



Translators without Borders - an introduction

Translators without Borders (TWB) is a US-registered non-profit organization offering language and translation support for humanitarian and development agencies, and other non-profit organizations on a global scale. Originally founded in 1993 in France as Traducteurs sans Frontières, TWB aims to close the language gaps that hinder critical humanitarian and international development efforts worldwide.

Recognizing that the effectiveness of any aid program depends on delivering information in the language of the affected population, and working with a global network of professional translators, TWB helps non-profit organizations overcome communication barriers, increasing access to critical information and services while fostering a climate of understanding, respect, and dignity in times of great need.

During humanitarian crises, TWB helps aid organizations and affected people overcome the language barriers that can impede vital response efforts, by:

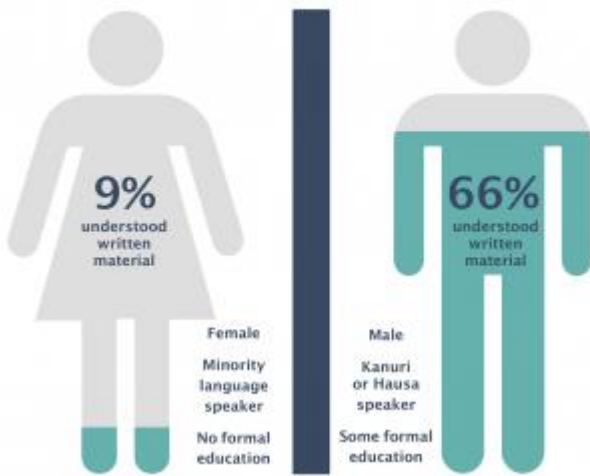
- Training translators and interpreters working in the languages of crisis-affected countries;
- Translating and disseminating critical information in the right languages before a crisis;
- Building networks of trained translators, often in the diaspora, who can provide immediate assistance;
- Developing freely downloadable multilingual glossary apps to support the consistent translation of key terms;
- Promoting the use and development of machine translation and other language technology tools for emergency response;
- Working with others to collect and disseminate data on the languages crisis-affected people speak and understand, as a basis for communication; and
- Providing advice and information on the most effective languages, formats, and channels for communicating with affected people.

TWB's language support has made a difference in crises from the West Africa Ebola outbreak in 2014 and the 2015 Nepal earthquake, to hurricanes Harvey, Irma and Maria in the Caribbean and southern USA in 2017.

TWB in Nigeria

An initial [assessment](#) by TWB in July 2017 found that language barriers were hampering many operational organizations' efforts to communicate with affected people in north-east Nigeria. A lack of basic data on the languages people speak and understand, combined with limited budgets for translation and a shortage of trained interpreters and translators for local languages were identified as obstacles. Humanitarian staff voiced fears for the impact this could have on the accuracy of needs assessments, the effectiveness of program design, accountability, and conflict sensitivity.

Do you read me?
Written comprehension by gender, education level, and mother tongue at 5 IDP sites in NE Nigeria



Research into comprehension of simple humanitarian information materials at five sites in Maiduguri confirmed the challenges. Just 23 percent of over 900 respondents understood basic messages in written Hausa or Kanuri, although IOM’s DTM data indicates that over 90 percent of IDP sites are receiving information in one of these languages. Less-educated women whose mother tongue was not Hausa or Kanuri were the least likely to understand messages in any format in those languages.

TWB found a strong preference - 79 percent - for communication in people’s own mother tongue. This varied by mother tongue, however, with 46 percent of Fula/Fulani/Fulfulde speakers interviewed preferring to receive information in Hausa. English was almost entirely ineffective among the sample;

audio was the most successful format.

An effective strategy for communicating with all sections of the affected population must include simplifying content, a mix of formats including audio/video or in-person delivery of messages, and translation or interpreting into the mother tongue of the target group wherever possible.

In north-east Nigeria, TWB’s aim is to:

- Ensure humanitarian organizations have better information about the languages and communication needs of affected people as a basis for planning communication with communities;
- Map language support capacity gaps;
- Train and establish translation teams in at least five key languages;
- Increase interpreting capacity among partner organizations through support and training;
- Improve consistency and accuracy of translation and interpreting through terminology development; and
- Increase access to information, education and communication (IEC) materials in local languages for humanitarian use.

For more information and resources

Download TWB’s mobile glossary app of protection terms in English, Hausa and Kanuri:

<http://app.translatorswb.org/>

Consult our reports and resources on Nigeria: <https://translatorswithoutborders.org/twb-response-nigeria/>

Contact Start-Up Manager Doreen Aninyei in Maiduguri (+234 806 646 5554, Doreen@translatorwithoutborders.org), Country Manager Alice Castillejo (Alice@translatorswithoutborders.org)