



HIF Evaluation Case Study:

TWB - Words of Relief

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Cover Photograph: Translators without Borders team in the field © Translators without Borders

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Acronyms

| | |
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| ACAPT | A needs assessment and analysis organisation |
| ALNAP | Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance |
| CDAC | Communicating with Disaster Affected Communities network |
| CDC | Centers for Disease Control |
| CWC | communicating with communities |
| DRC | Danish Refugee Council |
| ECHO | European Community Humanitarian Office |
| ERR | European Refugee Response |
| EVD | Ebola Virus Disease |
| GBP | Great Britain Pounds (sterling) |
| HIF | Humanitarian Innovation Fund |
| IAWG | Inter-Agency Working Group |
| ICRC | International Committee of the Red Cross / Red Crescent |
| IFRC | International Federation of Red Cross / Red Crescent Societies |
| INGOs | International non-Government Organisations |
| IOM | International Organisation of Migration |
| IRC | International Rescue Committee |
| MEL | Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning |
| MSF | Médecins Sans Frontières |
| NGOs | Non-Government Organisations |
| OCHA | Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Assistance (UN) |
| QCRI | Qatar Computing Research Institute |
| RRT | Rapid Response Teams |
| SMS | Short Message Service (text message) |
| TWB | Translators without Borders |
| UN | United Nations |
| UNHCR | United Nations High Commission for Refugees |
| UNICEF | United Nations International Children's Emergencies Fund |
| US | United States (of America) |
| WASH | Water, Sanitation and Hygiene |
| WHO | World Health Organisation |
| WoR | Words of Relief |

Introduction

This case study explores the impact of the Words of Relief (WoR) project, an innovative local language translation service developed by Translators without Borders (TWB) for NGOs, UN agencies and other actors during humanitarian responses. It covers the period from WoR's inception in 2013 through its application in Kenya, West Africa and other responses until 2017. It is informed by a document review and key informant interviews (see Annexes 1 and 2), and a field visit to Greece (2-6 May 2017) where the model is being applied in TWB's European Refugee Response (ERR). It is part of a larger evaluation of the Humanitarian Innovation Fund (HIF), a funder and supporter of WoR.

1. The innovation

Translators without Borders¹ is a US-based international NGO, founded in 1993, which aims to 'close the language gaps that hinder humanitarian and international development efforts worldwide.' TWB recognizes that most humanitarian INGOs are equipped only in major world languages (i.e. English and French) which often do not match those of the affected population, even when these are 'official' national languages. It finds that language barriers have been a problem in humanitarian operations, as highlighted in evaluations of the 2004 Asian tsunami and the 2005 Pakistan earthquake. In particular, TWB's translators observed significant language barriers in responses to the 2010 Haiti earthquake (humanitarians could not speak Haitian Creole), the 2013 Typhoon Haiyan in the Philippines, and the 2014/2015 West African Ebola epidemic (doc. 13).

1.1. Words of Relief

TWB's innovation, 'Words of Relief' (WoR), offers a service model for providing translation and other language support to humanitarian actors. Launched in 2013, it claims to be 'the world's first-ever global translation service dedicated to providing real-time professional linguistic support during crises to increase engagement and empowerment of affected populations'. It may still be the only service of its kind (doc 13).

The WoR language support model evolved and expanded during its lifespan from 2013 to date. Initially, WoR focused on: (i) building a corps of translators and interpreters in under-resourced world languages; (ii) preparing an accessible digital 'inventory' of essential crisis response information in multiple local languages; and (iii) maintaining a network of human and technological linguistic resources to mobilize immediately in response to a crisis (doc 2).

By 2016, the model had evolved into: (i) Rapid Response Teams (RRTs) of trained professional translators and interpreters in high-demand and under-resourced language pairs; (ii) Development of virtual 'spider networks' of additional volunteer translators working remotely in the global diaspora; (iii) Creation of a digital repository of essential crisis response information in multiple local languages. It also included: (iv) Translation, interpreting, and dissemination of time-specific information in specific crises; and (v) Digital tools to support frontline delivery of humanitarian aid, including the Words of Relief Digital Exchange (a real-time, interactive translation platform), Google Translation Cards, and improved Machine Translation capabilities (pursued in partnership with Microsoft) (doc 13).

1.2. Innovation process

The WOR innovation evolved through a multi phased process, largely as foreseen by the HIF's five-stage model. As described in reports by TWB and ALNAP 2015 (doc 11), the process included recognition and

¹ Website: translatorswithoutborders.org

invention phases carried out by Mission 4636² and other actors, development and diffusion phases led by TWB, and most recently, the innovation began a scaling phase (see Annex 3 for a summary of WoR's evolution).

1.3. HIF's role

The HIF has been a consistent funder of WoR, making four grants to the innovation at different stages: Development (GBP 132,414), Implementation (GBP 19,996), Diffusion (GBP 49,229 of 62,549 required); and scaling (GBP 400,000). The HIF has been a significant funder among others, providing about a fifth of WoR GBP 735,000 total (doc 13) – until the scaling grant awarded in late 2016.³ In addition, volunteer translators provided in-kind donations of their time.

1.4. Theory of Change

WoR offers a relatively clear theory about how it will achieve impact:

Impact

WoR's intended impact is to eliminate language barriers which hinder access to information for people affected, with an increasingly active role foreseen for people affected as well as humanitarians in eliminating them.

- In 2013, the WoR aimed to 'impact millions of people worldwide by eliminating language barriers that inhibit the work of relief organizations/frontline aid workers (...)' (doc 2), and in 2014 recognized that affected populations were 'indirect beneficiaries' (doc 8).
- In a review exercise in 2015, WoR staff expressed hope that the innovation would enable people to receive critical information, and bridge the communication gap between aid workers and people affected (doc 10).
- By late 2016, WoR highlighted removing language barriers in two-way communication with communities so that 'affected populations who are currently marginalized (...) due to language barriers (including literacy) will be better informed of situations on the ground and where/how to access assistance' and 'affected populations will gain a crucial voice in the design and delivery of aid that can improve the timeliness and effectiveness of humanitarian response' (doc 13).
- In a more elaborate Theory of Change diagram, WoR sees an ever more active role for affected people in achieving effective two-way communication, by 'influencing the response through communicating with the responders and others' and 'have the information they need, when they need it, in the right language, format and channel'.

Outcomes

WoR's intended impact is to be achieved primarily by supporting ever larger numbers of humanitarian actors (whether agencies, networks and/or the wider system) to remove the language barriers. Most often this support is to be provided alongside efforts at providing information to populations affected, participation and accountability, communicating with communities (CwC), and the 'localization agenda'.

- In 2013, WoR aimed to provide 'much-needed linguistic support' to multiple United Nations initiatives, NGOs, CDAC-N, and government agencies dedicated to humanitarian response. Building on the essential

² Mission 4636 was a Haitian initiative, following the 2010 earthquake, which provided an online translation and information processing service that connected the Haitian people with each other and with the international aid efforts. See www.mission4636.org

³ Other donors included Microsoft (100,000 GBP); Indigo Trust (15,000 GBP); One-time NGO service payments 2015 (4000 GBP); Start Network, 2015 (98,000 GBP) and 2016 (190,000 GBP); Monthly NGO service contracts through May 2016 (30,000 GBP); Annual NGO service contract (one with Save the Children, starting July 1, 2016): 100,000 GBP; and internal unrestricted funds from sponsorships (50,000 GBP).

concept of communication as aid, it would eliminate language barriers that inhibit the work of relief organizations/frontline aid workers (doc 2).

- In 2014/15 in West Africa, WoR aimed to help humanitarian operations ‘make their own programs more effective by ensuring they have messages in the right languages’ (doc 8).
- By 2016, through its diffusion efforts, WoR aimed to dramatically increase the users of its services, including through advocacy for providing people with simple and accessible information in a language they truly know and use regularly instead of a second or third language they may report knowing (doc 12).
- By end 2016, the WoR aimed to be ‘an integral part of the humanitarian communications toolbox, minimizing language barriers that affect the quality and effectiveness of crisis response’ (doc 13), and for ‘national and international responders have access to the rights tools in the rights language’ (WoR Theory of Change diagram).

Process

The process defined for achieving these outcomes is to deliver the WoR service model, services package, and a growing number of tools to help humanitarian actors remove language barriers. Increasingly, the expectation is that a larger and sustainable WoR programme is needed to maintain this process.

- In 2013, WoR spoke of deploying language capacities, preparing an inventory of translated information, and maintaining language support through a wider network of translators (doc 2).
- In the pilot project, WoR undertook to: (i) increase the availability of and access to vital crisis response information in Swahili; (ii) build technological and human capacity to provide improved real-time translation support in Swahili and additional languages to NGOs, other humanitarian actors, and crisis-affected populations (facilitating two-way communication); (iii) develop a standing network of translators in multiple East African languages to be rapidly deployed in a crisis; and (iv) establish a formal code of ethics to ensure compliance with humanitarian principles (doc 2).
- In West Africa, WoR aimed to create Rapid Response Translation Teams; train rapid responders; translate well-established messaging; voice over key messages; and disseminate local language messaging; advocate for its use (doc 8).
- By April 2016, WoR aimed to fully define its various tools for organizations who are looking for better language solutions during crisis, package them professionally, and market the packages broadly in person and virtually (...) to aid organizations and foundations to ensure long-term funding (doc 12).
- Looking ahead, WoR hopes to be seen more broadly as ‘the language experts’ in humanitarian response.

2. Impact and outcomes

This section describes impact and outcomes identified through this study.

2.1. Impact on people affected

WoR may have contributed somewhat to reducing language barriers and positive impacts for people affected in a few emergencies, notably in the Ebola response, but has yet to make much difference across the world’s crises. Further progress depends significantly on take-up of humanitarian actors and access of populations affected to WoR services.

WoR provided translated products and translation services that were relevant to the needs of people affected in Kenya, West Africa and elsewhere. In Kenya, WoR created a repository of content in Swahili that ‘addresses the affected people’s needs first and foremost, as opposed to just the responders’ (doc 7). In West Africa, the WoR’s translation team’s work ‘ensur[ed] that clear and consistent information [about Ebola] is widely available’ (doc 9). WoR provided a range of translations of signage, posters, information leaflets, web-based information, video and information content, and translation teams in response to Europe’s refugee crisis, Philippines/Nepal Disaster Responses, and the Ebola response (doc 13). While WoR seeks to ensure

information is provided to people affected in the appropriate language and format, it recognizes the needs of people with specific communication needs, such as illiterate, deaf or unsighted populations.

WoR is achieving mixed success in involving people affected and government authorities, and recognizes a need for further efforts here. In West Africa, WoR struggled to work with beneficiaries due to 'layers' of government and aid organizations, but this was not an issue in Nepal (doc 7). Occasionally, members of affected populations who have the requisite language skills have joined WoR's RRTs (doc 13). WoR recognizes a need to work on engagement with affected communities, and applied to fund a 'local representative' function to engage with communities from the off (doc 7). In Greece, TWB is enhancing community training and adding interpreting training, with an eye toward encouraging further growth in this area (doc 13).

In the Ebola response, WoR worked with partners to strengthen communication with communities, helping to promote behaviour changes that eventually stopped the spread of EVD. TWB worked with about a dozen partners to collect, translate and help disseminate Ebola-related materials into West African languages for the most affected populations in Sierra Leone, Guinea and Liberia. A total of 106 items – such as posters, social mobilization and SMS messages, Ebola videos, Ebola cartoons, maps – were translated in 30 languages. (...) One effective output was a series of simple informative posters from International SOS suggesting ways to prevent the spread of Ebola (doc 9).⁴ Translated prevention messages on Ebola helped many organizations that otherwise would not have had the resources to provide material in multiple languages. Agencies could therefore access resources in variety of languages, and some reported this contributed to increasing understanding, reaching more people, reinforcing behaviour change messages (doc 9). WoR staff suggest its main impact was to increase the recognition that people were not understanding Ebola messages, and its actual impact on people affected remains difficult to gauge.

In Greece, WoR is providing a considerable volume of translation products and services that seem relevant to people's needs. According to UNHCR, from January through March 2016, more than 100,000 refugees in Greece and the Balkans had access to translated signage developed by TWB. At Moria on Lesbos, UNHCR indicated 90,000 migrants had access to information that WoR created for Danish Refugee Council. The Norwegian Refugee Council indicated some 900 refugees per day saw WoR signage, posters, and informational leaflets on Chios. Since March 2016, the number of refugees in Greece has stabilized at 54,000. Internews reported that, from April 1–May 15, WoR's work (915 Arabic and Farsi articles for News that Moves) reached some 30,000 online viewers, generating more than 5,000 comments and some 2,700 offline interactions (doc 13).

In Greece, refugees, interpreters and volunteers highlight the affected population's need for information and appropriate language services. Residents at Ritsona refugee camp, some 70km from Athens, reported living without enough information, disconnected by language, and preoccupied with asylum applications. Ammar, a 35-year old Syrian man, said 'there is no information at all here. It's like being deaf at a wedding party', in contrast to his life in Syria, and noted the camp itself is disconnected, remote and difficult to reach. In particular, Ammar lacked information and advice about asylum and immigration, his primary concern especially since the March 2016 agreement between Turkey and the EU. In the words of Hannan, a 35-year old Syrian single mother of 7 children, 'Everybody is interested in asylum applications, our future, and where we will end up. There is no information at all about asylum.' Hannan also lacked information about what to do in an emergency during hours when aid agency offices in the camps close (evening and night). Ammar and Hannan separately spoke of confusion, anxiety and a lack of information about agencies' recent decisions to replace food distributions with cash transfers, and to reduce bottled water supplies in favour of filtering of water.

⁴ TwB reports this material was being translated into Lingala for the Ebola outbreak in northern DRC

Residents at Ritsona rely greatly on interpreters, whose language abilities vary considerably. The camp manager at Ritsona explained that communication with residents occurs mainly through door-to-door visits by IOM staff, and interpreters, who are Arab Greeks or recent arrivals who speak Greek. Ammar and his friend Salim find that some interpreters are better than others, especially when they could conduct more of an advocacy role in asylum discussions.⁵ They bemoaned the interpreters who refused to answer their questions or offer advice when asked. ‘I don’t know, I don’t know, is all they say.’ Respondents felt that if they could speak Greek their crucial interactions with asylum officials and doctors would be much more successful.

Clients at the Khora day centre⁶ in Athens are mainly from the Middle East and West Asia. Volunteers Lucie and Alba, who help run the centre, explain that people arrive and need advice on every part of life. ‘We refer people or try to do it in house. We have maps translated by TWB into 4-5 key languages. We offer people access to information and news. We provide legal advice through our legal team after screening people.’ An estimated 50% speak Arabic (mainly Syrians and Iraqis), 35% speak Farsi, 10% speak Urdu, and a few other languages too. They are served by a pool of 25-30 interpreters, and by the network of people, information and languages within the multi-story building and the hundreds of people using its services. One interpreter, Suheir 66, notes that trust gained through an appropriate manner (human warmth) is a prerequisite for communication. Mahmoud, a 25-year-old Syrian, agreed. ‘The most important thing given here is love, not just cold functional people doing a job.’

TWB-trained interpreters concur that good interpretation can save lives. ‘It can sometimes save lives, other times it can improve lives, or make people feel very much better (...),’ said one. ‘We are saving lives, helping lives or improving lives,’ summarized another.

2.2. Outcomes with humanitarians

WoR is supporting a growing number of humanitarian actors to remove language barriers. Specific humanitarian agencies are engaging and using WoR services, although many do not prioritize language and improved communication with communities. Other humanitarian actors are supported indirectly by WoR contributions to communication with communities, shared translation content, and interpreter training support. Some parts of the global humanitarian system may also be somewhat better informed about language barriers thanks to WoR’s advocacy efforts.

Agencies

A growing number of humanitarian agencies have used TWB services and expressed interest in the model. In Kenya, some NGOs clearly welcomed the inclusion of translation in their humanitarian efforts, recognizing the importance of language in aid delivery during a crisis or disaster (doc 4) and WoR was ‘overwhelmed by the interest and need’ for the service at the field level. For example, OCHA proactively requested Rapid Response Teams for the Burundi elections crisis and the Nepal earthquake, and other agencies expressed interest in deploying WoR elsewhere (START, UNICEF, OCHA, ICRC and others) (doc 3). By 2015, TWB was translating over eight million words per year for up to 310 development and human rights organisations using a crowd-sourced platform (doc 11). Most recently, WHO, IRC, Internews, and IFRC are now monthly subscribers to WoR’s translation and interpreting services for ongoing local language support (doc 13)

In Greece, partner interviews from May 2016 suggest the innovation is having a positive impact on NGOs’ work in three key areas: (i) quick access to in-language content, (ii) relieving pressure on staff, and (iii) coherently addressing language barriers (doc 13). At one point, WoR was working simultaneously with 18

⁵ Professional interpreters are required to interpret without conducting ‘advocacy’ or providing advice

⁶ KHORA is a humanitarian cooperative foundation based in Athens, run by a group of experienced volunteers. See www.khora-athens.org

partners in Greece and the Balkans, including major international, national and local responders. WoR now works closely with Internews, IFRC, and Save the Children through Skype-based translation and editing groups, involving them in continuous quality monitoring of translated content and glossary development, allowing standardization of key terminology (doc 13). TWB has also worked with partners to evolve its on-the-ground training courses, which were offered for the first time to partners' bilingual staff in Greece who were acting as informal translators. It also developed an interpreter sub-group of the UNHCR/Athens Communicating with Communities working group in Greece to enhance interpreting quality, strengthen interagency collaboration, improve glossaries for shared use by all responders, and work toward training machine translation engines (doc 13).

IFRC: TWB remains useful to IFRC as a translation expert and interpreter training partnership. It provides regular translations of print materials (posters, information notes, brochures, a training manual), audio, and internet into four main languages (Arabic, Farsi/Dari, Kurdish, and Urdu) and sometimes others. IFRC's internet platform provides information to migrants about access to services and resources in Athens and Thessaloniki. TWB also provides training to IFRC interpreters through special sessions. TWB's added value appears to lie in the provision of reliable quality translations, and expert support to IFRC interpreters notably during scaling up of the response in 2015-2016. A possible gap remained in understanding how beneficiaries comprehend translated materials (including technical terms), given their different levels of education.

Save the Children: TWB provides a useful range of services to support Save the Children's communication with communities. It provides an easy-to-use translation of documents upon request in Greek, Arabic and Farsi, to support communication with communities. It provides much appreciated skills development training to cultural mediator/interpreters who work alongside frontline staff. It is also conducting socio-linguistic research into language barriers and interpretation, including comprehension surveys and language barriers for children. The added value appears to stem from offering the three services together in a comprehensive approach to support the programme's wider objectives. A gap may be in TWB's ability to provide additional knowledge management and quality oversight to the research work.

Internews: TWB provides constant partnership support to Internews's key products: News that Moves, which offers online up to date information for refugees and migrants,⁷ and In the Loop, which explores the concerns and perceptions of people affected by the EU refugee crisis. It also supports the Mediterranean Rumour Tracker, which collects rumours among refugees passing through Europe, identifies misinformation, and responds with factual information (13). Internews collaborates closely with TWB's translation heads to ensure the most appropriate language is used. TWB's added value is in providing engaged partnership and dialogue to support Internews, expert advice on language matters including pitfalls and risks, and a voluntary campaigning approach. A gap was that earlier in the response Internews struggled with questions about the quality and professionalism of translations, as TWB struggled with different Arabic dialects and language nuances. TWB reports how these difficulties were addressed.

Khora: TWB provides Khora, the volunteer-run day centre for refugees and migrants in Athens, with interpreter training and testing and glossaries of terms. TWB provides training in interpretation and cultural mediation which is open to all including Khora volunteers and staff, who otherwise would receive no training. TWB also tests Khora's legal interpreters to assess the appropriateness of their interpretation, to ensure quality and coordination. TWB also prepares a useful glossary of key terms across several languages covering administration, the body, countries, general and health. TWB's added value is that such support would otherwise not be available to Khora which lacks the resources of an INGO, but supports hundreds of refugees and migrants in Athens. 'We'd be lost without TWB' (Lucie). 'Without TWB, a bad interpreter doing legal interpreting could make a huge difference to someone's asylum case and life. Bad interpreting could mean the difference between a claim being accepted or rejected' (Alba).

⁷ See: newsthatmoves.org

WoR's language support to humanitarian agencies is cost-effective for the agencies, compared to private companies and where no comparable alternative is available. Words of Relief 'creates a free corpus of open, localized, disaster-response content in under-resourced languages' and a unique 'volunteer-driven, standing network of professional translators and interpreters that can be deployed immediately in a crisis' (doc 6).¹ In Greece, IFRC and Internews highlighted TWB's cost effectiveness and value compared to private companies. 'It would be much more expensive to hire private companies. TWB translates texts very quickly, typically in 3-5 days. The quality of private companies or other alternatives might not be as good' (IFRC). 'Using commercial company would cost three or four times more. We would not be able to afford to constantly consult them with brainstorming and floating ideas (Internews).

However, many humanitarian agencies and (head office) staff do not adequately recognize the importance of language in humanitarian response and do not use WoR services, thereby limiting the innovation's uptake and impact on people affected. In Kenya, WoR struggled at first to get organizations to share material for translation, although the service was offered for free, because agencies felt they already had in-house translation staff or lacked pre-prepared crisis messages to translate (doc 10). In West Africa, there was a perception among head office and decision-makers that most people speak English which provided incorrect (doc 7). WoR has been less successful at establishing wider uptake of the innovation, because of lack of attention to this issue among humanitarian agencies (doc 11). Recognizing the risk that agencies may not use their service or that their approach to communication with communities may be unclear or undeveloped, WoR has opted to focus on agencies that know the project (such as IFRC, Save the Children, WHO), and gravitated toward collaborators that use innovative practices in listening to affected populations (QCRI, Humanity Road, Humanitarian OpenStreetMap, Internews) or create new tools for communications (UNHCR Innovation Labs, Microsoft) (doc 13). More recently, TWB feels UNHCR and clusters increasingly recognize the value of WoR.

In Greece, TWB's unique added value is questioned by some people. First, questions arose about the ability to deliver quality using the WoR volunteer model, particularly after the height of the crisis 2015-2016. It is suggested that TWB struggled to ensure quality across its Arabic and Farsi translations, which depended on the quality of volunteer translators and their coordination. 'TWB has experienced much staff turnover recently and seems to be constantly starting again,' said one observer. TWB was not invited to tender for the contract to provide translation services for UNHCR the coordinating agency in the refugee response. Instead UNHCR relies on one private company and a Greek NGO (Metadras), who are perceived to maintain very high standards in translation and field-based interpretation. Second, questions were raised about TWB's continued leadership and advocacy role since the height of the crisis, with suggestions they are responding to donor requirements with project ideas more than innovating and not coordinating and collaborating with national and local actors in sub-working group on interpretation. Third, it is suggested by some that TWB provide useful extra capacity and did a good job at key points, but cannot be considered indispensable to agencies.

Response

Beyond supporting agencies, WoR made language contributions to the wider humanitarian response in Kenya. TWB uploaded translated crisis materials onto humanitarian platforms (ReliefWeb, IAWG, Humanitarian Response.info and Swahili Wikipedia, proactively directing agencies to pre-translated content instead of waiting for them to provide text for TwB to translate (doc 10). When the large bulk of translations were added to the CDAC website in 2013-2014, there was an increase of over 300% month on month in views from 125 up to 450 views a month (doc 3). WoR also greatly strengthened machine translation in Swahili and inspired Microsoft training engines in other crisis languages. (...) WoR came in handy during the cholera outbreak and response in Kenya, when it provided the Message Library in Somali to the WASH Cluster who used the key message on cholera for their response (doc 4). The TwB team were able to direct people to the pre-translated messages.

Some WoR services have been adopted in other emergency responses. Pre-translated messages were translated into Kirundi, following the crisis in Burundi, saving valuable time (doc 10). In the Ebola response, materials were translated in local languages and made widely available to aid agencies on the ground (doc 9). WoR is continuing to put together the digital exchange and making a public-facing site for repository. All training for translators will also be available (doc 7). More recently, there are signs that TWB may be having an impact in places where not present. Requests for guidance tools and services for cultural mediators and interpreters have been received from agencies (DRC and IFRC) in Horn of Africa, to support a hotline in NE Nigeria, to provide interpreting support, and to develop common language services for NGOs in Myanmar.

In Greece, WoR made several useful contributions to the wider response. TWB participates in the CWC working group, a large sub-working group of the UNHCR-led protection working group. TWB attends every meeting and provides translation for the group. The group coordinates all CWC activities, ensures information is provided to people affected and feedback collected, ensures people are informed about decisions that affect them, conducts multimedia campaigns on camp winterization, and now on the change to cash assistance and accommodation. The group has little way of knowing how well it is performing overall, and conflicting understandings remain about implications of the EU-Turkey migration deal and cash-based transfers. More recently TWB conducted a comprehension assessment about how the international response messages were being understood. In addition, TWB prepared a glossary app informed by translation work in Greece. However, questions arise about its presentation, diffusion strategy, and link to other lexicons.

In Greece, TWB ventured into providing interpreting services to meet demands in the response, adapting the WoR model to provide interpreting services through an interpret platform. Recognizing the need for interpreters beyond written translation, TWB recruited professional interpreters to make them available for agencies in Greece. TWB adapted the idea to provide training support to existing interpreters, created a peer support sub-working group, and provided terminology support across range of languages. Interpreters and cultural mediators consulted gave positive feedback about TWB training and support, noting that it had strengthened their professionalism and helped them to work alongside frontline agency staff.

Drawing on its experience in different crisis responses (and response stages), WoR hopes to develop a surge response capacity. WoR has supported humanitarian responses to sudden onset emergencies (Philippines, Nepal, Haiti), a public health emergency (Ebola), and a refugee crisis (Greece, Europe). In emergencies, TWB also sees a collaborative role for itself at different stages of crisis response (doc 13): Early in a sudden-onset crisis, WoR often works with data aggregators “listening” to affected populations to better map and respond to the crisis. As communications and engagement shifts to providing information to affected populations, WoR works with partners in providing vetted information to affected populations. In the crisis response evaluation stage, WoR works with such organizations as ACAPS and Ground Truth Solutions, which deploy listening/feedback tools for affected populations to assist with assessment of humanitarian aid efforts (doc 13). WoR currently seeks funding to develop a global reach through a surge response capacity.

System

In different responses TWB has supported efforts to improve communication with communities, but its specific contribution to the entire humanitarian system remains constrained by its dependence on humanitarian agencies to adopt its services. As noted by ALNAP in 2015, wider diffusion remains a challenge owing to the lack of attention by aid agencies to issues of language in humanitarian response (doc 11). The need for local language translation is not typically prioritized at the organizational level (i.e. it is not included in budgets) or amongst field workers. Most of TWB’s engagement to date has been limited to those within the humanitarian sector who already recognized the importance of translation (doc 11). This reflects a wider challenge in diffusion humanitarian innovation where ‘gatekeeper’ agencies resist their adoption (doc 11).

Through WoR TWB is helping to raise awareness about humanitarian language gaps. In Kenya, WoR produced a short promotional film to increase awareness among aid organizations of the language gap that is prevalent in humanitarian work (doc 3).⁸ TWB also produced a ‘Words of Relief Impact Study on Ebola Information’ demonstrating the importance of making crucial healthcare information widely available in the native language (doc 10). TWB’s ongoing awareness raising, and the mobilization of translation teams during the Ebola and Nepal Earthquake responses, may have shifted understanding about the importance of translation in the sector, particularly in OCHA and in the East Africa region (doc 10). While these claims are not verified, ALNAP noted WoR succeeded in creating enhanced learning and evidence around the importance of language translation in disaster response (doc 11). In Greece, TWB is still trying to change attitudes, urging agencies to integrate language in their programmes, always budget for it, and pay interpreters.

3. Process

Although WoR struggled to measure its wider impact, it demonstrated comparative impact and made considerable efforts to measure success, learn lessons and share learning. It remains to be seen whether these efforts will shape a larger and more sustainable WoR programme that continues to deliver useful contributions towards removing language barriers in humanitarian responses.

WoR has struggled to measure its wider impact on agencies and people affected. As ALNAP noted, TWB has struggled to establish measurable evidence of the uptake of the Words of Relief project, or to trace its impact on relief agencies and beneficiary communities. TWB does not have a mechanism for assessing its reach: if, how and how often partners are using translated material in their communications. Some of this may be addressed through wider comprehension testing (doc 11). Yet the challenge remains in getting feedback from partners on how they used TwB’s services (doc 10).

WoR demonstrated the impact of translation into local language on awareness in a controlled exercise. TWB’s Kenya comparative impact study demonstrated that delivering messages in local languages significantly increases comprehension among affected populations (doc 13). In the study, 197 Kenyans in urban and rural areas who spoke Swahili plus some English were surveyed on what they knew about Ebola. Participants were shown a simple poster translated by TWB and used throughout West Africa after the disease took hold. Initially, only eight per cent of respondents answered simple questions about the disease correctly. When respondents were given simple information about the disease in English, correct answers rose to 16%. But when given this information in Swahili, respondents got 92% of the questions correct (doc 3). The results demonstrated that there is an increase in the rate of correct responses given to questions about Ebola after having read the posters (doc 5). This comparative study was unique among HIF grantees and highly recommended (doc 11).

WoR used multiple efforts to measure success in terms of outputs and activities. In Kenya, TWB undertook to assess the pilot project in relation to effectiveness and relevance (doc 2), using key performance indicators. It considered words translated, content disseminated, training/s developed, digital exchange platform (doc 3). It used multiple methods: process documented; partner focus group; After Action Review with team; and the comparative impact study (doc 3). It concluded the project demonstrated significant success with real evidence that the project achieved the planned outcome (doc 3). ALNAP concurred it demonstrated clear comparative benefits over the alternative of English/French-based communication (doc 11).

WoR made efforts to learn lessons and share learning about the effort. TWB ensured ‘Lessons learned’ were gathered and circulated to humanitarian stakeholders and actors (doc 3). Learning from the WoR pilot in Kenya were applied to the Ebola Extension in West Africa, for which a Learning Review of the Project was

⁸ Translation Matters: The Story of our Work in Kenya

produced (doc 3). The review captures examples of good practice, gaps and suggestions for improvement in TWB's approach to the Ebola response. TWB's After Action Review highlighted that TwB is a learning organization, committed to developing the best possible method of support to people affected by crisis. The team remained flexible and made changes to their plans as and when required to achieve their project goals. TwB took into account the learning from this project in developing its future plans, and in further defining its model of support (doc 10).

WoR was able to identify a number of key lessons during the innovation process. For example, it is noted that awareness raising around the problem that an innovation aims to address is a critical part of a diffusion strategy (11), it is challenging to maintain volunteer engagement beyond the initial shock of a crisis or if the crisis is protracted (3), and it is difficult to ensure translated information is being used and reaches beneficiaries as we are not in direct contact with affected populations. Further, translation is not a priority for aid agencies, illiteracy should not be overlooked, the lack of experience and availability of translators may affect the translations, the multiple languages and dialects makes it more difficult to respond to the needs of organisations, and a better monitoring system is needed to ensure translated material is used (doc 9).

4. Contributing factors

The factors that most obviously enabled WoR were financial and human resources, and good collaboration with some humanitarian actors and language providers. The innovation also benefited from a flexible organization and process, which seemed more important than formalized learning systems. The HIF provided both high quality funding at key points and support to a flexible process.

4.1. Resourcing

Financial and human resources were an indispensable factor in enabling the WoR innovation process. In financial resources, WoR received funding from a range of donors: the HIF, DFID, ECHO, Linked In, The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, and others. The HIF provided initial 'seed funding' and now a two-year scaling grant which allows some travel and development activities, but sustainable funding remains a challenge. In human resources, WoR relied initially on existing TWB staff in Kenya along with some dedicated key staff for the project, and a spider network of volunteer translators. In the Ebola response, TWB learned the need for an in-country translation presence in addition to the essential contribution of a wider community of translators. In the last two years, TWB has grown tenfold to 30 people, and relies on the support of 3,700 unpaid volunteers—although the volunteer model remains somewhat unreliable.

4.2. Collaboration

Collaboration with humanitarian actors and language providers was a critical factor for WoR, most notably the network of volunteer translators central to the WoR model. Recognizing the need to prioritize coordination and partnerships, TWB assigned specific staff to managing external engagement and continued to invest in managing these relationships and setting common objectives (11). First, networking with humanitarian agencies allowed the establishment of WoR, and continued to generate further collaboration in other settings. For example, TWB worked closely with CDAC Network and Digital Humanitarian Network in Kenya, SOS and CDC in West Africa, and INGO partners in Greece. Second, volunteer engagement ('this amazing resource scattered around the world') was a primary factor of success. TWB worked the Microsoft Local Language Team in Kenya, a spider network of community translators in West Africa, and a network of translators and the translation industry in Greece. Among technology companies, Microsoft Technology for Good was WoR's most notable collaborator.

4.3. Process

Flexibility of process was a primary factor in enabling the innovation. While WoR benefited from clearly defined roles and a 'very professional' approach (doc 11), it benefited very significantly from a flexible process (doc 11). Being a small organization, TWB responded quickly to learning and new opportunities: moving volunteer training online, shifting focus from Liberia to Sierra Leone, and preparing a video to raise awareness of Ebola (doc 11). Such flexibility was facilitated in part by HIF grants, which allowed it to develop the model in Kenya, to test it and learn quickly in West Africa, and to continue to integrate quick feedback into processes (doc 11). Being 'small and scrappy' was an advantage over larger more established organizations, allowing it to fail at first and successfully revise its approach.

4.4. Learning

The innovation benefited less evidently from the generation and integration of formal learning. WoR drew on the experience of Mission 4636 in Haiti by engaging its coordinator in its governance, but was not able to draw on many existing practices, codes and standards. In Kenya, TWB designed a monitoring evaluation and learning (MEL) system, but MEL has not been as systematic as hoped, although TWB recognizes the critical importance of evidence to generate sustainable funding, and WoR now has a dedicated M&E worker. Similarly, TWB conducted formal risk assessments but lacked strong risk mitigation strategies (doc 11) and risk management proved less important than a flexible nimble process. Moreover, requests for information and learning requirements by some donors risked being a burden to the innovation.

4.5. HIF

The quality of the HIF's funding and support played a crucial role in developing the WoR innovation effectively in the given time. As a funder, the HIF provided significant contributions amounting to about a fifth of financing for the innovation before the more recent diffusion and scaling grants. HIF funding also played a catalytic role at key points: seed funding in Kenya, pilot funding in West Africa, and diffusion and scaling up funding more globally. It allowed the flexibility that was essential to develop the project (see above). Compared to other funders, HIF funding was not tied to specific projects and more supportive than purely financial contributions. WoR benefitted in particular from the HIF's early guidance on governance and organizational structure; the validation and legitimacy gained from ALNAP studies; and overall encouragement to learning. In conclusion, WoR's key resource, its community of language workers, owed nothing to the HIF, and the project could have received equal amounts of funding without the HIF. However, the innovation would not have been developed so effectively without the quality of its funding and support, and would very unlikely have achieved progress so rapidly.

4.6. HIF support

Overall, WoR informants were very positive about working with the HIF, calling them 'the friendliest people to work with'. Compared to other donors, they were flexible and engaged, understanding that 'what ultimately matters is the innovation.' The monthly blogs requirement encouraged positive reflection among WoR staff, provided reporting to the HIF, and gave WoR useful publicity/exposure. However, the HIF's interest in learning and requests for information risked being a burden at times, especially if the information was not used by the HIF (i.e. for sharing learning etc).

The HIF's link with Save the Children was a source of some dissatisfaction, because it meant 'excessive bureaucracy' and all the same paperwork for WoR's multiple applications through Save the Children (4x HIF, 2x START, and a Save the Children partnership agreement). Requiring all WoR employees to sign the child protection policy seemed inappropriate for non-field staff, and requiring a fraud and whistle-blower policy seemed inappropriate for grants of GBP 100,000.

5. Implications for HIF

Here are three potential implications for the HIF:

- 1. Appreciating incremental outcomes:** The HIF should recognize how WoR makes useful and innovative contributions to humanitarian action even without having largescale impact or nearly transforming the humanitarian system. WoR's intended impact of removing language barriers in the humanitarian response is worthwhile and perhaps more directly supported by advocacy efforts, but should not obscure WoR's very practical contributions to specific agencies, responses, and wider CWC activities.
- 2. Recognizing HIF's dual value:** The HIF provides high quality funding and useful process support that is often worth more to WoR than the financial contribution alone. Without HIF's funding and support, the WoR innovation would not have evolved as effectively and quickly, and may not have been able to start up. HIF's scaling grant offers an opportunity to help with the important challenge of growing and sustaining the WoR programme.
- 3. Considering the limits of learning:** HIF's requirements for monitoring and evaluation, evidence collection and formalized learning are potentially valuable for HIF's wider innovation efforts in the sector. Yet they may offer fewer direct benefits to developing the innovation, and could impose unnecessary burdens or hinder the process unless these are sufficiently light and appropriate.

Annex 1. Documents reviewed

1. Translators without Borders, 'Because Language Matters' (n.d.)
2. Translators without Borders, 'Large Grant Proposal to Humanitarian Innovation Fund: Words of Relief,' (31 July 2013, Humanitarian Innovation Fund, Large Grant Proposal Application)
3. Translators without Borders, 'Large Grant Final Report, Words of Relief (WoR), Reporting Period 1-Dec-2013 to 31-May-2015'
4. Translators without Borders, 'Words of Relief: Reviewing Lessons Learned' (n.d.)
5. Translators without Borders, 'Does Translated Health-Related Information Lead to Higher Comprehension: A Study of Rural and Urban Kenyans' (April 2015)
6. Translators without Borders, 'Words of Relief Project' (n.d.)
7. Translators without Borders, 'Final Q&A: Reflections from TWB West Africa' (n.d.)
8. Translators without Borders, 'Humanitarian Innovation Fund, Small Grant Application: Words of Relief Extension to West Africa' (n.d.)
9. Translators without Borders, 'Words of Relief–Ebola Crisis Learning Review' (n.d.)
10. Translators without Borders, 'After Action Review' (2 July 2015?)
11. Tanner, L. and Obrecht, A. (2015) 'Words of Relief: Translators without Borders' local language translation for emergencies' (HIF/ALNAP case study. London: ODI/ALNAP)
12. Translators without Borders, 'Humanitarian Innovation Fund, Diffusion Grant Application' (April 2016)
13. Translators without Borders, 'TWB HIF Accelerating Innovation' (application, detailed draft, n.d.)

Annex 2. People consulted

Aimee Ansari, TWB Executive Director, 3 May 2017
 Nurangiz Khodzharova, TWB ERR Project Manager Translation, 3 May 2017
 Miguel Angel Barba, IFRC Greece Community Engagement and Accountability (CEA) Delegate, 3 May 2017
 Rebecca Petras, TWB Deputy Director, 4 May 2017
 Ritsona Camp, residents 4 May 2017 ('Ammar', 'Hannan')
 Khora Centre, volunteers 4 May 2017 (Lucy, Alba, Abbas, Suheir, Mahmoud)
 Ellie Kemp, Head of Crisis Response, 5 May 2017
 Simone Vandijk and Mor Benatar, Save the Children, MEAL adviser and partnership capacity development manager, 5 May 2017
 Fan-Man Tsang, Internews Operations Team Leader, 5 May 2017
 Interpreters and Cultural Mediators, 5 May 2017, Le Chat Noir, Athens (Popi, Zahra, Geny, Youssef, Zeina, Ana Maria)
 Rachel Maher, UNHCR/CWC Coordination Group Coordinator, 9 May 2017

Annex 3. Evolution of the WoR innovation

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| Recognition | The Haiti earthquake response exposed language barriers when French-speaking aid workers were unable to communicate effectively with Creole speaking population (11). From 2011 to 2013, crisis mapping exercises (Ushahidi in Kenya and the Digital Humanitarian Network in the Balkans and northern India) highlighted the need to translate valuable tweets in local languages. At this point, TWB directors began to discuss the need for a new translation approaches to support the humanitarian response, and especially the need to provide local language translation (11). |
| Invention | The translation service model was created during the Haiti response, when Robert Munro, a computational linguist based in California, coordinated Mission 4636, an ad hoc crowdsourced workforce of approximately 2,000 Creole- and French-speaking |

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| | <p>volunteers from 49 countries. In the months following the earthquake, the volunteers translated 80,000 materials into English for emergency responders while sending Creole-language materials about aid resources back to individuals and organizations within Haiti (7). TWB invited Munro to join an advisory committee alongside specialists from the Microsoft Machine Translation Team, the Communicating with Disaster Affected Communities (CDAC) Network and DHN. WoR was concerned to standardise the model for global application in multiple response contexts (11).</p> |
| Development | <p>The model was piloted between December 2013 and May 2015 in Kenya, focused on disaster-prone areas in northern Kenya. Eight translators worked out of TWB's Nairobi office, translating over 400,000 words of crisis related content into Swahili. Key messages were obtained from a wide range of sources.⁹ The translated messages were then disseminated via the CDAC Network member website. A pilot spider network of 11 volunteer community translators was established to translate crisis messaging from English into 11 local languages. The translators received a three-day training course in real-time translation support and a one-day 'refresher' course several months later. A code of conduct was written and a Facebook page set up to support communications within the network. TWB integrated its new digital exchange Application Programming Interface (WoRDE) with Ushahidi, and an enhanced Swahili automated translation engine hosted by Microsoft (11). The Swahili machine engine, Microsoft Translator, was trained with 428,000 words, significantly improving the accuracy and speed of translation (13).</p> |
| Implementation | <p>The model was implemented as far as possible thereafter. In November 2014, TWB was granted additional funding from HIF to implement Words of Relief in West Africa, complemented with a grant from the Indigo Trust. TWB set up a spider network of around 12 translators and translated information on the Ebola virus into local languages in Guinea, Mali and Sierra Leone. Three teams of translators were recruited through community and translation networks and received TWB's Rapid Response Team online orientation followed by further training, via Skype, on crisis translation. Over 100 items – approximately 81,000 words – were translated into 30 languages (11). WoR also collaborated with aid agencies on the ground to make sure content, such as the award-winning "Ebola: Poem for the Living" video (which WoR voiced-over in many languages), was widely disseminated. By March 2015, this video had been viewed more than 1 million times and embedded in 500,000 web pages (13). In addition, WoR provided translation and language support in the Nepal Earthquake, April 2015 (ICRC, Humanity Road, OCHA); Burundi/Tanzanian refugee camps, May/June 2015 (OCHA); the European Refugee Crisis, September 2015 ongoing (Internews, UNHCR, IRC, Save the Children, Norwegian Refugee Council, Hellenic Red Cross, IFRC, and more than 10 other INGOs); Yemen Conflict, March 2016 ongoing (Qatar Computing Research Institute, UNESCO); Ecuador Earthquake, April 2016 (Humanity Road); and the Zika response, April 2016 (WHO) (13).</p> |
| Diffusion | <p>TWB used learning from Kenya and West Africa to refine the Words of Relief innovation and promote its wider use, and to refine its support model. In April 2016, TWB applied for a diffusion grant aimed at making the innovation sustainable by highlighting its impact, outlining its innovations and flexible approaches, and</p> |

⁹ National Disaster Operation Centre (NDOC), the SPHERE Handbook 2011, International Federation of the Red Cross (IFRC) beneficiary communications SMS messages, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) public service announcements, and the CDAC Network/ infoasaid Message Library.

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| | packaging these services to support short and long-term fundraising and partnerships, and market these services broadly (12). |
| Scaling | In 2016, TWB applied for and was awarded a HIF grant to scale the innovation. Its purpose is to ‘better understand and support the process of scaling innovations which have the potential to bring about transformational change in the humanitarian system (...)’ ¹⁰ The idea of ‘scale’ means building on demonstrated successes to ensure solutions reach their maximum potential, have the greatest possible impact, and lead to widespread change. |

¹⁰ HIF website, <http://www.elrha.org/hif/funding/journeytoscale/hif-initiative/>