

Translation as empowerment: the role of translation in establishing equal dialogue between international and local NGOs

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This paper will present the first steps undertaken as part of a new research project that investigates the role of translation in establishing equal partnerships and dialogue between large Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) from the Global North and local NGOs and Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) in the Global South. Such organisations are typically involved in delivering aid in crisis situations, both by providing emergency assistance and long-term development aid, with the common goal of achieving a better and more sustainable future for all. International NGOs claim to work in equal partnership with local organisations, which implies working in a multiplicity of languages so that everyone can participate. Yet languages are often a blind spot in international development, as exemplified by the absence of any mention of languages in the UN's Sustainable Development Goals.

The paper aims to set out the theoretical starting point of this new research project. It will firstly introduce some of the key findings of my previous research on the role of languages in international UK-based development NGOs. These findings draw on more than thirty interviews with staff from Christian Aid, Oxfam, Save the Children and Tearfund. Secondly, the paper will introduce the conceptual framework that forms the basis of my new research project. Translation here is conceptually understood as a tool for inclusion and empowerment, as it can for example provide access to information and knowledge.

The paper will thus present an interdisciplinary theoretical understanding of translation, in which I place translation at the centre stage of principles of participation, inclusion and empowerment. Its aim is to explore the role that translation studies can play in interdisciplinary research that addresses development, advocacy and crisis management, and to explore ways in which translators and translation researchers can articulate clearly the importance of translation in international crisis and development situations.