Institution: University of Portsmouth		
Unit of Assessment: UoA 25: Area Studies		
Title of case study: Changing NGO Translation Practice to Empower Communities in Development		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: April 2015-May 2018		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s):	**Role(s) (e.g. job title):**	**Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:**
Dr Angela Crack	Reader in Civil Society	03/11/2008 - date
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2018-2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N		

1. Summary of the impact

This research empowered communities in the poorest parts of the world to engage actively with Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) that provide lifesaving aid. It demonstrated that local languages are crucial for NGOs to build strong relationships with communities and ensure successful delivery of development projects. Yet, remarkably, NGOs and government donors have historically regarded translation and interpretation as a low priority. NGOs serving hundreds of thousands of people in Malawi and Peru adopted the recommendations, which has led to improved community engagement with NGO projects and more positive practical outcomes for such work. The research has been promoted as a vital contribution to UK government aid policy through Parliament and the UK's national academies.

2. Underpinning research

Dr Crack specialises in the study of NGOs in international development work. She particularly focuses on NGO accountability, which is commonly recognised to include the responsibility of NGOs to be accountable to communities that receive their aid. Crack has built a research profile over the last decade through publications that draw on numerous in-depth interviews with key practitioner informants to analyse the challenges for NGOs in meeting their accountability commitments.

Development NGO policies tend to claim that they seek to be accountable by: a) ensuring that development projects are designed according to the preferences of communities; b) empowering communities to participate in decisions about project delivery to promote a sense of ownership; and c) inviting communities to provide feedback about projects.

Crack's research has consistently identified systematic failures in practice in meeting these goals (R1-R3), with failures in language-based understanding at the core of many problems. While language is essential to communicative processes, the actual language policies and practices of NGOs have scarcely been studied, despite the fact that NGOs operate in territories of high linguistic and cultural diversity. The present research is the first to have explored how such policies and their consequences affect the capacity of NGOs to be accountable to communities.

To undertake this study, Crack co-designed a three-year AHRC-funded research project (G1) with Professor Hilary Footitt (Reading, PI), Dr Wine Tesseur (Research Assistant) and the NGO INTRAC. The project involved extensive archival research and dozens of interviews with NGO workers, donor officials and translators/interpreters in the UK, Malawi, Kyrgyzstan and Peru.

The project found that NGO senior management often regard translation/interpretation as a marginal issue, and that the same is true for the UK's Department for International Development (DFID), which is one of the largest donors to NGOs (R4). This failure to recognise the importance of language in development work leads to serious and significant consequences.

The research demonstrated a consistent view amongst NGO fieldworkers based in developing countries that effective local language communication is vital in establishing relationships of trust and respect with communities. Fieldworkers report frustration with the lack of clear guidance from donors and NGO management about how to translate development concepts, leaving them to invent ad hoc solutions that may not convey the NGO message effectively. The concern that translation difficulties marginalise the very people that are supposed to benefit from NGO work is

widespread amongst such frontline staff, as is the perception and experience that this can lead to project failure.

In deriving policy-oriented conclusions from this empirical study, the research team argued that NGOs cannot be accountable to communities unless they address these issues (R5). They produced a report written for policy-makers and practitioners (*Respecting Communities*), which included several evidence-based recommendations (R6).

Recommendations for donors included:
A. Invite NGOs to include translation/interpretation costs in their budget.
B. Ask organisations to state their language and cultural policies in their applications and value NGOs that have these policies.
C. Ensure that monitoring and evaluation frameworks encourage NGOs to reflect on how language issues affect project outcomes.

Recommendations for NGOs included:
D. Include costs for translation/interpretation in the budget.
E. Translate materials into local languages so communities can participate in projects in an informed way.
F. Encourage staff to acquire additional language skills.
G. Incorporate language considerations in project design.

3. References to the research

(R1) **Crack, A. M.** (2013). Language, Listening and Learning: Critically Reflective Accountability for INGOs. *International Review of Administrative Sciences, 79*(4), 809-828. https://doi.org/10.1177/0020852313500599

(R2) **Crack, A. M.** (2016). Reversing the Telescope: Evaluating NGO Peer Regulation Initiatives. *Journal of International Development, 28*(1), 40-56. https://doi.org/10.1002/jid.3010

(R3) **Crack, A. M.** (2018). The Regulation of International NGOs: Assessing the Effectiveness of the INGO Accountability Charter. *VOLUNTAS: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations, 29*(2), 419-429. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11266-017-9866-9

(R4) **Crack, A. M.** (2019). Language, NGOs and Inclusion: The Donor's Perspective. *Development in Practice, 29*(2), 159-169. https://doi.org/10.1080/09614524.2018.1546827

(R5) Footitt, H. A., **A. M. Crack** & W. Tesseur, W. (2020). *Development NGOs and Languages: Listening, Power and Inclusion* (New York: Palgrave). https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-51776-2

(R6) Footitt, H. A., **A. M. Crack** & W. Tesseur, W. (2018). *Respecting Communities in International Development: languages and cultural understanding*: https://www.reading.ac.uk/web/files/modern-languages-and-european-studies/Listening_zones_report_-EN.pdf

Evidence for the quality of research

R1-R4 are articles that have been through a rigorous peer-review process by well-respected journals. R5 is a book from a prestigious publisher, and the proposal was peer-reviewed by the series editor and an anonymous reviewer. R6 summarises the book's findings in report form. As outlined in section 4, it has been the primary output that has generated impact and a reference point for further research by external bodies.

Research grant funding

(G1) Footitt, H. A., & **Crack, A. M.** The Listening Zones of NGOs: languages and cultural knowledge in development programmes. Funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council, July 2015-June 2018, (GBP305,547)

4. Details of the impact

NGOs in Malawi, Peru and beyond, serving hundreds of thousands of people, adopted the project's recommendations. The results are improved quality of data, increased levels of community understanding, and a greater sense of local empowerment. The project's recommendations are included in high-profile parliamentary and scholarly reports on language

strategy targeted at the UK government. Government and DFID representatives have met with the research team to identify how the recommendations can reshape policy.

Impact of NGO recommendations

Crack worked directly with NGOs through the research process and after the development of the findings, sharing conclusions in accessible forms and advising on the development of the project recommendations into concrete changes in policy and practice. Following the publication of the final project report (R6) she revisited her Malawian research participants in person to provide organisation-specific advice on implementation. Crack continues to develop these relationships with a view to continuing downstream impact, and has recently begun a formal consultancy role with Tearfund, one of the UK's leading development and relief NGOs, advising on the creation of a new translation policy. While this will deliver future benefits, a range of concrete impacts have already been achieved:

Recommendations D&E: Funding language costs and translating materials

Malawi is one of the poorest countries in the world and highly dependent on foreign aid. NGOs play an essential role in delivering basic services. One of the organisations that Crack worked with is the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace, which recently received over USD500,000 for human rights projects in Malawi. The NGO shared the *Respecting Communities* report with its donors, who responded by allocating funding for language costs. The NGO then translated its materials, and reported a remarkable improvement in community empowerment as a result: *'Beneficiaries are able to grasp the concepts, knowledge and develop the skills required for development at grassroots level…For instance, the people in Chitipa District specifically in Nthalire requested for Standard Operating Procedures for Proactive Disclosure of Information in Public Health Services to be translated into their local language.'* (S1) (August 2019). The participant states that the research has led to an enhanced sense of confidence and ownership among communities over the development process, as well as a change of mind-set among staff working for the NGO as they *'are keen to learn the languages spoken and understand the culture of the people'*.

Another organisation that worked with Crack is Trocaire, an international NGO that serves 181,000 Malawians. Crack's main interlocutor, [text removed for publication], was able to draw on the findings of the research in order to negotiate internally for funding to translate a training manual: *'Our volunteers have expressed that the translated manuals are very useful and are contributing to better programme results because they are able to facilitate gender equality discussions in an informed way … which has strengthened the case of allocating funding for translation of materials for programming in our organisation'* (S2). The organisation, which spans 17 countries, is now translating material into local languages in the other territories in which they work, referring to Malawi as an example of international best practice (August 2019).

Recommendation F: Language acquisition

Kusi Warma is a Peruvian NGO delivering health and education projects to over 12,000 children. Because of this research, they introduced a language policy to their operations (S3) (June 2018). Notably, as part of this, they paid for their fieldworkers to study Quechua. Kusi Warma now reports: *'Our direct work in the communities, continually and respectfully of their local culture, speaking their language (quechua-speakers at the Andes), establishes trust bonds with families, that contributes to the improvement of practices for the good growth and development of children'.* (S4).

Recommendation G: Incorporating language in project design

Crack worked with the Malawi Sexual and Reproductive Rights Alliance that includes six nationwide NGOs. Because of the research, they have translated advocacy messages, focus group discussion guides and questionnaires into Chichewa. This has *'helped us to start getting data that makes a lot of sense and meaning from our project beneficiaries…The research has also helped us to reach our advocacy targeted audience'* because the translations have significantly enhanced local understanding of the NGO's messages (S5) (August 2019). They now plan to translate these materials in the minority languages of Sena and Yao.

Impact of donor recommendations

In 2015, the UK enshrined in law the commitment to spend 0.7% of gross national income on development aid. A significant amount of aid is channelled through NGOs. The research fed into a long-running and high-profile political debate on aid effectiveness, and in particular, the ability of NGOs to deliver inclusive development.

In May 2018, Crack and Footitt presented their research findings to the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Modern Languages, at the invitation of its co-chair, Baroness Coussins. The donor recommendations emerging from the research were incorporated into the 'Government' pillar of the APPG's National Recovery Programme for Languages published in March 2019. This document, officially endorsed by the British Council and the British Chambers of Commerce, called upon *'Government, civil society and all stakeholders to act now to reverse this national crisis [in the UK's languages capability]'*. (S6)

The APPG pressed for a governmental response on our report by tabling a written question in Parliament (S7). As a result, the research team met with the Minister for International Development, Lord Bates, to identify how our recommendations could inform policy review (December 2018). [Text removed for publication] confirmed the following month that he had *'shared this [Respecting Communities report] with colleagues who are updating our guidance on programme design'* (S8) (January 2019). The reach and significance of the research findings were also demonstrated in a joint report by the UK National Academies (British Academy, Academy of Medical Sciences, Royal Academy of Engineering, and Royal Society). This urged the government to adopt a national strategy for languages, citing the *Respecting Communities* report as evidence that this strategy could strengthen the UK's work in international development (S9). DFID's own staff publication, *The Programme Pulse,* also highlighted the contents of the report. (S10)

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

(S1) A letter from [text removed for publication] - Karonga District, Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace.

(S2) An email from [text removed for publication], Trocaire Malawi, 02 August 2019.

(S3) An email from [text removed for publication], Kusi Warma, 6 June 2018.

(S4) Page from Kusi Warma's website, 'Success', http://kusiwarma.org.pe/en/success/

(S5) A letter from [text removed for publication], Malawi Sexual and Reproductive Rights Alliance, 01 August 2019.

(S6) All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Modern Languages (2019, 4 March). *A National Recovery Programme for Languages: A framework proposal from the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Modern Languages*, p.7

(S7) Webpage documenting written question tabled in the House of Lords, 'Development Aid: Question for Department of International Development', 18 October 2018
https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Lords/2018-10-18/HL10805/

(S8) An email from [text removed for publication], Department of International Development, 15 January 2019.

(S9) British Academy (2019, February). *Languages in the UK: A call for action*, p.7

(S10) Department of International Development (2019, February). *The Programme Pulse*, p.3.