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Translation as empowerment: Translation as a contributor to human rights in the Global South

This project investigates the critical role of translation in establishing an equal, two-way dialogue between Northern NGOs and their partner organisations in the Global South. The project considers translation, in written and oral form, as a contributor to communities' empowerment in two ways: as a tool that provides access to information and as a tool that enables voices to be heard. The project focuses on human rights advocacy organisations because language rights are part of the human rights agenda.

This research is important because translation as a communicative activity is often taken for granted, and its important role in providing access to information and enhancing communities' participation in society and public debate tends to be overlooked. For example, the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) aim to 'leave no one behind'. Communicating in a multiplicity of languages to achieve such an aim is critical, but the Goals do not mention the role of languages anywhere. Many international NGOs, who are key agents in achieving the SDGs, work primarily in English and do not tend to have translation policies in place. Languages are usually not included in evaluative processes, and funding for translation is limited. Because of this, it is unclear how two-way democratic communication can actually be ensured.

In collaboration with the Irish NGO GOAL, this research project sets out to investigate how the use or non-use of translation impacts on power relationships. The research methodology consists of a mix of ethnographic observations, interviews with staff in the NGO sector, as well as fieldwork in one of GOAL's country programmes with the aim to devise methods to measure the effectiveness and impact of translation provision.

Project website: <https://sites.google.com/view/translation-as-empowerment>

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