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INCLUSIVE COMMUNICATIONS GUIDE

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Authors: Nadine Kliffen & Marianne de Beer

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1 Introduction

WHAT IS INCLUSIVE COMMUNICATION?

As IUCN NL strives for a just and inclusive society, we are committed to inclusive language and images. We aim to tell stories and show images that a diverse group of people can identify with, and we make sure that stereotypes are broken. Images and words do not only describe reality, they also prescribe it.

WHY DO WE HAVE THIS GUIDE?

The goal of this guide is not to banish words, but to explore why we use certain terms, which worldview they reflect, why the can be problematic and what alternatives we can use in our communications. The principles and language guidelines are designed to prompt thought when using language. They are not set rules and should be seen as guidelines rather than restrictions. Some words, however, are recommended not to use at all.

We recognise that language is context- and audience-specific, and shifts between time and place; we would encourage you to think about what works best for your purpose. Therefore, this is a learning and living document that will be updated on a regular basis.

We also encourage you to use your judgement in applying the principles. We hope these principles and language guidelines will help you to choose words which align with your values and with feminist principles which we are committed to upholding, whatever the context.

In the inclusive vocabulary list attached to the document, we indicate which words require consideration, and what potential alternative words you could use. Please let us know if you think additional words should be on the list. Also, open discussions about the use of language are key. Not sure? Ask, talk, discuss.

HOW AND WHEN CAN YOU USE THIS GUIDE?

The main usage purpose for this guide is IUCN NL's external communication – so our website, articles, social media posts, reports, presentations, events and (formal) emails. Although the communications team is usually involved in writing or checking this content, we know that many of you take initiative to write pieces, give presentations and communicate with stakeholders, which is why this guide is useful for all IUCN NL's colleagues.

Additionally, this guide can also be useful when writing proposals, especially when a proposal includes gender, intersectionality & inclusion as an important aspect. Nonetheless, in all our proposals and future projects we aim for mainstreaming gender and inclusion principles, therefore this guide is a useful tool in applying inclusive communication in our proposals. Although we recognise that certain NGO words, which we might not prefer to use in our external communications anymore, are inevitable when communicating with certain donors.

HELLO!

2 How to write inclusively

In this section, we provide a general introduction to the themes that we will cover in our list with terms and tips for inclusive language. At the basis of all effective and inclusive communication lies critical review: what do you want to communicate and is that the way people will read it? What is your message? Does it, directly or indirectly, confirm that we are an inclusive organisation that includes all people in its work and communication, and works towards equality at all levels? It all starts with a clear, inclusive message.

After writing a text or developing visual material, it is important to zoom out for a moment and try to see your work from another point of view. Check, or let somebody else check, if you are applying inclusive language. 'Kill your darlings' (take out the irrelevant and repetitive parts) and make sure your work is as clear as possible.

Some principles for more inclusive language:
- **Avoid generalisations or catch-all terms.** Name what you mean as accurately and specifically as possible. Name the country, region or continent as well as the name of the (group of) people you are talking about. Avoid overly concise terms or acronyms that do not sufficiently cover the content.
- **Avoid terminology and abbreviations.** Language that contains a lot of terminology and abbreviations is not reader friendly, even not for people who understand the terminology, and therefore not inclusive.
- **Don't be afraid of the reaction of donors or the general public.** For external communication, don't simply use 'old' terms because everyone knows it. Choose new/the most fitting terms, tell the story behind them, use them consistently and draw your audience into your story.
- **We do not banish words.** We aim to have an open discussion about why we use certain terms, which worldview they reflect and why they can be problematic.

2.1. GENDER DIVERSITY AND SEXUAL DIVERSITY

We use inclusive language (gender neutral, non-gender specific) that includes women and describes people in an equal way.

Unless we are purposefully referencing persons of a particular gender, for example when talking about a project that specifically works with (Indigenous) women, or an issue that is particularly relevant for a certain gender, our language should be inclusive of all genders.

Therefore:
At events, in newsletters or other forms of communications, avoid addressing people with terms like 'dear sir/madam' or 'welcome ladies and gentlemen'. Rather, use inclusive language like 'dear reader' or 'welcome people, participants, everyone'.

In English, the use of the generic masculine form to refer to both genders creates a gender bias. Whenever possible, look for ways to modify the sentence to make it gender-neutral. Besides this, use both feminine and masculine forms.
- Leave out the masculine reference word
- Use plural forms for both nouns and reference words
    - o E.g. replace 'his or her' by 'their'
    - o Use preferred pronouns if known
- Use both feminine and masculine reference words
    - o E.g. 'he or she', 'she or he', 'his or her', 'her or his'
- Alternate in genders and pronouns
    - o E.g. 'Whoever she is. Whenever he lives. Every child deserves a childhood'

Avoid irrelevant, unnecessary or incorrect descriptions of gender, sexual orientation or relational or parental status:

- Check if the description is necessary by replacing it with the opposite. E.g.: remove 'female' in 'the female minister', because we also wouldn't say 'the male minister', remove 'gay' in 'the gay director', because we also wouldn't say 'the heterosexual director'.
- If it is necessary to describe sex, gender, sexual orientation or relational status, don't use it as an adjective. So don't say: 'she is the first female mayor', but 'it is the first time there is a mayor who is female'.

When it is relevant to specifically mention women in an article, report, etc. , instead write 'women in all their diversity' and optionally add the following footnote:

We acknowledge the diverse experiences and identities of women, regardless of gender, sex, choice of partner, class, education, ethnicity, background or religion.

In Dutch:
We willen de uiteenlopende ervaringen en identiteiten van vrouwen erkennen, ongeacht gender, sekse, partnerkeuze, klasse, opleiding, etniciteit, afkomst of religie.

Stereotyping roles/ attributes: refer to women and men without assuming stereotypical roles or attributes related to their gender. Do not present people, including women, as victims or vulnerable: their situation is vulnerable, not them. Explain the context.

2.2. EQUALITY & DECOLONISATION
The power imbalances we see today between countries and communities are rooted in the legacy of colonialism, which continues to have a profound impact on inequality and global racial injustice. Black, Indigenous and people of colour are less likely to hold power, whether economically, politically or socially, than white people.

When we talk about ethnicity, we mean the sociocultural values and shared beliefs of a group of people. The term is often used in relation to groups who 'deviate' from the norm, but this is incorrect.

Everyone has an ethnicity, because everyone is part of a population group, language group location and/or religion. We do not use the word race. There is only one race: the human race.

As with descriptions of gender and sexuality, the key point here too is that unnecessary use of a reference to the ethnicity of a person or group is avoided. Therefore, mention someone's migration background only when it is relevant. And when you do name it, pay close attention to which use of words is the most inclusive.

Finally, we aim to represent intersectionality in the language we use. Intersectionality is the overlap of multiple and intersecting social identities, like ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and class that contributes to specific types of systemic oppression and discrimination experienced by an individual.

2.3. LANGUAGE USED IN THE NGO SECTOR
Historically, the language that has been used in the 'international development' sector to talk about the people we work to support has conveyed ideas that reinforce the very systems we are trying to disrupt, and has often been based on inaccurate and discriminatory perceptions that reinforce 'white saviourism'.

The word 'development cooperation' implies that we, who give money and set up programmes, are the 'developed ones', and that we have a certain superiority over people in partner countries. Moreover, the word 'development' is largely identified with growth (and exploitation), a model which leads to increasing inequality and endangers the survival of the planet. As such, many prefer to speak of international solidarity (or cooperation) rather than development cooperation. Some prefer to speak directly of global justice, reflecting a worldview in which social, civil, political, cultural and economic rights are realised for all within the boundaries of the planet.

Again, the general rule of thumb here is to be as concrete as possible. Capacity building is vague, what is happening exactly? People attend a workshop on leadership or finance, for example. Often we don't train people directly but facilitate or support it. Don't inflate our role. Often partners are in the lead, make sure that this is clear in your text. The term capacity building/strengthening also undermines people's knowledge and autonomy.

2.4. NATURE-INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE

Inclusive communication treats all human beings equally. Generally, it does not include other beings. Truly inclusive communication is also nature inclusive. In many case, however, the human perspective on our planet makes nature-inclusive language quite a challenge.

Emphasising that a certain initiative benefits both people and nature, for example, is an important aspect of the communication of many of our projects. In addition, one could argue society should first treat all people equally, before focusing on other beings, to make sure we do not suggest that some people are more 'nature' than others (e.g. when using the word 'leefgebied' for Indigenous groups).

Without including related terms in our inclusive vocabulary, for now, we invite you to consider using more nature-inclusive language in your communication. For example by altering 'benefitting both nature and people' by 'for the benefit of life on Earth', whenever fitting. Another interesting example: 'people are the world's most dangerous animals.'

3 Inclusive visuals

When selecting images, ask yourself these questions:

- Do the visuals represent a balance of gender, age and ethnicity, etc.?
- In what context (private/ home or public, rural or urban) are women and men portrayed? Is this balanced?
- What (physical) characters, roles and professions are ascribed to women and men in the visuals (also traditional/ modern depiction in terms of clothing). Is this balanced?
- Is there a balance in women and men being portrayed as active (f.i. lifting heavy materials) / passive (f.i. resting) / leadership roles?
- Has it been avoided to depict women as extremely sensitive, naive or fragile?
- Has it been avoided to depict men only as commanding, invincible, robust and assertive individuals who hide their emotions?
- Does the image focus on the work of partners and colleagues and not on the donor / on IUCN NL?
- Does this image highlight the work and initiative of the partner organisation?

When taking pictures

- Make sure you have people's formal consent when you are taking their picture.
- Do not portray children recognisably, if not necessary and then only with consent of their parents.
- Take pictures with people in mind. Would you like to be portrayed like this?
- Would I photograph a similar image in The Netherlands?
- Do not show people in a vulnerable position.

4 Inclusive vocabulary IUCN NL

EQUALITY AND DECOLONISATION
Red words are strongly not recommended to use**, black words** are 'to think about'.

To avoid	Preference NL	Preference EN	Explanation
• inheemse volken • volkeren • gemeenschappen	oorspronkelijke bewoners van....	Indigenous peoples *(with capital letter 'I')*	'Inheems' has a different connotation than 'Indigenous'. In Dutch, the word is often used for animal and plant species, while Indigenous is often used by the original inhabitants of a particular region themselves. In combination with the word 'volken', the term refers to colonial times. Be, however as specific as possible, also in English, by mentioning the name of the people or their region, e.g. 'Amazonian people'.
• ontwikkelingslanden • arme landen • developing countries • poor countries	lage-en middeninkomenslanden, landen in kwetsbare situaties *benoem de specifieke landen*	• Low and middle income countries • countries in vulnerable situations • partner countries • cite specific countries	Based on Western perspective of 'development' and colonial power relations.
• poor or vulnerable people • arme of kwetsbare mensen • poor, poorest of the poor • armen, allerarmsten	mensen in een kwetsbare situatie mensen die (het meest) geraakt worden door armoede, mensen die weinig/het minste geld te besteden hebben	people in vulnerable situations people (most)affected by poverty, people who have little/least money to spend	Placing the adjectives 'poor' or 'vulnerable' before the noun 'people' reduces the identity of these people to their poverty or vulnerability, while this is anexternal situation they find themselves in due to circumstances.
• derde wereld /eerste wereld • third world / first world	Mondiale Zuiden / Mondiale Noorden specifieke continenten, regio's en gebieden noemen lage, midden of hoge inkomenslanden	Global South / Global North name specific continents, regions and territories low, middle or high income countries	'North' and 'South' also risk reinforcing divide and old-fashioned development thinking, but are more equal. Again, the rule is: be as specific as possible.
To think about	Preference NL	Preference EN	Explanation
• local • communities • lokale gemeenschappen	inwoner van ..., bewoners van het gebied	inhabitants of ..., people living in the area	The word 'local' is almost always redundant, as it usually refers to a specific place. In addition, it often has an exotic connotation. Again, be as specific as possible. The word can be necessary in some cases, for example when talking about local NGOs or communities as opposed to global organisations or important beneficiaries in global policy.
• local • partners • lokale • partners	partnerorganisaties partner ter plaatse	partner organisations partners on site	Idem. Moreover, our partner organisations are not always local, but rather (also) work locally.
• ontwikkeling(swerk) • development (aid)	bijdragen aan verandering	contributing to change	Idem.
• ontwikkelings-samenwerking • development cooperation	Internationale solidariteit Internationale samenwerking	International solidarity International cooperation	Idem.
• leefgebied van mensen • people's habitat • (gekoppeld aan territoriale rechten)	grondgebied gebied in beheer van	territory land	'Leefgebied' is associated with non-human animals. If not associated with territorial rights e.g. residential area, habitat.

PROJECT AND SECTOR LANGUAGE
Red words are strongly not recommended to use, **black words** are 'to think about'.

To avoid	Preference NL	Preference EN	Explanation
• **missie** • **mission** • **field visits** • **veldbezoek**	bezoek aan onze partner projectbezoek ter plaatse	visit to our partner project visit on site	Has a colonial (military and missionary) connotation.

To think about	Preference NL	Preference EN	Explanation
• **capacity building** • **capaciteitsversterking**	faciliteren ondersteunen samenwerken aan verbeteren van vaardigheden	capacity sharing learning from each other working together towards increased skills exchange	Building/strengthening capacity undermines the knowledge and autonomy of people themselves. Avoid one-way messaging and focus on mutual learning and knowledge exchange.
• **empowering** • **mensen in hun kracht zetten**	Specifiek zijn, bijv. 'het werk van milieu- en mensenrechten beschermers versterken door...'	Be specific, e.g. 'strengthen the work of environmental and human rights defenders by...'	'Empowering' creates the impression that change, resilience and self-reliance of people in vulnerable situations are only possible with outside support (from an NGO). It literally means 'to enable someone to do something', as if people are incapable of achieving anything themselves.
• **resilience** • **weerbaarheid** • **veerkracht**	Niet onnodig gebruiken: richt je op de omstandigheden en specifiek zijn.	Idem.	These terms relate to changing people rather than changing circumstances. It can also downplay the fragile circumstances they find themselves in. 'resilience' can be a positive term and is needed in the crises we are facing. But it should be used as an excuse to address dire circumstances that people are in, it should not erase their suffering.
• **protecting people** • **mensen beschermen**	Het werk van (bijv.) natuurbeschermers versterken	Strengthening/ amplifying the work of	Nature needs protection, but people are usually able to protect themselves. The circumstances (e.g. a failing legal system) may make this difficult, on which we should focus in communication. We can strengthen their work by improving the situation.
• **giving a voice / face to** • **mensen een stem / gezicht geven**	een platform bieden aan bijdragen aan dat stemmen worden gehoord	offering a platform to contribute to people being heard listening to people	People already have a voice, though it is not always heard (due to power systems).
• **beneficiaries** • **begunstigden**	mensen/partners met wie wordt samengewerkt benoem de namen van partners, gemeenschappen en mensen	people/partners we work with specific names of partners, communities and people	These words imply a passive recipient of aid.
• **empowered by us/IUCN NL** • **we empower/strengthen** • **wij versterken/bevorderen** • **we protect** • **wij beschermen** • **(etc.)**	versterkt/ georganiseerd door onze projectpartners ter plaatse en ondersteund/ gefaciliteerd door IUCN NL (bijv.)	empowered through activities from/ organised by our project partners on site support by IUCN NL (e.g.)	It is important to make a clear distinction between our role in a project and that of our partners, to give them credit for their work and/or not magnify our role.

GENDER DIVERSITY AND MARGINALISED GROUPS

Red words are strongly not recommended to use, **black words** are 'to think about'.

To avoid	Preference NL	Preference EN	Explanation
• sekse • sex	gender	gender	Sex refers to a fixed, definite biological fact, while gender is a socio-cultural construct of norms and behaviours assigned to people differently based on their sex assigned at birth.
• female environmental defenders	Vrouwelijke natuurbeschermers	women environmental defenders	In English, women should be used in this term.
• minorities • minderheden	gemarginaliseerde groepen groepen / burgers / activisten die voor hun belangen opkomen	marginalised people / groups	Minority suggests that we are dealing with a numerical minority perspective, and it is precisely for this reason that the interests of marginalised groups are often brushed aside. Using 'marginalised' focuses attention on the system, rather than the people themselves.
• gekleurd • mensen met een kleur • blank	mensen van kleur zwart wit	people of colour black white	When using these terms, consider the reason why colour is mentioned at all. Keep in mind that whiteness is often still used as the implied norm.
To think about	Preference NL	Preference EN	Explanation
• men and women • mannen en vrouwen • ladies and gentlemen • dames en heren	mensen van verschillende genders personen	people of all genders people	If a project targets women (or men), it may be necessary to use this term. In that case, use the 'gender disclaimer' at the bottom of the text.
• men, women, girls and boys • mannen, vrouwen, meisjes en jongens	mensen van verschillende genders en leeftijden	people of all genders and ages	Idem.
• m/w • m/v • he/she • hij/zij	v/m/x zij, hij en hen	w/m/x she, he and they	If necessary to mention gender, which is often not the case, X or hen/they should be added.
• (klimaat)vluchtelingen • (climate) refuges • migranten • migrants	Mensen die migreren/ vluchten voor de gevolgen van klimaatverandering	People who migrate/flee from the consequences of climate change	The word migration in itself is not problematic, but 'migrant' identifies the person solely as such, rather than focusing on the problem. Migrating, much less fleeing from danger or insecurity, is not an identity. It is about people in a situation.

🔍 Sources

Inclusive language guides
- WOMEN Inc - De incomplete stijlgids
- Belgian organisations - 'Decolonise. Now! Practical inspiration guide for equitable international cooperation
- Oxfam Novib UK - Inclusive language guide
- Partos – Inclusieve woordenlijst / Inclusive glossary (still in concept)

Gender
- APA style – Bias free language
- IOM– Gender-Inclusive Communication Guidance

Ethnicity
- OneWorld – 'Met deze taal stoppen we'
- OneWorld – 'Waarom het woord inheems ook waardevol is'
- Medium – 'Etnische gelijkheid begint bij taal'