

Recommendations for Inclusivity for Journalists



The Guatemalan Indigenous Inclusion in Media Toolkit toolkit adapts Internews Reporting on Vulnerable Populations Guidance and Thomas Huckin's Critical Discourse Analysis in the Functional Approaches To Written Text: Classroom Applications to provide best practices for organizations reporting on or depicting indigenous issues. The Toolkit provides a country context and a list of indigenous activists, opinion makers and subject matter experts whom organizations can consult, as well as a list of self-education resources that can equip organizations to provide strong, unbiased and informed reporting and commentary. It also provides suggestions for how organizations can identify and challenge weak or biased reporting found in mainstream media outlets.

The Interview Process

- The communities you intend to work with will be more willing to trust you if you are partnering with a source trusted by the community - an organization that has worked with them before, a journalist who has interviewed them before, or even a trusted member of the community.
- Use your trusted contact to understand the community you are interviewing. Who is approved to speak with outsiders? What hierarchy do you need to respect? Who has the authority to speak on behalf of the community? How are the answers to these questions affected by gender, age, role or other identity markers? Certain groups - such as indigenous women - should only be approached through an organization or group of indigenous persons that has been working with them directly.

- It may take a lot of time for the community to trust you - even when accompanied by a trusted partner. It may also take them time to decide who has the authority to speak or work with you, as all decisions are reached through building consensus. It is recommended you factor additional time into your interview process, especially if you have just begun your work with the community.
- Humans hold many biases and assumptions, but as journalists or organizations working towards inclusion, it is your job to subvert these biases and assumptions. When interviewing indigenous people and communities, you need to be humble. Don't assume what their needs, issues and concerns are. Be willing to learn from the interview subjects, instead of dictating what you think they need. Ask them what they want, instead of telling them what you can offer. Take the time to understand their perspective before you present your own.

Navigating Challenging Environments

- Keep in mind that political environments are volatile. With indigenous journalists and members disproportionately at risk of violence, your first priority must be to protect your sources and to do no harm.
- Ask your interviewees whether they are comfortable being named. If they express they are not comfortable, work with them to conceal their identity - assuming that they accept having their thoughts included in your article.
- Avoid getting anyone's face, location, or any other markers that might reveal their identity, on camera. If they agree to have their photograph published but are hesitant about being identifiable, work with the subject of the photograph to ensure you are concealing their identity to the fullest extent.

Terminology

- Use the specific name of the community wherever possible and needed. If you are talking about the Kaqchikel people, then refer to them as "Kaqchikel" instead of "indigenous." All communities and persons within them have different terms by which they prefer to be called. Some may be fine with being described as "indigenous." Others may not. Some may ask you to use a term that is not found in this Toolkit or in any ethnographic record. You should always refer to the person or community by the preferred term.

- As a general rule of thumb, if you are talking about an experience or determinant that affects all indigenous people in Guatemala, you can use an umbrella term like “indigenous.” If you are referring to only one community or a few communities, then you should refer to them by the specific name the community/person prefers.
- Indigenous peoples’ poverty is not because of their culture, traditions, or belief. Instead of talking about indigeneity or indigenous identity causing or exacerbating poverty, talk about the systemic and historical discrimination, suppression, and violence against indigenous identity and culture that causes indigenous people to be disproportionately affected by poverty.
- Don’t write or talk about development as if it follows an evolutionary timeline. Phrases such as “they have stone age technology,” or “a way of life reminiscent of a bygone era” simplify the complex historical and political forces that have discriminated against and marginalized indigenous people. Instead of examining the context, they slot complex variables and histories into binaries. Worse, they may even romanticize their history.
- Rather than focusing on what needs to be addressed in the present and giving audiences the tools to enact change, phrases such as these shift attention to an idyllic past that may not have existed.
- K’iche’, Kaqchikel, Mam are not dialects - they are languages. The same applies to the other 21 languages (19 Maya, 2 non-Maya) spoken in Guatemala. Referring to them as dialects ignores the communities’ rich linguistic and cultural heritage. This in turn exacerbates the problems these communities suffer from and allows *Ladino* populations to dismiss their culture as the “cause” of their poverty.
- Refrain from using terms such as “authentic” or “traditional” as much as possible. There are complex debates surrounding these terms due to the cultural suppression and appropriation indigenous communities have faced. If you need to use these terms, it is your responsibility to contextualize the usage of one term by explaining the debates surrounding both terms. Your choice of term should be informed by the insights of the specific persons, groups or communities you are working with. Be careful to not generalize those preferences to other persons, groups, or communities.

- **There is no “unified voice” among indigenous people. Indigenous people in Guatemala - like any Ladino/Mestizo person - hold multiple identities and distinct opinions. They do not necessarily hold the same views as the other members of their groups or communities. Indigenous communities make decisions by building consensus, which means getting all of these unique voices to agree to one single course of action. It is important to highlight and respect the time, patience, and effort that goes into building consensus to represent indigenous people and their culture more accurately and to not portray all indigenous people - even those within the same community - as having the same, unified voice.**

Textual Framing

Every text derives its meaning from not just what words go into it, but also from how those words are used, arranged, and presented in the larger context. Here are some framing guidelines to make your text, sentences, and words more inclusive and representative:

- **What are the dominant frames in the article? Are indigenous experts and interviewees’ frames (the problem, cause, evaluation, and solution) disseminated as many times as the frames of non-indigenous experts and interviewees?**
- **Which speakers, frames, or information are found at the beginning of the text/the sentences? Which speakers, frames, or information are at the foreground of the text/the sentence? Which ones are in the background or come later in the text/the sentence? Are indigenous speakers or indigenous frames at the background/in the lower half more times than non-indigenous speakers or frames? Is the interpretation of the article/sentence going to be changed if you rearrange the text/sentence clauses?**
- **Which speakers, frames, or information are omitted from the text or each sentence? Are indigenous speakers’ frames and insights being left out to make space for non-indigenous speakers?**
- **What presuppositions or assumptions is the text/the sentence working on? Are there assumptions regarding indigenous speakers, frames or information? Are those assumptions affecting the framing of the article?**

- **What discursive differences exist between your treatment of indigenous and non-indigenous speakers?**
 - **Direct quotes help viewers identify more easily with the speakers. Are indigenous speakers getting quoted directly as many times as are non-indigenous speakers? Or are you quoting them indirectly or paraphrasing their opinions?**
 - **Viewers identify more easily with individuals than with groups. Are indigenous speakers referred to as separate individuals with distinct opinions? Or are they referred to as a group with a “unified voice?” Are non-indigenous speakers referred to as distinct individuals?**
 - **Mental verbs help viewers see the speaker’s point of view more clearly. Are you using verbs such as “see,” “believe,” “think,” “feel,” “hear,” “observe” as often for indigenous speakers as for non-indigenous speakers?**
 - **The tone of the speakers (formality vs informality, friendliness vs authoritativeness, using simple terms vs using advanced terminology) can also shape viewer’s impressions. It can help the viewer identify which source is credible or likable or more authoritative. Are you using a similar tone for indigenous speakers as you are for non-indigenous speakers?**
- **The agent-patient relationship can help viewers identify who is more powerful or whom to side with. Who is more often the agent - the side doing things, making decisions, and taking action? Who is more often the patient - the side who is affected by the things done, decisions made, or actions taken? Are indigenous people more often the agent or the patient?**
- **The topic, theme, or the first grammatical clause of every sentence reinforces what is important. Does the theme or the main grammatical clause favor non-indigenous speakers and frames more heavily than indigenous speakers and frames?**
- **What is the main verb in most sentences? What does the main verb tell you about the framing of the text?**
- **Modal verbs - such as “could,” “might,” “would,” “may,” “should,” “must,” “will,” - convey the degree of certainty or uncertainty the speaker carries, which in turn shapes the viewers’ perception of who has more power. Do indigenous speakers have more modal verbs than non-indigenous speakers? What kinds of modal verbs do indigenous and non-indigenous speakers have? How does the addition or removal of these modal verbs affect the framing?**

- **What connotations, labels, and metaphors are you using for indigenous speakers as compared to non-indigenous speakers? How does the inclusion or exclusion of these words affect framing?**
- **What insinuations - implicit judgments or evaluations that may be missed by the average reader - exist in the text? How do they frame the discussion?**
- **Does the text situate the issue in the wider historical, societal, economic, political, and cultural contexts and debates? Or does it cover the present situation and isolates it from the wider context? Does it discuss policies - or politics? Does it discuss the factors behind a conflict - or tries to assign blame? For example, does it frame indigenous land rights activists' movements as "latest in a long line of movements to prevent mining?" Or does it list the historical, developmental, economic, and societal factors that have prompted this activism?**

Visual Framing

A picture is worth a thousand words and thus can be even more powerful than text for framing issues. The most important consideration while working with indigenous partners is protecting their privacy and dignity by not photographing them when they are doing something that they do not wish to share with outside viewers. Here are some more considerations to keep in mind:

- **Is the subject at eye level (conveying neutrality)? Is the camera looking up at the viewer (conveying power, authority) or looking down (conveying lack of power or authority)?**
- **Is there an extreme close-up (eyes, face) of the subject, conveying a sense of breach of personal space or privacy; or a close-up (face and neck) conveying a sense of intimacy? Is it a medium shot (bust or face and torso) conveying a positive, personal connection? Or a long shot (full body), wide shot, or extreme-wide shot that conveys a sense of distance from the person?**
- **Is the camera zoomed in to focus on a person, conveying a human angle? Or is it zoomed out, or in a birds-eye shot, conveying objectivity and invoking no emotions?**
- **What is in the foreground? The background? What is in focus? What is blurred out? Is there a Dutch angle that conveys a sense of things not being right?**

- **How does the visual contribute to the framing (problem, cause, evaluation, or solution) in the text?**

DISCLAIMER:

Convention C169 - Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention, 1989 (No. 169), Article 7 - lists that “The peoples concerned shall have the right to decide their own priorities for the process of development as it affects their lives, beliefs, institutions and spiritual well-being and the lands they occupy or otherwise use, and to exercise control, to the extent possible, over their own economic, social and cultural development. In addition, they shall participate in the formulation, implementation and evaluation of plans and programmes for national and regional development which may affect them directly.”

Any media intervention, analysis, interview, study or reporting your organization conducts and any application of the resources in this toolkit by your organization must involve the acceptance, cooperation and equal participation of the specific indigenous community in question. This also holds true if you are a governmental organization with Article 6 of the Convention stating that governments shall:

- **Consult the peoples concerned, through appropriate procedures and in particular through their representative institutions, whenever consideration is being given to legislative or administrative measures which may affect them directly;**
- **Establish means by which these peoples can freely participate, to at least the same extent as other sectors of the population, at all levels of decision-making in elective institutions and administrative and other bodies responsible for policies and programmes which concern them;**
- **Establish means for the full development of these peoples' own institutions and initiatives, and in appropriate cases provide the resources necessary for this purpose.**

*This document is part of *The Guatemalan Indigenous Inclusion in Media Toolkit* prepared by Halea Kerr-Layton, Saiansha Panangipalli, and Alex Yandell*