Language-independent communication in case of disaster

In case of disaster, language-independent communication helps to improve the understanding of key messages and reduce the ambiguity of messages (especially those linked to semantic interpretation) (Fitrianie & Rothkrantz 2007). Moreover, it has been found that not all languages use the same space frame. For instance words like "up", "across" or "between" don't always have equivalents in Himalayan languages. It also been found that an Australian Aboriginal language does not use any egocentric coordinates (such as on the left), but only cardinal directions ("to the East" for instance) (Deutscher 2010). Because language and geo-spatial perception are strongly linked, this makes safety instructions difficult to translate (Margetta & Fitzgerald 2016). Moreover, with between 100 and 115 distinct languages spoken within Nepal's borders alone, it would be impossible for EMSC (Euro-Mediterranean Seismological Centre) to translate a document into so many languages. Using visual communication is thus a good alternative to textual communication. Cartoons have been found to be an efficient way to communicate in the aftermath of a disaster (Chae et al. 2014) and to be understood in a quite universal way.

Note: See source document for full reference.

Applicable to:

Stakeholders: Communication, Languages, Access and use of infrastructure/services
Disaster Phases: Response
Types of Actors Concerned: Non-active citizens, Active citizens, NGOs
Hazards: Natural hazards

Recommendations:

- Use trustworthy, widespread, multi-lingual, culturally appropriate and inclusive means of alerting the target population in case of disasters
- Inform citizens about the risk they may face and about possible actions and measures, they can take to reduce vulnerability and better prepare themselves

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Source

Deliverable D3.3a "Initial report on the impact of best practices prototype implementation" (page 24)