

UGANDA SIGN LANGUAGE (USL) MEDIA TOOLKIT

This training Manual for Journalists on Covering Climate Displacement & Human Rights is developed by Okello Jesus Ojara, a multimedia journalist, under the “amplifying the truth” project by the WITNESS.

1. INTRODUCTION

This manual provides a complete, practical guide for journalists working with Deaf communities using Uganda Sign Language (USL). It focuses on accessibility as a method of reporting, and not as an afterthought.

Core Principles

- Deaf people are knowledge holders.
- Testimony is evidence.
- Accessibility is the method.
- Ethics and consent are non-negotiable.
- Journalism must hold systems accountable.

2. TRAINING OBJECTIVES

By the end of this training, journalists will be able to:

- Work effectively with sign language interpreters.
- Conduct ethical, trauma-informed interviews in USL.
- Capture Deaf testimony as primary evidence.
- Produce accessible visual stories.
- Link human stories to systems and policy failures.

3. ROLE OF THE INTERPRETER

Interpreter Responsibilities

- Interpret accurately and completely.
- Maintain neutrality.
- Preserve the Deaf person’s voice and meaning.
- Do not summarize or edit responses.

Interpreter Script (Standard)

“My role is to interpret exactly what is communicated...”

“I will not add or remove meaning...”

“I remain neutral at all times...”

4. PRE-PRODUCTION CHECKLIST

Accessibility Preparation

- Ensure visual communication only.
- No audio-only content.
- Prepare high-contrast filming background.
- Confirm lighting for clear hand visibility.

Equipment Checklist

- Camera (HD or higher).
- Tripod.
- External lighting.
- Backup storage.

5. CONSENT & ETHICS PROTOCOL

Signed Consent Script

“We want to record your story...”

“ You have full control...”

“You can stop at any time...”

“You choose how your story is used...”

“Do you agree?”

Ethical Guidelines

- Do not pressure participants.
- Avoid victim framing.
- Protect identity where necessary.
- Ensure that informed consent is recorded on video.

6. INTERVIEW GUIDE

Opening Question

“Can you describe what happened?”

Follow-Up Questions

- “How did you receive information?”
- “Did you have access to sign language communication?”
- “What challenges did you face?”
- “What support did you receive?”

Mapping Question

“Show your movement—from your home to where you are now?”

Closing Question

“How would you like your story to be shared?”

7. CORE STORY STRUCTURE

Scene 1: Introduction

Explain climate displacement in simple visual terms.

Scene 2: Testimony

Capture Deaf experience as primary evidence.

Scene 3: Exclusion

Highlight lack of accessible communication.

Scene 4: Displacement

Show movement and loss visually.

Scene 5: Accountability

Identify responsible systems and institutions.

Scene 6: Solutions

Present inclusive and practical recommendations.

8. VISUAL PRODUCTION GUIDELINES

Interpreter Framing

- Waist-up shot.
- Hands fully visible.
- Neutral background.
- Consistent lighting.

Essential Shots

- Climate-affected areas e.g. floods.
- Deaf subject signing.
- Close-ups (hands, facial expressions).
- Environmental context.

9. CAPTIONING STANDARDS

- Use simple, clear language.
- Match meaning of signed content.
- Use high-contrast text.

Sample Captions

- “Floods came without warning.”
- “No sign language access.”
- “Deaf people excluded.”

10. VERIFICATION & ACCOUNTABILITY

Verification Steps

- Cross-check testimony with data.
- Confirm locations and timelines.
- Validate institutional responses.

Accountability Questions

- Who failed to provide access?
- What systems excluded Deaf people?
- What policies need change?

11. POST-PRODUCTION & PUBLISHING

Accessibility Requirements

- Include sign language videos.
- Add captions and transcripts.
- Provide visual summaries.

Ethical Publishing

- Respect participant consent choices.
- Avoid distortion of meaning.
- **Return story to the community**

12. FIELDWORK CHECKLIST

Before

- Interpreter briefed.
- Consent prepared.
- Equipment ready.

During

- Record full responses.
- Avoid interruptions.
- Capture visual evidence.

After

- Verify information.
- Add context.
- Ensure accessibility.

13. FINAL MESSAGE

Accessibility is not an add-on; it is the method of truthful journalism.

14. OTHER RESOURCES FOR JOURNALISTS

<https://cpj.org/resources-for-journalists-covering-the-environment-or-extreme-weather/>

<https://www.disabilitydebrief.org/library/topic-cultmedia/>

<https://www.publicmediaalliance.org/tools/climate-change-tools/>

<https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/countering-climate-disinformation-africa-through-media-and-information-literacy>

<https://www.deafjournalism.eu/educative-material/>

<https://mediahelpingmedia.org/advanced/climate-change-tone-and-language/>

<https://jhr.ca/kenya-telling-climate-change-stories-a-journalists-perspective/>

<https://www.icfj.org/news/innovating-reach-deaf-and-hard-hearing-communities-truth>

<https://acme-ug.org/2025/02/13/diana-kibuuka-on-using-radio-and-podcasts-to-make-climate-stories-matter/>

<https://www.light-for-the-world.org/news/how-to-report-on-disability-6-tips-for-journalists/>

<https://www.unclearn.org/resources/library/climate-change-in-africa-a-guidebook-for-journalists/>

<https://inclusivefutures.org/covering-disability-in-the-media/>

<https://internews.org/areas-of-expertise/environment/>

<https://www.climatechangenewsservice.org/resources-for-journalists>

<https://afripoli.org/telling-climate-change-stories-perspectives-from-african-journalists>

15. POSSIBLE STORY IDEAS

1. **“Silent Flood Warnings”** – How Deaf communities miss early warnings during floods in communities like Kasese, Obongi and others.
2. **“Evacuated without Information”** – Stories of Deaf people displaced without accessible communication during disasters.
3. **“When Relief Speaks, Who Understands?”** – Lack of sign language interpreters in emergency aid distribution.
4. **“Mapping Displacement in Silence”** - Visual journeys of Deaf families forced to relocate due to climate shocks.
5. **“Cut off twice”** – How displacement deepens isolation for Deaf women and children.
6. **“Weather Forecasts They Cannot Hear”** – Accessibility gaps in Uganda’s meteorological services.
7. **“No Interpreter, No Warning”** – Government disaster briefings that exclude sign language.
8. **“Radio is Not Enough”** – Why traditional climate communication fails Deaf communities.
9. **“Digital Divide and Deaf Exclusion”** – Are mobile alerts and apps inclusive?
10. **“Lost in Translation”** – When interpreters are untrained or unavailable during crises.
11. **“Who Is Responsible?”** – Tracking government accountability for inaccessible disaster.
12. **“Policies without Practice”** – Uganda’s disability laws Vs reality in climate emergencies.
13. **“Invisible in National Plans”** – Are Deaf people included in climate adaptation policies?
14. **“Counting the Uncounted”** – Lack of data on Deaf people in displacement statistics.
15. **“Double Risk”** – Deaf women facing gender-based violence in displacement camps.
16. **“Teenage Mothers in Silence”** – Climate displacement, deaf girls and early pregnancies.
17. **“Barriers to healthcare”** – Deaf mothers struggling to access maternal services after displacement.
18. **“Hidden exploitation”** – Labor and survival risks for Deaf youth in camps.
19. **“Interrupted Learning”** – Deaf children dropping out due to climate displacement.
20. **“Schools without support”** – Lack of Ugandan Sign Language – trained teachers in emergency education setups.

- 21. “Learning in silence”** – Experiences of Deaf students in temporary learning centers.
- 22. “Deaf-lead climate solutions”** – Community innovations in adapting to climate change.
- 23. “Training the first responders”** – Efforts to equip interpreters for disaster response.
- 24. “Designing inclusive early warning systems”** – Practical models that work for deaf communities.