



Bearing witness

Isabel Hurtado de Mendoza talks to Laura Furones about working for the NGO Global Witness and the challenges of bridging the gap between languages

Isabel and Laura first worked together in 2008, and have collaborated professionally – at times more intensively, at other times less so – ever since. Last year, they teamed up again to work on *Toxic Takeaways*, a Global Witness (GW) publication about the ways in which large-scale soya production in Paraguay is linked to atrocious human rights abuses.

Isabel: Laura, can you start by telling us about your background in the third sector?

Laura: I was born and raised in Madrid. In other words, I was very much an urban girl. However, for as long as I can remember I've felt a deep connection with nature, and I've been passionate about environmental protection – unsurprisingly, I ended up studying environmental sciences at college and went on to do an MSc in Conservation. I also knew early on that I wanted to work at the front line of the fight against the climate crisis, even though it didn't have that name at the time.

I was very interested in other cultures too, and in seeing the world from many different perspectives. I moved to London in 2002 and started volunteering for GW, which was a tiny non-governmental organisation (NGO) then but has grown exponentially over the years. GW focuses on undertaking investigations and advocacy, with the ultimate goal of achieving climate justice and safeguarding civic freedoms. Simple mission, really hard work!

Isabel: Tell me about it! I've been working with GW for 15 years and I'd say there has been a reorientation of its objectives. To me, the subjects you address now have a more global scope and affect larger governance frameworks. Even when dealing with local conflicts, your campaigns always have repercussions on other regions of the world, involve governments and major corporations, and/or tackle issues that impact the whole planet and its inhabitants. A good example is our latest project together, where GW proved that European consumers are likely to be purchasing

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food linked to human rights abuses in Paraguay that Western corporations are turning a blind eye to. Working for you carries a significant responsibility!

Laura: Indeed! What do you enjoy most about translating for an advocacy organisation like GW?

Isabel: Probably the opportunity to make an impact. As I have progressed in my career, I have honed my expertise and I've chosen to work with clients that share my values. Knowing that my translations are actively contributing to fostering a more equitable and healthy society, as well as safeguarding vulnerable individuals, makes me proud of my work.

Seeing my words published and cited in prominent Spanish newspapers, such as in the article covering *Toxic Takeaways* in *El País*, is very rewarding too, and it's a reminder that I am doing my bit to shape a better future for my daughter. It's a shame, though, that I am usually not credited for my translations, as that recognition would be an added bonus.

So what sort of projects does your organisation need translators for, and what does it look for in a translator?

Laura: As an international organisation working in many different countries and contexts, we often need translators to help us get our messages across and reach broader audiences. Most of the investigations we publish go out in several languages, and many of the social media materials we produce also need translating. Sometimes, we even need internal materials produced in different languages. In our latest collaboration, we were aiming to use the Paraguay soya report for international advocacy but also, crucially, to trigger conversations within the country.

Obviously, we look for quality as a first criterion when sourcing translators. But flexibility and timely delivery are also very important – our investigative world moves quickly and changes all the time, so we need to be able to adapt our outputs to that. Tight deadlines are also a reality that we need translators to adapt to (as you know from your own experience).

In an ideal world, I'd like to always work with translators with whom I have a long-term relationship. Working with those who already know the process, who are already familiar with the subject of our reports and who have learned our particular idiosyncrasies makes a big difference. In the real world, that is not always possible, though, since our preferred translators are not always available when we need them.

What about you, Isabel? Do you find working with us challenging?

Isabel: GW is a very rewarding client, but also a particularly tough one. Since I started working with you in 2008, I have had to translate texts about many different issues, ranging from illegal logging, human rights violations and conflict minerals to money laundering, blockchain technology and the climate crisis. This means I have had to keep on my toes and constantly acquire knowledge regarding your latest campaigns. Contrary to the popular belief that any volunteer can translate for NGOs and similar entities, your texts are challenging and demand an excellent command of two languages, up-to-date subject matter knowledge and an awareness of cultural differences.

Your staff turnaround is also quite challenging, as different people have different ideas about working with translators. One

thing ITI offers is a directory of qualified, experienced translators, and some of us even specialise in your area of work too.

What would be very helpful to me would be to be regarded as a member of your team and to participate in the entire publication process alongside investigators, report writers, communication experts and so on. This would give me access to relevant reference materials, like prior translations, style guides or a list of preferred terms, which would ensure my output aligned with your purposes and would minimise the need for further editing.

Good communication with your experts is crucially important too, so that I can clarify ambiguities in the original, address queries or offer suggestions. I'd also like to have the opportunity to review the final draft before publication. And, in an ideal scenario, you would help me update my subject matter expertise by providing relevant reading materials in English and Spanish and inviting me to your CPD trainings.

Having said that, it's enormously rewarding.

As it is to know that whatever happens to the translation industry more broadly there will always be clients like GW, who grasp the significance of effective

communication and understand the damage that a poor translation can do to their success and reputation.

Laura: Full disclosure then: we really appreciate working together, don't we? I know I certainly do. I feel GW is very lucky to have you.

Isabel: Yes, we've had fun over all these years, haven't we? Here's to many more to come!

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Isabel Hurtado de Mendoza MITI has been a freelance translator working from English into Spanish for over 20 years. What moves her is education, solidarity, inclusivity and sustainability, and after 20 years' experience in the language industry, she specialises in culture, education and human rights. She is a social media coordinator for the ITI International Development & Coordination Network. Twitter: @Lingotrans; LinkedIn: isabelhurtadodemendoza.



Laura Furones has been working on environmental and human rights issues for over 20 years, with organisations like Global Witness, the EU FLEGT and REDD facilities, and the Climate and Land Use Alliance. She has worked and travelled extensively in Latin America and Africa, documenting and exposing illegal logging practices in tropical forests and advocating for strengthened law enforcement. She has also worked in partnership with organisations across the world to support land and environmental defenders and seek justice for those disproportionately affected by the climate crisis.