

# Breaking Down Barriers

*How Language Shapes Sustainability  
Conversations*

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Language is one of the most powerful tools at our disposal, yet it is often misused in ways that create barriers rather than building bridges. Nowhere is this more evident than in sustainability, where jargon and technical terms can alienate stakeholders, hindering meaningful progress.

## **The power of language in sustainability**

Sustainability is inherently relational—it connects people, the environment, and economies. However, the way we frame conversations can significantly influence engagement and outcomes. Research indicates that using clear, accessible language enhances collaboration and increases stakeholder buy-in. According to the United Nations, effective communication is crucial in advancing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially in diverse communities where language barriers can impact participation (United Nations, 2015).

## **Strategies to foster understanding**

To create a more inclusive and impactful sustainability dialogue, businesses and organizations should consider the following approaches:

**1. Avoid jargon:** While technical terminology is essential in professional settings, overuse can alienate non-experts. A study by the Journal of Environmental Psychology found that people are more likely to engage in sustainability initiatives when messages are framed in simple, relatable terms (Schultz, P. W., & Zelezny, L. C., 2003).

**2. Actively listen:** Effective communication is not just about speaking; it's about understanding different perspectives. Active listening fosters trust and inclusivity, ensuring that diverse voices contribute to the sustainability agenda.

**3. Reframe challenges as opportunities:** The way issues are presented affects how they are perceived. Instead of saying, "we lack electricity," a more constructive approach is to highlight "untapped renewable energy potential." This shift in narrative has spurred innovations such as mini-grid solar systems in rural Tanzania, improving energy access and economic opportunities (IRENA, 2018).

like South Africa and Nigeria, businesses have successfully engaged local communities by translating sustainability concepts into native languages. This approach ensures that grassroots stakeholders understand and participate in initiatives like conservation efforts and circular economy programs (UNEP, 2020).

### **Building a shared future**

Sustainability is a collective effort that requires inclusive, solutions-oriented conversations. The words we choose can unite or divide, inspire action or create resistance. By embracing language as a tool for collaboration, businesses can foster trust, innovation, and long-term success.

Are you looking to enhance your sustainability communications and stakeholder engagement? Let's work together to craft impactful narratives that drive meaningful change. Reach out to us for inquiries on how to refine your messaging and connect with your audience effectively.

### **References**

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