



## Language Choices

In accordance with our mission and biblical values, Africa New Life prioritizes and protects the dignity of the Rwandans we work with. **We recognize that our language choices play an active role not only in educating U.S. partners about Rwanda but also in guiding their compassion and love**, helping build thoughtful, respectful relationships between sponsors and students. As an ambassador for Africa New Life, the words you use to post and share about sponsorship and about Rwanda makes a difference in the lives of people across the world from you—and of those in your network!

Below are examples of phrasing to avoid and options to use instead as you post or share with dignity and honor in mind. This list is not exhaustive; it is meant to be a starting place for thoughtfulness, good conversation, and great care.

What to Avoid	What to Use Instead	...But Why?
your child; your Rwandan son/daughter	your sponsored student; your sponsored child (if age-appropriate); your student (if necessary for flow or space)	Avoid implications and mindsets of ownership, of sponsorship as parenthood, or of taking the place of the family.  Avoid patronizing our older students (they're not children!).
kid(s) or kiddo(s)	student(s); sponsored student(s); child(ren) (only if age-appropriate); young person/people	Avoid language that patronizes, demeans, or reverse-ages students.  Avoid the informality of a U.S. term that is not widely used in Rwandan English.
needy or poor (family, child, man, woman)	in need; living in poverty; experiencing poverty; vulnerable; among the most vulnerable  Note: "Children from Rwanda's poorest communities" could be appropriate while "Rwanda's poorest children" would not be.	Avoid diminishing individuals to their circumstances; use people-first language that recognizes their whole selves.
victim of; suffering from	survivor of; experiencing	Avoid diminishing individuals to their circumstances; use language that emphasizes their courage and resilience, not their victimhood.

choose a child or student (to sponsor)	pray over which student you could come alongside; select a profile of a student waiting for a sponsor	Avoid language that carries connotations of ownership or objectification; use language that emphasizes the sponsor's role in supporting (not possessing) another and in being obedient to God.
any language that suggests we are saving students or families—creating life or hope or dreams for them	language that suggests we are <b>coming alongside</b> or supporting students, women, families—freeing them up for <b>independence and self-sufficiency</b> to pursue their (God-given) dreams and honoring their (God-given) dignity	Avoid language that places staff or sponsors in the role of savior or that suggests students need us to be fully human; use language that emphasizes their individuality and independence and our role in supporting God's work in their lives.

Along with these examples, consider three themes of ethical representation:

1. **Independence:** The goal of many of our programs is to equip students and families to succeed and overcome circumstances caused by poverty. Our language should honor the achievements of the students and their families and emphasize that the goal of our support is to increase their agency.
2. **Shared faith:** We are fortunate to come alongside the Rwandan team in our faith and share beliefs with each other. Our language should emphasize the shared faith between Africa New Life, our donors, and the students and their families, recognizing the valuable contributions of all Rwandans to our understanding of God, faith, and forgiveness.
3. **Partnership:** We recognize that the impact of Africa New Life would not be possible without the hard work and active participation of students and their families in Rwanda. This is why language of “coming alongside” is so important as we equalize the contributions of donors, students, and their families.

This handout cannot possibly clarify all examples of language to avoid, exceptions to the guidance above, or potential cultural factors influencing Rwandan and U.S. language choices. In case of confusion or concern, please talk with a member of the U.S. staff. When in doubt about phrasing, err on the side of formality (“my sponsored student”) rather than informality and familiarity (“my kiddo”), which more easily lend themselves to potentially harmful or inappropriate racial and power narratives.