

THE CURRENT SITUATION OF THE DEAF AND HARD OF HEARING IN GHANA.

INTRODUCTION

In this paper, I will give a brief personal history of myself, a brief overview of our country Ghana, and an overview of the situation of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing in Ghana. This will cover our number, our sign language, educational attainment, employment, and accessibility issues.

1. BRIEF PERSONAL HISTORY OF MYSELF.[Refer to separate attached paper]
2. BRIEF HISTORY ABOUT GHANA.
3. official name.....Ghana
4. population.....24 millions approximately
5. Official language.....English. Over 25 ethnic languages
6. President.....Prof.J.E.A Mills
7. Regions.....10 major regions with 230 Constituencies[illustrate with political map of Ghana]
8. Currency.....GH¢ [Ghana Cedis]

3. THE SITUATION OF THE DEAF AND HARD OF HEARING PEOPLE

A. THE NUMBER OF PERSONS WHO ARE DEAF AND HARD OF HEARING

The number of persons with hearing loss or deafness in Ghana was obtained through a membership mobilisation exercise of people who are deaf and hard of hearing in 2004. During this exercise, approximately 6,000 Deaf and Hard of Hearing were registered.

However, since Ghana's current population is about 24millions while the number of PWDs was put at 4.2 million representing 20% according to the 2010 provisional estimates of the population and Housing Census report, (Daily Graphic, Tuesday November 22,2011) ,the actual population of the deaf and Hard-of -Hearing is yet to be determined upon further research.

B. OUR EDUCATION

Education of the Deaf in Ghana was started 1957 by the late Rev. Andrews Foster, an Afro-American Deaf Evangelist. Currently, there are 14 basic schools and 3 second circle schools for the Deaf in Ghana.

It must be noted that Bechem Second circle is teaching purely technical skills ..

Our first second circle school, the Mampong Akwapim Senior High Technical School for the Deaf has been turning out graduates , some of whom are at the Universities, Training Colleges, and Poly Technics. The number of those Deaf doing the tertiary programs at the integrated tertiary educational institutions currently is about 37.

The break down is as follows:

University of Ghana.....2
UEW,Kumasi Campus....3
UEW,Winneba Campus...11
Univ. Of Dev. Studies.....1
Presby. Coll. Of Educ.....10
Tamale Trg. College.....9
Takoradi Poly.....1

The aspiring Deaf students in these inclusive educational settings face serious communication barriers due to lack of sign language interpreters. {Tell the real life story of my current experience with UCC; experience at PTC, UEW, Akraasi's current problem at Winneba campus, Kumasi etc.

This lack of interpreters for the Deaf denies the deaf access to higher education and this leads to the high illiteracy and unemployment rates among the Deaf in Ghana.

C. SIGN LANGUAGE AS MEANS OF COMMUNICATION FOR DEAF PERSONS.

The Sign language we use in Ghana takes its roots from the American Sign Language. It was introduced by Rev. Dr Andrew Foster, the Deaf African-American as the means of communication and instruction between deaf pupils and their teachers, when he started the first school for the Deaf in Ghana in 1957.

The Ghanaian sign language is not very different from the American Sign Language (ASL). The differences between the two sign languages came about as a result of differences in culture, inadequate educational facilities for deaf people, and geographical location.

The Ghanaian Sign Language is not popular and is yet to be recognised as the natural language for deaf people. As a result, there are problems with teaching and training sign language interpreters and so those who interpret for deaf people are not professionally trained, qualified or licensed sign language interpreters as persists in developed countries like US.

D. SIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING TO THE PUBLIC:

Individual members from some few churches and organisations in Ghana are making some minimal efforts to learn how to use the sign language. The Church of the Later-day Saints, the Church of Christ, the International Central Gospel Church, the Jehovah's Witnesses, and the Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice (CHRAJ) are some of the few organisations that have recently begun showing interest in learning of the Ghanaian Sign Language.

The Ghana National Association of the Deaf (GNAD) is therefore assisting to provide members of these private organisations with sign language skills. Also GNAD organises public sign language classes for individuals who are interested in learning the sign language.

GNAD has published a Ghanaian Sign Language Book in 2004. This book acts as the Ghanaian Sign Language resource book for teachers, students, and individuals who want to learn our Sign Language. GNAD is set for the task of updating the Ghana Sign Language; committee has been already formed and tasked for this work.

However, we are encountering some problems in our efforts to update the book. Some of these problems are lack of funds and facilities/resources to assist in the data collection.

E. SIGN LANGUAGE INTERPRETERS AND INTERPRETATION

There are about just 24 uncertified Ghana sign language interpreters serving the whole deaf and hard of hearing population in Ghana. It was only in 2007 that one of the public Universities in Ghana introduced sign language and interpretation programme at the Certificate and Diploma levels.

As such, the level of interpretation skills is not very good and varies among the interpreters. Most of the sign language interpreters are volunteers who learned the sign language on their own with some assistance from deaf and hard of hearing people.

F. INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION FOR DEAF PEOPLE IN GHANA

In Ghana, the deaf and hard of hearing people use modern information and communication Technology [ICT] equipment.

Some deaf people use Computers, mobile phones and facsimile-faxes for communicating and transmitting messages. Deaf people who use these facilities are however few but the number is increasing gradually. The government has not subsidised these equipment for deaf people in Ghana as it is in many developed countries.

In view of the fact that most deaf people have little formal education and are unemployed, it is very difficult for them to benefit from modern communication technology for deaf people.

Also, all the television stations in Ghana except GTV, which introduced sign language for major news programs recently, do not have sign language interpreters, neither do they provide subtitles and captioning for their programmes. Also due to the non-availability of sign language interpreters, the programme does not take place regularly as expected, leading to frequent discontinuities.

The major means by which deaf and hard of hearing people get information on national issues is through the newspapers. But as I indicated earlier, the low level of literacy makes accessing this source of information difficult to most deaf and hard of hearing people.

G. EMPLOYMENT SITUATION AMONG DEAF PEOPLE IN GHANA

Unemployment among deaf people in Ghana is high. Only few deaf and hard of hearing people are employed in occupations such as teaching, arts, plumbing, manual works, tailoring, carpentry, painting, farming, hairdressing, and factory hands.

The unemployment problem of deaf people in Ghana is largely due to the low educational attainment and training. As indicated earlier, deaf education in Ghana is low; the highest educational attainment by many deaf people is secondary education. This is not enough to give them the skills to compete on the job market with their hearing counterparts.

To address this situation, provisions have been made in the recently passed Persons with Disabilities Law, Act 715, for the Establishment of Employment centres for persons with Disabilities and promotion of Employment of persons with Disabilities.” The main purpose of the provision is to help persons with disabilities, including deaf people to get jobs in order to reduce unemployment and begging among them.

To this effect, the government has begun putting in place employment centres or places where people with disabilities will be helped to access jobs.

Also the government has allocated 2% of the district Assembly Common Fund to persons with disabilities as means of assisting them to improve on their various income generating activities and increase their chance of getting employment. It is expected that government’s tax exemption policy to encourage private businesses or companies to employ persons with Disabilities, including deaf people, will open up more job opportunities that deaf people need. However, this dream is yet to be implemented.

MAJOR CHALLENGES:

Among the challenges of the Deaf, accessibility to information and a communication is considered to be the most critical. Thus all other problems facing the Deaf community can be traced to the communication barrier due to deafness or hearing impairment.

Since deafness is not easily perceived, the deaf population attracts less attention compared to their fellow persons with disability.

In the area of employment, even though it is a general problem, the situation is significantly worst among the deaf and other pwds as a whole.

It is equally difficult for the Deaf persons to access health care partly due to communication barrier. In many instances, Deaf persons are misdiagnosed and prescribed inappropriate medication leading to undue complications and preventable deaths. This is because there is no provision of sign language interpreters within the health care delivery system.

Access to quality tertiary education is very difficult for the Deaf in Ghana. This is due to the fact that deaf education is restricted to the second circle level with no or inadequate provisions made to enable the deaf school leavers to further their education at the tertiary levels.

CONCLUSION

Ghana is yet to implement some legal and practical measures such as the DISABILITY ACT 715, and the UN CONVENTION for PWDs that prohibit all kinds of discrimination against People With Disabilities including the Deaf and hard of hearing k people. These measures when achieved would secure some formidable level of development for PWDs including the Deaf.

I would say that the living status of the deaf and hard of hearing people in Ghana is very low compared with other groups of people (both disabled person and non- disabled persons).

Thank you all for patience in listening.
May God bless us all

S.K.Asare [Immediate past president of GNAD]