



ENFORCE THE DISABILITY ACT AND RECOGNIZE SIGN LANGUAGE IN GHANA NOW!



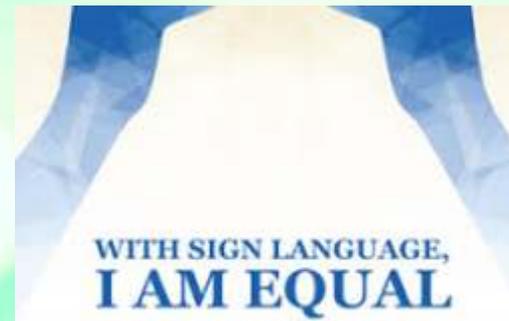
BACKGROUND

Ghana has in the past made significant strides in ensuring issues pertaining to disabled people are well catered for. The ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) and the passage of the Persons with Disability Act, 715 are examples of national and international efforts to increase the participation of disabled persons in socio-economic activities. While these legal measures guarantees and protect the rights of disabled persons, their effective enforcement and implementation in the country has become a major hurdle.

Deaf people, because of their hearing barrier encounter several setbacks that limit their access to vital national information, enjoying their fundamental rights and access to existing support systems to seek redress in law courts. Their inability to hear has resulted in their exclusion in decision making at all levels of society and therefore hinder them from making a substantive impact and contribution to national issues and development. The main medium of communication among deaf people and non-deaf people is through the use of sign language. Unfortunately, sign language interpreters are very scarce in Ghana.

STATISTICS

- The World Health Organization estimates that about 5.3% of the world population have hearing impairments.
- The 2010 housing and population census estimated an increasing deaf population at an annual growth rate of 2.2%.
- The cost of acquiring sign language services in Ghana is high due to the limited number of sign language interpreters. This makes it expensive to do business with deaf people.
- Act 715, sections 6 and 7 stipulates that public institutions should make appropriate provisions for people with disabilities. Article 9 section E of UNCRPD makes provisions for disabled people to have access to services of public institutions as well. However the non-enforcement of these regulations means that deaf people cannot realize their full potential.
- Almost all healthcare centers remain inaccessible for deaf people due to the non-availability of sign language interpreters at these health centers. Apart from few public institutions, almost all private tertiary education institutions remain inaccessible to deaf people. These barriers prevent deaf people from developing to their full potentials.



CHALLENGES FACED BY THE DEAF

In Ghana, despite the existence of the Disability Act 715, the deaf face a plethora of challenges at work, when conducting business and at social gatherings. Some of these challenges include:

- Absence of sign language interpreters or other hearing assistive services undermines the ability of people with hearing impairment to fully and effectively participate in their social, economic and cultural environments.
- This has given rise to unqualified and inexperienced interpreters who charge exorbitant fees for their services.
- They therefore often experience differential treatments, thus infringing on their fundamental human rights, a situation which is at odds with what international, regional and local conventions stipulations.
- The non-existent or non-enforceability of local legislations, treaties or conventions and policies which hinder access to sign language services or interpreters. Even in instances where these services exist, they are often sporadic and provided on ad hoc basis.
- Limited information about existing programmes and policies to support the recruitment, training and placement of sign language interpreters in vantage public and private institutional spaces to facilitate effective engagement and

communication with hard of hearing individuals.

- It is instructive to mention that most public institutions face the challenge of inadequate funds to improve or ensure availability of sign language and interpretation services.

BENEFITS OF AN ENFORCED DISABILITY ACT AND RECOGNITION OF SIGN LANGUAGE TO THE DEAF

- It is expected that the Disability Act, 715 and UNCRPD law when fully enforced will improve the lives of persons with disability immensely by helping them realize their utmost potential. The following are among the benefits to the deaf when the Act is enforced.
- Deaf people will realize their full potential in education by being able to pursue educational programs at the tertiary level.
- Deaf people will be able to interact at relatively low cost with non-deaf people if the number of sign language interpreters are increased.
- Deaf people will be able to access health care facilities for all their health needs.
- It will ensure that deaf people have access to financial services, information services and undertake other business activities to improve their economic wellbeing.

- An increase in the number of sign language interpreters to provide communication services for deaf people.
- Accessibility to the services of public institutions by deaf people.
- Funding sign language services of public institutions by Government.
- The cost of sign language services will be greatly reduced for deaf people.

EFFORTS OF GNAD SO FAR TO MAKE SIGN LANGUAGE RECOGNIZED AND THE DISABILITY ACT ENFORCED

- Trained sign language interpreters to be fluent in the Ghanaian sign language to provide communication services to the deaf community.
- Partnered with academic institutions (University of Cape Coast) to train and certify qualified sign language interpreters.
- National advocacy drive which resulted in all nurses and mid-wifery schools teaching basic sign language communication to equip nurses with the capacity to communicate with deaf people.
- Working with the Ghana Broadcasting Corporation to interpret news services for deaf people to keep them informed about activities across the country.
- Produced telephone directories of sign language interpreters for easy access to their services.

- Advocating for the engagement of sign language interpreters in all district and assemblies through capacity building of same.

RECOMMENDATIONS & SOLUTIONS FROM GNAD

- Government to formulate policies to promote the training and placement of sign language interpreters in both government and non-governmental organizations, teaching of sign language in schools and the creation of a database for sign language interpreters for easy access. This will significantly improve accessibility of sign language interpreters and cut down cost for their services drastically.
- Proactive engagement of government and other relevant public institutions by the associations of deaf persons will enable them take advantage of the

existing opportunities in the public sector in the short term.

- National Media Commission as part of giving license to individuals who wish to establish media houses should make it mandatory for the media house to employ the services of sign language interpreters. Government can back this with a policy.
- Government to formulate a policy that will recognize sign language as one of the formal means of communication for the deaf.

ACTION POINTS

- Call on government to review and enforce the provisions of the Disability Act.
- We also call on government to recognize and formalize sign language as the formal means of communication for the deaf. Government can formulate a policy to back this.



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