

## The Deaf of Kenya The Sign Language Community of Kenya



A Deaf person living in Kenya is not recognized as someone who has a complete and rich language. Nor as someone who belongs to a unique cultural group. But rather, this Deaf person is perceived to lack the mental capability to speak or to hear, at best the Deaf persons inability to hear is seen as a pathological problem and so much time, effort and resources are spent on speech therapy for deaf students in the schools for the Deaf with the goal of "making Deaf people speak." This being Kenyans' perception about Deaf people, their economic, educational and social standing among the general population is one of the lowest.

Deaf people in Kenya, as is true for Deaf people everywhere, place high value on community. Being together in fellowship is a high cultural value for them. Transparency in all situations is paramount within the culture for complete understanding and acceptance by Deaf People. By virtue of being deaf, Deaf people take in most of their information visually. Visuals of any kind used in any situation is appreciated and valued by Deaf people.

Not any part of Scripture has been translated using Kenya Sign Language up to date. There are no films or videos in KSL with a Christian message available.

Many schools for the Deaf in Kenya were begun by missionaries or church societies. Unfortunately, the Gospel was not communicated to the Deaf students in their heart language, KSL, so that there is little clear understanding of the Good News of Jesus Christ by the Deaf today.

Kenyan Deaf live within the same environment as hearing Kenyans. Their daily lives, employment and surroundings do not differ from the majority of Kenyans who live below the poverty line. The difference is that Deaf people are not recognized or respected for who they are as people by the majority. The need is obvious and the opportunity is now to bring the message of the Bible to the Deaf of Kenya.

**Primary Religion:**

Non-religious

**Disciples (Matt 28:19):**

0.07%

**Churches:**

18

**Scripture Status (Matt 28:20):**

None

**Population (date):**

291,000 (2013)

Or 7 in 1000



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### Have They Heard The Gospel?

Call Themselves Christian	5%
Believe In Jesus As God And Only Savior	0.07%
Prophet/Good Man, But Not God's Son	1%
Have Not Heard Who Jesus Is	94%
Is The Word Of God Translated?	No
Forms Of Gospel Presentation Available	None
What Kind Of Missionaries Are Needed?	At present there are not any Kenyan deaf persons who have any depth of Bible knowledge and/or theological training to clearly and effectively present the Gospel

# The Sign Language Community of Kenya

## Group Description

### Population All Countries

Comment

When we speak about Deaf people as opposed to deaf people, we're making the distinction of , among other things, their language of preference. Simply stated, Deaf people identify with the Deaf culture and use that signed language; deaf people do not and prefer to use the spoken language.

Estimating the population of a Deaf community is difficult. Quite honestly, no one knows how many Deaf there are in a given country. However, some generalities seem to hold true. In 1st world nations (like the US) 1-2 people in 1000 are Deaf; in those nations that are considered "2nd world", 3-4 people per 1000 are Deaf; in 3rd world nations, the numbers are much higher: 6-8 people per 1000 are Deaf. Again, this is an estimation only. There is absolutely no quantifiable documentation to support these numbers. But, they are the best we know. As implied, the estimated number of deaf is larger than the number of those who learn sign language and become part of the Deaf community. Some parents do not have the funds to send their child to a deaf school and some of these children never encounter others with whom to communicate. Almost all deaf children are born to hearing parents. Instead these children grow and work at home where they use gestures and sounds but do not have a true language. The number of these is unknown.

### Geography & Environment

Location

Deaf people are spread throughout all of Kenya, but they tend to congregate in urban centers where there are other deaf people with whom they can communicate.

### Language & Linguistics

Comment

Kenyan Sign Language is a developing language incorporating the signs used from the various schools for the deaf in the country.

Attitude Towards Mother Tongue

Very receptive

### Literacy

Adult Literacy Percentage

20%

Literacy Attitude

Somewhat receptive

Active Literacy Program

No

Comment

Among those who can read, using English only, the level of reading is documented to be at third grade level. English is the common language for all tribes of deaf. All instruction done in the 31 primary and vocational/technical and 2 secondary schools for the deaf in Kenya is done in English.

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### Economics

Average Annual Income

\$300 US

Occupation

Many work on the farms of their parents, and those who have been to technical training would support themselves with basic carpentry, tailoring, welding, mechanics, silk screeners and even fishermen.

Income Sources

Same as general population

### Community Development

Health Care

None

Comment

The deaf are not informed of the available public medical services, which are very poor to start with. There is no official government medical services targeted for them. Because they are often not able to communicate or to be informed, they are unaware of any clinics and are susceptible to fraudulent medical practitioners.

Diet (Quality)

Poor

Comment (Diet)

Because they are at the lower end of the economic scale by virtue of the society's perception of deaf people, they eat the cheapest, least nutritious foods of all foods available

Transportation

The government has issued special bus passes for the deaf which entitle them to half- fare on the busses. This is recognized and accepted by the bus conductors.

### Society & Culture

Family Structures

They tend to follow the rest of Kenyan cultures.

Neighbor Relations

Hearing neighbors in their community are generally tolerant of them, but communication remains very limited. The general public feels that the cause of deafness is due to a curse, probably brought about by not following traditional burial rites or dowry requirements, etc. So the deaf person is feared and shunned, and the family of the deaf person feels shame. They seldom send a deaf child to school. There is an assumption that the deaf are retarded or in some way mentally defective.

Authority / Rule

Decisions and actions are based on consensus, as is the general rule in Kenya, but even more so. There is never a single, dominant ruler or leader.

Social Habits/Groupings

Time is even more flexible than to other Kenyans; being together with other deaf and signing is extremely important, and they will spend hours communicating with one another. There are 4 street corners in downtown Nairobi that serve as social centers where all information/news is passed along. These started because certain deaf individuals chose those corners to sell sweets.

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Cultural Change Pace	Static Identification With National Culture
Integrated Self Image	Threatened
Recreations	Telling stories to one another
Art Forms	They love drama
Media	None available
Attitude To Outsiders	Very receptive
Attitude To Change	Somewhat resistant
Comment (Culture)	The deaf would welcome assistance in proving that their language is a valid and complete language system. They would welcome social changes which might improve their life. Signed Exact English is not acceptable for long-term interaction, but might be tolerated for brief encounters. They prefer to use Kenyan Sign Language, which is a combination of sign languages which developed within each of the separate schools for the deaf scattered throughout Kenya.

### Youth

Labor and tasks (6-12 year olds)	Like other Kenyan children.
Youth Problems (Teens)	Parents are not aware of the availability of deaf boarding schools for children. Even if they are aware of the schools there may be no funds available for schooling. Until a child goes to a deaf school he will experience extreme isolation.
Youth Greatest Needs (teens)	To be educated in his own language, Kenya Sign Language. Teachers who are serious about teaching deaf children. E.g., know and use Kenyan Sign Language, using visuals, understanding deaf culture. Innovative and up to date technical training. e.g., computers or even a typing class.

### Education

Primary Schools	31
Primary School Enrollment	3,310
Percent Of Eligible Students Enrolled	10%
Teacher To Pupil Ratio	1:60
Language Of Instruction Early Years	English
Language Of Textbooks Early Years	English
Number Of Schools > 90% Homogeneous	31

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### Comment (Education)

All formal instruction currently done in Kenyan deaf schools is done with ORAL English, not Kenyan Sign Language. Therefore, the level of communication between teacher and pupil is not good. This began in the 60's and is still the official government policy. There are only two secondary schools and no colleges for the deaf. Textbooks are old and outdated, usually donated from the West.

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### Status of Christianity

#### Church Growth

Reached Status	Engaged
Reached Classification	World A
Lay Leaders	8
Number of Pastors	20
Number of Missionaries	5
Number of Churches	18
Christian Literacy Centers	1
Comment (Church Growth)	No Bible schools especially for deaf people, although there are two deaf young men are attending a Bible school for hearing students. The literacy center is located at the University of Nairobi, in the linguistics department. A course in Kenyan Sign Language is offered to hearing people.

#### Religion & Response

Attitude To Christianity	Very receptive
Attitude To Religious Change	Somewhat receptive
Resistance / Receptivity	The deaf of Kenya are receptive when a trusting relationship has first been established. Receptivity is very high when communicating the Gospel in their heart language, Kenya Sign Language.
Spiritual Climate And Openness	They are interested, curious, and open to spiritual matters. For this reason they tend to be very susceptible to cults because cults offer a feeling of community and offer interpreters. Drama or ballad (Bible story told to a rhythm with a drum beat something like rap) would probably be the best way to present Scripture to the deaf culture. You must tell the whole story. Meaning you must answer the questions who, what, when, where, and why in order for them to fully understand what you are saying.
Recommended Approaches	To have a full understanding of deaf culture and communicate in Kenyan Sign Language. To make contact with leaders of the twelve deaf associations throughout Kenya. Evangelism program targeting the 31 primary schools for the deaf in Kenya.

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Current Needs

There is a need for a person to visit and share the Gospel with the students in the primary schools. There is also a need for a video to be produced of Bible stories as well as the whole Bible in Kenya Sign Language.

Items For Prayer

Recognition by the government that Deaf people are a unique cultural/language group, thereby affecting positive changes in education and society towards deaf people.

### History Of Christianity

Year Began

1960

By Whom

Roman Catholic Church

Comments

The Roman Catholics started the first schools for the deaf in Kenya

### Scripture

Available Scripture

None

Scripture Use

Individuals and some churches

Comment (Scripture)

Desire to have the Bible recorded on video tape in Kenyan Sign Language. The printed Bible available is edited correctly for easy understanding by deaf people, however these Bibles are not in their heart language and need to be imported from the United States; furthermore, most deaf people do not know how to read.

### Missions and Churches

Organization Name

Church of Christ

Organization Name

Presbyterian

Organization Name

United World Mission