

The Deaf of Mozambique The Mozambican Sign Language Community



photo by DOOR International

Among the poorest of the poor in Mozambique, the Mozambican Deaf typically are unemployed or under-employed. This forces them to remain with their (hearing) family to have regular income, moving to a city to try to find employment or joining a local Deaf gang.

Local churches have tried to reach out to meet the needs of the Deaf, but the need is quite large. Most Deaf live for “today.” Many fall into sexual immorality as well as drugs, alcohol, gangs, and stealing to survive.

As a Deaf population within a hearing one, the Mozambican Deaf struggle from the same things that most Deaf globally do:

- Most are born to hearing parents, but do not usually learn language or values from them. They often lack anything more than basic communication skills with family members.
- Their difficulty is not the inability to hear, but the great barrier to communicating with the surrounding dominant culture, especially acquiring information.
- In Mozambique, many hearing families still consider the birth of a deaf child to be a curse for some previous sin or wrong.

Mozambique formally recognized Mozambican Sign Language as an indigenous language in 2005. But it has only three schools for the deaf, with limited use of Mozambican Sign Language (oral methods are employed: to read lips, speak and read Portuguese). Thus, many of the Deaf in Mozambique lack formal education, especially beyond Grade 6. This creates a substantial literacy issue among the Deaf. There is also a substantial lack of qualified sign language interpreters in the country.

While a majority of the Mozambique population is considered Christian (56.1%) according to a 2007 census, the number of true Disciples is estimated to be quite low. With little understanding of resources in the official written language, Portuguese, and almost no resources in Mozambican Sign Language, the Deaf are cut off from understanding God’s Word.



Primary Religion:
 Non-religious

Disciples (Matt 28:19):
 Less than 2%

Churches:
 None specially for Deaf

Scripture Status (Matt 28:20):
 No Scripture

Population (date):
 Potentially 200,000 (2015)



Mozambican Sign Language Community

Have They Heard the Gospel?

Response to the Gospel

Some Deaf attend hearing churches, but there is no interpretation of services, and the Deaf struggle with access to written resources. The percentage of Christians is less than 2%.

Are Cross-Cultural Missionaries Needed?

There is much interest in assistance, specifically in the area of training nationals to work with sign language. Expertise is needed for the development of materials/media for the Deaf. Education is an area that could use a lot of help. Teachers are unaware of how to teach "literacy" in sign language, and the general lack of awareness regarding the Deaf makes education particularly difficult. As the Deaf are generally part of larger communities or people groups, many of their needs would depend on the local situations in which they are living. Evangelists or other religious workers who know how to communicate well with deaf people could definitely be put to good use.

Number of Christian Congregations Serving Group

There are only a few churches that have ongoing Deaf ministries; these include Baptist churches and Assemblies of God churches.

Do They Have the Word of God Translated?

No, no part of the Bible has been video-recorded in Mozambican Sign Language.

Any Hindrances to Scripture Distribution?

Literacy Rate

Unknown, but probably less than 10 %. There are three schools for deaf children in the country with limited use of Mozambican Sign Language because the oral method is preferred in which they teach the children to read lips and speak Portuguese. Still, few can read at a functional level sufficient to understand what they read.

What Other Forms of Gospel Presentations are Available?

Recordings
Literature
Films/videos
Radio

At this point there are absolutely no resources in Mozambican Sign Language
None available
Only in Portuguese
No
None available

Mozambican Sign Language Community

Group Description

Population

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 always larger than the number of those who learn sign language and become part of the Deaf community. Some become deaf late in life. Some children's 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

The Deaf are found throughout the country. Mozambique is a surprisingly large country geographically, ranking as the 35th largest country in the world. It is roughly the size of Turkey. The country has a long coastline on its eastern side, and the geography of the land tends to move from lowlands to hills and plateaus, with a mountainous region to the south.

Climate

Mozambique's climate is tropical with two seasons: a wet season from October to March and a dry season from April to September. Average temperatures remain fairly moderate; for example, in Maputo the temperature ranges from 13°C to 24°C (55.4°F to 75.2°F) in July to 22°C to 31°C (71.6°F to 87.8°F) in February.

Mozambican Sign Language Community

Language/Linguistic/Literacy

Primary Language

Mozambican Sign Language

Comment

Mozambique formally recognized Mozambican Sign Language as an indigenous language in 2005. It is not considered to be related to Portuguese Sign Language. There are variations in Mozambican Sign Language among language users throughout the country, but the variation appears to be minimal. There exists a Mozambican Sign Language dictionary.

Attitude towards mother tongue

Very receptive

Monolingual

Unknown, but probably most. Ability to lip read or read Portuguese is extremely limited.

Second Languages

Portuguese

Linguistically related

Unknown

Adult Literacy

Less than 10%

Literacy Attitude

It is especially difficult for the Deaf to learn to read and write, but in many cases it is their most viable method of communication with the hearing world and therefore a necessity.

Economics

As among the poorest of the poor in Mozambique, the Mozambican Deaf typically are unemployed or under-employed. This forces them into one of these situations:

- Remaining with (hearing) family who have regular income
- Moving to a city to try to find employment there
- Joining a local Deaf gang

Local churches have tried to reach out to meet the tangible needs of the Deaf, but the need is quite large.

Occupation:

Many deaf people work on their parents' farms or other agricultural-type work. It is extremely difficult for deaf people to find work outside the home, even for those who are educated.

Community Development Status

Health Care

Poor

Local Lang Broadcasting

None

Mozambican Sign Language Community

Self Image

Depressed as a group

Society

Neighbor Relations

Because of the linguistic barriers between the Deaf and hearing (the vast majority of the Deaf struggle with spoken/written language, and most hearing people do not know how to sign), the Deaf often remain culturally isolated from the hearing. Deaf individuals are born into hearing households, and thereby are involved in hearing culture, but there is a lot of difficulty with obtaining information or communicating. Communication with hearing people is extremely limited for most deaf people. Families with deaf children experience shame because of the evil/curse association. There is the possibility of the entire family's chances for good marriage partners and positions in the community being taken away. For this reason many deaf children are kept hidden.

Social Habits/Groupings

The Deaf are in many ways excluded from normal social life, forming an "us vs. them" mentality. Because of the power dynamics that often happen between the hearing and the Deaf in Mozambique, it is often difficult for the Deaf to feel empowered and capable of leadership. Their reliance on hearing family members, organizations, and structures can sometimes cause them to think they are not capable of doing things on their own. A key issue in developing Deaf leaders in the country is to focus on empowerment and leadership development within both the translation team and the local Deaf community.

Education/Youth

Primary Schools

There are 3 Deaf schools in Mozambique. For the size of the country and the number of Deaf, this is not enough to provide consistent education for the Deaf of the country. A lack of Deaf schools means that there is a need for a central cultural organization among the Deaf.

Language of Instruction

All three schools utilize oral methods, emphasizing speaking/voicing Portuguese and learning written Portuguese, often at the expense of Mozambican Sign Language.

Language of Textbooks

Only Portuguese

Greatest Needs

If government policy could shift so that students could be taught using sign language, deaf students could be much better educated. Teacher training would then be needed. Materials such as textbooks and visual aids would be helpful.

Mozambican Sign Language Community

Religion

Primary Religion

While a majority of the population of Mozambique is considered Christian (56.1%) according to a 2007 census, the number of Christians among the Mozambican Deaf is estimated to be quite low. With little understanding of resources in the official written language, Portuguese, and almost no resources in Mozambican Sign Language, the Deaf are cut off from understanding God's Word.

Hearing people typically distance themselves from the Deaf because of the communication issues. Some view them as cursed or not as fully capable of the same things that hearing people are. Deaf people are not currently recognized as equal citizens to hearing people. In a publication by the World Federation for the Deaf on Eastern and Southern Africa, Mozambique ranked last in the rights conveyed to citizens. Mozambique lacks:

- Any guarantee for the right to employment for the Deaf
- Any anti-discrimination laws
- Any service assistance to help Deaf people find jobs
- Any vocational training for the Deaf
- Any access to universities, much less interpretation services at the university

Mozambican Sign Language Community

Status of Christianity

Church Growth

Reached Classification	Unreached
Total Believers	An estimated less than 2%
Pastors	No Deaf pastors
Churches	A few churches have ongoing deaf ministries

History of Christianity in Group

Year Began	16th Century
By Whom	Dominican Missionaries
Significant Events	In the 16 th century, Christianity was introduced to the country by Dominican missionaries. The Dominicans, Jesuits, and Augustinians actively worked in the country for several centuries. Then in the 19 th century, Anglican missionaries set up a permanent mission station in the country. Other denominations have subsequently established churches. However, these efforts have only very peripherally intersected with the Deaf due to the language barriers involved.

Scripture

Translation Status	Translation project just beginning
Available Scripture:	None in sign language
Available Form	Printed in Portuguese, but only a very, very few Deaf can read Portuguese.
Use of Translation	Hardly at all
Hindrances to Scripture Distribution	No Scriptures exist in the mother tongue. Any other Scriptures are in a language in which the Deaf are not adequately bilingual.

Missions/Churches Working Among

Organization #1	A few Southern Baptist churches
Organization #2	A few Assembly of God churches