

## The Deaf Community of Nigeria The Nigerian Sign Language Community



Deafness is a serious disability and exacts a heavy toll for individuals, families, communities and countries. Nigeria is the most populous country in Africa and is roughly divided in half between Christians who live in the South and Central parts and Muslims who occupy the North. There are about one million deaf people living throughout the country.

There are several deaf schools in Nigeria. These schools are usually boarding schools and are frequently supported by the government. However, because parents see their deaf children as a shame on the family, they are often prevented from attending. Deaf children are often seen as cursed or demon possessed. Less than 40% of Nigeria’s deaf children are enrolled in primary school and even fewer are allowed to continue to secondary school.

Most teachers in the schools for the deaf in Nigeria do not know or understand Nigerian Sign Language. The schools follow the ‘oral method’ of attempting to teach deaf children to speak and lip-read the spoken language – English. Consequently, the deaf in Nigeria rarely develop good reading skills and are unable to adequately access the truths of God’s Word.

There are many hearing churches who have reached out to the Deaf community by using interpreters in their worship services. However, the interpreters are usually untrained and unskilled in the interpreting process and the deaf are left on the outside, only able to watch the worship take place, but unable to join in or fully understand what is being done and said around them. In the South and Central states there are about 30 Deaf led churches.

**Primary Religion:**

None

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

15%

**Churches:**

30

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

No Scripture

**Population (date):**

About 1,100,000 (2013)  
Or 7 in 1,000



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### Have They Heard The Gospel?

Is The Word Of God Translated?	The Deaf in Nigeria do not have a completed Old or New Testament in their heart language. In January 2013 a team of deaf translators from Nigeria began working with DOOR International in Kenya to learn the translation process and begin translating God's Word into Nigerian Sign Language.
Believe He Is The Son of God	15%
Jesus was a Prophet or Good Man, But Not God's Son (%)	60%
Not Heard Who Jesus Is Comment	25% in the South Results might be very different in the North, though, where about 90% of the population is Muslim and less than 10% are Christian.

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## 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. Note that the estimated number of deaf is larger than the number of those who learn sign language, becoming part of the Deaf community. 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

Deaf live throughout the country of Nigeria.

### Literacy

Comment

Nigeria has many primary and secondary schools for the deaf, as well as a college for the deaf in Oyo. However these schools are largely underfunded and many of the educators do not use Nigerian Sign Language well to communicate with their students. Also, many deaf are prevented from attending deaf schools because their parents see it as a wasted of resources. Deaf girls are often prevented from attending school out of their parents' fears for their safety. Less than half of the Nigerian deaf population attend school.

### Economics

Comment

The deaf in Nigerian are often under-employed.

### Society & Culture

Comment

Deaf children (and deaf of all ages) are considered 'demon possessed' by many hearing people and are often hidden away.

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They are seen as a shame to the family. Consequently, deaf children are rarely allowed to go to school – less than 1/2 of the deaf in Nigeria are educated even though there are many deaf schools available. Deaf girls are frequently forced into marriages by their parents. Usually these marriages are with hearing men who do not use Nigerian Sign Language. Separated from any kind of support system, these girls/women are often abused by not only their husbands, but their husbands' families as well. They are treated as slaves, forced to work long hours.

### **Education/Youth**

Comment

Less than 40% of the deaf in Nigeria can read well enough to understand a written Bible.

### **Religion**

Comment

The country of Nigeria is roughly half Christian, 40 percent Muslim and 10 percent local traditional religion. Deaf people might claim the same religion as their parents, but in fact most have little or no comprehension of either Christianity or Islam.

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## Status of Christianity

### History of Christianity in Group

Year Began

1970

By Whom

Andrew Foster

Comment

Andrew Foster was a black deaf missionary from the US who started deaf education across Africa. He started the deaf education in Nigeria and, along with it, started churches in the schools.

### Churches

Comment

There are about 30 deaf lead churches in the South. The North is largely Muslim with only 2 or 3 deaf churches. There are many interpreted services (also in the South), but the interpreters are often unskilled and the deaf usually don't understand much of what is being interpreted.

### Responsiveness

Specific Ways to Reach Group:

Once the deaf understand the message of the gospel, they readily accept the offer of salvation. However, hearing churches often see the deaf as merely a charity at which they can throw money. Little, if any, attention is given to the spiritual training and discipleship of deaf believers by the hearing pastors.