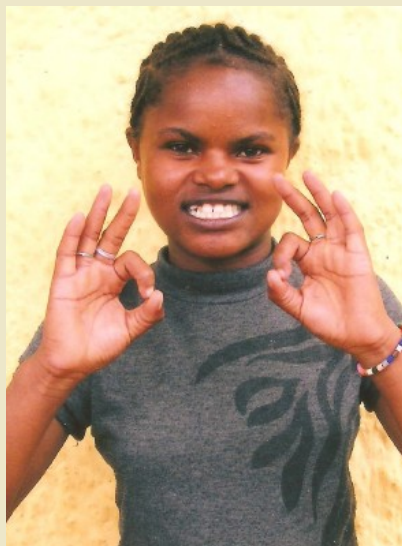


The Deaf People of Madagascar The Madagascar Sign Language Community



There are about 1800 to 2500 Malagasy who use sign language learned at school. FLM (Malagasy Lutheran church) who started the schools for the Deaf has seven schools around the country; there is one private school and one other centre, in total about 650 deaf children in these schools at the moment. It is estimated that 200,000 of Madagascar's population is deaf. The schooled ones are Christian and often their families are reached through them.

At the moment there is big talk and attempts made towards “inclusive” education, including deaf children along with hearing children in school. The idea is driven by those who sponsor the schools rather than by the deaf people themselves. The idea has some merit, but the drawbacks are huge since only a very small percentage of the deaf ever really succeed in that environment. Usually they are much more successful when surrounded by other deaf children and educated using Madagascar Sign Language instead of having to learn Malagasy and to lip read that language which they have never and will never hear spoken.

About 1500 are literate at the primary level. But only 25 reached the secondary level, ten reached high school and only five earned the diploma needed to continue study at the University—but till now no deaf students go there due to a lack of interpreters.

Most of them earn the equivalent of one dollar per day. Their job options are limited. Many work in carpentry, selling, hair dressing, farming, child care, fishing a few are teachers in the deaf schools.

They face problems every day because they are not accepted as a people who can do things in the society. They are a minority of course and people think the deaf are stupid and do not need education.

Some parents believe that having a deaf child is punishment from God so they are ashamed. Some parents are divorced on account of having a deaf child. They keep the child at home and even tie them up.

As a result most of them are brought up by an uncle or aunt or by grandparents but they do not send them to school. They just give them food and have them look after animals in the field. Some are overworked at home.

Primary Religion:

Christianity

Disciples (Matt 28:19):

1-2%

Churches:

3

Scripture Status (Matt 28:20):

No Scripture

Population (date):

1800—2500 (2012)



The Deaf of Madagascar

Have They Heard the Gospel?

Hindrances to Scripture Use

There is no Scripture in Madagascar Sign Language. Also, many deaf children do not have the opportunity to attend school and so only learn Madagascar Sign Language later in life. These people can only use gestures to communicate with those around them. It is difficult for the deaf to understand the Scripture when it is abstract and because the Madagascar Sign language is still under-developed.

Response to the Gospel

Children who have the opportunity to attend a school for the deaf usually become Christians in name and many of them are true followers of Christ. Most of the deaf schools in Madagascar are operated by the Malagasy Lutheran Church. The work was begun by missionaries working under the Norwegian Lutheran Church.

Bilingualism

Very few can read Malagasy or French, which is the medium of instruction in hearing schools. That would be a third language for the Deaf. Learning to lip-read and speak are very difficult for a deaf person.

Are Cross-Cultural Missionaries Needed?

There is an obvious need for someone to coach them in how to translate Scripture accurately into Madagascar Sign Language and then to produce and distribute it and teach Christians how to apply it in their lives. There should be 22 pastors to cover the nation and at present there are only three. People are needed who could help develop the sign language. Technicians from various fields could help with job training and other needs.

Number of Christian Congregations Serving Group

The deaf who live in town where there is a deaf school actively go to church because teachers translate the service in sign language but those who live far from the school are indifferent because they do not understand anything during the service.

Number of Congregations Using Primarily the Local Language

In the three deaf schools, every 2nd Sunday or 3rd Sunday there is a service in Sign Language. About 650 Deaf come to attend these services. At school, every morning before class there is a service explaining the Scripture using flannel graph. It is just the basics however they understand and they have faith in the salvation of Jesus Christ.

Language of Outside Communication Or Trade

Oral and written Malagasy