

Loud Silence: A Situation Analysis of Youth Living with Hearing Impairment in Uganda

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Abstract : People living with hearing impairment in Uganda are one of the most excluded minority groups in the country. The Uganda National Association of the Deaf estimates that deaf people make up 3.4% of Uganda's 43 million people. Deaf Children and youth often appear withdrawn because they face social stigma. In 2009, photojournalist Stephen Wandera Ojumbo conducted an exhibition in Kampala titled "Silent Voices with colourful Hearts" showcasing the life of deaf children at Uganda School for the Deaf, Ntinda, in order to create awareness of their plight, raising funds for the construction of a vocational centre for the deaf that didn't continue their education due to: lack of funds, non-inclusive educational institutions, and for those who cannot read and write. These children, whose lives were exhibited in 2009, are currently youths. In Uganda, there are just five primary schools for the deaf (three of these are located in Kampala, the capital city), and barely five secondary schools for the deaf. At the moment, some deaf children only receive special needs training equivalent to primary seven levels and the majority don't make it to secondary school education level due to the fact that English is a second language to them. There is a communication gap between speaking parents and deaf children, which leads to the breakage of family bonds. The deaf youth run away from their homes to form a community where they can communicate freely. Likewise, employment opportunities for the deaf are equally very limited. It's for this reason that a follow-up photo exhibition was conducted to expose more about what the youthful deaf people and their guardians go through in Uganda to get jobs, live and fit in the community, how they communicate and get understood, bonding with families instead of running away to bond with fellow deaf persons. The photo exhibition under the theme "Loud Silence" was significant in showcasing the ability of deaf youths in Uganda and eliciting solutions to make a more inclusive society for the deaf. It is hoped that partners in development will join in for intervention. The methodology used included individual interviews with the deaf youth and their parents and caretakers; photography at household and community levels; document review at organizations working with the deaf; observations; and key informant interviews with relevant personnel working with the deaf. Some of the major findings include: i) Effective sign language communication is key in deaf education, family bonding, and developing a sense of belonging; ii) Love and intimacy can keep the deaf bound together; iii) Education is important; everybody should struggle even if alone; iv) Games and sports are a unifying factor and most loved among the deaf; and v) better communication skills build confidence in deaf youth. In conclusion, concerted efforts are still needed to make Uganda schools more inclusive for deaf persons. This will enable a secure future for deaf youths.

Keywords : deaf, education, excluded, photo exhibition

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