

PROPAGATION OF SIGN LANGUAGE

Purpose

- To integrate the deaf and dumb youths/persons in the mainstream of the society.
- To give the speech and hearing impaired persons the opportunity for wider interactions in studies and job sectors.
- To create a new generation of citizens where hearing and speech impairment is no longer a handicap.
- The younger generation will take the responsibility of challenging the social ills of exclusion through the learning of sign language and imparting the knowledge to others.
- Integration (Sign Language) Clubs will be formed in schools by students which will enhance inclusive education for those with impairment.
- The idea is replicable beyond Nigeria.
- To eradicate the handicap caused by hearing and speech impairment in years to come.
- It is a positive Change Venture.

TARGET GROUP: Primary and secondary school children.

In the short term, more than 10 million children and youths in each State will learn from school, communicate effectively and impart Sign Language.

This will later spread gradually to every body in each State and the whole country at large

DISCRIMINATION AND DISABILITY, THE WAY OUT

Disability is as old as man. It is the inability of one or many parts of the body to respond to normal functioning/functions as expected. People attribute the malfunctioning of the body parts to one evil reason or the other in order to justify their negative attitude towards those who are disabled.

Disability however is a difference. There should be respect for individual differences in human beings and disability is not exempted. There are differences in colour, built, tongue and behaviour etc. and these differences should not cause a reason for discrimination because Disability is as old as man. The inability of one or many parts of the body to respond to normal functioning should not cause exclusion from the main stream of the society or be a source of subjecting those found with a difference to private treatment and handling that will, in the long term, result to discrimination, isolation and stigma.

When one or some parts of the body are not functioning properly, the remaining parts excellently combine and adjust to cope with the demands of life. Many disabled persons have proved that there is ability in disability and yet the society

Inclusive Education (Continued)

around us has not given them the expected attitude and care that could sustain them socially and economically. From the start, they were taken to exclusive and private environment for education, away from the view of their peers and the public. Those who planned the separate and private treatment meant well, it has served to give some of them the opportunity to read and write but it has caused discrimination and failed to give them full development from primary stage. The disabled that were treated in this way failed to enjoy the company of other non-disabled peers/children and the full environment of the regular schools. Their peers and the entire society missed them and kept keeping away from them until they are forgotten as part of the society. This is the true position of the disabled Nigerians. It extended to other spheres of life up to missing them in the development plans for the citizens hence no architectural structures had them in mind and no social engagements thought of them. The present day Architects now did not meet or school with them in the same environment to be able to know their needs so as to supply them in their designs of structures.

Discrimination is man-made and not part of disability. It can be dismantled for the sake of the development of the disabled persons. The consequences of stigma, isolation and discrimination cannot be over emphasized as they have led so many talented and vibrant disabled persons to the street as beggars.

The society patronizes begging as a trade and does not see it as a social ill. When a beggar is seen, especially the young ones, the question, "WHY?" does not readily come to mind. The giver feels happy that giving is an opportunity to serve God, to give alms and be a charitable person. Ideally such a person (beggar) should be seen as wasted man power and talent undeveloped which is a loss to the Nation and the family also. The thought of; "HOW TO MAKE A CHANGE IN THE PERSON'S LIFE SHOULD PREVAIL". No change will ever take place unless the beggar is removed from the road. The purpose of giving should be to help the beggar, isn't it? Are you aware that no beggar has been helped after so many years of giving on the road? Those you know since two or more years on the road, are they not still there? Where has all your money gone to?

Our survey has revealed that the moment they are discriminated out of the family and the main stream of the society, it is difficult to recall them. They get addicted to it (begging) and enjoy other ills that come with it.

The way out is INCLUSION AND INCLUSIVE APPROACHES IN ALL THINGS AND AT THE PRIMARY LEVEL. We call for a change of feeling, understanding and behaviour on the part of the society. We ask that pity and negative thought be dropped and A CHANGE FOR THE BETTER BE PICKED IN THEIR PLACE. A NEW IDEA! We want a policy that will make it compulsory for all disabled youths to go to school. Those who have passed school age should be introduced to adult education. Education for, at list, primary level will cleanse the debris that begging has deposited in their brain. This will make way for other training and development to take place.

We want a change that will make them part of the society, a change which gives them the Rights to associate with other children and other members of the society, a change that ensures Equality and the Rights to the needs of life.

We advocate for a Bill for Inclusive Education and Sign Language in primary and secondary schools in Nigeria. It is always better to catch them young when it comes to habit formation and change making. It is only when children learn from the same environment irrespective of their differences that discrimination gives way for acceptance, tolerance and peace.

We are sure that such a Bill will receive prompt attention in view of the SALAMANCA STATEMENT AND FRAME WORK FOR ACTION by UNESCO, in Spain in 1994, on Special Needs Education. After eleven years, Nigeria is yet to reflect in any way, the frame work for action adopted in 1994 in Salamanca Spain. There is urgent need for the disabled to have their place in the society and belong so as to be economically and socially viable and also contribute their own in the Nation building as part of democracy.



More than 300 participants representing 92 Governments and 25 International Organisations met in Salamanca Spain in 1994 to further the objectives of Education For All by considering the fundamental policy shifts required to promote the approach of Inclusive Education, namely, enabling schools to serve ALL CHILDREN, particularly those with special needs. UNESCO and Government of Spain organized this conference.

Friends of the disabled has risen to the challenges of the important conclusions of Salamanca Statements and we are working to ensure that Education For All, strictly means FOR ALL, especially to include those who are most vulnerable and have faced stigma and discrimination all along.

We have started to advocate for Inclusive Education and Sign Language through the Press Media. (Punch 20th July 2005 page 10; ThisDay 2nd November 2005 page 48; Television Media - News Line, 25th of September 2005.) We have distributed hand bills and flyers bearing numerical and alphabetical Sign Languages respectively. We have had several discussions with disabled peoples' groups and with the National President, Joint Association of Persons with disabilities and they are all positive. **We have written to The Federal Ministry of Education 2005 for Collaboration in a Seminar/Workshop to highlight the need for Inclusive Education as an instrument of combating discrimination, stigma and isolation. We have also written again in 2006 for Sign Language Inclusion in Primary and Secondary Schools.**

We are hopeful that after reading this piece, you will be able to support our efforts and passion with material and financial resources and by joining voice with us for a Policy Bill that will bring ALL CHILDREN TOGETHER IN EDUCATION

Every child should be provided for, to learn from the same environment, differences notwithstanding. Exposure is a major part of education. They have the Rights to live along with other peers/children. It simply requires the provision of relevant equipment to help individuals learn, and according to each person's pace and ability, except on special request or an extraordinary condition prevails.

If the Chemistry, Physics, and Arts students etc. are provided with relevant equipment in the same school for their special needs in special rooms, then;

- Braille equipment can also be provided for the visually impaired in a room to learn in their own way and in the same school.
- Ramps could be constructed for easy movement of the wheel chair and caliper users in the same school,
- Sign language could be made available to every child/student to help them interact with the deaf and dumb in the same school.

Sign Language is the only and the simplest factor that can eliminate hearing and speech impairment (deaf and dumb) and its negative effects/consequences. Language is easy to learn especially by children and more so when the need is obvious. Let teachers be recruited for Sign language in primary schools. Let the Teacher Training Colleges include Sign Language in their curriculum for transfer to pupils/students in schools.

If English Language could be taught in schools right from the primary level and it becomes a regular and official communicating language in Nigeria, then Sign Language could also be taught in schools more so when the need solves a social problem.

For a Nigerian to go to France or Germany to learn or reside, he/she has to learn French or German language respectively, otherwise he/she would be like a deaf and dumb person and would not belong or be integrated. This highlights the need for the young generation in particular, to learn Sign Language for the inclusion of youths with hearing and speech impairment into the main stream of the society. One cannot over emphasize the social and economic implications of Inclusive Education and sign language in our Nigerian schools.

Join us in campaigning for Inclusive Education. Join the CHANGE MAKERS' CRUSADE for a Positive Change. Let us show a worthy care and love for our brothers and sisters who, unfortunately, are disabled. God in His choice has left us non-disabled and Nature did not create another world for them, then, let us give those found with it, their Rights to belong and their Rights to Equal Participation in the Society. Disability issues should be included in Millennium Development Goals.

Let us know how you feel and give us your contributive ideas.

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