

Déyé món, gen món: Language, Power, and Development in Deaf Communities of Haiti

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In Haiti, where Deafness tends to be viewed as a curse upon the family, services for the Deaf are limited, contributing to inequity and social exclusion of Deaf communities. Lack of services and social stigmatization are especially problematic in the aftermath of natural disasters such as the 2010 earthquake and Hurricane Matthew in 2016 because Deaf communities have unique needs in emergency contexts. For Deaf individuals in Haiti, these needs pertain to access to communication and services, limited by the lack of a standardized sign language in the country.

While the Langue des Signes Haïtienne (LSH) is the language most commonly used by Deaf individuals in Haiti, to date there has not been a thorough documentation or standardization of this language. Sign standardization and sign language interpreter training has strong potential to facilitate communication, expand access and services, and bolster integration and advocacy for Deaf and Hard of Hearing communities in Haiti. Before standardization can be implemented, a community needs assessment is necessary to gather input on the design, execution, social value, and unmet needs that such a project can fulfill. This assessment, in which Haitian Deaf perspectives must be prioritized, would ensure that funding for sign standardization and interpreter training projects are efficiently and effectively directed.

Global Deaf Connection (GDC) is in the preliminary phase of a five-year project funded by Christian Blind Mission (CBM) and hosted in-country by Haiti Deaf Academy (HDA) to standardize Haitian sign language and establish a training program for sign language interpreters. Based in Port-au-Prince, home to the largest Deaf community in Haiti, and in partnership with GDC and HDA, our team (co-authors Hannah Bohn, Jennifer Compton, and Amal Warsame) will design and execute a community needs assessment to identify the facilitators and barriers to sign standardization and interpreter training, innovations in the field, and needs of the Deaf population pertaining to equal access to communication.

In order to be accountable and transparent to the funder and the communities affected, GDC and HDA also seek to measure and document the process and outcomes of the project. In collaboration with the HDA team and soliciting input from various stakeholders, our team will scope, create, and begin implementing a monitoring and evaluation plan. This plan seeks to ensure any measurable outcomes have baseline data, communicate with stakeholders to gather opinions and attitudes on the project, and develop methods for future data collection.

By identifying the facilitators and barriers of the Deaf community to communication access, GDC and HDA can develop a program to address the needs of the community holistically. Additionally, the implementation of a monitoring and evaluation plan will allow the organizations to assess success of outcomes, analyze community impact, and ensure transparency of project funding. Through the execution of a community needs assessment and the design of a monitoring and evaluation plan, GDC and HDA will be prepared to undertake their sign language standardization and interpreter training project to expand Deaf access to

equal communication opportunities, thereby fostering equity and social inclusion of Deaf communities in Haiti.