

**DeafNET**

Centre of Knowledge



# CONFERENCE REPORT 2022

**HIV AWARENESS RAISING**

**MENTAL HEALTH**

**CAPACITY BUILDING  
INITIATIVES  
WITHIN THE  
DEAF  
COMMUNITIES**

**LEADERSHIP**

**EDUCATION**

**ENTREPRENEURSHIP**

**SIGN LANGUAGE**

**SOUTH AFRICA | 21 - 24 NOVEMBER 2022**

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## INTRODUCTION

The DeafNET Centre of Knowledge (DeafNET) has, over the last 12 years, provided a platform and voice for networking knowledge and expertise in the interest of people living with hearing loss and related communication barriers. The fifth DeafNET Africa Conference on capacity-building initiatives within the Deaf community was the latest milestone in a series of conferences held in 2004; in South Africa on Mental Health and Deafness, in 2005, in South Africa on Mental Health and Deafness in a Caring Society, in 2011, in the then Swaziland on Working Together for a Better Future for D/deaf people on the African Continent, and in 2016, in South Africa, on Empowering Deaf People through Knowledge.

The 2022 Africa Conference was a multi-stakeholder opportunity and platform aimed at bringing together researchers, building relationships with the National Association of the Deaf (NADs), creating awareness of the needs and human capital of the Deaf community, facilitating networking and sharing knowledge and expertise. It was hosted in Johannesburg, South Africa, from 21 - 24 November 2022. This event attracted online livestream viewers as well as over 100 participants from 37 African countries: Algeria, Austria, Benin, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, Chad, Congo, DRC, Eswatini, Ethiopia, Gabon, Ghana, Guinea Republic, Ivory Coast, Kenya, Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Mauritania, Mauritius, Mozambique, Morocco, Namibia, the Netherlands, Niger, Seychelles, South Africa, South Sudan, Tanzania, Togo, Tunisia, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe. Engaging and working together with Deaf people in the spirit of “nothing about us without us” was the basis of deliberations and is essential for joint efforts to improve the quality of life of Deaf people in Africa and the adjacent Indian Ocean Islands.

The purpose of the conference was to explore new initiatives and align projects and activities, advocate and promote Sign Language, identify areas of personal and community development, mobilise community partnerships to give impetus

to projects and adopt resolutions. To that end, the conference sessions were designed to provide delegates with an in-depth understanding of DeafNET's programme. Additionally, the conference served as a forum for delegates to raise awareness in the private and public sectors of society of Deaf human and civilian rights including equal access to education at all levels.

The different conference sessions and workshops provided a platform for wider discussions on leadership, Deaf education, Sign Language, HIV/AIDS awareness, entrepreneurship and the mental health of Deaf people. Indeed, the four days were very energetic with serious discussion



and debate during the sessions. The academic papers presented by Deaf presenters, echoed in the form of abstracts and research papers from Deaf delegates from Africa and the Indian Ocean Islands, created a lot of eagerness.

DeafNET would like to express its wholehearted thanks to the SVE (the Foundation Friends of Effatha) from the (Netherlands) for their generous contribution, which made it possible for African and Indian Ocean Island countries to participate in the 5<sup>th</sup> DeafNET Africa Workshop.



## DAY- 1 (21<sup>st</sup> NOVEMBER 2022)

### OPENING SESSION

The opening ceremony of the conference started with the national South African anthem performed by Deaf learners from Sizwile School for the Deaf. Candice Morgan, member of the Board of Trustees, addressed and welcomed all the delegates present. She outlined that the DeafNET Africa Conference was intended to serve as a forum within the framework of a wider discussion on



capacity-building initiatives in Africa. The opening ceremony concluded with a special farewell bid to Rev Attie Smit and his great leadership. We hope his next chapter will be full of love and happiness happy -retirement!.

### WELCOME SPEECHES

Rev Attie Smit, Chairperson of the Board of Trustees, welcomed all the delegates to the conference and gave a brief overview of the next chapter to further develop models. The key to success, as he pointed out, is to build teams of competent and well-capacitated project experts to practise a Deaf-to-Deaf transfer of knowledge and skills. He then declared the conference officially open. Kobus Kellerman, treasurer and member of the Board, briefed the gathering on capacity-building initiatives within the Deaf community that will have an escalating impact on many Deaf organisations in Africa and contribute to urgently needed future Deaf development.

He asked all the Deaf leaders present to try and give their utmost best within themselves.



## ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The DeafNET Centre of Knowledge held its annual general meeting for members, chaired by Rev Attie Smit. He introduced the annual report and presented the overall performance and strategies of DeafNET for the 2022 financial year. This was the last meeting for Rev Attie Smit in his capacity as Chairperson of DeafNET, a position he has held since DeafNET became autonomous. The AGM also provided a unique opportunity for the attendees and invitees to develop and explore new initiatives and align projects and activities. Kobus Kellerman, the treasurer, presented the financial statements for the year ended 28 February 2022. He emphasised that governance procedures were in place. Candice Morgan presented the newsletter's special edition and thanked everyone for their support, as DeafNET celebrated the 16<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its journey. She highlighted the timeline of DeafNET to showcase a chain of events since its inception.

Woinshet Ayansa officially launched the DeafNET HIV/AIDS toolkit 2 at the AGM. Toolkit 2 aims to provide information and guidance primarily to the Deaf community in Africa. Reda Bami highlighted the importance of raising HIV/AIDS awareness in Africa. Finally, Candice concluded the AGM by launching the DeafNET Accredited Sign Language Programme.



## GALA DINNER

A gala dinner for participants was held at the Premier Hotel to welcome all the delegates in South Africa. The delegates had the opportunity to socialise and relax.

## MAIN CONFERENCE PROGRAMME 22 – 24 NOVEMBER 2022

### DAY- 2 (22<sup>nd</sup> NOVEMBER 2022)

#### PLENARY SESSION 1

The first session on “The Mental Health and Wellbeing of Deaf People” was a virtual presentation, chaired by Philemon Akach, a Board member.

The keynote speaker for this session was Dr Johannes Fellingner from Austria. He gave a brief overview in sign and drawing to explain what mental health is and reported on the increased rates of mental health problems among Deaf people. He also highlighted the discrepancies between a high burden of common mental health disorders and access to health care. Communication barriers between mental health professionals and Deaf patients may lead to misunderstanding and misdiagnosis. About a quarter of Deaf individuals have additional disabilities and a high probability of complex mental health needs. Research into factors affecting the mental health of Deaf children shows that early access to effective communication with family members and peers is critical. Improved access to health and mental health care can be achieved by the provision of specialist services with professionals trained to directly communicate with Deaf people and with Sign Language interpreters.



#### SESSION 2

Marie Louise Malu Kanda from the Democratic Republic of Congo, Director General of Foundation Balamu, represented Irène Esambo Diata, President of the Centre for Studies on Disability, who, due to unforeseen circumstances, was unable to be present. Marie Louise spoke about inclusive education and the promotion of special education in the DRC. She started by explaining that the DRC is faced with a number of issues, such as access to quality education and inclusion for people with disabilities undervaluation and marginalisation of people with disabilities,; in society; and neglect of the schooling of several children with disabilities by the parents. Technical and financial partners are needed to support and strengthen special education.





### SESSION 3

The third plenary session was chaired by Philemon Akach and opened with Abdelaziz Arssi and Nizar Kasmi Ismail, speaking on the bilingual model in Deaf education from Morocco.

This paper addressed the challenges and opportunities of including Deaf students in mainstream primary schools in Morocco, as well as the bilingual approach to Deaf education as an option to provide a Deaf-friendly educational setting to children. The speakers pointed out that research conducted over the past 40 years about this bilingual-bicultural model shows excellent educational achievements among Deaf children in countries where it has been implemented.



### SESSION 4

This session got underway with Inocêncio Zandamela from Mozambique with a paper on linguistic genocide, linguistic rights and cultural identity of the Deaf community in the SADC. He referred to articles in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Universal Declaration of Language Rights. Children of minority languages in crèches and schools where there are no bilingual teachers are an example of victims of indirect linguistic genocide. The absence of these languages within the curriculum and in school programmes has made us invisible.





## SESSION 5

The presentation by Ms Jeanette Raelisoa and Ms Lalaniana Rasolonirina Lucie from Madagascar presentation was entitled “Deaf Education in Madagascar”. Three case studies shared the challenges faced by an inclusion policy. This policy has had a positive effect on awareness-raising, but mainstream teachers do not have sufficient training to teach Deaf learners successfully. The main discussion was about the education of the Deaf in Madagascar which was started in 1950 by a Norwegian missionary in Antsirabe. Foibe Fanabeazana ny Marenina (FOFAMA) has since been the main driving factor and main centre for the education of the Deaf in Madagascar.



## SESSION 6

Representing The Bible Society of South Africa, Rocco Hough from South Africa gave a presentation on the English Bible for the Deaf as a handy educational tool.



The churches that read this Bible want to understand what the Lord is saying to them and the blessings. He indicated their desire to give Bibles to all interested, but hoped that schools for the Deaf would also realise what a great educational tool this Bible can be to learn the English language better. There are many stories, parables, events and histories in the Bible, and all the difficult words used are explained in a footnote at the bottom of each page, and with the help of 200 illustrations. For Deaf people who have difficulty learning English, this is a great tool, because when reading these stories, they can learn what the difficult words mean and they can understand them within the right context. The Bible Society of SA gave a hard copy of the Bible to all participants who attended the conference.

## SESSION 7

### Open virtual discussion with Dr Fellingner

This session was structured as an open discussion with Dr Fellingner, who aimed to set the scene regarding the mental health and well-being of Deaf people. The following topics were raised:

- ➔ CODA's mental health issues, relationships with parents and the Deaf community
- ➔ Children who are forced to wear CIs are depressed - how do you make children happier?
- ➔ Parent-child connection
- ➔ They have to feel someone cares for them and understands them
- ➔ How can we help the Deaf who have mental health issues?
- ➔ How can we make sure people in the Deaf community have access to proper health?



The discussion stressed the resilience of Deaf people, which is entrenched in the Deaf community. Also, the attack on morality was raised - the school has progressively become a the place of healing and home. Most of the time the adults are the problem.

## WORKSHOPS

Philemon Akach chaired all the afternoon workshops. Marie Louise Malu Kanda and Potentia Massilongo discussed the Red Star Process (RSP) as a teaching method, and a bilingual and bicultural educational approach. This method allows Deaf learners to acquire knowledge and Deaf culture, thus developing a strong deaf identity. Through bilingualism, Deaf learners develop specific skills not only in reading and writing but also confidence, self-esteem and life skills; they even manage to understand hearing people and their culture. The results of this new approach are visible. Deaf people exposed to RSP have a high level of functioning and performance. Indeed, through this method, they discover and recognise their talents.



Maadjé Krige and Sanél Ackerman gave an overview of the RSP. They explained that this method is applied in classrooms to enhance literacy skills in Deaf and hard-of-hearing learners. Through the RSP, these learners acquire the ability to read and write.



Three facilitators of the RSP, namely Kembou Lucie Nadine, Balkissa Moukelou and Mbaïndiguim Djerandil Christian, gave a presentation on the implementation of RSP in their countries and what they had learned in the previous workshop.

The method has proven to be particularly useful in raising the reading and writing proficiency levels of Deaf learners and improving their ability to express their emotions and thoughts, thus enhancing their communication skills.

*Throughout all the workshop sessions,  
the conversation was about Deaf education.*



## DAY- 3 (23 NOVEMBER 2022)

### SESSION 8

The third day of the conference was opened by Anthony Langwenya. Bruno Peter Nkosi Druchen looked at the challenges in the areas of leadership. The main points that emerged during the presentation were as follows:

- ➔ Are you a leader?
- ➔ Qualities of Leader
- ➔ Negative group dynamics
- ➔ Do's and don't's



The youth of today are the leaders of tomorrow. Bruno mentioned the challenges with gender equality in Deaf leadership. The rules now say it must be 50/50 between men and women. He also asked, what we can put in place so that our people are competent Deaf leaders and that our governments are willing to assist.

### SESSION 9

Anthony Langwenya introduced Leoni Bouwer and Laniana Rasolonira, whose presentation was on “Deaf Identities in Madagascar”.

Numerous deaf identity markers could be discerned from the case studies presented. Instead of referring to deafness as a “handicap”, a more useful perspective is that as a minority group, the Deaf community (and individuals) display vulnerability.



The identity imposed from the outside does not necessarily align with the internal knowledge a person has. From the outside the person is perhaps viewed as disabled, but from the inside as “different”. Inclusion, as enforced in Madagascar by funding organisations, seems to merely be enforcing token tolerance, which instead excludes vulnerable minorities.

## SESSION 10

Tim Stones, a Deafblind person from South Africa, made a virtual presentation and spoke about COVID, which exponentially increased the isolation of Deaf people. The presenter shared his own experiences with communication, access, and mobility, and elaborate on the impact these challenges have on the mental well-being of a Deafblind person. He also gave some solutions and strategies to live a more empowered and independent life despite these challenges. The key questions that were discussed were :

- ➔ Who am I/am I still me, as a Deafblind person, in the face of devastating loss and sudden change?
- ➔ How can I live an empowered and fulfilling life, holding onto hope, in a world that seems determined to isolate the already isolated even further?



## SESSION 11

The speaker of this session was Rachel Chomba from the University of Zambia in the Department of Educational Psychology, Sociology, and Special Education. In her presentation, on management strategies for children with



Deafblindness in Zambia, Rachel stated that teachers are not adequately trained to meet the needs of learners with Deafblindness in schools. The findings of her study revealed that there is a need for intense pre-service training to help students gain practical knowledge on the disability to help them come up with strategies that will improve the lives of learners.



## WORKSHOPS

Innocent Djonthe from Cameroon chaired all the afternoon workshops, where eight presenters took part. Kebe from Mauritania gave an overview of Silent Work, the forgotten children of Africa. In summary:

- ➔ Silent Work is a leadership initiative for the forgotten children in Africa - the Deaf persons
  - ➔ The initiative Focuses on safe drinking water, healthy food, health care, education and, employment
  - ➔ Mauritania overview: poverty and lots of difficult weather, transport is difficult
  - ➔ 70% have no access to health care, 38% have access to education
  - ➔ 100 000L of clean drinking water per day for the entire nation
- Once we work together, hand in hand with the children, we have so much potential as a deaf community.



Once we work together, hand-in-hand with the children, we have so much potential as a Deaf community.

DeafNET leadership facilitators Edgar Bwire, Jimmy Akimu, Shukuru Kubaburhanzi and Anthony Langwenya gave a presentation on “Social Competence in Leadership” and shared their experiences with their recent workshops held in Africa. In today's rapidly changing world and its challenges, the need for young and dynamic Deaf leaders with integrity and a calling to serve is becoming increasingly important.

Following the successful and empowering beekeeping project that started in Uganda and spread to Kenya, Edgar Bwire and Daniel Omboko highlighted the overall impact of the beekeeping project in Kenya and how the project has contributed to the Deaf people in Kakamega. These aspects of project design and implementation helped to make project successful.



To ensure sustainability, Kakamega Deaf Association has put in place some initiatives to establish and revive Deaf beekeeper cooperatives. Moreover, Irani Jankee gave a presentation on the success of the pastry-making project in Mauritius. The main purpose of the project is to contribute to poverty alleviation and also to promote sustainable development initiatives for Deaf people in Mauritius. Underlying each presentation was the acknowledgement of the importance of the importance of Deaf leadership and capacity initiatives in the Deaf community.

## DAY- 4 (24 NOVEMBER 2022)

### SESSION 12

The vital role of Sign Language in empowering Deaf people with knowledge was addressed during this plenary. The first session of the day was on “Standardization in South African Sign Language: What could it mean?”, chaired by Edgar Bwire. The presentation was delivered by Susan (Modiegi) Njeyiyana from the University of Stellenbosch. There is considerable variation in South African Sign Language (SASL), and this has been shown through lexical research. Currently, PANSALB is working on the standardisation of SASL and lexical selection.

Acceptance of this process is crucial if it is to succeed. This presentation examined language standardisation in general, as well as in sign languages more specifically, and took a close look at the process and implications of standardization for SASL. The South African government is very close to recognising SASL as the twelfth official language.



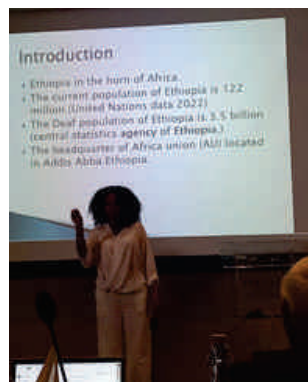


## SESSION 13

The paper presented by Woinshet Ayansa Girma was on the antonymy of Ethiopian sign language (EthSL). The aim of this study was to contribute new knowledge about how antonymous signs in EthSL are extended.

The presenter explained that antonymy is the relationship between words/signs which are opposite in meaning. Antonyms in EthSL are formed through in the following ways:

- ➔ By changing the movement parameter of the sign to the opposite direction; for example the sign for 'lend' vs 'borrow'.
- ➔ Through changing the palm orientation of the opposing sign; for example the sign for 'good' vs 'bad'.
- ➔ Through opposite relation lexical sign; for example, the sign for 'alive' vs 'death'.
- ➔ Morphological process of forming antonyms through affixing negation, NOT



## SESSION 14

This session was presented by Jonathan Amuah on investigating the overuse of initialisation in Ghanaian Sign Language (GSL). This influence is particularly observed in GSL signs using handshapes representing the letter of the English alphabet. Some signs in the old dictionary which were not initialised have acquired initialised features in the new dictionary for the same concept. However, yet to be investigated is the extent to which initialisation is frowned upon or acceptable in the wider Deaf community in Ghana.

## WORKSHOPS

Makhosini Peter Mathubu facilitated all the workshop presenters. Alfred Muruiki discussed mobile-based apps in Sign Language with the goal of providing Deaf-friendly mobile-based innovative educational products and tutorial services in Sign Language. It was developed in collaboration with UNFPA to build the knowledge of Deaf youth in the area of sexual health reproduction. The target group is Deaf users; secondary customers are teachers, parents and siblings of Deaf children, Sign Language students, and interpreters.



Maadijé Krige and Sanél Ackerman from De La Bat School for the Deaf, South Africa, presented the initiatives to improve access in schools for the Deaf. The common challenges identified are that most teachers are not fluent in SASL, cannot communicate their subjects well and unfamiliar with how to teach spoken language from a bilingual approach. Late start schooling learners struggle to catch up on their SASL ability and lack of d/Deaf representation in schools.



The following are the initiatives taken to address these challenges:

- SASL training for school staff
- Development of learning and teaching support material for Sign Language as a subject
- Development of learning and teaching support material for other school subjects in SASL
- Improve access within the school context
- Schools must take their own initiative to train staff in SASL

Joseph Reuben Hiza from Tanzania made a presentation entitled “Symbolic Universal Notation (SUN) A New Way to Reach the Deaf and Deafblind”. Joseph explained that SUN is a programme that brings Scripture and other writings to the illiterate Deaf as well as the Deafblind. Using a symbolic system of writing, the illiterate Deaf who are not educated in Sign Language, as well as the Deafblind, can read God's word for themselves. In other words, it is an alternative to a written communication system that helps those who cannot read or write in a normal way. Symbols represent all words we know. The symbols are easy to learn and understand by looking at them, although some need to be memorised. To summarise, promoting and spreading SUN - in the communities and school curriculum has the potential to support Deaf and Deafblind communities in reading and writing, raise their social status and promote independence.



The last presenter of the day, Ametefé Kossi ANE, compared the situation of Deaf education in Togo. Despite the right to education, the action taken by the authorities and existing legislation in education, are still lacking for Deaf people. There are many hurdles and barriers creating this gap, resulting in a high dropout rate at school and low literacy level in Deaf people. This is the current education system in Togo and Deaf people seem excluded. Partnership and government support are crucial.



## CLOSING CEREMONY

Philip Cook, Chairperson of the Scientific Committee, conveyed a word of thanks to all participants, delegates and presenters, because it was they who made the conference such a success. He stressed that we need to take care of our youth so that we can have leaders for tomorrow - today's children are our responsibility to take care of and we need to protect the innocence of our children. Sanjay Beepat, Manager of DeafNET, wished all the delegates a safe trip back to their countries. Furthermore, Kobus Kellerman said in his vote of thanks that he was stunned by the content of the presentations.

## **RESOLUTIONS**

The organising committee followed up on suggestions and comments made by presenters and participants and agreed upon the following resolutions.

### **MENTAL HEALTH**

1. DeafNET to consider developing a Mental Health module as a training programme.
2. DeafNET to include Mental Health as a standing topical matter with presenters in future conferences:

### **EDUCATION**

3. National Associations of the Deaf (NAD) in Africa and the Adjacent Island to lobby for the appointment of trained teachers of the Deaf in schools for the Deaf.
4. Inclusion of Deaf children in mainstream education should only be done on condition that the support needed to succeed is provided.
5. DeafNET to support the replication of the Red Star Model for teaching literacy in other African countries not yet reached.

### **LEADERSHIP**

6. DeafNET to identify and develop structures that will attend to youth matters.
7. DeafNET to consider developing a Gender Equality module as a training programme

### **SIGN LANGUAGE**

8. DeafNET to support NADs and Ministries for Education in the development of learning and teaching support material (LTSM) for Deaf learners.
9. DeafNET accepts and supports the process of standardisation of Sign Languages.

### **ENTREPRENEURSHIP**

10. DeafNET to promote empowerment programmes to increase employment, income generation, and livelihoods of Deaf people.

This report was compiled by Sanjay Beepat on behalf of the organising committee.

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More information is available on the website  
of DeafNET: [www.deafnet.co.za](http://www.deafnet.co.za)

