Working Together

Manual for Sign Language Work within Development Cooperation

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Foreword 1/4

This manual on Sign Language Work is a result of a cooperation project between the Finnish Association of the Deaf (FAD) and the World Federation of the Deaf (WFD). FAD has implemented development projects with Deaf Communities in developing countries for more than 25 years. These projects have been funded both by FAD and the Finnish Government. During the last 15 years FAD has gathered experience of long-term Sign Language Work with Deaf Communities in Albania and Kosovo (part of the Balkan region). One of the results of the work has been a legal recognition of Albanian Sign Language and Kosovar Sign Language.

According to the WFD, the lack of recognition, acceptance and use of sign language in all areas of life is the major barrier that prevents deaf people from enjoying full human rights, and this is especially true in developing countries[1]. This manual describes Sign Language Work following guidelines set out by the WFD, and in accordance with the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (see the **Introduction**). Sign Language Work follows the principle that to truly enhance human rights for deaf people the work must be sign language-based and it must include deaf people themselves – in accordance with the philosophy *Nothing about us, without us!* In practice, this means that FAD has trained deaf people to conduct Sign Language Work themselves.

The manual is signed by Florjan Rojba (General Co-ordinator for the Albanian National Association of the Deaf, ANAD), a deaf man who has been involved in Sign

Language Work in Albania since it began there in 2003. Florjan went on to support and advise the team that launched Sign Language Work in Kosovo in 2006.

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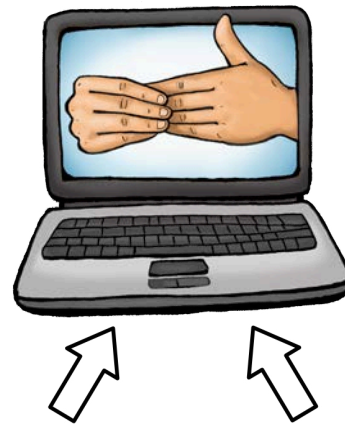
[1] We are aware that the suitability of the terms 'developing' and 'developed' countries has been contested, and that some so-called 'developed' countries are behind 'developing' ones in terms of research, sign language recognition, service provision and so on. We use 'developed' here to refer generally to countries where sign language documentation is at a more advanced stage, and according to our definition of cooperation work, such countries work with 'developing' ones to share information and skills.

This manual includes many lessons learned by FAD over the years, and consists of ethical guidelines and examples of best practice on how to implement Sign Language Work. The work has included testing and piloting the principles and guidelines in practice. As cooperation partners we faced many challenges, but we also realised the value of an appropriately phased, long-term, and community-based approach. This manual aims to share the insights and lessons that have been learned in these Balkan projects.

It is therefore important to be aware that the content of the manual is based on projects that have been run by FAD. This means that the manual has its limitations – activities and methods cannot and should not always be applied in the same way to any Deaf Community. Even if there is no **one** 'right way' to conduct Sign Language Work, we aim to contribute to the discussion by sharing our deaf-led, community-based approach.

This is not a manual about how to conduct sign language research in isolation. The manual is concerned with a particular way of doing research, with an emphasis on documentation and description of sign language as tools for enhancing human and linguistic rights. The process of Sign Language Work leads to community ownership of the Work, and to the empowerment of the Deaf Community at large. In order to get detailed information on how the linguistic work should be implemented – how to collect, process, analyse and describe sign data – you need to have a sign linguist involved in the Sign Language Work. Detailed linguistic information on that practical level is outside the scope of this manual.

Occasionally there are slight differences between the information in the signed text and in the written (English) text. This is because the two texts are likely to have different audiences: the signed text is targeted at deaf people in developing countries, while the written text is primarily directed at a (non-signing) hearing audience, including those who have no previous knowledge of sign language.

We are very aware that signing in International Sign is not accessible for all deaf people – especially in developing countries – and we encourage those who have skills in International Sign to discuss and share this information with deaf people using the sign language of their community. The translation of the signed text into other sign languages is also encouraged, and the written text can be freely translated from English into other written languages, to facilitate access.[2]

The introduction presents the framework, the target groups and the key messages of the manual. In chapter 2 basic information on sign languages and Sign Language Work is presented. Chapter 3 deals with the start of Sign Language Work – the need for an initial survey and planning of the work. It also introduces the Balkan model of Sign Language Work. Chapter 4 focuses on the elements needed in the work and on working methods, i.e. characteristics of a good linguistic advisor, recruitment of Sign Language Work staff and Sign Language Working Group members, and on information about how to conduct training. Suggestions for topics for Sign Language Work training are presented in chapter 5. Chapter 6 is a collection of best practices regarding communication, involving the Deaf Community and implementation of Sign Language Work in practice. Chapter 7 is a summary; highlighting some common basic mistakes, and how they can be avoided.

Foreword (continues) 3/4

How was the manual created?

Florjan Rojba and Karin Hoyer (a sign linguist working at FAD who worked on the Albanian and Kosovar projects) drafted the first signed version of the manual content. These signed texts were translated into English, and all the material was made accessible to relevant FAD personnel, steering committee members, and members of the WFD Expert Group on

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[2] The manual is intended to be freely used but its contents cannot be altered or modified without the authors' consent. In addition, when copying, translating, interpreting or referring to the manual in part or as a whole, the source is to be mentioned.

Developing Countries through a closed website for their comments. Deaf people involved in Sign Language Work in Albania and Kosovo commented on the signed texts in a separate workshop.

These comments led to revisions, and the final video clips were filmed by Florjan with the support of FAD's pedagogic advisor, Arttu Liikamaa, who has been involved in the Albanian and Kosovar projects. The clips on the UN and its Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities are signed by the WFD President Colin Allen, and the video clips in chapter 7 are signed by Kosovar deaf people. The role play video clips clarifying the work processes were made by Albanian people[3].

The signed text can be searched in two ways: either by using the written menu or by clicking on the video icons, which will take you to the next subchapter or to the next level.

Foreword (continues) 4/4

FAD takes full responsibility for the content of this manual, but we would like to express our gratitude to everyone involved (see below); we could not have created this manual without your support – thank you!

Contributors to the manual in alphabetical order (by surname):

Robert Adam worked as a linguistic advisor in the Kosovar project and checked the video content.

Eduard Ajas commented on the draft signed video clips and was an actor in the role play video clips.

Kaisa Alanne was a steering committee member representing FAD.

Colin Allen was a steering committee member (representing the WFD), signed

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[3] NB! The actors performing as local deaf people and an international advisor in the role play videos are using International Sign. The use of International Sign is chosen only for making the video clips easier to follow. In a real situation both the local deaf people and the international advisor should use local sign language for communication with each other.

video clips, and commented on the content of the manual.

Donika Allushi was an actor in the role play video clips.

Valmira Avdullaj commented on the draft signed video clips and was an actor in the role play video clips.

Paola Basha was an actor in the role play video clips.

Kasper Bergmann commented on the content of the manual.

Sopot Bogdani commented on the draft signed video clips.

Nebih Cakaj is a Kosovar Sign Language Work staff member who signed some of the video clips and commented on the content.

Munire Cani commented on the draft signed video clips.

Lidia Capa, **Besim Çemeri** and **Jetmir Dekovi** commented on the draft signed video clips and were actors in the role play video clips.

Vilson Demiraj was an actor in the role play video clips.

Hasan Dikyuva was a steering committee member (representing the WFD), commented on the content, and checked the video clips.

Fisnik Dodi was an actor in the role play video clips.

Beko Elshani, **Ramadan Gashi**, **Rukije Gashi**, **Elma Hasani**, **Erkid Hatia** and **Kimete Haziri** commented on the draft signed video clips, and Kimete also signed some of the video clips.

Julie Hochgesang commented on the content, and gave support with compiling the reference list.

Selman Hoti and **Shpend Hoxha** commented on the draft signed video clips.

Karin Hoyer worked as a linguistic advisor in the Albanian and Kosovar projects, and is the main coordinator for the manual compiling and translating it.

Klisman Ibrahimi and **Ilirjana Jupa** commented on the draft signed video clips and were actors in the role play video clips.

Petra Juva is the artist who drew the pictures.

Valentina Kalo was an actor in the role play video clips.

Jaana Keski-Levijoki made comments on the content of the manual.

Sanni Kostiainen compiled a draft of the manual's website.

Enver Kurtalani commented on the draft signed video clips and signed some of the video clips.

Annelies Kusters commented on the content of the manual.

Inkeri Lahtinen is the FAD Balkan and manual project manager, co-planner and producer, and made comments on the content.

Arttu Liikamaa works as pedagogic advisor in the Albanian and Kosovar projects, made comments on the manual content, checked the International Sign and filmed the final video recording, and was an actor in the role play video clips.

Hysen Mahmuti commented on the draft signed video clips.

Harry Malmelin gave technical support for the manual-making process.

Euphrasia Mbewe made comments on the content.

Denada Nano was an actor in the role play video clips.

Jari Nyberg edited the draft video clips.

Irena Oruçaj was an actor in the role play video clips.

Laura Pajunen commented on the manual's content.

Nick Palfreyman did the English proof-reading and made comments on the content of the manual.

Mikko Palo worked on the lay-out, user interface and web design, edited the final video clips and prepared the website, the USB memory sticks, and the USB cover.

Faton Parduzi commented on the draft signed video clips and signed some of the video clips.

Denis Plloça was an actor in the role play video clips.

Skender Preniqi and **Berat Rashiti** commented on the draft signed video clips.

Florjan Rojba has previously been an Albanian Sign Language Work staff member, supported the launch of Sign Language Work in Kosovo, compiled and signed the video clips, and filmed the role play video clips.

Rovena Rojba was an actor in the role play video clips.

Juhana Salonen made comments on the content of the manual.

Liz Scott Gibson proof-read the English and also commented on the content.

Kledio Sejdini and **Klaudia Shehu** were actors in the role play video clips.

Robert Skinner worked as a linguistic advisor in the Albanian project and commented on the content.

Nikoleta Spahi was an actor in the role play video clips.

Burim Tahiri commented on the draft signed video clips.

Esmeralda Terziu was an actor in the role play video clips.

Drita Toprlak is a Kosovar Sign Language Work staff member who signed some of the video clips and commented on the content.

Rina Toprlak signed some of the video clips.

Eeva Tupi commented on the content of the manual.

Aleksander Xukthi commented on the draft signed video clips and was an actor in the role play video clips.

1. INTRODUCTION – WHY HAVE WE MADE THIS MANUAL?

1.1 The framework of the manual – the UN CRPD and the policies of the WFD

In this manual, we take a human rights approach, and the frame of reference that we use is the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). We also follow the policies set out by the WFD (see wfdeaf.org > Databank). The aim of CRPD is equal opportunities for all people, having respect for difference, and accepting people with disabilities as part of human diversity. CRPD includes a statement about what "language" is, and says that signed languages are equal in value to spoken languages.

According to the WFD, the human rights of deaf people depend upon access to sign language. If a deaf person has no access to a sign language (for example at school, or through a professional sign language interpreter), he or she cannot participate in society in the same way as other people. This is discrimination on the basis of disability, and violates the human rights of deaf people.

Governments that have signed the CRPD must promote the participation of deaf people in society on an equal basis, and

facilitate the use of sign languages. In particular, governments must:

- recognise sign languages and promote the use of sign languages

- provide education in sign language for deaf children

- provide professional sign language interpreters

- make sure that deaf people have access to information and services in sign language

- support deaf culture and the linguistic identity of the Deaf Community

When deaf people have full access to society without discrimination, society will benefit significantly from the input of deaf people. Rather than being passive recipients of support given by hearing people, deaf people can become active contributors to the development of society – by sharing skills, knowledge and ideas.

1.2 Why do we need a manual for Sign Language Work?

Why do we need a manual for Sign Language Work? The UN CRPD recognises that equality and the human rights of deaf people depend upon access to sign language. The manual contains information about *how* this work could be conducted in practice, in an ethical and sustainable way.

Sign language documentation and research is the starting point for the empowerment of the Deaf Community. This empowerment takes place when work is conducted by deaf sign language users themselves. Unfortunately there are (still) cases in the world where hearing people do not involve deaf people in sign language research, and do not respect or cooperate with the Deaf Community.

This manual emphasises the importance of a community-based approach. Sign Language Work is not conducted in isolation by a few individuals, but in close and transparent cooperation with the Deaf Community. The manual aims to share ideas about how Sign Language Work should be conducted – this includes raising linguistic awareness, and advocating for the human and linguistic rights of deaf people. Deaf Community members can acquire the knowledge and skills that they need to improve their situation in society with the support of an advisor. This happens by learning basic facts about a sign language, participating in sign language research, and receiving training in human rights issues. Sign Language Work is a way to empower the Deaf Community.

Article 32 of the UN CRPD ('International cooperation') recognises the importance of international cooperation between different countries. For Sign Language Work this means that those countries with a longer tradition and more experience of sign language research can support countries with little or no sign language research, and assist with the documentation of sign language varieties in that country. This does not mean that concrete research materials are transferred, or that methods and results are 'copied and pasted' directly from one country to another. One of the aims of this manual is to support the linguistic advisor in her/his duty of advising the Deaf Community in a foreign country. This cooperation should take place in a respectful way – the advisor is also a 'learner', learning about the local sign language, deaf culture and history. In this way, Sign Language Work will have strong and positive outcomes for everyone.

1.3 Who is this manual for?

1. The manual can be used by **deaf people** (e.g. in countries where Sign Language Work has not been conducted before) who want information about the processes of Sign Language Work. The manual discusses several topics, and affirms that all sign languages around the world are of equal value, and should be respected. We also make it clear that there is no reason to abandon one sign language in favour of another. For example, a foreign sign language is no 'better' than a local sign language.

2. The manual is a resource for **international advisors** working in another country with local deaf people. The manual emphasises the responsibility of the advisor not to introduce her/his own sign language, but to work in close cooperation with the local Deaf Community, and to show respect by learning the local sign language, and by becoming acquainted with the culture and values of the local Deaf Community.

3. **International organisations** implementing or funding development cooperation projects that involve or target Deaf communities will benefit from learning about Sign Language Work through this manual. The manual can also be useful for **local project managers and project staff** in the target country, assisting in Deaf-

Community related project planning and the resourcing phase.

4. The manual offers useful information for stakeholders and actors connected and collaborating with local Deaf Communities, such as **schools for the deaf, sign language interpreters, Disabled People's Organisations and other NGOs**.

5. **State ministries and other governmental institutions** can use the manual as a source of information about the Sign Language Work that is needed to guarantee the human rights of deaf people. The states parties have a duty to engage in direct dialogue and collaboration with the rights holders, i.e. the Deaf Community. **Institutions and organisations that provide funding** for projects involving Deaf Communities can also learn why Sign Language Work needs to be considered a long-term endeavour if it is to be successful and sustainable.

1.4 What are the key messages of the manual?

The key messages are as follows:

1. *'Sign Language Work'* incorporates several important elements, and entails much more than compiling a sign language dictionary. The focus of Sign Language Work is to awaken the linguistic awareness of the Deaf Community, and to create opportunities for deaf people to learn about linguistics and research methods, which in turn raises their linguistic awareness, capacities and skills. Sign Language Work may eventually lead to a governmental or legal recognition of a sign language.

2. As active participants in training, Deaf Community members learn that they are *fully capable* of conducting basic sign language documentation and research themselves. This empowers the community and maximises deaf ownership of the Sign Language Work that is being done.

3. Respect the local sign language(s) and deaf culture. Minimise influence from International Sign, do not introduce a foreign sign language, and do not try to impose cultural changes.

4. The international advisor/partner should not be the one who does the work. This work should be conducted by the local deaf people themselves. The role of the advisor is to plan the Sign Language Work activities together with the community, to provide training, and to support the learning process in a subordinate role.

5. Sign Language Work is not a 'quick fix' and cannot be completed in a single year. It requires patience and will take several years, if it is to be successful and sustainable.
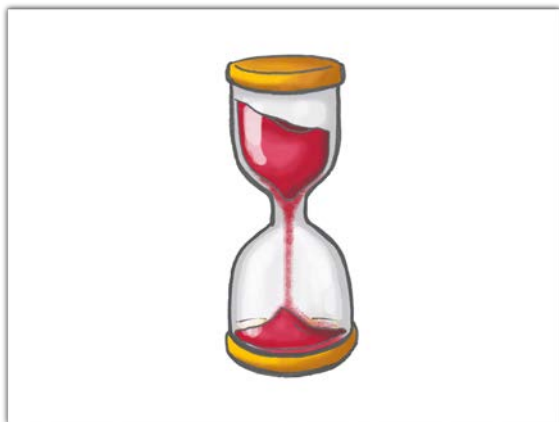
6. Although some principles of Sign Language Work are universal and non-negotiable, the manual itself is not meant to provide rigid guidelines that should be applied absolutely to every Deaf Community. Instead it consists of guiding principles on a general level, in order to support implementation of Sign Language Work on a daily basis.

The information in this manual is mainly based on the experience from the Albanian and Kosovar projects[4]. It is important to remember that every community has its own unique history, culture, and mixture of members/people, and also that the context of every country in the world is different. The examples of best practice for *how* to conduct Sign Language Work are intended to highlight key issues that should be considered. Information in the manual should therefore be applied with a flexible attitude, in order to accommodate the context of the community in question.

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[4] Just to give one example of how this is reflected in the manual: the education systems in these countries did not result in bilingual deaf students, and therefore Sign Language Work needed to rely on hearing persons for the work on the written parts of the dictionaries compiled in Albania and Kosovo. One of the long-term goals of these Balkan projects is the development of education of deaf children – for deaf people to have a real possibility of becoming bilingual citizens.

2. SIGN LANGUAGES AND SIGN LANGUAGE WORK

2.1 Communication and *natural* language

Communication might be linguistic, i.e. make use of a natural language, or non-linguistic. An example of non-linguistic communication is "body language"; the use of pointing, gesticulation/gesturing/gestures, and facial expression that a hearing person and a deaf person use with each other when they do not have a language in common. Deaf persons from the same community, however, use a natural language for linguistic communication between themselves. They rely on a shared signed language for interaction.

Linguistic communication occurs through natural spoken and signed languages that are used around the world. There are some criteria for what counts as a natural language:

* Languages rely on symbols for conveying meaning. Both words in a spoken language and signs in a signed language are symbols that relate to a specific meaning. Perception of a sign is connected to a mental image of what that particular symbol stands for.

* Languages have grammar. The grammar of a language are rules on how to put the words or the signs together. The use of space and facial expressions are part of grammar in signed languages.

* Languages emerge, change and evolve naturally – spoken languages within communities of hearing people and signed languages within communities of deaf people.

* Languages are passed from one generation to another.

* The first language of a child is either a spoken or a signed language. Later it learns to write, i.e. written language is a secondary form of language.

2.2 Signed languages

2.2a Signed languages and spoken languages

Signed languages are obviously different from spoken languages in some ways, but both modalities are equally valid means of communication. It is not justifiable to regard one modality of language as inferior or superior to the other.

An unfortunate misconception about signed languages is that they only use gesticulation, or pantomime. This is not the case – as with spoken languages, signed languages draw from a conventionalised vocabulary, and have been shown to have complex grammatical systems. Natural signed languages are not invented by anybody, but have evolved among deaf people. Equally, a signed language is not a visual representation of a spoken language. Sign languages do not entail spelling all words on the hands letter by letter, and often use different orders to spoken language words. Signed languages are not lacking in anything, and can be used to express any conceivable concept or idea. In that sense, signed languages do not need to be *developed*.

Spoken languages and signed languages differ from each other in the modality that they use. Spoken languages use the auditory–vocal channel, while signed languages are visual–gestural languages. Just as the words of a spoken language can often be divided into smaller units (for example, the sounds of speech) signs are

made up of smaller structural units, such as the handshape, orientation, movement, and place of articulation of the sign, as well as non-manual elements such as facial expressions. The grammars of signed languages make use of facial expressions and body movements, and use the space in front of and around the person who is signing in special ways. Signed languages should not be changed to fit into the structure of a spoken language. Signed languages should be respected as natural languages on their own terms.
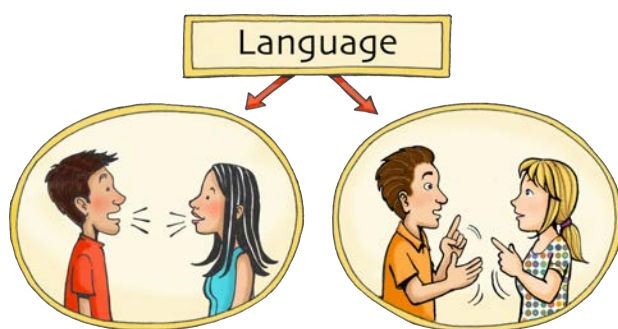
2.2b Deaf people and sign languages

Sign languages are the natural first language of deaf people, and because of this, deaf people have the right to express themselves in signing, and should not be forced to use oral language. Some deaf people around the world do not know sign language, and those who do use sign language often lack information about their language since most deaf people have hearing parents who have no signing skills and no knowledge about sign languages. The deaf child might grow up without access to a sign language, and sign language may not be used or allowed in school. It may also not be taught as a subject in school. Through Sign Language Work, information about sign language can be made accessible to the Deaf Community. Also hearing society gains from access to information about sign language and its importance for the Deaf Community.

The different sign languages used by Deaf Communities around the world are equally valid means of communication, and should therefore be used and respected (see wfdeaf.org > Databank > Policies / Statements). This means that care should be taken not to import foreign sign languages or International Sign into a community where indigenous sign language(s) already exists. The ownership of a sign language belongs to the Deaf Community where the language is used. This language has been transmitted from one deaf generation to the next – and therefore judgements about acceptable or intelligible usage of the language remain within the community. Deaf or hearing people from outside the community have no right to impose or suggest changes to these natural sign languages.

2.2c Sign language use and variation

Signed languages do not have a common written form – and it should be noted that the majority of spoken languages in the world also have no written form, and exist only as spoken languages. If a signing deaf child has access to education, s/he learns to read and write in school in a language other than sign language. For a hearing child, it is possible – though by no means necessary – that the language s/he speaks at home is the same as the language s/he learns to read and write in school.

Some hearing people have a signed language as their first language. Those are hearing children of deaf adults. The deaf parents' choice to use sign language with their hearing children should be respected. Hearing children brought up using signed and spoken languages have been shown to benefit linguistically from their bilingual upbringing.

There are several countries that have more than one sign language. There might be a majority sign language and one or more minority sign languages. Furthermore, each sign community features linguistic variation. There are often several different signs that correspond to a single word in a spoken language. Sign language use may vary according to factors such as gender, age and region, as is the case with spoken languages.

2.3 What is deaf culture?

The world's cultures differ from each other in many ways – communities may use different languages, eat different food, wear different clothes and practice different religions. Deaf Communities around the

world are defined by their cultural values, beliefs and practices, and there is an intricate relationship between deaf culture, sign languages and the identities of deaf individuals.
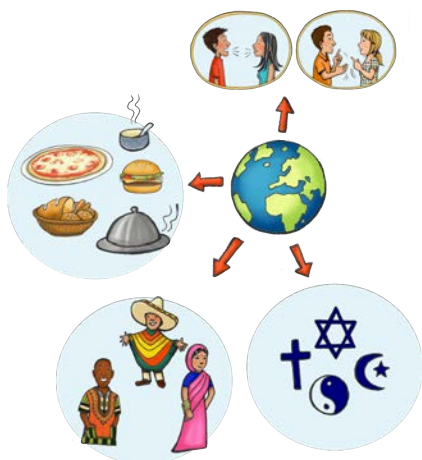
Communication using a sign language is characteristic of the culture of Deaf Communities. The use of sustained and unhindered eye contact during a discussion is crucial. Enough light is needed in order for a discussion to be unrestricted, and in the darkness the discussion might be done in tactile form – which also is the preferred communication form for some deaf-blind persons. When deaf people sign in larger groups, people often stand or sit in a circle to enhance visibility. Where deaf people gather at international events such as sports games (e.g. Deaflympics), and international conferences or congresses, there is often intense interaction, and when the event has finished, this transient 'bubble' of signed communication disappears, as people return to their home countries.

There are differences between the cultural practices of different Deaf Communities, but several practices are typical of many Deaf Communities, and this unites deaf people from around the world. Although sign languages are mutually unintelligible, they 'look' similar in certain ways – they use manual articulators, facial expressions and eye contact, and space is used for grammatical effect. Therefore, even though sign languages are different from each other, the use of a signed language unites deaf individuals from different parts of the world.

Deaf identity is linked to the shared experiences that deaf people have, and the sense of belonging to a sign community. This identity of course varies from one person to another, but culture, identity and language are elements that are an important part of being human. Deaf culture is one of the building blocks of the foundations of a Deaf Community.

2.4 What is Sign Language Work?

2.4a What is Sign Language Work – training and information

According to the WFD policy (see wfdeaf.org > Databank > Policies > Work Done by Member Organisations in Developing Countries) cooperation between countries should prioritise the establishment and strengthening of an organisation of the deaf, and Sign Language Work. Sign Language Work is linked to the fulfilment of human rights, since human rights for deaf people are realised through (access to) sign language.

Sign Language Work leads to linguistic awakening and raises the awareness of Deaf Community members about equality between spoken and written languages. This includes the notion that signed languages are natural languages on their own terms, and do not need to be changed in order to resemble spoken languages. Raising awareness of deaf culture and history is crucial in order for Deaf Community members to become proud of their identity and who they are. The process of Sign Language Work leads to empowerment of the Deaf Community.

Sign Language Work includes training for community members in basic sign linguistics, language documentation and description, and research methods. When real language data are collected, these data become the base for making dictionaries and for grammatical descriptions of the language. The products of sign language research are also tools for lobbying the government for the legal recognition of a sign language, and for developing other legislation.

A crucial part of Sign Language Work entails informing the Deaf Community, on a regular basis, of the work that has been done, and to keep relevant stakeholders updated on progress. These stakeholders may include government bodies, schools, disability organisations, and hearing parents and interpreters. As a result of Sign Language Work, the capacity of the Deaf Community is strengthened, and community members are empowered by the skills that they have acquired. The Sign Language Work conducted by Deaf Community members is concrete proof of what the community can achieve on their own. Training and sharing information are therefore essential elements in Sign Language Work.
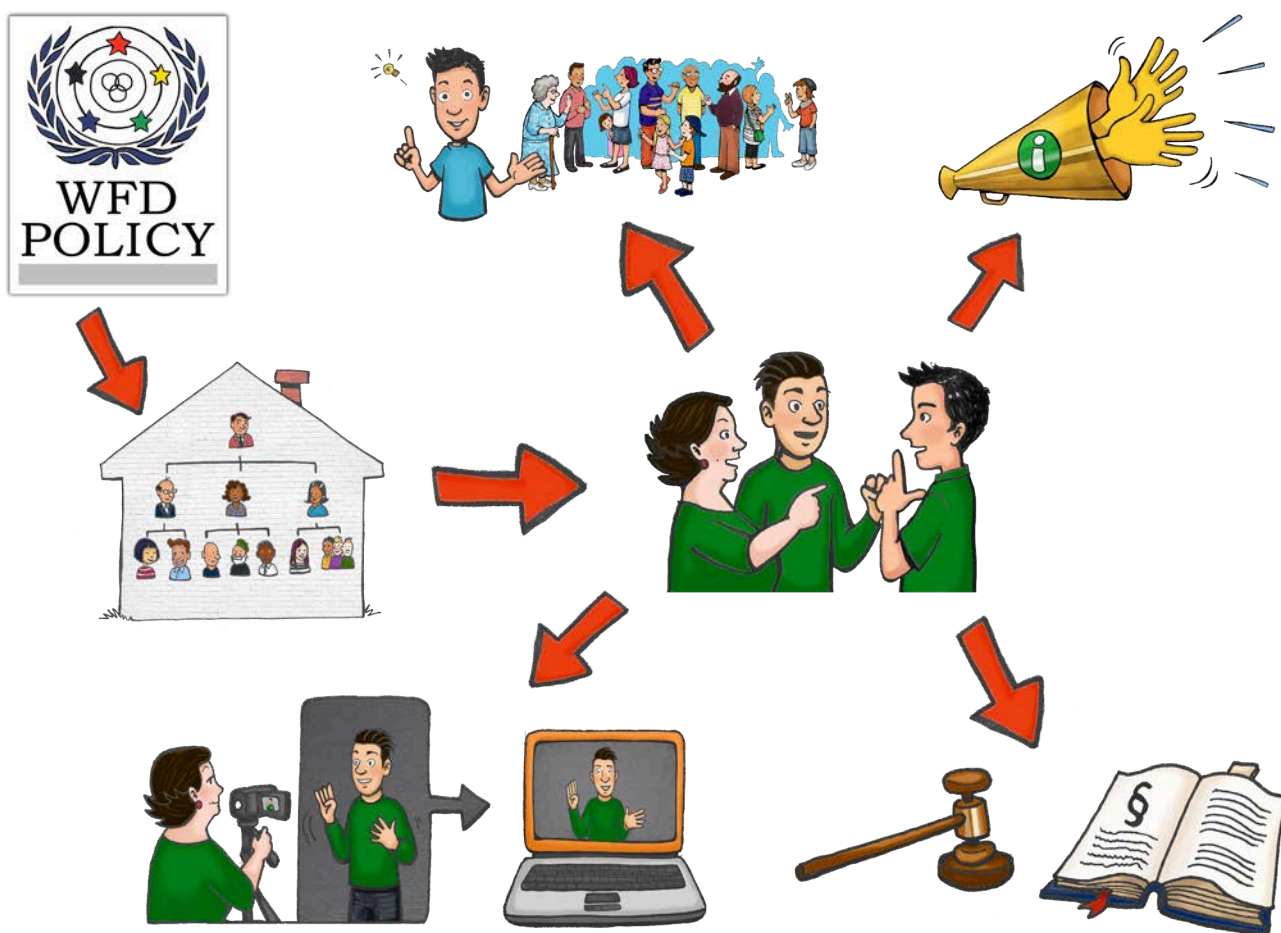
2.4b What is Sign Language Work – sign language documentation and description

In some countries there are several sign languages; a majority sign language with a larger number of signers, and minority sign languages with smaller numbers of signers. The aim of Sign Language Work is to document the sign language used by a particular sign community, and not to unify different sign languages or to produce a single standard alternative to different variants.

Sign language documentation is not to be conducted by working through a list of words and asking Deaf Community members to provide a sign for each one. Instead it is necessary to record natural signing that is free of influence from spoken/written language – research is based on these data. Natural sign language exhibits variation, and the aim of Sign Language Work is not to standardise sign language by selecting and promoting a single variant. On the contrary, Sign Language Work should showcase linguistic variation and promote respect for the right to use different variants.

In terms of the concrete, visible results of Sign Language Work, a printed sign language dictionary with photos or drawings is somewhat limited, and cannot fully represent visual languages that are expressed through movements. If dictionary work is to be conducted, it is recommended for the printed book to be accompanied by live video recordings of the language.

If the country in question does not have sign language linguists who can train deaf people to conduct Sign Language Work, it is necessary to identify a suitable linguist from abroad. Deaf Communities usually have strong networking skills, and international networks – e.g. by asking the WFD for advice – may reveal suitable candidates.

Sign Language Work is a tool both for supporting the vitality, use, and natural development of a sign language, and for enhancing its social status. When sign language use spreads into new domains, such as the media and higher levels of educa-tion, signs for new concepts are needed, and as a result, the language undergoes natural development and natural stand-ardisation. As a result of Sign Language Work, the status of sign language in society also increases.

2.4c What is Sign Language Work – language planning

Sign Language Work can be regarded as part of language planning, which consists of the four areas Attitude planning, Corpus planning, Status planning, and Acquisition planning (Reagan 2010):
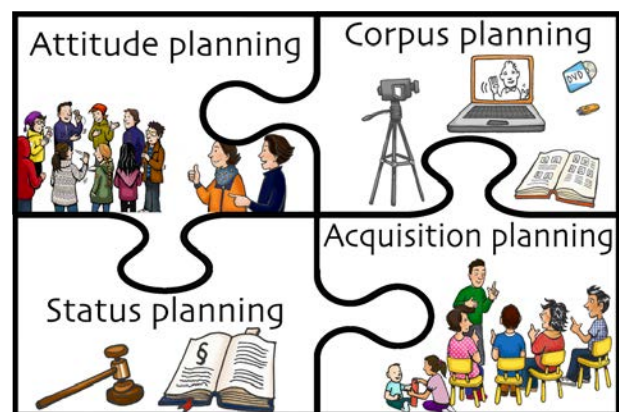
- Attitude planning
  - o Raising the linguistic awareness of Deaf Community members, for example concerning equality between spoken and signed languages.
  - o Sharing linguistic information with hearing people, to replace misconceptions with accurate information about sign languages – e.g. that there are many sign languages in the world and they are equal to spoken languages.

- Corpus planning
  - o Sign language documentation, research and description, with a view to publishing dictionaries, grammars and other material about the sign language.

- Status planning
  - o Lobbying for legal recognition of sign language, for the use of sign language as a language of instruction within deaf education, and for sign language in new domains of

use, such as the media (TV, the internet, etc.).

- Acquisition planning
  - Activities that increase the number of sign language users. In addition to signing deaf members of the sign community, other groups need sign language skills, e.g. deaf persons not being exposed to sign language from before, hearing parents of deaf children, sign language interpreters, and hearing teachers working in deaf education.

As can be seen from the descriptions above, Sign Language Work is a complex and flexible set of activities that may shift over time in accordance with the needs of the sign community. Even if there is no strict order in which language planning activities take place, there is however sometimes a certain focus of the goals to be achieved that will influence the order of the activities.

When starting Sign Language Work, for example, it might be wise to begin with attitude and corpus planning activities. This training and information sharing will lead to raised awareness and new linguistic skills that are needed for the next phase. Once the skills and competence of community members has increased, and documentation has been conducted, linguistic status planning can begin. This includes lobbying for a legal recognition of sign language, development of education and access to information in sign language in the media.
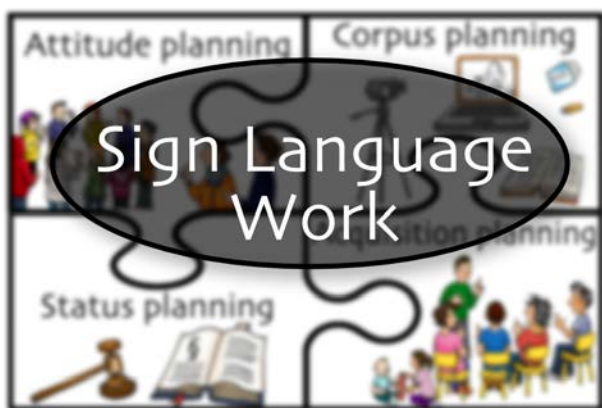
Similarly, before acquisition planning can take place, it is necessary to conduct re-

search and produce linguistic material (corpus planning) that can be used for language teaching. A language plan that covers a period of between five and ten years can help to identify the steps that need to be taken, and show how the focus of Sign Language Work may change over time.

2.5 The goals and processes of Sign Language Work

Sign Language Work has short-term goals (three years) and long-term goals (10-20 years). The short term goals are:

- to raise linguistic awareness within the Deaf Community

- to start sign language documentation and research

- to share and disseminate information about Sign Language Work

- to develop skills for lobbying for human and linguistic rights

More detailed information about the processes that can be used to obtain these goals are described in the following sections.

2.5a Goal 1: To raise linguistic awareness within the Deaf Community

The first step is to convey adequate information about linguistic and cultural facts concerning sign language and Deaf Communities to Deaf Community members. As a consequence of this, the community members come to understand their right to use sign language, and the value of their own deaf culture and history, and become aware of their identity. This awakening can happen as a result of training on deaf awareness and linguistics given by an international advisor, information obtained through the internet, by visiting international events attended by deaf people, or by going for a study trip to another country to learn from their experience.

guage data by filming the signing of Deaf Community members. Linguistic findings are then processed together with a Working Group consisting of representatives of the Deaf Community. The Working Group has a central role in compiling material from the collected sign language data – e.g. a dictionary consisting of both a printed publication and recordings with live examples of signs in use.

2.5c Goal 3: To share and disseminate information about Sign Language Work

If Sign Language Work is to be sustainable, information about the progress of activities should not be kept within a restricted group of a few deaf individuals. Information must be actively shared with the Deaf Community. Regular updates on progress is part of the process of raising the linguistic awareness of community members.

This awakening process has a collective element – even if it is the individual who becomes aware of his/her rights and potential, the awakening happens in a community context when the information is shared. This empowerment process may lead to a positive regard for deaf identity ('Deaf pride') and new knowledge of the potential of deaf people. The understanding that deaf people and sign languages are of equal worth to hearing people and spoken languages is an important basis for further learning. This awareness, along with the new linguistic skills that are acquired, will play a key role in sign language research.

It is also important to deliver information about the progress of Sign Language Work to other relevant groups and stakeholders, such as governmental bodies and institutions, disability organisations, deaf schools, interpreters, and hearing family members. They need to understand why Sign Language Work is being conducted by deaf people themselves – since they are the native users with command of the language – and that deaf people are capable of conducting this kind of work. The support of relevant stakeholders will be necessary if the results of Sign Language Work are to be accepted upon completion.

2.5b Goal 2: To start sign language documentation and research

Sign language documentation can begin when two or three Deaf Community members receive basic linguistic training from an advisor. They learn about sign language structure and grammar, and how to conduct research and document sign language. They start to collect sign lan-

Project funders need regular updates on the progress and development of the work that has been done. Another important partner is the linguistics departments of universities. Even if sign language research begins at an organisational level, it is crucial to aim for cooperation with universities, with the intention that research can be conducted at university level in future.

2.5d Goal 4: To develop skills for lobbying for human and linguistic rights

The advocacy of human rights derives from the participation of deaf people in Sign Language Work, together with their improved knowledge of linguistic issues and human and linguistic rights. By training community members on human rights issues, such as the UN CRPD, deaf people are able to begin conducting advocacy work to further the rights of deaf people. Through discussions with government officials, deaf representatives can raise concrete facts about the barriers that deaf people face, and highlight areas where improvements are needed.

The focus of the lobbying activities for improved legislation might be the following:

• legal recognition of sign language

• development of education for the deaf

• for the government to assume responsibility for funding sign language interpreter services

• for the governmental authorities to provide information in sign language

2.5e Long-term goals for Sign Language Work (10–20 years)

The long-term goal of Sign Language Work – 10–20 years – is the realisation of human rights for deaf people, secured through the legal recognition of sign language. In practice this means significant positive changes in access to society; funding interpreter services and information in sign language provided by the government, and the availability of bilingual education using sign language. Sign language research is ongoing and conducted at university level with deaf researchers and the close cooperation of the Deaf Community.

The Deaf Community is empowered and has increased skills and knowledge. Community members contribute to society in many ways and are regarded as a resource and a model example for other (linguistic or disability) minority groups of how to challenge and remove discrimination.

2.6 The UN and the CRPD

2.6a The United Nations (UN)

The United Nations (UN) is an intergovernmental organisation with 193 member states. The Headquarters of the UN is in New York, USA, and the organisation was established in 1945.

The aims of the UN are to maintain peace throughout the world and to develop friendly relations among nations. UN objectives include providing support to nations in conflict, improving the lives of people living in poverty, overcoming illiteracy, protecting the environment, and encouraging respect for each other's human rights and freedoms.

2.6b The UN Conventions

The UN has approved several human rights conventions and treaties. Examples include:

- the UN Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, which focuses specifically on equality between women and men

- the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, where the child's right to education is stated

- the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)

States parties that ratify these conventions are obliged to implement them by updating their national legislation as necessary in order to meet the articles of the convention.

2.6c The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)

The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) protects the rights of persons with disabilities and promotes their equality. The convention is concerned with aspects of everyday life, such as employment and social equality. The CRPD aims to shift the focus from a medical conceptualisation of disabled people towards a human rights model.

2.6d Deaf people and sign language in the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)
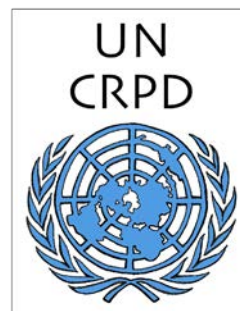
The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities includes the rights of deaf children as well as deaf adults. The Convention includes 50 articles that apply to all persons with disabilities, including deaf people. There are five particularly important articles for the Deaf Community (and deaf people):

Article 2 – Definition. The definition of "language" states that there is equality between spoken languages and signed languages.

Article 9 – Accessibility. This article regulates the states parties' responsibilities for guaranteeing access on an equal basis, e.g. by providing and financing *professional* sign language interpreters who offer an interpreting service of high quality.

Article 21 – Freedom of expression and opinion, and access to information. States parties have an obligation to recognise and promote the use of sign languages.

Article 24 – Education. Deaf children have the right to receive education in sign language. Teachers and other education staff must be qualified in sign language.

Article 30 – Participation in cultural life, recreation, leisure and sport. Deaf people are entitled to recognition and support of their cultural and linguistic identity, i.e. sign languages and deaf culture.

3. STARTING SIGN LANGUAGE WORK

3.1 Sign Language Work within the framework of development cooperation

'Development cooperation' is a particular means of empowering a Deaf Community in a developing country. Development cooperation is a process with different stages. The first step in this capacity building process is usually organisational support – since a strong organisation of the deaf is a prerequisite for further (development) work. When the organisation is running and functioning well, it can then begin to facilitate Sign Language Work. This arrangement is important for ensuring that the Deaf Community has ownership of Sign Language Work. If the country does not have a national deaf association, Sign Language Work can be started in conjunction with a local deaf club or in some disability organisation that truly represents the Deaf Community. Even if a university later becomes involved as a partner in sign language research, it is important that the real ownership of sign language research remains in the hands of sign language users.

Development cooperation programmes are based on training. In addition to training in sign language research, Deaf Community members need skills to lobby for the fulfilment of their human rights, and so training on advocacy is essential. Lobbying the government and cooperation with education authorities is often necessary in order to improve education for deaf children. Sign language interpreters are needed to facilitate communication between deaf and hearing persons, so interpreter training programmes also need to be established. Development cooperation activities may encompass several objectives, and therefore might have a programme-like structure with various different elements.

Insights from Sign Language Work are crucial not only for the people who are conducting the concrete sign language activities. Those who manage projects, or project funding must understand how the empowerment of Deaf Communities depends upon linguistic concerns. Therefore, sign language linguists should be used as advisors in the planning of the project, together with the Deaf Community and project or funding managers.

If the results of Sign Language Work are to be sustainable, clear long-term planning is required, and advisor input is needed for training Deaf Community members so that the community can develop.

Interpreter Training

Deaf Education

Sign Language Documentation and Description

Advocacy Work

Organisational Capacity Building
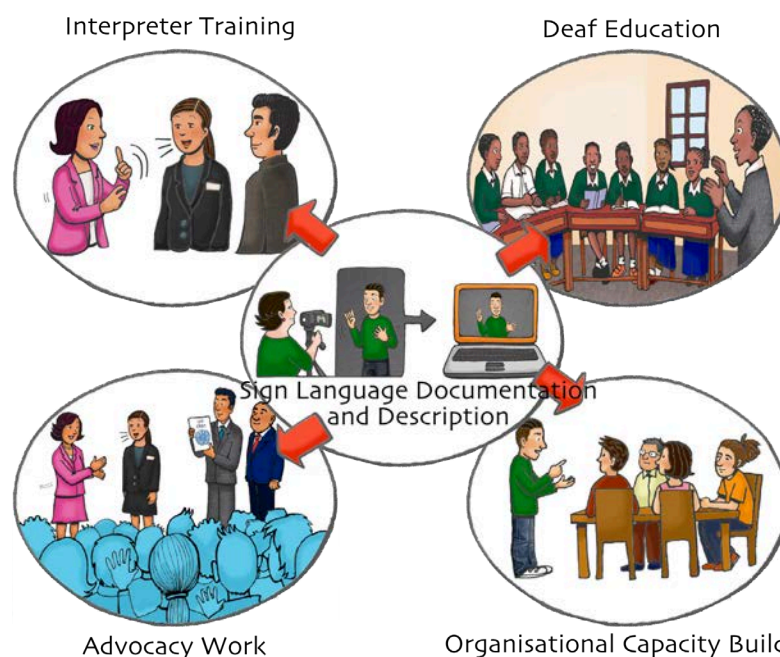
3.2 Conducting an initial survey

Deaf Communities around the world differ in several respects, and before Sign Language Work can begin, it is necessary to conduct an initial survey of the target community.

The person conducting the survey must be deaf, because s/he needs to have in-depth knowledge of Deaf Community issues (culture and identity) and excellent sign language skills. S/he must also have prior experience of conducting such surveys. It might be necessary to find someone from outside the country to work with the Deaf Community on this survey.

Face-to-face interviews are more appropriate for Deaf Communities than written questionnaires. Information should be obtained from several sources, for example the Deaf Community, deaf schools, government officials and representatives for existing disability organisations.

This survey can provide information such as:

• the number of community members

• the number of sign languages in the country

• the living conditions and the barriers that deaf people face

• the legislation of the country concerning deaf people and sign languages

It is good to be aware of the challenges that may arise during the process of obtaining this information. For example, statistics on the number of deaf people might not be available, so one might have to generate an estimate. It is not usually possible to determine the number of sign languages in a country before in-depth sociolinguistic research has been conducted. At this stage, it may be necessary to base the survey on the opinions of Deaf Community members.

Furthermore, it might not be possible, within the scope of the survey, to conduct a comprehensive study of the living conditions and problems that deaf people face. It might be that only limited descriptions or general comments can be made. As far as analysing legislation is concerned, this can be particularly challenging if the person conducting the survey does not have a high level of proficiency in the appropriate written language(s).

Despite such challenges, it is still important to conduct an initial survey. The results of the survey will be crucial for planning and for deciding on the goals of Sign Language Work.

3.3 Planning the Sign Language Work

Once the relevant data have been collected through an initial survey, an action plan for Sign Language Work can be made. This can be designed by the advisor and representatives of the Deaf Community. The planning is based on the needs that are identified through analysis of the survey data, and in this way the priorities of Sign Language Work can be determined.

Discussions between the advisor and Deaf Community representatives may cover which Sign Language Work activities should be conducted, and a time plan can be made to decide upon the order in which the activities should take place.

Activities contained in the plan may include:

• training in linguistic awareness raising

• sign language research through language documentation and description

- interpreter training programmes (at a later stage)

- networking and cooperation with other disability organisations, universities or other relevant institutions

It is important to have a flexible attitude when implementing the plan, – whenever the situation changes or new issues emerge, the plan must be revised and adopted to the new situation.

3.4 The Balkan model of Sign Language Work

3.4a Sign Language Work conducted in Albania and Kosovo

The model for Sign Language Work presented in this manual is the one that has been successfully implemented in the Balkans, specifically in Albania and Kosovo. The deaf associations in these two countries have cooperated with the Finnish Association of the Deaf (FAD) in joint development cooperation projects for 10–15 years, and examples of best practice for Sign Language Work developed during these projects provide the basis for much of the information in this manual.
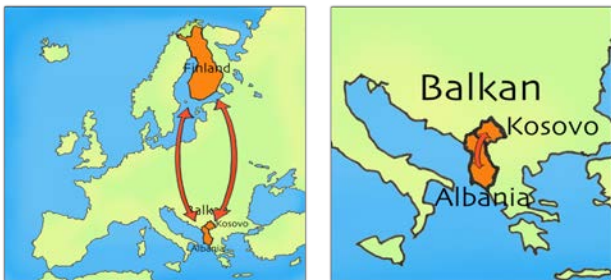
In both countries, the initial focus was on organisational support, with management training from an international advisor.

When the organisations were stable enough, Sign Language Work then began. In both countries, the work was implemented by a small team of two or three individuals, who conducted Sign Language Work on a daily basis. Since there were no sign language linguists in these countries, a linguistic advisor was recruited from abroad. The Sign Language Work staff received training from the advisor, and worked in close cooperation with the advisor. Later, training was given by other advisors, who gave training on teaching methods ('pedagogy'), interpreter training, lobbying techniques and the UN CRPD.

Throughout these projects, Albania and Kosovo worked in close South-South cooperation and shared experience and knowledge with each other. Sign Language Work first started in Albania, and one of the Albanian deaf staff members (who had already received training) supported the Deaf Community in Kosovo with starting Sign Language Work. Kosovo was the first to have an interpreter programme, and so a Kosovar interpreter trainer was used to start interpreter training in Albania.

3.4b Lessons from the Balkan model of Sign Language Work

It is crucial that the Sign Language Work staff cooperate closely with a Working Group of representatives from the Deaf Community. This Group contributes to the ongoing linguistic work by representing variation in the sign language used by the target community. In the projects conducted in the Balkans, members of the Working Group offered their time on a voluntary basis, and met according to an agreed schedule.

The Sign Language Work staff were responsible for collecting linguistic data by documenting the sign language used by Deaf Community members, and starting the analysis. The results of the data analysis were discussed further by the Working Group, and became the basis for the dictionary – both a printed and an electronic publication.

Members of the Working Group, and staff members who conducted Sign Language Work, were all deaf. This is because deaf people are the natural users of sign language, and should therefore exercise responsibility for the data collection and the analysis of the video data. However, the linguistic input of bilingual hearing persons was needed in those stages of Sign Language Work, when translations into written language and work on spoken language equivalents were needed for the dictionary. In Albania and Kosovo there were no deaf bilingual persons with enough spoken/written language skills to conduct this work. However, deaf people should also participate in this final stage of the dictionary making process, so that there is genuine collaboration between deaf and hearing people.

The Working Group is not responsible only for dictionary work. The tasks of the Working Group can grow and change over time. Even if the Group begins as a support forum for Sign Language Work staff, the objectives of the Group can become multifaceted as the linguistic awareness and skills of Group members develop. The Group can function as an advisory board in sign language matters by producing sign language material for the internet, and through involvement in interpreter training programmes, the assessment of sign language skills, and so on.

3.5 Arguments for the Balkan model of Sign Language Work

3.5a Arguments for the Balkan model of Sign Language Work – a deaf-led approach

One of the arguments for the model implemented in Albania and Kosovo has to do with its deaf-led approach: the staff members who conducted Sign Language Work in Albania and Kosovo were all deaf, as were the members of the Working Group. Hearing people were included in the later stages of the work for specific tasks that required competence in both sign language and written language (i.e. translating from signing into writing) since no bilingual deaf people were available for this.

The core part of Sign Language Work (data collection and analysis) must be conducted by deaf people themselves. This is because being part of a sign language community, sign language is the natural language of deaf people, and deaf people have access to intuitive linguistic knowledge and metalinguistic skills. There might also be hearing people who have deaf parents (Children of Deaf Adults, or CODAs) and are fluent signers with intuition about sign language. However, in order for the empowerment of deaf people to take place, it is crucial that deaf people realise they are fully able to conduct Sign Language Work. In this way the process contributes to undoing the effects of linguistic oppression. If the early stages of Sign Language Work are led by hearing people who don't understand why the process should be deaf-led, there is a risk that they begin to dominate the process. This might lead to deaf people assuming the passive role of bystanders.

The ownership of sign language needs to remain with Deaf Communities. Both the development of linguistic awareness and the empowerment of the community depend upon deaf people having the opportunity to take the lead in Sign Language Work. A deaf-led approach to Sign Language Work empowers deaf individuals and the community as a whole, because deaf people have the opportunity to become the acknowledged experts on their sign language.

When deaf people lead and participate in all phases of Sign Language Work, this also becomes a model for good ethical research practices that respect the community in question. Ethical research methods emphasise respect for human participants, therefore Sign Language Work is to be conducted by Deaf Community members.

3.5b Arguments for the Balkan model of Sign Language Work – a community-based approach

A second reason for advocating this model is its community-based participatory approach. Sign Language Work is not implemented by a few deaf individuals, but is conducted through a close relationship between Sign Language Work staff and

the Working Group that represents the Deaf Community.

There are several reasons for actively involving the language community:

- Community members embody linguistic variation in the language that they use, and their language skills are therefore relevant to linguistic work.

- The ownership of language documentation and description starts and remains with the Deaf Community.

- The active involvement of the community during Sign Language Work guarantees the commitment of community members to the work that is conducted, and their acceptance of this work.

This community-based model of Sign Language Work has also proven to be successful because the training facilitates learning on a broad base reaching not only a few individuals but a wider audience. The activities of Sign Language Work have to be conducted by local deaf people, but they often lack the knowledge of linguistics needed to begin by themselves. That is why input from an advisor may be needed at the beginning of each new stage of work. Local deaf Sign Language Work staff can learn from the advisor, and after that can continue the work by themselves. They will also share the skills they have learned from the advisor with Working Group members and into the community at large on a peer-to-peer basis.

4.1 The linguistic advisor

4.1a Characteristics of a good linguistic advisor

Whilst Sign Language Work is to be conducted by local deaf people, they may lack the linguistic knowledge necessary to start work independently if there is no external support. This is why input from an advisor may be needed. If there are no suitable trained sign language linguists in the country, an advisor should be appointed from another country.

The recruitment of the linguistic advisor needs to be done in cooperation with the organisation implementing and funding the project and the local Deaf Community. The linguistic advisor needs to be suitable and qualified for the task, and fulfil the following criteria.

She or he must:

- have a university education and a degree in linguistics

- be familiar with the process and methods of sign language research

- be fluent in a sign language and possess good communication skills

- be familiar with and have personal knowledge of deaf culture

- have an open attitude towards learning and acquiring a new sign language

If there are two equally qualified candidates for the linguistic advisor post, one hearing and the other deaf, the deaf candidate should be preferred. This because a deaf advisor can serve as a role model to be copied by the local Deaf Community.

A significant benefit in recruiting a deaf advisors is that s/he can function as a role model for the Deaf Community. Although deaf people can achieve similar things to hearing people, such as university degrees or certain kinds of jobs, Deaf Community members may only become aware of such potential possibilities by meeting the deaf advisor. Equally, the deaf advisor can be a positive model for hearing decision-makers and stakeholders who may never have met an educated deaf professional. A deaf advisor at a government meeting can make a big impact in challenging conceptions and attitudes about what deaf people are capable of achieving, which may lead to a more sensitive and supportive attitude towards the Deaf Community.

The linguistic advisor also needs knowledge of issues such as organisational structure, development cooperation project planning and management, and budget processes, in order that Sign Language Work activities are seen as part of a bigger picture of development cooperation.

4.1b The linguistic advisor – starting the work

The first task of an international advisor is to become familiar with the conditions in the country and begin working alongside the Deaf Community, to learn the local sign language, the culture, and the values of that community. The advisor demonstrates respect through a willingness to learn the local sign language and to adapt to the cultural patterns of the Deaf Community. When learning the local sign language, the advisor must avoid sharing signs from her/his own sign language.

Once the advisor has become familiar with the local sign language and the circumstances of the community, the planning of Sign Language Work can begin. The advisor and the Deaf Community will discuss and decide together the priorities and the goals of the Sign Language Work, and make a timetable based upon the findings of the initial survey (See also **Conducting an initial survey** and **Planning the Sign Language Work**).

It is crucial that the advisor does not directly copy and paste working methods and practices from her or his own home country. This may prevent the local community from committing itself to the planned work. Instead, plans should be based upon facts from the survey, complemented by ideas from both the community and the experience and knowledge of the advisor.

At a very early stage, the advisor should convey basic information to the Deaf Community about sign language research and the forthcoming Sign Language Work. This can be done through seminars, workshops or at larger gatherings of communi-

ty members. In order for Deaf Community members to become interested in participating in Sign Language Work, they need to understand why sign language linguistics and language documentation are relevant to them.

Advisors will need to offer not only linguistic input, but other kinds of support and advice in areas such as teaching ('pedagogy'), interpreter training, the UN CRPD and lobbying techniques. Additional advisors might need to be identified with the relevant skills and knowledge.

4.2 The recruitment of staff for Sign Language Work

The recruitment process to find the most suitable local deaf people to conduct Sign Language Work should be one of the top priorities in the first phase. Finding skilled people with learning potential will ensure positive outcomes from the Sign Language Work. For the sake of transparency and in order to avoid favouritism, the recruitment process should be conducted in an open and democratic way. The deaf people who will be involved in Sign Language Work should not be hand-picked by the advisor or chosen by community members themselves from amongst their friends.

It is recommended that the recruitment process is implemented through an interview procedure. An interview panel of local deaf people should be selected and training in interview techniques provided by the advisor. Information about the forthcoming interviews (at the deaf association) should be made widely known throughout the community. Interviews are then conducted by the panel with the advisor present as an observer only.

To find deaf signers who have a strong intuition about their language for this work, it is advisable to set tasks in the interview that require linguistic analysis. For example, applicants could be asked to watch signed video clips and answer questions about the content, and sign a story based on visual pictures. These kind of tasks reveal the linguistic and communication abilities of the interviewees and show their potential for learning new skills.

In addition to assessing language skills, attention should be paid to gender balance – you should choose both male and female staff – and other factors such as age, ethnicity and religion should be balanced as far as possible. The educational background of applicants may vary, and some applicants might not have attended school at all. All applicants should be considered, regardless of such issues, in order to identify deaf people who are fluent signers with strong linguistic intuition, good cultural knowledge, and who are actively involved in the Deaf Community.

4.3 The Sign Language Working Group

The Sign Language Work is conducted by a team of two or three deaf staff members. They are guided in their work by the linguistic advisor, from whom they receive linguistic training. However, Sign Language Work staff should not work in isolation but in conjunction with a Sign Language Working Group. This can be established by either 1) Each local deaf club sending a representative who is a fluent signer with good linguistic intuition, or 2) Working Group members being selected through open interviews.

The Working Group may consist of 10–15 deaf signers, and should be balanced as far as possible between men and women, representing different ages, ethnicities, religions and geographical locations. It is important that the members represent the diversity of the community, so that they are able to embody its sign language variation.

Where there are several lexical variants for the same notion, the task of the Working Group is not to choose one variant in pref-

erence to others, but to discuss and document all variants that occur in the language. The order of the variants presented could then reflect their frequency in the language. The description of a sign language should demonstrate and respect the variation that exists in that language.

The Working Group will need to meet on a regular basis. This may mean, for example, at weekends, if that makes it possible for Group members to attend such meetings. Although the work of the Working Group members may be voluntary, those planning the budget should remember to reserve funds for local travel, meal allowances and possibly for accommodation expenses.

4.4 How to implement the training – notes on the use of time

It is crucial to make sure that the advisor's time is used efficiently. If possible, the advisor's first trip should last for at least three months so that the advisor can:

- learn the basics of the target sign language and become accustomed to the context (the local way of life and the local deaf culture)

- draft action plans for Sign Language Work together with the community

- inform the community at large about what Sign Language Work is for, and to find deaf people who are interested in conducting the work

- facilitate the process of recruiting Sign Language Work staff, by giving training to the interview panel on how to choose good candidates for the work

'Interval training' has been shown to be an efficient way of learning in this situation. After the initial three month visit, the advisor would then visit the country for a training period of one month or so, thereafter leaving the Sign Language Work staff to work independently and practice the skills that they have learnt. After a few months the advisor would visit again for one month, evaluate the work that has been done, and teach new topics. The advisor can also identify any problems that have arisen, and aim to support the resolution of these problems with new training and discussion with the Sign Language Work staff. Following this model, the advisor would visit the country an average of three times each year. This should continue for at least three years.

It is recommended that the advisor is present in the country for longer periods of time at the beginning of the work. However, if the advisor is present all the time, there is a risk of staff becoming dependent upon the advisor. Local trainees develop more confidence when working by themselves, without the continual presence of the advisor, and the Sign Language Work is more likely to take place in a way that suits the local context.

The advisor should not attempt to share too much knowledge in a short space of time, and it is usually better to begin with the basics – the amount of information shared can be increased over time. The aim is for the advisor to share enough information with the trainees for them to continue working independently when the advisor is away.

Sign Language Work itself must be conducted by local staff members, and the role of the advisor is to provide only training and support. Since the advisor is not the one who conducts the work, the work itself will take longer, and the advisor must be patient enough to cope with this. Successful and sustainable outcomes will result when enough time is allowed for the learning process.

4.5 Target groups for training given by the linguistic advisor

The training that the advisor gives should target at least three groups:

• the Sign Language Work staff members who are recruited for the day to day work

• the Sign Language Working Group that consists of volunteer members representing the Deaf Community

• hearing staff from the deaf organisation, and other hearing people who work closely with the Deaf Community
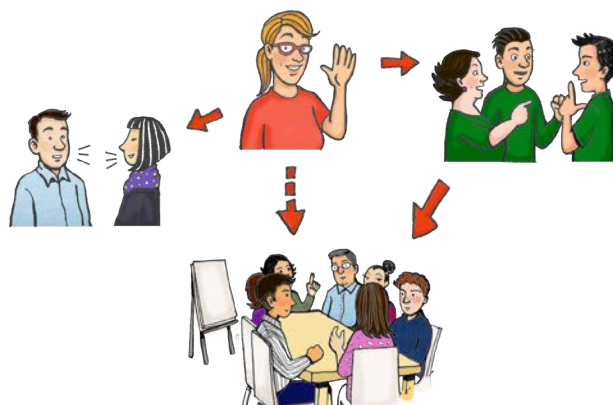
The advisor will work most closely with Sign Language Work staff, and also provide the Working Group with basic training. Over time, the advisor will withdraw from her/his role as an active trainer of the Working Group, and responsibility for this will be assumed by the Sign Language Work staff. Information shared by the advisor with the Sign Language Work staff will be shared with the Working Group by those staff. Through peer education, the Sign Language Work staff participate directly in increasing the capacity of the community.

It very important that hearing people in the organisation working with deaf people have the opportunity to acquire basic training from the advisor. If hearing people do not receive similar information to deaf people, and at the same pace, the increased linguistic knowledge and skills of Deaf Community members can become a source of conflict. In order to promote re-

spect between hearing and deaf people, hearing people need access to basic linguistic information. They need to realise that 'sign language' is not one language, but that many different sign languages are used around the world. They must also realise that spoken and signed languages are natural languages, and that even though their grammar and structures differ, they are equally valid.

4.6 Training as capacity-building – sharing skills in a sustainable way

Sign Language Work is at risk of ending if the few deaf recruits who have been trained unexpectedly resign from their work. It is important to plan Sign Language Work to minimise the chances of this happening.
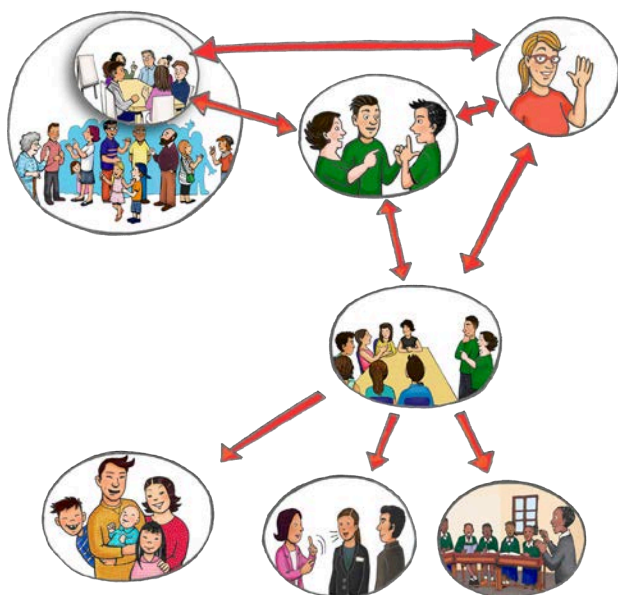
Firstly, training should be structured so that the outcomes of training are not limited to only a few individuals. The empowerment process becomes very vulnerable if the sharing of skills is focused on only a few individuals employed to conduct Sign Language Work. It is important to ensure that the Sign Language Work can be sustained by having a sufficient number of people involved at various levels. Whilst the advisor will be able to give some training to the Working Group of Deaf Community members, training will focus for the most part on the employed staff. It is essential that subsequently the staff will be able pass on their own learning, knowledge and skills to the Working Group.

Another threat to the sustainability of the work is that as the skills of Sign Language Work staff increase, they may become overloaded with external requests. For example, the input of Sign Language Work staff might be needed urgently in many different situations, such as in teaching sign language to hearing parents, school teachers and potential interpreters.

In time it may be necessary to set up a separate sign language instructor training programme to give a wider group of deaf people the skills and knowledge needed to teach a signed language. In this programme the trainees will receive information about the linguistic structure of a sign language from the Sign Language Work staff. Potential trainees might come from the Sign Language Working Group, or from other interested members of the Deaf Community who have not yet been involved in Sign Language Work.

This Training of Trainers (ToT) approach guarantees a broad pool of trained deaf people. Teaching is also an effective way of reinforcing what one has learned. By teaching other people, one realises whether one has understood a topic properly or not. This model, partly based on peer education, is a good way to share information with Deaf Community members.

4.7 Teaching methods

Interactive teaching methods are recommended, and training should have a very concrete form, with hands-on work. A traditional one-way teaching method, where the advisor 'lectures' local trainees must not be used. This is not the best way for deaf trainees to learn – they may never have had the opportunity to learn in their own sign language before, and their ability to process information when delivered in a lecture style may be limited.

Learning-by-doing is a functional approach, and means that participants can apply new knowledge, and practice newly-acquired skills. A lot of time should be devoted to this, in such a way that the prac-

tical implementation is carried out by the trainees. The responsibility of the advisor is to exchange skills with the Deaf Community, rather than to become a doer of Sign Language Work her/himself.
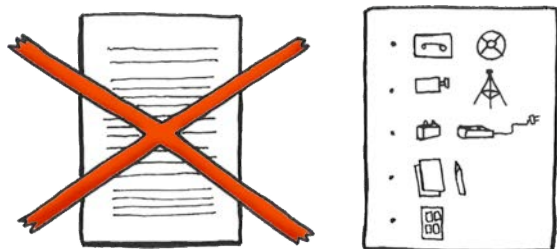
Culturally, deaf people are visual – this means that they also learn in a visual way. From this, it follows that visual teaching materials and tools shall be used in the training – e.g. visual notes with drawings as to-do-lists. Sign language should be used as much as possible, especially if the literacy skills of the trainees are weak. Instead of producing progress reports in a written language, reports can be presented in sign language in front of a camera and, if needed, later translated into a written language by a bilingual person.

While the advisor is away from the location of the Sign Language Work, it may be too challenging for the advisor and the trainees to correspond by written e-mails. It might also be the case that the advisor and the trainees do not have a written language in common. Instead, video chat programmes with a webcam should be used for communicating remotely in sign language. Rather than produce written information on websites, trainees should provide information about the Sign Lan-

guage Work on websites in sign language. This signed information can later be translated into written language.

4.8 Ensuring geographic coverage for Sign Language Work

Some countries are known to have more than one sign language. This might be because there are several schools for deaf children, or because one Deaf Community is isolated from others. The aim of Sign Language Work is **not** to reduce variation or to unify or standardise different sign language varieties (whether different languages or different dialects).

Sign Language Work focuses on one sign language at a time – but takes regional language variation into account. If the sign language is used across a wide area, it is crucial to work in several locations, with the aim of representing the language used in as many areas as possible. In practice this means that the initial information about Sign Language Work must be shared in different areas, so that as many regions as possible are represented in the Working Group. Filmed video data needs to be collected from different areas and different parts of the community, to get an accurate representation of real language use.

While conducting Sign Language Work, information about the on-going research should be shared on regular basis with the whole community in the form of seminars or workshops. Information should also be shared with key external stakeholders during the process, to try and maximise the chance that they will accept the results of the Sign Language Work when they are published.

When the Sign Language Work activities have begun and are running smoothly, it is recommended that deaf people from the country should network internationally. Visiting international sign language workshops, seminars and conferences is a good way to obtain the latest information about linguistic research, and to share experiences with other deaf people who are conducting Sign Language research around the world.

5. SUGGESTED CONTENT AND TOPICS FOR SIGN LANGUAGE WORK TRAINING

5.1 Deaf Awareness module

Local deaf people are sometimes used to the oppression and discrimination that they face, and may even consider hearing people to be superior. For changes to take place, individuals in the Deaf Community need to become aware of their cultural heritage, their linguistic identity as members of a Deaf Community, and the equality between signed and spoken languages. These things may not be recognised or openly discussed within the community, but deaf people need awareness of them in order to understand the ability to change their situation. The emergence of pride in using the local sign language also effectively protects the language from the influence of other sign languages.

The training in this module – on topics such as deaf culture, deaf identity, Deafhood and deaf history – must be given by a deaf advisor. Hearing advisors do not have the competence and personal experience (for example, of deaf identity) necessary to teach these topics.

5.2 Basic sign language linguistics

Basic linguistic topics that could be covered include:

- universal characteristics of language, and similarities and differences between spoken, written and signed languages

- the relationship between language and culture as revealed in the Deaf Community (sign language and deaf culture) – e.g. in the form of eye contact or seeking attention

- language structure: the building blocks of individual signs, and sign modification and formation (phonology and morphology), the order of signs in a signed expression (syntax), and other grammatical features specific for signed languages, such as body move-

ments, non-manual elements, and the use of space

- the social aspect of language and the relationship between language and society:
  o language variation (regional, social and individual)
  o language register and style
  o language change
  o language acquisition
  o bilingualism in children
  o language planning and policy

5.3 Sign language documentation

Training must be given on why and how to document sign language, based on the filming of natural language. This means that the Sign Language Work staff are first trained in the use of technical equipment and given practical training on how to collect linguistic data through natural discussions or interviews. Sign Language Work staff must learn not to begin with the spoken language, e.g. showing the deaf informants written words to sign. No written material should be used at all; instead linguistic data should be elicited through natural sign conversation or by using visual stimuli – such as pictures, photographs or video clips. Training is also to be given in research ethics, e.g. consent for filming and use of data.

Once natural signing data have been collected, the filmed clips can become a base for the development of a sign language corpus. A sign language corpus is a collection of organised sign language data which have been transcribed and annotated, and can be searched by a computer. A corpus is very useful for further research and for teaching the language.

5.4 Language description (including considerations for making a dictionary)

It is common for Deaf Communities to want a dictionary of their language, and therefore the advisor should explain the

limitations that dictionaries usually have. A dictionary cannot provide a comprehensive description of the language. However, a dictionary can function as a valuable first step for describing signs in a language, and as an important symbol and lobbying tool for sign language. The signs in a dictionary are not more "correct" than those not taken into the dictionary are "wrong". Sign languages contain linguistic variation and when languages change over time new signs enter into the language. It is important not to publish a dictionary only in the form of a book, since printed material does not do justice to the visual nature of sign language. Therefore the dictionary needs a "live" format, such as a website, a DVD or a USB memory stick.

The Sign Language Work staff need to learn how to organise the collected linguistic information in sign files – within a computer database, and maybe also on index cards stored in a box. They need to learn how to note down the form of the sign (handshape, orientation, movement and place of articulation) and information about the signer (gender, age and region). The Sign Language Work staff should learn not to work on the signs through a spoken/written language – e.g. not to arrange collected signs based on words in a spoken language in an alphabetic order. Instead signs can be arranged in groups based on the structure of the sign (handshape). In the analysis an alphabetical order of spoken language words should be avoided, since it makes the analysing process more complicated and confusing by mixing spoken language information into the sign research. Signs for a dictionary can also be arranged based on the meaning of the sign (signs for family members, school, food & drinks, etc.).

The collected and analysed material will then be discussed in the Working Group. After the discussions the signs need to be re-filmed if the planned outcome of the language description work is a dictionary. The Group can also give their input by filming example sentences for each of the signs with support of examples found in the filmed data. In this way, the dictionary presents not only individual signs, but also the signs in context. Finally, support from bilingual (hearing) persons with skills in both sign language and written language is needed for finding the equivalents to the signs in spoken language and for translating the signed example sentences into written language.
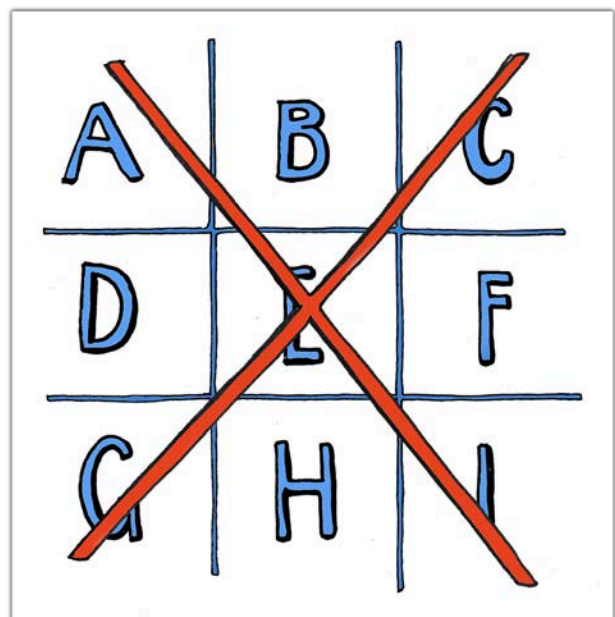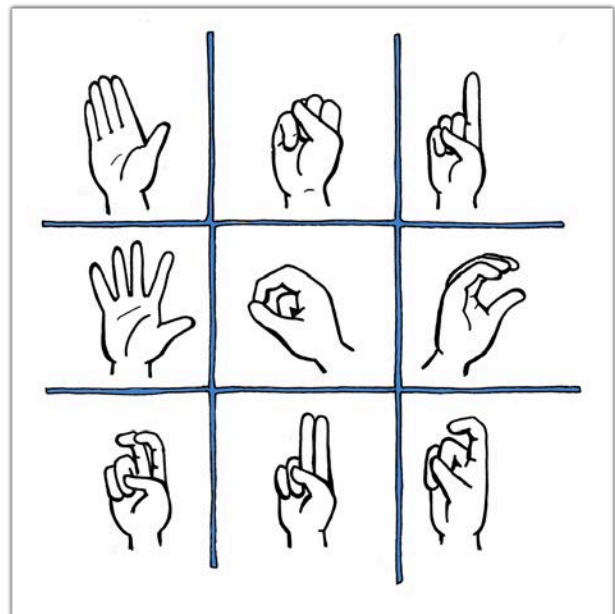
5.5 Training on 'how to teach' ('pedagogy training')

If the skills and the linguistic knowledge that one has acquired are to be passed on to other people, then Sign Language Work staff must have pedagogical skills (this means that they know how to teach). Having knowledge of a topic (such as sign language research) is not the same thing as being able to teach it. Once the staff are trained on how to teach, the staff will be able to teach sign language topics to several groups, such as the Deaf Community members, hearing parents of deaf children and interpreter students.

Therefore, a pedagogic advisor needs to be recruited to give training in:

• how to plan and structure sign language teaching sessions

• what kind of visual teaching material to use (such as video clips, pictures and photos)

• how to practice before the actual teaching session

• interactive teaching methods and how to give feedback

• self-reflection and self-evaluation in order to develop ones teaching skills

• how to adapt ones teaching to different target groups – since deaf sign language users, or hearing people who are learning sign language as a foreign language require different teaching approaches, and children and young people learn in a different way compared to adult learners

In addition to getting pedagogy training from the advisor, the Sign Language Work staff are also given feedback from the advisor after their actual teaching performance, where the advisor has been present as an observer.

5.6 Training in human and linguistic rights advocacy

Skills and strategies are needed in order to lobby successfully for the improvement of human and linguistic rights. This training module could contain information about society structures; how parliamentary decision-making functions, about different government bodies, and how legislation is structured in the country in question. Training on the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and other relevant international human rights treaties regarding deaf people and sign language is also a part of this module.

It is important for deaf people to practice their lobbying skills before meeting with different authorities, so that they are prepared and know how to behave. Participants can practice by acting out situations beforehand, to prepare different roles. When people are well prepared for lobbying, they are able to make a difference, and contribute both to the process of changing legislation and to the way that it is implemented. Lobbying on sign languages can cover issues such as the legal recognition of sign language, the use of sign language in education, funding for a sign language interpreter service, and access to information through sign language on TV and on the internet.

6. BEST PRACTICES AND CHALLENGES IN SIGN LANGUAGE WORK

6.1 Communication

6.1a Communication between Sign Language Work staff and the Deaf Community

Open interaction and communication is the basis for cooperation between Sign Language Work staff and the Deaf Community. It is very important that there is mutual understanding, so that motivation levels are maintained and successful (learning) results are achieved. This creates a supportive atmosphere among the people involved in Sign Language Work.

Communication challenges and misunderstandings that arise need to be dealt with openly and immediately. Unsolved communication problems tend to escalate into bigger problems. They can affect the motivation of those involved, and have a negative effect on the Sign Language Work as a whole. Transparent problem solving is the key to good communication and successful Sign Language Work activities.

6.1b Communication between the advisor and the Deaf Community

When the advisor arrives in the target country, her or his first task is to learn the local sign language so that communication is smoother and more efficient. The advisor should not use her/his own national sign language or International Sign for communicating with the local Deaf Community.

How can the advisor learn the local sign language? There might be some sign language classes in the target country, but language is best learned through interaction with language users, i.e. members of the Deaf Community. It is also advantageous for the advisor to meet female and male language users of different ages and other backgrounds. Some deaf individuals might be more used to communicating with language learners, and could function as interpreters, supporting the advisor with communication in the beginning phase. By learning the language of the community, the advisor also acquires cultural patterns and gets to know and to be known by the community members.

There are several benefits for an advisor who learns the sign language of the local Deaf Community:

1. According to the WFD policy (see wfdeaf.org > Databank > Policies > WFD Work in Developing Countries) foreign sign languages should not be imported into developing countries. The local and national sign languages should be respected and not be subject to foreign influence that might change, destroy or jeopardise the existence of a local sign language.

2. The target audience may not understand training that is given by the advisor if s/he uses International Sign or her/his own national sign language. Learning the sign language of the community therefore ensures that the training is accessible to the Deaf Community.

3. Sign Language Work staff need to understand guidance that the advisor gives on language documentation, but the advisor also needs to understand the sign language data that Sign Language Work staff collect. This means that the advisor needs to be proficient in the local sign language so that s/he can assist with analysis and explain features in the language that is the target of documentation and research. The advisor's proficiency in the local sign language contributes to the high quality of the linguistic work that is conducted.

4. Communication in the local sign language of the Deaf Community reduces the power-differential between the advisor and the language users. As a result, the two parties become more equal socially.

5. When the advisor socialises with the Deaf Community members, they get to know her/him and witness the increasing proficiency of the advisor in the local sign language. This helps community members to accept the advisor more easily.

6.1c The role of the advisor in fostering good everyday communication

When the advisor introduces a new training topic to Sign Language Work staff, it is crucial to ensure that the key points are understood. Interactive teaching methods can be used, such as regularly asking trainees to provide summaries of what has been discussed or covered. This helps everyone to identify if a topic is not yet clearly understood. It also gives Sign Language Work staff more confidence to continue working independently when the advisor is not present. For successful learning, communication must be clear and interactive, and new topics must be introduced gradually at the right pace.

The advisor has to know the local sign language in order to communicate with Sign Language Work staff. It is also useful if the advisor knows the basics of the spoken/written language(s) of the wider community. These language skills are beneficial when the advisor is involved in dictionary work, where equivalents to the signs are processed and written translations of the example sentences are produced. This phase happens after signed material is collected and analysed, when sign entries are created for the dictionary. Any hearing people involved in working on translations and written equivalents for sign entries will also need linguistic guidance from the advisor.

Open communication and direct problem-solving are basic principles for general interaction in Sign Language Work. Enough time must be allocated for solving problems and for effective interaction. The advisor is a role model for her/his interaction skills and communicative behaviour, and the importance of this cannot be overemphasised. Sign Language Work staff can learn crucial problem solving skills from the advisor. If communication is inade-

quate then Sign Language Work will suffer.

6.1d Communication between deaf, hard of hearing and hearing people

It is important to be aware of communication issues between deaf, hard of hearing and hearing people. Even if Sign Language Work activities are mainly implemented by deaf staff and deaf members of the Working Group, it is likely that the input of hearing people is needed. Hearing people are often involved in the later stages of dictionary development, and the deaf-hearing relationship may be crucial for the success of the project.

Hearing people might not be familiar with the communication patterns and rules that Deaf signers use. Examples include the importance of eye contact during signed interactions, and the attraction of a deaf person's attention by tapping on the shoulder, or waving, rather than by shouting. If signed communication is to run smoothly, hearing people need to be made aware of these cultural norms, for example through training by deaf people. This fosters cross-cultural cooperation and understanding.

If deaf, hard of hearing, and hearing people work together within a deaf association or on a project, problems arise if some people use spoken language to communicate with each other, because this excludes deaf people from taking part in discussion. One way to ensure that communication is accessible for everybody is to have an explicit language policy for the office or space where Sign Language Work takes place. This kind of policy states that sign language is to be used whenever deaf people are present. When no deaf persons are present, spoken language may be used. By using a signed language, communication becomes respectful and accessible for everyone in the room.

This language policy, of always using a signed language when deaf people are present, can sometimes be challenging for hearing and hard of hearing people. It is possible that they must be reminded of the policy – and about why using a spoken language might be disrespectful towards

deaf people. It can also take time for changes in linguistic behaviour to take place.

6.2 Linguistic challenges – the desire for sign language change and standardisation

6.2a Sign language variation

Deaf people do not usually have problems understanding the sign language used by people of different gender and age, who may sign in different ways. Within the community, deaf people often use different signs for the same concept, and therefore the lexicon of a sign language naturally contains linguistic variation. When deaf people are travelling (abroad), they often find it relatively effortless to learn a new sign language through communication with deaf signers in a new area or a new country.

Linguistic variation in sign languages can be a challenge for hearing people. Hearing teachers of deaf children can be apprehensive about the range of variants, and might even express a desire for children to change their signing and use standardised signs. For smooth communication between a hearing teacher and students, it is the responsibility of the teacher to learn the different signs that are used. (The teacher can use either one or several variants in return.)

6.2b Sign language variation and dictionary work

Sometimes a desire is expressed to reduce the variation that hearing people encounter in a sign language. Sign language interpreters, teachers or hearing parents of deaf children sometimes regard such variation as problematic. There are even cases where dictionaries are made by choosing only one variant for each spoken language word. This is not an adequate way to proceed with dictionary work, because the richness of expression in a sign language should be respected.

One of the dangers associated with this approach is that variants appearing in the dictionary may be seen as "correct" while other variants in use in the community language, which are not in the dictionary, are considered "incorrect". In light of this, it is recommended that dictionaries reflect natural signing, which contains variation. By collecting such 'real' sign language data from different deaf signers, different variants can be presented in the dictionary publication, as well as "live" signed examples of the signs.

Attempts to standardise sign languages often fail because signed languages are mistakenly compared with written languages. The written form of a language is usually the result of standardisation processes, and therefore writing follows strict, conventionalised rules of spelling and grammar. Rather, signed languages should be compared to spoken forms of a language – spoken and signed languages are both richer in variation than normative standard written languages.

6.2c To impose changes and attempts to unify sign language

Several attempts have been made to change or unify sign languages in different parts of the world. Within a sign community, linguistic variation is sometimes related to different schools for deaf children. Attempts should not be made to standardise varieties – or variants – in order to reduce variation. Linguistic variation in sign languages should be respected.

Foreign sign languages should not be imported into a country to replace an existing sign language. If a foreign sign language has already been introduced to a country, the use of the original/indigenous sign language can be supported and (re)vitalised by community-based sign language documentation and research, and language awareness training.

Misconceptions still prevail about sign languages 'lacking' elements that are found in spoken and written languages; sign languages are sometimes mistakenly judged as inferior on the basis of this, and in need of 'fixing' or developing. Sign languages should not be 'developed' by individuals from outside the community. The sign languages of Deaf Communities are natural, fully-fledged languages.

Different sign languages are used around the world, and attempts to unify different sign languages are misguided and unethical (see wfdeaf.org > Databank > Statements > Statement on the unification of sign languages). It should also be remembered that there may be several sign languages in one country in a similar way that there might be several different spoken languages.

All forceful attempts to change, standardise or unify natural sign languages are violations of the linguistic human rights of deaf people. Through Sign Language Work, Deaf Community members receive linguistic training and accurate information about the nature of sign languages, and become better equipped to resist pressure from others to change their language.

6.2d Sign language development within deaf education

Hearing teachers with poor signing skills might find it challenging to identify signed equivalents for written words in school books. We suggest that teachers take part in sign language classes to develop their signing skills. If such classes are not available, the teacher can actively engage with Deaf Community members and learn to sign from deaf adults. If this is also not possible, teachers can interact with their deaf schoolchildren, and learn how they express concepts.

One particular challenge is to find signed equivalents for terminology linked with a specific area of study. It is unlikely that established and conventional signed expressions already exist for all special terminology. It is not acceptable for working groups of hearing people – such as interpreters, teachers and educationalists – to develop new signs.

The best way to develop new signs is to establish a working group of deaf signers who have had basic linguistic training. Hearing people can join the group, but it is essential that they do not take over the decision making process.

The involvement of deaf people in this kind of work is essential, since hearing staff do not usually have a sign language as their first language, and so lack the necessary skills. Those who have a sign language as their first language have complex knowledge concerning language use, and metalinguistic awareness and intuition about their language. They can determine how new signs can be constructed according to the norms of the language.

6.3 Challenge – how to avoid (linguistic) colonialism and international pressure

The term "colonialism" is used here to refer to the introduction of linguistic or cultural influences from a more dominant culture that leads to the replacement of indigenous language(s) or cultural practices. In order to avoid this kind of colonialism, the advisor should be aware of, and observe how s/he communicates, and try to adapt to local cultural patterns. It is of the utmost importance that Deaf Community members are aware of international influences, and learn to resist them as appropriate.

The advisor should be recruited in cooperation between the Deaf Community and the project funder. Once the advisor is appointed, her or his behaviour is very important. If the advisor is unaware of local cultural patterns, uses International Sign or another sign language, the local sign language is then exposed to risk of being displaced. If a foreign advisor is recruited, s/he must learn the sign language of the community and become accustomed to the local deaf culture.

The advisor might find it tempting to conduct some of the tasks her/himself, but in the long run this is counterproductive for Sign Language Work. If the results are to be sustainable, deaf trainees need to learn new skills by conducting the work themselves. The advisor should adopt a background role; by advising instead of doing, the advisor makes it possible for trainees to implement the work themselves, and sustainable capacity building can take place. The advisor can also encourage the further spread of skills and knowledge, by encouraging Sign Language Work staff to share their experience with neighbouring

countries in the form of South-South partnerships.

Through their ethical behaviour, advisors are role models for how to respect the local sign language and cultural patterns. Through appropriate training, the local Deaf Community becomes empowered when learning new skills. They acquire new tools to manage the challenges they will meet, and this ensures successful results for Sign Language Work.

6.4 Challenges in involving the Deaf Community

6.4a Involving the Deaf Community – planning Sign Language Work

It is common for new Sign Language Work projects to face various challenges. Representatives of the Deaf Community must be involved in the planning phase, because planning should not be carried out by the international project manager and the advisor alone. This is for several reasons.

Deaf Community members are the experts on the local situation – collectively, they know about the history of the community, its sign language, the specific needs and everyday challenges that community members face in life. This information is needed in the planning phase, and therefore planning should be carried out in cooperation between the community, the advisor and the project manager. This is the way in which decisions must be taken about which Sign Language Work activities to carry out.

Local Deaf Community members must be involved in the planning phase because Sign Language Work models cannot be directly copied and pasted from one country to another. In international cooperation it is important to remember that every Deaf Community is unique, and faces different challenges. The project aims and activities must match the specific situation in question.

6.4b Involving the Deaf Community – input during all stages of work

When working with a small team of deaf Sign Language Work staff, it is crucial that the new or developing skills of the staff are shared with other community members as soon as possible. These members are key stakeholders in Sign Language Work. If they are not involved, problems may arise later on. It is important to bear in mind that information needs to be given to the Deaf Community as Sign Language Work takes place. The Working Group represents the community and has a crucial part to play in this process, not at least in representing the linguistic variation that can be found in the language. If the community is involved only when the work is coming to an end – e.g. when a dictionary is published – members of the community might reject the results of Sign Language Work.

In order for Sign Language Work activities to succeed, Deaf Community members need to have a genuine sense of ownership towards the work.

6.4c Involving the Deaf Community – participation on an equal basis

One challenge when involving the community is how to do so on an equal basis, because it is common for (sub)groups of a community to oppress each other. Examples of why this might happen during Sign Language Work are outlined below:

- The community might still be dominated by hearing people, who want to retain strong positions, and are unwilling to cooperate with deaf people. **Deaf and hearing people** are equal and should respect each other, but Sign Language Work should be conducted by deaf people themselves, at least at the beginning. It is crucial that the control of the Sign Language Work remains within the Deaf Community.

- **Gender** issues might be a reason for discrimination. Sign Language Work should not be dominated by male staff members, and women and men should be able to participate equally.

- The **younger deaf generation** might have difficulties in participating, if the community is dominated by an **older generation** that maintains

control or influence.

- **Income/wealth differences** should not be a reason for unequal treatment.

- **Education level** should not be a barrier for participating in Sign Language Work. Deaf people who have attended school and those who have not should be given the opportunity to participate in Sign Language Work.

- Even **city-versus-countryside** should not be a reason to discriminate between members of the Deaf Community. Everybody should be treated equally regardless of where they live.

- **Ethnic background** is not a reason to exclude deaf people from participating in Sign Language Work.

- Deaf people of different **religious backgrounds and beliefs** should be respected and should have the opportunity to participate in Sign Language Work.

For discrimination of this kind to be avoided or minimised, it may be appropriate to give information to the Deaf Community about equality and human rights issues. For Sign Language Work, it is crucial that linguistic and sociolinguistic variation is respected and made visible. This can be done by including representatives from the whole community in Sign Language Work.

6.5 Challenge — motivation of volunteers

When seeking to involve the Deaf Community, one challenge is how to motivate community members to take part in the work on a voluntary basis. In addition to the two or three paid staff members, Sign Language Work requires unpaid but committed language users who give their input as long-term members of the Working Group. Before Sign Language Work begins in earnest, it can help to stress the importance of the ongoing involvement of volunteers throughout the duration of the project so that they stay motivated and committed to the work. Volunteers can be aware that:

- They are not paid a salary because they do not work on a daily basis, unlike the Sign Language Work staff. Their work consists only of attending Working Group meetings.

- For Working Group meetings, travel expenses are paid (e.g. travel by bus or train). In addition to this, their expenses (meals and accommodation) will be covered.

- The input of volunteers is important because they are familiar with sign language use and regional variation.

- Once a dictionary is published (as a book and in electronic form), Working Group members will be acknowledged in the publication by name.

- The dictionary will be an important lobbying tool for persuading the government of the existence of the language. Over time, this effort will remove barriers that deaf people face, and improve their human rights.

A thorough understanding of the role of the Working Group is needed in order to secure the commitment of its members. When the members understand why the work is being carried out on a voluntary basis, it is likely that they will be willing to support Sign Language Work as long-term members of the Working Group.

6.6 Cultural clashes in everyday work

Different kinds of cultural clashes are to be expected in Sign Language Work. For example, the advisor and the local Deaf Community may have different cultural conceptions of time (e.g. different expectations regarding punctuality). The advisor must use a flexible approach when adapting to local customs. Partners must communicate openly on issues such as punctuality and scheduling, so that cooperation ensues as smoothly as possible. All parties should be encouraged to be flexible so that cultural differences can be overcome.

Differences between hearing and deaf culture might also present challenges. To laugh at different things, to have a different sense of humour, may be a source of misunderstanding. Informing other people before you leave a room may appear to be odd behaviour to a hearing person, but deaf people do not hear the shutting of a door which indicates that someone has left. Hearing people involved in Sign Language Work should be made aware of the fundamental features in communicating with deaf people, so that misunderstandings or conflicts due to ignorance are not created.

6.7 Challenge – prioritising

6.7a Challenge – prioritising how to use the available funding

One challenge that might emerge concerns funding. It might not be possible for all of the goals set out in the original project proposal to be achieved, if funding does not allow for this. In such a situation, the amount of funding available affects which activities can be implemented.

Discussion of priorities – involving the project manager, the advisor and Sign Language Work staff – is important. If the amount of funding falls short of what was expected, new plans must be made based on the most urgent Sign Language Work topics. Some activities may have to be postponed, pending further funding. Plans must be adapted to match the amount of funding available.

6.7b Challenge – which Sign Language Work topics should be prioritised?

Whose important is important? Another challenge concerns which topics should be dealt with in Sign Language Work. On one hand, the advisor might be overambitious in terms of the ideas that s/he wants to share, or the depth of the content. Sign Language Work staff might struggle to grasp all of the new topics, especially if there is not enough time to discuss each one. On the other hand, Sign Language Work staff might also have unrealistic plans for the things they want to achieve within the scope of Sign Language Work.

How can one solve the problem of which topics to prioritise? Plans must be realistic – adapted to the needs, situation, and circumstances of the Deaf Community in the target area. To obtain agreement for concrete plans, open discussions are needed between the advisor and all relevant local parties/individuals.

6.7c Challenge – the balance between learning new knowledge and skills, and putting them into practice

Time management can be a challenge when Sign Language Work staff and the advisor make plans for periods when the advisor is present. If active training takes place for a period of two weeks, problems and uncertainties can arise when the advisor has left staff members to continue by themselves. Time can be lost when Sign Language Work staff have to wait for the next visit by the advisor.

With this in mind, we recommend that the advisor does not spend all of her or his time engaged in active face-to-face teaching, but allocates time for practice. The advisor has to be present long enough for new topics to become clear, and for additional information to be given (if needed). If enough time is reserved for trainees to practice, it will be possible to digest and learn to apply the new skills.

6.8 Challenge – setting the order in which topics should be covered

If the advisor starts the training by teaching only linguistic topics in some depth, there is a risk that the content will be too challenging for Sign Language Work staff who have been recently recruited.

Staff members often need training in other basic skills first, such as:

- cooperation and team working skills – how to communicate and interact in a mutually-supportive way

- how to organise one's work – the planning of work on a weekly, monthly and yearly basis

- how to use the technical equipment needed for Sign Language Work – training in the use of video cameras, computers and other technical equipment, file management, editing, etc.

- how to report on the activities that have been done – training in making video reports

Basic insights and skills in these practical topics connected to the work is a prerequisite for the Sign Language Work staff to be prepared for acquiring deeper training in sign language linguistics.

6.9 Challenge – the need for flexibility in implementing a plan

It is well known that everything does not often go according to plan when starting Sign Language Work activities. Plans that are made by the advisor and the Deaf Community need to allow for flexibility. If a three-year plan is made for Sign Language Work, the original plan ('Plan A') will not necessarily be followed all the way to its conclusion.

To reach the goals that have been set, it is common for Plan A to be changed into Plan B, and then to be developed further into Plan C. This is done during the course of the work, and means that plans need to be open to evaluation and adjustment according to prevailing circumstances and situations. This evaluation and adjustment should take place in cooperation and agreement with the Deaf Community.

Consequently, it is good to have a flexible attitude and to bear in mind that a plan is only a plan. If a plan does not work, it needs to be re-evaluated and changed accordingly.

6.10 Challenge – an active dialogue with relevant stakeholders

If Sign Language Work activities are carried out within a small group of Sign Language Work staff in isolation, this can generate challenges later on. If others are unaware of the research, they may reject it. It is preferable that relevant stakeholders – such as the whole Deaf Community, interpreters, schools for the deaf, university linguistics departments, and governmental bodies – are aware of Sign Language Work from the very beginning (or at least from early on).

It is wise to maintain active contact, arrange regular meetings and repeatedly disseminate information about the Sign Language Work process to relevant groups and institutions. This can help to foster acceptance of the results of Sign Language Work, e.g. once a dictionary is published.

6.11 Challenge of sustainability – project duration and ensuring funding

If Sign Language Work is dependent on international project funding, how can the work continue sustainably once funding stops?

It usually takes at least three years to begin Sign Language Work and make sure that it is running properly. Sign Language Work is not a "quick fix", and it takes time to learn and build the capacity of Deaf Community members. The work should not be rushed. The people who are conducting Sign Language Work need time to digest and practice applying new knowledge, so that activities contribute to strong, lasting and ethical Sign Language Work.

If international project funding is used, this will almost certainly stop at some point, perhaps after several cycles of funding. While Sign Language Work activities and capacity building are being conducted, it is important to start lobbying, so that the government will take responsibility for future funding. Over time, as international funding decreases, government funding should increase. Ultimately, Sign Language Work should be guaranteed and funded by national authorities.

In the long run, the 'home' of sign language documentation and research should move to a place where language research belongs – this might be a linguistics department at a university that has more resources than a small deaf organisation. Through equal treatment with spoken languages, the status of the national sign language(s) will also increase. However, ownership of the language must stay within the sign community, and deaf signers must remain in control of the research of their language. In order that these principles are followed, Sign Language Work should continue through cooperation between researchers (whether deaf or hearing) and the Deaf Community.

In conclusion, Sign Language Work should be conducted on a long-term basis. It should not rely only on international funding, therefore lobbying activities need to be directed towards the relevant national government. These authorities should claim responsibility for funding Sign Language Work activities in future, when the initial funding stops.

7. SUMMARY: WHAT *NOT* TO DO, AND CONCRETE SUGGESTIONS FOR GOOD PRACTICE

1. Actors and project planners outside Deaf Communities – such as international organisations or governments – must not suggest or plan Sign Language Work projects without consulting the local deaf people concerned, or without having a sign language linguist involved in the planning. Local Deaf Community members should already be involved in the planning stages of Sign Language Work, according to the philosophy *"Nothing About Us Without Us!"*.

2. Sign languages differ from each other throughout the world. Do not try to unify different sign languages or language varieties into a single form, but respect languages as they are. Do not try to reduce variation by imposing standardisation efforts on a sign language. Variation occurs naturally in all language. (See wfdeaf.org > Databank > Statements > Statement on the unification of sign languages / WFD Statement on Standardized Sign Language)

3. Some people might regard sign languages as incomplete, and may not understand that these are natural languages. Do not impose changes or try to 'develop' a sign language – e.g. by adding what you think the language 'lacks'. Sign languages lack nothing; they are natural languages that develop over time through use within a language community. They should be respected as such.

4. Foreign advisors must not introduce her/his own sign language, or International Sign, into the target country. The local sign language(s) should be acquired and used for communication. Advisors should also familiarise themselves with the local culture. This helps to foster cooperation.

5. An advisor coming from a financially rich country should not impose outside behaviour or alien cultural values and beliefs on the target community. Rather than dominating, s/he should foster genuine cooperation with the Deaf Community in the target country, characterised by equality and mutual understanding. Working and setting the goals together will result in effective development and sustainability.

6. Sign Language Work should be conducted in accordance with the principles of openness and transparency. The advisor should not "hand pick" Sign Language Work staff according to her/his personal preference or opinion. Instead there should be a transparent recruitment process, where the Deaf Community is given information about recruitment. In this way all interested community members have the chance to apply for a position and attend an interview.

7. Where possible, do not pick only male or only female Sign Language Work staff. Try also not to show partiality towards younger or older people. Be therefore aware of the gender balance and work with people of different ages.

8. Sign Language Work as we have described it should not be conducted in a bubble by staff members. Interested members of the whole Deaf Community should have the opportunity to be informed and involved in different ways. It is advisable that the Sign Language Work staff cooperate with a Working Group. The wider Deaf Community should be informed of progress since it concerns their language.

9. Do not employ hearing people as Sign Language Work staff or Working Group members. When starting Sign Language Work, it is advisable for the work to be conducted only by deaf or hard of hearing people. They need to have good signing skills, be representative of linguistic variation and have strong connections to the community language use in order to work on the sign language data. Hearing people can be included at a later stage of Sign Language Work – when the focus of the work is to find equivalents and translate the collected signed data into a written language.

10. Hearing people should be aware of how they are interacting with the Deaf Community. It is important not to take control, since it is the Deaf Community that should lead the work. This will empower

the community and enable deaf people to cooperate with hearing people on an equal basis.

11. Do not conduct Sign Language Work without expertise on sign language linguistics. Sign Language Work implemented without this expertise will be inadequate. Linguists provide training to Sign Language Work staff in sign language structure and grammar, which contributes to robust, accurate and meaningful results based on standard and reliable paradigms.

12. The advisor should not be the one who does the work. Even if s/he thinks that the Sign Language Work is progressing at too slow a pace, and might prefer to do the work her/himself. It is crucial that it is the local Sign Language Work staff who implement the activities. The advisor's role is to stay in the background, offering support and providing training, but not moving into the spotlight and doing the work. In this way, real learning happens and leads to increases in local skills and capacity.

13. Sign Language Work is not a "quick fix". Learning takes time and outcomes emerge in due course. We feel that a minimum of three years is needed for Sign Language Work to achieve sustainable results. The advisor does not need to be continually present; if the advisor can visit the field at regular intervals to give training, the Sign Language Work staff can then work independently.

14. It cannot be presumed that findings from research on one sign language apply to another sign language without conducting research to find out. Guidance and information about *how* to conduct sign language research should be shared with countries that have no tradition of research.

15. Although two countries may use the same spoken and written languages, the signed languages may be different. Each sign language has its own historic trajectory. A sign language dictionary made in one country can never apply to another, even if the spoken language happens to be the same in both countries.

16. Do not collect signing data by confronting the deaf informants with lists of written words from a spoken language. To avoid influence or interference from a spoken language, it is preferable to film spontaneous conversations between deaf participants. Natural language use can also be elicited using visual stimuli, such as pictures, photographs or video clips/films.

17. When making a sign language dictionary, do not expect to find one sign for each spoken word. Words or signs in different languages do not correspond with each other on a one-to-one basis. There might be many words that match a sign, and correspondingly many signs that match one word.

18. If a sign is included in a dictionary, this does not mean that the sign is more acceptable or 'correct' and that other variants (not included) are 'wrong'. A dictionary is not supposed to be a tool for changing a language, or for trying to persuade deaf people to favour one sign instead of another.

19. Sign Language Work should not be conducted in isolation within a restricted group of people. In addition to working with the community you also need to get support for the work from different key stakeholders. If they are not aware of the ongoing work, they might reject the final results – such as a dictionary – once it is finalised and published. Therefore you should remember to actively inform the Deaf Community, and parties such as schools for the deaf, interpreters, linguistics departments at university, and governmental bodies about the progress of Sign Language Work. When these parties are aware of the ongoing work, it is more likely they are willing to accept the end result.

20. Do not become stuck on the original plan. If obstacles are encountered, the plan should be evaluated and changed to suit the new situation. It is important that Sign Language Work staff, the advisor and Working Group members have agreed on the original goals together, and also work jointly on re-planning and adjusting the activities whenever needed. This can be supported by flexible attitudes, and the confidence to change plans that are not working.

REFERENCES, SOME SUGGESTED FURTHER READING, AND WEB SITE RESOURCES

1. General references relevant to empowerment and participation in development cooperation work

UN and WFD webpages and documents; websites for Deaf Associations and NGOs; relevant research centres, projects, and websites

Allen, Colin. Avoiding Deaf colonialism in developing countries: Empowerment in development work. Video presentation at the International Workshop of Deaf Community Development at iSLanDS institute (Preston, UK) in July 2012.
www.slwmanual.info/#colin_allen

Albanian National Association of the Deaf (ANAD)
www.shknd.info
www.facebook.com/anad2000
Gjuha e Shenjave Shqipe 1, 2005 (First dictionary in Albanian Sign Language – book + DVD)

Deaf Academics
www.deafacademics.org

Dictionaries of African Sign Languages
www.africansignlanguages.org > Dictionaries/Dictionaires

Discovering Deaf Worlds
www.discoveringdeafworlds.org

Finnish Association of the Deaf (FAD)
www.kuurojenliitto.fi/en > Development Cooperation
www.facebook.com/kuurojenliitto

International Institute for Sign Languages and Deaf Studies (iSLanDS)
www.uclan.ac.uk/research/explore/groups/islands.php

iSLanDS Sign Language Endangerment Research Project
www.uclan.ac.uk/islands
www.uclan.ac.uk/research/explore/projects/sign_languages_in_unesco_atlas_of_world_la
nguages_in_danger.php > Questionnaire > Adapted Survey: Linguistic Vitality and Diversity of Sign Languages

Kosovar Association of the Deaf (KAD)
www.shksh.org
www.facebook.com/pages/SHKSH-KAD/484915854903850
Gjuha e Shenjave Kosovare 1, 2012 (First dictionary in Kosovar Sign Language – book + DVD)

National Association of the Deaf (NAD in USA)
nad.org/issues/international-advocacy

Sign Linguistics Corpora Network
www.ru.nl/slcn/

Auslan Corpus
elar.soas.ac.uk/deposit/0001
www.auslan.org.au/about/corpus/

BSL Corpus Project
www.bslcorpusproject.org

DGS Corpus
www.sign-lang.uni-hamburg.de/dgs-korpus/index.php/welcome.html

LSF Corpus
www.umr7023.cnrs.fr/-Realisation-de-corpus-de-donnes-.html

LSFB Corpus
www.corpus-lsfb.be

NGT Corpus
www.ru.nl/corpusngtuk/

PJM (PSL) Corpus
www.plm.uw.edu.pl/en/node/241

SSL Corpus
www.ling.su.se/english/research/research-projects/sign-language/swedish-sign-language-corpus-project-1.13982

Sign Linguistics (linguistic terminology in International Sign)
www.signlinguistics.com

SLLING-L List (e-mail list for linguists interested in signed languages)
listserv.valenciacollege.edu/cgi-bin/wa?A0=SLLING-L

SLLS: Sign Language Linguistics Society
www.slls.eu > About > Ethics > SLLS Ethics Statement for Sign Language Research
www.slls.eu > Starting Guide
www.facebook.com/pages/Sign-Language-Linguistics-Society/1476917052577121

UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN CRPD)
www.un.org/disabilities/convention/conventionfull.shtml

World Federation of the Deaf (WFD)
wfdeaf.org > Human Rights > UN CRPD

wfdeaf.org > Human Rights > UN CRPD > CRPD translations in national sign languages

wfdeaf.org > Human Rights > UN CRPD > Deaf as a linguistic and cultural group / Sign Language

wfdeaf.org > Databank

Guidelines, Policies, Statements, Submissions, Fact Sheets, Cooperation Agreements, Publications and Resources, Information about deaf issues

Policies > WFD Work in Developing Countries

Policies > Work Done by Member Organisations in Developing Countries

Statements > Statement on the unification of sign languages

Statements > WFD Statement on Sign Language Work

Statements > WFD Statement on Standardized Sign Language

2. Academic references

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