



November 2022

Dear Friends,



Apologies for the lateness of this Newsletter but we were awaiting the outcome of events surrounding the future of our sister charity, Signal – Sensory Impairment Globally, Nationally and Locally. This began life as a volunteer charity in the early 2000s and was established by two retired Teachers of the Deaf, Doreen Woodford and David Bond (both sadly no longer with us) and myself. Our first projects were in Tanzania – the construction of a Vocational Training Centre for deaf youth, and Malawi – a large outreach programme in the neglected Northern Region. Following that, a programme of work in conjunction with Signhealth Uganda.

Signal then merged with the Shropshire Christian Association with the Deaf and began to offer befriending services to deaf and hard of hearing people across the county. This grew into a major project supported by the UK Lottery. By this time the charity had fully professionalised and was doing well.

In recent weeks, despite the award of a major Comic Relief grant for Malawi, the trustees of Signal decided to close down the charity. Given our mutual interest in supporting Signhealth Uganda, we sought a meeting with Signal's remaining staff and as a result offered to replace the outgoing trustees with our own. This was received with evident enthusiasm and the change took place on Monday, 7th November. We are really excited about helping Signal to develop its work both overseas and in the UK and hopefully to reach the point when it can once again be fully independent. We will be asking Mitch Payne, the Charity Manager, and Ally MacDonald, the International Programmes Co-ordinator, to write a piece for us in a future edition of the Newsletter. Meanwhile, do take a look at Signal's work: www.signal.org.uk

Rod Clark
Chairman

Deaf Children in Burundi: Education Cannot Wait

This article looks at DeafReach's (DR) work within Burundi, both completed and ongoing, with the deaf community. The focus is on education for deaf children and some provision for deaf young adults.

Burundi at a glance

According to the World Bank, Burundi is a landlocked country in East Africa with a low-income economy where 80% of the population is employed in the agricultural sector. Located in the Great Lakes region, Burundi is surrounded by Rwanda to the north, Tanzania to the east, the Democratic Republic of the Congo to the west, and bordered by Lake Tanganyika to the southwest. With a population of 12.2 million people, 50.6% of whom are women and 41.5% young people under 15, Burundi is one of the most densely populated countries in the world.

UNICEF (2021), registered that Burundi remains one of the poorest countries in the world and has been consistently ranked close to the bottom of the Human Development Index (185 of 189 countries in 2020) with a GDP per capita (2018) of \$274 (a drop of \$30 from 2015).

Various reports paint Burundi as having experienced a cycle of chronic crises with successive periods of violence resulting in, among other things, a loss of human life and public and family property. These crises have had a negative developmental impact on all sectors of the country, especially basic social services such as education.

Other factors include a large return movement of Burundian refugees.

The Burundian population is affected by natural disasters such as torrential rains, flooding, landslides and high winds. Close to 90% of Burundi's population lives in rural areas and is reliant on agriculture that uses traditional farming techniques, and which have been disrupted by climate change, leading to food insecurity.

These impacts of climate change have been exacerbated by the socio-economic impact of COVID-19, as well as other recurrent epidemics/endemics such as cholera and malaria. Despite these shocks the World Bank also noted that Burundi has made significant progress in terms of the quality of and access to education. Since the introduction of free primary education in 2005, the Gross Enrolment Rate (GER) in primary education reached 118% during the 2021/2022 school year without significant variation between provinces, gender, or wealth levels.

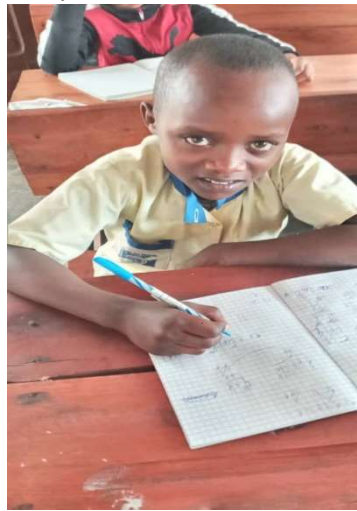
UNICEF 2021 agreed with the World Bank that Burundi made progress. However it also observed that while Burundi had made significant efforts in other areas such as protecting social sector



budgets, they remain largely insufficient to meet children's needs, including access to basic social services such as for children with special needs.

Deaf Education at a Glance

Following on from Howard's article in the last edition, our Burundi Trustee Lead, Chris Kubwimana completes this report. Chris is currently in Burundi, in part to prepare the way for Howard, our International Director, who is planning to spend between 3 and 4 months there in the New Year, supporting deaf organisations with Business Planning and completing our appraisal of 2 school projects for which we have received applications and which were described in the last Newsletter. Despite the fact the "everyone has the right to education" as enshrined in the Convention on the Right of the Children, the education situation for deaf children and adults alike in Burundi remains relatively inaccessible and precarious.



The lack of local government provision of education for deaf children leaves a significant gap. Helping to fill this gap are four primary schools opened by faith organisations but this provision is not available to the majority of deaf children across the country. There is no secondary school for deaf children in Burundi.

In Burundi the current constitution dated 2018 does not mention inclusive education or education for pupils with disabilities. A national strategy for special or inclusive education is essential.

Support for Education for Deaf Children

DeafReach (DR) is current working closely with two existing schools: Ephphatha School in Bujumbura and Centre d Education Spécialisée pour Déficients Auditifs (CESDA) in Gitega. Because of poverty many parents are unable to meet the school fees. DR intervenes to help some of children from the poorest families by paying the school fees and providing uniforms and educational materials. In addition DR is working with a local partner to offer informal education to a group of deaf children in Cibitoke. All these efforts have resulted in more than 40 children going to school who would otherwise never have put a foot inside a school in their lives.

Training and Income Generation Facilitation

In the recent months DR has provided funding for various training events for the deaf community including sessions on the United Nations Convention on Persons with Disabilities, Human Rights, and on sexual and reproductive health. Additionally it is clear that Deaf people have few opportunities to explore their potential towards being independent and self-reliant. DR funded a new tailoring workshop in Bujumbura for women. This is now transforming the lives of more



than 50 such women who are now able to earn a decent living unlike before when they had to rely on handouts from families and friends.

Capacity Building for Partners

Three national deaf organisations requested support to consolidate and develop their work. Howard, our International Director, worked intensively with each organisation to help them to develop their skills in Business Planning. And to produce their first Strategic Plan. Not only has this helped the organisations to enhance and strengthen their existing skills, but also to enable them to ensure their survival, to minimise dependency relationships, and, most significantly, to take action on local issues themselves. More partners will be trained in the coming months. DR also carried out an national Action Research exercise, looking into the current social and educational situation of Deafblind people.



Emergency intervention



The Deaf community is not immune to Burundi`s multiple crises. Indeed they are usually hit twice. Some deaf children and young adults alike have issues around psychosocial well-being owing to the recent civil war. Other traumatic events include sexual violence against girls where their plight is doubled because of communications barriers. This inevitably has a negative impact on their daily living and on their mental health.

In recent months DR has taken action to provide emergency assistance. In the course of 2020-22 Burundi was hit both by natural disasters such as floods and by the economic effects of COVID-19. DR intervened by providing food, cooking oil, salt, sugar, mouth masks, soaps and sanitary pads for girls. These items were distributed to both the deaf community and Deaf schools. When the Covid-19 first broke out DR was among the first organisations to provide training on the disease to its partners, helping them to gain insight into what is happening across world, what rules are in place and how we can protect each other.

The Challenges and the Future

With limited provision and protection in the land, many deaf children remain unaccounted and unprovided for. Even parents who have the means to send their children to school are unable to do so owing to the lack of suitable schools in the country. The existing four schools are overcrowded and unable to take more. The quality of education in these schools is also questionable due to the lack of adequate training and specialisation..

In recent years, and for the first time, local government in Cibitoke has shown an interest in deaf education. On becoming aware of the huge need, they have started to build a new school for the use of both deaf and hearing children. Building started in 2014 but has stalled due to lack of funds. The Regional Governor has approached DR for support both practically and financially. The resources required far outweigh what DR can provide, but we hope to be able to make, for us, a substantial contribution by way of strategic planning, fundraising training and perhaps a level of funding to help get the day school completed. However, this is not a commitment at this point because support must follow the production of a realistic Business Plan.

A similar plan for a second school project is also to be produced in conjunction with the Evangelical Church of Central Africa (ECCA).

Finally, DR is looking into the possibility of developing a programme for the Deafblind in Burundi particularly as this is an area of provision that is yet to exist.

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