

São Tomé e Príncipe: the urgency of the emergence of a sign language

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Abstract

Sao Tome and Principe has a high incidence of deafness in the population whose causes are diverse (treatment for Malaria, inbreeding, toxoplasmosis, among others).

For a long time the deaf children were excluded from primary school because they did not have a proper tool that allowed them to effectively communicate in school and since these children are deaf, the oral nature of the information at school did not allow them to learn correctly at school.

The Portuguese cooperation Project “Health for All” founded in the Valle Flôr NGO began in 2005 and broadened its scope of intervention for specialties since 2009. With the entrance of the otolaryngology team led by João Paço, many deaf children were detected and flagged, in order to immerse them in a sign language environment.

Given that this sign language as a language does not exist in São Tomé and Príncipe, our goal was to make it emerge so that it becomes the main instrument of communication among the deaf population.

The project “Without Barriers” aims at promoting the emergence of a sign language in STP, as well as consider together with the government (and particularly the Ministry of Education) the inclusion of sign language in the education curriculum. It also aims at raising awareness among the deaf people towards the need of a sign language creation and linguistic intervention, as well as training sign language teachers who can give continuity to the project.

In this paper we will present the project, its state of art as well as its phases of implementation.