

BEHIND THE VEIL: THE IMPACT OF
HEARING IMPAIRMENT ON RURAL
LIVELIHOODS IN GHANA
(COMPARATIVE CASE STUDY OF
HEARING-IMPAIRED PERSONS IN
ADAMOROBE AND ACCRA)

Mary Edward

Can be cited as:

Edward, M. (2018). Behind the veil: The impact of deafness on rural livelihoods in Ghana (Case study of a Deaf couple in Adamorobe). *Lancaster University Ghana Journal on Disability (LUGJD)* Vol. 1. 126-148. Lancaster University Ghana.

Behind the veil: The impact of hearing impairment on rural livelihoods in Ghana

(Comparative case study of hearing-impaired persons in Adamorobe and Accra)¹

Mary Edward^{*2}

¹ This research was funded initially by the Norwegian State Educational Fund (2014-2015) research support granted to the researcher during her studies at the University of Bergen, Norway.

² University of Brighton, UK. m.edward@brighton.ac.uk

I would like to thank all the participants who took part in the interviews both in Adamorobe, Accra and its environs. Thanks to Mr. Francis Boison (former President of the Ghana Deaf Association), Mr. James Abresua (hearing signer of Adamorobe Sign Language) and Dr. George Akanlig-Pare (University of Ghana) for their support during the period of data collection. I am grateful to the University of Brighton's Doctoral College for the Conference support awarded in February 2017 and to Dr. Pamela Perniss (University of Brighton) for her useful comments on the earlier draft of this paper.

Abstract

This paper examines the lives of two hearing-impaired³ couples, one living in a rural, and the other, in an urban community in Ghana. The living conditions and the survival strategies of the rural couple ultimately represent the impact of hearing impairment on rural livelihoods in Ghana. The need to survive is determined within the context of a highly speech-dominated society where the ability to speak is deemed critical for employment. Lives of HI in rural communities are veiled from society's scrutiny through the outward wearing of happy faces, but beneath the smiles are lack of education, unemployment, unfavourable societal norms, teenage pregnancies, poverty and lack of access to information.

Using comparative analysis, this paper discusses the living conditions of HI, and raises possible areas of improvement. It argues that the state policies should focus on demystifying, through awareness campaigns, hearing impairment as a disability in order to mitigate the impact of hearing impairment on a rural livelihood. It further proposes that education and equipping HI persons with employable skills, as well creating more avenues for sign language interpretation in every sphere of life, is key to government efforts to ameliorate the conditions of hearing-impaired persons, especially in rural Ghana. Finally, government policies that target improvement in rural livelihoods would also impact on the lives of HI and thus contribute to transforming their communities and granting them an open door to progress.

³ Hearing-impaired person/people= **HI**
Hearing impairment = **HI**
Non-impaired person/hearing people =**NI**

Keywords: *hearing impairment, rural livelihoods, awareness, education, mitigate, impact, training, information*

Obo and his wife Safowa, are a married couple who both have HI. They live in a community where HI is not seen as disability, but a trait possessed by a group of people. They are from Adamorobe, located in the South-Eastern part of Ghana. Obo and Safowa⁴ have no child together, but Safowa had had a child prior to the marriage. Their house is lively and their hugs, smiles and joy reminded me of the old phrase in stories I read as a child: "... and they lived happily ever after". They might not be sad after all, I thought; perhaps people have just labelled them as sad people. To me, it was sheer joy to enter their home and interact with them. However, I was soon to realise that behind the joy is the daunting story of hearing-impaired people and their livelihoods in a rural community. HI in rural communities are just hidden behind the veil of seeming contentment.

1. Introduction

HI is believed to be "the most frequent sensory deficit in human populations, affecting more than 250 million people in the world" (Mathers et al. 2000:1). The 2010 census of Ghana recorded that 0.4% of the number of people in Ghana suffer a disability of hearing. Table 1⁵ gives a general summary of the percentage of the various disabilities in Ghana as at 2010. The impact of HI in Ghana is revealed in the livelihoods of the people living with the condition.

While the lives of HI in rural and urban communities are influenced by their access to certain basic needs, government and societal policies also play pivotal roles. Education of HI in

⁴ Names have been changed to anonymise the couple.

⁵ See Appendix 1.

Primary, Junior High and (recently) Senior Secondary is free in Ghana. However, visits to several special schools in Ghana reveal lack of infrastructure, inadequate educational materials and insufficient funds for feeding (Frimpong, in progress). Personal interviews (conducted between 2014-2016) with some teachers and heads of the schools attributed their problems to the insufficient funds given by government (see Ametepee & Anastasiou, 2015).

HI is identified on three levels in Ghana: as a medical issue, a spiritual attack, or a social problem. Amedufu et al. (2006) attributed the cause of HI in Ghana to illnesses such as meningitis, fever, presbycusis, mumps etc. Some groups of Ghanaians attribute HI to spiritual attacks; e.g. Adamorobe (Nyst, 2007; Kusters, 2012a). This assertion is embedded in the belief in spiritualism in Ghana (Kuwornu-Adjaottor, 2011; Sackey, 1999). As a social issue, there are certain families and groups of people perceived to carry genes that cause the impairment. This perception is deeply rooted in Adamorobe; and a marriage law, which prohibited marriage between HI, was promulgated on the premise that the HI men are the carriers of the gene (Kusters, 2012a, 2012b; Nyst, 2007).

Several HI communities have emerged in rural and urban communities in Ghana.

Adamorobe⁶ is one of such communities and the coexistence between HI and NI is facilitated by a mutual language shared between them (Edward, 2015; Kusters, 2012a; Nyst 2007). Adamorobe Sign Language (AdaSL), the language of the HI and NI signers in Adamorobe, is believed to have existed from the 17th century (Okyere & Addo, 1994). The number of people with HI in Adamorobe is gradually declining because of the death of the

⁶ Adamorobe is noted for the hereditary deafness* (Nyst, 2007; Kusters, 2012).

older members⁷. Located in the South-Eastern part of Ghana (Eastern region), Adamorobe is noted for the high rate of HI. Living as an HI person in Adamorobe, one is welcomed into the life of rural livelihoods and the need for survival strategies.

In many communities within the world, marriages between two HI's are highly accepted within their culture⁸ as compared to marriages between HI and NI (as exemplified in the couples under study in this paper). The major reason for this is that marriage between persons with similar auditory conditions allows the couple to break through language and cultural barriers. However, events in the history of Adamorobe have demonstrated the need to readjust this preference to suit societal norms (this is not the case in other places in Ghana, see Okyere & Addo, 1994). Elsewhere in Ghana, (specifically Accra and its environs) many educated HI are gainfully employed in public and private sectors. This has brought improvement in their lives and thus affected their livelihoods positively (Singal et al. 2015).

Societal acculturation of HI in Ghana differs from one community to the other. In Adamorobe, the acceptance of AdaSL as the mediating language between HI and NI is overwhelmingly satisfactory and relevant for the economic integration of HI and NI. However, most HI in Adamorobe and other communities in Ghana are disadvantaged because of the language barrier between them and others who do not understand their sign language. Employers prefer NI in their work places and has resulted in many unemployed HI (educated and uneducated). Living a decent life therefore becomes a struggle and the few strong HI prefer "manpower" jobs and the weaker ones are left to their fate (Edward, in progress). In urban Ghana, some work places have slots for HI and people with other forms

⁷ Head count in December 2016 resulted in forty HI adults and children in Adamorobe (records from Philio's voluntary donations). Philio is a group of young men and women who voluntarily donate food items, clothes, educational materials etc. to less endowed schools and communities.

⁸ Known in other literature as Deaf* Culture (Kusters, 2012a, 2012b, 2014; Okyere & Addo, 1994).

of disabilities. Blue Skies, a multinational company in Nsawam an urban society has employed several HI and sign language classes are organised for some of the staff to aid easy communication with HI workers (Personal conversations with some deaf workers of Blue Skies). In Medie (close to Nsawam), a block making factory has over 60% of its workers being HI. Whereas, educated HI may have access to employment, the uneducated HI in the rural settings are mostly unemployed.

The oppression on the fundamental human rights of HI, has been recorded in various parts of the world (Lang, 2010; Miles, 2004,1984) and Adamorobe is no exception (Nyst, 2007; Kusters, 2012a). The lives of HI in Adamorobe and other parts of Ghana represent the failure of societies to make adequate provisions for people with special needs. The disabling environment present poverty, lack of education and inability to integrate fully into the society. The misrepresentations given to HI did not only suppress their rights, but succeeded in taking language away from them. For instance, Giulio Tarra, the president of the Milan Conference stated that “it is an absolute necessity to prohibit that language (sign language) and to replace it with living speech, the only instrument of human thought” (Lane, 1984, c.f. S. Wilcox, 2004: 121). The infamous Milan conference held in the 1880 resulted in a total disarray of education for HI (Vermeerbergen, 2006). The use of sign languages in schools was discontinued and replaced with speech. After the Milan conference, European students with HI became *speakers* instead of signers; as, Vermeerbergen (2006:171) put it “most – if not all – European deaf schools became (strictly) oral”.

The perseverance of HI within communities all over the world ensured their survival. A report by Miles (2004) indicates that people with HI have always been part of African societies. In Mile’s report, their integration within societies was at diverse levels in different

cultures; whereas some HI men became chiefs, others were just entertainers or servants. Thus, from the palace to the street, HI were involved in communities. Societal propositions disfavoured majority of HI and most times, decisions were taken on their behalf without consulting them. One such decision was the resolution of the Milan Conference which brought on board educators of HI (who are NI) with few HI representatives who became onlookers instead of participants (Moore, 2010; Erting, 1994). The encroachment on the lives of HI people has not only been an African problem; it is and has been a worldwide problem. In Spain, HI were the silent minority (Plann, 1997); in the Greco-Roman, during the period of Aristotle, there were infanticidal practices to remove children who were regarded as mentally or physically incapable of contributing to society (Lang, 2010); and in rural Asia, HI was thought of as insignificant and concealed (Miles, 1984). The battle for recognition and acceptance of HI has met much opposition even in developed countries.

All over the world, several HI communities have emerged within a larger community of hearing people. In order to integrate fully, (economic and social integration) sign languages have emerged within small communities or villages with a high incidence of hereditary HI e.g. Adamorobe SL in Ghana, Al-Sayid Bedouin SL in Israel, Bura SL in Nigeria, Mardin SL in Turkey, Ban Khor SL in Thailand, Martha's Vineyard SL, Nicaraguan SL (Groce, 1985; Senghas et al. 2005; Fox, 2008; Meir et al. 2010). Thus, emergence of sign languages within communities is necessary for the development of people with HI and ultimately lead to their economic and social integration.

2. Materials and methods

This study investigated the lives of HI within Adamorobe Community and other places in and around Accra. For a period of three years (June 2014- September 2016), qualitative data was

taken from selected HI individuals and 2 other hearing family members in Adamorobe and other places in Accra⁹. The people who were interviewed ranged from teenagers to senior citizens (age range 18-70 approximately). All the people who were interviewed were informed that the information will be used for academic and research purposes. The period of the data collection allowed follow-up to be carried on some of the participants. Further interviews were conducted on other HI within Accra and its environs (elsewhere group-referring to HI's that were interviewed in Accra and surrounding cities). These other group of HI were users of Ghanaian Sign Language (GSL) and most of them were actively employed in the public sector (teachers and administrators) and others were employed in the private sectors (private companies, masons, seamstress, traders etc.) The research employed a semi-structured interview and this allowed follow-up questions based on the responses given. Focus group interactions were usually recorded as notes and few individual interviews were recorded over video cameras with the consent of the signers. The information recorded included demographic data and other information about what caused their impairment. Table 2¹⁰ presents an overview of the people who were investigated for this study.

Data for this paper concentrated on two families; one family representing the lives of HI within rural Ghana (specifically Adamorobe) and the other family representing the lives of HI within urban Ghana. Although there is a sharp contrast between these groups of HI families,

⁹ The study involved different visitations to the communities in different times. The longest duration of working together with the research participants was 2 and half months (June-mid August 2014). The other visits were follow-up interviews done at most weekly. The researcher, with the permission of the signers from Adamorobe also did a linguistic research on the sign language (Edward, 2015) and is currently describing both AdaSL and GSL in relation to linguistic iconicity and how it is manifested in the two sign languages. All the interviews consented/ agreed to be interviewed. No one was coerced.

¹⁰ See Appendix 2.

the study also found other group of HI within urban Ghana who are deprived of essential things for development.

3. Results

The findings from this research are presented in sections 3 and 4;

3.1 The marriage by-law

In 1972, a group of researchers identified that the cause of HI in Adamorobe is through a gene that is transmitted through unions between two HI. This discovery marked the beginning of a by-law (*1975 marriage law*, see Kusters, 2012a, 2012b; De Vos & Zeshan, 2012; Nyst, 2007, Okyere & Addo 1994) that sought to marginalise HI and ultimately forbid unions between them. The *marriage law* (Kusters, 2012a; Nyst, 2007) was promulgated to ban marriage unions between HI couples as a step to end the genetic impairment. This law did not only suppress the right of HI to marry, it led to a gradual decline in their population in Adamorobe. Currently, the law although not ignored has been adjusted by the HI community to allow unions between two HI. The adjustment has led to “free marriages” (Bleek, 1978), and this refers to “sexual relationships between people who eschew the fulfilment of the traditional customs to marry” (Kusters, 2012a:2774). One other motivation of the free marriage is that HI couples do not have children in order to avoid HI offspring (also in Kusters 2012a). As much as children are gladly welcomed in African marriages, the marriage law in Adamorobe, has led to a societal preference for childless marriages. The law has also resulted in abortions and Kusters cites an earlier research done in the 1970s that attested to these claims.

“Bleek identified 79 different methods to perform an abortion, most of them herbal, although not all of them are effective and many of them are dangerous for the women that use them. People typically strongly disapproved of abortion, not because it is seen as “unlawful” or as “murder,” but because one can become infertile or die from it.”. (Kusters, 2012a:2776)¹¹

The devastating effect of the marriage law is experienced through the livelihood of HI in Adamorobe. HI unions and families have acted as financial support for each other to improve their livelihoods. The decline in the numbers of HI has resulted in fewer HI in Adamorobe and their system of interdependency is affected. The quest to be with an NI in a relationship to avoid giving birth to an HI child has not been so fruitful. The teenage HI (especially the young girls) have become vulnerable as some NI young men manipulate and impregnate them. These pregnant teenagers produce fatherless¹² children who unwittingly perpetuate the circle of poverty in Adamorobe.

3.2. Unemployment

Rural livelihoods in sub-Saharan Africa give a representation of what national policies on poverty reduction have failed to achieve (Kaimowitz, 2003). Adamorobe is an active community and the richness of the land has seen new jobs created in and around the community. Many people have migrated to the community due to the availability of land for farming. The stone quarry business, too, has attracted people from around surrounding communities. Real estate developers have secured huge plots of lands that are being sold while still others are being developed. In a conversation with a NI ‘Adamorobean’, he

¹¹ I have never attempted to ask my research participants this question; to avoid overly intruding into their privacy.

¹² If the men refuse their responsibility, the teenagers are left to fend for themselves and their children.

revealed that “the land has water” and this is seen in the number of mineral water companies that have sprung up in Adamorobe. In spite of the richness of the land, there remains a section of HI minority that are unemployed. Interviews with HI people revealed that most of them are engaged in farming, others in stone quarrying, while others are still unemployed.

One HI woman lamented that breaking the rocks (at the quarry) is very difficult because she gets body pains all over. It was disheartening that I could not identify any HI person who has been employed in the new businesses that have opened in Adamorobe, which is not the case in many urban communities in Ghana. Rural livelihoods have faced several challenges and one such challenge is the need for money and other social benefits. Although the HI community in Adamorobe never complain about their impairment, the need for an improvement in their lives is always mentioned. The lives of people with HI have been trampled upon for centuries (Lang, 2010) and these unfavourable conditions always breed poverty.

Obo and his wife are farmers who own a small farm and produce from the farm is sold within the community. From all indications, the ability to use speech, the ability to read and understand English or the demonstration of education is an important *licence* to secure a meaningful job. Of what use is a certificate to Obo and Safowa? They never went to school. To them, farming is all that they can do to put food on their table.

3.3. Lack of education and training

In most African countries education for people with HI started with Andrew Forster’s missionary work (Nyst, 2010). HI from Adamorobe were part of the initial groups in Ghana

to benefit from Andrew Foster's training¹³ (Nyst, 2007) but this does not seem to have had any impact on the old HI Adamorobeans who might have witnessed the school. Obo and Safowa had no formal education; the only language they have known is AdaSL and traces of GSL from contact with other HI who have been schooled. The younger population of HI in Adamorobe have had the taste of education and some are still in school at the nearby school in Akuapem-Mampong. A few other teenagers had to drop out of school due to lack of interest or because of pregnancy. Teenage pregnancy among the teenage girls with HI in Adamorobe and several rural communities in Ghana is increasingly common and very disheartening (Mprah, 2013). Whereas the adults prefer abortions (Kusters, 2012a; Bleek, 1978), the teenagers end up with babies and ultimately drop out of school.

Special needs schools in Ghana offer training in crafts and other potentially useful skills like sewing and hairdressing. These skills are offered to students who show an interest; however, because of pregnancy, some HI teenagers do not get the opportunity to benefit from this training. In an interview with two HI teenage girls from Adamorobe (in 2014), they demonstrated love and passion for school and the desire to ultimately receive training to have employable skills for the future. One gave birth (in 2016) before this dream could be realised.

3.4. Lack of information

Information transmission into AdaSL after the death of their main local interpreter seems to have affected the HI in Adamorobe¹⁴. In the past, there were accounts of a large population

¹³ The late Rev. Andrew Foster, the American deaf missionary taught at the Adamorobe School and he is remembered by some of the very old HI.

¹⁴ I worked with one hearing signer from Adamorobe. The deaf interpreter was from a family of deaf people and she acted as the interpreter for the entire community until her demise.

of NI signers and thus, information dissemination was easier. Currently, the rise in the number of people have led to more hearing non-signers who can only communicate minimally with HI through ad hoc gestures. The weekly church for the HI is the only place for HI *only* gathering and the service is held partly in GSL because the Pastor is not an Adamorobean HI. The giving of information to the HI community is affected by the lack of interpreters to disseminate government policies to the people. Access to basic information by HI within rural communities usually takes longer; more-so as information dissemination to the local communities in Ghana, pioneered by the *National Information Service*, involves an oral-aural medium (loudspeakers). The information services vans that move through towns and villages do not make room for visual-gestural communication through sign language.

Adamorobe is a typical representation of rural Ghana that is filled with so many natural resources but that are tapped by trained people from the urban centres. Compared to HI, visual impairment, and persons with other disability in rural Ghana have not benefitted from the *national cake* of resources allotted to *special* schools and businesses (see Baffoe, 2013).

4. Elsewhere in Ghana

The story in Adamorobe could be situated in many societies in Africa; the survival of the fittest seems to take a toll on the lives of people in rural societies. Specific qualifications are prerequisites for jobs and HI are disqualified even before the advertisement. The situation looks bleak in general, but in some parts of urban Ghana, lives of HI do matter. If Obo and Safowa had access to all the training that HI in other parts of the country have benefitted from, maybe their stories would have changed. However, the situation is different for some

HI living in urban parts of Ghana. The access to education, employable skills, the correct information, etc. have equipped these people to build their success stories.

Elsewhere in Ghana, HI who have the requisite training and skills *rub shoulders* with NI in the job market. Yoofi and Kuukua¹⁵ are both HI and they have four children together. Their story is a complete contrast to the story of Obo and Safowa, in rural HI Ghana. Yoofi and Kuukua are educated and sign proficiently in GSL; they read and write in English as well. Their four NI children have been educated. The lives of Yoofi and Kuukua reveal that, given the right training and education, HI can accomplish as much as NI and contribute to the growth of society. Ghanaian society – and African societies, in general – has failed to cater for people with special needs in rural communities. The trajectory of growth and development in the lives of HI people and every other person with special needs depend on the following factors which are the subjects of the next three sections.

4.1 . Education and Training

Adequate training and education has equipped *some* HI for the job market. Interpretation services are offered for HI students (and other students with special needs also get access to personal services) at most universities in Ghana¹⁶. The need to read and write English is very relevant for securing jobs in Ghana. Education for HI children is a necessary requirement for securing the relevant qualification for the job market. Although speech is sometimes required for specific jobs, there are many others that require mental training and skills other than an ability to speak *vocally*. Working in IT firms, teaching appointments and some managerial duties require skills and training and not necessarily the ability to use oral

¹⁵ Names have been changed to anonymise the couple

¹⁶ An example is University of Ghana's Office of Student with Special Needs (OSSN).

communication. The access to the right education and training is as relevant for HI children in rural Ghana as it is for those children in urban Ghana.

The few jobs that do not require formal training demand physical strength and are strenuous. The work on the farm can be difficult if done without any training on basic farming techniques. Although mechanised farming is out of reach for rural dwellers, basic skills like applying weedicides, insecticides, fertilizers etc. can boost productivity and increase yield among rural farmers. Working at the stone quarry in Adamorobe is very difficult for the older women who are involved. However, to them, that is their only source of livelihood and quitting is not an option. This work by all indication is not conducive for their health because it causes back pains. Training in other skills (sewing, carpentry, masonry etc.) will provide a source of livelihood for the persons with disability in rural communities.

Skills training for talented people always leads to self-fulfilment and advancement and progress in career. The ability to create and recreate is within our minds and opening the door to one's skills and talents through training is very important to fully unearth potential. Education for HI in the past disfavoured them and the quest to train HI with speech made them incapable of fully realising their potential. The need for skills training and development as well as utilising the right medium of communication relevant for HI (i.e. sign languages) is important for their general education and development. In Wilcox (2004), an American HI man laments the modus operandi of his education and concludes that he has the key to his mind and, like a computer, he has the mental capacity to work – if only he had been trained in a language he understood. The issue with education and training for HI is not an African problem but a worldwide issue. However, given the right input, i.e. education and training

provided in an accessible mode (preferably sign language), HI students will be prepared and equipped for their future.

4.2. Employability

Quality training must always be put to work for maximum results. HI have shuddered at the thought of assessing jobs after education and training. The fear can be overwhelming, and the discouraging aspect is to meet HI in commercial vehicles begging for money. Yoofi, advocating for a stop to this “humiliating task” claims that,

“Some wicked people are behind this work. They get their commission from the monies the innocent ladies and gentlemen get from begging”.

Personal conversations with some of these beggars in buses revealed most of them have been educated to at least Junior High School level and they claim that, the money from the begging will set them up in businesses (see Press Release by GNAD 30/11/2016)¹⁷. This unfortunate act makes some of the beggars susceptible to insults and abusive words from the people they encounter while others are either pitied or scorned instead of helped. Some HI have begged for several years without being able to start a business. Therefore, as Yoofi asserts, these young persons have most likely been manipulated to be engaged in begging business. A means to curb this unfortunate practice is to create avenues for graduates of Special Needs schools to be self-employed or to be employed by organisations that require their skills (Barnes & Mercer, 2005; Schur et al 2005).

One means to create employment for HI is for organisations and companies to enforce specific employment quotas for people with special needs who meet the criteria for

¹⁷ <http://gnadgh.com/news/?p=5129>

available jobs. Although the lack of education and training impedes the opportunity to be engaged in employment aside from man-power jobs in rural Ghana, there are diverse avenues and openings for educated and skilled HI in urban Ghana. Employment will provide financial independence for HI in rural Ghana and ensure the sustainability of economic growth within HI families.

4.3. Access to information

The access to information is critical to every society and inability to access information can lead a person or group of people to make wrong decisions. Further, “information has a deep impact on personal well-being, decision-making processes, innovation and production” and the “lack of needed information is understood as a composition of different behavioural aspects on the part of human agents that have implications for the production, the transfer or the use of information in a specific context” (Kajtazi, 2012:321). The lack or limited access to information by HI’s in Ghana has led to sexual exploitation (Mprah, 2013), limited access to healthcare (Tun et al. 2016), poverty (Yeo & Moore, 2003) etc.

“Ignorance of the law is no excuse” (a maxim of law) but ignorance of one’s own rights and responsibilities is disabling. The need to get information across to people of all walks of life demands a national and societal approach to information dissemination. Adamorobeans are aware of a school for HI children but they might not be aware of other information relevant to their lives. Yoofi and Kuukua have travelled to several countries of the world; Obo and Safowa do not even have a national passport. They did not even know about it until it was necessary for Obo to travel to another West African country. Fortunately, it is possible to cross the border with a Voters Identity Card. Obo and Safowa represent a section of Ghanaians (both HI and NI) who seem to be completely unaware of important things that

affect their lives; things they do not even seem to know could exist. Access to the right information is therefore important for the improvement in the livelihoods of HI in rural Ghana.

5. Discussion

The story of Obo and Safowa contrasted with the story Yoofi and Kuukua reveals the disparities in societies based on location, i.e. rural and urban livelihoods. The lives of HI living in rural Ghana and their survival strategies have long been intertwined with the need for them to come out from behind the veil and embrace the need for change and improvement. As summarised by Ellis (2000, 1999), the diversity of livelihoods is an important feature of rural survival but is often overlooked by the architects of policy. Although policy makers are aware of the strenuous lives of people within rural places, the need to factor them into policy making is usually left undone and their lives are left behind a veil of issues. Currently, basic education in Ghana is free (government schools)¹⁸ but the question remains “How free is free?”¹⁹ The access to this education is ultimately the key to making sure that HI children engage in meaningful education for a brighter future. Emancipation from the slavery of rural livelihoods, coupled with the urge for sustainable development begins when government and societal policies are tailored to suit rural dwellers. The need for sign language interpreters to be employed by the National Information Service is relevant for dissemination of information. In Adamorobe, collaborating between local NI signers and government will mediate between the external

¹⁸ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Education_in_Ghana#Basic_Education

Also on educational reforms in Ghana, see Adu-Gyamfi, S., Donkoh, W.J. and Addo, A.A., 2016. Educational Reforms in Ghana: Past and Present. *Journal of Education and Human Development*, 5(3), pp.158-172.

¹⁹ Communities without access to education might not benefit from this free education system.

communications and the local HI within the community. Although histories of HI in the world have generally been marked by issues of discrimination (Lang, 2010; Plann 1997; Miles, 2004), the future of such societies could be better if government and societal policies factor into account the acculturation of HI. In Adamorobe, the onset of the marriage by-law is rendered as *evil* by the HI community, and the death of the chief who instituted this law in a car accident was seen as a punishment for what he did (Kusters, 2012a). However, the fate of HI cannot be left in the hands of societal laws that will have the effect, in the long term, of wiping out their history. Although the marriage law is now defunct, its effects are evident in childless marriages, abortions and poverty among the HI in Adamorobe. The vulnerability of people with special needs and their quest to present themselves as *perfect* in the light of these challenges demonstrates resilience.

In conclusion, education and training are likely mechanisms to mitigate the impact of HI on rural livelihoods. Integrating people with HI into societies involves a comprehensive approach to demystifying the impairment and making provision for children with HI to be educated. Information dissemination and access to information are crucial to national development. Communication among people with HI involves manual articulation as compared to speech that is widely used by the majority. The fact of communicating with one's hands should not impede these people from gaining the right to information. Just as buildings have ramps and lifts for people who cannot use stairs, information dissemination agencies must have manual media for people who rely on their eyes to hear. In the global push for developing countries to meet the target of the UN's goals, the lives of people with special needs must be considered and special provisions made for their integration. Yoofi, Safowa, Obo and Kuukua are Ghanaian and should have an equal right and access to what Ghana offers to its people. The recognition of the diversity in developmental policies among

urban and rural dwellers will ultimately lead to proper distribution of national resources to meet the needs of all.

References

Amedofu, G. K., Ocansey, G., & Antwi, B. B., 2006. Characteristics of hearing-impairment among patients in Ghana. *African journal of health sciences*, 12(3), pp.87-93.

Ametepee, L.K. and Anastasiou, D., 2015. Special and inclusive education in Ghana: Status and progress, challenges and implications. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 41, pp.143-152.

Baffoe, M., 2013. Stigma, discrimination & marginalization: Gateways to oppression of persons with disabilities in Ghana, West Africa. *Journal of Educational and Social Research*, 3(1), pp.187-198.

Barnes, C. and Mercer, G., 2005. Disability, work, and welfare: challenging the social exclusion of disabled people. *Work, employment and society*, 19(3), pp.527-545.

Bleek, W., 1978. Induced abortion in a Ghanaian family. *African Studies Review*, 21(1), pp.103-120.

De Vos, C., & Zeshan, U. 2012. Introduction: Demographic, sociocultural, and linguistic variation across rural signing communities. In *Sign languages in village communities: Anthropological and linguistic insights* (pp. 2-23). Mouton De Gruyter.

Edward, M., 2015. *We speak with our hands and voices": Iconicity in the Adamorobe Sign Language and the Akuapem Twi (Ideophones)* (Master's thesis, The University of Bergen).

Edward, M. (in progress). Our Signs Matter: Protecting sign language in Adamorobe (Ghana)

Ellis, F., 1999. Rural livelihood diversity in developing countries: evidence and policy implications. Overseas Development Institute (ODI) Natural resources perspectives number 40. *Natural Resource Perspectives*, (40).

Ellis, F., 2000. *Rural livelihoods and diversity in developing countries*. Oxford university press.

Erting, C. (Ed.). 1994. *The Deaf Way: Perspectives from the international conference on Deaf culture*. Gallaudet University Press.

Frimpong, S. (in progress). 60 Years of Deaf Education in Ghana (1957-2017): A Brief History and The Forgotten Legacy of Dr Andrew Jackson Foster: - "The Father of Deaf Education in Africa.

Groce, N.E., 1985. *Everyone here spoke sign language*. Harvard University Press.

Fox, M., 2008. *Talking hands: What sign language reveals about the mind*. Simon and Schuster.

Kajtazi, M., 2012. Information Inadequacy: The Lack of Needed Information in Human, Social and Industrial Affairs. In *IFIP International Conference on Human Choice and Computers*. pp. 320-329. Springer, Berlin, Heidelberg.

Kaimowitz, D., 2003. Not by bread alone... forests and rural livelihoods in sub-Saharan Africa. In *Forests in poverty reduction strategies: capturing the potential*. *EFI Proceedings 47*, pp. 45-63.

Kusters, A., 2012a. "The Gong Gong Was Beaten"—Adamorobe: A "Deaf Village" in Ghana and Its Marriage Prohibition for Deaf Partners. *Sustainability*, 4(10), pp.2765-2784.

Kusters, A., 2012b. Adamorobe: A demographic, sociolinguistic and sociocultural profile. *Sign languages in village communities: Anthropological and linguistic insights*, 347-352.

- Kusters, A., 2014. Language ideologies in the shared signing community of Adamorobe. *Language in Society*, 43(2), pp.139-158.
- Kuwornu-Adjaottor, J. E. T., 2011. Spirituality and the Changing Face of Evangelicalism in Ghana. Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Department of Religious Studies, Kumasi, Ghana.
- Lang, H.G., 2003. Perspectives on the history of deaf education. *Oxford handbook of deaf studies, language, and education*, pp.9-20.
- Mathers, C., Smith, A. and Concha, M., 2000. Global burden of hearing loss in the year 2000. *Global burden of Disease*, 18(4), pp.1-30.
- Miles, M., 1984. Deafness in rural Asia. *The Volta Review*.
- Miles, M., 2004. Locating deaf people, gesture and sign in African histories, 1450s–1950s. *Disability & Society*, 19(5), pp.531-545.
- Moore, D. F. 2010. Partners in progress: The 21st International Congress on Education of the Deaf and the repudiation of the 1880 Congress of Milan. *American annals of the deaf*, 155(3), pp.309-310.
- Mprah, W.K., 2013. Knowledge and use of contraceptive methods amongst deaf people in Ghana. *African journal of disability*, 2(1), pp.1-9.
- Nyst, V., 2007. *A descriptive analysis of Adamorobe sign language (Ghana)* Doctoral Dissertation, University of Amsterdam, Faculty of Humanities. LOT.
- Nyst, V., 2010. Sign Language in West Africa. In Brentari, D. (ed) *Sign Languages: A Cambridge Language Survey*. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, pp.405-432.

Okyere, A. D. & Addo, M., 1994. Deaf Culture in Ghana. In: *Erting et al (ed); The Deaf Way; Perspectives from the International Conference on the Deaf Culture*. Gallaudet University Press, Washington DC.

Plann, S., 1997. *A silent minority: Deaf education in Spain, 1550-1835*. Univ of California Press.

Sackey, B. M., 1999. Women and health seeking behaviour in Religious Contexts: Reproductive and antenatal care in Ghanaian religious movements. A Case Study of the Twelve Apostles Church. *Research Review*, 15(2), 65-69.

Schur, L., Kruse, D. and Blanck, P., 2005. Corporate culture and the employment of persons with disabilities. *Behavioral sciences & the law*, 23(1), pp.3-20.

Senghas, R.J., Senghas, A. and Pyers, J.E., 2005. The emergence of Nicaraguan Sign Language: Questions of development, acquisition, and evolution. *Biology and knowledge revisited: From neurogenesis to psychogenesis*, pp.287-306.

Singal, N., Mahama Salifu, E., Iddrisu, K., Casely-Hayford, L. and Lundebye, H., 2015. The impact of education in shaping lives: reflections of young people with disabilities in Ghana. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 19(9), pp.908-925.

Tun, W., Okal, J., Schenk, K., Esantsi, S., Mutale, F., Kyeremaa, R.K., Ngirabakunzi, E., Asiah, H., McClain-Nhlapo, C. and Moono, G., 2016. Limited accessibility to HIV services for persons with disabilities living with HIV in Ghana, Uganda and Zambia. *Journal of the International AIDS Society*, 19(5Suppl 4).

Vermeerbergen, M., 2006. Past and current trends in sign language research. *Language & Communication*, 26(2), pp.168-192.

Wilcox, P.P., 2004. A cognitive key: Metonymic and metaphorical mappings in ASL. *Cognitive Linguistics*, 15(2), pp.197-222.

Wilcox, S. 2004. Cognitive iconicity: Conceptual spaces, meaning, and gesture in signed language. *Cognitive linguistics*, 15(2), pp. 119-148.

Yeo, R. and Moore, K., 2003. Including disabled people in poverty reduction work: "Nothing about us, without us". *World Development*, 31(3), pp.571-590.

PRE-PRINT

Appendix 1

Table 1. Population with disability in Ghana (2010 census)²⁰

Population with disability	Percentage (%)	Numbers
National disability rate	3%	737,743
Visual/Sight	1.2	295,720
Hearing	0.4	110,625
Speech	0.4	101,096
Physical	0.8	187,522
Intellectual	0.5	112,082
Emotional/Behavioural	0.6	136,898
Others	0.3	76,692

²⁰Ghana Statistical Service, 2012. *Population and housing census. Summary of final results*. Sakoa Press limited, Accra

Appendix 2

Table 2. Some demographic information of the interviewees

Adamorobe	Single	Married	Employment status
Male (Nr.=5)	3	2	2 farmers, 1
HI	3	1	herbalist, 1 not
NI		1	working <i>Driver</i>
Female (Nr.=6)	4	2	2 farmers, 1 works
HI	4	1	at the stone quarry,
NI		1	2 students <i>Trader</i>
Elsewhere	Single	Married	Employment status
Male (Nr.=6)	2	4	3 teachers, 1
			administrator, 1
			company worker, 1
			mason
Female (Nr.=3)	1	2	1 seamstress, 1
			trader, 1 University
			student