



Introduction

The work of deaf associations is divided into national and local levels. Those areas of scopes are connected because many government operations change from a time to time. In many countries, the governments use decentralization, which means empowering local and provincial power and leadership. They report to the central government, whose responsibility is national matters. This operation at local and provincial level is called as districts.

National associations of the deaf have a huge responsibility in fulling the goal of their association nationally, locally, and provincially. However, it is stressful and expensive to have a daily operation and carry out advocacy work at different levels. Thus, it is necessary for the associations to decentralize their operation. This not only empowers local and provincial members but also gives ownership to local deaf members. For local deaf members to maintain their affiliation to the national association, it is necessary to establish local branches/clubs. This will contribute to advocacy work at local level and achieving human rights for deaf communities in diverse branches. To make a difference between the responsibilities of a deaf association and a local deaf branch, national deaf association cover national policies, meeting with government officials and ministers. Local branches, on the other hand, focus on advocacy and lobbying at provincial governments and mayors. Together, deaf issues will be addressed both locally and nationally. The picture below explicates relationship between national association and local branches.

Setting up branches and clubs

While you have a national association of the deaf that operates on a national level advocating for the rights of the deaf, it is also important to have local branches or clubs at local level. They are needed for several reasons, such as:

- Covering the need to meet other deaf persons regularly. This is easier if you have a local club that organizes events and meetings
- Implementing the national policies on a local level
- Running out sign language courses
- Counselling services
- Advocacy
- Income generation
- Adult education Training of members in professional skills

The national association should encourage the establishment of local branches or clubs. However, the initiative should come from local members as running a local club involves considerable amount of work and motivation. Without it a local club will fail. The national organization should plan on how to support the branches and clubs financially and generally. Annual training seminars for the people elected to run the branches and clubs should be included in the annual work plans and budgets. You should organize activities for all kinds of groups of deaf people (children, women, elderly persons, persons having multiple disabilities, people identifying as LGBTQ+), and all people should be welcomed to your activities.



However, there are factors to consider when thinking of expanding of a branch. Consider geographic of your country; how far are the districts and what kind of potentiality they have? Are there deaf members present in branches and regions? Is it easy to find deaf members? What kind of skills and experience do they have? How much training and support do they need? What is their human rights situation in those deaf communities? Do you have finance to support them?

Steps to establish a Branch

1. Constitution of a local deaf club (branch)

After the formation of the local club, you should make the constitution of your club. Investigate the possibility of official registration in accordance with your government regulations. There are some common requirements of articles that must be included in a constitution. The name of the organization should be mentioned. You should clarify your relation to the national organization, and which organization that is. You should mention that your local deaf club follows the constitution of the national association. You should determine aims of your organization, that are for example to bring all deaf people together in your village/town/area, or to advocate for the deaf to obtain equal rights in the community.

2. Explain your activities

You should explain what kind of activities you carry out in the club. Those are for example arranging meetings for the members, promoting the status of sign language, promoting cultural activities of deaf people, promoting access to public cultural services, organizing training courses, seminars, and workshops, informing the members of the services provided by the local hearing community, informing the hearing community about the needs of deaf people, and cooperating with local authorities to promote equal opportunities for your members.

3. Define membership categories

Your statutes should mention that activities are open for all kinds of groups of deaf people (children, women, elderly persons, persons having multiple disabilities, people identifying with LGBTQ+). You should define your membership categories, that are for example: ordinary members (deaf persons), honorary members (a person who has provided important and distinguished activities for the club) and sponsoring members (individuals or organizations who support the aims of the club. They do not usually have the right to vote). You should clarify the rules regarding withdrawal of membership or expelling any members. For example, the board should have the right to expel a member failing to pay the membership fee or a member not pursuing the aims of the club. It is important to clarify that the board cannot expel a member only because of personal conflicts. There must be a reason for the expelling, and it must be stated in the constitution before the board can do so.



4. Decision-making

You should decide decision making bodies of your organization: How Annual General Meetings take place, and whether an Extraordinary General Meeting can be called, and on which situations, the voting rights at the General Meetings (does everyone have a voting right, or are decisions made by a simple majority?). You should also state the responsibilities, roles, and duties of your board. How should board meetings take place, and how often? Who have the right to sign on the behalf of the club? When is the reporting and accounting period? Also, it is important to include considerations about proposals of amendments and dissolution of the club.

In your constitution, you might have the following:

1. Name of the local branch organization
2. Description and use of common seal and logo of the organization
3. Mission (main purpose) of the organization
4. Vision (desired situation in the development field) of the organization
5. Objectives of the organization
6. Board of Trustees/ Executive Committee of the organization including how many will they be; how will they be put into and out of office.
7. Secretariat of the organization and its functions
8. Meetings and quorums
9. Management of financial resources
10. Membership of the organization (if required): Including who can be eligible for membership; duties/roles rights and responsibilities of members, acceptance, and dismissal of membership etc.
11. Procedures for amendment of the constitution including who shall amend the constitution, what notice is required for an amendment, what majority of people should be allowed to amend the constitution etc.
12. Dissolution. How will the organization wind up should the need arise? Who should decide on a resolution to dissolve and by what majority? What happens to the funds and assets after dissolution?

Membership mobilization

The goal of membership mobilization is to successfully mobilize, and support members grassroots is to strengthen the local branch at grassroots level.

Member mobilization strategies

1. Secure strong leadership

Engage strong leadership with grassroots member support to drive the community-wide efforts. Strong leaders can include both individuals who take on the work and the organization(s) that lead collaborative efforts.



2. Establish formal and informal structures

Develop a formal structure that can effectively lead community change efforts. Establish key structures and develop guiding documents to help facilitate the coordination of provincial/district efforts.

Transition from informal to formal structure

- Mobilize and identify members of an area and organize meetings
- Check members' knowledge about National Association and if no knowledge, make a basic presentation about NAD and its objective as well mission objective of mobilization
- Identify potential acting leader when larger membership is identified, branch constitution is developed and adopted

3. Develop shared vision

Create a shared understanding of the goals of the association and goals of province/district by drafting a written mission statement specific to the collaboration. Though this statement may share aspects with the mission guiding the lead the branch association organization and/or its partners, making it distinct and different can help unify a vision at district/provincial level.

Organizing a public meeting

The purpose of a public/community meeting is to exchange ideas and information by bringing together a cross-section of viewpoints. In a successful meeting, a variety of active participation are brought together, information and opinions are shared, resource person, potential leaders and volunteers are identified, and goals and initial action plans to do for district/provincial activities are established.

1. **Plan early:** Start planning at least 14 days (or as early as possible) before the meeting date.
2. **Designate a planning committee:** Although a community meeting is a communitywide event, it is helpful to designate a civic organization or a separate committee to handle the planning or organization of the meeting.
3. **Set a date, time, and place:** Make sure to avoid conflict with other regularly scheduled meetings and plan a snow date (if necessary).
4. **Develop and set a goal:** Why are you holding the meeting? Establish a clear goal or objective for the meeting. For example:
 - To present results of a town survey to the community.
 - To solicit opinions from community members on strengths and weaknesses of the community.



5. **Develop an agenda:** The agenda should naturally follow the stated goals. Think about your audience when inviting speakers and developing the program. What is likely to interest and involve everyone? The group should know what to expect before attending a meeting. You should be clear about what is being planned, how the meeting is going to be run, and who is going to play what role. Make sure not to overload the agenda. Once the agenda is set make sure that the meeting starts and ends on time.
6. **Invite participation:** Community meetings should be as inclusive as possible. Invite youths, elderly, teachers, farmers, and everyone in between. It is also important to include representatives from your villages, churches and civic organizations, Note: in organizing a community meeting you have to be sensitive to its diversity. Many communities have ethnic, cultural, and social differences that you need to accommodate. For example, if your community is bilingual, it is essential that you obtain a translator/sign language interpreter and print all documents in both languages to give everyone in the community a chance to participate.
7. **Follow-up:** It is important to provide follow-up information about the results of the meeting. You should also evaluate the meeting. To ensure that your meetings are successful and that they address the needs of the audience, you need feedback. If you have the time, it is worth asking participants to complete an evaluation before they leave the meeting. Make the evaluation brief and easy to complete. Ask a few questions about both the content and the format of the meeting that will help you plan future meetings. Ask participants not to sign the evaluations.

Strengthening local branch capacity

The organizational development of local branch requires:

- Understanding how an organization functions – determining where the organization is
- Using the local branch human and monetary resources to build a viable organization - use what you have
- Planning and implementing actions that enable the local branch to improve people's lives – do what you can
- Strengthening an organization's ability and capacity to effectively provide services to its deaf members and other stakeholders
- Sustaining its finances, operations, and benefits
- Providing leadership trainings and other trainings to local deaf branches or local members

It is important to provide leadership trainings and other trainings to local deaf branches and local members, so they understand the importance of having local branches and are equipped to carry out the work at a local level. Topics can be for instance as importance of your national sign language, how to use sign language interpreter, human rights and deaf awareness issues, how to mobilize to get members to set up local branches, the constitution



and organizational structure of your association, advocacy, communication, gender equality, resource mobilization, fundraising and conflict management.

Case studies

Malawi National Association of the Deaf (MANAD)

From its formative years in 1992 to 2008, MANAD has been operating in different areas in Malawi. To spread the operation of the association, MANAD started a program of setting up branches in the districts. With financial support from the Finnish Association of the Deaf (FAD), MANAD trained 13 Trainers of Deaf Trainer (TDT) in different regions. After completing the course, they were sent to open branches. The branches are under the control of MANAD district committee headed by the chairperson. The chairpersons from each district branches had a leadership training in importance of Malawi Sign Language, how to use sign language interpreter, HIV/AIDS, human rights and deaf awareness issues, mobilization of members to set up branches, MANAD constitution and organizational structure, advocacy, communication, gender, leadership, resource mobilization and fundraising and conflict management.

The branches were opened gradually in different years. The first branch was opened in 2001. It was just one branch. After building experience and gathering lessons learnt, MANAD opened three other branches in 2009 and then ten other branches in 2010. And then in 2011, six other branches were opened, and finally in 2012, 6 more branches were opened. MANAD now has 26 branches.

You can read more here: <http://www.manadmw.org/affiliate.htm>

Ghana National Association of the Deaf

GNAD's vision is to achieve an active and productive deaf community with access to education and information, and steady economic activities that can sustain and maintain quality and security of life. Its mission is to mobilize members, remove communication barriers, create awareness on deaf issues, and advocate for equal opportunities for deaf people. In Article 13, under Membership and Dues, the constitution of GNAD declared that "membership of the association shall be open to all deaf people in Ghana who have attained the age of 18 years. It also stated that a person who desires to join the Association shall submit an application for registration supported by an existing member who shall serve as a sponsor". This had been the case since the establishment of the constitution in 1996. Ghana has 260 districts across the country with 16 regions. Of this, there is 134 local branches of which 130 are fully recognized by GNAD. 16 regional branches have been established with 10 having regional executives and 6 regions having Interim Management Committee. The following are the steps into establishment and developing local (district) associations.

GNAD has a board of 9 members, 6 core members with 3 wings (Sport wing, Youth wing and Women wing). The board encourages National Executives Committee (NEC) meeting. The NEC is made up of regional leaders from all the sixteen (16) regions in Ghana. The NEC meeting takes place twice (2x) every year. During the NEC meeting, one of the important discussions is the establishment of new districts and mobilization of members in



old districts. Regional leaders are tasked to search available districts where there are deaf members but are not mobilized.

The mobilization process involves regional leaders identifying capable men and women to help and support their search for members. These men and women must reside in the district. The search for members includes visiting the nearby deaf churches, deaf schools, or recreational centers where some members may be found. In some cases, the leaders appeal to the department of social welfare and the district assembly for financial support in carrying out the mobilization process.

Usually, the identified members are given specific location and date to meet. Members who attend the meeting on the first day are registered automatically. Brief presentation on GNAD and the reason for the association formation are some activities on the first day of the meeting. Participants are encouraged to reach out to other members. In most cases, the members registered during the mobilizations do not pay registrations fees. However, some members registered afterwards may be asked to pay registration fees aside the normal membership dues. Also, membership is opened, in some places, for both deaf and hearing people. For instance, a child of deaf adult (CODA) can be a member and interpreters who regular help and services are admired are allowed as members of the local association without questioning. Nevertheless, this is not the case in other places. Some leaders do not allow hearing people to be members of the local branch.

As the membership grows, regional leaders visit, and members are encouraged to pay dues. Therefore, leaders are thus elected or appointed to handle the district association. The leaders are either elected or appointed as Interim Management Committees (IMCs). The election or appointment may either be supervised by the National Executives' representatives (in rare cases) or the regional leaders supervise the election or appointment. An interesting aspect of this is that the leaders are not usually selected based on educational qualification. Any active member with strong communication skills and active in the community who is also seen to posse admirable character may be selected. Constitution is created, usually duplication of the original GNAD constitution. The local association also creates letterheads for official works.

The local branch leaders propose amount for each member to pay as dues of the association. However, this proposition in most of the places are democratic. Members can debate how much they can pay as dues monthly. A saving account is then established with the constitution to save up the dues collected. Up to three (3) executives are signatory holders of the account; and two of the three can sign to make withdrawals. Money is usually used to pay regional dues, sponsor selected member to attend GNAD's national events such as Annual General Meeting, anniversaries, or any kind of deaf awareness program for which a local branch member is invited.

GNAD usually conducts preparatory studies in some of these local branches for either pilot or big projects. After the preparatory studies, some of these local branches are selected for the project. Also, GNAD often organize national activities in which most of these local branch's benefits. For example, in GNAD's recent menstrual hygiene project, almost 100 local branches benefited through various trainings and workshops. These kinds of involvements bring encouragement to the local branches to feel part of GNAD.



Another important steps GNAD adopts to develop the local branches is training and capacity building for local branch leaders. Leaders from the various local branches are given leadership, advocacy, lobbying, empowerment trainings, among others. The invitation for these trainings and workshops is irrespective of religion, location, tribe, or gender. Although women activeness and role plays are low, GNAD has high respect for gender balance and always encourage women involvement. These trainings and capacity buildings for local branch leaders strengthens the local association. Also, GNAD at times create opportunities for interpreters to attend workshops meant to inculcate the best conducts in their profession as the serve the deaf in the various communities. As a result, many interpreters have developed cordial relationship with the deaf and provide support whenever needed.

To sum up, these 136 local branches establishment did not take place in just a flash of light. It took many years through lots of works. In 1968 when GNAD was first formed, the first local branch was at Osu, a suburb of Accra which can be traced as far back as in 1970, and the first regional branch was in Greater Accra Region which is said to be established in 1983. In fact, the process of establishment of the local branches is a long one. And to build and strengthen these branches involves lots of works. GNAD is currently collecting data on the local branches to determine their dates of establishment, first branch executives and the methods used in forming these local branches.