

# National Conference on Improving Education for Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing Children In Ethiopia and their Inclusion

**Organizer:** Deaf Development and Information Association (DDIA)  
in partnership with Disability and Development Partners (DDP), UK

**Funded by:** Comic Relief

**Venue:** Sarem International Hotel: Belay Zeleke Hall, 8<sup>th</sup> Floor

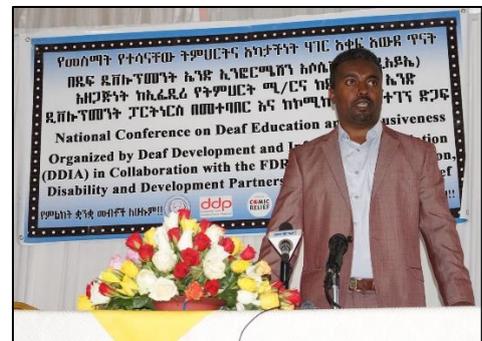
**Date:** 18 February 2020, 8:30 am – 5:00 pm

## Welcome



Participants were provided with a booklet of success stories from the lifetime of the project, in Amharic and English.

Sign language and English interpretation were provided throughout the conference, which was opened and facilitated by DDIA's Senior Advisor, Dr Eyasu Hailu.



A welcoming address was given by DDIA Chairman Ato Alemseged Abreham, who explained the project's objectives and the role it has played in improving the education of deaf children. He highlighted the innovative work done by teaching assistants and the significance of the teaching resources that were produced.

## Keynote speech from the Ethiopian Ministry of Education

The official MoE representative, Ato Tesfahun Belay, said that DDIA's work, in collaboration with the Ministry, had been significant in improving the quality of inclusive education in the country, noting its curriculum development for deaf and HoH pupils; distribution of sign language dictionaries; translation of textbooks into sign language; provision of IT equipment and other teaching materials; and the placement of teaching assistants in each school.



In doing all this, DDIA has led the way and greatly assisted the Ministry of Education, contributing to the improvement of inclusive education and boosting the motivation of deaf learners.

He said that the government and Ministry would remain at DDIA's side in all respects. Finally, the representative wished all the best for the project's continued results and pledged the government's willingness to do its best to make the project live on.

### Guests from Kentalis International



Marjolein Buré from the Netherlands and Bernadette Namirembe from Uganda, specialists in deaf education who were in Ethiopia to carry out an external evaluation of the *Improving Education* project, addressed the conference. They had been impressed by what they had heard so far about the project's implementation and results, were inspired to find out more about the work, and looked forward to visiting project schools over the next 10 days.

### Ethiopian National Anthem

Under the direction of Lydia, deaf TA at Meleik II Primary School in Addis Ababa, and with singing accompaniment from DDIA's Tesfanesh Talew, a group of deaf pupils – beneficiaries of the project – performed the Ethiopian national anthem in sign language. Their performance was recorded on video. Through the project, this has become a popular means for deaf and hearing children to sing/gn together in all the project schools and beyond, an expression of unity and a symbol of inclusion.

### A Demonstration Model for inclusive education

Alemayehu Teferi, introduced as the 'backbone of DDIA', presented the *Improving Education* project approach as a model of inclusion for replication elsewhere in Ethiopia, and a contribution to the Education Ministry's national roadmap. He put deaf education in its historical and international context, emphasizing the importance of sign language to the education of deaf and hard-of-hearing children.



Ato Alemayehu said that awareness of deaf education has grown, and progress made, pointing to the existence of many deaf educators, and the establishment of an Ethiopian Sign Language and Deaf Culture Unit at Addis Ababa University's Institute of Language Studies. The goal of the *Improving Education* project since 2016 has been to create a living example of inclusive education in Ethiopia in eight selected schools in Addis Ababa and other regions, where deaf and hard-of-hearing children have been enabled to attend school and to access the curriculum.

## Case studies and videos



Ato Kidane Admasu, the project's coordinator at DDIA, showed some short films produced during the project: a sign language conversation between a father and daughter, and the first spontaneous sign language performance of the national anthem. He explained that the idea had come from guest trainers in inclusive education from Seva-In-Action, based on their experience in India. Ato Kidane also explained how the sign language dictionary had been produced.

## The experience in project schools

Each of the eight project schools had sent an eight-strong delegation to represent them at the conference, including the director, deaf TA, teachers, parents, and representatives of their local Education Bureau and a neighbouring school. A delegate from each area spoke of how the Improving Education project had affected them and their children.



Between them, they expressed appreciation and gratitude for various aspects of the project:

- the work of the teaching assistants
- sign language training: for the school community, and parents of deaf children
- awareness-raising
- exercise books and essential stationery
- sign language dictionaries
- curriculum resources in sign language
- computer/IT equipment
- ear examinations and treatment
- the active recruitment of deaf and HoH children from the community

Comments included:

“Sign language training brought a breakthrough in communication for the deaf and hard-of-hearing students with their parents and in the school. This in turn allowed those groups to access information, and contributed to their educational success. The project has paved the way for accessible, inclusive education.” (Parent from Geda Kilole Primary School)

“DDIA's efforts have changed attitudes in both the school community and the communities around the school, creating a conducive environment for incisive education. Deaf students have more interest in their education, and more deaf children are coming to school.” (Director, Hayk Dar Primary School, Hawassa)

“Our school is moving to disability-inclusive classes. It has become a welcoming place for students with disabilities.” (Director, Menelik II Primary School)

“The attitudes and participation of our 40 deaf and hard-of-hearing pupils have steadily improved. Thanks to sign language training, government food provision, and an after-school programme, deaf students are showing more interest in their education than ever. The project has helped students with disability become happy and successful.” (Agazian Primary School)

### Lessons and experiences from abroad



The afternoon programme began with a presentation by Bernadatte Namirembe of Kentalis International. She shared her experiences of inclusive education in Uganda, Tanzania and the Netherlands, with a focus on the success of the Tanzanian model, where government policy has supported inclusion: students with and without disabilities attend the same classes and follow the regular curriculum, working together, helping one another, and developing a sense of mutual cooperation without difference, complemented by special classes where students with disabilities have extra support.

In the Netherlands, the situation is different from that in Africa due to the availability of technological solutions such as cochlear implants to facilitate deaf children’s education. They also have itinerant teachers providing support to deaf students at home and at school.

### Group sessions

The conference participants split into three groups at this point to consider five discussion points:

1. Strengths and weaknesses of the project
2. What can be done to assure the continuity of the project?
3. How can you support TAs to enable them to stay on in the schools after the project ends?
4. The role of parent, student and teacher committees in deaf education
5. Any other thoughts on inclusive education policy for deaf children in Ethiopia

Each group nominated a chair and a secretary to facilitate the discussion and present the findings:

Group	Participants	Chair	Secretary
1	Addis Ababa project schools	Yohannes Tekle	Muse Alemayehu
2	regional project schools	Gebeyaw Lemeneh	Derje
3	other institutions	Sofian Haiw	Hirut Tekle

The three groups' feedback is summarized below:

**Group Strengths**

- 1 • the provision of sign language training • the awareness-raising programmes • the provision of school materials • searching out deaf students in the community • much-needed IT equipment
- 2 • preparation and distribution of sign language dictionary and textbook DVDs in sign language • computer equipment • efforts to make the school environment accessible to children with disabilities • sign language training
- 3 • sign language dictionaries • textbooks in sign language • magazines and other printed materials • computer, projector etc

**Weaknesses**

- 1 • the uncertain future of the teaching assistants • the project was limited to the eight schools and their respective regions • if other woredas and sub-cities had been included, more deaf children would have benefited
- 2 • the project did not include disabilities other than those of deaf and hard-of-hearing children • it was limited to 8 schools and their respective regions • Not all TAs have university degrees, so they might not all meet government criteria for future employment • the absence of project offices in the regions
- 3 • the absence of project offices in schools • delays to project work in some schools • some mistakes in the dictionary/textbooks • many schools and regions were not included

**What can be done to assure the continuity of the project? How can you support TAs to enable them to stay on in the schools after the project ends?**

- 1 • "Government offices and we stakeholders expect to contribute our part."
- 2 • concerned institutions including DDIA should make efforts to force education offices and the Ministry of Education to facilitate opportunities for teaching assistants • To assure the continuity of the project we need to work hard and develop an appropriate education policy.
- 3 • The relevant bodies will make efforts to let the teaching assistants stay on in the schools • the project should have its own building in the country, offices in all regions, and additional funds for its continuity.

**The role of parent, student and teacher committees in deaf education**

- 1 and 3 • "A representative of people with disabilities should always be included during the formation of parent, student and teacher cooperation committees."

**Other thoughts on inclusive education policy for deaf children in Ethiopia**

- 1 • "We do have inclusive education policies, but the problem is that they have not been implemented. So let's put them into action!"
- 2 • "Theoretically, education policy is inclusive, but we cannot see this in practice. There are no books in sign language; schools are not welcoming to students with disabilities, and so on. So we need to make it a reality."
- 3 • "Ethiopia is rich in inclusive education policies. But we still need to put them into practice at all levels: from the Ministry all the way down to woredas and schools."

Scenes from the group discussions:



### Closing remarks

Ato Alemayehu began by expressing his sincere hopes for the continuation of the project, as long as there is concern about the education of people with disabilities. He pointed out that the project would continue to employ the teaching assistants until the end of the current school year. He also explained why teaching assistants were recruited from locally available potential: because most educated deaf personnel are found in Addis Ababa and do not wish to go and live in the regions.

Alemayehu called for continued support for deaf children throughout the country, including in Grades 5-8. There is a 20 year-old policy on providing interpreters in Grade 5, but no sign of this in reality. Children do not miraculously regain their hearing when they reach Grade 5. Even in Grades 1-4, only some schools have SEN teachers, and most of those that do lack sign language training.

He said that policies alone are not enough: we can all make efforts, make our voices heard, and involve ourselves in the policy-making process, to bring about changes in the lives of people with disabilities. Ato Alemayehu offered heartfelt thanks to participants for attending, to the coordinators of the project for all their contributions, and to Ato Workneh Getachew, who has dedicated himself to the project since its outset.



A certificate was presented to Ato Alemayehu from Hayk Dar School, and the conference came to an end with a burst of signed applause.

### Media coverage

A crew from Ethiopian Television was present, filming for a sign language programme broadcast on ETV on 3 and 6 March 2020. They also invited DDIA to their studios for an interview about deaf education and inclusion, broadcast live on the morning news on 22 February. See the interview (given by Dr Eyasu in Amharic and sign language, as Ato Alemayehu was travelling), here:

<https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=2461675084162951>

## Annex: Conference participants

name	sex	organization
Abebe Denku	M	JCK
Abebe Gitachew	M	GO
Abebe Tolosa	M	Adama
Abebech Girma	F	DDIA
Abraham Chernet	M	MCTM
Addisu Belay	M	Agazian
Adeynesh Ayele	F	DDIA
Alemayehu Teferi	M	DDIA
Alemaze Amaye	F	Merawi
Alemseged Abreh	M	DDIA
Amare Wolie	M	Merawi
Anteneh Tefera	M	DDIA
Aschalew Teocha	M	Agazian
Ashadiye Getu	M	Selam Fire
Awetash Hadgu	F	Soloda
Aynalem Abraham	F	DDIA
Aynalem Asfaw	F	NDA
Baye Wodaje	M	other school
Beniyam Tesemma	M	DDIA
Berekat Mekannen	M	Ministry of Health
Bereket Abebe	F	
Bernadatte Namirembe	F	Kentalis International
Binyam Gotu	M	Ras Abebe Aregay
Bishane Teka	M	Soloda
Bisrat Haile	M	Adama
Dagnachew Regassa	M	DDIA
Dereje Kidane	M	Hawassa
Dinar Olmeshd	M	Soloda
Edomgenet Tafesse	F	Menelik II
Efrem Birhanu	M	other school
Elamar Getachew	F	Education Office
Enderis Kidit	M	Hawassa
Epherem Desta	M	
Epherem Tadese	M	JCK
Esayas Abebe	M	Ministry of Finance and Economic Development
Esayas Dana	M	Hawassa
Eshetu Asfaw	M	Ministry of Education
Eyasu Hailu	M	DDIA
Fantanesh Belay	F	Hawariyaw Petros
Felekech Belay	F	Ministry of Finance and Economic Development
Firwote Alem	F	ACS
Fitsum Taffese	M	member
Gebyaw Limenu	M	Merawi
Gedefaw Tafere	M	Merawi

name	sex	organization
Gelenesh Woru	F	Berhan Lehetsanat
Gemeda Bati	M	Adama
Genet Nahusenay	M	Merawi
Getachew Geru	M	Agazian Education Office
Girma Asefa	M	NSA
Girma Merara	M	Adama
Hagernesh Mulu	F	Soloda
Hagos Melese	M	Hawassa
Hirut Takele	F	Selam Fire
Hiwot W/gewergis	F	Soloda
Kalkidan Kumelahew	F	interpreter
Kidane Admasu	M	DDIA
Kidane Alemu	M	Agazian
Kidist Tibebe	F	Hawariyaw Petros
Kidus Mitiku	M	other school
Kirsinesh Ylberhane	F	Government office
Konjit Saleyesus	F	DDIA
Lamrot Chekal	F	Selam Fire
Lydia Belhu	F	DDIA
Mamey Desie	F	Merawi
Maregn Alemu	M	Merawi
Marjolein Buré	F	Kentalis International
Martha Bekele	F	Ethiopian Centre for Disability & Development
Mastwat Tadesse	F	Hawassa
Mekonen Haile	M	ASC
Mekonnen Manuye	M	Addis Ababa University
Melaku Tekalegn	M	Adama
Mesay Mehese	M	Hawassa
Mesetawet Kebede	F	Adama
Meskerem Abebe	F	SPHMMC
Meskerem Beyene	F	SL interpreter
Mola Belay	M	Charity
Molla Wulie	M	Alpha Deaf School
Muhamed Amen	M	Agazian
Mulu Engdawork	F	other school
Mulutu Gadisa	M	OEB
Musie Alemayehu	M	Deaf church congregation
Rahel Geses	F	DDIA
Reweda Murad	F	Menelik II (parent)
Seblewongel Wolebo	F	EFCMY Deaf C
Shambel Belay	M	Agazian
Shushay Zebrhe	M	Soloda
Solomon G/her	M	DDIA
Sufiyan Heyru	M	Menelik II

name	sex	organization
Tadesse Asfaw	M	Selam Fire
Telemua Haile	F	Deaf Association
Tesfahun Belay	M	Ministry of Education
Tesfanesh Talew	F	DDIA
Tigise Alemayehu	F	National Deaf Association
Tseya Legesse	F	SL interpreter
Wedjia Shifera	F	GO
Woinshet Desta	F	Deaf Association
Woinshet Girma	F	DDIA
Wondimagegn Kebete	M	Selam Fire
Wondwossa Genet	M	Education Office
Workneh Getachew	M	DDIA

name	sex	organization
Wudase Tamire	F	Hawassa
Yared Amare	M	GO
Yasen Husen	M	Adama
Yemsraeh Niguse	F	Agazian Education Office
Yibeltac Tadesse	M	Government office
Yisak Kidane	M	Soloda
Yohanes Teklay	M	Ethiopian Centre for Disability & Development
Yordanos Bahru	F	Ministry of Labour & Social Affairs
Yoseph Yemalle	M	DDIA
Zinash Seyoum	F	Espert
Zureyashwork Asefaw	F	other school

Total: 111 (46 F : 65 M)