'The Deaf Dilemma', article for CBR News, N. 20, May-August 1995

**By Susie Miles (1995)**

Special schools and Community Based Rehabilitation (CBR) programmes, as they are currently run, are failing deaf children. Deaf children who attend special schools are isolated from their families and communities and receive an education that is largely inappropriate to their needs.

Despite the fact that most children who attend special schools have to live away from their families, organisations of deaf people argue for separate educational provision. Even some CBR documents concede that children with severe hearing impairments may need more specialised services than those offered by the CBR approach (O'Toole 1991 & Salamanca 1994).

There is an urgent need to demystify deaf education in order to encourage the involvement of communities, parents and deaf people themselves. The challenge is to develop an appropriate and sustainable approach to the education of deaf children. The author contends that this is not possible without the development of sign languages.

Where deaf people have formed their own organisations they have prioritised the development of sign language and an improvement in the standard of education for deaf children. Deaf adults tend to show more interest in the education of deaf children than any other group of disabled people. They recognise that without language and education there is no culture and that it is essential to start developing Deaf culture now by investing in the younger generation. If education is to improve, fundamental changes need to be made in schools for deaf children and in the training of teachers (Miles 1995).

In Mozambique deaf adults play a major role in the Ministry of Social Action's national Community Based Support (CBS) programme. Two deaf adults are employed by the ministry to support groups of deaf people and to develop sign language. In an urban informal settlement on the outskirts of the capital, Maputo, they teach small classes of deaf children as part of the CBS programme.

CBR workers are in a key position to link deaf children and their families with organisations of deaf adults. They can help raise the profile of deafness and dispel some of the misunderstandings surrounding it. Together they could lobby for change in the education of deaf children and the development of sign language and interpreting services.

**Reference:**  
**Title:** The Deaf Dilemma  
**Author:** Miles, S  
**Publisher:** CBR News  
**Date:** 1995