



# SAVE THE DEAF AND ENDANGERED LANGUAGES INITIATIVE - INDIGENOUS HANDS

ANNUAL  
REPORT  
2021

# FOREWORD



Dr. Emma Asonye, CEO

The year 2021 sustained the unpredictability and global frustration that 2020 brought, yet the year 2021 is a year we in S-DELI-IH will never forget in a hurry. Not for the wrong reasons, though. While the world was ‘locked down’ in pandemic isolation, we used the opportunity to launch a project that would redefine our interventions and project us to the global stage for a long time. In this episode of “2021 in retrospect” we bring you some of the project and activities that made a difference in our year 2021.

We began the year with the first ever Conference of Indigenous Hands and Voices of African Descent (IHAVAIC21), which has been described as one of the best virtual conferences since the pandemic, and one of the few academic meetings focused on indigenous African signed and spoken languages in our time. The conference, which was well attended by men and women of letters on the international front will soon yield its debut publication, Studies in Indigenous African Signed and Spoken Languages (SIASSL).

The crux of our indigenous sign language documentation project came with the introduction of project My Hero is You – a project that translated into indigenous Nigerian signed languages, an international literacy book about Covid-19 for children around the world. The book “My Hero is You” has been translated into several spoken languages and a few mainstream signed languages, ours is the first translation into indigenous signed language(s). While we still tout the success of that translation/documentation, we can’t wait to see it emerge as one of the contents of the Indigenous Hands SignApp, which is currently being developed, thanks to Godwin Adejoh for leading the amazing team working on the app. Team MY Hero is You, made up of our five Deaf Signers, Maurice, Festus, Lovina, Ifeanyi and Joshua and Team S-DELI participants, Val, Olamide, Rebekah, Precious and Blessing, thank you for making that project happen!

On the advocacy front, our Faces of BBS internship program was a success despite the setback it suffered. Four deaf women who are survivors of sexual and domestic abuse were selected for the one-year internship, they were trained for 3 weeks on how to become advocates against all forms of abuse against deaf girls and women. They started their campaign through skill acquisition and capacity building outreaches in various deaf communities. While two dropped out of the project, two successfully completed their one-year internship and were issued certificates of completion and some financial award. Today, Esther Ogunrotimi and Tornubari Ereba are proud S-DELI Ambassadors of the project Beauty Beyond Speech. All thanks to the Project Lead for BBS, Ms. Uchechi Opara (Opulence).

Time will fail me to discuss in detail the immense impacts of our monthly quiz on our Facebook group, Advocates for the Indigenous African Sign Languages, a group that has continued to add to its membership and participation on a regular basis. All thanks to S-DELI Content Developer, Ms. Olamide Fatosin who has been very efficient in anchoring the monthly quiz. Each month, someone has always gone home with some financial prizes, while on the other hand more people get to follow our Indigenous Hands the Indigenous Voices program on YouTube.

It is equally worthy of mentioning that Nelson, our architecture student, whose education we have been sponsoring since 2016 got admission into Enugu State University (ESUT) in late 2020 and is now in 200 Level. It has not been easy for him nor for us to ensure that his academic and personal needs are met while he is in school, but thus far, he has made it and we are proud of him. Thanks to our international supporters, Susie Olsen, Carman Melendrez and others who have made major contributions and donations that have helped to keep Nelson in school.

Our Triple Action Project (TAP) which took place virtually on the international front and physically in Ogun state Nigeria was a huge success.

Special thanks to the admin team, the Board of Directors, and the entire Team S-DELI and all our partners.

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# Our Mission



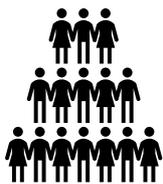
Our mission is to **document, develop and preserve** indigenous sign languages of the world's deaf communities for the **promotion of deaf literacy**. We are committed to promoting **early access to sign language** of immediate environment through **early intervention programs** for deaf children.

## Our Vision

To see all deaf children, grow up with adequate **cognitive and linguistic skills** and to bring **indigenous signing systems** of our deaf communities to the educational and digital space where they **thrive**.

# Our Impact

Over the past 6 years, S-DELI has been dedicated to advocacy, outreach, and research. We are on a mission to embolden deaf rights through campaigning for deaf literacy and language acquisition as well as the documentation of indigenous African sign languages. With the help of our global community, this past year we exercised this commitment through the development of some of our most exciting programmes and projects yet.



**+225**

**Registered international attendees for IHAVAIC21**



**>7**

**Research and media publications**



**15%**

**Increase in social media engagement**



**+10**

**Virtual campaigns and events**



**>300**

**Members of the global deaf community reached**

As the impacts of COVID-19 continues to reveal disparities across the world, marginalised communities remain vulnerable to the effects of the pandemic. The work of our advocates, ambassadors and interpreters operating directly with deaf communities has proven invaluable.

This past year, S-DELI continued to expand our global influence. With international programmes such as the **Conference of Indigenous Hands and Voices of African Identity** and the **Triple Action Project**, we have collaborated with scholars and advocates from all over the world to advance our mission.

Our **Indigenous Nigerian Sign Language Documentation Project (INSLDP)** continued virtually with the Indigenous Hands Sign App group that was formed in 2020. In the midst of the pandemic, several lexical and short story signs were collected by the research and documentation group. As that was going on, our target linguistic community was expanded to Zambia. A **Memorandum of Understanding** was signed to seal the newly formed relationship with the **Zambian Deaf Society (ZDS)** for the documentation of indigenous Zambian sign languages. Thanks to the great leadership of our own Nakasela Nachalwe, for leading the epoch project in collaboration with Mr. John Ndhlovu.



**'Beauty Beyond Speech' outreach programme for deaf schoolgirls, Nigeria**

# Indigenous Hands and Voices of African Identity Conference

*Indigenous Hands and  
Voices of African Identity:  
Discourse on Language  
Rights*

7<sup>th</sup> -8<sup>th</sup>  
January  
2021

The history of African signed languages is rich in linguistic and cultural diversity. Moreover, indigenous African signed languages are amongst some of the earliest discovered and defined languages worldwide. Yet, within the wider sign language sphere, they remain understudied, underdeveloped and under documented. This indicates a stark need for more conversations about how we can embolden research, knowledge, documentation and advocacy in order to protect and promote indigenous African signed languages.

We began 2021 with one of the most exciting and unique events in S-DELI history. **Indigenous Hands and Voices of African Identity: Discourse on Language Rights** was a 2-day international conference on indigenous African signed and spoken languages. The conference was a collaborative effort between S-DELI, the University of New Mexico Africana Studies, National Institute for Nigerian Languages (NINLAN), and Nigerian Languages Project. In light of Covid restrictions, the conference was held virtually and was delivered across Zoom and YouTube.

IHAVAIC2021 sought out to facilitate discussion between African, non-African, hearing and Deaf scholars in order to contribute knowledge towards the development of African signed languages. The Organising Committee began planning the conference in August 2020. By September, they had issued a Call for Papers with a deadline in October. Inclusivity and accessibility for attendees was of utmost priority for the Organising Committee. **Sign language interpreters were made available in British Sign Language, American Sign Language and a widely used conventional Nigerian Sign Language.**

The conference was very well received and had over 100 attendees over the course of the 2 days. **Guests were able to meet, converse and network with other agents for change in indigenous language protection.** The virtual nature of the conference proved to be one of its greatest strengths, since it allowed attendees from all over the world to come together, learn and contribute participate- a feat that may not have had as much outreach if the conference had been held in person.

S-DELI-Indigenous Hands and its partners were extremely proud and grateful for the level of reception and engagement of the conference and extends its thanks to all presenters, speakers, interpreters and attendees. The Organising Committee are looking forward to beginning the planning process of the next conference, and we look forward to having you there!

## [IN CASE YOU MISSED IT...](#)

All keynote speeches and presentations are available on the official S-DELI-Indigenous Hands YouTube channel. For further details on the conference, there is an official conference report on the S-DELI website. Finally, peer reviewed papers from the conference will be published on open access online portal (coming soon).

#IHAVAIC2021



# INDIGENOUS HANDS

**INDIGENOUS HANDS**

**The Mobile App**

Documenting, developing, and preserving indigenous sign languages of the world & promoting early access to sign language

**Coming to Google and Apple app stores in 2022**

# “My experience with the Beauty Beyond Speech internship has been educative and enlightening”

- Esther, BBS Graduate Ambassador

BBS has been an on-going brand of the S-DELI mission since 2017. Our research revealed that deaf schools all over Nigeria are experiencing high counts of sexual and domestic abuse cases. Since the beginning of the pandemic, global reports have unfortunately found an increase in abuse cases, with fewer numbers of reports from victims. In 2021, our BBS ambassadors conducted numerous school outreach programmes to raise awareness of domestic and sexual abuse amongst young girls and signpost them to individuals and services that can help support them.

Our Faces of BBS internship program was a success despite the challenges it faced. The BBS Ambassador team is made up of 4 deaf women who are survivors of sexual and domestic abuse. After being selected for a 1-year internship, they were trained for 3 weeks on how to become advocates against all forms of abuse against deaf girls and women. They started their campaign through skill acquisition and capacity building outreaches in various deaf communities. S-DELI are so proud to congratulate Esther Ogunrotimi and Tornubari Ereba who graduated in December 2021 after successfully completing the programme. All thanks to the Project Lead for BBS, Ms. Uchechi Opara (Opulence).

# Beauty Beyond Speech

S-DELI-Indigenous Hands are committed to doing our part to contribute towards the global campaign to end violence against women and promote girl education. Through our *Beauty Beyond Speech* (BBS) project, we seek to eradicate all forms of sexual and domestic abuse against deaf girls in Nigeria. By promoting their education and developing their skills, we empower young women and girls.

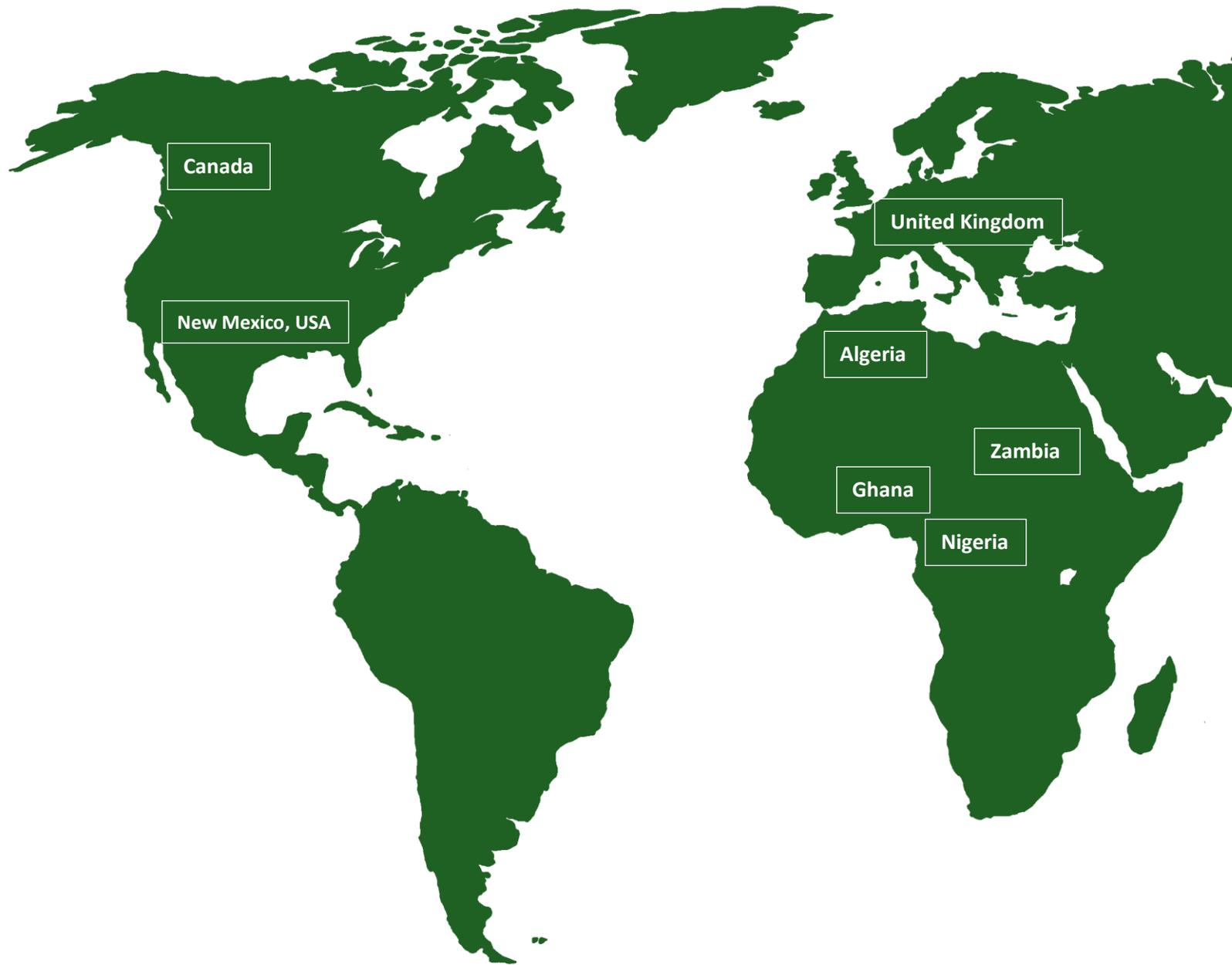
“The training instilled empowerment in me through enlightenment of my rights as an individual and woman with a disability”

- Tornubari, BBS Graduate Ambassador



Our ambassadors!





## S-DELI-Indigenous Hands Around the World

### Research

New Mexico, USA

Canada

Nigeria

Ghana

Zambia

### Operations

New Mexico, USA

Nigeria

United Kingdom

Algeria

### Community Outreach

Nigeria

Zambia

# Triple Action Project

‘Celebrating Thriving Deaf Communities’ &  
‘We Sign for Human Rights’

Human rights are basic rights and freedoms that belong to every citizen of the world. These are based on shared values like dignity, fairness, equality, respect and independence. They belong to all people, regardless of gender, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, language, or any other status such as disability and deafness.

However, due to societal prejudice and discrimination, deaf people’s rights are often overlooked or denied.

The International Week of Deaf is celebrated during the last full week of September (20<sup>th</sup>-26<sup>th</sup> September 2021). This week deaf communities and organisations all over the world gather to recognise and celebrate deaf cultures and languages at a local, national and international level. This year’s theme for the International Week of Deaf is ‘**Celebrating Thriving Deaf Communities**’. Within this week, the International Day of Sign Languages is also observed on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of September. The theme for this day was ‘**We Sign for Human Rights**’.

S-DELI’S Triple Action Project (**TAP**) is one of the biggest programmes of the year. Our dedication to deaf literacy and language acquisition for children sees that we also encompass the International Literacy Day (8<sup>th</sup> September 2021) in our outreach. TAP adopts a slightly different style from year to year and is designed in line with the theme of that year. The programme delivers both a virtual and in-person programme. This year’s virtual programme brought together the global S-DELI-Indigenous Hands community to discuss and advocate for the human rights of deaf communities. It featured video campaigns from team members, interviews with members of the deaf communities, symposium talks, presentations from special guests, unveiling of upcoming projects and musical performances. **The live programme took place on the official S-DELI YouTube channel and was well-attended and well-received by international audiences.** A million thanks to our Sign Language Interpreting department ably led by Ms. Blessing Ini for providing interpreting services for that programme and for all our programme for the year.

## [IN CASE YOU MISSED IT...](#)

TAP2021 is still available to watch on our YouTube channel as well as an official report on the S-DELI website.

## TAP2021 in Ogun State, Nigeria

This year’s TAP took place virtually on the international front and physically in **Ogun state, Nigeria**. anchored by deaf sign language teacher, Rebekah Akinpelu, S-DELI organised a **local seminar** to discuss signing for human rights and the need for Africans to embrace indigenous African sign languages. The purpose of the seminar was to enlighten the need to sign for human rights and to encourage the promotion and documentation of indigenous Nigerian sign languages in our deaf communities, to celebrate the International Day of Sign Languages with deaf children and adults alike, and to promote discourse on how deaf people can be encouraged to express themselves more in their indigenous sign languages whilst discouraging misconceptions regarding one’s indigenous language. Some of the points discussed were: **“We sign for the human right”, “The lack of linguistics and cognitive skills amongst deaf children”, “Sign language varieties in Africa”, “The lack of a recognized indigenous sign language in Nigeria despite being rich in several indigenous sign languages”, “The propagation of indigenous sign languages” and “The linguistic rights of an African child”**. The seminar experienced a fantastic turnout and was attended by school staff members, deaf students, deaf adults, sign language teachers and representatives of team S-DELI. The seminar was a success and was well-received by the local community. The seminar revealed excellent engagement with the themes discussed and participants connected with one another, exchanged knowledge and swapped experiences. **Participants expressed gratitude and passion for the S-DELI-Indigenous Hands vision**, and we are so grateful to all that attended. Many thanks to Rebekah for delivering the project.

# TAP 2021, Ogun State!



# My Hero Is You

The crux of our indigenous sign language documentation project came with the introduction of project **My Hero is You** – a project that translated into indigenous Nigerian signed languages, an international literacy book about Covid-19 for children around the world. The book “My Hero is You” has been translated into several spoken languages and a few mainstream signed languages, ours is the **first translation into indigenous signed language(s)**. While we still tout the success of that translation/documentation, we are eager to see it emerge as one of the contents of the Indigenous Hands SignApp. We extend our thanks to Godwin Adejoh for leading the amazing team working on the app. Team My Hero is You is made up of our five Deaf Signers, **Maurice, Festus, Lovina, Ifeanyi** and **Joshua** and Team S-DELI volunteer members, **Val, Olamide, Rebekah, Precious and Blessing**.

Maurice and Val!





**Team My Hero Is You 2021!**

# Our Stories



## Nelson's Testimony

My name is **Igelle Nelson Moses**, I am from Cross River state. I am the third son in a family of 7 and my family lives in Abuja, Nigeria. I became deaf at age 3, which resulted from a few days of sickness. I started learning and designing buildings at 19, motivated by a friend of my dad.

My dad is a mason, and my mom is a petty trader. **However, I was scared I wouldn't be able to pursue architecture as a career because I thought that a deaf person could not become an architect;** I hadn't seen a deaf architect or heard about one. My initial motivation came from my former teacher, Victor Emmanuel who continuously encouraged me to focus on the goal of becoming an architect. I did not know what it meant to be an architect, but he helped by explaining it to me, he said that a deaf person can equally become an architect, and this was a huge source of motivation for me.

When I was in the Junior Secondary School, Kuje, I had started designing different kinds of buildings and installing electricity in the designed paper-building. That time, I heard about AutoCAD, and I started looking for a professional AutoCAD software person to teach me how to do the software. I did not get much encouragement from my school, as the school kept telling me that I could not study architecture because I could not take science course. The school did not allow deaf students to take science subjects because the interpreting teachers could not interpret science subjects.

At some point, I fell very sick again and I could not go to school. For several months, I had a non-stop back ache, coming from several days of lifting bricks at building sites. I had followed my father to work because of my love for building and more so because I wanted to help with paying my school fees and paying for a private class on AutoCAD if I would get a tutor. It was at this time that Dr. Emma Asonye and his S-DELI team and Ann Swanson came to do a one-week free medical outreach at the Special School for the Deaf, Kuje and the Secondary School for the Deaf, Pasali. They saw one of my designed buildings in the principal's office, they were amazed, and they asked of the designer of the building. They sent for me and the next day, I came to the school with my father. At the end of that day, my hope of becoming an architect was reassured. I couldn't tell how joyful I felt from that day. Ms. Swanson immediately gave me the sum of N10,000 to go for an x-ray and other medical check-ups for my back pain and the S-DELI team promised to help me with my education and my ambition of becoming an architect.

Later on, after my secondary education, S-DELI got me a private tutor, bought me some science books in preparation for my Joint Admission and Matriculation Exam. My admission into Enugu State University of Science and Technology was like a miracle. With the help of Mrs. Uzoamaka Didiugwu, a staff of the University in charge of Deaf admission, I was admitted to the school to study architecture, although with no hope of how to continue for lack of financial support from my family. Again, team S-DELI stepped in, paying all my registration fees, tuition, including my housing, a new computer, a generator. Since then S-DELI through their foreign partners have been raising funds to support my education and very thankful to them. **Thank you, S-DELI, thank you, Ms. Suzie Olsen and others who have donated to my education.**

**When I got into the school, I was almost not allowed to continue with architecture because it was believed that I wouldn't make it.** They said that architecture is a difficult course for hearing students, how much more for a deaf student, who, in addition, reported to school late. With the intervention of team S-DELI and Ms. Didiugwu, I was allowed to continue. Everything was very confusing at first and my 100 level results were not very good, but **I'm quite happy that things have changed greatly,** and I have recorded a significant improvement in my results. **I am so very grateful to all that have played a role in bringing me to the point I am in my life today, I will not let you down, I promise. I hope to graduate with a great result and become an architect.**

# Nelson's architecture!



# Expanding the Mission: S-DELI & Zambian Deaf Society

A significant aspect of S-DELI-Indigenous Hands' work is our commitment to expanding our linguistic target audience. Our partnerships and collaborations with neighbouring African organisations for the deaf are irrefutably valuable, and we are so proud of our current and future relationships. This past year, a **Memorandum of Understanding** with the ZDS was signed on **June 12<sup>th</sup> 2021 at Lusaka, Zambia for the documentation of indigenous Zambian sign languages.**

We selected a vibrant team of 10 Deaf signers and sign language interpreters, who have been undergoing integral training and orientation in the sign language documentation process.

Today, we are working towards gathering the words and semantic fields that will be documented. The physical **documentation of indigenous Zambian languages** is proposed to begin following the launch of the Indigenous Hands SignApp. This is because we are eager to launch the app with the Nigerian sign language varieties as this will help guide the documentation process for the project in Zambia.

Throughout our endeavours. The development of this relationship is regarded as **one of our greatest achievements of 2021**; we are extremely proud what we have started, and **we are excited to see what will flourish.** We look forward to the emergence of this project, as it will embolden the establishment of S-DELI-Indigenous Hands in Zambia.

This past year, S-DELI team member Nakasela has been leading the enquiry into the registration of an international organisation in Zambia. **We extend a massive thank you to our own Nakasela and Mr. John Ndhlovu and our Zambian partners at the ZDS.**



The signing in Lukasa, Zambia!





# SPECIAL THANKS

## Team My Hero Is You

- Joshua Gyang Zi (Governor)
- Festus Zenda
- Ifeanyi Umah
- Maurice Henshaw
- Lovina Edem
- Olamide Fatosin
- Rebekah Akinpelu
- Blessing Ini
- Precious Ozoemena

## Team Admin

- Ezinne Emma-Asonye (Co-Founder)
- Oyinye Nwandikom (Head of Project, Nigeria)
- Sinmi Labisi (Organising Secretary)
- Olamide Fatosin (Content Developer)
- Valentine Douglas (Media Director)
- Adachinke Tiku (Financial Director)
- Paninga Muiliya (Social Media Coordinator)
- Uchenna Joseph Ibe (IT Director)
- Blessing Ini (Head of Sign Language Interpreting)
- Babalola Josephine (EA to the President)

## Our Collaborators and Supporters

- Africana Studies of University of New Mexico
- Nigeria Languages Project
- National Institute of Nigerian Languages
- First Love Assembly Nigeria
- African Union
- Emeka Offor
- Susie Olsen
- Carman Melendrez
- Nakasela Nachalwe
- Mr. John Ndhlovu
- Zambian Deaf Society