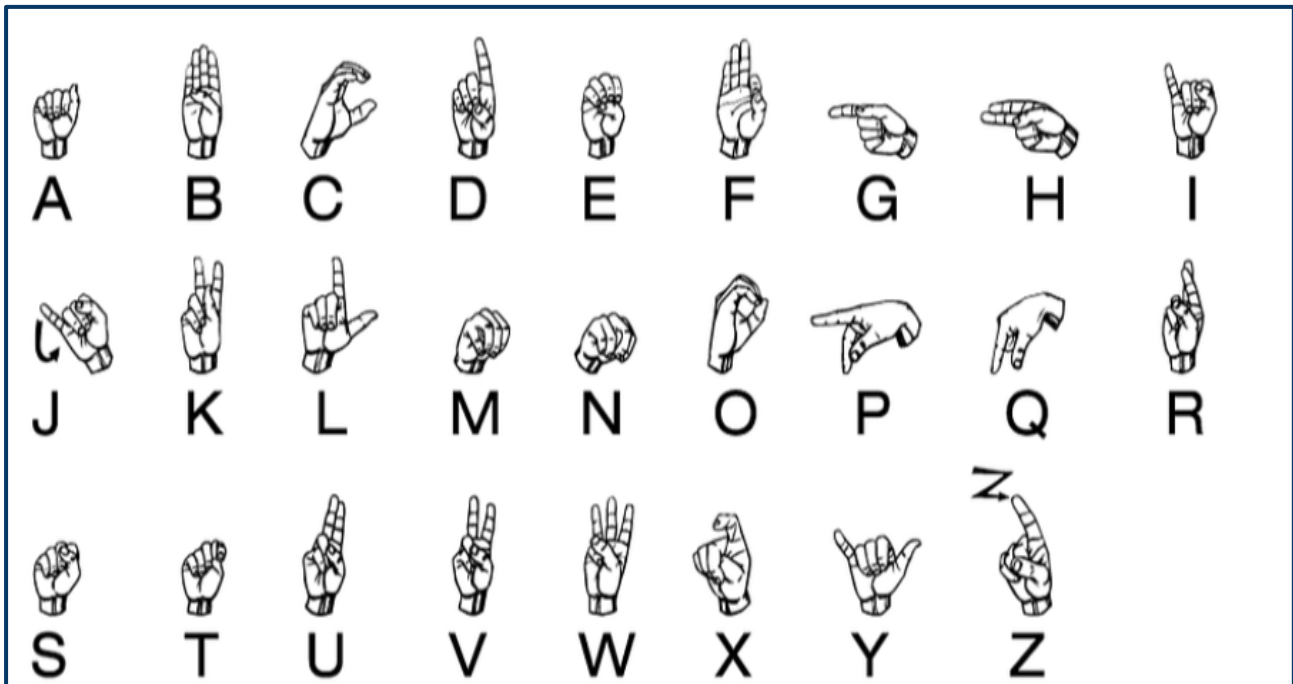




**USAID**  
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*The Kenya Sign Language Chart*

# KENYA

## PROMOTING DISABILITY INCLUSION BY PROVIDING TRAINING IN SIGN LANGUAGE

In 1997, USAID became one of the first bilateral development agencies in the world to adopt a policy on disabilities, which continues to guide the Agency’s efforts towards disability inclusion. In 2023, USAID released for public comment an updated DRAFT policy, “Nothing Without Us: USAID Disability Policy,” which incorporates decades of learnings, shares promising practices, and provides guidance to Agency staff on how best to ensure persons with disabilities can fully contribute and participate in society on an equitable basis with others. The USAID Kenya and East Africa (KEA) Mission aims to meet the Agency’s commitment to persons with disabilities by not only aligning its work with the DRAFT Policy but also with the Agency’s Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility (DEIA) Strategy, which aims to enhance diversity and ensure inclusion of marginalized populations within the Agency’s workforce, culture, policies, partnerships, processes, and programs.

As a testament to the KEA Mission’s disability goals and with funding from USAID’s Office of Civil Rights’ Disability Employment Division, USAID/KEA procured a local Kenya Sign Language (KSL) provider and offered KSL classes to interested Mission staff. The Mission aimed to ensure its staff could communicate with an incoming deaf staff member as well as with deaf stakeholders who take part in USAID’s programs. In addition, the offering of KSL at the Mission was intended to increase staffs’ cultural sensitivity and awareness of the deaf community’s unique culture and language and needs and experiences and contribute to a more inclusive and equitable Mission culture.

### KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

A total of 20 classes conducted.

At Least 50 Mission staff expressed interest in taking KSL and initially signed up for the trainings.

Out of the 50 staff who signed-up, 19 persons attended more than three classes.

The 10 participants who were interviewed after the course offerings expressed overall satisfaction with the training content.

## ABOUT THE COURSE

The KSL staff training program commenced in October 2022 and lasted four months. It combined in-person classes with asynchronous learning (at-home video lessons) and was led by deaf Kenyans employed by a Kenyan media company. Depending on an individual's schedule, a staff member could take the course on a Monday or a Friday each week, as the same lesson was offered twice per week. This flexibility enabled staff members to make up for missed lessons whenever necessary. The instructor taught a structured curriculum, which began with general greetings and included county names, development terms, and much more. The initial high level of staff interest in the course reflected a strong commitment by staff to not only improve their own knowledge of Sign Language but to improve the Mission's communications with Kenya's deaf community.

## LESSONS LEARNED

The Mission gained valuable insights from this pilot initiative and plans to incorporate these lessons into future iterations of KSL offerings for Mission staff.

- Staffs' demanding workloads hindered many staffs' abilities to participate each week in KSL classes. As a result, some staff fell behind in lessons and dropped out midway.
- Going forward, the Mission will select a vendor that is staffed and operated by Deaf Kenyans, thus ensuring both adherence to ethical standards and authentic training in KSL and in Kenyan Deaf culture.
- The Mission used a variety of training approaches: 1) in class training, with the same curriculum offered twice a week; 2) short video clips; and 3) dedicated training for the Mission's Front Office. However, given the high level of staff drop-outs due to competing meetings and priorities, in the future, the Mission will diversify its training approaches even further to include short trainings at all staff meetings, one-on-one trainings for staff interested in deepening their skills or reviewing what they learned in class, and trainings at office-specific meetings.
- In addition, it became apparent that only through repetition and continued practice can staff truly learn new language skills. With Front Office support, in the future, Mission staff will do its best to practice KSL at every opportunity including at all staff meetings and office level meetings, over coffee, on the Mission's video screens, and by the water cooler.
- It is also critical that Mission leadership set an example for the rest of the Mission. Front Office staff need to use Sign Language as much as possible and in as many settings as is feasible (i.e., all staff meetings, in the hallways, when greeting colleagues, etc.) Mission staff will likely follow their lead and mimic their behaviors.
- In addition, the Mission will seek immediate feedback from participants after each lesson, in an effort to shape next week's classes.



*“I have always been interested in learning sign language, so I took the opportunity and joined the KSL class. I was recently served by a waiter who was deaf. It was so nice to be able to communicate with him; he was so happy!”*

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