



Sign Language Work

AIM OF SIGN LANGUAGE WORK

- Linguistic awareness of deaf community
- Create opportunities for deaf people to learn about linguistics and researchh methods
- Capacity of deaf community is strenghtened
- Deaf community is empowered by the skills they have gotten



SIGN LANGUAGE WORK

EMPOWERMENT OF DEAF COMMUNITY

MORE THAN A SIGN LANGUAGE
DICTIONARY

COMMUNITY OWNERSHIP:
DEAF COMMUNITY OWNS SIGN LANGUAGE

PROMOTE LINGUISTIC AND
HUMAN DEAF RIGHTS

CREATE OPPORTUNITIES FOR DEAF PEOPLE TO
LEARN NEW METHODS AND SKILLS

TRAINING FOR COMMUNITY MEMBERS

MORE THAN A SIGN LANGUAGE
DICTIONARY

RECOGNITION OF SIGN LANGUAGE

LANGUAGE DOCUMENTATION AND DESCRIPTION

PROMOTE LINGUISTIC AND HUMAN DEAF RIGHTS

TOOL FOR LOBBYING



SIGN LANGUAGE WORK

SIGN LANGUAGE WORK



GOVERNMENTAL OR LOCAL RECOGNITION OF
SIGN LANGUAGE

SIGN LANGUAGE RESEARCH



TOOLS FOR LOBBYING FOR THE LEGAL
RECOGNITION OF SIGN LANGUAGE AND
OTHER LEGISLATION FOR DEAF PEOPLE



SIGN LANGUAGE WORK CAN CONSIST OF

- Language documentation and basic sign language research
- Application of the research results into dictionary work or other kind of publications, like teaching materials
- Linguistic awareness training for the deaf community
- Training in sign language structure and grammar for sign language interpreter students
- Training deaf people in how to teach sign language as a foreign language to hearing people.
- Linguistic advocacy work and language status planning for legal recognition of sign language and for improving existing legislation
- Establishing contacts to universities and promoting research in sign language

Interpreter training



Deaf education

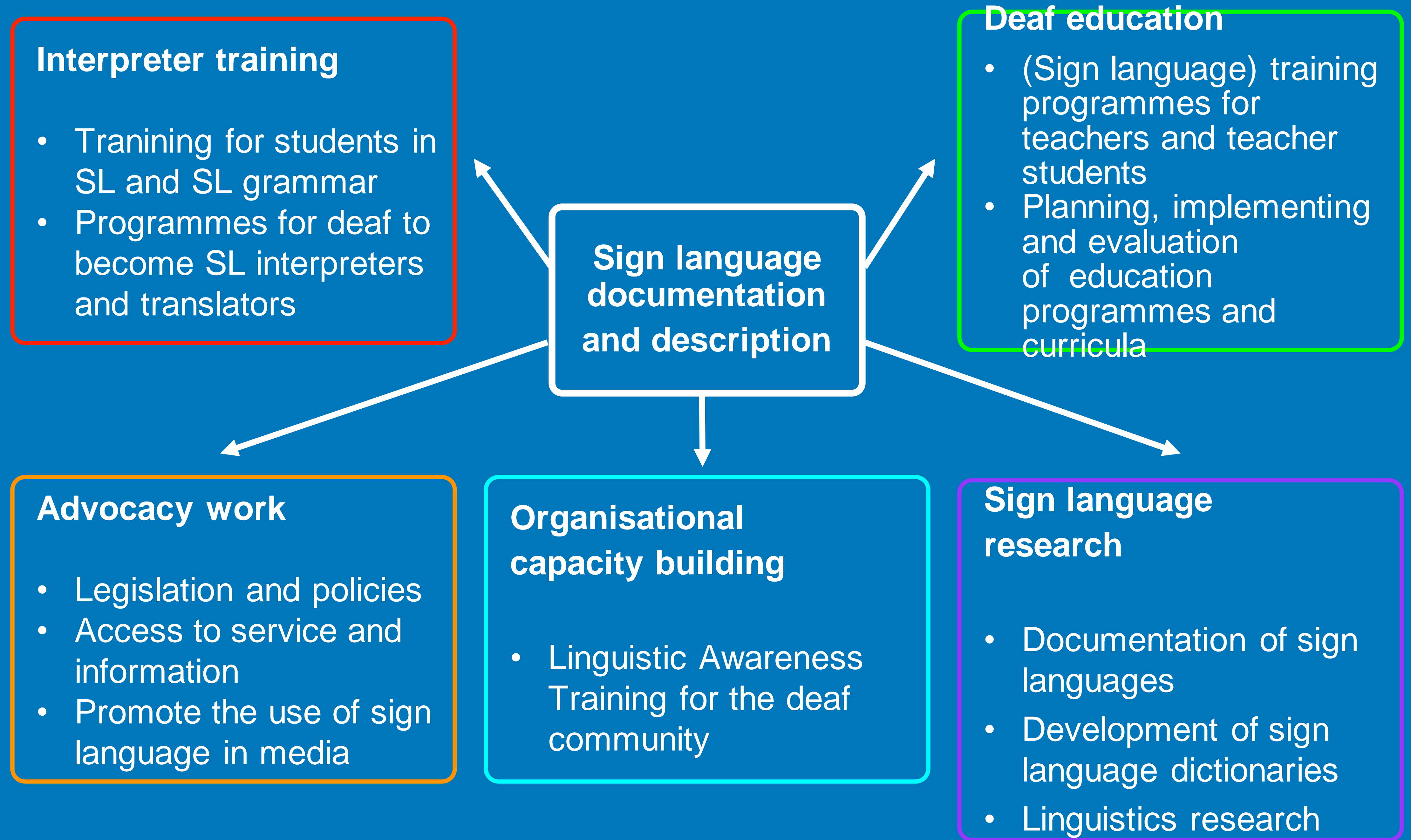


Sign language documentation and description



Advocacy work

Organisational capacity building



Interpreter training

- Training in sign language structure and use

Advocacy work

- Legislation and policies
- Access to service and information
- Promote the use of sign language in media

Sign language documentation and description

- Basic training in linguistics
- Dictionary work
- Grammar
- Development of teaching materials

Deaf education

- Sign language training programmes for teachers and teacher students
- Planning, implementing and evaluation of education programmes and curricula

Organisational capacity building

- Linguistic awareness training for the deaf community

Figure 1. Sign language documentation and description as the basis for language vitalization actions.

SHORT- AND LONG-TERM GOALS

Short-term goals (3 years)

- Raise linguistic awareness
- Start sign language documentation and research
- Share information about SLW
- Develop skills for lobbying for human and linguistic rights

Long-term goals (10-20 years)

- Realization of human rights
- Legal recognition of SL
- Positive changes in access to society
- Sign language interpreter funding
- Information in sign language provided by government
- Availability of bilingual education (using sign language)
- Sign language research is ongoing and conducted at university level
- Deaf community is empowered and has increased skills and knowledge

SIGN LANGUAGE WORK TAKES TIME

- SIGN LANGUAGE WORK CANNOT BE COMPLETED IN A SHORT TIME
- IT REQUIRES PATIENCE AND TAKES SEVERAL YEARS



SIGN LANGUAGE WORK AND DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION

EMPOWERING DEAF COMMUNITY IN DEVELOPING COUNTRY

STEP 1: FIND A PARTNER: NATIONAL DEAF ASSOCIATION OR LOCAL DEAF CLUB

STEP 2: CAPACITY BUILDING OF DEAF ORGANISATION – ORGANISATIONAL SUPPORT

STEP 3: START SIGN LANGUAGE WORK

STEP 4: TRAINING IN SIGN LANGUAGE RESEARCH, HUMAN RIGHTS, ADVOCACY

STEP 5: SIGN LANGUAGE INTERPRETER TRAINING PROGRAMS



DEAF-LED APPROACH

- STAFF MEMBERS AND WORKING GROUP WHO CONDUCT SIGN LANGUAGE WORK SHOULD BE DEAF
- THE OWNERSHIP OF SIGN LANGUAGE NEEDS TO STAY WITH DEAF COMMUNITY
- EMPOWERS DEAF INDIVIDUALS AND DEAF COMMUNITY AS DEAF PEOPLE BECOME EXPERTS ON SIGN LANGUAGE



- DO NOT EMPLOY HEARING PEOPLE AS THEY MIGHT DOMINATE THE PROCESS AND MIGHT LEAD DEAF PEOPLE ASSUMING THE PASSIVE ROLE
- HEARING PEOPLE CAN BE INCLUDED IN A LATER STAGE FOR SPECIFIC TASKS REQUIRING COMPETENCE IN SIGN LANGUAGE AND WRITTEN LANGUAGE (IF NO BILINGUAL DEAF PEOPLE AVAILABLE)



DEAF-LED APPROACH

- CONDUCT SIGN LANGUAGE WORK IN A CLOSE COOPERATION WITH LOCAL DEAF COMMUNITY
- FIND A METHOD THAT FITS YOUR DEAF COMMUNITY AND CULTURE



- SIGN LANGUAGE WORK SHOULD NOT BE CONDUCTED IN ISOLATION BY FEW INDIVIDUALS
- ALL ACTIVITIES AND METHODS CANNOT AND SHOULD NOT BE APPLIED IN THE SAME WAY TO ANY DEAF COMMUNITY IN THE WORLD.



COLONIALISM

- Cultural or linguistic influence from a dominant culture -> leads to replacement of indigenous languages or cultural practices
- Deaf community must be aware of international influence and learn how to resist them



ROLE OF INTERNATIONAL ADVISOR

Adopt a background role: Advises instead of doing the work

Must learn local sign language and become accustomed to local culture



ADVISOR ADVISES

TRAINEES LEARN HOW TO IMPLEMENT THE WORK

SUSTAINABLE CAPACITY

BE AWARE

- Do not copy and paste methods and results directly from one country to another
- You should have a sign language linguistic involved in collecting, analysing and describing the sign data
- The work should be conducted by the local deaf people themselves – if you have an international advisor or partner, they should not do the work
- International advisor and you as deaf association should respect your local sign language(s) and culture

LANGUAGE PLANNING

1. ATTITUDE PLANNING

2. CORPUS PLANNING

3. STATUS PLANNING

4. ACQUISITION PLANNING



THERE IS NO STRICT ORDER. THE ACTIVITIES SHOULD SHIFT OVER TIME WITH THE NEEDS OF THE DEAF COMMUNITY.

LANGUAGE PLANNING

1. ATTITUDE PLANNING

- Raising linguistic awareness of deaf community members
- Sharing linguistic information with hearing people and replace misconceptions with accurate information about sign languages
- Example: Spoken and signed languages are equal, there are many sign languages in the world

2. CORPUS PLANNING

- Sign language documentation, research and description

3. STATUS PLANNING

- Lobbying for legal recognition of SL
- Use of SL as a language of instruction within deaf education
- SL in media (TV, internet)

4. ACQUISITION PLANNING

- Activities that increase the number of SL users
- Other groups that need sign language skills: Deaf persons not being exposed to SL before, hearing parents of deaf children, SLI, hearing teachers



UNIFICATION / STANDARDISATION

Dictionary: Do not choose only one variant for each spoken language word

Richness of expression and linguistic variation in SL should be respected

Foreign SL should not be incorporated to replace an existing SL

Aim of SLW: Document SL used by a community, not to unify different SL or to produce a single standard alternative to different variants

Do not standardise SL by selecting and promoting single variant. You should promote linguistic variation and respect different variants



STARTING SIGN LANGUAGE WORK

- COMMUNITY BASED APPROACH:
INCLUDE DEAF COMMUNITY
- DEAF-LED APPROACH: DEAF PEOPLE DO
THE WORK



BEFORE STARTING SIGN LANGUAGE WORK

- The priorities made by the deaf community
- Situation of the deaf community
- The linguistic situation of the country – including the status and use of sign language
- The wider social context in the country
- The country's history and background
- National legislation and policies
- The resources available (both human, financial and time)

→ MAKING A LANGUAGE STRATEGY



STEPS TO CONDUCT SLW

1

Involve deaf community

2

Recruit a linguistic advisor

3

Conduct a survey

4

Plan the sign language work

5

Recruit staff of sign language work

6

Share information about SLW

7

Start sign language documentation and research

8

Language description

9

Provide trainings

10

Language planning

1. INVOLVE THE DEAF COMMUNITY

- Sign Language Work must be conducted by the deaf community



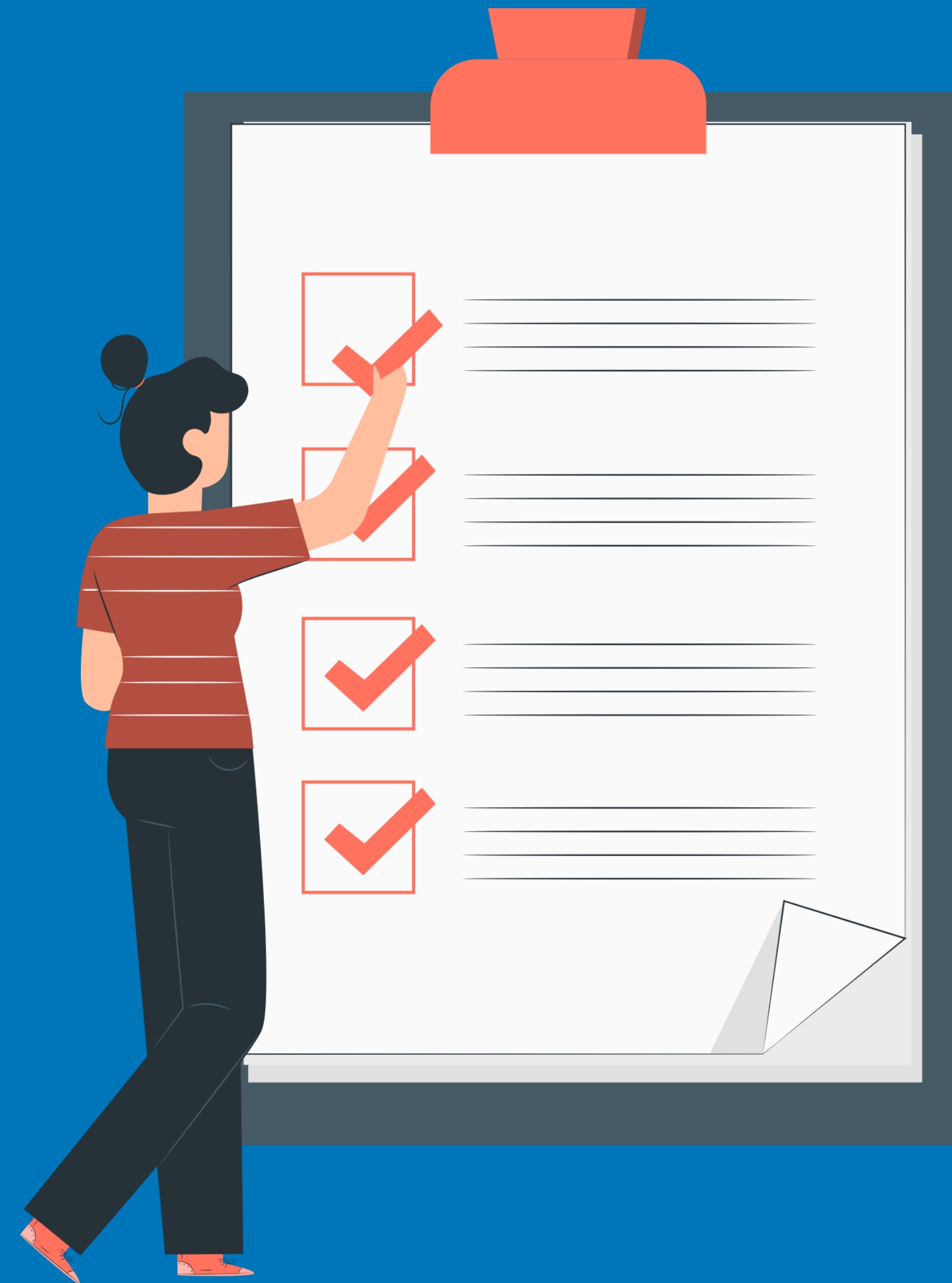
2. RECRUIT A LINGUISTIC ADVISOR

- If you do not have suitable trained sign language linguistics in your country, you can appoint one from another country
- The linguistic advisor should be qualified for the task
- The advisor should become familiar with local sign language and situation of the deaf community



3. CONDUCT A SURVEY

- If you do not have suitable trained sign language linguistics in your country, you can appoint one from another country
- The linguistic advisor should be qualified for the task
- The advisor should become familiar with local sign language and situation of the deaf community



4. PLAN SIGN LANGUAGE WORK

- Develop an action plan for sign language work based on the data collected through a survey.
- Prioritise Sign Language Work based on the needs identified through the analysis
- Discuss and decide together the priorities and goals of Sign Language Work
- Make a timetable



5. RECRUIT STAFF

- This is one of the top priorities in the first phase of Sign Language Work
- Identify deaf people who are fluent signers with strong linguistic intuition, has good cultural knowledge and are actively involved in local deaf community
- Do not employ hearing people as sign language work staff or working group members



6. SHARE INFORMATION ABOUT SLW

- Information must be actively shared with the deaf community
- Do not keep information with a restricted group of deaf individuals
- Deliver information to stakeholders, such as governmental bodies and institutions, disability organisations, deaf schools, interpreters and hearing family members



7. SIGN LANGUAGE DOCUMENTATION AND RESEARCH

1. Deaf staff members should receive basic linguistic training
 - Learn about sign language structure & grammar, how to conduct research and document sign language
 - SLW is conducted by a team of 2-3 deaf staff members
2. Sign language documentation
 - Collect sign language data by filming the deaf community members
 - Linguistic findings are processed with the working group
3. Establish sign language working group
 - Should consist of representatives of deaf community, 10-15 signers
 - Gender balance, represent different ages, ethnicities, religions, ethnographical locations
 - They meet on a regular basis (eg. weekends)



8. LANGUAGE DESCRIPTION (DICTIONARY)

- Sign language documentation and research
 - Staff should learn how to organise collected linguistic information in sign files
 - How to note down the form of the sign and information about the signer
 - Signs should be arranged in groups
- Discuss collected and analysed material
- Re-film the signs for the dictionary



9. PROVIDE TRAININGS: CAPACITY BUILDING

1. Sign language work staff
 - Recruited for the day-to-day work
2. Sign language working group
 - Volunteer members representing the deaf community
3. Hearing staff
 - From the deaf organisations and other hearing people who work closely with the deaf community

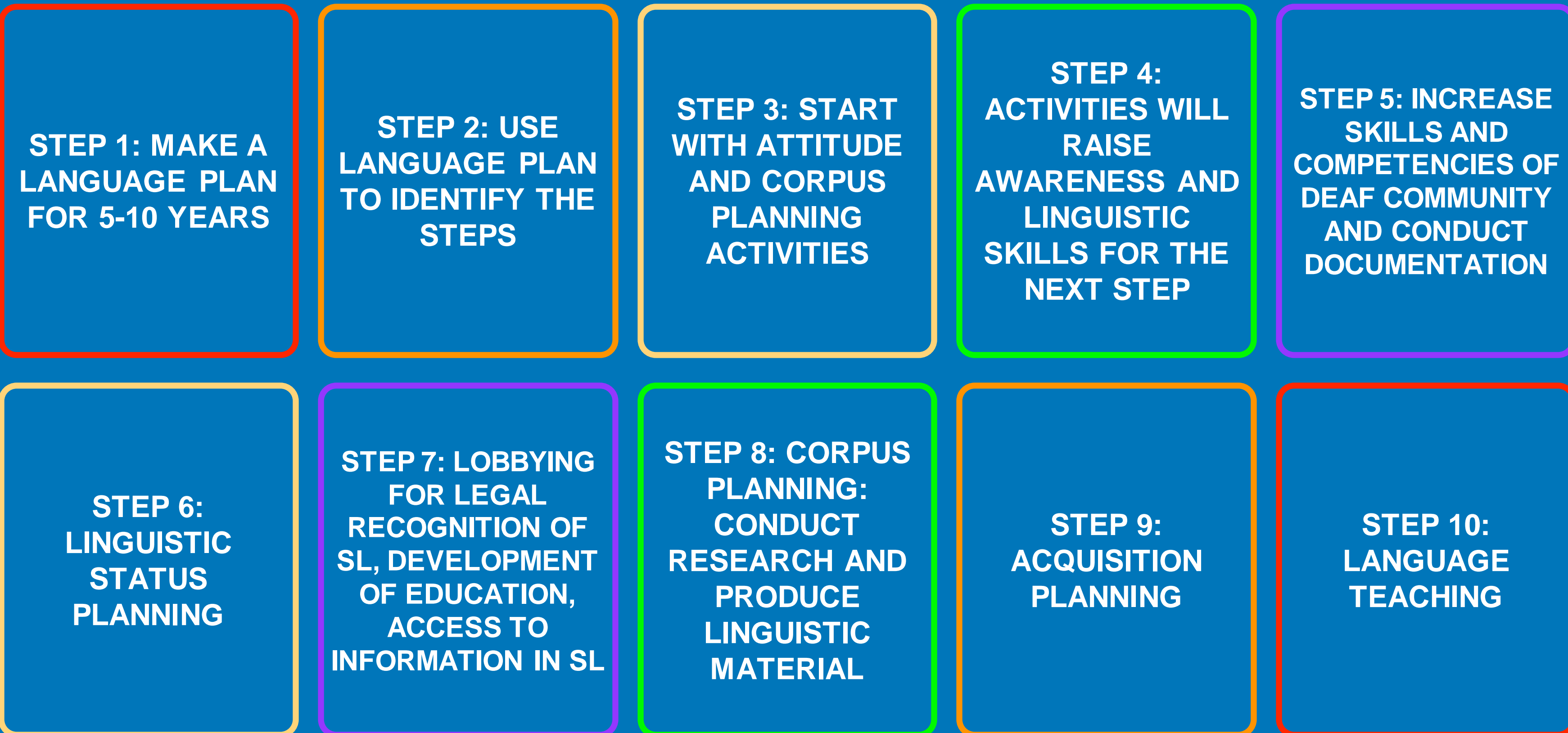
1. Sign Language Work training
 - Deaf awareness
 - Basic sign language linguistics
 - Sign Language Work documentation
 - Training on how to train (pedagogy training)
2. Human and linguistic rights advocacy
3. Lobbying activities
 - Legal recognition of SL
 - Development of deaf education
 - Lobbying for the government

9. PROVIDE TRAININGS: TRAINING METHOD

- Over time, advisor should withdraw from the role of trainer and give responsibility to the sign language work staff
- Training should be provided as capacity building – skills are shared in a sustainable way
- Sign Language Work may end if people who have been trained, unexpectedly resign
- Training should not be limited to only few individuals. Staff should pass their learning, knowledge and skills to the working group
- Establish Training of Trainers (ToT)



10. LANGUAGE PLANNING



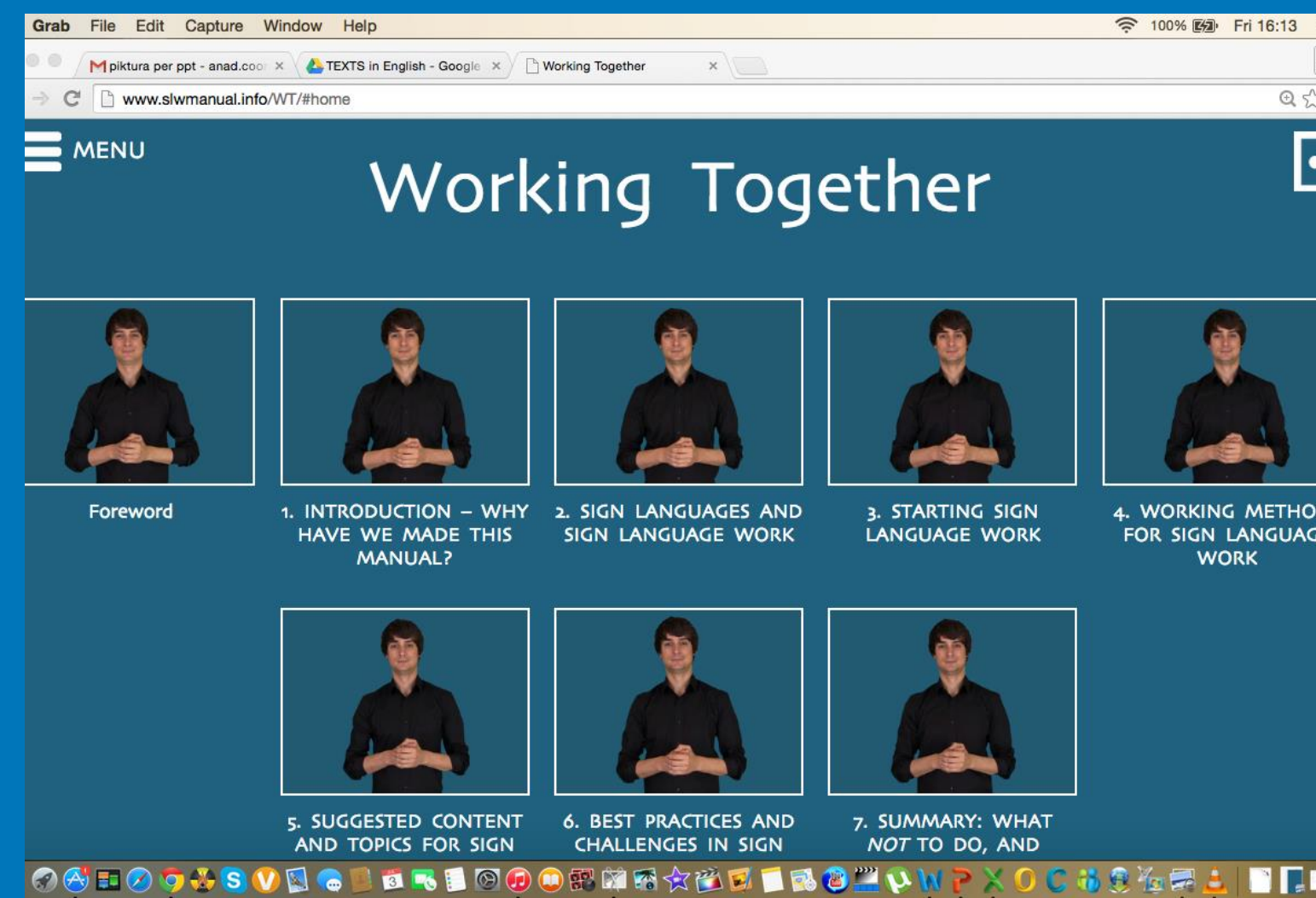
CHALLENGES IN SIGN LANGUAGE WORK

- Realistic planning
- Time management
 - A few years is a short time for Sign Language Work
 - Learning totally new concepts takes time
 - There is a limit to what you can learn at one time
- Cultural differences
- How to commit the working group members / deaf people to a long-term work on voluntary basis?



WORKING TOGETHER

Manual for Sign Language Work
within Development Cooperation



www.slwmanual.info

THE SEVEN CHAPTERS OF THE MANUAL

1. Introduction – framework, target groups, and key messages
2. Basic information on sign languages and Sign Language Work
3. Starting Sign Language Work – initial survey and planning of the work
4. Elements needed for Sign Language Work & working methods
5. Topics for Sign Language Work training
6. Best practices and challenges – e.g. concerning communication, involving the Deaf Community, and implementation of the work in practice
7. Summary “Do not” – common basic mistakes that should be avoided