



**LIGHT**  
FOR THE WORLD



**POLICY**

# Partnerships with Disabled People's Organisations



## Global situation

Around 15% of the global population are people with disabilities – 19.2% women and 12% men respectively – and in low-income countries the percentage is as high as 18%. With just over one billion people with disabilities and the still prevailing issues of discrimination and invisibility, it is evident that a strong representation of people with disabilities is needed.

The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) introduced a paradigm shift in thinking around women and men, girls and boys with disabilities<sup>1</sup> in human rights and development. Contrary to the previously dominant charity and medical models of disability<sup>2</sup>, the CRPD recognises persons with disabilities as owners of rights who can hold duty bearers accountable.

Accordingly, Art. 4.3. of the CRPD states: “In the development and implementation of legislation and policies to implement the present Convention, and in other decision-making processes concerning issues relating to persons with disabilities, States Parties shall closely consult

with and actively involve persons with disabilities, including children with disabilities, through their representative organisations.” Article 32 further states that all international cooperation efforts should be inclusive of and accessible to persons with disabilities.

These “representative organisations” are further defined by the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities as “(...) organisations of persons with disabilities [that are] rooted, committed to and fully respect the principles and rights recognised in the Convention. They can only be those that are led, directed and governed by persons with disabilities.” (CRPD Committee GC 7, para. 11)

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development<sup>3</sup> with its core principle “leave no one behind” adopts participation and inclusion as indispensable elements in its implementation and monitoring as well.

Participation as one of the key elements of the rights-based approach means ensuring that stakeholders<sup>4</sup> have genuine ownership and control in all phases of the programming

1 In most of our communication we use the term ‘persons with disabilities’ as derived from the CRPD. This includes women and men, girls and boys with disabilities, but we are also mindful of the important roles of the surrounding families and communities, and especially of caretakers, often the mothers.

2 These models portrayed persons with disabilities as objects and recipients of aid and services.

3 <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org>

4 Everyone, including children, older persons, members of ethnic minorities, indigenous peoples, and women and men with disabilities.

cycle: assessment, analysis, planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. That definition, especially when applied together with the principles of non-discrimination and inclusion, is in line with the CRPD and with the slogan of the disability movement: "Nothing about us without us".

Against this background of human rights and development, participation of people with disabilities becomes increasingly relevant for the whole development community; implementing and funding partners alike. The general obligation to meaningfully engage with organisations of persons with disabilities<sup>5</sup> is progressively recognised by some major funding partners; therefore it is not only a human rights obligation but increasingly a requirement from funding partners such as the Department for International Development, United Kingdom (DFID) or

5 Usually referred to as DPOs – Disabled People's Organisations. The term will probably soon be replaced with OPDs – Organisations of Persons with Disabilities, to reflect the language of the CRPD. As soon as organisations like IDA change their language we will do so as well.

the Department for Foreign Affairs and Trade, Australia (DFAT).

Regardless of the aforementioned rationale for DPO participation, DPOs encounter numerous challenges in their recognition as stakeholders and as part of broader civil society in Light for the World's programme countries. Their legal status, their organisational and financial capacities and political or power-related issues may also hinder DPO participation. Working with DPOs therefore requires awareness about these issues and proactive strategies to overcome challenges and ensure that participation is meaningful and empowerment a concrete action point.

Light for the World's Policy on Partnership in Programmes provides the broader framework. It describes Light for the World's values and principles, types of partnerships, the approach of working together and the life cycle of partnerships. This policy on DPOs deepens the specifics of working jointly with DPOs.

## Our approach

**The objective of Light for the World is an inclusive society where no one is left behind.**

Light for the World's Theory of Change<sup>6</sup> includes the empowerment of women and men, girls and boys with disabilities as well as their involvement in all development programmes as building blocks for an inclusive society. At the same time, Light for the World aims to be an inclusive organisation to ensure that we do not only preach inclusion, but actively practice it.

Strong DPOs are crucial for the empowerment of women and men, girls and boys with disabilities and in making their voices and interests heard. Their active participation in policy and programme development and in the politics that

shape our societies contributes to the removal of social, physical, communication, legal, and institutional barriers.

Accordingly, supporting DPOs in their capacity to participate in decision-making is an important part of our commitment to the rights of women and men, girls and boys with disabilities and to inclusive development in general.

**Light for the World's work with DPOs:**

**Light for the World's support of and partnerships with DPOs function in different ways and on different, often corresponding, levels:**

- in programme/implementation partnerships;
- by sharing and amplifying their messages through our communication channels;
- by providing access to networks;

6 See Strategic Framework 2015-2020: <https://www.light-for-the-world.org/light-world-strategic-framework-2015-2020>

- by encouraging and supporting other programme/ implementation partners to work with DPOs;
- by supporting, enabling and requesting DPO participation, inclusivity and representation in consultations, including our own strategic development, and events, as well as promoting an enabling and accessible policy environment;
- through strategic partnerships with DPOs and DPO umbrella organisations.

As a ground rule we seek to work with organisations as opposed to individuals, to ensure fair representation and as a contribution to sustainability and the transfer of skills.

#### Levels of DPO partnerships and roles of Light for the World

DPOs are highly diverse in their mandates and levels of operation as well as in their constituencies and memberships. These different identities must be considered when entering into a partnership. The Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities provides a comprehensive list of different DPOs.<sup>7</sup> With its extensive definition in mind, Light for the World understands DPOs as those organisations that are governed, led and directed predominantly – i.e. more than half of their membership – by women and men with disabilities and/or their families.

#### Some typical examples of DPOs and how Light for the World works with them:

##### **Grassroots and peer initiatives, self-help groups at community level**

These organisations are linked to their communities and have the highest credibility in claiming their rights at a local level. To reach the poorest and most excluded people in our mandate areas, we support the creation and capacity development of DPOs at grassroots level and reach out to existing initiatives. Light for the World does not directly partner with grassroots DPOs but has a responsibility to

7 CRPD Committee, General Comment No. 7, para. 12 [https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/\\_layouts/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CRPD/C/GC/7&Lang=en](https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CRPD/C/GC/7&Lang=en)

ensure that our local partner organisations work with, understand and support the role of DPOs in changing community attitudes and practices. Support on this level is an integral part of community-based programmes and includes capacity and skills development, ensuring participation in decision-making and overall visibility of DPOs.

##### **Member-based DPOs**

Member- and sector-based organisations include organisations specifically established by women and men who are deaf, blind or have physical disabilities, to mention just a few. They could also be organisations of young people with disabilities or of women with disabilities. Established by persons with disabilities directly<sup>8</sup>, these organisations are strongly recognised by their community. Light for the World’s role in partnering with member-based DPOs includes the strengthening of their representation, governance structure, and support for their networking capacities. Light for the World promotes the inclusion of members in remote and rural areas, individuals of different age and with different social backgrounds, to make sure that these groups are not left out and that representation is not limited to elite groups in urban areas. Resources can include funding and/or providing expertise (by our country offices, partner organisations or consultants) for specific activities or capacity development and training.

##### **Federations, networks, coalitions**

Networks of DPOs working together for the rights of all persons with disabilities are an important force. Their influence on public awareness, politics, policy development and standard setting can be significant.

#### Light for the World partners with federations, networks and coalitions by

- facilitating capacity development for advocacy and policy work;

8 In some cases also by parents and family members, for example of people with intellectual disabilities.

- connecting them to experts familiar with relevant policy frameworks and local contexts;
- supporting their programmes and initiatives, such as campaigns, conferences or training, and enabling their participation in relevant fora.

Light for the World might also proactively support the creation of networks, e.g. coalitions to monitor the implementation of the CRPD in countries. Besides the provision of resources needed in the aforementioned areas,

Light for the World supports access to and the creation of awareness raising and advocacy material. Federations, networks and coalitions with strong organisational structures and clear strategic plans can also become strategic partners, with implications for core-funding and longer-term partnerships.

At a regional and global level, we work strategically with DPO umbrella organisations such as the International Disability Alliance or the African Disability Forum.

## Implementation: Working with DPOs in Light for the World mandate areas and communications

### Communications and awareness raising

Amplifying the voice of partners, including DPOs, and connecting with them online and offline is a key part of Light for the World's overall communications strategy. Light for the World seeks to communicate partnerships with DPOs in a way that honours the "Nothing about us without us" principle. We make our partners as visible as possible, while also clearly respecting their rights: We do not speak on behalf of persons with disabilities, because Light for the World is not a representative body of persons with disabilities. Nonetheless, we are committed to speaking out for rights and call for full inclusion and accessibility within society. Fundraising requirements must always be diligently checked against this principled approach.

At the same time, DPO partners are requested to communicate their collaboration with Light for the World in their media and Public Relations activities. Light for the World can assist these activities through communications training, pooling of stories, pictures and videos, and by sharing content on our media channels.

### Rights and Advocacy

As stated in the CRPD and in the CRPD Committee's General Comment No. 7, DPOs are crucial stakeholders in any decision-making process that concerns persons with disabilities. In the rights and advocacy work of Light for the World, empowerment of DPOs from community level to

international level is part of our targets, particularly through the provision of capacity development support.

#### In practice this means that we

- build partnerships with DPOs and their umbrella organisations, including with global and regional networks such as the International Disability Alliance (IDA), the African Disability Forum or the European Disability Forum;
- facilitate DPO participation in relevant decision-making and awareness raising;
- support DPOs/networks in the implementation of their strategic priorities;
- support training and capacity development of DPOs, for example the training cycle BRIDGE9, coordinated by IDA and the International Disability and Development Consortium (IDDC).

### Eye Health

In general, eye health interventions focus on preventive, curative and surgical action where the role of DPOs is rather limited. However, in the area of prevention of blindness, school eye health and advocacy for inclusion and

9 BRIDGE is a training initiative by the International Disability and Development Consortium and the International Disability Alliance to develop capacities of DPO representatives for CRPD and SDG work. <https://www.internationaldisabilityalliance.org/building-success-bridge-crpd-sdg>

accessibility of services, DPOs are important partners. For example, in school eye health, members of DPOs (associations of blind and partially sighted people, amongst others) can help raise awareness on how to avoid loss of vision, and advocate reliable, fully accessible services for all.

DPOs can also be a point of reference for people with irreversible vision loss to receive rehabilitation and services such as mobility training, assistive devices or technology.

### **Inclusive Education**

DPOs can be important allies to promote inclusive schools and education in line with the CRPD. This requires capacity building to develop a clear understanding about inclusive education and how the education systems work in general. Also, some DPOs and individuals are critical towards inclusive education, especially those who have experienced educational settings that were promoted as inclusive, but were not.

When engaging DPOs in inclusive educational advocacy and programmes, capacity building on education sector planning, monitoring and keeping authorities accountable, inclusive education concepts are clearly needed.

Working with parent groups, and especially with parents of children with disabilities is crucial too: Parents and families are the ones making decisions about education and seeing first-hand what difference inclusive settings make for a child's development. DPO members who are successful in their chosen careers can also serve as role models for future generations of learners. At a local level and beyond, they can help raise awareness of the importance of education for girls and boys with disabilities.

### **Disability Inclusion in Community Development**

The roles of DPOs in community-level programmes, especially in Disability Inclusion in Community Development (DICD), are manifold:

DPOs can engage in awareness raising and advocacy around DICD and services. They help identify target groups/ areas and beneficiaries. They also play an important role in planning, monitoring and evaluation of DICD programmes and in some cases can act as implementing partners of

DICD programmes.

On the other hand, DICD and other community programmes often help to establish DPOs at local/ community level where no such organisations had existed before. This is crucially important to increase the visibility and participation of children and adults with disabilities in their communities and towards decision makers. When DPOs are newly formed, sustainable creation is important from the start in order to prevent DPOs disappearing again, once a certain DICD programme or funding has ended. Grassroots-level DPOs, which function as a disseminator for their members' interests at the immediate community level, are often still weak in their organisational capacities. DICD programmes and other NGO partners can take on a mentoring and training role to help forge connections, develop structures and support links to networks and higher levels.

### **Livelihood and inclusive economic development**

DPOs and their members in rural and poorer regions are particularly at risk of poverty and often lack income opportunities. Therefore, DPOs often create their own support mechanisms such as saving groups, cooperatives, and organising market stalls to sell their products and small businesses.

At the same time, DPOs play a crucial role in inclusive economic empowerment programmes. As mainstream actors are transforming their programmes to become more inclusive, DPOs can play a key role in identifying and mobilising women and men, girls and boys with disabilities to access these programmes. DPOs can furthermore play an important role in assessing the effectiveness of the inclusion process and effectively act as inclusion facilitators. DPOs are also important advocates for social protection services, and ensuring that existing programmes are accessible to people with disabilities.

### **Disability inclusive development cooperation**

DPOs have a vital role in pushing for inclusive policies and development programmes. As explained above, this can happen through joint advocacy work with DICD and other partners or by their participation in the design, monitoring

and evaluation of disability inclusive programmes. DPOs are also potential implementing partners, coordinators of networks or trainers in inclusive development programmes. Light for the World and partners offer training to NGOs to mainstream disability in international development and humanitarian aid. Employing trainers with disabilities<sup>10</sup> and inclusion facilitators has proven effective, as trainees tend to perceive the training as more practical and authentic. At Light for the World, we are committed to promoting

<sup>10</sup> Keeping in mind that not everybody is automatically a good trainer and that skills development might be needed to build up trainer/facilitator capacities

the employment of trainers with disabilities and DPOs as inclusion facilitators. Once the targeted programme has become inclusive, DPOs play an important role in connecting beneficiaries with disabilities to the services/programme, thereby also confirming the demand for inclusion.

### Life cycle of partnerships

The Light for the World Policy on Partnerships in Programmes defines the life cycle of partnerships and refers to the corresponding tools and agreements. For all details, please refer to this policy.

## Conclusion and summary

Light for the World works towards an inclusive society in which persons with disabilities have a decent life, participate equally in society, have full access to their rights and where no one is left behind.

Light for the World's Theory of Change includes the empowerment of women and men, girls and boys with disabilities as well as the involvement of persons with disabilities in all development programmes as building blocks for an inclusive society. At the same time, Light for the World aims to be an inclusive organisation to ensure that we do not only preach inclusion, but actively practice it. When looking at both international frameworks such as the CRPD or the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and Light for the World programme experiences, it becomes evident that working with DPOs is essential to ensure meaningful participation of women and men with disabilities in programmes, policy- and decision-making, in improving the quality of programmes by creating strong

links to beneficiaries and the communities, in raising awareness of inclusion and accessibility in all areas of life and ultimately, in making sure that no one is left behind. Strong DPOs are crucial for the empowerment of women and men, girls and boys with disabilities and in making their voices and interests heard. Their active participation in society, policy and programme development and politics contributes to the removal of social, physical, communication, legal, and institutional barriers. Finally, supporting DPOs in their capacity to participate in decision-making is a strong part of our commitment to the rights of women and men, girls and boys with disabilities and to inclusive development in general. We work with DPOs in our programmes and advocacy on eye health, inclusive education, disability inclusion in community development, inclusive development and livelihood in order to contribute to the disability community's call of "Nothing about us without us".

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