



**LIGHT**  
FOR THE WORLD



**POLICY**

# Rights of Persons with Disabilities



## **Global situation**

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“We declare that human rights are for all of us, all the time: whoever we are and wherever we are from; no matter our class, our opinions, our sexual orientation.”

Former UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon

Contrary to the universal principle of human rights, a significant percentage of the global population faces discrimination. People with disabilities are disproportionately affected by human rights violations and inequality. According to the World Disability Report 2011, more than 1 billion people live with one or more forms of disability. They frequently experience poorer health conditions, barriers to accessing education, fewer economic opportunities and higher rates of poverty than people without disabilities. This in turn contributes to their under-representation in decision-making positions and lack of full and effective participation in socio-economic and political spheres.

More than 80% of people with disabilities live in low- and middle-income countries, often marginalised and in extreme poverty. Furthermore, disability intersects with other identity factors such as age, poverty, ethnicity or gender, which is why, for example, women and girls with disabilities in the least-developed countries and in humanitarian contexts face multiple forms of

discrimination and marginalisation. Disability is more prevalent among women, older people and poor households. Women make up three-quarters of people with disabilities in low- and middle-income countries. Between 65% and 70% of these women live in rural areas.

Even though the protection guaranteed in human rights treaties and grounded in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights applies to all human beings, people with disabilities have often been sidelined or ignored in the rights debate.

In the past two decades, there has been a revolutionary change in approach to close the protection gap and ensure that people with disabilities enjoy the same standards of equality, rights and dignity. The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) was adopted by the United Nations in 2006 and entered into force in 2008. It signalled a “paradigm shift” from traditional charity-oriented, medical-based approaches to disability to one based on human rights.

With the CRPD, important new structures were established:

- the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and its Secretariat,
- the Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and
- the UN Special Envoy on Accessibility and Inclusion.

The new human rights treaty also had an impact on the development architecture. While the Millennium Development Goals had no mention of people with disabilities, the subsequent development discourse has changed to recognise people with disabilities as active stakeholders, not least because of tireless advocacy

## Our approach

Advocacy aims at positive social change and transformation. Light for the World's vision of "an inclusive society where no one is left behind and all persons participate equally" aims at exactly such change. We want to contribute to a world without barriers where people with disabilities are included on an equal basis to others.

Our rights and advocacy work is guided by the CRPD and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. In line with these frameworks, Light for the World is active in influencing decisions, practices and policies on education, health and eye health and community development to become inclusive and accessible.

## Our Theory of Change

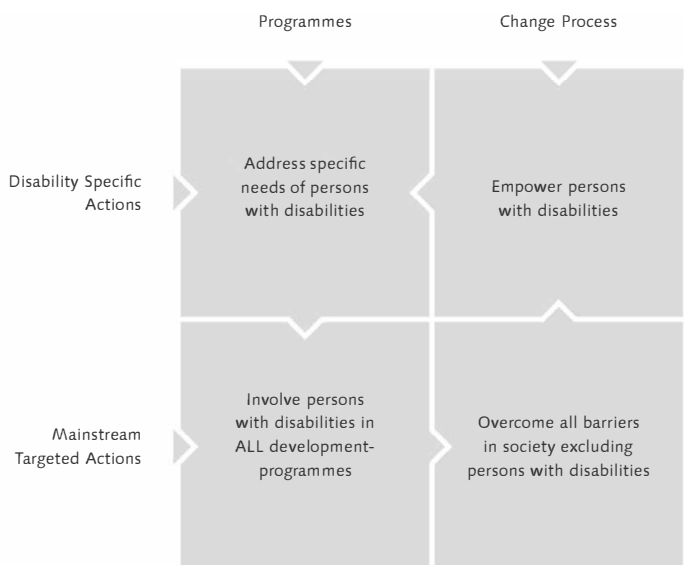
Our programmatic approach is based on our Theory of Change, supporting local partners to implement a combination of disability-specific actions, targeted actions in the mainstream, access to programmes, empowerment and social change processes.

by the disability community and its allies, including Light for the World. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development<sup>1</sup> contains several explicit references to persons with disabilities in its 17 Goals and the overarching principle of the SDGs "Leave no one behind" marks a clear interlinkage between human rights and development as outlined in the CRPD.

The progress achieved in human rights and development frameworks must now be translated into practice, particularly in development strategies and programmes. This requires evidence-based advocacy with clear messages, strong partnerships and dedicated resources.

1 <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/post2015/transformingourworld>

Advocacy drives and supports the implementation of the Theory of Change:



**In specific projects and programmes:**

Light for the World plays a crucial role in providing services for people with disabilities through its local partners. Such service provision, however, should only be a temporary commitment ultimately to be taken over by the state. In line with this, Light for the World’s advocacy focuses on influencing decisions, systems and resource allocations of governments, donors and development actors.

**By acting as an enabler:**

supporting the empowerment of people with disabilities and their organisations in accordance with the principle of the disability movement “nothing about us without us”. We provide individuals and organisations with tools and capacities to understand their rights and speak on their own behalf. We facilitate opportunities to raise these voices.

**Through disability mainstreaming:**

making sure that people with disabilities are included in all development programmes and budgets. This requires working with development actors on how to meaningfully include people with disabilities in their programmes and in the overall development discourse.

**By engaging in policy work for inclusion and accessibility:**

identifying barriers to inclusion and participation of people with disabilities and actively engaging in processes to overcome these barriers.

Advancing the rights of people with disabilities is an intrinsic part of Light for the World’s work, meaning that our advocacy addresses all our mandate areas: Health with a focus on Eye Health, Disability Inclusive Education and Economic Empowerment. Cross-cutting all thematic areas is the field of Disability Inclusion in Community

Development and overall development cooperation. We also advocate the realisation of the human rights of people with disabilities, including through our work on policy change.

**Principles for Light for the World’s advocacy work**

**Working across and connecting different levels:**

- At a local level, our aim is to create capacity and to ensure ownership and sustainability of interventions beyond project lifespans. We support empowerment efforts so that people with disabilities can claim their rights and hold authorities accountable.
- At a national level, we address governments to ensure inclusiveness of policies, strategies and budgets.
- At regional and international levels, we contribute to the implementation, monitoring and review of human rights and development frameworks.

**Self-representation:**

We firmly believe that people with disabilities have the ability and right to live independently and make choices of their own. Therefore, we facilitate the representation of people with disabilities in rights and development processes. In the spirit of the global disability community and its motto “nothing about us without us” Light for the World works with organisations of organisations of persons with disabilities (DPOs) as well as state- and non-state actors to realise the vision of an inclusive society.

**Working in partnerships:**

On our own, our voice might not be loud enough. Change is achieved more easily if it is demanded by many. Advocacy is therefore built on partnerships and networks.

**Evidence-based:**

Through our engagement at a local level we collect concrete evidence of existing injustice, as well as creating workable solutions. Research is yet another important element of evidence generation. These findings are key for our communications and exchange with decision makers and the wider public.

**Measuring impacts:**

We measure the contribution of our advocacy work by setting key milestones and tracking progress continuously. This is to check if the path we are following will take us to our goal.

## Implementation

### Thematic focus

In **Eye Health**, including uncorrected refractive errors and neglected tropical diseases, we work towards the inclusiveness and accessibility of services provided by our local partners and state actors. This also includes the advocacy of accessible information and communication about services and rights. Working with the Ministries of Health or equivalent authorities in our focus and partner countries, we advocate the promotion of eye health, its integration in general health care, and appropriate allocation of resources. At an international level, we work with the International Agency for the Prevention of Blindness, the International Coalition for Trachoma Control and the World Health Organisation to influence global eye health policies.

Sustainable Development Goal 4 “Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all” guides our advocacy of **Disability Inclusive Education**. We undertake advocacy initiatives with our partners in countries such as Burkina Faso and Ethiopia. Local inclusive schools serve as models for other schools and provide evidence on the merit of inclusion, which we use in turn for our international policy work. At international and national levels, we persistently call for increased investment in the education sector. We promote inclusive early childhood development as well as the development of disability inclusive education

strategies and their implementation for all ages. We also collaborate in undertaking research to build evidence on disability inclusive education and its benefits for the whole community. The Global Partnership for Education, the Global Campaign for Education and International Council for Education of Visually Impaired People are key international advocacy partners of this cause.

**Economic empowerment:** Programmes on economic empowerment and access to livelihood require targeted advocacy of the following: ensuring vocational training and internships are accessible to young people with disabilities, influencing government agencies and businesses to hire people with disabilities, changing legislation to ensure non-discrimination, inclusion and accessibility, or improving social protection mechanisms. At an international level, we lobby and work with the International Labour Organisation, United Nations Development Programme and other agencies engaging in the sector of economic development to ensure compliance with the CRPD and Sustainable Development Goal 8 “Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all”.

In **Disability Inclusion in Community Development**, formerly known as Community Based Rehabilitation (CBR), Light for the World’s advocacy has a strong focus on empowerment. We work with grassroots-level DPOs

to improve the service provision of governments for people with disabilities. We support the formation and transformation of organisations of persons with disabilities. We lobby for their representation at different levels of decision-making and support their running for office.

**Human rights monitoring:** We engage in key human rights processes and mechanisms. These include monitoring mechanisms such as national CRPD reporting or the UN’s central human rights review, the “Universal Periodic Review”. With our partners we focus on the right to development for people with disabilities in these processes and ensuring the expertise of DPOs is included in reporting procedures.

**Disability inclusive development:** Lobbying for and monitoring the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is another important area of engagement for Light for the World. We aim to ensure that development plans and programmes are inclusive of and accessible to all people with disabilities. Our entry points are the overall principle of the Agenda “Leave no one behind” as well as the respective SDGs and their relevance to the lives of people with disabilities, among these are SDG 1 poverty eradication, SDG 3 health, SDG 4 education, SDG 8 employment, SDG 10 reducing inequality and SDG 17 means of implementation and disaggregated data collection. The High-level Political Forum, regional and national SDG implementation and review processes, the financing for development discourse, as well as national development policies are other important forums for our engagement.

As a key part of our global engagement, Light for the World has a strong presence in the regions in the European Union and the African Union. We work to influence decisions, resource allocations and structures in the EU to become disability inclusive. We engage with selected European National Governments and their Development Agencies, striving for inclusiveness of the Official Development Assistance. These activities are based on the CRPD Article 11 “Situations of risks and

humanitarian emergencies” and Article 32 “International Cooperation”.

In the African Union, we are active members of the disability and development task force initiated by the African Union Commission.

**Data disaggregation** relating to disability and gender is another important issue for our advocacy work. Needs-based policies and programmes will only be developed if there is clear information about women and men, girls and boys with disabilities in low-income countries. Together with our allies we advocate disability-disaggregated data collection, i.e. using the “Washington Group Set of Questions on Disability” in national censuses and other statistical actions.

## Our work for human rights internationally

We strive for the holistic understanding and implementation of the CRPD in our focus countries and closely collaborate with the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Some of the activities we undertake at an international level include:

- provision of input for thematic reports by the UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities,
- contributions to general comments of the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which are developed to clarify different provisions of the CRPD,
- sharing information on the human rights situation of people with disabilities in the countries where we have programmes.

Light for the World has consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), enabling us to provide our expertise in consultations and meetings

of the UN and to work closely with UN agencies and structures.

## Cooperation and alliances

Networking and collaboration are important pillars of our work. At grassroots level, we work with local partners on capacity development to make sure that people (“rights holders”) are able to hold their state authorities (“duty bearers”) accountable.

We work in alliance with like-minded organisations to strive together for an inclusive society. Light for the World is an active member of the International Disability and Development Consortium (IDDC), a coalition of NGOs working for inclusive development. We also work with the International Disability Alliance (IDA), the global representative body of organisations of persons with disabilities. Light for the World is an associate member

of the European Disability Forum and holds a partnership with the African Disability Forum.

We strive for long-term cooperation with development organisations that take disability seriously in their own work, for example the African Child Policy Forum and Plan International. We are also active members of powerful coalitions relevant to our thematic engagement such as: The Global Campaign on Education, the International Agency for Prevention of Blindness and their respective regional and national chapters, and also CONCORD – the European NGO confederation for relief and development.

Working with other like-minded actors, we advocate increased participation of civil society organisations and full and effective participation of people with disabilities and their organisations in mainstream events and platforms. We also monitor and influence regional commitments and legislations to be inclusive of people with disabilities.

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