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LESSONS LEARNED  
**WALKING THE TALK**

Good Practices in  
Gender Equality



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## Walking the Talk: Gender Equality

### Introduction

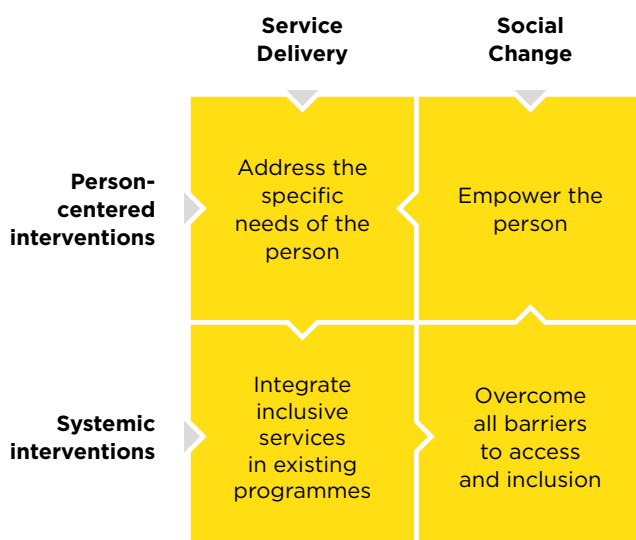
At Light for the World we work towards an inclusive society – in which persons with disabilities can participate equally. To achieve this, we focus on accessible eye care services, inclusive education, disability inclusion in community development, and strengthening the rights of persons with disabilities.

We don't just advocate for inclusion within our programmes – we aim for it to be an integral part of who we are as an organisation.

Persons with disabilities are not a homogenous group – there are girls and boys, women and men, and other persons with disabilities, and they all have different needs and face different challenges in everyday life. Therefore Light for the World is committed to support diversity, gender equality, and women's empowerment.

We know that we cannot do it alone. In a twin-track approach we implement person-centered interventions as well as systemic interventions. In order to achieve gender equality, human development organisations need to become more gender sensitive, while other stakeholders, such as women's rights activists and organisations focusing on gender topics, need to start including persons with disabilities within their ranks and in their activities.

### Gender mainstreaming in 4 dimensions



**Address specific needs**  
of women with and without disabilities & including men with and without disabilities in gender equality work

**Empowerment**  
of women and girls with disabilities and challenging of social norms

**Involvement in ALL programmes**  
of women and men

**Overcome barriers**  
and enable equal access of women and men to services and social events

### Selected data on women and men with disabilities

- The **disability prevalence rate** for women is 19.2% whereas it is 12% for men<sup>1</sup>.
- 45% of women with disabilities are **literate**, compared to 61% of men with disabilities, 71% of women without disabilities and 82% of men without disabilities<sup>2</sup>.
- **Employment rates** are 52.8% for men with disabilities and only 19.6% for women with disabilities<sup>3</sup>.
- **Representation** of women is low in national coordination mechanisms on disability matters; the representation of women with disabilities in national machinery for gender equality is even lower<sup>4</sup>.
- Of the 253 million people in the world who are **visually impaired** (distance-vision loss), 55% are women (139 million)<sup>5</sup>.

We are aware that Light for the World itself is not fully there yet – girls and boys, women and men, and other persons are not yet equally represented and supported in our organisation. We are, however, taking important first steps, and in this publication, we will share several good practices which have helped us to increase gender equality at Light for the World. We hope these practices inspire and encourage others as well!

- .....
- 1 WHO. (2011). World Report on Disability. Available at: [https://www.who.int/disabilities/world\\_report/2011/en/](https://www.who.int/disabilities/world_report/2011/en/)
  - 2 United Nations. (2018). Disability and Development Report. Page 108. Available at: <https://www.un.org/disabilities/documents/2019/UN-flagship-report-disability-7June.pdf>
  - 3 WHO. (2011). World Report on Disability. Page 237. Available at: [https://www.who.int/disabilities/world\\_report/2011/en/](https://www.who.int/disabilities/world_report/2011/en/)
  - 4 United Nations. (2018). Disability and Development Report. Page 110. Available at: <https://www.un.org/disabilities/documents/2019/UN-flagship-report-disability-7June.pdf>
  - 5 <https://atlas.iapb.org/global-burden-vision-impairment/gbvi-global-disaggregation-of-numbers-for-gender-and-age/>

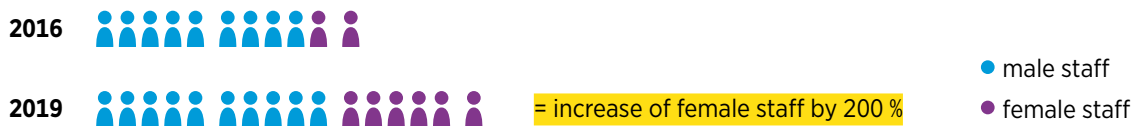
## Organisation

### Shifting the male/female staff ratio

Light for the World country offices in Asia and Africa used to have a great majority of male staff. Over the years, a shift in awareness started taking place.

The teams in Ethiopia and Mozambique, as seen in the graphs below, were quite successful in changing the male/female staff ratio in only a few years, and in the case of Ethiopia, even hiring the first female Light for the World Country Director.

#### Staff changes in male/female ratios in the Mozambiquan Country Office



#### Staff changes in male/female ratios in the Ethiopia Country Office



#### How did this happen?

A first step was to actively increase awareness on equality and women's empowerment throughout the organisation with the establishment of a gender focus group in late 2015. An organisational gender assessment (survey) in 2016/2017, and subsequent trainings in some of the offices of Light for the World, spread this awareness to leadership and general staff of the country offices. Gender equality became part of the conversation before and during recruitment processes.

In the Mozambique country office, for example, the awareness that the gender balance needed to change led to the decision to prioritise women during recruitment.

**“We proactively decided to start hiring female staff as a way to change the situation.”**

**Zacharias Zicai**  
Country Director  
Mozambique

The Ethiopian team’s leadership adopted a positive discrimination approach in the early stages of their recruitment process: An equal number of female and male candidates were shortlisted for each vacancy, even if some of the female candidates had slightly lower qualifications or fewer years of experience on paper compared to some of the male candidates. These candidates were then invited to proceed in the recruitment process, after which the rest of the process was merit-based.

In contrast, in our Austrian office we are currently aiming to raise the percentage of male employees to achieve gender equality. We are on the right track.

## **Communications and Fundraising**

### **Promoting female role models - the Her Abilities Award**

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In 2018, Light for the World launched the Her Abilities Award – the first global award honouring women with disabilities who have achieved greatness in their life or field of work. Why? Because, in comparison to men, only few women are recognised for their remarkable accomplishments, and Light for the World wanted to change that.

An independent award jury was set up, consisting of thirteen women from around the world, who jointly selected the winners for three award categories:

- **Arts, Culture & Sports**
- **Rights**
- **Health & Education**

In its very successful first year, the Award received nearly 400 nominations, highlighting the stories of 158 women with disabilities from 52 countries around the globe.

For the three winners of the Her Abilities Awards, receiving the award has opened up multiple opportunities to share their stories – stories which highlight the fact that women with disabilities are able of achieving much more than they are often given credit for.



For example, filmmaker Musola Catherine Kaseketi has since received the African Women Arts and Film Pioneer Award and was invited to attend the triannual Women Deliver Conference as a speaker. The other two winners, Toyin Janet Aderemi, the first wheelchair user to study and practice pharmacy in Nigeria, and activist Ashrafun Nahar, founder of the Women with Disabilities Development Foundation (WDDF) in Bangladesh, have also been invited this past year to speak at multiple conferences, meetings and events about gender equality, women's rights and disability. Ms. Aderemi even had the opportunity to speak at the United Nations.

**“Do not  
allow others to  
determine what you  
can do and what you  
can attain.”**

**Toyin Janet Aderemi**  
Her Abilities Winner 2018

## Language shapes realities - watching the language we use

The language we use – how we talk about people – may seem a minor issue, but it is in fact an important factor in the perception of equality. But **language is shaped by culture**. In a society that is not living gender equality, the language used will be discriminating as well, for example, by reflecting traditional images of female and male gender roles. This is why Light for the World developed a **guideline for staff members**, to ensure that the language we use is gender-sensitive, inclusive and welcoming for all. This guideline was developed in 2017 in German, and in 2018 in English. Since then, communications staff in particular are actively trying to use **gender sensitive language in publications, public relations and donor contact**.

So, how has our use of language changed as a result of this guideline? One requirement, for example, is to make sure that women and men are specifically mentioned, rather than simply stating ‘persons with disabilities’.

### Specific Objective 1:

Humanitarian Aid (UN Agencies, international and local NGOs) and public service is disability inclusive and mainstreams the need and desires of women and men, girls and boys with disabilities.

(Strategic Outline. South Sudan 2019-2012, page 2)

Another example is avoiding the male version of a term, when referring to an individual who could be both female or male, like changing chairman to chairperson.



Karin Krobath  
Chairperson  
Light for the World



Rupert Roniger  
CEO  
Light for the World

(Example from the Light for the World Activity Report 2018)



These are a few examples, and they may not seem like small tweaks and sidenotes. But how you speak about someone reflects what you believe, and Light for the World is choosing to take small steps to speaking and writing about women and men, girls and boys in an equal and inclusive manner.

## Programmes

### Choosing to target women directly

Light for the World works with individuals with disabilities as well as with the disability and development movement. **The voices of women with disabilities are often not heard**, and they therefore do not benefit equally from disability-inclusive programmes and activities. Light for the World addresses this gap by choosing to specifically target women with disabilities in programmes.

One such example is the Women with Disabilities Leadership Programme in Cambodia. Research, as well as decades of experience in the country, shows that the majority of Self-Help Groups, federations and Organisations of Persons with Disabilities (DPOs) from village to national level are led by men<sup>6</sup>. In addition, the gender rights movement and the development sector in general did not include women with disabilities. To counteract this, the Light for the World team in Cambodia launched a leadership programme for women with disabilities in 2016, aiming to build up the women's skills, relationships and networks.

24 women started the programme in 2016. All reported increased skills and self-confidence. By 2018 half of the women in the programme were in (formal) leadership positions, received promotions, or moved from volunteer to paid jobs. Some of the women left the programme early because they even had been offered permanent paid positions. Many participants have reached out to other women with disabilities in their communities, achieving more visibility at community level. In 2018, a new group of women started the leadership programme, adding up to 52 women in total who are now making an impact in the disability and development sector. On their own initiative, they are starting the first network for women with disabilities in Cambodia and have already secured their first funding. This upcoming women's network has already been approached and invited by many stakeholders, such as the local government, NGOs and government ministries for consultations on how to address various issues related to women with disabilities.

6 UNDP. (2010). Political Participation of Women with Disabilities in Cambodia.

Another example of targeting women with disabilities directly is a livelihood programme in Ouargaye, Burkina Faso, which Light for the World developed together with the expert organisation Trickle-Up and our local CBR partner OCADES Tenkodogo. In this region DPOs had already initiated income-generating activities but encountered difficulties of self-confidence, selling, reinvesting their membership fees, associative life and the sustainability of their production. Considering the National Policy for Gender and the Strategic Framework for Fighting Poverty, it became clear that the focus needed to be put on women, as there is scientific evidence that strengthening the livelihood of women will benefit the whole family. The programme therefore decided to choose vulnerable women (e.g. mothers of children with disabilities), as well as women and men with disabilities as target group.

Through this programme, which started in 2018, the beneficiaries receive training and support in setting up livelihood activities, with the aim of moving them out of extreme poverty and into sustainable livelihoods. After a thorough selection process 178 vulnerable women, 17 women with disabilities, and 22 men with disabilities were selected. Even though local traditions that limit the decision-making power of women, as well as the lack of education, are a challenge in this programme, we have observed a positive impact on the households of the participants concerning nutrition, health, and education of children and other members of their families.

**“Empowering women is not only a goal in itself. It is a condition for building better lives for everyone on the planet”**

**Ban Ki-moon**  
UN-Secretary-General

## Removing barriers for women to participate in our programmes

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In many cases, whether for economic, cultural, political, or social reasons, women and girls are less likely to participate in and benefit from the work that we do. On a global level Light for the World has observed that the number of women screened and diagnosed with cataract is much higher, while the percentage of treated cataracts is higher for men. To counteract such issues, programme staff actively looks for ways to **remove or reduce the barriers that prevent women and girls from accessing services** at an equal level to men and boys.

In one of three main referral hospitals in Mozambique, for example, we saw a sudden increase in women's attendance at eye health surgeries, after the implementation of several actions:

- Quotas  
Performance indicators requiring a higher number of women to be operated were encouraged by us and defined by the hospital itself.
- Increased awareness  
A new awareness and the eagerness to comply with project objectives pushed staff to convince women to use available surgical services.
- Trained staff and counselling  
One of the ophthalmic technicians was previously trained in psychology and takes the time to talk to the patients selected for cataract surgery. Counselling of pre-surgical patients and patients with chronic diseases is a main adherence factor to surgery, like explaining to female patients and their partners the added value of undergoing treatment.

This example demonstrates how taking little, specific steps can encourage women to access our programmes and remove gender-based cultural or organisational restrictions and issues.

## Advocacy

### Working towards gender parity in UN treaty bodies

Light for the World's work is guided by the **UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities**, adopted at the UN on 13 December 2006. This Convention has been ratified by 178 states so far. State Parties are obliged to submit regular reports to the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities which monitors whether the rights of persons with disabilities are being implemented. The 18 members of the Committee are all independent experts, who meet twice a year to review these reports.

In 2016, when new committee members were being elected, the number of women with a seat in the Committee plummeted. Committee members are nominated and elected by the (male-dominated) governments who are state parties to the CRPD. And as a result, of the 18 members, only one woman remained.

Light for the World was among the organisations publicly criticising this development<sup>7</sup> and joined GQUAL, a broad campaign for gender parity in international representation<sup>8</sup>. In the run-up to the next committee elections in 2018, Light for the World actively supported the candidacy of Gertrude Oforiwa Fefoame, a female expert with a disability from Ghana. We supported her online campaign which was led by Sightsavers<sup>9</sup>, and called on governments in European and African countries to vote for her. The campaign brought increased awareness, and in the end, Gertrude and five other female candidates were elected onto the Committee. Now, the Committee consists of six women and twelve men. It's progress but still a long way to go!

7 <https://www.light-for-the-world.org/where-are-women-disabilities>

8 <http://www.gqualcampaign.org/home/>

9 <https://www.sightsavers.org/news/2018/06/sightsavers-gertrude-oforiwa-fefoame-elected-to-un-disability-committee/>

<https://twitter.com/Kennedytasha/status/1006634495775334401>

 **Natasha Kennedy**  
@Kennedytasha Follow

.@MaggieLicht @yetnebersh\_lftw it was great to work with you, thank you for all the incredible support for @gofefoame campaign #InThePicture #COSP11 #EqualUN

1:29 pm - 12 Jun 2018

1 Retweet 3 Likes

1 1 3

 **Magdalena Kern** @MaggieLicht · 13 Jun 2018

Replying to @Kennedytasha @yetnebersh\_lftw @gofefoame

It was our heartfelt pleasure! Congratulations to @gofefoame, we are proud to be at your side and filling the #CRPD with life.

1

<https://twitter.com/SRehbichler/status/1006588374239580161>

 **Sabine Rehbichler**  
@SRehbichler Follow

Yeah! African woman power: Congrats @gofefoame (and all other candidates ;-)) for being elected to the #CRPD committee @ #COSP11! You rock! Looking forward to continue working with you! #EqualUN @Sightsavers\_Pol @yetnebersh\_lftw @NafisaBaboo @iddconsortium @lftworldwide

10:25 am - 12 Jun 2018

14 Retweets 25 Likes

14 25

## Supporting women to advocate for their rights

As noted at the start of this document, women are underrepresented in bodies, such as Organisations of Persons with Disabilities (DPOs), advocating for the rights of persons with disabilities. As a result, the perspectives of women with disabilities are often not considered in advocacy or disability mainstreaming activities. Light for the World therefore actively strengthens women's organisations.

In Cochabamba, Bolivia, Light for the World's partner IIMS<sup>10</sup> supports La Asociación Manuela Gandarillas which was founded in 2017. This is the first organisation for women with disabilities in Bolivia, founded by two women who were ostracised by male DPO members. IIMS has been working with them to build up the organisation – teaching the members about topics such as organisational development, public relations and community work. As a result, the organisation's members now have been able to link up with other women's associations, address issues such as gender-based violence, and work towards challenging socio-cultural norms.

In Kenya, Light for the World cooperates with United Disabled Persons of Kenya to train women with disabilities so that they can engage in government planning and decision-making processes. Kenyan law requires citizens to be involved in government planning, but persons with disabilities are left behind in the process, and this is even more so the case for women with disabilities. Through a training of trainers' model, women with disabilities in six counties have been taught advocacy, as well as practical skills, such as how to engage in a public forum or how to track local government budgets. As a result, 85 women with disabilities have effectively participated in local government planning and two women with disabilities have been appointed to the County Budget and Economic Forum which is the decision-making organ at county level.

By building the capacity of women with disabilities to advocate and to take an active role in political processes, Light for the World is **contributing to gender equality in public space**.

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 10 Instituto de Investigaciones Medico Sociales

## Conclusion

The examples showcased here represent just a few of the actions and changes in attitude that take place within Light for the World and its programmes in the past few years. We have recently updated our gender policy and are planning several more concrete actions towards gender equality in the near future.

Gender assessments and analysing good practices indicate that we are on the right track to make Light for the World an organisation living and breathing inclusion and diversity, where all staff **understand the importance and are supportive of gender equality in our office culture, our fundraising & communication, and our programmes & advocacy.**

We realise that we are still on our way, and are interested in hearing from others what actions they have taken to ensure that women and men, girls and boys and other persons with and without disabilities are all included and equal. We hope to continue making improvements so that in the future, these good practices are not just good practices, but **simply the way we work.**



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