



Disability Rights Policy Brief

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Cover photo: Young athletes in South Sudan play wheelchair basketball as part of a sports programme supported by Light for the World. The initiative promotes inclusion, confidence, and physical activity for people with disabilities.

Executive summary

Light for the World is committed to creating a world where people with disabilities and eye conditions can fully exercise their rights.

This policy brief addresses the rights of people with disabilities, who represent 16% of the world’s population, and outlines our unique value-add to drive sustainable progress at scale.

People with disabilities face significant barriers accessing basic services, economic opportunities, education and employment. This policy brief outlines five specific targets for Light for the World’s strategy period until 2030. To permanently dismantle barriers, we aim for systems and mindset change.

Collaborating with diverse partners and leveraging our expertise in disability inclusion, our approach is guided by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the Sustainable Development Goals.

Co-designing and implementing programmes with Organisations of Persons with Disabilities is key. Our unique Disability Inclusion Advisor approach trains a network of Disability Inclusion Facilitators with lived experience to promote disability inclusion.

In economic empowerment, the following topics are game changers: leveraging digitalisation, workforce development and partnerships.

In humanitarian action, our role includes: technical advice, advocacy and direct support to people with disabilities in emergencies.

For inclusive education, our aim is to build capacity in mainstream organisations, support teacher training and schools, and expand partnerships.

Gender, climate change and partnerships are priorities throughout all we do.

In all our work, our goal is also to walk our own talk to become more disability inclusive as a partner and organisation.



Vanandis, a businessman from Mumias, Kenya, expanded his IT services after joining Light for the World's InBusiness programme. Now offering computer training, graphic design, and retail, he also advocates for disability inclusion in his municipality.

Introduction

At Light for the World, we believe in a world where people with disabilities and eye conditions can fully exercise their right to health, education, work and protection in emergencies. 1.3 billion people (one in six, or about 16% of the world's population) have disabilities, according to the World Health Organization (WHO).ⁱ The share of women with disabilities (18%) is higher than that of men (14%).ⁱⁱ 80% of people with disabilities live in the Global South and lack access to basic services and economic opportunities.ⁱⁱⁱ

Globally, only 27% of people with disabilities are employed, compared to 56% of people without disabilities. Due to discrimination and barriers to access education, the share of women with disabilities in employment is even lower at 23%.^{iv} In Sub-Saharan Africa, 70% of people with disabilities in work are self-employed but face barriers to access finance and support services.

Children with disabilities are 49% more likely to never have attended school compared to their peers without disabilities. Most primary schools are not equipped to include children with support needs and few children with disabilities transition to secondary and tertiary education. The resulting low literacy rates and lack of professional skills among people with disabilities affect dignified and fulfilling work opportunities.

Disparities in access to services, work and education between men and women with and without disabilities are widening in a context of increasing political and budgetary volatility. These challenges are exacerbated by the climate crisis, extreme weather events, and conflicts, which are further increasing the prevalence of disability and are already affecting people with disabilities in humanitarian contexts.

Our approach

Light for the World has a unique track record of working on systems and mindset change. We convene and connect diverse partners, recognising their distinct roles and contributions, and contribute through our own expertise in disability rights and through disability inclusion advisory services.

Guided by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), signed by nearly all governments, we codesign and implement programmes together with Organisations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs).

Our work is rooted in local and lived experiences, and family and community engagement. We adhere to international and national standards and context of the countries we work in.

We ensure that women and men with disabilities are the drivers of change, as role models, advocates and Disability Inclusion Facilitators (DIFs). The DIF approach positions young people with disabilities as agents of change. As facilitators, they build awareness and support the implementation of disability inclusion in mainstream programmes, services and workplaces. In everything we do, we monitor that we do no harm, apply strict safeguarding policies, and strengthen systems for awareness, prevention, reporting and response.

Our theory of change is rights-based and comprehensive, consisting of three elements:

- 1) We support our partners to bring about individual and community change, through community sensitisation, training and behavioural change communication. We facilitate access to education, rehabilitation services, assistive technology, community activities and skills training and professional support services with special attention for people with disabilities that are more marginalised and are at risk to be left behind.
- 2) We advise, coach and co-learn with partners for organisational change, scaling our tested disability inclusion advisory approach and leveraging community-based organisations and networks.

Disability inclusion advisor approach

Through our unique Disability Inclusion Advisor approach, based on working with advisors in our country offices and with umbrella OPDs, we train a network of Disability Inclusion Facilitators (DIFs).

DIFs all have lived experiences and are certified as trainers and coaches on the 'how' of disability inclusion. As a result, organisations become more disability inclusive in their programming, systems, organisational policies and service delivery. We also provide capacity strengthening and funding support to national and local OPDs to ensure local ownership and sustainability.

- 3) We amplify the advocacy of partners for policy change, by supporting regional, national and local OPDs in their advocacy and campaigning efforts to ensure CRPD and SDG implementation and in elevating a human rights-based approach in all national policies.

We support research efforts to generate evidence and act as a convenor to bring together critical players to harmonise advocacy planning. At the regional and global level, we actively engage in and contribute to coalitions working on disability rights to make a coordinated, strong case for more disability inclusion funding.

Our priorities

Our goal is to achieve a more inclusive ecosystem to ensure that the rights of people with disabilities are fulfilled.

We work in an increasingly volatile context marked by polarisation, climate change, crises, and conflict, so enhancing resilience strategies is key. We also create space for action learning and co-creating solutions.

The following priorities all contribute to our mission:

Economic empowerment: We operate in a resource-constrained environment. To address this, we focus on digitalisation, workforce programmes and private sector engagement. We utilise social protection and rural development programmes. We will continue to work through relevant networks to achieve our goal: to increase access to work for people with disabilities across a wide range of sectors.

We strengthen the work of community partners and disability structures to facilitate access for programme participants to appropriate community support, professional support services and assistive technology.

In partnership with OPDs, we will scale our unique approach of Disability Inclusion Advisory Services and Disability Inclusion Community Development to work towards enhanced system capacity on disability inclusion.

We apply a twin-track approach where we:

- Expand our work on a more inclusive ecosystem and workplaces so that women and men with disabilities can access opportunities for skills development and work in sectors that have labour shortage and market opportunities, and
- Ensure that women and men with disabilities are better equipped to access those opportunities in terms of core life skills, employability skills and technical and entrepreneurship skills.

Humanitarian action: We prioritise disability inclusive humanitarian action and disability inclusive disaster risk reduction and management with three intervention strategies:

- 1) First, we provide technical advice to mainstream humanitarian actors to respond to conflict and emergencies in a disability inclusive way. As under the economic empowerment mandate area we will work with teams of Disability Inclusion Advisors and Facilitators, and ensure that they are well equipped to follow the Must-Do Actions of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee guidelines^v on inclusion of people with disabilities in humanitarian action, which include:
 - ▶ Ensuring meaningful participation,
 - ▶ Identifying and removing barriers,
 - ▶ Empowerment and capacity development of people with disabilities, and
 - ▶ Collecting and disaggregating data.
- 2) Second, we facilitate advocacy for inclusion of people with disabilities by supporting the collection of disaggregated data on disability and gender in humanitarian crises, as well as amplifying the voice of OPDs in country level humanitarian coordination mechanisms, e.g. by promoting a Disability Working Group with meaningful participation of OPDs.
- 3) Finally, we provide direct support with food and non-food item distribution to affected people with disabilities in emergencies in our focus countries, by mobilising our existing local networks and by connecting with mainstream humanitarian actors. We further enable disability specific support to people with disabilities, such as provision of rehabilitation services and assistive devices, livelihood development, prevention and response to gender-based violence, education in emergencies, and provision of psychosocial support.

Inclusive education: Our focus in inclusive education is to further expand our partnerships with coalitions and organisations that are contributing to achieving UN Sustainable Development Goal 4: ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and life-long learning opportunities for all.

We have a stronger focus on developing the capacity of mainstream organisations active in education on how to create an inclusive school environment. This includes advice and delivering good practices on the use of technology in education that fosters the quality of inclusive education. We will further continue to support the trainings of teachers in inclusive teaching methodologies and direct support to schools through our community network and local partners.

Our Inclusive education work is comprehensive and starts at an early age to ensure school readiness at the appropriate age. Inclusive education does not happen in schools alone, we work at family and community level, teacher education institutes and policy development and implementation and advocacy for systems change. We not only direct our efforts on children with disabilities in the education system, but also develop, document and disseminate good practices that target children with disabilities who are unable to participate in formal education systems.



Light for the World staff crossed flooded terrain in Mozambique to reach communities affected by Cyclone Eloise. Together with people with disabilities, we work to ensure inclusive support reaches affected people with disabilities.

Cross-cutting issues: We address gender, climate and partnerships across all mandate areas. For example, as part of agricultural programmes, climate change plays a large role. We initiate Agrilabs where farmers with disabilities cocreate local solutions such as accessible, stilted grain storage. In South Sudan, community leaders and local government officials received training focused on disaster preparedness after a period of heavy flooding. We address gender equality by understanding the intersectional and compounding discrimination women with disabilities face. For example, we aim to accommodate young mothers to participate in training and other opportunities.

Across our mandate areas we promote disaggregated data on disability and gender and cocreate approaches that help to reduce inequalities with a focus on intersectional analysis.

Our partnership approach

connects diverse partners and recognises their distinct roles and contributions. We uphold the role of OPDs as defined by the UN CRPD. Under the We Can Work programme, umbrella OPDs in four countries are hosting the Disability Inclusion Advisory teams and roll out the youth advocacy approach. While ensuring meaningful OPD engagement, we also recognise the value of other actors, such as community-based organisations and public services in providing support and referrals.

All our efforts adhere to agreed quality standards, as well as principles of a climate resilient approach, disability inclusion, implementing the CRPD's Article 32 commitments on development cooperation and humanitarian action, and the principle of leaving no one behind.

Our targets

1) Expanding disability inclusion expertise across our mandate areas

In all countries where we work and partner, we have well-established Disability Inclusion Advisory Teams to expand a network of certified Advisors, experts and Disability Inclusion Facilitators to respond to the growing demand for disability inclusion services across our mandate areas of economic empowerment, inclusive education, and humanitarian action.

2) Advancing inclusive humanitarian action

In the humanitarian contexts where we are active, national humanitarian response plans consider the inclusion of people with disabilities with attention for intersectionality. We contribute to the capacity of humanitarian actors and OPDs to put this into practice.

3) Promoting dignified work for people with disabilities

Through partnerships with OPDs, mainstream organisations and networks in economic empowerment, we ensure dignified and fulfilling work for at least 1.5 million women and men with disabilities in the countries we work and partner in. To ensure sustainability, we have enhanced the capacity of employers, government actors, skills development institutions, financial institutions, and business development service providers on disability inclusion.

4) Strengthening inclusive education systems

In all countries of focus, we are increasing our reach to children with disabilities in education through partnerships with mainstream education partners, OPDs and schools. We have enhanced system capacity on inclusive education and increased access to quality education for children and young people with disabilities.

5) Driving innovation through research and human-centred design

Our portfolios in economic empowerment, inclusive education and humanitarian action include research and human-centred design interventions that are driven by people with disabilities of all genders and are designed to address intersectional discrimination. As part of these projects, budget is allocated to document good practices and disseminate lessons learned.

Acknowledgements

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- i WHO Global Report on Health Equity for Persons with Disabilities: <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240063600>
- ii Ibid.
- iii Ibid.
- iv United Nations Disability and Development Report, <https://social.desa.un.org/publications/un-flagship-report-on-disability-and-development-2024>
- v IASC Guidelines on Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Humanitarian Action: <https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/iasc-guidelines-on-inclusion-of-persons-with-disabilities-in-humanitarian-action-2019>



Light for the World
Niederhofstrasse 26
1120 Vienna, Austria

info@light-for-the-world.org
www.light-for-the-world.org