

Working with Institutional Partners

Issue Paper

Executive summary

We believe in a world where people with disabilities and eye conditions can fully exercise their rights. Institutional partners are key to delivering this vision. We have over 30 years of experience working in partnership with governments, multilateral organisations, large foundations and in international consortia, including with other international NGOs.

At Light for the World, working in partnership is more than just an approach or a means to an end. It is a mindset that permeates all areas of our work – born from the belief and experience that together we can reach further, do better and achieve more.

In this issue paper, we outline our unique partnership approach and provide concrete examples of how we work with partners. We also set out six key elements we bring into partnerships, so that together we can deliver impact, at scale, sustainably.

Why institutional partnerships are key

At Light for the World, we believe in a world where people with disabilities and eye conditions can fully exercise their rights to health, education, work – and protection in emergencies.

Partnership is part of our mindset. It shapes our organisational culture, leadership, programmes, advocacy and funding.

We have over 30 years of experience working closely together with governments, multilateral organisations, large foundations and other international NGOs. Our partners trust our technical and local expertise and our extensive programming track record in eye health and disability rights. Together we can mobilise the influence, large-scale resources and stakeholders needed to co-create sustainable, inclusive and locally-driven change that delivers impact at scale.

Our work on eye health takes a comprehensive and systems-based approach, aligned with the Agenda 2030 Sustainable Development Goals and World Health Organization (WHO) Report on Vision. According to WHO, at least 1 billion people are lacking eye health care and 90% of sight loss is preventable or treatable.¹ Recent research confirmed that investing in eye health greatly benefits the economy: every US\$1 invested in eye health in Low- and Middle-Income Countries yields US\$28 in returns² - a great return for any funder who wants to make an impact.

Our work on disability rights is based on the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), adopted in 2006. One in every six people (16% of the global population) experiences a significant disability.³

There is growing willingness and interest among governments and international actors to become more disability inclusive. What is often missing – and what we and our local partners bring to the table – is the technical expertise and know-how needed to put inclusion into action.

Partnership – a cornerstone of our theory of change

Our partnership model reflects that impact at scale is only possible if we use a rights-based, integrated and comprehensive approach across three levels:

1. All our programmes are in collaboration with local partners.⁴ We place individuals and communities at the centre, as the drivers of change. This ensures that the work we support is locally-owned, context-relevant and informed by lived experience. For example, partnerships with organisations of persons with disabilities (OPDs) are integral to our work. We strive to build relationships that recognise and support the central role of OPDs in advancing disability rights.
2. At an organisational level, we advise, coach, co-create with and train local and international partners. For example, we work with international humanitarian organisations on disability inclusive crisis response, and we support national health agencies to train eye health specialists.

1 International Agency for the Prevention of Blindness (IAPB) Vision Atlas. See: (<https://visionatlas.iapb.org/>) [accessed 09.12.2025]

2 Wong B, Hennessy J, Stern J, et al., The Value of Vision: The case for investing in eye health, Seva Foundation, The Fred Hollows Foundation, and IAPB, (2025), See: (<https://visionatlas.iapb.org/news/the-value-of-vision-the-case-for-investing-in-eye-health/>) [accessed 09.12.2025]

3 Global report on health equity for persons with disabilities. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2022. Licence: CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 IGO: An estimated 1.3 billion people experience significant disability. This represents 16% of the world's population, or 1 in 6 people globally.

4 Light for the World (2025) Working with Local Partners, Issue Paper. See: (<https://www.light-for-the-world.org/our-publications/>) [accessed 09.12.2025]

3. Together with our strong network of partners and allies, we co-design public campaigns and strategic communications aimed at systems change. For example, we advocate for sustainable health and disability rights funding, and we champion intersectionality in all our programmes, including gender equality and climate justice.

Our partnership offer

Our partnership offer includes:

1. Strong presence and deep contextual expertise

- ▶ Long-standing presence and expertise in six focus countries in Africa and operations in many more countries and regions. We have a rich knowledge of each country's ecosystem and the interrelations between key actors.
- ▶ We hold trusted relationships and connections with governments, OPDs, local and international NGOs, other civil society organisations and movements and the private sector. This enables us to support our international partners to navigate complex local contexts. We work together to pilot and embed proven programmes and approaches into national, regional and global programmes and policies.

2. Proven ability to deliver large-scale impact

- ▶ Proven ability to deliver. We have an extensive track-record of effectively managing large grants covering multiple years and countries, both as a consortium lead and partner.

3. Partnership with technical and lived-experience experts

- ▶ Linking with technical experts and partners who are specialised in eye health and disability rights. We partner directly with people with lived experience and their representative organisations to deliver highly professional eye health interventions and Disability Inclusion Advisory Services. We understand and address the intersections between inclusion, eye health, gender, climate change and digital technology.

4. Scalable programmes and evidence-based approaches

- ▶ Our proven, scalable programmes and approaches demonstrate impact and inform systemic change. Together with our partners, we have innovated, piloted and scaled programmes in areas such as disability-inclusive employment, Disability Inclusion in Community Development (DICD), inclusive education, inclusive humanitarian action, child eye health and Neglected Tropical Diseases (NTDs).
- ▶ We invest in robust monitoring, reporting and learning frameworks that emphasise transparency and accountability to all stakeholders, from communities to donors.

5. Innovation through co-creation

- ▶ Together with our partners, we continuously improve existing models, tools and approaches. We use co-creation and user-centred design methods that tap directly into the lived experience of the people we work for to develop innovative solutions. This direct experience base enables us to be agile in response to the volatility of a constantly changing operating environment.

6. Collective advocacy

- ▶ We exchange, advocate and campaign together with like-minded organisations through networks like the International Disability and Development Consortium and the International Alliance for the Prevention of Blindness. We are an active voice at global fora, including the Global Disability Summit and the United Nations General Assembly.

Our strategic partnership with the Austrian Development Agency

Light for the World has been a trusted strategic partner of the Austrian Development Agency (ADA) since 2002. To date we have delivered 44 projects in 8 different countries co-financed by ADA as part of International Partnerships Austria. One example is the gender transformative InPower programme in Mozambique, which integrates disability inclusion into gender-based violence prevention. Between 2023 and 2027, this programme will directly reach 18,000 people in 5 districts of Mozambique’s Sofala Province. By building safer and more empowered communities, InPower helps ensure that every young person can enjoy the basic human right to protection, confidence and opportunity. The success of the project is made possible by bringing together a diverse group of mainly local organisations with the necessary knowledge, capacities and influence to make a high quality and lasting difference.



Examples of our Partnerships

Acknowledgements

Light for the World was founded, and is supported by our trusted donors and partners, to serve people with eye conditions and disabilities, so that everyone can fully exercise their universal human rights. We would like to thank all Light for the World colleagues, leadership and Board Members, past and present, and thank Benedict Hoefnagels and Childerik Schaapveld as leads for this issue paper.



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