

Working with Local Partners

Issue Paper

Executive summary

Local partners are key to our vision of a world where people with disabilities and eye conditions can fully exercise their rights. Our partners - organisations and institutions originating from and operating in our programme countries - bring diverse strengths and perspectives, all anchored in local contexts and accountability to their communities.

For Light for the World, working in partnership is a mindset, which is shaping our organisational culture, leadership, advocacy, funding modalities and ways of working. Working with and strengthening local partnerships is also essential to delivering impact and ensuring local partners lead and sustain change when our programmes end. Strengthening local capacity is therefore one of the intended outcomes of our theory of change.

In this issue paper, we outline our unique local partnership approach and provide concrete examples how we work with local partners. As part of our Strategy 2030, we share four priority areas and four targets we have set to ensure we deliver impact, at scale, sustainably.

Why local rights-based 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. By ensuring individuals and communities are at the centre and the drivers of change, we spark lasting organisational, policy and systems change on eye health and disability rights.

Local partners are key to this vision, enabling us to work together with individuals with disabilities and their communities. This ensures our efforts are grounded in local realities. Local partners and a strong, sustainably funded civic space are essential to fulfilling Light for the World's mandate beyond the lifespan of individual programmes.

Local partnerships include collaboration with all organisations and institutions originating from and operating in our programme countries: organisations of persons with disabilities (OPDs)¹ and other civil society organisations, ranging from national NGOs to community-based organisations. We also work with private sector actors, public institutions, academic institutions and government agencies at community, sub-national and national levels. These partners bring diverse strengths and perspectives to achieving our vision.

Creating equitable partnerships with local organisations and institutions is a cornerstone of our programme approach. In recent years, we have actively engaged in global conversations around decolonising development, shifting power and localisation. We are also rebalancing our own organisational power dynamics, showcasing in practice how the role of international NGOs can be reimaged.²

For Light for the World, partnership is a mindset. It shapes our organisational culture, leadership, advocacy, funding modalities and ways of working. It is through this lens that we aim to build sustainable, inclusive and locally-driven change.

Our unique equitable partnership approach

At Light for the World, all programme implementation is carried out in collaboration with local partners. Strengthening local capacity is not only a means to an end – it is one of the intended outcomes of our theory of change.

We work with a diverse range of local partners to reflect the complexity of the challenges we address and the intended outcomes of each programme. In eye health, our primary collaborators are ministries, governmental institutions, professional associations and supranational organisations. In disability rights, we engage broadly with public, non-governmental and private sectors, with a strong focus on strengthening meaningful participation of OPDs.

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- 1 Partnerships with OPDs are of particular importance to us. We strive to build relationships that support the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), which explicitly recognises the central role of OPDs in advancing disability rights. Articles 4.3 and 33.3 + General Comment 7 specify the role and importance of OPDs. See: (<https://social.desa.un.org/issues/disability/crpd/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities-crpd>) [accessed 09.12.2025]
 - 2 We are guided by the recommendations and innovations emerging from the systems change initiative RINGO (Re-Imagining the INGO and the Role of Global Civil Society). See: (<https://ringoproject.org/>) [accessed 09.12.2025]

As we are committed to decolonial practices, we approach our partners as equals, each bringing valuable knowledge, experience and perspective. Co-creation is central to how we work: we jointly design programmes, strategies and solutions with local partners, ensuring their insights guide the process. We convene and weave together collective, context-specific efforts. Exit strategies are intentionally part of all our programmes, ensuring that local partners will lead and sustain change.

Our partnership modalities are not static but rather specific to each context and partnership need.

Our support includes:

- ▶ Funding to demonstrate change at individual and community levels.
- ▶ Amplification of advocacy efforts of partners and the disability movement and providing visibility through our communication platforms and channels.
- ▶ Organisational development through coaching, co-learning, connecting of partners and peer exchange.
- ▶ Co-creating and sharing knowledge, information and technical expertise.³

We strive to be a reliable and trustworthy ally to local partners, committed to long-term collaboration built on shared objectives, values, mutual respect and accountability.

Our priorities

To strengthen our collaboration with local partners and ensure sustainable impact, we have four strategic priorities:

1. Transform how we develop and manage programmes and grants

- ▶ Establish genuine co-creation in programme design and implementation. We co-design sustainable exit plans from the start.
- ▶ Centre local and lived experience in monitoring, evaluation, knowledge-production and research. We ensure underrepresented groups, especially women with eye conditions and disabilities, can actively engage in these processes.
- ▶ Implement lean and partner-centred reporting mechanisms, while maintaining transparency and accountability to donors.

2. Provide better funding for local partners

- ▶ Increase the funding share allocated to local partners, with a particular focus on OPDs, in line with our Global Disability Summit 2025 commitments.⁴
- ▶ Support indirect cost coverage of local partners and ensure all funding includes resources for capacity strengthening for sustainability.

³ We build on the model and best practices of Peace Direct (2023) The nine roles that intermediaries can play in international cooperation. See: (<https://www.peacedirect.org/the-nine-roles-that-intermediaries-can-play-in-international-cooperation/>) [accessed 09.12.2025]

⁴ Our 2025 Global Disability Summit commitments (2025) See: (<https://www.light-for-the-world.org/news/our-2025-global-disability-summit-commitments/>) [accessed 09.12.2025]

3. Build and strengthen alliances and multi-stakeholder partnerships

- ▶ Act as a connector or convener, bringing together diverse actors for joint programme implementation, advocacy and peer learning.
- ▶ Provide technical support where we add value and do not replace and duplicate local expertise.

4. Strengthen partner capacities systematically and intentionally

- ▶ Use our due diligence process to conduct initial capacity assessments and jointly identify support needs.
- ▶ Harmonise approaches to capacity strengthening with greater financial autonomy for local partners.
- ▶ Localise capacity strengthening by working with consultants, trainers and service providers from or based in programme countries, while facilitating peer learning among partners to promote mutual exchange and growth.

Our targets

We are committed to walking the talk, and have identified the following targets as part of our Strategy 2030:

1. Co-creation and space for learning in programme design

- ▶ By 2028, ensure that 100% of new programmes include documented co-creation processes and learning activities with local partners (or other forms of participatory design).
- ▶ Starting from 2026, conduct annual surveys among local partners to measure their sense of ownership and decision-making power during joint programme and project implementation.

2. Funding allocation to partners

- ▶ Increase the percentage of total programme funding allocated to local partners by 20% by 2027. The funding allocated to OPDs will be measured separately and the number of OPD project collaborations will be reported through the Global Disability Summit reporting portal.

3. Partnerships and exit planning

- ▶ By 2027, co-create sustainability and exit plans with all major local partners, which will be updated on an annual basis through partnership convenings.

4. Strengthen partner capacities systematically

- ▶ Co-create and agree on a capacity strengthening plan (including on gender equality and climate action) with all major local partners and allocate programme resources for implementation.

Supporting the formation of an umbrella organisation of people with disabilities in South Sudan

Since 2015, Light for the World supported the formation of an umbrella OPD in South Sudan – the South Sudan Union of Persons with Disabilities (SSUPD), which was officially registered in 2020. Light for the World was initially one of the few partners of SSUPD, providing both financial and human resources for capacity development of member organisations and SSUPD. With time, other partners came on board, decreasing dependency on Light for the World, with activities shifting to provide trainings, consultancies for capacity assessments and legal and mentoring support. The examples show that it is important to draw knowledge and expertise from different sources. Although we continue to work closely with SSUPD, its activities and work no longer relies on us.

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