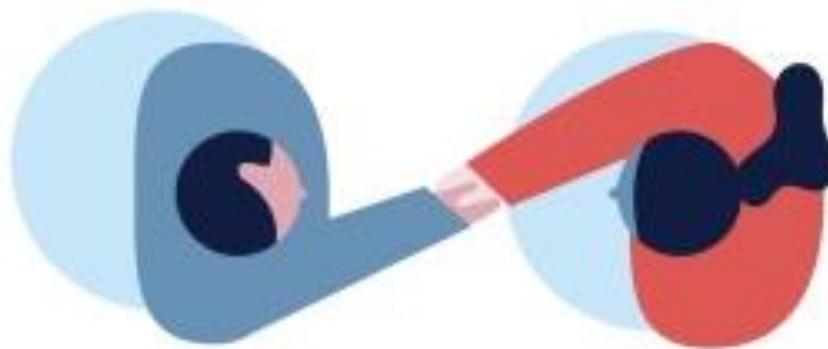


# PARTNERSHIP POLICY

November 2020



**DPOD**

DISABLED PEOPLE'S ORGANISATIONS DENMARK

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## FOREWORD

This Partnership policy has been developed in a collaborate effort between the Danish Association of the Disabled (DHF), the Danish Association of the Blind (DBS), Danish Deaf Association (DDL), National Organisation LEV (LEV), Danish Association for Mental Health (SIND), Association of Youth with Disabilities (SUMH) and Disabled Peoples’ Organisations Denmark (DH) on behalf of all organisations engaged in international development cooperation under the Danish Disability Fund.

The process was initiated late 2019 and finalised while the Covid-19 pandemic swept across the world. This meant that the partners in the global south were less involved in the formulation of the policy than originally envisaged. The experiences to be gained from the 2020-21 application of the policy in collaboration with and feedback from partners in the Global South, will inform whether and when to conduct a review and adjustments of the policy.

# 1. SCOPE AND PURPOSE

Danish organisations of persons with disabilities<sup>1</sup> have a longstanding tradition for partnering with organisations of persons with disabilities in the Global South - for the mutual benefit of all organisations involved, as well as the people we represent.

With this policy we want to pave the way forward for a continued strong and strategic approach to partnerships – different from short-term project cooperation and donorships.

We believe that there is no 'one size fits all' model for partnerships, but in the Global South, we primarily partner with organisations consisting of and representing persons with disabilities and their immediate relatives. These are our main partners.

We recognize that partnerships are not limited to the direct cooperation between likeminded organisations. The partnership approach also involves strategic partnerships and alliance building with international networks, other NGOs and public and private sector actors. Such strategic partnerships and alliances are vital for advancing the efforts made by our main partners and for avoiding creating parallel systems. However, this partnership policy applies only to the direct partnerships between organisations of persons with disabilities with whom we share values and have similar membership and/or mandate.

The policy is relevant to our own organisations, staff and volunteers who engage in international cooperation, and it will be shared openly with all partners from the very beginning of a relationship.

## THE AIM OF THE PARTNERSHIP POLICY IS TO:

- Outline the rationale for partnerships and the fundamental principles for entering new partnerships and developing existing partnerships.
- Promote a long-term partnership perspective by applying a strategic approach to developing strong and sustainable organisations and movements of persons with disabilities.
- Foster good practices in our partnerships and provide our volunteers and staff inspiration and guidance when working in partnerships.

<sup>1</sup> This includes organisations managed by persons with disabilities and their immediate relatives.

The partnership policy is supplemented by guidelines and tools that will help operationalize the policy.

## OUR STARTING POINT & COMMITMENTS

The partnership approach constitutes an essential basis for Danish civil society support to international development interventions and results. Our partnership policy is therefore complementary to our current **Strategy for International Development Cooperation for Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities** (2019 – 2021) and subsequent strategies. Moreover, it is complementary to the Danish strategy for development cooperation and humanitarian action - **The World 2030** and subsequent Danish development strategies.

Internationally, partnerships are also recognized as a powerful means for development. We are therefore committed to:

- Play a role as partners in support of the national efforts for the realization of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) cf. Article 32 that emphasizes international cooperation.
- Contribute to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the agenda of **LEAVING NO ONE BEHIND**. Based on SDG 17 “partnership for the goals”, we will aim to empower vulnerable and marginalized persons and develop their organisations to become strong and inclusive.



## 2. THE WHY, WHAT AND WHO OF PARTNERSHIPS

### WHY partnerships

Our joint mission as Danish organisations of persons with disabilities is to create lasting and positive changes in living conditions, participation and inclusion of all persons with disabilities. We consider partnerships to be of vital importance to achieving this mission.

Through our partnerships we support the development of a strong, vibrant and diversified disability movement that is representative of persons with disabilities and their immediate relatives, relevant to its members and able to safeguard the enforcement of the rights of persons with disabilities as stated in the UNCRPD.

We believe that the unified knowledge, experience and network embedded in a partnership contribute both effectively and efficiently to the fight against poverty, injustice and inequality. We trust that partnerships unify and reinforce our individual power to influence policies and behaviour as well as our ability to lift disability issues to a national and/or international agenda. We also believe that partnerships contribute to developing a strong and independent civil society consisting of organisations with solid capacities, professional competences and human and financial resources to engage members and communities in a sustainable manner - a civil society capable of acting as an effective counterpart to the state and the private sector.

We are therefore committed to sharing our expertise, knowledge and competences as persons living with disabilities in partnerships with likeminded organisations in the Global South – and to learn from and be inspired by our partners.

### WHAT defines partnerships

We believe that partnerships should be based on and characterized by shared long-term commitment, common goals and the highest possible degree of mutuality and equality. Consequently, we define partnerships as: **a mutually beneficial cooperation between partners respecting each other and working towards a shared goal of positive and sustainable impact for persons with disabilities.**

We aim to form partnerships that:

- Are founded on common values and objectives, mutually agreed principles/guidelines and shared commitment to creating positive change for persons with disabilities.
- Take into consideration the local context, including the partner's current situation and needs, and are respectful to the partner's strategies and priorities.
- Emphasize interpersonal relationships, reciprocity, accountability and the highest possible degree of equality – in recognition of the unequal power dynamics contained in many relationships by virtue of unequal access to funds.
- Enhance the capacity, legitimacy<sup>2</sup> and sustainability of the disability movement through long-term cooperation, organisational development and mutual learning.
- Combine different experiences, resources and skills into joint development interventions targeting mainly persons with disabilities and their organisations.
- Strengthen networks and collaboration within the disability movement and with other relevant civil society, public and/or private actors.

In our context a partnership is more than a project cooperation or donorship. As partners we expand our relationship beyond the transfer of money to also include mutual learning and support to moving forward the mission of our organisations. At the same time, we acknowledge that most partnerships depend on some funding for joint activities.

## OUR ADDED VALUE

As Danish partners, we consider our added value to be our:

- Solidarity and moral support to organisations and movements with which we share membership and mandate.
- Specialist knowledge and competences as persons living with a disability.
- Long-standing expertise in forming organisations and movements of people with disabilities that are relevant to the needs and aspirations of our members.
- Extensive experience with coordinated national and international policy work and rights-based activities, and our ability to place issues from our partners in the Global South on the Danish and/or international agenda.
- Opportunities to apply for and provide funding for development interventions tailored to persons with disabilities and their organisations.

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<sup>2</sup> Legitimacy is understood here as 1) the individual organisation's legitimacy as a representative of persons with disabilities and their immediate relatives, and 2) the larger movements' legitimacy in terms of inclusiveness and representativeness of all groups of persons with disabilities.

## WHO we partner with

In the global South, we primarily engage in bilateral partnerships with organisations and movements with a membership consisting of people with disabilities and their immediate relatives and a mandate similar to our own. Our partners are mainly:

- **National\* organisations** with an individual membership base and a legitimate and recognized mandate to represent and promote the rights and needs of a particular group (or particular groups) of persons with disability.
- **National umbrella organisations/disability movements** with a legitimate and recognized mandate to represent and coordinate a diverse group of organisations of persons with disabilities and be the unifying structure and united voice of these.

*\*In some cases, partnerships are established with locally or regionally based organisations of persons with disabilities.*

When our partner portfolio includes multiple partners, we strive to create synergy between partners within and across countries. Where several Danish organisations of persons with disabilities have active partnerships in the same country, we seek to ensure that efforts are coordinated, synergy is utilized and experience is shared, to strengthen the country's disability movement and connect partner to relevant global processes.

Our support to the collective disability movements in the Global South focuses mainly on ensuring coordination and synergy among inclusive and democratic organisations with capacity to promote the rights and opportunities of persons with disabilities. Where an umbrella structure exists, this will additionally be supported to ensure active, inclusive and democratic ownership and involvement across its member organisations.

## STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS

Our partnerships with organisations *of* persons with disabilities can be supplemented by strategic partnerships with human rights organisations, UN agencies, universities, research and media institutions, national or local disability councils, organisations *for* persons with disabilities, relevant public and private sector actors, etc.

The purpose of such strategic partnerships is to support and advance the efforts made by our main partners, and it will always be complementary to the primary partnerships. A strategic partnership will typically be pursued with a view to:

- Gaining access to the strategic partner's specialized knowledge / skills.
- Mobilizing stakeholders around a common agenda, thus increasing the level of influence on e.g. legislative and policy changes, implementation and follow-up.
- Influencing the strategic partner to mainstream its activities and services to include persons with disabilities.
- Avoid creating parallel structures and services.

National and local governments and public service providers are regarded key strategic partners as these are responsible for protecting and enforcing rights of persons with disabilities.

# 3. KEY PARTNERSHIP PRINCIPLES



**RELATIONSHIP**



**PURPOSE**



**ACTION**



**LEARNING**



**ACCOUNTABILITY**

As Danish organisations of persons with disabilities our partnerships will be guided by the following five principles:

- **Respectful and trust-based relationships:** We respect our partner's mandate, obligations and independence and will support the development and implementation of their strategies, policies and procedures. We believe that each partner contributes unique experience and insights and we strive for an open and respectful dialogue. We acknowledge the power associated with funding and will proactively seek to counter any unequal power relations arising from economic differences, while developing trust-based relationships founded on jointly negotiated agreements and guidelines for cooperation.
- **Shared purpose and commitment:** In partnerships we commit to each other. The most solid foundations for such commitment are shared and mutually agreed values and goals. We will strive to match each other's expectations in order to maintain commitment and prevent conflicts. We accept that there may be areas of differences in organisational aspirations and policies, but as long as these do not represent a conflict of interest, we and our partners will agree to differ/disagree.
- **Joint actions/initiatives:** We work together to achieve better results and greater impact for persons with disabilities and their organisations. We recognize that there are differences in what we each are able to contribute and emphasize our partners' role as implementers. We base our joint actions and initiatives on clearly defined agreements and respect of each other's mandates, core competencies and obligations. We encourage cooperation within the national disability

movement, and when relevant, we coordinate and collaborate across Danish organisations of persons with disabilities and our respective partners.

- **Mutual learning:** We believe that learning arises from any cooperation and that a shared learning environment is beneficial to our partnership and our joint actions. We are therefore committed to creating strong learning practices where relevant experiences (best/promising practices and challenges) and results are documented and shared systematically in order to reflect on and learn from our successes and mistakes.
- **Mutual accountability and transparency:** We strive to build strong organisations and strong relationships where partners are transparent and accountable to each other as well as to the members and communities we serve and to other stakeholders. The principle of mutual transparency and accountability applies to decision-making, joint actions, communication, financial affairs, delivery of results, etc. From the outset, we base our partnerships on equal rights and mutually agreed obligations and will endeavor to treat difficulties and conflicts as shared problems and seek to find common solutions. Generally, we believe that an open and transparent dialogue between partners enhances ownership and trust which is imperative for a successful partnership.

These partnership principles can be translated into a charter containing guidelines for the partnership cooperation. Such guidelines should be discussed and agreed upon from the outset of a partnership and subsequently monitored and reviewed. The guidelines complement an actual bilateral partnership agreement and any project agreements.

Find inspiration on how to approach the discussions on guidelines for the partnership cooperation in the **Guide to Partnership Engagement**.

# 4. OUR APPROACH TO PARTNERSHIP

## – TURNING PRINCIPLES INTO PRACTICE

Based on experience and best practice among Danish organisations of persons with disabilities we encourage a long-term and strategic approach to partnerships rather than short-term project partnerships.

Organisational capacity development is integral to our partnership approach in order to contribute to strengthening and empowering the disability movement. From the beginning of a partnership, we focus on promoting legitimacy, democracy and organisational and financial sustainability in our partner organisation – taking into account their needs and priorities.

While we differ in size, manpower and aspirations for partnerships, we always enter a partnership with the intention of staying committed for the timespan needed to fulfil the envisaged goals of the partnership. As such, we believe it is fruitful to regard partnerships in phases - although a partnership relation is rarely a linear process.

Due to our differences as organisations, we do not operate with specific timespans for the different phases of a partnership but will adopt a strategic long-term perspective and be transparent about our plans for the gradual development and termination of the partnership. A long-term perspective may include the following phases\*:



*\* Please note that the illustrated phases represent a model and is not a fixed approach to partnership.*

Find inspiration, templates and tools on how to approach partnership during the various phases of the partnership cooperation in the **Guide to Partnership Engagement**.

## Partner selection

Before entering a partnership, we reflect on our expectations and potential contribution to the partnership. The partner selection is based on a set of selection criteria. It is up to the individual Danish organisation to determine the specific criteria, but they should be informed by the following five minimum standards. Organisations should be:

- "Of" and representing persons with disabilities and their immediate relatives, i.e. Organisations of Persons with Disabilities (for additional information about representative organisations of persons with disabilities please refer to article 4 and 33 in the UNCRPD and the General comment No. 7 on the participation of persons with disabilities, including children with disabilities, through their representative organisations, in the implementation and monitoring of the Convention).
- Officially registered, or in the process of being registered, as a legal entity in the country of operation and acknowledged as a legitimate representative of persons with disabilities by the national disability fraternity.
- Committed to promoting the implementation of the CRPD and ensuring non-discrimination and accessibility to all persons that it represents, regardless degree of disability, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, or political affiliations – as well as actively promoting the inclusion and participation of women, youth and children with disabilities.
- Democratically founded, or in the process of becoming a democratic organisation.
- Complying with – or striving to comply with – own statutes

As Danish organisations of persons with disabilities our partner portfolios differ in size and geographical scope, but when selecting partners, the selection process always includes an open dialogue with the potential partner about values, goals, expectations, organisational fit, processes/ procedures, ways of working, etc. Moreover, we conduct a pre-partnership assessment, where we assess the legitimacy and determine the potential partner's capacity in order to understand its strengths and weaknesses, including its track-record in relation to members and the wider target group of persons with disabilities. Partner selection is never a one-way process but will always be determined by a mutual desire for collaboration and an active choice from both parties.

## Phase 1: Partnership scoping and inception

Once a partner has been identified, we focus on building a respectful and trust-based relationship based on a dialogue about shared values, goals, expectations etc. As part of this dialogue it is important to be clear about the scope of the partnership to level expectations and create a framework for cooperation. In some cases, the inception phase will be based on a Memorandum of Understanding and the partnership will grow within the framework of joint small-scale partnership

activities (trainings, development interventions, campaigns, etc.) before the partners are ready to formalize the partnership in an actual agreement. In other cases, partnership agreements can be developed from the beginning of the collaboration. In each case, a partnership agreement will constitute the foundation for a strategic long-term collaboration. The process includes but is not limited to:

Building relationship:

- Gaining insight into the context, identifying potential areas for joint action, initiating basic organisational capacity development and piloting joint small-scale interventions.

Entering into a partnership agreement:

- Initial agreement on the scale of cooperation and the timescale of the partnership.
- Agreement on common guidelines for the partnership; roles, areas of responsibilities and contributions by the respective partners; procedures and mechanisms for mutual accountability and monitoring the partnership.
- Signing of a partnership agreement (or Memorandum of Understanding). An agreement will not contain any project specific details such as planned joint development interventions, outputs, funding details etc. These are written into individual project documents and funding agreements.

Capacity development:

- Discuss and agree on a process and/or initial plan for the support to organisational capacity development in the partner organisation. Such process will typically focus on promoting legitimacy, democracy, organisational and financial sustainability and strengthening membership activities, advocacy, networking and the potential for diversified funding of activities in order to ensure the highest possible level of sustainability in the partner organisation when the partnership ceases.

We believe that the clearer agreements on guidelines, roles, responsibilities, accountability measures etc. are defined at the beginning of a partnership, the easier it is for both parties to raise questions in case of disagreement on values and goals of the partnership, mismanagement of power or funds, etc.

## Phase 2: Partnership building

In the process of partnership building, we focus on consolidating the relationship and the cooperation based on the partners' respective and unique contributions. We regard the sharing of decisions, information and ideas, and learning to be a prerequisite for the building of the partnership. Moreover, we emphasize mutual commitment, but do not allow the partnership to become exclusive. We therefore strive to support our partners in exploring other relevant

partnerships, strategic alliances and networks throughout the partnership, and we seek to support our partners in identifying and developing alternative funding opportunities thus preparing the partners early for the ultimate phasing out of the relationship. The process of partnership building includes but is not limited to:

Capacity development:

- Building essential skills and capabilities of staff and volunteers in Danish organisations involved in the partnership, including their active listening and observation skills so as not to make assumptions, genuinely ask questions for the purpose of learning and behaving with respect towards people.
- Promoting legitimacy, democracy, organisational and financial sustainability in the partner organisation, while developing our own procedures and practices in relation to international development cooperation and advocacy.
- Building professional skills for the empowerment of persons with disabilities, strategic service delivery and advocacy of relevance to members.
- Supporting partners in creating and joining networks with relevant national and international organisations, institutions, etc. and engaging new partners/donors.

Acting together:

- Supporting partners in designing and implementing membership activities, development interventions and advocacy initiatives that contribute to creating lasting and positive changes in living conditions, participation and inclusion of all persons with disabilities.
- Respecting the implementing partner's role as lead actor towards its membership/constituency.

Learning together:

- Regular (joint) monitoring and documentation of the results of joint initiatives, including an updated capacity assessment of the partner organisation.
- Joint reflections and learning initiatives, for example in the form of annual reflection meetings.
- Regular partnership review documenting successes (progress towards shared goals), challenges and learning.

We strongly encourage conducting regular review of the partnership to confirm whether the partnership is solid, on track and meeting the agreements made, or if expectations need to be redefined and commitment reaffirmed. Considerations in relation to an exit strategy should be an integral part of the partnership dialogue from the early years of the partnership.

### Phase 3: Partnership maturity

Maturity is about partners gradually becoming more robust, effective and sustainable organisations with a low level of dependency and a strong commitment to deliver lasting changes for persons with

disabilities. It is important to be transparent about the exit strategy in order to prepare for the eventual phasing out of the partnership without jeopardizing the partners' future existence and operation.

Achieving maturity is largely dependent on the ability of partners to transform learning (skills, knowledge, best/promising practice) into institutionalized organisational and professional practices. The process includes but is not limited to:

Capacity development:

- Consolidation of partners organisational and policy capacity at national and local (branch) level, with a focus on transforming previous learnings into organisational and professional practices.
- Developing and gradually implementing an exit strategy for the partnership, including a gradual phasing out of financial support, especially the financial support to organisational operations and salaries.
- Supporting partners in developing and implementing fundraising strategies, including local resource mobilization and engaging new partners/donors.

Acting and learning together:

- Consolidating the results of joint interventions, documentation of lasting changes for persons with disabilities, and gradually phasing out joint development interventions, while continuing joint advocacy cooperation.
- Providing support in identifying funding opportunities and developing project applications to relevant donors.

We endeavour to develop exit strategies in cooperation with partners well in advance of the termination of a partnership, to guide the process and prepare the partners on the conditions applicable to phasing-out of the partnership.

#### **Phase 4: Exit and continued strategic cooperation**

The exit of a partnership should ideally follow a strategic process of capacity development that leaves the partner in a strong, independent and sustainable position. With that in mind, it is obvious to engage in a continued strategic cooperation between independent disabled people's organisations. We regard such strategic cooperation to be of mutual benefit to both organisations and contributing to strengthen the work we do individually. The process includes but is not limited to:

- Mutual sharing of relevant information and participation in relevant national and international exchange of experiences.
- Engaging previous partner as a resource in training and capacity development of new partners.
- Joint contributions to advocacy work at international level.
- Joint participation in relevant high-level international meetings.
- Provision of ad-hoc technical support.

# 5. CROSS-CUTTING CONSIDERATIONS

## Human Rights, leaving no one behind

All disability groups experience underrepresentation in society, but some disability groups are particularly under-represented. We will consequently strive to safeguard the inclusion, accessibility and participation of the most underrepresented groups (for example, children with disabilities, persons with multiple disabilities or persons with disabilities belonging to a minority groups) in the activities supported by the partnership. Additionally, we will make all relevant information about the partnership available in accessible formats.

## Independence and sustainability

We acknowledge that in providing financial support to partners, there is an inherent risk of developing dependency of Danish development aid, thus leaving the partner in a situation where it is reliant on subsidies to cover its cost of activities and core functions such as salaries, administration etc. In order to counter this risk, we will systematically work with partners to diversify and increase their funding base, including local resource mobilization, laying the foundation for a more independent and sustainable financial situation. Moreover, we will promote a sound economic culture focused on avoiding expensive habits and overspending. We will do this for example by keeping allowances low, not always covering all expenses, not financing activities and structures that are unsustainable, and finally making agreements on gradually phasing out support for wages, meetings, transport, etc.

## Anti-corruption

We are aware that corruption is deeply rooted in many cultures but are determined to maintain the highest standards of integrity and work ethics among staff in our organisations and across all areas of our activities including the activities we undertake in partnership with organisations of persons with Disabilities in the Global South. When the partnership involves funds from the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs we are subject to its [Anti-Corruption Policy](#) and we will consequently engage in dialogue on how to avoid corruption, maintain a policy of zero tolerance towards corruption in all its forms and react promptly in cases of suspected or documented fraudulent behaviour, abuse of funds, nepotism etc. In order to avoid corruption, we will sign an anti-corruption code of conduct

with partners, support the development of anti-corruption policies and work with our partners to strengthen their financial systems, control mechanisms, procurement routines and whistleblowing mechanisms.

### **Preventing Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Harassment (PSEAH)**

Sexual exploitation and abuse as well as sexual harassment are unacceptable breaches of fundamental human rights and contradicts our core values. We will therefore work closely with partners in fighting sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment and make every effort to create and nurture a culture of zero-tolerance and accountability where rights are recognized, promoted and protected, and where violations are actively prevented. We will help partners develop relevant policies, establish safe and trusted reporting mechanisms and support the empowerment of staff and beneficiaries to identify, respond to and feel safe reporting violations. In case of suspected or documented violations by personnel (our own or our partner's) we will ensure a fair process for swift and credible investigation and sanctions.

### **Managing conflicts**

Our partnerships involve organisations and individuals from different backgrounds and orientations, carrying different experiences, attitudes, needs, expectations, resources, and personalities. We consider diversity a strength and inspiration but acknowledge that differences can be a potential source of conflict. We are not afraid of conflicts and believe that conflicts can be effective drivers of development within a partnership. We will consequently take a problem-solving, constructive approach to conflicts; encouraging a fast response before a conflict escalates in order to manage it, find solutions and move forward. We will strive to:

- Intervene quickly in cases of conflict and deal with issues head on in a sensitive, fair and constructive manner.
- Always confront the person(s) involved in the conflict before discussing it with others.
- Engage in dialogue and listen carefully to different concerns in order to identify the root of the conflict.
- Remain objective and avoid making hasty judgements.
- Be constructive in finding solutions for moving forward and be prepared to make compromises.

### **Premature termination of a partnership**

Partnerships can be terminated earlier than expected if it becomes clear that there is serious disagreement about the partnership's values and goals, if one of the parties violates key

agreements/guidelines for the partnership, or if any unforeseen contextual circumstances so require. In such event, we will seek to minimize any negative impact for those who are not responsible for the early termination of the partnership.

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