Best Practices and Ethics for Development Co-operation Projects
Prepared by the WFD Expert Group on Developing Countries
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1. INTRODUCTION

This document is designed to provide recommendations for people and organisations internationally who want to assist in establishing (local) development cooperation projects with Deaf Communities overseas on deaf specific projects. The UNCRPD article 32 addresses "International cooperation" which states that international cooperation should be inclusive of people with disabilities and accessible for people with disabilities, and should facilitate and support capacity-building. The focus of this paper is on *how to reach maximal involvement and ownership of (local) deaf people in an ethical, sensible and sustainable way*.

2. PURPOSES

2.1 New projects need to arise of context-specific needs, desires, expectations and realities. **Ideas for projects need to have the strong acceptance, ownership and agreement of the (local) communities themselves by consulting the local organisation/association (preferably a WFD Ordinary Member) representing the deaf people.** (Whilst this might seem obvious, it is very rare that organisations or development workers follow this advice.)

2.2 Since the local Deaf Community might not be aware of all possibilities that they might have for strengthening the human rights of deaf people, **consultations with international deaf partners** (individuals/ communities/organisations including WFD Ordinary Members overseas) might be fruitful and inspirational within this process. After getting information or examples about what is possible to achieve, Deaf Communities and/or local deaf associations might be able to decide about their own priorities.

2.3 During such consultations, **avoid the assumption that deaf people and communities in the developing world have a desire for Western solutions, live in a context with high levels of resources**, or that western ideas, concepts and developments can be "copy-pasted" into foreign contexts. As well as differing legal, political and cultural contexts, differing levels of resources, different government funding models (if any), there are deaf-specific cultural differences too. There are for example vast cultural differences in how deaf people relate to hearing people in each context – which is a critical success factor. **In this process, peer-support from a neighbouring Deaf Community** might be more fruitful than from deaf partners originating from a very different socio-cultural and politico-economical context.

2.4 Projects with Deaf Communities need to be **designed by people who have an understanding** of:
1. the local sign language, culture and local deaf values and networks, the history of the country, the political and economic situation, the legislation and the society in general;
2. the current activities, networks and involvements of the deaf organisation/community in question and
3. the history of previous projects, trainings, workshops and other interventions, in order to be able to build upon the work done in these organisations and projects, and not to repeat mistakes.

2.5 Therefore, **a detailed *contextual analysis* of the situation in the community** is a good starting point for the discussions on the project design by the international and the local partner. A short consultation visit is not enough to create such an analysis.

3. SUSTAINABILITY

3.1 **Sustainability of the project or organisation should be central:** the goal should be for local deaf people to (eventually) manage the project on their own, and for them to have the capacities, skills, and tools to lobby for implementation of human rights and equal access in society for deaf people.

3.2 Therefore, **the design of the project should be part of a long-term plan** with and for the community. There are certain steps that usually need to be taken before other steps – e.g. deaf awareness raising, strengthening of the organisation and sign language work are prerequisites for successful linguistic lobbying/advocacy activities or interpreter training programs. This needs to have occurred internally or be implemented/strengthened in the planning phase of the project.

3.3 **Capacity building projects need to be long-term, and therefore last at the minimum of 3-5 years.** Learning takes time, and external training support must be given on a long-term basis. Interval teaching/advising has proven to be successful, in that the advisor works long enough time slots with the community (several weeks), but then leaves the community to work by themselves – and after that regularly pays the community visits for giving more training (during several years). **Short project input can do more harm than good.**

3.4 **A prerequisite for a successful project implementation is an unhindered communication**. Pay attention to language use within the project activities – the most accessible language for deaf people is the local sign language.

3.5 **Be flexible with the project planning** – do not hesitate to re-assess and change the original plan if it is not working once the project has started (within the limits of keeping the goals of the project unchanged, activity changes can usually be motivated and explained to the funder). Beginning projects are usually pilot projects and therefore it is crucial to work with an open and flexible mind.

4. OWNERSHIP AND LOCAL PROJECT MEMBERS

4.1 It is very important that the **local deaf people have ownership of the project objectives** (and are not just enthusiastically accepting of "any help") as this is a key factor for projects to be successful.

4.2 **Competent local deaf people with leadership potential** need to be central figures in the project or organisation. The local deaf persons involved should be broad representatives of the whole community, to avoid a perception that the "voice of the community" is brought forward only by a small deaf elite. These people need to be carefully selected: be attentive to questions of gender, age, class, caste, ethnicity, religion, affiliation to deaf association, and educational differences.

4.3 Therefore, it is advisable to use a **transparent nomination/recruiting process**, to give all members in the Deaf Community the opportunity to apply for a position within the project. Instead of hand-picking people, a committee could be trained to form job descriptions, with the responsibility to interview and choose the right deaf people for the posts against these job descriptions. The selection criteria should be known by everyone and agreed upon. This would enhance the community's trust of the project. Further, this community-based approach would positively influence the sustainability and community ownership of the project work and reduce international dominance or dominance of elites.

4.4 **These people with potential need to be encouraged, nurtured, empowered and trained, preferably by deaf facilitators.** This training is the key to project success and can lead to **snow-ball effects within communities:** trained leaders could be central figures in training/empowering deaf people in their area or country (rather than international outsiders giving trainings to local deaf people of very diverse backgrounds). Training could be in sustainable development, project management, AIDS education, teaching skills, technical/vocational skills, computer training, counselling, language documentation and description, lobbying skills, advocacy tools such as CRPD, and so on.

4.5 **It is important to determine in advance whether, and at which moment, hearing people** (such as relatives, teachers, interpreters, other development professionals) **will be included in projects**. In general, be wary of hearing members taking control of projects from deaf people. At the same time it is very important that relevant (hearing) stakeholders are kept informed about the progress of the project. Their role must be clear and the lead must stay within the Deaf Community. When determining the way and amount of involvement of hearing people, it is important to keep in mind the following:

- In some deaf-specific projects, e.g. sign language work, hearing people's (teachers, interpreters, etc.) involvement in the work on sign language should be kept to a minimum and working group members should be **all-deaf**. This at least so long the deaf awareness and the basic linguistic insights in the community are strong enough to resist the pressure from outside towards the language. The real experts on language issues are the deaf signers so hearing people should be included only in a later stage.

- In other 'mainstream' development projects, such as projects aimed at employment, housing and education, excluding hearing people might alienate or even marginalise deaf people from hearing members in their local community (e.g. as relatives and neighbours in a rural setting). Hearing members might become jealous or frustrated if organisations focus only on deaf members of a community, particularly in situations of general poverty, which could lead to problematic deaf-hearing relationships. To avoid this, such projects could be designed to be inclusive and to stimulate/organise cooperation between deaf and hearing community members.

- Projects focusing on capacity building of the national associations of the deaf should have self-representation and self-governance by deaf people as an immediate goal. If the partner association is controlled by hearing board members or is under strong influence of hearing individuals, a succession plan handing over the control to deaf people should be made as a part of the agreement between the partners.

5. WORKERS FROM OTHER COUNTRIES

If people from outside countries are working in developing cooperation projects **as advisors or project staff (either paid or voluntary)**:

1. **they should be professionals** in the field in which they will be employed. It is not enough for a development worker to be deaf and have a sign language as their first language. For example, people who teach in a school should be trained to do so. In sign language work, people need to have a linguistic education background in order to work within sign language documentation and description. In technical trainings, people need to be experienced in teaching the skills they are trying to pass on. Given the complexity of development work, the person should ideally have training in international or community development if possible.

2. **their first task is to learn the local sign language**, to avoid importing a foreign sign language or relying on communication through International Sign or interpreters.

3. **these professionals can be either deaf or fluently signing hearing people**
   - In general, (international) deaf people seem to have certain 'tools' to understand (local) deaf people's needs, to learn a new sign language; they might be easily accepted by a local Deaf Community; they are important role models for local deaf people and also can be live examples for local hearing people to understand what deaf people can do and achieve. However, simply because someone is deaf does not mean that they are necessarily suited to work in a developing country context. As mentioned above: they should be professionals in their field and ideally have training in international or community development.
   - A hearing advisor also can be a huge role model – showing that also hearing people can learn a new sign language, be a model for both deaf and hearing on how to interact respectfully with the Deaf Community. A hearing advisor should be a fluent signer.

4. they should arrive in the destination well-prepared, with a **prior understanding of the community's** culture, community values, history, and political economic structures, the deaf organisation structure, the project management cycle, and so on.

Instead of sending short term volunteers to projects overseas **consider other ways to support deaf people in developing countries**, such as financially assisting existing local/national programmes or development organisations, or financially investing in training and providing employment to local deaf leaders.

6. FURTHER READING

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