

Principles and Guidelines
for the Support for
People with Intellectual
Disabilities Abroad
Followed by the Federal
Association of Lebenshilfe*



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* Lebenshilfe is the german expression for „Life Help“ for people with intellectual disabilities (learning disabilities).

Contents

Why Support for People with Intellectual Disabilities in Poor Countries?	4
The Situation of People with Intellectual Disabilities throughout the World	4
Self-image of the Association of Lebenshilfe with Reference to International Assistance	5
Support in Poor Countries	6
Activities of the Association of Lebenshilfe in Germany	8
Co-operation with Others and within Europe	9
Final remarks	10

Why Support for People with Intellectual Disabilities in Poor Countries?

According to its political programme the Association of Lebenshilfe commits itself to support people with intellectual disabilities across the borders of Germany, that means where help is particularly needed.

The Situation of People with Intellectual Disabilities throughout the World

People with disabilities constitute the largest minority throughout the world. These approx. 500 million people (almost 10% of the global population) must be given the same dignity as to all other non-disabled people. People with intellectual disabilities (ca. 0.6% of the global population) are part of them. International work means support for all disabled people, but particularly those with intellectual disabilities.

70% of the disabled people live in economically poor countries

- Mostly in rural areas, far away from any possibilities to participate in rehabilitation measures
- Only 10% of the global rehabilitation funds flow into the so-called developing countries
- Only 3% of all people with disabilities in need of rehabilitation measures receive them

In the past years self-help groups acting as non governmental groups (NGOs) have been founded in many poor and underprivileged countries

- Aiming at improving the situation of people with disabilities
- These NGOs are partners of the Association of Lebenshilfe
 - In close co-operation projects for people with intellectual disabilities are realised

The acceptance and treatment of people with (intellectual) disabilities is subject to the cultural, social, religious and economic conditions, for example:

- Ascribing special, even supernatural skills to those people
- Abandoning children with disabilities

- Sometimes a very good integration, for example in less structured and differentiated societies
- In Eastern European countries people with intellectual disabilities are still considered unable or unworthy of receiving support
 - They do not receive any of the very limited governmental supportive measures
 - No difference is made between the various forms of disabilities

Up to 25% of the population in poor countries are directly or indirectly involved in the effects of disability

- Considerable burden for the families
 - A disabled family member is an additional burden in an economically difficult situation
 - If a disabled person is cared for in the family, at least one family member is unable to contribute to the family income
- People with disabilities, and disabled women in particular, suffer most from the difficult situations in the poor countries
 - Nutrition problems
 - Lack of medical care
 - Barely access to school education
 - Social discrimination

Self-image of the Association of Lebenshilfe with Reference to International Assistance

People with intellectual disabilities and their families are the direct target group of the international work of the Association of Lebenshilfe. However, the practice shows that in those countries in which support is particularly needed, it cannot be limited to this group, nor can it be justified by developmental political or humanitarian explanations.

The Association of Lebenshilfe fights for – irrespective of the kind and degree of the disability – the improvement of the support for people with disabilities. Limiting the supportive measures to just those disabled persons „being capable of rehabilitation” is strictly contradictory to the ethical principle of nobody being excluded from human rights.

The Association of Lebenshilfe is first of all a parents’ organisation and a self-help association. Therefore, it focuses particularly on the family life

with a disabled relative by supporting measures suitable for strengthening family structures and reducing the burden of the families, in order to enable



them to take care and support their disabled children. However, it is just as important to support them according to their individual skills, in order to make them contribute to the family income. NGOs

should be strengthened, but more government funds and services are just as necessary.

As for development co-operation the Association of Lebenshilfe presents itself as a professional organisation looking for co-operation with the various governmental institutions to induce the political and social forces in foreign countries to improve the situation of people with intellectual disabilities.

Support in Poor Countries

Partner Organisations and Concepts

- The local partner organisations abroad are usually self-help organisations (NGOs) striving to improve the situation of people with (intellectual) disabilities
- Primary support for people with intellectual disabilities
- Highest principle is the help to self-help and support
 - Establishing structures of self-help

- Concepts for the integration of people with disabilities
- Establishing non-central structures
- Providing information and experience in the field of support for people with intellectual disabilities
- But: not releasing the government from responsibility; structures of self-help must be granted and supported

Accommodation and Sustainability of Support

Measures to support people with intellectual disabilities strengthens the society as a whole. Therefore, one objective is the steady development of a community in as many areas of social life as possible, whereby the following criteria must be considered:



- Relief programmes based on the respective social context
- Support of educational concepts rooted in the respective culture and society
- Sustainability of support, that is long-term effects and continuation of the Lebenshilfe projects after having officially expired
- Use of experiences made so far from development co-operation

Networking

The Association of Lebenshilfe supports endeavours to improve the situation in countries in which help is particularly needed, to distribute existing means more properly and to offer new programmes for action. Therefore, a close co-operation with other development aid agencies based on division of labour is aimed at, if the interchange of various experiences leads to synergy effects for the target group.

Socio-cultural Context

It is totally clear that relief projects must be in accordance with the social, political, religious, cultural and economic conditions of the respective country's population. This can be best achieved if

- People with intellectual disabilities and their families are already actively taking part in the planning process
- The partner organisation is represented in the decision making bodies
- The political constellation, the under-employment, the deficient economic conditions as well as the daily struggle for survival are being considered
- The socio-cultural (also ethnical) conditions of the respective society are included from the very beginning



Activities of the Association of Lebenshilfe in Germany

More than 100 out of about 500 local and district associations (German: OV's and KV's) are involved in international assistance in Germany. So are several state associations (German LV's), but the Federal Association of Lebenshilfe as umbrella organisation in particular. International assistance is usually carried out in form of specific projects which come into being through personal contacts.

International assistance is carried out in rather different ways. Its duration and success depends first of all on the personal efforts of the people involved as well as on the available financial means which are procured through various activities.

Apart from the projects of the OV's/KV's and several LV's the international assistance of the Federal Association of Lebenshilfe is presently carried out in form of:

- Humanitarian help, professional support as well as offering counselling in Central and Eastern European countries by means of several years' lasting projects
- Support for people with disabilities in countries of the South, also by means of long-term projects as well as counselling, exchange of information and furthermore invitation of local professionals, volunteers, trainees and students to Germany
- Co-operation with institutions of the European Union and other European organisations for people with intellectual disabilities
 - Fund raising for international assistance
 - The Federal Association of Lebenshilfe tries to get co-financial support from the European Union and German Ministries. Financial support is also included in the budget of the Association of Lebenshilfe
 - Information and public relations
 - Co-publishing of the newsletter: *Behinderung und Dritte Welt (Disability in Third World Countries)*
 - Further education programmes, conferences, workshops, study groups on international disability issues



Co-operation with Others and within Europe

The Federal Association of Lebenshilfe is in regular contact with German and international development aid agencies. The main issues here are the exchange of information and co-operation at national and international level. In this context the integration of measures for people with intellectual disabilities in general development aid programmes is a very important

criterion. The Federal Association of Lebenshilfe supports co-operation and networks between various non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in the field of special education.

The Federal Association of Lebenshilfe gathers information from all over the world about the work with people with disabilities, and with intellectual disabilities in particular. It is available in the library of the Central Office



of the Association of Lebenshilfe. Moreover, important materials in different languages are compiled and published. If required, they are sent to the organisations in the respective countries. These publications furthermore serve to inform volunteers, experts and other interested people.

There are also many enquiries from universities. The Federal Association of Lebenshilfe appreciates and supports the exchange of ideas between scientists and students who work in this field.

Regarding its support for people with intellectual disabilities the Federal Association of Lebenshilfe has agreed with other member organisation of Inclusion International (formerly the International League of Societies for People with Mental Handicap) to concentrate, regardless of countries of the so-called Third World, on Central and Eastern Europe, that is Russia, the Ukraine, Belarus, the Czech and Slovakian Republic.

Final remarks

Support for people with disabilities in countries in which it is particularly needed, is imperative. Therefore, the Association of Lebenshilfe feels committed to actively participate in the international work for people with intellectual disabilities.

Not only in Eastern Europe is it still utterly important to introduce models of special education issues which consider the equal rights of people with

(intellectual) disabilities, even if the economical and political situation in some Eastern countries make it quite difficult. Thus, the self-help organisations having been founded under these unfavourable circumstance must be supported all the more. However, humanitarian help must be provided as well.

As for Eastern Europe, the social and economic situation, in spite of increasing poverty, is comparably better than in many other Third World countries. The situation there has rather aggravated than improved in the past years. Impoverishment is increasing, and the growing number of population impede the social and economic development.



Meanwhile, the situation of some countries in the South is comparably stable. In others, that is mostly African countries, the armed conflicts recently flared-up have destroyed aims already achieved, and „produce“ more disabled people. Lack of food as well as diseases do the rest.

It is necessary to further support the NGOs of Third World countries, which have been founded in the past, and to stand up for the needs and wishes of the people concerned under these difficult circumstances.

Speaking more and more about the „One World“ means to assume responsibility, look beyond one's nose, and in view of the often desperate situation of people with disabilities in other countries to look for possibilities for support on a partnership basis.

(This version is based on the Guidelines for International Assistance of the Federal Association of Lebenshilfe)



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