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|  | Hoffnungszeichen Sign of Hope e.V. Partnership Policy | Revision: 01.00 Valid after: 01.07.2018 Review: 01.07.2020 Page: 1 of 8 |
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Introduction

Hoffnungszeichen | Sign of Hope is an interdenominational human rights, relief and development organisation. Helping those in distress is the focus of our work across the world. Sign of Hope campaigns where human rights are being abused or threatened. Sign of Hope provides humanitarian aid in the form of disaster relief and emergency aid and is also involved in sustainable development cooperation based on the principle of ‘Help People to Help Themselves’.

With a background of the Christian faith as a shared set of values and basic motivating factors, Sign of Hope is guided by the core values of empathy, charity and solidarity. The following quotation from Matthew 25, verse 40 illustrates the common core: ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.’

The purpose of this document is to outline the partnership objectives and principles of Sign of Hope as well as the process followed to ensure effective and efficient programming that creates positive change for the target communities. Supportive tools for each step of the partnership process have been developed.

This document solely addresses partnerships with national or local civil society organisations such as national and local non-governmental organisations, community-based and faith-based organisations including Dioceses and Churches. It does not cover other types of partnerships, e.g. with governments (local government, Ministries, etc.), the private sector (local, national and international businesses) or international organisations (INGOs, IOs, etc.). This does not mean that Sign of Hope does not consider and enter into partnerships with these actors. For this purpose, Memorandums of Understanding are signed as required.

Definition of Partnership

Sign of Hope’s understanding of a partnership is based on the Humanitarian Accountability Partnership Standard that defines humanitarian partnership as “a relationship of mutual respect between autonomous organisations that is founded upon a common purpose with defined expectations and responsibilities”. For Sign of Hope this refers to a “formal relationship between Sign of Hope and a local civil society organisation with the common goal of protecting the rights of people in distress and meeting their needs for assistance”.

Rationale for developing and working in partnership

As a principle and key way of implementation, Sign of Hope works through and with local partners. This approach is based on the conviction that local organisations are closer to the communities where Sign of Hope wants to create change; they are familiar with the local context and culture thus enhancing the ownership by the communities and enabling sustainable change. At the same time it is

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|  | Hoffnungszeichen Sign of Hope e.V. Partnership Policy | Revision: 01.00 Valid after: 01.07.2018 Review: 01.07.2020 Page: 2 of 8 |
|--|--|--|

Sign of Hope’s ambition to support and strengthen local civil society organisations to be the drivers of change in their communities.

Sign of Hope strongly believes in the transformative power of local change agents. The question is therefore not *when* to work in partnership but with *whom* to guarantee the best benefit for the local population. It is also a question about managing partnerships to ensure that the partnership successfully creates positive sustainable change in the communities Sign of Hope and its partners are targeting with their activities.

Background of Partnership Policy

As outlined above working in partnership is fundamental to Sign of Hope’s work. The partnership policy builds on Sign of Hope’s organisational values and its experience of working with partners. It is informed by commitments made by the global community:

Development Effectiveness Agenda

To support the implementation of the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness from 2005¹, the need to strengthen the participation of civil society organisations (CSO) in improving aid effectiveness was recognised by all stakeholders. After several international high level fora, the Busan Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation endorsed the International Framework for CSO Development Effectiveness and the Istanbul Principles that were adopted by 170 CSOs from 28 countries. One of the eight Istanbul principles (No.6) refers to partnerships: “Pursue equitable partnerships and solidarity”. It states that “CSOs are effective as development actors when they commit to transparent relationships with CSOs and other development actors, freely as equals, based on shared development goals and values, mutual respect, trust, organisational autonomy, long-term accompaniment and global citizenship”.

Localisation Agenda

The first World Humanitarian Summit convened by the UN Secretary-General took place in 2016. A key outcome of the summit was that the humanitarian system has to be more locally led: a shift is required to “reinforce and [...] not replace” the roles of national and local actors in the prevention and delivery of assistance (“Agenda for Humanity”). This is “central to the change in mind set and behaviour required to sustainably reduce need, risk and vulnerability”.²

Core Humanitarian Standard

The Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability (CHS) sets out Nine Commitments that organisations and individuals involved in humanitarian response can use to improve the quality and effectiveness of the assistance they provide. It also facilitates greater accountability to communities and people affected by crisis: knowing what humanitarian organisations have committed to will enable them to hold those organisations to account.

¹ The Paris Declaration of Aid Effectiveness outlines five fundamental principles for making aid more effective: ownership, harmonisation, alignment, results and mutual accountability. The aid effectiveness agenda has been further built and strengthened at various International High Level Fora resulting in the Accra Agenda for Action (2008) and the Busan Partnership for Effective Development Co-operation (2011), and further high level meetings in Mexico (2014) and Nairobi (2016).

² OCHA (2017:7)

Types of partners and partnerships

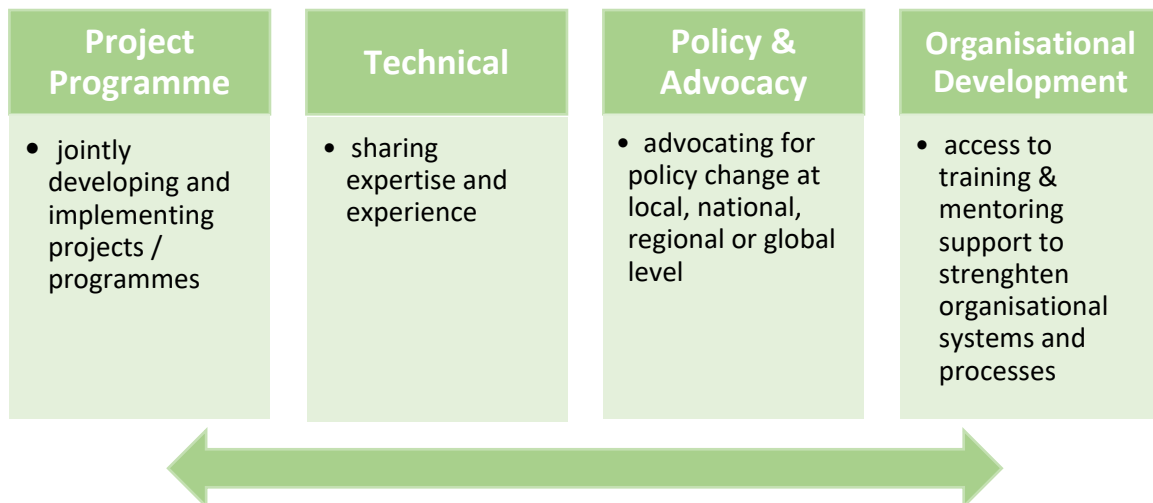
Partnership criteria based on shared objectives and values

Sign of Hope works with civil society partners who share the same organisational objectives and values and who have some experience in implementing donor-funded projects. The following table outlines the criteria:

| Values | Sectors & Reach | Experience |
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transparency • Non-discriminatory / inclusive approach • Integrity • Respect • informed by spiritual beliefs | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disaster Risk Reduction • Food Security, Shelter, WASH, Education, Health, Livelihood, Nutrition • Human Rights • Reach: regional and if possible also national level | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development and/or Humanitarian Aid Interventions • Human Rights • Project Management • Financial and narrative Reporting • Donor funding • Common language |

Partnership Arrangements

Sign of Hope works mainly in partnership with local civil society organisations to implement joint development and/or disaster relief projects. Besides project partnerships, other arrangements exist such as technical, policy and advocacy and organisational development partnerships. Most partnerships span around more than one category.



Guiding Partnership Principles

Partnerships between Sign of Hope and its civil society partners are guided by a set of partnership principles. These principles influence and guide the partner selection process, scope of the partnership, evaluation and communication between the partners, to ensure the effectiveness, sustainability and ethical integrity of all partnerships.

Equity: Decision making power and responsibilities are shared by both partners in an equitable manner.

Shared vision of development: Whilst Sign of Hope and its partners may be coming from very different contexts and backgrounds, they have similar views on how development is to be progressed, through people being empowered to take control of their own lives and circumstances.

Transparency: Both partners are committed to being fully accountable to each other. This will include full transparency in reporting and upward accountability to the funding partner, and to other donors. It will equally include downward accountability to the supported partner in terms of the provision of information and good consultation processes. It also refers in particular to downward accountability to programme beneficiaries as the primary focus of the partnership, through good consultation, information and feedback processes. Where particular issues of financial concern arise, the partner agency will be informed immediately.

Realistic expectations: Expectations from partnerships will be set at a level that reflects the current capacity of the partner, and the level of support that will be provided by (or to) Sign of Hope during the partnership. Similarly, expectations of support from Sign of Hope will be set at a level that reflects its capacity to support and respond to the partner in a realistic and timely manner.

Agreed strategy: Whilst both partners have their own strategic plans setting out their organisational objectives and guiding the overall approach to their work, there is sufficient compatibility in strategy to allow them to work together.

Mutual Benefit: Both partners benefit from the delivery of programming or advocacy work that is based on mutually agreed objectives. The ultimate aim of the partnership is to deliver real and lasting benefits to the intended beneficiaries of all programming work, advocacy or campaigning initiatives undertaken under the partnership. Both partners will take steps to ensure that all projects are designed, resourced and implemented in such a way that the intended development results are achieved, and that appropriate systems are in place to set clear targets and to measure results.

Partnership Process

The process of a partnership entails several steps. For each step it is important to have guidelines and to define clear roles and responsibilities. Sign of Hope's partnership process is visualised as having three stages and five steps.



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|  <p>hoffnungszeichen sign of hope</p> | <p>Hoffnungszeichen Sign of Hope e.V.</p> <p>Partnership Policy</p> | <p>Revision: 01.00 Valid after: 01.07.2018 Review: 01.07.2020 Page: 5 of 8</p> |
|---|--|--|

Stage I: Scoping and Building a Partnership

1. Preparing a partnership: Identification of partners

It is key to have a transparent process for identifying partners and clear assessment criteria for selecting partners.

How do we find & select partners?

Identification of relevant partners: Mapping exercise

- ✓ Identify what kind of partners would add value
- ✓ Search for partners by:
 - Exploring through existing contacts of Sign of Hope and /or by asking the target community (e.g. health centre, school, church, local government): What kind of organisations exist? Who do they think is an effective organisation?
 - Researching via local networks e.g. NGO forum, other INGOs or International Organisations.

Assessing identified partners and deciding with whom to partner:

ASSESSMENT TOOLS:

- Organisational compatibility
- Capacity of potential partner
- Risk assessment

Collecting information

- ✓ Background research on the organisation: e.g. annual reports, websites, if possible visit of office and projects, references, preliminary meetings and dialogue.
- ✓ Key questions to keep in mind:
 - What kind of an organisation is it?
 - Are our vision & values compatible?
 - What is their relationship to the target community?
 - What else are they doing beside our planned joint project?
 - What do we know about their background, their links and about their leaders?
 - Where does their funding currently come from?
 - What is the organisation's track record?
 - How is their credibility and public image?
 - What is the potential added value for both organisations?



At the same time while assessing the potential partner, it is also important that Sign of Hope shares relevant information with the partner. It is not a one-way process, but a mutual assessment where both partners reflect and decide if they want to partner or not.

Reviewing the information / reflection³

- ✓ Assessing risks and rewards:
 - Organisational risk (e.g. reputation impact, loss of autonomy, conflicts of interest, drain on resources, implementation challenges, security challenges);
 - Areas of benefit (e.g. better access to information and networks, greater reach, improved organisational efficiency, more appropriate and effective service delivery, greater innovation, enhanced credibility, increased access to resources)

³ Cf. Partnership Initiative 2011:12-14

- ✓ Resource Mapping: what can each partner bring to the partnership: e.g. information, expertise, networks, and people.

2. Setting up a partnership: Agreeing and formalising the partnership

After agreeing on a partnership, Sign of Hope and its partner will jointly formalise the agreement (MoU or Contract⁴). This is essential to enable a strong partnership agreeing on mutual roles, responsibilities and expectations. It is important that both parties sufficiently discuss any open question before signing an agreement. The agreement should include the rationale and the goals of the

How do we find & select partners?

AGREEMENT FORMAT:

- Letter of Intent (LoI)
- Memorandum of Understanding (MoU)
- Contract

partnership, deliverables by both partners and how the partnership will work (incl. practical, simple and transparent operational procedures such as reporting, monitoring, information sharing, financial accountability, empowerment of beneficiaries, mechanisms to handle disagreement, etc.).

Stage II: Managing and Maintaining Partnerships

3. Implementing a partnership

How do we ensure the delivery of quality programmes?

Once a partnership agreement is in place it is important to make sure that quality programmes are delivered. Transparency and accountability have to be ensured by establishing clear roles and processes for monitoring and narrative and financial reporting. It is important to identify ongoing support required by partners to ensure effective and efficient implementation.

Besides focusing deliverables, it is important to also nurture partnership: time is required and it has to be planned for. Only if there is a level of trust in the partnership, the partners will share what is going on⁵.

REPORTING / MONITORING FORMAT:

- Narrative Quarterly Report
- Financial Quarterly Report
- Monitoring Plan
- Performance Indicator Matrix
- TOR Field Visit

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To build trust it is important to not only take time for formal discussions, but also to have informal discussions across a range of people in the organisation - leadership and staff - and foresee sufficient time for meals and socialising. This is crucial for all stages of the partnership.

Stage III: Reviewing and Revising Partnerships and Sustaining Outcomes

4. Monitoring / Reviewing a Partnership

⁴ MoU: not legally binding; versus Contract: legally binding (important to manage larger amounts of funding)

⁵ Barefoot Collective (2009: 47)



The partnership itself needs to be monitored throughout its lifespan in a collaborative and participatory approach: To reflect and assess the different perspectives of the two organisations concerning the partnership, to examine how the partnership developed over time and to analyse if there are differences

PARTNERSHIP MONITORING TOOL:

- Partner questions for visit
- CHS self-assessment
- Ex-post evaluation
- Partner review

between the existing and the desired partnership. Key is that both organisations jointly agree on criteria for assessing the partnership. Possible criteria are: trust, respect, roles & responsibilities, transparency in regards to financial matters as well as decision-making, communication and added value, in line with the partnership principles.



Sign of Hope wants to learn from its partners and invites them to give feedback on how they are doing as a partner.

5. Sustaining / Ending Partnerships

In most cases, the agreement sets out the duration of the partnership. However, the aim of Sign of Hope is to build long-term partnerships as well as to have strong partners at their side for disaster relief and emergency response projects. Therefore, it will be an open and transparent discussion with the partner throughout the partnership to explore the development of the partnership (see above monitoring & reviewing) and whether there are possibilities to continue the partnership in the future beyond the project period. Subsequent questions to answer are what this continuation could look like and how it could be further developed in a way that is beneficial for both sides.

Sustaining the partnership will also depend on the availability of external financial resources. Where possible, Sign of Hope is committed to also invest in the organisational capacity development of the partner and to support them in order to gain access to additional (especially) local funding resources.

In case there is a need to end the partnership – especially if it is one sided – the respective side will communicate the reasons in a respectful, honest and transparent way. The need to end a partnership may arise if one side does not meet the obligations (e.g. implementation of activities, reporting requirements, respect of deadlines) agreed upon in the respective project agreement, or does not respect the above mentioned humanitarian principles and values.

Effectivity

This policy will be effective for all co-workers of Hoffnungszeichen | Sign of Hope e.V. until amendments will be announced. Each co-worker is obliged to observe this policy.

References

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|  | Hoffnungszeichen Sign of Hope e.V. Partnership Policy | Revision: 01.00 Valid after: 01.07.2018 Review: 01.07.2020 Page: 8 of 8 |
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