BUILD A DEAF ORGANISATION

Introduction

The organisation's interaction with target groups and its working environment are important for its legitimacy. It is important for the organisation to receive support and acceptance from its target groups as well as to have a great cooperation and an active dialogue with the target group. It is also important to maintain interaction and active participation in different networks, which will increase the validity of the organisation in the eyes of other actors. This, in turn, will affect the organisation's strength and output.

It is important that consider what people know about your organisation. Can people see the results your organisation has achieved? It is important that agencies and communities in your country recognise and appreciate your organisation. They should know your organisation as a national association of the deaf and what you do – for example advocate for the rights of deaf people in your country. It is a good signal if people refer to your organisation for questions and ask for advice. You should be active in your relations with your target group – the deaf community. The deaf community should recognise and accept your organisation and your work as an association representing the deaf. Your organisation should enjoy the trust of the deaf community.

This can be succeeded by participating in networks both locally, nationally, and internationally. You should work actively to enter new partnerships and networks, also on international level.

Active participation in networks

The likelihood that the organisation will survive and have an impact is strongly related to how it tries to cooperate with others, in both the short and long term. Cooperation can be spontaneous, deliberate, and strategic. It is highly beneficial for the organisation to participate actively in existing and functioning networks and whenever necessary, to build new relevant networks and strategic alliances. The organisation should be a part of several networks and strategic alliances and participate actively in them. It is a good idea to actively enter new partnerships and networks locally and internationally.

Find out whether there are concrete examples that your organisation is part of, and actively participates in, existing networks. Does the organisation take initiatives for coordination between organisations with similar objectives? Are there examples of joint activities, methods work, and regular meetings with networks? It is very beneficial for your organisation to network and cooperate with other actors: You can make a policy change that is good for the deaf community (eg. your government provides sign language interpreting at hospitals), you can share different ideas with other organisations, you can get new projects or funding to support your goal, you can make different agreements (eg. agree with the government that they will support the establishment of sign language interpreter training in your country) and you will gain more people to support your cause in advocacy. Benefits of networking are for example information sharing, sharing learning and good practices, you can become more active in advocacy work, more people know about your organisation, and you can push your agenda in different networks and forums.

When networking, you should treat people well, learn to talk to people you do not know (as they might have some power to make a change or provide you funding), make 5 to 10 new relationships with well-connected people, listen to other people, attend regularly to events to present your organisation, and stay constantly in touch with people you know and have met. You never know if you need them later. Keep in mind the importance of representation. You should represent the organisation in different events. For example, if you do not represent and participate in different events, people forget you, and do not know that deaf people exist, because you are not visible. By participating in networks, you are also visible and raise awareness of deaf people.

Building networks

Deaf community
- Your target group

Disability community

- Wider target group
- Similar need for recognition and attention to their basic human rights
- Higher percentage of empathy and willingness to cooperate
- Stronger advocacy opportunities if you advocate together
- Usually have experience on how to lobby and advocate for the government

Government institutions

- Main provider of programs and services
- Can revise, uphold, implement, and enforce appropriate policies and procedures to promote basic human rights
- Can link current institutions with better and quality accessibility (e.g. teachers of the deaf with required sign language certification)
- Can permanently fund programs and services

NGOs

- Alternative provider of programs and services
- Can provide funds for initiation of new programs and services (provide funding for e.g. a capacity building training)
- Can focus on specific needs and multiple solutions
- Can bring / link deaf experts from other countries (e.g. sign language research)

Academic and research institutions

- Bring new information to assist in advocacy and lobbying of the organisation
- Provides what you need for research and information (e.g. sign language research)
- Provide appropriate recognition of higher and quality education / training (e.g. sign language interpreting program, deaf education program)
- Can be at local, national, and/or international level

Participation in networks (lobbying)

- Government
- Parents
- Teachers
- Community workers
- Disability groups
- Disabled Persons' Organisations (DPO)

Networking/Collaboration (External Relations)

- International cooperation
- Government
- DPOs
- NGOs

Deaf organisations and DPOs participation are usually called advisory, where they participate when needed. They have no say in final decisions. They usually have the role of representation and have a formal permanent seat where they help with decision making.

International cooperation

International cooperation has grown tremendously over the last decades. Article 32 of the UN CPRD about international cooperation recognises the importance of international cooperation between different countries. The necessity of international cooperation has emerged through humanitarian obligation and intensified poverty in developing countries due to the widening gap between the rich and poor. It is also a reaction to global issues, such as environmental destruction, population increase, terrorism, refugee outbreak, and women exploitation. Boundaries between international issues and national issues are weakened because of globalisation – a problem in a single nation may spread its effect to the rest of the world (for example COVID-19). The mutual respect and understanding of other cultures are the starting point in international cooperation.

Cooperation among countries can help solve joint problems and share knowledge and best practices. It often emerges around common challenges that extend beyond national borders. Many countries experience similar challenges and concerns related to deaf issues and deaf communities. Cooperation among countries and deaf associations can be an effective tool to strengthen, share and accelerate deaf rights within countries and across regions.

For instance, for sign language work this means that those countries with a longer tradition and more experience of sign language research can support other countries with little or no sign language research and assist with the documentation of sign language varieties in that country.

International networking

The ability to network internationally is particularly important in a globalised world, in which some of the problems in a Southern country can be related to developments in and the interests of the North. Oil production is an example of such a scenario.

The corporation producing oil locally and which causes problems for the local population, is owned by a multinational corporation, with its headquarters and shareholders in a country far away.

Cooperation involves creating, adapting, transferring, and sharing knowledge and experience to improve the rights of deaf people – while also making the most of existing resources and capacities. At the national level, cooperation among countries can support and reinforce national efforts for advocacy and enrich perspectives on best practices and lessons learnt in other countries. These exchanges have the potential to impact sub-regional and regional processes as well as global policy debates.

For deaf national associations and organisations, it is very relevant to be involved in international cooperation. By being a member of the World Federation of the Deaf (WFD), one can get benefits such as voting rights at the WFD General Assembly, get direct support for local advocacy (letter of support, for example) and receive current information about deaf issues and events all over the world. The national deaf organisation will be able gain more network and perhaps establish an international project collaboration with another deaf association or organisation from another country. The international project could contribute a few benefits such as:

• Sharing resources
• Capacity building of the organisation
• More grant and funding opportunities
• Saving costs through sharing administrative expenses
• Make use of compatible skills and abilities
• Improve leadership skills

An example of international cooperation in education settings is Frontrunners in Denmark, which is an international deaf leadership programme. It is a program which develops international leadership abilities of deaf youth. International conferences are important because they are a regular gathering for sharing the achievements of the deaf people and exploring ideas for future development. For instance, World Congress of the World Federation of the Deaf, International Congress on the Education of the Deaf, etc. Thus, working together collaboratively can result in greater accomplishments as compared to each organisation working on its own separately.

Disability groups

The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) sets out both general obligations and specific measures required for its implementation. A wide range of skills and competences are required to carry out these necessary steps, which include various activities such as legislative and policy reform, development of new and affordable technologies, development of outreach in accessible formats, conduct of training, including for professionals working in specific sectors and provision of international cooperation. No single actor or stakeholder, working alone, can therefore implement the CRPD or achieve disability-inclusive development.

For this reason, there has in recent years been increased recognition of partnerships between different stakeholders, which draw on the resources and varying competences of each and are critical for the advancement of the rights and inclusion of persons with disabilities. Multi-stakeholder partnerships are voluntary and collaborative relationships between various parties, in which all participants agree to work together to achieve a common purpose or undertake a specific task and to share risks and responsibilities, resources and benefits.

Multi-stakeholder partnership refers to collaboration between different actors, both state and non-state. Non-state includes civil society, particularly Disabled Peoples Organisations (DPOs), the private sector, the media, academic institutions, and other stakeholders, who have come together to advance the rights and inclusion of persons with disabilities.

Multi-stakeholder partnerships can work at international, regional, national or community level. Their scope and nature can vary widely, from short-term or one-off collaborative efforts to longer-term efforts. They can also focus on a single narrow goal or entail multi-issue collaboration. Multi-stakeholder partnerships are beneficial and are about creating lasting and meaningful impact at all levels of action. They are based on nurturing working relationships based on trust, mutual respect, open communication and understanding between stakeholders regarding each other's strengths and weaknesses.

Forming a multi-stakeholder partnership

Those seeking to form a partnership should begin by clearly identifying their desired outcome or goal. While in the context of the CRPD all actors should be seeking to advance the realisation of the rights and inclusion of persons with disabilities in line with the Convention, specific goals may vary tremendously. For example, one set of stakeholders may wish to advance implementation of the CRPD completely, with a focus on international or regional solutions. Another set of stakeholders may be focused on implementation of one specific right or thematic area, for example, the right to education or the right to an adequate standard of living at local level. Once the desired outcome or goal has been identified, it is important to map the measures necessary for its achievement:

- How can the desired change be achieved?
- Is there a need for legislative or policy change?
- Is there a need for research, data, and statistics?
- Is there a need for awareness-raising or advocacy?

By reviewing the situation and identifying the necessary measures, those seeking to form a partnership will also be able to map those actors that can most advantageously influence each other.

This can for example include considerations of:

- Which actors have the power to shape and adopt policy?
- Which actors are in a position to provide any necessary funding to advance the identified goal? Which actors are most knowledgeable regarding the situation of persons with disabilities?
- Which have the technical expertise required to address specific issues as relevant, for example in the case of accessible Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs)?

In many cases the achievement of a particular outcome or goal may require the involvement of various actors operating at different levels, as there are generally many levels at which policies are developed, decisions taken, budgets allocated, and implementation carried out.

Local, regional, and international affliliates: Become a member organisation

Joining a professional organisation is critical in keeping abreast of the latest knowledge and practices locally, regionally, and globally. It helps the professional to stay abreast of current issues and opportunities. What member organisations share is a common interest in inclusive development for all and the protection and promotion of the rights and well-being of persons with disabilities. Registering your organisation as a member offers opportunities to:

- Have access to up-to-date field, policy and practice information
- Network and promote your own work
- Access information that helps your own practice
- Link up with other organisations on collaborative projects

As a national association of the deaf, you should be an ordinary / member association of at least two different umbrella organisations:

1. World Federation of the Deaf (WFD)

Any recognised or registered national organisation of the deaf, with legal status, that has an established position in its country, its majority of members are deaf persons, and its vision and aims like those of the WFD, may apply for Ordinary Member status. Ordinary Membership are limited to one national organisation of the deaf in each country.

The WFD Board has the authority to approve exceptions for extraordinary circumstances. Being a member of WFD, you get benefits such as:

- Voting rights at the WFD General Assembly, which is the primary decision-making body of WFD.
- Get direct support for your local advocacy (letter of supports for example)
- Receive current information about deaf issues and events all over the world
- Discounts on WFD events and merchandise

2. Disabled Peoples' Organisation (DPO) in your country

DPOs are often linked to bigger disability community network on local, national and international level.

Benefits: Similar need for recognition and attention to their access to basic human rights, higher percentage of empathy and willingness to collaborate, stronger advocacy if you advocate together, experience on how to lobby and advocate with government