

Systems Change: Decolonisation

Issue Paper

Executive summary

At Light for the World, decolonisation is central to how we work and to achieving sustainable systems change. We believe that shifting power, resources and decision-making to local actors — especially people with disabilities and their representative organisations — strengthens the effectiveness, legitimacy and impact of our work. We centre the voices, leadership and lived experiences of people with disabilities, shifting power and decision-making to those most affected and ensuring that they shape the programmes, partnerships and organisational practices that affect their lives. Our approach focuses on strengthening local leadership, co-creating knowledge and advocacy with partners, and building inclusive organisational cultures, which challenge inequities and promote accountability. By doing so, we contribute to more equitable systems in health, education, work - and protection in emergencies.

In this Issue Paper, we outline our approach to decolonisation in our work. As part of our Strategy 2030, we share five priority areas and three targets to ensure we deliver impact and scale sustainably.

Introduction

At Light for the World, we believe in a world where people with disabilities and eye conditions can fully exercise their rights to health, education, work – and protection in emergencies. Decolonisation is fundamental to Light for the World’s mission, values and strategy. Empowering local leadership directly enhances the effectiveness, legitimacy and sustainability of our work.

By shifting power, resources and decision-making to those most affected — people with disabilities and lived experiences — we ensure our programmes are locally led, grounded in national and local contexts, rights-based and truly responsive to people’s needs and lived realities.

Our work on decolonisation is based on global frameworks¹² and lessons from our work and co-creation with local partners, including Organisations of People with Disabilities (OPDs).

Our approach

At Light for the World, our rights-based approach is foundational: we base our work on the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)³ and the principle of “Nothing About Us Without Us,” ensuring that people with disabilities and their lived experiences are central to design, advocacy and decision-making. Through inclusive, dignity-centred programming, we strengthen local capacity, influence policies and transform systems so that individuals with disabilities and eye conditions can fully exercise their rights to health, education, work – and protection in emergencies.

Our theory of change and Strategy 2030 include commitments to strengthen local capacity and accountability. We are committed to innovate, co-create and to walk the talk on our values, including decolonisation, anti-racism and inclusion across all levels of the organisation and in all aspects of our work⁴.

Our priorities

To implement our decolonisation commitments, we will:

1. Shift power to local leadership, OPDs and local partners

- Decolonisation requires a deliberate shift in where power, decision-making and resources are held. For Light for the World, this means strengthening the leadership and agency of local actors—particularly OPDs and local partners—so they are not only implementers but equal partners in defining priorities, shaping strategies, making decisions and influencing how resources are allocated. This approach recognises local knowledge, expertise and lived experience, as well as allocation of more financial resources, as essential to achieving sustainable and locally owned change.

-
- 1 Start Network (2022) Anti-Racist and Decolonial Framework (<https://startnetwork.org/learn-change/resources/library/anti-racist-and-decolonial-framework>) [accessed 27 August 2026]
 - 2 Pledge for Change (<https://pledgeforchange2030.org/>) [accessed 27 August 2026]
 - 3 United Nations Human Rights (2006) Convention on the Right of Persons with Disabilities (<https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-rights-persons-disabilities>) [accessed 27 August 2026]
 - 4 Light for the World (2024) Strategy 2030 (<https://www.light-for-the-world.org/news/publications/light-for-the-world-strategy-2030>) [accessed 27 August 2026]

2. Embed intersectional disability inclusion

- ▶ All of our programmes, policies and organisational practices address intersecting identities — such as gender, age, type of impairment, socioeconomic status and geography — to dismantle compounded barriers.
- ▶ We apply intersectional analysis in eye health, inclusive education, work and emergency protection, ensuring that diverse voices shape all learnings, data and decision-making.

3. Co-create knowledge, communications and advocacy with local stakeholders

- ▶ We are rebalancing how stories, data and evidence are produced by elevating local expertise and lived experience. This means adopting participatory research methods and enabling OPDs and communities to shape key messages, lead campaigns and co-author content.
- ▶ We are committed to ethical and responsible communication practices, avoiding harmful power dynamics and ensuring dignity, accuracy and contextual nuance in all external and internal communication.

4. Strengthen our organisational culture and partnerships through accountability mechanisms

- ▶ We will employ anti-racism and decolonisation principles to guide recruitment, career progression, team norms and leadership visibility, ensuring fairness, transparency and meaningful allyship across country and global offices and with our partners.

5. Build organisational capacity for sustainable systems change

- ▶ We will develop tailored action plans and strengthen staff competence and training on decolonisation and anti-racism.
- ▶ We shall develop a monitoring mechanism to check our progress and ensure accountability towards our Strategy 2030 goals.

Our targets

We have identified the following targets as part of our Strategy 2030:

1. Through our international and country office digital channels, we will directly address decolonisation, anti-racism and inclusive storytelling, co-creating content with OPDs, disability inclusion facilitators and local experts to ensure authentic and diverse narratives.
2. We shall strengthen our learning as an organisation by continuously deepening our understanding and practice of decolonisation and inclusion – actively challenging dominant paradigms, amplifying local knowledge and integrating diverse perspectives to transform how we think, partner and deliver impact.
3. We will continue to strengthen inclusive governance structures and local partnerships, while institutionalising roles that lead decolonisation and inclusion across all programmes, partnerships, leadership development, organisational culture and communication practices.

Acknowledgements

Light for the World was founded, and is supported by our trusted donors and partners, to serve people with eye conditions and disabilities, so that everyone can fully exercise their universal human rights. We would like to thank all Light for the World colleagues, leadership and Board Members, past and present, and thank Silvester Kasozi and Ambrose Murangira as leads for this issue paper.



info@light-for-the-world.org
www.light-for-the-world.org