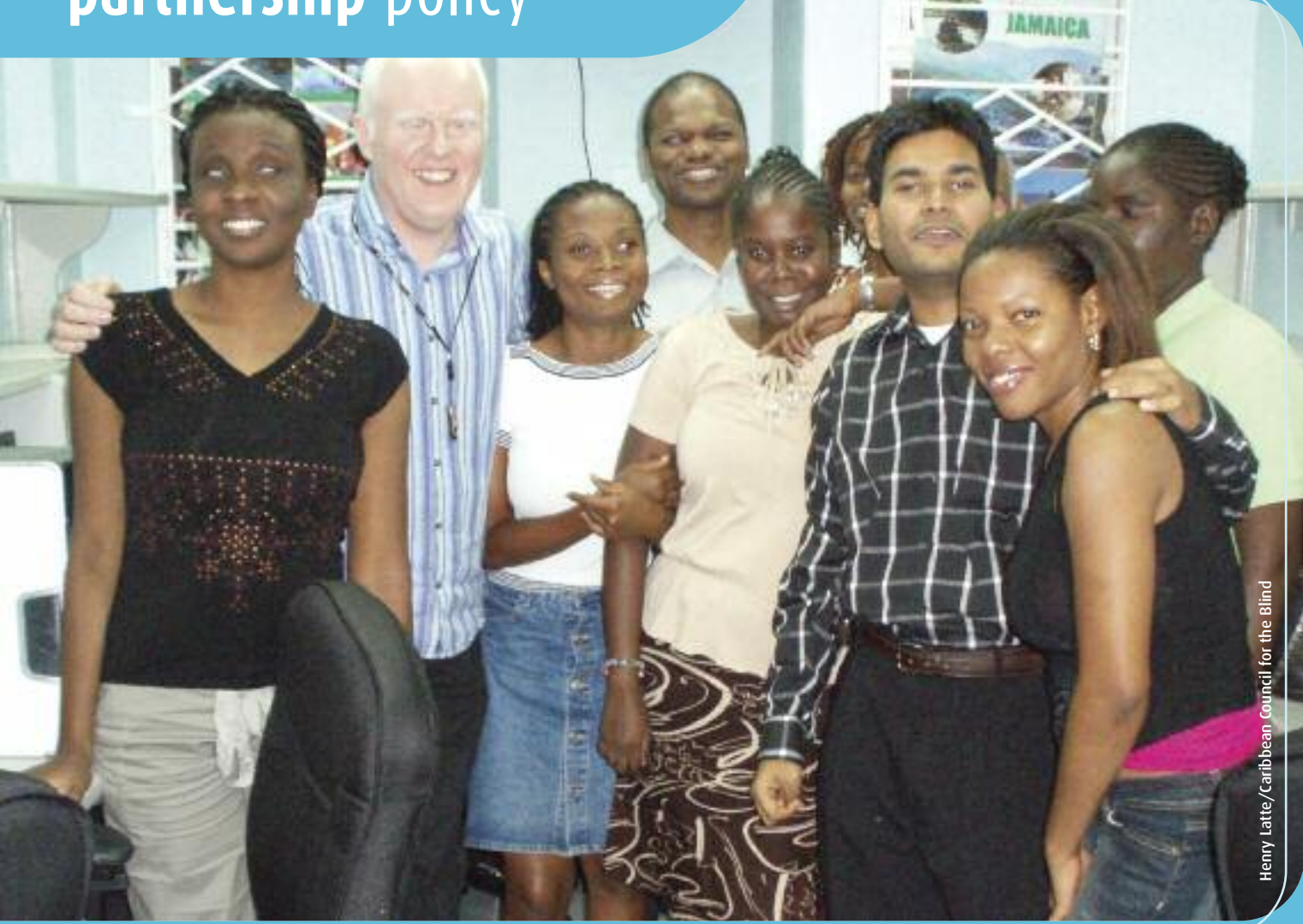




# Sightsavers' programme partnership policy



Henry Latte/Caribbean Council for the Blind

**Note:** A general overview of Sightsavers International's vision, mission, values, areas of work and the context in which this policy fits may be obtained from other organisational documents such as Sightsavers' Strategic Framework and Sightsavers' Annual Report and Audited Accounts.

# Introduction

This Programme Partnership Policy was approved by Sightsavers' Council of Trustees in April 2007. It builds on and incorporates parts of Sightsavers' earlier Partnership Development Framework 1999 and now replaces it.

The policy and its supporting package of materials is being introduced to all Sightsavers staff and partners according to regional timetables and includes in-built monitoring, learning and review processes.

The development of this policy has involved interaction with Sightsavers personnel throughout the organisation and with over 40 partner organisations. It has also drawn on the approaches and experience of other external agencies.

Sightsavers would like to express its sincere thanks to all those who have participated in the development process and to acknowledge the particular contribution of our partner organisations. We would also like to thank and acknowledge Jonathan Dudding of ICA:UK for his involvement throughout the process.

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## 1. Sightsavers' policy on partnership

Sightsavers' policy on partnership outlines the principles and approaches that the organisation has agreed are fundamental to Sightsavers' programme partnerships. It aims to provide a common understanding of Sightsavers' approach and to promote consistency and coherence in our work.

The focus of this policy is Sightsavers' relationships with programme partner organisations whether they are:

- government departments, non-government organisations (NGOs) or disabled or blind people's organisations (DPOs or BPOs);
- at project or more strategic level, and whether or not they involve the provision of funding; or
- single organisations or more complex relationships such as government ministries or networks, alliances, coalitions and consortia of partner organisations.

Although the policy does not relate directly to our relationships with corporate partners, international networks, donors or private contractors, the principles can provide guidance as well as information about our values and our approaches.

This policy applies to all Sightsavers staff in all departments, in the UK and overseas, whose work has any connection with our programme partners. It provides guidance for Sightsavers staff and a basis for discussion with partner organisations when negotiating ways of working appropriate to the local circumstances. It should be shared with our programme partners.

## 2. Partnership: its purpose and importance

**Sightsavers defines partnership as a mutually beneficial and interactive relationship which is agreed for a specific purpose and which works towards a shared goal of positive programme impact.**

Sightsavers considers partnerships to be of vital and fundamental importance in the way it works towards achieving its mission.

The ultimate purpose of working in partnership is to increase the positive effects for the intended beneficiaries. There are both short and long-term benefits of working in partnership:

- short-term: through combining our resources we work more effectively and together we achieve greater progress than we would if working individually; and
- long-term, assisting partner organisations to develop their capacity and to interact with each other encourages stronger institutions able to work independently of Sightsavers' support, thereby promoting sustainable development.

## 3. Partnership principles

It takes time and commitment from the organisations involved to develop a relationship based on trust and respect for each other. Sightsavers believes the following principles are fundamental to this process and should be two-way in all partnerships, guiding everyone involved in the relationship.

### 3.1 Shared goals and compatible values

**Sightsavers and its partner organisations should work together on the basis of common and agreed goals on behalf of the intended beneficiaries and have compatible vision, values and ways of working.**

A shared commitment towards achieving our agreed goals and positive impact is essential for working together. However, this does not mean that all goals must be shared. Sightsavers seeks compatibility but accepts that there may be some areas of difference in organisational goals or policies where Sightsavers and partner organisations agree to differ.

Core organisational values are less visible and easy to identify than more concrete programme goals but they are important because of the way they influence how we work. Sightsavers recognises that compatible values are key to developing strong relationships that hold together when facing difficulties.



### 3.2 Interdependence

**All the different resources and contributions made by Sightsavers and partner organisations to the relationship should be recognised and valued, not just financial and material ones but also human resources, legitimacy, local knowledge, contacts and technical skills.**

We recognise that when Sightsavers and partner organisations are working together, we have collective responsibility for both outcomes and process. We are thus interdependent and we complement and depend on each other.

Sightsavers believes in the importance of establishing and respecting areas of comparative advantage, of identifying the needs for strengthening for each organisation, and of acknowledging and valuing all types of contribution. Whatever the differences in size, capacity, expertise, power or resources, Sightsavers believes that all the members of the relationship should treat each other as equals and with respect.

Sightsavers is committed to working towards more equitable partnerships through:

- recognising the benefits it gains from working with partner organisations;
- supporting capacity development by partner organisations;
- encouraging empowerment of partner organisations and sustainability of programmes/impact;
- joint planning and reviewing of programmes; and
- promoting local ownership of the programmes it supports.



Ultimately, Sightsavers envisages that partner organisations should be able to continue their work independently without relying on Sightsavers for financial support. This does not necessarily mean an end to the partnership: Sightsavers values continued sharing of ideas and skills and strategic interaction and may continue to provide occasional support for new ideas.

### 3.3 Mutual accountability

**Sightsavers and its partner organisations are accountable to each other and also to other stakeholders, including beneficiaries, for their actions, their achievement of impact and their efficient use of a range of resources.**

The mutual rights and obligations between Sightsavers, its partner organisations and the beneficiaries must be established and agreed formally at the outset of a relationship.

Although accountability processes tend to centre on funding and financial controls, Sightsavers also recognises the need to value and to be accountable for the effective and valid use of other essential resources (skills, experience, local knowledge, relationships with other stakeholders etc.).

Within the partnership:

- All parties are responsible for delivering the outcomes and activities ascribed to them and as agreed between them in return for receiving the inputs, often financial, technical or training. This requires agreeing clear roles and responsibilities for holding each other to account and documenting these in the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU, see section 7.1 of the OPD Policy & Procedures Manual).
- Sightsavers is also responsible for providing partner organisations with the inputs as outlined in the MoU.

Externally there will be other accountabilities,

- Sightsavers is accountable, primarily through its Board of Trustees, to its individual supporters and donors and to the UK Charity Commission and to our intended beneficiaries.
- Our partner organisations' accountabilities will be different and may include their members, government and other funding agencies. Ultimately they too should be accountable to their intended beneficiaries and/or the communities they represent.

Sightsavers believes that accountability should involve the assessment and management of risks. When exploring a relationship with partners, Sightsavers expects each organisation to assess the potential risks and rewards of working together and to develop systems for monitoring and managing them.



## 3.4 Ownership

**Sightsavers believes that ownership, by partner organisation(s) and/or the communities involved, is an essential ingredient for motivation and for the sustainability of programmes in the long term.**

Sightsavers considers ownership of an initiative to involve taking appropriate management responsibility, having a sense of commitment and considering that it belongs to them. This does not necessarily mean that the programme is self-sustaining; the partner organisation(s) and/or communities may draw on Sightsavers or other stakeholders for financial and other forms of support.

At the outset there will often be sense of shared ownership with Sightsavers. In this case, a framework for partnering and organisational development process should ensure that a full sense of ownership passes to the partner organisation(s) and/or communities within an agreed timeframe.

Sightsavers nevertheless needs partner organisations to acknowledge the support and participation of Sightsavers in their programmes as this serves as an important part of Sightsavers' own accountability to its donors.

## 3.5 Openness and understanding

**Sightsavers believes that openness and honesty are essential in a working relationship in order to develop understanding and to build trust over time.**

Sightsavers recognises that this should be a two-way process and that both Sightsavers and its partner organisations should know each other equally well.

Sightsavers believes that all members in a partnership should:

- share information and opinions on matters of joint interest;
- be transparent on financial matters;
- have the right to speak out ;
- respect each other's opinions;
- treat difficulties as shared problems and discuss them constructively;
- agree conflict resolution mechanisms at the outset; and
- be willing to be flexible and adapt to each other.

Sightsavers is committed to investing the time and effort necessary for exchanging information and perspectives and understanding each others' points of view, even if there is agreement to disagree.

## 3.6 Joint learning and mutual support

**Sightsavers' relationships with partner organisations and the quality of our joint impact on the lives of beneficiaries will only improve through learning and putting our learning into practice.**

Sightsavers believes that learning is a crucial element in any successful partnership and that, for it to happen, all the partner organisations involved need to reflect on their own practice and share their experiences.



Sightsavers is committed to strengthening learning practices and to supporting a planned and structured approach to learning that provides opportunities for reflection and joint learning reviews and that facilitates learning processes between our partner organisations.

### 3.7 Consistency

**Sightsavers believes that consistency on many levels is needed for establishing trust and understanding.**

Sightsavers considers that partnerships should be broad-based relationships involving multiple members of staff. This is to strengthen the relationship, to promote consistency and continuity and to maximise the benefits of the partnership beyond specific programme commitments.

When negotiating ways of working, Sightsavers appreciates the need for our partnerships to co-exist with each other and the possible benefits of consistency with its own and with partner organisations' other external relationships.

We also recognise the need for internal consistency of Sightsavers country, regional and central office level contacts with our partner organisations.



Jamshyd Masud/Sightsavers

## 4. Sightsavers' approach

### 4.1 Sightsavers' preference is always working with partners

Sightsavers distinguishes between working **with** partners and working **through** partners. Working with partners is characterised by:

- collaborating to achieve shared goals;
- contributing more than just financial inputs;
- valuing and respecting partner approaches, opinions, creativity; and
- supporting capacity development.

Sightsavers recognises that it sometimes works **through** partner organisations: this happens when Sightsavers leads the agenda and tends to dominate the relationship. Sightsavers is concerned that it should be jointly recognised when this is happening and that a timeframe and ways for moving towards working **with** the partner organisation(s) should be agreed.

### 4.2 Participation in partnership:

Sightsavers is committed to developing relationships where the partner organisations can collaborate beyond programme work, both formally and informally. This might include influencing each other's strategies and policies, cooperating on external advocacy work or building alliances and networks.

### 4.3 Organisational development:

Sightsavers is committed to supporting relevant capacity-building processes of individual organisations and also of networks, consortia and coalitions where appropriate. We believe that one key approach is through enabling contact between our different partner organisations and encouraging their collaboration. Sightsavers looks for:

- a positive effect on programme goals and impact to be derived from organisational development; and
- learning from each other between partner organisations and Sightsavers.

### 4.4 Individual approach:

Using common core principles, Sightsavers negotiates with each partner organisation appropriate ways of working and forms of support to suit the circumstances.

### 4.5 Aiming for sustainable outcomes and impact:

Sightsavers seeks the achievement of sustainable programme outcomes and impact. In promoting sustainability, Sightsavers expects to develop strategies with partner organisations whereby they will ultimately take over the provision or mobilisation of the resources necessary to continue the programme.

## 5. Partnerships in practice

The nature of Sightsavers' relationships with partners can and will change over time. They will not all start or finish in the same way or change equally over time; this will vary with the partner organisation(s), their preferences and the circumstances. Most partnerships will, however, go through the key stages and processes outlined below.

### PARTNERSHIP: Exploration

**Initial information gathering:** Sightsavers and partner organisations develop a basic understanding of each other: what they do and who they are. The organisations exchange information enabling them to check if the other(s) meet any selection criteria they may have for working in partnership.

**Moving Closer:** Having established possible interest in working together, Sightsavers and partner organisation(s) discuss and identify common programme interest(s), what each wants to get from the partnership, what each brings to the partnership and jointly assess their organisational capacities, the potential risks and benefits for each organisation.

As part of this process of moving closer, it may be agreed to work together on a few project activities with a time-limited project-based MoU before deciding whether to commit to a longer-term partnership or other type of relationship.

Not all exploration processes or initial trial projects will lead to commitment to developing a long-term partnership.

### PARTNERSHIP: Commitment

If it is decided and agreed that Sightsavers and partner organisation(s) have shared goals and that it would be mutually beneficial to work together over a longer period of time, a framework for partnering should be developed to complement programme specific MoU.

- Although not legally binding, a **framework for partnering** agrees an overall goal and vision for the partnership, how it will develop and

the evolution of roles and responsibilities over a defined period, usually five to ten years. It documents an overview of strategies for reaching the goal, review mechanisms and the circumstances under which the relationship would end. Frameworks for partnering should not overlap with programme MoUs (see section 7.1 of the OPD Policy & Procedures Manual) or contain detailed capacity-building activities, funding or timetables (in separate MoUs developed as required).

### PARTNERSHIP: Development

**Nurturing the relationship:** Sightsavers and partner organisation(s) staff establish ways of working which help the relationship to grow and develop: communications, visits, meetings, feedback, reviews, formal and informal interaction and support.

**Organisational development:** undertaking activities which strengthen the organisations' capacities may also enable the relationship itself to evolve. The organisational development process should be owned and led by the organisation(s) seeking to improve their capacities. Sightsavers aims to work in cooperation with other organisations supporting partner organisational development. Sightsavers may also support the capacity-building or strengthening of relevant networks, coalitions or consortia which include organisations not otherwise receiving financial support from Sightsavers.

Organisational development can include a wide range of capacity-building activities including areas such as strategic planning, governance, leadership or management training, mentoring and upgrading of office systems etc.

**Monitoring and evaluation:** approaches are agreed for joint monitoring and evaluation of the progress and achievements of the relationship, any issues encountered and the effects of any organisational development processes. This can happen informally during visits as well as formally in a partnership review involving Sightsavers and the partner organisation(s). The monitoring of the partnership is in addition to the existing monitoring processes for programme activities, finances and outcomes.

## PARTNERSHIP: Reviewing

Complementing ongoing monitoring and evaluation processes, partnership reviews provide a formal opportunity to reflect on the information gathered.

**Partnership reviews:** Partnership reviews are participatory processes which provide participants with time and space to review the relationship and their accountability to each other. Sightsavers expects them to happen at regular 1-2 year intervals and to cover:

- Progress in relation to aim and strategies in framework for partnering;
- Capacity development (where appropriate);
- Satisfaction with relationship quality, mechanisms and behaviours;
- Identifying learning for informing future planning and practice; and
- Agreeing and documenting any adjustments to the way forward and/or likely exit strategy.

Partnership reviews can focus on two levels: the day-to-day quality of the relationship, capacity development and learning processes and/or on the overall aim and future of the relationship. Towards the end of a Framework, they may lead to a number of different outcomes, including:

- Identification of new objectives and a new Framework;

- Preparation for a different kind of relationship; and
- Phasing out of financial support and new era of strategic involvement.

## PARTNERSHIP: Transforming or ending

**Strategic involvement:** Sightsavers anticipates that over time many of its partnerships will develop a strategic nature; this may involve:

- Working with several partner organisations in alliances, coalitions or consortia at a wider sectoral level towards shared strategic goals; and
- Moving beyond funding to focus on collaboration in areas of policy, technical expertise, information exchange etc.

Sightsavers is concerned that all parties in the relationship have realistic expectations for how the relationship may evolve, transform or end and are fully prepared for the ultimate phasing out of the relationship.

**Planned:** Natural ending points for partnerships occur when shared objectives have been achieved and/or programme or project MoUs come to an end. If no extension or renewal is agreed, and no new sector/area is identified, it is likely the partnership will end.

Sightsavers encourages the early development of exit strategies that guide the planning and process of ending partnerships. They set in place conditions for promoting the sustainability of programme outcomes and the independence of the organisations involved.

**Unplanned:** Partnerships may end unexpectedly if it becomes clear that the objectives will not be reached, if inappropriate behaviour is identified or if it is decided that it is no longer relevant. In this event, the parties involved should strive to minimise any negative effects.