

## Sustainability

### Link to Dark & Light's mission

Dark and Light Blind Care has as its mission to support the blind and other people with disabilities in developing countries. This is done by working together with local partner organizations. Dark and Light merely has a supporting role, and ultimately the partner organization should be able to survive on its own. In other words, the partner organization has to be able to eventually work in a sustainable way without the support of Dark & Light Blind Care.

To realize this goal it is important that Dark & Light clearly states a policy on sustainability and creates expertise in this field. When the policy is clear within the organization it will be possible to provide the partners with guidance and support in taking the necessary steps towards reaching this ultimate goal.

### Context

It is impossible to start talking about improving sustainability when it is not clear what is exactly meant by the word sustainability. There are several types of sustainability: ecological, financial, economic, social and organisational. For Dark and Light the most important types of sustainability are social, organisational and financial sustainability. This is expressed in the following definition used by Dark and Light:

*"The partner organisations are able to function independently from foundation Dark and Light Blind Care and other foreign donors, financially as well as organisationally, which means their projects and the effects of their projects for the target group will continue even after Dark and Light Blind Care has ended her involvement in the project"*

### Influences on sustainability

Dark & Light has done extensive research to find out what influences determine whether an organization can become sustainable or not. The following influences were found.

- Participation and ownership
- Capacity building and training
- Government policies
- Finances
- Management and organisation
- Society, gender and culture
- Technology
- Environment
- External political and economic factors
- Realistic duration

Additional ideas to these ten were:

- Multi annual policy plan
- The need for a fitting exit strategy.

Dark & Light Blind Care is already applying most of these points, because they are integrated in the project selection form. (For more information on this see the study

by Sigrid de Ruyter, "Beyond development", on sustainability, p. 11.)

## **Model**

In order to work on sustainability together with our partner organisations a model for sustainability has been developed. This is first of all a general model that states the major focal points relevant for the different levels of sustainability. In this model the sustainability of the partner organization is scored on four different levels: outcome, project, organization/innovation and system.

### Outcome

On the first level of analysis the sustainability of the outcome of the projects for the target group is measured, this is the basic qualification for a project. Sustainability of outcome means the continuity of effects, for a longer period of time. This means that the long term effects of the project should always be noticeable by the target group who were enrolled in the project. If this is not the case Dark & Light should reconsider funding the project.

### Project

The second level is project. For a project to be sustainable, it has to be valuable in the long run, in other words provide high quality services, and be able to state an exit strategy which is aimed at creating a sustainable project. On this level the most important criterion is whether the project has an exit strategy.

### Organisation/innovation

The third level is organisation and innovation. At this level the management skills, strength of leadership, and the flexibility of the organisation are measured. The partner organisations should be flexible enough to act on changing circumstances and incorporate new developments into their projects.

### Institutional system.

The fourth level, institutional system, refers to the system surrounding the organisation and its projects. A project has reached sustainability when the activities have been taken up in the national program and do not need Dark & Light's support anymore, or are incorporated in a local initiative. This is important to Dark & Light because disabled people should have the same rights as others.

## **Project assessment**

The four levels of sustainability are incorporated in the project selection form. This is described in several points. The project coordinator at Dark & Light can grant the partner organization a score of level one to four on each of the levels. The scores one to four reflect the stage of sustainability that the partner has reached.

The score on the level of outcome is measured in the first selection criterion. The most important aspects measured are: Relevance for the target group, understanding the problems of the disabled in the local situation and reflecting this in the project, and measuring the effect on the target group. The project level is described in the tenth criterion, sustainability. The most important point on this level is the presence of an exit strategy. The following aspects need to be taken into account: Strategy on local fundraising, strategy on government support, client contribution, independency.

The third level, organisation/innovation is measured at the sixth criterion named innovation. This reflects the following aspects: learning from experience and implementation of recommendations.

The final level, institutional system, is described in criterion eleven and twelve, Cooperation/ Lobby & Advocacy. The aspects paid attention to here are the following: Cooperation with other organisations to strengthen their position, also in lobby and advocacy activities. Advocacy to community, organisations and government on rights of disabled and health rights. Lobby to other local organisations and the government to include disabled (for more information on the project selection see Project Selection Form).

If the score of the project and the organisation is not sufficient the project coordinator should use one of the tools or methods mentioned below to improve the score.

### **Tools & Methods**

There are several tools and methods available that can be used to improve the organizations score on financial and organizational sustainability. The tools for improving organizational sustainability are found on all levels of the model.

First of all on the level of outcome, to guarantee the long term effects of a project, an effects assessment can be done. This effects assessment reveals whether the project has long term effects for the target group. This is a basic criterion for the continuation of the project.

Secondly, on the level of project, the organization should monitor the quality of the project by conducting regular evaluations and improving the planning and monitoring activities (for more information, see policy paper on Program support).

Thirdly on the level of organization/innovation, the organizational sustainability can be improved by performing an organization assessment (Dark & Light usually uses the OCAT tool for this, see policy paper on capacity building). To implement the outcomes of this organization assessment, an organization development plan should be written. This is a plan that states the activities that will be performed to improve the own organization from within. It should include capacity building activities aimed at strengthening the independence of the organization (for more information on capacity building activities see policy paper capacity building).

Finally on the level of institutional system the organization should use Lobby and advocacy activities to get more local involvement and attention from the government for the organization and its project. Dark & Light could support the partner organization in these activities by providing them with information and training on Lobby and Advocacy activities (for more information see policy paper on Lobby and Advocacy).

In addition to this the organization should develop a multi annual strategy plan. In this plan the strategy used to reach sustainability together with actors and activities outside the organization itself is formulated. This should be linked to the organization development plan.

Furthermore, there are several methods which can be used for improving financial sustainability. These are mostly found at project and organization/innovation level.

On the level of project the organization should formulate an exit strategy for the specific project. In choosing this exit strategy there are three methods relevant for the projects Dark & Light supports. These are:

- user fees

- community pays approach
- imbedding

*User fees* refers to people being asked to pay a certain part of the cost of the services they use. *Community pays* means that the community pays for the costs needed by one of their members. *Imbedding* means trying to include the projects into already existing national programs run by the government, or local initiatives.

Which of these options should be used depends for a large part on the situation of the partner organisations in the different countries.

*User fees* would be a good solution in countries where cooperation with the government is not really an option, and where there is no close community willing to provide for one of their members. For this method to work, however, the population needs to be able to afford a certain part of the cost. The 'Indian' variation of this system where every person pays a certain amount according to ability to pay would be most successful in countries where there is some sort of middle class, where people are able to pay the full price, and in that way contribute to paying for the poor peoples services.

*Community pays* approach is only possible in countries where it is clear the community can actually afford to raise the funds, and where the community is close enough to provide this for each other. This means research into this by the partner organisation is needed.

*Imbedding* of projects into government activities or getting the government to take over the project would be most successful in countries that have a strong government which is able to react to new developments. Also it is important that the partner organisation has strong lobby and advocacy capacities to grasp the attention of the government and show them the possibilities. A variation to this would be a situation where the partner keeps on performing the activities while the government is subsidising.

On the level of organisation/innovation the organization could make a bigger effort to broaden the donor base or get government subsidies.

### **Differentiation of the models**

Dark & Light supports different kinds of projects which all require their own approach, and each type of project has a preferred method to reach sustainability. That is why three different sub-models are being used. One for education projects, one for medical projects, and one for rehabilitation projects. In some cases it may be possible to use a combination of the three different methods that can be used to reach sustainability. This should be decided per project and organization taking into account the different circumstances in the regions they work in.

#### Education

For the educational projects the best solution is to formulate an exit strategy which is aimed at imbedding the projects into a national government program. The reason for this is that in most countries there is already some sort of education system present. When this is the case it is better to work with the existing framework instead of trying to formulate your own concept. It is possible to use *user fees* or *community pays* approach in countries where the government is not or almost not present or not taking up their task of providing education for all. However, it will be more difficult than imbedding, especially when it concerns disabled because people usually do not want to spend much money on them.

### Health care

For the eye care projects there are three different options to choose from in formulating a plan to reach sustainability and reduce dependence from Dark and Light. These are: user fees, community pays approach and imbedding in the national government system on primary health care. Which option to choose is mostly depending on the situation in the country. It is up to the partner organisation to choose the best option.

### Rehabilitation

For the rehabilitation projects the methods to be used to reach sustainability are also user fees, community pays and integrating the blind in already existing income generating programs. Most families are able to provide a small amount of money if this means that their disabled family member is enabled to contribute to the family income or provide for themselves. Also it would be possible to get the community to contribute, especially if the project is community based. This could be organised via self help groups in which all the members save up and in turn receive a loan from the group. Sometimes it is also possible that there are vocational training or income generating programs for non-disabled people present in the country. It is our aim to include the disabled into these programs. This could also be in the form of a micro credit program. These have also shown to be very successful in the past.

Community based rehabilitation might be integrated into basic health systems. However, rehabilitation projects are often most difficult to become sustainable because it is often not a priority of the government or national initiatives, while education and health care are a priority, and it involves a lot of participation from the community.

### **Consequences for our program support and capacity building**

Besides these important components this policy on sustainability has some direct consequences for our program support:

- The different aspects of sustainability have been incorporated into our monitoring system and proposal form, assessment form and evaluation procedure (all included in our ISO 9001 system). This way all new proposals and existing projects are screened on effects for the target group, quality of the PME system, capacity of the organisation, institutional strength.
- D&L will not support projects that do not have proof of sustainable impact for the target group (relevance) or have a plan to prove this (effect evaluation)
- New (multi annual) proposals will be checked on their exit strategy which should contain or at least describe the strategy to improve financial independency. Only projects with a good exit strategy will be supported.
- Key partners without an organisation development plan or strategy plan will be stimulated and supported to develop organisation development plans (see policy on capacity building). Part of this action is based on the quick scan provided to partners that are interested in institutional fundraising. Selection of partners for OD assessments are taken up in the D&L annual plan.