

This policy aims to guide partnership activities by embracing certain key commitments pertaining to power, mutuality, long-term interaction, contextual approaches etc; and by outlining, in general terms, some of the most important practical implications. The policy has been developed in close collaboration between DIGNITY partners and staff and in consultation with DIGNITY's management and board, with inspiration from likeminded organisations and research. The policy is based on concrete experiences of building relations, generating knowledge, and making change across regions, cultures, and disciplines.

1. BACKGROUND: WORKING IN PARTNERSHIPS

DIGNITY is an international human rights, development and research organisation and rehabilitation clinic fighting for a world without torture. Through its work on prevention and rehabilitation DIGNITY seeks to ensure that no one is subjected to torture and violence and that torture does not live on with traumatised survivors and their families.

Drivers of torture and violence are social, cultural, and political. Torture and violence are symptoms of deep societal problems of inequality and injustice and the fight against torture ties into enduring local and global struggles about power and equity. Challenges related to climate change and resource conflicts, push back against human rights, authoritarian populism and divisive nationalism only seem to enhance disregard for human dignity. This calls for a reenforced and innovative fight against torture and violence based on contextual knowledge, human rights, social justice, global solidarity and, not least, strong partnerships.

Torture is a complex phenomenon, which can only be effectively addressed by applying multiple, long-term strategies that are based on grounded knowledge. Such strategies can only be developed and implemented by involving a wide range of social and political actors at local and global level. Therefore, DIGNITY is only able to achieve its mission in close collaboration with national and international institutions and networks that include like-minded civil society organisations, academia, authorities, individuals, and communities. As such, DIGNITY considers diversified partnerships as the foundation for its ability to achieve results in the fight against torture and violence¹.

¹ See for instance Celermajor, D. (2018). *The Prevention of Torture: An Ecological Approach*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

DIGNITY collaborates with a range of actors and institutions, including:

- Civil society organisations, professional organisations, and networks and coalitions
- State and government institutions, including criminal justice institutions, health, and migration authorities and local authorities
- Independent monitoring bodies, such as national human rights institutions, ombudsmen, and national preventive mechanisms
- International organisations, regional bodies, and UN agencies
- Research institutions, universities, and academic networks

Collaborations with these actors cover a wide spectrum of interactions and commitments. Across this spectrum, long-term partnerships with change agents in countries challenged by poverty and political transition constitute a primary focus for DIGNITY. Thus, this Partnership Policy is directed towards such collaborations and describes the aims, principles, modalities, and phases of partnership that focus on project implementation – i.e., processes where DIGNITY and one or more partnering organisations establish substantial collaboration through contractual partnership agreement with a view to commit to key principles, develop shared goals and implement joint activities. In such processes, the partnering organisations are typically like-minded civil society organisations, but they may also include NGO networks, professional organisations, monitoring institutions, research institutes, universities etc².

Partnerships typically include activities, where DIGNITY's expertise, experience, network, and resources are merged with the partners' complementary capacities to create synergy and impact. The aim is to promote the partners' potential to develop long lasting changes in the fight against torture in their respective contexts. In turn, DIGNITY continues to learn from and share with its partners, to achieve grounded results and to facilitate exchange in the fight against torture and violence.

Project implementation most often include transfers of funds from DIGNITY to its partners. Since DIGNITY retains some level of control over these transfers and is accountable to back-donors' demands, the partnerships feature ensuing power dynamics. While being cognizant of power differentials, DIGNITY does not aim to generate a vertical and hierarchical donor-relation in the partnerships. DIGNITY will remain vigilant to acknowledge and mitigate entrenched power relations that may thwart South-North exchange. DIGNITY is ready to hear and act on partners' feedback. This entails a commitment to critically reflect on positions and performances in the partnerships from an intersectional and decolonising perspective³. It also entails an investment in developing activities and skills that promote equity and safe spaces for discussing issues of power.

²DIGNITY does not engage in direct partnerships with state authorities that include contractual agreements and transfers of funds. As such, this policy does not cover any specific aspects of DIGNITY's collaborations with state authorities – most notably the importance of developing joint actions that improve and implement mandates and support the rule of law.

³ Intersectionality refers to the entrenched ways that forms of discrimination related to social and political identities may reinforce each other. Decolonization refers to the dismantling of enduring power dynamics of subordination, privilege, extraction, cultural bias, racism, marginalization etc. related to imperialism and colonialism.

This ranges from the overall efforts to manifest equity in partnership development processes to the very concrete considerations of how agreements are worded, meetings conducted, decisions made etc. By addressing power imbalances – also when it is difficult and demands resources and compromise – DIGNITY insists on developing partnerships based on horizontal relations according to the changing context.

In sum this policy underpins DIGNITY's commitment to not work through its partners to achieve its policy goals, but to always work *with* its partners to pursue shared ambitions for change – respectfully and flexibly in long-term relationships of mutual trust and benefit.

2. CROSSCUTTING AIMS

Each partnership is unique and adapted to the given context, but all partnerships fundamentally aim to identify and support change agents in the fight against torture and violence and the promotion and protection of human rights and social justice. Generally, partnership activities aim at generating a joint capacity to achieve concrete results for people at risk of being affected by torture and violence through innovative and empowering interventions, advocacy and/or research. Yet, partnerships are not only a means to achieve certain goals. Partnerships are ends in themselves and may pursue some crosscutting aims, including:

GLOBAL SOLIDARITY AND EQUITY

Human rights, development cooperation and research have empowering potentials but are also part of enduring relations of inequality and politics. Strong partnerships can challenge assumptions that rest on racial, ethnic, gendered, cultural, and unconscious bias about what matters and who counts. To work in partnerships is thereby a way to enhance global solidarity, to decolonize knowledge, and dismantle power imbalances – including those that the partners are part of. To pursue this crosscutting aim, partners must listen closely to the diverse voices of people at risk of being affected by torture and violence and keep beneficiaries' concerns and interests in constant focus.

GROUNDING ACTION AND SUSTAINABILITY

Firm contextual knowledge and involvement of legitimate social actors are critical to make a difference to people on the ground. Long-lasting social and political changes that inhibit torture and violence demands firm anchoring in the realities and everyday life of affected communities. Action must be based on grounded knowledge and the demands of social actors close to the context of the problems being addressed. In this way, partnerships can enhance sustainability of joint results and enable meaningful participation of beneficiaries and key stakeholders, including both rights-holders and duty-bearers.

COMPLEMENTARITY AND IMPACT

Dialogue and collaboration between diverse social groups bring about positive changes in the fight against torture and violence. Complementarity, joint learning, and exchange of experiences are fundamental for partnerships. Embracing diversity and bringing together actors across sectors with different expertise and positions in society enables the partnerships to empower more beneficiaries and enhance the quality of the joint work. Strengthening national and global linkages are equally crucial for achieving impact – that is to generate the knowledge and capacity to influence laws, policies, and practices that protect people from torture and violence and its afterlife.

3. PRINCIPLES

DIGNITY's vision is a world without torture. DIGNITY's partners pursue their unique visions and mandates. Partnerships should set common goals and engender changes that contribute to the realization of both partners' distinctive and complementary visions.

DIGNITY defines a partnership as a collaborative relationship between organisations that commit to joint principles and work towards common goals. This work is based on complementary competences and strengths and is formalised in a mutual agreement that establishes objectives, actions and division of roles and responsibilities over a defined period. DIGNITY engages in partnerships with organizations that together with DIGNITY commit to follow key **principles**, when undertaking the joint work. The key principles, include (but are not limited to):

- **M**utuality and respect
- **E**quality and non-discrimination
- **A**ccountability and transparency
- **P**articipation and empowerment

These principles may inform the partnership goals, but they mainly serve to frame the processes and relations of the partnership . DIGNITY and its partners may include additional principles to guide specific partnership arrangements and contexts, but the four MEAP-principles remain central.

Anchored in the shared commitment to the partnership principles, the partners formulate common **goals** of the partnership⁴. The goals should relate to each organisation's vision and mandate, acknowledge the partners' complementary competences, recognize the worth and contribution of each partner and pursue the added value of joining forces. The common goals often include the development of enhanced capacities⁵ to fight torture and violence with a focus on joint learning and the creation of tangible improvements in the everyday lives of beneficiaries.

⁴ See Annex 1 for an elaboration of the MEAP-principles, their basis in human rights and their applicability.

⁵ See Annex 2 for an elaboration on DIGNITY's approaches to capacity development.

Across all partnerships there must be a shared commitment to promote and protect the safety of staff and beneficiaries and others involved in the given research/intervention from any harm in relation to the joint work⁶ .

4. MODALITIES

DIGNITY generally distinguishes between the following types of partnerships:

PILOT PARTNERSHIPS

Short-term, pilot or ad-hoc partnership agreements are typically based on specific gaps or emerging challenges such as needs for specific technical inputs, urgent protection, responses to emergencies, mapping, trust-building, research, testing of models, piloting of new ideas and themes etc. Ambitions to engage with new actors or in new contexts and volatile situations may also be grounds for pilot partnership. To manage expectations and explicate roles and responsibilities, the objectives and exit criteria for pilot partnerships should clearly reflect a short-term perspective in the partnership agreement. Still, pilot partnerships must feed into the partners' long-term strategies. New partnerships will typically start up with one or more short-term agreements, and a positive mutual assessment of the cooperation may lead to a continuation and subsequently develop into long-term strategic partnerships.

STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS

Long-term strategic partnerships entail year-long joint commitments to implement activities that produce tangible change for people at risk of being affected by torture and violence in a given context. These partnerships typically encompass multiple dimensions of DIGNITY's and its partners' strategies and mandates and entails a focus on validation, innovation, policy-influence, and mutual advice to external stakeholders. Strategic partnerships are crucial drivers of mutual learning and south-north and south-south exchange with the purpose of strengthening anti-torture knowledge and practices 'from the south'. In this sense, strategic partnerships are key to enhance solidarity, sustainability, and impact. When feasible, strategic partnerships include core funding from DIGNITY to increase the autonomy, flexibility, and the firm grounding of activities. Long-term strategic partnership agreements must reflect clear exit strategies, which include criteria for when joint results are achieved, when the partners' capacities to act as change agents are fulfilled, and when the work together is completed, better fulfilled in other constellations, off track etc.

ALLIANCES

As stated above, DIGNITY firmly believes that advances in the fight against torture and violence are premised on complementarity, collaboration, and exchange. Anti-torture work relies on alliances and networks that can genuinely include South and North, strategically engage local and global actors, and firmly link policy, practice, and knowledge about torture and violence to the every-day lives of people at risk. Future, present, and former partnerships constitute the backbone of such alliances that DIGNITY aims to develop further and take responsibility to facilitate.

⁶ Adherence to this commitment is facilitated by the Ethics Committee and the Security Organization of DIGNITY in cooperation with the involved partners.

5. PHASES

DIGNITY distinguishes between four main phases of a partnership:

PREPARING PARTNERSHIPS

Any partnership must be thoroughly prepared and based on solid knowledge about the context of the partners and their role and emplacement in social and political structures and networks. Preparations include context analysis and assessment of potential partners' history, mandate, governance structures, local anchoring, affiliations, financial robustness etc., considering issues such as:

- Partners' access to and legitimate relations with beneficiaries and relevant stakeholders
- Partners' capacity and willingness to engage in long-term commitments, including processes of learning and sharing for the benefit of people at risk of being affected by torture and violence
- Partners' capacity and willingness to be(come) a change agent in the fight against torture locally, nationally, and globally

Assessments go both ways and the preparation phase should include transparent presentations of DIGNITY's strengths and weaknesses to enable potential partners to meaningfully reflect on the opportunities (and limits) of a possible partnership.

ESTABLISHING PARTNERSHIPS

Once a potential partner has been identified, the actual establishment of the partnership must be participatory and give primacy to the partner's and DIGNITY's joint ownership of the process. This requires open communication about the strategies and capacities of each partner as well as the clarification of processes of interaction and management structures of the partnership. Adequate time should be devoted to this and the knowledge and skills to engage in such dialogues should be continuously developed. When a common understanding is reached, the joint activities and the partnership agreement should be designed. The design process should entail a thorough and meaningful inclusion of beneficiaries' voices and perspectives and include (but not limited to):

- An in-depth discussion of the shared overall aim, reflection on how to follow MEAP-principles in practice, formulation of common goals and the priorities for long-term collaboration
- Identification of complementary competences and explication of the value added by joint activities
- Discussion and clarification of roles, responsibilities, and expectations
- Capacity assessments and formulation of partnership agreements and plans
- Development of exit strategies and criteria as well as clear commitments to achieve impact, sustainability, and autonomy and indications of when and how this is achieved.

IMPLEMENTING PARTNERSHIPS

A partnership is a companionship, where the partners agree to accompany each other on an often demanding but also rewarding journey. Implementation of the partnership entails continuous development of mutual trust and harmonization of expectations according to a changing context. Fruitful institutional collaboration is often contingent on positive interpersonal relations and accessibility, responsiveness, and other communicative dimensions of the partnership should be nurtured⁷.

Implementation entails mutual accountability and transparency in strategies, activities, administration, and economy to ensure shared decision-making processes, clear division of roles and responsibilities and alignment of expectations. Implementation also relies on a firm commitment to closely monitor the progress of the partnership, including:

- Annual dialogue about the partnership development to ensure joint learning and continuous attention to capacity needs and strengths.
- Monitoring, evaluation, and identification of lessons learned to ensure that progress is made towards long-term goals.
- Follow up on the MEAP-principles to identify needs for procedural and processual adjustments and further partnership development efforts

Implementation must acknowledge that partnerships are dynamic and that contexts change – often dramatically. This calls for an ongoing commitment to take responsibility for each other’s well-being when adverse situations, dilemmas and conflicts arise.

PHASING OUT PARTNERSHIPS

Clearly defined goals and exit criteria – jointly defined at the establishment of the partnership and continuously adjusted to the context – are necessary for identifying the end of a partnership. The ultimate end-goal is that the partnership has generated sustainable positive change for the targeted beneficiaries and that both partners have become more knowledgeable, capable, robust, autonomous, and connected. A partnership can also end if the desired results have not been met or if there are collaborative challenges, mismanagement of funds, significant political changes, lack of funding, security risks etc. In all cases, the partners must jointly decide on an exit strategy in accordance with the partnership agreement, including:

- Clear and transparent communication about why, how, and when to phase out the partnership
- Documentation of results and promising practices to ensure mutual learning and dissemination for the benefit of other organisations involved in the fight against torture and violence.

While the partnership may simply conclude, phased out partnerships may also develop into lasting relations of vibrant exchange and mutual advice, bilaterally or as part of alliances and networks that DIGNITY and its partners develop, drive, or participate in together.

⁷ DIGNITY expects all its staff and staff of organisations and other entities that are contractually associated with DIGNITY to conduct themselves in a way that respects human dignity. DIGNITY’s [Code of Conduct](#)

6. IMPLEMENTATION AND CONTINUOUS DEVELOPMENT OF THE POLICY

The fulfilment of this policy must be an integral part of the collaboration between partners and a key element of the dialogue in all the four phases of the partnerships process. Furthermore, adherence to the four MEAP principles must be continuously revisited throughout the collaboration and will always be included in reviews and evaluations of all partnerships.

One year after its adoption, the policy will be revised. A targeted partnership policy work flow will be established directly under DIGNITY's management group to closely follow the initial year of implementation (2022) and to facilitate that the policy commitments are integrated in DIGNITY's procedures and tools.

The policy will likewise be subject to review every three years where the policy aims, and implementation will be assessed and revised as needed in continuation of these reviews. A key focus of these reviews will be to continuously facilitate and ascertain that the policy aims are integrated in relevant procedures and documents, including partnership agreements, project document templates, monitoring and evaluations processes etc.

To facilitate implementation and firm integration of the policy, it will be translated into French, Spanish and Arabic and other languages as needed.

GLOBAL PARTNERSHIP EXCHANGE

To facilitate ongoing discussions and mutual learning the Global Partnership Exchange (GPE) site on FABO will be made available to all partners. GPE is a joint learning community, where all partners can share experiences and knowledge facilitated by the FABO platform. The policy and its annexes will also be available at FABO. Following up on the successful implementation of the initial GPE workshop in October 2021, which contributed significantly to the formulation of this policy, DIGNITY will continue to support the GPE workshop as an annual event, where the implementation of policy can be assessed and further strengthened.

ORGANISATIONAL SET UP IN DIGNITY

The partnership policy is anchored with the Director of International Programmes. Complaints regarding the policy is handled in accordance with DIGNITY's [complaint handling mechanism](#).

ANNEXES

Annex 1: MEAP principles unpacked

Annex 2: Capacity development

A joint commitment to follow certain fundamental principles enables partners to establish a dynamic team that can stay on course as the context changes, opportunities and challenges occur and conflicts arise. Such principles inform both the processes of how the partners work together and the pursuit of the outcomes that the partners want to achieve. Accountability will for instance feature prominently in the way partners relate to each other, how they engage with project stakeholders and how they commit to interact with beneficiaries. Yet accountability may also feature in the results that the partnership works to achieve by strengthening knowledge, rules, institutions etc. that hold powerholders accountable and enable people at risk of being affected by torture to access justice.

All partnerships are unique, and the partners may define and integrate specific principles, which are relevant for the given context, type of collaboration, specific goals, particular relationships etc. Yet, DIGNITY will typically insist that partnerships commit to four sets of principles.

- **M**utuality and respect
- **E**quality and non-discrimination
- **A**ccountability and transparency
- **P**articipation and empowerment

The first set of principles – mutuality and respect – is profoundly relational and as such foundational for this policy. The other three sets of principles are well-established cornerstones of human rights-based approaches to development, good governance, humanitarian standards etc. These principles are derived from universal human rights standards and are as such commonly understood as having intrinsic qualities as ‘ends’ in themselves. These principles are also integral to good practices in collaborative efforts to engender change. As such equality, accountability and participation are also seen to have instrumental qualities as ‘means’ to achieve lasting political change – not least in relation to ongoing efforts to ‘leave no one behind’ and reach the sustainable development goals.

Since these principles concern political change, they can support partners’ efforts to address issues of power. The MEAP principles may enable partners to talk about, think about, and act on relations of power in the partnership. They may also help the partners to identify how the partnership is part of local and global power structures and to act upon this insight together. Finally, the MEAP principles may also facilitate an ethical approach in the partnerships. Meaningful participation of beneficiaries or the setting up mechanisms, whereby beneficiaries can hold the partners accountable to project goals, enhance the partners’ capacity to follow basic ethical standards of autonomy, beneficence, and do no harm.

Principles are at once non-negotiable and inspirational. They set a frame through which a given action can take form and direction. Inspiration and guidance on how the principles may inform partnerships are suggested out below⁸ :

MUTUALITY AND RESPECT

Partnerships based on mutuality and respect do not tolerate manipulation, strong-arming, condescension, dishonesty, insincerity, indifference, overruling etc. Partners must respect each other's positions and perspectives and inalienable human rights – including rights to freedom of expression and access to information. A partnership is a trustful relationship, where partners interact in a respectful and equitable manner. Good communication and genuine dialogue must remain characteristic of all partnerships. At the same time, power issues feature in all partnerships as well as the processes that surround them - from intervention design and implementation to reporting and learning. The principles of mutuality and respect entail constant attention to the ways partners depend and rely on each other, while also supporting each other's ability to preserve autonomy, assume responsibility and unfold own identities. Mutuality and respects demand a commitment to share assumptions, expectations, and assessments earnestly and to institutionalise joint decision-making procedures. Partners should strive to establish safe spaces for discussing power and invest in conflict resolution skills and mechanism to build relations that enable partners to challenge each other constructively.

EQUALITY AND NON-DISCRIMINATION

Freedom from discrimination is a human right. Partners should promote equality in the way they communicate and relate to each other, to beneficiaries and other stakeholders. Partners should treat each other as equals (also when enmeshed in inherently unequal relations of power) and should never discriminate each other. Respecting diversity and overcoming prejudices can be sensitive and politically charged, but always strive to take sensible steps towards enhancing equality and diversity in a given context – including efforts to address unconscious bias. A commitment to equality and non-discrimination demands attention to dynamics of marginalization and exclusion and to the compounding effects of intersecting forms of discrimination. Thus, the analyses that partnerships are based on should focus on root causes of vulnerability and activities should be designed to address these problems accordingly.

ACCOUNTABILITY AND TRANSPARENCY

Partners should be jointly and explicitly committed to accountability and transparency towards beneficiaries, in their internal operations and towards donors and other stakeholders. This includes openness and high standards in financial management and the institutionalization of systems that strengthen accountability towards the partners' peers and constituencies (e.g. through complaint mechanisms, codes of conduct, openness about budgets and costs, accessible reporting etc).

⁸ The description of how the MEAP principles can be operationalized is a 'living' text that will continue to develop based on concrete experiences by DIGNITY and its partners.

Accountability rests not only on available systems, but on knowledge and capacity to claim rights and entitlements and to hold powerholders accountable. Partnerships should strengthen such capacity and generate and share such knowledge between each other and together with relevant stakeholders. Transparency can be sensitive – especially in politically charged environments – and should always balance with commitments to confidentiality and do no harm and be adapted to the context.

PARTICIPATION AND EMPOWERMENT

Partnerships should empower DIGNITY and its partners to pursue their visions through synergy and exchange. Participation is both a means to and an end of empowerment. Meaningful participation goes beyond mere consultation or technical add-on to project design. Participation should engender genuine ownership and control of the partnership through all phases and by all partners. This commitment should include beneficiaries and other key stakeholders, who should be actively involved in assessing needs, designing and implementing activities and in making key decisions. This approach to participation is informed by a human rights-based approach to development that regards participation as a right to articulate one's expectations towards powerholders and to take charge of one's own development. Participation fosters critical consciousness and empowers people to bring about a change in their own lives. Lack of participation is not always due to bad will. It requires time and resources that DIGNITY and its partners should be willing to invest.

Some of these principles are more difficult to follow and monitor than others. Participation can be costly and seem fruitless. Non-discrimination can be contentious to explicate. Mutuality can be undermined when one partner controls the funds. Adhering to the MEAP principles is an iterative process that depends on the contexts and the partners and actors involved. What DIGNITY and its partners should do differently and how their performance can be assessed will remain an ongoing conversation and subject to joint qualitative assessments during annual partnership dialogues.

Capacity development is an integral part of most partnerships. DIGNITY defines capacity development in accordance with the UN definition as “the process through which individuals, organisations and societies obtain, strengthen and maintain their capabilities to set and achieve their own development objectives over time”. Focus is thereby on developing capacities that lead to change for those that a given intervention is meant to benefit, while ensuring sustainability and firm grounding in the contexts and everyday lives of beneficiaries.

DIGNITY does not aim or claim to build partners’ capacity through a one-way process of transferring expertise and resources to fill identified capacity gaps. DIGNITY rather works to continuously develop the capacity to fight torture and violence together with its partners. This means that partnerships thrive on the one hand to identify and nurture the complementary and emerging organizational capacities of the involved partners, while on the other hand, to also enhance the shared global and local capacity to fight torture that is invested in all actors at risk of being affected by torture and violence.

Capacity development entails a thorough assessment that recognizes both partners’ key strengths and identifies capacity gaps, complementarities, exchange, and opportunities for joint growth. The capacity assessments inform the joint formulation of partnership development plans, which outline tailor-made capacity strengthening activities that are adapted to the context. The development plans are integrated in the partnership agreements with long-term commitments to enhance the local and global capacity to fight torture and violence and to promote both partners in becoming increasingly robust, sustainable, and autonomous.

Some partners may have limited technical capacities that DIGNITY can help to strengthen, and DIGNITY may have limited capacity on other fronts. Long-term partnerships demand the allocation of considerable time and resources to ensure that skills and tools become fully embedded in both partner organisations. Capacity development also require a clear framework to steer the process and review the progress. Such progress will typically entail a gradual transfer of technical responsibilities to implementing partners. Where capacity development forms part of a partnership, the aim is always to increase the partners’ strength and autonomy to act independently as drivers of change, not least by aligning capacity development activities for institutional growth and development with each organisation’s own strategic focus.

DIGNITY’s capacity development activities seek to generate mutual learning with a particular focus on enhancing ‘south-north’ and ‘south-south’ learning. Capacity development also focus on strengthening mechanisms that can link local, regional, and global actors, research and practice and state and civil society to ensure a holistic and innovative approach to torture prevention and rehabilitation.