THE PRACTICE OF CO-ORDINATION BETWEEN ILEP MEMBERS

GUIDELINES ON CO-ORDINATION AND CO-OPERATION AT COUNTRY LEVEL

Adopted by the Working Group on Co-ordination and
Approved by the ILEP Working General Assembly

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Co-ordination is the core of ILEP; the reason for being a Member. It is both the great achievement of ILEP and the greatest cause of friction between Members. It is a balance between the desire of each Member to act with absolute autonomy and the desire of each Member to ensure that what funds are available are used to the best possible effect in support of people affected by leprosy.

The tensions inherent in this balancing act are managed by the system of co-ordinators: allocating responsibility for each project or country to a single Member whose right to act is respected by all other Members. That respect means giving up some freedom of action such that other Members only act through or in concert with the co-ordinator.

Today this system is under pressure. The old geographic separation of Members’ fields of activity is breaking down. Often many Members are, or want to be, operational on the same territory. Then divergence occurs between those who see respect for a single ILEP National Co-ordinator as the only solution, and those who see flexible co-operation as the way forward.

That divergence threatens the well-being of the Federation as complaints are heard on all sides:
- "There is no longer any other Member which shares our understanding of co-ordination"
- "We are blocked from working where we want"
- "A Co-ordinator should be our servant, helping but not controlling us"
- "There is no longer trust between associations like in the old days"
- "We need more than financial co-ordination; we need co-ordination on practical problems in the field"
- "Associations insist on their rights where they are the Co-ordinator but find all sorts of excuses for acting just as they want elsewhere"
- "Nobody bothers to read the Guide to Co-ordination or follow the agreed procedures"

The following Guidelines on co-ordination and co-operation between Members at country level have been adopted as a basis for improved common understanding and practice. The Guidelines relate to a number of aspects around which friction has commonly occurred:
1. Appointment of National Co-ordinators

- To have a single Member-association as National Co-ordinator is the most straightforward way in which to ensure co-ordination in the field. Members should make every effort in each country to agree on a National Co-ordinator.

- For the few countries where it is not possible to agree on a single Co-ordinator, Members will nonetheless devise alternative procedures to ensure co-operation between them as regards contact with the government, identification of new projects, and support of the National Programme.

2. Agreeing the Practice of Co-ordination for each Country

Members vary in their ways of working; Local circumstances vary from country to country.

It is essential, therefore, that for each country the Members active there openly discuss with each other how they expect and want the process of co-ordination to be applied. There is need for common understanding between the Members involved about the way they wish to work together within the framework laid down by the rules of co-ordination.

It is particularly important for Members to have a common understanding of their policy regarding the development of anti-leprosy work in the country and the contribution that they can make to it. Where there is an ILEP National Co-ordinator, it is the responsibility of that Member to develop and promote such a policy, in consultation with other Members supporting that country. For countries without an ILEP National Co-ordinator, the Members involved will find other ways to agree a common policy.

It would be good for understandings on the practice of co-ordination in a country to be set out on paper in the form of an accord between interested Members.

The time of renewal of a National or State Co-ordination would be a good opportunity for the Members concerned to jointly review such accords and their understanding of how co-ordination should take place between them for the country concerned.

3. Field Co-operation

In all countries where more than one association is operationally active, Members recognise that it is essential to promote co-operation between them in their field activities. As agreed in the Statement on Field Co-operation adopted at the General Assembly in Dublin:

- Where a National Co-ordinator exists, that Member has responsibility for organising co-operation between Members on the ground. Other Members may reasonably expect the Co-ordinator to arrange regular consultations, to be a source of information and to facilitate their practical requirements if asked.

- Where no National Co-ordinator has been appointed, the Members involved will instruct their Representatives to work closely together and to share the tasks that would otherwise have fallen to the National Co-ordinator.

- Given their different structures, it would be helpful if Members could be clear about the level of authority given to each Representative. Differences on this can lead to misunderstanding.
- When Representatives in a given country meet, a report of their meeting must be sent to the headquarters of the Members involved and to the Co-ordinating Bureau.

4. **Contact with Governments**

The purpose of all co-ordination is to avoid confusion. In dealing with government authorities it is especially important to avoid different messages being given by different Members. Thus:

- The National Co-ordinator, in discussion and in co-operation with other interested Members, must take the lead in contact with the government.

- The rules of ILEP co-ordination do NOT preclude contact with the government by other Members. Those other Members, however, MUST:
  * Discuss such contacts, in advance, with the National Co-ordinator
  * Keep the National Co-ordinator informed of the outcome of all such contacts
  * Notably, the point on which the co-ordination rules are most strict is that, in line with Bye-Law 9.4, no formal agreement shall be negotiated or signed with the government without the approval of the National Co-ordinator.

- In countries without a National Co-ordinator, it is harder but even more necessary for all Members active in the country to keep each other informed of contacts they make with the government.

It has been evident in recent years that many complaints arise because Members active in countries where several of them are operational, have NOT respected these rules:

  * In countries such as Brazil and Vietnam that have a National Co-ordinator, other Members all too often have NOT kept the co-ordinator properly informed of their discussions with government.

  * In countries without a National Co-ordinator such as India, Nepal, Nigeria, and China, Members do NOT make enough effort to tell each other about their plans and the visits and contacts that they make.

As regards the countries cited above, the situation has improved recently as Members set up and respect a variety of mechanisms for co-operation and consultation but there is still considerable room for improvement.

5. **New Initiatives**

A related area which has caused friction, is the way in which when developing new initiatives, all too often Members at best respect the rules but not the spirit of co-ordination. There is a definite tendency to tell other Members (let alone the Co-ordinating Bureau!) of new projects only after an association has already planned and decided on its support.

Where it relates to a country for which another Member is National Co-ordinator, such an approach breaches the principles of co-ordination, angers the co-ordinator, and may well mean the Member concerned does not profit from relevant information from the co-ordinator about the local situation.
Where the National Co-ordinator does not keep other interested Members well-informed, it is disrespectful and reduces their willingness to support that co-ordinator and the country concerned.

Most seriously, where there is no national co-ordinator, it means too many small, dispersed initiatives without any clear policy or impact.

Thus Members commit themselves to:

* Sharing information with other interested Members regarding new initiatives as early as possible, and before a final decision on support is taken.
* Facilitating such sharing by the development of appropriate procedures such as the newsletter on new initiatives started in India last year.

6. Knowledge of Co-ordination

Understanding of both the purposes of ILEP co-ordination and of the rules agreed over the years, is often weak among those who have to ensure its practice. It is important that not just the heads of associations but also their headquarters staff and field representatives have a working knowledge of the procedures they should be following in order that co-ordination between Members be both effective and amicable.

- Training

Training in ILEP co-ordination procedures should be made available for the staff and representatives of Members.

* Members can provide in-service training themselves.
* Individuals can be sent to the Co-ordinating Bureau for a personalised introduction to ILEP procedures.
* The Co-ordinating Bureau arranges occasional seminars. These can be arranged either in London or on a regional basis.
* When member-associations bring their Representatives together, Co-ordinating Bureau staff can lead sessions on the co-ordination procedures.

- The Guide to Co-ordination

The second edition of the Guide is about to be published. This includes all changes to the co-ordination procedures agreed since 1991. Most notably, as a result of experience with the first edition, it has been re-designed and re-written to make it more user-friendly. It is hoped that it will now be much easier for the staff of member-associations to use in answering the practical questions they face.

The Guide was always intended by Members as a working tool (Assembly, June 1989) to improve the operation of co-ordination among Members. Members, therefore:

* Will ensure that they distribute copies of the new edition of the Guide and explain its importance to all their staff whose work touches on co-ordination, notably their field Representatives and staff in Project Departments.