

IN SOLIDARITY WITH LATIN AMERICA

TO THE SPANISH SOCIETY WHICH, THROUGH
ITS PURCHASING OF ONCE'S LOTTERY GAMES,
CONTRIBUTES TO BUILDING A FAIRER WORLD



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TABLE OF CONTENTS

PRELUDE.....	7
CHAPTER I	
BRIEF OVERVIEW OF DISABILITY IN LATIN AMERICA.....	11
CHAPTER II	
FOAL: AN OVERVIEW OF THE DRIVING FORCE FOR CHANGE IN LATIN AMERICA...	27
CHAPTER III	
FOAL'S ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE.....	41
CHAPTER IV	
BUILDING UP ALLIANCES.....	49
CHAPTER V	
ACHIEVEMENTS AS A RESULT OF AN EFFORT: EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES CENTRES AND THE AGORA PROGRAMME (PART I).....	69
CHAPTER VI	
ACHIEVEMENTS AS A RESULT OF AN EFFORT: CO-FINANCING OF PROJECTS AND STRENGTHENING OF THE ASSOCIATIVE MOVEMENT (PART II).....	97
CHAPTER VII	
ONCE: THE PRIME MOTOR.....	105
CHAPTER VIII	
IN SOLIDARITY WITH THE WORLD.....	113

TO THE SPANISH SOCIETY WHICH, THROUGH ITS PURCHASING OF ONCE'S LOTTERY GAMES, CONTRIBUTES TO BUILDING A MORE JUST WORLD.



PRELUDE





PRELUDE

Very often, behind an acronym and along with the meaning represented by each initial, one can find a history of intense work. This history may be rich in projected dreams. It may also include a number of projects, some already delivered, some in progress; some that never took off, and some whose profiles may not be outlined fully but which already constitute impending projects.

Acronyms refer us to an institution which has secured results. It is those very achievements that manage to transmit to the collective imaginary the meaning of those initials. This is the case of the ONCE Foundation for Solidarity with Blind People in Latin America (FOAL).

When those four letters are pronounced, “FOAL”, they evoke concepts associated with this Foundation (born 15 years ago) such as solidarity; sustainability; cooperation; equality; inclusion; effort, etc.

For all the above, this book aims to contribute in some way to consolidating the significance of FOAL’s work in our historical memory, which represents a huge task in itself but which also concerns us. Our historical memory is sometimes fragile and can be lost among better-publicised events. FOAL, however, has made it possible for many children, teenagers and adults in Latin America to enjoy a more dignified and more complete life. In short, it is a life more in accordance with their human rights.

Fifteen years ago, when FOAL was just four initials charged with purposes but with no results yet, some people thought our efforts were just a pipe-dream. Today, fifteen years later, ONCE and FOAL are proud of having been able to contribute to enhance the development of thousands of blind people in many countries, and proud of having also received in return vital and invaluable human knowledge and experiences.

In times of crisis, efforts must be redoubled because fewer resources are available. However, FOAL is accustomed to persevering in areas where, unfortunately, the situation of crisis is permanent. Poverty certainly hurts when it refers to the lack of financial resources, but when poverty involves the infringement of every person's inherent rights, it becomes a fierce poverty. And this is precisely the type of poverty that FOAL fights against every day, transforming this world in which we live in a more comfortable and amicable place; a world which becomes more just, which belongs to all of us: a world without exclusion.

Hence, the following pages constitute a succinct but heartfelt homage that describes the vicissitudes this Foundation has gone through, and whose rationale behind its existence is the unavoidable engagement of ONCE in development cooperation, a commitment which is only possible thanks to the solidarity of Spanish society and to the work of our lottery ticket sellers.



CHAPTER I

BRIEF OVERVIEW OF DISABILITY IN LATIN AMERICA





CHAPTER I BRIEF OVERVIEW OF DISABILITY IN LATIN AMERICA

When we talk about disability, we are referring to a defined reality that is present in 10% of the world's population. This estimate has been provided by the World Health Organization (WHO) and is based on figures obtained when analysing the percentage of disabilities acquired through illness, trauma, malnutrition, genetics and so on. The WHO established a set of categories that could cause disability.

According to the same source, probably more than 25% of the total population of Latin America has a disability. We are talking about at least 50 million people, of which around 80% live under the poverty threshold (according to the World Bank). If we consider that a family has an average of three members, the figure that illustrates the percentage of Latin American people experiencing both extreme poverty and disability reaches a total of 150 million.

Taking into account the 2002 study carried out by the WHO and entitled, 'Health in the Americas', three main causes of disability have been identified in Latin America:

- Health-related causes (congenital anomalies; chronic illnesses; malignant tumors; infectious diseases; nutritional deficiencies and parasitism, as well as problems related to the development of the foetus and to giving birth);
- Environmental causes (mainly pollution caused by the use of pesticides and insecticides in agriculture);
- Other causes (in particular violence and the lack of safety measures in the workplace to avoid accidents, as well as disorders in mental health caused by armed conflicts, along with the devastating effects of anti-personnel landmines).

EXCLUDED WITHIN THE EXCLUDED

Nowadays, nobody doubts that poverty and disability conforms to a binary set whose elements feed on each other. Poverty generates and accentuates the effects of disability, while the presence of a disability produces poverty. Therefore, governments have to break this circle by introducing a cross-cutting disability factor in all their policies, as well as in their human and social development plans.

Although Latin American countries have committed to implementing their national Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs), people with disabilities, who are excluded within the excluded, are usually ignored in these policies which, in most cases, do not include either sanctions or rigorous follow-up mechanisms.

Thus, people with disabilities in Latin America remain outside the decision-making processes that have an impact on their quality of life. Not only that, their human rights are not respected either. The International Disability Rights Monitor (IDRM) has identified different social contexts in which disability is a clear cause for discrimination. These areas are:

Communication: Only 40% of countries have a version of their political constitution in an alternative format. Few governments contemplate the possibility of adapting their national communication systems to make them more inclusive, in contrast to countries such as Chile, Panama or Costa Rica. The case of Brazil stands out in this regard, as it has a telephone system adapted for deaf people that covers 70% of the country's territory, although this constitutes an exceptional case.

Education: Although, as in so many other areas, there is a lack of specific data addressing disability issues, it is known as a general rule that children with disabilities are excluded from the educational system.

Access to education varies according to the type and degree of disability. Often, mainstream schools do not accept students with severe disabilities and when they do, the education of those who are accepted is usually limited due to the lack of qualified human and teaching resources.

Employment: Despite huge efforts by many countries to promote labour inclusion and the hiring of people with disabilities, one of the main problems for this sector of society continues to be an extremely high unemployment rate, which is close to 70%, and even higher in the case of women with disabilities. The reasons for such a devastatingly high unemployment rate can be found in the lack of qualifications, accessibility and planning for universal design (it is not much use, for instance, to have an adapted workplace if the means of transport to get there is not accessible). Another reason for this extremely high unemployment rate is the unfair distribution of the Latin American economy.

Health Services: In most regions, access to the health system depends on working status, which means that given the disproportionately high unemployment rates among people with disabilities, health insurance is also restricted for this group. Furthermore, public health systems are deficient for people with disabilities as they do not have resources for specific services or technical aids.

Private medical insurance is not a solution either. On the one hand, very few people with disabilities can afford it. On the other hand, insurance companies usually reject people with disabilities as clients. At the same time, there are scarcely any health professionals qualified to assist people with disabilities, and those few who are available work for services delivering rehabilitation systems that consider disability as a medical problem and not from a global and integrated perspective.

Housing: Throughout almost all of Latin America, people with disabilities live with their families. Independent living constitutes a privilege and an exception rather than a fundamental right. This is due firstly to the complexities derived from the multiple existing barriers and obstacles when accessing education and employment. Secondly, it is due to a lack of planning with regard to the percentage of housing facilities (public or private) incorporating universal design criteria.

Institutionalization: Although it constitutes a flagrant infringement of basic human and ethical principles, many people with disabilities are confined to centres against their will. This initial infringement of their rights can open the door to further violations, as these people will be more vulnerable to abuse and violence. For example, while laws contemplate the possibility of rejecting psychiatric treatment, the opinions of people with a psychosocial disability are rarely taken into account in practice when applying such provisions.

Some countries are starting to become aware of how situations such as these undermine dignity. In this regard, they have brought in initiatives to deinstitutionalize people with disabilities, although it is still a trend and therefore it is a practice that has not been rooted or extended yet.

Accessibility: As in many other aspects, most countries have laws that require compliance with minimum accessibility standards for buildings. These requirements may apply only to new buildings or just be simply ignored in a systematic way. Even public infrastructure does not comply with these basic accessibility requirements established by law.

As a consequence of all the above, and despite the fact that Latin American countries are willing to work to make accessibility not only an element to be included from the outset in production processes but a real benchmark in existing spaces and services also, the reality is that it amounts more to a verbal commitment than an assumed responsibility.

AN ASSOCIATIVE MOVEMENT IN PROGRESS

Given the general economic and social characteristics of the Latin American subcontinent, many of its countries are beginning to experience significant progress (in all areas but particularly in the economic context). However, the starting point for people with disabilities in many cases is atrocious.

An associative network is gradually coming together. Although its structural framework is fragile and its trajectory brief, a sense of belonging to a specific group has taken root. This awareness of the collective is essential to articulate an operative and strong associative movement. That reality has facilitated the setting up of Iberoamerican disability networks. To date four operating networks are in place:

- Iberoamerican Intergovernmental Technical Cooperation Network, which focuses on developing policies for the care of seniors and people with disabilities (RIICOTEC). It was founded as a result of the Chile Declaration in 1993;
- Iberoamerican Network of Non-Governmental Organizations of People with Disabilities and their Families (RIADIS), founded in Bolivia in 2001 under the auspices of IMSERSO (Spanish Institute for Older Persons and Social Services, which also includes people in a situation of dependency);
- Iberoamerican Network of Organizations of People with Physical Disabilities (RED), established in the Dominican Republic in 2001 with the support of the Spanish Confederation of Physically and Organically Disabled People (COCEMFE) and IMSERSO;
- Iberoamerican Network of Intergovernmental Cooperation for the Education of People with Special Educational Needs (RIINEE), founded in 2004 by the ministries and secretariats of education in Ibero-

merican countries with the purpose of contributing to the development of education for people with special educational needs, as a means to achieve their inclusion in education, social inclusion and improvements in their quality of life.

With regard to people with visual disabilities, the Latin American Union of the Blind (ULAC) was founded in 1985 with support from the Spanish National Organization of the Blind (ONCE). ULAC is an international non-governmental and non-profit organization which brings together organizations for and of the blind from 19 Spanish-speaking and Portuguese-speaking countries in Latin America. Its main objective is to achieve through unity the complete strengthening of organisations for and of people with visual disabilities within it, as well as the full integration of people with visual impairment in Latin America and in society.

In addition to disability organizations, which are growing in number and increasingly focusing on working together, each Latin American country has an official body dedicated to disability.

REGULATORY FRAMEWORK

The Latin American regulatory framework concerning people with disabilities fluctuates greatly from one country to another. Disability legislation in Latin America is characterised by its dispersion, its excessive proliferation and its systematic lack of compliance. Although there is a willingness in different countries, and in many cases they have even developed a regulatory basis upon which effective future legislation could be built, the reality is that the very few laws, directives and sanctions that exist are not taken into account in practice.

Nevertheless, the associative movement, whose main objective is to strengthen itself until it reaches the necessary critical mass to have an impact on those decision-making bodies, has an unalienable start point in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, from which other treaties were articulated. The treaties

listed below were also decisive in terms of their direct or indirect engagement with disability issues and were ratified by Latin America:

- International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966);
- International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966);
- International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (1965);
- Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Violence against Women (1979);
- Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (1984);
- Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989).

Of particular importance is the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, adopted in 2006 and which has become the main legal instrument structuring the new social model for people with disabilities. This UN Convention identifies people with disabilities as subjects by right and not as mere objects of those rights. This new conception represents a complete shift from classic models based on concepts such as charity and compassion (and so close to a third one, paternalism), models which were also based on an obsolete paradigm involving an assistive, rehabilitating and medical approach.

The UN Convention provides overdue clarification of the content of these human rights as they are applied to people with disabilities, providing a one-stop benchmark point for domestic laws and policies in each country. One of the greatest achievements of this text is that it provides for mechanisms to supervise progress at national level in this area, providing evaluation standards and outlining a framework for international co-operation.

The ratification of these international agreements shows a willingness to rectify the flagrant infringement of human rights that people with disabilities have experienced throughout history. However, the commitment to eliminate barriers must be real, whether these barriers are tangible or not. Countries must also make a concerted effort to build more just and inclusive societies.

The effectiveness of those efforts will also depend on the capacity of Latin American countries to go deeper and incorporate the disability perspective into a wider discourse and in a cross-cutting manner, as is happening with other groups at risk of being exposed to situations of greater vulnerability, such as women and children.

Furthermore, Latin American governments will have to carry out studies (the more detailed the better) to describe in detail the reality of disability, get to know it well and then be able to put forward efficient, tailored solutions and answers; in this way we can contribute indirectly to overcoming the stereotypes that undermine and hinder efforts to bring about the social and labour inclusion of this group.

Finally, Latin American governments must promote a permanent and, whenever possible, productive dialogue with the disability movement to build stakeholder networks. Nothing for people with disabilities without people with disabilities.

COMMUNICATION CHANNELS BETWEEN SPAIN AND LATIN AMERICA

The link between Spain and Latin America is extremely well-known by everybody, as is illustrated through historical discourse. However, we would like to highlight that in the last century, cooperation links have been further reinforced and dialogue between equals has gradually become a very common and productive practice. Of all the bilateral meetings carried out, those which stand out as the most productive are: **‘Encounter in Democracy’**, held in 1983 with the participation of more than 100 top level political, cultural, economic and scientific representatives from both sides of the ocean, gathered together through the Institute of Iberoamerican Cooperation (ICI), a stem of what later would become the Spanish Agency for International Cooperation (AECID).

Similarly, **the meeting of former Latin American democratic presidents** held in the Guadalupe Monastery in Extremadura, was also significant. The Guadalupe Declaration, named after the event, includes an explicit and binding commitment to consolidate an Iberoamerican community of nations and to promote education, culture and science, as well as supporting the different peace processes in Latin America.

Thus, the Iberoamerican Summit of Heads of State and Government originated there, a summit which is recognised as an observing body by the United Nations and with a similar status to those of the European Union, the African Union, the Organization of the Islamic Conference, the Holy See and the Red Cross.

The 13th summit, held in Bolivia under the theme ‘Social Inclusion as Driving Force behind the Development of the Iberoamerican Community’, concluded with the Santa Cruz de la Sierra Declaration. In response to a request from Spain, it also declared 2004 as **the Iberoamerican Year of People with Disabilities**.

This reality constituted a point of inflection in Latin America regarding the concept of disability. On the one hand, the disability movement had to face, for the first time, the challenge of using the opportunity provided to them in such a way that their actions had long-term consequences. To this end it had to articulate itself, enter into a dialogue and pull together in the same direction, leaving aside any style considerations. Indeed, it managed to do so.

On the other hand, Latin American public authorities, administrations and governments saw disability as something systematic and not isolated. In this manner, those who had not done so before came to understand that the demands of organizations of people with disabilities did not happen out of the blue or because of the influence of some visionaries. They constituted no more and no less than a matter of rights and, more specifically, a human rights issue.

In 2004, the Iberoamerican Year of People with Disabilities, important developments were achieved. The first of these was a very strong sense of social awareness regarding inclusion through activities that would promote the advocacy of rights and equal opportunities. A brief evaluation of this achievement would show four clear results in this respect:

- Significant progress with regard to public policies for enhancing the life conditions of people with disabilities and their families, with a particular focus on those who are living in poverty;
- A more solid awareness of the social dimension of disability was consolidated at national, regional and local levels through carrying out studies, censuses, surveys, reports, etc.;
- Certain dynamics were established regarding the inclusion of disability issues and the disability perspective within the debate and writing-up of this regulation;
- The setting-up of organizations dedicated to people with disabilities was encouraged in those regions or areas where no network was present, while consolidating the already existing ones.

2004, the Iberoamerican Year of People with Disabilities, showed that a participatory democracy required new public policies for people with disabilities, taking into account their own input, through their representative organizations, in all stages of the decision-making process: elaboration, consultation, approval, implementation, follow-up and evaluation.

Another key milestone in understanding the huge commitment of the different Iberoamerican countries towards people with disabilities was the XXII Iberoamerican Summit of Heads of State and Government, held in the Spanish city of Cádiz in November 2012 on the theme ‘A Renewed Relationship in the bi-centenary of the Cádiz Constitution’.

At this Summit, **2013 was proclaimed the Iberoamerican Year for the Labour Inclusion of People with Disabilities.** This proposal was jointly put forward by Ecuador and Spain, echoing a suggestion presented by ONCE through FOAL (its Foundation for Latin America) and by CERMI (the Spanish Committee of Representatives of People with Disabilities).

During the summit state leaders recognised the need to strengthen public policies, initiatives and efforts to ensure the full and effective labour inclusion of people with disabilities, and foster policies towards growth and the projection and encouragement of small and medium-sized enterprises.

The summit set out 2013 as a step forward without return, from which labour inclusion can be an effective reality. As expressed in the official communiqué, “inclusion in employment not only guarantees their [persons with disabilities] social integration; it’s positive economic and social impacts also extend to the entire community, enabling it to take advantage of a valuable human capital, which promotes social cohesion and reactivates the economies in Iberoamerican countries”.

For this reason, the heads of state attending the summit made a commitment “to promote inclusive growth policies with equity and based on decent work”. They also committed to taking the necessary measures to eliminate institutional barriers caused by the invisibility of people with disabilities within their respective legislations.

Taking into account Agreement 159 of the International Labour Organization (ILO) on the professional re-adaptation and employment of people with disabilities, they also recalled the right to work of people with disabilities on an equal opportunity basis regarding gender.

The leaders called for the private sector to raise awareness around the potential that people with disabilities have, and to eradicate all prejudices and stereotypes that are not only old-fashioned but which have also become obsolete in the 21st century.

The proclamation of 2013 as the Iberoamerican Year for the Labour Inclusion of People with Disabilities constitutes a unique opportunity to show the direction that public policies and civil society's actions must take in order to incorporate people with disabilities into the labour market.

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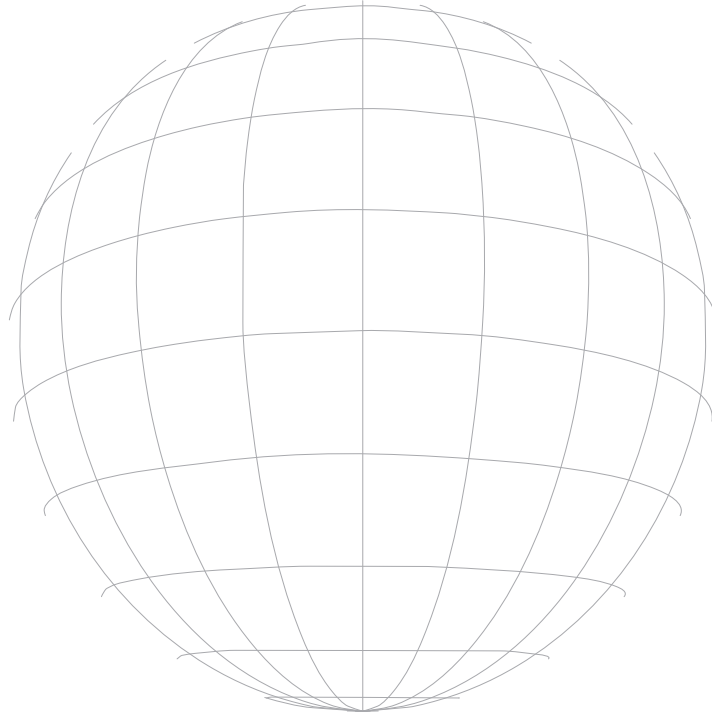
Up to now, there is no doubt disability is a pluralistic social and personal reality in Latin America. However, there are still challenges left. For instance, a percentage of people experience particularly excruciating levels of exclusion and suffer discrimination within specific groups. This group must become an urgent priority in public policies.

Women with disabilities are among these specifically vulnerable groups, as are indigenous people with disabilities, immigrants or people belonging to an ethnic minority or with a different sexual orientation, people with multiple disabilities, children with disabilities, people with disabilities who cannot represent themselves, people who live in rural areas, and people who suffer the stigma associated with mental illness.

Achieving complete equality for people with disabilities in comparison to the rest of the population, as well as securing their full social emancipation in Latin America, will depend on the interested parties' clear awareness that they must take control of their lives and design their own future.

Within a social context, this awareness is expressed through the joint work and the unified action that the associative network represents, which is essential for advancing with regard to the rights of people with disabilities.

FOAL, set up thanks to ONCE's conviction that it is possible to have a different, more just, more inclusive and more efficient world, began working in Latin America to bring about change in the reality described here. FOAL started its work also with the firm belief that the moment will come when people with disabilities will definitely be in charge of their own lives, live as citizens with full rights and enjoy an education that will make them capable of performing a job that provides them both with financial and personal independence.





CHAPTER II

FOAL: AN OVERVIEW OF THE DRIVING FORCE FOR CHANGE IN
LATIN AMERICA





CHAPTER II FOAL: AN OVERVIEW OF THE DRIVING FORCE FOR CHANGE IN LATIN AMERICA

Collaboration between the Spanish National Organization of the Blind (ONCE) and Latin America was an established objective almost since this organization's first steps during the first half of the 20th Century. While joint actions were piecemeal, they were invariably productive. This collaboration took the shape of book donations (both in braille and audio format) of specific bibliographical materials; through the donation of technological tools; through the coverage of expenses implied in the participation of Latin American professionals in relevant world congresses, as well as through its support to numerous blindness prevention campaigns, lest we not forget that 80% of world blindness could be avoided (according to data produced by the World Health Organization).

However, it wasn't until the 1980s before work was done to identify common systematic and periodical working objectives. In 1984, ONCE's General Advisory Board set up the Fund for Cooperation with Ibero-america in order to formalize the allocation of aid to people with visual disabilities in Latin America. This economic catalyst facilitated the carrying out of multiple activities, with the main objective of improving the quality of life of this sector of the population. In particular, it allowed for the sponsoring of cooperation programmes in the areas of welfare and assistance to blind people and people with severe visual impairments. The initial budget for this was 15 million pesetas.

ONCE's engagement in Latin America, however, continued to increase. Thus, the budget for the institutional fund for cooperation gradually grew to 100 million pesetas (almost 1 million U.S Dollars), along with the magnitude and significance of the projects it sponsored. However, the subsequent severe devaluation in the Spanish currency in 1994 led to a loss of purchasing power for the fund. Aware of the impact that this could have on the initiatives developed in different countries, ONCE again increased its financial allocation to the fund to 1 million US dollars.

Initially, programmes and initiatives sponsored by the fund were characterised by their assistive dimension. Nevertheless, the paradigm shift that took place within Spanish society and which was encouraged and assumed by ONCE, would modify, not only the parameters for action in Latin America, but also the conceptualization of disability itself.

Within an irreversible and historic process that had its hiccoughs but which continued to be convincing, the response from public powers to disability was based on a welfare model. Within such a model disability was understood as a medical problem, where people with disabilities were considered mere beneficiaries of rights. This model, however, experienced a substantial shift towards becoming a model based upon rights, through which disability would be seen now as part of the richness of reality from an integral perspective, and where people with disabilities would become subjects with rights.

Taking into account this new paradigm, the ONCE Foundation for Solidarity with Blind People in Latin America (FOAL) was founded in 1998 in order to establish fluent and long-lasting communication channels for the most urgent needs emerging on the other side of the ocean. FOAL would act as a Foundation ready to work in a sisterly manner with its Latin American counterparts, while respecting at the same time each country's idiosyncrasies and particularities.

Hence, FOAL articulates itself as a new stable and fertile meeting point, which promotes, facilitates and encourages cooperation projects and action policies that improve the life conditions of people with visual

disabilities and therefore, those of people with disabilities in general in Latin America. Nevertheless, it maintains the same hallmarks that characterised ONCE's prior collaboration with Latin America, those being: stability; continuity; work; honesty; generosity; participation and progress.

PURPOSES AND OBJECTIVES

FOAL's purpose is as precise as it is effective: to promote the improvement of the life conditions of people with visual disabilities in Latin America, thus contributing to enabling them to enjoy their human rights and fundamental freedoms from an equality perspective. This represents a substantial investment on repairing through international development cooperation the deficit in citizenship people with visual disabilities suffer.

Therefore, FOAL's main beneficiaries are blind and partially sighted people in Latin America. Job creation, the improvement of access to education and educational development constitute its immediate contributions, carried out through training programmes and professional training, as well as through labour promotion and inclusion programmes.

FOAL's actions are based on a human rights model, particularly since the adoption of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities in 2006. Its direct or indirect actions are channelled through associations representing people with disabilities in Latin America, and its work enables the attainment of personal autonomy; full social inclusion; equal opportunities and no discrimination, as well as minimising the impact of blindness or visual disabilities.

The Foundation's annual budget is approximately 1.5 million Euros, to which direct or indirect contributions by the European Commission; the different Latin American governments; Spanish autonomous communities, local companies or entities and private individuals should be added.

The always cross-cutting work carried out by FOAL in Latin America is channelled through different actions:

- Technical assistance for the execution of programmes and projects;
- Direct or indirect participation in the managing of activities, centres and programmes;
- Collaboration in activities with other entities which carry out similar or complementary actions to those performed by FOAL;
- Qualified interlocution recognized officially by public administrations in order to promote the objectives proposed in its statutes;
- Concession of subsidies to similar institutions and allocation of financial aid.

FOAL participates actively in the 19 countries that make up the Latin American Union of the Blind (ULAC): Argentina; Bolivia; Brazil; Chile; Colombia; Costa Rica; Cuba; Ecuador; El Salvador; Guatemala; Honduras; Mexico; Nicaragua; Panama; Paraguay; Peru; Dominican Republic, Uruguay and Venezuela.

SCOPE OF ACTION

FOAL's actions are aimed at achieving personal autonomy and independence for people with visual disabilities, the empowerment of the associative network and the involvement of the different public administrations, so that the projects it participates in are not just circumstantial and become structural. To this end, FOAL has mainly focused its work on three major areas:

Education

Today, more than ever, education can be a privilege. Within an increasingly more specialised world, we must guarantee education in all its stages and on an equal opportunity basis. It is for this reason that education constitutes one of FOAL's areas of action.

Thanks to its joint work with public administrations such as the Spanish Ministry for Education and its Latin American counterparts, FOAL promotes and stimulates quality education that ensures this right for Latin American children, through the setting up of Educational Resources Centres and through the suitable training of professionals dealing with the specific needs of students with visual disabilities.

As regards projects on access to culture and the promotion of reading, more than 2,000 people have been beneficiaries of some of the actions developed by FOAL. This is an area the Foundation is particularly sensitive about. Subsequently, it backed up the demand put forward by the World Blind Union (WBU) on the 20th of December 1993, in which they urged governments “to provide quality didactic materials to students with disabilities and to foresee long-term training for teaching and support staff”.

Taking into account the UN Standard Rules for the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities (which contain 22 guidelines related to this sector of the population), FOAL believes that measures should be implemented in Latin America with the objectives of training teaching professionals in Braille, developing accompanying methods (how to produce tactile materials) and repairing technical devices.

Also, FOAL supports the negotiations being held by WBU and other non-governmental Organizations in the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO), a specialized agency within the UN system, in order to ensure access to reading and printed texts of works published by organizations of people with visual disabilities in which ULAC and ONCE participate.

Labour Inclusion: Vocational Training and Employment

If education constitutes a basic right, putting the acquired knowledge into practice by performing a job is also every person’s right, especially in those situations where people find themselves unprotected in the social context, as happens in the case of people with disabilities.

Everybody is aware of the fact that employment is the basis upon which many vital aspects for the individual rest. For example, financial independence is key to achieving personal autonomy. Aware of this challenge, FOAL strives to provide, in this context, the most adequate professional training for each profile, attempting also to make jobs suitable for the people with disabilities that perform them.

To this end, the Foundation developed an ambitious project called the ÁGORA programme (Occupational Management Centres in the Latin American Region), in order to incorporate people with visual disabilities into the Latin American productive network through consulting units, training and labour mediation. These units act as delegations and focus on the specificities of each region, and it is their job to identify people with visual disabilities of legal working age; to give training courses and workshops; to provide professional and employment-related advice, and to secure internships to incorporate this population sector into the labour market.

AGORA's action areas are to improve the employability of people with visual disabilities; to fight against poverty; to combat gender inequality and to invest in facilitating the capacity building and the access to employment of those people with more difficulties, such as people over 45 years old.

Each individual who benefits from the services provided by AGORA is interviewed in depth. Then, a personalised work itinerary is developed, which includes relevant training, learning and support actions. In many cases, the process leads to a work placement emerging from the actual offers generated within the project.

Due to the significant and numerous synergies it prompts, AGORA's role as intermediary between public and private entities offering employment opportunities within the region constitutes one of its most interesting features. This allows for the generation of a dynamic job bank, managed according to the needs and skills of its beneficiaries.

In those cases where no candidate is suitable for the job placement being offered, a training course would be given so that the person could learn how to carry out tasks and use the tools characterising the company offering the vacancy.

Finally, AGORA's technicians make sure that the job placement is adapted to the needs of a worker with a visual disability, so that he or she is able to perform it to the highest possible level.

Another characteristic of this project is that self-employment is encouraged as a means of social sustainability, and as an example to show that business capacity (whatever the scale may be) is not incompatible with a visual disability. Hence, all the different phases within this working model are backed up: from its beginning (with a business study and design) to the process of searching for finance and including supervising mechanisms during its initial phase.

AGORA aspires to extend its scope of implementation so that the help it provides reaches the largest possible number of beneficiaries and it is developed in a wider variety of countries within the region.

Support for the Strengthening of Organizations

FOAL's last purpose is to establish mechanisms that could be self-managed by Latin American Organizations of people with visual disabilities in the future. In other words; to lay the bases so that experience provides them with a diligent and efficient autonomy and the capacity to be influential.

To this end, FOAL promotes the setting up, strengthening and consolidation of the associative network in those countries where it is present. FOAL's intense work both with the Latin American Union of the Blind and with different regional and local associations, allows for the stimulation of a collective conscience which is rooted and is germinating.

The deeper the involvement of the associative network in all contexts and levels related to disability is, the more stable development will be, not being therefore subject to one-off whims.

In partnership with Latin American associations of blind people, FOAL contributes to advocacy efforts in defence of their human rights. To this end, it trains their executive staff and grassroots members to enable people with visual disabilities to be present in those places where decisions which concern them are made, putting in practice the motto of the UN CRPD: “Nothing for people with disabilities without people with disabilities”.

Other Objectives

Although improving access to education, promoting training, labour inclusion and the articulation of a strong associative network constitute its priority working areas, FOAL has also engaged in many other issues:

- Integral rehabilitation;
- Personal autonomy;
- Universal accessibility and design for all;
- Promotion of R+D+I (Research, Development and Innovation) in the fields of blindness, visual disability and tflotechnology (an Assistive Technology that applies all technological knowledge available to blind people or people with low vision);
- Promotion and distribution of accessible bibliographical resources, along with technical resources and basic tools that enable the education of blind or partially sighted people;
- Encouragement of cultural development and sports practice as indispensable and efficient tools for social inclusion.

FOAL'S PRINCIPLES AND VALUES

Every organization's statutes embody a code of ethics in which its principles and values are described in detail. In FOAL's case, they are as follows:

- **Respect for the person's inherent dignity** in general, and that of people who are blind or partially sighted in particular. The concept of "dignity" is understood from a philosophical and from a rights perspective. It is an inherent value to every human being to be rational and be provided with freedom and with a creative power, as people can shape and improve their lives through decision-making and through the exercise of their freedom.
- **Personal autonomy and independence.** Only through decision-making initiatives executed voluntarily and free from pressure, urgency or coercion (however subtle these may be), a person can achieve full development, which includes the concept of "being wrong" as part of the inalienable right of being.
- **Non discrimination** with regard to segregation whose criteria may infringe on human rights in some way. Nobody or nothing can be excluded on the bases of ethnic origin; nationality; gender; age; religion; language; health conditions; economic status; disability; political ideas, civil status or anything that prevents the recognition or the exercise of human rights.
- **Full participation and inclusion** of blind and partially sighted people in society.
- **Respect for difference** and for the acceptance of visual disability as merely another feature of diversity and of the human condition.

- **Equal opportunities** in all areas of life - both personal and work-related - as a form of social justice, where a system is socially just when everybody has the same opportunities to access social welfare and enjoys equal political and civil rights.
- Promotion of **Design for All and Universal Accessibility** as requirements that must be fulfilled in all environments, processes, goods, products and services, as well as by instruments, tools and devices in order for them to be understandable, usable and workable by all people safely and comfortably and in the most natural and autonomous way possible.
- **Gender equality** as a reality that guarantees a sustainable development.
- Integration and support of all measures focusing on the **inclusion of blind and partially sighted women**, and those which underpin their role as subjects with rights.
- **Respect for the development of skills of children with visual disabilities**, while respecting their identity.

These values are applied through a set of actions characterised by the principles of good governance, transparency and excellence in the action criteria and procedures, in the definition of its working priorities, in the employment of its resources and in the communication of its results.

When applying the above mentioned values and principles to the work that FOAL has been carrying out in Latin America, this can only be understood from the perspective of its very strong links with the subcontinent. It is not and has never been the intention at all to implement ONCE's model through FOAL in Latin America. The objective is a much wider, productive and interesting one. It is about putting ONCE's experience, trajectory and resources at the service of organizations of people with visual disabilities in Latin

America, in order for them to become stronger, be able to manage their own projects and become politically influential entities.

Thus, FOAL provides the necessary tools and financial and human resources to encourage projects in different areas of the Latin American geography, while receiving at the same time an enormous reward in the form of knowledge, experience and participation in the transformation of a hostile reality into a more friendly and humane one.

* * *

Despite the human, economic and material efforts of those parties involved within FOAL's structure, there are many obstacles and problems that must be faced every day. In the same way as people with visual disabilities have to overcome barriers both trivial and some almost insuperable on a daily basis, FOAL also has to persevere throughout its development process against multiple technical, human and administrative difficulties, which are solved with diligence and always building bridges so that the best possible result is obtained.

The times of crisis that the planet is being faced with cannot become a burden that slows down progress. Social and cooperation policies, now more than ever, have to be crucial axes in all countries in order to avoid the excluded ones, the ones who have always endured a deficit in citizenship throughout history, paying now also the consequences of a recession in which they played no role whatsoever.

FOAL has continued to promote active cooperation policies with governments, with people with visual disabilities and with representative entities in Latin America. In this way, it has favoured the consolidation of the associative movement by creating thousands of work placements and training actions.

Some of the recognitions and awards given to FOAL back up the work carried out and confirm that FOAL is moving forward in the right direction. This is the case, for example, of the 2012 Asicom Award, given to ONCE by the Iberoamerican Association of Communication and the University of Oviedo for its work with people with visual disabilities in Latin America. Another example is the decisive contribution made by ONCE and FOAL to the final designation of 2013 as the Iberoamerican Year for the Labour Inclusion of People with Disabilities.



CHAPTER III

FOAL'S ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE





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As a non-profit entity with a Foundation legal status, FOAL is governed by a Board of Trustees. This Board of Trustees appoints a Permanent Commission as a representative body.

The secret of FOAL's diligence and effectiveness is an up-to-date and well-tuned machinery, while at the same time never getting out of sight its three major lines of action:

- To achieve an expeditious and efficient management of the resources dedicated to cooperation;
- To incorporate entities and public figures that could collaborate in the improvement of the relations with the different country representatives, with an aim to promote social policies and generate greater resources in favour of people with visual disabilities;
- To increase in particular the resources and projects that relate to job creation, which constitutes a fundamental pillar for social inclusion.

STATUTES

The good governance of an organization cannot take place without a log book that accurately sets out and defines its purposes, its execution mechanisms, the guidelines to be followed and the way in which action must be taken.

With its own legal status and full capacity to act, FOAL, the ONCE Foundation for Solidarity with Blind People in Latin America, specifies its principles and values within its statutes.

Based on a human rights model, they establish that FOAL works to achieve the highest degree of personal autonomy; full social inclusion and enjoyment of citizenship rights, as well as equal opportunities and non discrimination for people with visual disabilities in Latin America.

As it is specified in its statutes, FOAL is regulated by the Foundation Act 50/2002; by its current development rules and other legal dispositions, and by its founder's will, which is manifested in the memorandum of association through its statutes, as well as in the rules and provisions the board of trustees may establish during their interpretation and development.

Its stipulated scope of action covers Spain and the Latin American countries, with a particular focus of action on geographical areas with specific needs for human and social development.

THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES

It is responsible for FOAL's management and administration. It must be composed by a minimum of 3 members and a maximum of 25. Their appointment is carried out according to the following criteria:

- Up to 3 members may be put forward by organizations of people with visual disabilities whose activities are developed in any of the Latin American countries;
- Up to 9 freely-appointed members, who are selected among individuals and legal entities that stand out for their contribution to the disability associative movement, as well as for their work in favour of the collaboration between Spain and the community of Latin American countries;
- Up to 3 members may be appointed by ONCE.

Along with a delegation representing ONCE and its Foundation, the following members are currently part of the board:

- The Iberoamerican Social Security Organization (OISS), which is an intergovernmental body that promotes the economic and social welfare of the countries within the Latin American community;
- The Iberoamerican General Secretariat (SEGIB), which coordinates the Iberoamerican summits;
- The Spanish Agency for International Development Cooperation (AECID), which is part of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation;
- Red Cross, a unique world humanitarian movement of its kind, and whose emblems are recognized by international law and command respect under all circumstances;
- Caritas, the humanitarian organization of the Catholic Church, bringing together 163 associations distributed all over the world. It is dedicated to combating poverty, exclusion, intolerance and discrimination;
- The Spanish Committee of Representatives of People with Disabilities (CERMI), which represents a meeting platform and a means for political action for the more than 3.8 million Spanish people with disabilities and their families. It brings together 7,000 Spanish associations and entities;
- The Latin American Union of the Blind, which brings together organizations for and of people with visual disabilities from 19 Spanish and Portuguese-speaking countries in Latin America;
- The MONDRAGON Corporation, the largest international business corporative network in the world, with more than 80,000 staff members from the 5 continents and annual earnings of more than 8 billion Euros;
- Telefónica, the main Spanish multinational operator of telecommunication services. It has 250,000 staff members and annual net earnings of approximately 10 billion Euros;
- BBVA, a Spanish financial entity present in more than 30 countries, with more than 100,000 staff members and an annual net profit of more than 1.5 billion Euros;
- Political dignitaries such as Isabel Allende, a senator in the Republic of Chile and former President Salvador Allende's third daughter.

The members of the board of trustees perform their responsibilities over a period of four years, after which they can be re-elected again. Its president, executive vice president and secretary are appointed from among its members.

Furthermore, the board of trustees may agree to appoint one honorary president and several honorary vice-presidents, who will not vote or have any responsibilities regarding the dealings carried out by the governing body.

Its members will meet at least twice a year when summoned by the person holding the presidency at that time, although they will meet as many times as is needed to guarantee that FOAL is functioning correctly.

Powers of the Board of Trustees

The board of trustees has the following legal powers:

- To govern and administer the Foundation, notwithstanding the functions delegated onto the managing bodies;
- To represent FOAL in all relations, at events or in contracts involving authorities and institutions of any kind and in any geographical context, tribunal or any other public or private entity, as well as before any individual exercising rights, actions and exceptions in relation to processes, files and/or claims that affect the Foundation, granting to this end the relevant powers;
- To interpret and develop the statutes by safeguarding their essential meaning;
- To elect and substitute the members that may hold the presidency, vice-presidencies and secretariat;
- To approve the annual plan of action and accounts;
- To ratify the action programmes within the budget estimates;
- To appoint the company responsible for auditing FOAL's annual accounts;
- To appoint and dismiss managing staff;
- To sanction the code of ethics and safeguard its fulfilment;
- To make decisions on any matter which directly or indirectly affects FOAL's normal development.

Organizational Chart

The current organigram of the ONCE Foundation for Solidarity with Blind People in Latin America is as follows:

- An honorary President:
 - HRM King of Spain

- Four honorary Vice Presidents:
 - HRH Infanta Margarita de Borbón y Borbón dos Sicilias;
 - The very honourable Mr. Mario Alberto Nobre Lopes (President of the Mario Soares Foundation, (a distinguished Portuguese institution which promotes cooperation);
 - The very honorable Mr. Adolfo Suárez González, duke of Suárez;
 - The very honorable Mr. Óscar Arias Sánchez (President of the Óscar Arias Foundation for Peace and Human Development).
- Trustees:
 - President;
 - Executive Vice President;
 - Secretary;
 - Board members.
- General Director.
- Associate General Director.

PERMANENT COMMISSION

It is composed of the person acting as first executive vice-president, a member of the board of trustees and a member of the delegation appointed by ONCE, the person holding the secretariat of the board of trustees and the person acting as general director of the Foundation. It meets at least once a month and its main responsibilities are:

- To approve proposals on plans, programmes and generic or specific actions involving a cost higher than the amount authorized by the managing bodies; to raise relevant proposals at the board of trustees;
- To ratify FOAL's budget estimate and the proposal of its settlement report;
- To inform about the proposals raised at the board of trustees regarding the appointment and dismissal of management staff at the Foundation;
- To decide the compensation and legal systems applicable to the Foundation's management staff;
- To ratify the hiring of staff and to establish their working conditions;

- To authorise the allocation of goods and services;
- To produce relevant working papers to which any member of the board of trustees may be ascribed;
- To make decisions on any issue or matter that may be urgent, subject to later ratification by the board of trustees.

FINANCIAL SYSTEM

FOAL's patrimony is made up of all goods, rights and obligations, which are subject to economic evaluation and which may be part of its initial resources (its permanent resources), or which may have been acquired later. In order to fulfill its commitments, FOAL has different financial sources:

- The returns on the initial patrimony;
- Economic contributions transferred to the Foundation by ONCE or by a third party;
- Subsidies awarded by the state, autonomous communities or any other public or private entity, in benefit of inventory.
- The results derived from the economic activities approved by the board of trustees;
- The dues or compensations satisfied, in any case, by their beneficiaries, according to the criteria established by the permanent commission.

On an annual basis and within the first three months of the year, the person that exercises the competencies of the presidency, as proposed by the permanent commission, will formulate the annual accounts, which are subject to approval by the board of trustees.



CHAPTER IV

BUILDING UP ALLIANCES





CHAPTER IV BUILDING UP ALLIANCES

The effectiveness of an organization can be measured from many perspectives. One of them is its capacity to establish partnerships with other institutions through agreements, pacts and any other sort of collaborative mechanisms which enable it to achieve its goals.

In FOAL's case, due to its predisposition towards a common understanding and its commitment to solidarity, there have been many synergies that have helped the Foundation to speed up its commitments and obtain from them the maximum benefit throughout the years, thus providing people with visual disabilities (the rationale behind its existence) with the help required as expeditiously as possible and in the best conditions.

FOAL's open and dynamic predisposition has consolidated fluent relations with multiple and significant bodies within Latin America such as the Iberoamerican General Secretariat (SEGIB), founded in 2003 by the Iberoamerican Summit of Heads of State and Government as a permanent body for the institutional and technical support of the Iberoamerican conference.

Four generic working areas remain open within SEGIB, those being; the political, the economic, the social and the cultural. Also, it promotes multilateral and horizontal cooperation within the framework of the Iberoamerican conference in order to strengthen the Iberoamerican identity through actions in the fields of culture, science and education, contributing in this way to the achievement of the millennium development goals in the region.

SEGIB carries out follow-up, assessment and dissemination of the summits' cooperation programmes, which are ascribed initiatives and projects that ensure their quality, their results and their sustainability. Not in vain then, SEGIB is a member of FOAL's board of trustees.

Some of the most important bonds consolidated by FOAL are those which serve as pillars for its collaboration with MEC, previously known as the Spanish Ministry of Education and Science, and with the Organization of Iberoamerican States (OEI) in order to carry out educational cooperation projects and programmes which may be of interest.

The Organization of Iberoamerican States for Education, Science and Culture (OEI), is an intergovernmental cooperation body established in 1985 and headquartered in Madrid.

It promotes cooperation, exchange, development, diffusion and communication among its member countries in the fields of education, science, technology and culture. It also advocates for the promotion of the Spanish and the Portuguese languages.

The **agreement between MEC, OEI and FOAL**, which came into force in 2006 and whose validity is indefinite, regulates the competencies of all entities involved.

Thus, MEC commits:

- To promote and establish relations with the ministries of education in countries of the Iberoamerican region, in order for them to participate in relevant educational cooperation actions within the framework of the Iberoamerican Intergovernmental Technical Cooperation Network for the Education of People with Special Educational Needs (RIINEE);
- To carry out the educational follow-up of the actions taken;
- To support, through experts and technical assistance, actions derived from this educational cooperation initiative;
- To propose to the Follow-Up Commission projects included in its programme which are in line with the objectives of educational cooperation.

Accordingly, the organization of Iberoamerican states is obliged:

- To execute or collaborate from a technical point of view in the development of the projects that are formalised to carry out the educational cooperation actions;
- To carry out the purchasing, reception and follow-up of materials and equipments related to goods and services, according to the provisions in OEI's procedural and managing regulations;
- To propose the projects included in its programme which are in accordance with the objective of educational cooperation contemplated in this tripartite agreement to the Follow-Up Commission;
- To present before the Follow-Up Commission a report justifying the administration and management of the funds transferred to OEI for the execution of projects, accompanied by an expenses report for the previous year.

Finally, FOAL's obligations under this agreement are:

- To provide educational resource centres and centres producing specific didactic materials for blind students with the necessary equipment for their functioning, while advising the ministries of education of different countries about their implementation and development;

- To improve the qualifications of the professionals appointed by each ministry for the implementation of centres producing didactic materials, as well as to participate in the training of teaching staff working with blind students within an inclusive education system through FOAL's educational resources network;
- To propose to the Follow-Up Commission those projects which agree with the ultimate purpose of educational cooperation;
- To provide the Follow-Up Commission with the technical evaluation reports regarding the impact of their actions.

At the same time, the agreement allows any of the stakeholding parties, with all other parties' consent, to collaborate with as many bodies, administrations, public or private entities and institutions as they may consider suitable, in order to achieve educational cooperation.

Gradually, some countries started to sign up to this agreement as national entities and beyond their adhesion to OEI. Countries which become parties to the agreement through their respective ministries of education are engaged in an inclusive education model, attempting with this cooperation agreement to articulate an effective response for all parties involved in the education of people with visual disabilities (experts in this field, parents, mainstream education teaching staff, students). To this end, these countries assign part of their national budgets and human resources, designing from the outset their own model which is tailored to each country's reality and, therefore, to their particular educational systems.

In this same context and as collaboration framework, FOAL signed an agreement in 2011 with the Spanish Agency for International Development Cooperation (AECID), which is attached to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation; the Spanish National Organization of the Blind (ONCE); the ONCE Foundation for the Cooperation and Social Inclusion of People with Disabilities, and the Spanish Committee of Representatives of People with Disabilities (CERMI).

The purpose of this agreement between AECID, ONCE, ONCE Foundation, CERMI and FOAL is to contribute to the social inclusion of people with disabilities, and to fostering sustainable human development. To this end, these five entities agree: to promote cooperation and collaboration with organizations of blind and partially-sighted people in those countries which are included within the AECID's area of competence; to promote employment, capacity-building and professional training for people with disabilities; to include the principle of universal accessibility in AECID's management and structure; to encourage the inclusion of disability as a cross-cutting issue in development cooperation policies, programmes and projects, and to promote the strengthening and cohesion of disability social movements from a human rights perspective.

Therefore, the ONCE Foundation agrees:

- To promote universal accessibility in AECID's main premises and services (both physical and virtual), as well as in its procedures, services and benefits made available to the public;
- To facilitate access to employment for people with disabilities at AECID, by studying and proposing the adaptation of rules that regulate the selection processes for their entry, as well as paying attention and improving the working conditions and aids for civil servants with disabilities or who have relatives with disabilities;
- To encourage the implementation of social clauses from AECID's own actions regarding administrative hiring, according to current legislation and in favour of labour inclusion and accessibility for people with disabilities;
- To inform and offer support, within ONCE Foundation's frame of competencies in relation to professional training, employment and accessibility to the children and relatives of civil servants and staff members working at AECID, as well as to the actual AECID personnel in case of a recently-acquired disability;
- To promote actions with the objective for AECID to incorporate the issue of assistance for people with disabilities and their families in a cross-cutting manner and as a singled-out social group within the policies, programmes and actions it may promote and develop;

- To organize an annual training activity at AECID training centres, which will be ceded for this purpose, taking into account the availability within their programmes and the conditions outlined in the annual collaboration plans.

In accordance with this agreement, FOAL will be responsible for:

- Setting up a framework programme of collaboration for the execution of development cooperation programmes and projects with blind and partially-sighted people. It will include performing technical assistance actions in centres belonging to member countries in Latin America and within the framework of the objectives established by the current cooperation plan with AECID;
- Promoting collaboration between FOAL and the different AECID technical offices in Latin America, in order to carry out national and/or regional action programmes in the fields of education, labour inclusion and institutional reinforcement, with a timeframe for each programme of between 3 and 5 years;
- To organize an annual training activity at the AECID training centres present in Latin America, which will be ceded to this end, taking into account the availability within their programme schedules and the conditions outlined in the annual collaboration plans.

Similarly, the role given to CERMI is:

- To contribute to the dissemination of a human rights approach towards disability and the fight against poverty, and to encourage the inclusion of such issues within Spanish policies and strategies on international development co-operation;
- To promote the strengthening and cohesion of social movements articulated around the issue of disability in those areas of the world where Spanish development cooperation is implemented;

- To stimulate the assimilation of international development cooperation strategies focusing on the human and social development of people with disabilities and their families within the Spanish disability associative network;
- To carry out a study analysing the significance of disability in Spanish development cooperation policies, with the aim of improving the effectiveness of future actions and contributing to promote respect for the human rights of people with disabilities through such actions;
- To carry out actions for the promotion and the assistance of people with disabilities and their families as a cross-cutting axis of its international developmental co-operation strategies, policies and programmes;
- To host a forum to reflect and gain awareness about the inclusion of disability and the introduction of the universal accessibility principle within the development cooperation policies and strategies of the agency and other Spanish operators.

Finally, AECID will:

- Channel the participation of ONCE and its Foundation, FOAL and CERMI in the contents of the regulatory and programmatic initiatives promoted by this agency and which are affected by this agreement, so that the social sector of disability can make contributions and suggestions that improve such content from the perspective of people with disabilities;
- Promote the presence of ONCE and its Foundation, FOAL and CERMI, which represent people with disabilities and their families, in AECID's participation and consultation bodies and forums that exist at present or may exist in the future, and which have a link with this sector of the population, its interests and demands.

A Coordinating and Follow-Up Commission, composed of two representatives from each signing entity will meet at least twice a year to coordinate the activities required for the execution of this agreement of unlimited duration.

WALKING HAND IN HAND WITH OISS

Although its origins date from further back, the Iberoamerican Social Security Organization (OISS) was set up in 1954. It is a specialised international body of a technical nature, which promotes social and economic welfare in Iberoamerican countries, as well as those countries linked to them through the Spanish and Portuguese languages. It does so through the coordination, exchange and use of mutual experiences in the areas of social security in particular and within the wider context of social protection in general.

In 1999, FOAL signed a collaboration agreement with OISS to promote the exchange of technical support. According to this agreement, both parties agreed:

- To collaborate in technical support and assistance activities through initiatives that will enable the advancement in the development of joint projects. It also refers to the collaboration in knowledge dissemination, in particular in relation to the internationalisation of social security. This knowledge involves the adequate modification of managing institutions, as well as research and any other activity relevant to their respective objectives and purposes in general terms, and those which aim at improving social security systems for people with disabilities in particular;
- To exchange publications on social, labour or economic issues which may be produced as a result of their respective actions.

The activities contemplated by the agreement can be materialised through courses, studies, experts' trips, technical visits, seminars and international colloquia.

With an initial life span of two years, the agreement is automatically renewed at the end of each natural year.

ALLIANCE WITH CERMI

One of FOAL's strongest partnerships is with the Spanish Committee of Representatives of People with Disabilities (CERMI), which constitutes a platform for the representation, advocacy and action for the more than 3.8 million Spanish people with disabilities and their families.

It is made up of the main national organizations of people with disabilities; several member bodies involved in specific sectors, and a large group of regional platforms. CERMI gathers together more than 7,000 associations and bodies.

In April 2008, FOAL, CERMI and the Spanish Ministry of Education and Science (MEC) signed a collaboration agreement to elaborate and publish a study on the issue of disability within education systems in Iberoamerican countries. This study led to a book entitled 'People with Disabilities and Access to Educational Services in Latin America', which was coordinated by Pilar Samiego García.

This study, along with other previous and later works focusing on learning about the reality of disability in Latin America, is crucial, as the more we are aware of the particularities, needs and features of the social sector for which we work, the more specific and useful the proposals we can develop to improve their quality of life will be.

In addition to the agreement, the relationship between FOAL and CERMI is extremely fluent and symbiotic.

SYNERGIES WITH ULAC

If there is an institution with which FOAL intrinsically shares a sisterly relationship, it would be the Latin American Blind Union (ULAC). The Union was established in 1985 and is made up of organizations for

and of people with visual disabilities in Latin America. Its purpose is to promote the strengthening of the institutions that make up this organization, as well as the full inclusion of all people with disabilities in Latin America.

FOAL and ULAC both share the objective of reinforcing the associative movement of blind people in their respective countries, as it constitutes a legitimate and necessary tool to actively advocate for the human rights of this sector of the population.

In 2004, FOAL and ULAC ratified a four-year collaboration agreement, which may be renewed indefinitely.

By entering this agreement, ULAC commits to elaborating a strategic plan of action. This must include the criteria and the necessary organizational and economic commitments required for implementation in both the definition of its objectives and of its functioning. An example of this is outlined below:

- Good governance, transparency and excellence constitute basic action principles within its action and procedural criteria; in the definition of its working priorities; in the employment of its resources, and in the communication of its results;
- ULAC will encourage within its governing bodies a functional, small-sized and professionalised executive structure, so that this enables the union to fulfil its commitments;
- It will develop actions with the aim of achieving greater financial autonomy and, above all, a wider participation of the public and private sectors in the countries in which it intervenes, generating in this way synergies to obtain economic resources to finance its budget through external co-funding sources;
- It will promote contributions from its own resources, which will come from ULAC's member organizations and collaborating partners or sponsors;
- It will encourage the full incorporation, the democratic participation and a degree of commitment among all the countries that make up the Latin American region, and whose associations are part of

- ULAC. In this way, it will facilitate therefore their integration and representation within its bodies;
- It will promote the strengthening of national organizations through the continuous standardisation and updating of training courses in administration and management, prompting subsequently the responsible and democratic participation of members in their respective organizations;
 - It will encourage statutory reforms within national organizations based on the changes and needs experienced by people with visual disabilities, simplifying organizational complexities whenever possible and incorporating professionalism, responsibility and dedication criteria in order to gradually facilitate more efficient definitions and distributions of tasks. Also, it will have to act in favour of a progressive renewal through an orderly rotation of all senior posts, making possible the incorporation of young people and creating awareness about the need for the inclusion of women in training and employment. At the same time, it will reinforce their rights not only by being able to elect representatives but also by being themselves elected. ULAC must perform these tasks while supporting the necessary statutory reforms in order to implement the principles of non-discrimination and equality between men and women;
 - To promote a policy of effective service provision for national institutions by both elaborating and presenting projects for one or several countries, such as the encouragement of the better use of the variety of services available in each state for the benefit of blind people in Latin America;
 - The relationship between ULAC and FOAL will be reinforced, while respecting both institutions' autonomy and independence when complying with their respective objectives;
 - FOAL will be mentioned in all joint actions.

At the same time, FOAL consolidates its commitment to providing ULAC with financial support and political guidance.

FOAL AND THE SOFT CENTRES

In 2007, the Latin American Blind Union (ULAC) launched the SOFT project (Typhlotechnological Optimization and Assistance Service), in order to improve the use of technological tools adapted specifically

for people with visual disabilities. To this end, a consortium was set up to enable the launching of centres providing technical support, capacity-building, maintenance and repair of typhlological equipment. The centres are to provide services gradually to cover the needs of the Latin American region.

These technical support and repair centres attempt to solve the stagnation and underuse of existing equipments in the region, which is due to a capacity-building deficit, a lack of technical advice regarding their use and maintenance, and to the different difficulties in both repairing them and sourcing spare parts. These centres offer an integral work in the achievement of a better use of typhlological equipment.

FOAL, in its efforts to improve the education of people with visual disabilities, is linked to and participates actively in this project. These centres constitute a means to offer technical support and aid in the maintenance of equipment, which FOAL provides these educational resource centres with in order to assist people with visual disabilities.

COALITION WITH HILTON PERKINS

Founded in 1829, Perkins School for the Blind is a centre with a worldwide reputation for its excellence in the teaching of blind people, people suffering from deaf- blindness and people with multiple disabilities. Some internationally renowned students have attended this school such as the woman activist Helen Keller and her teacher Anne Sullivan.

Perkins' main mission is to help people with disabilities acquire a greater degree of independence. Through the development of their knowledge, their skills and their self-esteem, students learn to live, work and get along in the most independent way possible.

In 1989, Perkins established the integral international Hilton Perkins Programme with the support of the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation, in order to promote and consolidate the education of blind and partially-sigh-

ted children. Hilton Perkins' primary focus is to develop skills at the local, regional and national levels to establish sustainable and independent educational services.

An institution of this nature is bound to share a common understanding with FOAL, as they have similar aims and purposes. For this reason, even prior to the setting up of FOAL, both institutions had collaborated since 1990, joining efforts to achieve the greater educational, labour and social inclusion of deafblind people in Latin America.

Some of the joint actions developed throughout this time have involved:

- Training professionals working in educational programmes for students with visual disabilities and additional needs (including those with deafblindness) at the Interamerican University of Costa Rica, the Mackenzie University of Sao Paulo in Brazil, the Metropolitan University of Education Science in Santiago of Chile, and at the Dr. Domingo Cabred Higher Institute for Educational Psychology and Special Education in Argentina;
- Numerous encounters among parents of deafblind people and people with multiple disabilities in different places within Latin American. Their aims would be to establish links among families, to identify leaders among parents, to promote self-determination and empowerment, as well as to encourage the development of joint networks both through the parents associations to which they belong, and among them in a direct and independent manner;
- The establishment or consolidation of early-intervention educational services through the supply of economic, logistic and material support to institutions such as the Eva Lindstedt Centre in Sao Paulo (Brazil) and the Manuel Rocca Rehabilitation Hospital in Buenos Aires;
- Training for preparing staff to work in early-intervention services for children suffering from deafblindness or with multiple disabilities that are associated with visual disabilities;
- Meetings of different associations working to improve the quality of life of deafblind people;
- Sponsoring a number of participants to take part in forums of interest such as the Deafblind Inter-

- national World Conference and the World Federation of the Deafblind International Conference;
- Consultancy services: early intervention, transition to adult life or the sensory integration of deaf-blind people;
 - Programmes on the transition to adult life;
 - The production and distribution of bibliographical materials both in Spanish and Portuguese;
 - The call for scholarship applications to the Master's Degree in Multiple Disability and Deafblindness;
 - The training of staff in low vision and sensory integration, with the objective of producing functional strategies to facilitate visual communication in their development;
 - The production of useful goods such as rocking chairs and posture pants;
 - Specific educational programmes for children with visual disabilities and brain damage;
 - Launching specific resource centres such as the Multiple Disability, Deafblindness or Visual Disability ADEFrav resource centre in Sao Paulo (Brazil);
 - Regional capacity-building programmes;
 - The development of didactic materials such as games and toys that may stimulate the use of sight;
 - Training courses in cortical vision;
 - Training courses in management and advocacy of family rights.

COLLABORATION WITH CARITAS SPAIN

Founded in 1957, Caritas Spain is a humanitarian organization attached to the Catholic Church. It operates through 68 Caritas diocesan offices and 3 institutions (the Saint Vincent de Paul Association, the Spanish Confederation of Religious -CONFER-, and the Spanish Federation of Social and Health Religious).

It has around 60,000 volunteers all over Spain, approximately 4,000 staff members and more than 160,000 members that sponsor it financially (60% of its funds come from private sources, with private donations as its main source of income).

The services provided by Caritas Spain are split in three major areas: humanitarian aid, development co-operation and social services.

In 2012, FOAL and Caritas Spain signed an agreement for the execution of the AGORA programme in Bolivia to improve the labour inclusion of people with visual disabilities through advisory actions, capacity-building and labour insertion.

The above-mentioned two-year agreement details FOAL's and Caritas Spain's financial contributions so that the Bolivian Pastoral Social Caritas carries out and develops the AGORA programme with technical support from the National Federation of the Blind in Bolivia (FENACIEBO) and the Bolivian Institute for Blindness (IBC).

LINKS WITH THE RED CROSS

In order to be able to improve the quality of life of people with visual disabilities in Latin America, FOAL strives to involve all actors in the area that may contribute to this purpose through their capacity, efficacy and implementation. This is the case, for example, with Red Cross Spain, with whom FOAL signed a collaboration framework agreement to identify, formulate, execute and evaluate actions focusing on training and labour inclusion for blind people in Central America.

Furthermore, aware of the devastating effects of the continuous natural disasters to which certain Latin American regions are exposed, FOAL has offered all its resources to combat their consequences.

To guarantee joint actions are undertaken effectively, actions will be stipulated through agreements that will be specific for each. In such agreements, each institution's engagement will be determined, as well as their degrees of responsibility in the managing of such commitments, which may relate to tasks linked to the administration of funds, to the execution of the materials and contents, or to both aspects simultaneously.

UNDER THE AUSPICES OF UNESCO AND UNICEF

One of the actions with the biggest impact and where FOAL participates is the Education for All Children with Visual Impairment (EFA-VI) campaign. This campaign was initiated by the International Council for Education of People with Visual Impairment (ICEVI), along with the World Blind Union (WBU) and backed up by UNESCO and UNICEF.

This campaign, which started in 2006, addresses children with visual disabilities in developing countries, where only about 10% of children have access to education.

The EFA-VI campaign contemplates the following UN Millennium Development Goals:

- To achieve primary education on a universal scale;
- To promote gender equality and women's autonomy;
- To set up international development associations.

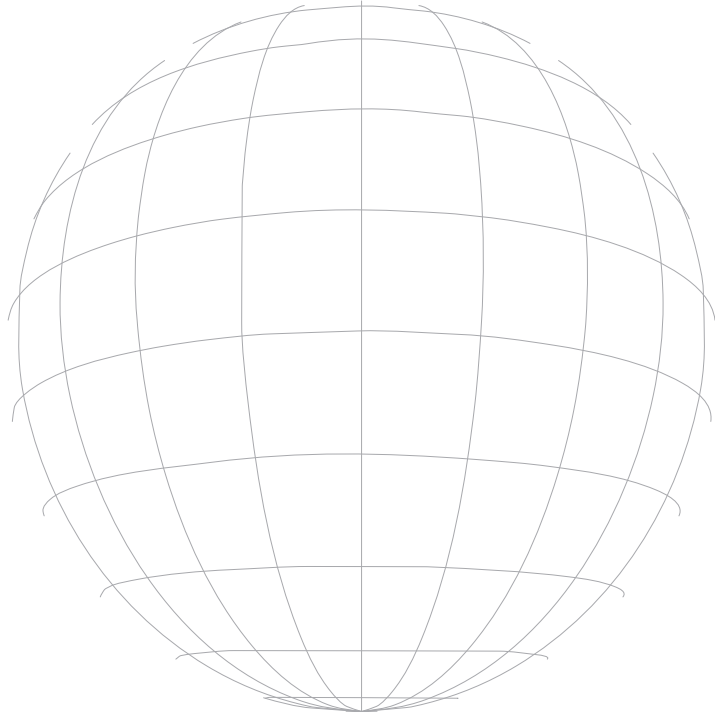
In this regard, it has identified 7 working areas:

- To improve awareness around the right to education of people with visual disabilities;
- To implement systems to evaluate and identify children with visual disabilities;
- To facilitate access to early-intervention and low vision services;
- To provide human and financial resources in order to develop quality educational programmes;
- To incorporate parents into the education processes of children with visual disabilities;
- To produce educational and bibliographical resources for people with visual disabilities, as well as for the educational community as a whole, including educational professionals, mobility experts, rehabilitation professionals, parents and others.

FOAL's work within the Global EFA-VI campaign is linked to the cooperation agreement signed in 2006 with the Spanish Ministry of Education and Culture (MEC) and the Organization of Iberoamerican States (OEI). The actions under the auspices of FOAL and framed within this campaign are divided into the following:

- Courses in early intervention, awareness, screening and low vision;
- Supply of teaching materials for students with visual disabilities;
- Elaboration of self-learning guides for teaching staff;
- Services focusing on the production of bibliographical materials (in braille, tactile and audio formats), on early intervention and on visual stimulation.

Since 2008, FOAL has supported actions taken within the EFA-VI campaign in all those countries in which they have been implemented and without exception.



A grayscale photograph of two students, a boy and a girl, looking at a computer monitor. The boy is leaning over the girl, who is sitting at a desk and typing on a keyboard. The monitor displays a website or application. The background is slightly blurred, showing other students in a classroom setting.

CHAPTER V

ACHIEVEMENTS AS A RESULT OF AN EFFORT: EDUCATIONAL
RESOURCES CENTRES AND THE AGORA PROGRAMME (PART I)





CHAPTER V

ACHIEVEMENTS AS A RESULT OF AN EFFORT: EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES CENTRES AND THE AGORA PROGRAMME (PART I)

Cuando se enumeran, When the tangible results of a specific endeavour are enumerated, analysed, examined and shared, only the fruits of the tree, that is, the visible and external aspects are taken into account. Behind these results, however, there are a number of intangible factors which are difficult to quantify and value, but without which such fruits would have never existed. They are in fact the roots of the tree.

We could apply this metaphor to FOAL, whose branches and fruits, that is, its specific results will be looked at below. We will do such analysis without overlooking the fact that the projection of each of these results is much bigger than it seems, as there are huge doses of excitement, human resources, interconnected chains and favours impossible to quantify and/or mention, although all of them are crucial for the achievement of the final result.

The fruits from its three action areas concur within the enormous list of results obtained through FOAL's work:

- Projects carried out in collaboration with public and private institutions;
- Actions addressing the strengthening of the Latin American associative network of people with visual disabilities;
- Opening and permanent co-financing of local projects.

All these aspects are surrounded by inalienable and cross-cutting objectives in each of its actions, such as gender equality and the encouragement and implementation of new technologies.

PROJECT SELECTION CRITERIA

Most projects promoted by FOAL in collaboration with Latin American associations and bodies are the result of a process that sometimes simply starts with two lines in an e-mail, which is being sent from any Latin American region to FOAL's technical office, headquartered in Madrid.

That outline, that concise request for materials, that unpolished idea, that message in a bottle activates FOAL's apparatus. Once the request for collaboration is received, whatever its nature and its degree of specificity, FOAL's technicians analyse it in depth. The specific need is thus outlined in detail and examined from a wide perspective; its viability is studied and sometimes the proposal is even modified in order to optimise the number of people that could potentially benefit from it.

To this end, communication with the people responsible within the association requesting collaboration is constant. Nobody knows better than them and with more accuracy their deficiencies, their strengths and their needs.

At this particular stage, FOAL carries out, above all, the important task of identifying resources and training regarding the provision of services. It does so by widening their overall scope to make every project financially viable.

Having experience in how to start up a project, solving and overcoming vicissitudes and knowing what the real options are with regard to both economic and other resources, constitutes an added value that is indirectly materialised through the enrichment of an area, while contributing at the same time to the strengthening and independence of the associative movement.

In relation to financing, along with its response to each project with a particular economic contribution, FOAL also seeks the involvement of other entities such as the Spanish Agency for International Development Cooperation (AECID). FOAL participates in its calls for projects with different initiatives, in the same way as it participates each time a public authority allocates economic aid for initiatives related to development cooperation. This is the case, for instance, with the autonomous communities of Madrid and Andalusia, which have provided financial support for several of the proposals raised by FOAL.

Once the project is completely outlined and approved, supervision by FOAL is constant, accompanying Latin American entities throughout the whole process and supervising everything including bureaucratic and management aspects. Even at the start of the project, collaboration remains a constant feature in time. Indeed, one of FOAL's purposes is to promote initiatives which are not one-off projects but which constitute efficient and sustainable proposals.

The project selection criteria developed thanks to FOAL's management during its 15 years of existence are based on the principles of impartiality and non-discrimination, gender equality, and inclusion within the community. There are 8 issues that are taken into account in this regard:

- The project's economic and material viability;
- Number of beneficiaries;
- Focus on the assistance to people belonging to groups at greater risk of vulnerability;
- Public and/or private co-responsibility in the material and financial execution of the project;
- Experience working with other international cooperation entities;

- Competencies and responsibilities in the delivery of the project;
- Transfer rate of results to the beneficiaries of the project.

At the same time, FOAL's contribution to the different projects may adopt any of the following actions in the delivery mechanism:

- Providing technical assistance for the execution of programmes and projects;
- Participation in the direct or indirect management of activities, programmes or centres;
- Participation in the development of activities with other entities which carry out programmes or activities in line with or complementary to those run by the Foundation;
- Qualified interlocution with public administrations regarding the organization of civil society, so that it promotes the improvement of the quality of life of people with visual disabilities;
- Allocation of subsidies for institutions;
- Allocation of financial aid through different methods;

THE INCLUSIVE EDUCATION PROGRAMME

Life has never been easy for children with visual disabilities, particularly in less developed countries. In such countries, along with a lack of social, medical, administrative and governmental structures, there are also prejudices and obsolete stereotypes regarding disability.

However, September 2000 represented a turning point. It signified a global raising of awareness that would affect this reality and many others. It was then that UN member countries ratified the Millennium Declaration, which includes 8 inalienable development goals:

- Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger;
- Achieve universal primary education;
- Promote gender equality and empower women;
- Reduce child mortality;
- Improve maternal health;
- Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases;
- Ensure environmental sustainability;
- Develop a global partnership for development.

FOAL, whose *raison d'être* is to achieve the full social and labour inclusion of people with visual disabilities in Latin America, was keen to join in these goals and decided to work in order to eradicate the lack of compulsory education in this region.

The concept of poverty can be understood not only in economic terms but also from the perspective of the absence or the breaching of rights, and education is one of those rights. Poverty constitutes the main obstacle for the achievement of this objective, as less than 10% of Latin American children with visual disabilities attend school.

For all these reasons, FOAL began to develop an ambitious project that would:

- Favour the educational inclusion of children with visual disabilities;
- Promote equal opportunities when accessing training through the use of Braille and other adapted services;
- Train professionals in the use of typhlotechnological tools;
- Guarantee basic materials for students with disabilities in the specialised centres, as well as educational resources for inclusive education.

This is the genesis of FOAL's inclusive education programme for people with visual disabilities. It is based on the implementation and development of educational resource centres throughout the entire region. While these centres are adapted to the students' needs and are equipped with the necessary materials and resources for their training, they also allow for the follow-up of each student's educational curriculum in the case of children.

Taking into account their open nature to the community, educational resource centres participate and carry out joint actions with different organizations and institutions within the public and private sectors, in order to improve the educational, social and labour conditions of people with visual disabilities.

The setting up of these centres is possible thanks to the agreement of indefinite duration signed by FOAL in 2006 with the Ministry of Education and Science and the OEI.

These centres' aims are to provide students with visual disabilities with specific material, to train the professionals who work with them in specific areas related to disability, and to create units of bibliographical production so that the student can have the materials in the specific reading and writing system he or she may require.

Objectives

While each educational resource centre is organised according to the particularities and possibilities of the countries where they are located, they all maintain a harmonious balance, which can be summarised in the following nine purposes:

- To support and promote resource centres as well as centres for the production of materials for blind people;
- To collaborate in the training and capacity-building of teaching staff working with blind and visually

impaired students within an inclusive educational system;

- To participate in initiatives that facilitate inclusive education;
- To enable people in Latin America to access education, training and information;
- To train the centre's teaching staff in the use of bibliographical materials which are specifically produced for people with visual disabilities; to train them also in the use of equipments and technologies that allow the production of texts in braille, tactile and audio formats;
- To disseminate knowledge about different applications and typhlotechnological devices that facilitate the access to communication and information technologies for people with visual disabilities;
- To increase the possibilities of social, educational and labour inclusion, as well as to promote the individual, family and social development of people with visual disabilities, thus contributing to the improvement of their quality of life;
- To articulate social networks and dynamics that stimulate and promote social participation within this population sector.
- To develop actions that respond to the needs of people with visual disabilities in Latin America, as well as those of their organizations and of the communities where they live and participate.

Along with educational tasks at all levels, the educational centres also have many other functions due to the particularities of the areas where they are located. These additional functions may be of great significance for the development of the associative network of people with visual disabilities in particular, and of people with disabilities in general. For example, these centres:

- Become a **means of communication** between the different administrations and this sector of the population. The lack of channels for joint work between the different governments (from national to local level) and the disability associative movement hinders progress, as small as that may be. This is why educational resource centres constitute both a physical space and a point of reference for interlocution, as they visibilise something that, prior to their implementation, was a vague reality;
- Guarantee the **right to vote** in an independent and anonymous manner. The Latin American reality, still in the first phase of its effervescent progress, does not yet provide suitable structures that guarantee

equal opportunities or the full exercise of fundamental rights. These educational resource centres can also contribute to eradicating this situation by, for example, offering their premises and their resources during all types of elections. This would guarantee then the possibility for people with disabilities to exercise their right to vote so that they are able to participate in an effective manner in shaping their own political reality;

- **Identify toxic medicines and products.** There is very little access to the health system within rural areas in Latin America and, in many places, the health system is so limited that it becomes obsolete. This is why it is crucial that people with visual disabilities who may need to take medication regularly are able to go to a place where they are informed about the most suitable drugs for their symptoms, the expiry date of such products, and the suitability of other alternative treatments;

- Carry out the transcription of **exams and materials for public entry examinations**, access to higher studies or work placements. Often, where there is a will to facilitate inclusion and make things easier for people with visual disabilities, there is however a lack of resources. That is why, whenever possible, educational resource centres can adapt the essential materials that might intervene in any stage of the educational process, as well as in the process of access to employment;

- Based on all aspects mentioned above, educational resource centres can also edit **manuals** of different kinds for those places where it is possible to find people with visual disabilities among their students and/or workers, such as internal or training manuals, private school handbooks, handbooks for private or public institutions, etc.;

- Contribute in an efficient manner to achieving the Millennium Development Goals, which are promoted by the UN, and particularly the goal regarding universal **primary education**.

Staff, Resources and Infrastructures

When fulfilling fundamental tasks such as advising, training and producing educational materials, the role of technical staff is essential. This is why, as well as familiarising themselves with the people they work and their specific educational needs, they must also be able to use and know perfectly the adapted applica-

tions that the centre makes available to its users, so that they enable the users' participation and access to information.

Educational resource centres must have staff with the following profiles:

a) Service coordinator/ financial and administrative manager. This person will be responsible for the functioning of the centre and its staff. He or she will make sure that quality, effective and efficient educational resources are produced. He or she will deal with the service applications and their filing. He or she will be the interlocutor with publishing houses, will deal with the requests of supplies, will lead the centre's human team, distributing the different tasks and establishing a balance of work duties. He or she will collaborate with the General Director for Special Education within the relevant Ministry of Education, and will stipulate the centre's priorities.

b) Training and pedagogic assessment technician. This person will cover the capacity-building needs of the educational community within the field of visual disabilities. He or she will try to acquire new bibliographical resources and, whenever possible, will make new professional contacts that will help to obtain such resources. Due to his or her direct and continuous contact with students and teaching staff within the centre, this person will be ideally placed to channel claims, suggestions, proposals and needs that may contribute to improve the centre.

c) Production technicians. They are in charge of producing didactic materials for the centre. They will carry out additional tasks, depending on the work load available and on each individual's capacity:

- Bookbinding of adapted texts;
- Elaboration of tactile sheets;
- Transcription and adaptation of texts to be printed in braille;
- Elaboration and production of texts in audio format;

- Correction of materials, mainly in braille and tactile formats;
- Permanent and fluent communication with the centre's coordinator. Support in the administrative tasks that may be assigned to them (writing-up of production reports, lists of required supplies, technical incident reports, etc.).

d) Maintenance technician. This person is in charge of keeping the computer and production equipment running. In the case that they are specific members of staff within the centre, they may occasionally carry out functions as production technician, or even serve as support staff when the circumstances require.

Along with the specialised staff, educational resource centres require a minimum amount of technical infrastructure:

- Complete computer kits (printers, internet access, scanner, CD recorder, etc.);
- Up-to-date software that optimises the performance of different devices (antivirus, braille transcription programmes, graphic design programmes, etc.);
- Typhlotechnical adaptations which ensure every worker with a visual disability in the centre can carry out his or her tasks (screen readers, character magnification software, adapted web browser, etc.);
- Specific equipment for the actual functioning of the centre (cutting machine, photocopy machine, Perkins brailleurs, Thermoform and Zy-Fuse ovens, necessary to produce didactic tactile materials, etc.);
- Perishable materials or supplies (braille paper, Thermoform paper, Zy-Fuse, material to prepare moulds or adapted miniature replica, etc.).

A case study - the Educational Resource Centre for the Blind in Managua

Any initiative that may contribute to improving the quality of life of people can be described in detail but, if it is not translated into a practical reality, if this idea is just left on paper, then it will be a waste of time and spoil many dreams. FOAL has defined the objectives, functions and purposes of the educational resource centres, leaving also space for improvisation required by any institution which is subjected to the unforeseen vicissitudes of everyday routine. However, the most important thing is that FOAL has developed a tool to improve the quality of life of people with visual disabilities in Latin America and has put it into practice. We can take a look at one case study to illustrate this and see the results obtained by these centres, which have been able to improve the reality of thousands of people.

The Educational Resource Centre for the Blind of Managua (CRECI) was inaugurated in 2007. Its aim is to provide students with the material they need to access the education curriculum in the same way as any other student. Furthermore, it can also receive requests for bibliographical material in braille, tactile or audio formats from blind organizations of Nicaragua, the Solidez Foundation, the Louis Braille Library, the Centre for Documentation and Libraries within the Department of Special Education of the Ministry of Education in Nicaragua (MINED), as well as from several local authorities such as those of Managua and Matagalpa.

They framed their objectives within three areas of action: to strengthen institutional capacity by providing a quality educational response to students with visual disabilities, so that they can be fully incorporated into society and within the country's productive life; to reinforce teaching staff's competencies through capacity-building and through providing them with educational materials so that they cover with efficiency the needs of students with visual disabilities; and to accompany teaching staff in special and regular schools throughout the educational process.

Some Final Considerations

Although very limited in number, reports on the progress in the educational process for people with disabilities in general and people with visual disabilities in particular in Latin America, indicate that the situation has improved.

Nevertheless, the scattering of data, the full and detailed breakdown of each country's population and the loose employment of definitions, prevent us from obtaining specific figures that show the real qualitative and quantitative levels of such improvement.

Without being more specific, the truth is that the situation of people with visual disabilities in Latin America, in general, is better than a few decades ago. Without doubt, FOAL's contribution has been and will continue to be crucial. At the same time, the ministries of education of the different Latin American countries have gained awareness regarding the need to keep alive this joint effort.

For this reason, FOAL's purpose is to persevere in this direction, setting up and consolidating more educational resource centres, so that the daily work continues to ensure everybody has access to education, as is set down in the UN Declaration of the Millennium Development Goals.

However, the success of a fully inclusive education cannot be explained or assured just by opening the doors of education centres to people with disabilities (even though this constitutes a triumph in itself). Other determining factors must be taken into account, analysed and contemplated in this process:

- Families' interest in their sons or daughters studying in a mainstream centre;
- Teaching staff's engagement within a mainstream education centre when training students with special educational needs;
- Fellow students' ability to integrate and understand disability as a part of human nature;
- Degree of adjustment and development of the child with a disability, which is closely linked to his or her self-esteem and level of autonomy;

- Type of support the child has within and outside the school;
- Family and financial resources.

Through the employment projects developed by FOAL in Latin America, we have seen that around 70% of people enrolled in labour insertion programmes have not received more than 9 years of training in total, which is insufficient for both people with a disability and people with no disability.

For this reason, a good grounding in education involving all elements in a cross-cutting manner will help to minimise the economic, psychological and social difficulties that may be present during the transition to adulthood by people with visual disabilities, providing them with the necessary skills to cope with the new stage in their lives.

In this way, the educational resource centres promoted by FOAL are a valid and unique example for their specificities in the world, having proved throughout the years that their firm resolution to improve the education of thousands of children and adults with visual disabilities is indeed possible.

THE AGORA PROGRAMME

Taking into account the serious limitations people with low vision have to face in education, it is not surprising that the employment situation facing them is also bleak and even devastating. They do not have many alternatives. In general, they are limited to manual jobs with very low wages, which do not allow them to be independent or to have full autonomy and, what is even worse, without many opportunities for professional development.

The main barriers regarding the labour inclusion of people with disabilities in general can be summed up in four aspects:

- The concept of “a worker with a disability” does not exist within the business mindset. It constitutes a non-existent reality, and without visibility there is no possibility of turning this situation around;
- When there is an opportunity to hire a worker with a disability, employers activate a set of mental prejudices. One of the most damaging prejudices in this regard is the thought that a person with a disability will cause them all sorts of problems;
- Employers defend themselves by saying that it should be governments which would have to set example with regard to the hiring of people with disabilities, and that they should be called upon later to provide them with imposing benefits for those who hire them;
- Lack of education and skills among people with disabilities.

FOAL is aware that this stark reality exists, although it also knows how to change it. This can be done mainly by following two lines of action: by contributing to improving access to training for people with visual disabilities, and by providing them with skills so that they are capable of performing specific tasks, and through promoting awareness among employers regarding their social responsibility, as social and labour inclusion represents an issue concerning not only governments but society as a whole, and through opening their eyes to disability by showing that a worker with a disability is as profitable, disciplined and capable as any other.

When a person with a disability gets a job, the person improves his or her situation as an individual and becomes closer to being a citizen with full rights. Moreover, society gains awareness about the fact that disability is part of human diversity and, therefore, part of a multi-faceted reality. FOAL strives tirelessly to achieve a society in which people with disabilities are contributors. To this end, it has developed, among other actions, an interesting and productive project called AGORA.

In Greek civilization, the terms “AGORA” refers to the squares within their polis or state-cities, which even nowadays and after more than 2,000 years, continue to be taken as a benchmark in terms of rights and democracy.

The “AGORA”, an open and noble space, became the centre of social, cultural and economic activity for the Greeks. In the same manner, the project initiated by FOAL as the “AGORA programme” takes this term’s Hellenic origins as the medullar structure of its ultimate objective: The full social inclusion of people with visual disabilities in Latin America.

The acronym “AGORA” stands for Classrooms of Occupational Management in the Latin American Region. These classrooms were created with the specific aim of improving the employability of people with visual disabilities in Latin America, by carrying out orientation actions, capacity building and labour insertion, as well as mentoring to promote the development of micro business ventures.

To this end, professional guidance, social and labour skills workshops and occupational training and labour mediation are offered in each AGORA classroom.

As a general rule FOAL’s AGORA programmes are structured in modules. In this way they can be conducted in full or partially, depending on both the beneficiaries’ capacities and the conditions and opportunities of the labour market in each of the areas of influence. Thus, the intent is to tailor actions as much as possible in the areas of training and labour insertion according to the person’s particular skills and his or her immediate environment.

From a different point of view, the work carried out in these classrooms and promoted by FOAL also enables them to fight against poverty, to promote gender equality in the participation of clients, to strengthen the associative networks, while carrying out capacity-building, as well as empowering and promoting access to employment for people over 45 years of age.

Like the Greek AGORA, FOAL’s AGORA programme aims to participate actively in the construction of a more inclusive and harmonious reality. In short, a more just reality.

Context and Background

Poverty reduction (understood to be a lack of opportunities and options of a person to enjoy a decent standard of life), constitutes one of the Millennium Development Goals ratified by the United Nations. As we saw previously, FOAL has signed up to these goals by taking them on as its own. Furthermore, adherence to these guidelines is a prerequisite in the European Union's policy for the co-financing of NGO projects.

More specifically and contextualising the situation of people with disabilities, the World Health Organization (WHO) reports that this social group constitutes approximately 10% of the total population and, according to the World Bank, 20% of the poorest people in the world. Therefore, disability is a cause and a consequence of poverty. Additional data from the UN indicates that 82% of people with visual disabilities in developing countries live under the poverty threshold. These figures may be even higher in regions where war, open or hidden conflicts or natural disasters prevent us from obtaining any census or quantitative data.

These figures illustrate a deplorable situation where people with disabilities are discriminated against worldwide and, hence, excluded from social, economic and political life within their respective communities. This complete discrimination constitutes one of the key causes of high poverty rates among this group in the most economically depressed countries.

At times the situation is so extreme that for thousands of people with disabilities who live by chance (we must not forget) in developing countries, finding themselves among the most excluded has such profound implications that they become a matter of life or death.

No international body is unaware of this reality. In fact, the European Commission issued a Guidance Note on Disability and Development in June 2004 which states, among other things, that “if the interests of people with disabilities are not recognised, it will not be possible to achieve the essential objective of eradicating poverty in developing countries. It will not be possible either to promote the human rights of people with disabilities or their participation in society”. It concludes with a substantial reflection: “to mitigate poverty in a sustainable manner, it is necessary to approach the issue of disability”.

Traditionally, issues related to people with disabilities were dealt with from a medical perspective and with condescending connotations, which made this concept closer to charity rather than rights, being in this way subject to the individual interpretation of government representatives.

In this way, a common factor throughout Latin America is the fact that both the nature of the policies addressing people with disabilities and the aid received by international and cooperation organizations, are based on the provision of isolated medical or welfare services. These services have very little to do with the new rights-based approach to disability, according to which people with disabilities are subjects with rights who can decide for themselves, just as their fellow citizens do. Thus, the services and aids whose goal is to improve the quality of life of this social group should stimulate their participation in society as citizens under equal conditions in comparison with everybody else. Most importantly, they should promote their participation on an equal opportunity bases, so that all kinds of discrimination and the low levels of training and social exclusion are eradicated.

Fortunately, those traditional approaches have changed in recent decades, and new ways of understanding disability are being adopted based on human rights and people with disabilities' own ideas (“Nothing for us without us”), while at the same time understanding that the disabling factor is not disability but how society is organised.

In this sense, the AGORA Programme contributes to the fulfilment of the global objective to combat poverty and to improve the quality of life of the most vulnerable groups by strengthening their capacity for self-development, and through the generation of options that enable people with visual disabilities to be subjects in their own development and not passive objects of charity or donations.

Currently, the situation in many parts of Latin American is quite adverse. Despite the great amount of laws and regulations addressing the issue of disability, measures that guarantee the basic fundamental rights required to ensure the dignity of people with disabilities are costly, and therefore are relegated by govern-

ments themselves. Nevertheless, it would be churlish not to acknowledge that thanks to institutions such as FOAL, an improvement has taken place regarding access to education, access to public spaces, as well as access to health and social security systems which, while insufficient, demonstrate that it is both required and possible to advocate for social inclusion.

Through the actions defined within the AGORA programme, the fundamental needs of people with visual disabilities in Latin America are considered. These people generally have very few resources and find themselves in a situation of almost total exclusion within the labour market due to the following factors:

- Absence of resource provision for specific assistance at the national, regional and local levels. As a result, there is a lack of suitable rehabilitation, education and training;
- Conditions of extreme poverty that affect people with low vision and their families and are an obstacle to adequate rehabilitation, education and capacity-building. The very scant resources available are used to cover basic needs, and a lack of knowledge regarding the specific needs caused by blindness prevents parents and tutors from bringing their children to specialised centres;
- Isolating circumstances that make it difficult to access information regarding centres, associations and the existing possibilities in the fields of rehabilitation, education and training;
- Social prejudices, according to which blindness is sometimes understood as a stigma, particularly in rural areas;
- Weakness within the associative network, which makes it difficult to roll out suitable support projects in education, rehabilitation and capacity-building;
- Physical barriers and barriers imposed by social prejudices, which impede access to education and employment.

The combination of these factors explains how Latin American people with visual disabilities often have to face precarious life conditions or circumstances, making professional and personal development more difficult.

FOAL strives to fill the gaps in this social sector's educational and employment needs, as it is the only sustainable way through which they can have a decent opportunity for economic independence and social integration. FOAL does so by taking into account the multi-faceted nature of the concept of poverty which, according to the UN, represents "an integral concept that includes economic, social, political and cultural aspects".

New Technologies as Allies

One of the difficulties identified both through FOAL's experience and through the actual reality of people with visual disabilities, is the digital gap. ICTs or Information and Communication Technologies perform a major role nowadays and they offer new ways to secure inclusion in contexts that were unthinkable before. ICTs overcome the restrictions characterising disabilities (such as screen readers, which enable blind people to access information in text on internet). Of course this implies adapting equipment so that new technologies are also accessible.

Along with the accessibility of new technologies, it is also essential that people with visual disabilities receive adequate training in how to use such technologies so that they can obtain maximum benefit from them. Hence, once computers are adapted, access to information will be guaranteed. Access will enable people with low vision to attain better qualifications and have the chance to get jobs that were previously inaccessible to them.

All this without prejudice to other qualities and aptitudes that those people may have individually and as a social group, and even promoting those more developed and/or recently-acquired ones due to their disability.

The Nature of an Integrated Programme

As described earlier, the AGORA programme aims to improve resources for the employability of blind and partially-sighted people through training, capacity-building and support for labour insertion, as well as through the reinforcement of institutions and organizations of people with visual disabilities.

To this end, a variety of actions have been drawn up for each of the geographical areas where the programme is being implemented. These actions are based on the successful experience in the field of inclusion in the labour market by people with visual disabilities being carried out by ONCE, while respecting and integrating the peculiarities and contributions of each region.

To implement the services provided by the AGORA programme, adapted spaces are used where computers equipped with typhlotechnical software can be found. In these premises it is possible to:

- Facilitate access and use of Information and Communication Technologies for people with visual disabilities;
- Train people with visual disabilities in the use of ICTs;
- Disseminate knowledge about the different typhlotechnical applications and devices that enable access to ICTs by people with visual impairment;
- Enhance possibilities for educational, labour and social inclusion among this population sector, as well as favouring their personal, family and social development, thus improving their quality of life;
- Reduce the digital gap, which has a particular impact on people with visual disabilities;
- Develop actions in response to the needs of people with low vision, their organizations and the communities in which they live.

At the same time, each centre (either in fixed or mobile headquarters) has developed an activities agenda that includes the following:

- Training functions: technological literacy and training for the enhancement of employability;
- Labour guidance and insertion, as well as searching for employment;
- Use of resources.

These activities are managed by staff specifically hired to this effect and who are part of the AGORA

programme's headquarters in that country, from where the different services are provided to people with visual disabilities. This team is usually made up of the following:

- A coordinator from the AGORA programme, in charge of coordinating all activities in the classrooms, their economic management, and for relations with other institutions;
- Training technicians, who will guarantee the development of the planned training actions, evaluate the budgetary and pedagogic quality standards, verify the balance between content and knowledge to cover a particular job vacancy, as well as the use of didactic methodologies and activities suited to each occasion;
- Labour insertion technicians, who will take on different tasks ranging from advising clients on the use of services and their labour insertion itinerary, to follow-up and update, as well as making visits to companies to inform them about services, capture possible job offers, etc..

This management team is also complemented by administrative staff who assist with everyday tasks.

Although each AGORA programme has, at least, one physical office within its territorial scope, it aims to assist and reach the whole country. To do this any adjustments and relevant changes are introduced for each particular area, with the objective of reaching the largest number of beneficiaries with visual impairment.

Services Provided by the AGORA Programme

Training provided through the AGORA programme to people with visual disabilities is defined according to the real interests of beneficiaries as well as by the local demand for labour. Nevertheless, given the capacity of the population and the job opportunities available in each region, special attention is paid to occupational training in several productive fields.

The services provided by the AGORA programme to its users are fourfold:

*** *Professional guidance:***

1. Occupational interview with the user.
2. Occupational diagnosis.
3. Personalised employment plan.

****Improvement of his or her employability through:***

1. Social and labour skills workshop:
 - Motivation workshop;
 - Active job search workshop;
 - Basic social skills and interview workshop.

2. Occupational training:
 - Basic occupational training;
 - Training in the management of micro business ventures;
 - On-line training;
 - Formal education courses.

*** *Labour mediation.***

*** *Micro Business ventures.***

Finally, in order to assess the working environments where placements for people with visual disabilities could be available in each region, a sufficient level of education and training must be achieved. Thus, the AGORA programme also carries out tailored or individualised training and capacity-building activities, according to the needs within each country's labour market.

Coordination and Follow-Up

With regard to the management of the AGORA programme, there is a **Coordinating and Follow-Up Committee**, where both FOAL and local partners are present.

In AGORA, FOAL works in coordination with local public and private partners, with a view always to ensuring the relevant governmental authorities in the fields of education and employment are partners in the programme. This has the aim of enabling public policies to be implemented in education and labour insertion of this group. The most relevant organizations of people with visual disabilities in the country participate as natural members; this may be those with the largest number of people with visual disabilities, or those providing services to this population sector.

The committee supervises the programme's Technical Management Unit, which is made up of the programme's general coordinator and technical personnel from the partner organizations. It meets regularly and identifies new alternatives for generating employment for people with visual disabilities within the target areas where the programme's actions are implemented. Also, and in order to expand the programme's benefits and empower this group at national level, it strengthens the relationships among the institutions involved by promoting their reinforcement and cohesion as far as it is possible.

Along with the Coordinating and Follow-Up **Committee and the Technical Management Unit**, which oversee all actions developed within the programme, the follow-up and evaluation system is complemented by an analysis of such actions carried out with the beneficiaries regarding the actions taken jointly with companies, and with a rigorous control of the budgetary implementation. This is delivered through the provision of such activities and expense updates, which are sent regularly by local partners to FOAL. This enables an in-depth evaluation of the programme during its implementation.

Simultaneously, a methodological approach based on the development of a main plan is put forward, which will be the basic management document of the programme. In it, the definition and scope of overall

actions are clearly identified. Moreover, FOAL's database will be used as a management, follow-up and evaluation tool.

In order to execute the follow-up system, different types of indicators have been established:

- Process indicators: they provide information about the different phases, the design of the administrative management and control of the programme's actions (quality of services, adjustment to needs, etc.);
- Result indicators: they show the direct and immediate effects of the programme, and they refer both to people (beneficiaries of training and workshops) and actions deriving from them (contacts with companies, offers, interviews carried out by beneficiaries, etc.);
- Impact indicators: they relate to the ultimate consequences of the programme such as self-employment initiatives (whose sustainability goes beyond a year); work placements obtained through actions for the improvement of employability, etc.

Finally, a national and local communication and dissemination plan is drawn up and executed within the above mentioned execution plan, for which purpose a dissemination strategy has been designed.

The ultimate purpose of the communication and dissemination plan is to attract the particular interest of authorities and entities in the area, which will contribute greatly to both the multiplication of its effects and its potential future implementation in other countries and regions. Furthermore, the media coverage derived from the communication and dissemination plan will be key to prompt organizations' active involvement in it.

The possibility that this programme is transferable to other regions depends on both its management from the very beginning by the local counterparts, and the possibility of having the involvement as well as human and physical resources of participating organizations. If we understand the programme's managing system in this way we will reinforce its interrelations, consolidating their continuity from a temporal and geographical perspective.

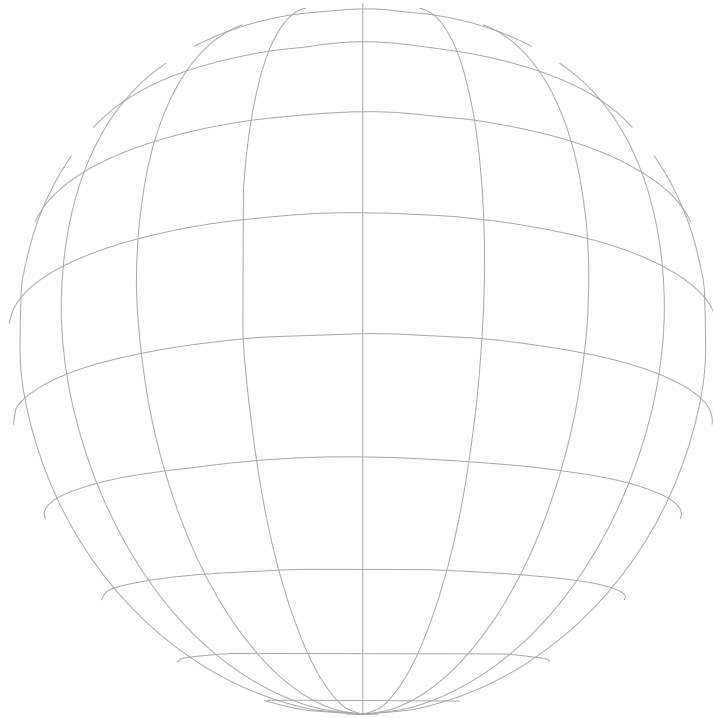
Beneficiaries

In relation to the final choice of direct beneficiaries for the programme's actions, such selection is carried out by local partners, taking into account a number of requirements that, although they don't have an excluding nature, would favour the selection of a user if it was necessary. For example:

- People with visual disabilities whose disability is legally certified by their country's current certification system;
- Economic resources;
- Special attention is paid to people from rural areas, older individuals who have been overlooked by cooperation projects, as the biggest support programmes have traditionally focused on big cities.

Moreover, within the selection of people that may be beneficiaries of such actions, particular attention is paid to the inclusion of women and people over 45 (of which around 60% are women). In this way we try to mitigate multiple discrimination on the basis of disability, gender and age as much as possible.

The attempt to guarantee a balanced access of men and women considers as essential requirement that the individual gender percentage is never above 60% nor below 40%. Nevertheless, within these limits the engagement of women in activities is fostered constantly, thus allaying the multiple discrimination experienced by them because of their disability and/or their gender.



A man in a white shirt and glasses is leaning over a table, looking at documents. The room has large windows with a view of a building and trees. The text is overlaid on the image.

CHAPTER VI

ACHIEVEMENTS AS A RESULT OF AN EFFORT (PART II):
CO-FINANCING OF PROJECTS AND STRENGTHENING OF THE
ASSOCIATIVE NETWORK





CHAPTER VI

ACHIEVEMENTS AS A RESULT OF AN EFFORT (PART II): CO-FINANCING OF PROJECTS AND STRENGTHENING OF THE ASSOCIATIVE NETWORK

In addition to its own two initiatives - the inclusive education programme with the educational resource centres and the AGORA programme, which cover the two crucial contexts for individuals' development, training and employment, the ONCE Foundation for Solidarity with Blind People in Latin America keeps other means of collaboration open with different entities that share the same aims: to improve the quality of life of people with disabilities by involving the largest possible number of associations and governments, while respecting the particularities of each model.

Despite the fact that one of its priorities is sustainability over time, FOAL has participated in several isolated projects and initiatives in which it has considered its presence necessary due to their relevance and potential projection. It has also pursued joint initiatives with several institutions by promoting a transparent and organised planning, which always ensures the success of a project.

The involvement and guidance of FOAL's technical office personnel, as well as their knowledge regarding delivering comprehensive attention to the needs expressed by Latin American blind people, enable them to

work with different institutions in project development. These have varied greatly in themes and scope throughout the years.

STRENGTHENING OF THE ASSOCIATIVE MOVEMENT

FOAL's strategy is not really about implementing the Spanish model at all in Latin America. In fact, its rationale is to contribute to the development of joint work; to put its knowledge and resources at their service to prompt a real and effective improvement of the rights of people with visual disabilities. For this, however, FOAL is aware that it is necessary to have a strong and consolidated associative movement, with a structure that allows for an efficient and quick response to the most urgent needs. Hence, for FOAL creating a solid and cohesive associative network is a priority goal.

FOAL is aware that the better organized the disability movement is, the greater its capacity to intervene in questions regarding policies that contribute to improving the rights of people with visual impairment and, consequently, the improvement of their quality of life. Thus, it proposes initiatives (including legislative initiatives) and solutions, prompting their participation in full in all life contexts.

In this regard, FOL has a symbiotic and collaborative relationship with the Latin American Blind Union. ULAC is an international organization representing and advocating for the interests of people with visual disabilities, and signifying therefore a catalyst for the whole associative network. These two institutions join efforts to make the disability social sector more capable, more efficient and more operational. The activities and initiatives committed to the strengthening of the movement are:

- Joint work for the unification of the typhlological movement in Latin American countries, promoting the emergence and development of organizations for and of the blind at national level;

- Fostering equal opportunities and full participation in order to achieve the integral development of people with low vision;
- Encouraging self-esteem and self-confidence among people with visual disabilities, and promoting the development of their personalities and their personal fulfilment so that they can be protagonists within their own communities;
- Promoting the adoption of and compliance with legislation that eliminates all kinds of discrimination such as active/passive discrimination, and which may contribute to achieving equal opportunities and social integration;
- Advocating on an ongoing basis for the respect and defence of the human rights of people with visual disabilities.

At the same time, FOAL has developed a coordination and implementation policy to strengthen and consolidate existing blind organizations within the Latin American subcontinent, through the unification and democratisation of these processes in such a way that the democratic renewal of leaders is guaranteed by taking into account cross-cutting and gender equality criteria.

We can only ensure a structure capable of responding to the multiple challenges facing disability by combating the atomization of the associative movement and by implementing democratic processes within its structure. In this regard, this can be achieved through five action areas:

- To incorporate qualified members representing all geographical and thematic areas into representative and functioning bodies, thus promoting the effective presence of women and young people as a cross-cutting action axis within all its policies; to set up a suitably-trained management team to execute those actions effectively, guaranteeing and facilitating the objectives established by the organisation itself;

- To enable professionals and to identify a suitable interlocutor among the various national, regional and local institutions that may be directly or indirectly interested in disability;
- To identify inalienable objectives and to develop an action programme;
- To design and implement communication campaigns to disseminate information about activities, services and benefits being provided by organisations, as well as the very reality of disability in itself, contributing in this way to greater awareness among the general population.

Other Action Areas

In addition to the main initiatives developed by FOAL itself and those developed by other entities (mainly the open and permanent co-financing of projects and the strengthening of the associative network), FOAL's activities involve additional fields of action:

- Comprehensive rehabilitation;
- Personal autonomy;
- Accessibility and universal design;
- Typhlotechnology and R+D+I;
- Cultural and sports development.

To this end, for example, FOAL focuses on improvements in the comprehensive rehabilitation services provided by its partner organizations. It distributes to previously prepared entities software that complements the training of people with visual impairment, such as the Braille Music Editor (for composing songs with multiple tracks as well as using and playing scores), or Lambda (mathematical language editor). It updates agreements with ONCE's Bibliographical Services regarding the delivery of braille files to Latin American institutions capable of printing in this format and supported by FOAL, as well as the delivery of didactic materials in thermoform format to educational institutions. Moreover, a space dedicated to the dissemination of magazines produced by ONCE's Bibliographical Services has been set aside on FOAL's web page, offering downloadable audio and braille versions.

Other projects promoted by FOAL in order to implement the above-mentioned categories date back to its first steps in Latin America, such as the initiative to set up new peripheral **units for bibliographical production**, which gave way to the current educational resource centres. Thanks to those peripheral units, a larger number of blind children accessing text books and school materials was guaranteed, as one of the main obstacles for inclusive education is precisely the lack of adapted documents and materials throughout the region.

FOAL promotes braille as the reading and writing code for blind students within their educational and personal autonomy processes. However, one of the difficulties in the learning process is the great geographical spread of students with visual disabilities, particularly those who live in rural areas. It is difficult to make materials available to them and to the professionals trained in braille.

To resolve this, FOAL created several braille production units in many schools and organizations of people with visual disabilities, so that there is a centre of reference for each region that supplies books in braille for the education sector. To this end, FOAL has equipped these units with an industrial braille printer. In order to guarantee equipment functions correctly, several agreements have been signed with the schools where they are located, according to which they commit to making the necessary material available to students within their respective regions, giving priority to those students enrolled in mainstream centres.

Given the importance of keeping these machines up to date, and taking into account the lack of resources, training courses are conducted on how to print texts in braille and on handling and repairing printers; on the elaboration of tactile sheets; on editing audio-books and documentation in Lecto Text formats (enabling text to speech conversion) and DAISY (Audio Digital Information System).

This training has been carried out in the different branches of the Spanish Agency for International Development Cooperation (AECID) and in Spain, with those beneficiaries in greatest need of this support having been previously nominated by organizations of people with visual disabilities.

In this way, the project's sustainability and continuity are guaranteed, as knowledge is transmitted to local organizations by enabling them to have the equipment and to disseminate such knowledge to other people.

Peripheral bibliographical production units are complemented by supplying libraries, museums and other centres with the equipment they need to provide information in accessible formats. Finally, FOAL distributes different works of world literature among some centres thanks to donations from ONCE and as a starting point for future popular libraries.



CHAPTER VII

ONCE: THE PRIME MOTOR





CHAPTER VII

ONCE: THE PRIME MOTOR

The expression “prime motor” was coined by Saint Thomas Aquinas, who used it to refer to the origin of all causes. We use it to refer to FOAL’s ultimate cause, its constant and tireless work, which has managed to involve thousands of people who have made a gesture, a dealing, proposed an idea, sorted out a problem, mediated, made donations or who have dedicated themselves to FOAL’s cause through their time, economic or material resources. None of this would have been possible without that prime motor called ONCE.

The Spanish National Organization of the Blind constitutes a strange entity in itself and an unusual organization from its very origins. It was founded on the 13th of December 1938, coinciding with the festivity of Saint Lucia, that signifies “light for the world”, and which became thereafter this institution’s patron.

Prior to the creation of ONCE, the situation of blind and partially-sighted people was one of abject misery. One only needs to read some literary texts of the time to realise how miserable their reality was. However, blind people have always been known for their fighting and self-improving spirit. Hence, from 1903 onwards, blind people started to sell these rather unorthodox raffle tickets on the streets and in town and village squares.

This formula, which was initiated in Alicante, spread to the rest of Spain quickly. By 1930, these raffle tickets of the blind were sold in all regions of the country. Gradually, blind people were able to organize themselves with the intention of setting up a Spanish Federation of the Blind, which would establish the lottery ticket draw in a more canonical way. This allowed for the sponsoring of different activities and projects to improve the quality of life of blind people in Spain.

It is certainly peculiar and unheard of that, in the middle of a Civil War, when the nationalist-controlled sector was almost fully defined as the guiding force in the country, they would approve a decree that made official the constitution of the Spanish National Organization of the Blind.

The rationale behind the creation of ONCE was to provide blind people with an organisation that they themselves could run, and which would establish the coupon as a source of sustenance to compensate for the lack of public assistance blind people were subject to. For the first time in history, this represented a systematic and organized attempt to claim back their stolen dignity.

By the 1950s, coupon sales had not only settled in but had consolidated. Nevertheless, it was not all success and achievements. There were also serious setbacks in the fight to achieve equal rights. For example, in 1959, an order from the Ministry for Employment excluded ONCE's workers from social insurance, a fact that did not change until 1991. Nothing, however, could prevent this entity from continuing its fight to improve the quality of life of people with disabilities. If the path to follow was rocky, it would push on regardless.

In the 1980s, ONCE began a process of transformation whose benefits are evident to this date. To start with, its internal democratisation process, which guaranteed the decisive and full participation of all its members when electing its representatives.

The second challenge was to recover financial stability to be able to respond to its members' technical, human and material needs. To this end, ONCE persevered in its negotiations with public powers, resulting in the integration of all ONCE workers within the social security system. Furthermore, it gave way to a nor-

malisation of the request for public assistance aids granted to employers and other operators who created employment for people with disabilities. Finally, a similar status to that of other non-profit organizations that work for the achievement of the common good was secured.

And this is how ONCE has come to be what it is today; by facing up to vicissitudes, by creating employment even in those moments when the blows of the crisis were at their fiercest, and by training hundreds of thousands of people to enable them to perform an ever more decent profession.

THE VALUES OF A UNIQUE INSTITUTION

Throughout the many decades since it was set up, ONCE has consolidated its own idiosyncrasy and culture, which is based on a set of values.

Without doubt, the first of those values **is its fighting and self-improving spirit**. If there is one thing which has made it possible for people with visual impairment to enjoy a high degree of autonomy and welfare nowadays, that is ONCE's refusal to give up and its lack of despondency. Thanks to that, blind people have done their best to get trained and work, shaping in that way their own destiny.

We can also highlight the value of **independence**. Until recently, the concept of disability was associated with a fatalist degree of guardianship, permanent supervision and an inevitable degree of submission (as small as this might be). Blind people have however systematically rebelled against that reality because a different reality was possible, a reality where self-management, self-governance and institutional independence wasn't a dream but a possibility.

Along with this great value of independence, it is necessary to mention another closely-related value: **autonomy**, mainly with regard to blind peoples' capacity to manoeuvre, manage and govern themselves as people. The bridles of life must be personal and non-transferrable. For this reason, ONCE has transmitted to its members the invaluable possibility of being autonomous and making life choices for themselves. To this end, it has always provided its members with the resources, tools and mechanisms they require to facilitate full personal development, full enjoyment of their capacities, and genuine exercise of their rights.

Another great value for ONCE is its capacity to work as a team and to carry out joint efforts. It is not easy to act as a team and apply joint criteria, prioritising the achievement of the common weal as opposed to personal whims, and conjugating at the same time Kant's "be and must-be". However, ONCE was aware from the very beginning that it would only become strong and capable by bringing the institution and therefore all its members together.

An organisation like ONCE could have shut itself up, without even looking outside its organization walls. In contrast to this, it decided to assimilate one of the noblest values as its own: the value of solidarity. It is an entity of and for the blind. It is an organization of the blind because all its members (around 70,000) have varying degrees of visual impairment. It is also an organization for the blind, which means that its activity focuses on its own members. However, this has never prevented it (even from its very constitution) from developing a structural policy of solidarity with those people with additional disabilities other than blindness or visual disabilities. It has particularly shown its solidarity towards these people through their incorporation in the labour market as ONCE employees, mainly as lottery ticket sellers.

In the 1980s, the coupon was a huge success, and ONCE took advantage of this to display strategies that allowed the organization to share its experiences and its human, material and economic resources, so that the whole associative movement had the opportunity to set itself up and contribute to its own future. It was in this way that another value, also closely related to solidarity, was developed: **the value of fellowship**.

The value of fellowship materialised itself in a tangible and evident manner in 1988, when the ONCE Foundation for Cooperation and Social Integration of People with Disabilities was founded. It was set up with two objectives: training and employment for people with disabilities. Taking into account both aims, it would be possible then to enjoy an independent life from an economically autonomous perspective.

Furthermore, this fellowship constituted the basis of another institution that, like the ONCE Foundation, would focus on the most noble of purposes. We are, of course, referring to FOAL.

The contribution to wealth generation in the country, taken **to be creating employment** for people with

disabilities, constitutes another of the values characterising ONCE. ONCE was quick to realize that the coupon could not and should not be the only funding source, and so it invested strongly and unreservedly in the creation of employment for people with and without disabilities.

All the values mentioned above...its fighting and self-improving spirit, its independence, its autonomy, its team work and solidarity, as well as its fellowship and contribution to the wealth generation, have been conferred to FOAL from the very beginning, as proof of the success that it has been experiencing throughout the years with vocation and effort. FOAL represents for ONCE an investment for the future, a tool at the service of all people with visual disabilities in Latin America. Similarly to Spanish blind people then, who have finally become their own owners and who do not shirk when demanding their rights, Latin American blind people will, sooner rather than later, also enjoy a future that is already becoming their present.

FOAL has achieved many successes throughout its history. Some of them, the most tangible ones, are reflected within these pages. There is, however, still a long way to go in order to achieve a more just society. The Latin American associative network is gaining awareness of itself, which constitutes an essential premise towards self-liberation from ostracism, prejudices, indifference and abandonment. FOAL has participated actively in this awareness-raising process.

At the same time, training for people with disabilities in Latin America nowadays is still very poor, insufficient and, in many cases, non-existent. However, FOAL has been demonstrating the capabilities of people with visual disabilities for years. It is enough with a bit of disposition and some aids that may adapt the resources available to us to obtain a high rate of performance from them. FOAL has infused through its work the idea that training people with visual disabilities is not so much an expense as it is an investment for the future. Gradually, that approach is also transforming the actual reality of those people.

Finally, we should highlight the fact that FOAL has eagerly collaborated in the employment of people with disabilities in specific centres, in ordinary companies and also in self-employment projects for people with disabilities. Who said fear? The most difficult barriers are the ones that we set ourselves up against.

FOAL has eradicated stereotypes. It has not tried to convince anybody. It has just shown how things can be done in a different way. Consequently, politicians, businesspeople and civil society have been able to approach disability in a more honest, humane and real way, moving away from charitable and paternalistic attitudes.

As subjects with rights, people with disabilities are neither asking for charity nor raising their voices so that their whims can come true. They demand to be citizens with full rights, nothing more and nothing less than that.

The day will come when FOAL will remember the dark times as they become a thing of the past. In the meantime, though, its support and collaboration with Latin America continues to develop steadily, tirelessly, beautifully and productively. A step forward that would have been impossible to take without that prime motor represented by ONCE.

A black and white photograph of a young boy with short hair, looking over a typewriter. His hands are on the keys, and he is looking directly at the camera with a slight smile. The image is semi-transparent, allowing the text to be overlaid.

CHAPTER VIII

IN SOLIDARITY WITH THE WORLD





CHAPTER VIII IN SOLIDARITY WITH THE WORLD

Seventy-five years after its constitution, ONCE has extended its solidarity beyond its national frontiers. Its constant and daily effort to achieve a greater and more real social inclusion of people with visual disabilities; its firm and convincing advocacy for inclusive employment and the social economy, and its dauntless work to build a more just world, have all turned ONCE into a unique icon.

ONCE could have chosen to draw back and stay at home. It could have been satisfied with the goals achieved. It could have remained stagnant and become a mediocre organization stuck in its ways. On the contrary, ONCE has decided to be adventurous and seek achievements for those in greater need, what it has been fighting for throughout the years for its own members, that is: respect and active advocacy of their rights as people.

For this reason, ONCE decided to spread its activities as widely as possible, becoming in that way a sort of citizen of the world. In this regard, it is now present and active in 25 countries, in addition to our EU partners. In addition to participating in educational and employment programs in 19 Latin American countries, it also intervenes dynamically in the EU decision-making process. ONCE is a member and a sponsor

of the World Blind Union. It is present in the European Disability Forum, and it is a member of and contributes to the work of the UN Committee of Experts on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Its presence and activism are alive in many other forums which, although perhaps with less media impact, have an extremely significant human focus.

The model of social inclusion promoted by ONCE and its Foundation is spreading all over the world by working to secure full autonomy for people with disabilities and to guarantee their visibility, while adapting itself to the particular social and cultural features of each country. In other words: ONCE and its Foundation never impose their model. Instead, they make proposals and mould themselves to the specific circumstances in a useful and adaptable manner.

ONCE AND THE EUROPEAN UNION

While ONCE and its Foundation's first engagement with European institutions dates back to a much earlier time, it began participating in a systematic and organized manner in 2000. ONCE's stronger presence in the European institutions was motivated by its conviction that employment (and subsequently prior training also) constitutes the best and most efficient means for the social inclusion of people with disabilities.

Hence, this is why ONCE and the ONCE Foundation did not want to miss the opportunity to share their valuable knowledge and experience so that the European Disability Strategy, which frames its proposals and binds itself to the so-called EU2020 Strategy, and whose purpose is the achievement of intelligent, sustainable and integrating growth, would make pioneering initiatives proposed and implemented by ONCE and its Foundation at the time as its own.

In fact, we must point out that ONCE and its Foundation have been working for 15 years now so that all EU directives take people with disabilities into account. In this regard, significant advancements have been achieved in the fields of transport accessibility, access to culture, accessibility, and educational and labour inclusion.

The participation of ONCE and its Foundation in the new European Disability Strategy (2010-2020), which shows a commitment to making the European Union a geographical space for all, has been fruitful, as productive has been also their decisive and effective contribution so that structural funds continue to generate employment, training and accessibility initiatives similar to those carried out in Spain in all countries.

Thus, several European Commissioners have visited Spain to get to know firsthand the particular way in which ONCE and its Foundation operate, which is exemplary with regard to the management of structural funds when generating employment initiatives for people with disabilities.

ONCE COOPERATION IN EUROPE

In addition to participating in the different spheres of multiple European bodies, ONCE and its Foundation work hand in hand with other European disability organizations, proposing initiatives and promoting campaigns relentlessly. They carry out two specific projects within European territory: one in the Balkans and another in Portugal.

The Balkans Project

ONCE has developed an initiative known as the Balkans Project, with the purpose of implementing in this area an inclusive education system from which as many children with disabilities as possible may benefit.

The dreadful armed conflicts that devastated this eastern European region undermined the social conditions of the population. ONCE knew at first hand the real situation in the region as it had sent there a group of volunteers, professionals from ONCE's Educational Resource Centre in Barcelona. This was also possible thanks to support from the International Relations Department within ONCE's General Council, which had been collaborating with schools for children with visual disabilities in Sarajevo, Derventa, Belgrade and Tirana since 2003.

During this time and in collaboration with the Spanish military and the Spanish Red Cross, the volunteers linked to ONCE and its Foundation have contributed to guarantee the right to education and the right to culture of people with disabilities, as they look after the needs of children with visual disabilities and provide students with the necessary tools to produce text books in braille.

Furthermore, the systematization of mobility training with white canes has been promoted among children and blind adults in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

In addition, partnering with the NGO MestrexBosnia has facilitated an effective communication with mainstream school teachers, who are finding an increasing number of children with visual disabilities among their students. This fact makes the principle of inclusive education come true.

Public and private institutions have got involved in this project which, while it continues to look after and respond to the needs of students with visual disabilities, has also had an unforgettable and inclusive impact on Bosnia, Serbia, Macedonia, Albania, Bulgaria and Moldavia.

ONCE's Influence in Portugal

While Portugal is a developed country which maintains a brotherly relationship with Spain as part of the Iberian Peninsula, it has been a recipient of ONCE and its Foundation's solidarity for more than a decade through a collaboration agreement with the Portuguese Association of Blind and Partially-Sighted (ACAPO), thanks to which our Portuguese neighbours have received technical assistance and have had access to a certain number of places at ONCE's University School of Physiotherapy, as well as in English language immersion courses for secondary school children in summer camps. Moreover, they have received financial support for training projects, as well as being recipients of donations of specific materials for blind people.

One of the outstanding joint actions in recent years was the International Seminar on Self-Advocacy of Visually Impaired People in the 21st Century, held in Lisbon in October 2012 at the senate room of the as-

sembly of the Republic of Portugal. The aim of the event, which was attended by important political figures as well as multiple representatives of the international associative movement of people with visual impairment, was to foster a debate on the different models of assimilation of self-advocacy by people with visual disabilities and on service provision through the different organizations, where ONCE represented a constant example to follow.

ONCE'S IMPACT IN AFRICA

With certain exceptions, cooperation actions carried out by ONCE and its Foundation in Africa have been developed in collaboration with different NGOs which have their own infrastructure in that area. Among them, there are some projects that must be highlighted due to their special significance.

Saharan Refugee Camps in Tinduf (Algeria).

This represents the most emblematic initiative displayed by ONCE in the African continent, as it has enabled the development of 5 schools for blind children, one in each camp (Smara, Auserd, Aaiún, 27th of February, and Dajla). They look after all the aspects that come together in the effective education of children: food; transport; facilities; specific and standard materials; teaching staff salaries; training for teaching staff, access to the information society through typhlotechnologies, and so on.

This reality has become an oasis within the hostile environment of the Sahara Desert, unparalleled in any other developing country in terms of the level of education achieved.

In a few years, blind children have gone from being isolated from the education system and from their communities to having a higher educational level than the average student without a disability, thus enjoying genuine social inclusion. ONCE supports and sponsors the work of its professionals, who year after year since this adventure began in 2003, visit these camps to carry out the training of their local teachers and to make available the donations of specific teaching materials such as reading and writing materials in braille, low vision materials or specific material needed for training.

This project's peculiarities make it a paradigm in the context of international development cooperation. The joint actions, the coordination and the complementarity of the institutions, as well as the shared responsibility of the local authorities are criteria that are fulfilled and which are part of the international principles that all good cooperation projects should include.

Assistance in Morocco

The results of our relationship with this neighbouring country have been as productive as discontinuous has been our communication. The most systematic work took place when a delegation from the special education resource centre of Tetuan visited the educational resource centre in Seville in order to familiarise themselves at first hand with the education model used by ONCE and its Foundation.

Furthermore, in collaboration with the ADELIAS Foundation, an educational kit containing special materials was donated to satisfy the needs of 50 blind children that were being looked after at the educational centre in the city of Nador and within its scope of influence.

Also, and along with the Cervantes Institute in Tetuan, ONCE and its Foundation have provided all necessary human and material resources to enable blind people to learn the Spanish language in those countries with training centres, providing them with text books in braille, reading and writing material and access to typhlotechnologies.

Support for Equatorial Guinea

Despite the fact that Spanish cooperation work in this former colony is extremely constant, collaboration has been difficult in the context of blindness due to the lack of local partners. However, just a few years ago the National Organization of Blind People of Equatorial Guinea (ONCIGE) was set up, to whom ONCE has offered help for the assistance of people with low vision, as well as for rehabilitation and training programs for their members.

In addition, the classrooms for learning braille and accessing typhlotechnology that ONCE had set up in Malabo have had their first social results among blind people in the country, thanks to ONCE's donation of both basic specialised materials and high-technology devices.

Engagement with Portuguese-Speaking Countries

The former Portuguese colonies of Angola, Mozambique, Cape Verde, and Santo Tomé and Príncipe (Guinea Bissau) are the poorest countries within the African continent and, therefore, in the world. Moreover, they are quite detached from the African Blind Union due to the fact that their official language is Portuguese and the union is monopolised by English-speaking countries.

ONCE collaborates with these countries through ACAPO, the Portuguese Association of Blind and Partially-Sighted. Usually, this cooperation work is channelled through the development of training programs in personal autonomy, literacy, and typhlotechnology, where ACAPO acts as facilitator of the assistance being offered.

Other Projects

Africa is a vast continent. Its more than 30 million square kilometres are a proof of it. However, ONCE is gradually sowing its seeds in different places, and those seeds are growing little by little.

Thus, ONCE has also collaborated with the Agua de Coko Foundation in **Madagascar**, working on the education of children who have been exploited in the saltmines. A school for blind children has been opened there thanks to resources provided by ONCE. They have set up the Malagasi Gospel Choir, that includes many blind children in its formation, and which had the opportunity to tour Spain.

In **Cameroon**, it has been possible to open up a school for blind children in an extremely poor area with the support of the NGO BERUDEP. With regard to the **Chad** region, a significant amount of computer equipment was donated through the NGO AICP-Pandora, along with the necessary guidance and specific

complementary materials. The North of **Uganda** also received ONCE's support through the NGO África Directo to improve the conditions of blind girls in a boarding school there.

Finally, 500 solar filters were donated in collaboration with Red Cross Andalucía for blind albino people in African countries, where they go through their everyday lives striving to overcome the stigma of superstition, that is to say being considered as evil beings.

HAITI'S CRY

Perhaps some of us still remember the terrible images of Haiti on different media on the 12th of January of 2010, when an earthquake with its epicentre in Puerto Príncipe and with a magnitude of 7.2 occurred in the Haitian capital. More than 300,000 people died and a similar number was injured to different degrees, while more than 1.5 million Haitians were left homeless. It represented one of the most devastating humanitarian catastrophes in history.

It did not take long for ONCE and its Foundation to react to this disaster. Only a week later and thanks to an awareness campaign among its members and workers, more than 120,000 Euro were raised. In addition, a donation of ortho-prosthetic items worth 60,000 Euro was carried out through the Fundosa Group (ONCE's business division), which was made available to the Red Cross for immediate delivery.

However, it was not only an expeditious delivery of financial help. Since then, ONCE and its Foundation have worked with the Haitian Society for Friends of Blind People (SHAA), whose acronym reflects the society's name in its original French language. During that same year, four projects were implemented through FOAL:

- An education programme (with the delivery of styluses, slates, abacuses, Perkins brailers, braille paper, Impacto-texto printers, braille displays, school writing books, geometrical games and Brailin dolls);
- A rehabilitation programme (which included the provision of canes of different types and lengths, repair equipment, talking watches and CCTVs);
- An entertainment and leisure programme (with goalball and showdown balls, Ludo, Tic-Tac-Toe and chess);
- A programme for the refurbishment of offices (computers, printers, tables and chairs, portable dividers and other office furniture).

Since that terrible month of January 2010, ONCE and its Foundation are doing their best to ensure people with visual impairment in Haiti can lead a normal life and are able to enjoy a greater degree of autonomy, thanks to the generosity of all its members. To this end, SHAA's education programmes have been restored, its rehabilitation programme has been reinitiated and expanded, a leisure and sports programme for people with visual disabilities has been set up, the women's and senior movements have been reactivated within SHAA, and a program of psycho-social assistance for workers and members of the organization who may be traumatized by the effects of the earthquake has been developed.

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ONCE's solidarity goes beyond maps, frontiers, limits, obstacles, races, languages, creeds, etc. Wherever its work is needed, ONCE is there. ONCE and its Foundation are aware of the importance and necessity of working together, not for the simple fact of being beside someone but, as the Spanish philosopher Donoso Cortés says, to do things together. There is no greater enjoyment than sharing our enjoyment, and the enjoyment of our rights is the greatest enjoyment that a person can have.

For this reason, ONCE, The Spanish National Organization of the Blind, which after 75 years of tireless work has achieved a more dignified life for its members, will not rest until each and every person with a disability in general and with visual impairment in particular see their human rights, systematically breached in the past, restored at once. Wherever they may be, they will not be alone.

TO THE SPANISH SOCIETY WHICH, THROUGH ITS PURCHASING OF ONCE'S LOTTERY GAMES, CONTRIBUTES TO BUILDING A MORE JUST WORLD.

