



Special Olympics
Europe / Eurasia



**Special Olympics Europe/Eurasia
Strategy for Partnership with Africa**

**An Overview by Michael Smith
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Special Olympics: Linking Europe and Africa

One of the core values of Special Olympics is a commitment to operating as a unified global movement, in which its program leaders, volunteers, families and athletes are linked to, and supportive of, development in other countries and other regions of the world. In this regard, Special Olympics Europe/Eurasia (SOEE) has begun to develop initiatives to strengthen a natural partnership with Special Olympics in Africa. We believe that both regions can gain by such a partnership.

Special Olympics Africa is truly on the move. Over the past 10 years the region has established programs in 32 countries, and has expanded its impact to 75,000 individuals being served in year-round Special Olympics local programs. Much of this progress has been due to the leadership and actions of national Special Olympics boards, and by the creativity and commitment of local volunteers, families, and by the inspiration of people with intellectual disability themselves.

The growth of Africa is moving its population towards 2 billion people by 2050. Approximately 10-15 million of the children born during this period will have intellectual disability. Special Olympics Europe/Eurasia, as part of its 2006-10 regional strategy, has made a commitment to support the work of Special Olympics Africa and to provide a better future for these children.

Special Olympics in Africa: Beyond Sports

Given the specific conditions in Africa, Special Olympics must go beyond providing sport for individuals with intellectual disability, although this fundamental “Right to Play” cannot be undervalued. Through linking its programming in sports to initiatives in health, family support, and public attitude change, Special Olympics, working with other partners, can help ensure that children and adults with intellectual disability and their families are not left out of the broader drive to achieve the UN’s Millennium Development goals by 2015.

Special Olympics has an active role to play in ensuring that in the national action plans of African nations, and in the allocation of development budgets, people with intellectual disability are not forgotten: Primary education for all by 2015 must include special education provision for children with intellectual disability; primary health care for all must ensure that children with intellectual disability are included in health provision and that doctors understand the specific needs of this part of the population.

In that the primary care provider for children with intellectual disability are mothers and female siblings, Special Olympics is committed to providing a mechanism to increase the independence of children with intellectual disability, while supporting families which tend to be caught in life-long poverty.

With a network throughout Africa, and with activities to bring together different programs at events and conferences, Special Olympics Africa can contribute to intra-African cooperation and integration, working towards the vision of One Africa.

The Principles of Partnership

The work of Special Olympics Europe/Eurasia with Special Olympics Africa must be based on the principles of mutual recognition and mutual respect. Special Olympics Africa is not to be seen as an underdeveloped region simply in need money. Special Olympics Europe/Eurasia and some of its national programs and organizational partners must be more than donors giving money. Partnerships should be based on an understanding of the strengths of each entity, and how these strengths can be combined for mutual benefit. Partnerships should be based on an understanding of Africa's unique challenges and of its particular culture of organization and management, and on a respect for the level of commitment and creativity of its people to develop Special Olympics.

Good governance of any Special Olympics program is essential for its long-term development. It is also an essential foundation for successful long-term cooperation with external partners. Part of good governance must be an open dialogue with national Special Olympics leaders on the perspective and requirements that external partners have in relation to financial management and transparency of reporting. External partners must also make an effort to understand local realities, and create simple partnerships not buried in bureaucracy and unrealistic reporting expectations.

Special Olympics Europe/Eurasia believes strongly in the importance of strong and transparent national organizations, and equally, decentralization that leads to democracy and local capacity building and empowerment.

Partnership Benefits to Special Olympics in Europe

Special Olympics Europe/Eurasia has a great deal to offer Special Olympics Africa in terms of 30 years of program-building experience, and in the existence of European-based financial resources. In turn, we believe that Special Olympics Africa can contribute to the further development of Special Olympics in Europe.

Partnering with Special Olympics Africa can bring a source of new inspiration to established programs in Europe; highlight the global solidarity and strength of the Special Olympics movement and so expand the interest from new global and domestic donors; create new links to African populations living in Europe, many of whom are not being

reached by conventional Special Olympics programs; and provide innovative best-practices in regards to creating low-cost, high-impact local programs.

Special Olympics Europe/Eurasia would support the broad European Union initiative towards “twinning partnerships” bringing together Africa and European universities and schools, parliaments, towns and cities, and civil society networks. Twinning national or local Special Olympics programs, their volunteers, families, coaches, and athletes, can contribute towards this wide-ranging network of deep, well-founded, institutional support partnerships, cementing the bond between the two continents.

Special Olympics Europe/Eurasia-Special Olympics Africa Activities in 2007

1. Work with Special Olympics Africa to better document and present the impact and potential of Special Olympics Africa in its focus countries.
2. Research and create a dialogue with European national governments, foundations and NGOs who are active in Africa.
3. Convene a European Partners Strategy Meeting, in partnership with Special Olympics Ireland, 19 April, 2007, in Dublin.
4. Apply for EU funding for a Special Olympics Knowledge Sharing Conference for African Special Olympics leaders in partnership with Special Olympics Ireland and the Irish government (November 2007).
5. Engage in discussions with the EU’s Development and Humanitarian Aid DG.
6. Promote the concept of supporting Special Olympics Africa to European Special Olympics programs with natural ties to Africa, including: Ireland, the United Kingdom, Denmark, Norway, Switzerland, Netherlands, Sweden, Germany, France.
7. Assist in the management and development of the FIFA Football For Hope partnership with Special Olympics Africa.
8. Further research and discussions on the possible involvement of IAAF and Olympic Fund for Africa.

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