



FROM
PEOPLE
TO
PEOPLE

RESULTS REPORT 2020

ABILIS FOUNDATION

More than 37 000 persons with disabilities participated in projects, millions of people received information and about 450 disability organisations built their capacity to contribute to inclusive and sustainable development. Despite of pandemic, successful work continued in Finland and in the named programme countries



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Abbreviations

BoLSA	Bureau of Labour and Social Affairs
CBM	Christian Blind Mission
CO	Country Office (of Abilis Foundation)
CRPD	Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
CSO	Civil Society Organization
EDF	European Disability Forum
HQ	Headquarters (of Abilis Foundation)
HRBA	Human Rights-Based Approach
IGA	Income Generating Activity
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organization
LNGO	Local Non-Governmental Organization
MFA	Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland
MOLSA	Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
NGO	Non-governmental Organization
NLCF	The National Lottery Community Fund
OPD	Organization of persons with disabilities
PO	Partner Organization (of Abilis Foundation)
RBM	Result-based management
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SHG	Self-Help group
SRH	Sexual and Reproductive Health
SRHR	Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights
ToC	Theory of Change
ToT	Training of Trainers
UNCRPD	United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

Yhteenveto

Abilis-säätiö toteutti vuonna 2020 globaalia kehitysyhteistyöohjelmaa nelivuotisen (2018-2021) suunnitelman pohjalta, mutta mukautti toimintoja koronaviruspandemian myötä. Joustavilla sopeutustoimilla pystyttiin varmistamaan se, että ohjelman ja käynnissä olleiden projektien toteutus jatkui tilanteen edellyttämällä tavalla. Säätiö sai ulkoministeriöltä luvan kanavoida projektirahoitusta vammaisjärjestöjen COVID-sisältöisiin hankkeisiin, jotta tietoa sekä hygienia- ja elintarvikkeita voitiin jakaa vammaisille ihmisille saavutettavalla tavalla. Näiden 76 erillisen projektin avulla Abilis-säätiö tarjosi tukea yli miljoonalle ihmiselle. Maakohtaiset erot olivat suuria ja eniten COVID-sisältöistä tukea kanavoitiin Nepaliin ja Etiopiaan, mutta myös muihin säätiön ohjelmamaihin: Tansaniaan, Ugandaan, Myanmarin, Vietnamiin ja Tadžikistaniin.

Avustustyön rinnalla säätiö jatkoi aktiivista tiedotustyötä ja kehitysviestintää. Pandemia loi uusia verkostoja ja tarvetta vammaisinkluusion vahvistamiselle. Valtavirtaistamista jatkettiin vaikuttamistyön kautta. Koko ohjelman toteutuksessa keskeisinä toimijoina olivat Helsingin toimiston lisäksi nimetyt kumppanijärjestöt ja säätiön maatoimistot ohjelmamaissa.

Säätiö vastaanotti vuoden aikana yli 500 hakemusta, mikä heijastaa pandemian aiheuttamaa lisääntynyttä avun tarvetta. Saapuneista hakemuksista 193 hyväksyttiin rahoitettaviksi ja 221 hakemusta hylättiin. Säätiön tavanomaisista projektirahoituksista hyötyi 37 263 vammaista henkilöä. Heistä yli puolet (53 %) oli vammaisia tyttöjä ja naisia. Epäsuorasti hyödynsääjia on vähintään kolme miljoonaa.

Säätiö hyväksyi yhteensä 177 loppuraporttia. Päättäneiden projektien tulokset olivat linjassa säätiön strategisten painopisteiden ja maaohjelmien tavoitteiden kanssa. Tuloksissa heijastuvat pandemian vaikutukset, olosuhteiden muuttumisen myötä. Pandemia nosti esille sen, että terveysepidemiat, yhteiskunnan sulkutilat ja humanitaariset interventiot eivät riittävästi huomioi vammaisten ihmisten tarpeita ja mukanaoloa avustustoimintojen suunnittelussa ja toteutuksessa. Pandemia lisäsi vammaisten ihmisten kokemaa syrjintää, ja vammaisjärjestöjen mahdollisuus vahvistaa talouttaan ja löytää ulkopuolinen rahoittaja heikkeni. Jos huomioidaan hankkeet, jotka oli valtaosin toteutettu ennen pandemiaa, tulokset ovat tiettyjen tulostavoitteiden osalta paremmat.

Vuoden 2020 tulokset ovat tiivistetysti tulosmatriisiin mukaisesti esitettynä seuraavat:

Tulos 1. Yhteiskunnallisesti vahvistuneet vammaisjärjestöt

- Jäsenmäärän lisääntyminen: 27 % vammaisjärjestöistä
- Aktiivisten jäsenten määrään lisääntyminen: 19 % vammaisjärjestöistä.
- Yhteistyön lisääntyminen muiden toimijoiden kanssa: 67 % vammaisjärjestöistä.
- Taloudellisen kestävyys vahvistuminen: 37 % vammaisjärjestöistä.
- Yhteisön suhtautuminen vammaisuuteen: 94 % vammaisjärjestöistä.

Tulos 2. Sosiaalisesti voimaantuneet vammaiset ihmiset

- Lisääntynyt osallistuminen sosiaaliin tapahtumiin/tilaisuuksiin: 65 % osallistuneista vammaisista henkilöistä
- Lisääntynyt ystävien lukumäärä: 65 %:lla osallistuneista vammaisista henkilöistä

Tulos 3. Taloudellisesti voimaantuneet vammaiset ihmiset

- Kohentunut tulotaso: 62 % vammaisista henkilöistä
- Työllistyminen/Itsensä työllistäminen: 1614 vammaista henkilöä
- Päätöksenteko oman rahan käytöstä: 31 % vammaisista henkilöistä

Tulos 4. Vahvistunut vammaisinkluusio yhteisöissä

- Perheiden lisääntynyt tuki vammaisille perheenjäsenille: 33% vastaajista
- Lisääntynyt viranomaistuki vammaisjärjestöille: 59 % vammaisjärjestöistä
- Ympäristön esteettömyyden koheneminen: 15 % vastaajista

Tulos 5. Päättäjien ja viranomaisten lisääntynyt vammaisinklusiivinen työ

- Lisääntynyt dialogi viranomaisten ja muiden toimijoiden kanssa: Yli 100 kokousta, kun lasketaan sekä kotimaassa että ohjelmamaissa toteutunut yhteistyö
- Viranomaisten pyytämät asiantuntijatehtävät: 40 tehtävää, joista vastasi vammainen asiantuntija tai vammaisjärjestö, sisältäen kotimaassa ja ohjelmamaissa toteutuneet asiantuntijatehtävät

Näiden tulosten lisäksi ohjelman kautta tuettiin vammaisia ihmisiä koronaviruspandemian aikana. Noin 2,5 miljoonaa ihmistä sai tietoa koronaviruksesta ja miten suojautua tartunnalta ja 181 829 vammaista ihmistä sai terveysvalistusta saavutettavalla tavalla. Lisäksi vammaisten ihmisten selviytymistä tuettiin jakamalla hygienia- ja ruokatarvikkeita sekä tarjoamalla psykologista ja vertaistukea sekä erityistä tukea väkivaltaa kohdanneille vammaisille naisille. Vammaisjärjestöt tekivät yhteistyötä viranomaisten ja avustusjärjestöjen kanssa.

Vuosi 2020 oli poikkeuksellinen ja työntäyteinen. Tulokset kontribuoivat nelivuotisen ohjelmakauden tulostavoitteisiin, sekä useisiin kestävän kehityksen tavoitteisiin (erityisesti tavoitteet, 10, 5, 8, 16, 17). Ohjelman sisältö ja tulokset tuovat lisäarvoa Suomen kehitysavulle ja kontribuoivat tulostavoitteisiin (MFA Priority areas 1.- 3.).

Executive Summary

While the Global Development Programme of Abilis Foundation was carried out as outlined in the 4-year plan (2018-2021), adjustments were necessary after the breakout of the COVID-19 pandemic. Through flexible amendments Abilis ensured that the programme and ongoing projects could continue as normally as possible. Abilis was twice granted by the Ministry for Foreign Affairs a special permission to use project funding for COVID-related projects. Through these 76 projects, information, hygiene products and other necessities were provided, in an accessible way, to persons with disabilities. More than a million people benefitted from the support. By far the biggest needs were in Nepal and Ethiopia, but other programme countries also received support: Tanzania, Uganda, Myanmar, Vietnam and Tajikistan.

To complement project funding, active information sharing and awareness raising continued in Finland and in the programme countries. Through advocacy activities, the Foundation participated in several networks that were created during the pandemic and responded to the growing interest to disability inclusion. The activities were implemented in close collaboration between the Headquarters in Helsinki, partner organisations and Country Offices in the programme countries.

Abilis received more than 500 new applications, including COVID-related requests, which reflects increased need for support. In total, 193 were approved and 221 were rejected. Altogether, 37 263 persons with disabilities were involved in the regular Abilis-funded projects. More than half of them (53 %) were women and girls with disabilities. Additionally, at least three million people benefitted indirectly from the support.

Abilis approved 177 final reports. The results are in line with the strategic priorities of Abilis and the objectives of the Country Programmes. The results reflect the effects of the pandemic, as circumstances change. The pandemic highlighted that health epidemics, lockdowns of societies and humanitarian interventions did not take sufficiently into account the needs and involvement of people with disabilities in the planning and implementation of relief operations.

The pandemic increased the discrimination experienced by people with disabilities. Similarly, the ability of disability organizations to strengthen their financial situation and find an external donor was weakened with the pandemic. If projects that were largely implemented before the pandemic are included, the results are better for certain expected results.

The main results are introduced below, based on the indicators at the outcome level:

Result 1. Stronger OPDs in society:

- More members: 27 % of OPDs
- More active members: 19 % of OPDs
- Increased contact with stakeholders: 67 % of OPDs
- Improved financial sustainability of OPDs: 37 % of OPDs
- Changes in disability perception in community: 94 % of OPDs

Result 2. Socially empowered persons with disabilities

- Increased participation in social events: 65 % of participants with disabilities
- Increased number of friends: 65 % of participants with disabilities

Result 3. Economically empowered persons with disabilities

- Improved income level: 62 % of persons with disabilities
- Improved employment: 1614 persons with disabilities employed
- Managing one's own finances: 31 % persons with disabilities

Result 4. Improved disability awareness in communities

- Increased family support: 33% of participants with disabilities

- Improved support to OPDs from duty bearers: 59 % of OPDs
- More enabling environment: 15 % of participants with disabilities

Result 5. Improved disability inclusion and mainstreaming

- New dialogues and strengthened collaboration with stakeholders: More than a hundred meetings, when including advocacy work in Finland and in the programme countries.
- Expertise assignments by persons with disabilities: 40 assignments requested by authorities, including assignments in Finland and in the programme countries.

In addition to these results, the programme supported the resilience of persons with disabilities in the COVID-19 pandemic. About 2,5 million people received information about COVID-19 and how to protect from the infection. Also, 181 829 individuals with disabilities received health education and/or materials in accessible formats. Persons with disabilities were also supported by distributing hygiene products and dry food, by offering peer support and counselling, as well as by providing special support to women with disabilities who experienced domestic violence or other forms of abuse and discrimination. OPDs collaborated with authorities and aid agencies.

The year 2020 was exceptional and demanding. The outcomes of the programme contribute to the impact of the 4-year plan and the SDGs, particularly to the goals # 10, 5, 8, 16 and 17. The content and results provide added value to the Finnish development aid through aggregated indicators in the MFA Priority areas # 1.-3.

1. Introduction to the results report

This annual report introduces the results of the Abilis Development Programme 2020 and follows the programme plan 2018-2021. The aim of the programme continued the same and focused on improved realisation of human rights of persons with disabilities. The starting point is to recognise the situation of persons with disabilities in families and communities, as well as the general perception of citizens on disability. As persons with disabilities tend to be one of the most marginalised and discriminated groups, different levels and types of actions are needed in parallel to each other, to change the situation. The programme is implemented through the following modalities that forms the triple-track approach of Abilis Foundation:

1. **Supporting** groups and organisations of persons with disabilities in the Global South by providing funds, facilitation and monitoring for their projects through Country Programmes for empowerment;
2. **Advocacy work** at the domestic and international level, including programme countries, for mainstreaming and policy dialogue;
3. **Communications and awareness raising activities** in Finland and in the programme countries for improved disability inclusion.

The programme focuses on **capacity building** of organisations and on **participation** of persons with disabilities in the designated programme countries through project funding. Participation in projects with meaningful activities and peer support are considered as efficient means for **empowerment towards equal rights and opportunities**. In fact, persons with disabilities are the agents of change for their own lives and for their communities. Through different kinds of projects, that include technical support on organisational and project management, both individuals and OPDs **increase their capacity**, while families and community members change their attitudes positively. Also, the **awareness** and **capacity of duty-bearers** to work for disability inclusion and mainstreaming at different levels are targeted through project activities and advocacy work.

The programme recognizes the weak position of women and girls with disabilities. That is why **gender equality** is a cross-cutting theme in the entire programme. Additionally, special projects are supported for the **empowerment** and **full and equal participation** of women and girls with disabilities in society. **Full ownership and involvement** of persons with disabilities who are not too often given such opportunities, are core principles. As discriminative practices are deeply rooted at different levels, various kinds of activities and approaches are needed. Seven **Country Programmes** and a Fragile States sub-programme ensure the smooth operation of the project funding mechanism, supported by **awareness raising** and **advocacy activities**. Active communications and advocacy work from the HQ support the Country Programmes to raise awareness and advocate on identified themes. The Abilis HQ manages and coordinates all programmes and reports to the MFA.

The programme is based on the **Human rights-based approach** (HRBA) and uses **Results-based management** (RBM) to increase the quality and effectiveness of its development aid activities. **Risk management** is an integral part of the programme work. It supports the management and decision making and is carried out at global, country and project levels.

The unique approach of Abilis and this programme provide added value to the Finnish and global development policies and practices. Many development aid projects focus on the national level, but Abilis aims at reaching grassroots level OPDs, thus complementing other actors' work. The results of 2020 confirm that this approach is necessary when working towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Agenda 2030.

2. Results of the Abilis Development Programme 2020

2.1. Towards equal rights and opportunities of persons with disabilities

All the activities in 2020 were contributing to the expected result of the programme at the impact level¹ that is:

Persons with disabilities have equal rights and opportunities with others, and are enjoying dignified and productive lives.

This expected result can be achieved only after committed long-lasting work by different actors and their interventions. The programme contributed to the national level policy work in Finland and in the programme countries, as expected in the Abilis Results Framework 2018-2021 that gathers all results based on set targets. According to the Abilis experience, political will to promote disability inclusion globally has risen strongly. The CRPD-guided demand to involve persons with disabilities in all development has led to ongoing processes towards disability inclusion. However, there are still many practical obstacles, and new types of collaboration are needed.

The Abilis programme has contributed to the growing trend of inclusive development, including national and international level work. The ratification of the UNCRPD progressed in Tajikistan, a shadow report was prepared by the disability movement in Myanmar, and several national level legislative improvements occurred in Ethiopia and Uganda. The alternative report for UNCRPD is in the stages of finalization in Vietnam. The Government of Nepal is developing a National policy and Plan of Action on Disabilities following the recommendation of the CRPD committee. Gradual implementation of the UNCRPD is going on in Tanzania. Thus, tangible improvements in the realisation of human rights of persons with disabilities took place in 2020, as expected.

It is noticeable that despite the pandemic, the programme reached more than 37 000 persons with disabilities through concrete project activities, and more than a million people when including COVID-19 response with information sharing. In total, 177 OPDs implemented and finalised their projects and 193 new projects started. Additionally, there were 101 ongoing projects from previous years. Thus, 471 projects and 450 OPDs were supported during the reporting year. Involvement of OPDs in policy level work follows the content of the UNCRPD and indicates an increased recognition of equal rights of persons with disabilities. The gained skills and experience in working with stakeholders will assist OPDs in their future work towards improved disability inclusion in their societies. The expected impact of the programme remained valid during the reporting period.

2.2. Gender equality and empowerment of women and girls with disabilities

2.2.1. Gender equality as a cross-cutting objective

Gender equality was a cross-cutting objective in the programme in 2020. This applied to all activities, including projects under Country Programmes, awareness raising and advocacy activities. All projects were oriented to pay attention to gender equality and encourage women and girls with disabilities to be included. As a result, 22% of projects had gender as the main objective, and 73 % included it partly (Figure1.).

¹ Abilis Results Framework 2018 - 2021

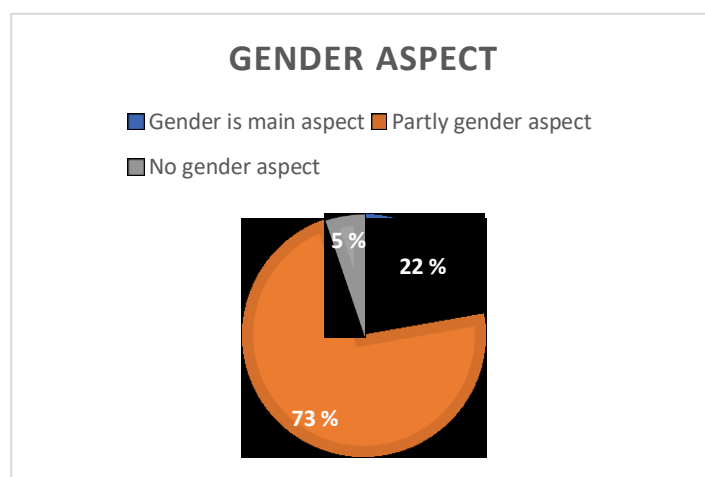


Figure 1. Gender aspect in the finalised projects in 2020.

When analysing the participants of projects, 53 % of them were women and girls with disabilities. In total 19 749 female participants benefitted from the programme. Figure 2. illustrates the proportion of women, girls, men and boys with disabilities who participated in projects. The proportion of girls and boys was equal, 7 %.

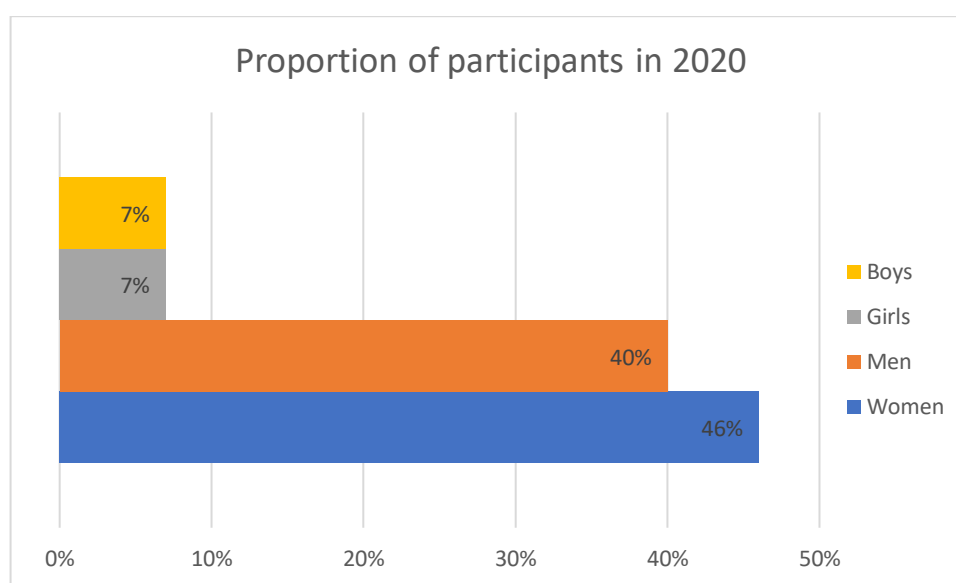


Figure 2. Proportion of women, girls, men and boys with disabilities in finalised projects.

2.2.2. Empowered women and girls with disabilities

Among the finalised projects, 11 focused on empowerment women and girls with disabilities, and improvement of their rights and status in society, through their own organisations. Five more projects focused on ending gender-based violence. The empowerment projects contained often organisational and leadership skills, peer support and mentoring. Women with disabilities were encouraged to take leading positions and participate in men-led OPDs and in their decision-making bodies to change the old-fashioned way to run an organisation. It was

reported that there is a need to strengthen the capacity of OPDs on gender equality. This will get particular attention in the coming years.

There was a growing need to organise training on sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), and that topic was more often found in the new projects started. Requests for SRHR trainings came up from all programme countries, but mainly from women-led organisations that have already some knowledge on human rights and capacity to manage SRHR projects.

2.3. Result 1: OPDs – strong actors in society

There were more than 500 new applications processed in 2020. Out of them 193 were approved and 221 rejected. The remaining ones were processed the following year. These results are more than anticipated, partly due to the acute needs created by COVID-19 and to the new funding approved to alleviate human suffering during the pandemic. The flexible funding mechanism of Abilis to support acute needs was made possible by the smooth response from the MFA. In total, 76 OPDs were working for COVID-19 relief, through which they gained new skills and networks for future involvement in society.

In total, 177 final reports were approved of successfully completed projects. Only very few projects had to be interrupted due to mismanagement. The expected results were exceeded, as for the number of successful projects completed, and the number of cases where funding had to be interrupted was smaller than expected. This confirmed the validity of the results framework.

There were more than 40 projects aiming at capacity building of OPDs. Many of them included trainings on different topics such as leadership skills, financial management and advocacy. Some projects concentrated on human rights trainings and raising awareness of the UNCRPD. One of the methods used was the Training of Trainers (ToT). Participants of these trainings represented smaller OPDs and self-help groups (SHGs). After ToT-trainings they provided training to their peers in their home areas. Through this method, many smaller OPDs and the entire disability movement became stronger. One good example comes from Myanmar, where a project called “Equipped for Action” led to great successes with stronger OPDs:



Photo 1. ToT training led to stronger OPDs in Myanmar.

After attending Training of Trainers in Kalay, the representatives of four townships were greatly empowered in knowledge and skills. They got back to their areas and started the movement actively. They conducted assessments and data collection and advocated for the rights of children with disabilities. They supported other persons with disabilities to organize themselves as an OPD.

2.3.1. More active members in OPDs

About 27 % of the OPDs reported to have more members and 19 % more active members after the project, when comparing to the situation before the project. The low result reflects

the fact that there were only a few projects aiming at larger membership. Some OPDs reported that the COVID-19 situation affected the membership work and that it was not relevant to discuss the number of members during a humanitarian crisis.

At the same time, COVID-19 related projects with dissemination of information and materials reached passive members and other community members with disabilities and activated them to become a member in an OPD. Getting support from an OPD sparked interest in joining it. As a wider observation, empowered group members were the best role models and advocates to bring new members to an OPD.

One particular output level result, the number of project participants who know the UNCRPD, was strongly linked with the OPD involvement. In total, 88 % of individuals reported to know their rights and the UNCRPD after the project. That made the difference in activism and contribution to civil society: better understanding of one's own rights led to an increased interest in promoting disability inclusion. Empowered individuals form stronger OPDs who can better contribute to civil society.

2.3.2. Increased contacts with stakeholders

About 67 % of the OPDs reported to have more contacts with stakeholders. These were mainly projects largely implemented before the pandemic. Most groups (89%) reported to have more attention from other stakeholders, but not all contacts were positive (More: Chapter 2.6.2.).

When pandemic hit the globe, many aid interventions started to address the needs of vulnerable population. First OPDs were not heard, neither included in general responses. During the prolongation of pandemic, more OPDs reported improved covering of persons with disabilities in aid actions. OPDs were contacted and consulted by government and humanitarian aid agencies. For instance, in Ethiopia, local governments supported OPDs to distribute aid to their members. It was not sufficient, but still a step towards equal rights of all citizens.



Capacity building of OPDs seems to be key for improved collaboration with stakeholders. Relevant capacity is appreciated by stakeholders and it brings confidence to both parties. Thus, OPDs should have skills and competency to discuss and collaborate with other agencies. They need to be stronger in order to be part of stakeholder networking, as expected in the Abilis results framework.

2.3.3. Improved financial sustainability of OPDs

About 37 % of the funded OPDs who had included income generation or fund-raising activities in their project, reported to have increased income. Out of them 10 % had found another funding source outside of the own organisation. Often Abilis was the first external supporter and because of Abilis, the OPD was able to get another donor. New donors were consulting Abilis and asking for a reference. Strengthened capacity and improved management skills supported the new phase of the OPDs. This applied also to local governments that started to fund some OPDs. In Nepal, local government provided grants after a successful project funded by Abilis. In Uganda, the government set up a new system – a disability fund – for persons with disabilities.

Most of the income of OPDs came from activities started during projects. Most commonly, an OPD established a cooperative or a small business, such as an Internet café, tailoring and carpet making workshops, service unit to provide services to customers (e.g. massage or secretarial or sanitation services). While members received their salaries from the profit, part of it remained with the organisation. The Abilis guidebook “Sustainable Livelihoods” guided many OPDs in planning profitable business ideas with market analysis and estimations of expected profit.

Similar outcomes have been observed during the last couple of years. Even though the income level of OPDs was not very high, small fund-raising had been started. The programme aims at a higher level of OPD funding: minimum of 50 % of OPDs should find other means of funding after the project. In this exceptional year, the lower result can be a logical consequence of the pandemic. In the long run, it is essential to remember that many grassroots groups operate in poor rural villages where extra funding is not available, nor is it the aim of the group members. Thus, a realistic level of income, including both OPDs and their individual members, and poverty reduction should be the aim. The local context and ownership of the projects must always be taken into consideration.

2.3.4. Changes in disability perception in community

In 2020, the results in the area of disability perception reflect the negative influence of the pandemic and the crisis. In those projects that started in 2017-2019², and were thus implemented mostly before the pandemic, the mentality of community towards persons with disabilities was reported improved. In total, 94 % of OPDs reported to be better recognised by other NGOs and less discriminated. More importantly, about 33 % of the OPDs reported the increased appreciation from the community as one of the most important results. Appreciation most often meant attitude change, improved communication and invitation to civil society forums, or supporting businesses run by OPDs and their members, for example.

A similar positive change occurred at different levels of society. In practice, perception towards disability improved at community level in rural areas, as well as in towns and cities. This is the aim of the programme when focusing on awareness raising and disability inclusion. Society as a whole must be considered, when trying to change attitudes and behaviour of people towards disability. The special goal to reach grassroots level groups and operate in remote areas, where OPDs lack external support, was achieved as well (Figure 3.). Their role in the local community is particularly important. While SHGs were working and becoming more visible, community members recognised their contribution to development.

Figure 3. shows that the finalised projects were located in different areas quite equally, thus, the effects are widely visible in the entire society. Gradually, persons with disabilities can experience equality and non-discrimination in every-day life, regardless of where they live.

However, in some projects implemented in 2020, OPDs reported severe cases of how OPDs and their members were left behind and segregated due to pandemic. Persons with disabilities were perceived as a burden and blamed for the problems. Lockdowns left some persons with disabilities without medical care or medicine that led to a deterioration in their condition. This led to neighbours blaming people with disabilities for spreading COVID-19. As the pandemic and insecurity lasted, women with disabilities experienced domestic violence and exploitation. This negative behavior can be seen to be due to the pandemic and as one of the consequences of the crisis situation. Still, it is a setback for a positive development and hopefully only a temporary phenomenon.

² In total 10 finalised projects from 2017, 44 from 2018 and 77 from 2019.

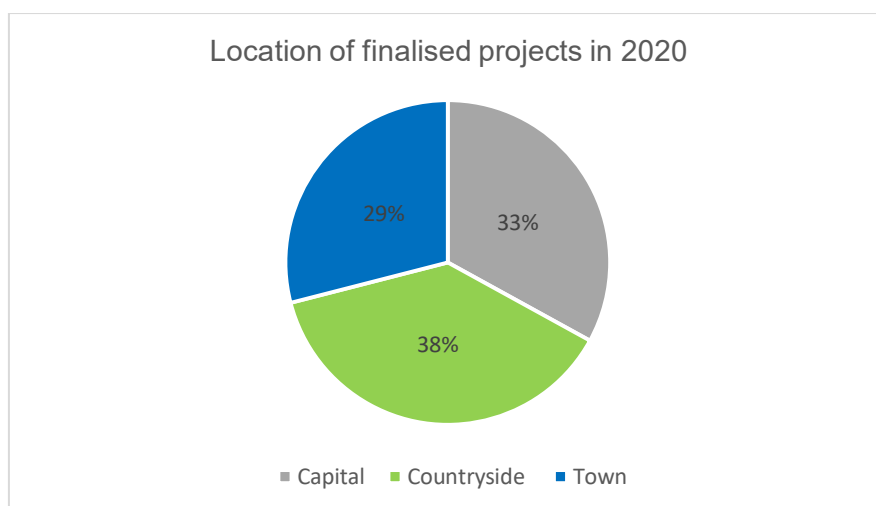


Figure 3. Location of project sites led to a broad coverage of improved disability perception in society.

2.3.5. Analysis of results on building capacity of OPDs

The realisation of disability rights and the implementation and reinforcement of the UNCRPD require strong and capacitated OPDs to work with authorities, duty-bearers, and other stakeholders. This is why the Abilis programme aims at supporting the capacity building of OPDs, including groups at very grassroots level. Improved capacity ensures increased possibilities for OPDs to contribute to their own communities and even to wider society. OPDs need active members and improved skills to advocate, promote and claim disability rights, and to cooperate with stakeholders. Empowered individuals can represent their organisation and participate in social and political life as rights-holders. Strong OPDs also have women in their leadership.

The results of 2020 confirm that empowered individuals and capacitated OPDs have better possibilities to act as rights-holders and to collaborate with duty-bearers. Active and visible individuals with disabilities and OPDs create a positive change of attitudes and behaviour among family and community members. They cooperate with different actors and contribute to sustainable development as decision-makers in civil society, in policy work and in other assignments at local, national and international levels.

In the Abilis-funded projects, many groups are small in size and limited in operations. This applies especially to grassroots groups in remote areas and newly-established groups. Some groups do not actively advocate or invite more members due to the nature of their association. Abilis respects their initiatives but encourages persons with disabilities to join peers and to set up organizations for joint actions. A democratic civil society should include OPDs equal to other NGOs.

In 2020, all involved OPDs built capacity in project management and in collaboration with stakeholders to some extent. Groups and organisations became stronger actors in societies through capacity building and experiences provided with the Abilis financial and technical support. OPDs located in different areas help to ensure a wider spread of disability inclusion.

2.4. Result 2: Socially empowered persons with disabilities

The programme included different types of projects aiming at social empowerment of persons with disabilities. The objective was to support persons with disabilities in such a way that they

can become active family members and citizens in their own communities. The pandemic affected the social participation of empowered individuals but, on the other hand, empowerment supported individuals to better overcome the crisis situation.

2.4.1. Increased participation in social events

The results indicated that 65 % of the participants were able to join social gatherings after the projects (before the pandemic and restrictions in movement). Out of them, 33 % reported to have a notable increase in participation. The main reasons for improved possibilities to participate in social events were the following:

1. Information
2. Improved self-confidence
3. Networking with people and family support

Additionally, improved communication and transportation facilities, financial situation and accessibility were supporting participation.

When considering the most common reasons why project participants could not attend social events, the main ones mentioned were the lack of information, family support and money.

Accessibility was also reported to limit the participation. Due to COVID-pandemic and restrictions in movement, participation was no longer possible. Some interviewees wished to continue active social life as soon as possible to ensure further improvements.



2.4.2. Increased number of friends



The number of friends increased during projects. About 65 % of the persons with disabilities reported to have more friends after the project. About 8 % reported to have a big change in social contacts, including new friends with disabilities. Their formerly isolated life became more active with peers, leading to emphasized social empowerment and further improvements in living conditions and well-being.

Additionally, trainings and peer gatherings provided new knowledge and improved life skills. About 88 % of participants reported to know human rights, including the UNCRPD. Increased understanding of rights strengthened participation, social interaction and the number of friends.

The Abilis country coordinators and facilitators played an important role in facilitating and mentoring the groups. As individuals with personal experience on disability, they could provide peer support and encouragement.

Photo 2. Friendship and peer support – keys for empowerment.

2.4.3. Analysis of results on social empowerment

Different types of projects offered opportunities for persons with disabilities to participate and learn, recognize human rights and find ways to express their own will. This empowerment process was reported to be essential to build self-esteem and self-confidence after experiencing discrimination and isolation due to disability. Some participants described their

process of growing to be a citizen with rights, but also responsibilities that belong to rights-holders.

The programme expected to reach a level where 80 % of participants can participate in social events. This was not reached, due to many reasons. One of the biggest reasons was COVID-19 with protective measures in society. Restrictions in movement limited and changed the implementation of project activities in many programme countries. However, communication and networking with peers in the middle of the pandemic supported many participants in a remarkable way.

The expected level in the increased number of disabled persons with more friends was achieved. As the majority of the finalised projects started in 2018-2019, social contacts had been created already before the pandemic. It is important that socially empowered individuals could continue being active and visible, in order to create a positive change of attitudes and behaviour among family and community members. Empowered individuals are needed in OPDs to work together for improvements in disability inclusion and mainstreaming.

Persons with disabilities, in the Abilis programme countries, often lack access to information and social contacts, and due to that have difficulties in building self-esteem and becoming rights-holders with the necessary knowledge on human rights and tools to claim their rights. Based on the achieved results in 2020, the programme was able to support the meaningful participation that is key to a person's ability and skills. Through participation, social contacts and peer support a person with a disability can build self-esteem and self-confidence and learn life skills. Even though only a limited number of participants were analysed in this set of outcomes, the results show that the indicators work and collect relevant information.

2.5. Result 3: Economically empowered persons with disabilities

The programme had a strong focus on economic empowerment and improved livelihood of persons with disabilities. About 52 % of the finalised projects aimed at income generation (IGA), due to the weak employment possibilities and high poverty levels of persons with disabilities. The projects included a variety of income generation, food security and poverty reduction activities.

This Annual Results Report includes finalised projects from years 2018 – 2020. Due to the revision of indicators, some data was gathered on the management of one's own finance, and some data on income level. The need to revise indicators, from one year to the next, creates challenges in the Abilis approach, as projects from different years come to end during one reporting period.

2.5.1. Improved income level of persons with disabilities

According to the collected data, about 62 % of the participants of IGA projects reported to have improved their level of income. The majority of them had attended short vocational skills training (non-formal) and gained entrepreneurship and other necessary skills as well. The projects were preparing them for employment. Participants reported hoping to find work later on. Special appreciation was expressed about improved skills and confidence to apply for a job.

“Yayesh is a 33-year old married mother of two children. She got seven months training on carpet manufacturing. Her skills of making export standard design carpets were improved. On top of it, her social life has developed. She shares ideas/knowledge on different issues and attends different social events. She has improved self-esteem and earns up to ETB1,100 every month. Even though the salary is not enough, it is better than before this employment.”

2.5.2. Improved employment of persons with disabilities

In total, 1614 persons with disabilities got employed through projects finalised in 2020. Out of them, 64 % were women with disabilities and 36 % men. Most of them (86%) were self-employed. Some individuals found a job in the private labour market. A very common way of job creation was a group workshop, or a cooperative through which participants were able to work, sell products, provide services and generate income. The most common sectors were handicrafts and tailoring, small grocery shops, IT and secretary services and agriculture (farming and animal husbandry).



Through the project of 3299 Eur on vocational training and small business of a cooperative, 12 persons with disabilities were trained and 5 of them got a job and generate income for improved living standard. The cooperative business with photocopying and computer facilities is serving customers, such as OPDs and local authorities in Vietnam.

Photo 3. Projects created jobs and income generation possibilities to participants.

2.5.3. Managing one's own finances

Many participants highlighted the meaningful life that followed from the IGA projects. New skills for earning money to contribute to family living was one of the most powerful tools in the process of empowerment and acceptance by families. About 31 % of those who started earning money, reported to have improved the possibility to manage their own finances (Note! limited number of projects due to change of indicator). However, there is a need to strengthen the empowerment of persons with disabilities in order to have their voices heard, which can lead to gaining control of their own lives, including of their own money.

2.5.4. Analysis of results on economic empowerment

Most participants were able to earn more income after taking part in projects. Their technical skills on IGA had improved as well as knowledge on how to run a small business of their own. Still, it was highlighted that external support and facilitation is needed for sustainable income.

A typical IGA project contained a short skills training course followed by start-up kits or materials, and the opening of a shop/workshop, or another type of setting, for the implementation of the activity. Social empowerment of the participants enhanced their involvement in groups and gave stronger basis for productive employment. It was reported necessary to emphasize the role of social networks and access to raw materials or other resources in order to run a profitable business. Thus, a project aiming at successful livelihood and poverty reduction should include enhancing the proper planning, and



Necessary capacity building and skills training, but also access to raw materials or other resources are required, when improving the income level of persons with disabilities.

opportunities to adopt diverse livelihood modalities. The Abilis Guideline for Sustainable Livelihoods should be used more in the future to assist groups to plan more profitable and sustainable IGA projects and to identify the most important challenges already at the planning stage.

Even though a limited number of participants was analysed in this set of outcomes, the results indicate that the indicators work and collect relevant information. More finalised projects with individual measurements will provide more reliable data in the coming years. Additionally, the data collection system of Abilis must be revised with regard to collecting the number and type of trainings IGA projects contain.

2.6. Result 4: Improved disability awareness in communities

2.6.1. Increased family support to persons with disabilities

In total, 34 finalised projects included some activities related to the promotion of human rights and the improvements of living conditions of children with disabilities. In these projects, parents received training on disability and human rights. That led to wider understanding on how to support one's own child with a disability. About 33 % of the families increased their support to their children with disabilities. Assistive devices were the most common type of increased support. The data does not adequately reflect the qualitative changes in the support that existed before and after the project.



In 21 projects parents, and more often the mothers, of children with disabilities started income generation that reduced the poverty level and malnutrition of the families. In five projects inclusive education was emphasized. In total, 5216 children and adolescents with disabilities benefitted from the programme. There was a gender balance, equal number of girls and boys in this beneficiary group.

About 7 % of all finalised projects were implemented by parents of children with disabilities. More than previously, parents were included in OPDs and gained wider understanding on disability and inclusion. That may lead to improved disability inclusion in families and independent living for youth with disabilities in the future.

Photo 4. The programme aims at increasing family support to persons with disabilities.

2.6.2. Improved support to OPDs from duty-bearers

Based on 157 finalised projects, of which data was available, **59%** of the funded OPDs had increased support from duty-bearers. The majority of projects that did not show significant increase, focused on small-scale income generation activities, food and hygiene items distribution, or skills training of members.

The types of increased support included stakeholder participation or collaboration during the project; increased recognition, interest and appreciation from duty-bearers; new or strengthened networks and contacts; invitations or opportunities to discussions with local

authorities or participation in planning and decision-making; improved communication with local authorities; plans of future collaboration with stakeholders or new commitments from duty-bearers; and additional resources, such as land, from local government. Duty-bearers most often included local government and authorities, other NGOs, the private sector and the surrounding community.

In Nepal, the government financial support is a great achievement towards more sustainable work of OPDs. In practice, and as an example, when an Abilis-funded project starts, the local authorities are contacted and informed about the project. Later on, after the completion of an Abilis-funded project, OPDs can apply for a grant from the local government authorities. The local authorities have a budget for allocating funds to OPDs. Most Abilis-funded projects in Nepal in 2020 were successful in establishing dialogues and collaborating with local authorities, including further funding.

In some programme countries authorities tightened requirements which forced OPDs to collaborate with them. For instance, in Uganda, the government required all OPDs to validate their operations in the country. This required extra registration and efforts from OPDs. In Vietnam, the political and legislative situation limited the establishment of new OPDs and the implementation of projects with external funding. Additionally, increased administrative procedures have complicated the work of OPDs. Similarly, in Tajikistan, reporting requirements have been tightened, which is not a good sign, if the aim is a democratic society.



Disability inclusion was operationalised in the majority of Abilis programme countries to some extent. The pandemic changed the circumstances and makes it difficult to assess how sustainable the support from authorities to OPDs is. More factual results can be reported later on, when the humanitarian crisis of COVID-19 is over.

2.6.3. More enabling environment

About 15% of project participants found that their environment was more enabling after the project. 75% reported no change in the environment after the project. Out of those who did not perceive any change, 58% found their environment at least somewhat enabling before and after the project, and the rest found that the environment was not enabling enough or not at all. What made the participants perceive their environments as more enabling were accessibility modifications, in school buildings for example, or learning about services that improve accessibility. This was one of the new indicators introduced in 2019, thus data is lacking in many projects.

Through Abilis funding and the active work and involvement of OPDs, some changes were reported to have taken place in attitudes and the general perception of people in society with regard to enabling and disability inclusive environments. Individuals pointed out that they have experienced less discrimination and exclusion, as well as better access to public places. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, some individual-level data from the final stage of projects is not available, as face-to-face monitoring visits and interviews were not possible.

2.6.4. Analysis of results on disability awareness in communities

According to the final reports of projects in 2020, local authorities and officials, as duty-bearers, in all programme countries, gave some support towards OPDs, even though country variation existed. Improved understanding on disability and awareness on disability rights led

to concrete actions, even though huge needs exist to implement disability policies and the UNCRPD. It was assessed essential that the HQ level work supported the country level work. At the same time, CO/POs and the groups implementing projects contributed to general atmosphere, visibility of OPDs and persons with disabilities. As a summary, the Abilis programme improved awareness on disability rights among local and national authorities and other stakeholders, enhancing the opportunities of persons with disabilities to access public services and to enjoy dignified life. It can be stated, that improved understanding convinced stakeholders to bear duties and follow the UNCRPD principles. In some other countries, like in Vietnam, there is no clear guidance for CSOs, including OPDs, on how they should set up and run their organisations. Each province or city understands the regulation in a different way, resulting in confusion for both local authorities and CSOs. It should be noticed that through its disability funding, Abilis has shown to the authorities in some countries, such as Nepal and Uganda, at least, that grassroots OPDs are capable of implementing projects successfully with the right environment and support. Hence, these governments have established their own grant systems for OPDs.

The increased administrative procedures have complicated the work of OPDs, and the space for CSOs is shrinking in many countries. These trends may affect their performance even more in the coming years. Targeted advocacy work in wide networks and designed awareness raising activities, in Finland and in the programme countries, will be necessary also in future, in order to tackle the issue of discrimination and exclusion of persons with disabilities. Awareness raising and advocacy work should strengthen the work that fosters respect for disability rights and dignity, and combats prejudice and harmful practices.

Based on these outcomes and reported feedback, the set indicators seem to measure concrete actions and disability inclusion that happen in families and in communities. Long-term use of same indicators would ensure more reliable results. Abilis continues working towards a more tangible and operational results framework.

2.6.5. Domestic communication activities for improved awareness

Abilis HQ office contributed to the wider result of the programme, to improve disability inclusion through awareness raising, by focusing on the work in Finland. **Leave no one behind** was an important slogan during the year. Similarly, key themes included resilience of women and girls with disabilities and accessible information about COVID-19. Based on the strategic plan, gender equality, livelihoods and human rights were emphasized in external communications. Information related to the programme and the results of the projects, as well as to the living conditions of persons with disabilities in the Global South were shared widely.

Most public events were cancelled due to the pandemic. At the same time, many news media contacted Abilis and offered cooperation for media visibility. Due to the pandemic and the uncertain situation around the world, prices in media publications went down and Abilis took advantage of this momentum. More articles and paid advertisements were published in different magazines³, in total 12 articles and/or advertisements. These were supported by outdoor advertisements in Helsinki city center. The Abilis Ambassadors, Rosa Meriläinen wrote three blogs and Silva Belghiti two. A new modality of awareness raising was launched with video production and distribution. Silva Belghiti, Aleksi Kirjonen and Abilis board members were included in these short videos discussing disability and human rights on a wide scale. A new collaboration started with the disabled artist Kaisa Leka whose simple cartoons pointed out essential principles in disability inclusion and non-discrimination, as well as the work of Abilis (one example below).

³ The magazines are the following: Apu, Akson, Askel, Autisti-Iejhti, Kotimaa, Martat, Tunne ja Mieli sekä TTT-lehti.



Social media (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn) was the main channel of awareness raising and it grew significantly during the year 2020. All social media channels were in active use. Facebook was the most popular tool to share information about disability and global development, as well as about the results of the projects and the programme. In Twitter, Abilis participated in social debates and shared results of work - all positive changes in the lives of persons with disabilities in developing countries. Through its active role in the social media, Abilis reached out to decision-makers, NGOs, the private sector and institutions in Finland, receiving new followers and donations. Many new organizations globally joined the Abilis channels, too.

There was collaboration with some schools⁴ and Universities of Applied Sciences in terms of global education and related matters. Only virtual discussions were held and visits in person were postponed until further notice after pandemic.

The pandemic had a positive impact on information and material available on projects. The Abilis representatives from programme countries, while working remotely, were trained to better use WhatsApp for sharing materials. New WhatsApp groups were established (Ethiopia, Nepal and Uganda) and information was shared faster than ever before. The main attention went to COVID-19 related projects, about which accessible information was shared both locally and in Finland.

2.7. Result 5: Improved disability inclusion and mainstreaming

During the year 2020, active advocacy work continued in Finland and in the programme countries. More emphasis was put on national level dialogues in the programme countries. Based on contacts created during the previous years, the PO/CO representatives had a growing number of stakeholders and platforms they worked in. At the same time, growing number of stakeholders contacted Abilis, both the HQ office and CO/POs, and requested capacity building on disability inclusion and related matters. The pandemic with increased needs on disability mainstreaming among stakeholders supported the wider approach of the advocacy work. At the same time, the pandemic led to many limitations in organising meetings and events. Luckily, technological solutions, such as webinars and remote meetings, replaced most of the planned gatherings and events, allowing work for disability inclusion to continue.

2.7.1. New dialogues and strengthened collaboration with stakeholders

At the HQ, a great number of meetings and round table discussions took place with the line Ministers and their cabinets, civil servants, politicians and representatives of NGOs. The dialogue with *the Finnish Government* was active throughout the year. A new contact was established with the *Ambassador for Disability Questions*, as well as with the *Peace Mediation Unit*. The new unit, as a new endeavour where human rights, humanitarian aid and development all come together, could promote the creation of one comprehensive policy towards people with disabilities. A joint Webinar on Disability and Fragile States was organised

⁴ Pääasialliset yhteistyöoppilaitokset: Viikin Normaalikoulu, Jyväskylän Ammattikorkeakoulu, JAMK, Diakonia ammattikorkeakoulu, DIAK

with Fida and the Development Policy Council of Finland in November 2020. The Finnish Minister of Foreign affairs was one of the key panellists.

Regular contacts were maintained with the Humanitarian Unit to keep the topic of disability inclusion in the broader inclusion work. Abilis, as a founding member of **GLAD** together with the MFA, continued to attend the GLAD Steering Committee meetings and the Humanitarian Working Group. Participation in the GLAD Summit in Washington in February 2020, in collaboration with the representatives of the Humanitarian Unit of the MFA, strengthened the dialogue with the humanitarian affairs. Membership in DRG - Reference Group on Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Humanitarian Action - provided a wider network and audience for Abilis to share its perspective on disability inclusion.

Dialogue with the **European Disability Forum** (EDF) continued through direct contacts and through the working group on Africa Strategy and International Development. Due to the EDF contacts, a meeting with the EU Commissioner Jutta Urpilainen was arranged just before the pandemic. The topic of the meeting was disability inclusion as part of ECHO mechanisms, as well as the new Africa Strategy of the European Union. Dialogues with international NGOs like CBM and other EU-level disability actors continued and relevant information sharing occurred during the pandemic.

The cooperation with NGOs was also active throughout the year. Fingo as an NGO platform created several working groups for Finnish agencies for discussions. Abilis provided disability mainstreaming in these working groups and networks. Active collaboration with several Finnish NGOs⁵ included meetings in Finland and in the programme countries. A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) provides the frame for the work in most of these cases. Joint actions in those countries where both parties operate, demonstrate concrete cooperation. Trainings and guidelines on disability inclusion have been provided to support disability mainstreaming in Finnish NGOs.

As the **private sector solutions** are highly risen topic on the agenda of Finnish development policy, Abilis got familiar with some possibilities to include disability inclusion in the sector. As one of the starting points, Abilis provided training on disability inclusion to Finnfund. The dialogue continued during the year and further cooperation was planned for the future. Similarly, business-oriented training on inclusion was offered to FairTrade, whose work has complemented Abilis work greatly since moving towards a more sustainable path to inclusive development. The work in promoting **digital inclusion** led to a consultancy assignment (through Abilis Consulting Ltd.) with Fingo, on digital inclusion practices.

The separate Results Matrix 2020 includes results of the programme countries (Outcome 5., Output 5.1.). The Annexes 1-8. describe the country situations and how Abilis CO/POs carried out advocacy tasks. Based on the outcome results and outputs, disability inclusion has increased in all programme countries.

2.7.2. Expertise assignments by persons with disabilities

In 2020, Abilis HQ, Country Programmes and advocacy programmes carried out about 40 diverse expertise assignments requested by authorities or other stakeholders at national and international levels. Finnish Ambassadors contacted Abilis to contribute to eight different events for disability inclusion in 2020, the Abilis Nepal Country Coordinator has been assigned as an expert member in the National Disability Direction Committee, OPDs in Vietnam were invited to be involved in drafting local action plans, based on the National Action Plan. In addition to these, eight disability awareness trainings for government organizations were

⁵ The main Finnish NGOs with whom Abilis worked closely in 2020 include the following: Fida International, Finn Church Aid, Finnish Refugee Council, Finnish Red Cross, Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Mission, Save the Children Finland, SaferGlobe, CMI - Martti Ahtisaari Peace Foundation. There was also some cooperation with Plan Finland, UFF and One Day work.

provided in Ethiopia and one in Vietnam. In Uganda, some assignments from the government were given to work for the finalization of two new laws.

2.7.3. Analysis of results on disability inclusion and mainstreaming

Abilis advocacy activities were adapted to the COVID-19 situation by increasing our work to provide lifeline support services to major humanitarian organizations on how to deal with marginalized populations, such as people with disabilities, in these new and uncertain times. This included multiple stakeholder meetings and direct consultancy tasks for humanitarian organizations on issues such as lifeline/bridge support in pandemics, as well as on creating good practices to reach out to OPDs and people with disabilities in lockdowns that severely hinder their ability to move around, and therefore affect health, livelihood and other vital areas of life. Abilis provided expertise through its engagement in the Reference Group on Inclusion about humanitarian aid, as well as through direct input towards humanitarian work.

Abilis finds it important to take advantage of crisis situations, since they provide an opportunity for more permanent larger changes. COVID-19 exposure is one of these situations. It has already created awareness among mainstream organisations on how little practical knowledge they have on people with disabilities on the ground. Thus, the pandemic has increased the visibility of disability dramatically. This, in turn, leads to increased demand of disability expertise. Abilis does its part to help turn the political will and exposure into practical results. It means committing donors to doing things the right way through genuine participation of people with disabilities at every step.



The Triple-Nexus approach challenges both Finland, Abilis and the global community to provide greater outputs for the resources allocated. Abilis has gathered expertise on operating in fragile contexts where development aid, humanitarian assistance and peace work are linked together. Further actions are needed in creating disability expertise for peace mediation, often strongly linked with development and humanitarian aid in fragile contexts.

There is also an acute need to promote functional models of disability inclusion for the private sector and investments. It is not an easy combination to promote disability rights while, at the same time, contributing to profit, and yielding the needed results on other cross-cutting topics, such as climate, gender and poverty alleviation. This work is only at the beginning, but considering the challenges of the year, Abilis is off to a very promising start.

Achieving disability inclusion requires capacity and willingness of political decision-makers to work for disability inclusion. This, in turn, requires awareness and understanding of disability rights and the UNCRPD. Disability-friendly policies at all levels should be prepared together with OPDs. That is why Abilis advocacy work, in Finland and in the programme countries, emphasized active and genuine engagement of persons with disabilities. The results indicate gradual progress. A minor modification of indicators for the coming years would lead to results easier to report.

2.8. Result 6: Resilience of persons with disabilities during COVID-19 pandemic

The pandemic exposed the reality of the vulnerability of marginalised groups like persons with disabilities. As the pandemic hit nations in growing speed, and led quickly to humanitarian

emergency, governments and international aid agencies were not well prepared for inclusive interventions. Persons with disabilities were too often left behind, not heard and were disproportionately affected by the adverse impacts of the pandemic and the ensuing security measures. In many programme countries, using face masks became mandatory, public gatherings were banned, and movement restrictions came into force. Those who did not comply were punished. People lost their means of income, which affected their livelihoods dramatically increasing hunger and malnutrition. Poor hygiene, on the other hand, put (the) people at great risk of getting the virus. From the very beginning of the spread of COVID-19, people with disabilities were left behind as the information was not provided in accessible formats.

To mitigate the impact of COVID-19 and alleviate the suffering in this humanitarian crisis, Abilis approved COVID-19 related fund requests and accepted changes to on-going projects, which enabled people with disabilities to cover their daily needs and raise awareness on how people with disabilities can protect themselves and their family members from COVID-19. The following chapter shares some of the main results of that targeted and acute work.

2.8.1. Raised awareness on COVID-19 and how to protect against infection

The approval of Abilis-funded projects during pandemic in 2020 was vital. Starting from information sharing to the distribution of hygiene materials, needs for financial support were huge. About 2,5 million people received information about COVID-19 and how to protect against the infection. Furthermore, 181 829 individuals with disabilities received health education and/or materials in accessible formats. Also, 2120 persons with disabilities learned about their human rights on health and medical services, relevant in this emergency.

2.8.2. Improved survival during humanitarian crisis

Through the projects, OPDs supported their members to survive and overcome the crisis. Hygiene products were distributed to 12 435 and dry food items to 4 586 persons with disabilities. Psychological support and counselling were offered to 1117 individuals with disabilities during the prolonged crisis and uncertainty. In total, 1936 women with disabilities got special support in cases of domestic violence or other forms of abuse and discrimination. In some projects financial support ensured persons with disabilities and their families could pay their rents and stay safe at home.

During lockdowns, many people with disabilities lost their income. Some groups were rich in ideas and developed ways to survive. Here is one example from Ethiopia that shows how eager and committed persons with disabilities were towards generating their own income even in the midst of crisis:

There were problems due to COVID-19 in delivering the spinning wheels with carders to project beneficiaries and giving training on how to spin. To overcome this problem, they took wool to their homes and made thread traditionally. They made 110 kg of woollen thread. The woollen thread was delivered to Addis Ababa for sale.

2.8.3. Collaboration with stakeholders due to pandemic response

To promote inclusive actions by governments and to strengthen disability friendly interventions by international aid agencies, eight projects emphasized cooperation with authorities and stakeholders. Many more OPDs collaborated with local governments, even though no exact result data is available. Four finalised projects highlighted the improved disability inclusion in

the operations of their local governments and other stakeholders, due to cooperation with OPDs. Further results may be visible in future, as lessons will be learned. At this stage, some examples of good practices can be shared:

- The local Police Station offered its compound for the distribution of hygiene products and food stuffs. The place was relatively accessible and reachable. There were also volunteer sign language interpreters to ensure information given reached the deaf.
- The Office of Labour and Social Affairs consulted the OPD on how to organize the event to support the members of the association by providing different food items which help them during the stay home and Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) to keep them from being infected (by coronavirus).
- The officers supported OPDs in the procurement process by indicating markets where they could find quality hygiene products in bulk with fair and reasonable price.
- The community and some government sectors appreciated the OPDs who offered their help in finding families with persons with disabilities, where this information was lacking.

2.8.4. Analysis of results on resilience of persons with disabilities during pandemic

Very soon after the pandemic started, the number of requests from OPDs grew tremendously. Abilis recognised the needs and analysed the situation together with the country representatives and partners. Based on the analysis – and the facts - that people with disabilities did not get access to information and other necessities, Abilis made a rapid decision to apply for a special permission from the MFA to channel project funding to acute needs to OPDs in the programme countries, including fragile states. After a quick approval by the MFA, in April 2020, Abilis was able to welcome applications for information dissemination and material production in an accessible way. By June 2020, about 300 000 euros and 62 new fund requests had been approved as the Abilis programme response to the pandemic. Later in November, an additional permission was approved by the MFA to channel another 100 000 euros towards COVID-related projects. In total, 76 projects in 2020 were aimed at acute needs of persons with disabilities who faced survival crisis due to the pandemic.

Through those projects millions of people received basic information about the virus and protective measures. Thousands of persons with disabilities received hygiene products, dry food, water and other necessities, as discussed earlier. Peer support was offered together with project facilitation and monitoring by Abilis representatives. Some groups received professional counselling. According to the feedback from OPDs, the Abilis support was vital. Rapid actions for new projects and flexibility to adjust on-going projects were appreciated by all OPDs. Some feedback describes this:

“The participants are grateful to Abilis for the support done at the right time. The support helped them protect themselves from the pandemic as well as continued their activities related to the livelihood.”

“All the members were able to stay at home safely during that scary time. The beneficiaries developed self-esteem and self-confidence due to the contribution they have done in the family and they were valued from others as well.”

The Abilis team worked hard to process a huge number of applications, followed by active communications, and conducted background checks and monitoring virtually and through networks. Risk management was carried out in this exceptional situation with care and innovative solutions.

3. Assessment of the year 2020

3.1. General assessment with a focus on the impact

Despite of the pandemic, the year 2020 was an active year with a great number of good outcomes. Through successful fund management, Country Programmes with wide advocacy and awareness raising activities, the programme contributed to the expected impact of the 4-year plan. The coverage of Abilis-funded projects was big and the number of participants in the programme bigger than in earlier years. Through the triple-track approach, Abilis Foundation was able to contribute to the policy level work and mainstreaming, as well as to processes through which OPDs and persons with disabilities gain necessary capacities and skills.

The COVID-19 pandemic created a humanitarian crisis that no one could foresee, and rapidly. However, Abilis took flexible measures and approved funding for COVID-19 awareness raising and emergency response activities to alleviate the social and economic impact of the crisis. Using technological solutions and programmes, virtual meetings and remote work practice, it was possible to continue the implementation of the programme activities. Even though the pandemic caused many challenges, projects and Country Programmes were implemented quite successfully considering the circumstances. No project was terminated due to the pandemic. Some projects were interrupted for a limited period of time, if the majority of the activities consisted of social meetings, trainings and peer gatherings. About 12 projects were modified and their activities were changed to meet acute needs of group members.

The pandemic increased the need for advocacy work. In the middle of the crisis, authorities and other stakeholders in many programme countries realised that they need to learn more about disability inclusion. Abilis representatives used earlier networks and created new ones. Active involvement is visible in results. The active communication work remained essential to share relevant information and news. As a result, awareness on disability has increased.

3.2. Leave no-one behind – contribution to SDGs

The Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development, with its 17 SDGs, provides a powerful framework for the Abilis programme⁶. It guides the work towards results-orientation, but supports Abilis Foundation to contribute to achievements of disability-inclusive development on a wider scale. The Agenda 2030 pledges **to leave no-one behind**, including persons with disabilities, and has recognized disability as a cross-cutting issue.



Out of the appointed goals, the Abilis programme contributed specifically to the SDG #10 – Reduced inequalities, that is one of the main aims of Abilis; #5 – Gender equality and #8 – Decent work and economic growth. As discussed earlier, women and girls with disabilities experience wider discrimination and abuse and should be supported specifically. When addressing social empowerment, self-confidence and independent living, the programme contributes to the SRG #3 – Good health and well-being. Additionally, livelihood projects, that are common in many Country

Programmes, focus on poverty reduction (SDG #1) and food security (SDG #2). Income

⁶ Agenda 2030 includes 7 targets and 11 indicators explicitly referring to persons with disabilities. <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>

generation projects often require vocational training, even though non-formal and short in duration, and thus contribute to SDG #4 - Quality education, including access to vocational training. The overall capacity building of persons with disabilities and OPDs contribute to the SDG #16 – Peace, justice and strong institutions to ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels. The unique approach of Abilis to reach people with disabilities even in disasters, like the COVID-19 pandemic, and to build their resilience contributed to the SDG #11 – Sustainable cities and communities. The entire Abilis approach, together with annual operations, strengthens the means of implementation and revitalizes the global partnership for sustainable development (SDG #17).

3.3. Contribution to Finnish Development Objectives

The Abilis Development Programme aims at **reduction of inequality** of persons with disabilities. All activities of the programme in 2020 emphasized **human rights** of and **elimination of discrimination** against persons with disabilities. **Gender equality** was an essential part of the programme as a cross-cutting theme and as a set focus among objectives and results (More: 2.2.). It contributes to the MFA Priority area 1 as the main target. The programme highlights the importance of persons with disabilities and OPDs to know their rights and to be able to claim them. Capacitated OPDs can *act actively* among other *civil society* actors and contribute to **sustainable development**. Supporting income generation and livelihoods of persons with disabilities, the programme aims at **poverty reduction**.

3.4. Challenges encountered and overcome

In 2020, Abilis succeeded in working without major new challenges. The **project level challenges** included some weak capacity of OPDs, particularly in financial management and reporting, project budget changes by OPDs without consulting Abilis, procurements being more expensive than amounts budgeted, and shortage of supplies and price inflation when purchasing items. In some cases, project audits were not adequate and did not meet the requirements. The Abilis HQ office supported CO/POs to work with the OPDs, as they play an important role in facilitation and monitoring. When the pandemic hit countries, and lockdowns and movement restrictions limited the work in person, advice and technical support was provided to **all Abilis representatives** to continue **working remotely**. The HQ staff kept regular contacts with CO/POs and showed professional flexibility while supporting them. The Board of Abilis gave constant support to the staff to implement the programme in the best operational way. New routines developed and the team spirit within the programme staff grew. Experience sharing and discussions with CO/POs strengthened the new working style – remote work – with good practices. However, some communication challenges appeared mainly due to poor Internet connections at home offices. This, in turn, led to some delays in project processing, payments and implementation of projects.

All in all, COVID-19 **affected the implementation of projects** in different ways, depending on the project location and on the infection situation in the country. As a matter of fact, it caused disruption in routine work. Mainly due to lockdowns, it limited income generation activities, temporarily. Some small businesses suffered the most. Unstable exchange rates led to losses in the amounts the funded OPDs and the CO/POs received. In practice, this meant less funds received than what was budgeted. Some project activities were interrupted and/or changed to other ones. This applies mainly to social gatherings and group trainings that were restricted. The saddest thing is that some positive results achieved were lost due to COVID-19. The coming years will show how temporary or permanent this loss is.

The short Country Programme Summaries contain more details, Annexes 1.-8.

During 2018-2021 **the Abilis M&E system** has gone through development, a process which is still on-going and is to be finalised before the next programme period. Due to new indicators that were established in the middle of the program (~ 2019), baseline data for some indicators was not available from all projects. In addition, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, some individual-level data from the final stage of projects could not be gathered, as face-to-face monitoring visits were restricted. These changes affected the results and the outcomes of the reporting period.

Currently some indicators are not relevant to all projects, yet are collected from most projects. Thus, they give a skewed overall result. If a project focuses on training a group's existing members in ICT skills, for example, it is unreasonable to set "Increased number of members" as an indicator/goal. This challenge should be taken into consideration when updating the collected indicators and the M&E system overall. Abilis should consider having **a pool of indicators**, from which relevant indicators for each project would be picked.

3.5. Lessons learnt

Collaboration – key for success

Abilis-funded groups identified cooperation, networking and advocacy as some key learnings for the sustainability and success of projects. Collaboration and advocacy work together with policy makers is key in overcoming some of the challenges facing persons with disabilities. Groups reported that through awareness raising activities, communities have learnt to engage people with disabilities in different activities, and give them opportunities to maximise their potential. Community authorities and other stakeholders should be used to help projects achieve their full potential. For example, animal husbandry projects benefitted from cooperation with the local authorities.

Continuous advocacy should be practiced to ensure sustainability and continuity of work started during Abilis-funded projects. Cooperation with different NGOs was also found important in finding more effective ways of using funding support. The Abilis Country Offices reported that joint efforts by OPDs in engaging and lobbying authorities have been seen to produce more tangible results as compared to singular efforts by each OPD. Thus, the role of Country Offices and Abilis facilitators is important in combining the advocacy of individual OPDs into bigger advocacy efforts.

Planning and management skills

Good planning and management skills were other key elements of learning raised. Many groups emphasized the importance of collecting relevant data to ensure good planning. Relevant data enabled the groups to answer to the diverse needs and to budget for different materials needed. Teamwork and commitment were seen as key elements to good management processes and ensuring efficient use of resources. In addition, sound management of projects secured support from the local authorities. Accessible ICT was also raised as something to give attention to.

Special attention to women with disabilities

Capacity building of leaders of groups, ensuring gender equality and capacity building of women with disabilities and parents of children with disabilities were seen important. Women with disabilities are the most disadvantaged and the poorest of the poor and the majority depend on support from families, friends, and community members. Women with disabilities in rural areas meet many difficulties and need support to improve their abilities and access to services and information. In addition, they are exposed to a greater risk of violence. Furthermore, COVID-19 has resulted in disproportionate impact on the lives of women with disabilities, which has triggered worsening inequality. This includes accessing information, getting health care services, access to water, sanitation and hygiene as well as to basic necessities such as meals, which may increase the risk of malnutrition. The key learnings to

overcoming these barriers women with disabilities face were to build capacity of women with disabilities and to support their leadership.

Safety and accessibility not to be forgotten

Security and safety issues and the importance of accessibility came up in the reports of lessons learnt. Safety was mentioned especially in relation to the COVID-19 projects, but also in relation to keeping property safe. Accessibility modification projects have great impact to ensure participation and the right to a decent working environment.

Inclusive interventions during crisis like COVID-19

Abilis support to COVID-19 related projects brought many learnings. The pandemic has showed that stakeholders have to work together to ensure the inclusiveness of persons with disabilities during such global crises. Governments fall short of reaching out to the people who live in rural areas. Therefore OPDs, INGOs and LNGOs play a significant role to improve the livelihoods of people. Flexibility from the donor side is essential. Abilis-funded responses were seen effective, for instance in delivering food items and medical materials to persons with disabilities directly to their homes. Accessible information was identified as one key gap in the mainstream responses to COVID-19. The Abilis-funded projects helped to fill in this gap by providing information in multiple forms to reach all person with disabilities by visual, audio, easy-to-read and door-to-door counselling services. The participants to Abilis projects felt that they received more solid knowledge of COVID-19 and their capacity to promote community awareness about effective prevention measures increased. Abilis projects disseminated information on COVID-19 to rural areas and dismantled harmful myths. One important lesson learnt was the provision of female-friendly prevention kits for COVID-19 that included sanitation pads.

Another important lesson from the COVID-pandemic was the use of online platforms in Abilis work, both internally between the HQ and focus countries as well as with the groups in each focus country. However, there have been huge challenges with the accessibility of online applications, for example for the visually and hearing impaired. However, Abilis has found the most accessible applications, and the teamwork and team spirit of the whole Abilis team, including all Country Offices in Asia and Africa, has been strengthened by regular online meetings and trainings.

Capacity building leads to many necessary changes

Empowerment, participation and peer support were reported to be the key elements for the independence of persons with disabilities. Participation of persons with disabilities creates an inclusion platform and dismantles negative attitudes. Training was recognised as a key element to empowerment and participation. Project participants had learnt to give feedback, which is an important part of participation and initiating change. A key learning in projects focusing of children with disabilities and their families was that peer support should be used for children with disabilities too as it is a great tool for empowerment. Some Abilis-funded projects focused on supporting parents of children with disabilities. Capacity building of parents contributes to the protection and well-being of children with disabilities.

The Abilis-funded projects and supported groups act as a platform for learning and sharing experiences. In addition, an important lesson learnt was the support needed to the families of the deaf to change attitudes and enable the participation of deaf family members. In addition, specific support to some impairment groups, e.g. the deaf and hard of hearing, or blind and visually impaired, were seen necessary to ensure equal participation of all persons with disabilities.

Generally, Abilis procedures are seen effective. Learning by doing is a good method for empowerment. Economic support is needed and it is an effective way of empowering persons with disabilities and changing attitudes in the communities. Many projects also mentioned the importance of psychological support. This is an area that Abilis may need to put more focus

on in the future. In addition, a clear message from the groups was that Abilis should continue supporting emergency responses for persons with disabilities and their families. The Covid-19 pandemic highlighted how persons with disabilities are still being left out of mainstream responses. The Abilis support should be quick, simple and smooth to process. The groups wanted Abilis to continue supporting global events such as the one organised by the World Federation of the Deaf, where groups of persons with disabilities who are in an especially vulnerable position in comparison to other groups of persons with disabilities would have a possibility of meeting their peers and exchange experiences and good practices. Long-term support to advocacy efforts was also raised by the groups.

More country-related lessons learnt can be found in the Annexes 1.-8.

4. Programme development, assessments and evaluations

4.1. Joint evaluation with sister foundations

Abilis, KIOS and Siemenpui Foundations conducted a joint external evaluation in Dec 2019 – May 2020. The evaluation was carried out by Cowan Coventry and Miia Toikka. The evaluation had a dual purpose of accountability and learning, and was expected to feed into the planning of the next programme period (2022-2025) and the strategy processes of the Foundations. The evaluation approach, methods and report were guided by OECD DAC evaluation criteria, in particular relevance, impact and sustainability. Field visits to projects were paid to Nepal and Uganda.

Based on a great number of interviews, document reviews and consultations, the evaluators gave their recommendations. The Evaluation Report highlights differences between the three foundations, but clearly shows also the common ground. The report recommends that “foundations approach” should be formulated and presented more clearly, and substance expertise of each foundation should be used more widely.



The Abilis, KIOS and Siemenpui Foundations continue to make a distinctive, relevant contribution to Finland's development cooperation. Their programmes clearly align to Finland's development priorities and their support to, and advocacy on behalf of, 'hard to reach' marginalised populations to defend or claim their rights is particularly relevant to the 2030 Agenda of 'leaving no-one behind'

The key recommendations for Abilis Foundation focused on grant management, the sustainability of project results and building civil society, and the capacity of OPDs. The observations of the evaluators to consider a broader interpretation of the human rights-based approach and advocacy work challenge Abilis to develop its way of describing the approach. The Management Response of Abilis discusses the matter in more detail.

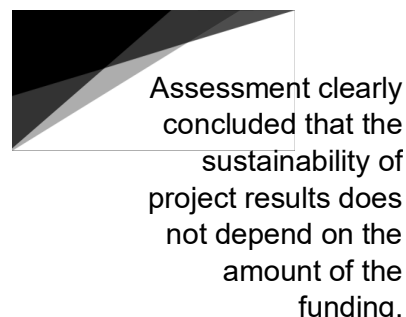
4.2. Internal assessments and their outcomes

4.2.1. Internal study on funding and project sustainability

Based on the recommendations of the joint evaluation of the foundations, Abilis conducted a participatory, internal assessment of how its funding mechanism could be improved. The assessment had two parts: The first one focused on the amounts of funding and sought to find out whether the existing maximum amounts for fast track, regular and special funding were suitable, or in need of modification. The second part analysed the sustainability of results

achieved in Abilis-funded projects. The aim was to identify what kind of factors contribute to sustainable results.

The first study was conducted internally via questionnaires sent to Abilis' global staff. It found that **funding amounts** should be bigger, especially due to the different price levels of programme countries. Having diversity in the amounts and in the length of projects was found necessary and important, as it makes project facilitation more manageable. It also responds efficiently to the diverse needs of OPDs with differing levels of capacity and different focuses and ambitions. The amount of the funding does not correspond to the amount of facilitation it requires, meaning that a small amount for a new organisation may require more technical support than a large project of a group with good capacity. Interestingly, the first assessment clearly concluded that the sustainability of project results does not depend on the amount of the funding.



In the second study, Abilis CO/PO staff contacted groups that had projects finalized in 2018–2019 and asked them a structured set of questions regarding the project and how its impact is felt today. The projects were chosen so that they would be diverse in content and size, and so that first time beneficiaries, as well as those more familiar with Abilis procedures, were included. Out of the sampled projects, 93% of livelihood projects had activities that were still continuing despite the pandemic, and in organisational projects, this figure was 83%.



The study concluded that projects are sustainable when they respond to actual needs. In general, factors contributing to sustainability were the same in African and Asian countries, but certain things stood out more in different contexts. General factors contributing to sustainability in all projects include: collaboration with authorities, ownership of projects, changed attitude and support of surrounding communities, communal ways of working, good communication, and skills sharing.

Furthermore, in livelihood projects specifically, motivation of participants, good planning and market research, networking with third parties, good financial management, further skills and product development, and the establishment of cooperatives, savings and loans associations and other types of solidarity groups were found to improve sustainability.

In organisational projects (capacity building, advocacy), team work, ownership, communication skills and personal development were found to be key. The most common reasons for discontinuing organizational activities were lack of resources, competition and broken equipment in need of maintenance. Many groups wish for more skills development in language, technology, financial management and different themes, such as SRHR and GBV.

Both studies, and comments from Abilis staff also, emphasized that in the future, more time and resources should be put into supporting groups already during the planning phase, which would continue as strengthened monitoring by Abilis staff. This would improve sustainability and minimize risks related to projects.

4.2.2. Internal study on SRHR issues for further development

In autumn 2020, Abilis recruited a university trainee, as an intern, from Lund University, Sweden, to undertake research on the intersectionality of Sexual and Reproductive Health

and Rights (SRHR) and Disabilities. This in-depth research used current literature, key expert interviews (mainly in Finland), data gathering and insights from the Abilis Programmes in Tanzania and Vietnam. A key outcome of the research was an options paper laying out a selection of strategies and indicators for developing SRHR themes within the Abilis programme. The Abilis global staff team participated in two training sessions on SRHR, led and developed by the intern, enabling staff to be well informed of current themes in SRHR and to have the knowledge of how to incorporate these issues effectively into the Abilis programme.

As a result, SRHR has been incorporated into the 2022-2025 Programme Plan as a thematic area, included in the objective '**Empowerment of women with disabilities with special focus on SRHR**'. Indicators have been developed to measure the impact of SRHR at the project and programme level. A number of Country Programme Plans have developed detailed approaches to SRHR relevant to the context within their country. Communication and advocacy activities also have an increased focus on SRHR.

4.3. Development of tools and procedures

4.3.1. Guidelines and manuals to support successful work

Abilis Guideline for Sustainable Livelihoods

Based on the findings of the Abilis internal assessment on income generation projects in 2019, as well as earlier studies on similar topics, Abilis identified the need for more systematic planning and facilitation of IGA and livelihood projects. Economic empowerment is one of the key focus areas in Abilis work and many IGA and livelihood projects are facilitated every year. Yet, particularly grassroots-level projects often face challenges that require more support in project planning and implementation, as well as in post-project operations for more sustainable, long-term results. To address these needs, Abilis developed a guideline to support planning and facilitation of IGA and livelihood projects. In 2020, ***the Abilis Guideline for Sustainable Livelihoods*** was finalised. The guideline covers the main issues that should be considered when planning and implementing an income generation or a livelihood project, practical tips for the facilitation process, and examples to assist with business planning. With the guideline, Abilis staff can support groups in planning more profitable and sustainable IGA and livelihood projects and to identify potential challenges already at the planning stage.

To support the practical introduction of the guideline and to strengthen the capacity of Abilis staff to facilitate the planning and implementation of IGA and livelihood projects, all Programme Coordinators and country ***staff were trained*** on the topic. Country-specific trainings allowed the staff to reflect their experiences on the ground and apply and adapt the guidelines according to the context and the beneficiaries. The guideline was distributed to the programme countries, including country staff and relevant implementing OPDs. At the time of writing, the guideline is translated also into Kiswahili to increase its usability and widen the audience and impact in Tanzania. More translations (such as Vietnamese, Russian) are planned to take place in 2021 and in the upcoming years.

Abilis in fragile contexts

Although the Abilis Fragile States Sub-programme is coming to an end, the need to continue operations in fragile contexts continues to be extremely topical. Most Abilis programme countries are considered or include areas that can be considered fragile. Thus, many Abilis staff members already have experience in working and supporting OPDs in fragile contexts. To strengthen the understanding of all Abilis staff members on fragility and to support facilitation of projects and OPDs in such situations, Abilis developed and updated ***the Abilis in Fragile Contexts Guidelines***, which bring together tacit knowledge of the staff and pool and compile expertise of other actors. The participatory development process drew on lessons

learnt by other international stakeholders, experience of Abilis staff, and Abilis' networks with extensive experience on working in various fragile circumstances.

To support the practical introduction of the guideline, Abilis has **started to train its staff**, and more trainings will be organised in the upcoming years, and already in 2021. In the future, the guideline can assist Abilis staff in project management, enable more OPDs also in fragile contexts to join development efforts, and contribute to more coordinated actions and improved risk management in Abilis operations. The updated fragile contexts guideline also contributed to the development of the new Abilis thematic programme, which focuses on improving the resilience of persons with disabilities in crises in 2022-2025.

4.3.2. Using technical solutions in data collection and recording

Improvements in the data base called Arkisto

Arkisto is the internal data management tool in Abilis, an online-based application, which facilitates especially analysis of and reporting on programme-related data. This database is coupled with another application, through which Abilis maintains online templates to produce standard documents. In 2020, Abilis updated the template system to reach a higher technical level, update to modern standards, and improve accessibility and risk management. At the same time, the data recording system got a lift-up and several technical features were fine-tuned. In addition, Abilis opened up the use of the recording system to its Country Office staff, hereby shifting and sharing certain project administrative tasks to the programme countries. Internal training sessions and a new user manual supported these improvements and will ensure standard working procedures within Abilis HQ staff and programme country staff.

KoBo & digital data gathering

Abilis has searched different opportunities to use technological solutions and innovations in project management. Accessible mobile technologies have a great potential to improve the efficiency of Abilis operations, enabling feasible and cost-effective data collection, and better assessment of the results and effectiveness of Abilis-funded interventions. In 2020, Abilis has particularly emphasised the development of digital data gathering and piloted a mobile field visit form using KoBo Toolbox. The initial results and feedback from the country staff were encouraging, highlighting the benefits of faster processing and more efficient use of resources. There are still some issues that need further development and testing, e.g. ensuring accessibility and compatibility with the existing database, and the development work is continuing in 2021.

4.3.3. Capacity building of team members in programme countries

During the year 2020, Abilis continued building capacity of the staff, including Abilis representatives in the programme countries. **Regular training session once a month** became established as part of the practice. Topics such as RBM, safeguarding, SRHR and sustainable livelihoods were discussed in the sessions.

Additionally, the programme followed the plan, and the recommendation of the external evaluation, to support South–South cooperation and information exchange between Abilis programme countries. Abilis Asian Country Office staff met in Nepal in February 2020. The meeting contained several topics, including training on RBM, GBV and SRHR. Due to the pandemic, capacity building of Abilis representatives in the African countries was organised locally. For example, safeguarding training was organised in Tanzania. A local expert was invited to facilitate the training.

5. Concluding words

As this report demonstrates, Abilis was able to implement the programme well in 2020, with amendments made. Available financial resources were used effectively and project funding maximised to projects in the programme countries (More: Financial Report 2020, a separate document). The acute and quickly changing pandemic situation in the programme countries was taken seriously. New working practices were developed to keep a high-quality level in all programme activities and to minimise risks. Capacity building of the staff was ensured by remote trainings and continuous dialogue between the HQ and CO/POs. The results-orientation guided the work, even though COVID-related projects were known not to follow the set indicators. It was also recognized that it was not possible to collect data in the middle of a pandemic in the same way as under normal conditions. Despite the pandemic, the programme work led to many positive outcomes (Results Matrix 2020). Active dialogue and information and expertise sharing with different stakeholders and networks strengthened the development towards equal rights and opportunities of persons with disabilities.

The exceptional year provided many lessons learnt. They will be utilised in the coming years and while developing the programme further. The implementation of the programme continues in 2021. Abilis remains open for flexible actions to support OPDs in their respective countries.

Annex 1. A short summary on the Myanmar Country Programme 2020

At the end of 2020, Abilis finally got its official registration after a process that took six years. The Myanmar Country Programme focused on promoting livelihood activities, capacity building of organisations of persons with disabilities, and dissemination of information and raising awareness on Abilis and disability. In addition, the Country Programme focused on supporting and building the capacity of women with disabilities. Geographically the focuses were Kayin, Kayah, Rakhine and Chin State, and Sagaing and Yangon Region. However, due to security risks in monitoring, it was not possible to implement projects in Rakhine State.

The Country Programme reached most of its goals for 2020. Training and technical support to groups has been provided during field visits. The number of new organisation of persons with disabilities has increased, especially in Chin State, due to the Abilis support. More organisations of persons with disabilities have been formed and the capacity of existing OPDs has increased. Thus, Abilis support has improved the disability movement in rural areas of Myanmar generally. Only the number of started projects was less than expected. This was due to the Covid-19 pandemic. In fact, most of the funded projects were Covid-19 emergency response projects for persons with disabilities.

Changes in operating environment

Covid-19 hit Myanmar at full force during the second half of the year. Abilis got permission from the Foreign Affairs of Finland to provide Covid-19 funding to groups. Nine Covid-19 emergency projects were funded in Myanmar, in total 66 484 euros. By supporting Covid-19 emergency responses for persons with disabilities, the effects of Covid-19 were reduced on persons with disabilities and their family members. During the Covid-19 pandemic, most of the persons with disabilities had difficulties performing and keeping their jobs. Most of Abilis Covid-19 support in Myanmar went to prevention of the disease (hygiene kits) and food support (cash for food or delivery of food directly to persons with disabilities). ABILIS Myanmar Country Office took part in the Covid-19 Emergency Response Committee for persons with disabilities. This committee coordinated the Covid-19 responses targeting persons with disabilities and made sure that the projects did not overlap. The monitoring trips to groups were impossible to conduct due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Most of the monitoring of groups' activities was managed via phone.

The general elections of Myanmar were held on 8th November 2020, despite the Covid-19 pandemic. The pandemic restricted voting. There were also restrictions on campaigning. However, the number of voters with disabilities increased.

There is fighting between the Myanmar military and ethnic armed groups in most of the areas in Myanmar. Among our targeted areas, Rakhine, Chin and Kayin state are in a state of conflict. The situation of human rights deteriorated in 2020 (Human Rights Watch) with restrictions on gatherings and journalists and activists being arrested. 130 000 Rohingyas are in closed camps and the internet was locked down in Rakhine for 16 months.

Major challenges/successes and lessons learnt

Persons with disabilities were not visible, were hidden and in silence, but now they stand strong for their rights. To fight for their rights collectively, OPDs are emerging in Southern Chin State, as well. Mindat and Kanpatlet townships inspire us very deeply, because after conducting disability rights awareness raising workshop, seven persons with disabilities in Mindat and eleven persons with disabilities in Kanpatlet came together and organized OPDs. Their OPDs are still young, but it's a good sign that there will be a change in the society through their voice. They are actively participating in Chin State level Disability Rights Movements. Now they have become activists, people who were being forgotten before.

Matupi and Paletwa townships are also having activity as groups of persons with disabilities and they will also be strengthened from the fund of Abilis Foundation.

The biggest lesson learnt during 2020 was the use of online applications for meetings. The Covid-19 pandemic forced all meetings and training online. There have been huge challenges with the accessibility of online applications, for example for the visually and hearing impaired. However, Abilis has found the most accessible applications and the teamwork and team spirit of the whole Abilis team, including all Country Offices in Asia and Africa, has been strengthened by regular online meetings and trainings. And, the Myanmar Country Office has learnt to manage the groups via phone, that has been essential in the everyday work.

Risk management

Political situation and civil war were identified as the biggest risks for the Myanmar Country Programme. It is unsafe to travel to some areas, because of ethnic armed groups, e.g. in Chin State. Organisations of persons with disabilities in conflict areas have challenges in conducting meetings and implementing projects. Monitoring of these groups is difficult. To mitigate this risk, Abilis will phase out from unsafe areas during 2021-2023 and use its networks to monitor the projects.

The rainy season and other challenging weather conditions restrict movement in some Abilis project areas, e.g. Chin and Kachin State. Thus, Abilis will not travel during the rainy season and contact to the groups will be upheld via phone. Regular contact with the groups is made via phone, also due to poor internet connections. The flexibility of Abilis funding allows for the possibility of groups to change their activities, so that they can be conducted despite the changing weather or other challenges.

The internal risks are mostly around the poor capacity of the groups in managing projects and the organisation, language barriers due to many ethnic backgrounds and limited participation of women with disabilities. All these risks have been addressed with targeted training to groups, budget allocations for translations and focused support to women with disabilities.

Annex 2. A short summary on the Nepal Country Programme 2020

The Abilis Country Office in Nepal is functional as a registered non-profitable company in the name of “Abilis Nepal Network” (ANN) since 2018. The major task of the Country Office is to facilitate the Abilis funding mechanism in Nepal, supporting Organisations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs) and Self-Help Groups (SHGs) working in all parts of the country with particular focus in grassroots levels. The Country Office is facilitating for developing project plans, and for the implementation of the projects to achieve Abilis objectives and priorities mentioned in the Abilis Strategic Plan 2018-2021. Monitoring of project activities, reporting to Abilis Headquarters, maintaining accountability and ensuring project results are the major tasks carried out by the Country Office while facilitating the Abilis funding mechanism in Nepal.

The planned thematic areas in 2020 were capacity building, income generating activities and the empowerment of Women with Disabilities. Planned geographic areas were the rural areas across province 2 (Madheshi province in the south) and province 7 (Far-West). The Nepal Country Programme managed to partly cover the planned thematic areas. However, it was not possible to focus on the planned geographic areas, due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Country Office organised an Abilis Asia Country Office meeting and capacity building for promoting Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights of persons with disabilities in Nepal, in February, 2020. The major element of the meeting was the capacity building in RBA to the Country Offices in Asia, which was facilitated by Ms. Veera Pensala. The session was physically attended by the Country Coordinators and other staff of Nepal and Tajikistan, whereas the participants from Myanmar and Vietnam participated through Skype, due to the travel restrictions caused by corona virus outbreak. A workshop on gender-based violence on women with disabilities and SRHR, particularly focusing on the Asian context, was organized as part of the meeting. The workshop was attended by local women with disabilities and the personnel of Abilis Asia Country Offices. The Country Office has extended longstanding coordination with the Finnish Embassy. The participants of Asia Seminar got an opportunity to attend a joint meeting at the Embassy with Finnish NGOs. This showcased how the Embassy of Finland is cooperating and collaborating with Abilis Foundation at country level, so that such practice can be transmitted to other Asian countries.

The Country Office facilitated the process of “Joint Evaluation of Abilis, KIOS and Siemenpuu Foundations” during 29 February - 6 March 2020, at country level. The process included group interviews and interviews with project participants. Some project sites were also visited. The Abilis Country Coordinator contributed to the evaluation process providing feedback on both the Inception Report and the Final Evaluation Report through Abilis HQ.

Changes in Operating Environment

The Ministry of Women, Children and Elder Citizen formed the “National Disability Direction Committee”, following the provision of Act on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. The committee is headed by the Minister and comprise 24 members with 10 representatives from classified OPDs and two members as disability rights experts. The Abilis Country Coordinator has been assigned as expert member in the committee.

Successes of the Country Programme

The Nepal Country Coordinator was very successful in networking and advocating for the rights of persons with disabilities. He organised 8 meetings and 5 policy dialogues with Ministry of Federal Affairs and Local Development, Ministry of Health and Population, and with Municipalities and National Human Rights Commission for the inclusion of persons with disabilities in COVID-19 response, to cover rights-based provisions in the Rules on the rights of persons with disabilities. He frequently advised the government of Nepal on disability

policies. For example, a training was provided to the partners and project staff of UN Women on disability-inclusive project management. The Country Coordinator also participated in the development of collaboration with National and International stakeholders for promoting disability-inclusive development in achieving SDG targets. Additionally, the Abilis Country Coordinator was nominated by the Ministry of Women, Children and Elder Citizens in the “National Disability Direction Committee” as disability rights expert.

One of the results of the advocacy work lead to a system whereby the daily news update about COVID-19 situation was interpreted in sign language through National Television. This was the contribution of the advocacy carried out by the Abilis-funded organisations under the projects.

Challenges and risks

The Social Welfare Act didn't cover the disability allowance to severe disability, and that affected the persons who are receiving the disability allowance. Abilis-funded organisations have to plan an advocacy strategy for the amendment of such a provision that excludes persons with disabilities.

A major risk was that most of the grassroots level organisations have low capacity of project planning and objectives setting. Thus, the project results are not quite relevant and do not always follow the Abilis objectives. The Nepal Country Office is working on the issue by focusing on the capacity building of grassroots level OPDs and Self-Help Groups.

An unexpected risk that could not be predicted was the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic. The first case of Corona virus infection was found in February 2020 and the lockdown was declared by the Government since 23 March 2020 in Nepal. Due to the travel restrictions, the organisations couldn't continue their regular project activities. Some of the old projects requested some modification of activities and Goals of the project to cover the humanitarian support to persons with disabilities. The regular field visit was also affected, however the virtual method was applied to monitor the project activities and to interview the project beneficiaries.

Annex 3. A short summary on the Vietnam Country Programme 2020

The Vietnam Country Programme focused on livelihood activities, supporting girls and women with disabilities, and on capacity building of new organisations of persons with disabilities in Hanoi and Da Nang. The Country Office also concentrated on advocacy work to raise awareness on disability. Abilis extended its registration to three selected areas of North Vietnam in 2020, as persons with disabilities in those areas face a lot of discrimination due to their disability and ethnic background.

The Country Programme reached its goals for 2020. Face to face training has been conducted, but the technical support has moved to online support and providing training to groups during field visits. Most OPDs have become stronger, received more appreciation from their community and got more attention from other stakeholders. Most persons with disabilities can earn more income after taking part in Abilis-funded projects. Some started their own business and also created more jobs for others. Women and girls with disabilities have been trained, have started their own businesses and also created more jobs for their peers. South to South support has been used. Asia Country Office staff met in Nepal, with online participation from the Vietnam staff due to Covid, to discuss supporting women with disabilities.

Changes and challenges in operating environment

The Covid-19 pandemic restricted movement and slowed the implementation of Abilis-funded projects to a degree. According to a survey by UNDP, 96% of respondents with disabilities had financial difficulties; 30% of respondents were made unemployed due to COVID-19 and 49% who work had their hours reduced, and 59% received a pay cut; 82% of respondents expressed concern for their health problems. Thus, persons with disabilities are struggling with income and health challenges due to the pandemic.

The space for civil society is still open, but it is harder for organisations of persons with disabilities to set up and work in Vietnam. CSOs are one of the government's three focus areas for development. However, there is no clear guidance for CSOs, including OPDs, on how they should set up and run their organisations. Each province or city understands the regulations in a different way, resulting in confusion for both local authorities and CSOs. For example, in Da Nang it is quite easy to set up an organisation but Hanoi is stricter. In addition to these challenges in setting up an organisation, all organisations need to apply for permission from the local government to implement a project. The increased administrative procedures have complicated project management and delayed the start of funded projects.

Major lessons learnt

Close collaboration with local partners is important in communities to monitor the projects. This means OPDs, which are umbrella-OPDs or OPDs with good reputation.

Some costs should be allocated to cover expenses, when Abilis invites representatives from local partners to join some monitoring trips in the local areas. In addition, some costs should be allocated to invite COLDE/ARB members to join some monitoring trips for them to have better understanding and insight about Abilis-funded projects and thus give more support for the Country Office.

Risk Management

The Vietnam Country Office identified political changes as an external risk. Currently, a draft law on Associations has been submitted to the National Assembly deputies. There are still many disagreements, so the process has been delayed. The delay of passing this draft Law on the Association has affected the establishment and operation of organisations of people with disabilities in Vietnam.

In addition, there is a decree from the Vietnamese Communist Party that affects the operation of all organisations of persons with disabilities in Vietnam by restricting the power persons with disabilities have in the running of their organisation. According to this decree, OPDs will be merged with other organisations for/related to disability. Most often this will result in a situation where the president of this new organisation is not a person with a disability. Thus, the number of persons with disabilities would reduce in the governing body of the organisation. As a result, the organisation may not be a real OPD in the end. All in all, the voice of persons with disabilities will be reduced.

The expansion to new project areas was seen as an internal risk. The new project areas are remote rural areas in a mountainous region. This makes monitoring and facilitating projects more challenging. The field visits have to be planned well beforehand to mitigate these risks. Monitoring the remote areas takes more time, but the Abilis working method is effective in supporting the groups with low capacity in rural areas. The Abilis Country Office staff combine logistically sensible areas to one field visit to avoid extra travelling back and forth. They train many groups during the visits to the remote areas and Abilis also uses its good networks to reach groups in remote areas.

Groups of the Deaf need a lot of support, but working with them is hampered by the lack of knowledge of sign language and lack of sign language interpreters. Abilis Country Office has a budget line for reasonable accommodation to cover the costs for sign language interpretation so that the groups of the Deaf would have an equal opportunity to apply for Abilis funding.

Annex 4. A short summary on the Tajikistan Country Programme 2020

In 2020, the Tajikistan Country Programme focused on the **following thematic areas**:

- Awareness raising on disability and human rights and the UNCRPD.
- Capacity building of Organizations of persons with disabilities.
- Vocational training and income generation activities.
- Supporting the South–South cooperation and information exchange between Abilis programme countries in Asia.

In 2020, Abilis continued to support the activities for awareness raising on disability and human rights and the promotion of the ratification of the UNCRPD in Tajikistan. The Tajikistani Government approved in February 2020 the National Action plan on preparedness to Ratification and implementation of the UNCRPD. The ratification is planned at the end of 2023. This is a result from the active campaign of the OPDs that Abilis has supported since 2018 in many regions. As a result, the knowledge of right-holders and duty-bearers on the human rights and the UNCRPD has been increased.

The project participants were persons with disabilities and parents of children with disabilities. Special focus was given to women with disabilities and OPDs led by women with disabilities. Considering deprivation and marginalization, the priorities were given to i) girls and women with disabilities, ii) children with disabilities, and iii) people with hearing impairments. The working area will cover Dushanbe, Sugd region, Khatlon region and five Districts of Republican Subordination (Vahdat, Lash, Gissar, Faizabad, and Rasht).

Changes in the operating environment

The programme implementation was heavily affected by the global **COVID-19 pandemic**. Abilis could not do the planned monitoring visit to Tajikistan and the planned training for women with disabilities on sexual harassment had to be cancelled.

The Tajik government denied a long time the existence of the pandemic in the country. The first cases were openly published only at the end of April 2020. Despite all the precautions the Country Office staff caught the disease, which affected the work. Many ongoing projects found themselves in the situation that the planned project activities (trainings, round table discussions, public meetings) could not be held. Thanks to the guidance and good facilitation, we managed to find alternative ways of implementing the project activities and none of the existing projects had to be cancelled or interrupted. The advocacy work was shifted to radio, instead of meeting face to face and trainings were shifted to be shown on a local tv channel.

Abilis also provided OPDs funding in order to spread the information about COVID-19 among persons with disabilities. Four COVID-19 related projects were approved during the year 2020.

Covid-19 also revealed the existing weaknesses and low capacity of organizations of persons with disabilities. Therefore, a lot of capacity building activities were needed in order for organizations of persons with disabilities to survive this time. 18 out of 20 finalized projects had capacity building elements in their project activities. The **capacity building of organizations of persons with disabilities** ended up being the second major theme during the year 2020.

COVID-19 also hindered the planned activities for **economic empowerment**. Only one income generating activity project was started last year. That was as small-scale farming learning project for 10 persons with disabilities in Shaartuz district of Khatlon region. The project is still ongoing, but the first results are very promising.

There is a new rule from the Government of Tajikistan from January 2020 and Ministry of Justice instructions that all civil society organizations need to submit reports including detailed

financial expenses report to Ministry of Justice until the end of February each year. Instructing organizations of persons with disabilities about these new regulations increased the workload of the country staff. We have also noticed that the registration of the new organizations has become more difficult (partly due to COVID-19 also). During the year 2020 only one new organization got a registration, the project is delayed because of that.

Major successes and challenges

The major success of the Country Programme 2020 is related to the promotion of awareness raising on disability and human rights and the promotion of the ratification of the UNCRPD in Tajikistan. Thanks to the intensive campaign of the Organizations of persons with disabilities supported by Abilis, Tajikistan Government approved, in February 2020, the National Action plan on Preparedness to Ratification and Implementation of the UNCRPD. The ratification is planned at the end of 2023. As a result of Abilis-funded projects, the knowledge of right-holders and duty-bearers on the human rights and the UNCRPD has been increased and it is not forgotten even during the crisis situation.

The major challenge that we faced in 2020 was the global pandemic COVID-19. Due to that many project plans had to be re-evaluated and changed because of the restrictions for public meetings, face to face events and travelling. The major success was that we managed to find alternative ways to implement the project activities and none of the projects had to be interrupted. We also managed to distribute masks, hygiene items and food and, more importantly, spread the information about COVID-19 and other virus-infected diseases to persons with disabilities and their families. However, some important activities, like training of women with disabilities on sexual harassment, had to be cancelled, because the trainer could not travel. That money was used for one of the COVID-19 projects.

Risk Management

The main risks identified in the risk matrix are the very low capacity of the organizations of persons with disabilities, changing staff, lack of resources, increased number of external official audits/inspections, corruption within the country, natural disasters, the shrinking space for NGOs and economic instability. The outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020 posed a new and unexpected risk to the Country Programme that no one could predict. As a result of COVID-19, many project activities could not be implemented and monitored as planned, as the Country Programme staff got infected. It is too early to say what the consequences of COVID-19 are, but it seems that the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic intensified the possibility of some identified risks to happen, and even caused some risks to happen.

Annex 5. A short summary on the Ethiopia Country Programme 2020

Year 2020 was exceptional in many ways, as it was the last year of the partnership between Abilis and Ethiopian Centre for Disability and Development (ECDD), but at the same time the first year of the partnership between Abilis and Ethiopian Women with Disabilities National Association (EWDNA). In addition to the change of partner organisation, global COVID-19 pandemic, the war in Tigray Regional State in Ethiopia, and the internet lockdown brought challenges for the implementation of the Country Programme during 2020.

ECDD and EWDNA facilitated Abilis funding activities in Ethiopia, focusing primarily on income generating and capacity building activities of groups/cooperatives of persons with different kind of disabilities, and COVID-19 emergency response. A new OPD called 'Empower Persons with Disabilities Ethiopia Association' (EPDEA) was established to coordinate and facilitate the export carpet production chain and the projects related to it. This was essential, as the majority of small and medium-sized IGA projects focuses on Sera Helsinki cooperation and the export carpet business activities run by persons with disabilities. Special focus was given to women with disabilities in every activity, which resulted in a higher participation of women with disabilities and a higher number of women with disabilities benefiting from the Country Programme.

During 2020, 17 funding applications were approved. The total amount of 127 052 Euros was granted to new projects. 47 374 Euros was granted to COVID-19 awareness raising and emergency response projects, and 59 731 Euros to projects that contribute to the export carpet business and Sera Helsinki cooperation. Most of the finalized 20 projects were small IGA projects that focused on sanitation services, leather works and tailoring, shoe making, electronics and food preparation. A few projects contributed to the export carpet business value chain and capacity building of OPDs. Five projects focused on COVID-19. The total number of indirect beneficiaries of finalized projects was 10 720. Comparing the numbers of direct and indirect beneficiaries to the target numbers, the programme reached more than three times as many people as originally planned.

Abilis, ECDD and EWDNA have collaborated tightly during the year. Both Abilis and ECDD have trained EWDNA staff for Abilis work. ECDD and EWDNA started the revision work of the Abilis Country Profile Paper of Ethiopia during the reporting period. During the year, EWDNA HQ office became equipped and staffed for Abilis work.

Changes in operating environment

The prevalence of global COVID-19 pandemic and temporary political unrest affected Abilis work in Ethiopia during 2020. Ethiopia ratified the State of Emergency proclamation to control the Spread of COVID-19. To mitigate the impact of COVID-19 and alleviate the suffering of this humanitarian crisis, Abilis approved COVID-19 related funding and accepted changes to on-going projects, which enabled people with disabilities to cover their daily needs and raise awareness how people with disabilities can protect themselves and their family members from COVID-19. The Ethiopian Government made also efforts to disseminate information regarding the spread and prevention methods of COVID-19.

The tension and the war between Tigray People Liberation Front (TPLF) and the Federal Government affected Abilis work only little, as the geographical focus was in the regions of Amhara, Oromia, and Addis Ababa City Administration during the reporting period. The war caused only an information gap when processing the final report of one Abilis-funded group.

Despite the challenges, almost all the planned activities were successfully carried out. Applications and reports were processed from the home office, and a lot of information was gathered via telephone conversations. Monitoring of the projects was partly conducted through phone calls and email exchange, due to the state of emergency and movement restrictions. Out of four Abilis Review Board (ARB) meetings, only two were arranged due to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. Instead of physical meetings, regular applications and final reports

were reviewed via email exchanges. Five Basic Business Skills (BBS) trainings, one life skills training and one Sexual and Reproductive Rights (SRH) training were arranged for Abilis beneficiaries by taking care of safety measures. A project launching workshop regarding the Abilis funding mechanism was carried out. Furthermore, four Abilis manuals were translated into Amharic during the reporting period.

Challenges, successes and lessons learnt

The Ethiopia Country Programme 2020 focused on social and economic empowerment, and capacity building of persons with disabilities and their organisations. Disability awareness of the community was improved and it contributes a lot to create inclusive society within that community. Project participants were able to cater for their basic needs, get married and establish family, send their children to school, cover their family medical expenses and lead independent life due to increased income. The number of project participants who manage their own finances, and the number of project participants who are self-employed also increased. At the same time, the project participants started to build up self-esteem and self-confidence, which resulted in an increased number of project participants who participate in social events of the community. Furthermore, the number of friends that project participants have made increased. Appreciation from community increased, as many persons with disabilities are working hard and living independently. OPDs capacity was strengthened as the capital of the associations improved, communication with government authorities and decision makers improved, the number of contacts, cooperation, orders, and invitations from local authorities or stakeholders increased, and the number of meetings participated in or organized with decision makers, authorities and other stakeholders increased during the reporting period.

Risk Management

Political instability and ethnicity-based violence was identified as the most severe risk in Ethiopia in 2020. This risk was realised during the year as temporary political unrest in certain areas and as a war in Tigray. For Abilis work, this risk had only little effect, as the work was conducted in relatively secure areas.

Abilis took flexible measures and approved funding for COVID-19 awareness raising and emergency response activities to alleviate the social and economic impact of the crisis. COVID-19 showed also that money transferred to Ethiopia cannot be transferred out from the country. This became evident in one project, which was changed from Sign Language interpreter training to COVID-19 emergency response. Also, natural disasters resulting from climate change take place in Ethiopia, but so far, their impact to Abilis projects has not been that big. However, environmental aspects are taken into consideration when assessing project applications and reports.

When it comes to risks at the project level, weak capacity of the groups/cooperatives remains the major risk for the successful implementation of the projects. Lack of project and financial management experience delays the implementation of the projects. However, no projects were terminated, and no money misuse or corruption were detected during the year.

Changes in the board and management composition of the OPD showed that the capacity and commitment to implement and report certain activities may change dramatically. This was evident in Sera cooperation, when one OPD decided not to sign a new agreement with Sera and violated its reporting responsibilities to Abilis. This had a huge negative impact on the livelihoods of persons with disabilities who were making design carpets, but also for Sera, as the delivery times of the design carpets were prolonged and the quality control of the carpets was jeopardised, which put the business as a whole in a very difficult situation. From the democratic viewpoint it is important, however, that the OPD has the possibility to change the composition of the board and management, but at the same time, the new board and management needs to take care of their responsibilities related to on-going activities and partnerships.

Annex 6. A short summary on the Tanzania Country Programme 2020

A small number of projects finalised in 2020 were delayed from previous years, in most situations the groups needed extra support to finalise the reporting of the project, once activities had been successfully completed.

As in previous years, Abilis finalised projects which supported awareness raising to the community and local government. In Arusha the following disability day events were supported: World Autism Day; International Week of the Deaf and International Day of Persons with Disabilities. Staff from Abilis also participated in the International Week of the Deaf celebrations in Tabora.

In total, 11 projects were successfully finalised. One project was interrupted (changes) due to dissolution of the beneficiary organisation and project activities. One project was interrupted (terminated) following an investigation by a partner organisation into safeguarding allegations. Abilis continues to strengthen safeguarding, building the capacity of the funded organisations and working with other donors and partners to follow up incidents. Staff from Abilis Tanzania participated in two bespoke safeguarding training sessions during 2020.

Project visits outside Arusha took place in July, August and September. Visits inside Arusha took place on a regular basis when it was safe to do so, due to the pandemic. Technology and communication made it easier to maintain contact with beneficiary organisations, enabling follow-up and support on project implementation.

There were two Abilis HQ visits, one in January 2020 and a longer capacity building visit during October and November 2020. Meetings were held in person and remotely with key partners including the Finnish Embassy in Dar es Salaam, Fingo, Fida, CHAVITA, GlobalGiving, the National Lottery Community Fund and Finnish Special Education in Africa.

15 projects were started in 2020, most on the theme of livelihoods and COVID-19 response. The International Day of Persons with Disabilities was supported in Dodoma in December 2020. Pilot projects focusing on Women and Youth with Disabilities were supported and a Special Grant was approved to collect data and for the study “Evolution of Disabled People’s Organisations in Tanzania: Leaders, Experiences and Stories”, which will be used to strengthen the capacity of future leaders in organisations of persons with disabilities.

Changes in operating environment

The initial impact of COVID-19 on the Tanzania programme was less disruptive than in other Abilis programmes. Nearly all of the livelihoods projects continued, albeit with delays but without major changes. New projects continued to be supported and the pipeline of applications developed with groups over the previous 3-6 months enabled project applications to be approved throughout the pandemic.

Abilis Tanzania took an early lead in supporting COVID-19 response projects in March and April 2020, choosing to work with previously funded groups familiar to Abilis, to enhance community ownership and reduce the likelihood for fraud and mismanagement. An initial five COVID focused projects were supported, two on the theme of providing accessible COVID information to persons with disabilities, and three projects supplying COVID protection equipment to persons with disabilities.

Risk management

Abilis continues to proactively manage programme risks in Tanzania. The Tanzania risk matrix was updated in autumn 2020, safeguarding issues and mismanagement in the beneficiary groups are considered as high-risk areas and need targeted mitigation to ensure a safe and effective Abilis programme. There is a growing concern about practices within some national

level Tanzanian OPDs. Abilis will specifically target youth and female-led OPDs and support future leaders of the disability movement to build organisations which fully represent their members. Abilis will also communicate with other donors as part of background checks and to share information.

A success story – in an acute situation when the pandemic hit

Tanga COVID Soap project 20AF066

Abilis had supported a group of deaf women in Tanga (18AF063-FT) to establish a business producing and selling liquid soap and other cleaning products. The Abilis support ended in October 2019 and the business was successfully continuing activities during a monitoring visit by Abilis HQ staff and Chairperson. When the COVID pandemic started to expand in March 2020, Abilis realised that soap and cleaning products would be in high demand. Discussions were held with the group about the feasibility of expanding their business and how best to respond to the demand for soap-based products. It was decided to expand production through buying additional production equipment, raw materials and packaging. The group also requested transport to enable safe delivery of cleaning products. The Abilis Tanzania staff supported the group to rapidly develop the application, which was approved by Abilis on 23.3.2020 and the first instalment reached the group's bank account a week later. This is an example of successful cooperation between Abilis and beneficiaries to build the capacity of the disability sector to respond to situations within their own countries.



(left) Delivery of base chemicals for soap production.



(right) The group's retail shop in Tanga with soap and cleaning products for sale.

Annex 7. A short summary on the Uganda Country Programme 2020

During the year 2020, the Ugandan Country Programme continued with the implementation of the planned activities and building on achievements from previous years. These were:

1. Persons with disabilities have improved income levels and been economically empowered.
2. OPDs have improved capacities for organizational, project and financial management.
3. OPDs are active in their societies through their contributions to development and issues affecting them.

The Country Programme focused on two main thematic areas; Income generation activities (IGA) and capacity building of persons with disabilities and OPDs. The geographical working areas were central and western regions of Uganda.

Projects, which were started in 2020, reflect the main aim of the 4-year Country Programme as well as the 2020 programme plan for Uganda. Expected results were improved standards of living, self-reliance, improved self-esteem, ability to afford basic day to day needs, having a dignified life, strengthening of OPDs' capacities, closer collaboration with authorities/stakeholders, and more visibility of Abilis Foundation in Uganda. Achievements can be seen through the number of project participants who have improved their incomes, employed/self-employed and/or having small business enterprises, access to funding from government disability grant, increased collaboration with authorities/stakeholders, disability policies that have been enacted into law and more visibility of Abilis Foundation in Uganda. A total of 15 new projects were funded and 14 finalised.

Changes in operation environment

The government of Uganda requested all OPDs to validate their operations in the country. This required extra registration according to the Uganda Companies Act. However, this process was on hold due to the COVID 19 situation, which took priority. The process has now been resumed.

The COVID situation also affected operations, as there was a lockdown from March to June. Although restrictions were lifted, there were standard operation procedures (SOPs) which were to be followed by everyone. Some of these are still in place. The effect of the lockdown and SOPs contributed to a slow-down in operations. Staff had to work from home and most groups could not implement projects effectively. This was seen more with grassroot groups who could not even communicate effectively, as they relied on internet cafes which were closed.

Major challenges

- COVID 19 affected implementation through lockdown and caused disruption in routine work for both the Country Office and the funded groups. It also affected other activities, such as income generating activities. These were not seen as essential services and hence were not operational during the lockdown.
- Unstable exchange rates that led to losses in the amounts received by the groups and the Country Office. This meant less funds received than what was budgeted.
- As there were restrictions in movement, it was difficult for groups to get the required support and facilitation.

- Restrictions in movement also affected the groups, for example, some project beneficiaries lost their livestock because of non-availability of veterinary services during the lockdown.
- Communication challenges due to working at home leading to delays in project processing, payments and implementation.

Lessons learnt

Joint efforts by OPDs in engaging and lobbying authorities have been seen to produce more tangible results, compared to singular efforts by each OPD. Abilis Country Office was part of the donors who supported the national high-level dialogue meeting in 2018 where different OPDs, authorities and other stakeholders gathered to ensure that key UNCRPD issues are domesticated and implemented in the country. This process led to joint efforts by OPDs to ensure that issues raised by persons with disabilities were included in national acts. This effort led to the enactment of the Persons with Disabilities Act, in 2020, and the Mental Health Bill, in 2020 as well.

Risk Management

In our plan there were three main risks indicated:

- Political instability: Impact of this risk was low. This did not have any major effect on the programme.
- Climate-related issues: There were cases of floods in some parts Uganda, which led to challenges in monitoring groups. However, the impact of the risk was considered low.
- Delayed reporting: The impact of this risk is low to medium. Most groups have reported on time or with some delays. The unforeseen COVID 19 situation has contributed to this, as it was a challenge to make follow-up visits on the groups.

Annex 8. A short summary on the Fragile States Sub-programme 2020

Main fragile states in Africa

The Democratic Republic of the Congo

In 2020, 11 new projects in the DRC were funded under the Fragile States Sub-programme. The projects took place in the provinces of South Kivu (8) and Kongo-Central (3). Seven regular projects focused on **improving livelihoods** through income generating activities and vocational training, two smaller projects focused on **organizational capacity building** by completing registration processes of grassroots organisations, and two fast track projects responded to the needs of the most vulnerable persons with disabilities during the first wave of **COVID-19**.

Three of the livelihood projects were continuation of previous initiatives: Strengthening and further developing income generating activities and businesses through added value to the end product, and by reducing workload (manual labour). The majority of the beneficiaries were **women with disabilities**, and four projects and/or groups were also managed by women with disabilities. Five of the projects were finalized in 2020, achieving their goals despite hindrances caused by COVID-19.

Livelihood and **vocational training** projects identified more potential beneficiaries than the projects could take, in other words, needs of persons with disabilities in the DRC remain significant. Participants in livelihood projects were usually able to see results, i.e., gain income, already during the final stages of the project, and paying their children's school fees was often the first priority to be taken care of.

Registration of non-governmental organisations and opening of organisations' bank accounts lack transparency in the DRC. Government offices do not give receipts for paid registration fees, which change according to time and place. Opening a bank account is costly, takes a long time, and requires extensive registration at different levels.

A survey sent to the beneficiary groups mapped the needs of OPDs in the DRC. Although the needs were found to be significant, the high-risk environment and the high likelihood of misuse of funds, lack of other Finnish actors in the DRC, and lack of possibility to travel and get to know the local disability movement personally, led Abilis to make the decision to withdraw from the DRC after 2021.

Mozambique

Seven projects from 2019 continued in 2020, most of which were livelihood projects. Four of these were also finalized during 2020. The rest were delayed due to COVID-19 and violence in Sofala province. In total, 15 new proposals were approved and funded in 2020, seven of which were small **COVID-19 response projects**. The COVID-19 projects covered different disability types and provinces in Mozambique. In addition, one regular project that started as a capacity building project, was changed to COVID-19 response.

Seven new, non-COVID-19 related projects took place in Maputo, Sofala, and Manica provinces. Three were **livelihood projects**, one focused on sign-language training of healthcare professionals, and three were **capacity building** and/or **awareness raising** projects of organisations and the disability movement. One of them was the first Abilis-funded project by AMUSAM, an association of persons with psychosocial disabilities in Maputo, which is notable as psychosocial disabilities are often overlooked. One project was finalized already in 2020, and the rest continued to early 2021.

Though the pandemic caused economic hardship, which affected at least one livelihood project as business opening hours were restricted, projects were implemented quite successfully considering the circumstances. The presence of armed groups in Mozambique meant that banks required a lot of documentation before allowing the withdrawal of funds, but no significant delays occurred.

Two projects of organisations of **women with disabilities** were funded, and two other projects were **led by women with disabilities**. One finalized project that started in 2019, focused on training youth with disabilities about SRHR. In general, **gender equality, SRHR and GBV** remain areas where more work needs to be done and where OPDs need to strengthen their capacity.

The main goal of Abilis in Mozambique was to phase out during 2018–2021. However, the worsening fragility of the country, the good networking, yet weak capacity of OPDs, and the smooth collaboration with the partner organisation AJODEMO Maputo led Abilis to make the decision to stay in Mozambique after all, and to plan a Country Programme for 2022–2025, with a focus on rural provinces, gender and SRHR, and capacity building of OPDs.

Sierra Leone

In Sierra Leone, Abilis continued to fund individual projects focusing on income generation and livelihoods, and women and girls with disabilities. COVID-19 caused serious economic deterioration, and together with the government restrictions, affected persons with disabilities particularly badly, restricting their access to food and other daily necessities. COVID-19 also worsened the already weak situation of women and girls with disabilities, including increased incidents of sexual and gender-based violence.

Seven new projects were started in Sierra Leone, and nine projects were finalised, including three fast track projects started and finalised in 2020. In total, 560 persons with disabilities directly benefitted from the projects finalised in 2020. Around half of the projects were implemented in Freetown, and half in provincial towns and rural areas. Most of the finalised projects improved the livelihood opportunities of persons with disabilities by training relevant skills and providing tools and materials to start new or strengthen existing livelihood activities. While most supported livelihood projects included low-energy, environmentally conscious activities, one project had a particular focus on environmentally sustainable business and used solar power as their main source of energy.

Compared to 2019, more projects have emphasised the status of women and girls with disabilities. All projects had at least a partial gender aspect, and out of all projects finalised in Sierra Leone in 2020, 59% of direct beneficiaries were women and girls with disabilities. Livelihood projects in particular had a strong gender focus, with 67% of direct beneficiaries being women and girls with disabilities. Two finalised projects addressed the urgent needs of persons with disabilities in crisis and contributed to the COVID-19 response activities by raising awareness and distributing food items and sanitary products. One of these projects also addressed the increased incidents of sexual and gender-based violence during COVID-19 by raising-awareness of sexual and reproductive rights of women with disabilities and establishing a phone service for them to report any violation of human rights. With the experience and visibility gained through Abilis-supported projects, two funded OPDs improved connections with stakeholders and strengthened their capacity into a level that allows them to contribute to the development efforts within their communities.

At the turn of the year 2020, Abilis received two final reports that required more thorough processing and investigation. To investigate the ambiguities and to verify the actual implemented activities, Abilis cooperated with other trusted partners, including Taksvärkki ry (Operation a Day's Work Finland) and their financial consultant in Freetown. One project under

investigation was found to be fully implemented with lots of evidence and beneficiaries' testimony to prove. However, due to the very weak capacity of the funded group, their financial procedures were deficient. It is recommended to put more emphasis on financial management training when supporting very grassroots organisations.

The other project, however, was terminated due to the organisation's violation of the Project Agreement. Based on the findings, the majority of the project activities were not implemented as reported, but the organisation had provided Abilis with false information including non-authentic receipts, payment vouchers that could not be traced, and costs linked to project activities without any credible evidence of their implementation. Abilis claimed the reimbursement of the funds that were not used according to the Project Agreement, in total 5767 EUR. Up to date, two reminder letters have been sent, but to no avail. Abilis has also reported the case to the Anti-Corruption Commission of Sierra Leone.

Somalia and Somaliland

Abilis has been funding projects of OPDs in **Somalia / Somaliland** since 2000. Networking, background research and connections in general have so far been possible, with the help of the Somali diaspora and a few good in-country contacts. Through the Abilis support in 2020 in Somalia and Somaliland, the main objectives of increasing food security, improving livelihoods and awareness raising on disability issues were largely achieved, as all 13 finalized projects, in 2020 concentrated on activities around these objectives. Also, the planned 50% rate of female beneficiaries was surpassed, the achieved rate being 59%. Thus, the empowerment of women with disabilities is one of the main results.

Both countries, Somalia and Somaliland, are continuously prone to crisis situations deriving from natural/climate catastrophes, which as a consequence lead to food insecurity, health issues and unemployment, especially among persons with disabilities, refugees and internally displaced persons with disabilities, as well as women with disabilities. The COVID-19 pandemic was added upon these issues, and awareness raising activities, as well as the distribution of masks, disinfection and information was part of many projects.

During 2020, there were altogether three projects funded in **Somalia**, two Fast Track and one regular project. All in all, six projects were finalized in 2020, three projects that started and finalized in 2020, plus three other projects that finalized in 2020 with funding from 2019. Among the finalised projects, the main activities focused on vocational training (3 projects), disaster prevention and preparedness (2 projects) and human rights activities (1 project). A total of 267 persons with disabilities participated in activities and trainings and benefitted from the programme. The number of women with disabilities (136) was slightly higher among the direct beneficiaries than that of men (104). The number of indirect beneficiaries was 1406 persons. The total amount allocated to Somalia in 2020 was 38.097 euros.

During 2020, there were four regular projects in **Somaliland**. However, seven projects finalized in 2020: four that started and finalized in 2020, plus three others that finalized in 2020 with funding from 2019. Among the finalized projects, health/COVID (3 projects) and food security activities (2 projects) were the most popular ones. Only two finalized projects concentrated on mainly IGA, vocational training and poverty reduction activities. In all, 871 persons with disabilities participated in activities and trainings and benefitted from the programme. The share of women with disabilities (397) was much higher among the direct beneficiaries than that of men (268). The number of indirect beneficiaries was 3724 persons. The total amount allocated to Somaliland in 2020 was 69.351 euros.

The following success stories can be shared through reports in Somaliland:

- Due to continuous advocacy and lobby work, the Somaliland government employed 264 persons with disabilities in ministries;

- Five journalists with disabilities are successfully working with TV and radio stations in Hargeisa (two blind persons and three wheelchair users);
- Six persons with disabilities own their businesses and have been able to maintain them now for several years without outside support.

These success stories continue to inspire many other persons with disabilities to fight against inequalities, discrimination and the belief that disability is a curse.

SNDF, the umbrella organization of OPDs in Somaliland, could increase its membership to 42 OPDs. SNDF has a good and very active collaboration going on with different national ministries, but also with several international partners, such as Embassies, the EU and international disability organizations.

Remaining challenges

The less successful stories include that the National Disability Policy of Somaliland, approved in 2013, remains in the shelf without practical implementation due to financial restraints. Also, the CRPD remains practically unimplemented for similar plus political reasons. Other remaining challenges are, e.g., the lack of inclusive education, absence of legal aid, no statistical research on disability, impacts of COVID-19, negative attitudes in communities, poverty and environmental/ structural barriers.

Fragile state in Central-Asia

The situation of persons with disabilities in **Kyrgyzstan** remained difficult. Even though the country ratified the UNCRPD in 2019, things have not progressed as wished. The political leadership of the country is quite weak and the situation unstable. The last parliamentary elections (that were held in Oct 2020) were considered false and they resulted in the resignation of the President. From time to time, there are also clashes near the borders with Tajikistan, due to unmarked territories and water resources. It seems that Kyrgyzstan is now politically the most unstable country in Central Asia.

The COVID-19 worsened the situation of persons with disabilities in Kyrgyzstan, especially women with disabilities. The pandemic increased domestic violence towards women with disabilities. Abilis continued to support women with disabilities who experienced violence to find shelter in Bishkek. Some other carefully selected activities of women with disabilities were supported financially to overcome the hardship caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The plans to support OPDs in income generating activities faced a huge set back due to COVID-19 restrictions. One of the planned IGA projects, opening a beauty salon by women with disabilities, could not be implemented. Instead of a beauty salon, the organization is now giving some computer training and cooking classes for persons with disabilities following the rules of social distancing.

Fragile states in East-Europe

Ukraine was heavily affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. For this reason, Abilis support in Ukraine was concentrated in helping people with disabilities to survive the pandemic. In 2020, Abilis supported five projects in Ukraine and four of them were related to the pandemic.

Abilis continued the co-operation with HDL (Helsingin Diakonissalaitos) and started to support Roma people with disabilities in Ukraine. Abilis provided the Roma Women Fund Chiricli with funding to help Roma people with disabilities in the COVID-19 situation. Over 240 Roma people with disabilities received hygiene packages and food kits that were essential for survival in the crisis. The project discovered the poor living conditions of Roma people with

disabilities in Ukraine and the need to have more detailed information about their situation. At the end of the year, after consultations with HDL, Abilis provided another fund to the Roma Women Fund Chiricli, for a survey where 490 Roma persons with disabilities of different ages and sexes in seven different regions were interviewed about their living situation and their needs. One of the successes of this project was that one of the Abilis known disability activist in Ukraine, Iryna Sarancha, worked in this project and offered the Roma Women Fund Chiricli her disability expertise for this project. The information received from the survey was communicated to the authorities in Ukraine and the issues of Roma people with disabilities have been taken on, as part of the National Strategy of Roma People. The survey will serve as a background study for further actions.

Abilis is also planning to organize a training on disability issues for HDL and their partners. This training is included in the plan of the HDL project supported by the MFA. The training plans were not discussed in 2020 due to the pandemic. Five new projects were approved in 2020.

There were no finalised projects, but one new COVID-related project in **Kosovo** in 2020.

Fragile states in Middle-East

There were no finalised or new projects in **Palestine, Lebanon, Jordan** or **Syria** in 2020.