

ACTIVITY REPORT 2021

Support to organisations of persons with disabilities in developing countries

Abilis Foundation, founded in 1997 and registered in early 1998, is a Finnish organisation working to promote the human rights, equal opportunities and independent living of persons with disabilities in developing countries and in Eastern Europe. To accomplish this mission, the Foundation grants financial support and conducts awareness raising, education, training and counselling programmes. This includes global disability diplomacy on human rights focusing on direct or indirect help to persons with disabilities in least developed countries. Abilis Consulting, a company established and owned by Abilis Foundation, provides expert services tailored to the needs of various operators, thus complementing the Foundation's work to advance disability inclusion.

The cornerstone of Abilis Foundation's work is the provision of funding to reliable small-scale, high-quality initiatives, designed and implemented by organisations of persons with disabilities in least developed countries. The funding helps promote the activity of persons with disabilities and improve their involvement, position and opportunities in their societies. Funding is only granted to states officially classified as LDCs. Individual grants are small – usually between 1,000 and 20,000 euro – the focus being on grassroots-level organisations in the least developed countries of the world. The bulk of the funding comes from the Official Development Assistance administered by the Finnish Ministry for Foreign Affairs.

An active year despite the pandemic and political disruptions

The Foundation's global agenda was carried out as outlined in the 2021 plan, with adjustments required by the Covid-19 pandemic at home and in the programme countries. In Myanmar and Ethiopia, even political unrest affected the lives of local people and complicated the implementation of individual projects according to plan.

The Foundation's domestic staff worked mainly remotely throughout the year. Monitoring visits to programme countries were not conducted. The practices adopted in 2020 to monitor and support the implementation of projects and country programmes through remote communication and partner networks, ensured the success of continued work. Regular communication with project-implementing organisations and country representatives provided peer support – a crucial benefit in the prolonged crisis and against the discrimination experienced by persons with disabilities.

Global agenda to guide the work

Abilis Foundation's global agenda was carried out using a results-based management system. Overall, the Foundation's work helped improve the inclusion of persons with disabilities and to ensure that their human rights are promoted. Project funding was channelled through country programmes and a sub-programme for fragile states focused on selected themes. Information sharing and communication as well as advocacy and disability diplomacy were further key elements of the global agenda.

Country programmes were carried out in the Asian states of Myanmar, Nepal, Vietnam and Tajikistan, and in the African states of Ethiopia, Tanzania and Uganda. Mozambique, where the programme had been in the process of phasing out, was resumed to the list of beneficiaries. Key actors in the delivery of country programmes and aid were appointed partnership organisations (Ethiopia, Tajikistan and Mozambique) or country offices set up by the Foundation (Myanmar, Nepal, Vietnam, Tanzania and Uganda). Through the subprogramme for fragile states, most of the funding went to the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Somaliland, Sierra Leone, Kosovo and Ukraine.

Support and distribution of grants

The Foundation processed more than 450 applications. 152 applications were approved for funding and 298 were rejected; the rest were put off to be dealt with in the next financial year. The number of British-funded projects was 12; the rest were financed with Finnish government support.

The Foundation's grants were small, geared to the needs of groups of persons with disabilities living in poor rural environments. Project implementation, management and reporting were well in line with the capacities of the rural groups. The average grant size was 7,053 euro. This complies with the decision of the Foundation Board to focus on max. 5,000-euro grants to newly founded groups and to small hands-on undertakings (71 projects). Excluding such small handouts, the average size of regular grants, which were in majority (81), was 9,593 euro.

In compliance with the Finnish government's development policy focus (Africa strategy), most of the grants were allocated to Africa (98 grants, 65 per cent). Asian countries received a total of 44 project grants (29 per cent). Individual funding recipients were in Eastern Europe (10 projects, 6 per cent). The biggest beneficiary in Africa was Ethiopia with 17 new grants (133,997 euro). Tanzania started 15 new projects (90,686 euro) and Uganda 14 (111,189 euro). The National Lottery Community Fund (NLCF, U.K.) supplemented the Finnish government's funding to the Tanzanian and Ugandan projects. Seven new grants were made to Mozambique (65,034 euro). In Asia, most of the funding went to Tajikistan (12 project grants, 103,738 euro). Active work continued in Vietnam with 12 new small-scale projects, the total grant being 52,126 euro. Despite the adversarial conditions of Myanmar, the Foundation was able to continue support to groups of persons with disabilities; nine new projects were launched during the year (56,700 euro).

The subprogramme of fragile states focused on improving the capacity of disability organisations to help provide job opportunities and livelihood for persons with disabilities in nominated countries. The biggest contribution went to DR Congo for 17 new projects (110,491 euro). Eight new grants went to Somaliland (42,297 euro). In Sierra Leone, disability group projects were supported with four new grants (25,754 euro). Of the Foundation's total support, around 80 per cent (122 grants) went to the least developed countries of the world, and about 56 per cent was channelled to the Foundation's key programme countries (85 new grants, 579,518 euro). The share of fragile countries was now bigger than in earlier years, because, before withdrawing, the Foundation wanted to give local disability organisations an opportunity to consolidate their own work.

More than a million beneficiaries

Abilis Foundation processed 191 final reports in 2021. Ten of these had been completely funded during the previous year. Most of the completed projects (78 %) were delivered as scheduled and properly reported on. Six projects had to be terminated because the situation of either the group or the operating environment did not allow them to be carried on. With the initial stage of the project complete and appropriately reported on and in the absence of evidence of administrative misuse of the finances, no need for recovery arose. One grant decision was cancelled after the Foundation was informed of inappropriate conduct by the local organisation's leaders towards their employees. Six projects managed to be carried through with money less than the grant, and the grant decision was amended accordingly.

More than a million persons with disabilities benefitted from Abilis Foundation's project funding in 2021. This is about the same number as in the previous year and follows from the fact that information about health issues and the coronavirus was provided on a wide front through various media in 25 completed projects. Indirectly, 2.5 million people benefitted from the Foundation's work. When only conventional, completed projects are reckoned with, the number of active participants was 24,700, well over a half (57 per cent) being girls or women with disabilities. The projects helped the participants gain new knowledge and skills and get

an opportunity to engagement and empowerment. About half of the projects offered group members means of livelihood and employment. Most (72 per cent) of the supported organisations operated in rural areas or small towns. As provided in the Foundation's strategy, support was targeted to small, genuinely grassroots groups.

Disability diplomacy and advocacy

Disability inclusion and genuine involvement of persons with disabilities was the focal point of the Foundation's advocacy throughout 2021. Despite the exceptional circumstances, the Foundation's representatives actively attended remote meetings of various networks. Apart from domestic networks, Abilis cooperated with prominent global agencies of the disability sector.

With fresh ideas towards new funding period

During spring 2021, the Foundation prepared a four-year programme funding application to the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, backed up by a results matrix, country programmes including background analyses, and strategies for information and advocacy work. During the autumn period, the document forms, indicators and results framework of the project management were redesigned, the practices of results data collection and the database were upgraded, hands-on country-level instructions were written for advocacy and information, and work for curbing the impact of climate change continued. Throughout the year, staff training was provided in thematic competence as well as the use of the new practices and upgraded tools.

Board work and new strategy

The Foundation's Board convened six times during the year. Besides financial decision-making and general administration, the Board contributed actively to the implementation of periodic plans and policy for 2022 through 2025. A Board-endorsed funding application was submitted to the Finnish Ministry for Foreign Affairs in May, and a positive decision was received at the end of November. The composition of a new Board for the next term (2022 to 2023) was confirmed by the Board in December 2021.

Owing to the nature of the Foundation, no support or financial benefits are granted to related parties; the entire funding going to organisations of persons with disabilities in developing countries. A part-time related-party employee was paid 795 euro in salary. Board members, including the Chair, were paid regular meeting fees, 6,070 euro in total. The Chair received 6,125 euro in expense and per diem allowances. The Executive Director received 856 euro in expense allowances. Salaries, fees and remunerations paid to the Foundation's management (Board, Executive Director and the Managing Director of Abilis Consulting) totalled 81,692 euro. Auditor fees amounted to 8,432 euro. Expense allowances were reimbursed for on an actual expense basis.

Key resources

Abilis Foundation employed an average of 13 people, nine of them under an open-ended contract and the rest under a temporary contract. Three people worked part-time throughout the year, two for 80 per cent of worktime. The staff received remuneration in the form of salary, benefits in kind and per diem allowances, as provided in the regulations applicable in Finland and in compliance with the Foundation's approved payroll system and personnel policy rules. The financial statements were audited by Registered Accountants Kristian Seemer and Anssi Pietiläinen. Authorised Public Accountant Tero Paukku served as deputy auditor. The financial statements were prepared by Administer Oy, and eFina was employed as the electronic financial management system. The project management tool was the Arkisto database (Salesforce).

Abilis Consulting

Abilis Consulting Limited, owned by Abilis Foundation, carried out six assignments in 2021, including a continued joint project with the Finnish Red Cross and Save the Children. Other

clients included World Wildlife Fund, WWF Finland, Fingo and Threshold Association. Their commissions focused on inclusive education, assessment of project and programme work, and the evaluation of disability-specific project cooperation. The Foundation's loss for the year was 232 euro.

Risks and uncertainty factors

The Foundation updated its risk matrix and risk management outlines in spring 2021. The internal and external risks involved in the Foundation's operation, their likelihood and their impacts have been identified. The key uncertainty factors affecting support work overall are continued availability of funding and critical attitudes towards development aid, which may overshadow the Foundation's future performance. Global pandemics and political tensions may affect the Foundation's work in direct or indirect ways. Should the risks materialise, it may become impossible to deliver some of the ongoing projects, or parts of them, or to fund new initiatives. Travel restrictions may make it hard to monitor the work.

The biggest risks at the programme and project levels are weak capacity of beneficiaries, corruption and mismanagement of granted funds. Natural disasters, humanitarian crises and unexpected changes in a country's policymaking or in the internal circumstances of an organisation complicate project delivery. Disasters and crises may lead to long-term needs but also difficulties in supporting organisations in affected regions.

The Foundation carried on advocacy to secure future funding and continued active information sharing to lessen criticism of development assistance. Due diligence and risk minimisation continued with technological solutions and the project management mechanisms developed over the years.

2021 financial data

Government support at Abilis Foundation's disposal in 2021 was 2,624,991 euro. This consisted of 1,950,000 euro granted under the government's four-year funding decision (2018 through 2021), 585,000 euro in additional funding from the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and 89,991 euro of government support carried forward from the previous year. The total government support granted by the Foundation amounted to 1,072,093 euro to new projects and 211,165 euro to country programmes. A total of 1,254,647 euro was spent on new initiatives and launches from earlier years. Information expenses were 86,542 euro, project management expenses 524,652 euro and administrative expenses 209,416 euro. The amount used for the initiative Disability Diplomacy on Human Rights was 84,897 euro. The remaining government support to be carried forward to 2022 was 201,568 euro.

As in previous years, the Foundation had access to British funding from the NLCF, 152,785 euro, of which 107,578 euro was used over the year. The remaining 45 207 euro will be used in the first half of 2022 for projects and project administration in Tanzania and Uganda. An E.U. initiative led by a consortium managed by Christian Blind Mission (CBM) continued throughout the year helping to promote disability inclusion in humanitarian aid and volunteering. From the total E.U. funding of 45,223 euro, the amount used was 38,953 euro. The initiative was extended because of the pandemic and will be concluded in early 2022.

The Foundation's own fund raising generated 5,728 euro and investments yielded 68,946 euro. The Foundation's surplus for the year was 25,883 euro and consolidated surplus was 25,651 euro.

Outlook for 2022

Abilis Foundation will continue active work in 2022. For the years 2022 through 2025, the Foundation received a total of 12 million euro of programme-based support (3 million euro/year) from the Ministry for Foreign Affairs. This helps the Foundation continue programme work in the nominated nine countries, where advocacy and information at the national level are also encouraged. Long-standing cooperation with Finnish organisations

will be stepped up. The Foundation will be investing heavily on the triple nexus approach and supporting local disability organisations in emergency response planning. The Ukrainian crisis in late winter 2022 has once again highlighted the vulnerable position and chances of survival of persons with disabilities. We need stronger disability inclusion in development cooperation as well as in humanitarian aid and peace-building. In all these endeavours, Abilis Foundation offers its expertise and brings added value to the work done by other operators and through other financial instruments.