

ACTIVITY REPORT 2018

Support from Finland to organizations of persons with disabilities in developing countries

Abilis Foundation, registered in 1998, is a Finnish organization established to promote the activity, human rights, equal opportunities and independent living of persons with disabilities in developing countries and in Eastern Europe. To achieve this mission, the Foundation grants financial support and conducts awareness raising, education, training and counselling programmes. The activities include global disability diplomacy on human rights with the aim of helping, directly or indirectly, 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 for advancing disability inclusion.

The core activity of Abilis Foundation is to fund reliable small-scale, high-quality initiatives designed and implemented by organizations of persons with disabilities in least developed countries. The funding helps promote the involvement, position and opportunities of persons with disabilities in developing societies. Funding is only granted to states officially classified as LDCs. Individual grants are small – between 1,000 and 20,000 euros – the focus being on grassroots level organizations in the least developed countries of the world.

Principal funding from the Finnish Ministry for Foreign Affairs

The bulk of the funding comes from the Official Development Assistance administered by the Finnish Ministry for Foreign Affairs. 2018 was the initial year of a four-year funding period (2018–2021) and 1,950,000 euros were received as government support. An additional item of 292,970 euros was carried forward from the previous year. This helped manage the financial situation in early 2018 in anticipation of a decision about renewed government funding, which only came on 7 February 2018.

Abilis Foundation added new funders in 2018. In Tanzania and Uganda, a project supporting persons with disabilities to earn a living was launched for a pilot year with British funding. The co-funding partners were The National Lottery Community Fund (TNLCF) (previously Big Lottery Fund, BLF) and Global Giving, with a total contribution of 187,334 euros for the pilot year (2018-2019). Finnpartnership contributed 67,728 euros to help employ persons with disabilities in Ethiopia. This particular project focused on training local people to weave woollen carpets, which will be marketed and sold by SERA Helsinki Oy and its Ethiopian partner Ennat Design Handicraft Ltd.

The Foundation's own fund raising produced 27,771 euros, most of this, 22,495 euros, in donations. The highest single item, 14,674 euros, consisted of money that came in as donations in memory of Kalle Könkkölä, Abilis Foundation's founder and long-term chair, who died in 2018.

Programme-driven support

In 2018, Abilis Foundation implemented a global programme in line with its adjusted plans for 2018–2021. The global programme consists of subprogrammes, the principal actions being taken in the form of country programmes and a subprogramme for vulnerable states. Further subprogrammes were information and develop communication as well as advocacy and disability diplomacy. From project-based work and focus countries Abilis Foundation moved to a new concept of programme work with programme countries and results-based management. The key aid processes, tools and criteria evolved over the years, will be deployed as before to ensure high-quality delivery.

Country programmes were designed and carried out for Kyrgyzstan, Myanmar, Nepal and Tajikistan in Asia and for Ethiopia, Mozambique, Tanzania and Uganda in Africa. Key actors in the delivery of the country programmes and aid were appointed partnership organizations (in Ethiopia, Mozambique, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan) or a country office set up by the Foundation (in Myanmar, Nepal, Vietnam, Tanzania and Uganda). Abilis Foundation received official registration in Nepal and Uganda.



Support and distribution of grants

Pending a decision of further government support, Abilis Foundation handled no new applications in early 2018. While the closure, applied from autumn 2017, cut the number of incoming applications, the Foundation processed 250 applications over the year. 161 applications were approved for funding and 58 were rejected; the rest were put off to be dealt with in the new calendar year. The number of British co-funded projects was 20. The total funding granted by Abilis Foundation for new projects was 1,286,584 euros. A total of 1,198,061 euros were spent in new initiatives and launches from earlier years.

The grants were small, geared to the needs of groups of persons with disabilities living in poor rural environments. Project implementation, management and reporting were in line with the capacities of the rural groups. The average grant size was 7,013 euros. This complies with the decision of the Foundation Board to focus on max. 3,500-euro grants to newly founded groups and small hands-on undertakings. Excluding such small handouts, the average size of conventional grants, which were in majority (88), was 9,688 euros.

Most of the applications came from Asia (43 %) and Africa (51 %), where the Foundation's main programmes are operated. Individual applications arrived from and funding was granted to Latin America (3 %) and Eastern Europe (3 %). In Asia, most grants went to Vietnam (16 grants/121,347 euros) and Nepal (15 grants/123,080 euros). Tajikistan (13 grants/84,900 euros) and Myanmar (11 grants/64,071 euros) continued as recipients of active funding, whereas funding to Kyrgyzstan was run down with clearly fewer grants than in previous years (8 grants/63,996 euros). In Africa, Uganda was the biggest grantee (26 new projects (126,185 euros), followed by Ethiopia (14 grants/92,745 euros), Tanzania (12 grants/71,712 euros) and Mozambique (11 grants/68,186 euros). Among fragile states, Sierra Leone (8 new projects/73,653 euros), Somalia (6 new projects/40,136 euros) and Somaliland (6 new projects/60,988 euros) were the principal beneficiaries. Individual grants were made to Latin American and East European countries (8 grants/65,641 euros). Of all the support, 78 % (128 project grants) went to the least developed countries, and 72 % of the funding was channelled to key programme countries (126 new grants/816,222 euros).

The funding and the content of the new projects reflected the themes chosen as country programme focus areas. All the new launches are linked to specific country programmes and to the Foundation's longer-term goals. In terms of euros, most financial support (42 %, 515,936 euros) was spent in efforts to improve opportunities for employment and livelihood. In the main programme countries, support to job opportunities for persons with disabilities was higher still; 47 % of the projects (446,452 euros). Educational projects (17 %, 206,749 euros) helped improve the basic facilities, professional development and employment opportunities of persons with disabilities. A major sum (39 %/480,164 euros) went to the promotion of human rights of persons, especially women, with disabilities and to the advancement of their social involvement and organizational activity. The strategic focus of the Foundation's work – the improvement of the position and rights of girls and women with disabilities – has been increasingly visible in the projects; 95 % had gender equality as main or partial objective. At least 58 % of the participants were girls or women with disabilities; in the main programme countries up to 62 %.

More than 20,000 persons with disabilities impacted

In 2018, a total of 20,363 persons with disabilities actively benefited from Abilis Foundation's project funding. Well over a half (ca 60 %) were girls or women with disabilities. Most of the participants (85 %) were reached out by projects carried out under country programmes. Indirectly, a multiple amount of people were impacted. Organizations consisting of persons with various disabilities were the largest beneficiary group (70 %). Most of the recipient organizations (70 %) operated in rural areas or in small towns, where the availability of community support or services is limited and other funders are more or less non-existent. As provided in the Foundation's strategy, support was directed to genuinely grassroots level groups and organizations, some of which were registered with Abilis' assistance.



Active people and well-functioning organizations

Abilis Foundation approved 137 final reports in 2018. Most of the completed projects (91 %) lasted for less than two years. Prolonged projects – with a duration of over three years – accounted for 4 %. Seven projects had to be terminated, most of these as a result of insufficient capacity of the organization. No financial mismanagement was discovered and no money had to be recovered.

The results of the completed projects comply with Abilis Foundation's strategic focus areas and country programmes. Disability awareness increased; this positive development was reported by over 75 % of the organizations. At the individual level, the trend manifested itself in the fact that 59 % of project participants were able to take part in communal events previously inaccessible to them. After the project, 64 % were aware of their rights and of the U.N. Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which will help them defend and fight for their own rights. Organizations of persons with disabilities extended cooperation with other actors, organizations and decision makers drastically (65 %). One in two projects brought new members to the organizations. Some 66 % of project-implementing organizations reported an increased number of active members, which helped establish information and advocacy work in the community.

Education and material as part of high-quality work

In 2018, Abilis Foundation strengthened its own competence in programme-driven approach and produced documents to guide results-based management and monitoring. These processes will help support results-based funding and reporting in future years. The new results framework and new indicators required the redesign of the Foundation's application forms as well as monitoring and reporting forms; the job was completed by the end of the year. The updating of project management guidelines began in summer 2018. The description of activities guided by human rights-based approach was brought up to date, and a new manual was written to guide gender equality work (Gender & Disability in Abilis Foundation). Later in the year, the Foundation launched a research on how to promote job opportunities and livelihood for persons with disabilities in Nepal and Sierra Leone. In spring 2018, an internal assessment was conducted of the Foundation's 15-year work in Kyrgyzstan. The conclusions and resulting recommendations were immediately adopted into use and will be employed further on. Research and development, as referred to in the Foundation Act, were not done in 2018.

Disability diplomacy and advocacy

The initiative Global Disability Diplomacy on Human Rights was actively driven under the leadership of Kalle Könkkölä through the first half of the year. The key goal was to influence foreign policy and development policy in an effort to improve the position and involvement of persons with disabilities. The practical work included meetings, training sessions, advocacy work and information campaigns. The Finnish Ministry for Foreign Affairs and Abilis Foundation co-hosted the global meeting of the GLAD network (Global Action on Disability) held in Helsinki from 31 January to 2 February 2018. In June Abilis Foundation attended the Conference of States Parties to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities held in New York. The team of experts with disabilities met two times and "the Elders", a support group consisting of qualified specialists, also met twice.

All this was profoundly affected by the death in September of Kalle Könkkölä, the founder of Abilis Foundation and the leader of the diplomacy initiative. To pay tribute to and to support the continuation of his life's work, Abilis Foundation, together with Threshold Association, Disability Partnership Finland, Foreign Ministry and the Greens in Finland, organized a commemorative seminar on 3 December 2018, the International Day of Persons with Disabilities. The event was attended by more than a hundred people in Helsinki and reached many more through video connection. Later in the year Abilis Foundation reorganized the disability diplomacy work, prioritizing projects that will be carried on as part of the advocacy programme. In his will, Kalle Könkkölä remembered Abilis Foundation. The will, the execution of which has yet to be completed, provides that the bequest is to be directed into a fund and any return is to be used for operating expenses. Services to drive the disability diplomacy initiative were bought from Threshold Association, led by Kalle Könkkölä, at standard cost (12,318.80 euros).



New Chair and amendment of Bylaws

The Foundation's Board convened six times during the year. In addition to financial decisions and general administration, the Board actively contributed to the laying out of plans for the new financial period and formulated policies required by new donors. The most noteworthy changes took place after Kalle Könkkölä's death in autumn, when a new Chair and Vice Chair were elected by the Board and the Bylaws were adjusted accordingly. The new Bylaws were confirmed by the Finnish Patent and Registration Office on 5 March 2019.

Owing to the nature of the Foundation, no support or financial benefits are granted to related parties; the funding goes to support disabled people's organizations in developing countries. This is clearly stated in the Foundation's related-party policy. No financial agreements were made with related parties. The Members of the Board were paid regular meeting fees, 5,940 euros in total (including fee to the Chair). In addition to the meeting fees, the founder and Chair of the Foundation was paid a remuneration of 2,630 euros for his disability diplomacy work and 2,942 euros for travel expenses including per diem allowance. The new Chair elected in autumn was paid 1,060 euros in meeting fees and 779 euros in expense allowances. The Executive Director received 1,705 euros in expense and per diem allowances. Salaries, fees and remunerations paid to the Foundation's management (Board and Executive Director) totalled 67,163 euros. Auditor fees amounted to 8,432 euros. Travel expenses were reimbursed for according to the Foundation's travel compensation rules on an actual expense basis.

Key resources

The average person-years contributed in 2018 were ten. Eleven people were regularly employed by the Foundation and three worked part-time. Three of the part-timers worked through the year, one in autumn. The personnel were paid remuneration in the form of salary, benefits in kind and per diem allowance 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. Deputy Auditors were Kari Mikkola and Tero Paukku. The financial statements were prepared by Administer Oy and the electronic financial management system employed was eFina. The project management tool was the Arkisto database (Salesforce).

Abilis Consulting

Abilis Consulting Limited, owned by Abilis Foundation, carried out three assignments, of which one was still in progress in the beginning of 2019. Two assignments, in progress in the beginning of 2018, were completed early in the year. Multi-staged cooperation continued with the Finnish National Institute for Health and Welfare for the development of the social sector in Kyrgyzstan. The themes of the two assignments carried out in partnership with the Finnish Red Cross and Fairtrade Finland were the improvement of disability inclusion and support to persons with disabilities in crisis situations. Abilis Consulting produced a profit of 25,199 euros for the period.

2018 finances

Abilis Foundation continued its adjusted activities within the year's financial framework with the Finnish Foreign Ministry as the principal source of funding. In addition to the new programme support grant of 1,950,000 euros, the disposable funds in early 2018 included government support carried forward as planned from the previous year (292,970 euros) in anticipation of a decision about new government funding. The total government funding available to the Foundation was 2 242,970 euros. The support paid by Abilis Foundation to organizations of persons with disabilities in developing countries was 1,114,931 euros. Information expenses were 75,082 euros, project management expenses 446,747 euros and administrative expenses 187,258 euros. The amount used for disability diplomacy on human rights was 112,328 euros. The remaining government support to be brought forward was 306,623 euros. The numbers reflect the situation in early 2018, when decisions of new grants could not be made and active use of project funding had to be suspended. The newly adopted programming approach required investment in personnel training and guidance, whereby less



resources were available for facilitating and processing new applications. The government support carried forward will be applied in 2019 to even out the reduced annual funding and the granted aid.

In addition to government support, the Foundation made planned use of funding from the National Lottery Community Fund and Finnpartnership in the latter half of 2018. Most of the TNLCF funding, 83,130 euros, went to project funding (11 projects in Tanzania, 9 in Uganda), and 12,174 euros to project management and travel expenses for a trip made with the donor. The total cost was 95,304 euros. The cost of Finnpartnership-sponsored activities amounted to 16,385 euros; most of this, 12,944 euros, spent in Ethiopia.

The Foundation's surplus for the year was 12,025 euros and consolidated surplus was 37,224 euros.

New funding period beginning in the 20th anniversary year

In 2018 Abilis Foundation celebrated its 20 years of activities on various occasions and increased its recognition, especially in Finland. The Foundation demonstrated its achievements and impact through media (radio campaign) and with a photo exhibition touring in the Greater Helsinki area. A number of newspaper articles and an anniversary book were published. Abilis Foundation appeared in the World Village Festival in Helsinki in spring and in the Disability Day Art events of 3 December 2018. Abilis representatives were requested to give speeches and lectures in schools, institutions and disability events. Active cooperation continued with domestic and international agencies and stakeholders.

Establishment of programme work and application for additional funding

The Foundation continues to strengthen programme work and results-based management in 2019. Employment opportunities for persons with disabilities is another theme of the year. Informed by research-based recommendations, the Foundation will compile a handbook to help guide and support organizations in planning and carrying out sustainable projects for job and livelihood creation in less developed countries. In addition to internal training programmes, the Foundation has scheduled regional meetings with the representatives of country offices and partnership organizations to be arranged in the latter half of the year. Sharing experiences and learning through peer support are important elements of regional meetings. In spring 2019, the Foundation will file a follow-up application to TNLCF and look into possibilities to apply for additional funding from Finnpartnership. An election spring in Finland will provide plenty of opportunities for advocacy, and the positive development of disability inclusion helps promote dialogue with various operators.

