



Gender and disability

in Abilis Foundation



The purpose of this guideline is to indicate how gender impacts the lives of persons with disabilities and adapt the knowledge in a way that further improves the way gender equality is implemented in Abilis' work. Women with disabilities are at an extremely vulnerable position due to the multiple discrimination they face.

Abilis Foundation
Lintulahdenkatu 10
00500 Helsinki
Finland

email: abilis@abilis.fi
www.abilis.fi

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1

Women and girls with a disability

Women and girls with disabilities belong to one of the most vulnerable groups in society. The intersection of gender and disability positions them in such a way that they experience multiple discrimination. This means that they are discriminated because of their disability as well as their gender. Having a disability magnifies the existing discrimination women face in general. Indeed, the opportunities women with disabilities have are extremely limited. The reasons for this are diverse: stigma, restrictive gender roles, and the lack of information. The injustice is evident in areas such as education, employment, marriage and parenthood, and health care.

Extending to various sectors of life, the discrimination women with disabili-

ties face is highly extensive. To begin with, the social perceptions regarding women with disabilities are often-times not only extremely negative but hugely misinformed. In fact, stigma is one of the main causes for their discrimination. Opportunities that women with disabilities have are immensely limited, and at worst, non-existent. In addition, they are highly susceptible to various forms of abuse. Ultimately, the type of discrimination women with disabilities face is widespread, and in many ways, intertwined. Therefore, the stigma women with disabilities face are linked to assumptions such as; men are traditionally expected to be assertive and independent, whereas women are expected to be emotional and complaisant.



1.1. Guiding Frameworks

The Abilis Foundation is committed to follow the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), which recognises the additional layer of discrimination, gender positions in the lives of persons with disabilities (Article 6). Specifically, it stresses the fact that women with disabilities face a greater risk of being neglected, abused, or exploited, both inside and outside the home. Because of the commitment of Abilis, advancing gender equality is one of its main concerns.

Other UN policies such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), and the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are also central in guiding the work of Abilis. For instance, the CRC

highlights the importance of allowing children with disabilities to actively participate in society (Article 23).

Goal 5 of the SDGs specifically addresses gender equality. The goal emphasises the importance of empowering women and girls by giving them more opportunities. It names various gender-related points of interest that require especial attention:

- Eradication of discrimination, violence and harmful practices, such as child marriages and female genital mutilation.
- Improvement of sexual and reproductive health.
- Insurance of women's equal rights to resources, ownership, finance services, inheritance and natural resources.



Additionally, the policies conducted by the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland steer the work of Abilis. Indeed, one of the specific priorities in the ministry's development policy is the improvement of the rights and status of girls and women. It names gender equality as one of the biggest issues in the global South, and states that the enhancement of women's rights strengthens the society as a whole.

ARTICLE 6

Women with disabilities

The fact that women with disabilities face multiple discrimination must be recognised, and significant measures must be taken to ensure their right to enjoy all human rights and fundamental freedoms fully and equally.

ARTICLE 7

Children with disabilities

Children with disabilities must be ensured the full enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms on an equal basis with other children.

Source: United Nations, The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2008).

Gender Equality

Gender equality refers to the social, political, and economic equality between genders. It requires for equal access to opportunities and rights. Most importantly, it requires for them to be valued and respected equally. The UN declares gender equality as a fundamental human right as well as a necessity to a "peaceful, prosperous and sustainable world" (SDG, Goal 5).

Intersectionality

The concept of intersectionality is paramount when discussing gender equality in the context of persons with disabilities. Intersectionality refers to the way multiple forms of discrimination overlap. Forms of discrimination such as: classism, racism, sexism, ageism, and ableism. A person who belongs to various marginalised groups experiences multiple forms of discrimination. Thus, there is an intersection between the types of discrimination they face. Women with disabilities, girls with disabilities, boys with disabilities, women with a disability from an indigenous background and poor men with disabilities are all examples of such groups facing multiple discrimination.



2

Experiencing stigma

There is enormous stigma against persons with disabilities, ranging from believing they are helpless and need constant guidance, to thinking the disability is a punishment for moral misconduct. Such beliefs are extremely harmful. Stigma that maintains the idea of women with disabilities as shameful enforces them to be confined in the home, which in turn passivates them and decreases their self-confidence, resulting in the lack of opportunities.

Not only are women with disabilities fundamentally seen as a divergence from the ideal, they are oftentimes denied the right to perform their gender. For women with disabilities, activities such as dressing up, and putting on make-up, are generally viewed as "unnecessary". Denying women with disabilities from such modes of self-expression, upholds the idea that people with disabilities only require the bare essentials. This further maintains the idea that they are not entitled to the full human experience.

In addition, because women with disabilities are regarded as inept, they are assumed incapable of doing domestic jobs or being mothers. There is a widespread belief that women with disabilities will automatically give birth to children with disabilities. This again demonstrates the negative attitudes as well as the lack of knowledge and understanding of disability, as even the prospect of having a child with a disability is met with animosity.

In large part, the beliefs are what disable persons with disabilities. Not the impairment itself. The false conception that persons with disabilities are incapable is what disables them. Ultimately, perceiving women with disabilities as infectious, inept, and incomplete greatly damages their chances at a prosperous life.

However, as stigma is socially constructed, it can be dismantled. This can be done through means such as visibility, education, and raising awareness. Dismantling harmful misconceptions is crucial in empowering persons with disabilities.



2.1. Active participation in society

It has been affirmed that women and girls with disabilities participate much less in society than men and boys with disabilities. Due to social norms, women are expected to do housework, which is why they are more likely to be hidden in the home, as compared to boys. Because doing housework is not seen as an "option" for boys, they are more likely to be sent to school and other activities. (Katsui & Mojtahedi 2015, 564-567.)

The structure that disables women with disabilities and denies them of opportunity is an intransigent cycle, Katsui and Mojtahedi (2015, 569) de-

scribe it as such: "Many women with disabilities tend to be trapped into the vicious circle of prejudice, low expectations, limited experiences, and low performance, which reinforces and even deteriorates their realities, particularly when their parents are gone."

The predominance of gender discrimination is evident in the way women have difficulty even within disability organisations. Women are oftentimes degraded and silenced in disability organisations, whereas men remain vocal and in power. In this way, women with disabilities struggle even within their own community. Their possibilities for active participation are hugely limited.

One of the most important aspects of gender equality is the idea of equal opportunity. It is because of the lack of opportunity, that women have less wealth, less autonomy and less power and thus, less possibilities for active participation in society. Landholding rights can be used as an example. In many Southern countries, the landholding rights of women in general are extremely poor. Women have close to no opportunity to own land and women with disabilities have even less opportunities for land ownership. Such constraints further hinder women's prospects and financial, political, and social status. Thus, the enforcement of equal opportunity is extremely vital in improving the lives of women with disabilities and increasing their possibilities for active and meaningful participation.

2.2. Education

ARTICLE 24 Education

All persons with disabilities have the right to education. Furthermore, the education must be inclusive and extend to all levels.

Source: United Nations, The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2008).



It is declared in the UN sustainable development goals that, "Obtaining a quality education is the foundation to creating sustainable development. In addition to improving quality of life, access to inclusive education can help equip locals with the tools required to develop innovative solutions to the world's greatest problems" (SDG, Goal 4).

Gaining an education is crucial in becoming autonomous and independent. Education can lead to an increased possibility of employment and generating income. These in turn

enable one to become active in improving one's own social conditions.

There are numerous reasons for the low education level for women. Naturally, parents are very influential in determining the educational prospects of children. For instance, some parents might not enrol their daughters to school because they will marry them off to another family. In some societies or families, the education of women is not considered a priority, whereas it is considered necessary to require the help of girls and young women on housework and other tasks related to



Girls tend to drop out of school more easily than boys. This is due to poor sanitary facilities, and the derogatory way they are treated by their peers.



the family economy. When education supposes an economic sacrifice from families, parents oftentimes choose to support their sons' education in detriment of their female siblings. This has again much to do with the roles set for women in societies and the social hierarchies which determine individuals' opportunities

Key factors for girls with disabilities' low education opportunities are stigma and an inaccessible environment. Parents' shame, long distance to school, poor accessibility at school and in general, and language barriers

are also influential factors in denying children with disabilities education.

However, educational opportunities are also largely dependent on one's social class, economic status, parents' attitudes, whether one lives in an urban or rural area, and the severity of one's disability. For example, it is much more likely for a woman with a disability to be highly educated if her parents are highly educated and have supportive attitudes.

2.3. Employment and dependency on others

ARTICLE 27

Work and employment

The article states that all persons with disabilities have the right to gain an income from work that is freely chosen from a labour market and work environment that is open, accessible, and inclusive.

Source: United Nations, The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2008).

Many of the reasons behind low education apply when discussing employment. Not to mention, the lack of an education hinders the chances of being employed. Being employed is a way to gain income and power as well as a way to become independent. Having difficulty in the labour market greatly hinders women's ability to influence. Therefore, it is crucial to support the employment of women with disabilities.

In addition to having difficulty being employed, regrettably, women with disabilities also face challenges as employees. For instance, it is not uncommon for parents to demand the money their daughter has earned, whether it is because they do not believe in her ability to manage her





own finances, or simply because they are using her.

Above all, it is very challenging for women to be employed in positions of power and influence. It is typical for men to be the employers, thus employed women are oftentimes still dependent on men in this regard. Due to this dependency, abuses of power toward female employees are common. For example, if a female employee is sexually abused by either her co-worker or supervisor, they often stay silent for fear of being fired.

Lastly, having a job and a family is a way for men with disabilities to partly overcome the stigma they face; the case is not the same for women. Even if a woman with a disability has a family and a job, she is still faced with a lot of stigma. The significance of employment in the lives of women with disabilities is critical. As well as generating an income, it makes them independent, and decreases the risk of abuse.



2.3. Family life, marriage and children

ARTICLE 23

Respect for home and the family

Appropriate and effective measures must be taken to ensure persons with disabilities face no discrimination in matters pertaining to marriage, family, parenthood, and relationships. It stresses that the right to freely make decisions relating to marriage and children as well as access to information on reproduction and family planning must be ensured.

Source: United Nations, The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2008).

The sexuality of women with disabilities is frequently under scrutiny. They are repeatedly perceived as either asexual or hypersexual. Such assumptions are extremely harmful and prevent women with disabilities to freely express their sexuality. Such prejudices also hinder their romantic and social prospects.

It has been noted that the likeliness of getting married is lower for women with disabilities than it is for men with disabilities (Emmett & Alant 2006, 455). It is also more likely for a man to marry someone without a disability than it is for a woman. Women more commonly marry men with disabilities.

Because women with disabilities face challenges regarding marriage, it is not uncommon for them to become the second wife of someone (regardless of its illegality). This further renders them vulnerable, as second wives have no rights in the marriage. As in, no rights to shared children or property.

In addition, in some societies the women may even be coerced by their husbands into quitting their job or their studies. Additionally, the divorce rates of women with disabilities are much higher than those of women without disabilities. (Emmett & Alant 2006, 455).

If a woman gives birth to a child with a disability, it is not uncommon for the father to leave the family because of this. Being left a single mother, leaves the woman in a very challenging and vulnerable position. Especially, if the finances of the mother were dependent on the income provided by the father. Such a situation demonstrates

how, as Emmett and Alant affirm (2006, p. 452), disability is not only a consequence of poverty but also a cause for poverty.

As has previously been stated, women are oftentimes blamed for having children with disabilities. Conversely, men are not. Women with disabilities are also encouraged against having children. Men face less pressure in that regard. Perhaps this has something to do with the fact that women are commonly the ones expected to take care of the child.

One of the ways women are discouraged from having children is simply not presenting it as an option for them. It is common for parents of children with disabilities to not discuss the topic with them at all. As such, women

with disabilities grow thinking getting children is not possible for them, even though it can be. In addition, the prevention of women with disabilities having children can be very forced. For instance, in Central Asia it is not uncommon for women with disabilities to be compulsorily sterilized or pressured into having an abortion. Other means of prevention include inaccessible hospitals, lack of sign language interpreters, uninformed doctors, and doctors who simply instruct women with disabilities against having children.

In some cultures, motherhood plays a significant part in determining a woman's womanhood. Therefore, the fact that some women are instructed against it, is consequential in how they are perceived as women.

In addition to facing difficulties regarding marriage, women with disabilities as well as mothers of children with disabilities, face adversity regarding parenthood.



2.5. Sexual and reproductive health

ARTICLE 5 Health

All persons with disabilities have the right to the highest obtainable standard health care without discrimination on the basis of disability. Appropriate measures must be taken for it to be accessible and gender-sensitive, and for it to include rehabilitative care. Specifically, the need for sexual and reproductive health to be as affordable and of as good quality as for others.

Source: United Nations, The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2008).



One of the issues regarding health care for women with disabilities is related to the lack of information. There are many reasons for the information not reaching women with disabilities. Discussing sexuality is a taboo in many countries, making it difficult for any woman to get valid information on the subject. For instance, the information may not be in sign language or braille, making it inaccessible for deaf and blind people respectively. Illiteracy also greatly obstructs access to information. What is more, persons with disabilities who belong to sexual minorities, face an even greater challenge of obtaining proper information. Lastly, people with disabilities are oftentimes perceived as asexual, therefore it is believed such information is not necessary for them.

The consequences for the lack of information on sexuality and sexual health are extremely damaging. The lack of information can result in sexually transmitted diseases and unwanted pregnancies. Making matters worse, people with disabilities face big challenges in access to health care. WHO estimates that complications during pregnancy and childbirth result in 20 million women acquiring disabilities. They state that such complications could easily be avoided with proper reproductive health care.

Getting treatment in hospitals can be extremely challenging for people with disabilities due to inaccessibility, the lack of a mutual language and sign language interpreters, as well as doctors' ineptitude regarding disability. Women may sometimes even

refuse to seek health care, because they are afraid no one will take care of the household chores while they are gone (Katsui & Mojtahedi 2015, 565).

The lack of information may also result in having misguided conceptions on

sex and sexuality. For instance, if a caretaker molests a child with a disability while taking care of him/her the child may grow to think of it as normal sexual behaviour. As such, the child may form distorted and harmful conceptions of sex and sexuality.

2.6 Abuse

ARTICLE 16

Freedom from exploitation, violence and abuse

Appropriate measures must be taken to ensure the protection of all persons with disabilities from all forms of exploitation, violence and abuse, all the while being conscious of their gender-based aspects.

ARTICLE 13

Access to justice

All persons with disabilities must have access to justice on an equal basis with others. For this to succeed, the people working in the field of justice must be trained accordingly.

Source: United Nations, The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2008).



Disability increases the risk of abuse and above all, having a disability makes one vulnerable to maltreatment. Abuse is more common among disabled women, but boys with disabilities are at an extremely vulnerable position as well, particularly those who live in institutional settings. Boys with disabilities face a risk of being abused by their counsellors. As the abuser is a person of responsibility and has power over the child, such cases are very hard to expose.

What is important to note is that the abuse persons with disabilities face is not only limited to physical violence. The abuse can appear in other forms such as isolation, abandonment, negligence as well as emotional and sexual abuse. (Maxwell, Belser & David 2006.) The abuse can occur anywhere and can be inflicted by anyone. Furthermore, events such as war and environmental catastrophes greatly increase the risk of abuse.

2.6.1. Physical Abuse

As has been stated, women with disabilities have a high risk of suffering physical violence. The perpetrator can be anyone: a spouse, a relative, a caretaker, a teacher. Sometimes male spouses with disabilities may be violent towards their wives as a way to prove their masculinity (Peta 2017, 380) or due to feelings of inadequacy. This again demonstrates how gender roles may be harmful. Upholding the idea of men as violent and aggressive, leads to violence and aggression. In addition to assault and beatings, breaking one's equipment (i.e. wheelchair, crutches, white cane) and forcefully undressing someone in front of

strangers for a medical examination in a public hospital are also types of physical abuse (Maxwell, Belser & David 2006, 294).

2.6.2. Psychological Abuse

Notably, hiding women with disabilities in their homes is a form of abuse; it is a way to silence them and make them invisible as well as to render them incapable. Keeping women with disabilities hidden in home, strips them of their autonomy. Children with disabilities may also be abandoned due to their parents being ashamed or not believing in their parental abilities. Negligence refers to instances where caretakers of people with disabilities neglect their assistive duties; for instance, by not helping a person with a disability out of bed or with getting dressed. Lastly, emotional abuse includes insulting, threatening, intimidation, and degradation. (Maxwell, Belser & David 2006).



2.6.3. Sexual Abuse

The risk of sexual abuse for women with disabilities is exceptionally high. Sexual abuse can occur anywhere: in the home, at the hospital, at school. In addition, the disability one has, may impact the abuse one faces. For example, people with physical disabilities may be sexually harassed by their caregivers while they are being carried somewhere or washed. Additionally, it has been established that women with intellectual disabilities face heightened risk of suffering violence and sexual abuse (Combrinck 2017, 59). Deaf women are also in a vulnerable position especially as communicating about abuse can be impossible due to having no means of communicating with others.

There are many reasons for the high rates of sexual abuse toward women with disabilities. One of them being the fact, that they are seen as incapable. As such, the way women with disabilities are portrayed and talked about is significant. Depicting them as weak exposes them to more violence. Secondly, women with disabilities are more vulnerable due to their lack of access to education and employment. The social isolation they endure may make them dependent on their partners and families. It has been reported that there is an increased risk of abuse if the victim is financially, emotionally, or physically dependent on the perpetrator (Peta 2017, 176). Perpetrators knowing that women with disabilities have difficulties understanding, discussing and/or reporting abuse is also an endangering factor.



Often the abuse is not being reported. The reasons for this are manifold. For instance, being financially dependent on the abuser prevents many women from discussing their abuse. Fear of further violence is also a reason, as some women may be punished by their family for being abused. Another reason is the fear of being judged by the community. It is common for women to be shamed and rejected for being abused. Some may also stay silent due to fear of family making her marry her rapist. Additionally, not only is discussing sexual abuse a taboo, but it is also emotionally taxing. Not to mention, some women not even understanding that they have been abused. Lastly, there are difficulties in reporting such crimes as law enforcement may not be educated enough in dealing with such issues or they may just be dismissive. Specifically, deaf women may face difficulties in reporting abuse due to communication barriers.

3

Empowering women with disabilities

Having a positive sense of self is an important step in becoming empowered. Due to gendered discrimination, it is more challenging for women to acquire a healthy self-esteem. This is one of the reasons it is more difficult for women to get active, as society does not provide them with an empowering sense of value and capability.

Meeting other women with a disability and sharing experiences can be very empowering. Abilis provides platforms and possibilities for women to meet

as well as share joys and challenges. Many Abilis funded projects are based on the idea of peer support and providing a possibility for persons with a disability to meet. Adding an element of training may strengthen the process and feeling of empowerment. Education and employment are other important factors in the process of empowerment. Abilis has funded various women's employment projects. When women with disabilities get together without men, we often see a great transformation. Quiet and timid women become outspoken and confident.



Peer support is invaluable in improving the self-esteem of women and girls with disabilities.

For example

Abilis funded a project in Tajikistan called "The Centre for Applied Arts for Women with Disabilities". It was implemented by a local organisation of women with disabilities. Ten women were trained in sewing, knitting, and embroidering children's clothes and traditional women's clothes. At the end of the project, an exhibition of the handiworks was organised. After the training, the women went to work in a local handicraft centre and trained others in the organisation. The result of the project granted the women with sewing skills and an opportunity to realise their skills. In addition, the organisation got more experience in activity organising and project management. The project also strengthened the organisation's economic capacity. Most importantly, the project enabled some women to leave their home for the first time. Thus, it also strengthened many of the women's sense of capability and self-esteem.



4

Abilis gender equality actions

Furthering gender equality has always been a priority in Abilis. All Abilis employees in and outside of Finland are committed to this goal. The following quotes indicate commitment to this theme.

“ **The rights of women in developing countries are mostly acknowledged on paper but not in real ground. The society is still stereotyping women as secondary members of the family. While transforming into Human rights era, one should embrace women for equal entitlement of rights.** ”

BIRENDRA RAJ POKHAREL, ABILIS
COUNTRY COORDINATOR NEPAL

“ **Both men and women have equal rights and dignity. However, for many reasons rights and dignity of women are violated. If we want to be a civilized nation, we must fight for the rights of women. As Napoleon Bonaparte said “Give me an educated mother, I shall promise you the birth of a civilized, educated nation”. We have to fight for the rights of women for the existence of our all!** ”

JIBON WILLIAM GOMES, ABILIS LOCAL
EXPERT BANGLADESH

4.1. Policies

Abilis strategy through 2021 has a strong focus on women and girls with disabilities. This strategy steers Abilis to support women with disability to get organised and form their own organisations as well as to fund projects created and implemented by women. In addition, Abilis puts special emphasis on employing women with disabilities and supporting women and girls with disabilities to get an education, employment and to gain income. The strategy will be updated regularly and a strong emphasis on gender equality ensured in the future. The updating process will be done with the strong participation of women with disabilities within the Abilis family.

Abilis Foundation has a number of internal policies that guide its funding activities and the work of all its employees. For example, there are travelling and safety policies which guide the work of Abilis headquarters, country offices and partner organisations. Abilis does not tolerate any form of sexual harassment and Abilis as an employer condemns all forms of workplace sexual harassment. Pre-

vention of workplace harassment is a high priority.

If one is a victim of such sexual harassment, they are encouraged to speak up, and they will be supported. Furthermore, if someone notices someone being harassed, they ought to intervene and help towards stopping it. If Abilis gets information on someone being harassed, bullied, or treated inappropriately, preventative measures will immediately be taken to stop it. This zero-tolerance policy applies to Abilis headquarters in Finland as well all Abilis country offices and disability organisations Abilis partners with.

A good and trusting working environment is an important factor in a non-abusive working place. When

Info

Sexual harassment means unwanted sexually charged behaviour towards another. It can appear in either verbal or physical form e.g. improper touching or inappropriate remarks. If such behaviour is repetitive and systematic, it can be categorized as sexually charged workplace bullying.

all employees feel respected and valued, it is easier to also bring up difficult issues for discussion. Abilis as an employer takes good care of its employees and has several policies and structures to support its employees and prevent all forms of abuse and bullying. Gender issues are taken into account in all Abilis policies.



4.2. Gender equality in Abilis funded projects

Abilis wants to increase the amount of funded projects from groups of women with disabilities. In addition, Abilis wants to increase the active participation of women in other Abilis funded projects.

Abilis also condemns all kinds of harassment within the projects it funds. All focus country staffs are encouraged to give training to grantee organisations on gender issues including sexual harassment. There are some preventive measures in place. For example, country staffs are encouraged not to travel alone for safety. Especially women employees of Abilis have reported that sometimes travelling alone is a big risk. Thus, Abilis also reserves funds for this kind of preventive measures into the country programmes.

4.2.1. Meaningful participation

Abilis works hard in trying to ensure women to be heard and not only used as “props” and for women to be able to participate fully and be in positions of power. Notably, some organisations may falsely claim women to be included in a project or an organisation, when in actuality they have no real possibilities of influencing the project.

For example, some disability organisations have women's committees that work within, but cannot make



decisions about, the organisation in question. Men in the organisation would use these committees as an excuse for not including women into the decision making bodies of the organisation. In other words, claiming that women are able to participate as the organisation has a women's committee, when in practice men are still making all the decisions. Thus, ensuring women's needs to be heard is a high priority, and requires further potent action.

4.2.2. Affirmative action, role models and visibility



It is important to note the importance of highlighting women's rights and gender equality, otherwise it may be side lined. Thus, addressing gender equality specifically is extremely vital. It also leads to the issue being addressed more efficiently. Abilis needs to carefully look at what structures really empower women and enable them to participate fully.

Ultimately, improving gender equality in practice can be done through many means, the most pertinent ones being: affirmative action, visibility, raising awareness, education, and better implementation of laws. Affirmative action refers to the promotion of discriminated people by favouring them; a case in point being the prioritisation of female-led projects.

Visibility on the other hand is done by encouraging women with disabilities to engage in social affairs, participate and be active. Encouraging women with disabilities to be visible can be done by for instance providing them with role models. Girls seeing women with disabilities being independent and active, enables them to realise their own potential and worth. Another way of encouragement is changing social attitudes. When the society around a woman with a disability does not regard her with disdain and hostility, it is much easier for her to become socially active. Furthermore, seeing women being active and capable, decreases misinformation on gender.

Lastly, raising awareness and education are also extremely vital in advancing gender equality. It is important to note that educating people on gender equality ought to not only be limited to women. As important as it is for women to realise their rights, it is equally as important for people to be taught to respect them.

4.2.3. Peer support and education

Peer support is one key to the empowerment of women with disabilities. Abilis funded projects provide women with disabilities with peer support at the same time improving their self-esteem.

Education on gender issues will also be provided through training on abuse and sexual health by:

(1) Promoting projects that train women with disabilities on such issues and,

(2) Encouraging country offices to give training on such issues

In addition, women with disabilities will be educated to use helpful tools that prevent abuse such as various smartphone applications. Abilis country coordinators and facilitators have a central role in determining what the tools are that are suitable to that country context.



4.2.4. Leadership and involvement in decision making

Abilis wants to enable women with disabilities to take more leadership roles and be more involved in decision-making by providing proper training and support. Through its funding Abilis promotes the economic empowerment of women with disabilities. Abilis also employs affirmative action in recruitments, training, participation, representation, and leadership.

Furthermore, there ought to be greater collaboration between women's rights organisations and disability rights organisations. It is common for disability organisation in developing countries to be led by men, which is why the concerns of women with disabilities are greatly disregarded. Many women's rights organisations on the other hand are unaware of the issues regarding women with disabilities. It is common for them to regard women with disabilities with pity and view them as incapable and passive. This disconnect between women's rights organisations and disability organisations, further marginalizes women with disabilities.

5

Way forward

Abilis Foundation is committed to the following actions to further gender equality within the organisation and the societies it works in.

5.1. Networking and cooperation

It is important to building a strong relationship with women's and men's organisations as well as other organisations working on gender in Finland as well as in Abilis focus countries. Collaboration is encouraged between women's rights, human rights, and disability rights organisations.

Abilis has had a practice of bringing all Abilis facilitators and country coordinators together every 4 years to share experiences, receive training and develop their work. In the future, Abilis will put even more effort into

providing spaces for common learning. Asia and Africa regional meetings will be organised and country coordinators brought together to share experiences and expertise.

Gender issues will be one of the main topics of learning and sharing. Abilis has a lot of expertise about gender issues within the organisation and this expertise should be utilised better. Abilis employees are encouraged to try new and innovative ways of sharing information and expertise so that all the expertise within the Abilis family can be put into good use.

5.2. Training on gender issues

Increasing expertise on gender issues at Abilis headquarters and country offices/partner organisations. Training will be provided for staff and all employees are familiarised with gender issues.

Abilis country offices and partner organisations will also provide training to Abilis grantees on gender issues, sexual and reproductive health, abuse among other topics.

5.3. Dismantling harmful misconceptions

Abilis will advocate and raise awareness about disability and gender on various spheres of society both in Finland and in Abilis focus countries. Different kinds of materials will be developed, so that the information reaches everyone in a suitable form. For example, using pictures or comics to make information more visual, interesting and accessible, to those who cannot read. Making sure all information is accessible.

Abilis will focus on communicating about disability specific gender issues through many means e.g. a social media campaign. Information will be distributed on Abilis' goals and achievements in relation to gender. The work of Abilis provides education and visibility in showing by example the ability of women and girls with disabilities.

Abilis Foundation is determined to address disability and gender related topics for further development, in order to better operationalise the important and vital principles discussed in this guideline.



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The purpose of this guideline is to indicate how gender impacts the lives of persons with disabilities and adapt the knowledge in a way that further improves the way gender equality is implemented in Abilis' work.



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