



The Human Rights- Based Approach

in Abilis Foundation



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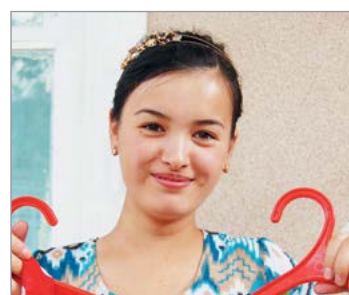


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This document explains what a Human Rights-Based Approach means in practice in the work of Abilis Foundation.



1

Why a Human Rights-Based Approach?

Abilis Foundation is a Finnish development actor supporting Disabled People's Organizations (DPOs) and their members in developing countries so that they can work actively for improvements in their living conditions and realization of disability rights in their countries. The respect and promotion of the rights of persons with disabilities are at the core of all activities of Abilis Foundation. Since its establishment in 1998, Abilis Foundation has taken the human rights-based approach (HRBA) seriously and made continuous efforts for strengthening and developing it further. This document presents how human rights, par-

ticularly disability rights, are the basis of Abilis Foundation's work and what the human rights-based approach means in the work of Abilis Foundation.

In 2015 all UN member states agreed on goals and targets for development for the following 15 years. This agreement is known as the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development containing 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) with associated 169 targets. The human rights are strongly reflected in the 2030 Agenda. The dignity of the individual is explicitly recognized and the goals and targets are to be met for all nations and people, and for all segments of society, i.e. no one will be left behind. Furthermore, the Agenda urges to reach first those who are furthest behind. The disability perspective is reflected in various parts of the SDGs and specifically in parts related to education (Goal 4), growth and employment (Goal 8), inequality (Goal 10), accessibility of human settlements (Goal 11), as well as data collection and monitoring of the SDGs (Goal 17).

As a part of its commitment to promote development in a sustainable way and to draw up its own national plans of actions, Finland has adapted its development policy to support the capacity of developing countries to achieve the sustainable development goals and targets of the Agenda 2030. Besides SDGs, Finland's development cooperation and policy also gives emphasis to human rights-based approach to development. Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland (MFA Finland) has a guidance note on HRBA (MFA 2015), and its



Human rights of children with disabilities are one of the priorities of Abilis Foundation.

current development policy (MFA 2016) describes, "the realization of human rights is a key goal in Finland's development policy. The aim is also to strengthen the capacity of individuals and authorities to promote human rights as well as to assure that development cooperation is not discriminatory and people have an opportunity to participate in decision-making. This is known as the human rights-based approach." Furthermore, MFA Finland has published its approach related to addressing rights of persons with disabilities (MFA 2018), where HRBA is

brought up as "the principal strategy to operationalize disability inclusion across the whole development programme".

Persons with disabilities in the global South tend to be invisible, disadvantaged, and forgotten in the context of development. They tend to be among the poorest of the poor and hidden in their own homes. That is, it is commonplace for persons with disabilities to be excluded from society. A number of persons with disabilities are not registered and thus do not even exist officially. The realization of their human rights is a huge challenge since they are not even recognised as part of the society.

For many persons with disabilities in the global South, daily life is restricted to one room, to their home or the proximity thereof. The fulfilment of basic needs is a struggle and many persons with disabilities die of complications related to their disability because of a limited access to health care, social security and/or due to insufficient knowledge of disability and human rights. In many cultures attitudes toward disability are negative and harsh. In some cultures disability is seen as a result of a sin committed in one's previous life or by an ancestor. Consequently, it is extremely difficult for a person with a disability to get a job or acquire an education. The stigma based on disability is severe in many parts of the world.

The realities of persons with disabilities are quite different from each other depending on her/his environmental context, personal capacity, and the disability itself. For example, in many



Persons with disabilities are active members of their society on an equal basis with others.

Participation in cultural life, recreation, leisure and sport is a right.

countries in the global South, a deaf person has little or no access to sign language. It is next to impossible for them to properly study in mainstream schools when they lack a mother tongue. Participation in the activities of society is very difficult or impossible for many persons with visual or physical disabilities due to physical as well as information- and communication-related barriers particularly in rural areas.

Persons with disabilities can also be subject to multiple discrimination. In practice this means that a person is discriminated not only based on her/his disability, but also on sex, age, ethnic, linguistic, religious and indigenous background, sexual orientation,

and/or HIV/AIDS status.

According to the World Report on Disability (WHO and the World Bank, 2011) about 15 % of the world's population lives with some form of disability. This scientifically verified global estimate of disability prevalence is also affected by an increasingly aging population, rapid spread of chronic diseases and different kinds of injuries caused by traffic accidents and humanitarian disasters including natural catastrophes and armed conflicts. Disability is a development issue as well as a human rights one, because of its bidirectional link to poverty: disability may increase the risk of poverty, and poverty may increase the risk of disability (WHO and the World

Bank, 2011). As addressing poverty and inequality are first and foremost considered as human rights concerns (MFA Finland, 2018), poverty of many persons with disabilities is a clear human rights issue.

It is important to raise the issue of human rights of persons with disabilities in order to change the disabling attitudes and to create an enabling environment for all. Persons with disabilities themselves will also have to be

aware of their rights. Every person is unique and has a full right to claim for and defend his/her own rights, while duty-bearers are obligated to have their obligations to respect, protect and fulfil human rights of rights-holders. Human rights principles, such as participation, empowerment, accountability, non-discrimination and equality, are important in the work of Abilis Foundation as a duty-bearer (see Article 32 of the UN Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities).



Disability And Human Rights-Based Approach

2

2.1. Human Rights- Based Approach and the Evolving Concept of Disability

The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) recognizes in its Preamble that “**disability is an evolving concept** and that disability results from the interaction between persons with impairments and attitudinal and environmental barriers that hinders their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others”. The World Report on Disability (WHO and the World Bank, 2011) defines disability as the umbrella term for impairments, activity limitations, and participation restrictions, referring to the negative aspects of the interaction between an individual (with a health condition) and that individual's contextual factors (environmental and personal factors). This kind of relational approach to disabilities has started to gain more support. The definition of disabilities today does not concentrate only on the medical and individual aspect of impairment (known as medical model)

but also on other relevant aspects including social (known as social model), environmental as well as psychological aspects. For a long time, it was assumed that challenges were natural and unavoidable consequences of impairment (OHCHR, 2010) but this no longer holds true due to the “profound shift” in understanding disabilities as human rights issues enshrined in the Convention.

The main aim of a human rights-based approach to disability is to enable each person to act as an equal citizen and to have an equal right to live. Meaningful participation, empowerment, ownership, and an enabling environment are some of the key elements of the human rights-based approach to disability. Participation of persons with disabilities is essential. Empowerment is made possible also through participation and once empowered, a



Peer support and employment have empowered many persons with disabilities.

Many women with disabilities are talented. When given an opportunity, they could contribute to their households.

person is encouraged to exercise their self-determination right. Participation also strengthens equality in society, which is one of the objectives of the human rights-based approach to disability. Persons with disabilities are to be seen as active citizens and as valuable resources to the society on an equal basis with others through the concepts of substantive equality and reasonable accommodation.

2.2. A Human Rights-Based Approach to Disability and Development

Katsui (2012) explains human rights-based approaches to disability and development through the concepts of participation, empowerment, mainstreaming, and solidarity among others. Based on evidences, Katsui (2012) connects Twin-Track Approach and charity-based approaches to human rights-based approaches to disability and development. She points out that both empowerment-centred disability-specific activities and mainstreaming ones could affect participation of the

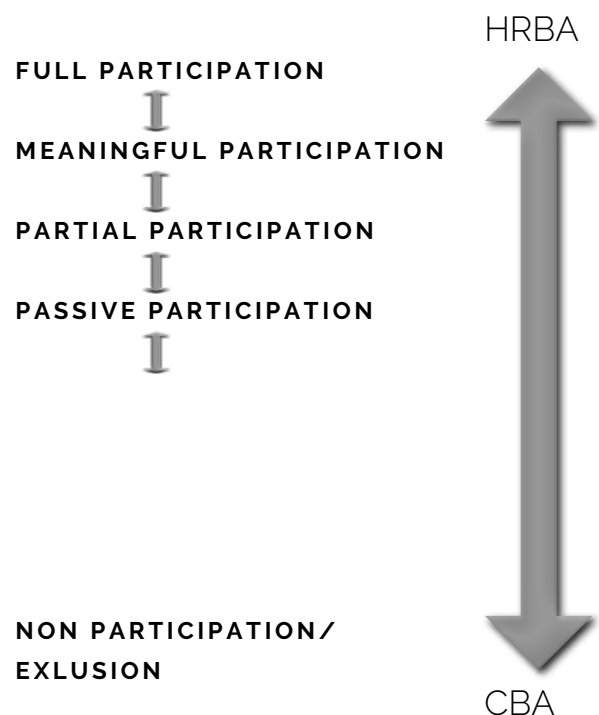


FIGURE 1. HRBA AND CBA IN PRACTICE (KATSUI, 2012).

rights-holders at different level from non-participation to full participation (Figure 1.).

Many persons with disabilities are seen as passive objects both in local cultures in the global South and in the traditional development work with a charity-based approach (CBA). As a person starts to be empowered and/or mainstreamed, s/he has more possibilities to participate and become an active subject. However, before a person can start claiming her/his rights actively, s/he must actually perceive her/himself as a right holder who has equal human rights with others based on substantive equality. This could happen through empowerment among others.

At the other end of the axis there are those who are already empowered and mainstreamed, know their rights and act to claim for them, when a human rights-based approach (HRBA) is operationalized in an ideal setting. However, as established above, many persons with disabilities in the global South live in extremely unequal and disabling environment with limited personal capacity. In practice, it means that such an ideal operationalization of a human rights-based approach remains far too distant from the reality of many persons with disabilities when they are neither empowered nor mainstreamed. This is the very context of inequality where Abilis Foundation works. Charity-based approaches to disability and development are theoretically far from human rights-based approaches.

Nevertheless, in practice, due to the realities of many persons with disabilities in the global South, human rights-

based approaches and charity-based approaches to disability and development are not as totally different approaches. This is particularly due to needs of persons with disabilities that have to be reasonably accommodated as human rights such as, assistive devices. Under the UNCRPD, provision of assistive devices is a State obligation (Article 4). However, in the global South, too frequently only non-governmental organisations sporadically provide them for persons with disabilities. Such a needs-based approach to disability and development is theoretically close to CBA, and connects two theoretically far apart approaches of CBA and HRBA to disability and development. The two approaches are also connected due to the starting point of many persons with disabilities in the global South.

For example, if deaf women have no access to sign language, they are often passive participants in a human rights project. Perhaps it has not been possible to learn sign language or maybe there has not been a sign language interpreter available. Lack of access to mother tongue and thus that to information, are often the starting point for many deaf persons. In this situation these women cannot actively take part in the project. On the other hand, passive participation can be the first step to empowerment, as a person goes out of the home for the first time and observes a number of other persons with similar or different impairments in the project activity at hand. Such subtle psychological change or sense of empowerment sometimes has a significant value for those who have been hidden at home for their whole lives. After being empowered the person can start partici-

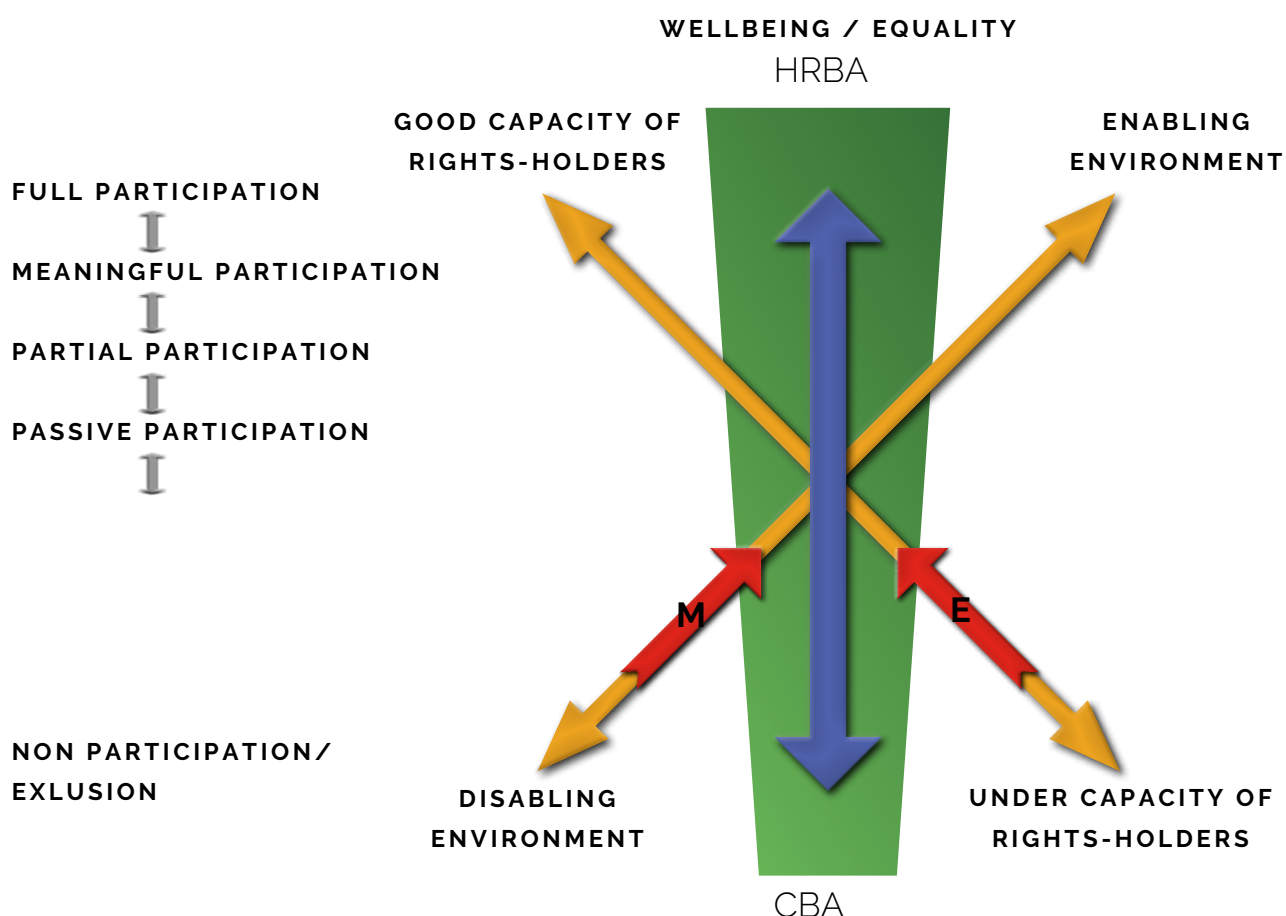


FIGURE 2. AN EMPIRICAL THEORY OF A HUMAN RIGHTS-BASED APPROACH TO DISABILITY AND DEVELOPMENT (KATSUI, 2012).

pating more actively with her/his own conscious decisions.

Figure 2. explains how the environment and the capacity of rights-holders can also affect human rights-based approaches to disability and development. A person's level of participation is affected both by the environment and personal capacity. An enabling environment is one of the key factors in the wellbeing of persons with disabilities. The environment includes duty-bearers such as family, community, an organization of persons with disabilities or physical environment such as a school or a work place. A person's wellbeing improves the more enabling the environment is. On the other hand, the more

the disability issues are mainstreamed into society, the more society enables persons with disabilities to participate, (M-letter, mainstreaming on the enabling-disabling environment axis).

From the figure we can also see how the capacity of a rights-holder affects her/his wellbeing and empowerment. The more a rights-holder's capacity is strengthened, the more s/he tends to be empowered (E-letter, empowerment on the good capacity – under capacity of rights-holders axis). Once empowered a person has the capacity to advocate for her/his rights. As a result, their wellbeing also tends to increase, particularly when their full participation could result in their environment becoming more enabling. >

Participation is critical from the point of view of a person's ability and skills. One's capacity increases when one participates more. Also the more a person's capacity improves the more likely s/he is to be empowered. A person is more likely to start being active in the decision making regarding her/his own life after being

empowered and having the skills and ability to do so. A person's wellbeing increases when s/he is empowered and mainstreamed and thus capable of deciding whether to participate or not to participate. Subsequently such self-determination right of a person could impact on his/her environment to become more enabling.



Everyone is entitled to enjoy their rights. In many countries, girls with disabilities tend to enjoy less rights than those without a disability and boys with disabilities, due to various barriers, regardless of their abilities.

2.3. The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

Internationally human rights of persons with disabilities have been recognized as important, particularly through the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. The other United Nation's human rights treaties apply also to persons with disabilities. Nevertheless, in reality a disproportionate number of persons with disabilities were left out. In this regard, the Convention complements other international laws by its emphasis on the equality and non-discrimination of persons with disabilities.

The Convention and its Optional Protocol were adopted in December 2006 at the United Nations' Headquarters, and was ratified by Finland on the 10th June 2016. The Convention addresses in detail the rights of persons with disabilities as part of international human rights law and suggests clear guidance to duty-bearers on how to respect, protect, and fulfil the rights of persons with disabilities. The Convention reaffirms that persons with disabilities are active members of their society on an equal basis with others. The Convention highlights equality and full and active participation of persons with disabilities. In addition to outlining general principles, the Convention takes into account different aspects of life such as employment, education, and recreation.

Abilis Foundation's work has been positively affected by the Convention. Today (September 2018) 177

For example,

Abilis can fund projects where ramps and accessible toilets are built in DPO offices. Such projects promote the realization of Article 9 (accessibility). When it comes to income generating activities, a project in which funds are granted for raising chickens promotes Article 27 (work and employment) as well as Article 19 (Living independently and being included in the community).

states in the world have ratified the Convention and many of them are on the OECD/DAC list of ODA recipients. Abilis Foundation's work supports the realization of the Convention at many levels.

Firstly, the work of Abilis Foundation implements Article 32 (International Cooperation) of the Convention. By promotion of human rights through international cooperation Finland, is implementing its obligation stipulated in Article 32 by supporting organizations of persons with disabilities in the global South. Abilis Foundation's policies of giving support straight to the grassroots groups and organizations of persons with disabilities is in conformity with the Convention and the slogan of the global disability movement, "Nothing about us without us". Persons with disabilities at grassroots level and their initiatives are financially supported. Secondly, each funded project promotes the rights of persons with disabilities as well as enhances their living conditions and possibilities in practice.

All the projects funded by Abilis Foundation originate from persons with disabilities themselves based on their real life situations, needs and/or conditions. The following articles of the CRPD are most relevant for Abilis-funded projects:

ARTICLE 5

(Equality and non-discrimination):

With its funding activities Abilis Foundation promotes the equality of persons with disabilities. One of Abilis Foundation's visions is a world where persons with disabilities are equal with other citizens.

ARTICLE 6

(Women with disabilities):

In its strategy Abilis Foundation has defined that special emphasis is given to the status, education and income generation of girls and women with disabilities. During the last few years, the number of organizations formed by women with disabilities has been constantly increasing. Women and girls with disabilities have also increasingly become aware of their rights and possibilities.



ARTICLE 8

(Awareness-raising):

Human rights and advocacy as well as awareness-raising regarding the Convention are special strategic focus areas of Abilis' work. Awareness-raising and advocacy work for the rights of persons with disabilities are often in a central role in many of Abilis funded projects. Such activities are also implemented in conjunction with other project activities such as income generation.

ARTICLE 7

(Children with disabilities):

In the strategy of Abilis Foundation special emphasis is also given to the status and living conditions of children with disabilities. Abilis funding given to organizations of parents of children with disabilities enhances children's possibilities to attend school and participate.

ARTICLE 9

(Accessibility):

Accessibility is severely taken into account in different aspects of Abilis' work. Abilis Foundation tries to serve as a good example of this by promoting accessibility through its actions. For example, much of the material provided by Abilis is accessible to persons with visual impairments.



ARTICLE 21

(Freedom of expression and opinion, and access to information):

In its oral and written communication Abilis Foundation uses accessible formats and also encourages the organizations funded by Abilis to do the same. Abilis recognizes sign language and promotes the use thereof.

ARTICLE 27

(Work and employment):

A strategic emphasis is put on the independent income generation of persons with disabilities. Through its funding activities Abilis aims to enhance the possibility of persons with disabilities to get employed and earn a living. This enables the participants with disabilities to become part of the community and gives them a better chance to improve their situation by being able to provide for themselves.

ARTICLE 29

(Participation in political and public life):

Abilis Foundation supports persons with disabilities in forming their own organizations as well as in joining organizations of persons with disabilities (DPOs). DPOs advocate for and give information on disability rights as well as encourage their members to be active and take part in decision making, politics and other functions of the society.



3

The human rights-based approach in Abilis Foundation's work

3.1. Human Rights as the Basis of Abilis Foundation's Work

Systematic and conscious adoption and implementation of international human rights, norms and principles are the basis of a human rights-based approach. Additionally, the recognition of both the rights-holders and their rights as well as the duty-bearers and their obligations is pivotal. In practice, this means that in a human rights-based approach the capacity of rights-holders to demand and promote their rights and the ability of duty-bearers to fulfil their responsibilities are strengthened.

The objectives of Abilis Foundation's work are the promotion of activities of persons with disabilities, their human rights and equality, and the possibilities for independent living in the global South. Abilis Foundation pursues a world where persons with disabilities are aware of their rights and these rights are respected, promoted and fulfilled.

The work of Abilis Foundation is mainly targeted at strengthening capacities of rights-holders, namely persons with disabilities. This includes also strengthening capacities of persons with disabilities to conduct advocacy towards and have dialogue with duty-bearers on disability inclusion and mainstreaming. In some projects, Abilis has also supported duty-bearers in their endeavour to meet their responsibilities.

A human rights-based approach is implemented in the global programme of Abilis Foundation, which includes country programmes with partners and project management (application and reporting processes), communication and advocacy work, and the work with stakeholders. The human rights-based approach is also implemented in the whole governance of Abilis Foundation (the board and Headquarter office).

The work of Abilis Foundation is human rights-based in many aspects, even though not yet fully. The next sub-chapters explain the basis as well as the actual implementation of the approach in the work of Abilis Foundation.

For example,

Abilis has funded several projects in Tajikistan where organizations of persons with disabilities have distributed information on the Convention. For effective dissemination of information the groups have organized workshops for persons with disabilities as well as for government officials.



Persons with Albinism, epilepsy, HIV/AIDS, and/or chronic diseases are relatively new groups that Abilis has been supporting.

3.2. Work with One of the Most Disadvantaged Groups of Persons

A disproportionate number of persons with disabilities are among the poorest of the poor and one of the most disadvantaged groups. Disability is seen as something to be ashamed of in many cultures. It is all too common for persons with disabilities to be kept hidden away and excluded from mainstream discourse on and practice of development and human rights. Abilis Foundation supports also persons that are subject to multiple discrimination for example girls or women with disabilities, children with disabilities, and persons with disabilities that are of an indigenous background.

Abilis Foundation also funds cross-disability projects that are planned and implemented by groups of

persons with disabilities. The aim is to promote the status of persons with different kinds of disabilities equally in the global South. Abilis also recognizes the questions specifically related to specific contexts of the global South.

For example,

Abilis funds projects that are submitted by albinos or those who have HIV. In the global South these two groups are very disadvantaged even if in Finland they are not recognized as groups of persons with disabilities.

All organizations of persons with disabilities, that fulfil the criteria for Abilis Foundation's funding, can apply. Abilis supports the activities of different kinds of groups from different countries, tribes, clans, and religious backgrounds.

3.3. Empowerment

Abilis Foundation aims to facilitate the empowerment of persons with disabilities around the world, particularly in the global South. Empowerment is related to culture and local conditions. Most importantly, it is a personal process that is caused by a change(s) at a level of individuals. Empowerment does not happen in a vacuum and an impulse is needed to start the process. The type of impulse needed to start the process of empowerment depends on the individual. For example, for someone it is enough to see another person with a disability walking in public. Others may need many changes at different levels such as personal, family, community and national levels for the process of empowerment to begin. The aim of Abilis Foundation's work is to give persons with disabilities the chance to be part of something that is important to their lives. Being part of a project may give the first impulse that starts the process of empowerment.

Most of the time when a DPO applies for funding from Abilis at least one of the group members is already relatively empowered. This is reflected in the fact that the group has already managed to finalize the application. However, many other persons with disabilities who are members of the group have also the chance to participate and become empowered through the funded project.

Many active persons with disabilities have become role models for those who did not believe in their own potential.

3.4. Participation

One of the main criteria of Abilis' funding is that funding is granted only to projects that are owned by persons with disabilities. Abilis supports the formation of new groups of persons with disabilities as well as organizations that are already registered. Abilis Foundation's definition for a DPO is that over 51% of the members of the board of the organization have to be persons with disabilities. This ensures that the authority and control of the organization is in the hands of persons with disabilities. In the case of children with disabilities, Abilis funds organizations of their parents. Abilis Foundation also supports the independence and decision making of youth with disabilities and assists them in finding their own place in a DPO and/or society.

The participation of grassroots organizations is supported through Abilis Foundation's global programme. In the named programme countries Abilis Foundation has either a country office or a partnership with a local organisation. These representatives



of Abilis Foundation can help applicants with the planning as well as the actual implementation of their project. An Abilis representative can also, if needed, translate the application from a local language to English or any other main language that Abilis Foundation uses. This method of work ensures that Abilis really reaches the grassroots level. Applying for a grant is not hindered by the applicant's illiteracy, as Abilis representatives can assist them in writing ideas down. Abilis also has easy-to-read manuals to help at different stages of the project cycle (Abilis Manuals 1-3). Especially the manual 1: Participatory Project Planning is an important tool.

The money transfer can be channelled through a partner organization or a country office to ensure that even the groups unable to open their own bank account can receive Abilis funding. Thus, the funding system of Abilis Foundation is flexible and encourages newly established groups to be active and build capacity through project activities.

For example,

if a country's weather conditions restrict the implementation of a project or a group has other problems in completing the project in the desired time, Abilis Foundation can give more time or support to the group to complete the project under the prevailing circumstances.

Abilis Foundation supports groups and organizations of persons with disabilities in taking their first steps. A group of persons with disabilities has the possibility to experience how



Abilis encourages and helps youth with disabilities make important decisions concerning their lives through funded projects.

to manage and implement a project. After this first experience it is significantly easier for the group to implement their next activity, or even apply for the next grant and/or to ensure funding for the activities in other ways. Often a longer time is needed for the planning stage and the implementation of a project for groups of persons with disabilities in the global South.

For example,

a group of women with disabilities had to start with the practice of literacy skills before they could start their actual project of income generation. Running a small business requires simple reading, writing and counting skills.

For the time being, a significant amount of support is needed for planning of and applying funding for projects since many persons with disabilities in the global South have been socially excluded. With Abilis support they will be able to study the skills needed to handle money and to implement an activity of their own.



Encountering stigma is sometimes very painful. However, when positive encounters between persons with disabilities and the non-disabled are many, attitudes are easier to change.

3.5. Ownership and Trust

The initiative of each project comes from groups of persons with disabilities, often at grassroots level. Abilis Foundation provides grants for projects instead of implementing them as a development cooperation partner. In practice, this means that the ownership of Abilis funded projects is in the hands of the funded groups and organizations in the global South.

For example,

Abilis provides grants to DPOs in Somalia and in some other fragile states and circumstances. DPOs are working in hardship situations and with limited resources. However, they know the acute needs of their members. Abilis trusts the applicant's genuine initiatives and wishes to implement activities.

The staff of Abilis Foundation can help the group in its application process so that the application meets Abilis Foundation's criteria. However, the Abilis headquarters do not define what kind of or how a project should be implemented, if a project is in line with the priority thematic areas defined in the global programme of Abilis Foundation.

Abilis Foundation trusts the applicant's abilities and potential to learn as well as to implement their activities. All persons have the ability to implement a project when given a suitable amount of responsibility and provided the project activities are in the right proportion to the capacity of the group. The experience of being trusted is very empowering. Capacities of many persons with disabilities in the global North and South have been underestimated. Often they are not included in different functions of society on an equal basis with others. For example, the experience of being given a few chickens to take care of with Abilis funding can be empowering for those who were not given proper responsibilities to share within the household. The individual as well as the group could not only exemplify their potential and possibility through the Abilis funded project but also gain respect from the surrounding community. This could empower the person with a disability and give this person more confidence in her/his capacities. Often a person who has been excluded for a long time just needs a small push to become an active actor in her/his life. In practice, empowerment can mean no longer being afraid of leaving the house and being exposed. This is an important first step for both the rights-holders and duty-bearers to encounter each other in order for them to start breaking barriers.

3.6. Accountability, Transparency and Accessibility

Accountability as a principle of the human rights-based approach relates to both duty-bearers and rights-holders. It focuses on the knowledge, mandate, resources, and willingness of duty-bearers to fulfil their human rights obligations and that they are held accountable for it. At the same time the rights-holders have a key role in holding duty-bearers accountable. To be able to do it, rights-holders have to be aware of their rights as well as government's and other duty-bearer's responsibilities in their realization. An important aspect in Abilis Foundation's support to empowerment of persons with disabilities as rights-holders, is to strengthen the capacities of DPOs and their members to advocate for their rights and to engage themselves in dialogue with duty-bearers (e.g. local government officials) on disability inclusion and mainstreaming. In addition, Abilis Foundation is directly engaged in advocacy work and policy dialogue with duty-bearers on disability inclusion and mainstreaming in its programme countries as well as at the global level.

In the common language, accountability means that an organisation (or a person) is responsible for its actions. It is often related to the use of resources, i.e. that funds and other resources are used for agreed purposes in an effective manner. Accountability and transparency are fundamental princi-



All grantee organizations are required to report on

ples of Abilis Foundation's work as a grant provider, and Abilis Foundation has actively developed its grant-making mechanisms accordingly. For example, applicants have the possibility to see what kinds of activities are funded by Abilis Foundation.

The work of Abilis Foundation involves several stakeholders, which all are accountable in relation to their roles and responsibilities. Abilis Foundation



the use of funds and results achieved.

reports on the use of received funds and results achieved to its donors and also to wider audience. At the same time Abilis is accountable and transparent about its values and aims, funding criteria and mechanisms as well as decision-making processes and results to DPOs and their members. Furthermore, Abilis Foundation ensures that its country representatives (including review boards assessing the applications) function

according to their roles and responsibilities. Country representatives are accountable for providing all relevant information and support to DPOs, and they report about their actions to Abilis Foundation. The leaders of DPOs are accountable for their members that the application process and in case of receiving funding also the implementation of the project are done as agreed. The DPOs also report about the results achieved and use of funds to Abilis Foundation through country representatives.

Abilis Foundation strives to be accessible and open to all, particularly to those who are the most disadvantaged. The application and reporting forms are designed so that a person with little previous experience can use them. All forms are translated into the main languages used by Abilis (English, Spanish, French, Russian and Portuguese) and some other local languages (i.e. Amhara and Swahili). The accessibility of Abilis funding is increased by the different language versions. The possibility of DPOs at grassroots level being granted Abilis funding is increased by the fact that the groups can use their own mother tongue. Abilis' partners in the global South have taken part in the development process and have been able to influence what the forms should entail.

4

The human rights-based approach of Abilis Foundation in practice

Human rights are strongly emphasized in the strategy of Abilis Foundation. Abilis' Strategy (2015-2021) notes that the key elements in improving capacities of the people with disabilities in developing countries to have an impact on the quality of their own lives include:

- Commitment to the promotion and realization of the rights of persons with disabilities.
- Supporting the activities of people with disabilities at grassroots level.
- Respecting the diversity of the field.
- Supporting especially vulnerable groups, such as girls and women with disabilities.

In line with its strategy, and with the overall objective of realizing global disability rights, Abilis Foundation has set four expected outcomes for its work in the Global Programme Plan 2018-2021:

- Project participants have increased their knowledge on their human rights.
- Project participants have strengthened their capacity in managing their independent living.
- The community of project location has become more enabling.
- Space for political dialogue on disability inclusion and mainstreaming has been created.

Abilis supports fundamental rights of persons with disabilities in its work: the Economic, Social and Cultural rights as well as Civil and Political Rights. In its global programme and related country programmes, Abilis Foundation has identified together with its partners the main thematic areas for the projects including the following:

- Income generation and livelihoods,
- Economic empowerment of persons with disabilities through vocational skills,
- Capacity of self-help groups and DPOs working at grassroots level for protection and promotion of human rights,
- Capacity building of DPOs and persons with disabilities in organisational management and leadership, and
- Capacity building and empowerment of persons with disabilities, especially girls and women with disabilities.

4.1. Institutional Mechanisms

Abilis Foundation is founded and managed by persons with disabilities. Most of the members of the board are persons with disabilities. All members of the board have an extensive experience on disability, development and human rights. More than half of the employees of Abilis Foundation are also persons with disabilities or a parent of a child with a disability. Abilis Foundation actively and consciously recruits persons with disabilities to

work at different levels in Finland and in the global South. The partner organizations of Abilis Foundation are organizations of persons with disabilities.

Abilis follows the rules of good governance. These are outlined in Manual 4, so that Abilis Foundation's partner organizations and country offices know the rules and follow the instructions given.

Right to work is essential for persons with disabilities. Income generating activities are the most popular projects that persons with disabilities want to implement.



4.2. Funding Mechanisms

Funding is directed to organizations of persons with disabilities as well as to grassroots level groups that are only starting their own activities. Abilis Foundation is often the first funder for them and this funding gives the group/organization a possibility to strengthen its capacities. A well-implemented project increases the capacity of the group/organization as well as that of the individual participants involved in the activities. The management of a project offers an opportunity to learn new skills and strengthen the knowledge related to project management. It is also a fundamental part of Abilis Foundation's work to understand the situation of human rights of persons with disabilities in the country that Abilis Foundation is working in. The current thematic priority areas for the work of Abilis in the programme countries are based on country profile papers, which identify the most acute needs of persons with disabilities, key stakeholders and their activities in promoting disability, and existing gaps in national and international efforts.

Abilis Foundation gives three different kinds of grants. Groups and organizations can choose an appropriate amount of responsibility depending on their own capacity, and participate in a way they choose.

Regardless of the kind of grant, a person can be included in all kinds of project activities with the level of participation s/he wants depending on her/his own capacity as well as her/his life situation and environment. With the growth of personal capacity and motivation, a person can participate more and take more responsibility. Often the number of people involved increases when moving from one grant scheme to another. For example, in fast track grants fewer people are involved in a project than in a regular grant project. However, sometimes even a special grant project does not automatically guarantee full participation of persons with disabilities. In this sense, not only the goal of human rights but also the process becomes an important aspect to monitor and evaluate.

Fast Track grants:

Small grants from 500 Euros to 3 500 Euros for a maximum period of 6 months. This form of grant is designed to build a foundation for good organizational work and participation.

Regular grants:

From 3 501 Euros to 10 000 Euros for roughly 1 year. The organizations applying for this grant are already active and mostly registered. With this grant they get empowered and become more active as well as build their project management capacity.

Special grants:

From 10 001 Euros to 20 000 Euros for a maximum period of 2 years. This kind of grant is rare. Usually these grants are given for big projects to DPOs that already have a good organizational structure, skills and previous experience.

Love and affection are important also for children with disabilities.



4.3. Implementation

In many Abilis funded projects awareness-raising and human rights are intertwined with other types of activities. Slightly more than half of the projects are income generating activities. For instance, organizations apply for funding for buying chickens, pigs or cows for the members of self-help groups. In addition to these income generating activities that are based on economic empowerment, a part of these projects is designated for awareness-raising related to disability rights in the community involving duty-bearers. In this way human rights can be linked to all kinds of projects of all sizes.

Some of Abilis funded projects focus specifically on the promotion of human rights. There are projects that concentrate on disseminating information on the Convention and promoting the ratification and/or

implementation thereof. For example, now when Tajikistan has ratified the CRPD, the focus of funded projects and the whole country programme is on strengthening the implementation of the Convention. Abilis funds also training projects where the main focus is on human rights of persons with disabilities and on how these rights can be promoted, this being one of the main thematic areas of the global programme. Material on human rights of persons with disabilities has been translated into local languages in some projects. In some countries human rights have been raised on the agenda through media, for example in radio programmes and newspaper articles. In this way it has been possible to raise the awareness of both rights-holders and duty-bearers, especially with respect to promoting human rights of persons with disabilities on an equal basis with others.

5

Continuous development of Abilis Foundation's work

Meaningful participation of persons with disabilities has been the main focus of Abilis Foundation's work since it was founded. Abilis has supported persons with disabilities in their endeavour to participate and get involved in the decision making in matters concerning their own lives. Abilis Foundation believes strongly that a person's capacity is strengthened when s/he is given the possibility to take action. All persons with disabilities have the right to be equal citizens and active participants in society. Even when they are passive, they should be able to decide to do so of their own will.

This approach has been strengthened during years of action. Funding from Abilis Foundation is a way to open doors for increasing a person's capacity and turning her/his own environment into an enabling one. Abilis funding gives an opportunity to take an appropriate amount of responsibility and to acquire new skills so that the group can implement further activities after the funded project.

Abilis Foundation started to focus on its quality development regarding monitoring and evaluation of Abilis funding as well as indicators to measure impact thereof. Abilis is especially interested in the long-term impacts of its funded projects on the lives of persons with disabilities at the grassroots level. However, existing indicators such as Incheon Strategy indicators are as yet far from the realities of persons with disabilities at grassroots level in many countries in the global South. Therefore, Abilis has actively developed together with its partner organisations indicators to measure changes taking place at the individual and organizational levels, measuring for example if a project participant was part of the decision-making processes of the project. The testing of these indicators and their use in data collection have provided also valuable information on how to improve the data collection methodology. This will be one of the areas of further development in Abilis' work during the coming years.



“How many friends with disabilities you have?” This is one of the indicators that Abilis uses for measuring changes.

During the past couple of years Abilis Foundation has also developed further its programme approach, and the current Global Programme Plan 2018-2021 provides an important framework for the work of Abilis. The country programmes in Ethiopia, Myanmar, Nepal, Tajikistan, Tanzania, Uganda and Vietnam, global disability diplomacy on human rights, communication and awareness raising activities, research and development work, as well as collaboration with many Finnish and international actors all contribute to the achievement of the objectives of the global programme. Abilis will continue the development of its global programme and for that the above mentioned improvements in data collection methods are also important.

From the perspective of reduction of inequalities, Abilis Foundation has to make an extra effort to reach the most disadvantaged even among persons with disabilities in the global South. It is important to systematically analyse how to strengthen inclusion of these groups in the on-going programme work. At the same time the new institutional, funding and implementation mechanisms might be necessary to give priority to their initiatives and activities for them to realize their rights, and thus, Abilis seeks actively e.g. opportunities for forming new funding partnerships and alliances.

Abilis Foundation is determined to address on the above mentioned areas of further development in order to better operationalize the human rights-based approach to disability and development.

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