



Leaving No One Behind:

The Finnish Approach to Addressing the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in the Development Cooperation and Policy

MINISTRY FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF FINLAND



Table of Contents

The Finnish Approach	4
Finland's Development Policy Programme	9
Finland's Strategic Priorities and Key Partners	12
What Have We Achieved?	17

Cover photo:

Young women with disabilities in Nepal were offered vocational training and job opportunities. They learned to make carpets, for which they get earnings. Photo: Abilis.

ISBN: 978-952-281-560-6 (print), 978-952-281-561-3 (pdf)

Layout: Innocorp Oy

Finland has recently celebrated its 100 years of independence. Centennial Finland is one of the most equal countries in the world. Finland's history provides plenty of examples how essential rights and well-being for all have been successfully promoted through universal social policies. Equity-orientation of all sector policies explains part of the high relative rankings that Finland has achieved in e.g. educational performance (PISA) and child well-being as measured by the UNICEF multidimensional child well-being indicators.



The success of 100-year old Finland is largely based on universal social policies and social innovations.

Consequently, Finland's approach to international development has been shaped by the ideals of Nordic Welfare Society. Finland has also greatly benefitted from its strong disability movement, leaving its mark to the Finnish social policy and practice. The importance given to the rights of persons with disabilities is also reflected in the development policy, which recognizes that investing in equality and in the rights of persons with disabilities are cross-cutting objectives for all Finnish development.

The *Finnish Model* for addressing inequality and disability rights can be summarized in four key elements: 1) **human rights as the core** for all activities. 2) Supporting **equal, accessible and non-discriminatory national institutions, strategies and policies** and ensuring capacity of duty bearers at all levels to deliver services and protection for all. This is an investment that delivers sustainable results. 3) **Gender equality** cuts across all interventions and is a key priority for Finland. 4) **Civil society participation**, in this case meaningful participation of the Organizations of Persons with Disabilities (DPO) in particular, is a principle without which no sustainable results in terms human rights for persons with disabilities can be achieved. Fully autonomous participation of persons with disabilities in societies is both an important principles as well as one of the goals of the Finnish Development Cooperation.

Further insight into each of the above key elements in the Finnish approach can be found in the following sections.



The Finnish Approach

Committed to Human Rights

Finnish Development cooperation is **Human Rights Based (HRBA)**¹. This is the principal strategy to operationalize disability inclusion across the whole development programme: Finland is committed to supporting policies and measures that specifically address the situation of those that face the most severe poverty. Finland is also committed to supporting the realization of human rights as a development result, and Finland's approach to address poverty and inequality are by first and foremost considering it as a human rights concern, not a moral question.


Finland has a decades long commitment to advance the rights of persons with disabilities.

Finland focuses on supporting processes and systems that build the capacities of the rights-holders, duty bearers and other responsible actors² to ensure that structures and resources for delivering the human rights as well as mechanisms for accountability are in place. In operationalizing this approach, Finland has defined that as a minimum, all activities have to adhere to the Human Rights Principles, such as non-discrimination, inclusion and participation.

Finnish Development cooperation has recognized disability primarily human rights concern for decades. In the 1980s when it was still common to see disability referenced mostly within the framework of charity, and typically as a concern of faith-based organizations, Finland stood as an exception in promoting systemic changes,

¹ Human Rights Based Approach Guidance Note (2015).

² Rights-holders: all human beings. Duty bearers: states, authorities with the mandate and responsibility to respect, protect and fulfill rights. Other responsible actors: civil society actors, donors, international organizations, service providers, private sector, traditional and religious leaders, among others.



policies and public services that would guarantee equal access to public services and equal human rights for persons with disabilities.


Strengthening National Systems and Policies

Over the past 15 years, Finland has played a key role both as a donor and a broker in the global social development policy including discourses shaping the understanding of poverty as a multidimensional phenomenon. It has been widely noted that without a strong social dimension it is impossible to reach the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG). The SDGs are committed to establishing universal social protection systems (target 1.3) to ensure that no one is left behind and that prosperity is shared.

Finland is contributing globally to the building of coherent social policy systems, which are increasingly adopted as the key mechanism in responding to extreme poverty and risks related to both individuals' life-course (such as young or old age, ill health, disability, pregnancy, etc.) but also to counteract risks and vulnerability related to economic instability and politically fragile situations.

Focus on Gender Equality and Non-Discrimination


Persons with disabilities are particularly exposed to targeted violence, exploitation and abuse, including sexual and gender-based violence. Women and girls with disabilities often face double discrimination. Due to stigma and discrimination, physical barriers and lack of accessible information and communication materials sexual & reproductive health & rights (SRHR) services are typically inaccessible for women and men with disabilities. Gender-based violence and abuse, as well as neglect of essential health services for women and girls



Gender equality and the rights of women and girls with disabilities are priorities for Finland.



*In Palestine the status of women with disabilities is often very low. Peer support and activities such as sewing have given them brighter prospects.
Photo: Abilis*




contribute to the higher incidences of disability among women than men: WHO estimates that each year 20 million women acquire disabilities due to complications during pregnancy and childbirth that could be significantly mitigated with proper pre-natal, childbirth, and post-natal medical care.

Addressing the rights of women and girls with disabilities, recognizing the multiple forms of discrimination and mainstreaming gender considerations in disability programming is a key priority for Finland. Finland advocates for systems, structures and services that are inclusive and accessible also to women and girls with disabilities, and funds targeted programmes addressing sexual and gender-based violence and discrimination faced by women and girls with disabilities. Finland is active in political dialogue to raise awareness and international attention to the situation of women and girls with disabilities.

Nothing About Us Without Us

A core principle in the Finnish approach to disability inclusion is the principle “**nothing about us without us**”. This principle has been realized by recognition of the importance of meaningful participation of persons with disabilities and their representative organizations (DPOs) in the implementation and processes of the development cooperation. This recognition and the approach is largely based on the advocacy by the strong Finnish disability movement, which has significantly influenced the disability rights agenda in the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland.



The Finnish disability movement is an important partner in moving the Ministry's disability rights agenda forward.

What is unique about the Finnish approach is the strong focus on supporting the capacity of the organizations of persons with disabilities versus organizations for persons with disabilities, as well as the focus on relatively low-capacity grassroots actors in developing countries. A significant part of the Finnish support to disability inclusion is fully designed and implemented by persons with disabilities themselves.



*Reaching out
to the grassroots
disability organizations
through innovative
funding instruments
and partnerships.*

In 1989 and 1998 respectively, two important organizations, Disability Partnership Finland (formerly FIDIDA) and the Abilis Foundation, primarily focusing on the rights of persons with disabilities, were established by the activists of the Finnish disability movement. The Ministry began to allocate funds to both of these organizations.

The Abilis Foundation allocates grants to projects fully planned and implemented by DPOs in developing countries. Abilis has developed an innovative grant making mechanism that includes multiple project management tools, country programmes, and strong cooperation with local and international actors. Moreover, Abilis runs *The Disability Diplomacy on Human Rights*, an initiative to share its expertise on disability and development with different actors. The cooperation between the Ministry and the Abilis Foundation has been a unique model allowing the Ministry to channel its funds to local grassroots DPOs that otherwise can face serious barriers accessing such funding. This has proven to be an effective approach and it has been noted with great interest by the international community.

Disability Partnership Finland is a CSO and an umbrella organization formed by eight Finnish disability organizations representing diverse disability groups and broader Finnish disability organizations. Disability Partnership offers expert services in Disability and Development issues and cooperates with non-governmental organizations, companies, consultancies, public offices and education facilities. Disability Partnership implements development cooperation work together with its member organizations in developing countries. In addition it provides services to strengthen disability inclusion in the mainstream development agencies and programmes.

These two organizations are among the most important national partners for Finland in advancing disability rights globally and they have demonstrated to have an important complementary role to the other funding instruments of the Finnish Ministry for Foreign affairs.

Finland's Development Policy Programme

Reducing poverty and inequality and the promotion of sustainable development goals form the main objective of the current development policy of Finland. The commitment to Leave No one Behind (³LNOB) -principle is an inherent part of the implementation of the development policy programme. Finland has also ratified the CRPD in 2016 that specifically obliges the state parties to ensure that international development is inclusive of and accessible to persons with disabilities (Article 32). Additionally, the current Development Policy 2016⁴ states that the rights of persons with disabilities are taken into account in all activities.

LNOB-principle means a commitment to reaching out to furthest ones behind first!

The Finnish approach to LNOB-principle focuses specifically on addressing and promoting the rights of persons with disabilities. The approach to disability inclusion in Finland has two main tracks: Finland aims to 1) mainstream disability across policies and programmes as well as 2) support disability-specific interventions. In addition, Finland is also active in political dialogue to advance the attention and urgency to the disability rights agenda globally.

³ “Leaving No one Behind” is a principle that is at the core of effective implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, making it universal and transformative. This principle should therefore be at the core of international development cooperation setting its priorities in a way that everyone is included.

⁴ Finland's Development Policy 13, 2016



International and National Coordination

Finland coordinates its efforts both nationally and internationally. Finland, together with a group of like-minded partners, established the Global Action on Disability (GLAD) network in late 2015. GLAD members are committed to collectively increasing coordination of their disability-inclusive contributions, learning from each other by sharing knowledge and resources, expanding and diversifying the community partners' contributing resources to disability-inclusive development and humanitarian action and to strengthening existing partnerships and disability inclusion within existing global initiatives.

Ministry for Foreign Affairs coordinates a group of Finnish CSOs, DPOS, research institutes and the departments of ministries in charge of disability inclusion. The purpose of this group is to coordinate between Finnish disability-actors, share information and learn and plan mutual policy priorities. The coordination group is led by the Ministry's Unit for Human Rights Policy. The Ministry also holds a very close relationship with the Finnish DPOs and has a regular contact and coordination with them.

Monitoring the Commitment

Finland was the first country to adopt a disability marker for development cooperation. This marker was primarily created for tracking of funding and it was introduced in 2016. The marker is still relatively new and there is no comprehensive data available yet. It has been noted however, that once the proper use of the marker is fully introduced, it will be a great tool for better tracking of the funding and for overall accountability.

Monitoring of the disability inclusion is further strengthened by the Quality Assurance Board that regularity checks all financing proposals against the HRBA minimum criteria.

The integration of disability in the Finnish Development Policy Priority Areas has also been strengthened significantly in order to be able to report on the commitment to advancing disability rights. Finland is also increasingly committed to systematic gathering and use of disaggregated (sex, disability) data across all activities, results tracking and reporting.



*Teaching braille to visually impaired young people in Peru – a skill that is crucial for further studies and in accessing information.
Photo: Abilis*



Finland's Strategic Priorities and Key Partners

Finland currently has four strategic priorities which it promotes and supports through various cooperation and funding mechanisms. Those priorities include:

Strengthening the capacity of duty bearers.

Strengthening capacity of persons with disabilities as rights holders.


Supporting access to basic rights and services.

Protection of the rights of persons with disabilities in humanitarian action.

Strengthening the Capacity of Duty Bearers

Finland supports and cooperates with several organizations in order to strengthen the capacity to respect and protect human rights. One of these organizations is the **United Nations Partnership to Promote the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNPRPD)**⁵. The UNPRPD supports the full implementation of the CRPD through facilitating coalition building and capacity development at global, regional and country level. The core focus is to develop the capacities of national stakeholders, particularly governments and organizations of persons with disabilities, for the effective implementation of the CRPD through promoting disability-inclusive internationally agreed development goals. Finland is the biggest donor of this multi-donor trust fund.

⁵ Multi-Trust Fund



Finland also supports the **African Union Disability Architecture (AUDA)**. Since 2013, Finland has supported the disability mainstreaming capacity of the African Union Departments, Member States and the Regional Economic Communities. The support also contributes to strengthening the accountability for the implementation of the Continental Plan of Action for the African Decade for Persons with Disabilities: the project has created a continent-wide monitoring and evaluation matrix for the Plan against which the member states will report on their national implementation.

Finland financially supports the mandate of the **United Nations Special Rapporteur on Rights of Persons with Disabilities**. This is an important human rights accountability mechanism to monitor and support the implementation of the CRPD and the broader human rights framework, and to address the barriers persons with disabilities face in accessing the rights globally.

Strengthening the Capacity of Persons with Disabilities as Rights Holders

70% of the disability-specific funding is allocated through Finnish DPOs and their partners in developing countries. Finland also supports the global disability movements, primarily via the **International Disability Alliance (IDA)**. IDA is an alliance of eight global and six regional organizations of persons with disabilities advocating at the UN for more inclusive global policies for persons with disabilities, especially to ensure that the Agenda 2030 is inclusive and in line with the CRPD.

Finland co-finances the EU Initiative *Bridging the Gap*. The objective is to strengthen the implementation of the CRPD and the attainment of disability inclusive SDGs and to support the efforts of partner countries in implementing the CRPD through the capacity development of government institutions and DPOs.




Supporting Access to Basic Rights and Services

As a part of promoting access to basic rights and services, Finland supports many development programs in the education sector which include special needs and inclusive education activities – in Mozambique, Ethiopia, Nepal, Palestine, Afghanistan and Myanmar. Many disability-related CSO projects either provide education or facilitate access and participation for students with disabilities in inclusive and special needs education. In Ethiopia bilateral technical assistance in special needs and inclusive education has been provided since 2004, as well as teacher education since 2017. In Palestine, Finland is the focal point for inclusive education technical working group. In Kosovo Finland supported the development of education sector, especially special and inclusive education from 2000 to 2013.

Protection of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in Humanitarian Action

Persons with disabilities are among the most marginalized in any crisis-affected community and are disproportionately affected by disaster and conflict situations. They face particular barriers in accessing life-saving relief and recovery support and are often denied opportunity to participate in the planning and implementation of humanitarian programs.

Since 2013 Finland has supported the “Strengthening protection of persons with disabilities in forced displacement” project. It is implemented by UNHCR in partnership with the Women’s Refugee Commission, with the aim to address disability inclusion in refugee operations. This is done through the provision of training to UNHCR staff on disability issues, adequate services and protection and by increasing monitoring and accountability. UNHCR is currently gathering the lessons learnt to be disseminated with a wider humanitarian community.



In collaboration with World Vision, Finland has been supporting the development of simple and low-cost technological solutions and innovations that can facilitate the daily life of people with disabilities in humanitarian emergencies in Kenya, Uganda and Iraq. Focus has been especially on water and sanitation to promote the protection, safety and dignity of persons with disabilities.



This is a classroom in Ethiopia where visually impaired children have been included in primary education together with other children.

Photo: Abilis

What Have We Achieved?


Case of Finnish Support to Education for Children with Disabilities in Ethiopia

Ethiopia has made significant progress in getting more children in schools. Enrollment in primary school increased from 75% in 2007 to 86% in 2011. More children also finished primary school – an increase from 48% to 58% over the same period. Ethiopia matched its ambition with resources. Government spending on education rose from 11% of total spending in 1999–2000 to more than 25% in 2012–2013.

While these numbers are encouraging, children with disabilities often do not have access to quality education. Understanding this challenge, Finland has supported special needs education in Ethiopia since the 1980's. Improving access of children with disabilities to quality education has been the main objective. In the 1980's Finland supported training of Ethiopian teachers, educators and experts in special needs education. A total of 27 Ethiopians obtained master's degrees and 31 obtained bachelor's degrees in special education from the Finnish Universities.

Support to Ethiopia's special needs education since the 1980s.

Later the cooperation continued in the form of technical assistance. During 2008–2012, Finland supported the implementation of the special needs education programme strategy. During this intervention, the strategy was revised towards a more inclusive focus. Nine pilot inclusive education resource centers were set up. Currently, special needs and inclusive education is recognized as a cross-cutting programme in the five year plan of Ethiopia's Education Sector Development Programme. Although the number of students with special needs in schools is still very low, the number has steadily increased and awareness on their right to education has improved.



The recently finalized project financed by Finland, **Enhancing Inclusive Education Capacity of Teacher Education and Resource Centers**, aimed to enhance the capacity of teacher training colleges to introduce a pedagogical approach to special needs and inclusive education and strengthen the network of inclusive education resource centers.

It increased the awareness about special needs among parents, school personnel and broader community. Starting 2018, the models of the project were adopted by the national General Education Quality Improvement Program for Equity for scaling up.

Finland's long-term support to inclusive education contributes to systemic changes and legislative reforms in Ethiopia.

Finland's long-term commitment to supporting the national education system in Ethiopia has resulted in systemic change. Finland has been able to support the Ethiopian education sector as well shape the understanding of inclusive and good quality education. A new funding model, implemented by the Global Partnership for Education, has created incentives for developing country partners to tackle the most difficult education challenges of equity, efficiency and quality. In Ethiopia it has resulted in more investments in the strategies and programmes that will lead to systematic and durable reforms.

Finland has become a valued global leader in inclusive education. And external evaluation stated that Finland has been a “leading light” around the world in this field, and in certain countries the only prominent donor systematically taking the inclusive education agenda forward. Despite Finland's small size as a donor, it has been able to capitalize expertise, moral authority and global prestige around this agenda in a way that has made a difference in the global agenda of inclusive education⁶.

A good example of the Finnish impact on the ground is the complementarity of different funding mechanism and actors operating together at the country level such as in Ethiopia

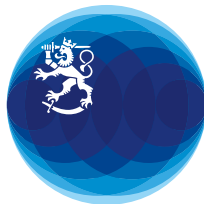
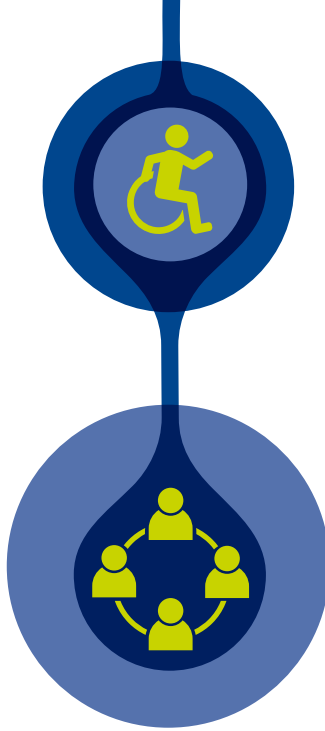
⁶ Evaluation: Inclusive Education in Finland's Development Cooperation in 2004-2013 (2015)

where both the Ministry and various Finnish CSOs and DPOs work towards the same goals from different angles.

The Finnish bi-lateral cooperation around inclusive education has had a significant impact in its partner countries 'legislative and policy reforms, as well as in changing perception and attitudes. As a result of Finland's support many countries now recognize the right to education by children with disabilities. The three decades and the numerous activities implemented have contributed to transformations in minds of people and in the lives of persons with disabilities and their families.



The Ministry of Education and Vocational training in Zanzibar is supporting disability-inclusive education. Photo: Anja Malm



**Ministry for Foreign
Affairs of Finland**

Department for Development Policy
Keo-20@formin.fi
www.formin.finland.fi