

***OUR ISSUES MUST NOT BE DECIDED
WITHOUT OUR INVOLVEMENT****

**Ex-Post Evaluation of
SOWER INTERNATIONAL'S DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME
IN MONGOLIA
2005-2025**



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ACRONYMS

ADB	Asian Development Bank
ARDA	Adventist Relief and Development Agency
CC	Compass Centre
CPWDA	Council of Associations of People with Disability in Arkhangai
CBO	Community-Based Organisation
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
D/HH	Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing
ECCS	Enabling Communities through Civil Society Strengthening in Rural Mongolia
EPSO	Empowerment of PWD through Strengthening OPD
FIDIDA	Finnish Disabled People's International Development Association
FINNIDA	Finnish International Development Agency
FLOM	Finnish Lutheran Overseas Mission
FLOM-M	Resident office of FLOM in Mongolia
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GoF	Government of Finland
GoM	Government of Mongolia
HDI	Human Development Index
INGO	International non-governmental organisation
IOE	Institute of Outdoor Education
JICA	Japan International Cooperation Agency
LR	Leading Researchers
MASLI	Mongolian Association of Sign Language Interpreters
MDG	Millennium Development Goal
MDLI	Mongolian Deaf Linguistic Identity Empowerment
MFA	Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland
MMA	Mongolian Management Association
MNAD	Mongolian National Association of Deaf
MNAWU	Mongolian National Association of Wheelchair Users
MNDF	Mongolian National Deaf Federation
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
OPD	Organisation of Persons with Disabilities
PWD	Persons with Disabilities
SADPI	Support of Arkhangai Disabled People's Initiative
SI	Sower International
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
ToR	Terms of reference
TT	Tegsh Tuglal (Equal Light)
TIKA	Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency
UN	United Nations
UNCRPD	United Nations' Convention on Rights of Persons with Disabilities
UN WOMEN	Secretariat of the UN Commission in the Status of Women
WB	World Bank

* Slogan of the very first *Assembly of persons with disabilities* organised in Arkhangai by the Skills and Health Project 2005-2007.

Cover Photo by Kari Leppänen: *Arkhangai Development Centre for Persons with Disabilities* in March 2026.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Sower International (earlier called Finnish Lutheran Overseas Mission, FLOM) has implemented international development projects with the support of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs (MFA) of Finland in Mongolia since 2005.

Ex-post evaluation refers to an evaluation that is carried out some years after the programme has been completed and provides evidence on the longer-term impact and sustainability of the programme (MFA 2018). The impact and sustainability of Sower International Development Programme in Mongolia 2005-2025 is assessed in two parts:

In Arkhangai province, where the following four projects have been implemented over the period of 20 years. The work was concluded in 2025.

- *Skills and Health Training* (2005-2007);
- *Support of Arkhangai Disabled People's Initiative (SADPI)* (2008-2017);
- *Support of single parents* (2017-2020) ;
- *Enabling Communities through Civil Society Strengthening in Rural Mongolia (ECCS)* (2021-2025).

At national level, which has been supported by three projects since 2013:

- *Capacity building for Mongolian Deaf People by empowering their NGOs* (2013-2017);
- *Improvement of Reproductive Health Services for Women with Disabilities through Empowerment of Peer Groups* (2017-2022);
- *Mongolian Deaf Linguistic Identity Empowerment (MDLI)* (2021-2025).

The work at National level continues with the implementation of the project *Empowerment of PWD through Strengthening OPD (EPSO)* (2024-2026).

The summary of evaluation findings, conclusions and related recommendations on the impact and sustainability are presented in the table below. The table also presents an assessment of effectiveness of the *New Key Project* (2009-2011) as its impact and sustainability cannot be properly assessed due to the nature of the project. Also, some observations on the efficiency of the projects are presented.

Sower International has proved to be a learning organisation. The nine projects evaluated form a compact development programme. In fact, it was not planned to be a programme; planning of the projects was done for very short periods, typically for three years but sometimes for two years only. Nevertheless, a new project was built on top of the experiences gained in previous projects, and the focus of the projects get sharper by the time.

Sower International has proved to be a reliable partner to the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and has planned and implemented its Development Programme in Mongolia with the Human Rights-based Approach, gender equality and inclusion of persons with disabilities.

Sower International's work in Arkhangai province is an example of development from bottom to top. In the beginning of *the Skills and Health Development project*, the cooperation with provincial government offices was limited, but during the implementation of subsequent projects the junior officers in the local government's hierarchy got involved in the work. They simply realized that the cooperation will help them to perform their own tasks. Gradually, the project was an integral part of the social work of the local governments. The policy and decision-making levels were reached much later, partly because some of the decision makers in local governments witnessed and appreciated the work. Also, some of the junior staff, who had been working with the projects, were promoted to the decision-making ranks.

It took 10 years of awareness raising before the provincial decision makers in Arkhangai realised the situation of persons with disabilities; exactly 10 years after the *Skills and Health Training Project* started in

2005, Arkhangai was among the first provinces to apply for a *Development Centre for Persons with Disabilities* to be built in the province. It took 11 more years before the Centre was fully operational in its new building in 2026.

The policy influencing is not an easy task for an INGO like Sower International, but through the cooperation that has lasted more than 20 years, there has been an influence on the policies of Arkhangai province in health, education, employment and infrastructure sectors. There will be an opening for policy influencing at national level related to the research on the Mongolian sign language and the development of Mongolian Sign Language Digital Dictionary.

FINDINGS	CONCLUSIONS	RECOMMENDATIONS
COUNTRY CONTEXT		
Mongolia is the most sparsely populated sovereign state in the World. More than half of its population is congested in or close to the capital Ulaanbaatar, whereas the desolation in the countryside is extreme.	Measured by share of poor in the population and HDI, the disparity in development between urban and rural areas Mongolia is wide.	After concluding the work in Arkhangai province, the rural areas should be given attention in SI development programmes in future. Ideally, a new project could be planned in another province to take advantage of the lessons learned in Arkhangai. As a minimum, the countryside should be guaranteed its fair share (over 50%) of national level actions.
RELEVANCE		
The Programme has good match with MDGs (2005-2015) and SDGs (2016-2025) subscribed by both GOF and GOM.	2005-2015: all 5 projects supported achievement of MDG 3 (Promote gender equality and empower women) and MDG 8 (Ensure a global partnership for development). 2016-2025 all 6 projects supported achievement of SDG 3 (Good health and well-being), SDG 5 (Gender equality), SDG 10 (Reduced inequalities) and SDG 17 (Partnership for goals).	SDGs could be used as guideline for planning forthcoming projects.
The Programme has a good match with the cross-cutting objectives of Finland's Development Policy 2012	There is perfect match with the Policy's 1 st and 2 nd objectives: Gender equality and Reduction of inequality. There is no match with the 3 rd objective: Climate sustainability.	Climate sustainability to be attended in the future projects.
IMPACT		
After 20 years of presence in Arkhangai province, the Programme implemented through	PWD and women are represented by the <i>Council of Associations of People with Disability in Arkhangai (CPWDA)</i> and <i>The</i>	The experiences and lessons learned through the work in Arkhangai province should be ideally used for planning and

<p>four projects, was concluded in 2025.</p> <p>The PWD and women are visible and vocal part of the society in Arkhangai.</p> <p>Arkhangai provincial government has assumed its role as the principal duty bearer of its citizens, and is supervising the local governments in its soums and baghs to do the same.</p>	<p><i>Community Initiatives – Arkhangai Committee</i>, which serve as umbrella organisations for 16 local CBOs.</p> <p>Arkhangai provincial government has improved its services in education, health and employment sectors, and made government offices and other public places accessible to PWD.</p> <p>The Development Centre for PWD in Arkhangai has facilities for treatment, therapy and rehabilitation for several thousand PWD annually.</p>	<p>implementation of a new project in one of the Mongolian provinces. This would require a commitment of minimum 10 years.</p>
<p>The work in Ulaanbaatar, which started in 2013, continues. Its major impacts have been:</p> <p>Awareness of PWD on their sexual and reproductive rights</p> <p>Research on Mongolian sign language including creation of first ever Mongolian Sign Language Digital Dictionary.</p>	<p>The evaluation considers the projects <i>Improvement of Reproductive Health Services for Women with Disabilities through Empowerment of Peer Groups</i> (2017-2022), <i>Capacity building for Mongolian Deaf People by empowering their NGOs</i> (2013-2017), and <i>Mongolian Deaf Linguistic Identity Empowerment (MDLI)</i> (2021-2024) as excellent examples of promoting human rights of PWD.</p>	<p>The work on Mongolian sign language and its digital dictionary should continue without further interruptions.</p>
<p>EFFECTIVENESS</p>		
<p>The <i>New Key</i> and to some extent also <i>Support to Single Parents</i> are considered as humanitarian assistance rather than development projects. It is difficult to assess their long-term impact.</p>	<p>The projects were timely and well justified in their context. The obvious needs of the target groups of these projects (single mothers) were attended without analysing the root causes for their situation.</p> <p>The preventive work of <i>Support to Single Parents</i> Project with teen-aged girls and young couples had positive results.</p>	<p>SI should concentrate in preventive work when dealing with other beneficiaries except PWD.</p> <p>SI should continue and expand the preventive work done with teen-aged girls and young couples in <i>Support to Single Parents</i> Project and include domestic violence in the preventive programmes.</p>
<p>EFFICIENCY</p>		
<p>None of the projects evaluated has produced a proper final report.</p>	<p>The missing final reports were replaced by outsourcing an independent final evaluation for each project. This is a good idea, but it didn't work as the final evaluations were not systematized and their quality was very heterogeneous.</p>	<p>For the sake of any future need of concise information of the past projects, the project should prepare a final report and clearly indicate that in its cover page.</p> <p>Less quantity and more quality for evaluations, which should follow the evaluation guidelines of MFA.</p>

A couple of projects were planned for periods of two years only.	If a problem could be solved in two years, it is not a real problem. Planning projects for such short periods causes extra work to all parties involved.	The future projects should be planned for a period of minimum four years.
SUSTAINABILITY		
SI Development Programme in Arkhangai has phased out in 2025. The level of activities (training, awareness raising, etc.) is understandably less than before, but there is good scope for sustainability in fulfilment of basic rights of the principal groups of right-holders (PWD and women).	The right holders are organised in two Councils (see Impact above). Arkhangai provincial government has assumed its role as a duty bearer and demands the same from local governments and the Development Centre for PWD.	The council representing women <i>The Community Initiatives – Arkhangai Committee</i> is much younger and weaker than <i>CPWDA</i> . Some follow-up may be needed.
The work on Mongolian sign language continues, but there are already good signs of sustainability.	The working group under <i>National Council for Language Policy</i> (Including e.g. four ministries) has drafted the <i>Mongolian Sign Language Law</i> , which is expected to enter in Parliament in October 2026. Since 2022 GoM has organised regular courses to sign language interpreters.	Documenting of Mongolian sign language is a special opportunity to national level policy influencing, which should be allocated adequate time and resources.
VISIBILITY		
After 25 years of presence in Mongolia FLOM is very well known in Arkhangai, and to some extent even nationwide.	The prestige created over decades should not be lost due to the change of the name of the organisation.	The launching of the new name Sower International should be planned and implemented with utmost care.
Tegsh Tusgal (TT) as a newly established Mongolian NGO would need to enhance its visibility and strengthen its partnerships through regional networks and formal engagement with government bodies and line ministries	TT visibility for its future program development and engagement should be created joining the efforts with Sower International.	TT could organise annual flagship events to support soft reporting and invite external partners to share in these experiences. TT could promote volunteerism in the health and education sectors to benefit future generations and foster civic engagement.

INTRODUCTION

Ex-post evaluation refers to an evaluation that is carried out some years after the programme has been completed. An ex-post evaluation provides evidence on the longer-term impact and sustainability of the programme. Ex-post evaluations are sometimes referred to as impact evaluations. (MFA 2018.)

The Evaluation is carried out in accordance with *the Evaluation Manual of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland* (MFA 2018). The layout of the evaluation report will satisfy both the requirements set in the Evaluation Manual, and in the Terms of Reference (ToR) for the Evaluation. The ToR is presented in Annex 1. According to the ToR the priority issues of the evaluation are:

- Assess the relevance, effectiveness, impact, coherence, efficiency and sustainability of the projects at general level.
- Identify and analyse possible long-term impacts of the projects on beneficiaries, communities and the society.
- Assess the lessons learned and based on these, provide clear and actionable recommendations to Sower for planning and managing its projects in Mongolia and elsewhere as appropriate.

The evaluation is based on the written project documentation (project plans, annual reports, previous evaluation reports, etc.) that have been provided by Sower International. The fieldwork of the evaluation was carried out on 4-14 March 2026. The evaluation team visited Ulaanbaatar and Arkhangai and held meetings and interviews with the government institutions, partner organizations and relevant stakeholders as well as persons who have been working in the projects. Altogether 60 persons related to activities of the Development Programme were met individually or in small groups. There were 26 semi-structured key informant interviews. Time constraints did not allow for observations of any on-going development efforts. A debriefing meeting was organised with project staff and close collaborators both in Tsetserleg, Arkhangai and at Tegsh Tusalgal office in Ulaanbaatar to provide immediate feedback and reveal some early findings of the evaluation mission. The itinerary of the evaluation team and the persons met are presented in Annex 2 and Annex 3 respectively.

The Chapter “*Conclusions and Recommendations*” includes the comments intended for the Programme and its partners, whereas the Chapter “*Lessons learnt*” may have a wider application for example in planning of future cooperation.

SOWER INTERNATIONAL’S DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION IN MONGOLIA

Sower International (earlier called Finnish Lutheran Overseas Mission, FLOM) has implemented international development projects funded by the Ministry for Foreign Affairs (MFA) of Finland since 1979. FLOM in Mongolia (FLOM-M) was established as the resident office in Mongolia. It was registered as a non-for-profit and non-governmental organization in November 2001 by the Ministry of Justice and Domestic Affairs of Mongolia. FLOM’s mission in Mongolia, however, had started already in 1997, when it started to work on development projects through the Norwegian Lutheran Mission, a Norwegian NGO already established in Mongolia. In the first years, FLOM-M implemented a number of small projects with its own funding. (MMA 2014.)

FLOM-M was registered by the Immigration Agency of Mongolia and its main fields were defined as aid and development work in the health, education and social sectors. In Mongolia, projects were implemented through FLOM-M until 2022. From 2021 onwards new projects have been implemented through a local non-governmental organisation (NGO) Tegsh Tusalgal (TT, Equal Light).

The development projects have focused on promoting the rights of persons in vulnerable situations, through awareness raising and capacity building in Ulaanbaatar and Arkhangai. Beneficiaries have included persons with disabilities, single parent households, civil society organisations, and rural communities. Other stakeholders have been local, provincial and national government authorities and various service providers.

With the finance from the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland Sower International has implemented the following projects in Mongolia:

• Skills and Health Training Project	2005-2007	Arkhangai
• Support of Arkhangai Disabled People's Initiative (SADPI)	2008-2017	Arkhangai
• Information society	2009-2012	Zavkhan
• New Key	2009-2011	Ulaanbaatar
• Leadership training project	2009-2010	Ulaanbaatar
• Capacity building for Mongolian deaf people by empowering their NGOs	2013-2017	Ulaanbaatar
• Improvement of Reproductive Health Services for Women with Disabilities through Empowerment of Peer Groups	2017-2022	Ulaanbaatar
• Bright Future - Support of single parents	2017-2020	Arkhangai
• Enabling Communities through Civil Society Strengthening in Rural Mongolia (ECCS)	2021-2025	Arkhangai
• Mongolian Deaf Linguistic Identity Empowerment (MDLI)	2021-2024	Ulaanbaatar
• Empowerment of PWD through Strengthening OPD (EPSO)	2024-2026	Ulaanbaatar

As the time did not permit the evaluation team to visit Zavkhan province, it was agreed to exclude the Information Society Project from this evaluation. It has been the only project outside Arkhangai province or Ulaanbaatar. Its thematic scope was rather different from the rest of the projects and, hence, there may not be many lessons to be learned. Furthermore, there is already substantial information gathered on the Information Society Project's performance; an evaluation report available and the project was also subject to the ex-post evaluation carried out in 2014. The project *Empowerment of PWD through Strengthening OPD (EPSO)* was not included in the Ex-post evaluation as it is still on-going.

COUNTRY CONTEXT

Formerly the heartland of the Mongol Empire, Mongolia became a province of China in 1691. Mongolia declared its independence in 1911, but was reoccupied by China in 1919. With the support of the Soviet Union, Mongolia declared its independence in 1921. The People's Republic of Mongolia, established in 1924, was the World's second communist state. It was heavily influenced by the Soviet Union. In January 1990, Mongolian people undertook the peaceful Democratic Revolution and introduced a multi-party system and market economy in the country. Since then, Mongolia has been politically democratic, but has suffered from fast rotation of its governments; In the past decades there has been 17 different governments. Mongolia still works its way to stable governing system and establishing a strong legal basis.

The Mongolian society is undergoing a fast development from a traditional nomadic pastoral society to an industrial society and further to a post-modern information society. The economy of Mongolia has developed very favorably over the past two decades: Real Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita nearly tripled since 2000, and reached in nominal terms 6711 USD by 2024 (ADB 2025). In the UN classification Mongolia was promoted from lower middle-income country to upper middle-income country in 2024 (UN 2024, 17).

This impressive growth has taken place thanks to the fast expansion especially in mining, industry and service sectors, which account for over 82% of GDP. The economic development has been far from linear. The country's economy is vulnerable as it depends heavily on exports to Russian and China, which accounted more than 80% of exports in 2024. The traditional agriculture and livestock husbandry, which remain mainstay of the rural population contribute only 7,4% of GDP. There has been a sharp decline in the

contribution of agriculture to the GDP, which was still 13% in 2020. This was partly due to two consecutive *dzuds* (heavy snowfall or freezing of soil covering pasture lands and causing large numbers of cattle die) in 2023 and 2024. (ADB 2025.) During the winter *dzud* 2023/2024 8.1 million heads of livestock died (UN 2024).

Agriculture and livestock husbandry do not provide enough employment and income for the growing population. Poor economic conditions in the countryside have led especially the young people to immigrate to Ulaanbaatar and other cities in order to find employment.

With a population of 3,5 million inhabitants and with a territory of over 1,5 million km², Mongolia is the most sparsely populated sovereign state in the World. As more than half of the population of the country is congested in or close to the capital Ulaanbaatar, the desolation in the Mongolian countryside is extreme. Rural-urban disparity has been considered as one of the bottlenecks for development since the turn of the Millenium (UN 2024, 38).

The Human Development Index (HDI) of Mongolia in 2005 was 0.658. In 2022 the HDI was 0.741 (UN 2024, 17). The HDI of Ulaanbaatar, however, was much higher at 0.850 (UN 2024, 26). To illustrate the difference: Ulaanbaatar's HDI is at the level of Turkey, whereas the countryside has a HDI that compares to that of Kyrgyzstan.

The prevalence of poverty in Mongolia is 27.1% in 2022. The countryside has the highest poverty rate, reaching 41.2%, which is significantly higher than in soum centres (10.6 percentage points lower), provincial centres (15 points lower), and Ulaanbaatar (nearly 20 points lower) (WB 2025). These numbers represent the situation before the two consecutive *dzuds* in 2023 and 2024. The poverty situation in the countryside at present is arguably much worse.

There are many facts that suggests that gender equality in Mongolia is better than in many countries in Asia; e.g. female adult literacy rate and education enrolment rations are higher than male. Women outnumber men even in tertiary education. In the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Index, reflecting progress in gender equality, Mongolia moved from 85th place in 2024 to 65th in 2025, ranking fifth in the East Asia and Pacific region.

However, work still needs to be done in Mongolia to achieve gender equality. Women have fewer economic opportunities than men and suffer from high levels of gender-based violence, particularly in rural areas (ADB 2024).

There are very few women in highest decision-making bodies both in government and private sector. As of February 2024, only 18.1% of seats in parliament were held by women. In 2018, 11.5% of women aged 15-49 years reported that they had been subject to physical and/or sexual violence by a current or former intimate partner in the previous 12 months. Also, women and girls spend 18.9% of their time on unpaid care and domestic work, compared to 7.5% spent by men. (UNWOMEN 2026.)

In 2022, the average household size in Mongolia was 3.4 members (WB 2025).

The work of FLOM-M and TT concentrates in two geographical areas: The Ulaanbaatar, which leads the country in Human Development Index and Education Index, and in Arkhangai province, which is among the least developed provinces assessed through these two Indices. (UN 2024, 26.)

KEY FINDINGS

Relevance

Relevance answers to the question: Is the intervention doing the right things? It refers to the extent to which the intervention objectives and design respond to beneficiaries' global, country and partner/institution needs, policies and priorities, and continue to do so if circumstances change. (MFA 2018)

For the purposes of this evaluation, the Development Cooperation Policies of Finland and the developments in Mongolia in relation to human rights, persons with disabilities and gender equality were studied.

THE GOVERNMENT OF FINLAND DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION POLICIES

At the time when the first projects of the evaluated Programme started, the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland (MFA) was in the process to develop its NGO Development Cooperation Guidelines. After a lengthy process it was published in 2006. The principal messages could be summarized (MFA 2006):

- Work carried out by NGOs forms a significant element of Finland's overall development policy.
- Each NGO finds its own mission and way of operating - the Ministry's role is to enable and support.
- The development cooperation carried out by NGOs complements public bilateral (government to government), multilateral and the EU's development cooperation.
- United Nation's Millennium Development Goals form the most global and comprehensive development policy umbrella for both the work of governments as well as NGOs.
- Organizations are obligated to monitor the quality of the aid, and its results and effectiveness in a systematic way.
- NGOs are encouraged to cooperate with other actors when planning and implementing their development cooperation.

These principles of NGOs' role in the Finnish development cooperation have been reinforced with some modifications in the subsequent Government of Finland development cooperation policies as presented in continuation.

The Government of Finland policy for development cooperation was expressed in *the Finnish Government Decision-In-Principle* of 2007 (MFA 2007). Its goal was to eradicate poverty and to promote sustainable development in accordance of Millennium Development Goals (MFA 2007, 15).

The three cross-cutting themes of *Finnish Development Policy* (MFA 2007, 16) were:

- Promotion of the rights and status of women and girls, and promotion of gender and social equality;
- Promotion of the rights of groups that are easily excluded, particularly children, people with disabilities, indigenous people and ethnic minorities, and the promotion of equal opportunities for participation;
- Combating HIV/AIDS as a health problem and as a social problem.

The Government of Finland recognized Finnish NGOs as part of its official development cooperation, but does not expect that they strictly follow the policy. Rather, the Finnish NGOs are expected to implement, whenever possible, the presented principles in their projects at grass root level (MFA 2007, 34).

The Government of Finland launched a new *Development Policy Programme* in 2012, which promises to increase the cooperation through Finnish NGOs. In return greater effectiveness was expected from them in the implementation of their development cooperation. (MFA 2012, 19.)

The *Development Policy Programme* of 2012 reaffirms Finland's commitment to work to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MFA 2012, 5). As an addition, it introduces a strong emphasis on human

rights: “Finland’s human rights-based development policy emanates from the idea that all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and in rights” (MFA 2012, 11). According to the Policy Programme “extreme poverty is the world’s greatest single human rights issue” (MFA 2012, 7). The cross-cutting objectives of the development policy were (MFA 2012, 24):

- Gender equality;
- Reduction of inequality;
- Climate sustainability.

Within gender equality the policy paper recognizes specifically the problem of domestic violence: “Finland advances and supports the participation of women in decision-making and rejects any form of discrimination that gives rise to gender inequality (sexual and domestic violence, as well as unequal rights of ownership and inheritance)” (MFA 2012, 24).

In its *Development Policy* of 2016, the Ministry for Foreign Affairs subscribes the Agenda 2030 and the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG). The four special emphasis areas of the Development Policy are:

- The rights of women and girls;
- The economic development of partner countries;
- Democracy;
- Food security and availability of water and energy.

The *Development Policy* of 2016 recognizes (MFA 2016, 44.) the role of Finnish NGOs not only to cooperate with the official development cooperation whenever possible, but also to complement it in the countries, which the official cooperation does not reach. NGOs were requested to interact with the embassies of Finland. Both of these had been a common understanding since long time, but this was the first time they were explicitly written down.

Since the early 2020s, the Finnish development cooperation has been seen in the wider context of Finland’s international economic relations. The present policy is established in 2024. It maintains the rights of women and girls as the first area of emphasis in Finnish development cooperation. The other areas are education and climate actions. (MFA 2024.)

Through the policy paper GoF maintains its human rights-based policy, and advances and protects the rights of women, girls, persons with disabilities, indigenous groups, gender minorities and other people, who are in vulnerable position (MFA 2024, 21). The policy confirms the shift of emphasis from bilateral governmental programmes to NGO programmes in the Finnish development cooperation (MFA 2024, 31).

THE GOVERNMENT OF MONGOLIA POLICIES ON PWD AND GENDER

With the Constitution of 1992 the state assumes its role as a duty bearer in relation to Mongolian citizens, who may be in vulnerable position. In its Article 16, the Constitution grants several important rights to its citizens, including right to life, freedom of speech, assembly and religion, healthy and safe environment, general education free of charge, and the right to material and financial assistance in old age, disability, childbirth and childcare.

The *National Human Rights Commission* in Mongolia was established in 2001. The Commission is an institution mandated with the promotion and protection of human rights and freedoms, provided in the Constitution, Mongolian laws and international treaties to which Mongolia is a party. The Commission has established its presence in the provinces of Mongolia through appointing Referents. In Arkhangai, a Referent was appointed in 2014.

Based on the Constitution, the Government of Mongolia has taken the following major steps to safeguard the rights of persons with disabilities (PWD):

- 1992 The 1st nationwide programme to decentralize the services for PWD;

- 1998 Amendment to Social Security Law of PWD;
- 2006 UN Convention on Rights of PWD (UNCRPD) which states in the 1st article its purpose “to promote, protect and ensure the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms by all persons with disabilities, and to promote respect for their inherent dignity”;
- 2009 Ratification of UNCRPD;
- 2010 Accessibility standards of civil buildings and walkways (CC 2016);
- 2012 Establishment of National Rehabilitation Centre;
- 2012 The Incheon Strategy of Making the Rights Real;
- 2013 Resolution 281 to adopt UNCRPD;
- 2014 The Street project that supported building of new roads with lighting, intersections and pedestrian that comply with the accessibility standards;
- 2016 Law of the Rights of PWD;
- 2023 Social insurance package consisting of four laws – Social Insurance General Law, Law on Pension of Social Insurance Fund, Law on Assistance to be issued from Social Insurance Fund, and Law on Pension, Assistance and Payment to be issued from Social Insurance Fund in relation to occupational accidents and diseases. The package moved the old-age pension system from a notional defined contribution to fully funded individual accounts. (UN 2024, 19.)

The unanimous opinion expressed in the interviews was that the legal framework for PWD to claim their rights exists, but the duty bearers’ implementation of the laws and international agreements has been slow. Especially the Law of the Rights of PWD of 2016 is commonly considered to be without implementation. According to a recent evaluation “*Mongolian Government’s understanding of accountability as a duty bearer is not yet well established*” (MFA 2023, 147).

The Constitution stipulates that men and women shall enjoy equal rights not only in political, economic, social and cultural fields, but also in marriage. The steps taken by the Government of Mongolia to promote gender equality include:

- 2011 Law on Promotion of Gender Equality;
- 2011 Law on Family;
- 2017 Law on Combatting Domestic Violence;
- 2017 National Programme on Gender Equality.

ANALYSIS

During the implementation of the Programme, development cooperation has been guided first by the eight Millenium Development Goals (MDG) and later from 2016 onwards by the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG). These are shared goals of Government of Finland and Government of Mongolia as both governments are signatories of MDGs and SDGs. In the Table 1 the Projects implemented by Sower International are placed under each MDG and in Table 2 under each SDG they have significantly contributed to.

Table 1. The Projects’ contribution to Millenium Development Goals (MDG)

MDG 1: Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger

- Skills and Health Training 2005-2007
- Support of Arkhangai Disabled People’s Initiative (SADPI) 2008-2017
- Capacity building for Mongolian Deaf People by empowering their NGOs 2013-2017

MDG 2: Achieve universal primary education

- Skills and Health Training 2005-2007
- Support of Arkhangai Disabled People’s Initiative (SADPI) 2008-2017
- Capacity building for Mongolian Deaf People by empowering their NGOs 2013-2017

MDG 3: Promote gender equality and empower women
▪ All five projects implemented between 2005 and 2015

MDG 4: Reduce child mortality
▪ Skills and Health Training 2005-2007

MDG 5: Improve maternal health
▪ Skills and Health Training 2005-2007

MDG 6: Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases
▪ Skills and Health Training 2005-2007

MDG 7: Ensure environmental sustainability

MDG 8: Ensure a global partnership for development
▪ All five projects implemented between 2005 and 2015

The contribution of the first project *Skills and Health Training* to MDGs is impressive. As a multisectoral project it contributed to six out of eight MDGs. Obviously, the subsequent projects with more focused scope to persons with disabilities and gender equality couldn't reach the same. All five projects implemented between 2005 and 2015 supported the achievement of MDG 3 (Promote gender equality and empower women) and MDG 8 (Ensure a global partnership for development).

Table 2. The Projects' contribution to Sustainable Development Goals (SDG)

SDG 1: No poverty
▪ Support to Single Parents 2017-2020

SDG 2: Zero hunger
▪ Support to Single Parents 2017-2020

SDG 3: Good health and well-being
▪ All six projects implemented between 2016 and 2025

SDG 4: Quality education
▪ Support of Arkhangai Disabled People's Initiative (SADPI) 2008-17
▪ Support to Single Parents 2017-2020
▪ Capacity building for Mongolian Deaf People by empowering their NGOs 2013-2017
▪ Improvement of Reproductive Health Services for Women with Disabilities through Empowerment of Peer Groups 2017-2022
▪ Mongolian Deaf Linguistic Identity Empowerment (MDLI) 2021-2024

SDG 5: Gender equality
▪ All six projects implemented between 2016 and 2025

SDG 6: Clean water and sanitation
SDG 7: Affordable and clean energy

SDG 8: Decent work and economic growth
▪ Support to Single Parents 2017-2020
▪ Capacity building for Mongolian Deaf People by empowering their NGOs 2013-17
▪ ECCS 2021-2024

SDG 9: Industry, innovation and infrastructure

SDG 10: Reduced inequalities

- All six projects implemented between 2016 and 2025

SDG 11: Sustainable cities and communities

SDG 12: Responsible consumption and production

SDG 13: Climate action

SDG 14: Life below water

SDG 15: Life on land

SDG 16: Peace, justice, and strong institutions

- Capacity building for Mongolian Deaf People by empowering their NGOs 2013-2017
- Improvement of Reproductive Health Services for Women with Disabilities through Empowerment of Peer Groups 2017-2022
- Support to Single Parents 2017-2020
- Mongolian Deaf Linguistic Identity Empowerment (MDLI) 2021-2024

SDG 17: Partnerships for the goals

- All six projects implemented between 2016 and 2025

The projects' contribution toward SDGs was significant. For example, Support to Single Parents Project contributed to nine out of the 17 SDGs. All six projects implemented from 2016 onwards supported the achievement of SDG 3 (Good health and well-being), SDG 5 (Gender equality), SDG 10 (Reduced inequalities) and SDG 17 (Partnerships for the goals).

Cross-cutting objectives

There is even a better match with the cross-cutting objectives of Government of Finland development cooperation. *Rights of women and girls* and *Gender equality* have been the first cross-cutting objective in the development policies of 2007 and 2012. In more recent development policies, these occupy the position of the first thematic action area of the policy.

It can be safely said that the evaluated projects promoted rights of women and girls. The question is: did all of them also promote gender equality? An outsider may have considered two projects as activities for women only. In spite of the relatively advanced state of gender equality in Mongolia, the fact still remains that the society is dominated by men. In such a situation it would not be wise to leave the impression that the project pretends to introduce a change that involves only women.

In the case of *Single Parents Project*, the early versions of project documents had a title: *Single Parents Project, especially for single mothers*. This limitation is considered to be unnecessary. A man in Mongolia is facing serious problems; on average his life span is almost 10 years shorter than a woman's, which is the 12th largest disparity among all the countries in the World (UN 2024, 42). The single fathers may not have the stigma that many single mothers have to carry. However, single fathers certainly have serious problems and they, and especially their dependent children, may be badly in need of support.

It appears that the Mid-term Evaluation of the project paid attention to this matter, and towards the end the project was clearly a project of all single parents. Finally, the number of single fathers, who participated in the project, was quite small, less than 10% of the number of single mothers.

In the case of the Project *Improvement of Reproductive Health Services for Women with Disabilities*, there is no doubt; the project was planned for women only. When the project was implemented by a leading Mongolian NGO, it was realized that also men with disabilities had serious psychological issues related to plans to have family and children, and a specific peer group for men was established.

In GoF development cooperation policy papers 2007 the rights of groups that are easily excluded appear as the second cross-cutting theme. In the policy of 2012, the second cross-cutting objective is called reduction of inequality. Most of the projects under evaluation have a special emphasis on persons in vulnerable situation, especially persons with disabilities and some more specifically to the deaf or hard-of-hearing persons. Also, the projects are typically designed to serve especially women in vulnerable situations.

While the Programme is strongly involved in gender equality and supports persons in vulnerable situations, the climate sustainability and other environmental concerns are not well spelled out in the project plans and reports. There are reported cases where good things have happened as reported by a *Mid-Term review of on ECCS-project* (IOE 2023): “*As part of the project to protect the environment, we have been selected for the project to make 14 types of environmentally friendly products and have received 6 million MNT funding. Fabric bags and nets are being made to replace plastic bags. The administration staff of our soum is supporting us in cooperation with soum's local leaders.*”

Human Rights-based Approach

Since 2012 GoF has emphasised Human Rights-based approach in its development cooperation policies. In the Programme, the Human Rights of persons with disabilities were recognized already during the Skills and Health Training Project, which encouraged the persons with disabilities to claim their rights, and organised a first ever *Assembly of persons with disabilities* in Arkhangai province with the slogan “***Our issues must not be decided without our involvement***” (MMA 2014, 9). This slogan was selected to be the title of this Ex-post evaluation, as the idea of rights of the persons in vulnerable situations is leading the Programme all the way through.

The evaluation considers the projects *Improvement of Reproductive Health Services for Women with Disabilities through Empowerment of Peer Groups* (2017-2022), *Capacity building for Mongolian Deaf People by empowering their NGOs* (2013-2017), and *Mongolian Deaf Linguistic Identity Empowerment (MDLI)* (2021-2024) as excellent examples of promoting and sustaining human rights of persons with disabilities.

MDLI project was part of the evaluation of *Human Rights-based Approach (HRBA) in Finland's Development Policy and Cooperation*, which recognized the work done on Mongolian sign language development as follows (MFA 2024, 146): “*A transformational aspect of dignity that has been supported in the work of FLOM and DPF partner, Tegsh Tugshal, has been that of introducing and strengthening rights holders' and duty bearers' capacities to use sign language. This has been described as providing the basis for a fundamental shift in becoming able to communicate and thus participate in society among a sector of the population that had been severely excluded in the past. **This example of working towards linguistic rights and cultural identity has been such a clear and momentous change for those benefiting that it may be one of the clearest examples of transformation encountered.** The extent to which duty bearers have embraced (and financed) their responsibilities in terms of ensuring that translators are available as requires remains uncertain, but significant results have been achieved in acknowledgement of these responsibilities in legislation and to some extent in practice.*”

Impact

The impact answers the question: What difference does the intervention make? It describes the extent to which the intervention has generated or is expected to generate significant positive or negative, intended or unintended, higher-level effects (MFA 2018).

The impact of Sower International Development Programme in Mongolia 2005-2025 is assessed in two parts:

1. Impact in Arkhangai province, where the following four projects have been implemented continuously over the period of 20 years: *Skills and Health Training* (2005-2007), *Support of Arkhangai Disabled People's Initiative (SADPI)* (2008-2017), *Support of single parents* (2017-2020)

and *Enabling Communities through Civil Society Strengthening in Rural Mongolia (ECCS)* (2021-2025).

2. Impact at national context, which has been supported by three projects since 2013: *Capacity building for Mongolian Deaf People by empowering their NGOs* (2013-2017), *Improvement of Reproductive Health Services for Women with Disabilities through Empowerment of Peer Groups* (2017-2022), and *Mongolian Deaf Linguistic Identity Empowerment (MDLI)* (2021-2024).

IMPACT IN ARKHANGAI PROVINCE

Arkhangai province is located some 500 km west of Ulaanbaatar. With a territory of 55 314 km², it is slightly bigger than Estonia. Arkhangai province had 95253 inhabitants in 2022 (in 2005 there were 89114 inhabitants). At the turn of the Millenium Arkhangai province was selected as the working area of Sower International based on its relatively easy accessibility from Ulaanbaatar, its harsh conditions just North of Gobi Desert, and the poverty of its population. Arkhangai remains as one of least developed provinces in the country. Its Human Development Index (HDI) is the fourth lowest among all the 21 provinces of Mongolia (UN 2024, 26).

Persons with disabilities (PWD) and single parents have been the two principal groups of beneficiaries of Sower International Development Programme in Arkhangai. These groups are almost equal in size.

According to the records maintained by the newly established *Arkhangai Development Centre for Persons with Disabilities* there are 3314 PWD living in Arkhangai province. The number of PWD has been quite stable over the years; in 2011 it was 3419. The number of PWD at that time represented about 3,7% of total population. The break down to different types of disabilities was: persons with visual impairment 357, persons with hearing or speech impairment 502, persons with mobility impairment 652, persons with developmental impairment 620, persons with mental disorders 465, and multiple disability 340 (FLOM-M 2012).

The number of single headed households in Arkhangai province is reported at 3338, of which 2625 were headed by a woman (IOE 2021). The number of households headed by a woman and with children under 18 years, which were considered as the principal beneficiaries of the project, was 1139 (ECCS Project document 2020). In both cases the family members should be included as beneficiaries, which would sum up the number of beneficiaries to about 20000.

Skills and Health Training Project 2005-2007

The first *Skills and Health Training project* contributed two specific impacts for the posterior development of the Sower International's Development Programme:

- It sharpened its focus from the original multisectoral approach to persons with disabilities and to pregnant women and single mothers. In this work the role of Mr. Sandagsuren, who had established an NGO of persons with disabilities already in 2002, was very important as he knew personally persons with disabilities in different parts of Arkhangai province.
- It organised continuing education through short courses and seminars for 323 local doctors and 250 local nurses. These numbers obviously are numbers of participants, i.e. the same doctor may have participated in several courses or seminars. Nevertheless, it can be said that the knowledge and skills of medical staff in Arkhangai province were up-dated and up-graded in the themes that the project considered important.

Support of Arkhangai Disabled People's Initiative Project (SADPI) 2008-2017

SADPI had a development objective: *To enhance the socio-economic status of persons with disabilities and empower them to participate equally in society.* Most of its impacts SADPI achieved through the cooperation

with the local governments at province, soum and bagh levels in cooperation with the *Council of Associations of People with Disability in Arkhangai* (CPWDA), which was established as an CSO in 2012.

The Arkhangai provincial government has assumed its role as the duty bearer for its citizens with disabilities by including rights of persons with disabilities to health and education in the policy of its Social Development department. Furthermore, the administrative units under the provincial government, the soum and bagh governments, were ordered to develop corresponding plans for their areas. Implementation of these plans, is a criterion in performance evaluations of the soum and bagh governments. (CC 2016.)

The advocacy work of SADPI may not have reached directly all persons with disabilities in Arkhangai province, but it reached social welfare officials in the soums and the social workers in the baghs (CC 2016).

The Lifelong Education Centre recognized persons with disabilities as a social group that has a right to and need of education. Starting from 2015 the Centre included literacy and life skills classes in its programme. The provincial employment policy improves the employment of persons with disabilities by introducing to employers the possibility of reimbursement of the salary from the employment support fund. (CC 2016.)

There have been accessibility standards of civil buildings and walkways in Mongolia since 2010. However, at national level the implementation of these standards is poor. In Tsetserleg, the administrative centre of Arkhangai, the Government of Mongolia *Street project* built 9 km new roads with lighting, intersections and pedestrian walkways in 2014 that comply with the standards for meeting the needs of wheelchair users and persons with vision impairment. At the same time some old administrative buildings were refurbished to meet the accessibility standards and from 2015, the town planning committee included accessibility for persons with disabilities in the section for blueprint development for new buildings. The *Council of Associations of People with Disability in Arkhangai* (CPWDA) has been member of the provincial Construction Approval Committee and checked the compliance of the plans and constructed buildings with the accessibility standards. (CC 2016).

The number of beneficiaries of different interventions of SADPI is reported to be 2090.

Support to Single Parents – Bright Future 2017-2020

The *Support to Single Parents* project has the development objective *to help single mothers to participate in the labour market, gain employment and societal support.*

The project almost reached its entire group of the principal beneficiaries by advocacy and training efforts with a participation of 1043 single mothers. Through advocacy single parents were informed about their rights granted by the Government of Mongolia. According to the evaluation (IOE 2021) the public services most often tapped were: food voucher, child care allowance, social assistance related to loss of a breadwinner, benefit for single mothers and disability benefit.

Also, 122 participated in different project interventions to improve the household income and livelihood. Some 19% of the households sampled by the End evaluation reported that they became employed, and 29% joined to the business group. (IOE 2021.)

The project assisted to establish seven local CBOs at soum level to advocate and protect the rights of women. In 2020 *The Community Initiatives – Arkhangai Committee* was established as an umbrella organisation to serve the local CBOs.

At the same time of dealing with the problems with single parents, the project developed a preventive approach and advocated girls and newly married couples to avoid the problems of single parenthood in the future. In fact, the number of participants in these awareness raising events were greater than the number of single parents attending. As a preventive measure, 1021 teenager girls and 89 young couples have been part of awareness raising or training.

It was a brave move from Sower International to move towards preventive work, as the effectiveness of such work is very difficult to measure and its potential impacts may only be seen years afterwards. In this case, there has been luckily a quite immediate feedback, which is recorded in the project end evaluation report (IOE 2021) where an interviewed key informant from the provincial department of health stated: *“As a representative of a partner organization, I think the Bright Future project not only trained and empowered the target people involved in the project, but also provided excellent training and counselling services to their families and other youths and adolescents in collaboration with professional organizations. One of the project achievements is that recently, the number of pregnancies of girls aged 15-19 in the province has been decreasing. It is evidenced that 103 girls gave birth in 2018, but it dropped to 95 in 2019 and to 75 in 2020. I can conclude it is a result of three-year successful partnership of 10 soums.”*

Enabling Communities through Civil Society Strengthening in Rural Mongolia (ECCS) 2021-2025

ECCS continued the work of previous projects SADPI and *Support to Single Parents* with an expected impact of *“Enhanced inclusive active citizenship of persons in vulnerable situations, especially persons with disabilities and rural women”*. The Project aimed to empower persons with disabilities and women in Arkhangai by organizing training on their human rights.

With the anticipation that ECCS is the final project of its kind in Arkhangai, which was spelled out already in the project plan, the advocacy was carried out by *the Council of Associations of People with Disability in Arkhangai (CPWDA)* and local CBOs. *The Community Initiatives – Arkhangai Committee*, whose number of associated CBOs had increased to 10, was leading advocacy for its own reference groups. A *Capacity Assessment of Arkhangai Council for Community Initiatives* was carried out in 2023 by *Institute of Outdoor Education*. It revealed some challenges in the organisation, which were attended according to recommendations by ECCS. Both councils gained some experience in implementing small projects for other donors and administration of funds from Arkhangai provincial government.

A special effort by the project was to train 38 specialists through eight thematic modules to act as Human Rights advisors and trainers in the Arkhangai province. These human rights specialists were certified by the *National Human Rights Commission* of Mongolia.

In the interview with one certified trainer, a single mother, told her story, which illustrates the environment, but also the possibility for a change to the better: *“I was a very shy person, but I had passed the training and received the certificate from the National Human Rights Commission. There was a special day for human rights at the school where my children go, and I volunteered to give a lesson on the human rights. My children had been victims of bullying in the school, but it stopped completely after my participation. The kids came to say to my children; we didn’t really know that your mother is a teacher!”*

Arkhangai provincial government has responded very well as the principal duty bearer of its citizens. It continues with provision of services in education, health and employment sector that have been started already during previous projects. Also, the efforts to improve the accessibility of government offices and other public places have continued. Arkhangai provincial government concluded successfully the negotiation with Central Government of Mongolia and the Asian Development Bank, which were started already in 2015, and the *Development Centre for Persons with Disabilities* was constructed in Tsetserleg with superb facilities for different therapies, special care and rehabilitation for several thousand persons with disabilities annually.

According to the Chairperson of CPWDA, the project had benefitted each and every one of the persons with disabilities in Arkhangai province. Most of them have participated in advocacy sessions, training courses or special events. In some cases, benefits may be just indirectly through better services of the duty bearers, like the provincial government, social welfare officials in the soums and the social workers in the baghs or at the *Development Centre for Persons with Disabilities*.

Several persons interviewed expressed that the biggest impact is that the persons with disabilities are now visible and vocal. Before they used to stay at home without any communication with their peers. Now they are active part of society, especially in Arkhangai. It is clear that active participation in social and economic activities still depends on the degree of disability, resources of the family, and unfortunately, also on the distance from home to bagh, soum or provincial centres. Luckily, remoteness is not anymore affecting seriously access to rehabilitation services as the *Development Centre for Persons with Disabilities* has also accommodation for persons with disabilities coming from the countryside.

When placing the development in Arkhangai in timeline, there is an interesting match between the comments by key informants interviewed and the developments. It was commented that it took 10 years of awareness raising before the provincial decision makers in Arkhangai realised the situation of persons with disabilities. Nine years after the *Skills and Health Training Project* started in 2005, the first concrete steps were taken to improve accessibility of the public buildings, and the next year the provincial governments of Arkhangai applied the *Development Centre for Persons with Disabilities* to be built in Tsetserleg. Another key informant complained that the Government is very slow. It took 11 years before the Centre was fully operational in its new building in 2026, though the operations of the Centre had been started two years earlier at a temporal venue.

IMPACT AT NATIONAL LEVEL

During implementation of the Programme, the recognition and knowledge on the number of persons with disabilities has improved significantly. According to *UN Country Update 2024*, there were exactly 111 228 PWD in Mongolia in 2023, leading to a disability prevalence rate of 3,2 % (UN 2024, 8). Earlier, as the government agencies report various statistical figures based on their service requirements, the prevalence was roughly estimated to be between 3,3% and 5% of Mongolia's total population (FIDIDA 2009).

All the impacts of the projects may not be nationwide, but at least the development of Mongolian sign language will have an impact to all persons with hearing disabilities within Mongolia (estimated at 16000) and even beyond its frontiers.

The persons with disabilities in Mongolia have assumed an active role in facing their challenges individually and through their specific CBO's locally. They have also been active at national level: In two recent national elections the persons with disabilities have exhibited a high (over 84%) rate of voting. Consequently, for the first time two persons with disabilities were elected to the Parliament in 2024. (UN 2024, 44.)

Capacity building for Mongolian Deaf People by empowering their NGOs (2013-2017) and Mongolian Deaf Linguistic Identity Empowerment (MDLI) (2021-2024)

The first project was a joint venture with *Mongolian National Deaf Federation* (MNDF) and *Mongolian Association of Sign Language Interpreters* (MASLI). It worked since 2013 towards the long-term objective of *promoting the rights, recognition and inclusion of Deaf/HH in Mongolia*.

For the implementation of MDLI, Tegsh Tusgal signed minutes of understanding with the four principal Deaf CSOs, namely *Mongolian National Federation of Deaf* (MNFD), *Mongolian National Association of Deaf* (MNAD), *Deaf Education NGO*, and *Mongolian National Sign Language Development Committee*. Deaf Community representative Deaf Club were supported from the beginning of the project implementation.

During the MDLI project, the Deaf CSOs developed the Curriculum for of sign language interpreters training and trained a pilot batch of 51 interpreters across three levels, based on experiences gained training in the previous project.

After an extensive research and field work to collect data across all 21 provinces of Mongolia and 9 districts of Ulaanbaatar, the Mongolian Sign Language Digital Dictionary (see: www.mnsl.mn) was launched in

November 2024 consisting at that time of 1400 categorized signs with their translations and even transliterations using the traditional Mongolian scripts.

The projects have also done extensive advocacy, and have been in contact with over 1000 Deaf/HH persons. Another important target group has been potential employers for Deaf/HH persons. Through specific efforts of the projects, 50 potential employers increased their knowledge on deaf specific employment.

Improvement of Reproductive Health Services for Women with Disabilities through Empowerment of Peer Groups (2017-2022)

The project has been implemented in cooperation with the *Mongolian National Association of Wheelchair Users* (MNAWU). The project took one step further in fuller realization of rights of persons with disabilities as stated in the UNCRPD, which emphasises that in all matters related to marriage, family, parenthood, and relationships, the discrimination against persons with disabilities must be eliminated.

The project created 14 peer groups (with 183 members) in Ulaanbaatar and five provinces. The project was able to change the attitudes of caregivers, decision makers and health professionals who before the project considered that sexual and reproductive rights are not relevant to persons with disabilities.

Sexual and Reproductive Health education package was developed consisting of 5 modules of 38 hours each. Training manuals and materials for health staff were produced, and 469 government health workers participated in training or advocacy events. In 18 health facilities the project improved the accessibility to suit persons with disabilities.

Leadership Training project (2009-2010) and New Key project (2009-2011)

The *Leadership Training project (2009-2010)* appears to be an internal capacity building project for the staff and principal stakeholders of projects implemented at the time. It doesn't have a measurable impact of its own, but the impact will be seen through better performance of other projects and general contribution to the society. *New Key project (2009-2011)* was a specific project to attend needs of women who had recently moved to Ulaanbaatar and were without a proper identity documentation, which limited their access to public services provided by Government of Mongolia. It is impossible to assess impact of these two projects. In fact, already the previous Ex-post evaluation complained that it was difficult to get in contact with the participants of *New Key project* beneficiaries as they have moved on, got married or changed their telephone number (MMA 2014). Instead of the impact, the effectiveness of these two projects is assessed in the following Chapter.

Effectiveness

According to the Evaluation Manual (MFA 2018) the effectiveness describes “*the extent to which the intervention achieved, or is expected to achieve its objectives, and its results, including any differential results across the groups*”.

The development related to the main beneficiary groups of the Programme (persons with disabilities and single parents) are discussed in the chapters Impact and Sustainability. Here are some findings of effectiveness of the two projects (*New Key* and *Leadership Training*), which didn't directly contribute to the abovementioned beneficiary groups. The assessment of these projects is based on findings of their earlier evaluations. No new data was understandably available of these projects, which terminated already in 2011.

The *New Key Project* focused on assisting 123 women who had migrated from rural areas to Ulaanbaatar. The project was a very timely response to the great migration wave, which reached its temporal peak in 2010, when some 40000 people migrated to Ulaanbaatar. The migrants identity documents were invalid and could not be used in Ulaanbaatar to access social, education and health services and schooling for children.

Among other efforts the *New Key Project* supported 120 out of 123 women to obtain up-to-date identity documents (MMA 2014).

According to the final evaluation (Stephens 2011) all interviews concluded that the objectives of *New Key project* were met. Firstly, the participants gained confident, self-respect and had made successful transition into city life. Secondly, the life skills seminars had empowered the women with knowledge and information about the legal system directly affecting them. This knowledge gave them confidence in dealings with local officials when applying for their benefits. They also use this knowledge to help others from the community. Thirdly, some 60-80% of them were able to find work and could support their families.

The purpose of the *Leadership Training* project was to develop the capacity of the project staff and the leaders of co-operating organizations. Through the project 21 people, who were responsible for these organizations, were receiving training in traditional form through 2-3 day workshops and complemented with computer-based distance learning. The training modules included:

- The Constitution of Mongolia and Human Rights;
- The civil society as an indicator of a democratic governance;
- Developing yourself as a person and your leadership skills;
- Transparency and evaluation as parts of good administration;
- Communication skills and ethics;
- Citizens participation in the society;
- What is corruption? How to prevent corruption?
- What is a tax? The importance of paying taxes;
- Family as a basic unit of a society & Mongolian Law on Family;
- Child's rights and child's protection;
- Reducing poverty and helping the most vulnerable in the society.

The project was planned to be also a model project as far as project management and administration were concerned. An evaluation confirms *“the tremendous accuracy of the project management including the meticulous approach to organization and training where the participant's attendance and performance were constantly checked and evaluated”* (MMA 2014).

The previous ex-post evaluation in 2014 found out some hints that the local staff could have been more involved in the decision making (MMA 2014). The Leadership Training project played an important role in building the capacity of Mongolian project staff. The training was considered instrumental in enabling a gradual transfer of project management and administration from the expatriate staff to national staff.

Efficiency

Efficiency describes *“the extent to which the intervention delivers, or is likely to deliver, results in an economic and timely way”* (MFA 2018).

The total investment of Ministry for Foreign Affairs to the Sower International Development Programme presented in this Ex-post evaluation has been 4,42 million €, i.e. on average 221 000 € per year. This is considered to be quite modest investment to reach the impacts described in this report.

From the final evaluations of different projects, it can be reduced that the project implementation and day-to-day management has been highly appreciated by the interviewed stakeholders. However, there have been shortcomings in other parts of the project cycle management, which have caused extra work for the project staff. These problems may have not been visible from outside, and probably they have not hampered projects' daily routines.

Planning

The normal cycle for the MFA financed projects implemented by Finnish NGOs has been three years. Most of the project plans have been made for that period. However, the *Leadership training project* (2009-2010) was planned for two years only, *Capacity building for Mongolian Deaf People by empowering their NGOs* (2013-2017) was planned and submitted to MFA for approval in two parts, and the *Support of Arkhangai Disabled People's Initiative (SADPI)* (2008-2017) in four or five parts.

There must be some reasons behind this, but generally speaking it doesn't make sense to plan a project for two years only. It will just add the work load to anybody involved in the project, in Sower International and in MFA.

Administration

The administration of project funds has been done according to the rules and regulations set by the contract with Ministry for Foreign Affairs. The evaluation of SADPI project (2008-2017) states: "*Project administration is managed carefully, which is achieved by not over complicating management system, but ensuring critical recording and administration*" (CC 2016). The same administrative rules were applied to Mongolian CSOs, which sub-contracted part of the implementation. In the interviews some of these CSO have valued highly the transparent processes of project administration, and admitted that though it has been sometimes painful, it has been worthwhile to learn international standards for project administration.

The administration, however, has not been perfect. In two occasions the projects of Sower International have suffered from a fraud of project funds by its employees or staff members of a partner NGO. The latter case took place in 2022-2023. The case was thoroughly investigated by several Mongolian audit companies, before the final sum missing was found to be almost 12000 EUR. Unfortunately, the special audits took their time and the Ministry for Foreign Affairs (MFA) interrupted disbursements to all three on-going projects in Mongolia from May 2024 until September 2025. The delay was reflected in the achievements of the projects.

Reporting

The Projects have done their Annual Reports on the standard format provided by MFA. The format has a limited space and is quite rigid system. Nobody seems to like filling in the boxes, but having reports in standard form brings along also its advantages.

MFA did not demand the Finnish NGO's to prepare a final report on their projects. The reason was that the annual reports were supposed to be cumulative, and hence, the last annual report served also as the final report. The idea of cumulateness, however, was not well understood, and the practice to report only annual achievements pertained in some projects until the early 2020s.

Evaluation

At first sight it appears that the projects have been well evaluated. The first project, *the Skills and Health Project* (2005-2007), has an evaluation report of its skills component. Later, the final evaluation at the end of the project period has been a normal practice. There have been half a dozen organizations and plenty of individual consultants, who have evaluated the projects over the years. The reports are of varied quality, but as a clear indication that the Sower International wasn't pleased with the quality of the reports, only one of the consultants involved in evaluations was granted a second chance to do an evaluation.

For this xx-post evaluation, the final evaluation reports should have served as the principal source of information in assessing the achievements of the projects. With a couple of exceptions, the reports did not meet the expectations. There are amounts of detailed raw data in the reports, but the text is largely descriptive rather than analytical.

The Ministry for Foreign Affairs published its Evaluation Guidelines: *Between the past and future* in 2007 (MFA 2007b). The introduction of the guidelines says: “*The purpose of these Evaluation Guidelines is to provide user groups with basic information and knowledge on the evaluation process and how to manage it, and what to do with evaluation results. The key user groups of these guidelines include personnel at the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland, cooperation organisations including non-governmental organisation (NGOs), and those consultants and individuals who perform evaluations or review tasks commissioned by the Ministry.*”

Between past and future -guidelines were distributed widely (a second print was taken already in 2008) and it was used by many Finnish NGOs. The oldest NGO project evaluation report, which applies the guidelines is dated April 2008. Apparently, the Evaluation Guidelines were not introduced in Sower International’s projects in Mongolia. The Mongolian evaluators and even Finnish project workers in Mongolia couldn’t possibly know the existence of these guidelines. The guidelines should have been introduced by the Sower International staff in Finland. On the other hand, after receiving the first evaluation report, the MFA officer in-charge of these projects in the Ministry should have reacted and instructed to use proper guidelines for any subsequent evaluation.

Sustainability

Sustainability expresses the extent to which the net benefits of the intervention continue, or is likely to continue when external supports come to an end (MFA 2018).

ARKHANGAI PROVINCE

The sustainability of the work of the four projects implemented in 2005-2025 is based on the activity of the local governments’ bodies and the civil society organisations that participated in the implementation of these projects. The Council of *Associations of People with Disability in Arkhangai* (CPWDA) was established in 2012. It is a coalition of six local CBOs that have been working in Arkhangai province. *The Community Initiatives – Arkhangai Committee* was established as a CSO in 2020. It serves as an umbrella organisation for 10 local CBOs, which work in 10 soums of Arkhangai province with a common goal *to protect and promote rights of women and their families, children and elderly people and promote their participation in social lives and care of their working status and opportunities in Arkhangai province.*

The councils have full support of the Arkhangai Governor’s office and local authorities, which pay the operative costs of their office and meeting hall. The CPWDA participates in several working groups of the local government including Construction Approval Committee for inspection of building plans and works from the point of view of accessibility.

The Arkhangai provincial government has introduced the rights of persons with disabilities to health and education in the policy of its social development department and instructed the soum and bagh governments to do the same. The Arkhangai provincial government is hosting an impressive *Development Centre for Persons with Disabilities* in Tsetserleg. Arkhangai province was among the two first provinces to start the negotiations in 2015 with the *Ministry of Population Development and Social Protection* on the Centre (CC 2016). Construction of the centre was financed by a loan from Asian Development Bank. The building is brand new and will be taken in use in April 2026. Its services include for example physiotherapy, socio-psychological support, social work, employment counselling, mentoring, and a workshop and a store for mobility and hearing aids. The Centre has already provided services for two years in the premises of previous maternity ward. In its first full year of operations 2025, the centre served 3450 persons with disabilities, but the new building increases the capacity significantly. At present there are 27 employees at the Centre. As a special guarantee of sustainability, a long-time project officer of Sower International, who knows personally most persons with disabilities in Arkhangai, has been employed as the Head of Social Rehabilitation Services of the Centre.

NATIONAL LEVEL

Though the work with the Deaf/HH community at national level still continues, it demonstrates already positive signs of sustainability.

Mongolian Sign Language working group consists of 30 members, including the *National Council for Language Policy* (directly under the President's office), *Ministry of Education*, *Ministry of Justice and Internal Affairs*, *Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Protection*, *Ministry of Digital Development, Innovation and Communication*, and representatives of 10 Deaf/HH CSOs. The working group has drafted the *Mongolian Sign Language Law*, which is expected to enter in Parliament for discussion and eventual approval in October 2026. The process has been recognized by Government of Mongolia in its Action Plan 2025-2031, which commits to assume the related legislation, interpreter training, bilingual education and media accessibility.

Since 2022 the Government of Mongolia has assumed the responsibility on sign language interpreter training. The courses are organised presently at the *National Development Centre of Persons with Disabilities*, downtown Ulaanbaatar.

The development of *Mongolian Sign Language Digital Dictionary* continues. At the time of the Ex-post evaluation it included already 2000 words.

Some development partners in Mongolia are working to improve the technology of TV broadcastings to increase the use, and improve visibility of sign language interpretations in TV programmes.

Improvement of Reproductive Health Services for Women with Disabilities through Empowerment of Peer Groups (2017-2022)

The project has been an eye opener in application of Sexual and Reproductive Health as Human Rights to persons with disabilities. The level of activities is lower than during the project time. However, there are elements that will survive.

Ministry of Health has promised to improve accessibility and continue procurement of PWD friendly equipment (beds, weight scales, etc.) to its health centres. The Ministry has also trained 30 trainers to work with the health sector personnel in Sexual and Reproductive Health of persons with disabilities. The training package created by the project is now a course that can be opted to form a part of the compulsory annual continuing education programme of health staff. As the course is available on-line, it has become quite popular. *Mongolian National Association of Wheelchair Users* (MNAWU), however, would like it to have the status of a compulsory course to be taken by all staff.

The peer groups created by the Project act now as provincial branches of MNAWU and continue their advocacy work in five provinces. The project was able to change the attitudes of caregivers, decision makers and health professionals who before the project considered that sexual and reproductive rights are not relevant to persons with disabilities. Sexual and Reproductive Health education package was developed consisting of 5 modules of 38 hours each. In 18 health facilities the project improved the accessibility to suit persons with disabilities and 469 government health workers participated in training or advocacy events.

The leading Mongolian CSO implementing the project, *Mongolian National Association of Wheelchair Users* (MNAWU) is regarded as an expert organisation in the issues of sexual and reproductive health of persons with disabilities, and is regularly invited to decision making events not only in the issues of persons with disabilities but also gender equality related issues. Also, seven members of the peer groups are members of Governor's councils in their respective provinces or districts, and can influence in local decision making.

There is very long lasting sustainability of the project efforts. Before the project started all PWD pregnancies were automatically categorized as high-risk pregnancies. The project raised awareness of health staff that this

is not necessarily the case, and many women with disabilities were encouraged to have children. The evaluation team met personally two of those children.

Coherence

Coherence answers the question: How well does the intervention fit to its environment? The compatibility of the intervention with other interventions in a country, sector or institution. (MFA2018.)

The Finnish Government Development Policy Programme: Towards a Sustainable and Just World Community (MFA 2007, 35) encourages the Finnish NGOs to co-operate with other actors in their development cooperation efforts. The coordination of international assistance to a country is the responsibility of the host country government. In the 2000s the universal acceptance of MDGs and SDGs by most development partners has improved overall coherence of development cooperation interventions. This is the case also in Mongolia.

The big players in development cooperation in Mongolia have been Japan, the United States, the European Union, the United Nations (UN), Asian Development Bank (ADB), World Bank (WB) and some other development banks (ADB 2025).

At national level Sower International has worked in very specific niches in promoting sexual and reproductive health of persons with disabilities, and the cultural identity and language of persons with hearing impairments. International interest to these topics has been limited. The projects have maintained communication with *Japan International Cooperation Agency* (JICA), which recently concluded an 8-year development programme in PWD sector. Hardware (buildings and equipment) support to PWD sector has been financed from ADB and *Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency* (TIKA), but the projects have not had direct contacts with them as the coordination is taken care of by the Government of Mongolia.

In Arkhangai, the Programme has developed over the years a very close cooperation and coordination with the local governments at province, soum and bagh levels. International actors have paid only limited interest in persons with disabilities or poor women's issues in Arkhangai. Short term cooperation has been developed with *Adventist Relief and Development Agency* (ARDA), *World Vision* and *Mercy Corps*.

The principal cooperating partners of Sower International have been the national and provincial CSOs. There are more than 20 CSOs, who have cooperated with the nine projects during their implementation. Some of them are umbrella organizations at national or provincial levels, which represent 6 to 30 CBOs. The following CSOs have participated in the implementation of two or more projects:

- National Federation of Organizations of PWD of Mongolia;
- Mongolian National Association of Wheelchair Users (MNAWU);
- Mongolian National Association of Deaf (MNAD);
- Mongolian National Federation of Deaf (MNFD);
- Council of Associations of People with Disability in Arkhangai (CPWDA);
- Community Initiatives – Arkhangai Committee.

Visibility

The abbreviation FLOM is well known and appreciated in Arkhangai province. In the final evaluation of SADPI “*more than one public official referred to the issue of PWD as being synonymous with FLOM*” (CC 2016). In an interview for this evaluation FLOM was described as a “*bridge between PWD and the government*”.

Very few might know the full name for FLOM. For many, however, it is clear that the 'F' in the beginning stands for Finnish or Finland. This has indirectly been building the reputation of the government of Finland as an exemplary actor in the promotion of human rights of every individual.

Since many years Sower International's projects have been the only development efforts in Mongolia supported by the Government of Finland. An officer of the Embassy of Finland in Beijing, paid a visit to Mongolia in November 2025. Based on the discussion held with the project staff, she has an appreciation of the long and consistent work. The CSOs working in the projects have been able to network with others and had contacts and even impact at policy level. She mentioned specifically the Mongolian Sign Language Digital Dictionary, which is a new and valuable tool for deaf people especially in Mongolian countryside to learn their mother tongue (the Mongolian sign language). As the projects are the only development efforts financed by the MFA, they are an important part of making up of the image that the public in Mongolia has about Finland.

FLOM has done good work, and the communication on achievements has been active. The name of the organization has changed very recently. Actually, the official registration in Mongolia for the name Sower International was received while the Evaluation Team was in the country.

As the work in Arkhangai concluded in 2025, it may not be possible or necessary to introduce the name Sower International there. In the streets of Tsetserleg, FLOM may be remembered with that name for the decades to come. Special efforts are needed to introduce Sower International and Tegsh Tusgal in Ulaanbaatar and nationwide. The on-going *Empowerment of PWD through Strengthening OPD Project (ESPO)* plays an important role in making Sower International and Tegsh Tusgal known and appreciated in Mongolia.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion A: Mongolia is the most sparsely populated sovereign state in the World. Furthermore, more than half of its population is congested in or close to the capital Ulaanbaatar, whereas the desolation in the countryside is extreme. Measured by the share of poor in the population or the HDI, the disparity in development between urban and rural areas in Mongolia is wide.

Recommendation A1: After concluding the work in Arkhangai province, the rural areas should be given adequate attention in the Sower Internationals Development Programme in future. Ideally, a new project could be started in another province, which would be planned and implemented taking full advantage of the lessons learned in Arkhangai. As a minimum, the countryside should be guaranteed its fair share (over 50%) of any national level actions.

For future fundraising and program planning, TT and local CBO councils could pursue joint ventures for project proposals and new initiatives. Partnering across several provinces may strengthen these proposals. They could also apply to serve as project implementers for ADB or other donors, guided by mid-term development cooperation strategies. Board members and active supporters may help identify opportunities. Potential donors include the EU, the United Kingdom, Canada, and Switzerland, Asian countries, and private donors.

Conclusion B: The Programme has good match with MDGs (2005-2015) and SDGs (2016-2025) subscribed by both GoF and GoM. In the period 2005-2015 all 5 projects implemented supported achievement of MDG 3 (Promote gender equality and empower women) and MDG 8 (Ensure a global partnership for development). In the period 2016-2025 all 6 projects implemented supported achievement of SDG 3 (Good health and well-being), SDG 5 (Gender equality), SDG 10 (Reduced inequalities) and SDG 17 (Partnership for goals).

Recommendation B1: SDGs are still valid to be used as guideline for planning the future projects.

Conclusion C: The Programme has a perfect match with the Finland's Development Policy's (2012) 1st and 2nd cross-cutting objectives: Gender equality and Reduction of inequality. However, the Programme has very little contents that support the 3rd cross-cutting objective of climate sustainability.

The TT team has made some efforts to improve climate sustainability, particularly in waste management. However, these initiatives should have been formalized in their operational manual and integrated into internal policy, rather than remaining *ad hoc*.

Recommendation C1: Climate sustainability should be given specific attention in Sower International's future development programmes as the impacts of climate change appear to be drastic in Mongolia.

Conclusion D: The persons with disabilities and women are visible and vocal part of the society in Arkhangai. They are represented by the *Council of Associations of People with Disability in Arkhangai (CPWDA)* and *The Community Initiatives – Arkhangai Committee*, which serve as umbrella organisations for 16 local CBOs.

Arkhangai provincial government has assumed its role as the principal duty bearer of its citizens, and is supervising the local governments in its soums and baghs to do the same. It has improved its services in education, health and employment sectors, and also made government offices and other public places accessible to persons with disabilities. The *Development Centre for Persons with Disabilities* in Arkhangai has facilities for treatment, therapy and rehabilitation for several thousand persons with disabilities annually.

Recommendation D1: The experiences and lessons learned through the work in Arkhangai province should be ideally used in planning a new project in one of the Mongolian provinces.

Conclusion E: The evaluation considers the projects *Improvement of Reproductive Health Services for Women with Disabilities through Empowerment of Peer Groups* (2017-2022), *Capacity building for Mongolian Deaf People by empowering their NGOs* (2013-2017), and *Mongolian Deaf Linguistic Identity Empowerment (MDLI)* (2021-2024) as excellent examples of promoting human rights of persons with disabilities. MDLI has documented Mongolian sign language (with an on-line dictionary), which would be the mother tongue for D/HH persons in Mongolia.

Recommendation E1: The work on Mongolian sign language and its on-line dictionary should continue without further interruptions.

Conclusion F: The *New Key project* and to some extent also the *Support to Single Parents project* are considered as humanitarian assistance projects rather than development projects. The obvious needs of the target groups were attended without analysing much the root causes for their situation. These projects are considered to be timely and well justified in their context. The preventive work of *Support to Single Parents project* with teen-aged girls and young couples created promising results.

Recommendation F1: Sower International could concentrate in preventive work when dealing with other beneficiaries apart from persons with disabilities.

Preventive work is well suited for NGOs; It is about dealing with people and the costs compared to implementation of other types of work are modest. On the other hand, it is very difficult to measure and report on results of preventive work, as the results can only be seen after several years or decades. However, for a well-established INGO like Sower International, who have gained trust of both the donor and with local organizations through decades of cooperation, it would be a logical next step.

Recommendation F2: Continue and expand the preventive work done with teen aged girls and young couples in *Support to Single Parents Project*. Sower International has successfully implemented projects with similar preventive elements in Bangladesh. Experiences from these and the best lessons learned could be utilised in Mongolia.

Recommendation F3: Include domestic violence in the preventive programmes. Domestic violence seems to be a taboo in Mongolia, not a word is mentioned in documents of the past projects, but the problem was taken up by several key informants interviewed.

Conclusion G: None of the projects evaluated has produced a proper final report. The missing final reports were replaced by outsourcing an independent final evaluation for each project. In theory, this is good idea, but it didn't work as the final evaluations were not systematized and their quality was very heterogeneous.

Recommendation G1: For the sake of any future ex-post evaluation, or anybody else who seeks concise information of the past projects, it would be advisable to prepare a final report and clearly indicate that in the cover page of the report.

Recommendation G2: Less quantity and more quality for evaluation. The final evaluations need not be done necessarily in all projects, but whenever they are done, they should follow the appropriate evaluation guidelines.

Conclusion H: A couple of projects were planned for periods of two years only. If a problem could be solved in two years, it is not a real problem. Planning projects for such short periods just causes extra work to all parties involved.

Recommendation H1: The future projects should be planned preferably for a period of minimum four years.

Conclusion I: After the Sower International Development Programme phased out from Arkhangai in 2025, the level of activities (training, awareness raising, etc.) is understandably less than before. Nevertheless, there is good scope for sustainability in fulfilment of basic rights of the principal groups of right-holders (persons with disabilities and women), which are organised in two Councils. Arkhangai provincial government has assumed its role as a duty bearer and demands the same from local governments and the *Development Centre for Persons with Disabilities*.

Recommendation I1: *The Community Initiatives – Arkhangai Committee* is much younger and weaker than *CPWDA*. Some follow-up may be needed.

Conclusion J: The work on Mongolian sign language continues, but there are already good signs of sustainability. The working group under *National Council for Language Policy* (including e.g. four Ministries and CSO representatives) has drafted the *Mongolian Sign Language Law*, which is expected to enter in Parliament in October 2026. Since 2022 Government of Mongolia is organizing regular courses for sign language interpreter training.

Recommendation J1: Documenting of Mongolian sign language is a special opportunity to wider national level policy influencing, which should be allocated adequate time and resources.

Conclusion K: The development cooperation of Finland has already lost many well known and appreciated brands (like FINNIDA and FIDIDA) without getting much in return. After 25 years of continuous presence in Mongolia FLOM is very well known in Arkhangai, and to some extent even nationwide.

Recommendation K1: The launching of the new name Sower International should be planned and implemented with utmost care, in order not to lose the prestige created by the projects implemented in the past. It is advised to consult specialists in branding to manage the process smoothly.

Conclusion L: Tegsh Tusgal (TT) as a newly established Mongolian NGO would need its own visibility for its future program development and engagement, which should be created through joint efforts with Sower International.

Recommendation L1: TT could allocate a budget for annual flagship events to support soft reporting and invite external partners to share in these experiences. This approach would enhance TT’s visibility and strengthen partnerships through regional networks and formal engagement with government bodies and line ministries.

Recommendation L2: TT could promote volunteerism in the health and education sectors to benefit future generations and foster civic engagement.

LESSONS LEARNED

Organisational learning

Sower International has proved to be a learning organisation. The nine projects evaluated, which have been implemented between 2005 and 2025, form a compact development programme. Seven of these projects have quite compatible impact statements (or development objectives, long-period aims, overall objectives or goals as they have been called previously). The synthesis of these objectives could be: *Increased dignity, awareness and inclusion of persons in vulnerable situations to the Mongolian society*. The persons in vulnerable situations have been poor women in rural areas, women without proper identity documents, single parents, or persons with disabilities in general or deaf and hard-of-hearing (D/HH) in particular.

In fact, it was not planned to be a programme; planning of the projects was done for very short periods, typically for three years but sometimes for two years only (see Conclusion H above). Nevertheless, a new project was built on top of the experiences gained in previous projects, and the focus of the projects get sharper by the time.

Sower International has also proved to be a reliable partner to the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and has planned and implemented its Development Programme in Mongolia with the Human Rights-based Approach, gender equality and inclusion persons with disabilities in triple tracks; i.e. they have been mainstreamed to all projects, each project had also specific objectives related either gender equality or inclusion of persons with disabilities. The third track, policy influencing, is not an easy task for an INGO like Sower International, but through the cooperation that has lasted more than 20 years, there has been an influence on the policies of Arkhangai province in health, education, employment and infrastructure sectors.

There will be a good opening for policy influence at national level related to the development of Mongolian sign language and its digital dictionary, which should be utilized also for wider policy influencing purposes.

Cooperation with local governments

In the early days of development cooperation, there was a theory that, if you work with the top of any organisation, the benefits will trickle down the ranks to the ordinary people in need (to the poorest segments of the society or e.g. to the workers of an industrial company). In reality that didn’t happen in large scale. The example of Sower International’s work in Arkhangai province demonstrates, however, that development can follow a process of capillary rise, moving gradually from the grassroots upward through the layers of society. Such bottom-up capillary ascent, however, requires time.

Sower International has been working in Arkhangai province over 20 years, which is a very rare case in the history of Finland’s development cooperation. It appears that the provincial governments in Mongolia have “*a short memory*”. Due to the constant changes of elected representatives and high-ranking officers, nobody in the governments seems to remember the past cooperation nor agreements. In the beginning of *the Skills and Health Development project* the cooperation with local government offices was limited, but during the implementation of subsequent projects the junior officers in the local government’s hierarchy got involved in the work. They simply realized that the cooperation will help them to perform their own tasks. Gradually, the projects were an integral part of the social work of the local governments. The policy and decision-making

levels were reached much later, partly because some of the decision makers in local governments witnessed and appreciated the work. Also, some of the junior staff, who had been working with the projects, were promoted to the decision-making ranks. It is a slow process; In a key informant interview it was mentioned that it took 10 years to build the relation with the Provincial Government of Arkhangai.

On the other hand, once the working relation has been established and the government realizes its mutual benefits, it will last. One person, who had organised training (not related to Sower International's work) in many provinces, said in the interview that it is rewarding to organise a training course in Arkhangai, because the government officials are active; they arrange venues, invite participants and they may even join the training sessions themselves. That won't happen in other provinces.

Mixed peer groups

Several projects within the Programme applied mixed peer groups, i.e. a group may have had blind, deaf and mobility impaired participants. In Arkhangai, the groups included both single parents and persons with disabilities. Several key informants mentioned in the interviews that this was an eye-opening experience and gave a new perspective to one's personal situation. Several persons with disabilities expressed that before that experience, they were capable to defend only the interests of their own reference group, but after they can defend the interests of persons with disabilities as a wider group.

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ANNEX 1. TERMS OF REFERENCE

Terms of Reference for an Evaluation

November 2025

Ex-post evaluation of Sower International (earlier Finnish Lutheran Overseas Mission, FLOM) work in Mongolia 2005-2024

1. Background to the evaluation

1.1. Programme context (policy, country, regional, global, thematic context)

Situated between Russia and China, Mongolia, with its rich and long history, offers a unique arena to today's global politics. The country's diverse landscape and large geographical size present the country with urban well-developed areas, yet within those there exist pockets of underdevelopment, despite being classified as a lower middle-income country. There also exist large rural areas, with pastoralist communities making a living for example through farming.

The collapse of communism over thirty years ago opened new possibilities for persons with disabilities and civil society organisations. Although the legal framework is relatively conducive for Persons with disabilities human rights, the reality is often very different. Families with Persons with disabilities face many problems and they are not aware of their rights. Tradition for people to get organised among and by themselves is still developing. Now there are already local organisations for persons with disabilities (OPDs) but they generally have very weak capacity due to many reasons, e.g. lack of knowledge, poor attitudes and limited external support. Communism also left a heritage whereby a person's value is measured by what they bring to the society through work and in which expressing and sharing one's ideas or promoting collaboration was frowned upon.

With prices rising due to the global economy and war in Ukraine, and with inequality and financial difficulties challenging many families, 2025 saw a significant uprising of citizens and OPDs raising their voices against corruption within the government.

1.2. Description of the programme to be evaluated

Sower International (earlier called Finnish Lutheran Overseas Mission, FLOM) has implemented development projects funded by the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland since 1979. In Mongolia, projects were first implemented through FLOM's representative office, FLOM in Mongolia (FLOM-M) during the years 2005-2022 and then through a local civil society organisation, Tegsh Tusgal 2021 onwards. Projects have focused on promoting the rights of persons with disabilities, through awareness raising and capacity building in Ulaanbaatar, Arhangai and Zavhan. The projects have been:

FLOM-M

Skills and Health Training Project	2005-2007	Arhangai
Support of the PWD	2008-2016	Arhangai
Support of single parents	2017-2020	Arhangai
Information society	2009-2012	Zavhan

New Key Leadership training project	2009-2011	Ulaanbaatar	
Capacity building for Mongolian deaf people by empowering their NGOs	2009-2010	Ulaanbaatar	
Improvement of Reproductive Health Services for Women with Disabilities through Empowerment of Peer Groups	2013-2017	Ulaanbaatar	
Ex post evaluation for FLOM-M projects	2016-2022	Ulaanbaatar	
	2012		UB, Arhangai, Zavhan.

Tegsh Tusgal (TT):

Enabling Communities through Civil Society Strengthening in Rural Mongolia (ECCS)	2021-2024	Arhangai	
Mongolian Deaf Community's Linguistic Identity Empowerment (MDLI)	2021-2024	Ulaanbaatar	
Empowerment of PWD through Strengthened OPDs (EPSO)	2023-2026	Ulaanbaatar	

Beneficiaries have included persons with disabilities, civil society organisations, single parent households and rural communities. Other stakeholders have included local, regional and national government authorities and various service providers.

Additionally, FLOM has worked to support local churches through building the capacity of local church leaders and members in Arhangai, Ulaanbaatar and Zavhan.

1.3. Results of previous evaluations

Previous project evaluations and one ex-post evaluation have revealed that the development work has achieved good results, making an impact on the local communities and even on a regional and national level. Areas of development have included capacity of implementing organisation (FLOM-M and TT) in project management, for example monitoring and evaluation, and sustainability of the work.

2. Rationale, purpose and objectives of the evaluation

The purpose of this evaluation is to conduct a holistic ex-post evaluation of FLOM's development work in the years 2005-2024 in Arhangai, Ulaanbaatar and Zavhan,

This evaluation upholds Sower International's commitment to accountability and organisational learning, and its findings and recommendations can be used for replication and planning of similar activities also in new target areas. The donor, the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland records all the project and programme evaluations and also has the right to publish and share them.

The evaluation will provide Sower important information concerning the relevance of different types of assistance and partnership structures in a rapidly changing operational environment.

With FLOM's development work ending in Arhangai, and with significant advances made in TT's MDLI and EPSO projects in promoting the rights of persons with disabilities even on a national level, an ex-post evaluation will provide key insights into what has led to these advances, what factors enabled and hindered, and led up to, the achievement of sustainable results throughout the years. Furthermore, the findings of the evaluations will be used to further develop the new MDLI2

continuation project that focuses on promoting Mongolian sign language work in provinces, as well as develop the ongoing EPSO project.

With turbulent times globally and locally, the evaluation is a unique opportunity to assess how the rights of persons with disabilities and the capabilities of civil society organisations, especially OPDs, have evolved throughout the years in Mongolia through FLOM's work, and what key lessons and areas of development need to be understood and implemented in current and future projects.

Mongolia as a country is in a fruitful position, neighbouring both Russia and China, to play an even more profound role in global politics, thus potentially presenting new opportunities for international donors. With funding opportunities decreasing worldwide, it is the strong and capable civil society organisations that will be on the frontlines of development and promotion of human rights. Their ability to lead strategically and resourcefully, collaborate and share with others, and promote ethical operational capability will be vital. The evaluation will also provide insights to FLOM and its partners in Mongolia to strengthen civil society.

The priority issues of the evaluation are:

- Assess the relevance, effectiveness, impact, coherence and efficiency of the projects at general level.
- Impact Analysis: Identify and analyse possible long-term impacts of the projects on beneficiaries, communities and the society.
- Lessons Learned: Assess the lessons learnt and based on these, provide clear and actionable recommendations to Sower for planning and managing its projects in Mongolia and elsewhere as appropriate.

3. Scope of the evaluation

The scope of this evaluation encompasses several key areas:

Timeframe: The evaluation should cover the whole duration of the projects from their initiation to the present, as possible and applicable.

Geographical focus: The evaluation should focus on regions of Mongolia where Sower has been implementing projects; namely Ulaanbaatar, Arhangai and Zavhan, ensuring a context-specific analysis.

Stakeholder involvement: It includes perspectives from various stakeholders, including direct beneficiaries, project staff, local partners and local government. Special focus should be put especially on persons with disabilities and organisations of persons with disabilities.

Methodological approaches: A mixed-methods approach are to be used to provide a holistic assessment. The evaluator is expected to propose what methods would suit best to be used in this evaluation.

Reporting and Dissemination: Findings from the evaluation will be compiled into a comprehensive report. Dissemination of the findings, lessons learned, and recommendations will be part of the management response by Sower International.

Sower International understands that it is not possible to analyse and evaluate the whole project life span very deeply and thoroughly, partly only superficially.

4. Issues to be addressed and evaluation questions

The evaluation criteria to be applied and the key evaluation questions are as listed below. However, the evaluator should not take these questions too literally to be answered precisely, but they serve as guides in the evaluation process. The evaluator can develop more, applicable questions during the evaluation process.

The main questions for the evaluation are:

- What are the main success factors achieved; how and why they were borne?
- What are the main shortcomings and mistakes made on the way; how and why they were borne? How they could have been avoided?

Relevance refers to the extent to which the objectives of the programme are consistent with beneficiaries' requirements, country priorities, global priorities and partners' and Finland's policies. This includes an evaluation of how the promotion of human rights and gender equality, non-discrimination as defined by international and regional conventions, national policies and strategies, have been integrated into programme design and implementation.

- How has the Mongolian society changed since the beginning of the intervention? Have the strategy and chosen aid modalities been relevant in the given context and in each project implementation time?
- Have the chosen approaches met the needs of the society of that time, various groups of stakeholders, putting focus on those in most vulnerable situations?
- Were there adaptations made to improve project relevance as per identified needs for project scope adjustment?
- How well have the intervention has fit with priorities of the Mongolian society and interventions by other actors in the field (Governmental or non-governmental)?

Effectiveness describes the achievements towards the programme outcome and key outputs, or whether they are expected to be achieved in the future. Evaluation of promotion of human rights and gender equality, non-discrimination and promotion of climate resilience is integrated in the analysis.

- Are there any indications of how well the projects' results have been achieved?

Efficiency is defined by how well the various activities have transformed the available resources into the intended results in terms of quantity, quality and timeliness. Use of resources to promote human rights and gender equality, non-discrimination and promotion of climate resilience is integrated in the analysis. Comparison should be made against what was planned. Furthermore, the management and administrative arrangements are analysed.

- Has the resource allocation (staff, time etc.) been adequate in relation to objectives?
- Were the interventions' resources used in an efficient way?

Coherence refers to the compatibility of the intervention with other interventions in a country, sector or institution. Two dimensions of coherence should be covered: External coherence (Is the intervention consistent with other related interventions in the same context, does it add value while avoiding duplication of effort?) and Internal coherence (Does the intervention create or strengthen synergies and interlinkages within the institution/government (policy coherence)? Is the intervention consistent with relevant international norms and standards?)

- Have the projects' approaches and focuses been contributing to the realisation of Mongolian and international priorities, norms and agreements?
- Has there been adequate flexibility to adjust the projects to the changing context?
- What kind of knowledge and experience transfers have there been between various actors?

Impact describes how the programme has succeeded in contributing to its targeted wider development impact, i.e. impact for its final beneficiaries, including promotion of human rights and gender equality, non-discrimination and promotion of climate resilience. The evaluation of impact covers intended and unintended, short- and long-term, positive and negative impacts.

- What has been changed through the projects' intervention?
- Have the projects been able, not only to follow the changes in the operational context, but also to affect those?

Sustainability and Exit refer to the likely continuation of programme achievements when external support comes to an end. Typically, sustainability covers economic/financial, institutional, technical, socio-cultural and environmental dimensions. Sustainability also includes an analysis on the likely continuation of achievements in human rights and gender equality, non-discrimination and promotion of climate resilience. Evaluation of phasing out (exit) plans is part of the sustainability analysis.

- What are the achievements the projects have produced that will last even in the future? How were they borne?
- Is there something Sower should still do to safeguard the good benefits of the projects?

Coverage & Reach

- How were the projects target groups chosen and to what extent did the project reach the most vulnerable target groups?
- What kind of consultation processes were there when planning and deciding the project coverage and approaches?

Accountability & Learning

- How effectively have the projects been able to incorporate feedback from various stakeholders into the project planning and implementation, and ensure accountability to local authorities and the affected populations?

5. Methodology

The evaluator should use different evaluation methods creatively taking into account the long time span of the projects to be evaluated. Multiple methods are expected to be used to validate the findings, both quantitatively and qualitatively.

The document study will be relatively important part of the evaluation to validate the activities and achievements of the first projects. It would be beneficial if it would be possible to “read also between the lines” to understand the thinking and justification behind the decisions made in those times. It is understood that access to the beneficiaries and other stakeholders of the early phases of the intervention in Mongolia might be quite difficult. Hence, high accuracy is not expected to be reached in proofing the achievements.

6. The evaluation process and time schedule

Within the Sower International, the (Eevan titteli englanniksi) will be the focal point of the evaluation. Due to the complexity of the evaluation, the evaluator is encouraged and expected to actively communicate with this office; discuss about all shortcomings, obstacles, additional needs and other issues that might arise.

Phase	Activities and outputs	Date &time allocation wd	Persons concerned
Tendering	Evaluator is selected.		Sower
Kick-off meeting	The evaluator and Sower staff meet each other online and review relevant issues as the evaluation starts.	0,5 wd	Evaluator, Sower team
Document study and inception report	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review relevant project documents Develop methodology of the process Create the evaluation plan and write inception report 	6,5 wd	Evaluator Sower team for consultations as needed
Inception report meeting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Present the early findings and discuss the relative importance of those Discuss the field mission arrangements 	0,5wd	Evaluator, Sower team
Field mission	Meetings, discussions and interviews with stakeholders and beneficiaries.	10 wd	Evaluator
Draft Report	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Writing the draft report Submitting the report for comments 	7 wd	Evaluator Sower team for consultations as needed
Comments	Draft report reading and commenting		Sower
Final Report	Finalising the report	1 wd	Evaluator
Closing session	Presenting the report	0,5 wd	Evaluator, Sower team

In total, the evaluation will include 26 working days.

7. Expertise required

The evaluator is expected to have the core experience and knowledge in the following fields:

- Programme evaluations and planning in the relevant sector.

- Project cycle management (PCM) and Results Based Management (RBM), and their application in programme design, monitoring and evaluation (M&E);
- Relevant sectoral experience, preferably experience from the region or country;
- Other experience and knowledge relevant to the evaluation.
- Experience in integrating cross-cutting objectives in project planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation.
- Ability to write clear and concise reports.

8. Budget

The total budget for the evaluation is 13 500 EUR (Including the fee and the reimbursable costs).

9. Mandate

The evaluator is representing oneself and not Sower International. The evaluator is entitled and expected to discuss all matters relevant to this evaluation with all pertinent persons and organisations.

Annexes:

Annex 1: Key project documents (to be provided by the Sower International)

Annex 2: MFA evaluation manual <https://um.fi/development-cooperation-evaluation-manual>

ANNEX 2. PROGRAMME OF THE EVALUATION

20.2.-3.3.2026	Compiling and organizing materials for the evaluation.
25.2.2026	Presentation of the Inception Report
2.3.2026	Inception Meeting
27.2.-3.3.2026	Detailed planning of the field work
4.3.2026	Travel Helsinki-Ulaanbaatar
5.3.2026	Meetings and interviews in FLOM-M offices Ulaanbaatar
6.3.2026	Meetings and interviews with government officials Ulaanbaatar
7.3.2026	Meetings and and interviews in NWAMI Office Ulaanbaatar
8.3.2026	Travel Ulaanbaatar - Arkhangai
9-10.3.2026	Meetings with local government officials and NGOs.
10.3.2026	Debriefing meeting in Tsetserleg
11.3.2026	Travel Arkhangai - Ulaanbaatar
12-13.3.2026	Meetings and interviews in Ulaanbaatar
13.3.2026	Debriefing meeting in TT Office, Ulaanbaatar
14.3.2026	Travel Ulaanbaatar-Helsinki-
16-23.3.2026	Report writing
24.3.2026	Presentation of first Draft of the Report
24-27.3.2026	Incorporating early comments to Draft Report
27.3.2026	Presentation of final Draft of the Report

ANNEX 3. PERSONS MET AND INTERVIEWED

Ulaanbaatar city:

Ms. Oyuntuya, Operational Director of FLOM-M
Ms. Baigalmaa, Head of the Department on the Special Needs' Education, Mongolian National University of Education
Ms. Narantuya, Ministry of Health, Director of National Center for Transfusion Medicine
Ms. Gereltsetseg, EPSO Project manager, Tegsh Tusgal NGO
Ms. Dulguun, EPSO Project officer, Tegsh Tusgal NGO
Ms. Delgermaa, Chairlady of Development Assistance Center, NGO, President of Mongolian National Federation of Blind
Ms. Enkhbayar, Director of Training and Information Center for People with Disability, NGO
Ms. Ganjargal, MDLI project, Sign language interpreter
Ms. Otgonjargal, MDLI project, Sign language interpreter
Ms. Solongo, Representative from Baganuur district
Mr. Ganzorig, Artist, volunteer
Ms. Unursaikhan, Representative from Erdenet city, Orkhon Province
Ms. Yumjirdulam, Teacher, sign language interpreter, member of education council, Deaf club
Mr. Battogtokh, Vice President Mongolian Committee of Deaf Sports.
Ms. Baasanjav, Deaf Education NGO
Mr. Enkhbaatar, President of National Association
Mr. Dashdentev, Retired teacher, Chairman of Elders' Council
Mr. Ganbaatar, Chairman of Sign Language Council
Ms. Nyamzul, Representative of Naigvar 2 worship service
Ms. Chuluundolgor, Chairlady of Mongolian Association of the Wheelchair users
Ms. Bolormaa, Finance manager, Mongolian Association of the Wheelchair users
Mr. Ganbaatar, Staff member of Mongolian Association of the Wheelchair users
Ms. Sumiya, Team leader of girls peer group, Mongolian Association of the Wheelchair users
Mr. Ganbaatar, Team leader of men peer group, Mongolian Association of the Wheelchair users
Mr. Undrakhbayar, Chairman of Tugeemel Khogjil Center, NGO, former advisor to the Prime Minister
Mr. Lkhamjav, Program manager of Tugeemel Khogjil Center, NGO
Ms. Ariuntuya, Executive Director, Tegsh Tusgal NGO
Ms. Soyolmaa, Program manager, Tegsh Tusgal NGO
Ms. Byambasuren, Project manager, MDLI project
Mr. Ganbaatar, Sign language researcher, MDLI project
Mr. Gankhuyag, Sign language researcher, MDLI project
Ms. Agiimaa, Sign language interpreter, MDLI project
Mr. Chuluun-Erdene, Information accessibility and technology specialist, GADPwD
Ms. Narangerel, Chairlady of State Commission, Language Policy
Ms. Tserendolgor, Independent consultant, former staff of Tegsh Tusgal NGO
Mr. Hisao Chiba, Chairperson, Asia Human Development Centre, ex-officer of JICA PVD programme in Mongolia

Arkhangai province:

Mr. Sambuudanzan, Chairman of the Council of Associations for People with Disability
Mr. Avirmid, Head of Development Center for People with Disability
Ms. Erdenetsetseg, Division head of Social Rehabilitation Unit, Development Center for People with Disability
Mr. Sandagsuren, Chairman of Shine Ekhlel Association, Certified Trainer of Human Rights
Ms. Ankhtuya, former Project Manager of FLOM-M 2011-2024
Ms. Ulziisaikhan, Board member of the Council of Associations for People with Disability, Chairlady of Arkhangai Branch of the Wheelchair users' Association, Certified Trainer of Human Rights
Ms. Mungunzaya, Referent of Human Rights Commission in Arkhangai province, Ex-legal Adviser to Governor of Arkhangai province
Ms. Oyungerel, Member of the Peer group, led by Ms. Ulziisaikhan
Ms. Otgonjargal, Member of the Peer group, led by Ms. Ulziisaikhan
Ms. Tseveen-Ulzii, Soum social worker, Certified Trainer of Human Rights
Ms. Tserenchimeg, project beneficiary representative, single headed household
Ms. Oyuntsetseg, project beneficiary representative, single headed household
Ms. Dolgorjav, Chairlady, Olnii Sanaachilga, Arkhangai Council NGO
Ms. Uranchimeg, Executive Director, Olnii Sanaachilga, Arkhangai Council NGO
Ms. Bolortuya, Manager, Olnii Sanaachilga, Arkhangai Council NGO
Mr. Mungun, Accountant, Tegsh Tusal NGO, former FLOM staff member
Ms. Suvdaa, Psychologist, former group coordinator of Arkhangai based projects
Ms. Badamkhand, Coordinator of the Council of Associations for People with Disability, former group coordinator of Arkhangai based projects

Others:

Ms. Heini Laakso, Second secretary, Embassy of Finland, Beijing. E-mail communication.
Ms. Saara Bengtsson, Development Coordinator, Sower International
Mr. Tomas Bengtsson, Technical advisor, Sower International
Ms. Päivi Vuorinen, Project Coordinator, FLOM-M 2002-2011
Ms. Sanna Rantanen, Project Coordinator, FLOM-M 2003-2009
Ms. Eeva Heikkilä, Manager in Development cooperation, Sower International
Mr. Eero Horstia, Senior Adviser, Development cooperation, Sower International