



# Felm Development Cooperation Progress Report 2023

Felm<sup>1859</sup>



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## Summary

The second year of implementation witnessed global change at a rapid pace, marked by contestation of the treaty-based world order and shrinking civil society space, while livelihoods suffered as climate change reached the 1.5°C threshold. Felm's development work is rooted in values-based cooperation with church diaconal ministries and faith-based and civil society organizations, targeting the most vulnerable and marginalized persons in the Global South. The Development Cooperation Program's funding reached €7.14 million, with €6.17 million contributed by the Finnish Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA). Nearly 159,000 direct beneficiaries were reached across nine countries, including 150,000 rights-holders and close to 9,000 persons with disabilities. 56% of rights-holders were women and girls, meeting the gender target. Indirectly, approximately 2.9 million people benefited. The 33 funded projects progressed as planned, with an absorption rate of 95,2% by the end of the reporting period. Exceptions to the plan included political changes in Myanmar and the decision to withdraw from West Africa at the end of 2025. The program content was refined following recommendations from the 2022 self-assessment, with tailored support addressing specific needs identified during monitoring. Budget reallocations supported partner initiatives, including channeling over €200,000 of MFA funding into three humanitarian projects that benefited more than 2,000 individuals in distress.

Felm played a dynamic role within the network of MFA partner organizations, significantly contributing to national development policy dialogs, particularly in the run-up to the spring parliamentary elections. During the year, Felm reached 1.1 million people through various media outlets in Finland. Felm engaged in global and national debates on climate funding, decolonization, and protection against sexual exploitation and harassment, for example. Child Helplines were set up in Nepal, Mauritania and Ethiopia. Development of the Global Education Portal to reach Finnish elementary students continued.

The program achieved noteworthy progress in climate resilience under Outcome Area 1, as the duration of food shortage periods decreased, and both the adoption of sustainable farming practices and improved agricultural techniques increased. Tree planting and land restoration efforts strengthened community resilience, although varied performance highlighted the need for better disaster risk management. In Outcome Area 2, educational outcomes improved, with significant steps in inclusive education and vocational training. Primary and lower secondary education completion rates exceeded program targets, although in some regions challenges remain in ensuring safe and inclusive learning environments and addressing infrastructure issues for students with disabilities in some regions. Outcome Area 3 saw progress in integrating the rights of persons with disabilities into policies, with notable success in government consultations and inclusive service models, although challenges in representation persist.

Felm's triple nexus approach integrated humanitarian, development, and peace efforts, maintaining a focus on climate-resilient agriculture and water-saving techniques. Cross-cutting efforts included progress in climate resilience practices and gender equality training, though additional support for gender analysis is necessary. The KPMG audit report received in 2023 highlighted the need for ongoing adaptation and knowledge exchange to address complex challenges within the overall risk landscape. Felm's risk management system identified heightened external risks, particularly from conflicts and climate change, alongside moderate internal risks like staff turnover. Although no incidents of abuse were reported, efforts to enhance safeguarding measures continue.

## Tiivistelmä

Globaali muutos oli ohjelman toisena toimintavuotena nopeaa ja sitä leimasivat sopimusperustaisen maailmanjärjestyksen haastaminen ja kansalaisyhteiskunnan tilan kaventuminen. Samalla ihmisten toimeentulo kärsi ilmaston lämpenemisen saavutettua 1,5°C rajan. Lähetysseuran kehitysyhteistyön juuret ovat arvopohjaisessa yhteistyössä kirkkojen diakoniatyön sekä uskopohjaisten ja muiden kansalaisjärjestöjen kanssa. Työn kohteena ovat globaalien etelän heikoimmassa asemassa olevat ja marginalisoidut ihmiset. Kehitysyhteistyöohjelman rahoitus ylsi 7,14 miljoonaan euroon, josta ulkoministeriön osuus oli 6,17 miljoonaa euroa. Ohjelma tavoitti lähes 159 000 suoraa hyödynsaajaa yhdeksässä maassa, mukaan lukien 150 000 oikeudenhaltijaa ja lähes 9000 vammaista henkilöä. Oikeudenhaltijoista 56 % oli naisia ja tyttöjä ohjelman näin saavuttaessa sukupuolten välisen tasa-arvon tavoitteet. Ohjelma tavoitti 2,9 miljoonaa epäsuoraa hyödynsaajaa. Rahoitetut 33 hanketta etenivät yleisesti ottaen suunnitellusti ja niiden käyttöaste oli raportointikauden loppuun mennessä 95,2 %. Poikkeuksia suunnitelmiin aiheuttivat Myanmarin poliittiset muutokset sekä Lähetysseuran päätös vetäytyä Länsi-Afrikasta vuoden 2025 loppuun mennessä. Ohjelman sisältöä tarkennettiin vuoden 2022 itsearvioinnin suositusten mukaisesti ja seurannassa havaittuihin erityistarpeisiin vastattiin räätälöidyllä tuella. Käyttötarkoituksen muutoksilla tuettiin kumppanien aloitteita. Ulkoministeriön ohjelmatausta yli 200 000 euroa kanavoitiin kolmeen humanitaarisen avun hankkeeseen yli 2000 hädässä olevan ihmisen tukemiseksi.

Lähetysseuran panos UM:n ohjelmatukijärjestöjen verkostossa oli merkittävä muun muassa eduskuntavaalien alla käydyssä kehityspoliittisessa keskustelussa. Lähetysseura tavoitti vuoden aikana 1,1 miljoonaa ihmistä eri medioiden kautta Suomessa. Lähetysseura osallistui globaaleihin ja kansallisiin keskusteluihin esimerkiksi ilmastorahoituksesta, dekolonisaatiosta ja suojelusta seksuaaliselta hyväksikäytöltä ja häirinnältä. Nepaliin, Mauritaniaan ja Etiopiaan perustettiin lasten auttavia puhelimia. Globaalikasvatusportaalin kehittämistä jatkettiin suomalaisten peruskoululaisten tavoittamiseksi.

Tulosalueella 1 ohjelma saavutti merkittävää edistystä ilmastokestävydessä, kun ruokaturvattoman kauden keskimääräinen kesto lyheni ja kestävien viljelykäytäntöjen ja parannettujen maanviljelytekniikoiden käyttöönotto lisääntyivät. Puunistutus ja maanparannustoimet vahvistivat yhteisöjen ilmastoresilienssiä, vaikka vaihtelevat tulokset osoittivat, että katastrofiriskien hallintaa on edelleen parannettava. Tulosalueella 2 oppimistulokset paranivat ja inklusiivisessa, sekä ammatillisessa koulutuksessa edistyttiin merkittävästi. Perusasteen ja alemman keskiasteen koulutuksen valmistumisaste ylitti ohjelman tavoitteet, vaikka paikallisia haasteita ilmenee edelleen turvallisten ja osallistavien oppimisympäristöjen varmistamisessa ja vammaisten opiskelijoiden infrastruktuurikysymyksissä. Tulosalueella 3 edistyttiin vammaisten henkilöiden oikeuksien sisällyttämisessä politiikkoihin. Hallitusten kuulemisissa ja osallistavissa palvelumalleissa saavutettiin huomattavaa menestystä, vaikka edustuksellisuuteen liittyy edelleen haasteita.

Lähetysseuran kolmoisneksus-lähestymistapa integroi humanitaarisen sekä kehitys- ja rauhantyön ja keskittyi edelleen ilmastokestävään maanviljelyyn ja vettä säästäviin tekniikoihin. Monialaisiin toimiin sisältyi edistystä ilmastokestävyystoimissa ja tasa-arvokoulutuksissa, vaikka tasa-arvoanalyysille tarvitaan lisätukea. Vuonna 2023 vastaanotettu KPMG-raportti korosti jatkuvan sopeutumisen ja tiedon jakamisen tarvetta, jotta voidaan vastata monimutkaisiin haasteisiin yleisessä riskiympäristössä. Lähetysseuran riskienhallintajärjestelmä tunnisti kohonneita ulkoisia riskejä, jotka liittyivät erityisesti konflikteihin ja ilmastonmuutokseen, sekä maltillisia sisäisiä riskejä, kuten henkilöstön vaihtuvuutta. Vaikka hyväksikäyttötapauksia ei toiminnassa raportoitu, suojelutoimenpiteiden tehostamista jatkettiin.

# 1. Changes in the operating environment

## 1.1. Global trends in 2023

The Felm Development Cooperation program is implemented in nine countries on three continents. The program countries are Cambodia, Colombia, Ethiopia, Mauritania, Myanmar, Nepal, Senegal, Tanzania, and Zimbabwe. The programme also has regional activities in Eastern Africa beyond the programme countries. The program is adjusting and responding to the societal and environmental changes in the global and local contexts.

The rules-based international order is in decline, as some actors are breaching various conventions with impunity, even with the backing of major Western powers. In international politics, confrontation is intensifying, and tensions have increased. Democracy has declined globally, autocracy has strengthened, the number of conflicts has increased and the situation regarding freedom of expression has deteriorated globally. The food crisis caused by climate change patterns is accelerated by these conflicts, and the number of chronically hungry people is in a worldwide surge. Distress and prolonged need for humanitarian assistance is rising. The global south is at risk of a decreasing trend in assistance as the donor priorities are changing due to the ongoing wars in Ukraine and Gaza. The wars in Ukraine and Gaza have also created divisions between actors in the Global South and the North, and criticism of the Global South has highlighted the double standards of the “West” in relation to the grave human rights violations and suspected genocide in Gaza.

During the second implementation year of the program, climate change remains the biggest threat to the lives and livelihoods of vulnerable communities in Felm’s program areas manifesting in increasing disasters and volatile weather patterns. The year 2023 was the warmest year on record both on land and at sea with record-breaking heatwaves, catastrophic floods, accelerated glacial melting, and severe droughts. The Arctic Sea ice was at its lowest level ever and greenhouse gas levels continued to increase. The El Niño during 2023 in the Northern Hemisphere significantly influenced global weather patterns, disrupting food security by reducing crop production. The warming climate has already triggered an irrevocable process of losses and damages in several of Felm’s program areas, destroying lives and livelihoods and making climate work a top priority.

The year 2023 was marked by the overlap and complexity of humanitarian crises. The partially overlapping and blurred nature of conflicts, extreme weather events caused by climate change, and natural disasters induced the need for a wide range of support. Serious conflicts continued in Myanmar, which has been identified as a complex humanitarian emergency by international aid actors, and in Ukraine, where Russia’s war of aggression is causing growing multi-sectoral humanitarian need among the civilian population, especially among internally displaced persons. Following the attack by Hamas to Israel in October, the subsequent Israeli counteroffensive into Gaza has created a massive humanitarian emergency, exacerbated by restrictions on the delivery of humanitarian aid.

High inflation continued globally, which affected the price of food and daily consumer goods. Also, project costs have increased, and projects have had to increase funds.

Meanwhile, in Finland, both the austerity pressures of the new Finnish government and its new political positions regarding the activities of Finnish civil society have raised new concerns about the state

of civil society in Finland. Program support organizations have joined forces to influence both public opinion and government policy in supporting development cooperation and warranting the freedom of civil society in our country. During the reporting period, Felm has prominently questioned the benefits of development cuts in several media outlets and defended the role of various civil society actors in our society. (see Appendix 9)

## 1.2. Operating Environment in Felm Partner Countries

### Southeast Asia

During the ongoing program, **Cambodia** has navigated a complex socio-political landscape characterized both by challenges and incremental changes. While churches operate relatively freely, the space for democratic movements remains constrained, reflecting a shrinking environment for activism and human rights advocacy. The widening economic disparities worsen societal polarization and limit opportunities for marginalized groups to participate in civic and political processes effectively. Cambodia held elections that were unfortunately considered undemocratic. The results ensured that political power remained in the hands of the same faction as before. Cambodia is undergoing rapid urbanization, transforming from a primarily rural society to an increasingly urbanized one marked by expanding slums and rising crime rates. The government's commitment to inclusive education and sustainability initiatives offers some promise for fostering resilience and community empowerment.

The overall situation in **Myanmar** continued to intensify due to the armed conflict. In May 2023, the country faced a natural disaster, the Cyclone Mocha, which was one of the strongest storms in the region this century. The cyclone especially caused damage in Rakhine state. Implementation of some of the project activities were suspended for some time. At the end of 2023, the conflict escalated especially in the northern part of the country. The current situation remains unpredictable. The new laws stated by the State Administration Council on civil society and political actors have influenced some of the projects and made the implementation challenging. The cost of living has increased, which has affected the everyday lives of people in many ways as well as the implementation of the projects. Access to internet is limited and blackouts occur frequently.

The position of Felm in **Nepal** has improved as there was a positive change in Felm's relationship with the federal government. This was the result of a continuous effort to build and maintain good relations with federal level government agencies over the past two years. In October 2023, an earthquake caused severe damage in Jajarkot District, where Felm is supporting two projects. Unfortunately, there was a delay in reaching large number of victims with emergency assistance. In places where humanitarian aid was distributed, the families felt discriminated against based on political support, caste and other affiliations. In summer 2023, lumpy skin disease caused the death of over 50 000 animals in Nepal. This, together with a decline in rice paddy production, has slowed down agricultural sector growth. During monsoon season, there was a lack of sufficient rainfall in Tarai district, which has impacted cultivation on arable land. Projects try to tackle these challenges, for example by introducing and developing climate resilient agriculture methods.

## Eastern and Southern Africa

From 2022 to 2023, **Ethiopia** has been marked by significant political turmoil and humanitarian challenges, deeply impacting both civil society and development initiatives. Despite the signing of a peace agreement in late 2022, recovery has been slow, with essential services still disrupted in conflict-affected areas due to ongoing security concerns and infrastructure limitations. A lack of internet access and security issues stemming from local armed clashes have hindered project implementation and monitoring in certain areas. In 2023, Ethiopia faced escalating armed conflicts that disrupted agricultural activities, leading to diminished harvests, and increasing the risk of famine in several regions for 2024. Climate change has aggravated these issues, with ongoing droughts and floods expanding the areas affected, exacerbating food insecurity, and displacing more people internally. Rapid urbanization driven by rural-to-urban migration, further strained cities already grappling with inadequate infrastructure, rising crime rates, and growing slums. Furthermore, high inflation has compounded these challenges, severely affecting project budgets and necessitating additional funding to sustain planned activities into 2024. Despite these adversities, positive strides were noted in peace negotiations in Amhara and Oromia, offering hope for future stability and underscoring the resilience of Felm partners committed to achieving their project objectives under demanding circumstances.

**Tanzania's** economic growth continued faster than expected. However, political opposition has been concerned about the increase in corruption. Although the country has become more transparent, it struggles to provide basic services for its citizens. The government was criticized for its treatment of the Masai indigenous people. Also, tougher opposition towards sexual and gender minorities can be detected in Eastern Africa as a whole.

Political crisis prevails in **Zimbabwe** and has led the country to an economic depression. This has affected many people's food security, protection, education, and health in multiple ways. The general elections in August 2023 fell short of democratic standards. Citizen rights have been restricted and civil society has faced more repression. The government planned to enact a Private Voluntary Organizations (PVO) Amendment bill, which would severely restrict civic space and the right to freedom of association. An increase in human rights violations has been reported, affecting food security, protection, education and health in multiple ways.

## West Africa

The societal and political situation has been stable in **Senegal**, in comparison to its neighboring countries. However, anti-Western disinformation campaigns sponsored by foreign and domestic actors have gained foothold, partly as it feeds into the criticism towards the colonial past. Economic growth in Senegal is strong and the country has started to produce oil and natural gas. This progress hasn't alleviated social challenges such as poverty, child labor and gender-based violence.

The General elections held in **Mauritania** in 2023 have not yet led to major changes. The military continues to exert a strong control over the country's political development. The economy and people's livelihoods still depend largely on agriculture and livestock. Soil erosion caused by unsustainable farming and husbandry practices together with climate change are accelerating desertification, which is becoming an existential threat to the country. The state of civil society is alarmingly restricted in Mauritania. Human rights abuses remain widespread as activists and those critical towards the government are being persecuted, and the police use disproportionate force. Both ethnic minorities and women



continue to face intense cultural and patriarchal discrimination, and the legislative reforms in favor of women's political empowerment have not led to concrete societal changes.

## Latin America

The role of religious actors in peacebuilding have been highlighted in the recent efforts in **Colombia's** "Total Peace" approach. The current government has opened spaces for church leaders, Christian organizations, and international ecumenical organizations to contribute to and to accompany the peace processes. This has resulted in an increasing need to strengthen the work of the churches and ecumenical networks in the areas most affected by violence, to accompany communities, to carry out social monitoring and national and international advocacy for the achievement of peace. As a part of recognizing the role of religious actors in the Colombian peace process, the Felm partner World Council of Churches (WCC) was appointed as one of the permanent associates for peace talks. The WCC's role in the peace talks is seen as crucial, providing accompaniment and, where necessary, leadership and moderation.

## 2. Coordination and collaboration

### 2.1 Cooperation with other Civil-Society Organizations in Finland

The CSOs receiving MFA Program-Based Support (PBS) engaged in dialog with the MFA on the timetable and content reforms of the PBS reform process. The organizations had a broad wish for a participatory consultation process on the subject. Felm was a member of Fingo's working group, which drafted a letter from PBS recipient organizations to the MFA on the possibilities of reforming the PBS instrument. The letter took a stand on, among other things, the November referral discussion on combining the MFA's humanitarian aid funding with the framework for development cooperation funding when applying for program-based support for 2026–2029. Felm also actively took part in development policy advocacy work in close collaboration with Fingo's member organizations (See chapter 3.4).

Felm was also an active member of the **Working Group on Quality and Impact** (Laatu ja vaikuttavuus -työryhmä) of the Finnish development cooperation CSOs, engaging in the sharing of good practices, mapping possibilities for collaboration and finding solutions to common challenges around issues such as decolonized MEL practices, quality of MEL systems, joint evaluations, and protection against sexual exploitation and harassment (PSEAH). Felm was also part of the Fingo-coordinated core group of CSOs working towards shifting the power in the sector of global development. This cooperation fed into Felm's internal processes, especially to the work around decolonization and anti-racism, as well as the development of Felm's MEL practice.

### 2.2 Cooperation and funding

Felm continued to strengthen its relations and determine its role with ACT Alliance members and took part in two EU SEE (System for an Enabling Environment for Civil Society) global calls for proposals, together with other CSOs as a consortium<sup>1</sup>. Felm's role was to ensure that disability inclusion would

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<sup>1</sup> The consortium consists of DanChurchAid, Christian Aid, Cordaid, IBON International representing CSO Partnership for Development Effectiveness, European Center for Not-for-Profit Law, HEKS, Norwegian Church Aid, and Kvinno.



be an integral part of the project design. Even if the consortium did not win the grant, Felm was able to increase its profile among its peer organizations.

In **Tanzania**, Felm is supporting, as an associate member, an EU-funded consortium<sup>2</sup>. In 2023 Felm provided technical support to the consortium on EU compliance and daily operational support to the project staff, as well as operating as a secretary in the Project Consortium Coordination Committee. Felm also provides 8.31% (€90,584) co-funding to the project.

In **Tanzania**, Felm and Fida have joined efforts in improving disability inclusive sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) services with the support of MFA funding. The approach developed for the project<sup>3</sup> by Felm's partner Selian Lutheran Hospital has been extended to the Nkinga Referral Hospital, supported by Fida. This has helped to raise the profile and impact of the disability inclusive SRHR work in Tanzania. Fida, Felm and their partner hospital have jointly documented the methods and tools, and joint plans have been developed for scaling up in 2024-2025. Furthermore, Felm and the Finnish Meteorological Institute have continued their cooperation on the weather station acquisition and after sales trainings. The PITA project on inclusive education has a deepening research collaboration with the University of Jyväskylä with plans for Finnish researchers to take part in the conference PITA project is organizing in 2024 in Makumira University.

The EU-EIDHR funded a 3-year-project in **Nepal** ended in April 2023 after an additional two months no-cost-extension period. The project worked towards strengthening the voices of civil society and empowered them to engage in evidence-based advocacy and fight for a more inclusive and plural civil society. The MFA provided 5% of the eligible costs of the project budget. As 2023 was the last year of the project, most of the activities were focused on ensuring long term sustainability of the project activities and handing over the project structures and mechanism to the local government in Nepal<sup>4</sup>. Likewise, in 2023, many dialogs and meetings were held with the local, provincial and federal government authorities to ensure that the policy makers continue to develop and refine suitable policies and guidelines for social, economic and political transformation of the project beneficiaries. As a result of Felm Nepal advocacy, 5 out of 15 authorities have already endorsed the Freed Haliya Rehabilitation Guideline and the remaining 10 Local Government have provided their commitment to endorse the guideline in the future.

Together with its partner Integral Cooperation in **Cambodia** (ICC), Felm applied for pilot funding from EKOenergy<sup>5</sup> in 2023. The funding enabled the installation of irrigation systems powered by so-

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2 The consortium is made up of three Tanzanian organizations, namely, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania, C-Sema and the Amani Girls Organization, and is supported by Fida, the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine, the Lutheran World Federation, the Tanzanian Development Trust, and the ACT Alliance, together with Felm as associate members.

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4 For example, the project had worked closely with Freed Haliya groups, especially single women's groups, persons with disabilities and Civil Society Organizations. By the end of the project, 20 TEP (Transformative Education Program) groups were registered with the local government so that these local groups would continue their advocacy for the rights of Freed Haliyas, single women and persons with disabilities, at the grass-root levels.

5 EKOenergy is a Finnish non-profit ecolabel that aims to promote the transition away from fossil energy sources around the world. Through its Climate Fund, EKOenergy finances community-led renewable energy projects in low- and middle-income countries to combat energy poverty. By using EKOenergy-labelled energy, consumers from households to large companies can contribute to the financing of these projects.

lar panels in the ICC project villages. ICC already had experience of the possibilities offered by solar panels in its operating area when it was able to facilitate and support UNDP's solar farm installation project. Cooperation with UNDP gave important experience with renewable energy projects and their opportunities, as well as an understanding of operators and companies in the field. During 2023, the ICC studied the opportunities and prerequisites of renewable energy in its operating area and the principles for protecting the environment and water resources. Thorough planning and funding from EKOenergy made it possible to install five solar-powered water pumps and train villagers to ensure the maintenance of the technology. Due to the heat caused by El Niño and the lack of rainfall, the rainy season in the project area started late. Because of this, traditional farming was not possible. Thanks to new solar-powered water pumps, home gardens could produce crops earlier than expected in spring 2024 and thus contribute to food security in the villages. The pilot bore fruit for the 2024 call for applications and enabled Felm and ICC to receive even greater funding from EKOenergy. The purpose of the new funding is to increase the capacity and know-how of both the partner and Felm on renewable energy.

Following the Global Consultation of National Child Helplines in Stockholm (2022), connections between **National Child Helplines** and Felm and Felm partners' staff were set up (e.g. in Nepal, Mauritania and Ethiopia). This increased the knowledge of referral pathways, for example, in child protection issues. For example, in **Tanzania** there has been a notable degree of cooperation between government officials and various faith leaders regarding ending child marriage by changing the law and by positively transforming norms.

## 3. Implementation strategies

### 3.1 Program activities

The Annual Program Review at the end of 2022 served as an orientation to the planning of the program and project activities in 2023. It became obvious that during the second implementation year, the program needs to identify synergies within itself and to start linking partners for peer learning and cross fertilization. These linkages between partners' projects were identified during the program design, and the implementation of the second program year capacity building activities have served as a platform to build the concrete linkages and synergies between partners and their projects.

The 33 projects progressed in line with their respective plans and the absorption rate of project operational funding was 95,2% in the end of the reporting period. Projects that suffered a delayed starting in 2022 were mainly able to catch up during the year, apart from **Myanmar** projects<sup>6</sup>, that needed to adjust to the changing operational environment due to the conflict prevailing in the country. The management cycle of the projects is well established and implemented as planned with support to targeted partners' capacity strengthening in results-based management, thematic and cross-cutting program priorities, and advocacy. Peer learning workshops between partners were also implemented.

Periodic meetings between headquarters and the regions continued throughout the year to guide the program management. Partner support by regional financial advisors and tailored capacity building in finan-

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cial management and good governance helped to keep a high level of administrative and financial practices. In addition, partners requested support to strengthen their advocacy work in all thematic areas, such as climate resilience, access to inclusive education and disability rights. These requests included increasing multi-sectoral partnerships and mapping other stakeholders beyond the partner and project level.

Innovation within the program involves piloting novel approaches in different contexts. While Felm recognizes the need to further explore, innovate and pilot, the past year has not been particularly favorable for experimentation. During the spring period, the civil society organizations, and Felm with them, prepared and braced themselves for the possible policy changes ahead. During the autumn period, Felm's attention was increasingly focused on internal processes during the change negotiations.

### 3.2 Alterations to the plans

Reallocations were made within the program budget during the year to strengthen the project activities and to ensure project sustainability, but also to respond to humanitarian needs in the beneficiary communities in a double nexus approach.

In the autumn, the change negotiations in Felm led to significant changes in some program countries, with **Felm's decision to withdraw from the West Africa** Development Cooperation Program at the end of 2025. Partners in **Senegal** and **Mauritania** have been duly informed, and more support resources have been allocated to the region for a sustainable phasing out. The overall goal of the change negotiations was to clarify the functions of the organization to adjust to the changes in the operational environment and weakened financial prospects. As a result of the negotiations Felm's budget will be balanced gradually so that the savings goal of 3 million euros will be reached during 2025.

Although the change negotiations led to significant staff reductions, their impact on the development program was marginal. The organizational restructuring from January 2024 onwards was designed to support the guidance and thematic development of the program. Nonetheless, some staff changes may temporarily affect the optimal continuity of program implementation.

### 3.3 Humanitarian aid

In 2023, Felm funded 11 projects from the Disaster Relief Fund and redirected development cooperation funds from the MFA to emergency aid in three projects. A total of 704,200 euros was channeled to 23,375 beneficiaries for humanitarian aid. The Disaster Relief Fund distributed 500,000 euros through 11 projects for humanitarian aid in a total of 10 countries. 21,295 people benefited directly from the assistance, 385 of whom were persons with disabilities. The main targets of Felm's humanitarian work in 2023 were Ukraine and Gaza, which were funded by Felm.

The development cooperation funds of MFA were redirected as humanitarian aid in three projects in **Ethiopia** and **Zimbabwe** amounting to 204,200 euros and 2,080 beneficiaries. In Tigray, Ethiopia, humanitarian aid was channeled to strengthen food security and nutrition in conflict-affected areas, and in Gambella food security and nutrition was supported among refugee and host communities. In Zimbabwe, supplementary "lean season" food assistance was necessary in climate change related drought-affected areas. The indirect effects on families and communities reached a much larger number of people.



Children in distress and their families also received a total of EUR 254,000 in humanitarian aid from the Children’s Bank in 2023. Nearly 8,000 children benefited directly from the Children’s Bank’s emergency assistance.

The food crisis deepened around the world in 2023 due to unstable weather conditions, conflicts, and intensified inflation, among other factors. Felm supported its partners in emergency aid-type food aid and in strengthening food security in, for example Tanzania, Zimbabwe, Ethiopia, Colombia, Cambodia, and Myanmar. Both collection funds from parishes as well as private donors and development cooperation funds from the MFA were used for the work.

In spring 2023, a policy paper for humanitarian assistance at Felm was completed. It defines a direction and focus areas in Felm’s humanitarian work, including how to link humanitarian aid, development cooperation, diaconia and peace work.

**Table 1. Felm’s MFA funded humanitarian action in 2023**

Country	Project	Content of support	Amount €
Ethiopia (Tigray)	ETK007	food security and nutrition in conflict affected areas	38,732
Ethiopia (Gambella)	ETK008	food security and nutrition in refugee and host community	44,366
Zimbabwe	ZWK002	food security in drought affected areas	121,100
<b>2 countries</b>	3 projects in total		204,198

**3.4 Advisory support in the regions**

Felm’s thematic, administrative and financial advisors played an important role in guiding and supporting the implementation and monitoring of development projects in the regions. Through targeted training activities, Felm advisors created space for networking between partners and provided platforms for peer learning and sharing of good practices. The advisors also played a key role in Felm’s risk assessment process.

In 2023, advisory support accounted for 15,3% of total program implementation in the regions. For MFA-funded part-time assignments, time recording was used to allocate costs according to the criteria of the funding sources. Table 2 presents the number of advisors working in the regions and their realized share of working time during the period. Overall, the actual number of man-years in advisory support exceeded the planned 12.75 person-years by 6%.

**Table 2. Felm advisors in regional positions during 2023.**

Location	Position	Actual working time
		2023
<b>Global</b>		
	Advisor for climate resilience	80%
	Advisor for disability inclusion	93%
<b>Regional</b>		
Latin America	Program Manager	33%
	Advisor for Communication	20%
	Regional Director	21%
West Africa	Program Manager	57%
	Advisor for Financial Administration and Good Governance	0%
	Senior Program Manager	50%
Eastern and Southern Africa	Program Manager	50%
	Advisor for Financial Administration and Good Governance	96%
	Advisor for Communication	25%
	Senior program manager	18%
	Regional Director	15%
South and Southeast Asia	Program Manager	80%
	Advisor for Livelihood and Food Security	40%
	Advisor for MLE	40%
	Advisor for communication	17%
	Advisor for Financial Administration and Good Governance	50%
<b>Country specific</b>		
	Program Manager	50%
	Program Manager	0%
	Advisor for Inclusive Education	58%
	Country Director	30%
Tanzania	Program Manager	70%
	Advisor for Education	100%
Nepal	Program Manager	77%
	Advisor for Communication	83%
	Country Director	22%
Myanmar	Program Manager	17%
	Advisor for disability inclusion	53%
<b>Person years</b>		13,45

## 3.5 Advocacy work in Finland

### Development Policy Advocacy Results

The year 2023 was defined by the parliamentary elections and the formation of the government program. In collaboration with the MFA and other development organizations, Felm formulated recommendations for the government program and engaged in constructive dialog with political decision-makers and experts from all parliamentary groups. Felm took the first initiative to assemble a network of church-based actors to strengthen their voice as advocates for human rights and development cooperation, particularly in close collaboration with the Archbishop's Office and the Church Council.

Our development policy recommendations were prepared in collaboration with partners, using examples of their work in communication. Perspectives were also obtained from the LDC conference in Doha, where the Felm leading advocacy advisor took part as part of the Finnish delegation. Simultaneously, Felm engaged in public mobilization, disseminating parliamentary influence through local parishes across Finland, and all Finnish bishops were mobilized to advocate for development cooperation<sup>7</sup>.

The government program eventually included a provision emphasizing the importance, effectiveness, and reliability of development cooperation undertaken by civil society organizations. More broadly, cuts outlined in the government program were directed towards the technical frame expecting future growth and are to be implemented in a backloaded fashion. Substantively, Felm aimed to strengthen the role of development policy as part of Finland's foreign and security policy framework. It raised the profile of development policy within government parties amidst heightened international tensions, but also instrumentalized development policy to serve geopolitical delineation against the conventional understanding of development finances targeting the poor and marginalized, despite the political sides of the target countries.

### Climate Financing and Policy Advocacy Results

Felm continued efforts to develop Finland's climate financing system based on human rights in collaboration with government officials and political decision-makers. Key forums for collaboration were the joint climate financing group of organizations and the secretariat of the Development Policy Committee. Additionally, Felm actively took part in the consultation process on the evaluation of climate financing during and after its implementation. Felm engaged in public discourse<sup>8</sup> on the topic as well as publishing research-based texts addressing the geopolitically tense situation of climate financing. Through these efforts, Felm also amplified the voices of partners, using their experiences of the changing climate as the basis for advocacy and policy recommendations.

In addition to these efforts, Felm engaged in a dialog with the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of the Environment, and political leaders on the allocation of climate financing as part of the state budget. Furthermore, in collaboration with the Secretariat of the Development policy committee and the climate group of NGOs, Felm proposed transparent reporting mechanisms for showing the effec-

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<sup>7</sup> Piispoilta vetoamus kehitysyhteistyön puolesta: <https://yle.fi/a/74-20008814/64-3-152315>

<sup>8</sup> Maailmanpolitiikan arkipäivää, Ilmastokokous ja rahoitus, <https://areena.yle.fi/podcastit/1-67302818>



tiveness of climate financing. An acknowledgment of Felm's expertise in the field was evident when the leading advocacy advisor served on the evaluation panel for the Finnish Academy's funding call for green transition initiatives. Felm also organized a media training session targeted to Nordic reporters on the intricacies of climate negotiations that hosted high-level experts, with close to 150 participants including media outlets such as LeMonde, Finnish broadcast services and Reuters.

International attention on climate financing in 2023 was particularly focused on the loss and damage fund, with a lesser emphasis on defining the Global Goal on Adaptation. Felm collaborated with ACT Alliance and the Lutheran World Federation (LWF), submitting statements to the UNFCCC and engaging with negotiating authorities and decision-makers to find sustainable and fair solutions to issues of financial responsibilities and eligible targets.

Regarding climate financing, the new government of Finland has in its austerity policies drastically cut the annual amount of funding available for the implementation plan of climate funding from 200 million to about 130 million euros. Despite civil society advocacy efforts, climate financing was not included in the government program, and significant budget cuts targeted the sector during the government's term. However, progress was made as, following Felm's recommendations, climate financing was included for the first time in the climate annual report. Internationally, noteworthy results were achieved as the COP 28 in Dubai approved a fund focusing on climate damages. Additionally, a strong human rights-based approach was integrated into the adaptation goal, emphasizing the need for locally led adaptation involving minorities and vulnerable groups. Based on media analysis, we also see a shift from reporting climate negotiations via the mitigation issues strengthening the leadership narrative of the West towards more balanced views on the just transition allowing space for voices from the Global South.

### 3.6 Development communication and Global education

#### Development communication

**The highlight of Felm's development communications in 2023 was the making of Colombia 360 virtual reality game.** The game was produced together with a Finnish education technology company 3DBear. Felm's communications advisor visited the community of the Kogi Indigenous people in the Sierra Nevada mountains of Colombia and filmed their life for the game. The game gives a unique access to the culture of the Kogis. It gives voice to the Kogi people to share their experiences about the importance of their own language and mother tongue-based education supported by Felm. The game works both with a desktop browser and with virtual reality glasses. It is suitable for all ages from secondary school onwards and has already received positive feedback. In 2024, Felm will focus on the promotion of the game in schools, parishes and the public.

During the year, Felm produced two videos in which people from Finland and from the project areas shared their experiences and thoughts about disability. In the first video, a Finnish youth influencer from the Shed music theater group discussed inclusive arts and the rights of the persons with disabilities with a Cambodian dancer from the dance group of Felm's Cambodian disability project partner Epic Arts. By the end of June 2024, the video has reached an audience of approximately 27,000 people

in social media. In the second video<sup>9</sup>, a landmine survivor and a disability activist from **Colombia** and a disability activist and influencer from Akson, the Finnish Association of Spinal Cord Injured, discussed the situation of the people with disability and the importance of peer support and organizing to an association. The feedback from the video participants both in Finland and Felm's project countries has been positive: this kind of a dialog increases understanding of the typical challenges and different realities in both countries and builds bridges between different actors working with a similar theme.

One of the development communications initiatives of Felm is to closely follow one specific project from the start until the end of the project. In 2023, this project in **Nepal** focusing on climate resilience was visible in two different videos and in several articles. In the first video the physician and social media influencer Pippa Laukka reported on the food security situation of the project communities. Laukka is famous for her role in the television program "Olet mitä syöt" and she visited the project in 2022. The second video described the baseline of the project and the situation at the start of the project with interviews of the project beneficiaries and project staff. By the end of June 2024, these two videos together have reached an audience of nearly 98,000 people. The project and the effects of climate change in Nepal were also addressed in native advertising articles published in Sunnuntaisuomalainen (published in 16 newspapers across Finland), Maaseudun tulevaisuus and Iltalehti. Together these articles reached an audience of 1.1<sup>10</sup> million people. A new filming trip to the project region took place in late 2023, and the outcomes of the trip will be published in 2024.

Development cooperation was under critical discussion before the parliamentary elections. Felm participated in the discussion with a television advertisement about the results of development cooperation, with an article in the elections newsletter of the MustRead, which is aimed at decision makers, with media and with two podcasts. As a result of the initiative of Felm, the bishops of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland raised their voice in social media for the development cooperation and their comments gained a lot of media attention<sup>11</sup>. Based on the initiative of Felm, the CEO of our partner organization in Nepal and a Nepalese doctoral researcher wrote an opinion piece about the relevance on development cooperation in Nepal and the text was published in Helsingin Sanomat. In addition, Felm published several other articles, videos and social media posts on development communications focus themes and the results of development cooperation during the year.

## Global education

In 2023, schools and educators had access to the Felm Globaalikasvatusportaali - Global Education Portal<sup>12</sup>. The Portal is a resource bank of global education materials targeted at teachers and educators. The Portal was designed to be as user-friendly as possible: It is an open-access portal with no need for registration, and materials are broken down by theme, school level, and school subject. The material was disseminated via Fingo's global education network and with the help of partner schools and teach-

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9 The video was published in the beginning of 2024 and its reach results will be reported in the 2024 report.

10 Based on the reach of the newspapers

11 E.g. Yle, Helsingin Sanomat, Turun Sanomat, Kirkko ja kaupunki, Seurakuntalainen, Kotimaa and Huomenta Suomi

12 Globaalikasvatusportaali website: [www.gloaalikasvatusportaali.fi](http://www.gloaalikasvatusportaali.fi)

ers. The Portal was also promoted to educators of the Finnish Evangelic Lutheran church in different events, network gatherings, and social media channels.

Global Agents is a learning oriented global education platform aiming to increase understanding of sustainable development. It will be supplemented with an interactive game that is currently under construction. The scope of the game is to build upon the Finnish official primary and junior high school curricula to provide a learning tool for wider use in teaching and to address Agenda 2030 themes. The game will equip the students to make sustainable choices through age-appropriate and inspiring exercises.

The Global Agents game progressed to developing and testing phase in 2023. During the year, the focus was on the technical and content development of the game. Development work was conducted in collaboration with the primary target group, the students: In spring 2023, a group of primary school students were involved in designing the visual content for the game. Also, testing of the Global Agents game started with two testing groups in May 2023. The obtained information was used in developing the game in Autumn 2023.

Already with the small testing group, the results showed that **playing the game was a motivating way to learn about sustainable development and prompted students to engage in critical reflection on their consumption patterns**. However, it was observed during the initial testing phase that the role of written content was disproportionately significant and needed to be summarized or replaced with videos for the final version of the game.

At the end of 2023, work on the Swedish translation of the game also started. From the point of view of accessibility and equality, it has been deemed important to produce the portal in both official languages.

The partners in the development of the game are a learning services company and a game development company. In 2024, development and testing phases are continuing with wider groups and finalizing the Swedish translation of the game. The portal and game will be finalized and launched in Autumn 2024.

## 4. Resources of the program

### 4.1 Staff in Finland

The program staff was composed of both the program staff in Finland and the advisory support staff in the regions, with 7 person-years allocated to the Helsinki Office and 16.85 person-years to the partner countries. This chapter focuses on the staff in Finland.

The Development Cooperation Program staff in Finland was composed of both part-time and full-time staff. The part time staff were the Program Director for Diaconia and Development 50%; Advisor for PMEL 60%; Advisor for Communication: 40%, Advisor for Global Education: 10%, and four Thematic Advisors: 4 x 10 %. A new Program Director started on July 1st, 2023, as the previous Program Director was promoted to be the new General Director of Felm. The full-time staff consisted of five staff members: the Program Director for Development Cooperation, the Finance Manager, the Administrative Coordinator, the Senior Program Advisor and the Program Coordinator. The salary of the Advisor for



Humanitarian aid was entirely covered by Felm. The Felm Gender Advisor worked closely with the Development Cooperation program throughout the year.

The Diaconia and Development team's overall role in Felm's Development Cooperation Program is to advise and support the program globally, including humanitarian aid. The home office based thematic advisors provided capacity building and support to both Felm staff and the partners.

## 4.2 Financial report

### **Co-financing of the Development Cooperation Program by the Ministry for Foreign Affairs**

The grand total of Felm's development cooperation operations for 2023 amounted to 7.131,984 euros. The total share of MFA program support employed during the reporting year was 6.164,767 euros, including grant funds carried over from 2022. The funds were allocated according to the annual plan. The projects have valid project agreements and addendums, which contain agreements regarding the use of amended budgets.

Administration costs amounted to 10% of the total of development cooperation program costs and covered costs directly arising from the administration of Felm's development cooperation funds by various departments of the organization. In addition to the International Department, the Department for Parish Relations and Fundraising, the Finance and Administration Department, the Communications Department, as well as the office of the Managing Director and the board of directors and organizational administration were allocated their own share. The total of development communications and advocacy, and global education costs amounted to 175,739 euros (approx. 2,5%).

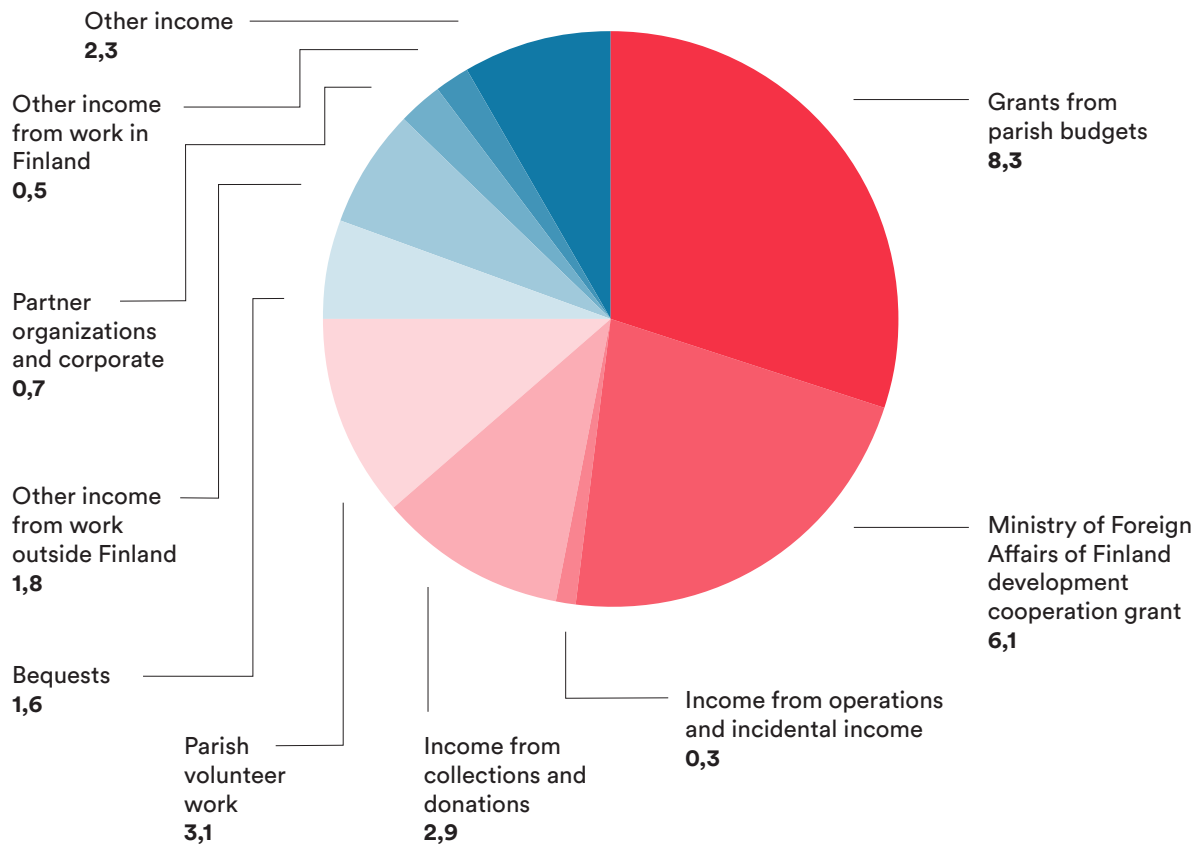
### **Development cooperation program self-financing share**

Felm's operations are funded by parishes of the Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Church and Christian organizations, the MFA, the EU, and individual donors. Felm's total income for the fiscal year was 27.5 million euros (2022 25.6 million euros), including financial support of 16,6 million euros. Financial support consisted of parishes' budgetary grants, church collections, parishes' volunteer activities, testamentary donations, other direct donations and collections, as well as other income. Parish budgetary grants were not used to cover the self-financing share as they include funds collected through the church tax. Nor are grants directed toward operations in Finland or other income, or other grants received from the MFA considered in the self-financing share of the development cooperation program. Further information can be found in Felm's report of operations and financial statements.

The 150 314 euros of targeted funds for the support of the development cooperation program for 2023 were raised through Ylen hyvä fundraising (Nenäpäivä). Additionally, funds were received in 2023 from individual donors either directly or through parishes totaling 5.969,416 euros.

Permanent sources of funding include long term service agreements made with parishes and organizations for the support of individual projects or specialists working in them. Service agreement funds were collected in parishes through, among others, bazaars, voluntary work, events, collections, and mission circles. The total self-financing share of Felm's development cooperation program was 967,217 euros in 2023.

**Figure 1. Felm income 2023 (million euro)**



This corresponds to a 7.5% share for projects promoting the rights of persons with disabilities and a 15% share for other projects.

An external auditor has conducted an audit of development cooperation operations carried out with Finnish government funding. The auditor’s reports, prepared based on the audit, form part of the finance report. The audit report for 2023 (KPMG) concludes that the financial statements present fairly the financial position of the association and the results of its operations in accordance with current Finnish laws pertaining to preparation of financial statements and meets statutory requirements.

## 5. Beneficiaries

The total number of direct beneficiaries of the program reached 158,846 persons in 2023. The number of direct beneficiaries in 2023 consists of 149,660 rights-holders and over 9,000 duty-bearers directly reached by the program. Table 3 (page 20) gives the detailed disaggregation of rights-holders and duty-bearers by age, sex, and disability status. The program has reached 149,660 rights-holders from the most vulnerable and marginalized groups in all the target areas. Qualitatively the program reached the targeted special focus groups of girls, children, young people, women, indigenous/ethnic groups, minorities, and PWDs.

**Table 3. Number of beneficiaries disaggregated by sex and age.**

	Total	Age 0-14		Age 15-24		Age 25-	
		Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male
Rights-holders ... of whom PWDs	149660*	23284	18834	18465	14392	41209	33396
	8977 (5,6%)	1538 (6,6%)	1516 (8,0%)	1114 (6,0%)	1175 (8,2%)	1790 (4,3%)	1273 (3,8%)
Duty-bearers ... of whom PWDs	9186			336	421	3556	4873
	434 (4,7%)			31 (9,2%)	33 (7,8%)	166 (3,3%)	204 (4,2%)
Indirect beneficiaries	2897091						

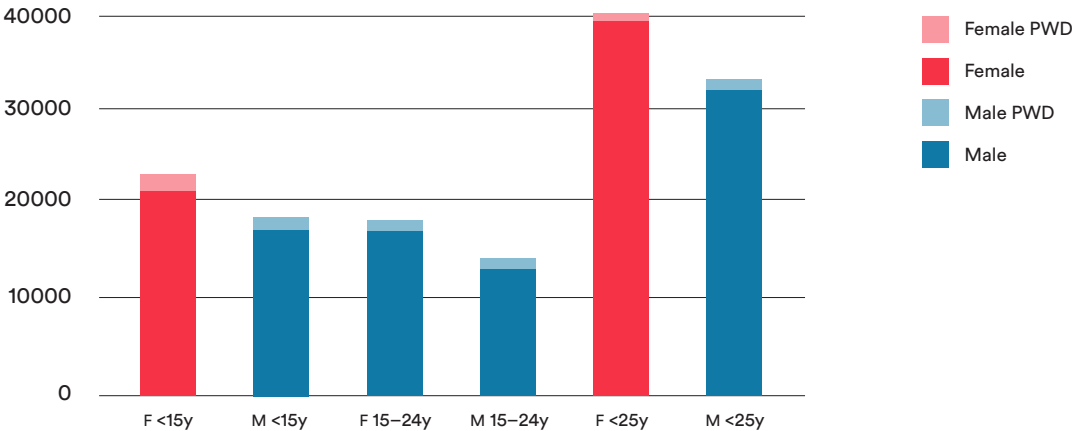
\*) The total of disaggregated rights-holders/duty-bearers is less than the total of rights-holder/duty-bearer beneficiaries, since the disaggregation was incomplete

55.5% of all the rights-holders were women and girls, which reaches the targeted share of female rights-holders. The biggest rights-holder group was women over 25 with 41,209 beneficiaries while it was also the biggest participant group for men with 33,396 beneficiaries. The program reached 18,465 girls and 14,392 boys from the age group 15-24 and 28,284 girls and 18,834 boys from the age group 0-14. All figures have increased notably when compared to 2022 results representing impactful gender mainstreaming practices on a program implementation level. Gender analysis and gender mainstreaming were among key topics covered in Felm’s partners’ capacity building trainings. Training sessions were often delivered by the local experts which guaranteed strong understanding of local context and nuances around gender equality and social norms. Reporting with gender disaggregated data continues to be a standard practice for Felm’s partners.

Close to 9,000 persons with disabilities were reached, representing 5.6% of all the rights-holders. When analyzed per age group, the share of persons with disabilities is the highest among beneficiaries aged 0-14 and second highest among age 15-24 representing about 6-8% of the total number of beneficiaries per age group and sex (Table 3). One of the program outcome areas focuses on inclusive education in primary and secondary educational levels which explains the division. Felm’s overall target is to reach 65,000 persons with disabilities, representing 15% of the total target of 434,000 rights-holders. The reported number of persons with disabilities reached by the program is gradually increasing as the Washington group training sessions have improved the partners’ ability to identify persons with disabilities. Percentage of reached persons with disabilities is lower than in 2022 while the actual number is higher because of the overall increase of the reached beneficiaries.

During 2023 Felm’s program reached 9,186 duty-bearers in total. The profile of the duty-bearers (Figure 2, page 21) differs greatly from the one of the rights-holders. It can be assumed that the profile of the reached duty-bearers reflects the make-up of the duty-bearers in the operating countries and targeted areas, and that Felm can only have limited influence on who the duty-bearers are. 57% of all duty-bearers are men, with a strong representation of adults (over 25 years). The figure is slightly smaller than in 2022 showcasing increased participation of women duty-bearers. Young women and men (15-25 years) represent 8% of all the duty-bearers as in the 2022 reporting year. 4.7% of duty-bearers are

**Figure 2. Total disaggregated number of rights-holders**



persons with disabilities. The figure has almost doubled when compared to 2022 when the result was 2.5%. Despite the progress, persons with disabilities are clearly underrepresented among duty-bearers. The disability advocacy program is expected to engage a stronger representation of persons with disabilities in decision making bodies but achieving concrete changes takes time and are also determined by factors beyond the program’s influence.

In 2023, 2,897,091 indirect beneficiaries were reached through different means including media, advocacy work and through program’s direct beneficiaries. The biggest group of indirect beneficiaries were reached through local radio with over 1 million listeners in **Zimbabwe**. Different forms of media form a central means for reaching indirect beneficiaries. For example, in **Cambodia**, 92,296 indirect beneficiaries were reached through either social media or radio broadcasts and the rest represents extended families and neighborhoods of children and youth with disabilities. Indirect beneficiaries also involve school administration and teachers working in program supported schools. In **Tanzania**, over 70,000 indirect beneficiaries live in the 45 project villages and their neighborhoods, benefiting from reforestation and climate resilience activities.

**Intersectional approach - Focus on the Most Vulnerable and Marginalized Groups**

Felm’s added value and strengths are focusing its work in all program target areas on people from the most vulnerable and marginalized groups. The levels and types of vulnerabilities depend on the local context and the program target groups are hence carefully identified by partner organizations. Felm focuses especially on women, girls and persons with disabilities, also paying attention to intersectional discrimination to allow multiple intersecting and overlapping factors contributing to marginalization to be taken into consideration. The program pays strong attention to the role of both rights-holders and duty-bearers as active change agents in the supported development interventions.

Disaggregated data of the beneficiaries gives indication that Felm is working with the right-holders who are potentially facing intersectional discrimination, such as girls with disabilities or women and girls from minority ethnic groups. Felm continues to implement and further develop its approaches to



better acknowledge intersecting and overlapping factors discriminating people in the most vulnerable positions. This is acknowledged both in project design but also in collaboration with the partners. Felm is building partners' capacities not only to understand intersectionality but also to advocate for the rights of people in vulnerable positions. In addition to increasing right-holders' awareness over their rights, partners' capacities to analyze and implement different tools, duty-bearers are also included to create a strong base for achieving structural changes to prevent intersectional discrimination. An intersectional approach gives a strong base for understanding different needs of right-holders across all outcome areas of the program in addition to targeted actions.

## 6. Progress towards the expected results

### 6.1 Outcome area 1: Resilient Communities

The program aims at improving the resilience and inclusion of people from marginalized groups. The program is responding to the ongoing climate crisis in various ways fit to the local contexts. The emphasis is on the inclusion of women and persons with disabilities, along with people from other marginalized groups. The Felm approach on climate resilience is a holistic community-based development with focus on food security, livelihoods, and climate change adaptation and mitigation (CCA & M). According to the results, it is safe to say, that resilience to climate change has increased in the program's target communities, and the program is bringing about the change laid out in the program ToC.



The climate resilience of communities in vulnerable positions is improved by adopting inclusive, locally led disaster risk management (DRM) processes and CCA & M measures by the end of 2025 in a context appropriate way. Furthermore, households in vulnerable positions are supported to diversify their livelihoods to strengthen their capacities to cope with and recover from climate-related and other hazards strengthening resilience including improved food security in the target communities.

After the two years of program implementation, clear progress has been made towards Outcome 1 of the program. Resilience to climate change and disasters have improved in the vulnerable communities the program is targeting, as the average amount of months of experienced food shortage or shortage of money to buy food has decreased to 4.4 months against the baseline of 6 months (II1). The program level target is to reduce the food insecure months to an average of 4 months. The program is close to reaching its target after the first two years of implementation. This excellent result indicates that implementing and sustaining inclusive CCA & M measures have been efficient in strengthening the local communities' DRM capacity and in diversifying their income. Based on the upcoming mid-term review, Felm may consider increasing the target value.

In total, during the reporting period, 56 community-based disaster risk reduction strategies or plans were developed in Zimbabwe, Senegal, Nepal, Mauritania and Cambodia (OI1.1.). In **Senegal**, for example, the project communities have taken to use five different strategies to reduce their vulnerability to disasters: tree-planting (fodder trees, soil-improving trees, fruit trees) and have planted all together 1,446 trees. They have been setting up two community cereal banks. And they received training on bee-

keeping as a strategy to increase their climate resilience and disaster risk reduction (DRR). Additionally, 66 women were involved in the DRR activities which helped strengthening the existing strategies and helping to set up new local risk monitoring groups in the communities (9 in total).

The first two years of the program show that the chosen methods to increase climate resilience in the vulnerable communities have been largely efficient and it is vital to share them across the program. The focus of capacity building increasingly promotes peer learning and sharing that will enable the spreading of climate resilience practices across the program regions and countries. Peer learning as a methodology has also been the interest of Felm partners globally.

The results of the mid-term assessment show that 20.5% of households in the target communities are now using wood-saving stoves or other alternative environmentally sustainable fuel for cooking in the targeted communities, the target being 52% by the end of 2025 (OI1.2). The innovative approach of the programme includes piloting new ideas and strengthening learning and sharing experiences. For example, In **Zimbabwe**, the Gwai Grandmothers' Group<sup>13</sup> has further developed a method of building wood-saving stoves from clay and the practice has spread to a large part of the community. The method was promoted in the Felm program since 2019 by a resilience building toolkit and trainings. The community has made the technology its own and further developed it from a one plate model to a 3-4 plated one with an integrated oven. This has brought significant changes in the lives of the women in the community: Time is saved due to faster cooking as multiple dishes can be cooked at the same time and the stove heats quickly, and fire-wood demand is significantly less so women do not spend time looking for wood. Women can build the stoves themselves and teach the method to each other improving their quality of life and having control of their time spent on domestic work. The local authority Zimbabwe Environmental Management Agency have noticed the impact and have adopted the method for their other projects.

Additionally, 51% of households in the target communities use climate-resilient agricultural practices (OI1.3) at the mid-term of the program, the target being 70% by the end of the program period. Some 6500 households (out of the targeted 11 000 households) globally have gained additional, sustained sources of income which are not vulnerable to the same hazards as their initial sources of income (OI1.4). In **Tanzania**<sup>14</sup>, the climate resilience of communities has been strengthened as the families increasingly gain interest in the cattle feeding business. The half-moon bunds used to solve land restoration challenges can be used to increase fodder production. One school dug 250 half-moon bunds in 2023, after having harvested the grass from the first bunds, and used the money for improving the WASH infrastructure at the school. Interest has also risen within the families to engage in the cattle feed business using these half-moon bunds, even if control is challenging and the restoration of commonly used lands is extremely difficult. This example manifests one of the interlinkages between the different outcomes of the Felm program, as climate change mitigation measures can provide resources to schools, contributing to quality education.

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13 ZWK003

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For example, in **Tanzania**<sup>15</sup> the project organized tree planting campaigns and promoted adding trees within the farming system as part of climate-resilient farming (OI1.4). In total 67 116 trees have been planted during 2023 in farms, family yards, and public spaces within the communities. At the time of reporting, when the dry season was over, about 90% of the planted seedlings were still alive. Nine tree nurseries were established to support school environmental clubs. In addition to this in the extremely dry Kishapu area, where farmers were trained in water management in 2022, there was variation in the adoption rates of these methods in 2023 but some interesting progress was seen.

In **Mauritania**<sup>16</sup>, reforestation activities also contributed to a perceived improvement in community health and well-being. Thanks to the tree nurseries set up in each of the 10 target villages, the communities are familiar with the benefits of forest and fruit trees. As part of these activities, the project has promoted the planting of *Moringa oleifera* which is reported to have various nutritional and health values for humans, while it also improves the local environment. The moringa tree is a fast-growing, drought-resistant tree. All villages have opted to set up and maintain moringa plantations and have used various parts of the tree as firsthand remedy for children, women, and the elderly in case of illnesses, and as a vitamin boost to strengthen the immune system (OI1.1).

These results under Outcome 1 show that the program is moving in the right direction and to major part has exceeded its halfway threshold for results. Although the overall results are showing good progress towards the target values in impact, outcome, and output levels, there is a clear deviation between projects. More targeted support needs to be directed to certain partners and projects for these projects to also meet their targets. Capacity strengthening will focus more on reaching the target of OI1.1, supporting communities with Disaster Risk Management. The capacity of partners needs to be strengthened to face unpredicted disasters and changes in the operating environment and particularly address loss and damage. Felm has supported the resilience of communities, but it is becoming apparent that need for building the capacity to address loss and damages is ever more significant.

### 6.2 Outcome area 2: Inclusive, Quality Education

Program Outcome 2 focuses on access to inclusive, quality education especially among children and youth from marginalized groups. The outputs contributing to outcome 2 are diverse in implementation, target groups and modalities. The measures taken to further quality and inclusion of education are locally adapted and respond to the needs of the local partners, according to the needs of the diverse target groups and educational contexts. This reflects the understanding that increased access to inclusive quality education means different things in different contexts.



Outcome 2 is contributing to the program impact of improved resilience and inclusion of people from marginalized groups, including improving their right to education. Felm focuses on the inclusion of persons from marginalized groups such as ethnic and linguistic minorities (including users of sign languages), girls, and children with disabilities, who are widely excluded from access to education. The

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program further improves physical accessibility and safety of learning environments. Many kinds of tools have been selected to promote change towards the program outcome in accordance with partners' capacities and resources. These tools include working with pre-primary, primary and secondary education, vocational training, teacher education, as well as both formal and non-formal education.

Despite of the very diverse nature of the activities under this outcome there is demonstrated progress towards the outcome and in some cases, the set target levels seem modest and could be upgraded. On the program impact level (II2), completion/survival rate at primary and lower secondary education in targeted schools and/or classes are disaggregated by sex and disability. With the baseline of 71% of overall completion rate in primary and secondary, the midterm data shows a completion/survival rate of 85,2% exceeding the 80% target level. For example, in **Cambodia**<sup>17</sup> the project report states that the students have also improved their self-confidence, cultural identity and social skills through the program. The program has involved 36 teachers, who have received training and support to teach in the home languages of the students.

It is important that all learners can receive education in a language they understand. The Felm program promotes and strengthens mother-tongue based and multilingual education (MTB-MLE). The number of students in targeted pre-primary, primary and secondary schools whose first or home language is a language of instruction indicates a positive change in the inclusion of children from language minorities (OI2.1), as they can better understand what is being taught. By 2023, the share of students who have access to mother tongue education in the pre-primary and primary level has increased from 30 % baseline to 74 % in pre-primary and 75% in primary school against the target of 80%. Increasing teacher education has made it possible to reach out to more communities, and thus more students have been reached. The teachers have received pedagogical training to increase their knowledge and skills, and thus it can be assumed that the quality of education has also improved.

The indicator (OI2.2) on secondary education does not apply to the context for which it was originally designed, and it has been removed from the results matrix. This is due to the prevailing education policy in **Tanzania**, according to which Swahili, an East African lingua franca, is the language of instruction at the primary level of education, while English is the medium of instruction at the secondary level. This language policy is not likely to change in the foreseeable future. On a project level<sup>18</sup> however, this indicator provides interesting data, as it appears that in the most low-resourced community secondary schools only 5% of the students come from private English medium primary schools, compared to 48% in private secondary schools owned by the Lutheran church. The focus is on supporting the low-resourced community secondary schools.

The number of students with disabilities in the targeted pre-primary and primary schools has increased remarkably (OI2.3). Mother tongue-based education has been able to also reach out to persons with disabilities, as the share of students with disabilities has increased from the baseline of 1.3% to 4% against the target of 5%. It can also be argued whether the target is set too low, since it was almost reached as soon as 2023. According to monitoring data, in **Myanmar** students with disabilities became

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17 KHK004

18 TZK002



more comfortable with attending school because of their teachers' improved knowledge about disability through the training.<sup>19</sup>

There is a strong need to provide a safe, inclusive and protective learning environment. The focus of interventions varies depending on the local context. The degree to which children feel happy to come to school indicates whether students feel safe, included and protected (OI2.4). The level is measured with a methodology that allows students themselves to assess their level of being happy to attend the school. Although the methodology of the assessment is carefully designed, it is important to note that the concept of satisfaction varies between cultural contexts. Progress towards the outcome has been made in terms of providing safe and protective learning environments since the degree of students feeling most of the time happy to come to school has increased from the baseline of 63% to 70%, the target being 80%. However, the poor school satisfaction rates of children with disabilities call for Felm's attention and further investigation. In **Nepal**<sup>20</sup>, it has been noted that the high drop-out rate of pupils with disabilities correlates with school satisfaction. The preliminary assessment suggests that many project schools lack disability-friendly infrastructure and an inclusive learning environment. Moreover, school administrators and teachers often lack awareness regarding the importance of creating such an environment. To address these challenges, Felm actively promotes initiatives within project schools. This includes efforts to identify children with disabilities, foster disability-friendly and inclusive learning environments, and facilitate access to psychosocial counselling services for these students.

Improving access to inclusive vocational and life skills training is an effective way of increasing inclusion in societies. Especially for persons with disabilities, obtaining a profession through vocational training is a key for changing negative societal perceptions and enabling income. As part of the vocational and life skills training, more than 500 people against the target of 1,800 have gained functional literacy skills, which will improve their access to society and even further training (OI 2.6). For example, in **Colombia**<sup>21</sup>, the program has equipped adults of indigenous communities with functional literacy. The project kicked off with 20% of adults gaining literacy skills in the target communities and proceeding cumulatively to 50% of the adults aged 16-45 years. The project is expecting to reach a 90% functional literacy rate.

### 6.3 Outcome area 3: Rights of Persons with Disabilities

The Program Outcome area 3 focuses on improving the integration of the rights of persons with disabilities into government policies and practices, with active involvement of persons with disabilities and their organizations. In line with the principle of “nothing about us without us”, the program aims at strengthening capacities of partner organizations, especially organizations of persons with disabilities (OPDs), to promote and advocate for the rights of persons with disabilities so that they can for example take part in government consultations, working groups, and processes on legislation and policies that define the implementation of the



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United Nations' Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. In 2023, CSO and OPD staffs' and volunteers' capacity to advocate for the rights of persons with disabilities was strengthened in seven countries, including Columbia, Cambodia, Nepal, Ethiopia, Tanzania, Burundi, and Rwanda. The strengthened capacities contributed to the organizations' abilities to advocate for legislative and policy reform and policy enforcement in 6 ongoing and 2 completed processes (OI3.1).

For example, in the East-African region, a regional advocacy project<sup>22</sup> supported Tanzanian, Burundian and Rwandan organizations of persons with disabilities in advocacy actions related to climate justice and inclusive sexual and reproductive health services. In **Rwanda**, contributions were made to improve the inclusion of the second National Transformation Strategy, which is the main government plan for implementing Rwanda vision 2050. In Rwanda, the project also responded to disaster situation by developing a post disaster needs assessment tool for persons with disabilities in partnership with the Rwanda Ministry of Disaster and Emergency Management. In **Tanzania**, an organization of women with disabilities worked on inclusive sexual and reproductive health services with Selian Lutheran Hospital, which has become a recognized Centre of Excellence on disability inclusive sexual reproductive health services, providing a model towards implementation of the WHO recommendations for health equity in Tanzania. The Ministry of Health based Technical Working Group, who plan the implementation of the WHO recommendations, recommended that the Ministry of Health in Tanzania select at least five Regional Referral Hospitals to pilot the recommendations taking Selian as a model. In Tanzania, contributions were also made to the Ministry of Health maternal and childcare guidelines to ensure inclusive support from service providers to victims of gender-based violence.

Since the beginning of the program in 2022, the supported organizations of persons with disabilities had been consulted in 33 government processes, which is an impressive achievement as the target for 2025 is 45 government processes (OP3.2). The 33 processes included 11 national level, 6 regional level, and 16 local level government processes in Nepal, Ethiopia, and the East-African region. The program's efforts to sensitize and train government officials and decision-makers on CRPD and its implementation at different levels (so far, almost 1,000 duty-bearers have been sensitized – ref. OPI3.3.1) are paying off as government processes are seeking to include organizations of persons with disabilities in consultations. Another factor that supports the active role of persons with disabilities in society and politics is peer-support and improved awareness of rights of persons with disabilities amongst persons with disabilities themselves. The program supported persons with disabilities to take more active roles for example in **Nepal**, where peer support and advocacy groups have enabled an active role for 78 persons with psychosocial disabilities in advocating for their rights and speaking for themselves<sup>23</sup>.

Another indicator of the improved integration of the rights of persons with disabilities into policies and practices is the extent to which persons with disabilities feel respected by other people (OI3.3). The experienced respect was mapped via a survey during a period ranging from the end of 2023 to the beginning of 2024.<sup>24</sup> The results showed that 45% of the respondents felt respected most of the time, 52 % felt respected sometimes, and 3% felt not at all respected. There is progress from the program baseline

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22 XXK004

23 NPK001

24 Partners had various adaptations of the survey based on the project context, so the methodology varied between projects.

(30% feel respected most of the time) towards the program's target for 2025 (50% feel respected most of the time). However, this indicator has proved quite challenging methodologically. Regardless, this gives an indication of the enhanced level of experienced respect towards persons with disabilities in their immediate surroundings, which would indicate the effectiveness of the awareness-raising on the rights of persons with disabilities through peer support groups, community awareness sessions, sensitization sessions, and other awareness raising activities in 9 countries, including Columbia, Cambodia, Myanmar, Nepal, Zimbabwe, Ethiopia, Tanzania, Burundi and Rwanda.

At impact level, Felm's program aims at improved resilience and inclusion of people from marginalized groups in the program target areas. The program monitors the number of persons with disabilities in the mainstream community structures and groups in the target communities. However, this indicator has been challenging to monitor, with only one project providing satisfactory quality data in 2023 reporting.<sup>25</sup> This data shows that 88 persons with disabilities (67 female) were part of mainstream community groups such as school management groups, forest users' group, and a mother's group. The project has worked actively to engage peer support group members with other community groups, already achieving its target for 2025. This impact is significant as the project supports people with psychosocial disabilities which is a very marginalized and stigmatized group in **Nepal**. In Nepal, another project with a focus on school mental health<sup>26</sup> has actively advocated for inclusive practices and accessible infrastructure of common areas such as schools, health facilities, and local government offices. The project has also worked towards enhancing the representation of persons with disabilities by actively involving them in social audits and Local Project Advisory Committee meetings and joint monitoring visits across all four project municipalities. The project also urged project schools to appoint psychosocial focal teachers from teachers with disabilities, resulting in five persons with disabilities among the 120 focal teachers.

Based on the available data, Felm's program is particularly strong in facilitating peer support activities, raising awareness of the rights and empowering persons with disabilities to claim their human rights. Some of the program's projects are also strong in advocacy. While Felm's partners have implemented the projects successfully, it should be noted that our impact and outcome indicators can only partly capture the longer-term program level impacts and outcomes. Some of the significant and relevant changes are not possible to monitor through Felm's program-level indicators, as projects approaches and contexts vary greatly.

While program outcome area 3 is implemented primarily through targeted projects, the other two outcome areas also include elements related to the rights of persons with disabilities. In those countries or regional settings where Felm has partners with strong expertise in the rights of persons with disabilities, collaboration between partners has been a very effective way to mainstream disability inclusion. For example, in **Cambodia**, Felm's partners, who mainly focus on climate resilience and inclusive education, have successfully collaborated with Felm's partner organization Epic Arts in strengthening awareness of the rights of persons with disabilities. In the future, Felm plans to facilitate this kind of collaboration further and utilize especially the expertise of its OPD partners in mainstreaming disability inclusion.

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25 NPK001, KOSHISH

26 NPK005, CMC-Nepal

## 6.4 Humanitarian-Development Nexus

The Felm triple Nexus approach paper was published in December 2022, and thus this reporting period was its first implementation year. To embed the triple nexus as a guiding principle and systemic practice, Felm aligns with OECD DAC's recommendations, emphasizing capacity building, innovation, and piloting to foster a culture of interdisciplinary collaboration. With the definition paper, Felm engages in developing the interlinkages between its humanitarian, development and peace work. The collaboration between these three fields faces challenges as the funding and administration are often separate in the traditional structures of globalized aid architecture. The contemporary triple nexus approach can be seen as an evolution of concepts such as Linking Relief, Rehabilitation and Development (LRRD) and the New Way of Working (NWOW).

Felm brings to the nexus approach decades of experience in multisectoral development programs integrating humanitarian aid, development cooperation, diaconia, and peace work, despite not explicitly using the term "triple nexus". Felm's approach, thinking and working methods, engage enhancing coordination and mutual learning both within Felm and with the partners. In Felm's program, the same partner organizations work for different nexus components with varying level of linkages and joint approach. The nexus approach is particularly relevant in conflict-affected regions like **Ethiopia, Myanmar, Colombia, and Zimbabwe**, where all partners of the program are funded by the MFA.

The nexus approach in 2023 Felm's program has been implemented in partnership with the MFA. The program has benefited from reallocations such as the Livelihoods and green energy for refugees in Gambella, Ethiopia; Humanitarian food security help for Tigray conflict victims, Ethiopia; Developing climate resilient agriculture and community livelihoods in Brakna, Mauritania; Humanitarian work; Zimbabwe, Water-saving farming methods (half-moon beds) and drought-resistant seed varieties in Tanzania; and the Skills enhancement and participation of women and youth in several projects.

An effective triple nexus implementation at Felm also relies on addressing structural challenges, such as governance silos and funding inflexibilities. Felm advocates for structural changes and engages in dialog with state institutions to develop metrics and set targets for nexus implementation. Collaborative advocacy with partners, such as ACT Alliance and LWF, is crucial for advancing human rights-based approaches.

## 6.5 Cross-cutting Objectives and mainstreaming

### Climate resilience and low-emission development

In 2023, all partners implementing projects under Outcome 1 took part in a global peer-learning session online. During these sessions, each project presented their best practices and challenges related to climate resilience. Following the presentations, participants engaged in discussions and shared additional experiences. The main outcome of the peer-learning session was the recognition that partners have diverse ways of addressing the similar climate-related challenges and that exchange of knowledge is important in broadening the understanding of climate resilience practices.

The sharing of good practices was also done through the monitoring visits of the climate thematic advisors. For example, beekeeping as a successful new climate resilience activity was spread from a partner in **Zimbabwe** to another one in **Senegal** through the visits and recommendations made by the



Felm advisor. Similarly, the need to add poultry and small ruminants to intensify the climate resilience actions in Senegal, was added into the project through the good example from Zimbabwe.

Overall, the majority of Felm partners implementing projects under Outcome 1 have increased their capacity in climate resilience as a targeted action through the trainings and advising from Felm. There is visible progress also in mainstreaming of climate resilience into other than climate-related projects (under Outcome 2&3). Climate issues are incorporated into teaching and educational materials for children and in adult literacy in Senegal, and in teacher training in **Tanzania**. Additionally, in **Cambodia**, a disability project has been promoting environmental education through their materials. There is some progress in the three-step model especially among partners who are implementing climate resilience as a targeted action since many are actively engaging in promoting climate resilience through awareness raising in different ways and different forums. Some educational projects are also promoting climate resilience through awareness raising.

Given the Felm partners' increasing interest and need to engage in climate advocacy, an introductory training to climate advocacy was provided to all partners in 2023. Two partners were selected to share examples of their projects as case studies for others to learn from. Additionally, partner visits commenced, with **Ethiopian** partners visiting their **Tanzanian** counterparts.

Throughout the year, the development of "Felm's Climate Resilience Marker" progressed. This marker is based on the "Building Resilience to Climate Change and Disasters' Toolkit" developed in the previous program period. The Marker assists all partners in utilizing the Toolkit to enhance their climate resilience. The questions and layout of the Marker have been drafted and the piloting will be done in 2024. Moreover, the marker utilizes KoboToolbox as a server, enabling partners to collect data online and enhance their skills in data management.

## **Gender equality**

Felm partners have varying expertise in gender justice. Therefore, the objective is to achieve at least the do-no harm level of the three-stage model of gender justice during the program implementation. During 2023 this was advanced by providing training in gender justice for the partners. The trainings were conducted by Felm staff and by local, consulting advisors, as well as consulting advisors from Fingo. Partners in Cambodia, Nepal, Myanmar, Zimbabwe, Senegal, Mauritania, Ethiopia, Tanzania and Colombia have received gender training during 2023, but the need for future training varies greatly amongst partners.

To achieve the do-no harm level, partners should conduct a gender analysis and devise a gender plan for their work. For instance, in **Nepal**, partners have conducted a gender analysis, and this has led to concrete changes in their work. SAHAS<sup>27</sup> has developed recruiting methods to allow women to be prioritized in the process. CMC-N<sup>28</sup> updated their GESI (gender equality and social inclusion) and PSEAH policies and included equality as a subject in teacher training. Not all the partners who partic-

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<sup>27</sup> NPK003

<sup>28</sup> NPK005

ipated in training sessions completed the gender analysis, since the diversity in the knowledge before the training was so notable.

According to the pre- and post-training survey, the understanding of the effects of gender in everyday life increased, as well as the knowledge of gender policies. For instance, the participants of the Ethiopian training responded that gender justice is now at the core of their focus, and they want to discuss it with colleagues to put it into practice. Some of the partners will need more support in conducting gender analysis, and this will be conducted during 2024.

### **Rights of persons with disabilities**

Regarding the cross-cutting objective of disability inclusion, Felm's priority development project is to expand the use of Washington Group data collection tools at program level to improve disability inclusive data collection and programming. In 2022, Felm started pilot projects with two partners, Integral Cooperation Cambodia (ICC) and Zimbabwe Council of Churches (ZCC), to gain experience of the use of the Washington Group data collection tools. In 2023, these pilot projects were continued. The pilot projects demonstrated that both Washington Group Short Set (WG-SS) on Functioning and Washington Group/UNICEF Child Functioning Module are suitable tools for collecting data on functional difficulties which may place people at risk of limited participation when they meet barriers in their environment. However, it was observed that the high-quality utilization of the WG-SS at program level will be a long process, requiring resources and capacity building in data collection and analysis. This learning was considered when planning the program level recommendations and trainings for the use of WG-SS in mid-term data collection. The WG-SS questions were integrated into the household survey format and instructions of the mid-term data collection conducted by Felm's partners, providing data to the Felm program outcome and impact indicators in Outcome 1.

In 2023, Felm's development cooperation partners were provided both training sessions and peer learning opportunities on disability inclusion. Peer learning and sharing opportunities were provided in the theme of disability advocacy for the partners focusing specifically on the rights of persons with disabilities and in the theme of mainstreaming disability inclusion for other partners. All Felm's partners were also invited to a one-day training session focused on disability inclusive data collection and the Washington Group approach to strengthen their skills in data disaggregation by disability status.

While some of Felm's partners have strong expertise in the rights of persons with disabilities and disability inclusion, many of the partners still have limited knowledge and experience of practical and meaningful ways to enhance disability inclusion in their day-to-day work. Therefore, Felm's priority development project, training, and peer learning sessions have strongly focused on strengthening the do no harm-level in the first years of the program implementation. In the countries or regional settings where Felm has partners with strong expertise in the rights of persons with disabilities, a very effective way to mainstream disability inclusion is to facilitate collaboration between partners. For example, in **Cambodia**, Felm's partners ICC and Morodok have successfully collaborated with Epic Arts in strengthening awareness of the rights of persons with disabilities.

## 6.6 Contributions to the development policies

Appendix 10 indicates the alignment of the Felm program to the development policies, including UN Sustainable Development Goals, DAC indicators, development priorities of MFA and MFA aggregate indicators. The impact statement of the program contributes to the achievement of the development policies, as well as each outcome area contributing directly to different SDGs and providing inputs to the MFA aggregate indicators.

Outcome 1 is in line with Finland's Development Policy priorities of Rights of Women and Girls and Peaceful, Democratic Societies, Climate and Nature as well as Sustainable Development Goals (SDG10, SDG1, SDG2, SDG13 and SDG16). Some of the Outcome area's indicators provide inputs to the MFA's aggregate indicators.

Outcome 2 is in line with Finland's Development Policy priority Quality and Inclusive Education as well as Sustainable Development Goal 4. Some of the Outcome area's indicators provide inputs to the MFA's aggregate indicators.

## 7. Sustainability and capacity building

### 7.1 Developing Felm's capacity

Felm staff training was practically oriented and focused on supporting understanding in key processes as well as the tools and the concepts used in the program. These included for example financial management capacity development for regional staff and advisors. Staff members both delivered training and took part as participants to thematic training sessions designed for partners in gender equality, non-discrimination and inclusion of persons with disabilities, climate resilience and low emission development, and psychosocial support. The benefit of this was that regional advisors and partners gained common ground in the understanding of the concepts. In the spring, a staff conference for Southern and Eastern Africa was used to provide a climate presentation and induction in triple nexus.

### 7.2 Capacity building of the partner organizations

The partner training sessions continued from the previous implementation year with an emphasis on further building key capacities and know-how and thus fostering stakeholder engagement to the program priorities and targets. The training sessions have also made it possible to build concrete linkages and synergies between partners and their projects. The training sessions were realized both in hybrid meetings where the trainer and the participants connected via online tools or face-to-face. Simultaneous interpretations were used for general training sessions where appropriate. For more in-depth training, face-to-face and local languages were preferred.

Partners in all four regions (South and South-East Asia, East and South Africa, West Africa and Latin America) received training in **child welfare guidelines**, followed by **child protection** flash training to complete the understanding on child rights. Two-day **gender training** was provided for Ethiopia and Tanzania in the spring followed by Senegal, Mauritania, Colombia and Zimbabwe in the autumn. The focus of the gender training was to ensure a human rights-based concept on gender equality and to

introduce the three-step model of the mainstreamed theme for the purpose of ensuring that the do no harm level be ensured throughout the program. The combined gender and Washington Group training for Senegalese and Mauritanian partners received very positive feedback from the participants, as it was considered very contextualized and included practical sessions involving project /partner -specific issues.

Peer learning events in climate sustainability and disaster risk management were tailored to all partners. In Kishapu, **Tanzania** for example, a one-week peer learning visit between Ethiopian and Tanzanian partners focused on dryland agriculture. The sharing of the methods and knowhow of the Ethiopian partner, who also runs an MFA funded climate resilience program, resulted in a partner WhatsApp group filled with pictures and ideas that partners wanted to add to their projects. This especially had an impact on the agricultural water management practices within the Tanzanian TCRS project<sup>29</sup>.

Special focus was given to **Myanmar** partners, who could not be trained within the country due to restrictions on movement and free expression. The Myanmar partner joined for example the sessions held in Cambodia to make sure that a safe space could be provided for the training participants. In July and September, the project manager of LSDO<sup>30</sup> participated to the 7th international conference in Mother Tongue Education in Bangkok.

All partners benefited from global training on **climate updates** as well as focused training on the **Washington Group** tool for disability inclusion.

According to the capacity building strategy peer learning was the preferred methodology used for partner capacity enhancement during the second implementation year. Capacity building events in the rights of persons with disabilities and mainstreaming of disability inclusion were tailored for both disability focused partners and for partners working in climate change and inclusive education sectors. This allowed for the development of more meaningful contents for both highly specialized actors and those partners working mainly in other thematic areas.

For example, in **Ethiopia**, in June 2023 Felm Climate Advisors organized a 2-day online peer-learning training session for partners that contribute to Outcome 1 or have climate resilience components in their projects. During the training all partners were asked to present their best practices such as wood-saving stoves, bio-gas use, agriculture methods, water saving and harvesting methods etc. to each other. Mutual learning on sharing of best practices brought new ideas and perspectives to the partner. In September 2024 Felm Climate and Advocacy Advisors organized an introductory training on climate advocacy which was attended by many Felm partners. The training included basic knowledge of what can be done to advocate for climate justice and how some Felm partners are already doing it.

Peer learning included further sessions in inclusive and first language education and climate fairs. The peer learning involved the sharing of good practices and was highly appreciated by the partner organizations.

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Where appropriate, the partners also received Felm support in updating their financial management and the use of Felm's finance reporting formats. For example, in **Nepal**<sup>31</sup> financial monitoring and capacity building was carried out in spring, in addition to the regular contact between Felm and partner finance teams. The findings included that the partner had followed their own procurement requirements rather than following the stricter Felm requirements described in the Felm manual. The management of the partner was brought up to ensure that all personnel who are managing procurements know all Felm's requirements.

For example, in **Myanmar**, the ECDC<sup>32</sup> staff received requested a training in project contents, tools and methods development involving adapted methods such as the Easy Picture Communication App and Good Life cards. The thematic advisor also provided support for developing training materials and social inclusion guidelines.

### 7.3 Sustainability of the projects

Projects were instructed to produce a separate Sustainability and Exit Plan during the first year of implementation (2022). The Sustainability and Exit Plan outlines the project's phasing out strategy and action plan to achieve the desired state of institutional, economic, socio-cultural, technological, and environmental sustainability by the end of 2025. This plan helps partners to particularly consider ways to strengthen the capacity, capability, and motivation of the local context to sustain the project results and take responsibility of the continuation after the active project phase.

Four projects could not submit their Sustainability and Exit Plans in 2022. However, three of them submitted plans in 2023. One of the Myanmar projects was not able to produce the plan as the increasingly difficult political situation in the country made it impossible to implement the project according to the plans. The project plan was revised in 2024.

In general, in 2023 projects continued implementing their Sustainability and Exit plans alongside and in connection with the project activities. Although some partners found it difficult to develop the Sustainability and Exit plan at the early stage of the project, a separate strategy and action plan has proven to be an effective methodology to systematically consider and develop the sustainability aspect of the projects.

Regardless of project's thematic outcome area, projects reported several common sustainability-promoting factors fostered in their work: 1) respecting and building on the socio-cultural values of the local community, 2) maintaining and developing the local community's sense of ownership of the project and its achievements, 3) building capacity and equipping beneficiaries with the necessary resources and skills that they would pass on to others in the longer term, 4) involving, advocating and cooperating with various stakeholders, such as government officials, CSOs and other actors.

Given that climate change is the most critical challenge for the sustainability of all the achievements, it is necessary for partners, regardless of their thematic focus area, to build their capacity to prepare

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for climate related risks and adapt their work to a changing environment. Some partners working on Outcome 2 (education) and Outcome 3 (rights of persons with disabilities) report having cooperated with Felm's other partner organizations specializing in climate resilience. Also, some partners working in education or in the rights of persons with disabilities shared their expertise to the climate resilience projects. This kind of knowledge exchange and mutual learning benefits the projects as well as promoting the sustainability of the whole program.

As withdrawal plan, most projects plan to transfer the project operations progressively to the communities, institutions, or other development actors, and to the local governments as duty-bearers. A third of the projects plan to phase out from some areas or hand over responsibility to local agents at the end of the program. Only project is scheduled to phase out completely by 2025. Most projects hope to continue with a new project phase after 2025, either with Felm's support or another funding source, including the projects in West Africa where Felm's support will discontinue after this program period. As a result of Felm's change negotiations held in the autumn of 2023, Felm decided to withdraw from a few operating countries by the end of 2025 and 2028. In terms of development cooperation, this means that Felm's support for development cooperation projects in **Senegal** and **Mauritania** will not continue after the current program period. Felm started preparing for the exit processes at the beginning of 2024 in cooperation with partner organizations in these countries.

## 8. Risk management

### 8.1 The risk management system

Felm's integrated risk management system covers various levels of operation (organization, program, regional and program level). The system and processes at all levels are described in the Felm Development Cooperation Program's PMEL-plan and other program documents.

**Risks at the program level are assessed annually**, mostly based on the country-specific reporting from Felm staff in the regions. The risk data, consisting of an assessment of probability (on a scale of 1-5) and impact (on a scale of 1-5) of each program-level risk per country, as well as information on materialization of the risk and risk mitigation measures implemented, is compiled via Felm's web-based reporting system as a part of the annual reporting cycle. This allows for the analysis of risk trends and informs management on key areas where risk management needs to be reinforced. The web-based reporting system also allows Felm to keep a record of risk materialization. Some program-level risks, however, are assessed annually by the program management. These are risks that the program management is better placed to assess, such as risks related to cuts to the ODA funding in Finland. Felm field staff continuously monitor the operational environment and partner's project management and implementation and keep the Regional Director, as well as the program management in Helsinki up to date of any urgent or unexpected developments. These are dealt with as part of regular program management on a continuous basis.

**The development needs of the risk management process, tools and structures** were discussed at the program level in 2022, and Felm's risk appetite, clarifying and enhancing the linkages, roles, and cooperation between the organizational, regional and program level risk management were identified as areas of improvement. A management audit, commissioned by the MFA and executed by KPMG, was

launched at the end of 2022, and the final report was received in April 2023. The report pointed out a total of six observations, two of which were of a minor level and four of a moderate level. The overall observation on risk management states that the risk management arrangements related to development cooperation and program-based support are at an appropriate level. However, some gaps in coordination at the organizational level were noted. The report recommended Felm to take risk management as a priority in 2023. Discussions on the development of internal audit function had already started in Felm in 2022, however, the change negotiation processes during 2023 postponed the implementation to a later date.

The program's risks were reassessed during the annual reporting period in early 2024. The risk level of each risk in the program's risk register was determined as the average of the risk level reported by country, apart from the risks assessed by Felm Helsinki.

In 2023, **no new risks were identified, and no risks were removed** from the program's risk register. The new risks identified in 2022 were monitored and reported first time in connection with the 2023 annual reporting. These risks are related to information warfare undermining Felm's rights and knowledge-based approach, duty-bearers' faltering commitment to the implementation of the CRPD and cuts to development finance in Finland due to the change of government.

## 8.2 External risks from changes in the operating environment (contextual)

**The overall risk level from the external program risks increased in 2023. Various external risks materialized**, even if their risk level was assessed as moderate at the program level. Most of the materialized risks concerned **Ethiopia** where conflicts and unrest in project areas limited operations and, most of all, **Myanmar**, where the grave consequences of the military coup increasingly restricted the freedom of speech and CSO operational space, making cooperation with the duty-bearers very complicated. This has caused an economic and security crisis which is also severely limiting project implementation and monitoring. Due to the security situation, monitoring visits are conducted by the local staff only. Mitigation measures included adapting project plans and monitoring activities and following the situation closely together with the partners and the Finnish Embassy.

The risk of deteriorating security and increased conflicts and tensions materialized fully in Ethiopia and Myanmar. The risk of information warfare undermining the rights and knowledge-based approach did not materialize, however, growing information warfare was observed in Ethiopia, Zimbabwe, Myanmar and Tanzania. **The level of external risks was mostly assessed to be at a moderate level** (7 to 12 on a scale of 1 to 25). **However, four external risks were at a high level**: the risk related to general negative economic or development trends, the risk related to climate change and natural disasters, the risk related to the limited space for civil society and freedom of speech, and the risk related to funding cuts on development finance due to the change of government in Finland. The risk of funding cuts did not materialize in 2023, however, the risk level is still considered high.

The other **three high level risks were reported as having fully or partially materialized in almost all operating countries**. Climate change affected all operating countries, damaging the environment, worsening living conditions and increasing social problems. Project implementation was slowed down in livelihood projects due to the irregular rainy seasons, drought and flooding in Cambodia, Nepal and

Senegal, and in the harsh conditions of Mauritania. Project implementation and monitoring visits had to be adapted to the conditions.

Climate change is also one of the major factors fragilizing economies and thus also interlinks with the risk of general negative economic or development trends. International tensions and conflicts, continuing war in Ukraine, inflation, food and energy crises comprised these trends. Various regional and local crises, like the election year and cholera epidemic in Zimbabwe and households' expanding microfinance loans in Cambodia, led to serious economic difficulties to many ordinary people and households. The consequences of global and local crises also hit the program's target communities and rights-holders. However, these constraints only had a minor impact on the Program.

### **8.3 Internal risks related to partners and activities (institutional and programmatic risks)**

**Internal risks, which include risks related to Felm and partners, were at a moderate level.** No internal risks were assessed to be at a high (13 to 19 on a scale of 1 to 25) or critical (20 to 25) level, while one internal risk was at a low level (6 or below). In **Tanzania**, discriminatory attitudes continued limiting the participation of women and persons with disabilities in project work. Targeted action to ensure the participation of these groups was used in response. The identification and participation of persons with disabilities remained a challenge in many contexts. This risk didn't however have major impact on the participation of persons with disabilities to the program, as clear guidelines were in place since the project planning.

The risk of negative consequences for the beneficiaries of participating in the program did not materialize in 2023. In **Myanmar**, the partner organizations and beneficiaries are both exposed to a high level of risk and need to continuously adapt their activities accordingly. Cooperation with the formal education system is not possible in the education project of a Felm partner. However, an alternative way of implementation is adapting the project to work in the informal sector.

During Autumn 2023, Felm's change negotiations resulted in staff turnover and organizational changes that to some extent limited Felm's capacity to lead its usual innovative work temporarily. Priority was given to key processes in program administration and partner support. With regular staff turnover, some program countries such as Nepal, Ethiopia, Senegal and Colombia needed extra support and attention from the Felm head offices. Staff changes in partner organizations in Ethiopia, Cambodia, Mauritania, Senegal, Tanzania and Zimbabwe limited the local implementation capacity. However, the overall results of the program show no slow-down of the progress towards project results. The risk of lack of adequate staff resources was reported to have materialized partially due to the above-mentioned changes.

During 2023, the Felm Reporting Hotline<sup>33</sup> was completely renewed and developed to meet the requirements of the whistleblower protection law and the survivor-centered principle. Felm's complaints handling procedures were also strengthened and a Complaints Committee was established, as well as

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<sup>33</sup> The Felm Reporting Hotline for sexual harassment, child safeguarding concerns, corruption, and other unethical conduct by Felm staff or in Felm supported projects

the procedure for SEAH contacts or concerns with the MFA. In addition, all Felm staff received training on the Reporting Channel/Hotline. Felm also added a new advisor position for safeguarding starting in this role in the beginning of 2024. All Felm staff was trained in child safeguarding to increase the level of vigilance. In the course of the year, Felm was contacted once through the whistleblowing channel. The case has been adequately addressed and reported. MFA has since closed the case as resolved. Protective measures need to be strengthened in all activities and should ultimately be part of everyone's job. A Symposium on the World Children's Rights Day gathered both Felm staff and partners to learn about child safeguarding, child participation and children's rights in time of climate crisis.

## 9. Monitoring, evaluation and learning

In 2023, Felm worked to improve the quality of the monitoring data, especially focusing on improving the shared understanding between partners, Felm regional staff and Felm HQ on program indicators. The program indicators are used in project monitoring, and they are essential to the program monitoring as well, as they allow Felm to aggregate results information coming from multiple projects. The quality of the program indicator data varies between projects, as those working with projects may have a different understanding and expectations regarding the indicators and how to use them in monitoring, in comparison to those working on the program level. To help harmonize the quality, Felm HQ staff went through 18 projects' (out of 33) results matrices, including all projects focusing on rights of persons with disabilities, providing comments on the use and definition of program indicators, on baseline and target values, and other indicator-related issues. This seemed to have been beneficial, since more projects provided data to the program indicators in the 2023 reporting in comparison to the 2022 reporting.

In preparation for the mid-term data collection taking place in December 2023-February 2024, Felm developed survey templates and guidance to support partners' data collection efforts. The mid-term data collection provides information for many of the Felm program's outcome and impact indicators and is conducted every two years during the program (baseline, mid-term and endline data collection). From the baseline data collection, it was observed that some partners struggle to create the survey tools needed for program outcome and impact indicator data collection, and guidance on the process may be helpful. The identification of persons with disabilities can also be a challenge when conducting a survey, and the survey template sought to solve this, making use of the Washington Group Short Set (WG-SS) of questions. This aim was to allow data disaggregation by disability, required by many of the Felm program indicators. Partners had been trained on the WG-SS, and the introduction of the WG-SS questions to the survey built on that. However, some partners already have their own robust MEL systems including survey methods, and external tools are not necessary. Therefore, the use of the Felm tools was not obligatory to projects, and the developed survey templates were intended to be modified based on project-specific needs. The templates and guidance were provided in English, French and Spanish and distributed in early December.

The use of digital data collection advanced in parallel to the mid-term data collection and survey template development. An English-language household survey template was created in KoboTools, destined to be shared with the relevant Eastern and Southern Africa Climate resilience project partners. A small internal working group collaborated to share experiences and learn about the technical features



of the tool, and shared external training materials and other information on digitalized data collection with Felm staff and key partners. However, it was observed that there is still a long way to go to be able to effectively use KoboTools together with partners, and tailored internal training and sharing of experiences would be useful. It was decided that peer-learning on data collection with KoboCollect will take place in Zimbabwe in early 2024, followed by Felm staff training in preparation for the endline data collection.

The preparation of the survey templates and instructions on mid-term data collection brought up some methodological difficulties in collecting certain program outcome indicator data. This led to the adjustment of certain indicators. Adjustments were also made to the set of program output indicators based on what was learned from the 2022 reporting, and some indicators were abandoned altogether since they didn't add value to the program monitoring.

The Annual Program Review meeting did not take place in 2023, since the autumn season was marked by personnel changes in some key positions (especially the head of the Diakonia and Development unit), the Felm change negotiations, and absence of certain key program staff. However, at the project level, the learning processes were developed in spring 2023, as the Project review discussions with partners were launched. The concept was first tested in Senegal and revised based on the feedback received. In Q2 2023, the concept was introduced to Felm regional staff in other countries, and discussions were started. However, the practice will need further development and efforts to make it an established feature of the program's MEL cycle.

At the regional level, an important event promoting learning was organized in the Eastern and Southern Africa region where Felm staff came together to discuss the regional project portfolio. Thematic peer learning activities also took place and allowed dissemination of good practices. More information on the peer learning can be found in section 7.2. of this report.

# Appendices

- 2. Updated results framework**
- 3. Changes to the indicators**
- 4. Updated risk matrix**
- 5. Financial report (against the approved annual budget)**
- 6. Auditor's report**
- 7. KPMG Management audit recommendations follow-up**
- 8. Programme projects and partners 2023**
- 9. Communications results**
- 10. MFA and SDG indicators**

