

Our year in Research

2025



Liliane
Fonds

Words from our director

"Research enables us to advocate for the rights of children and young people with disabilities. It gives us the evidence we need to challenge stigma, influence policy and create inclusive environments in which every child and young person can thrive."

Erik Ackerman

see the
strength in
every child

Advancing disability inclusion through research

2025 has been a year of bold exploration and meaningful discovery. Our research has illuminated the realities faced by children and youth with disabilities in fragile contexts, while also uncovering innovative approaches to early support and education.

Through our dedicated focus on Community-Based Rehabilitation – particularly highlighted in our flagship *Breaking Down Barriers* project – we have gathered invaluable lessons on how to sustain lasting impact. Each insight we share is the product of collaboration and resilience, and we hope these findings inspire further action and creativity toward building a more inclusive future.



CBR field worker visiting girl and her family PHOTO: BRICE GODARD

Why Liliane Fonds invests in research

Stemming from our long-standing commitment to supporting children with disabilities, we feel a strong responsibility to stay up to date with the latest developments in disability-inclusive development and to contribute to generating new knowledge in this field. To make informed decisions about our policies and programs, we therefore invest in research.

We base our approaches and strategies on research, working closely with our partners to maximize the impact of our collective efforts. Our lobbying and advocacy activities are evidence-based, all aimed at advancing the right to inclusion and protection for children and youth with disabilities.

To support and enhance local knowledge generation and expertise in disability inclusion, we also invest in strengthening research capacity in the countries where we work.

Research topics are defined together with our partners, based on local needs and contexts, to ensure that findings can be applied immediately. Whenever possible, research methods are participatory, including the voices of persons with disabilities and empowering youth to act as researchers. This approach further strengthens the relevance and impact of the research we support for children and youth with disabilities and their families.

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Breaking down Barriers: Turning research into action



Rupankar Dey doing research
in Uganda PHOTO: LILIANE FOND

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Breaking down Barriers: Turning research into action

Breaking down Barriers is Liliane Fonds' flagship initiative for translating research into action. Over time, the project has evolved from a traditional north-to-south academic partnership into a dynamic, collaborative platform. Today, collaboration between northern partners (such as Radboud University, the Netherlands), southern universities (including PhD students from Zambia, Rwanda, and Cameroon, as well as a Postdoctoral researcher) and local organisations is the norm.

By focusing on our core strategy – Community-Based Rehabilitation (CBR) – *Breaking down Barriers* now integrates research deeply with practice, ensuring that the evidence gathered leads to tangible improvements in the lives of children and youth with disabilities.

In 2025, we explored the factors that sustain CBR, with the goal of securing lasting impact in practice. The lessons learned from nearly a decade of collaboration have strengthened our ability to turn knowledge into impact, making *Breaking down Barriers* central to our mission for disability-inclusive development.



A mother in conversation with a CBR field worker during a home visit PHOTO: NUDOR



“Empirical evidence can change the world!”

DR. THOMAS MTONGA

Researcher and lecturer at the University of Zambia and supervising and contextualising the research, ensuring academic quality.

■ Read more in a short [interview](#) with Dr. Thomas

Dr. Thomas Mtonga presenting during the Breaking down Barriers conference in The Hague, 2024. PHOTO: CHARLOTTE GRIPS

■ Read more about *Breaking down Barriers* on lilianefonds.org

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Nexus: Disability Inclusion in fragile contexts

The Nexus Project marks a strategic expansion of our commitment to disability-inclusive development by addressing the compounded vulnerabilities, such as exclusion from education, healthcare, and protection services, of children and youth with disabilities (CYWD) in fragile contexts.

Through targeted research and pilot initiatives in Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Bangladesh and Indonesia, the project explores the intersection of disability with conflict and climate change, two domains where data and inclusive interventions are critically lacking.

By embedding learning into every phase, Nexus builds our capacity to operate effectively in humanitarian and climate adaptation settings. The project not only strengthens the evidence base for advocacy and programming, but also positions Liliane Fonds as a credible partner in global efforts to ensure no child is left behind in times of crisis.

The four learning briefs developed in 2025 summarize key findings on risks and needs of CYWD, potential adaptations to existing intervention strategies such as Community-Based Rehabilitation,

and approaches for collaboration with humanitarian and climate actors. These insights will guide a new round of innovative pilot projects - launching at the end of 2025 - to test context-specific solutions and strengthen inclusive programming in fragile settings.



Glory Agho

"The Nexus project for us has not just been research as usual, but research to transform the lives of children with disabilities: guiding us to design context specific interventions that are practical, inclusive and grounded in real evidence."

GLORY AGHO

Manager at [CBC Health Services](#) in Cameroon

■ Find out more about Nexus on lilianefonds.org



When disaster strikes, inclusion often does not

Children with disabilities in southern Bangladesh are too often left behind in disaster response. Discover what Marja Rijers, Adviser Monitoring and Evaluation at Liliane Fonds, learned in cyclone-prone communities (August, 2025).

■ Read what Marja Rijers of Liliane Fonds learned in [cyclone-prone communities](#)

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Digital innovation for Rehabilitation: RehApp research in DRC

How can digital tools transform rehabilitation services for children and youth with disabilities? In partnership with Enablement foundation, development organization ADED and research institute INSP, we are pioneering a research initiative to explore this question in Uvira (South Kivu, Democratic Republic of Congo).

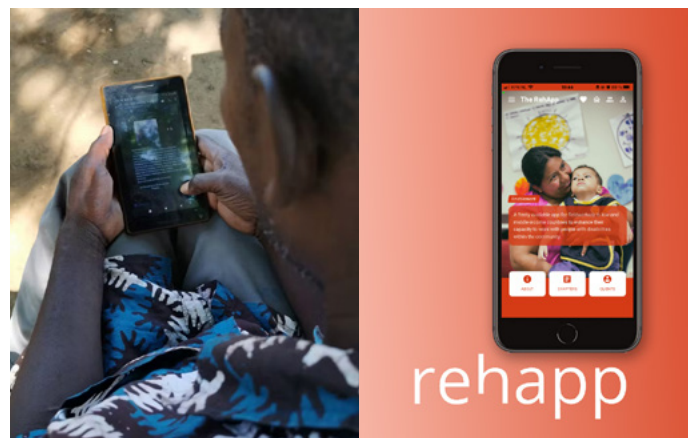
The project tests a mobile application, **RehApp**, designed to empower Community-Based Rehabilitation (CBR) workers with disability knowledge and client management features, the RehApp. With financial support from the French Fund for Innovation in Development, 42 CBR workers have been trained to use RehApp.

The research investigates how CBR workers use the tool to generate evidence on the effectiveness of digital solutions in low-resource settings and inform future scaling strategies across the DRC and beyond.

■ Find out more about RehApp on lilianefonds.org



CBR worker in Zambia (ZECREP) PHOTO: LILIANE FONDS



CBR worker in Zambia (ZECREP) PHOTO: LILIANE FONDS

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Shifting power to the next generation:

Youth-led research on access to sexual and reproductive health services

Youth are a driving force for change, yet remain underfunded, underrepresented, and unheard in decision-making spaces. Liliane Fonds is committed to shifting this dynamic. In 2022, we helped establish the first-ever Regional Council of Youth with Disabilities under the Make Way Programme.

From 2023 to 2025, youth researchers, many of whom are living with disabilities, designed and led a groundbreaking study on access to sexual and reproductive health services in Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda, and Zambia. By supporting research that is entirely youth-driven, Liliane Fonds ensures that evidence is not only about young people, but also shaped by their perspectives and lived experiences. The findings reveal systemic barriers and offer actionable recommendations for more inclusive service delivery and community development. This investment in youth-led inquiry strengthens our mission to turn knowledge into impact for disability-inclusive development.

■ Read more about the youth-led research on lilianefonds.org



Make Way Workshop with Regional Council of Youth with Disabilities in Zambia PHOTO: ROLUX MEDIA

Blog

Also see the Make Way blog post *Two Years of Make Way's Regional Council of Youth with Disabilities: the young people reclaiming their voice and influence in SRHR policy* for first-hand insight into youth-led advocacy in SRHR. (Make Way, December 2024)

■ Read the blog here [Two Years of Make Way's Regional Council of Youth with Disabilities: the young people reclaiming their voice and influence in SRHR policy](#) OR - [Make Way](#)



Make Way Workshop with Regional Council of Youth with Disabilities in Zambia PHOTO: ROLUX MEDIA

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Early Identification and Intervention:

A strategic driver of inclusive Early Childhood Development

Through the approach Early Identification and Intervention (EIEI) we advance our mission to ensure children with disabilities are supported from the very start of life. This reduces preventable mortality and combating long-term exclusion. Rooted in inclusive development, EIEI reframes early support as a child's right and embeds it into health, education, and social systems across low resource settings. Through partnerships with CHAI and JF Kapnek Zimbabwe, the initiative mobilizes evidence, builds local capacity and promotes community-based models that reach children in their first 1,000 days.



Twatasha, a young girl with cerebral palsy, receives support through community-based rehabilitation in Zambia PHOTO: MONA VAN DEN BERG

In 2025, Liliane Fonds was part of a team identifying global efforts by mapping good practices, identify existing and scalable tools, and launch a resource hub that supports caregivers, practitioners, and policymakers. From training 120 volunteers in Burundi to supporting national systems in Rwanda and Kenya, the EIEI approach is transforming how early support is delivered. By sharing practical experiences amongst countries and amplifying the work of local partners across Africa and Asia, Liliane Fonds positions EIEI as a strategic driver of disability-inclusive development; shaping policy, scaling impact and building a global community of practice.

■ To find out more about this initiative, visit lilianefonds.org

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Bridging the knowledge gap to advance education for severely disabled children

Inclusive education for children with severe disabilities remains a significant challenge, often overlooked in mainstream efforts despite global commitments like SDG 4. Recent research funded by Liliane Fonds highlights that the current provision of inclusive education primarily serves children with mild to moderate disabilities, leaving the most vulnerable behind.

Findings, derived from collaboration with Liliane Fonds partners in seven African countries, emphasize the importance of adopting specialized strategies. Key enablers include comprehensive teacher training in inclusive pedagogy, partnerships with parents, individualized instruction, and the integration of rehabilitation and life skills into curricula.

Community involvement, the distribution of assistive devices and support services such as school meals also prove vital in breaking down barriers.



Inclusive Education expert from Liliane Fonds visiting inclusive schools in Kenya PHOTO: IRENE NGOLO CDSK

The study recommends flexible teaching models, such as resource units in schools, home-based education & community-based education to provide educational opportunities for children who might not otherwise have access. These insights emphasize that only through dedicated, context-sensitive strategies, education can truly become accessible and meaningful for every child, regardless of disability.

■ Want to find out more? Visit lilianefonds.org

Inspiration Workshop organised by
Liliane Fonds for Make Way in
Zambia PHOTO: ROLUX MEDIA



What's next?

From 2026, Liliane Fonds will make research and innovation more strategic through a central learning agenda, guiding both what we learn and how we position the organisation. Key learning questions focus on reducing stigma and discrimination among children and youth and improving early identification and intervention for young children with disabilities.

New research will explore community-level approaches to stigma reduction, the effects of climate change and conflict and pilots addressing Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV), with comparative studies starting in 2027. Ongoing work continues, including Breaking Down Barriers PhD research on sustainable CBR models and the final results of the Telerehabilitation study.

Together with partners, Liliane Fonds will continue to identify new research priorities to advance the impact of programmes and advocacy.

Stay tuned for more updates and explore our latest research and insights on disability inclusion at lilianefonds.org



Research Focus Group PHOTO: AISHA IBRAHIM