Digni

Photo: Digni

Digni's Progress Report to Norad 2025

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1. General

1.1 Name of grant recipient:	Digni
1.2 Norad's agreement number:	GLO-3726 QZA-23/0002
1.3 Norad's agreement title:	Together for Just, Inclusive and Sustainable Development 2023-2027
1.4 Total grant amount:	NOK 808 800 000
1.5 Agreement period:	01.05.2023 – 30.04.2027
1.6 Reporting period:	01.01.2025 – 31.12.2025
1.7 Countries of implementation 2024:	Aghanistan, Bangladesh, Burundi, Cambodia, Cameroon, Congo, DR Congo, Ecuador, Egypt, Eswatini, Ethiopia, India, Indonesia, Kenya, Lebanon, Liberia, Madagascar, Mali, Mongolia, Mozambique, Nepal, Sierra Leone, State of Palestine, Uganda, Vietnam, Zimbabwe

2. Progress and results

2.1. Summary

Digni's 2025 progress report outlines the achievements of the third year of the programme *Together for Just, Inclusive and Sustainable Development (2023–2027)*. The programme aims to see *empowered communities and individuals living in dignity* and contributes to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development across six thematic goals and four strategic priorities. In 2025, the Digni programme reached about 658 200 direct project participants and directly affected the lives of around 3.2 million people.

Through initiatives across the portfolio, the programme has contributed towards *SDG 17. Partnerships for the Goals*. In 2025, Digni continued to strengthen networking, collaboration, knowledge sharing and peer learning across the fellowship and in strategic partnership with public, private and civil society stakeholders. Partners and members were actively involved in developing Digni's revised Theory of Change, while Communities of Practice, regional workshops, joint learning initiatives and learning resources on Fabo supported mutual exchange across thematic areas. The programme also contributed to *SDG 16. Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions* through strong civil society engagement, advocacy, rights-based approaches, protection work and initiatives promoting Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB).

The programme contributed to *SDG 3. Good Health and Well-being* by improving access to health services, strengthening maternal and child health, expanding community-based mental health services and addressing stigma. The programme also contributed to *SDG 6. Clean Water and Sanitation* through WASH training and household-level practice change. An increasing number of projects within the Digni portfolio worked to combat gender-based violence, contributing to *SDG 5. Gender Equality*. The involvement of men, religious leaders and church structures remained an important part of the response. The

programme has contributed to eliminating harmful practices and worked towards equal opportunities across all thematic areas.

Contributions towards *SDG 13. Climate Action* and *SDG 7. Affordable and Clean Energy* were made by strengthening climate resilience, environmental stewardship, sustainable energy use and climate-smart agriculture. These efforts also contributed towards *SDG 2. Zero Hunger* by improving food security, supporting sustainable agriculture and strengthening livelihoods in communities affected by climate change and environmental degradation.

Through education initiatives for children with disabilities, disadvantaged girls, language minorities, indigenous communities, and illiterate adults, the programme worked intentionally towards learning opportunities for all, as outlined in *SDG 4. Quality Education*.

Multiple initiatives contributed towards *SDG 1. No Poverty* and *SDG 8. Decent Work and Economic Growth* by strengthening income generation, savings and loan groups, entrepreneurship, vocational skills, business development and job creation. Several projects demonstrated how economic empowerment can function as part of broader integrated approaches linking literacy, civic education, livelihoods and collective agency.

Overall, Digni's 2025 report reflects a year of strong results with 89% of the projects progressing as planned or better. The Mid Term Review confirms that projects are most effective when strengthened assets become individual and collective agency, anchored in enabling conditions like public systems and community institutions. By integrating sustainability, inclusion and locally led, faith-based approaches, the programme has tackled complex challenges and achieved measurable impact. Strong coordination among partners, civil society and local authorities, alongside strategic learning reinforced these results — in line with *SDG 17. Partnerships for the Goals*.

2.2. Progress towards Digni's strategic priorities 2023-2027

In addition to the overall thematic goals, Digni has four strategic priorities that influence the overall direction, the secretariat's budgeting and work, assessment of project funding, and allocation of capacity development resources to Digni, member organisations, and partners.

Leaving no one behind

Leaving no one behind and empowering the marginalised are central parts of Digni's vision and strategy, closely connected to the concept of *diakonia*.[1] As a diaconal organisation, Digni links the values of human dignity, justice, compassion and stewardship of God's creation with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the vision of leaving no one behind. Digni's partners work with inclusive and participatory processes to address poverty, exclusion and inequality and strengthen the voice of marginalised people and their ability to influence their conditions.

At the project level, about 18 000 of the total project participants are people with disabilities. Although there has been a marginal decrease in numbers from 2024, it is still higher than in 2023, indicating both a higher awareness of inclusion and improved reporting practices.

Around 81 500 persons from ethnic minorities and indigenous groups participated in the projects, representing 12.4 % of all project participants. One project working on mother tongue education and literacy among minorities in Ethiopia contribute considerably to this. The same goes for one climate adaptation and skills training project in India, where a large number of persons from ethnic minorities are involved. Notably, this indicator is most likely underutilised due to the sensitivity of recording information about the ethnicity of project participants in some contexts.

In terms of gender balance, 59 % of project participants in 2025 were female, a slight increase from 2024. Historically, the proportion of women have been even higher in the Digni portfolio, but over the past few years we have seen a noticeable increase in men's participation.

In addition to the primary direct reach of the global Digni programme with about 658 200 project participants in 2025, a large number of people do not engage directly in project activities but are directly affected by the changes that primary participants or systems produce. In total, the Digni programme directly affected the lives of around 3.2 million people in 2025[2].

In 2025, 24 participants representing eleven partner organisations from the English-speaking part of Africa attended an eight-week course *Diakonia, Sustainable Development and Asset-Based Approaches,* organised by Digni together with VID Specialised University. The course highlighted the close link between diaconal principles such as human dignity, participation, inclusion, non-discrimination, and the sustainable development goals' overarching goal of *leaving no one behind*. Participants were equipped with practical skills in mapping and mobilising local assets. All the participants developed an action plan for how to integrate these perspectives in their organisations and reported good progress at a reunion the following year. A more condensed version of this course is planned for French-speaking partners in 2026. To further support the partner organisations' learning journey, Digni will support publishing the

[1] Diakonia is the Christian response to the needs of individuals and communities, especially the marginalised. Diakonia goes beyond charity, entailing a mutual reciprocity that seeks to reduce poverty, transform society, fight for justice and peace and empower the marginalised and oppressed.

[2] Based on portfolio analysis report, *Estimating Secondary and Indirect Reach in Digni Supported Projects* from February 2026, in Report 1 of the 2025-2026 Digni Mid Term Review

book *Locally led development in contexts of faith: Theories and methods of asset-based diakonia*, co-authored by academics in Norway and Cameroon. In 2025, Swedish Mission Council (SMC) and Center for Kirkeligt Udviklingssamarbejde (CKU) and Digni established a collaborative forum for dialogue and exchange on diakonia and asset-based approaches to ensure synergies and cooperation across the shared partner portfolio in Asia and Africa.

Strengthening Civil Society

Strengthening civil society within the Digni fellowship is a combination of project- and partner capacity strengthening, organisational development and support to locally led engagement. Together with partners and members, Digni contributes to strengthen the ability of civil society actors to mobilise communities, build collective agency, and engage with relevant decision-makers to bring about long-term positive changes in communities.

A key element is the systematic use of partner- and member assessments, working as tools for organisational development and risk management tools. These assessments identify strengths and gaps and form a basis for follow-up and learning. Complementary to these, Digni provides capacity development initiatives as well as sharing and learning arenas, including courses, workshops, Communities of Practice and digital platforms for competence development and peer learning among projects, partners, member organisations within and across countries. Together, these efforts contribute to stronger civil society actors.

Regardless of the thematic focus, bringing partners together in person is valuable, in the sense that it facilitates synergies and create relationships and a sense of joint ownership to the global Digni Programme. This was visible through several cross-partner gatherings in 2025: the regional MERL workshops; the course in diakonia; the bamboo workshop in Ethiopia[3]; and not least the exchange trip to Congo Brazzaville with 13 representatives from project partners in four countries, all working with gender-based violence (GBV). Among the key takeaways were the importance of embedding change within local churches to ensure sustainability, integrating GBV prevention into theological education, and utilising partnerships between the church and the authorities to influence policy.

Throughout the year Digni hosted several in-person and online learning events, such as knowledge management, Theory of Change (TOC) etc, as well as in coordination with our sister organisations, SMC and CKU, and their partners. Through these, we have encouraged sharing and learning between partners across our portfolios, covering topics as financial management, anti-corruption and good governance, ethical use of AI in project management, risk management, and outcome mapping. In June 2025, four partners representatives finished a one-year facilitated online course on *Church-Based Leadership Development* and in August four new participants started. The partners have expressed great benefit from the course both on an organisational, professional and personal level. Digni has actively used the online

[3] More information under *Climate and Environment*

learning platform Fabo[4] for learning events and for the creation and sharing of resources, as part of capacity development efforts in the fellowship.

Localisation

To follow up on the ongoing discourse and further strengthen locally led development, Digni has undertaken several initiatives to foster engagement on the issue. The topic of locally led development and power dynamics between donors and project partners was integrated into the workshop in Ethiopia as a part of *Diakonia, Sustainable Development and Asset-Based Approaches* course. Creating a safe space for dialogue around the topic was highly appreciated by the participants.

Partners and members have been heavily involved in the development of Digni's new Theory of Change to secure local ownership and relevance. The Community Generated FoRB Indicator Tool models show how to localise MERL and let community members and project participants define what meaningful change looks like. This is highly relevant also for other thematic areas than Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB).

Finding ways of supporting the development of partner driven Communities of Practice (CoP) is closely connected with the localisation process where the needs, interest and expertise among partners are the driving force instead of priorities set by the Digni secretariat. To best understand how this can be done, Digni had several consultations with members and partners in addition to an online survey during 2025, confirming the need, relevance and interest in CoPs in the Digni fellowship. Guiding documents have been developed and during the autumn we the early movements towards CoPs on Climate Smart Agriculture and Gender Based Violence, as well as several Joint Learning Projects with strong CoP elements.

Climate and Environment

During 2025, Digni strengthened knowledge sharing, practical learning, and competence exchange on climate change, environmental degradation, and climate-resilient development across its global partner network.

A Joint Learning project on bamboo, brought together more than 40 participants from nine countries, representing NGOs, churches, research institutions, government agencies, academia, and private-sector actors. The workshop strengthened cross-sector and international collaboration on bamboo as a tool for sustainable development, environmental restoration, and livelihood improvement. Key results included increased knowledge and practical understanding of bamboo's potential for land restoration, climate resilience, income generation, renewable energy, and sustainable value chain development. Participants exchanged experiences on propagation techniques, species selection, and context-specific applications through presentations, peer learning, and field visits. The workshop also led to the establishment of a CoP for continued knowledge sharing and collaboration.

[4] Learning site: DIGNI'S LEARNING HUB | fabo.org

Learning resources on climate and environment have been made available through Fabo, including dedicated pages on climate-smart agriculture developed through a Joint Learning project[5]. The learning resources, available both in English (2024) and French (2025), have reached up to 4 000 visits and have strengthened access to practical tools, lessons learned, and knowledge sharing across partners.

To strengthen environmental sustainability across its network, Digni has encouraged member organisations and their partners to deepen their engagement with climate-related challenges and reduce their environmental footprint. Digni's *Member Assessment* included an evaluation of the member organisations' capacity and awareness on climate and environmental sustainability. The average score of 3.0 out of 5, indicates basic awareness of environmental and climate issues, increasingly reflected in strategies and project planning. However, environmental management remains largely informal, with potential for strengthening policies, monitoring systems, and systematic implementation.

The Digni-secretariat has maintained an active and conscious approach to reducing its environmental footprint, particularly through the implementation of travel guidelines within the secretariat and across Digni-related activities. Follow-up is ensured through environmental management systems, including the 2025 renewal of the Eco-Lighthouse certification.

Religion and Development, including Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB)

Religion is central to Digni's development work and reflects the shared identity within the Digni fellowship. Faith and convictions drive efforts to combat injustice, uphold human dignity, mobilise change, and promote environmental stewardship, equality, and human rights.

Digni participates in the International Partnership on Religion and Sustainable Development (PaRD) and leads the Norwegian Network for Religion and Development. Through these networks, we engage with how faith-based actors form a vital part of civil society and contribute to social mobilisation and development. Collaboration across these platforms strengthen partnerships between faith-based actors, government, academia, and business. Together with the Network for Religion and Development, we co-hosted a seminar on *Locally led development among faith-based actors*.

Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB) is a strategic priority. Since 2023, we have strengthened the understanding and capacity across the Digni programme, with growing engagement among members and partners. Three member organisations are now NORFORB[6] members, and one additional organisation is an observer in the network. This has created fruitful networking and synergies between other NORFORB members and their partners. Interest among partners is also reflected in strong demand for the eight-week course *Redressing Religious Inequalities: a FoRB Sensitive Lens to Development* with 36 applicants to 20 available seats that took place in the beginning of 2026. A few partners from our Danish

[5] Learning site: Climate Smart Agriculture - good practices | fabo.org

[6] The Nordic Ecumenical Network for Freedom of Religion or Belief, NORFORB

and Swedish sister organisations were also accepted to ensure cross-learning between partners in our portfolios.

Several partners gained a better understanding of the relevance of FoRB as the topic was included in the workshop in Ethiopia as a part of *Diakonia, Sustainable Development and Asset-Based Approaches* course.

In 2025, representatives from some of Digni's partner organisations working with education in a multireligious context, participated in a facilitated online course *Religious Diversity and Dialogue*[7] offered in cooperation with the project *Inclusive Citizenship and Human Rights,* run by the Holocaust Centre. The focus was to equip educators with tools to promote understanding, coexistence and inclusion despite religious divides in their educational setting. As FoRB and religious literacy have been included in the application templates for two application rounds, we see a higher level of consciousness when partners analyse their contexts. Including FoRB in both the member assessment and the updated partner assessment tool, also contributes to raise awareness of the issue amongst partners and members. Together with CKU, Digni commissioned a FoRB Learning Review in 2025. This is a thorough review of 42 projects (2020–2025) supported by CKU and Digni, to identify best practices, improve measurement of results, and develop localised indicators. The review resulted in a well-received report[8], launched in October, and the innovative Community Generated Indicator Tool[9], launched in January 2026.

Both outputs have been recognised by policymakers, including the UN Special Rapporteur on FoRB, as well as academia and practitioners, marking an important contribution to the international FoRB field. Fred Nyabera, an experienced FoRB trainer stated that the report offers practitioners important lessons grounded in context. Ahmed Shaheed, the former UN special rapporteur, praised the tool saying it is truly monumental, and highlighting the tool's focus on intersectionality, transparency, sensitive contexts and power dynamics.

> "The report offers a rich and evidence-based analysis of how FoRB programming can foster meaningful change in complex and often restrictive environments. It highlights the transformative impact of locally led initiatives, interfaith collaboration, and inclusive approaches- demonstrating that strategic, context-sensitive investments in FoRB not only advance human rights but also strengthen social cohesion, gender equality, and democratic participation."
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> *Marie Juul Petersen, researcher Danish Institute for Human Rights – on the FoRB Learning Review: Freedom of Religion or Belief in Practice – Insights for Impact*

[7] Course-1 Religious diversity & dialogue – Inclusive citizenship and human rights
[8] Freedom of Religion or Belief in Practice - Insights for Impact,
[9] Community-generated-indicators | FORB Learning Platform

2.3. Thematic results 2025

This section is based on aggregated results from Digni's Global Results Framework[10], as well as narrative reports from project partners. Although projects often apply an integrated approach, Digni's results framework is structured around six thematic outcome areas. All projects report on global indicators in one or more areas, enabling Digni to aggregate results thematically. Analysis of completed projects are based on Digni's assessment of the project results reported across the thematic areas. Outcome level results show empowerment and changes at an individual and community level, whereas strong outcome and impact results indicate that there are structural changes among communities and/or at societal level, reaching beyond the project participants.

For 2025, the analysis of results is supplemented with selected findings from the Mid Term Review, commissioned by Digni and to be submitted to Norad in September.

Civil society in strategic partnership

In 2025, 83 projects reported progress towards the goal of a *society characterised by strong civil society engagement for just, inclusive and sustainable development*, with 18 projects submitting final-year reports.

The activities involved about 658 200 project participants, including around 384 800 female (59%), 18 000 persons with disabilities, and 81 500 from ethnic minority or indigenous groups. In 2025, the Digni programme reached approximately 3.2 million people directly. Almost 6 750 networks and groups solved local challenges. In 2025 alone, more than 1 800 groups were established, and 20 300 project participants, 65 % women, were trained in organisational skills. The share of women continues to increase across all indicators compared to previous years.

The more than 58 400 project participants trained on advocacy and/or human rights are nearly twice the target of 35 000 for 2025. This represents an increase of 36 % compared to 2024. Three projects in Eswatini, Kenya, and Sierra Leone, together with a regional African project, contributed significantly to this number. These projects focused on strengthening a rights-based approach through advocacy and training, particularly targeting vulnerable groups such as youth and women. A common emphasis across these projects was preventing and responding to gender-based violence. The effort resulted in more than 1 500 groups engaged in advocacy.

Of the 18 projects concluded in 2025, three have achieved impact at societal level, seven delivered results at a high outcome level, five at outcome level and two at output level.

The *Use Your Talents Institutional Development* project (UYT), implemented across more than fifteen countries in Africa, demonstrates impact-level results. UYT is an empowerment- and asset-based approach that encourages individuals and communities to identify, value and mobilise their own resources. Through utilising existing skills, knowledge, networks, and local assets, the projects address local challenges such as gender-based violence, weak infrastructure, and limited income opportunities. Rather than focusing primarily on needs and external financial support, UYT strengthens local

[10] See *Annex B: Digni's Global Results Framework 2023-2026_progress report 2025* for a full report.

ownership by building on existing resources. During the project period, the project strengthened institutional capacity through development of training modules, revised curricula in more than 12 institutions, and produced eleven textbooks. The project facilitated a "transition from a culture of dependence to a culture of local initiative", with churches and faith-based organisations (FBOs) defining their own priorities and strategies and demonstrating collective agency. Key achievements include structural changes, such as the appointment of a national UYT coordinator within a church in Cameroon and the establishment of a master's programme in Community Development at the Protestant University of Central Africa. The project has also contributed to a shift in mindset – from perceiving scarcity and self-identification as "poor" to recognition of an "abundance of God-given talents"[11], which in turn leads to agency. The project demonstrates strong scalability and network growth, expanding from 18 to 42 participating churches and FBOs, exceeding the target of 30. Overall, UYT has contributed to a growing movement for social change within churches and local communities, extending beyond the initial project participants and continuing beyond the project period.

Digni's Mid Term Review supports the report from the UYT project[12]. The review argues that projects in the Digni-portfolio using the Use Your Talents approach have made credible contributions to breaking aid dependency and foster localised socio-economic resilience across diverse global contexts.

The Mid Term Review team highlights that the methodology explicitly refuses to provide financial handouts or seed-funding but rather focus on facilitated discussion and peer-learning to "trigger a psychological shift from a deficit to an asset-based mindset". Through mapping existing resources in the communities, participants recognised that they could drive their own development. In the Mid Term Review this is labelled as *communities gained a transformative psychological asset.* Throughout project cycles *communities formed collective economic structures*, economic independency reshaped household power dynamics, and led to *shifts in gender norms and women achieving structural empowerment.* One example from Kenya, shows how female project participants went around cultural barriers to establish their business. As harvesting honey culturally was considered "men's work" in their communities, the women's group hired men to harvest honey for their new honey business. The review also points to how minority Christian groups became visible problem solvers, when they utilised local assets. There are multiple examples, from Ethiopia, Central Asia, Kenya and Mali, of how this eased community tensions.

The review concludes with a strong *contribution claim:* "the UYT methodology sparked a psychological shift that built the foundational human and economic agency necessary for communities to independently resolve complex environmental, gender, and social cohesion challenges".

In Nepal, one project working to mainstream mental health, contributed to enabling the policy environment for implementing the National Mental Health Strategy and Action Plan (2020–2025) through a combination of advocacy, legal engagement and stakeholder collaboration. An important approach was the partner organisation's filing of a Public Interest Litigation to the Supreme Court in

[11] Quote by Dr. Paul Salatou, lecturer and Vice-Dean of the Faculty of Education Science in the University of Ngaoundere, Cameroon, Final report UYT 2025, p. 1

[12] Digni Mid Term Review, component 2, draft report June 22, 2026, pp. 27-30

2020, which in 2025 led the Court to rule a requirement to the Ministry of Health and Population and other relevant ministries to establish functional mental health mechanisms at all levels of relevant government systems. This was supported by engagement with policy- and decision-makers, including ten federal-level dialogues that resulted in 40 public commitments to strengthen collective advocacy, policy dialogue and shared learning, as well as 15 collaborations with non-state actors, including 40 civil society organisations and UN agencies. These efforts contributed to improved coordination mechanisms, including the establishment of a Technical Working Committee and ongoing development of the next national strategy for mental health (2026-2030). At the same time, the project combined policy-level engagement with organisations that strengthen right-holders. Through the establishment of 25 mental health support groups and the formal establishment of one Organisation of Persons with Disabilities (OPD) in Gandaki Province and two in Bamati Province, the project contributed to increase representation and participation of persons with psycho-social disabilities in advocacy.

Another project in Kenya focused on increasing women's participation in decision-making within historically male-dominated church leadership structures. The project demonstrates how the church's faith-based legitimacy and organisational structures can serve as a platform for normalising women in leadership roles and influence community norms. The project represents an important pathway for civil society engagement in contexts where religious institutions shape civic space. It also illustrates women's entry into formal public decision-making structures in a context where they are typically excluded from governance and leadership roles within churches, communities, and the public sphere. Empowered by their new status within the church, women leaders transitioned from being passive observers to active participants in civic life. They successfully engaged in local government public participation forums, such as Ward Development Fund planning meetings. This was clearly demonstrated in Turkana where a woman was selected to the Lodwar Development Fund, where she credited the leadership training in church to strengthening her self-confidence making her more vocal especially in the advocacy training in the public sphere. Their presence and contributions in these spaces signalled a shift in community expectations, where women's voices were increasingly recognised as legitimate and necessary for decision-making. Other key results include adoption of governance practices that support transparent and democratic leadership elections, as well as increased confidence and active participation among women in the church, with more than 1 900 church leaders introduced to these practices. These changes have had spillover effects beyond church structures. For example, women leaders are now participating in local government planning forums and other decision-making spaces. There is also evidence of improved transparency and accountability influencing local committees, such as water committees and school boards. In addition, church leaders, male and female, are increasingly recognised by local authorities as credible partners in community development.

Faith-based local actors continue to be important agents of change, contributing actively to community development within the Digni programme. In 2025, around 80% of the projects engaged more than 5 700 religious or faith-based leaders for social change. More than 1 700 churches, congregations or other religious groups participated in project activities and almost 1 200 churches or religious buildings were used for project

initiatives. As in previous years, most mobilisation of faith actors and assets took place in Sub-Saharan Africa. The presence of large, well-established churches and networks with long-standing partnerships with Digni's member organisations creates favourable conditions for using these assets in project implementation. The Mid Term Review[13] highlights that the existing infrastructures of churches provide a permanent platform for physical and human assets, that reduces the short time engagement often seen in international development. Their strong community legitimacy and trust and existing physical infrastructure also enable effective mobilisation of resources and implementation of initiatives, as well as facilitation of engagement on sensitive issues related to social norms.

Digni increasingly works with partners to strengthen the understanding of religious literacy, FoRB principles, and the role of religious actors in their specific context. Further details are provided in section 2.2 under Religion and Development, including FoRB and in section 2.4 under Freedom of Religion or Belief.

In 2025, we see that projects with strong results tend to actively involve churches, mosques, and religious leaders as platforms for mobilisation, awareness raising and community dialogue. Faith-based structures can also serve as important entry points for strengthening collective agency and facilitating cooperation – both among churches and faith-based organisations at national and international levels, and between communities and public authorities, as illustrated by the Use Your Talents approach.

Two of the 18 projects that ended in 2025 did only achieve results at output level within the civil society component, while the rest of the projects were assessed to be at outcome or impact level. Although most projects demonstrate results with collective agency and empowerment, a small number of projects show strengthened individual agency, improved access to services, and increased awareness, but weaker evidence of sustained collective structures or influence on governance systems. Projects that combine capacity development with advocacy, cooperation with authorities, and institutional embedding are more likely to achieve better results at community and societal level.

Good health

In 2025, 18 projects reported progress towards the goal of *project participants and communities being able to positively influence conditions regarding their own health and well-being*, with seven projects submitting final-year reports. An additional ten projects contributed to selected indicators, despite *Good health* not being chosen as a main thematic area of the projects.

As a result of project interventions, close to 44 700 individuals benefited from health services in 2025. This represents a significant reduction from more than 145 000 in 2024. The decrease is to a large degree caused by a reduction in number of projects working on health services from 2024 to 2025, since some larger projects ended in 2024. In addition, improved data collection methodology and reporting practices contributed to more exact reporting, leading to some projects reporting lower figures in 2025, compared to previous years.

[13] Digni Mid Term Review, component 2, draft report June 22, 2026, pp. 51-52

Throughout 2025, targeted interventions on infant and maternal health, as well as mental health, led to improved access and quality of health services within these two specific thematic sub-areas.

There has been a continuous increase in the number of people receiving mental health services due to Digni-supported projects over the past years. In 2025, more than 24 700 individuals received specialised mental health services, compared to around 12 300 in 2024 and 4 600 in 2023. This significant increase in 2025 is mostly due to a mental health project that has used advocacy and rights-based approaches to improve mental health services in public health facilities and hospitals in Nepal. In addition, two mental health projects in Afghanistan contribute with large figures to the 2025 result. 5 600 individuals with physical or mental illnesses or other disabilities reported reduced stigma in their communities, a huge increase compared with less than 1 400 in 2024. In 2025, more than 5 200 individuals were trained on stigma related to physical and mental health and 2 100 on stigma related to disabilities. In total, close to 24 000 individuals were trained on water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH), resulting in 4 300 households practicing WASH principles.

Of the seven projects that ended in 2025, two mental health projects in Nepal had results at impact level, while three mental health-projects in Nepal, Afghanistan and Indonesia had results at high outcome level. The remaining two projects had results at outcome level. For these two, the health components served as supporting components, with a focus on water, sanitation or waste management.

In Bagmati and Gandaki provinces in Nepal, from 2022 to 2025, project activities to mainstream mental health through advocacy have had a strong impact on strengthening mental health and suicide prevention. At the baseline, very few programs for mental health promotion, prevention, or suicide prevention existed and limited provincial budgets were allocated. Through continuous strong civil society advocacy, technical support, and collaboration with the Ministries of Health and Social Development, mental health and suicide prevention were gradually integrated into government planning and budget. By the end of 2025, 22 multisectoral mental health programs were developed and implemented across both provinces. Provincial budget allocation for mental health rose to approximately 2% of the health budget. Multisector collaboration supported the launch of in-patient mental health services at Pokhara Academy of Health Sciences and Hetauda Provincial Hospital in 2024. More than 15 000 persons with mental health problems have received services at Pokhra Academy of Health Science and Hetauda Provincial Hospital due to increased government allocation to mental health. The strong civil society advocacy component at national and local level is key to the success of the project. The advocacy efforts and achievements of this project and the multistakeholder collaboration is further elaborated under the theme Civil society in strategic partnership.

In another Nepal-project, results at impact level were obtained by the rights-based community mental health project in Lumbini Province. Due to project activities, accessible and qualitative mental health services are now integrated into 15 local health facilities, with 44 trained health workers confident in diagnosis, treatment, follow-up, and referral of mental health patients to district hospitals. Services are available locally, supported by telemedicine and outreach, leading to a major increase in service use, from 16 users at the beginning of project to a little over 520 users in 2025. Mental health has become a part of

local government priorities, with policies, budgets, data systems, and ongoing training of health personnel in place. All facilities use standard reporting systems, enabling better decision-making, resource allocation, and targeting. Community groups actively seek services, raise awareness, and advocate towards authorities. There is reduced stigma and more open discussion on mental health—especially among women and marginalised groups – in the communities with participation of people with mental illness in public life. Neighbouring municipalities have started advocating authorities' services on mental health, indicating scalability and wider influence of the project. Local capacity, ownership, and integration into government systems and priorities provide a good foundation for continued impact beyond the project period.

In Indonesia, the mental health project implemented in marginalised areas of Medan from 2020 to 2022 has achieved strong results in expanding both access to and quality of mental health services, while simultaneously strengthening community-based and civil society structures. The project successfully shifted the focus from institutionalised care towards integrated, community-anchored approaches, combining service delivery with capacity building, stigma reduction, and advocacy. Access to services increased significantly at both hospital and primary health care levels, with innovations such as daycare rehabilitation, fast-track services, home visits, and integrated mental health activities. Service utilisation rose sharply, exemplified by the Helvetia Primary Health Centre treating more than 330 patients in 2025 compared to a baseline of 46. At the same time, local health centres improved their competence and embedded mental health services into routine care. Civil society strengthening represents a key achievement. The project established 52 formally recognised mental health cadres across all villages and created coordination structures that have been scaled up across Medan. The creation of a community-based mental health organisation as a legal CSO further institutionalised community engagement. These efforts contributed to increased empowerment, confidence, and social inclusion among people with mental disabilities. The model has demonstrated early signs of replication and policy uptake, including local budget allocations and mayoral support. However, sustainability remains uncertain, particularly due to ongoing health system reforms that may affect funding and institutional responsibility for mental health services.

The Mid Term Review team highlighted another mental health project from Nepal as an example of moving *from assets to institutionalisation*[14]. The project worked to help rehabilitate and reintegrate abandoned women, while also helping communities and the government to adopt sustainable, protective mental health support systems.

Through the project, women abandoned by their families/communities due to severe mental health issues gained treatment, recovery, and agency. Over 150 women who had been chained, locked up, or abandoned in the streets were treated and reintegrated into their communities in the rehabilitation centre. Many joined self-help groups and continue to advocate for their rights and well-being.

[14] Digni Mid Term Review, component 2, draft report June 22, 2026, pp. 34-36

Community attitudes shifted from viewing mental health as supernatural, demonic possession to understanding it as a condition treatable through medication and psycho-social support. Care-for-caregiver programs equipped families and resulted in low relapse rates after reintegration.

At the provincial level, general hospitals began operating in-patient crisis services for mental health, which did not exist prior to the project. Two government hospitals adopted these in-patient services, and the government began recruiting psychiatrists and psychologists for facilities that previously lacked mental health staff.

The project established a system where cases were referred through local governments rather than directly to the NGO, and local authorities were required to commit to a formal protection role. Patients were linked to social protection schemes, receiving monthly financial support and health insurance, which incentivised families to cooperate in the long-term care of the women. The reach of this comprehensive protection remains limited due to the intensive resources and approach needed to secure this.

To achieve these results, the project started by diagnosing the risk environment. Women with mental health issues face double marginalisation, due to their gender and disability, as well as severe stigma. This often results in women with severe mental health conditions either being locked up or abandoned on the streets. The project established an emergency care and service centre (building physical assets), while simultaneously working with psychoeducation and care-for-caregivers sessions at community level. Through the project, learning was converted to agency, as women recovered and were reintegrated into their communities. Many of them joined self-help groups, advocated for their rights and served as visible ambassadors of 'treatability'. The implementing organisation engaged government institutions through exposure programmes and partnered with crisis management centres and local police to establish referral pathways. The project mandated local governments to sign MOUs before patient intake, to ensure accountability from the state. In addition, social protection linkages (health insurance, stipends) contribute to sharing the burden of care between families and the government.

This project is not an isolated service delivery effort. It is rather an example of *assets to enabling conditions*. According to the assessment made by the Mid Term Review team, the project interventions effectively contributed to the government adopting services and providing social security. The intervention showed practical 'proof-of-concept', e.g. showed the communities and the government that empathetic, holistic care works. At the end of the project, full national adoption of in-patient services and government budget allocations are still ongoing advocacy goals. However, there is cooperation at the local government level, as well as the provincial hospital level.

Peaceful relations

In 2025, 28 projects reported progress towards the goal of *project participants and communities enjoying equal rights and live in peace and safety*, with four projects submitting final-year reports. Additional six projects contributed to selected indicators, despite *Peaceful relations* not being chosen as a main thematic area of the projects.

In 2025, slightly more than 11 300 persons actively worked with activities related to peace, conflict prevention and resolution, trauma healing and reconciliation, or addressed situations of violence, gender-based violence, or conflict in rural communities or slums in urban areas, across 14 countries in the Digni programme. The persons engaged constituted religious or traditional leaders, civil rights activists, male and female project participants, survivors of gender-based violence, widows, youth, ethnic and/or religious minorities. This represents a large increase in engagement in this thematic area compared with the 2 700 persons recorded in 2024.

There has been a gradual increase in number of projects working to combat gender-based violence within the Digni programme, from 13 projects in 2023 to 19 in 2024 and 22 in 2025. Around 92 300 persons trained on gender-based violence in 2024, and additional 37 600 in 2025, has led to an increased number of gender-based violence cases reported and handled. In 2025, close to 2 000 cases were reported compared with 1 300 in 2024 and 750 in 2023. Of these, 750 cases were reported from a project started by one of the church-based actors in Liberia, as late as in 2024.

Nearly 3 200 caregivers and parents were in 2025 demonstrating a positive change in attitude towards child development and rearing due to training, awareness raising, and other project activities. Of these, 25% were men. This has resulted in more positive parenting practices, improved family dynamics and better communication between caregivers and children in 15 projects in countries in Africa, Asia, and South America.

Around 52 300 children received various training on children's human rights. A project that started in 2024 targeting children's rights abuse, exploitation, and trafficking on the border between Kenya and Uganda recorded more than 1 500 child rights violations to which 75% were responded to. This result was attributed to a notable enhancement in the understanding and awareness of child rights and protection among children, faith leaders, educators, parents, and community members. Through ongoing sensitisation initiatives, participants acquired a deeper comprehension of various types of child rights violations, the child protection services available, and the established referral pathways.

Of the four projects that ended in 2025, two projects achieved results at high outcome level and two projects have results at outcome level.

In Cambodia, one project that achieved high outcome results has been working on building resilience among indigenous Bunong women and youth. The project objectives were to create a community safe from violence and responsive to the rights of children. In addition, the project aimed to improve and increase livelihood opportunities compatible with protecting the biodiversity of their ancestral forests, and qualitative education. The project achieved particularly strong results in peaceful relations and protection. The number of reported gender-based violence cases increased from zero to 32, with 13 cases resolved through psychosocial support and legal assistance, indicating improved trust, awareness and willingness to report abuse. A total of 78 *safe groups* were established, reaching around 680 participants, of whom 470 were women. The more extended presentation of the change process in this project is based

on the findings of the Mid Term Review team[15]. They attributed the success of the project to using locally owned and integrated approach to development focusing on cultural identity, bilingual curriculum, and economic empowerment to achieve change. The case study shows how increase in assets and agency empowered project participants to change their conditions.

The project started by identifying barriers and risks, through a needs assessment and 10-step community development process, done by the Indigenous Community Committee (ICC). This identified institutional weaknesses, drivers of school drop-out rates, root causes of child labour, and patriarchal barriers to women's participation. To build assets the project used a holistic design, focusing both on physical and human assets. The project transformed the Jahoo Gibbon Camp staff into professionals with specialised skills and led to employment of 30 young Bunong people.

Through the self-assessment process, the community recognised that the traditional matriarchal land-owner structure in the Bunong-community was not reflected in the composition of the leadership in ICC. This 'psychological shift' drove an increase in women's representation in the ICC to 40 %.

Traditional gender norms required women and children to spend two to three hours per day fetching water. By installing piped water infrastructure across the community, the project eliminated this time barrier and made it possible for women and youth to attend peer support group meetings, participate in the ICC, and engage directly in livelihood activities. Simultaneously, *Keeping Safe Groups* and after-school programs for children made children into change agents in the community. In this way, both human and physical assets were converted into agency for people in the community.

By the end of the project, community members confidently negotiated directly with government officials for resources like streetlights and road improvements. The ecotourism revenue derived from project intervention is channeled into a community-managed fund, creating a self-sustaining loop that finances community watch and forest patrol teams to defend their ancestral land (natural assets).

In Kenya, the other project assessed to reach results at high outcome level strengthened the resilience and empowerment of excluded out-of-school youth in seven sites in Turkana County by addressing challenges related to health, livelihoods and inclusion. The project engaged 310 youths who gained substantial improvements in knowledge about sexual and reproductive health rights (SRHR), psychological wellbeing, and increased health-seeking behaviour. The project established and strengthened youth civil society structures, including seven advocacy groups and a youth network. Furthermore, 21 youth champions were trained in governance, citizen participation and advocacy. The project also organised seven forums bringing 70 youth champions together with state actors, i.e. chiefs, ward administrators, sub-county officials, etc, creating structured spaces for inclusive participation in public decision-making processes.

Moreover, faith-based organisations provided trusted platforms, legitimacy and networks that expanded civic space and strengthened coordination between youth, communities and government. Evidence suggests shifting relations between youth and authorities, with greater openness to youth participation

[15] Digni Mid Term Review, component 2, draft report June 22, 2026, pp. 31-33

and tangible involvement in local decision-making, including youth elections and participation in planning processes. The project also strengthened civil society capacity by leveraging faith-based actors to expand civic space and coordination. Youth demonstrated both individual agency (power within) through improved confidence and collective agency (power with) by advocating, mentoring peers, and engaging communities. Overall, the project empowered youth as active agents in their communities, improving both individual wellbeing and demonstrating high outcome-level empowerment across social, economic, and civic areas promoting peaceful, inclusive and democratic coexistence.

Freedom of Religion or Belief

In 2025, five active projects were categorised as FoRB-projects. Four projects operate in the SWANA-region[16], where traditional human rights work and advocacy are challenging. These partners have leveraged media, online platforms, and networking, generating results not always captured by Digni's global results indicators.

The reports show that, despite regional instability, partners achieved notable outcomes in 2025. Keeping regional media broadcast aside with millions reached and hundreds of thousands of interactions, almost 7 800 persons have been exposed to FoRB awareness raising activities and 3 350 have actively engaged and responded to the content in various ways, e.g. through participation in webinars, community fora and other safe spaces. In 2025, 210 persons have received thorough training in FoRB and more than 1 630 persons actively promoted FoRB.

In Palestine, 46 women and religious leaders from religious and ethnic minorities participated in safe spaces for reconciliation in 2025. According to the FoRB Learning Review report "Musalaha's tried and tested reconciliation methodology achieves the seemingly impossible by bringing Israelis and Palestinians together in dialogue and joint action using faith-based principles with a multidisciplinary approach to reconciliation as a starting point for addressing FoRB violations". [17]

Across SWANA, around 100 various media productions by SAT-7 generated tens of millions of views in 2025, amplifying carefully framed FoRB messages and normalising inclusive narratives in public discourse. This was combined with deep, localised interventions such as active feed-back mechanisms and 49 in-person follow-up workshops, with close to 1 500 participants, to foster personal reflection and change.[18]

In a Regional Africa Project, the partner organisation PROCMURA trained 84 women as FoRB trainers in 2025, enabling them to lead community discussions and activities using the Local Change Makers

[16] South-West Asia and North Africa, also referred to as Middle East and North Africa (MENA)
[17] Freedom of Religion or Belief in Practice - Insights for Impact,, pp. 46-47
[18] Freedom of Religion or Belief in Practice - Insights for Impact, p. 51 presents SAT-7 as a case study of the good practice of going both broad and deep with media campaigns.

Course[19]. 580 religious and community leaders, women and men, have participated in community forums fostering open dialogue about FoRB and gender related issues. The project contributed to positive changes in attitudes and practices, with religious and traditional leaders actively and publicly promoting women's rights and FoRB.

One SWANA-project that ended in 2025 showed results on a high outcome level, despite being in its first four-year period and with implementation across the challenging context across the region**.** It combined faith-based dialogue, digital platforms, media engagement, and regional networking to successfully reframe FoRB from a Western concept to a locally grounded, legitimate concern linked to human dignity. The project provided substantial knowledge-, relational-, and institutional resources to civil society actors (such as a well-functioning digital platform[20], media productions reaching over 5 million people, interreligious charter, trainings etc). It managed to build confidence among participants to act upon learning and knowledge. Evaluation documented attitude and behaviour change among strategic participants as religious leaders, civil society activists, journalist etc, including increased civic activism, replication of FoRB initiatives, and stronger interfaith cooperation. FoRB discourse to some degree entered media, parliamentary debates and institutional conversations. In 2025, the project culminated with a regional FoRB conference, attended by roughly 90 participants representing a broad mix of stakeholders from 13 countries. As a result, a regional FoRB network with 50 participants was established, with a five-year strategy to function as a platform for knowledge exchange, advocacy coordination, monitoring of FoRB violations, and cross-border collaboration. The collaboration continues and deepens in the new project phase 2026-2030. Networking is highlighted as one of the good practices in the FoRB Learning Review.

Environmental sustainability

In 2025, a total of 20 projects reported progress towards the goal *of project participants and communities are resilient to climate change and exercise responsible stewardship of the environment*, with three projects submitting final-year reports. Additional two projects contributed to selected indicators, despite *Environmental sustainability* not being chosen as a main thematic area of the projects.

The 2025 results continue to reflect a strong emphasis on building resilience and promoting environmentally sustainable practices across Digni's project portfolio. Key results in 2025 include more than 8 600 farmers adopting climate-smart and environmentally friendly agricultural methods; almost 5 700 farmers reporting increased yields; and over 330 communities implementing plans to address

[19] Local Change Makers Course is a resource produced by the FoRB Learning Platform, under NORFORB. Digni is a part of the management group of the platform. Freedom of Religion or Belief in Practice - Insights for Impact, p. 40 presents PROCMURA as a case study of the good practice of equipping local trainers of trainers using ready-made toolkits that can be localised.

[20] Bihorriya platform is a digital FoRB hub that enables knowledge exchange, cross-country collaboration, and sustained engagement among religious, civic, and academic actors with 19 000 users across the region and 100 000 user interactions.

deteriorating environmental conditions showing an increase in results compared with 2024. The number of persons trained in climate change adaptation remained high at slightly above 22 000, broadly in line with the 2024-figures, while almost 8 400 persons were trained in natural resource management, slightly below the 9 100 reported in 2024.

The figures confirm continued emphasis on climate-smart agriculture, adaptation, disaster risk reduction, sustainable energy, and natural resource management. The most notable increase compared with 2024 is in the number of people benefitting from sustainable energy sources, which rose from 690 in 2024 to almost 5 700 in 2025. This increase is mainly linked to two larger second-year projects that began reporting activities under this indicator in 2025. Also, a significant increase in farmers reporting increased yields, which grew by 49 %, and farmers trained in climate-smart and environmentally friendly agricultural methods, which increased from about 6 700 to 10 200. Female participation remained balanced with 50 % across the thematic area, compared with 51 % in 2024.

The aggregated results are influenced by a few larger projects. One project in Vietnam accounts for around 92 % of all persons trained in disaster risk reduction management and 63 % of persons trained in natural resource management. Another initiative in Bangladesh accounts for 48 %. Two projects in Kenya and Cameroon together account for more than 75 % of persons benefitting from sustainable energy sources in 2025. This concentration of results shows that the aggregate figures should be interpreted with caution, as several indicators are driven more by changes in reporting from a few large projects than by broad-based progress across the portfolio.

Overall, the 2025 portfolio shows continued progress in strengthening local capacities, practices, and systems related to environmental sustainability. While most indicators show clear quantitative increases—particularly in training, adoption, and yield improvements—these gains are mainly at output and outcome level. Fewer projects demonstrate structural change at institutional or societal level, as reflected in the limited number of final-year projects reaching high outcome or impact level. Stronger results are associated with projects that combine technical interventions with community organisation and institutional anchoring, while translating these gains into sustained, large-scale impact remains constrained by limited influence on broader governance and environmental systems.

Of the three projects that ended in 2025, no projects achieved impact at societal level, one project demonstrated results at a high outcome level, and two projects have results at outcome level.

Examples from the 2025 final reports illustrate different pathways to strong results.

One Ethiopian project shows high outcome-level results with clear improvements in climate resilience, food security, and sustainable livelihoods. Climate-smart agricultural practices, water harvesting systems, and agroforestry have been widely adopted, contributing to reduced soil erosion and improved water availability. The reduction in food shortage periods and the transition from subsistence to surplus production demonstrate tangible household-level impact. Importantly, replication by neighbouring communities and uptake of practices by regional authorities indicate emerging effects beyond the immediate target areas.

Another project in Ethiopia demonstrates outcome-level results through institutionalised improvements in waste management systems. Regular waste collection services are now established, with a significant increase in households paying for services. Community ownership is strengthened through sanitation committees and a locally enacted bylaw providing a legal framework for enforcement. Behaviour change is evidenced by declining penalties over time, indicating increasing compliance. The project also links environmental management to livelihoods through organised waste collection groups and income-generating activities. Remaining challenges, such as continued waste burning, suggest that results are not yet fully consolidated.

In Cambodia, one project demonstrates outcome-level results primarily through strengthened community agency and engagement in environmental protection and the promotion of climate-smart agricultural practices. Communities show increased awareness of climate change and environmental degradation, and collective actions such as clean-up campaigns and forest protection initiatives have been established, while nearly 1 000 farmers were trained in climate smart and environmentally friendly agricultural methods. While these results reflect meaningful behavioural change and strengthened "power within" and "power to", structural environmental outcomes remain limited due to external drivers of deforestation and constrained influence over decision-making processes.

Overall, the 2025 portfolio shows continued progress in strengthening local capacities, practices, and systems related to environmental sustainability. Stronger results are associated with projects that combine technical interventions with community organisation and institutional anchoring, while limitations are linked to challenges in influencing broader structural and environmental governance conditions.

Quality education

In 2025, 22 projects reported progress towards the goal of *learners in project areas acquiring relevant high-quality education*, with four projects submitting final-year reports. Additional seven projects contributed to selected indicators, despite *Quality education* not being chosen as a main thematic area of the projects.

Education interventions have different focus areas, including girls' school attendance, functional literacy training for adults, mother-tongue based multilingual education, inclusion of learners with disabilities, and vocational training.

Nearly 450 educational institutions documented improved student performances, half of which were in Madagascar, and more than 6 500 adults completed functional literacy education in 2025. Of these, the vast majority were in Ethiopia. Nearly 290 000 learners, 50 % girls, where enrolled in target educational institutions, mainly in Ethiopia, Kenya, Madagascar, Mozambique, and Vietnam. This 44 % increase from 2024 mainly reflects the inclusion of previously unavailable results data from Madagascar. Ten of the projects worked specifically on inclusion of children with disabilities. More than 1 200 teachers have been trained in inclusive education, while more than 1 200 children with disabilities were enrolled in the targeted schools.

Of the projects that ended in 2025, the projects in Vietnam and Cambodia are examples of results at high outcome level, while the projects in Bangladesh and Kenya demonstrate results at outcome level.

The two projects in **Bangladesh and Kenya** expanded education opportunities for vulnerable women. In Kenya, literacy and numeracy training strengthened women's economic agency and awareness of the risks of early marriage and female genital mutilation, while increased school enrolment may help delay marriage for girls. Children's enrolment nearly doubled, from 1 684 at baseline to 3 256 in 2024. In Bangladesh, literacy and numeracy training had lower uptake than expected, with 28 women graduating against a target of 100. However, vocational training proved more attractive, with 105 graduates against a target of 100, reflecting participants' preference for skills linked to immediate income opportunities. Average household income for those associated with the project nearly doubled, from 36 000 BDT to 66 000 BDT.

In Can Tho, Vietnam, a key achievement was the institutional transformation of the Provincial School for Children with Disabilities into the Hau Giang Inclusive Education Support and Development Center, which (since June 2024) has been officially mandated to provide early detection, early intervention, and inclusive education support for children with disabilities across the province. This transition represents an important structural shift, establishing a provincial-level mechanism to support inclusive education within the formal education system. Cooperation between provincial authorities, education institutions, and disabled people's organisations has helped consolidate this shift through stronger provincial planning, coordination, and steering. The project also strengthened the capacity of teachers and education authorities through large-scale training and improved inclusive teaching practice.

In Cambodia, an integrated project supported the indigenous Bunong community by combining education, protection, and livelihoods interventions through community mobilisation. Near-universal enrolment was achieved in nine target schools, and dropout was reduced from 7-9 % to approximately 2-3 %. Teachers and parents reported stronger collaboration, with parents contributing resources and actively supporting school development plans. Over five years, School Management Committees evolved from having little awareness of their roles to independently producing and implementing School Development Plans. Across nine partner schools, almost 70 school development plan actions were carried out, generating additional support from parents, commune council funds, REDD+, INGOs, and the Department of Education, which are indications of systemic change.

The Mid-Term Review illustrates how education can activate Digni's Theory of Change (ToC) when learning is linked to agency and local systems. In the Bunong project in Cambodia, education outcomes were strengthened by combining school participation with child protection, mother-tongue cultural relevance, parental engagement, and stronger School Management Committees. This helped move education from individual attendance to community ownership. An ongoing integrated project in DRC, also selected for case-study analysis but not part of the final-reporting sample used here, points to a similar pathway through adult literacy: reading, writing, and vocational skills strengthen human assets, while savings groups and civic education enable participants to take on new social roles and advocate with authorities. Together, the two case studies show how education can function as a catalyst across the ToC dimensions: building human assets, strengthening individual and collective agency, and gradually influencing the enabling conditions around schools, families, and local governance.

Economic empowerment

In 2025, 23 projects reported progress towards the goal of *economically empowered project participants and communities*, with six projects submitting final-year reports. Additional 14 projects contributed to selected indicators, despite *Economic empowerment* not being chosen as a main thematic area of the projects.

In 2025, more than 6 000 people, 62 % of whom were women, reported increased income compared to when they joined the projects. A total of 3 100 savings and loan groups were active, and 9 700 people received training in income-generating activities. In addition, more than 3 400 people were trained in entrepreneurship and business development, while around 130 small and medium-sized businesses received support. This contributed to nearly 700 new businesses and enterprises and close to 200 new jobs in 2025. Overall results were lower than in 2024, mainly due to the conclusion of a large-scale economic empowerment project in Uganda in 2024 and disruptions in Vietnam following the restructuring of district and provincial administration, which affected the legal registration and implementation of project activities. In most projects, economic empowerment is a relatively small component; only ¼ allocate more than 30 % of the project budget to this area.

Of the six projects that ended in 2025, two achieved results at high outcome level and three projects have results at outcome level. One project was only able to demonstrate results at higher output level. Three of the projects were implemented in Cambodia, two of which were concluded early to form part of a new country programme as of 2026.

In Kenya, a project targeting out-of-school youths in the remote Turkana region has significantly improved economic agency for project participants showing results at a high outcome level. In total, almost 100 youth in 35 groups completed market-relevant apprenticeships, reaching 93 % of the target, and 96 % immediately applied their skills through income-generating activities, creating more than 90 business ventures. To sustain these gains, four youth business hubs have helped bridge the gap from training to self-employment by providing access to tools, equipment, peer learning, mentorship and collaborative enterprise spaces. The hubs have also strengthened market linkages by exposing youth to customer demand, pricing and local service opportunities.

The Cambodia portfolio consisted of three projects and illustrates results at different levels. At high outcome level, community-led initiatives among indigenous Bunong communities reduced economic vulnerability through locally owned services and enterprises. This included a piped water system that substantially lowered household water costs and improved access to safe water, as well as the transfer of the Jahoo ecotourism initiative to local ownership. In the Mid-Term Review commissioned by Digni, the Bunong project was the subject of in-depth analysis as a case study. The evaluators found that the Jahoo ecotourism model, coupled with a smart spice farming programme, represented an effective strategy to protect the forest and ancestral land of the indigenous communities, observing that the forest is less prone to land-grabbing for plantations. Participation in the spice programme required families to commit to ending logging in protected areas, while giving them access to an alternative source of income from high demand crops compatible with local wildlife.

At outcome level, young entrepreneurs using digital learning tools reported improved profitability, while youth and farmer groups gained employment, income and market opportunities. A notable innovation was the use of a chatbot for business learning and follow-up, which enabled young entrepreneurs to access practical guidance more flexibly and has potential for further scaling beyond the original target group. The projects also contributed to eight contract farming agreements and strengthened links between producers, buyers and local markets.

Overall, the Cambodia projects show a combined picture of strong community ownership and high outcome-level change in some areas, promising outcome-level results in entrepreneurship, digital innovation and market access, and more modest outcome results where underlying vulnerability and market constraints limited progress.

In several projects, economic empowerment serves as a minor supporting component within broader integrated interventions rather than as the main project objective. This is the case in one project **in Ethiopia**, where donkey cart groups have been established as an income-generating activity for some participants and to promote waste collection to support environment outcomes within a large community. Almost 250 participants reported increased income through a variety of initiatives which also included loan and savings, livestock development, house building and more. Similarly, **in Nepal**, economic empowerment components were introduced to support individuals with mental health challenges, within a wider project context addressing stigma and access to services related to mental health. Though limited in scope, the income-generating initiatives have resulted in documented changes in the situation of project participants, justifying an outcome-level assessment. **In Tana, Kenya**, meanwhile, a large integrated development project focusing on primarily on safe water management and literacy has struggled to translate income generating skills training into sustained income beyond individual success stories. Livelihood effects remain fragile, small-scale and highly context dependent.

Illustrating the potential of well-managed integrated projects, an ongoing project in **Bas-Uélé, DR Congo**, shows how economic empowerment can contribute to Digni's wider Theory of Change when linked to literacy, vocational training, savings groups and civic education. The Mid Term Review suggests that literacy first built confidence and capability, while vocational skills and savings groups created economic room for action. Civic education then helped translate this agency into collective engagement with authorities on infrastructure and accountability. Since the project has not yet submitted a final report, the findings should be treated as mid-term evidence, but they point to a credible Assets–Agency–Enabling Conditions pathway rather than income generation alone.

2.4. Learnings

Reflections on lessons learned in the reporting year

When analysing the project portfolio, we see generally strong results across most projects, with 89% progressing according to plan or better. This is consistent with previous years and reflects Digni's strategic focus on capacity development, as well as close follow-up by Norwegian member organisations.

At the same time, results from projects that submitted final reports in 2025 were somewhat lower than in previous years, although the distribution across thematic areas remained broadly consistent. It is difficult to identify clear trends or explanations for the more modest results, but one contributing factor may be that three projects ended early to facilitate the transition to a new country programme in Cambodia. Another possible explanation may be that the 2025-cohort of completed projects just happened to perform slightly below previous cohorts. Even so, the average results remained above outcome level, and there are examples of high performing projects, particularly on strengthening civil society and mental health.

The overall picture is that projects often succeed in mobilisation, participation, attitude change and local organisation, but that lasting structural change requires more long-term system anchoring. Results are strongest when individual resources are combined with collective organisation, local ownership, institutional linkages and practical follow-up over time. This is consistent with the findings in the Mid Term Review, which confirms Digni's TOC by showing that sustainable impact is strongest when strengthened assets build collective agency and are embedded in, or contribute to the transformation of supportive enabling conditions (see below).

At the same time, observations point to an important learning area: while many projects demonstrate strong responsiveness, flexibility and local relevance, there may be scope to strengthen initial project designs for stronger duty-bearer engagement, sustainability, and exit planning. Future project proposals could benefit from more critical interrogation of underlying assumptions and causal chains in project-specific Theories of Change. This is, for example, the case for economic empowerment components, where success often depends on market linkages, value chains, stakeholder incentives and engagement, and environmental conditions.

Planning for bigger impact also requires more explicit advocacy planning, clearer duty-bearer engagement and relevant MERL tools to track change beyond activity and output level. Many projects address issues where governmental actors are only one of several relevant duty-bearers. Enabling conditions may also be shaped by traditional leaders, faith institutions, schools, markets, service providers, community networks or social norms. This means that project design should not only ask whether communities will be mobilised, but who and what needs to be influenced, through which mechanisms, and what changes in behaviour, practice or institutional responsibility the project expects to contribute to.

Particularly in contexts where public systems are weak, difficult to access or lack the capacity, incentives or resources to fulfil rights obligations, we often see communities taking matters into their own hands. In such settings, community development initiatives mobilise local resources, relationships and initiative to address concrete challenges. From Cambodia to Madagascar, we see youth- or church-led groups combine voluntary action with engagement of relevant authorities and stakeholders to address issues ranging from infrastructure repairs and livelihood opportunities to natural resource management, gender-based violence and mental health stigma. This assets-based approach is most evident in the Use Your Talents concept, whereby churches and other faith institutions pledge to resolutely go "beyond the walls of the church to transform the public space".

A further lesson is that volunteers often function as a crucial bridging layer between community-driven action and more formal service systems. This was particularly evident in projects addressing mental health stigma and access to services, where trained community-based volunteers play a key role in bridging the gap between families, communities and health institutions. This is visible in Nepal, where mental health initiatives have helped establish referral pathways up to district hospital level while also working with families and communities to improve follow-up and reduce stigma. Similar patterns are seen in Indonesia and Afghanistan, where community volunteers were instrumental in connecting people with psychosocial disabilities to services, or in mother and child health initiatives in Ethiopia, where structures such as the Women's Development Army (whose main weapon was trust, not force) helped extend outreach at community level.

The examples above suggest that, where public systems are weak or difficult to access, mobilisation of local networks and civil society actors have an important role to play in addressing gaps in formal service provision by strengthening identification, referral, follow-up and community acceptance. Importantly, this also strengthens evidence-based advocacy: when local groups and networks engage authorities and other relevant duty-bearers, they do so based on concrete experience and locally grounded evidence.

Key insights from the Mid Term Review

The present report includes selected findings from the Mid Term Review, commissioned by Digni as part of its contractual obligations to Norad. The final review report will be submitted in September; the findings presented here offer an early preview to broaden learning from Digni's project portfolio.

An integral part of the Mid Term Review was the assessment of outcomes from 83 Digni-funded projects beyond what is captured in current standard MERL systems. Combining a comprehensive desk review with qualitative research and tracing contribution in six case studies, the evaluation team analysed projects through three dimensions central to Digni's adjusted Theory of Change: assets, agency and enabling conditions. These dimensions are already reflected in several outcomes in the Global Results Framework. Applying them across the full project portfolio enables a deeper, cross-thematic analysis of results and learning.

The review found that 87 % of projects had all three dimensions (*assets, agency* and *enabling conditions)* clearly included in the design and results. Enabling conditions was the least clearly articulated dimension,

with a higher portion of the projects struggling to document and capture outcome-level progress or beyond.

Assets

The evaluators found that strengthening assets is a universal strategy in *all* the reviewed projects. As the projects proceed, the focus increases on integrating the assets into the communities in form of collective asset management, for example community-run savings groups and cooperative business models. These serve as important building blocks for resilience.

In 97 % of the projects, human assets are used as an effective entry point for wider change, for example through capacity development. The review highlights the portfolio's local and global faith-based networks as a key strength, functioning as long-term social assets beyond the formal lifecycle of projects. The most successful projects strategically connect different assets (human, social, economic, physical, natural) using one asset to strengthen and unlock another, for example using social networks to secure land rights.

The review shows that assets are most transformative when they move beyond resource delivery and become foundations for agency and longer-term enabling conditions. This is visible in projects where skills generate confidence and leadership, savings groups create bargaining power, infrastructure reduces barriers to participation, and community-managed natural or economic resources become platforms for rights protection and institutional engagement.

Agency

97 % of the projects reviewed include elements of strengthening agency. The report affirms that Digni partners not only increase participation but also address power dynamics by enabling rights-holders to build confidence, act collectively, engage duty-bearers, and influence decisions affecting their lives.

Across the portfolio, agency is strengthened both individually and collectively. At the individual level, projects help people overcome stigma, fear, and perceived powerlessness, particularly among vulnerable groups. At the collective level, self-help groups, women's groups, youth structures, and community committees provide "safe spaces" for solidarity, confidence-building, and coordinated action. The strongest examples show these groups moving beyond participation to "Power Over" e.g. through influencing institutional governance, securing public resources, and challenging traditional hierarchies.

Overall, the evidence suggests that Digni's most effective agency outcomes occur when human and social assets are deliberately converted into organised civic influence and control over resources, transforming marginalised individuals into active architects of their own development.

Enabling conditions

This dimension is present in 87 % of the reviewed projects; seeking to influence institutions, policies, duty-bearer behaviour or social norms. According to the review, the main challenge with this dimension is documenting measurable outcome-level change, as changing laws, institutional practices, and deep-rooted norms require longer timelines, sustained contextual advocacy, and stronger evidence.

Three main trends stand out in how the portfolio influences enabling conditions. First, projects are moving from service delivery to systemic advocacy, using practical results as entry points for influence. Second, they create local accountability mechanisms, where communities, committees, groups, or faith-based structures engage authorities and demand responsiveness and influence resource management. Third, they address intangible barriers, especially stigma, harmful traditional practices, and restrictive gender norms.

In sum, the evidence points to that Digni's most effective enabling-condition outcomes emerge when strengthened assets and agency are anchored into formal or informal systems, e.g. MoUs, governmental plans and religious leadership structures. In these cases, and especially when complemented with evidence-based advocacy, project gains move beyond individual or group-level change and become embedded in institutions or community norms.

Implications for Digni's project portfolio management

Although Digni will review the Mid Term Review findings and recommendations in due course, the highlights above, together with lessons from the 2025 reporting, already point to several areas for further exploration and strengthening.

The evidence broadly confirms the causal pathways in Digni's adjusted TOC. Its relevance across contexts and actors is reinforced by the presence of all three dimensions of change throughout the portfolio. The review affirms that the most sustainable outcomes emerge when assets, agency, and enabling conditions reinforce each other as a connected *chain of change*. Material, human, social, and psychosocial assets become transformative when they are activated through individual and collective agency, and then anchored in institutions, community systems, norms, or policies that allow the gains to endure.

The next step is to translate this knowledge into stronger impact-oriented project design by more explicitly mapping change pathways, stakeholder engagement and duty-bearer roles, and by investing in MERL tools that can track impact beyond output-level.

This also means strengthening the practical use of knowledge in planning and adaptation. Change is not driven by theory alone, but by partners' ability to monitor progress, observe gaps and improvement opportunities, and translate these insights into practical adjustments during implementation. Much of this work is already developing well across the portfolio and should be encouraged further. At the same time, Digni should use emerging evidence more systematically to support timely learning, adaptation and, where necessary, more substantial changes to project models that are unlikely to generate meaningful change beyond outputs and lower-level outcomes.

2.5. Significant deviations from the latest approved application and/or plan

Cambodia – transition to country programme

In 2025, three projects in Cambodia were concluded at an early stage of implementation (year 2 of the project cycle) and have therefore not submitted full final reports, but deviation reports. This reflects their

transition into the new country programme (IMPACT), managed through the Mission Alliance country office in Cambodia. The project activities, partners, and target groups have been integrated into the country programme, operational from 2026. At the point of transition, the projects demonstrated positive progress at outcome level, particularly in strengthening youth capacity, community engagement, and local organisational structures. However, some results, especially related to sustainable income generation and employment, remained partially achieved due to structural constraints such as limited private sector engagement and labour market barriers.

2.6. Risks

Overall Risk Management Framework

Digni's risk management framework provides a robust foundation for informed decision-making by leadership at all levels and supports systematic risk identification, analysis, and mitigation. The framework includes tools and procedures designed to strengthen risk management across the Digni secretariat, member organisations, partner organisations, and individual projects.

Risk management at project level

A formal risk analysis is mandatory for all projects receiving financial support from Digni. The analysis is updated annually, reviewed by partners and member organisations, and finally approved by Digni's advisors. All projects assess risks and unintended consequences related to Norad's cross-cutting issues.

Risk management at partner level

In 2025, Digni further strengthened its approach to partner-level risk management through a revision of the Partner Assessment Tool. The updated toolbox was finalised and made available to member organisations via Digni's e-learning platform Fabo. The revision introduced improvements and also aimed to prepare for the comprehensive assessment of all partners planned for spring 2026. As part of Digni's regular monitoring system, member organisations reported on and submitted revised risk scores for 2025 and follow-up plans through Digni's project management system (DiP). These measures are to be reported and the scale runs from 1 (high risk) to 5 (low risk). It is also integrated into the ongoing dialogue with member organisations, as well as into partner monitoring during field visits and through concrete action plans.

From 2024 to 2025 the risks have been slightly reduced: the average score increased by 0.03 from 4.317 (rounded to 4.32 in the 2024-report) to 4.32 in 2025, compared to a baseline of 4.17 in 2022. The improvements are mainly found in the categories "Logistics & Procurement", "Compliance" and "Strategy & Program".

Risk management at member organisation level

Digni's Member Assessment Tool was launched and deployed in 2024. By the end of 2025, all 17 of Digni's member organisations had undergone a member assessment, conducted by external consultants, to ensure an independent and systematic review. Following the identification of risks within each

organisation, Digni collaborates with the respective member to develop a follow-up plan that includes targeted mitigating measures. Overall, many organisations demonstrated well-established systems and procedures. However, it is more challenging to assess the level of consistent compliance in practice, which is reflected in generally higher scores on systems than on implementation.

2025 is the first year of reporting the risk score from the member assessments. The average risk score is 4.1 The areas for improvements are mainly found in the categories of "Conflict of Interest", "Procurement", and "Environment".

The Partner Assessment tool and the Member Assessment tool have, together with the project specific risk analysis, given the Digni secretariat a much-improved understanding of the risks, and a clearer opinion on strengths and weaknesses in the Digni-chain. Common risk areas identified across several organisations have been incorporated into Digni's overall capacity development plan.

Major changes in the overall risk picture

The political climate in many Western countries has led to debates and cuts in international development aid, posing a challenge for the sector and ultimately for those who are dependent on it.

The current geopolitical situation is marked by even more ongoing armed conflicts and heightened geopolitical tensions. The Russian invasion of Ukraine has triggered a cascade of consequences, extending far beyond the Ukrainian population. Simultaneously, the conflict in the Middle East and in other regions continue to pose substantial challenges to the operational capacity of some partner organisations and the well-being of affected communities. Some projects, for example in Lebanon, and Mali have had to adjust their activities due to conflicts and wars that has hindered their progression. Despite adversities, it is noteworthy that 89 % of Digni projects have progressed in accordance with, or exceeded, their plans.

Cross cutting themes

In December 2025, Digni offered a facilitated online course in risk analysis and management for partners and members, with a focus on understanding the risk of unintended negative consequences. There were 150 registered participants, and the feedback was overwhelmingly positive. We could also note improvements in the deliveries of risk assessments at the project level during spring 2025.

Human rights

Digni is committed the human rights compliance requirements regarding inclusion and non-discrimination in relation to LGBT+, as expressed in Digni's Position paper on SOGIE rights. At the same time, strengthened requirements related to inclusion and non-discrimination of LGBT+ may have unintended consequences if not carefully managed and monitored. Clearer expectations and dialogue with partners may, in certain contexts, lead to heightened tensions or operational challenges. Local partner organisations operating in restrictive or conservative environments may face reputational risks, reduced community acceptance or even legal constraints. This can, in some cases, result in more cautious engagement or superficial compliance, and ultimately also affect negatively the LGBT+ community.

Regarding the inclusion of people with disabilities, the introduction of reporting requirements has contributed to a significant increase in both attention and participation – this is made evident by a 58 % rise in participants with disabilities between 2023 and 2025 (compared to a 28 % increase of project participants overall). However, a strong emphasis on quantitative reporting may also carry risks. These include incentives to prioritise easily measurable participation over meaningful inclusion, quality engagement, and long-term outcomes. Digni seeks to mitigate these risks through continuous dialogue with partners, capacity development, and a focus on balancing compliance with context-sensitive, meaningful inclusion practices.

Women's rights and gender equality

Digni has observed a significant increase in both the number of projects addressing gender-based violence (GBV) and in reported and handled cases. In 2025, 22 projects reported on Outcome 3.2 (participants and communities combat GBV), up from 19 in 2024. At the same time, the number of GBV cases identified and handled increased markedly from around 1 300 to close to 2 000. This development is likely linked to heightened prioritisation of GBV among major church partners, as well as substantial investments in training in previous years. Notably, over 90 000 individuals received GBV training in 2024, compared to 37 600 in 2025, suggesting that earlier capacity-building efforts are now yielding results. Men constituted 42 % of training participants, reflecting efforts to engage broader community groups. While these trends are encouraging, they also carry potential unintended consequences. Improved reporting mechanisms and increased awareness may lead to a rapid rise in identified cases without a corresponding scaling of response capacity and support services.

Several large church partners in Africa have taken an active role in addressing GBV and have initiated regional collaboration. In May 2025, 13 partners from Congo, Kenya, Zimbabwe, and Sierra Leone convened in Congo Brazzaville to exchange experiences on GBV, church-led social transformation, and women's economic empowerment and learn from the local partner, Église Evangelique du Congo. The establishment of an African Community of Practice on GBV represents an important step, aiming to strengthen knowledge sharing and promote coherence.

Overall, Digni seeks to balance increased attention to GBV with a continued focus on responsible implementation, adequate support systems, and long-term, context-sensitive approaches that minimise unintended harm.

Climate and environment

Climate change and environmental degradation affect the poorest communities the most, with partners increasingly reporting shifting rainy seasons, reduced crop yields, and a rise in climate-related disasters. In response, Digni has strengthened awareness and knowledge-building efforts across its network. In 2025, a French-language resource hub was launched on the Fabo e-learning platform, and training initiatives have expanded following successful workshops on Climate Smart Agriculture (CSA) in 2024. This has contributed to new initiatives, including a bamboo-focused project involving 45 participants from 10 countries, and the establishment of a Community of Practice on CSA and bamboo.

While these efforts enhance capacity and engagement, international collaboration also entails potential unintended negative consequences. Increased programme activity and collaboration—particularly international workshops and exchanges—can contribute to higher levels of air travel by staff and partners, thereby increasing the carbon footprint associated with climate-related programming. These risks undermine the environmental objectives the initiatives seek to promote. Digni seeks to mitigate this tension through its environmental management commitments. The secretariat is certified under Eco-Lighthouse (Miljøfyrtårn) and actively promotes internal awareness of the environmental impact of travel, including efforts to reduce emissions and encourage more sustainable practices. Moving forward, balancing the need for knowledge sharing and partnership building with low-emission approaches, such as digital collaboration and regionalisation of activities, remains a key priority.

Anti-corruption

Digni recognises that a strict zero-tolerance policy, while essential, may lead to unintended negative consequences. A key risk is the exclusion of competent local grassroots organisations from partnerships due to limited organisational capacity, particularly in financial management, compliance, and reporting. Such organisations often possess critical contextual knowledge, local legitimacy, and access to vulnerable communities, and their exclusion may undermine localisation efforts and reduce programme effectiveness. To mitigate this risk, the Member Assessment tool is used not only to identify capacity gaps, but also to assess the ability of member organisations to manage partnerships with weaker local actors. This enables proportionate risk management and targeted capacity strengthening, rather than exclusion based on formal compliance criteria alone. Combined with Partner Assessments, this approach provides a comprehensive overview of risks across the partnership portfolio and supports informed decision-making where additional measures or capacity development are required. It allows Digni to maintain inclusive partnerships while upholding accountability standards.

Digni also recognises that project-related procurement activities may inadvertently increase corruption risks in local contexts by introducing higher cash flows and distorting local markets. To address this, Digni has, as leader of the Anti-Corruption Network for Norwegian civil society organisations in 2025, facilitated experience sharing on best practices, and preventive measures and mismanagement cases.

In 2025, a regional workshop for African church leaders, three physical spot checks of partner organisations and two financial reviews have been conducted by Digni secretariat. These, together with Member and Partner Assessments, work as preventive measures, control mechanisms, and tools to strengthen financial management.

3. Knowledge management

3.1. Evaluations and reviews

This section responds to the plans for *Results monitoring and evaluation* in Digni's Annual plan 2025, with revisions described in the cover letter to Digni's 2nd disbursement request for 2025, submitted to Norad on October 29, 2025.

FoRB learning review

As previously mentioned, Digni and CKU jointly commissioned a Learning Review in 2025 to strengthen the evidence base for effective programming, capture results, and improve monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) in the FoRB field, resulting in The report *Freedom of Religion or Belief in Practice - Insights for Impact*[21] and *The Community Generated Indicator Tool – Understanding and Measuring Change in Freedom of Religion or Belief Projects.*[22]

Drawing on desk studies of 42 projects (2020-2025), surveys, 31 key informant interviews, and 11 focus group discussions, this landmark report identifies effective strategies, recurring challenges, and key lessons across the two portfolios, both in relation to programming, implementation and capturing results. The report offers valuable insights and recommendations for practitioners, donors and policy makers.

The portfolio demonstrates strong trust between partners and grant holders, as well as high levels of legitimacy of faith-based actors in addressing sensitive issues in a contextualised way. Across the portfolios, projects operated in complex and often restrictive environments, yet showed positive outcomes at attitudinal, relational, behavioural, and structural levels. The review shows that FoRB-focused initiatives can contribute to meaningful change when rooted in trust-based partnerships, collaboration with diverse stakeholders, and locally informed programme design. It also highlights the importance of applying an intersectional approach, addressing multiple forms of marginalisation, and stresses the necessity of long-term engagement to achieve structural change. The report provides a catalogue of good practices found in the portfolio and identifies priority areas for improvement, including strengthening pathways from attitudinal change to structural impact, enhancing cross-learning, and further developing tools and systems for results measurement.

The review also highlights the value of locally contextualised MERL frameworks and participatory monitoring approaches, and resulted in the Community Generated Indicator Tool, providing practical ways to localise FoRB monitoring and strengthen knowledge-based and adaptive programming. The tool guides the development of context-sensitive indicators in collaboration with community stakeholders, which can clarify what meaningful change looks like for various actors taking power dynamics, intersectionality and sensitivity into account.

[21] Freedom of Religion or Belief in Practice - Insights for Impact, launched in October 2025

[22] The Community Generated Indicator Tool – Understanding and Measuring Change in Freedom of Religion or Belief Projects launched in January 2026

The Learning Review has contributed to systematising knowledge across the portfolio, informed programme and MERL development. It provides a shared reference point for practitioners, donors, and partners, and strengthens the foundation for more effective and evidence-based FoRB programming going forward. In line with Digni's management response and in dialogue with CKU, we will follow up the main learnings and recommendations, e.g. continued capacity development on FoRB sensitivity and increased peer learning and exchange.[23]

Mid Term Review

The Grant Agreement's Specific Conditions 9.1 require Digni to carry out a mid-term review focusing on progress to date by June 30, 2026. This deadline has been extended to September 11, in agreement with Norad. The review has been conducted in 2025 and 2026, with a focus on strengthening results and knowledge management to enhance impact across Digni's international development portfolio. The review has assessed progress to date, and the effectiveness of current knowledge management systems and practices. The Mid Term Review consists of three components, with three different objectives:

1. *To assess the indirect and wider population outreach of Digni-funded projects beyond the measurable indicators of the Digni global results framework.*
2. *To assess outcomes caused by Digni funded projects beyond what is reflected in current and standard Monitoring, Evaluation, Research and Learning (MERL) systems.*
3. *To assess the approaches and capacities of the Digni umbrella, in terms of knowledge management systems, structures, and practices.*

Digni's Global Results Framework requires all individual projects to report the number of project participants, defined as "persons who are directly involved in or targeted by the project". This represents the programme's primary direct reach: individuals and groups who are directly engaged in project activities and benefit first-hand from project interventions. These participants actively take part in activities such as training, facilitation, service provision, resource distribution, or other forms of direct support provided by implementing organisations or their partners.

The Global Results Framework does not currently include indicators for reach beyond these direct project participants. Objective 1 of the Mid-Term Review therefore included an assessment of the wider population outreach of Digni-funded projects, beyond what is captured by the framework's measurable indicators.

Secondary direct reach refers to individuals, groups, or institutions that benefit indirectly from a project through the actions, influence, or services of primary participants, or through strengthened systems. These people do not necessarily participate directly in project activities, but they are affected by the changes generated by primary participants or by improved systems. In many cases, reaching these groups may be an intended outcome of the project, even if they are not counted as direct project participants.

[23] E.g approval of Stefanus Alliance's application for a Joint Learning Initiative where a CoP on FoRB in development is a central part and the "FoRB in practice" initiative, a deliberate coordination of capacity development initiatives on FoRB between CKU, SMC, Digni and Stefanus Alliance International

The portfolio analysis report *Estimating Secondary and Indirect Reach in Digni-Supported Projects* builds on a systematic review and quantitative survey of the 2024 portfolio, to identify a recommended factor for estimating secondary direct reach. The purpose was to arrive at a conservative estimate of the total direct reach of the Digni-portfolio. This factor has been used to estimate the direct reach of Digni-funded projects in 2025 and will be tested against project reports in future reporting cycles.

The review also explored whether broader indirect or spill-over effects could be estimated. However, the available data were not yet sufficiently robust to support a reliable conclusion. This area will therefore require further exploration.

In component 2 of the Mid Term Review, a team of consultants have assessed outcomes from 83 Digni-funded projects beyond what is captured through current standard MERL systems. The review team has combined a comprehensive desk review with qualitative research and contribution tracing in six case studies, to analyse the projects. More information about this assessment can be found in section 2.4. Learnings, under Key insights from the Mid Term Review.

Component 3 of the Mid Term Review maps Digni's capacity and ability to capture, use, and share learning and results. This component is primarily an organisational analysis rather than a results analysis, focusing on the systems, practices, and culture that support learning and knowledge work across the Digni fellowship. Preliminary findings indicate a strong motivation and culture within the Digni fellowship to prioritise learning and knowledge work as a means of strengthening impact. This has been an explicit area of focus over the past two years. As no baseline was established for this work, the findings should be interpreted as a qualitative indication of current strengths and areas for further development, rather than as a measured change over time.

The full consolidated report from all three components of the Mid-Term Review will be submitted to Norad on 11 September 2026.

3.2. Digitalisation and Knowledge Management

A localised support structure for MERL and related digitalisation was designed and planned in 2025. This initiative will localise key expertise and resources to partners in the global south, who will support the global Digni portfolio and network of partners, in designing for knowledge-based projects, knowledge planning, and related digital development. The support unit will also play a role in facilitating and technically supporting Communities of Practice across the partner ecosystem. A cost-sharing model where partners can use this localised support function at a modest fee, will be designed and implemented during the first year of operation. By shifting global support resources to the local partner level, the potential for building upon contextualised knowledge and experiences is stronger. The structure will serve as a foundation for sustainable south-south programme support and peer-learning and will also be a model for localisation of other roles and functions moving forward. The initial support unit will be hosted by the Nairobi office of United Bible Society Association from 2026, with the intention of expanding to a

few other partners in Africa and Asia from 2027. The content and specific role of the global MERL and digitalisation support unit will be shaped in line with needs emerging from the Digni Mid Term Review.

Digni held three regional workshops on Knowledge Planning in Projects in 2025, in East Africa, Southern Africa and South Asia. In addition, a digital version was conducted for partners from Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Zimbabwe. The purpose was to facilitate a practical approach to localised knowledge planning and –management, building capacity in the operational context of partners and their projects, and promoting locally led MERL and knowledge management. The workshops were well received, and two more regional workshops, one in Africa and one in Asia, are planned for 2027. The first projects implementing a locally led Knowledge Plan in line with the principles of Dignis new guidelines were approved in 2025 and will go operational in 2026. In addition, existing projects are making adaptions in line with the guidelines.

A participatory process of utilising learning to design a revised Theory of Change for the Digni global programme was ongoing through 2025. Discussions relevant to the Theory of Change were facilitated through altogether 14 webinars, process meetings and focus group discussions, involving more than 200 representatives from Digni partners, member organisations and secretariat. The result is a well anchored Theory of Change model, adapted to the context and results of the more than 60 local civil society organisations and mass movements of the Digni fellowship. The intention is to gradually roll out the main aspects of the Theory of Change from 2027, and to design a revised Global Results Framework and other knowledge systems with the ToC as a basis.

The working group on MERL related to digitalisation and systems is operational, consisting of the Digni secretariat and four member organisations. From 2026 the group will be expanded to encompass partner representatives.

Plans were made to operationalise a Global Results Framework working group from spring 2026. Members of the group will be recruited from three local partner organisations, two member organisations and the Digni secretariat.

As co-chairs of the MERLiN network, Digni played a key role in facilitating knowledge sharing, dialogue with Norad and a community of practice related to knowledge planning and MERL in civil society organisations. An essential product of this work is the co-development of the guideline *Making a knowledge plan* in collaboration with Development Learning Lab. The contextualised knowledge planning capacity building of Digni builds upon this resource. The network has now grown to more than 30 organisations.

In June, Digni participated at the Africa Evidence Summit in Nairobi.

4. Financial report and audit

4.1. Significant deviations from the latest approved budget

Digni's Grant Agreement with Norad requires a written explanation of variance of more than 20% of a budget line, defined as total yearly amount per member organisation, unless the variance constitute less than 1% of the yearly allocation.

For 2025, all budget deviations between member organisations were below this threshold. However, the financial report shows significant deviations of more than 10 % between approved budget and actual costs for four member organisations, as seen in the table below.

DIRECT PROGRAM COST BY MEMBER ORGANISATION	2025				
	Approved	Actual cost	Deviation	Deviation	Share
	NOK	NOK	NOK	%	%
Bibelselskapet (BS)	8,456,779	7,278,826	- 1,177,953	-14%	4%
Frelsesarmeen (FA)	11,232,961	9,070,659	- 2,162,302	-19%	5%
Norsk Luthersk Misjonssamband (NLM)	20,207,433	18,018,797	- 2,188,636	-11%	9%
Wycliffe (WYC)	2,115,152	1,830,691	- 284,461	-13%	1%

Both Bibelselskapet and Frelsesarmeen budgeted with high own shares in the approved budget and have reduced these in the final reports.

For Bibelselskapet, there is in addition one project with underspending due to unexpected and sudden changes in a key managerial position, followed by a lengthy recruitment process. For the programme, this led to some uncertainties and delays. Despite this situation, the programme made good progress and delivered quality coordination and capacity-building in alignment with the approved application and work plan. Bibelselskapet was actively engaged in the recruitment process of the new manager, who has demonstrated exceptional competence and capacity to quickly step in and fill the gaps.

For Frelsesarmeen, the deviation is partly due to project expenses budgeted to be covered by other donors having been extracted from the financial accounts to Digni, so that Actual costs 2025 only includes project expenses to be covered by the grant from Norad. In addition, one project experienced delays in 2025 following the resignation of the Community Engagement Strategist (CES), resulting in a temporary capacity gap and the postponement of planned activities, which contributed to underspending. Following the recruitment and successful onboarding of a new CES, implementation regained momentum and is now broadly on track with the approved work plan, supported by strengthened field-level engagement, improved follow-up, and an increasing focus on achieving and documenting outcomes.

For Norsk Luthersk Misjonssamband, three projects account for most of the deviations between approved budget and actual costs. The main reasons for the deviations in two projects in Ethiopia were exchange rate fluctuations, adjustments in activities to less costly alternatives (venue for event), and reduction in expat position to support one of the projects. In addition, one project in Kenya also had a reduction in salary expenses to expat due to less time spent supporting project activities.

In the case of Wycliffe, project implementation in Nepal was delayed due to the late approval of the project by Nepal's governmental Social Welfare Council (SWC). As a result, activities commenced in November rather than the planned September start date, leaving only two months for implementation in 2025. This shortened implementation period contributed to significant underspending against the annual budget.

5. Other reporting requirements

5.1. Results achievement, the Civil Society Support

Country	Type of CSOs	Number of CSOs reached	Number of CSOs strengthened
Afghanistan	NGO, organised community groups	12	1
Bangladesh	NGOs, organised community groups	16	2
Burundi	NGOs, organised community groups	19	1
Cambodia	NGOs, organised community groups	12	8
Cameroon	Church	3	1
Republic of the Congo	Church	1	1
Democratic Republic of the Congo	Church	1	1
Ecuador	NGO, organised community groups	18	1
Egypt	NGOs, organised community groups	18	1
Eswatini	Church, organised community groups	10	2
Ethiopia	NGOs, churches, organised community groups	24	6
India	NGOs, organised community groups	7	2
Indonesia	NGOs, organised community groups	3	1
Kenya	NGOs, church, organised community groups	11	3
Lebanon	Foundation	1	1
Liberia	NGOs, church, organised community groups	13	3
Madagascar	Church, organised community group	6	1
Mali	NGOs, organised community groups	90	2
Mongolia	NGO, organised community group	4	1
Mozambique	Church, organised community group	2	1
Nepal	NGOs, organised community groups	19	5
Sierra Leone	Church, organised community group	2	1
State of Palestine	NGO, organised community group	8	1
Uganda	NGO	10	2
Viet Nam	NGO	2	1
Zimbabwe	Church	2	1
Africa Regional	NGOs, association, organised community groups	24	3
Global	Organised community groups	4	
Total		**342**	**54**

The number of civil society actors reached are NGOs, many of them faith-based, churches, foundations, and associations, as well as organised community groups that are connected to the project through sub-agreements/MOUs. The number of civil society organisations strengthened, refers to the project partners that Digni's member organisations collaborate with. All these have been assessed utilising Digni's Partner Assessment Tool and are followed up with capacity building and support according to their identified needs.