Project iRi plus

Project phase
2025 – 2027

Integration – Rehabilitation – Inclusion

Addis Guzo
Moving forward together

Center of Excellence for mobility aid provision, pediatric physiotherapy & early childhood intervention

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Project iRi[plus]

Integration – Rehabilitation – Inclusion

A small[plus] for a big impact: our strategy for the years 2025 to 2027.

Addis Guzo has been working for and with people with disabilities in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, since 2012 – in a solidarity-based, solution-oriented, pragmatic and forward-thinking way. The project phase from January 2022 to December 2024 was entitled **iRi – Integration – Rehabilitation – Inclusion.**

Our team in Ethiopia have not only achieved the planned targets for this project period, but have exceeded them in many ways. For the new three-year project phase from the beginning of 2025 to the end of 2027, we have decided to continue and deepen **iRi,** while making targeted adjustments and expanding the overall project with a [plus].

The plus represents our increased focus on building capacity. We firmly believe that sustainable change can only be achieved through continuous training and further education for both beneficiaries and employees.

These are the 7 [plus] factors of Addis Guzo:

[plus 1] We are in the process of becoming a center of excellence that provides important pioneering work and training in Ethiopia in the areas of professional mobility aid provision, pediatric physiotherapy and early childhood intervention.

[plus 2] We train our employees to become trainers in the areas of mobility aid provision and rehabilitation services.

[plus 3] We offer high-quality further education courses with praxis oriented training concepts for external experts.

[plus 4] We support young talented people with disabilities in their first steps into the labor market.

[plus 5] We are expanding our skills development program to strengthen self-reliance and decision-making skills, and plan to establish a resource center as a first point of contact for families with children with disabilities.

[plus 6] We advise and support our employees in planning their professional careers and support them in their efforts to pursue internationally recognized and accredited training opportunities.

[plus 7] We are planning to establish a social enterprise whose profits will be reinvested in the charitable work of Addis Guzo.

As in previous years, we are focusing on consistency and development at the same time. The challenges are big and many of them are unpredictable. But we are used to that.

Thanks to the well-coordinated cooperation of all parties involved, we are confident that we will continue to find ways forward and solutions to further our impact, just like we have over the past 12 years. The positive results of our work, which we witness, encourage us and drive us forward every day.

Bernhard Wissler
Project coordination

Project Overview

Responsible body	Addis Guzo Moving forward together 3000 Bern Switzerland
Project location	Addis Abeba, Ethiopia
Project title	**iRi**^{plus} - Integration - Rehabilitation - Inclusion
Project duration	3 years from the beginning of 2025 to the end of 2027
Number of direct beneficiaries	approx. 12'000 people with disabilities, relatives, caregivers and health professionals

Mobility aid workshop:

Provision of customized wheelchairs	2'100
Maintenance and repair	6'000
Provision of additional aids	900

Rehabilitation and integration:

Early childhood intervention	330
Pediatric physiotherapy	420
Follow-up, doctor's visits, consultations	1'200
Parent training workshops	300
Further training for caregivers and physical therapists	150

Skills development training:

Work and career	50
Promotion of life skills	570
Dance and sports training	210

Number of indirect beneficiaries	over 30'000 dependents
Project costs	2'027'059 million Swiss francs
Implementing organization	Addis Guzo Ethiopia Recognized non-profit organization in Ethiopia, according to Proclamation No. 1113/2019 by the Authority for Civil Society Organizations

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What drives us

Current situation

According to the United Nations Human Development Index, Ethiopia ranks as one of the least developed countries in the world.

People with disabilities and their families are particularly vulnerable to extreme poverty due to unstable or low income and a lack of public social service programs, making their living conditions especially fragile. Furthermore, misconceptions about disability are still widespread in Ethiopian society, and those affected experience discrimination, oppression and exclusion in their daily lives and often live in very isolated and segregated conditions.

Despite increasing government efforts, there are still significant gaps in the provision of all necessary services for people with disabilities and their families. This applies to the provision of appropriate mobility aids, where few wheelchairs are available, and those that do exist are often of questionable quality and/or unaffordable. Access to education and work is limited or even impossible for many people with disabilities, which significantly affects their prospects for participating in society and achieving an independent life of dignity.

Among the most vulnerable are children with disabilities, especially girls and children with severe impairments and multiple disabilities. In addition to the lack of educational opportunities, they are also at increased risk of violence, sexual abuse and abandonment.

Improving their situation is of particular concern to us.

Vision and Mission

A dignified life for people with disabilities in Ethiopia

For years, we have been promoting the social integration, self determination, and economic independence of people with disabilities through innovative programs and collaborative partnerships with other organizations. We support individuals and their families in overcoming their daily challenges by providing aids for independent mobility, therapeutic services and vocational training opportunities to secure their livelihoods.

We actively work to help overcome barriers and foster a growing inclusive Ethiopian society where persons with disabilities have access to the specific services they need to thrive. We are committed to helping raise awareness of the needs and rights of persons with disabilities and to countering discrimination through education and advocacy.

As a center of excellence, we will contribute to the further development of rehabilitation services in Ethiopia by continuously pioneering in this field and by training our employees and other professionals according to international standards. Through continuous exchange with national and international organizations and experts, and through regular evaluations, we ensure the quality of our work. Our model emphasizes close collaboration between the Swiss and Ethiopian Associations so that all activities are both firmly rooted in the guiding principles of the organization and structured within the Ethiopian context.

Who we are

Association Addis Guzo Switzerland

Addis Guzo is a recognized non-profit organization in Switzerland with 49 active members, which includes both the Swiss Board and the General Assembly.

We maintain at all times our commitment to serve people regardless of disability, gender, social status, age, political affiliation, or religious beliefs. The Swiss association, our board and association members work on a pro bono basis.

Additionally, we regularly have volunteers who travel to Ethiopia to work directly at the Addis Guzo center.
In August 2024, we set up a 50% paid management position in Switzerland. This is our response to the imminent expansion of activities and to create a structure to help secure the project into the future. We continue to believe in the power of volunteer work, and as such, volunteers will continue to provide ongoing and integral support to the development and sustainability of all services provided.

Thanks to the close cooperation between the Swiss board, the executive director and the management in Addis Ababa, we are able to react quickly to an ever-changing environment which presents ongoing operational challenges. We are steadfast in ensuring, at all times, the optimal use of our financial and human resources.

Addis Guzo Ethiopia

Center of Excellence for mobility aid provision, pediatric physiotherapy & early childhood intervention

Addis Guzo is officially registered in Ethiopia as a foreign non-profit organization. Our center is located in one of the poorest neighborhoods in the city and is firmly rooted in that community.

Over the past twelve years Addis Guzo has step by step expanded it's services and as a result developed into a renowned center of excellence that is highly valued by authorities, national and international organizations, and diplomatic missions. Our strong management team runs the center, which now has over 40 employees. By exchanging ideas with the Swiss Association on an almost daily basis, we are able to shape our day-to-day activities and develop long-term strategies together.

Through continuous and systematic cooperation between all departments, we ensure effective service delivery, promote team spirit and transparency. The newly established center of excellence is a catalyst for the development and continuous improvement of highly professional services in the areas of mobility aid provision, pediatric physiotherapy, and early childhood intervention. These important areas of rehabilitation and service provision for people with disabilities have been pioneered and implemented at Addis Guzo in accordance with international standards and are currently unique in Ethiopia in terms of development and quality.

We work with strong local and international partners to bring about change beyond our organization’s capacity to improve the long-term quality of life for our beneficiaries.

Professional mobility aid workshop

Our guiding principle in providing mobility aids is “ability not disability.” We recognize the potential of mobility aid recipients and build on their individuals’ strengths by providing customized high quality mobility aids. Since the project began, we have worked with international experts in the field to develop both the theoretical and practical skills of our workshop team. The aim of these trainings is to customized wheelchairs and other available aids so that they best meet the needs, requirements and life circumstances of each individual beneficiary. A wheelchair that is tailored to the user allows them the greatest possible independence, reduces health complications, and relieves the burden on caregivers.

Wheelchair provision and customizing

The mobility aid workshop in Addis Guzo is the only one of its kind in Ethiopia in terms of professional assessment, adaptation, repairs, maintenance and follow-up care. After thorough individual assessments, we continuously provide approximately 700 wheelchairs to people with disabilities every year. We are currently the largest and most important supply for the country of high quality, customized wheelchairs. Thanks to the expertise of our employees and our wide range of wheelchairs, we can guarantee professional and needs-oriented care. Our partner association in Switzerland, “rollaid”, collects and refurbishes high quality wheelchairs, therapy equipment and spare parts and sends the aids in containers to our center in Addis Ababa. We then coordinate the distribution of the wheelchairs in close cooperation with the local authorities.

Maintenance and Repairs

We ensure that the valuable equipment can be used in the long term. Our workshop team is able to repair and maintain about 2'000 wheelchairs a year. Thanks to a large number of spare parts from Switzerland, we can repair almost every model - another service that is unique in Ethiopia.

Provision of additional mobility aids

In addition to manual wheelchairs, including sports wheelchairs, we provide a wide range and variety of other mobility and therapeutic aids. These include walkers, crutches, feeding chairs, standing frames, shower and toileting chairs, communication aids, and the Swiss Trac wheelchair pulling devices. Whenever aids are provided, the beneficiaries, family members and caregivers receive training on the proper use of the device by our specialists.

Along with the regular maintenance that we offer, both the safe use and durability of the aids is addressed.

Plus

Our standard in the provision of therapeutic aids is truly exemplary in Ethiopia. Through on-the-job training and years of professional experience, our workshop staff have developed into highly skilled wheelchair technicians, a profession that does not yet exists in Ethiopia. We are currently developing a practice-oriented training concept that will enable our staff in the future to pass on their knowledge as trainers to professionals. This will help to increase the urgently needed number of experts in this specialized field of work.

Child-friendly rehabilitation

During early childhood, our brains and bodies are best able to respond to therapeutic interventions. Early intervention is the key to unlocking the full potential of a child struggling with developmental delays or disabilities. In Ethiopia, specialization in early intervention and pediatric physiotherapy is still in it's infancy. Addis Guzo has pioneered early intervention and pediatric physiotherapy in Ethiopia in recent years.

We are committed to international best practice and evidence-based therapy approaches that include multidisciplinary assessments, family-oriented practice, a strength-based focus and play-based therapy, capacity building through intensive coaching of caregivers and cross departmental teamwork. We count on the child's trust and cooperation and build on a good therapeutic relationship. Our physiotherapists receive ongoing training from international experts in early intervention and pediatric physiotherapy and are currently the only specialists in Ethiopia with in-depth knowledge of how to treat young children with developmental delays and disabilities.

Family-centered early childhood intervention

Our rehabilitation department specializes entirely in the therapeutic treatment of children and has developed the first comprehensive early childhood intervention program for children aged 0 to 6 years in Ethiopia. Rehabilitation services at Addis Guzo are characterized by a child friendly and caring approach, which is both less stressful from the child's perspective, and effective from a therapeutic standpoint.

Thanks to general improvements in diagnostics in the country, a larger number of children can now be admitted for therapy at a younger age. Early childhood intervention is long recognized as the standard for providing effective and sustainable support for children with developmental delays or disabilities. Our program has been carefully developed and implemented to support our youngest beneficiaries to develop to their potential, promote integration into their communities, and to prevent secondary complications relative to their disability. Our comprehensive and holistic therapy model acknowledges the crucial role that the family and the entire environment play in supporting a positive treatment outcome. The program includes, in addition to specific physiotherapy exercises, intensive parent coaching, adaptive play, functional communication, home visits, elements of occupational therapy, a barrier free playground and the provision of children sized mobility aids.

Our services are structured around four different age groups:

- Little Littles (0-1 year olds)
- Middle Littles (1-2 year olds)
- Toddlers (2-3 year olds)
- Preschoolers (3-5 year olds)

Pediatric physiotherapy and specialized groups

In addition to early childhood intervention, the rehabilitation department also offers individual physiotherapy treatment and customized group therapy. In pediatric physiotherapy, we work primely on the basis of the Bobath principles. The concept according to Bobath is a physio-therapeutic approach that is used for the treatment of children with cerebral palsy and neurological disabilities. We regularly work together with Bobath therapists from abroad since there is no such training available on the east African continent.

Currently we have two specialized groups, one for children with Spina Bifida, and one for children with complex disabilities and a high level of care.

- Individual Pediatric Physiotherapy
- Groups for kids with Spina Bifida
- Groups for kids with High Care Needs

Families

Timely intervention is just as important for caregivers as it is for the child. Families who participate in our programs often experience for the first time that they are welcome, that they are listened to, and that their concerns are being taken seriously. In the warm and playful atmosphere of our center, parents and children can experience joyful moments together while at the same time receiving highly effective therapy.

Our families are actively involved in the therapeutic process. Parents receive intensive coaching at our center, where siblings are always welcome and included in the therapy whenever possible or helpful. The treatment at the center is complemented by home visits, individually designed treatment programs for home and follow-up care.

Apart from that, social networks develop in different therapy groups and provide additional support and encouragement for caregivers with shared experience of social isolation, stigmatization, financial burdens and previous trauma.

Our programs include trainings for caregivers on topics relevant to children with disabilities, such as:

- Healthy nutrition
- Skin care (avoiding pressure sores, appropriate diaper changing, catheter care)
- Safe feeding and positioning
- Child-appropriate play, stimulation, and interaction

Follow-up, consultations, and medical appointments

We support children and their parents beyond program completion through follow-up appointments based on the need of child and family. In addition, a pediatric neurologist provides regular outpatient clinics at our center to address urgent medical needs or offer a second professional opinion.

Counseling, referrals, and collaboration with other professionals and partner organizations provide additional layers of support in our treatment.

Plus

Our physiotherapists undergo a training program that is specifically tailored to Ethiopian conditions, based on international best practices and successfully implemented in collaboration with international experts. The development of our modularized training program was completed in 2024 and the corresponding module manual for both theoretical and practical training is currently in progress.

Using a Trainer of Trainers (ToT) approach, our most experienced staff are now being trained to educate other professionals.

Furthermore, together with other like-minded stakeholders, we are preparing to set up the first comprehensive resource center in Ethiopia, where families of children with disabilities can come as a first point of contact to receive the information they need on available resources and services.

Inclusive playground – a sensory and play garden for children with and without disabilities

In November 2019, we partnered with the Kukuk Kultur association to build Ethiopia's first wheelchair-accessible inclusive playground for children with and without disabilities. The playground is unique in its design and educational quality - a green oasis to discover, experience and relax.

A variety of play options provide a wealth of new sensory and physical experiences for the children in our rehabilitation program, along with their siblings and caregivers. Our inclusive playground has become an integral part of our children's therapy program. This is particularly important as many of the children spend much of their lives isolated in their homes. Having fun outdoors is usually a completely new and invaluable experience for both carers and children.

Customized skills training

A study published by UNICEF in May 2024 entitled “Disability, Social Norms and Behavior Change in Ethiopia” shows that people with disabilities in Ethiopia face significant problems in terms of their employment opportunities. This not only limits their educational and employment prospects, but also leads to their general marginalization in society and an increased risk of poverty.

In addition to providing aids and therapeutic services, improving the educational situation is therefore crucial to enable future access to the labor market. The principle of “helping people to help themselves” leads to a self-determined life, enables the development of individual potential, strengthens resilience and is a prerequisite for escaping the poverty trap in the long term.

Work and career

Bottlebrush – Microbusiness

In the middle of our small compound stands a magnificent bottlebrush tree. It gave its name to the women’s cooperative in which our handicraft workshops have joined forces. Under the protective umbrella of Addis Guzo, eight women, all of whom experience physical disabilities, have been successfully generating a living for themselves and their families for over 10 years, organizing the work and management of their workshops independently and successfully. We provide the necessary infrastructure, barrier-free access to a clean and safe workplace and ongoing training and coaching. The three workshops produce handmade, high-quality, and unique toys, reusable diapers, and garments. The aim of our ongoing support is to achieve the greatest possible independence and personal responsibility, while at the same time recognizing that individuals with disabilities in Ethiopia need additional supports in order to succeed within the existing social framework. Two of the original Bottlebrush groups are now working independently in workshops outside Addis Guzo. In the future, we will continue to train women with physical disabilities in high quality handicraft techniques or other income generating opportunities and either integrate them into existing groups or support them to work from home.

Plus

Measures for vocational integration

The proclamation on the right to employment of persons with disabilities obliges employers in Ethiopia to provide appropriate working and training conditions, reasonable accommodation and active support, especially for women with disabilities. In reality, there is a huge gap between the legal requirements and their implementation. In the future, we will offer young people with disabilities, who have completed school or vocational training, targeted support in order to enter the employment market. After a detailed initial discussion and a careful evaluation, a step-by-step plan is developed together with the beneficiaries with the aim of strengthening life skills, gaining preliminary work experience through internships, and finding an apprenticeship or regular job through:

- Internships at our center
- Internships in collaboration with our partner organizations
- Provision of mobility devices
- Support for the implementation of barrier-free access in possible working places
- Financial assistance for transportation

Promoting life skills

The WHO describes life skills as the foundational abilities that enable people to develop their potential and master their lives. Due to a lack of education and years of isolation, many of our beneficiaries have had few of the necessary experiences, exposure, and guidance required to develop basic life skills. Additionally, they have learned behaviors and habits which are in fact counterproductive to reaching their full individual potential. Because of this, we specifically support the improvement of life skills when planning and implementing our trainings. This includes, among other things, self-awareness, stress management, emotional regulation, and interpersonal skills. So far, we have offered our courses exclusively to women. However, the role of men is equally important for social progress. That is why we are expanding our offerings and also designing courses for men on topics such as:

- Gender-based violence
- Resilience training and prevention of victimization
- Trauma awareness and processing
- Child protection
- Family planning

Plus

We are expanding our range of skills training to include courses on self-competence and decision-making skills.

Dance and sports training

We continue to lead our sports and arts programs with the firm belief that sports and dance are effective and affordable rehabilitation measures for people with disabilities. Regular training builds strength and endurance, improves motor skills and coordination, and strengthens self-confidence. In addition, it has a positive effect on mental health and general well-being. Our sports and dance coaches are themselves living with physical disabilities and are inspiring role models.

Contemporary Dance

Contemporary dance offers participants a unique creative opportunity to express themselves emotionally through movement and to be engaged in physical activity. By focusing on flowing movements, creativity and self-expression, physical and emotional strength is fostered. Individual physical limitations fade into the background. In the dance groups, participants experience community and a sense of belonging. Since 2018, the dance group has been impressing audiences with ambitious performances and has received much recognition for its achievements.

Our dance program includes:

- Dance groups for adults
- Regular performances in and outside of Addis Guzo
- Dance & sport component in rehabilitation groups for children
- Summer academy with dance classes for children from the neighborhood
- Training our junior dance coach Yohannes to become a senior dance coach

Wheelchair basketball

Our wheelchair basketball teams train twice a week and are actively enjoyed by people who experience a motor disability and are seeking physical fitness, team spirit and competition opportunities. The energy, joie de vivre and competitive spirit of the 40 women and men radiates far beyond the sports field. Our coaching duo, both wheelchair users themselves, have developed a new training concept that aims to help all participants reach their full potential. Every year, the two teams take part in several national competitions an both teams have repeatedly achieved much success, being the National Champions in 2023 and first and second in 2024. Among our wheelchair basketball enthusiast we have players who are also members of the Ethiopian National Wheelchair Basketball Team and others who have been selected to attend training courses for wheelchair basketball referees and coaches.

Our sports program includes:

- Training for women's and men's team, twice a week
- Participation in national competitions
- Participation in practice matches
- Summer academy: Intensive training weeks & sport classes for young people from the neighborhood
- Further training for wheelchair basketball coaches and referees

Plus «Addis Ability»

Addis Ability Social Enterprise

To date, the association's financial expenses in Switzerland and Ethiopia have been covered almost exclusively by membership fees and donations. Aside from our NGO, we are planning to establish a social enterprise, which will mark a new step in our fundraising efforts in Ethiopia. "Addis Ability" will offer therapeutic services, equipment and supplies, training for parents, continuing education for physical therapists, and professional support for organizations that want to replicate our model.

These services will be charged to both individuals and organizations that have the financial means. 100% of the net profit will be used for Addis Guzo's humanitarian aid and to help finance the free services for those in need.

Initially, the company will operate in the following area:

1. Rehabilitation

- Physical therapy for children & adults
- Early childhood intervention
- Resource center for parents
- Further training for physical therapist, wheelchair technicians and caregivers

In a second step, we see the possibilities for expanding our services by additionally offering the following:

2. Provision of therapeutic aids and supplies

- Import of new wheelchairs and aids for sale
- Professional wheelchair assessment and provision
- Supportive devices like e.g., sitting and feeding chairs, crutches and walking frames

Addis Ability Rehabilitation Center

The physiotherapy market is booming in Addis Ababa. This also applies to the field of pediatric physiotherapy. At the same time, awareness of our center has increased significantly in recent years. Our physiotherapists have acquired unique expertise and skills in the areas of pediatric physiotherapy and early childhood intervention through years of intensive and continuous training, and the positive results of the provided treatments have become widely known. We assume that, for this reason, more and more economically stable families are seeking our services. Alongside this growing trend, we are receiving repeated requests to provide further training for external professionals or provide consultation concerning the replication of our rehab model. In light of these factors, we decided to found Addis Ability.

Therapeutic Supply Store

Access to assistive devices in Ethiopia is not only a challenge for people living in poverty. Even those who have the necessary financial means cannot simply buy a wheelchair, let alone one that is adapted to their individual needs. Other aids and consumables such as adult diapers or bed liners are also difficult or impossible to obtain. Therapeutic supply stores are service providers in the health care sector that specialize in the provision of therapeutic aids and consumables. Addis Ability aims to open the first therapeutic supply store in Ethiopia within the next three years. We are convinced that social responsibility and economic success can go hand in hand and hope that the founding of "Addis Ability" will promote the financial independence of the project from donations from Switzerland.

The project in facts and figures

Personnel requirements

Project area	Number of employees
Management Ethiopia	
Country Director	1
Program Director	1
Mobility aid workshop	
Workshop management	1
Rehabilitation technology	6
Rehabilitation and integration	
Department management	1
Department coordination	1
Physiotherapy	5
Therapy-assistance	1
Skills-training	
Department management	1
Department coordination	1
Dance	1
Wheelchair-Basketball	2
Administration, general operations, security	
Accounting	2
Technical service and drivers	2
Security	10
Kitchen	3
Cleaning	2
Total employees in Ethiopia	**41**
Management Switzerland (50%)	**1**

Project costs

Total expenditure for the iRi^{plus} project 2025-2027	**CHF**	(rounded) **%**
Expenditure programs financial	873'500	43%
Material costs (donated)	540'000	27%
Total program costs	**1'413'500**	**70%**
Operating expenses in Ethiopia	298'800	15%
Expenses for administration in Ethiopia	110'000	5%
Operating and administrative costs Switzerland	204'759	10%
Total costs for the iRi^{plus} project	**2'027'059**	**100%**

Edition October 2024
Publisher Addis Guzo Association
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Texts Christine Oberli
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Addis Guzo

Moving forward together

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