TOWARDS INCLUSIVE FOOD AND LIVELIHOOD SECURITY FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES IN EAST AND CENTRAL AFRICA

We are Able! Position Paper



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ADF African Disability Forum

VNG International

ZOA from relief to recovery

The Hague Academy for local governance

see you including everybody

The Leprosy Mission The Netherlands

Funded by Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Index

Preface 4

Introduction 6

Part one: Daily challenges for persons with disabilities 8

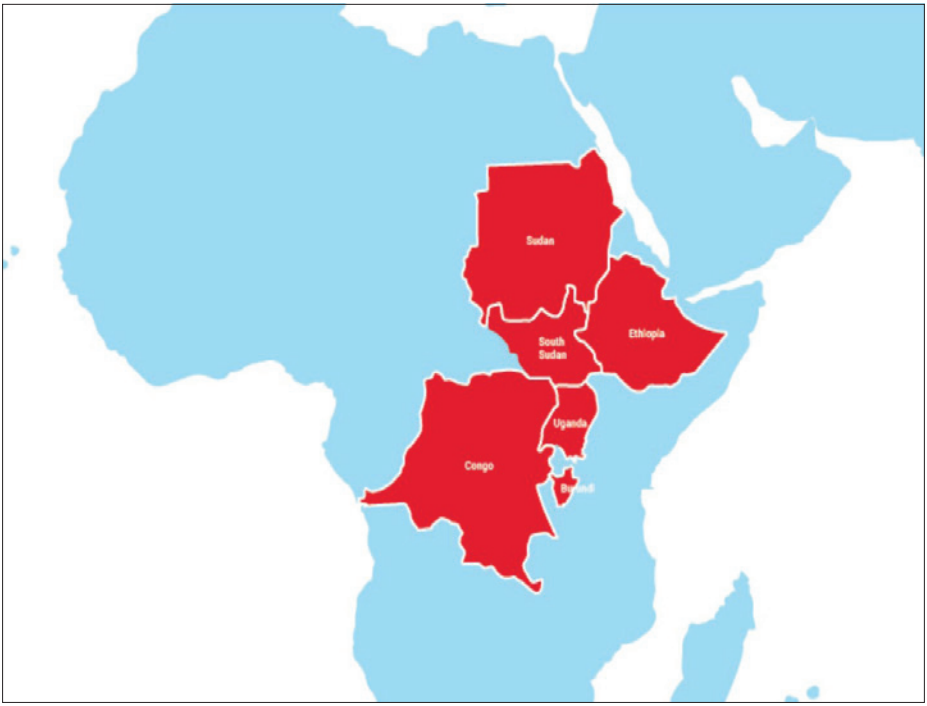
Part two: Policy analysis of inclusive food security 14

Part three: Our recommendations 18



Preface

The We are Able! (WaA!) Consortium was established in early 2021 with a five-year goal of promoting inclusive food and livelihood security for persons with disabilities in East and Central Africa. Now, in June 2023, at the project's halfway point, the Consortium is proud to present its collective analysis of the current requirements for establishing an enabling policy framework and addressing the challenges faced by persons with disabilities in this region. Drawing from this analysis, the Consortium has formulated evidence-based policy recommendations that it intends to propose to policymakers at the local, district and national levels, in the six countries where we operate. Furthermore, these recommendations will be shared across Africa and supported by international community. The position paper will serve as a guiding document for our advocacy efforts, aligning with the WaA! lobby and advocacy strategy, and informing our ongoing work.



The Consortium consists of four Dutch NGOs (SeeYou Foundation, The Leprosy Mission, The Hague Academy and ZOA), along with VNG International, a Dutch local government network dedicated to local governance, and the African Disability Forum (ADF), which serves as the regional umbrella association for national organisations representing persons with disabilities. These six organisations collectively strive to achieve inclusive food security by fostering inclusive governance and facilitating access to basic resources, leaving no one behind. This initiative is being implemented in six African countries: Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, South Sudan, Sudan and Uganda.

The We are Able! Consortium (2021-2025)

To enhance the effective implementation of existing legislation regarding the inclusion of persons with disabilities, the WaA! Consortium is dedicated to improving food security and access to basic resources for persons with disabilities through its five-year program. This program, funded by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs as part of its Power of Voices budget framework (2021-2025), aims to establish an empowering environment for marginalized groups, with a specific focus on persons with disabilities. The ultimate objective is to enable these individuals to assert their rights, ensuring food security by promoting their inclusion within communities and facilitating better access to essential services.

Introduction

In the realm of the WaA! program, we have delved deep into the arena of food security challenges faced by persons with disabilities. Together, we have dissected and examined these obstacles from various angles, spanning from individual to societal and systematic levels. Engaging with concerned stakeholders and directly involving persons with disabilities, we have meticulously analysed the issues at hand, leading us to discover concrete avenues for improvement and solutions that can be implemented across all six participating countries.

Our journey has unveiled a range of overarching categories that hold immense potential to address the challenges faced by persons with disabilities. Firstly, our Consortium aims to raise public awareness throughout society about the rights of persons with disabilities, with specific focus on their right to food and the vital importance of food security. Secondly, we strive to empower persons with disabilities by supporting the formulation of self-organisations



and strengthening the development of Organizations for Persons with Disabilities (OPDs), enabling them to actively collaborate with like-minded civil society organisations (CSOs), churches and community-based organisations.

Creating a civic space is another integral aspect of our mission. By facilitating the involvement of OPDs and similar CSOs, we aim to empower them to influence agenda-setting processes for inclusive governance and the formulation of concrete policies that foster inclusive food security. We recognise the significance of engaging with traditional, informal, and public authorities, bolstering their capacities and accountability mechanisms to ensure the implementation of inclusive laws, practices, and norms.

Each of these options possess its own strengths, challenges and drawbacks, exhibiting varying degrees of success in addressing the specific obstacles faced in diverse country contexts. However, through our extensive research and experience, we have found out that a combination of efforts proves to be the most promising approach to improving the policy environments and establishing a more inclusive food security framework for persons with disabilities.

Our position paper is an exploration of the realities experienced by persons with disabilities in East and Central Africa. At the Consortium level, we delve into their daily challenges and examine how these adversities directly impact their food and livelihood security, drawing upon our findings from the past two and a half years. Moving forward, we summarise our comprehensive analysis of existing policies and legislation. Finally, we conclude with a collection of specific recommendations focusing on targeted governance at various levels, from local to national and from African to global. Most importantly, these recommendations mirror the actions that we, as partners and stakeholders in the WaA! Consortium are committed to implementing ourselves.

Part one: Daily challenges for persons with disabilities

According to the United Nations department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA), there are over 80 million Africans living with disabilities. These individuals face numerous challenges, including poverty, food insecurity, and limited access to adequate resources and community participation. They are more dependent on others for survival and are more vulnerable to food crises.

Stigmatization, mainly for women and girls with disabilities, restricts their access to adequate resources, basic rights and opportunities. Barriers such as limited awareness of land rights, negative and impartial attitudes, and exclusion from decision-making processes makes it difficult for persons with disabilities to acquire land security and engage in agricultural activities. Climate change exacerbates these challenges by reducing agricultural production and increasing food scarcity. Safeguarding the rights of persons with disabilities is nearly impossible due to inadequate legislations and limited support for disability-inclusive projects.

What is food security?
Food security is achieved when "all people, at all times, have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life." — (World Food Summit, 1996) We at WaA! define food availability as having adequate food. This is mainly achieved through farming practices since we work in rural areas. Access to food means that everyone can physically get food from the markets and have sufficient resources to buy or grow food. Using food properly is vital, which means being able to handle food safely and ensure it has good nutrition. Despite facing challenges such as economic, political, natural and social, we want food availability and access to remain consistent and stable.
While all these dimensions are integral, it's imperative to understand that in fragile, rural and conflict-affected areas, having access to land and water for farming is a major factor in determining food security.

Food security programs are almost inaccessible to persons with disabilities due to lack of information, eligibility criteria, and physical barriers. In times of uncertainty and crises, persons with disabilities face obstacles accessing humanitarian aid and are often ignored and overlooked in distribution programs citing reasons such as benefitting from disability-specific social protection measures. They also encounter barriers in land tenure registration and face limited accessibility in income-generating activities. Furthermore, children and youth with disabilities are less likely to benefit from school-based nutrition programs due to lower attendance rates. The procedures for securing land rights are often not accessible by persons with disabilities as the costs for land registration and certification are high, and information on land certification does not (always) reach them.





The WaA! program promotes disability inclusion through participation, inclusion, and participation (PIP) approach, which encourages dialogue and inclusion of persons with disabilities in outlining comprehensive development plans that address their specific needs and rights, including food security and equal participation. To ensure meaningful participation, persons with disabilities need to self-advocate but often lack the skills and capacity to do so. Discrimination and stigmatization lead to exclusion from livelihood opportunities and basic services. An interviewee in Uganda explained during a focus Group Discussion: "I was invited for an interview as a Community Development Officer. When I appeared for the interview in a wheelchair, they concluded that I did not get the job because of my inability to ride a motorcycle, although I was told that I was the best candidate."[1] Many non-governmental organisations often overlook persons with disabilities as potential burdens and the failure to communicate job opportunities to persons with disabilities underestimate their ability to participate in recruitment drives.

1 *"Overall findings and policy recommendations of the Scoping Studies, 'We are Able!' Programme 2021, and our Policy Brief Perceptions, Capacity and Law, January 2022"*

The lack of capacity and shrinking civic space hinder the ability of a person with a disability to advocate for equal participation in the society. Recent research commissioned by Trócaire in Uganda[2] reveals limited awareness of land rights amongst persons with disabilities and duty bearers. This lack of awareness leads to negative behaviours towards persons with disabilities within their communities, resulting in discrimination and increased vulnerability. Also, persons with disabilities are rarely consulted or included in land-related decision-making processes, hindering their ability to generate income and secure their livelihoods. This lack of access to land is severe for women with disabilities, with only 7.8% of them having secured land rights in the six targeted countries[3].

Due to the efforts of civil society, legislation exists in various African countries either through domestication of UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) or African Union framework to safeguard the rights of persons with disabilities. Unfortunately, the lack of awareness, limited resources, and competing priorities contribute to the exclusion of disability-inclusive development interventions. As a result, less than 2% of international aid from 2014 to 2018 was directed towards projects benefitting persons with disabilities.[4]

Under the WaA! program, the Consortium implemented the PIP approach across various countries. This method of ensuring food security and agricultural production encourages the involvement and input of persons with disabilities, particularly in fostering the 'village vision.' An integrated development plan is designed for the entire village community, including members with disabilities. By bringing together all segments of society within a village, an extensive analysis is conducted to identify the barriers that impede socio-economic progress, limiting access to social services, and hinder food security for households, mainly those with persons with disabilities.

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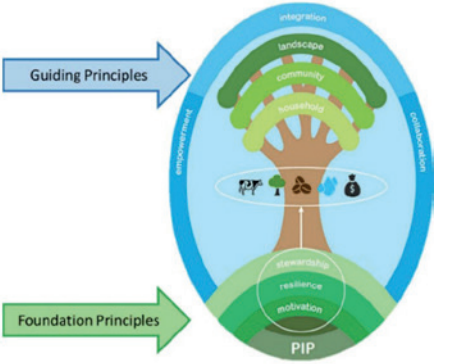
2 Trócaire, 2017, Enhancing Awareness of land rights of persons with disabilities in Acholi-Land, a research report presented during the Northern Uganda Land Platform (NULP) June 2017.

3 Baseline study report We are Able!, 2021.

4 Disability-inclusive ODA: Aid data on donors, channels, recipients - Development Initiatives (devinit.org)

Introducing PIP: Building a better future in agriculture together!



PIP (Plan Intégré du Paysan translated to Integrated Farm Plan) is an inclusive working method that empowers communities and has been making waves in Uganda and Burundi through the WaA! program. The farmers are the real catalysts for change, true champions of progress and the secret behind PIP's success. PIP takes an inclusive approach by fostering active collaboration and dialogue within households. Everyone in the community gets a say in creating an agricultural plan together. Every voice matter and outlining a thorough agricultural roadmap is a team effort, ensuring that persons with disabilities are included in the management committee responsible for monitoring and evaluating the results. The approach also focuses on three fundamental principles: motivation, management and resilience. With PIP, the possibilities are endless, and farmers are taking charge by transforming their communities by building a thriving agricultural landscape.



A woman in DRC pointing at her integrated farming plan.

Part two: policy analysis of inclusive food security

Despite the existence of policy frameworks related to food security at various levels, there is a significant gap when it comes to developing an inclusive environment for persons with disabilities. An effective policy analysis is crucial to outlining the barriers that prevent inclusive food security for persons with disabilities. By understanding the existing policy landscape, stakeholders can understand the pitfalls and devise targeted interventions to address them. Furthermore, it is essential to advocate for the integration of relevant initiatives into existing food security policies, ensuring that the needs of persons with disabilities are met and their right to adequate food is upheld.

Addressing the policy gaps requires a holistic approach that considers the unique challenges faced by persons with disabilities. This analysis will pave the way for the development of effective policies that foster inclusivity, equitable access, and food security for all individuals, including those with disabilities.

- **United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD)**

The UNCRPD is a global legislation promoting disability inclusion, but lacks focus on Africa and faces limited implementation in the WaA! countries. It is ratified by all the WaA! countries, including the Netherlands, which is integral for our program. The Optional Protocol established a monitoring committee, and Article 32 emphasizes the inclusion of persons with disabilities in development efforts, which the WaA! program highlights to the Dutch government and other civil society and non-governmental organisations in the Netherlands. However, the UNCRPD does not address the food security of persons with disabilities.

- **Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in Africa (African Disability Protocol)**

The African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights does not specifically mention disabilities, but there is an additional protocol called the 'African Disability Protocol (ADP)' that addresses the issue. The ADP emphasizes the importance of community and family involvement in disability inclusion and manages the impact of traditions and customs on stigmatization. These aspects are crucial in addressing the challenges faced by persons with disabilities, as highlighted in the WaA! program. However, the ADP has not yet gained adequate ratifications to become enforceable, as it requires 15 ratifying states, but currently, only 8 ratifications have been obtained.



- **Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (Maputo Protocol) & the Agenda 2063**

In addition to the ADP, the African Union (AU) has also introduced a protocol that specifically focuses on the rights of women. Referred as the Maputo Protocol, it's an extension of the African Charter on Human and People's Rights, mainly emphasizing the rights of women in Africa. Article 23 of the Maputo Protocol highlights their economic and social participation, including their access to employment. This protocol empowers women with disabilities to invest in their livelihoods and ensure food security. The AU has developed Agenda 2063, which holds relevance for the WaA! program. Agenda 2063 serves as Africa's blueprint and master plan for transforming the continent



into a global powerhouse in the future. It encompasses several aspirations that align with our goals, such as improving the quality of life, eliminating inequality, and enhancing the well-being of citizens.

- **The Sustainable Development Goals (specifically SDGs 2, 5, 10 and 17)**

The 2030 Agenda and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are crucial for improving food security among persons with disabilities. SDG2, the first goal, aims to eradicate hunger, achieve food security, improve nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture for all. People with disabilities face limited access to food and nutrition, and they experience higher poverty rates. They often face unemployment and low earnings, resulting in less money to spend on food. Despite the social protection measures available, they do not cover disability-related expenses, pushing food and nutrition down the list of spending priorities. SDG10 aims to reduce inequalities and calls for the inclusion of persons with disabilities in society, including areas related to food security, livelihood and decision-making. Stigmatization, religious beliefs and ableism contribute to unequal relationships with persons with disabilities. On the other hand, SDG17 focusses on partnerships necessary for achieving the SDGs. Our WaA! program underscores the significance of partnering with civil society, including OPDs, to ensure their consent and cooperation, leaving no one behind.

To conclude, policies that uphold the rights of persons with disabilities are present at various levels and have the potential to bring benefits in all countries implementing the WaA! initiative. These legislations encompass inclusion requirements at various levels, spanning disability rights specific legislation, food security policies and land registrations. These laws and regulations are often comprehensive, but their effectiveness in positively impacting persons with disabilities is often hindered by inadequate implementation and recognition at the local level.

Part three: our recommendations

The everyday challenges faced by persons with disabilities, along with insights gathered from two-and-a-half years of WaA!, have led in policy recommendations for all levels of governance. These recommendations showcase not only our work as partners in the WaA! Consortium but also extend to external stakeholders such as communities, NGOs, local governments and institutions. These stakeholders have a crucial role to play in shaping policies that enhance food security and livelihood opportunities for persons with disabilities.



We distinguish between six categories of recommendations. There are general recommendations, as well as recommendations that apply for the different levels of governance relevant to the We are Able! programme. These range from local to the global level.

I: General recommendations:

- Invest in agriculture, smallholder farming and the production and marketing of food crops, ensuring food and income at community levels. In times of climate crisis, invest in climate resilient and sustainable forms of agriculture. The positive experiences of using the PIP approach in several WaA! countries merits upscaling and copying in other African countries.
- Be aware of the underprivileged position of women with disabilities. Women should be cognizant of their own rights, and officials and communities should ensure equal access for men and women to economic opportunities. Specific attention must be paid to intersectionality, which recognizes the interconnectedness of social identities and emphasizes the need to consider the unique challenges and forms of discrimination faced by women with disabilities.
- Work on strengthening the position of persons with disabilities from a rights-based and social approach. Prevent ableism — a form of discrimination or prejudice against persons with disabilities, denying them equal opportunities and access to resources. Supporting persons with disabilities out of spite is closely associated with the frequent stigmatization faced by people with disabilities.
- Address the role of religion in stigmatization of persons with disabilities, with specific attention to the role of religious leaders in positively changing community perspectives of persons with disabilities[5].
- Standardize the integration of disability inclusion as a topic in capacity building of key land actors, in particular concerning inheritance rights.

5 *See our Policy Brief June 2022: The role of religious norms and religious actors in disability inclusion.*

II: Recommendations at local and regional level:

- Local governments should ensure the implementation of human rights and in particular those regarding the specific needs of persons with disabilities such as access to land, water and sanitation. This requires collaboration with stakeholders and informed actions to leave no one behind. The local inclusion agenda is an asset for achieving this and ensuring that persons with disabilities can own or inherit land is essential for inclusive food security.
- To support local governance in advocating for inclusion, they need resources from higher level of government and implement local inclusion agendas effectively.
- Ensure that OPDs are strengthened so that they can advocate at all levels and support access to land processes.
- Secured land ownership is an opportunity for persons with disabilities to produce their own food through agriculture and engage in economic activities such as harvesting their land or renting out. Procedures for land tenure security should be inclusive and accessible to persons with disabilities, representing persons with disabilities should be ensured in the formal and customary structures responsible for land ownership and conflict resolution.
- In cases of land conflicts, persons with disabilities and their families should engage in family dialogues and mediation meetings to ensure persons with disabilities are given opportunities to access to land.
- Disability community leaders should support other persons with disabilities to ensure access to justice and claiming their rights.



III: Recommendations at the national level in Africa:

- Disseminate information on Disability Rights to raise public awareness.
- Ensure a supported environment for women with disabilities to access justice and protect their rights.
- Align national policies on food insecurity and disability inclusion, addressing existing gaps ratification shortcomings.
- Monitor UNCRPD enforcement and compliance, particularly in the WaA! countries.

IV: Recommendations at the African Union level:

- Ensure that disability inclusion is integrated into the African Union's efforts to improve food security.
- Advocacy at the African level should focus on Agenda 2063, as it aligns with the goals of ensuring food security for all persons with disabilities.

V: Recommendations at the global level:

- Address the overlapping areas between disability inclusion and increasing food security. Address the lack of attention to food security in the UNCRPD.
- Work with international partners like International Disability and Development Consortium (IDDC) and EUCORD to mainstream food security into disability-specific interventions.
- Improve progress towards SDGs for persons with disabilities by addressing their vulnerability in terms of food security. This is part of SDGs 2, 5, 10 & 17.

VI. Recommendations at the Dutch level:

- Pay close attention to intersections of vulnerability. In food crises, refugee situations and climate disasters, persons with disabilities are extra vulnerable for disastrous impact in their livelihoods. Dutch policy should address the intersection of disability inclusion and food security beyond the WaA! programme.
- Stress the importance of disability inclusion throughout international development efforts related to food security.



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