



# We are Able!

## Policy brief scoping studies 'We are Able!'

### Summary





## 1. About We are Able!

'We are Able!' (WaA!) focuses on lobbying and advocacy by and for persons with disabilities and other marginalized groups. The aim is to increase their access to basic services including access to agricultural extension, techniques, inputs and markets. The programme also provides support for access to resource administration and dispute resolution, and resources such as land and water for food production.

WaA! works with individuals directly as well as through their representative organizations, such as Organizations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs) and mainstream Civil Society Organizations (CSOs). Formal and informal authorities at local, national and international level are involved to promote dialogue and a conducive enabling environment for change that ensures food security for those most at need in countries affected by conflict as well as by the impact of the coronavirus pandemic.

The project includes scoping studies that have been conducted in Ethiopia, Uganda and DR Congo (DRC). These studies contribute to filling the knowledge gap on the challenges and problems faced by persons with disabilities to access services and resources. The studies also critically reflect on assumptions and discourses guiding interventions to remove social barriers that hinder persons with disabilities from fully participating in society. Furthermore, the studies help to enhance learning with partners and develop adaptive programming.

The theory of change of the WaA! programme hinges on the following three key assumptions:

1. Persons with disabilities will be mobilized and capable of claiming their rights and will actively participate in local OPDs/CSOs.
2. Through increased capacity and legitimacy, plus effective lobby and advocacy strategies, OPDs/CSOs become more inclusive. This enables them to influence agenda setting for inclusive governance, influence public discourse, and gain a seat at the table.
3. Working together with public authorities and strengthening capacity for inclusive governance results in local authorities actively engaging with OPDs/CSOs to develop laws and practices and set norms for inclusive governance.



## 2. Why We are Able! is needed

### 2.1 The opportunities and challenges for persons with disabilities to access services and resources

- The access of persons with disabilities to services and resources is conditioned by (mis)conceptions and practices of stigmatization in communities in Uganda & DRC.
- Disability, e.g. with underlying diseases like lepra, is regarded as a curse of God or a punishment that renders persons with disabilities vulnerable and useless. They may even become written off as beggars. This leads to domestic, administrative and societal violence resulting in unequal access to resources and services.
- Persons with disabilities are overlooked as marginalized groups. As a result, they are limited because of challenges in physical access and lack of assistive devices.
- There is little help from state legislation (absence of effective legislation) and lack of awareness of rights of persons with disabilities.

### 2.2 The opportunities and challenges of organizations representing persons with disabilities and state and non-state authorities

While several governmental and non-governmental institutions have interventions focusing on OPDs, coordination is lacking. This results in a patchwork of interventions, limited exchange of experiences, and missed opportunities for synergy.

If public authorities are aware of the work of OPDs, they tend to consider them as organizations that 'assist' and 'care for' persons with disabilities, rather than that they 'represent' them. Likewise, while churches specifically target persons with disabilities, they often consider them as vulnerable people that need charity, but not as a group that holds rights, and that should actively participate in decision-making on issues that concern their lives.

This results in widely shared feelings of disappointment and anger. As one interviewee explained: "What bothers me is that we are continuously considered as people that need charity, help or assistance; even when many of us have capacities to do things, to think and participate in changing our society. They look at us not as a human resource, but as a person to help. This is unacceptable and must change".



## 3. How We are Able! will bring change

### 3.1 Intervention rationale and practices of intervention by government, civil society, and intervening organizations

- Persons with disabilities can only effectively fight marginalization, stigmatization and injustice if they organize themselves through creating organizations.
- Empowerment of persons with disabilities is essential for social integration and the promotion of their dignity.
- Promoting the rights of persons with disabilities requires awareness raising and changing narratives that legitimize their exclusion in decision making and in access to natural resources and services. This exclusion ultimately limits their food and nutrition security. These narratives are based on beliefs about the origins of disability (curse, bad fate), their social standing (beggars, marginalized, vulnerable) and the perception that they are 'incapable' of decision taking and schooling.
- Inclusion of persons with disabilities in national, provincial and local institutions is essential for their protection and better consideration of their multiple needs.

### 3.2 How interventions and interveners are being assessed by diverse stakeholders: beneficiaries, government, civil society

The WaA! Programme considers awareness raising about rights among people with disabilities as a key component of the programme. Access to basic social services, such as education and healthcare, are essential for decreasing vulnerability. The question remains how to change social norms leading to stigmatizations and about what awareness precisely needs to be raised. It should not only target public authorities, but also a wider community.

## 4. Call to action

### Donors:

- We call on donors to recognize and support OPDs as the rightful representers of persons with disabilities;
- We call on donors to fund programmes aimed at reducing stigmatization globally.



## **Governments:**

- We call on all national governments not only to design but also to implement inclusive legislation;
- We call on national governments to actively stimulate local governments to work in a more inclusive manner (and vice versa);
- We call on national and local governments and municipalities to work with OPDs in the design and implementation of awareness raising campaigns. The aim is to reduce stigmatization and improve social acceptance of the position of persons with disabilities in society.

## **Non-governmental organizations:**

- We call on (inter)national non-governmental-organizations and their wider networks to adjust their programmes as to creating equal opportunities for all people.
- We call on (inter)national non-governmental organizations and their wider networks to work closely together in their programmes with OPDs.

