



# Annual Report 2021 Summary



The Hague Academy for  
local governance



## About We are Able!

We are Able! (WaA!) is a five-year programme, financed by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs under the Power of Voices partnerships for strengthening civil society. We are Able! helps persons with disabilities achieve a sustainable, fully-fledged place in their community, so that they have greater food security. The project commenced in 2021 and is intended to run until 2026. WaA! operates in six countries: Burundi, Ethiopia, DR Congo, South Sudan, Sudan, and Uganda. The programme is run by a consortium of six organisations: ZOA, African Disability Forum, SeeYou, VNG International, The Hague Academy for Local Governance and Leprosy Mission International.

The strategic objective of the WaA! programme focuses on empowerment, amplifying voices and creating resilience among men, women and youth with disabilities and other excluded groups. The aim is that by 2025, through engagement with public authorities, persons with disabilities and other excluded groups, resilient and capable local Organisations of Persons with Disabilities (DPOs) are successfully influencing laws, policies, practices and norms for improved food security for all.

## Main project activities

Persons with disabilities face an array of challenges that make them more susceptible to food insecurity. In the first year of its implementation, the WaA! programme focused on a large number of activities related to awareness raising. This was done at all levels and on a diversity of subjects relating to each of the three Pathways of Change. In the beginning of the year, awareness raising about the WaA! project took place in all the six countries, mostly in the form of workshops, launch events or community meetings.

In Uganda, for example, the team organised eight meetings at the sub-country level to inform communities about the project and its objectives. This was an opportunity for persons with disabilities to share challenges pertaining to their disability. During these meetings, sub-county leaders acknowledged the plights of persons with disabilities and they committed to supporting the project.

Several awareness-raising activities around the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) were also conducted for better awareness raising. During a training on the UNCRPD in Burundi, it became clear that public authorities of – as well as people with disabilities in – four districts were unaware of this legal framework. It was reported that, as a result of the training, people with disabilities can now claim their rights and hold public authorities accountable. Moreover, the public authorities expressed their commitment to increase accessibility and budget for people with disabilities. The results of the awareness-raising activities contributed to all three Pathways of Change.



### **Pathway 1: Community mobilisation**

The training of Disability Inclusion Facilitators (DIFs) was mentioned in most of the country reports and is strongly related to the awareness-raising campaigns described above. DIFs are often deployed to provide basic support to create a targeted and effective awareness raising campaign. In South Sudan, DIFs supported and formed self-help groups for the most marginalized people with disabilities. This was an opportunity for them to assist each other and to further develop themselves.

### **Pathway 2: Strengthening OPDs and CSOs**

Several activities relating to the strengthening of OPDs and CSOs (Civil Society Organisations) were implemented in all six countries. Organisational assessments led to the identification of capacity gaps which inspired training in organisation management and financial management skills. In addition, significant energy was invested in training CSOs and OPDs in networking and association building. In October 2021, OPDs from Gedaref locality visited CSOs in the West Galabat locality in Sudan. This helped OPD members better understand how to create cooperative associations and networks. Members learned how to identify potential challenges and spot existing opportunities for creating such groups.

### **Pathway 3: Engagement of public authorities**

In order to draw attention to legal frameworks already in place but not yet adhered to, activities were created to further engage authorities and encourage adherence. The previously mentioned UNCRPD is a noteworthy example. Training in inclusive governance was conducted in all six countries, usually in the form of Training of Trainers (ToT) by VNG International or The Hague Academy. In Uganda, for example, 16 participants (10 women and 6 men) were selected to participate in the ToT programme. The participants represented different stakeholders, including consortium partners, CSOs, organisations for people with disabilities and public authorities.

## **Lessons learned**

The hotel in Nairobi, Kenya in which the WaA! Learning Week event was organised, was inaccessible for persons in wheelchairs. Even though the owners of such venues may claim that their spaces are accessible, it is always preferable to have it assessed by a person living with a

disability. In this case, it was used as an opportunity to sensitize participants without disabilities about how unaware they often are about physical barriers leading to the inaccessibility of venues.

In South Sudan, it was reported that partners' unrealistic expectations, claims and demands to own the project led to the delay of project implementation. Negotiations took time for partners to enter into Partnership Funding agreements. In addition to causing delays, it also lowered morale and motivation for the implementing staff on the ground. Although this is not a new phenomenon, it was a reminder that expectation management is easy to overlook. Including both local authorities and persons with disabilities in trainings and meetings proved to be of greater value than anticipated: particularly in the informal moments of meetings (breaks, etc.). A lesson learned is that in such meetings ample time should be reserved for informal moments such as coffee/tea breaks and/or refreshers.

Identifying collective opportunities for different working groups, such as Lobby & Advocacy and Communication, has been challenging. This has been particularly evident in terms of engagement on the use and sharing of the best available evidence, experiential knowledge to achieve higher quality operations and create greater visibility for WaA! projects. Through dialogue during the regional event, a promising coordinating/cooperation mechanism is evolving.



## Activities at working group level

### MEAL and KM working groups

The MEAL (Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning) and KM (Knowledge Management) working groups have been collaborating on several topics and have held joint meetings throughout 2021. During the first two quarters of the year, the MEAL working group organized and oversaw the im-

plementation of the baseline study. This consumed a significant amount of the MEAL working group's time. However, it was viewed as time well spent, as the MEAL working group developed guidelines for their alliance with the KM working group. Spearheaded by VNG International, the KM working group supported the development of additional basket indicators specifically related to public authorities under pathway 3. The group organised a regional learning and sharing event in Nairobi, Kenya, to ensure knowledge is shared within WaA! and between WaA! and its partners with the goal of strengthening partnerships and creating better development results.

### **Lobby & Advocacy working group**

The Lobby & Advocacy working group organised 4 internal workshops to promote the exchange of information and to develop joint WaA! advocacy strategies. These included the following: an ADF workshop on Ratification of the African Disability Rights Protocol (ADP); two workshops educating local governments about WaA!, persons with disabilities and OPDs during an annual conference of VNGI's 'Iedereen doet mee'- programme; a series of exchange sessions on disability inclusion for the Strengthening Civil Society consortia; a presentation by SeeYou on disability mainstreaming during Power of Voices' kick-off workshops by the Dutch embassy in Uganda.

Furthermore, there was active engagement, participation and presentation of WaA! and local inclusion agendas at different events, forums and networks: the EUCord; The Food Systems Summit; the United Cities and Local Governments; the Adopt an SDG campaign by Building Change; the Leave No One Behind Platform of Partos and the gender and inclusion lobby of WOMEN. Contact and regular communication was initiated with key and relevant stakeholders: the African Union, Dutch municipalities, MakeWay, Right2Grow, the Netherlands Food Partnership (NFP) and the Food4All network, MOFA and other Power of Voices consortiums. The Inclusive SDG2 'Zero hunger' was presented to parliamentarian Jan Klink (VVD).

The L&A working group's most important conclusion from the year 2021 is the need to start prioritizing L&A's focus on African Disability Rights Protocol. However, it is clear it will take quite some time to get municipalities to engage. Entry points for this are available (e.g., the World Urban Forum) and it is important that they are used. It has proven challenging to connect the activities of the different partners and to really work together. However, the L&A working group is evolving as a coordinating mechanism.

### **Communication and Finance working groups**

The communication and finance working groups provided important support in 2021, each on their own topic. Guidelines were provided and hands-on assistance was delivered. The communication working group made important decisions about branding and developed a visual identity, including a website ([www.weareable.ngo](http://www.weareable.ngo)) and social media presence.

### **Capacity development**

The capacity-building working group has put great effort into getting the Shift of Power approach off the ground. After developing a Shift of Power tool, five of the six countries participated in a Shift of Power workshop. It was concluded after the discussion held at the Nairobi

regional learning event that it is important to take voiced concerns and hesitations seriously. They have been listed and can be used as a monitoring and learning tool on Shift of Power. Furthermore, country coordinators need to be coached to increase knowledge and understanding of Shift of Power. This will enable them to translate it into an effective process with clear roadmaps which include how and when they can engage in a constructive discussion with and manage expectations of partners, OPDs and CSOs.

## A review of partnerships

### Burundi

Collaboration with all partners has been good. UPHB and ZOA work closely together with the teams based at ZOA offices in the Makamba and Cibitoke provinces. When activities are organized by VNGI, for example, the staff helps with preparations by communicating the invitations. The Netherlands-based partners, TLM and THA, have smoothly and effectively organized activities with UPHB and VNGI, their partners in Burundi. Communication between TLM, Enablement and UPHB was challenging initially, as the roles of each partner were not clear to everyone. Communication improved with TLM's and Enablement's visit to Burundi and additional meetings between TLM and the coordinators in Burundi. The Country Programme Steering Committee (CPSC) meets monthly, which helps with necessary communication on action plans and strategies. This ensures mutual learning and makes it easier to benefit from each other's expertise. The relationship with the authorities is positive.

### DR Congo

The DRC team faced some challenges because of the late start of FENAPHACO (Fédération des associations des personnes handicapées du Congo) and difficult underlying relationships. Fortunately, over time, the situation improved. Collaboration among members of the consortium is positive and fruitful. Most exchanges take place during coordination meetings; however, members also communicate outside of meetings to discuss timely issues regarding the implementation of complementary project activities. Many activities are carried out jointly, especially those targeting the same outcome. Relations with the local authorities have been positive from the very start of the project. The relationship was made official by the signing of MOUs (memorandums of understanding) with the various decentralized entities which are the chiefdoms. These authorities are often present during activities carried out by members of the consortium at the level of the chiefdoms, territories and the province.

### Ethiopia

At the Harar field office (based on the agreement entered into with each co-implementing partner: ADF, TLM, VNGI and THA) the entire team works together and shares the same compound, office and logistics. This greatly enhances efficient collaboration. The most important stakeholders have been identified in a stakeholder mapping exercise. Accordingly, they are involved throughout programme planning, implementation, monitoring and reporting phases. Both at Oromia and Addis Ababa areas, ZOA and all consortium partners have created a smooth relationship with the identified stakeholders. Monitoring and reflection workshops are conducted

regularly with all programme signatory bodies. ZOA and all other WaA! consortium partners are actively participating in respective UN clusters, networks and other technical working groups both at woreda and zonal levels.

### **South Sudan**

Under ZOA's leadership, all Consortium Partners have collaborated well. Each partner collaborated with more than three local partners in the implementation of project activities across the three Payams. Partnership assessments were conducted with each partner, focussing on their internal governance capacities and support structures. They were also assessed on their ability to deliver programmatic quality and on their financial systems. The assessments resulted in capacity-building plans. The consortium also maintains a close relationship with the Ministry of Gender, Child and Social Welfare. Coordination with other (FSL) partners for this project can be further improved.

### **Sudan**

Collaboration among the implementing partners has been well established and all partners coordinate well with all project stakeholders. Nevertheless, it has been a struggle to convince local authorities to accept local implementing partners. Due to changes in the political and administrative structures, our two national implementing partners have faced challenges. Women with Disabilities Association (ADD) and Maan Organisation (ZOA) allegedly had members belonging to the Al-Bashir regime. ADD and ZOA were requested to replace these partners. After numerous meetings with the relevant parties, the issues were resolved. ZOA has agreed to work with Al-Twaki Organisation, a new local implementing partner, and ADD managed to convince the HAC commissioner that Women with Disabilities Association had no members belonging to the Al-Bashir regime.

### **Uganda**

Overall, collaboration among the consortium partners has been good, especially during joint planning, reviewing activities and coordinating action in the field. The collaboration's key challenge revolves around communication gaps and the timely sharing of information and updates in the shared folder. The Consortium Partners and District Unions of PWDs have continued to build their working relationship with the public authorities and government structures at the local and district level. Arua City and Yumbe District Local Government have positively engaged PWD representatives in their annual budget conferences 2022/23. Their participation in the training and awareness raising of district leaders on disability inclusion shows their commitment to growing partnership and political will.

### **The Netherlands**

The cooperation at HQ level is going well. Successes and challenges are being shared. Staff turnover at HQ level particularly affected the communication working group. There is a desire to invest more in mutual relationships and meetings. Trust is the basis for good relationships and healthy cooperation.

The WaA! governance structure is quite heavy, and the conclusion is that this needs to be handled differently in the coming years. It is a challenge to find an effective and efficient way of exchanging information between the countries and the working groups. The meeting in Kenya has contributed to improved communication.

## Finances

The We are Able! programme is 33 per cent behind its budget (actuals 5M, budget 7.6M) due to the late implementation of activities. The coronavirus pandemic had a major role to play as well as the war in Ethiopia and a coup in Sudan. In the last quarter of 2021, expenditures were almost at budget level, indicating that the WaA! programme is now running at full power. Furthermore, WaA! consortium partner African Disability Forum (ADF), enhanced their capacity quickly; however, they were not operating at their maximum ability until the end of the year. They performed activities in Burundi, DR Congo, Ethiopia and Uganda, but did not succeed in appointing an ADF-Member in Sudan and South Sudan until the end of the year. Although the under expenditure was 54 per cent, we were able to successfully create a Capacity Development Plan. This will enable ADF to become a stable and mature organisation capable of sustaining the WaA! programme.

Various basket indicators were used to measure the efficiency of the WaA! programme and its activities in the six countries. Budgetary information was gathered by budget line, by country and by pathway to achieve better outcomes. As per the country-wise budget line, Burundi used 67 per cent of its country budget, DR Congo used 80 per cent, Ethiopia used 64 per cent, Sudan used 60 per cent, South Sudan used 56 per cent, Uganda used 68 per cent, and Netherlands used 72 per cent. The budget report by pathway saw an overall expenditure of 54 per cent (indicating sub-budget-lines), that is, pathway 1 used 68 per cent, pathway 2 used 47 per cent and pathway 3 used 52 per cent of the total budget allocated for 2021.

