

Achieving inclusive food security through improved local governance

The We are Able! program
(2021-2025)



including
everybody



The Leprosy
Mission
The Netherlands



Funded by

Ministry of Foreign Affairs

The Hague Academy for
local governance

WE ARE ABLE!

The We are Able! (WaA!) program, implemented in Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, South Sudan, Sudan, and Uganda, empowers persons with disabilities to advocate for their right to food, land, and livelihood opportunities. By strengthening their voices and resilience, We are Able! ensures their active participation in decision-making processes, enabling them to provide for themselves and their families and be valued members of their communities. Through collaboration with OPDs, civil society organisations (CSOs), local governments and policymakers, the program fosters an enabling environment where inclusive policies and laws secure equal access to food and essential resources.

Since its launch in 2021, We are Able! has worked to influence legislation and governance structures to enhance food security for persons with disabilities. The program facilitates dialogue between OPDs and both formal and informal authorities at local, national, and international levels, contributing to more inclusive agriculture and food policies and decision-making processes. We are Able! is implemented by a consortium of six partners, including the African Disability Forum, ZOA, SeeYou Foundation, The Leprosy Mission, The Hague Academy for Local Governance, and VNG International. The program is funded by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs.



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VNG & THE LOCAL INCLUSION AGENDA (LIA)

The Association of Netherlands Municipalities (VNG) introduced the Local Inclusion Agenda (LIA) as a policy framework to help municipalities advance disability inclusion, in alignment with the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN CRPD).

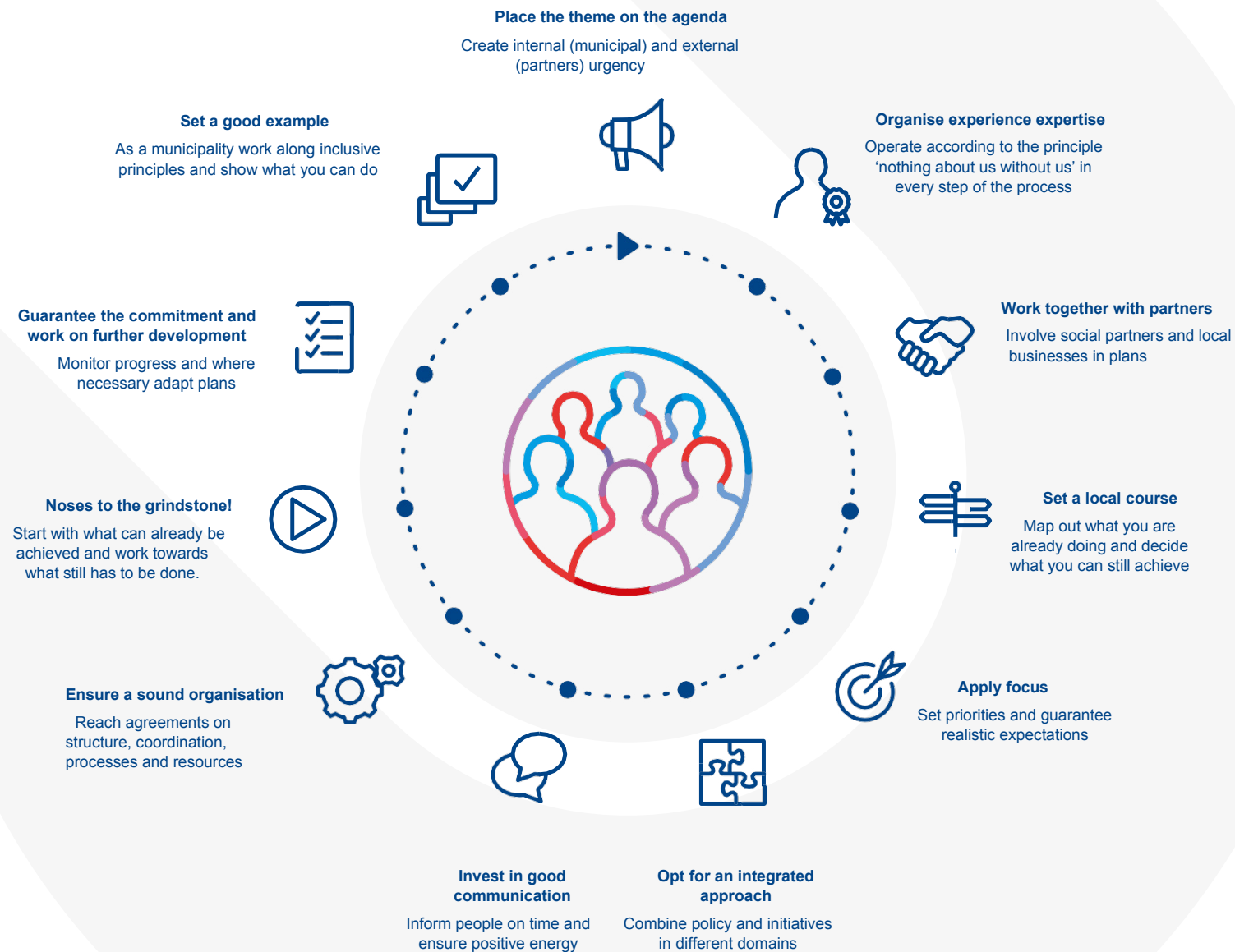
The LIA was first developed in the Netherlands following the country's ratification of the UN CRPD in 2016. Dutch municipalities were encouraged to implement comprehensive local policies that systematically promote accessibility and inclusion across various sectors, including education, housing, employment (e.g. in agriculture or food production), leisure, transport, and welfare.

The LIA has been incorporated into the We are Able! program to ensure that local policies are not only inclusive but also adhere to international standards like the UN CRPD, fostering greater accessibility and participation for persons with disabilities in all aspects of society.



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THE ORIGINAL LIA ROADMAP





THE LIA IN WE ARE ABLE!

Under the We are Able! (WaA!) program, VNG International supported the contextualization of the LIA in each of the six African countries where the program is active, ensuring that public policies and services adequately address the food security needs of persons with disabilities.

Instead of imposing a one-size-fits-all approach, we facilitated participatory processes in each country to align the LIA with existing governance structures, local laws, and cultural understandings of disability inclusion.

Local stakeholders, including Organizations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs), were engaged to ensure that the LIA reflected lived experiences and practical accessibility needs. This approach was made possible through collaboration with our partner organizations in each country, ensuring strong representation of persons with disabilities, capacitated to advocate for their rights in inclusive decision-making processes.



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BURUNDI



- LIA helped institutionalize disability inclusion by integrating it into communal five-year development plans, annual budgets, and work plans.
- OPDs gained official recognition and are now included in communal meetings as legitimate advocacy groups.
- 10% of the communal budget is now allocated to disability inclusion initiatives.
- Public infrastructure has been made more accessible, with new buildings incorporating inclusive design.
- Through micro grants, OPDs have been able to carry out small agriculture-based activities that have strengthened the position of people with disabilities within their respectful communities and reinforced overall food security.
- A positive shift in perception now sees persons with disabilities as contributors to community development.

Success Story: From exclusion and suffering to a hopeful future



We share the story of Salvator Ndayikengurukiye, whose story is a poignant testament to the strength and resilience of disabled persons in Burundi before We are Able!

“Disabled persons have lived in extremely precarious conditions” says Salavator , aged around 50, “I was with my mother when we saw a disabled person begging. As I couldn’t walk, sometimes she had to carry me on her back. The passenger spat at the hand of the disabled beggar, and my mother said: “Son, as long as I am on this earth, I will work to prevent you from being spat on by passengers”.

With tears in his eyes: “We were ignored, rejected, as if our existence had no value. Every day was a struggle against humiliation and indifference”.

“We were seen as burdens on society, forgotten on the margins, with no chance of being heard or improving our living conditions.”

We are Able! has brought change. He says.

“When I started taking part in the project’s activities, something in me changed. I learned to work with other disabled persons and to create opportunities to improve my life and those of my peers. Today, I’m an agent of change in my community. I’ve found my dignity and I’m no longer haunted by who I am.”

A bright future for him and other disabled persons:

He says: “Today I am an example of resilience and empowerment. My life has been transformed, as have those of many other disabled persons who have seen the project as a role model. We have risen to our feet, we can now stand with pride and say that We Are Able, that we disabled persons have dreams, talents and abilities”.



Advocacy note submitted to the Provincial Ministry of Social Affairs for OPDs to obtain access and legitimacy to operate at provincial level.

**Visit by
members of
the consortium
and OPDs**

- LIA provided a monitoring framework for legal and policy reforms, pushing for the 2022 disability rights law and increased representation in governance.
- 23 OPDs received legal recognition at provincial level, allowing them to start partnerships with INGOs which facilitated access to financial resources and operating more effectively.
- The annual budgets of the 4 supported chiefdoms now include provisions for disability inclusion, ensuring sustainable support.
- Advocacy efforts led to land inheritance rights for persons with disabilities, improving food security and economic stability.



Visit in Kinshasa to meet Mrs. Irène Esambo Diata, Minister-delegate to the Minister of Social Affairs, in charge of the Disabled and Other Vulnerable Persons (in 2019 she became DRC's first minister for persons with disabilities, as a woman with a disability).



Success Story: From Resistance to Advocacy – Samuel Dejene's Journey



- LIA strengthened OPD engagement in governance, ensuring persons with disabilities play an active role in policy decisions.
- Local governments adopted disability-sensitive monitoring tools to enhance accountability.
- Disability Mainstreaming Committees (DMCs) secured ETB 632,000, training 2,000+ government staff and OPD members on inclusion.
- Improved access to assistive devices has increased economic independence and social participation.
- Local governments have provided office spaces to OPDs, further increasing legitimacy as recognized partners.
- Participation of persons with disabilities to governmental small business activities increased, strengthening food security.
- Number of persons with disabilities engaged in safety net programs has increased – guaranteeing food security.

Samuel Dejene, a 33-year-old polio survivor from Addis Ababa, once hesitated to identify as a person with a disability. Lacking awareness of his rights and disconnected from the disability community, he had never engaged in advocacy. This changed when he joined We are Able! as a role model in Kolfe Keranio Sub City.

Through the program, Samuel collaborated closely with the Disability Mainstreaming Committee (DMC) that was set-up within the Sub City's local government office, participated in disability inclusion activities, and built strong relationships with OPDs. His growing awareness empowered him to claim his rights—most notably, overcoming bureaucratic barriers to secure a duty-free vehicle, a benefit he was entitled to. This success fueled his passion for advocacy, and he now works to improve accessibility in his sub-city, addressing infrastructure barriers like lifts, transportation, and walkways.

As a Senior Internal Auditor, Samuel actively integrates disability mainstreaming into the city's planning and execution processes. His commitment extends beyond his professional role—he co-founded a TikTok-based charity group, **Humanity First Persons with Disabilities Support Association**, an innovative online OPD that raises funds, provides assistive devices, and promotes disability rights. Under his leadership, the association became officially registered, challenging traditional advocacy models by leveraging social media for awareness and knowledge-sharing.

SUDAN



- LIA has driven disability inclusion by creating stronger partnerships between local governments, OPDs, and civil society. Six LIAs were signed in 2023, ensuring persons with disabilities participation in governance, food security, and livelihood programs.
- A comprehensive disability data collection effort reached 6,835 individuals, including 946 IDPs, forming the foundation for future policy and service improvements. Trained persons with disabilities enumerators ensured accuracy and awareness within communities.
- The Locality Joint Committees (LJCs) were established in six localities to oversee LIA planning and implementation, while a state-level committee was formed to drive policy reforms and inclusive development strategies.
- OPDs and local authorities secured LIA grants, leading to profitable income generating activities such as meat processing, solar powered farming, poultry production, and goat fattening. These efforts improved persons with disabilities' economic independence and expanded food security initiatives.
- The Zakat Chamber pledged 20% of its budget to persons with disabilities, and local authorities allocated funds for OPD office construction and accessibility improvements. Recruitment targets for persons with disabilities were raised from 2% to 5%, reinforcing long-term inclusion in governance.

Success Story: Osman Adam – From Teacher to Disability Rights Advocate



Osman Adam, a physics graduate from Gedarif, was born with a mobility impairment. Despite working as a secondary school teacher, he had little knowledge of disability rights, national and state laws, or connections with OPDs and CSOs.

Through We are Able! awareness campaigns, Osman gained in-depth knowledge of the UNCRPD and disability rights. His three-month training with ZOA further enhanced his expertise and involvement with OPDs. Recognized for his dedication, Osman was appointed Secretary-General of the Gedarif State Council of Persons with Disabilities, where he strengthened governance and disability inclusion.

During the 2023 Sudan conflict, Osman led emergency support efforts for people with disabilities, partnering with We are Able! and other organizations to assist those stranded in conflict areas. His leadership in training workshops, radio programs, and awareness campaigns furthered disability inclusion.

In 2024, Osman joined ADD International as a Project Officer, leveraging his experience to drive We Are Able's objectives. He now plays a key role in advocacy, service provision, and policy influence, while securing a sustainable livelihood for himself and his family.



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Success Story: Bol Akau Kuai – From Struggle to Stability



- LIA has strengthened disability inclusion by fostering co-creation, co-implementation, and co-action review among Public Authorities (PAs) and Organizations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs). LIA contributed to the ratification of the UNCRPD and supported the development of the National Disability Bill and Action Plan through sustained advocacy and policymaker engagement.
- The National Disability Inclusion Technical Team (DITT) and the Disability Mainstreaming Committee (DMC) were established, fostering collaboration between government, OPDs, CSOs, and other stakeholders.
- Leadership at county and Payam levels now spearheads community discussions on inclusive land rights and food security, ensuring long-term local ownership.
- Increased Livelihood Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities: Economic empowerment programs, including entrepreneurship training and market access, have enhanced financial independence and employment prospects.
- Public officials have become more committed to disability-inclusive governance, integrating inclusion into policies, services, and recruitment processes.

Mr. Bol Akau Kuai, a 48-year-old man with a physical impairment, lived in extreme hardship in Malual-chaat village, struggling to feed his family of four. His home had cracked walls and leaking roofs, and his children had to drop out of school due to financial difficulties.

Through the We are Able! project, Bol gained knowledge and skills on disability inclusion and rights, which led to his employment as a tax collector in Malith Thoor village. With a stable income, he can now support his family, ensuring they have food, shelter, and access to education.

“I am now able to support my family. I am glad the rights of persons with disabilities are being considered in public institutions”

Looking ahead, Bol plans to further his education, start a business, and train his community on disability inclusion, advocating for greater opportunities for persons with disabilities in public life.

UGANDA



- LIA enabled the creation of a five-year disability inclusion framework, now integrated into local government budgets.
- Strengthened disability coordination structures have increased OPD participation in decision-making.
- Public infrastructure improvements in hospitals, schools, and markets have enhanced accessibility.
- 78% of persons with disabilities can now access development funds, supporting economic empowerment and food security.
- A shift in mindset and greater respect for persons with disabilities has led to increased opportunities in governance and civil society.
- Capacities and lobbying position of OPDs has been strengthened, providing them a seat at the table and further advocating for the (food security) needs of people with disabilities.





PHOTO CREDITS

Page 1, 2, 4, 10, 14, 16, 18, 21, 22: **ZOA, 2025**

Page 8: **SeeYou, 2025**

Page 11, 12, 13, 15, 17, 19, 20: **VNG International, 2024**

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