



2024

Meaningful Participation of Persons with Disabilities in Food Security and Livelihood Programming

What we can learn and replicate from the partnership between WFP and HI in South Sudan

Purpose

This learning paper presents good practices from a joint project between the World Food Programme (WFP) and Humanity & Inclusion (HI) South Sudan on mainstreaming disability into food security and livelihood (FSL) programming. It shares recommendations for replication and scaling to other country offices that work on making programmes more inclusive of persons with disabilities, in order to reach those most at risk.

Primary audience

WFP technical advisers, disability inclusion focal points, programming, and monitoring and evaluation staff



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Description: Focus group discussion with disability inclusion focal points in Yambio.

Background

The global estimate of persons with disabilities is 16 percent (1), and latest data estimates on people who will be in need in South Sudan in 2024 show that 15 percent of 9 million people are persons with disabilities (2). However, the number is likely to be even higher in humanitarian contexts, such as South Sudan (3). Persons with disabilities are among those identified at being particularly affected by food insecurity (4). According to the latest protection analysis update, persons with disabilities, and especially women with disabilities, face heightened risks of vulnerability and discrimination in accessing humanitarian services (5).

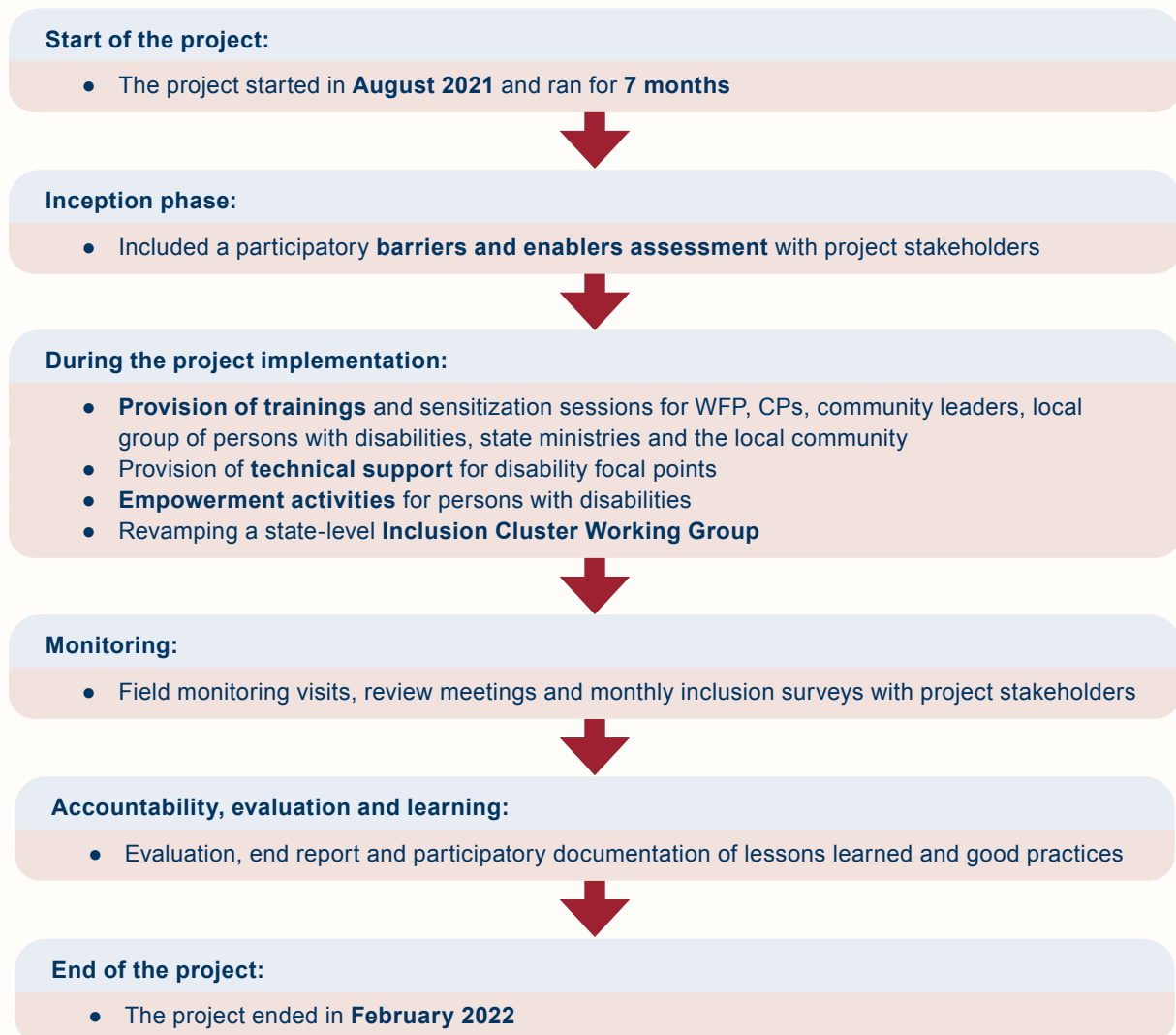
With the completion of WFP's two-year disability inclusion road map and subsequent workplans, WFP has made steady efforts on disability inclusion in recent years (6). One example of how WFP has initiated more meaningful participation in FSL programming in line with the **Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Guidelines on Disability Inclusion** (3) is the seven-month pilot project between HI and WFP in South Sudan. The pilot project, funded by WFP and implemented by HI, focused on strengthening the access and meaningful participation of persons with disabilities to FSL opportunities in Yambio, Western Equatoria. It began in August 2021 and was based on a previous collaboration between WFP and HI in 2019–2021.

The pilot project led to a continuation of WFP's and HI's partnership by conducting joint research on the good practices of their collaboration and the pilot project in November 2022, which was funded by the Phase 3 – Leave no one behind! project.

What was the pilot project about?

At the beginning of the project, HI together with persons with disabilities conducted an assessment that identified barriers, enablers, opportunities and entry points for inclusion of persons with disabilities in FSL programming. The results were validated jointly with WFP, cooperating partners (CPs), two state ministries, i.e. the Ministry of Gender, Child and Social Welfare, and the State Ministry of Agriculture, and members from the Union of Persons with Disabilities Yambio, a local group of persons with disabilities, to inform subsequent project activities. The pilot project provided capacity development opportunities for the above-mentioned stakeholders, as well as for the community and community leaders in Yambio, Western Equatoria. At the end of the seven-month pilot project, good practices and lessons learned were documented to continue those practices.

Key pilot project activities



What we wanted to learn

- What changes were initiated and sustained in WFP’s programming?
- What are the key success and hindering factors to anchor and maintain the four “must do” actions¹ and the twin-track approach as part of an inclusive programming approach in line with the IASC Guidelines on Disability Inclusion?
- What factors could foster replication and/or scaling in other contexts?

Findings on collaboration

Relevance and effectiveness

The pilot demonstrated the **relevance and effectiveness** of the partnership between WFP and HI South Sudan. The project built on existing collaboration in which HI provided technical support and training on inclusive humanitarian action to WFP. This helped the joint development of the pilot project proposal and ensured a common understanding and agreement of the project objective(s) and location. WFP’s **ownership, commitment and support** from senior management staff was essential in starting the pilot.

1 See findings on pilot project activities.

Application of newly gained knowledge

Another success factor was the **interest** and **willingness** of WFP and CP staff before, during and after the project to learn more and apply their **newly gained knowledge** on mainstreaming disability into their work. They confirmed that working closely and in an interactive way with HI and the Union of Persons with Disabilities helped them to improve disability inclusion in their own projects.

Impact on other projects

The seven-month pilot project demonstrated that, despite the relatively short timeframe and the funding cuts that hampered the continuation of a new project phase, many of the actions and good practices initiated during the project were continued or had an **impact on other projects** carried out after the end of the pilot project. To further sustain the good practices and target some of the barriers that require more time, for example work on data collection and analysis, including adaptation of related tools, more financial resources are needed.

Findings on pilot project activities

The pilot project was guided by the four “must do” actions of the IASC Guidelines on Disability Inclusion. It ensured **meaningful participation** of persons with disabilities, **empowered** them to contribute to project activities, provided **capacity development** for different stakeholders, and **removed barriers** that were identified during the collection of **quality disaggregated data**.

Meaningful participation

Persons with disabilities actively contributed to the project activities as co-facilitators for awareness-raising sessions and enumerators for the barriers and enablers assessment, and were recruited as project staff. For example, one of the HI staff with a visual disability facilitated trainings for WFP and CPs, and the Chair of the Union of Persons with Disabilities Yambio, who has a physical disability, co-facilitated the community sensitization session. The project staff was mindful of any reasonable accommodation requirements, e.g. providing transportation allowance or a support person.

After the project, persons with disabilities or households with members with disabilities continued to participate in the food for asset programmes

and meetings with humanitarian FSL actors. They took an active role in the project management committees, where two out of ten seats are now reserved for persons with disabilities. Persons with disabilities also continue to participate in community consultations or dispute resolutions.

Removal of barriers

The barriers and enablers assessment provided an opportunity for WFP and CPs to collectively understand and prioritize which barriers needed to be addressed in the short term.

After the end of the project, key informants reported that attitudinal, environmental and institutional barriers continue to be dismantled by disability inclusion focal points, community leaders, representatives of the local group of persons with disabilities.

For example, a decrease of stigmatization and discrimination at community and (non-)state actor level was observed due to a change of perception on the capacities and the rights of persons with disabilities because of previous trainings and sensitization sessions. The confidence of persons with disabilities also increased as they learned about their entitlements and continued to raise awareness about these.

Physical barriers were addressed in several ways, including through adaptation of agricultural tools to ensure persons with physical disabilities can work with them. A guide on how to make seed distribution and farm equipment distribution more inclusive and accessible for persons with disabilities was jointly developed by the State Ministry of Agriculture and FSL cluster.

There were improvements made in access to information and feedback mechanisms by establishing different communication channels. For example, CP's acquired basic sign language skills, and community leaders have been sensitized to inform and receive feedback from persons with disabilities within their community.

Empowerment and capacity development

The project offered a series of empowerment and capacity development activities, as listed below:

- trainings on introduction to disability-inclusive humanitarian action, and basic sign language training;

- training of, mentoring and coaching for two to four disability inclusion focal points from WFP, CPs and the two state ministries;
- community awareness sessions for community leaders and members, including persons with disabilities; and
- coaching on facilitation skills and training on the rights of persons with disabilities, and financial literacy training, for persons with disabilities.

These activities led to increased confidence of persons with disabilities to inform and further sensitize other persons with disabilities and the (humanitarian) community about their rights, although limited resources hampered continuation of this work.

“With the training the actors have received they [...] they can do the basics in terms of changing the situations and the challenges that people with disabilities face in the contexts where they work.”

Person with visual impairment

Quality data collection

The project itself used the Washington Group Set of Questions (WGQs)² to identify individuals with different types of functional difficulties in the community. This was complemented by a barriers and enablers assessment at the beginning of the project for more qualitative data. The assessment findings were also used for a session on data collection within the two-week intensive training for WFP and CP staff, in which the different barriers and enablers in accessing FSL opportunities and the use of the WGQs were highlighted.

The pilot project monitored the inclusion of persons with disabilities through monthly feedback sessions. Lastly, there was a strong focus on inter-agency learning by documenting good practices and sharing these, including to other WFP regional offices.

After the project, respondents demonstrated a better understanding of the concept of disability, the diversity within disability, including the barriers they face, which underlined the importance of collecting disability data. The need for more in-depth training on data collection remains.

Key recommendations

The following key recommendations can be replicated in other contexts to improve FSL programming, contributing to quality programming and accountability to affected populations.

Meaningful participation

- Ensure meaningful participation of persons with different disabilities and/or their representative (in)formal groups who are interested, and have the capacity or are willing to build their capacity, including persons with psychosocial and intellectual disabilities, of different gender, age and other intersecting factors, throughout the project as active contributors.

Identification and removal of barriers

- Provide sensitization sessions to decrease stigmatization and discrimination.
- Ensure that trainings are inclusive and accessible for project staff and those targeted by the project through collaboration with persons with different disabilities.

Empowerment and capacity development

- Offer opportunities to persons with disabilities (at community or group level) to learn about their entitlements to access and meaningfully participate in WFP FSL programmes, and expand awareness sessions facilitated by person with disabilities to more rural communities and front-line staff.
- Train and sustain a pool of disability inclusion focal points at field office level to support and guide other WFP and CP staff.

2 The WGQs are a widely tested tool that generates, in a non-discriminatory way, comparable and disaggregated data on the prevalence of persons with different functional difficulties.

Quality disability disaggregated data

- Ensure regular feedback meetings during the project with persons with disabilities, and identify good practices and lessons learned at the end of the project.
- Support, contribute to or engage in working groups/ task forces on data coordination, to identify and use existing data sets, and learning from other data-collection efforts.
- Strengthen data collection using the WGQs and barriers and enablers assessments.

- The executive summary and the full report are available on the **Phase 3 - Leave no one behind!** project website in accessible formats.

Next steps

To further build on the key findings, knowledge-sharing is essential for continuous collaborations. This could be done through inter-agency peer exchange, e.g. in disability inclusion working groups. In addition, it is recommended to ensure joint ownership in the partnership and have a project period of one to two years for maximum impact. To ensure buy-in and funding, senior management would need to be engaged and stay informed. For WFP, working with a technical, disability inclusion-focused NGO such as HI is highly recommended, as relevance and effectiveness would be ensured, and therefore programme quality enhanced.

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