



REACHING THE UNREACHED



WHAT THIS POLICY THEME IS ABOUT

The policy theme Reaching the Unreached was used by Woord en Daad in its 2021–2025 policy period to bring a focus on addressing the persistent gap between **those who benefit from development interventions and those who remain excluded despite being intended beneficiaries**. Previous research and field experience demonstrated that exclusion often results from hidden cultural norms, social hierarchies, stigma, and institutional barriers. Many people who most need support—such as women, individuals with disabilities, refugees, the ultra-poor, and children in extreme vulnerability—do not participate because they face financial, relational, cognitive, or social constraints.

The theme's core ambition was to intentionally identify exclusion-prone groups, understand the barriers they face, and design more inclusive strategies.



OUR LEARNING JOURNEY

To address these challenges, Woord en Daad integrated the theme across all its thematic programs. A key tool used was the **Exclusion Risk Assessment (ERA)**, implemented in 33 projects. These assessments helped identify who was being left out and why. Groups identified included people with disabilities, vulnerable women, youth lacking access to education or employment, and children living in garbage dumps. In some situations, it was not possible to perform a full ERA. In that case, a reduced version of the ERA was performed, or exclusion-prone groups were identified as part of other types of studies (context analyses, baseline studies).

The insights gained led to both adaptations of existing strategies and the creation of new, tailor-made approaches. **Examples** include specific interventions for children in waste settlements in Ethiopia, disability-inclusive employment initiatives in Burkina Faso, and

livelihood and restoration programs for formerly exploited women in Colombia. The Participatory Integrated Plan (PIP) approach empowered farmers—particularly smallholders, women, and youth—to contribute actively to planning and implementing sustainable agricultural practices. The Gender at Work framework supported more systemic approaches to gender inclusion.

Importantly, inclusion became a topic of discussion much earlier in the project cycle. Rather than treating inclusion as an afterthought, many teams addressed exclusion risks during the design and business development stages. Dialogue with partners and communities increased awareness and facilitated practical steps to address exclusion. Through this, the attention for this policy theme helped **shift organizational culture toward a more conscious and intentional approach to inclusion.**



RESULTS AND LESSONS LEARNED

The implementation of the theme produced substantial learning across programs and partner networks. Teams gained sharper insights into exclusion dynamics and were able to tailor interventions more effectively. Several projects experienced improved outcomes for vulnerable groups through adapted or newly developed strategies, demonstrating the benefits of inclusive programming not only for excluded groups but for project success as a whole.

Five core lessons stand out from the 2021–2025 period:

- 1. Inclusion must be given explicit and intentional attention from the design phase.** Without deliberate attention, exclusion occurs by default. Inclusion needs to be embedded in design, decision-making, and implementation.
- 2. An exclusion risk analysis is essential and can be performed on a tailor-made basis.** Clarifying who is at risk of exclusion and why provides the insights key to developing targeted inclusion approaches. The most important thing is that this knowledge is gathered; how exactly this is done is less important. The ERA tool can be customized, but other types of studies can also be used. Besides generating knowledge, an exclusion analysis also raises awareness among employees, partners, and communities, which is often the key to action and behavioral change.
- 3. Exclusion is multidimensional and context-specific.** No single strategy works everywhere; approaches must be adapted to financial, social, relational, and cognitive barriers in each context.

4. Effective inclusion requires extra effort, resources, and systematic planning. It is not a quick fix; it requires time, budget, skill, and (often) collaboration with specialized organizations.

5. Sustainable inclusion depends on structural embedding and improved monitoring. Inclusion must be anchored in standard procedures, culture, and tooling. Monitoring should focus not only on participation but also on meaningful benefit.

These lessons reflect both the progress and the challenges of working on inclusion. While awareness and strategy adaptation have improved, currently, monitoring remains insufficient to fully understand effectiveness. Many exclusion-prone groups still face systemic barriers that require long-term commitment to overcome.



WHAT WE TAKE WITH US GOING FORWARD

Looking ahead, **Woord en Daad will continue to prioritize inclusion** in the next policy period, with a shift toward effective inclusion. This means ensuring that marginalized groups not only join interventions but also **benefit optimally and sustainably.** Achieving this requires **stronger monitoring systems** that combine qualitative and quantitative approaches to capture lived experiences and uncover underlying mechanisms.

Inclusion will be further integrated into context analyses, business development, project design, and partner collaboration. **Structural embedding**—through clear principles, integrated tools, knowledge-sharing systems, and consistent onboarding—will remain essential. Partnerships will be strengthened through shared ownership, accessible tools, and continuous dialogue. By maintaining focus on intentional, evidence-based inclusion, **Woord en Daad** aims to deepen its impact and contribute to greater equity and dignity for those who are most often left behind.

