

Women-led, disability-inclusive livelihoods (WDIL)

Dhading District, Nepal, July 2018 - July 2021

This project aimed to address the needs of some of the most vulnerable people in this rural part of Nepal, with a focus on women with disability and those who care for disabled family members.

Partnership approach

We worked with our long-time partner DHRC-Nepal, and DWA in Dhading as the downstream partner, both DPOs committed to promoting and protecting disabled peoples' rights. With sustainability in mind, we invited municipality officials to join the project steering committee, to gain insight into the approach and workings of the project, and disabled people's realities. We believe local authorities have a duty to disabled people and this project has been an example of how to deliver on those promises. We have seen the results as municipalities take steps towards disability inclusion in their programmes.

We used a whole-family approach to address the needs of individual women with disabilities, and families with a disabled member. Training and awareness in disability rights and livelihoods, and the establishment of women-led SHGs, will be lasting community legacies, whose success can inform systemic and policy level change, reaching many more people.

Impacts

The project's full, longer-term impact remains to be seen, but the intended outcomes have been achieved:

- 36 SHGs have been established, with 640 disabled and vulnerable members
- 638 individual/family livelihoods in farming, livestock and small business
Income from 447 livelihoods at the end of Y3 amounted to £44,533. SHG members made savings of £2,891, most of which became low-interest revolving loans to members for investment in livelihoods
- 635 SHG members obtained DICs and 5 single women were registered as vulnerable for benefits/allowances
- Indirect benefits to 2,962 family members
- Increased wellbeing, self-esteem, and confidence

The value of training and increased awareness about disability cannot be understated, including dispelling traditional myths and prejudices, held even by disabled people themselves.

Value for Money

The budget of just under £250,000 was funded by UK Aid Direct. It has benefited people who had been left behind in every way, denied rights and opportunities. They included people whose all-consuming caring roles had limited their opportunities too.

A crude cost per beneficiary over 3 years was £390 per person, including support such as rehabilitation and assistive devices. The livelihoods investment of roughly £83 per person has increased people's wellbeing, capacity and confidence to improve life for themselves and their families. We hope this investment will multiply and endure for a long time to come.

Abbreviations

DCC	Disability Coordination Committee
DICs	Disability Identity Cards
DHRC	Nepal Disabled Human Rights Center
DWA	Disabled Welfare Association, Dhading
DPOs	disabled people's organizations
SHGs	self-help groups
SMs	Social Mobilizers



The Bageshwori Disabled Livestock Farmers' SHG formed in 2018. It is led by Chairperson Sharmila, whose daughter with learning difficulties; Secretary Dipana, who cares for her deaf brother; and Treasurer Gita, a physically disabled woman. Gita suffered discrimination and struggled to attend school, but was all the more determined to complete her secondary education. She is responsible for collecting and recording savings and transactions for the SHG.

The three women were instrumental in registering the SHG in 2019 and have since lobbied for local government support, for the group's longer-term sustainability. Its members are successfully generating incomes through rearing goats, buffalo, poultry... and fish!

Social inclusion

The criteria for SHG membership was disability, and some members were represented by a parent or carer. The DPO project team were mostly people with lived experience or disabled family members. The local Social Mobilizers (6 people with disabilities, 3 carers and one single parent) were responsible for identifying project beneficiaries with a wide range of disabilities, including autism, deafness and impaired hearing, learning disabilities, low vision and blindness, physical, voice and speech, multiple and psychosocial disabilities.

Sustainability

The pillars of the WDIL project's lasting legacy will be:

- The empowerment of women with disabilities and carers, with understanding of disability rights, working together in self-help groups which continue to function.
- The engagement and contributions of local authorities (4 municipalities and 17 wards) whose officials sat on the project steering committee, value its inclusive approach and adopt it in future development programmes.

SHG members – all either disabled people or their family members – have been trained in self-advocacy and group management, and belong to recognized, supportive groups which bring opportunities for livelihoods, saving, income and loans. The SHG model has sustainability embedded, and could be mainstreamed in local government programmes as a next step to benefit disabled people yet unreached.

There is evidence that officials in Dhading are more sensitized about disability issues thanks to WDIL. Disability budget allocations have not been used optimally in the past, but advocacy by the lead and downstream partners, the SHGs, and media coverage have helped encourage their effective use.

We know that 70% of SHGs are managing without external assistance. Six SMs are DCC members, potentially paving the way for others to become members of government committees and amplifying the voices of disabled people.

As part of the project, disability expert Nirmala Dhital was commissioned to review legislation relating to women and disability, culminating in a report (in Nepali, summarized in English): a useful resource and advocacy tool for DPOs.

Challenges

In Years 1 and 2, Nepal experienced political instability and a changing federal structure which affected SHG registration in 2 municipalities. There were also natural disasters – floods, landslides, heavy and prolonged monsoons... – but the difficulties were surmounted through planning and adaptability.

In Year 3, the unimaginable happened: the COVID-19 pandemic brought lockdowns, travel restrictions, great anxiety, new ways of working, cancelled visits, budget revisions, a no cost extension, and UK government cuts to international aid resulting in an abrupt end to the project. All had to be managed.

The perils of working in rural areas are many, but nearly all the Dhading team and SHG members, mostly disabled people, managed to avoid accidents or illness. Concerns arose about the predominance of livestock livelihoods, especially goats, but they actually proved their worth during the pandemic and lockdown.

As the project came to an end, staff expressed worries about their future. Despite many funding applications we were unable to secure continuation funds during the pandemic. We hope the skills and experience will boost SMs CVs and prospects. Four DHRC team members succumbed to COVID-19 in the summer of 2021, and DHRC's Director was in an ICU for 24 days. We are grateful for all the support and solidarity they received.



Juthe Shrestha (25) was born deaf and blind in the village of Pokhari Bagbachhela. His wellbeing is testament to his mother and sole carer, Kanchi Maya. Juthe has no language as such, but does respond to his mother's touch. He sits in the warm winter sun in front of the house and although his mobility is limited, Kanchi Maya has taught him to move into the shade when it gets hot.

Kanchi Maya was invited to join her local SHG and helped to apply for a DIC, qualifying Juthe for a social security allowance of NR 3,000 per month. With seed money from the SHG, Kanchi Maya bought a buffalo to rear and sell on, and to provide fresh milk and yoghurt. She hopes to buy a calf and save the rest in Juthe's account.

Kanchi Maya is devoted to her son and is always there for him. She has no respite as there are no community-based social services in the area, and she feels she cannot depend on anyone else to care for Juthe.

Further reading

- [WDIL Success Stories](#)
- DHRC '[Disability Voice](#)' programmes on national radio and TV
- [Review and Reflections](#) by Ability Manch



[DHRC](#) is a national DPO formed in 2000 to promote the political, social, legal and economic rights of all disabled people.



[DWA](#) has been supporting disabled women and men in Nepal's Dhading district through vocational training since 1994.



[DDP](#) has been working on disability and development for almost 30 years. In our partnerships with DPOs, inclusion is at the heart of everything we do – so people with disabilities are not left behind.