



**Inclusive Futures**

Promoting disability inclusion



# Disability Inclusive Coffee Project: Lessons Learnt

July 2022

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

- TABLE OF CONTENTS ..... 2
- 1.1. Background to the Initiative ..... 3
- 1.2. Why Coffee in Nepal?..... 3
- 1.3. The Partnership ..... 4
- 1.4. Learning: Project Adaptation and COVID-19 Response ..... 4



## 1.1. Background to the Initiative

The Disability Inclusive HAMRO Coffee project (Task Order 16) was developed under the Disability Inclusive Development programme<sup>1</sup> by Light for the World (LFTW) with Cordaid (formerly ICCO) and the National Federation of the Disabled Nepal (NFDN). It was designed to promote a disability inclusive coffee value chain in Nepal with the active involvement of Organizations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs) and an expert NGO in the livelihood sector. It promotes the economic empowerment of farmers with disabilities through coffee farming, training young people with disabilities to enter skilled levels of the coffee value chain, and advocating for coffee stakeholders to become more inclusive.

This document captures the lessons learned and adaptations to the project during the first phases of implementation. This includes lessons learned during project design, inception and the response to COVID-19. The report will be complemented by a process document examining the approach taken by partners at three levels: the farmer or local level; the jobs and skills level; and the market level. This document covers a period where the partners established four coffee nurseries run by people with disabilities or their families, provided 60 farmers with saplings in Sindhupalchok and Kavre municipalities, and provided barista training to youths with disabilities.

## 1.2. Why Coffee in Nepal?

People with a disability in Nepal<sup>2</sup> remain one of the ‘most vulnerable and deprived sectors of the population’,<sup>3</sup> where only 36.4% of people with disabilities are in work, compared to 54.6% of persons without a disability.<sup>4</sup> A 2018 survey found that only 16% of people with disabilities had a monthly income.<sup>5</sup> Promoting jobs, self-employment and stable income in the coffee value chain among people with disabilities in both the rural and urban population is therefore critical. The diversity of job opportunities within the coffee value chain (from nursery owner to farmer, and from grader to barista) presents a range

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://inclusivefutures.org/about-us/>

<sup>2</sup> In Nepal, there is no agreed estimate to the number of people with a disability. OPDs have argued that official figures, such as the 1.94% rate captured in the 2011 census and 3.6% in the 2011 National Living Standards Survey, under-represent the number of people who have a disability in Nepal. A 2014-15 household survey found a prevalence rate of 14.5% when using the internationally recognised Washington Group Questions to identify the disability rate among 18,223 households (Eide et al, 2016, p. 76)

<sup>3</sup> Prasai & Pant, 2018, p. 1; Poudyal et al, 2018, p. 10

<sup>4</sup> Eide et al, 2016, p. 13, 129

<sup>5</sup> Samarajiva, 2018, p. 25

of opportunities to test and verify the approach to successful disability inclusion in agricultural value chains. Coffee farming itself in Nepal is an increasingly lucrative activity. While a coffee plant takes three to four years to reach peak profitability and might not always be encouraging for smallholder farmers with limited livelihoods options, it can be a reliable long-term source of income as established plants are productive for up to half a century with proper care. For people with a disability, coffee farming also represents a less labour-intensive crop following the first year of growing compared to other seasonal or cash crops.

### 1.3. The Partnership

LFTW and Cordaid began their partnership in Nepal in 2015 to support Cordaid staff and partner organisations with inclusion training. The partnership led to a design workshop in 2018 in Kathmandu, which first developed the concept of a ‘Disability Inclusion and Empowerment (DI&E) Technical Assistance (TA) Facility’ to support an existing EU-funded coffee value chain project. The National Federation for Disabled Nepal (NFDN) joined the partnership as experts in disability advocacy and with a strong network of OPDs nationally to complement the technical inclusion expertise from LFTW and coffee expertise from Cordaid.

In December 2019, LFTW, Cordaid and NFDN launched the ‘Disability Inclusive Hamro Coffee Project’. As the EU-funded project had finished, the new project was redesigned as a standalone project. The revised project design presented opportunities to focus on inclusion and derive lessons on what worked and what did not when improving access to the coffee value chain for people with disabilities. The project has since gone through several iterations, including the suspension of the project from 1 July 2020 until 31 March 2021 to allow a COVID-19 ‘Bridging Project’ that was funded by LFTW.

### 1.4. Learning: Project Adaptation and COVID-19 Response

The Bridging Project concluded as planned on 31 March 2021. As a result of the collaboration between LFTW, Cordaid and NFDN, four nurseries were established in the two focus districts to be run by people with disabilities and their families, 60 people with disabilities received livelihood support and coffee saplings to plant, two local OPDs were supported to run health initiatives at the local level using mass media, as coffee entrepreneurs were supported in online marketing that could be used during the lockdown. The implementation also supported the partners to resume activities under the Disability Inclusive Development Programme on 1 April having maintained momentum towards the original objectives of the project.

The response to the changing context of the coffee value chain project in Nepal and subsequent pandemic led to several project revisions, and adaptations as the implementation generated lessons learned. The following is a collection of lessons captured by the project partners during the process of adaptation and implementation until April 2021, which demonstrate ‘what worked and what did not work’ in terms of integrating people with disabilities at the various levels of the coffee value chain ‘from seed to cup’. These lessons form a first stage of the two process documents capturing the lessons learned in implementing a coffee value chain project, which will hopefully be of use to similar projects in the future.

## Farming level

Interest in Coffee Farming: the project was designed based on coffee's earning power, favourability in the terrain in the two project districts and because it is a less labour-intensive crop than alternative cash crops. However, Farmers appeared reluctant begin farming coffee. Some reluctance could also be traced to previous short-lived projects to encourage coffee growing in the districts that had not provided adequate support to farmers and familiarity with charity-based disability support projects. Clear explanations of the process of coffee farming, the risks and potential rewards was key to increasing interest and confidence in the project. Once the success of the first cohort of farmers was visible in the community, interest increased among other farmers and the local government.

Terrain: The terrain where coffee grows in Nepal is quite hilly and steep. It can be a challenge to involve people with physical disabilities. A potential workaround is to select farmers with disabilities who have a support system around them, such as family members who contribute to the farm work and commit to coffee farming as a family. As a result, the project design does risk exclusion of the most marginalised: people with disabilities who do not have a support network.

Land ownership: There could be a risk of overburdening marginal farmers (who own less than 1 hectare of land) that already have scattered livelihood options, by encouraging them to plant coffee saplings in their land. Coffee plants take between 3 -5 years to establish and produce their first harvest, and marginal farmers cannot afford to dedicate a large part of their land solely to coffee. Connecting marginal farmers to coffee cooperatives offers opportunities for group farming. For smallholder farmers, who have at least 1 hectare of land, intercropping other vegetables, plants and shade trees with coffee, can be an option to increase their income. During the project however, working with farmers who had additional streams of income and providing cash support in the first year of farming reduced the risk for farmers when dedicating land to coffee farming.

Local market linkages: It was important to clearly set up a local market for the coffee crop. This included establishing four coffee nurseries run by people with disabilities or their family members, as well as having access to a local processing centre. This ensured that there was a supply of saplings and an opportunity to sell crops locally. The nurseries have benefitted from additional sapling requests from famers under the project in the first instance, particularly those sources for the second cohort of farmers. However, advocacy efforts and interest generated by the success of the first cohort of farmers led other farmers and local government to also buy saplings in the two project areas as well as neighbouring municipalities. Once the farmers harvest their crops, they also have the opportunity to sell the harvest with the local processing centres, which had been established under the EU-funded project. The system is expected to self-sustain after the project, as the demand for coffee from the municipality far outstrips supply.



Picture 1: Chandika Badal, a coffee farmer with a disability tending her coffee plant supported in Kavre district

Disability Inclusion Facilitators (DIFs): The mobilization of DIFs along with extension service providers (ESPs: experts to provide technical support for coffee growers) at the field level was very successful. The project hired DIFs who are people with lived experience of disability and who were members of local organisations of persons with disabilities (OPDs). The DIFs supported communication with farmers with a disability, liaison with OPDs and helped change negative stereotyping of people with disabilities among local authorities and project participants. This enabled the project participants to accept the project and the technical team more easily, as the DIFs had built a level of trust with the community. In particular, the impact of training was more pronounced owing to the support with communication, as this translated into improved understanding. As people with lived experience of disability, the DIFs could also support accessibility audits, advocacy efforts and recognise reasonable accommodation needs of project participants more readily.

Training: training with farmers with disabilities needs careful design. There is limited access to the training venues and transport to a central venue is challenging, in particular for people with disabilities. The training for farmers included practical skills, and was best served with one-to-one training with joint visits from the ESPs and DIFs. While this is intensive in terms of time, the outcomes of the training are improved as approaches can be adapted to learning needs, contextualised and the status of the farmer's saplings can be assessed. While the support from the DIFs also allows for improved communication and understanding by the farmers, it is also crucial to provide training to the technical trainers in disability inclusion to support appropriate delivery.

Reasonable Accommodation: Even as a disability inclusion project, sufficient resources were not allocated for reasonable accommodation. Of the 88 farmers who have been onboarded, 39 farmers required assistive devices to better participate in the project. This does not mean that the remaining 49 farmers did not need assistive devices; they may have already owned such devices. These devices are key to reducing barriers to participation for farmers with a disability. Budget reallocation and advocacy support from NFDN to access government funds for assistive devices were crucial to meeting the needs of farmers with disabilities and supporting participation.

Duration of the project: However, while coffee remains a suitable cash crop for people with disabilities, and a limited harvest is expected a year after planting saplings, the full economic potential of the plants will not be realised for an additional 3-4 years. As a result, the full impact of the project will not be seen during before the planned closure of the project. For this reason, coffee farming would also not have been a suitable COVID-19 response project had the activities from the Bridging Project not continued when under the Inclusive Hamro Coffee project. Coffee farming projects should only be considered as long-term livelihood projects.

## **Job & Skills level**

Beneficiary selection: The project aimed to work with people with all types of disabilities and not only with a specific impairment type. To identify the first cohort of barista trainees, the partners aimed to complement other disability inclusion projects in Nepal. A pool of potential applicants of young people with disabilities were selected from NFDN's FOUND Project.<sup>6</sup> By collaborating with another Project

---

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.leprosymission.org/our-work/project/found-project/>

working specifically on employment generation, the right candidates could be selected for this barista training who met the criteria set by the partners (interest in the coffee sector and at least a secondary school education).

**Impairment Type:** The diversity of impairments was greater among farmers, who were holders of disability cards in the two rural districts targeted by the project. Among baristas the first cohort of barista trainees were principally women with a hearing impairment. An unintended result of the success of promoting the baristas for employment was that employers preferred women with a hearing impairment when seeking employment from subsequent trainee cohorts. The trainer also found it challenging to update training approaches that had been tailored for people with a hearing impairment to a training package that accommodated a greater diversity of disability. Projects need to prepare for accommodating a greater diversity of disabilities among trainees and job seekers if this is in the project plan.

**Facilitation:** The project hired sign-language interpreters and tailored the barista training curriculum to make it accessible. The facilitator first devised the inclusive curriculum together with the support of the project staff, followed by revision after each training, including the feedback of the trainees themselves. By creating a tailored curriculum and by providing an inclusive, accessible environment, the trainees were able to fully grasp the content of the training.

**Seeking Employment:** The Barista training course culminated in a skills fair where potential employers from the retail sector were invited, and the trainees could show off their skills. Though the skills fair did not directly result in concrete employment offers, it created interest among attendees that was passed on through networks. Continued follow up with the prospective employers, that included sharing video clips of the baristas working as a 'video job application', helped 100% of the attendees receive an employment offer.

**Existing precedence:** Fewer negative stereotypes of people with disabilities were found in the hospitality sector in Kathmandu. This was in large part due to the precedent of people with speech and hearing impairments being employed in restaurants, especially the Nanglos chain of restaurants. Existing experience with disabilities in different sectors can inform a project on the amount of advocacy required to challenge negative stereotyping.

**Retention:** While all baristas were hired, not all of the baristas maintained jobs for more than a few months. Cordaid followed up with the baristas to collect information from employers and the trainees to gauge why retention had been challenging. The baristas had not been adequately informed about what to expect from employment and expectations from employers in a place of work. They had not also been taught about their rights in a workplace and how to negotiate salary levels, for instance. As the first cohort of trainees all had a hearing impairment, communication was reported by the trainees to be a challenge



Picture 2: Milan Thapa, a barista with a hearing impairment who successfully found employment following inclusive training

in work. As a result of the feedback, soft-skills trainings has been added to the technical training offered by the project, which has been well received by the trainees.

Accessibility: The project also supported accessibility audits of two existing coffee businesses and supported reasonable accommodation of their premises to make it more accessible for people with disabilities. This has served as a good example for other coffee entrepreneurs and inspired them to think about the accessibility of their own venues. More importantly, coffee entrepreneurs realized that reasonable accommodation to build inclusive facilities do not cost as much as they thought, and with planning can be achieved at a little extra cost. However, the main barrier faced in Nepal has not been lack of interest in improving the accessibility of venues but rather ownership of the venue itself: landlords would not provide permission to make the required changes to cafés or processing centres (such as door widening, building wheelchair access or accessible toilets). Targeting the entrepreneurs that own their premises is easier when advocating for improved accessibility. However, additional advocacy aimed at landlords or property owners could yield wider results.

## Stakeholders

Local government: Initially local authorities were sceptical of an inclusive coffee value chain project that supported farmers with disabilities, who did not believe farmers with disabilities would be able to succeed. However, concerted advocacy efforts by NFDN, the DIFs and OPDs has led to a radical change. Municipal governments have since released funds for farmers with disabilities in the project area and for other groups of farmers with disabilities. The success was supported by investment in advocacy at the local level, which in the Nepali context is responsible for managing funds in the local area. However, the use of advocacy for disability rights linked with advocacy for livelihood support was particularly effective, in particular when success could be demonstrated to the local officials after the first cohort of farmers had received their saplings.

OPDs: Five OPDs have been supported during the project. The engagement of OPDs supported beneficiary selection, local coordination, amplified advocacy efforts and supported continued engagement with project participants during COVID-19 while travel was restricted. Working with and mapping capacity support for local OPDs is key when working with remote or rural communities, as well as in projects where advocacy is a key goal.