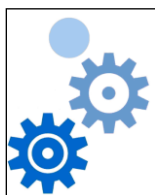


## “MAKING IT WORK!” Good Practice case study



# How to foster meaningful community participation through the strength and commitment of Self-Help Group of persons with disabilities?

**Title:** Self-Help Group Development  
**Organization/project:** Tibet Disabled Persons' Federation / Handicap International Inclusive Community Development  
**Location:** Lhasa and Shigatse Municipality, Chamdo County – Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR), China  
**Scope:** Regional (TAR)

## Related articles of the CRPD

This practice relates to **articles 19, 21, 26, 29** concerning the right to living independently and being included in the community; freedom of expression and opinion, and access to information; Health and rehabilitation; participation in political and public life.

## Related article of the China National Law of the Protection of Persons with Disabilities (2008)

This practice relates to:

**Article 3:** “Persons with disabilities shall enjoy equal rights with other citizens in political, economic, cultural and social respects and in family life as well. “

**Article 10:** ‘The State encourages persons with disabilities to have a sense of self-respect, self-confidence, self-strength and self-reliance, and make contribution to socialist development.’”

**Article 45:** “The government and society shall promote mutual understanding and exchanges between persons with disabilities and their fellow-citizens, publicize the work on disability and deeds of assisting persons with disabilities, advocate self-accomplishment among people with disabilities, and foster a social environment of unity, friendship and mutual help.”



*Self Help Group meeting, practicing awareness sessions on disability*

**PARTICIPATION  
COMMUNITY LIFE-  
INNOVATION –  
SELF HELP  
GROUP-  
ACCESSIBILITY – LOCAL  
CULTURE**

*Key words*

## Background and context

Due to religious beliefs, the perception of disability is quite negative in TAR. Most of the people with disabilities and their families are overwhelmed of having disability as they think it was the impact of the previous lives wrongdoings. Fatalism is widespread and people tend to think that nothing can be done to change the situation. Thus, many persons with disability stay at home and do not share their issues with other people, they considered it is their own problem.

## Description of the practice

Traditionally in TAR, community life is active and there is a habit of helping each other. So that is why, formal **Self Help Group of people with disabilities and their families meeting on voluntary base were formed** on by the Inclusive Community Development Project. Community leaders and local Disabled Persons' Federation staff were trained to support the Self-Help Groups. **The objective of Self-Help Group participation is to decrease persons with disability loneliness, isolation, burden, and on the other hand increase confidence, knowledge and happiness.** The Self-Help Group is organizing regular activities such as disability prevention, disability awareness events and home visits. This practice was used in others Community Based Rehabilitation projects outside China (Bangladesh, Cambodia) and has proven to fit in the local Tibetan culture.

## Process involved

1. Project technical advisor provided training on Self-Help Group concept, benefit of being part of a support group, monitoring and evaluation process to the key Community Based Rehabilitation implementers of Disabled Persons' Federation and Handicap International project staff.
2. The trained staff conducted the training to the key community actors: village party secretaries and leaders.
3. Key community actors shared the information to persons with disabilities and their families in their respective community to identify the Self-Help Group members.
4. Identified Self-Help Group members list was submitted to the local Disabled Persons' Federation and to the project.
5. Trained Disabled Persons' Federation staff provided training on Self-Help Groups concept, to the identified members to get clear and common understanding of Self-Help Groups. Members had to reconfirm their interest to participate in the Self-Help Group.
6. Meetings were organised by the Disabled Persons' Federation staff to choose group leader and clarify their role. During meetings, Self-Help Group members express their needs, issues and try to identify solutions. Priorities and action plan were defined.
7. According to the needs expressed, regular and continuous training on disability prevention, capacities building, access to services, and social communication were provided by the Disabled Persons' Federation staff.
8. Self-Help Groups members carry out the activity according to the plan and meet on regular basis to share their experiences with support from local Disabled Persons' Federation staff.

## Resources required

### Human Resources:

2 staff from the Inclusive Community Development project staff

1 Local Disabled Persons' Federation staff per Self-Help Group

Self Help Group members: Commitment and willingness to meet regularly on a volunteer bases.

Funding : Most of the activities were funded by the project but some of the Self-Help Group have already started to successfully raise funds to sustain their activities.

## The factors that made this practice possible

- The **local cultural setting is favorable to the emergence of support group.** Self-Help Groups members are committed and willing to join the group on voluntary base with no payment.
- Good support from the local Disabled Persons' Federation and government was provided. This is very crucial to keep the members motivated.
- **Active group leader** and support from the village leaders/party secretary is also key factor to sustain the group.
- Close technical support, especially at the beginning stage, was provided to be able to run their daily activities.

## Some of the difficulties encountered

- **Personal conflicts** between some members are common but can be usually resolved with mediation.
- **Distance/geographic constraints.** Group members are scattered, live far from each other, in different village or remote areas. The project has formed small groups which are closer and organise 2-3 meetings with all the different Self-Help Groups members together as a team.

- **Timing and scheduling of activities.** Most members are engaged in farming and cannot attend long training sessions or activities, especially during planting and harvest season. It is difficult to organise special meetings/activities on short notice. So the project informs the members long in advance and tries not to organise activities during busy time of the year.
- **Low literacy, low level of knowledge on disability issues.** Some members are unable to read/write and only speak/understand the local language. Visual materials are used to make awareness materials and specific training is provided according to their needs.
- **Lack of trained capable workers** to facilitate, follow-up groups. The staff receives continuous training.

## The effects / impact of the practice

- ✓ During project evaluation, members have expressed that their situation has improved significantly compared to before. People with disability indicate that they are **less discriminated** in the community. Moreover, they feel they are not the only one facing problems. The members are **more confident and motivated** after seeing the impact of their group activity.
- ✓ Disabled Persons' Federation, Self Help Groups members, village leaders and party secretaries have realized the impact of Self-Help Groups for both the members and the community. Village leaders acknowledged that Self-Help Groups are **a resource in the community** which reduces their work load.
- ✓ Through the Self-Help Groups activities, community better understand disability issues and realise the capacities of persons with disabilities. This helps to create more **participation opportunities** for persons with disabilities and their families in the community life. Persons are no longer seen as passive recipients of support but as **active members of the community**.

## Possible improvement

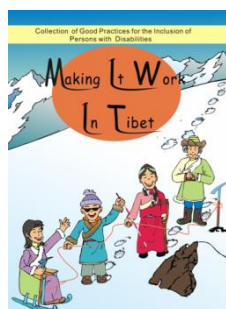
- Organise more regular meeting and training to the Self-Help Groups members to become more competent and efficient, so that they can run the activity more independently, with very little support from the Disabled Persons' Federation.
- Create more opportunities to share experiences among the different groups to learn from each other.

## Recommendations for the replication of this practice

- Identify and empower persons with disabilities which can be role model and "ambassadors" in promoting disability issues in their own communities.
- Provide good explanation of Self-Help Groups concept, this is crucial to avoid over expectation from the members.
- Self-Help Groups should not be composed of more than 15 members to keep it easy to manage and coordinate. Two group leaders should be appointed and rotate.
- Different level governmental leaders and Disabled Persons' Federation should be invite to Self-Help Groups activities occasionally to get more recognition, support and attention.
- Key community actors and local authorities should be involved in every steps of to ensure the activities are sustainable.

## More information

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**Full project report:** [Collection of good practices for the inclusion of people with disabilities](#)

**Criteria for the good practices:** see page 8 (Part 1 of the report)

**Recommendations from the good practices:** Part 3 of the report