

## From Recovery To Development: Empowerment of Women with Disabilities

Persons with disabilities are often excluded from humanitarian response and recovery efforts. This is partly due to the marginalization of persons with disabilities in their communities and partly due to the lack of data and information on the situation of persons with disabilities. This Case Study Series provides examples of practices and learning on inclusion of persons with disabilities, on disaggregated data collection and its use, and on the impact of inclusive practices on both persons with disabilities in the affected communities, as well as within Movement organizations.

### BACKGROUND

On the 25<sup>th</sup> April 2015, a 7.6 magnitude earthquake struck Nepal, killing over 8,000 people and injuring another 22,300 individuals.<sup>1</sup> The pilot project, ***Empowerment and Inclusion of People with Disabilities in Earthquake Affected Communities*** supports disability inclusive recovery and resilience-building in Lamjung and Tanahun Districts by:

1. Empowering persons with disabilities, through Self-Help Groups to raise community awareness and advocate for inclusion in community social services and response mechanisms.
2. Promoting an accessible environment in selected Village Development Committees affected by the earthquake, through reconstruction / upgrading of homes and public buildings.
3. Increasing livelihoods opportunities for persons with disabilities and their households, through a revolving fund provided to the Self-Help Groups and training on technical skills.

Humanity & Inclusion, a non-governmental organization working with persons with disabilities and vulnerable populations, provides the Nepal Red Cross Society (NRCS) expertise for training and capacity development on disability inclusion, with technical and financial support from Hong Kong Red Cross and Danish Red Cross.

Promoting protection, gender equality and social inclusion has been adopted as one of the four Strategic Aims in the Nepal Red Cross Society 7<sup>th</sup> Development Plan (2016 – 2020), with commitments to empowering women to improve their community through involvement in all activities.<sup>2</sup>

## **“THE LAST MILE” – INCLUSION OF WOMEN WITH DISABILITIES**

Women with disabilities face discrimination on the basis of both gender and disability. As such, they are often under-represented within activities targeting women, as well as those targeting persons with disabilities. Of the 108 Self-Help Group members involved in the pilot project, 70 are male and 38 are female, with approximately 20% being family members of persons with disabilities. Women with disabilities also face barriers when accessing training activities, largely related to gender norms in society which result in negative attitudes of family members and added household responsibilities of women. Yet, reaching and working with those that are the hardest to reach – those “living at the last mile” – can result in the most significant changes to their lives and their communities.

## **EMPOWERING WOMEN WITH DISABILITIES TO IMPROVE THEIR COMMUNITIES**

Women with disabilities involved in the pilot project report personal and social changes that are the result of gaining different types of power in their relationships, households and communities.

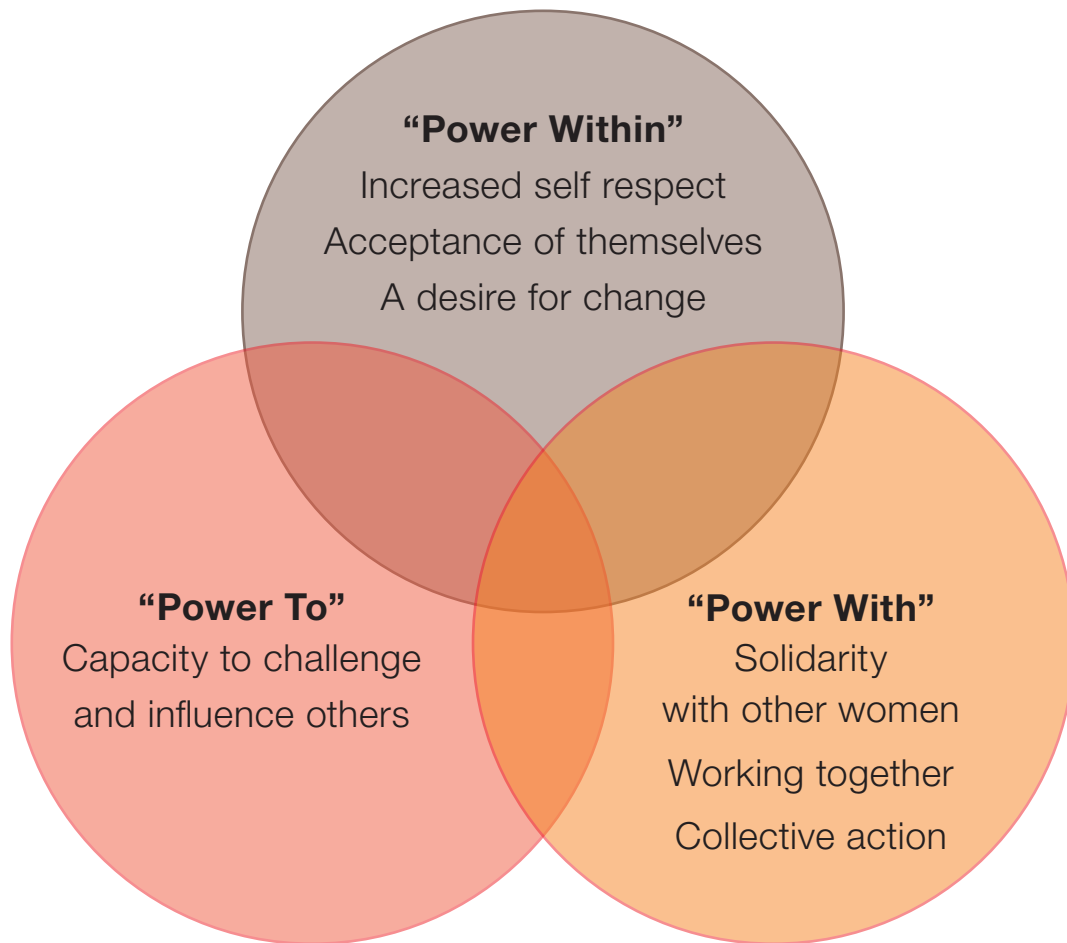


Diagram 1: Describes the types of power that women with disabilities reported developing through the project.<sup>3</sup>

*“Then I got married. As a daughter-in-law you have to housework, and so I had to do less training. My mother in law used to say what’s the point of you being involved in this training. My husband’s sister also has a disability. So I went to her and other women with disabilities and said they can’t treat us like this... We formed a small group. Now my family doesn’t say anything when I go out of the home. I am getting more confident. I am getting empowered.” – Young woman with disabilities, Self-Help Group Kotdarbar, Tanahun District*

## **“WHAT WORKS” FOR INCLUSION OF WOMEN WITH DISABILITIES**

- Provide opportunities for women with disabilities to meet each other, share experiences and ideas.
- Set criteria for inclusion of women with disabilities in meetings and trainings and create a specific space for their perspectives to be shared.
- Consult with women separately about barriers to participate in activities, especially livelihood activities, and their recommendations on how to make these activities more appropriate for women, who may have additional household responsibilities compared with men.

## **“WHAT CHANGE MATTERS THE MOST” – STORIES FROM WOMEN WITH DISABILITIES**

“I want to thank the Red Cross for their work with women with disabilities because they have received important training – It has helped their self-image and confidence. Two to three years back we had one lady who worked in a paddy field, but this took a long time to make money. Now she grows and sells vegetables. She can borrow money from others because they know that she can pay it back. Even the agricultural sector will give her seed because they know that she has the right skills and training. Her family is more economically stable. We have a group, and we collect money between ourselves, so that we can borrow from each other when we need it. When women with disabilities are involved in these projects, the love and affection from the family changes, and there is improvement in her status.” – Sita Devi Kunwar, Vice-President of the Women with Disabilities Group, Resource Center for Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities in Tanahun District

**CASE STUDY SERIES ON DISABILITY INCLUSION**  
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“At first, I was neglected by my family and not included in family activities. I went to a training where I saw that persons with disabilities can do these things. I came back and spoke to my family. There is a girl in the village and her mother sometimes scolds her. I went to this neighbor and told the family that it is not the girl’s fault that she has a disability. Now the family have started a bank account for the girl and they know about all the allowances for their daughter. At first, I did not have this idea, but now I want to be independent. So I have started my own



business. I have a small shop where I sell rice. It is a source of income for me, but I want to make it a bigger business – I have ambitions.” – Jana Devi Thapa, Woman with Physical Disability, Self-Help Group Kotdarbar, Tanahun District

“My family used to say if you go out of the house [to training] the community will see you with evil eyes. The family and community used to have negative thoughts about persons with disabilities. Now it is not so bad. We learned first. We changed our hearts first and became more confident. We talked to them and slowly they changed their mind.” – Deu Maya Thapa, Self-Help Group Rising Ranipokhari, Tanahun District



