



From Pilot to Practice: How CBM Global supported the Nepal Red Cross Society Strengthen Disability Inclusive Disaster Preparedness

How collaboration and inclusive tools strengthened disability-inclusive disaster preparedness

CASE STUDY



Photo description: Community members, including persons with disabilities, attending an outdoor meeting facilitated by CBM Global Nepal staff in a rural village.

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Summary

For over 30 years, the Finnish Red Cross (FRC), member of International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), has supported the Nepal Red Cross Society (NRCS) in disaster preparedness. While inclusion was not initially a core principle, it has been increasingly integrated into cooperation over the past decade. Between 2019 and 2023, NRCS implemented the Empowered Persons with Disabilities in an Inclusive Community (EPIC) project, led by the Danish Red Cross (DRC) with FRC and the Hong Kong Red Cross as partners. This unique project specifically focuses on persons with disabilities and their families within a defined geographic area. It enables a targeted approach to understanding and addressing their needs and barriers, while promoting their development through a community resilience framework that incorporates disaster risk management. FRC's role centered on the Disability Inclusion in Disaster Risk Reduction (DiDRR) component piloting new tools such as an inclusive Vulnerability and Capacity Assessment (VCA) guideline, DiDRR training modules, and accessible community-based emergency response training. These were designed to make disaster preparedness processes more inclusive for people with disabilities in Lamjung and Tanahun districts.

While EPIC's final evaluation captured broad achievements, it lacked in-depth insights on the tools from the perspective of people with disabilities themselves. Recognizing this gap, FRC, through its global partner Abilis Foundation, contracted CBM in October 2024 to assess and upgrade selected DiDRR tools in collaboration with FRC, DRC, and NRCS.

Who was Supported

From October 2024 to July 2025, CBM worked closely with

- People with disabilities and their family members/caregivers from the project location.
- Local disaster management committees.
- Self-help groups and organizations of people with disabilities (OPDs).
- Community members in Lamjung district.
- NRCS technical teams and FinnRC/DRC partners.

CBM's Role and Actions

Below are the key activities we engaged with:

1. Assessing the DiDRR Tools:

We reviewed the effectiveness and efficiency of three key DiDRR tools:

- Disability inclusive Vulnerability Capacity Assessment (VCA) tool.
- Disability inclusive Disaster Risk Reduction (DiDRR) training manual.
- And operational guidelines for inclusive DiDRR training events.

The process included:

- Desk review and study design.
- Field visits to Dordi Rural Municipality, Lamjung, one of the project sites.
- Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), Key Informant Interviews (KIIs), and document analysis.
- Braille questionnaires for blind interviewers, accessible venues, sign language and local language interpretation.
- Daily reflection sessions to understand the current challenges and to adjust the plan, for instance refined questions and addressed gender balance in participation.

2. Upgrading the Tools:

Based on findings, we:

- Incorporated feedback from people with disabilities, caregivers, community leaders, and NRCS staff while upgrading the DiDRR tools.
- Referenced similar national/international tools to improve usability of the tools.
- Ensured designs were feasible for both urban and rural Nepal contexts

The final products were:

- Assessment report: which highlights the findings from the field, specifically around the effectiveness and efficiency of the DiDRR tools and approach. It provides recommendations for both upgrading specific tools and offering general recommendations for future DiDRR related initiatives.
- Checklist for Disability Inclusive Events/Meetings – Practical guidance for planning accessible and participatory gatherings, including those linked to VCAs.
- Short Package of Disability Specific Training Sessions – A concise 4-hour training module to be integrated into NRCS's future disaster risk management manual.

The first product is prepared in English whereas the second and third ones were produced in Nepali and translated into English with care to preserve meaning. FRC is planning to design appealing visual materials based on these tools and will be publishing them across IFRC network in the coming months.

What Worked Well

The following achievements are observed through this partnership:

- Strengthened NRCS's technical capacity on disability inclusion by providing not only recommendations for the given DiDRR tools but also guidance for border DiDRR programs and initiatives.
- Created practical tools ready for integration into NRCS's broader training and policy revision process. Furthermore, those tools will be good reference for CBM's field programs, specifically on DiDRR.

- Gathered rich, firsthand perspectives from rightsholders, ensuring tools reflect lived realities.
- Built stronger collaboration between CBM, NRCS, and Red Cross Movement partners, setting the stage for future inclusive DRM initiatives.
- CBM Global had the opportunity to interact with the local chapter of NRCS and people with disabilities from disaster prone and vulnerable areas, which focused on the ground reality of disaster risk reduction and management.

Challenges and How We Addressed Them

During the assessment and tool-upgrading process, we encountered several practical challenges. While these could have hindered the quality and inclusiveness of the work, adaptive strategies were put in place to ensure meaningful participation and reliable data collection.

- **Time Gap Since EPIC:** The EPIC project had concluded about a year earlier, which meant that many participants struggled to recall detailed experiences related to the specific DiDRR tools. This posed a risk of incomplete or inaccurate feedback. We used carefully designed prompting questions and concrete real-life examples from the EPIC period to help participants refresh their memories. Interviewers encouraged participants to connect the tools with their personal experiences, which often brought back key details.
- **Unplanned Participant Flow in FGDs:** Although each Focus Group Discussion (FGD) was planned for 5–6 participants to allow balanced participation, in practice, additional community members often joined the sessions spontaneously. This created crowded discussions, limiting individual voices. We thus split larger groups into smaller, more manageable clusters, ensuring each had a facilitator. Groups were also separated by gender where possible, making the conversations more comfortable and targeted.
- **Gender Balance and Participation:** In initial mixed-gender FGDs, women particularly those with disabilities were less likely to speak openly. We organized separate FGDs for women and men, creating safe spaces for women to share their perspectives without hesitation. This approach significantly increased women’s contributions to the assessment.
- **Overlap of Project Discussions:** Participants often shifted conversations from the DiDRR tools to broader EPIC project interventions, reflecting their interest in discussing overall project impacts. While valuable, this could dilute the tool-specific focus of the assessment. Facilitators respectfully redirected discussions back to the assessment objectives, while still acknowledging and noting broader reflections for partner reference.

Accessibility Logistics: Ensuring accessibility was both a requirement and a challenge. Some participants could not physically attend central venues due to mobility barriers or distance. Additionally, communication accessibility was crucial for meaningful engagement. We conducted home visits for participants unable to travel, provided natural sign language interpretation, and ensured that materials were available in accessible formats, including braille questionnaires for blind interviewers. Venues were selected for physical accessibility, and local language interpretation was provided where needed.

Conclusion

Through this partnership, CBM not only assessed and improved DiDRR tools but also strengthened the foundation for NRCS to embed disability inclusion into its national disaster preparedness frameworks. This collaboration ensured that the voices and needs of persons with disabilities will remain central in Nepal's future disaster risk management work.

What could others learn from this?

1. **Engage persons with disabilities from the outset.** Involving persons with disabilities and their caregivers early in the assessment and design process ensures that tools and guidelines reflect lived experiences and address real barriers to participation in disaster preparedness.
2. **Plan and resource accessibility from the beginning.** Ensuring accessible venues, transport support, home visits for those unable to travel, braille questionnaires, sign language interpretation, and local language facilitation requires deliberate planning and budgeting. This enables more inclusive participation and richer feedback.
3. **Adopt gender-sensitive facilitation methods.** Organising separate discussions for women and men, and engaging female facilitators, can create safe spaces that encourage women with disabilities to share their views more openly.
4. **Use adaptive facilitation to maintain focus.** When discussions shift toward broader project issues, skilled facilitators can respectfully steer the conversation back to the specific objectives, while still valuing and recording additional insights.
5. **Bridge time gaps in project evaluation.** When there is a long gap between project activities and review, practical prompts, examples, and scenario-