



Inclusive Futures

Promoting disability inclusion



Disability Inclusive Coffee Project: Process Document

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1.1. Introduction

This document is the last of three learning documents completed during the UK-funded Disability Inclusive HAMRO Coffee project (Task Order 16). The project was supported through the Disability Inclusive Development (DID) Programme (2018 – 2024), which has an explicit aim to solid evidence base around what delivers positive results for persons with disabilities to scale up, as well as ensure this data and evidence is disseminated and informs the global community and governments.

The Process Document has been written for an audience of value chain and livelihood specialists to share lessons learned on making activities in a coffee value chain project inclusive. It includes observations from participating organisations, project participants and an external evaluation. It is hoped that the learning captured can support other livelihood or value chain projects to become more inclusive by replicating what worked and avoiding what did not.

The Process Document complements an earlier document titled *Disability Inclusive Coffee Project: Lessons Learnt*,¹ that captured lessons learned by the project partners when adapting the project design and approach during inception and the COVID-19 pandemic. The *Lessons Learnt* document was written for a broader audience to communicate general approaches to inclusion. A technical manual for barista trainers has also been produced, to capture best practices for trainers to make their courses more accessible.

1.2. Background to the Initiative

Disability inclusion has been neglected in international development. A lack of evidence around what works in practice to deliver inclusion contributes to difficulty in building effective programmes. The UK's Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office-funded DID Programme was designed to contribute to the long-term improved well-being and inclusion of people with disabilities in low-and-middle-income countries. Run through a consortium of 16 non-governmental organisations in six countries, DID is supporting a series of interventions around increased access to health care and education, improved livelihoods and reduced stigma and discrimination, using new development approaches such as adaptive management and community-based consultation to deliver better quality of life for people with disabilities. The programme creates a solid evidence base around what delivers positive results for persons

¹ <https://www.light-for-the-world.org/publications/disability-inclusive-coffee-project-lessons-learnt/>

with disabilities to scale up, as well as ensure this data and evidence is disseminated and informs the global community and governments.

The Disability Inclusive HAMRO Coffee project (Task Order 16) was developed under the DID programme 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 Organization of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs) and an expert NGO in the livelihood sector. It promoted the economic empowerment of farmers with disabilities through coffee farming, trained young people with disabilities to enter skilled levels of the coffee value chain, and advocated coffee stakeholders to become more inclusive.

1.3. Why Coffee in Nepal?

Coffee farming in Nepal is a highly lucrative activity for actors across the value chain, from small holder farmers to large estate owners, traders to exporters, roasters to baristas. Available research confirms that, coffee is more profitable for smallholders compared to other conventional crops given that it has high net return per unit area, and can be grown in steep and marginal land where cereal and other crops cannot be grown profitably. Currently, coffee is grown in 43 districts of Nepal on around 2,626 hectares of land (NTCDB, 2019). An estimated 31,340 farmers are involved in coffee farming in Nepal, with an annual production of 314,500 metric tons of green beans (NTCDB, 2021). As a coffee plant takes three to four years to reach peak profitability, coffee might not always be encouraging for smallholder farmers with limited livelihoods options. However, it can be a reliable long-term term source of income as established plants are productive for up to half a century with proper care. Additionally, the diversity of job opportunities within the coffee value chain (both on and off the farm, including nursery owner, seed producer, farmer, primary processor, grader, secondary processor, roaster, barista, Q-grader, sensory expert and brewer) presents a range of opportunities to test and verify the approach to successful disability inclusion in agricultural value chains.

People with a disability in Nepal² are one of the ‘most vulnerable and deprived sectors of the population’,³ where only 36.4% of people with disabilities are in work, compared to 54.6% of persons without disabilities.⁴ A 2018 survey of 400 people with disabilities found that only 16% had a monthly income.⁵ As such, it was equally important for the project to test whether an inclusive coffee value chain is an effective means to promote jobs, self-employment and stable income among people with disabilities in both the rural and urban population. The project will document the impact of removing barriers to participation for people with disabilities, including inaccessible communication, barriers to resources or training, negative attitudes and stereotypes and financing.

1.4. Evolution of the Partnership

Hamro Coffee

The Inclusive Coffee Value Chain Project was first designed as a complementary project to ‘Hamro Coffee’. Hamro Coffee was an EU-funded project implemented by Cordaid, the Centre for Environmental and Agricultural Policy, Research, Extension and Development (CEAPRED) and the Nepal Coffee Producers Association (NCPA). The partners worked in six districts of central and western Nepal from 2017 to 2019 with the aim of increasing the income of smallholders through coffee farming. The project targeted 6,000 farmers and improved 14 primary processing centres to improve both the quantity and quality of coffee produced, so allow for it to approach ‘speciality grade’ while also strengthening market linkages for increasing domestic and international trade.

² In Nepal, there is no agreed estimate to the number of people with a disability. OPDs have indicated official figures, such as the 1.94% rate captured in the 2011 census and 3.6% in the 2011 National Living Standards Survey, are under-representing 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)

³ Prasai & Pant, 2018, p. 1; Poudyal et al, 2018, p. 10

⁴ Eide et al, 2016, p. 13, 129

⁵ Samarajiva, 2018, p. 25

LFTW and Cordaid partnered in 2015 to support Cordaid staff and partner organisations with inclusion training and preparedness for the Accessibility, Communication, Attitude, Participation (ACAP) framework necessary for inclusive programme development. 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’. This Facility would support the EU-funded Hamro Coffee project in Nepal, making the project accessible and inclusive for farmers with disabilities. NFDN was engaged by LFTW as a local implementing partner, 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.

However, before funding could be secured for the Disability Inclusive Hamro Coffee Project, in October 2019 the EU-funded Hamro Coffee project closed. Continuation funding could not be secured. As a result, LFTW, Cordaid and NFDN revisited the Facility concept and redesigned the project to be delivered as a standalone project.

TO16 - Inclusive Coffee Value Chain Project

In December 2019, the Disability Inclusive Hamro Coffee Project was officially launched as ‘Task Order 16’ under the UK-funded Disability Inclusive Development programme. While it no longer supported the original Hamro Coffee project, the principles of creating a disability inclusive coffee value chain were retained. The scale of the project, however, was reduced. The project would now:

- Establish 4 coffee nurseries to grow coffee saplings in two districts: Kavre and Sindhupalchok
- Support 90 farmers with disabilities with coffee saplings from the nurseries in Kavre and Sindhupalchok
- Provide technical training through Extension Service Providers (local technical experts who had been established under the original Hamro Coffee project) as well as inclusion support to farmers and local stakeholders through new Disability Inclusion Facilitators (local people with disabilities who provided advocacy and inclusion support)
- Identify and train 31 youth with disabilities in skilled sectors of the coffee value chain, including roasting, grading and barista training
- Produce technical manuals on the design and provision of inclusive training for people with disabilities in Nepal
- Promote inclusion and support farming cooperatives, employers, other coffee-related businesses and government bodies to become more accessible for people with disabilities

- Utilise processing centres established under the original Hamro Coffee project to provide a sustainable market to sell the coffee harvested by farmers with disabilities in Kavre and Sindhupalchok
- Work with national and international traders to encourage a market for the inclusive coffee

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. However, the revised scale reduced the geographical scope of the pilot, as well as the overall number of people with disabilities who could be supported across Nepal in different levels of the value chain.

COVID-19

The Inclusive Coffee Value Chain Project began inception activities in December 2019. The first COVID-19 case was identified in Nepal on 21 February 2020, which led to a country-wide lockdown from 23 March. All public and private travel was banned, as well as all construction work, manufacturing, services, and corporate and public sector work requiring in-person attendance.

The impact was threefold. Firstly, the project – particularly field travel and training – could not continue as planned. Secondly, the economic impact was severe: those who depended on the informal sector, such as small entrepreneurs or those in the hospitality industry, lost their only source of income. Thirdly, people with disabilities were disproportionately affected by the virus, lockdowns and the economic shock brought about by the pandemic.⁶

Bridging project

In light of the disruption to activities and changes to the needs of the project participants, LFTW, Cordaid and NFDN agreed to suspend the project from 1 July 2020 until 31 March 2021. A COVID-19 response project – the ‘Bridging Project’ – was put into effect with two goals: to respond to the needs of project participants and to maintain the momentum towards the objectives of the Disability Inclusive Hamro Coffee Project. With funding from LFTW, the partners provided cash support to farmers with disabilities who had been impacted by COVID-19, focussed on establishing people with disabilities in roles in the value chain that were least

⁶ For additional information on the impact and response to COVID-19 for inclusive development, please see learning documents here: <https://inclusivefutures.org/learning-from-COVID-19/>

impacted by the pandemic, and supported OPDs to advocate for the rights of people with disabilities during the government’s response to COVID-19.

1.5. Project Results

The July 2022 *Disability Inclusive Coffee Project: Lessons Learnt* catalogues the learning by the project partners during the inception phase of the Inclusive Coffee Value Chain Project, its suspension for the Bridging Project in July 2020 and then resumption on 1 April 2021. The project partners further refined the project plan to account for the activities undertaken during the Bridging Project, and on securing a no cost extension continued implementation until 31 March 2023.

The partners proceeded with a ‘twin track’ approach: direct delivery and mainstreaming. People with disabilities received training, skills development and cash support from the partners, while advocacy efforts were led by NFDN targeting a groups of stakeholders, such as local government, OPDs and actors at the retail end of the value chain such as exporters and café owners. In total the partners achieved the following, meeting the majority of project targets:

Activity	Result	Achievement/Target
Saplings distributed to local farmers with disabilities	88 farmers received saplings	98%
Young people receive skills training for work in the coffee value chain	50 youth received training	119%
Farmers receiving assistive devices	40 farmers received assistive devices	N/A
Farmers with and without disabilities who received livelihood or inclusion training	303 farmers received training ⁷	152%
Buildings for coffee training or employment made more accessible for people with disabilities	14 buildings with improved accessibility	74%
Capacity strengthening training provided to OPD members	123 direct recipients, 255 indirect recipients	410%
Survival rate of saplings distributed to farmers	65% survival rate of all saplings	81%

⁷ This figure includes the farmers who received saplings

1.6. Learning per key activity

Farming level

At the farming level, the project team set up four nurseries to provide saplings to farmers. In total, 88 farmers were provided with saplings, access to assistive devices and training on managing coffee plants. NFDN undertook advocacy with the municipal and ward authorities, and also facilitated advocacy and accessibility audit training to local OPDs. Four disability inclusion facilitators and two extension service providers were deployed to provide ongoing support to the farmers. The following learning was captured by the team:

Training provided to coffee farmers: In the original design, coffee farmers with disabilities were to receive training in group settings at a coffee orchard of a successful local farmer. An extension service provider (ESP: a local coffee expert) would facilitate the training assisted by a disability inclusion facilitator (DIF: a local person with a disability). However, low accessibility to many of the farms posed a significant hurdle and COVID-19 restricted the options for group training at the beginning of the project.

To provide training to all the farmers with disabilities and abide by COVID-19 restrictions, the ESP and DIF travelled to each farm to provide one on one training. As a pair, the ESP and DIF were able to share a motorbike and travelled together. Training focussed on three areas: plantation, plant protection and shade management. While more time consuming and labour intensive, the approach was less costly, was easier to manage and had a better reception from the farmers. This extended period of one-on-one interaction with the farmers and their families also helped the ESPs and DIFs build a high level of trust among project participants.

Cash Support: The initial distribution of saplings reached 60 households with 200 saplings each. The distribution coincided with the COVID-19 lockdown and the decision was taken to support each farmer with NPR 10,000 (GBP 63). The cash support was to account for lower incomes during the lockdown and compensate farmers who had dedicated land to coffee farming.

The second distribution of coffee saplings in April 2022 did not include cash support in its design. During the initial assessment, the team identified 35 farmers who were interested in coffee farming. However, once it became clear that cash would not be distributed alongside the saplings, more than half of the farmers opted not to continue on the project.

The project partners reached the original decision not to provide cash to farmers in order to move away from a grants model and from generating dependency on the project. On review, the project team opted to include an equal level of cash support with the second distribution to compensate for the land they were dedicating for coffee growth. As explained below, land

dedicated to coffee would not produce income for at least a year and was a significant investment by the farmers in the project. The team also agreed that improved communication with the local community could have better managed expectations ahead of the second distribution of saplings. Improved communications would have allowed the team to adapt the approach to include cash distribution ahead of the second distribution.

Material support: Irrigation support, appropriate pest control and shading is crucial for the success of coffee plants. This demand for these resources was more acute owing to the siting of the plants (see below). While the cash distribution was in part to support farmers access these resources, the project had not budgeted for additional material support. While a small realignment was undertaken to provide irrigation for some households that struggled to access adequate water for their saplings, resources were not available to all farmers.

Failing to budget adequate material support for farmers was challenging. While the project could not have predicted where the coffee would be grown, resources to support coffee growth and survival rates would inevitably be needed even in the most promising farming locations. It is little surprise that nearly two-fifths of farmers reported during the evaluation that they needed additional resources to help maintain their coffee plants.

Local advocacy: Local advocacy proved an immensely powerful tool. The project benefitted from the partnership with NFDN, who had significant experience with local advocacy, and working in a context where local authorities have control over budgeting. The investment in advocacy by NFDN aided access to assistive devices for project participants, resources for farmers and supported the sustainability of the project outcomes.

Initially NFDN secured assistive devices for 42 farmers from different government and semi-government bodies. The assistive devices had originally been in the project budget and allowed a reallocation of funds to provide alternative support to farmers. Despite serious reservations from the local authorities during introductory meetings, NFDN also successfully advocated for farmers to receive much-needed irrigation and farming material support. This included irrigation support to 16 project participants from Melamchi Municipality and irrigation support to 30 participants from Mandandepur Municipality. In addition, advocacy in neighbouring municipalities led to funding and resources for farmers with disabilities not enrolled on the project Sangachokgadi, Balefi, Tiripura Sundari, Bhotekoshi and Bagmati. These advocacy efforts helped to mitigate the lack of budget for material support, noted above.

Training provided to members of local OPDs on advocacy, as well as training on accessibility audits to the DIFs and NFDN staff, strengthened advocacy. The DIFs were independently able to advocate the local government for improved accessibility. This included visits to health centres by one DIF who liaised with NFDN and then provided feedback to the centre on

potential improvements. Local OPDs also provided input on accessibility improvements during construction on a new government building in Melamchi municipality.

The investment in advocacy yielded real benefits to the project and has supported sustainability. Leveraging resources from the national and local governments in terms of material support and assistive devices allowed project resources to be reinvested for greater impact. Advocacy led by NFDN forged strong links between the local authorities and farmer groups, DIFs and local OPDs, which will survive the end of the project. Training provided to OPDs has been cascaded to nearly 300 members, which has also improved local advocacy capacity as well.

Technical support: the project evaluation highlighted technical support as a weakness during the project. This included not taking soil samples ahead of planting, the siting of the coffee plants on less than ideal land, technical support from extension service providers (ESPs) who were not agricultural experts and lack of shade protection. This observation was borne out by the lower than expected sapling survival rate (65% of all saplings had survived the first, and most difficult, growing season) and proportion of farmers who reported issues with pests and irrigation (60%).

As above, the project team would recommend planning additional resources for materials such as shade protection in similar projects. Likewise, the team concedes siting of the plants was not ideal; had ideal siting been possible it would have been part of the project design. However, the choice of land was linked to project participants, who were selected specifically as farmers with a disability, rather than because their land was ideal for coffee cultivation. Soil samples were also not taken for this reason. However, and as above, the team is now aware that joint cropping would have provided a more substantial interim income for the farmers during the projects. This approach would also have supported soil quality over time had it been pursued, and would be recommended for any similar project.

The selection of the ESPs, likewise, was a conscious decision. Both ESPs supporting the programme were local and able to travel more frequently to the farmers. Both also owned coffee pulping centres. Linking the farmers with these ESPs was a balanced approach to provide adequate technical support for the farmers while also supporting the sustainability of the project. The link between the farmers and the owner of the pulping centre meant that farmers had a clear route to sell their coffee cherries. At the same time, the ESPs as pulping centre owners were expected to continue to support local farmers so as to increase yields and, therefore, their own profits. This approach would not be adapted on any future project, although additional technical training could have been provided to the ESPs.

Support to Farmer Producer Organisation (FPOs): Following training and the delivery of saplings, the farmers were supported to become member of local FPOs. The project partners

employed a two-track approach to support farmers with disabilities to become active FPO members: actively linking the farmers to the FPOs while providing inclusion training and capacity strengthening to the FPO itself.

As part of the capacity building efforts, coffee orchard management training was provided to 200 members of six local FPOs. Additional training was provided by NFDN on disability sensitization and increase awareness on rights of people with disabilities. The FPOs also conducted operational procedures review for inclusion of farmers with disabilities. These trainings were opened up to a wider group of FPOs, including those for other crops, to increase the impact of the activity.

There was initial interest in capacity strengthening, and Agriterra⁸ conducted initial assessments with the District Coffee Cooperative Union in Kavrepalanchowk and three farmer groups in Sindhupalchowk. However, despite initial enthusiasm and positive results from the assessments, the interest from FPOs to follow up on some of the recommendations was limited.

The design had assumed that potential benefits for FPOs, such as increased group profits from an 'inclusive coffee' brand or speciality coffee, would provide an ample incentive to engage with the project. The long lead times to see the benefits of engagement, however, led interest to diminish rapidly. As with the farmers themselves, providing tangible results for key stakeholders could have maintain motivation. This may have been achieved by providing additional support during the project, or beginning engagement with FPOs at a time when coffee cherries were being harvested.

DIF engagement: One of the most important lessons of this project comes from the engagement of DIFs. Two DIFs were hired in each district, who worked alongside the ESPs and OPDs in the field. The responsibilities of the DIFs included data collection, coordination of the farmers, local advocacy and sensitization.

The DIFs were recruited locally and were members of OPDs.⁹ As people with a disability, the DIFs were trusted by the farmers with disabilities, and they could leverage their experience during advocacy meetings with local government. Their presence helped motivate the farmers and supported changes in community awareness around disability. Having knowledgeable

⁸ A specialist organisation in cooperative development (<https://www.agriterra.org/>) that assessed the FPOs based on organisational strengths, understanding, potential and threats.

⁹ One DIF was not an OPD member, but became a member during the project.

local peers with disabilities is invaluable to disability inclusion projects, in particular those with high levels of community and local government engagement.

Income generation: as noted above coffee plants require four years to reach peak profitability. As a result, the length of the project posed a significant challenge. The project was originally planned to support people with disabilities enter a much longer EU-funded livelihood project centred on coffee. When the project was redesigned as a standalone coffee value chain project, the partners took the decision to directly support farmers in order to generate lessons learned and community-level support for people with disabilities.

By the end of the project, the first cohort had only just harvested their first – and smaller – crop of coffee. The second cohort had yet to harvest a crop. As such, the project did not measure as large an impact on livelihoods as hoped. The evaluation identified 8 farmers of 79 who had planted and sold some of their cherries. Most farmers still had immature plants that had not produced a crop. The partners have concluded that any project working in the coffee value chain that includes farmers should plan to run for at least four years.

Owing to the delay in dedicating land for coffee farming and returns, projects could consider implementing short-term activities that generate income during the coffee maturity period. Examples of such activities include intercropping with crops like ginger or turmeric that grow well in a similar environment. By diversifying income sources, farmers can enhance their livelihoods and reduce their reliance on coffee as the sole income-generating crop.

Nonetheless, even during the project period, 19 families reported that 6.33% of their income was now coming from coffee farming (an increase of 6.8% when compared to other sources of income), 89% of whom were now in a position to save money when compared to those who were not yet profiting from coffee (68%). Actual income from plants that were already bearing fruit was averaged at 29,427 NPR (c. 180 GBP). When compared to the potential with coffee farmers in the community who had mature plants, an average income of 64,231 NPR (c. 392 GBP) could be expected if the plants continue to grow. As such, the approach has potential as a means to improving livelihoods.

Moreover, while income generation was not widely recorded during the evaluation, it was clear that the project approach had provided additional benefits. Confidence increased, with 82% of farmers reporting that they were more confident following the project. Farmers also reported improvements in their family's behaviour, with 85% reporting a positive change. Increased respect, support and being looked to as an equal representative of the household were the most common responses regarding the change in family interactions. In total, 91% of farmers still indicated that they would recommend coffee farming to other people with disabilities.

Skills & Employment level

At the skills level, the partners provided training to young people with disabilities to become baristas (three training sessions), green graders (one session) and processers (one session). In the original project design, the team had planned to make existing training more accessible and inclusive. In the new design, the team limited the training to a few skill sets in order to generate as much learning as possible. The focus was on accessible training for baristas.

In addition to training, the project partners supported local coffee businesses to become more accessible through grants to make infrastructure improvements, as well as to link trainees to jobs with employers (principally cafés). The trainees were also provided with support from a dedicated disability inclusion facilitator and offered assistive devices where necessary. The following lessons were generated:

Inclusive skills trainings and curriculum development: As a result of the project redesign when the EU-funded Hamro Coffee project did not continue, training focussed on a smaller set of marketable skills. This included barista training, processing training and green grading training. Selection criteria were imposed to support retention: participants had to be 18-35 years old, jobseekers and have completed secondary level of education. The call for applications was disseminated through OPDs and their networks, and efforts were made to source participants from the ongoing FOUND project in Nepal to support complementary projects.¹⁰ The approach helped the project reach people who were in need of a job and those who were interested in entering the coffee value chain.

The training was provided at the National Coffee Academy by the inclusive coffee ‘champion’ Dr Raj Kumar Banjara (see below). Dr Banjara had welcomed the opportunity to make his training centre accessible and an early activity in the project was to build ramps and an accessible toilet. The first cohort trained by Dr Banjara were all people with a hearing impairment, while subsequent cohorts had a range of impairments. The trainer reported that the mixed groups were more challenging, owing to the diverse learning needs and adaptations to the training approach. The trainer adapted the approach to accommodate the diversity of learning needs, extending the course from 30 to 50 hours, with additional supervised practice session after the training. The trainer also worked with the trainees to develop new methods to help people with disabilities prepare coffee effectively and safely, such as additional equipment for baristas who only have the use of one arm.¹¹

¹⁰ Fuelling Opportunities to end Unemployment for Nepalis with Disabilities (<https://tlmnepal.org/blog/found/>)

¹¹ For all the adaptations, please refer to the Inclusive Barista Training Manual developed during the project.

The ongoing adaptation to the training and flexibility helped the learning outcomes of the barista training. The flexibility demonstrated by the trainers represents the reasonable accommodation that is key to any successful training, including that with people with disabilities. While the trainers indicated they found the mixed groups more challenging owing to the planning and material that needed to be revised, the intention of the training was to gather lessons learned on adaptations required for a wide range of impairment types.

Job placements: The first cohort of trainees all had a hearing impairment. The subsequent cohorts had a mix of disabilities. Identifying job opportunities after the training proved challenging. The demand for service jobs reduced following the COVID-19 pandemic and impact on the tourism industry in Nepal. Ironically, efforts made to support job linkages with the first cohort may have made subsequent job placements more difficult. In order to promote the first cohort of trainees, 'digital CVs' were prepared, showcasing the skills each barista had learned. These were distributed to potential employers. As employers had seen videos of mainly women with a hearing impairment, they became less interested in people with other sorts of impairments. There is also existing local familiarity with a chain of cafés that employed people with hearing impairments, with the result that negative stereotypes were easier to challenge for that one particular disability type but not others.

Job retention was also a significant challenge. While the trainees reported that they felt competent to work as baristas, it appears that they were unable to retain jobs once they were linked to cafés. There were also challenges with maintaining contact with the baristas following training, which was mainly over Facebook and through a Kathmandu based disability inclusion facilitator. While the project team had been informed that all baristas had found work, when interviewed during the evaluation only 14% of all trainees reported still being in a job. Those who reported earnings were found not to be earning a living wage and could not survive on barista work alone.

The project team agreed that more should have been done to map and engage with potential employers to help sensitise them to onboarding employees with disabilities. More could also have been done to sensitize the trainees themselves about finding work, salary negotiations and professional conduct. Only the final cohort of barista trainees were provided with six hours of soft skilling; this should have been a standard element of the training approach from project design. In addition, establishing a clear means of communication to track the trainees after they have graduated would have allowed the project team to respond to challenges finding and retaining work more effectively.

Improving accessibility: In order to improve accessibility for both employees and customers, the project had allocated budget to help coffee chain actors improve the accessibility at their venues. The project first undertook a feasibility assessment of about 12 venues, consisting of cafés and primary processors, after which NPR 500,000 was made available to construct

improvements. Following the accessibility audits, the key adaptations were constructing wheelchair ramps and accessible toilets. However, the project team struggled to identify sufficient numbers of locations where the improvements could be constructed. While business owners were keen and aware that better accessibility would improve business, they did not own the buildings. The project team agreed that mapping and targeting commercial building landlords in parallel would have been a more effective approach.

Champion: The partnership with Dr. Banjara and the National Coffee Academy as ‘champions’ of inclusive coffee strengthened the project. Initially targeted and trained as a stakeholder at the beginning of the project, Dr Banjara has emerged as a prompter and support of the project’s aims. He redesigned his training centre and café to be accessible, promoted inclusion across the coffee chain through his networks, supported the design of an inclusive coffee brand, conducted training, supported learning documentation and also attended the Dubai Coffee Expo to promote the project and its findings. Identifying a champion or potential champions through stakeholder mapping is hugely beneficial in a value chain project, as it allows access to networks between the different steps in the chain and provides the project additional influence and authority.

Market level

At the market level, the project team established an ‘inclusive coffee’ brand. This brand was linked to the local market through a micro-site and QR code, while the international market was targeted through the attendance of an international Expo in Dubai. The following learning was captured:

Traceability stories: Consumer trends demonstrate an increasing focus on sustainability, environmental impact and transparency. There is a growing market for environmentally conscious, sustainable businesses that create social impact for communities. In the domestic market in Nepal, there is a small but incremental trend in consumers demanding sustainably sourced coffee that also guarantees fair prices for farmers. The demand is even greater from international buyers of Nepali coffee. While the strategy in the Nepali coffee industry has been to increase both the quality and quantity of harvested coffee, branding is a significant opportunity to increase its international profitability.

The project team attempted to capitalise on showcasing the impact of ‘inclusive’ coffee. A micro-site was created to test how well traceability stories and the promotion of coffee produced by farmers with disabilities as ‘Inclusive Coffee’ would work.¹² The micro-site was launched with five stories: a combination of small videos and stories with photos, documenting

¹² <https://inclusivecoffeejourneys.org/>

five beneficiaries of TO16 from different tiers of the coffee value chain and their journey in inclusion. A small sticker was printed with a unique QR code linked to the micro-site, which was used on the coffee packaging of two coffee companies for a limited run, which also helped direct traffic to the site. The site had an average of 161 unique visitors and 375 views in the first two months of 2023.

However, the branding exercise only had limited traction. Additional time and advocacy would have been required to convince businesses of the potential of traceability stories in speciality Nepali coffee. The current focus on increasing coffee output was still entrenched in the approach taken at the marketing and sales level. In addition, owing to the short project period, the project team was not able to demonstrate the saleability of coffee harvested from the farmers with a traceability story. Without evidence, it was difficult to engage wholesale buyers and sellers.

1.7. Recommendations on Project Design

The independent evaluation concluded that the project had potential for impact. Coffee is a promising crop in Nepal, where demand is high as an export commodity. Likewise, it is a particularly suitable investment, as following the first growing season the plants do not require as much tending from farmers and can produce cherries for decades. However, there were some key considerations that posed a challenge to measuring longer term impact that should have been considered during the design:

Project length: The partners agreed that the project should have been longer. Coffee plants require at least three years to fruit successfully and five to reach their full yield. The first saplings were distributed in March 2021 and a second batch in April 2022. By project completion, only one in ten households had harvested any produce from the first distribution of coffee plants and those from the second batch were still too immature to produce cherries. The median income reported from farmers from coffee plants was only 18% that could be expected from the plants that they owned.¹³ Supporting the farmers through several growing seasons would have been necessary to ascertain the true impact of the project at the level of the farmers.

Stakeholder mapping: The evaluation team recommended additional stakeholder mapping. Relationships with some key stakeholders, including local government agriculture units and

¹³ 19 farmers of 79 interviewees reported an average earning of 14,843 NPR from coffee farming. On average the farmers had 141 plants, which has an economic potential of 82,984 NPR (rate of NPR 102 per kg, with an average production of 5.77 kg/plant.)

barista networks and employers, had not been engaged or adequately mapped in order to leverage their support. Had the local government agriculture units been identified and engaged, additional resources may have been leveraged for farmers with disabilities in the area supported by the project. Likewise, improved mapping of café networks or barista employers could have improved the success of placing trainees in jobs and job retention.

Additional Field Level Technical Support: The evaluation team questioned the selection of the ESPs to support farmers, stressing the importance of targeted hiring of field staff with technical education to provide technical support to coffee farmers. While the selected ESPs received training at the beginning of the project to help prepare them to support farmers, the evaluation team reported that there were gaps in technical knowledge and support for coffee farmers and nursery owners. Examples given included better advice on siting of the saplings, on pest and disease control, or seed quality to support the sustainability of the nurseries. As above, the project team had selected the ESPs to increase engagement with farmers and the sustainability of the project. However, additional technical support should have been made available to the ESPs and the farmers as a result.

Feasibility Study: The evaluation team further recommended a feasibility study. This could have included the location of coffee project both in terms of the municipality as well as with individual farmers in terms of soil quality, weather patterns and coffee demand. Likewise in Kathmandu looking at the demand for certain skill sets ahead of training. Information ahead of the project launch could have informed design as well as allowed the team to develop mitigation strategies to known challenges, such as sites less amenable to growing coffee.

As mentioned above, the project design was bound by financial and geographical considerations: the locations, technical staff and funding available had been determined by the original design. Moreover, the land available to farmers with disabilities dictated where saplings could be grown. Nonetheless, considerations of scope, feasibility and project length are paramount when designing any coffee value chain project.

1.8. Impact

It has been difficult to assess the full impact of the project before many farmers were able to harvest a coffee crop. An ideal project length to do so would be at least four years as it takes up to five years for a coffee plant to reach its full yield. In the current project, the first cohort only harvested their first – and smaller – crop of coffee. The second cohort had yet to harvest a crop. As such, the project has not, at present, had as large an impact on livelihoods as hoped.

The project evaluation identified 8 farmers of 79 who had planted and sold some of their cherries. As mentioned above, the yield was low as it is the first crop from the initial batch of saplings. Nonetheless, 19 families reported that 6.33% of their income was now coming from coffee farming (an increase of 6.8% when compared to other sources of income), 89% of whom

were now in a position to save money when compared to those who were not yet profiting from coffee (only 68%). Actual income from plants that were already bearing fruit was averaged at 29,427 NPR (c. 180 GBP). When compared to the potential with coffee farmers in the community who had mature plants, an average income of 64,231 NPR (c. 392 GBP) could be expected if the plants continue to grow.

Impact has been shown in other ways. Although there were concerns about the siting of the plants and a lower than expected survival rate, the coffee farmers have demonstrated that people with disabilities can maintain saplings through the first – and most difficult – season. The income for farmers who were able to harvest cherries further illustrates the potential of coffee as a livelihood opportunity for people with disabilities. Of the farmers interviewed, 90% said that they were eager to continue farming coffee and a similar proportion would recommend it as a livelihood source to others.

As explained above, the livelihood outcomes for the trainees was not as significant as for farmers. The livelihood potential of jobs in the coffee value chain remains unclear: only 14% (4 people) of the trainees had work at the time of the evaluation, and reported lower and disparate wages (5,000 NPR to 10,000 NPR). The project design could have been improved: soft skilling should have been added to the training earlier to support baristas with CV writing, interviewing and searching for jobs, alongside how to act and what to expect in the workplace. While, the support of the project champion, Dr Banjara, use of existing networks in the coffee sector in Kathmandu and the provision of video CVs was helpful, it could not compensate for lack of sensitization with employers and an unfavourable job market.

However, the project partners have demonstrated that it is possible to make a value chain more disability inclusive and the project has had a positive influence on the value chain in Nepal. The lessons learned during the training with baristas will influence future training at the National Coffee Academy, and the inclusive barista training manual has been disseminated to other training centres in Nepal. Dr Banjara continues to be a strong advocate for inclusion in the coffee value chain in Nepal and there are ten cafés or coffee training centres that are permanently more accessible as a result of the project. At the local level several municipal governments have made resources available for people with disabilities as a result of advocacy undertaken during the project. Local farmer producer organisations are also now more inclusive, with 61% of farmers with a disability reporting they were now members. And at the most local level, farmers also reported a significant shift in the way they were perceived by their families and the local community: 85% reported that family attitudes towards them had improved and 81% reported change in the community's level of respect to them.

Impact Story 1: Milan and Biken: Confronting Biases

Milan was one of the 11 participants in the first cohort of Barista training organized for deaf participants under the Inclusive Coffee Project in Nepal. The 25-year-old is currently employed at Pauline's Garden, a popular café in Kathmandu, as head Barista. A typical shift lasts 9 hours a day and he earns NPR 19,000 a month.

Biken Shrestha, one of the proprietors of Pauline's Garden, shares that Milan was initially hired by their previous manager. Shrestha who did not have prior experience working with people with disabilities confides that initially he was hesitant about working with deaf staff members. He was familiar with deaf servers in the hospitality sector, having seen them at one of the oldest restaurant chains in Kathmandu for years. But since he did not know sign language, he had doubts about hiring deaf people at his own business. Shrestha's main concern was that challenges might arise with respect to communication with the customers and which might lead to misunderstandings or sloppy service.



Milan Thapa working at Pauline's Garden

“But then I thought, if I hire one person with disability, that is only 10% of my workforce. If any issues with communication or training comes up, I could still rely on the remaining 90%,” smiles Shrestha. However, Milan put all his doubts to rest. Within a year, Milan has become a beloved and trusted member of the team, having risen to the Head Barista and Bartender position.

“And I can communicate just fine with him. We have all learnt a little bit of sign language while working with him, and we use gestures, expressions to get the message across,” explains Biken.

Meanwhile, Milan is harboring a bigger dream for his future. He signs that he wants to gain more experience and work his way towards working in bigger hotels. Eventually, he wants to open his own café one day.

Biken reflects that having worked with Milan, he has had the opportunity to confront his own biases. Based on his experience working with Milan, he looks forward to creating more opportunities for people with disabilities in his business.

“Anyone who has the skills and the right attitude, regardless of their physical disabilities, will be welcome to work in Pauline’s,” concludes Biken.

Impact Story 2: Prithvi Devi: Coffee Farming

Prithvi Devi usually starts her day with farm work. She milks her buffaloes, gives them feed and then goes to the local dairy to sell milk. After she finishes her morning chores, she returns home to her youngest son, Govinda. She cannot leave him alone for extended periods, as she is his primary caretaker, while her husband works away from home as a teacher.

Her three older children have all flown the nest. Two daughters are married, while her eldest son works in Kathmandu. There is no one else who can lend her a hand and so it is upto her to manage the housework, farm work, while also giving full time care to her 22-year-old son.

Govinda’s eyes light up when he hears her familiar voice. He rushes to the door, clings to her, as she makes her way to the kitchen. Prithvi gives him a snack, which he accepts happily and eats, lying down on his bed.

“When he was younger, he attended a program for children with intellectual disabilities in the capital. That program was set up by some NGO, and it ran for a few years. When that support ended, we did not have the means to keep him in school. We are farmers, how would we make a living in the city?” reflects Prithvi.

A chronic lack of funding in social services, education and health facilities, mean that the extent of government support the family receives to care for and provide for Govinda is limited to a Disability allowance of NPR 4000 a month.

“If they had some sort of carer who could come in a few hours a week, or some sort of day care program, where he could go and be active and meet people... but no one in our local government is motivated or interested to provide any additional support for people with disabilities,” shares Prithvi.

To add to her dismay, for her son’s safety, whenever she has to go work on the farm, she has to leave her son locked up in the house.

“I am always worried. My mind cannot rest. I am always in a rush to come home and I breathe easy only when I see him.”

Prithvi heard about coffee farming from other villagers in 2019. She was excited that for the first time, there was some targeted livelihoods support for people with disabilities and

families who are caregivers to people with disabilities. After attending an orientation session, she decided to sign up and received 200 coffee saplings which she planted in her farm. A dedicated extension service provider visits her farm regularly monitoring her coffee plants and providing her expert advice.

“This is the first time that I have planted cash crops. So I was a little nervous. I would have maize ready for harvest around this time otherwise,” laughs Prithvi, “but I know that a kilogram of coffee cherries goes for as much as NPR 105, so the maize has now been relegated.”

She expects that from the fourth year onwards, her coffee plants will provide good yield. For now, she is living off of the income from the rest of her farm where she has planted her regular crops such as maize, wheat and vegetables for her family’s subsistence. Prithvi has also discovered that to her relief, coffee farming constitutes a lot less manual labor in comparison to the regular crops.

“I need to make sure Govinda is looked after when I am gone. So, I am hopeful, coffee will give us a good income, and it will be a way out of our current situation,” shares Prithvi.

In the past few years, the Nepalese specialty coffee market is resurgent driven by a boom in domestic and international demand. Private traders buy directly from farmers, often trying to outbid the other traders. This presents a perfect opportunity to build opportunities for farmers with disabilities and their families within a robust and growing value chain.

“I have a guaranteed buyer for my coffee cherries already. For now, I am waiting for my cherries to ripen,” smiles Prithvi.

The income from coffee can provide a way out of poverty for families like Prithvi’s and allow them to build a better future for themselves and their loved.



Prithvi Devi in her coffee farm