



Research and Studies
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Community-based solutions for economic resilience: Building on local knowledge and know-how to respond to climate change challenges (Nepal)

Innovation, Impact & Information Division & Resilience and Inclusion Division
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About HI

Handicap International – Humanity & Inclusion (HI) has a longstanding presence in Nepal, where it supports vulnerable populations particularly persons with disabilities through inclusive, community-driven programming. The organization's approach is to promote economic resilience by building on local adaptation and mitigation practices, ensuring that interventions are inclusive, sustainable, and responsive to marginalized groups

About this study

This study has been conducted with the assistance of Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Luxembourg.



A. Context of the study

HI's work in Nepal is grounded in the principle that resilience must be locally owned and rooted in the knowledge and adaptive strategies of the communities themselves. Nepal's diverse geography and climate make the country particularly vulnerable to natural disasters, requiring innovative community-led solutions for sustainable and inclusive resilience.

B. General and specific objectives

The primary aim of the study was to strengthen HI's economic resilience programming by gaining deeper insights into the local adaptation strategies adopted by vulnerable communities in Nepal. Specific objectives included:

- Identify and document local knowledge and practices for climate change adaptation and mitigation among at-risk households.
- Highlight the unique challenges and capacities of persons with disabilities and other marginalized groups.
- Co-create evidence-based recommendations to inform future inclusive programming and policy advocacy.

C. Methods

The study employed a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative data. Fieldwork in Badimalika municipality included key informant interviews, focus group discussions, and semi-structured interviews with 103 participants, ensuring voices of the most vulnerable were amplified. Community-level discussions were complemented by a literature review to contextualize findings and assess the level of transferability of promising practices.

D. Findings

Nepalese communities face a range of climate hazards, including landslides, floods, erratic rainfall, and human-wildlife conflict. Landslides, often worsened by poorly planned infrastructure, are among the most destructive hazards. Vulnerable groups, especially persons with disabilities, face disproportionate impacts and barriers to recovery, such as loss of assistive devices and exclusion from relief efforts.

Communities demonstrate strong local leadership, social cohesion, and innovative adaptation strategies, such as water management innovations and diversified livelihoods. However, significant gaps remain in disability inclusion, with many still forced to react to hazards rather than plan proactively. Policy commitments exist but need stronger implementation at the community level.

“People with disabilities are often the last to receive help when disaster strikes. We need support that helps us prepare, not just react.” Community member, Nepal

E. Recommendations

1. Adopt area-based and community-driven approaches anchored in local priorities.

In disaster-prone districts, community-led preparedness initiatives bring community members together to map risks and assess vulnerabilities specific to their area. Rainwater harvesting programmes follow a participatory model where local people decide on system locations and beneficiaries, ensuring transparency. Farmers’ cooperatives gather community views before tailoring training and resources to the unique conditions of high-altitude agriculture. By working at the local scale and prioritising shared decision-making, these efforts deliver solutions—from improved irrigation to year-round vegetable production—that communities themselves identify as essential.

2. Ensure that persons with disabilities at the center of program design and implementation and advocacy.

The Futuremakers initiative focuses on young people with disabilities, engaging them directly in shaping programmes with groups like the National Federation of the Disabled-Nepal. Self-organised support groups strengthen confidence, promote solidarity, and lessen social isolation. Joint efforts between disability-led organisations, funders, and government bodies ensure inclusive policy advocacy and technical capacity building. Over time, participants become leaders and mentors themselves, embedding disability inclusion into local institutions for the long term.

3. Support marginalized groups by scaling successful livelihood diversification models.

Across rural Nepal, livelihood diversification projects combine income streams as livestock rearing, bamboo crafting, and small-scale production. In agriculture, the introduction of plastic tunnel greenhouses has enabled families to triple their incomes by cultivating vegetables year-round. Cooperatives act as the bridge between farmers and state services, facilitating vocational training, market access, and government grants. These opportunities focus on groups often excluded from formal employment (women, older residents, and people with disabilities) enabling participation in manageable, home-based activities and fostering peer-to-peer learning.

4. Expand community-led water management solutions and strengthen inclusive governance.

The water user committees overseeing rainwater harvesting schemes ensure that women, youth, and other underrepresented groups have a formal voice in decision-making. These projects meet a large share of household water needs—up to 67% in some places—while freeing time otherwise spent fetching water. Governance processes are designed for openness, from planning and implementation to resolving disputes. Combining local water knowledge with improved storage and filtration systems has built lasting, self-managed solutions that communities can maintain without continuous outside intervention.

5. Ensure climate adaptation planning and finance are accessible to all, with a focus on local innovation and capacity building.

Community crop diversification and food security strategies build resilience by aligning planting schedules and crop choices with shifting climate patterns. Reforestation drives in disaster risk reduction programmes promote the “cut one tree, plant four” principle, while agroforestry integrates trees, crops, and livestock for stability. Local finance schemes linked to economic diversification projects give residents small loans for adaptation investments, making climate readiness affordable. In parallel, training combines indigenous practices—like bamboo flood barriers—with modern techniques, so communities can innovate without losing their traditional strengths.

F. Conclusion

Building resilience in Nepal requires transformational, community-driven approaches that leverage local knowledge and prioritize inclusion. Investing in locally led adaptation and ensuring that the most vulnerable are at the center of programming will enable communities to move from crisis response to proactive resilience. HI’s research and programming in Nepal emphasize the need for bottom-up approaches, where communities are empowered to identify, refine, and systematize their own solutions to climate risks. This ensures greater ownership, sustainability, and relevance of interventions, and positions HI as a leader in inclusive, sustainable development.



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