

SELF-HELP GROUPS

Good practice in CBM supported programs

CBM's partners often develop and support self-help groups to work towards empowerment of people with disability. Self-help groups are a way of bringing people together at the most local level for social support, saving money, awareness raising and advocacy, or something specific like the collective purchase of medicines.

Here are some key things we've learned about succeeding with self-help groups that involve people with disability.

For self-help groups to function well

- Invest in group leadership through training potential leaders in group management, leadership and rights of people with disability.
- Ensure the necessary support people are identified to help with group development. Ideally the same people who are resourced to do this are able to encourage people with disability to actively participate.
- Ensure the group is financially transparent; this builds trust. Guidelines for management of funds is essential.
- They need operational guidelines for a shared understanding of roles, responsibilities and for transparency.
- Consider what motivates people to join a group and work with that. Sometimes people join a group simply to make friends and build confidence. After a while, members might be more interested in income generation or advocacy.

For self-help groups to be disability inclusive

- Consider group profile and participation. Look at whether most members have a particular type of impairment (often mobility-related) and consider how to broaden who participates.
- Consider encouraging groups to budget for transportation of people with mobility impairments using group savings to enable participation.
- With those who can't always attend meetings, find ways to keep them represented and informed by visiting these members or having their family members attend.
- Consider savings expectations and participation ensuring nobody is excluded because financial contributions are set too high.
- Consider what might be stopping men or women's participation and how to address meaningful participation of both.
- Link in with people's routines such as scheduling meetings in line with a related event like health screening.
- Build groups as locally as possible as this means that people with disability can attend easily.

For self-help groups' sustainability

- Groups seem to be more sustainable when they are linked with other groups enabling them to work together towards shared goals.
- To achieve outcomes at local, state or national government levels, self-help group members need know how their concerns can be represented at those levels for example, through peak bodies, apex bodies or umbrella organisations.
- Sustainability of self-help groups will look very different in different contexts. There is no single model for success, but from the outset, implementing partners should be clear that they will only be providing financial and technical support for a set period of time.
- Expectations of self-help groups and implementing partners need to be the same so that there are no surprises or unmet expectations. This includes the role of self-help groups when a project finishes.

To access the more detailed report (in English) including case examples for each consideration, see [see self-help group final report¹](#) or contact programs@cbm.org.au

¹ <http://www.cbm.org.au/selfhelpgroups>