

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 and 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 - visit these members or have their family members attend.

Consider savings expectations and participation - make sure 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 - 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/ national government levels, self help group members need know how their concerns can be represented at those levels - e.g. 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 - including roles of self help groups when a project finishes - so that there are no surprises or unmet expectations.