

Livelihood Strategies and Government Support for Persons with Disabilities in Rural Nepal: A Qualitative Study in Madi Village, Kaski District

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Abstract

This study examines the livelihood strategies and access to government support for persons with disabilities (PWDs) in Madi Village, Kaski District, Nepal. Drawing on a qualitative narrative design, in-depth interviews with 16 PWDs captured the dynamic relationship between livelihood practices and state interventions. Findings indicate that while PWDs engage in diverse livelihood activities including farm, off-farm, and non-farm strategies, structural barriers such as limited accessibility, inadequate program awareness, and insufficient financial support impede their economic security and inclusion. Despite progressive measures like the 2014 Disability ID initiative and the 2017 Social Security Act, implementation gaps persist, leaving PWDs vulnerable and dependent. The study highlights the need for disability-sensitive livelihood programs, inclusive policy reforms, and caregiver support, emphasizing an integrated approach to economic empowerment and social inclusion. Insights from this research can inform policymakers, NGOs, and social workers in designing sustainable interventions that foster resilience and dignity for marginalized groups.

Keywords: Persons with Disabilities, Livelihood Strategies, Government Support, Rural Nepal, Social Inclusion

1. Introduction

Disability and poverty share a reinforcing relationship, particularly in rural contexts where geographic isolation, scarce resources, and infrastructural limitations exacerbate vulnerabilities. In Nepal, PWDs constitute a marginalized group facing compounded barriers in education, employment, healthcare, and civic participation. Although government initiatives such as the Persons with Disabilities (Rights and Welfare) Act of 2017 and various social security programs attempt to address these challenges, their impact remains limited due to inadequate implementation, limited financial coverage, and poor accessibility (Adhikari & Poudel, 2017; Government of Nepal, 2017).

This study explores two key questions:

1. What livelihood strategies do PWDs in rural Nepal adopt to sustain themselves?
2. How effective are government support mechanisms in enhancing their well-being and inclusion?

Focusing on Madi Village—Ward No. 4 of Kaski District—this research sheds light on the intersection of disability, livelihood, and policy in an under-researched rural setting, offering valuable implications for inclusive development in line with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

2. Literature Review

Research indicates that PWDs in Nepal encounter multidimensional exclusion shaped by structural, cultural, and economic factors (Aryal et al., 2018; Shrestha & Gautam, 2020). Despite progressive laws such as the 2017 Act Relating to the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, barriers in physical infrastructure, information access, and public attitudes persist (Banks et al., 2018).

The conceptual framing draws upon the **social model of disability**, which situates disability not merely as an individual impairment but as a socially constructed phenomenon influenced by systemic inequalities (Barnes et al., 1999). Scholars also highlight livelihood diversification as essential for rural households facing economic uncertainty (Ellis, 1998). Linking these perspectives, this study examines how institutional barriers and policy gaps shape livelihood choices for PWDs in rural Nepal.

3. Methodology

A **qualitative narrative design** was employed to capture the lived realities of PWDs. Madi Rural Municipality, Ward No. 4, was purposively selected due to its high concentration of PWDs and rural characteristics.

- **Sample:** Sixteen PWDs representing diverse age groups, disabilities, and socioeconomic backgrounds.
- **Data Collection:** In-depth interviews and case studies provided rich, contextual insights.
- **Analysis:** Data were analyzed using **Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)** to identify recurring themes and nuanced experiences.
- **Ethics:** Informed consent, confidentiality, and cultural sensitivity were strictly maintained.

This approach ensured that participants' voices guided the interpretation of findings, highlighting both livelihood resilience and systemic challenges.

4. Findings and Discussion

4.1 Livelihood Strategies

PWDs employed three main livelihood strategies:

- **Farm Strategies:** Most engaged in subsistence farming with minimal adaptive tools. Some used disability allowances to purchase seeds or small livestock, yet irrigation and mobility constraints limited productivity.
- **Off-Farm Strategies:** A few participated in wage labor or operated small shops; however, lack of vocational training and inaccessible workplaces restricted opportunities (Johnson, 2018).
- **Non-Farm Strategies:** Many depended on family support, community networks, and irregular allowances, underscoring economic vulnerability.

While diversification provided some resilience, lack of market access, skills, and capital perpetuated livelihood insecurity (Smith, 2018).

4.2 Government Support and Services

Key initiatives included the **Disability ID (Identity) Card Program (2014)** and the **Social Security Act (2017)**, offering monthly allowances, healthcare subsidies, and education support. However, respondents emphasized:

- Financial assistance (Rs. 1,600/month) was insufficient for medical or livelihood needs.
- Schools, health posts, and local offices lacked disability-friendly infrastructure.
- Limited awareness campaigns meant many remained uninformed about available benefits.

These gaps highlight the disconnect between **policy intent** and **local realities** (Government of Nepal, 2020).

4.3 Interplay Between Livelihood and Government Support

The study revealed a **partial dependency relationship**: while some PWDs used allowances to supplement farming or healthcare, inadequate coverage forced many to rely on family or charity. This reinforced cycles of economic insecurity rather than enabling sustainable independence (Miller & Davis, 2020).

4.4 Structural Barriers

Barriers extended beyond economics to **attitudinal discrimination**, lack of sign language interpreters, and limited representation in local decision-making bodies. Such exclusionary practices diminished the impact of both livelihood efforts and state interventions, reinforcing marginalization (Shrestha & Subedi, 2019).

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

The findings underscore that while Nepal's disability policies mark important progress, implementation gaps hinder meaningful change. PWDs remain constrained by inadequate financial assistance, inaccessible infrastructure, and limited livelihood options.

Key recommendations include:

1. **Tailored Livelihood Programs:** Vocational training, microfinance schemes, and market linkages for PWDs.
2. **Accessibility Reforms:** Disability-friendly public infrastructure and communication services.
3. **Awareness Campaigns:** Community outreach to disseminate information on rights and benefits.
4. **Caregiver Support:** Financial and training support for family caregivers to reduce economic burden.
5. **Policy Integration:** Align disability programs with SDGs and local governance frameworks for sustainability.

This study calls for **holistic, disability-sensitive rural development strategies** that bridge the gap between policy and practice, fostering inclusion and economic resilience for marginalized communities.

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