

CHALLENGES IN IMPLEMENTING A COMMUNITY BASED REHABILITATION (CBR) PROGRAMME

Primary reader: GOVERNMENT

Message: ENSURING THE SUSTAINABILITY OF A CBR PROGRAMME

Introduction:

The concept of community Based Rehabilitation (CBR) is relatively new in Sierra Leone. The idea was initially introduced through the collaborative effort of Sight Savers and the Sierra Leone Association of the Blind (SLAB) in 2005.

It had been pilot-tested in four operational districts in the country (Bombali district in the north, Bo in the south, Kenema in the east and Freetown urban in the West) with rights holders and family members trained in orientation and mobility (O&M), daily living skills (DLS) and other forms of empowerment.

The programme was initially funded by Comic Relief – UK and by 2010; donor fatigue and shortage of funds have had an adverse effect on the continuity of the first CBR project in Sierra Leone.

Implementing CBR programmes with no government support is unsustainable. The absence of referral centres, lack of assistive devices such as white canes for the blind, crutches and wheel chairs for polio victims, poor infrastructure coupled with no intention of owning the project by both the government and the community adversely affects sustainability.

For a concrete and sustainable implementation of CBR programmes, the political will is needed to enhance a systematic development approach. The central government should take the lead which includes the provision of logistics for project implementation, payment of salaries and allowances to CBR officers including community sensitisation to be complemented by agencies working in the field of rehabilitation.

Sensitisation and awareness raising campaigns to assist in changing the public negative perception on disability greatly enhances the chance of a sustainable CBR project. Continuous community sensitisation increases the level of confidence of rights holders thereby encouraging them to come forward and take their rightful positions in the community irrespective of their disabilities.

In Sierra Leone the introduction of the CBR programme has had a positive impact on both the urban and rural communities. The continuous CBR community sensitisations through town hall meetings, focus group discussions, radio panels and jingles including empowering rights holders through basic training in orientation and mobility, daily living skills, encouragement to attend and participate in community meetings and vying for elective positions at all levels of mainstream community life assisted the marginalised to discover their potential. Two years after the launching of the programme in the country, the first disabled Member of Parliament, Mr Julius Koffie, was elected. This has greatly encouraged disabled people at all levels of the political cadre (Ward, local and Parliamentary levels) to come forward. Typical examples of two disabled individuals; Tony Alie, a blind man who contested in constituency 67 in the Bo District and Fofi Konneh, a polio survivor contested in Constituency 69 in the 2007 elections.

As at the time of writing this article, over fifteen disabled persons (male and female) have so far contested for positions in the local council and parliamentary elections of November 2012, with a lot more accessing other forms of social support in main stream community life.

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Sierra Leone