

PARTICIPATORY ACTION ON SOLVING PROBLEMS OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITY

Message: PARTICIPATORY ACTION IS KEY IN SOLVING MOST PROBLEMS OF PWDS.

Primary reader: PWDS AND COMMUNITY MEMBERS.

INTRODUCTION

Community Based Rehabilitation (CBR) and Empowerment Project started in Sierra Leone in 2004. It is the collaborative efforts of the Sierra Leone Association of the Blind (SLAB) with Sight savers International and Comic Relief UK as sponsors.

The Community Based Rehabilitation and Empowerment Project identify and register persons with disability especially the Blind and Low Vision (BLVP). This programme has field staffs that are trained in rehabilitation and empowerment of the Blind and Low Vision Persons. They get into communities to sensitize, register, screen through Eye Care Personnel, and train them in Rehabilitation skills including basic skills training for income generation, Orientation and Mobility, Daily Living skills, income generating activities thereby empowering them to become self reliant and active partners in community and national development. The involvement or inclusive community participation in decision making matters affecting their communities can further strengthen their mental skills in solving problems. This method is impacting a lot of Persons with Disability in most Chiefdom in Bo District, Southern Sierra Leone. In some Chiefdoms, persons with disabilities were marginalized or abandoned by family/community members because of their negative perceptions about disability issues. Some Persons with disability have unified with family/community members simply because they have also become active members with capacities in the socio-economic and political lives of their society. Most people with disability have businesses in the fields of agriculture, social and politics and some of them are chiefs, cattle bearers and estate owners.

Narrative

This is a case study of a blind man called Dauda Moinama who lives in a small village called Ndikpaya in Tikonko Chiefdom, Bo District. Ndikpaya has a rough population of 100 people with a blind population of seventy.

Moinama happens to be one of the industrious Blind and Low Vision Persons in the village with a sheep and two goats, a wood seller and a petty trader which serves as his livelihood. His plight came about when a week ago his sheep ate a plastic paper while suckling her two weeks old lamb. The sheep died a week later leaving the lamb. Moinama was highly depressed with the loss of his sheep because the life of the lamb was at stake as it was too young to be taken care of by anyone in the village. To Moinama and his community members there was no way of saving the life of the lamb.

On one of Mr. Alpha's visit as a CBR Worker in Ndikpaya village in 2007, Moinama explained his plight in tears, asking Mr. Alpha to come to his aid in saving the life of the lamb. This was a problem for both Alpha and his client because he was not a veterinary doctor. However, Mr. Alpha called a meeting of all the People with Disabilities and some of the community members and engaged them in a focus group

discussion. Brainstorming on the issue in a participatory manner, all of them effectively worked to coming up with a solution to this problem. A lot of suggestions were made by the participants, among which were either to leave the lamb to the grace of God or find other means of saving the life of the lamb. Among the Blind and Low Vision Persons, Mr. Paul Koroma came with a solution, even though it was initially vague. He suggested that the lamb be taken to another sheep in the village that had recently delivered two lambs and was suckling them. This suggestion at first seemed ridiculous because of the cultural perception of a sheep suckling another lamb that was not birthed by her as impossible. However, they later agreed to take Moinama's lamb to Pa Bockarie Macavory whose sheep had recently given birth to two lambs. Pa Macavory came up with a solution, Guess what the solution was, He took his kettle, filled it with water and took it along with us. On arrival, Pa Bockarie took the nursing sheep, placed it a trough and washed it with the water. Later, he took Moinama's lamb and washed it with the water from the sheep. Leaving the lamb, it went straight to the nursing sheep. At first it was difficult to allow the lamb to suckle from the sheep but after smelling its body the sheep accepted to suckle it.

Once the sheep accepted Moinama's lamb it continued to suckle it to maturity. Moinama got his problem solved through participation of his colleagues and community members. Last year 2011, Moinama proudly told Mr. Alpha in a happy mode that his sheep has given birth to a lamb. Mr. Alpha later visited the village to celebrate their success and experience in the issue that a sheep can suckle another lamb that does not belong to her.

Conclusion:

- Problems of People with Disabilities and Community members may be sometimes difficult if left to individuals alone but with total involvement of all they will easily solve the problem.
- There is also wisdom in participating holistically.
- Brainstorming through participatory action reaps rich dividends and therefore a working tool to solving community problems.
- Participatory action can build the confidence of PWDs and community members to solve problems which may seem difficult at their own levels.
- Participatory action can promote inclusive society which to some extent is absent in our communities in Sierra Leone.
- As a result, Participatory action serves the whole community

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