

Using communities of practice to strengthen rehabilitation and disability inclusive development practices: Learning from the GRID network in Cameroon

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GRID is one of many projects that the CBCHS SEEPD program is running; SEEPD emerged from CBR work and rehabilitation services of the CBCHB

<http://www.cbm.org/programmes/SEEPD-382099.php>

http://www.cbchealthservices.org/html/seep_d.html

Goal for this presentation

- To share how CoPs can be used in CBR and community based inclusive development (CBID) work in African settings
- Our suggestions: from the GRID Network

What is a Community of Practice?

A **group of people** who share **common goals** and who are interested in *(sometimes passionate about!)* **developing and spreading new knowledge** to **improve understanding and action** around an issue.

Adapted from Wenger-Trayner's work

<http://wenger-trayner.com/introduction-to-communities-of-practice/>

What is a Community of Practice?

- Can be **deliberate** or **spontaneous**
- People who want to engage in a **collaborative learning** process, to share knowledge and learn from each other for **professional development**
- Members meet **physically, virtually**, and/or using phones.

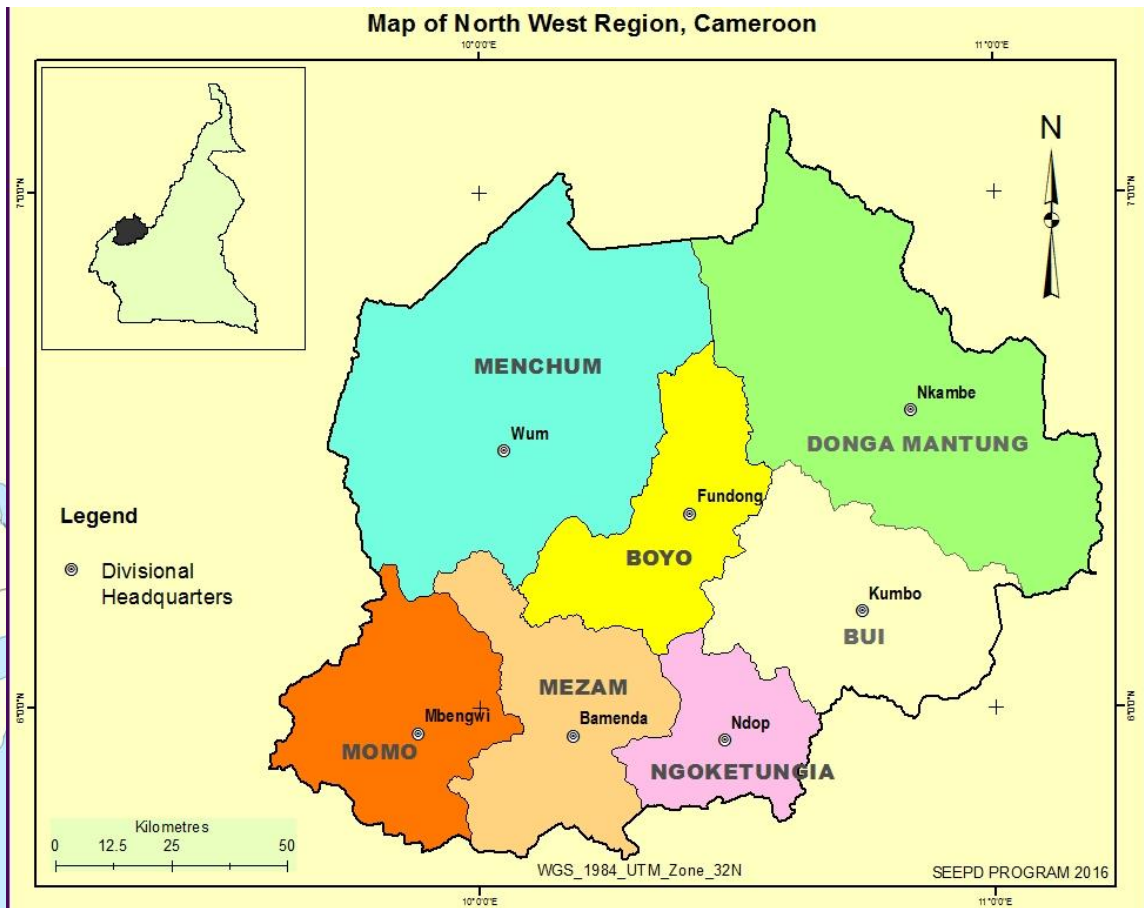
In our case, to improve knowledge, practices, and services in inclusion, disability, and rehabilitation, from several organizations.

The goal of the GRID Network

.... is to develop communities of practice focused on disability, rehabilitation, and inclusive development to improve quality of life in the North West Region.

Guiding Frameworks

- WHO CBR Guidelines (WHO, 2010)
- ICF model (WHO, 2002)
- The Sustainable Development Goals (2015)
 - Specific goals for the theme group were identified based on the SDGs



Why the GRID Network?

- The GRID Network = Groups for Rehabilitation and Inclusive Development
- Growing community of rehabilitation providers in Cameroon, as in other African and LMIC countries.
- In many places there are no, few, or very new professional development opportunities for CBR and rehabilitation providers who are committed to inclusive development
- Can be very difficult to find out about PD opportunities
- People want to talk with and learn from each other

The GRID Network



GRID Network - 2+ years

- **Core project team** of 3 people making organizational decisions
- **Leaders** for each of theme groups
- **10 members** (approx.) nominated for each theme group from several organizations
- **Discussions:** Theme groups work on what they see as priority areas for collaboration
- **Ongoing communication:** 2X annual F2F meetings, daily/weekly Whatsapp discussions, some other social media and internet communications

CBR with Cameroon Baptist Convention Health Services

Pre-1980s: Services for people with disabilities including physiotherapy had been established previously

1982-3: The Community Based Rehabilitation established for the North West Region of Cameroon to serve rural areas.

Over the years we grew: in several areas of the region, now implemented in rural and urban settings, reaching approximately 502,973 people including 23,677 PWDs

Why we needed a CBR group in the GRID Network

- GRID Network established January 2016
- CBCHS has a long standing CBR program in the region
- The rehabilitation landscape has been changing, thus there is need to document and share evidence-based practices in CBR
- Other organizations in the region are also developing CBR initiatives

Aims of the CBR GRID group

The CBR theme group aimed to:

- use knowledge and evidence to improve CBR services in the region
- find ways to share what has been effective
- select key areas to focus on for improved services

CBR Group questions

The CBR group was intended to focus on questions such as:

- What works (what is effective, what has impact) with respect to CBR in the NWR and in other places in the world?
- How can we keep up to date with CBR discussions and debates that are happening globally?
- What can we learn and implement from other programs?
- What are the impacts and benefits of CBR on broader development initiatives?

CBR Theme Group Members

- Local, national and international group members are from several sectors and professional backgrounds.
- The CBR Group has people from Cameroon and USA
- Passionate and committed to sharing ideas and key learnings.

What is the GRID CBR Group doing?



Providing opportunities for professional collaboration and learning between different organizations

More specifically....

- Focused on knowledge dissemination, use, and changing practices (i.e. implementation)
- Sharing resources, dialogue and communication to learn about CBR and inclusive development
- Developing and adapting resource materials
- Encouraging the use of internet and social media to share knowledge relevant to CBR in African contexts
- Providing leadership opportunities for CBR leaders
- Encouraging universities to include rehabilitation and inclusive development in their programs

However....

Several challenges

- Many participants are busy and don't read/participate
- Takes time and money to develop and adapt resource materials – not done as much as hoped
- Internet and social media have been cut, or limited several times in the past 2 years; expensive
- Opportunities for universities not taken up by them

Achievements so far

- Learning about programs and referrals
- Expanding learning opportunities for greater empowerment and participation
- Strengthening institutional support for collaborations and communities of practice
- Promoting inter-organizational relationships in the disability and inclusive development arena
- Opportunities for leadership development

What have we learned? Key points

- The importance of perseverance, flexible coordination, and leadership
- Consideration of benefits and incentives for CoP members
- The roles of meetings, technology, and social media to maintain satisfying group rhythms
- The power of projects to focus attention
- Ways of supporting different types of participation and activities
- Understanding CoPs in broader sociopolitical contexts.

Flexible coordination and leadership

- There needs to be at least a minimal level of coordination
- Leadership can be shared or one person
- Keep going, even when difficulty

Example from GRID network

We had 2 project leads, and one CBR CoP Leader who worked together well to keep the group going

- ✓ Allow for time to communicate and plan

Consideration of benefits and incentives for CoP members

- members need to see benefits, especially at the beginning

Example from GRID network

Because of the unknown nature of the CoP at the beginning and the costs, we did not include all CBR workers, and maybe we should have.

- ✓ Try to include all who are interested
- ✓ Provide clear benefits for the first several months

Meetings & social media to maintain satisfying group rhythms

- Getting together is vital in CoPs (core purpose)
- Really crucial to have ways that people can communicate and share

Example from GRID network

Twice annual face to face meetings, and regular use of Whatsapp group allowed members to talk with each other across distances

- ✓ use the social media that people are comfortable with

The power of projects to focus attention

- Members can share information for different purposes
- In addition to sharing articles, information (e.g. GRID Notebook) effective to have a “project” such a writing together

Example from GRID network

The CBR group worked on adapting the WHO CBR Guidelines to the local context.

- ✓ a relevant project for group members

Ways of supporting different types of participation and activities

- Members can be in different locations and involved in different kinds of work
- Have to be careful of side conversations, but sometimes they are helpful to help members feel included or to deal with challenges

Example from GRID network

- ✓ CBR Group leader was part of the GRID Leaders group
- ✓ CBR workers can feel isolated; CoP is one way of connecting to reduce feelings of isolation

Understanding CoPs in broader sociopolitical contexts

CoPs always take place in broader contexts that provide opportunities and constraints

Reflecting on the contexts helps members to see their work in bigger way

Example from GRID network

- ✓ Discussions about CBR at national level (policies, opportunities, challenges).
- ✓ Discussions about what is happening in other countries (international members, conferences like this one)

Challenges identified in the CBR Group

- **Reluctance to participate** - some people want to be part of the group but do not want to publicly share what they don't know so they are quiet; maybe intimidated by more experienced members
- **Time required for effective CoP development** – we are finding the CBR group is still developing after 2 years
- **Lack of experience with critical thinking** - discussion does not go deep without skilled facilitation; some people are not used to being questioned as part of their professional development; questioning (intended to be helpful) can lead to bruised feelings, silence
- **Feelings of Exclusion:** Some people felt “left out” because they could not join due to resource limitations

Summary

- Despite the challenges, we think there is considerable potential for CoPs (of many kinds) to contribute to CBR and CBID goals
- CBR workers and volunteers could be supported to be part of CoPs
- We can be creative about how to bring people together across organizations and geographic areas to focus on topics and projects

Thank you and Contact us

We would love to:

- Hear about similar initiatives, and what you learned
- Share your resources with the CBR GRID Network

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**Thank you, Merci, Meyaka, Zonka,
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