Community Based Rehabilitation (CBR) Africa Network (CAN)

A COMPREHENSIVE REPORT ON THE CBR WRITING SKILLS WORKSHOP HELD IN CBC HEALTH SERVICES RESOURCE CENTRE, MVAN, YAOUNDE, CAMEROON FROM NOVEMBER 11 - 15, 2019

Introduction

A training of Community Based Rehabilitation (CBR) stakeholders on writing skills took place in Yaonde, Cameroon. This training was organized by the Cameroon Baptist Convention (CBC) Health Services in collaboration with the CBR Africa Network (CAN).

CAN usually conducts writing skills workshops targeting CBR practitioners at the grassroots level. 12 such workshops have since been conducted in 10 African countries, including Egypt, Ghana, Malawi, Sierra Leone, South Africa, and Uganda and most recently Cameroon. During the workshops, participants are encouraged to write success stories and articles to showcase their work on the field. These are later published by CAN through its communication outlets.

The capacity-building aspect of CAN has been very beneficial to its participants across the years. In Cameroon, the training was attended by 45 participants. The following topics were covered: Understanding Documentation, The Writing Process, Principles of Good Writing, Writing a Story, Inclusive Writing, Identifying and Writing Effective Success Stories, Ethical Issues, and Action Planning.

Workshop Objectives

- To strengthen capacities to better communicate best practices, lessons learned and challenges in implementing Community Based Rehabilitation work
- To identify focal points/organizations who will be sharing information from CBR practitioners in Cameroon with CAN secretariat
- To identify the possibilities/opportunities for increased information sharing and
- To enhance CBR networking.

The following were anticipated as immediate and progressive outcomes:
- Participants equipped with skills to better document their experiences
- Articles written about different CBR programs in Yaoundé Cameroon were to be uploaded on CAN website and subsequently published
- Establishing and strengthening of CBR networks
- Identification of pertinent issues in CBR/disability for possible advocacy campaigns

Target group

The training was tailored to meet the interests of CBR practitioners and communicators, Disabled Peoples Organisations (DPOs) and Persons with Disabilities. The training had participants from eight out of the 10 regions of Cameroon

Expectations

Participants were keen to learn, given the following expectations mentioned before the training:

- I expect that at the end of this workshop. I should improve on my writing skills.
- I expect to also better understand what documentation is all about
- I expect to better improve on my writing skills especially writing stories (success stories). To be able to do my work very well

- I expect that I should be able to effectively communicate in writing, best practices, stories and other write-ups for the program.
- Get to know other CBR Partners
- Gain Knowledge on writing skills to enhance reporting
- Master writing of success stories
- At the end of the workshop, I expect to have my skills developed in the areas of disability reporting.
- To be acquainted with technical vocabulary in disability communication
- To learn new techniques of story writing and inclusive writing skills
- Advance skills in story writing
- Contribute ideas through active participation
- Sharing of experience in the communication field
- Participate as much as possible in everything that has to do with writing
- To give me all the time and capacity
- I will share my experience in writing disability stories
- I will like to know how information is gathered/collected
- How to keep/preserve information
- How to spread it to all and sundry
- How to ensure that information reaches the targeted population
- Wish to learn how to develop a successful story
- To know my role in the CAN and to know what is CAN all about
- To get more writing skills
- To make a review on our use of CBR skills over the past years
- To know more how to get a local organization to involve in fundraising for people with disability
- To understand how to write reports
- To understand documentation especially that of Persons with Disabilities
- To develop writing skills of Persons with Disabilities in an inclusive society
- Understand types of writing and how to entice leaders
- Identifying storylines that draw a meaningful conclusion
- How to approach story writing from an inclusive perspective
- I expect to gain knowledge on writing skills in Cameroon
- To improve on ways on writing success stories
- To improve on documentation
- I expect at the end of this workshop to be able to improve on my writing skills especially that of success stories.
- I expect to gain more skills on what and how to document
- I expect to improve my reporting skills
- Learn modern advanced ways of documentation
- Build more skills in success story writing
- Learn more on how to get a captivating story idea to write on
- I am expecting to learn new and better skills in approaching and writing disability stories.
- I will be very focused to listen and learn how to write a success story
- Will effectively implement all that will be learned here back in my community

Areas of focus during the training:

i) Understanding documentation.

CAN prioritizes proper documentation of activities by all its partner organizations. CAN acknowledges the work of partner organizations which are sometimes not documented, thereby encouraging documentation. The organization will not only document but most importantly focus on quality. Participants learned the different ways of documenting most especially in unchangeable formats for posterity. This includes but not limited to collecting newspaper clips, photographs, slides, videos, TV/Radio Adverts, interviews, speeches, and reports. This procedure will empower and inform the community of CBR stakeholders. This

documented information will inform CAN, and will also be shared by CAN to its diverse audience in Africa and beyond. Participants learned the best methods to use to have beneficiaries collaborate in sharing their information for documentation.

ii) Writing Process. The participants were enlightened on how to make the writing process not only effective but also how to make it enjoyable. Each writer it was noted has their writing process and skills that guide them in their writing. Participants learned how to get inspiration for a story idea and finding a niche for a story. These sources could be childhood experiences/memories, routine activities, etc. However, given that each person can have their unique sources of inspiration, it is always good to respect personal intuition. Writing should be made simple and easy to be understood by the target audience. Appropriate language, paragraph and sentence construction needs to be appropriate. Putting together information in a much meaningful way is critical in promoting information sharing on CBR stakeholders in Africa.

iii) Understanding/Writing Leads. Participants learned how to write a lead, ie the first paragraph. This persuades the person reading a story and needs lots of techniques. In a conventional report, there is the intro, body, and conclusion but a focus on the lead is important. The various types of leads introduced included: Summary/Digest/Straight Lead, Question Lead, Punch/Capsule/Bullet/Cartridge Lead, The statement or Direct Quotation, Contrast lead, Direct address or direct appeal lead, Descriptive lead, Parody lead, Staccato lead/ Poetic lead, Suspended interest/delayed lead. The introduction of any story takes into consideration the audience. Participants used the knowledge gained to write a lead of their choice. Learning about the body of the story, which appears in different forms like the Inverted Pyramid, Inverted feature pyramid, the hourglass style, etc. Avoiding leapfrogging and adding color to stories can make stories attractive to the reader. Emphasizes was laid on the principle introducing the story, telling it to the end, and introducing it again. Participants also learned how best to use the narration style and samples of transition words, sentences and questions. Effectively editing the final article is primordial, a part that must be effectively considered.

iv) Inclusive Writing. CBR practitioners need to ensure that their writing does not make others feel inferior, ignored, less-important or excluded. This includes individuals or a group of people. This can sometimes be done unknowingly. Care has to always be taken with our writing. During this training, participants were exposed to different ways in which they may exclude certain categories of the audience. Skills on how to ensure inclusive writing were also given to participants.

v) Writing success stories. The objective was to define a success story and the reason for using it, understanding the different types of success stories, identify the key audience with who to share the success story and develop strategies for communicating the story to different audiences**.** A success story is a simple description of a program's progress, achievements and lessons learned. Participants learned that all success stories need some action to be taken. Again a success story is written to gain visibility and credibility, create and promote a program, satisfy information request and educate stakeholders, garner more support, resources, and accountability as well as evaluation.

The 4 "Knows" of a success story were highlighted to the participants. These include: Know the information that you want to share, know the audience, know how to tailor your message to your audience, and know your story.

vi) General Principles of good writing. To this, participants learned how to select readers, who are intelligent, but uninformed about the topic but get informed through it. Deciding on the purpose of the report and letting every sentence make a timely contribution to the purpose. The use of simple, concrete and familiar language to convey messages, checking writing at the beginning of every section, and the importance of reiteration of the story idea in an attractive way.

vii) **Ethical issues.** Participants were drilled on ethical issues, differentiating between the right and the wrong issues, emphasizing that choosing the right thing is ethical and vice versa. Ethical issues surface, especially in persuasive writing. However, CBR practitioners should steer clear of manipulation and misconceptions, because there are many instances where ethical issues arise in writing about CBR. Ways of averting this were presented to the participants. The writer and the editor of any story are expected to always address these ethical issues. And to understand them. Truth remains the guiding rule. This is to ensure that what is written does not create more harm than good.

Feedback from Participants

At the end of the training, some participants shared their feelings.

"The workshop has strengthened my capacity to communicate best practices, lessons, and challenges in implementing the CBR approach to the wider African audience and identifying the focal point person/organizations responsible for sharing information from CBR practitioners in selected countries within CAN secretariat".

"The workshop has enhanced my skills in identifying and writing success stories that are reflective of the work we do and attract funding, understand challenges in CBR work, identifying and exploring the possibility of increasing information sharing among partner organizations and enhance CBR networking," explained one.

"I have grasped the aspects of documentation, equipped myself with writing skills and ready to write stories and send to the EDID program for dissemination with the CAN newsletter, website, and other digital platforms," expressed a participant.

"I have never written a story before, but today, I have developed skills that will enable me identify and write success stories, document communication material for easy access and dissemination, how to engage funders through story writing, the different story writing processes, understanding and writing leads, the body of a story, inclusive writing skills, CBR writing skills, technical vocabulary related to disability reporting and best practices in story writing" explained another.

"Before I came to this workshop I did not know how to write a success story. However, after the workshop I have learned how to write a story," said disability activist. "I appreciate the workshop as it has equipped me with the knowledge I dint have," another participant noted.

"I have learned how to write a success story, something I never used to do during all the years of my practice in health. All that I knew was to write a report. Writing a story is important because in a way it communicates to people the things that have been done. What I haven't liked is the period of the workshop; it needed more days to grasp the concept," a health worker said.

Lessons:
During the training CAN was able to document some lessons about writing skills. First, there is evidence that the majority of the stakeholders are doing great work but are not aware that they are doing CBR work. Besides many of them only rely on reports that are written to meet their contractual obligations to donors. Unfortunately, there is less documentation of the results which makes information sharing difficult. However, many of the CBR practitioners are interested in sharing information.

Secondly, there is limited capacity to document CBR results. Once this gap is addressed, there is a great possibility that more information on CBR will be available for sharing since CBR practitioners would be knowing what to share.

Recommendations

Positive things: Participants confirmed that the workshop was a good learning session with well-organized, well mastered, and well selected lessons that will improve field work. With Cameroon being a bilingual country, participants also welcomed the strategy used to deliver lessons to the understanding of everyone. This inclusiveness at all levels including participant selection with diversity considerations was also applauded. A lot was learned on how to write success stories, thanks to the practical and theoretical knowledge gained at individual and group levels.

Other logistic arrangements like lodging, feeding and transportation to and from the training site were good as expressed by some participants. According to participants, this eliminated stress and facilitated learning to achieve the objectives of the learning. Making learning materials available to participants was a plus as this will enable the participants to have documents for reference as they work.

The facilitators were appreciated for forming a good rapport with the participants enabling good interaction and relationship to boost learning. This also enabled good relationship between participants. The enthusiasm of the participants who endeavored to be present for trainings early everyday was acknowledged. In general, the content of the workshop in all forms was appreciated.

Things to be improved on

In as much as participants had expressed they contentment in what went well, they also highlighted the things that the organizers need to improve on in subsequent trainings. To them, the time for this rich training was limited, thereby making the non-respect of the time scheduled for activities. The lateness observed at meal times was also something to improve on subsequently. The presentation on CBR, they observed needs to be on the program and more elaborate to inform participants most of whom don't know much about CBR.

There were suggestions for more practical sessions during adult training, and the condemnation of too much repetition. The attendance sheet was not inclusive because the sex and disability columns were not included. Also earmarked were the necessity for refresher courses, regulation of salt in food, and the importance to inform participants prior to changes made on the schedule.

The five-day Training of Community Based Rehabilitation (CBR) stakeholders on writing skills that took place in Cameroon Baptist Convention (CBC) Health Service Resource Center at Mvan Yaounde, Cameroon, ended on November 15, 2019. It was organized by the CBC Health Services Empowerment and Disability Inclusive Development (EDID) program under the mantle ship of Community Based Rehabilitation (CBR) Africa Network (CAN).

The workshop was a success, given the positive feedback gotten from participants. This feedback was captured as presented above. The workshop was characterized by practical and field work where in participants constituted groups, visited CBR sites in Yaounde neighborhood and thereafter, identified and wrote success stories. These group stories are resubmitted for publication on the CAN website and other media outlets.

The training was facilitated by the Ugandan based Executive Director of CAN Dr. Abdul Busuulwa, and Mr. Abanda Alphonse, Head of Grants department and Coordinator of communication within the HIV-Free project of the CBC Health Services. Mrs. Aghor Glory, Program Manager, EDID Program organized the training while Mr. Pascal Ahidjo, Secretary Executive Committee CAN handed over certificates to participants at end of the training. He and Miss Maku Vivian did the translations that made the training effectively bilingual in speech and in Presentations.


Empowerment & Disability Inclusive Development (EDID) Program
TRAINING OF COMMUNITY BASED REHABILIATION (CBR) STAKEHOLDERS ON WRITING SKILLS
Atelier de formation des acteurs de la Réadaptation à Base Communautaire (RBC) en techniques de rédaction
11th – 15th NOVEMBER
Yaounde- Cameroun 2019
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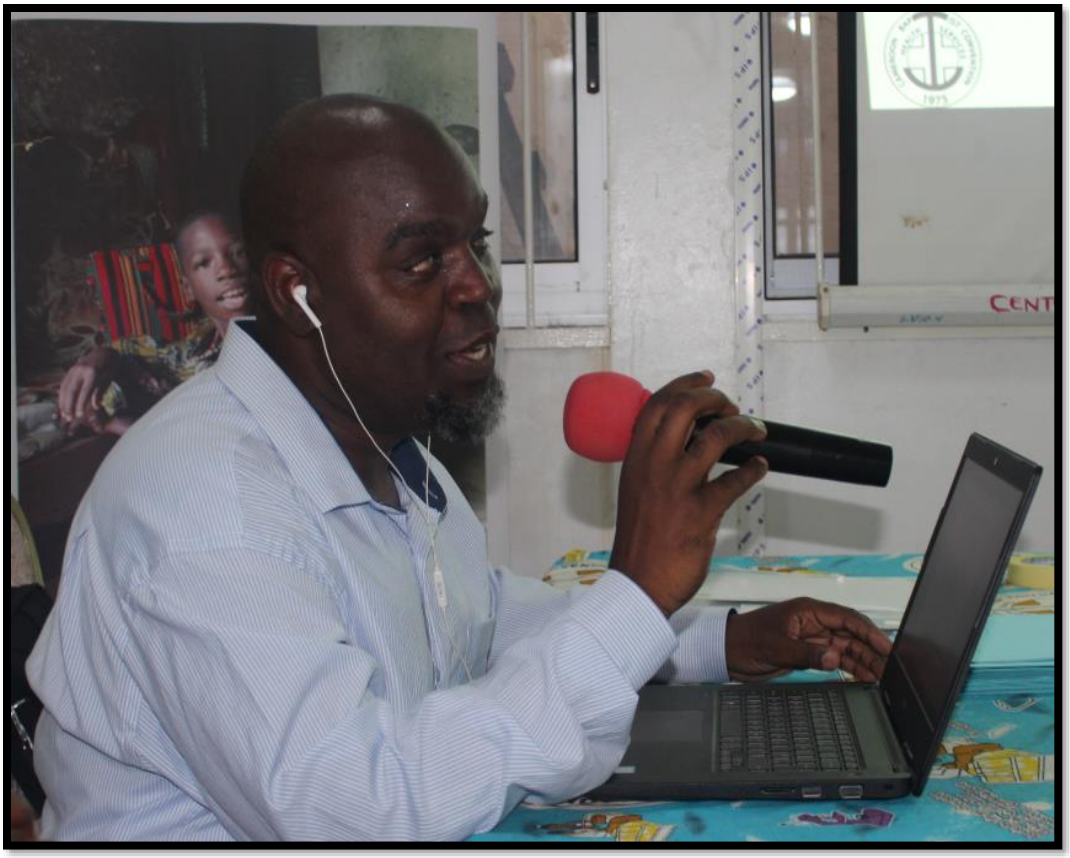




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