

Editorial - A thirty year-long journey of a journal

After nine years, it is time for Disability, CBR and Inclusive Development to move into the next phase of its development. It is also an appropriate time to record the journey of this journal over the last thirty years.

The first decade

During the nineteen eighties, the field of rehabilitation was in an evolving stage in many developing countries, including India. The government and by civil society in India were attempting to reach the large numbers of persons with disabilities, particularly those living in rural areas in the country, using different programmes and approaches. Community Based Rehabilitation (CBR) was considered important during those years due to two reasons: one was the availability of appropriate know-how for service provision for persons with disabilities in the community through the training manuals developed by the World Health Organization (1989), and the consequent shift from 'professionals' to 'non-professionals' in community-based programmes. The second reason was the national commitment at that time for universal provision of services and the shift from 'everything for a few' to 'something for everyone' (Murthy, 1991).

It was against this backdrop that from 1990, the Disability Division of ACTIONAID-India began to actively promote CBR projects through non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in different parts of the country, in rural areas and urban slums. These projects were managed by people from different backgrounds; persons with disabilities, family members, religious and charitable organisations, rehabilitation professionals and social workers. The CBR projects had various components including prevention, medical rehabilitation, education, vocational training/income generation, social rehabilitation and awareness building (Thomas, 1993).

It was well understood that rehabilitation was culture dependent, especially if it was to take place in community settings and therefore it would be difficult to have a centralised plan, particularly in a country as diverse as India. A centralised national plan could only provide a framework to guide situation-specific decentralised planning for service provision. In order to ensure that such decentralised programmes are effective, especially if they are carried out by non-professionals, it was necessary to equip the implementers of CBR with the

necessary knowledge and skills for implementation, monitoring and evaluation (Thomas M, Thomas MJ, 1995).

With this underlying principle, ACTIONAID Disability News was started in 1990, as a biannual publication meant for concept clarification and highlighting of issues to be addressed in the field of rehabilitation. The newsletter, which was circulated free of cost, was aimed at implementing agencies, donor organisations, policy planners, administrators and professionals involved in rehabilitation. The rationale for starting the newsletter was this: implementers were more likely to try to improve their programmes when they knew where they were in relation to global trends, and what they needed do to catch up with what was going on. The Goodricke Group, based in Kolkata, India, was the main sponsor of the newsletter.

The initial issues of the newsletter attempted to provide a holistic picture of the field of rehabilitation, including methods of service delivery, manpower training, development of technical aids, evaluation and research. Over the next few years, the scope of the newsletter gradually changed, to include more articles from contributors from all over the world, including a few peer-reviewed articles. A readership survey showed that a majority of the respondents read more than 75% of the newsletter and that more than 80% gained new information from it (ACTIONAID Disability News, 1993).

The second decade

As more authors showed interest in contributing to the newsletter, readers sent their feedback that the newsletter could be upgraded into a journal. From 1997, ACTIONAID Disability News became the Asia Pacific Disability Rehabilitation Journal, with an international editorial board comprising members from different parts of the world. The major focus of the Journal was on articles related to policy development, concept clarification, development of methodology in the areas of service delivery, training of manpower and programme evaluation, and development of technology related to rehabilitation. Articles were published under three sections: Developmental articles, Original articles and Brief Reports, after peer review by an international review board. Two issues of the journal were published each year and circulated free of cost. The journal had a dedicated readership that slowly increased, as assessed through reader feedback. Action for Disability, UK was the main supporter of the journal in the initial years, and was joined by CORDAID, the Netherlands, a few years later.

This was one of the very few journals dealing with community based rehabilitation, to be published and circulated from the developing world, where this form of rehabilitation initiatives were most prevalent. Thus it served to fill a gap in knowledge on CBR, primarily aimed at developing countries. Two thousand printed copies of the journal were initially circulated free of cost to readers who had requested for it, from over 75 countries all over the world. The journal began to be widely quoted by academics, administrators, policy makers and implementers, apart from being indexed in international indexing systems. Healthlink Worldwide's list of CBR Essential Resources in 1996 and 2003 quoted the maximum number of articles from this journal, as important training resources in CBR.

With the aim of continuing with its mission of disseminating quality information to people involved in promoting CBR, the Asia Pacific Disability Rehabilitation Journal group came out with some associate publications with the support of different donors, between 1999 and 2006. All knowledge enhancing activities of this group were in the area of CBR, aimed at promoting creative thinking and implementation in this field. These activities were also disseminated through the websites of AIFO, Italy (<http://www.dinf.ne.jp/doc/english/asia/resource/apdrj/>) and the Japanese Society for Rehabilitation of Persons with Disabilities (<http://www.aifo.it/english/resources/online/apdrj/journal.htm>)

Friday meetings were started in 1997 in Bangalore, India, as public meetings to discuss CBR and other disability-related issues, by a group of like-minded people. The idea at that time was to meet together for a few hours once in two months, on the last Friday of every odd month at a fixed venue to brainstorm on issues related to CBR. These discussions explored different perspectives and divergent opinions held by many groups. From a small group of 5 to 10 persons to start with, it grew to an assembly of 50 to 100 people, who came from different walks of life to debate at this forum. There were no incentives other than participation in a healthy debate during the meetings. Over the years, Friday meetings became popular and changed into a capacity building instrument for many practitioners of CBR around Bangalore. The deliberations from these meetings were published from 1999 in a newsletter called **Friday Meeting Transactions** twice a year, and mailed to readers in association with the Asia Pacific Disability Rehabilitation Journal. The newsletter also contained other information that could be useful as training material for programme implementers. The articles were published in this newsletter without references, standard styles of writing or peer-reviews, in a format suitable for trainers in this area.

However, after 6 years, the Friday Meetings were found to have outlived their utility. Opinions from the discussants at the Friday Meeting and from readers of Friday Meeting Transactions about the need to continue these activities, showed that a majority could now access similar activities near their places of work. Since the Friday Meetings had lost their uniqueness, and did not serve any special purpose, it was decided to close them at the end of 2002, and to stop publication of the Friday Meeting Transactions.

The **Selected Readings in Community Based Rehabilitation** was an occasional associate publication of APDRJ, dealing with contemporary reviews on CBR, and meant for academicians, researchers and policy planners. Series 1, entitled 'CBR in Transition' was published in January 2000, with the support of Action for Disability, UK. Series 2, on Disability and Rehabilitation in South Asia, was published in 2002, with the support of DFID-UK and Action for Disability.

These books contained about ten to twelve invited papers from authors around the world, focusing on in-depth, global reviews on specific themes related to community based rehabilitation. They aimed to function as an advanced reading for planners, researchers and managers involved in CBR to give them a clearer understanding and a global view of the various aspects.

The APDRJ team brought out the **Training Notes in CBR** in 2000 and the '**Manual for CBR Planners**' in 2003, with support from Action for Disability, UK. These manuals were meant for planners and trainers of CBR, to be used to plan more systematically and effectively for CBR programmes. They were circulated widely, using the mailing list of APDRJ. The Manual for CBR planners was translated and used in many training programmes in different parts of the world.

The third decade

By 2010, one thousand two hundred copies of the journal were being mailed to 91 countries in Asia, Africa, North America, South America, Europe and Australia/Pacific. About 60% of the readers were from developing countries. About 25% of the readers were individuals, the rest were institutions (NGOS, academic institutions including libraries and INGOs). The journal was available electronically on the AIFO website, and was also disseminated through WiderNet E Granary Digital Library, USA and EBSCO Publishing databases, USA.

The journal was being indexed in CINAHL Systems, USA and Elsevier Bibliographic Databases, Netherlands. The estimated readership through direct

mailing was about 15000, based on the analysis of feedback questionnaires sent in 2009. It was also estimated that the readership from different electronic media was about 5000.

The production and distribution was managed by 3 people on a voluntary basis, all of whom had other full time occupations, with very little expenditure on office infrastructure and management systems. This arrangement continued for 13 years (1997 to 2010), with 2 issues consistently brought out every year.

By 2010, the future of Asia Pacific Disability Rehabilitation Journal was under discussion between the management team and interested stakeholders from different parts of the world.

The low frequency of publication of the journal had led to its exclusion from major literature and indexing databases. This meant that articles, though freely available on the internet, were relatively difficult to find. This problem, combined with the low publishing frequency, could have led to a comparatively low impact factor. While there was a range of other rehabilitation journals, all were subscription based and expensive, or authors had to pay a fee to get their papers published. Given the increasing importance being accorded to disability issues from the decade of 2000s, in particular human rights, CBR and inclusive development, combined with the fact that the majority of persons with disabilities lived in low and middle-income countries, the time was right for a journal with a global scope to continue to be free and openly accessible for readers and free for authors; to reach higher international scientific quality; and to be published more frequently.

With the growing acceptance of the APDRJ and the fact that it had steadily been gaining recognition from different sources, including SCOPUS, it was decided to upgrade the journal to reach such a standard.

CBR had by then grown and evolved, from being a service delivery approach for persons with disabilities living in rural areas in developing countries, to a world-wide accepted strategy and movement, based on inclusive community development principles. Most of the debates that were raging over the past decades, over 'medical vs social', 'rights vs services', 'DPOs vs CBR', were gradually fading, with a better understanding among different stakeholders, as evidenced by the WHO CBR Guidelines of (2010) that was developed in partnership between different interest groups. Regional CBR Networks had been established across Africa, Asia and Latin America to sustain the movement through training, and information exchange. There was also a need for more

vehicles for information dissemination in different formats; not only for CBR-related information but for other emerging themes of importance in the disability sector.

Disability, CBR and Inclusive Development was launched in 2011 with a new international editorial board, published by Vrije University, Amsterdam and supported by NLR, the Netherlands, CBM, Germany, Light for the World, the Netherlands, and the Liliane Foundation, the Netherlands. The journal aimed to address the needs of practitioners in the field (particularly those from developing countries), policy makers, disabled persons' organisations and the scientific community. It was an e-journal, in order to reduce costs, fit with the image of a modern journal and cater to the needs of the large majority of readers. The frequency of publication was increased to four issues per year. The journal continued to address a global audience, since issues of disability and community-based inclusive development were of concern to people in all countries.

From 2011 to 2019, four issues of the journal have been brought out every year. Apart from SCOPUS, the journal is being indexed in Google Scholar. The journal was positively evaluated in **Journal Citations Impact Factor report** (<https://www.citefactor.org/impact-factor/impact-factor-of-journal-Disability-CBR-and-Inclusive-Development.php>).

A readership survey conducted in 2013 showed that more than 90% of the respondents rated the journal as **excellent and good** on its usefulness; and that more than 90% of the respondents rated the journal's quality as **excellent and good**. Some comments from the survey:

"The Journal provides immense opportunity to researchers and research students in the field of special education, disability studies and rehabilitation to update their awareness as well as develop new idea about the field and get oriented with international research findings."

"A very informative journal in terms of the work being currently carried out in the field of CBR. I am happy with the contents and I appreciate the direct contact from the Editor".

"DCID is the only Journal from developing countries that focuses on CBR and helps organisations involved in CBR to learn from those who are already doing CBR".

From 1 January to 31 December 2018, the journal website recorded 33,538 sessions from 25,303 users. On an average, each visitor browsed around 2-3 pages per visit (Source: Google analytics data for <http://dcidj.org> for 1 Jan – 31 Dec 2018).

The future

Over the last 30 years, the journal grew from a national newsletter to a journal focusing on the Asia-Pacific region, and then went on to become a global journal. In 2018, discussions were held with editorial board members about sustainability of the Journal, especially management sustainability. Till now, the journal has been managed by a small team based in India, but this is not sustainable in the long term. One idea that came up in discussions was the possibility of linking the journal with an organization involved in promoting disability issues and knowledge management, in order to maintain the journal over a longer term and to help with academic and management sustainability.

I am pleased to announce that from 2020, Disability, CBR and Inclusive Development will be taken over by the Liliane Foundation, the Netherlands, and Mr. Huib Cornielje, Director, Enablement, will be the new Editor-in-Chief.

It has been a wonderful, enriching and often challenging journey over the last three decades with the journal. I am grateful to all the donor organizations who sustained this journey over the years, the members of the Editorial Boards of APDRJ and DCID, Vrije University-Amsterdam and Mr. Arjan de Rooy, and to my dedicated team of fellow travellers – Dr. M.J. Thomas, Ms. Nina Agtey, Ms. Vardini R, Ms. Padma Nair, the National Printing Press, Bangalore and the Shree Ramana Maharishi Academy for the Blind, Bangalore.

Dr. Maya Thomas

Editor-in-Chief

Disability, CBR and Inclusive Development

REFERENCES

Actionaid Disability News (1993); 4 (2)

Thomas, M (1993). Strategies for Rehabilitation in India. Actionaid Disability News, 4; (1).

Thomas M, Thomas M.J (1995). Evaluation-based Planning for Rehabilitation Programmes in India, In O'Toole B, McConkey R (Eds). Innovations in Developing Countries for People with Disabilities. Lisieux Hall in association with AIFO: Chorley, UK.

Murthy RS (1991). Community Based Rehabilitation: Is there a Need for Research? Actionaid Disability News, 2; (2).

World Health Organization (1989). Training in the Community for People with Disabilities. Geneva

World Health Organization (2010). CBR Guidelines. Geneva