

## Editorial

Community based rehabilitation (CBR) was initially promoted to address needs of persons with disabilities living in developing countries. Today it is the accepted strategy to promote inclusive development for all persons with disabilities, based on the rationale that none should be excluded from the development process for any reason. Over the years, as CBR evolved, there has been some debate about how it can be applied in a developed society, with the premise that while the principles of CBR could be considered as universal, practice may differ according to the context.

There are vast differences between developing and developed countries in terms of the contexts or backdrop against which CBR practice can be viewed. In most developing countries, the major challenges include poverty, large populations, poor health care leading to high incidence of preventable causes of impairment, and low levels of education and awareness, especially in remote rural areas. Addressing basic needs remains a priority in these countries. Many of these countries have laws, policies and regulations for inclusion and protection of rights of persons with disabilities, and to prevent discrimination; but implementation of these laws leaves much to be desired, mainly because of lack of sufficient financial resources to ensure implementation. For example, laws to promote physical accessibility may be present, but in practice, most public places and transport systems remain inaccessible to persons with disabilities. Likewise, most rural areas where a majority of persons with disabilities live, have limited infrastructure, services and facilities that can be of benefit to them. Where present, welfare measures promoted by governments for persons with disabilities are generally viewed as inadequate in terms of both quantity and quality.

On the plus side is the family and community support that is still prevalent in developing countries that place a higher value on the 'collective' compared to the 'individual'. This is not to say that such values do not exist in the developed world. In Japan for example, there are rural communities that are very close-knit and mutually supportive, where people do not lock their house doors, illustrating their inclusive and welcoming spirit.

Another positive factor in developing countries is the presence of an active and vibrant voluntary sector in disability and development issues; these came up

mainly as an alternative to address needs in development areas, in the absence of sufficient government involvement in the early years.

CBR and inclusive development thus clearly have different baselines on which to work towards inclusion in developing and developed countries. Developing countries have a lower baseline to work with in terms of limited services and facilities, poor accessibility, limited resources and support from government. In many instances, services have to be developed from scratch, especially in rural areas. These countries have to work with larger populations as well.

In contrast, developed countries have better developed services, systems and resources for implementation of laws and policies to promote inclusion, including accessibility provisions for different categories of impairment. Populations of persons with disabilities that need to be covered are generally less than what is found in developing countries. Against such a backdrop, CBR and inclusive development experiences from countries like Japan highlight some good practices of a twin track approach in promoting inclusive communities: identifying needs and opportunities in the community for marginalised groups on the one hand; and mobilising community resources and support to change attitudes and promote inclusion on the other. Persons with disabilities with high support needs are ensured access to high quality services. Other marginalised groups such as the elderly and the homeless also reap the benefits of inclusive development.

As and when the economic situations improve in developing countries, they can learn from the experiences of inclusive development from the developed world, especially inclusion of persons with high support needs and of other marginalised groups in the community.

Season's greetings and good wishes for the new year to all our readers from the DCID team.

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