

International CBR consultation by WHO

Comments by Tomas Lagerwall, Rehabilitation International

1) Community Based Rehabilitation (CBR) was initiated as a concept to provide services to people with disabilities in developing countries. Today we should look at CBR from a Human Rights perspective. CBR should be a tool to implement existing international agreements such as the World Program of Action, Standard Rules, the Salamanca agreement and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Furthermore, it will support the development of a Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities.

2) Historically CBR programs have been run by professionals – often dedicated and committed – who gave people with disabilities training and support. As CBR programs develop it is fundamental to train people with disabilities to take leading positions – as professionals and managers and serve as role models for other disabled people in the community. This will empower people with disabilities and strengthen their position in the community.

3) CBR should be a tool to empower people with disabilities and their communities. Decisions should be made in the community and by the people concerned.

Concrete actions include using local people as much as possible e.g. by fostering resources and workers within the community. As an example assistive technology equipment can be produced in the community instead of relying on outside sources. Training is therefore a crucial element in CBR. Local teachers, health workers and craftsmen are examples of groups to be trained.

4) Many CBR programs operate in a limited geographic area. Expanding and sustaining CBR programs is a challenge for the future.

5) Many CBR programs started by providing service to people with mobility impairments. Children with developmental disabilities are a priority in some programs.

With regard to hearing impaired, deaf and visually impaired people many programs have had less success in meeting the needs. Adequate programs providing training for blind and deaf people should be developed.

While the number of deaf and blind people in many communities is limited, people with hearing impairments often constitute a large group. Assuring affordable hearing aids and adequate service would therefore be a priority area.

People with speech impairments are often completely left out. In addition medical disabilities or chronic diseases are other groups where more attention is needed.

6) Organizations of people with disabilities at global, national and local levels should be consulted when developing and improving CBR programs.

7) In all societies people with disabilities are unemployed to a much higher degree than the general population. In most industrialized countries people with disabilities are receiving social benefits, which help them survive.

People with disabilities, generally speaking are poorer than most other citizens.

Income generating activities are therefore crucial for disabled people in many parts of the world and should be promoted.

8) Lack of access – to the physical environment as well as to information – is a major obstacle for people with disabilities all over the world. Financial constraints are often the argument for not providing better access. CBR programs should encourage and demand access and assist in providing adequate solutions.

9) Trainers at the local level, such as Community Health Workers (CHW) are key persons in many CBR programs. In most cases a CHW is a woman who comes from the community and works as a volunteer. Many countries are unable to pay salaries to local trainers. It is important not to exploit women who already have a heavy burden. When it is not possible to pay salaries, incentives of different kinds should be explored to stimulate, motivate and encourage local trainers.

10) While CBR started in developing countries, there are several examples of interesting CBR programs in industrialized countries such as Canada, Australia and Sweden. CBR could be further developed in industrialized countries.

11) Only in recent years has disability been an area of interest for Research and Development. In order to improve the concept and gain acceptance, more Research and Development on CBR is required.