

**Strategies to Reach Disadvantaged Groups in Society**  
***Experiences of Community-Based Rehabilitation (CBR)***  
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I shall like to mention another point before I start my presentation - yesterday we discussed criteria to identify the poorest persons. One criteria which, I would like to add to what was said yesterday by Usha, is that households who have persons with disability are also among the poorest. Far too often, when we are considering poverty alleviation and development programs, persons with disabilities tend to be left out and do not get access to development programs, because they are not specifically defined as vulnerable group to be included.

My presentation will be based primarily on my experience in the field of **community-based rehabilitation** in different countries in Southeast Asia and Africa. I really do not have experience of working with other disadvantaged groups, so I do not know much about poverty alleviation, or gender focused community development programs. However, in the course of having worked in the field of CBR over the last 15 years or more, I have had occasion to observe relationships between CBR, community development, poverty, disability, the changes that have taken place, particularly in the field of CBR over the last 15 years, and how things are moving from a services delivery approach based on medical oriented model to more of social and development oriented models in the field of CBR. I think that there are a lot of lessons that we can learn from these experiences and observations of changes in CBR, to apply them also to our discussions today. So my points are based on my experience in the field of community based rehabilitation, but I do believe that there are issues here that we can use in our discussions as well.

Before we look at strategies to reach disadvantaged groups, I think we need to spend a little time on analysing **why do we need to develop such strategies?** There is a need in talking about **developing strategies**, because we know that disadvantaged groups, which include persons with disability, are generally left out of a lot of development programs and out of the development process. Why does this happen? Yesterday we heard some reasons from Sunil in his introductory speech, but let me add on to some of them.

One example, which I want to deal with, is the example of micro-credit programme in Bangladesh, which is very famous. I mean **Grameen Bank** has made it very famous all through the world. In 1998, there was a study done for NOVIB, a donor agency from Netherlands, and when they looked at all the partners and different population groups that Grameen Banks were working with, in the field of micro-credit, they found that the "hard core" poor were really left out of these micro-credit programmes. When they analysed those "hard core" poor, which were left out, they found that some women groups, persons with disabilities and people who had no access to any kind of development programmes were not benefiting from Grameen Bank. So this study found that the "hard core" poor were not really part of these micro-credit programmes, why did it happen?

One of the reasons for this exclusion that this study found was that the "hard core" poor, which includes persons with disabilities, are not perceived as "credit worthy", they are so poor that they are not able to contribute in terms of savings, they are not able to repay the loans that they get, so in other words they are not, credit-worthy. This is as far as micro credit schemes are concerned.

Secondly, these poorest persons **lack the skills** to manage micro enterprises. So in the context of lack of education and skills training, they do not have the capacity to manage a micro-credit programme.

The third reason was the **attitude of charity** and expectation of free welfare and benefits on the part of the "hard core" poor. The fact that they were so used to doles and handouts that they continue to expect the same, and therefore the spirit of initiative and enterprise was missing.

The fourth reason was about taking away of large parts of benefits of the programme by some minority groups. Here I am not talking about minority group of persons with disabilities or other disadvantaged, but about certain **powerful minorities** in the community. In Bangladesh, it was interesting to learn that there are some powerful money lenders in the villages, who send the women to ask for micro-credits, because most of the micro-credit programmes in Bangladesh target women. So money lenders gathered a group of women, sent them to the different agencies to collect credit, and then used the money that they got for their own purposes. So a powerful minority of moneylenders in the village exploited the entire micro-credit programme for their own benefit.

As far as persons with disability were concerned, lack of mobility was one major barrier for them for accessing micro-credit programmes. Other barriers included, **lack of positive policies** on the part of organisations that promoted micro-credit schemes, and **lack of training** in disability issues for personnel working for development programmes and micro credit programmes.

So I think that some of these reasons, which prevented the poor and disadvantaged groups from joining micro credit programmes, probably are the same reasons why these groups are also left out of a whole lot of other development programmes, largely because they are not seen as capable. I think these are the many reasons why the "hard core" poor and the disadvantaged groups tend to get left out of development programmes as well.

**Strategies – Organising Groups:** One of the strategies in any development programme, and this is an understanding which has grown also in the field of CBR, is that we need to organise groups, we need to organise persons with disabilities or other disadvantaged groups, in order to include them into the development process. All these concepts of participatory strategies, community participation, the social model in CBR, all of these are concerned with organising communities, with the end goal of **communities taking charge** of their own development or of their own programmes.

This process of organising communities, particularly communities in poor countries, is a process, which is fraught with a lot of difficulties. Let us look at these difficulties as well, because we need to keep these in mind when we are looking at strategies to include disadvantaged groups in the

communities. One of the major difficulties in organising groups, organising communities, issues related to community participation, community control, ownership of programmes, is linked with the diversity that we find in any community. Generally when we talk about communities, many of us who are not in the field, tend to have a very romantic, idealistic notion of what a community is. We tend to think that communities are very homogeneous, very cohesive, very mutually interdependent, and these are some of the assumptions that we tend to make when we talk about the community. International development experience has shown and it is documented that this assumption is completely unreal and that there is nothing like a homogeneous community anywhere. **Communities are heterogeneous**, diverse in terms of social-economic status, educational status, religion, culture, and ethnicity. For instance in India we have the caste system. So all these differences make it very difficult, not only to coordinate services in a community like this, but also to promote community participation, involvement, organising groups and getting them to work together.

I can give you an example of the problem of the caste system in India. There are certain rural areas in India where different castes take drinking water from different wells. If they do not even share the same drinking water-well so how can we think of organising groups to work together? So an important point that we need to consider is - **who therefore constitutes the community?**

In many CBR programmes, particularly in many urban slums CBR programmes, one finds that, when we talk about the community, very often it gets translated into parents, families, and, more specifically, mothers. So it's important for us that when we are talking about organising groups and organising communities, to first understand, who is the community, how do we define this community, what are the kind of differences that exist in that community, before we can start planning to organise or plan for integration into development programmes.

The next set of issues related to organising community groups is related to the widely varying and **different needs of groups** that can be in conflict with each other, for example among persons with disabilities. In any community we find that persons with disabilities and their families constitute a minority group, in terms of absolute numbers. When we are talking about development programmes for the community, the **needs of the majority** community have nothing to do with the needs of persons with disabilities, in fact the needs of majority communities are always about health, sanitation, water, education and health care. So rehabilitation services and needs of persons with disabilities come always last, sometimes they do not even figure in the list of community priorities. This raises issues of **access and equity**, which we will be discussing tomorrow.

The next set of problems related to the NOVIB example in Bangladesh has to do with corruption, which is a reality in many of our countries. **Vested interests**, groups with their own interests, the powerful minorities, they have nothing to do with persons with disabilities or other disadvantaged groups, but generally with the **political support**, they tend to corner most of the benefits of development programmes. In fact, during our travel for coming to this workshop we were talking about this subject and about a joke, but it is also a pretty disturbing joke, that one politician, when his daughter got married, he gave her some NGOs as dowry. In India we have the system of dowry, so when a daughter gets married her parents must give money called dowry. Thus NGOs are seen as

a good income generation activity for the rich and powerful, rather than an organisation for promoting development. These rich groups they are interested in cornering of benefits. They feel that NGOs must be getting a lot of money from donor agencies, so they are seen as an income generation activity.

In another example from another state of India, a CBR programme tried to involve local leaders in the programme and they found that the local leaders and the local politicians were very interested in the programme. When NGO talked to them, they offered their full co-operation and every assistance. One year later they found the reason for this interest - the leaders were expecting to receive a percentage of funds. When they found out that they were not going to get any funds, they lost interest in the programme very fast. So these issues are very real – corruption and cornering of benefits, and we have to deal with these, when we are discussing community development programmes.

To continue our discussions about some of the problems, another important issue is that of the **mind-set and attitudes**. This is a very big barrier in any community development programme, which is looking at issues of equity, access and including disadvantaged groups in development programmes. On one side, we have the mind-set or attitude of the community, where they expect benefits and are reluctant to take charge of their own development. This is a common problem for different groups, whether they are persons with disability, other disadvantaged groups, persons affected by leprosy, or poor people. It has been said that there are historical reasons for this as well, because many of our countries have had **colonial pacts**, followed by varying forms and varying interpretations of socialist forms of governments where the state is expected to take charge of all welfare and development programmes. So because of this history, many of our communities are not ready to take charge of our own programmes and development. The expectation is that the government should do it. "Why should we?" they ask. And if we are asked to take charge of our programmes, it means that the government is abdicating its responsibility. So these are some of the mind-set issues that we have to deal with, the reluctance to take charge, and expecting somebody else to look after us. All these issues are at the level of the community.

There is another big barrier at the level of the service providers, usually NGOs and in some instances governments. Many service providers are very comfortable with their **role of service provider** and they do not want to shift to the role of being a facilitator. They are afraid of letting go, of loosing control, of loosing their empire building, because there are many NGOs which have built huge empires, buildings, infrastructure, control and political ambitions. So it means letting go of all this if they become facilitator rather than a service provider. In fact one such NGO very clearly told me that, "Well what we will do? What will our role be if the groups that we are working with become empowered?" So the need to change the mind-set on the part of the service providers from being a service provider to a facilitator, that we are there to facilitate development and we are not there just to give services, that is another change.

Of course there can be other problems, like in rural Nepal, of difficult terrain, remote areas, mountainous areas, where you have to walk for several days to reach some isolated villages. Thus

**difficult terrain** is another barrier to organising groups and to facilitate their access to development programmes.

**Self-help Groups:** One strategy or approach, which I found to be quite useful whether it is for working with persons with disabilities or with women, is organising **self-help groups**. Literally self-help groups means a group that gets together to help themselves for various purposes. In general now in India the term of self-help groups tends to be associated with micro credit work, but it is not only for micro credit. A self-help group is a group that gets together, it is a relatively **homogeneous group**, with common interests and when persons get together with a common objective. It could be an instrument for micro credit programmes and it has worked quite successfully in parts of India for micro credit programmes.

So I think that self-help groups strategy for organising groups is one that we should be able to look at. Second thing is that when we are promoting self-help groups and other kind of organisation work, we need to keep in mind that we have to play a **facilitators role**, we need to build capacity of the groups that we are working with. It is not enough to say that we organise them into groups and leave them. Many of such groups face many barriers. As I said earlier, they have lack of skills, lack of education, so groups once organised, **need to be trained** in management skills, accounting skills in the case of micro credit, leadership skills, communication skills, in order to be able to lobby with other agencies like government, banks, other development programmes. So we need to spend a lot of time on capacity building, keeping in mind that our role is that of a facilitator, and that we are not going to be with that group permanently.

Once self-help groups are formed and sufficiently trained in the skills that they would need to manage themselves, they need to have access to credit programmes and access to other existing development schemes, whether it is from government or from others NGOs or banks. Providing these groups **access to credit** and to other schemes would be of great help to them. Again we need to keep in mind, our role is to just provide that access, our role is that of a facilitator not a service provider, to facilitate the access and then leave them to follow it up and to manage on their own, which they would be able to do it very well if we have done a good job of our capacity building.

**Attitude change:** This is something which also requires a lot of input, also takes a lot of time, and sometimes it is very difficult to achieve a change of attitude on the part of the communities, to shift from expectations of benefit to take charge of their own programmes. The second attitude change we need to bring about is on the part of the service provider, from change from being a provider to become a facilitator. Both these changes take a lot of time and are not very easy, but it is important to concentrate on these strategies of attitude change.

**Developing Role Models:** There is one more strategy here, which I have not mentioned so far. The strategy to develop role models, identify some **key people** within the communities where we work, who can make a change. When we can't change the attitude of the communities, help them to become, to become leaders in the self help groups, make them into role models to motivate and enthuse others groups. So identify and develop role models of persons from the groups that we are working with, is another strategy that we need to build up. When the rest of the community sees

successful examples of role models, obviously their attitudes and motivations will also change. Nothing brings success like success they see, so developing successful role models is another issue that we need to keep in mind.