

WHO Statement: International Day of Persons with Disabilities: 3 December 2009

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen.

Considering the challenges that people with disabilities face it is vital that disability is integrated across all development sectors. In this context disability-inclusive MDGs would help to implement a number of the substantive Articles of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRDP). For development to be inclusive change must happen in the communities where people live.

Community-based rehabilitation (CBR), initiated by WHO in the seventies and now implemented in over 90 countries throughout the world, has evolved to become a development strategy to provide rehabilitation, reduce poverty, equalize opportunities and promote the inclusion of disabled people in their communities. CBR is a multi-sectoral approach, implemented through the combined efforts of people with disabilities themselves, their families, organizations and communities, and the relevant governmental and non-governmental organizations working in the development sector. CBR is a flexible and dynamic strategy that focuses on four key development areas – social, health, education and livelihood – and promotes mainstreaming and empowerment.

I would like to briefly look at concrete ways in which CBR can contribute to bringing the CRPD to communities and contributing to achieving the millennium development goals for people with disabilities

We all know that poverty is both a cause and consequence of disability. People with disabilities face stigma and discrimination in their communities and are frequently denied their basic rights such as food, education, employment and access to health services. People with disabilities incur extra costs, such as healthcare, and are less likely to work. CBR promotes livelihoods and employment and hence contributes to Eradicating extreme poverty and hunger (Goal1) by:

- Identifying and overcoming barriers that prevent participation.
- Exploring potential employment opportunities for people with disabilities in their communities.
- Providing or ensuring access to skills training for income-generating activities and employment.

Children with disabilities are still among the most marginalized and least likely to go to school. The correlation between low educational outcomes and having a disability is often stronger than the correlations between low education outcome and gender, rural residence or poverty. CBR supports Goal 2 communities to achieve universal primary education by:

- Informing families with disabled children that they have a right to access educational opportunities.
- Providing recommendations and practical assistance to make school environments physically accessible and teaching flexible and child-centered.
- Referral of children to specialized services to enable inclusion in primary education e.g. referral for assistive devices.

Many women with disabilities face discrimination based on both their gender and disability and are at increased risk of violence and abuse. Women who care for family members with disabilities may themselves face significant hardships particularly where there are limited support services. CBR supports gender equality and empowerment of women (Goal 3) by:

- Promoting equal access and participation for women with disabilities in all community development initiatives.
- Supporting girls with disabilities to access educational opportunities.
- Supporting the development of self-help groups for women with disabled children.

Globally there are approximately 200 million children with disabilities. Children with disabilities are more at risk of dying, not only because of life threatening medical conditions or lack of access to health services, but also because in many cultures they are neglected or left to die. CBR programmes can reduce child mortality (Goal 4) by:

- Ensuring early identification of children with impairments and referral of children to specialized medical and rehabilitation services where required.
- Providing disability awareness training to primary health care staff to ensure children with disabilities are able to access general health care.
- Providing basic home-based therapy interventions to promote child development.

Millions of women experience morbidity and disability as a result of pregnancy and childbirth complications. At the same time, women with disabilities can also become mothers themselves, and often need particular consideration during pregnancy or when bringing up children. CBR can contribute to the improvement of maternal health (Goal 5) by:

- Raising awareness within communities that people with disabilities have sexual and reproductive health needs.
- Supporting women with disabilities to access maternal health services in their communities.
- Ensuring that traditional birth attendant training programmes have a focus on disability.

Infectious diseases are disabling; for example, HIV can cause blindness, neuropathy and dementia. Research conducted in Mozambique on disability and HIV found that one reason people with disabilities are routinely excluded from HIV and AIDS policies and programmes is a refusal or reluctance to regard people with disabilities as sexual beings (DDP 2009). CBR can contribute to Goal 6 combating HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other diseases by:

- Reducing the stigma surrounding sexuality and people with disabilities.
- Promoting the provision of health information to be available in accessible formats.
- Developing tailored prevention programmes for people with disabilities where mainstream programmes are inappropriate and ineffective.

Environmental risks (e.g. poor sanitation and water quality) and natural disasters cause ill health and disability. Many people with disabilities face barriers in accessing community facilities such as wells and latrines and they are often excluded from disaster management activities. CBR contributes to Goal 7 environmental sustainability by:

- Ensuring communities involve people with disabilities when designing safe water and sanitation facilities.
- Making recommendations and modifications to ensure access to existing facilities.
- Ensuring disaster response training within communities considers the needs of people with disabilities and appropriate strategies are in place.

Goal 8: Develop a global partnership for development

CBR is a partnership approach, and works with all development sectors to achieve positive outcomes for people with disabilities. It has 3 global alliances, CBR Asia-Pacific Network, CBR Africa Network (CAN), and the CBR American and Caribbean Network.

WHO, ILO, UNESCO and the international Disability and Development Consortium are developing Guidelines on implementing CBR . These will provide practical guidance on how CBR can ensure, in line with the CRPD, that people with disabilities have the same rights and opportunities to benefit from the MDG's as do others in their communities. We look forward to working with you to implement CBR to bring about inclusive development in communities.

Thank you.