Empowerment in Community-based Rehabilitation and Disability-inclusive Development

Pim Kuipers*

ABSTRACT

Purpose: This paper seeks to contribute to discussion on the understanding and measurement of empowerment of people with disabilities in developing countries. A novel, text analysis approach was used to depict the way in which empowerment is characterised in conventional measures in Western settings. This was then compared with depictions and analyses of the way in which empowerment is characterised in documents that have more relevance to developing countries.

Method: First, computer-based content and concept analysis was applied to three key empowerment measures. This was compared with analysis of responses to a recent online survey of empowerment conducted by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN-DESA). Visual representations in the form of "word clouds" were generated to depict key concepts within each data source. Second, to provide specific detail regarding how empowerment has been described in documents which relate to developing countries, more detailed computer-assisted lexical analysis was performed on the text of responses to the UN-DESA survey, and on the text of the Empowerment component of the CBR Guidelines.

Results: Initial "word clouds" illustrated considerable discrepancy between concepts inherent in the three most relevant empowerment measures when compared with responses to the UN-DESA survey relating to empowerment in a development context. Subsequent lexical analysis depicted greater specificity and ranked the concepts associated with empowerment in key disability and development-related documents.

Conclusions: Conventional Western measures of individual empowerment may not adequately encompass the broader social, economic and community orientation of empowerment as described in documents from disability and

^{*} Corresponding Author: Dr Pim Kuipers, Associate Professor, Griffith Health Institute, Griffith University, Australia. Email: p.kuipers@griffith.edu.au

development circles. Further research is required to substantiate these novel and speculative indications.

Key words: empowerment, CBR, international development, lexical analysis.

INTRODUCTION

Across both developing and economically developed countries, the notion of empowerment relates to expanding freedom of choice and action to shape one's life. It implies a degree of control over resources and decisions (Narayan, 2002). Empowerment theories differ, but most recognise three levels of empowerment, namely: **Individual** (pertaining to gaining control over one's life), **Organisational** (pertaining to organisational structures, roles, actions and policy), and **Community** (pertaining to collective action, participation and community institutions) (Zimmerman & Warschausky, 1998).

In development contexts, the goal of empowerment is usually to enable poor people to participate in, negotiate with, influence, control, and hold accountable institutions that affect their lives (Narayan, 2002). In contrast, in rehabilitation settings in economically developed countries, the focus of empowerment is usually individually and psychologically oriented (Zimmerman & Warschausky, 1998).

The notion of empowerment is foundational to community-based rehabilitation (CBR) and disability-inclusive development (DID). Empowerment was important in early CBR documents (Helander, 1999), it is a fundamental component of the CBR Matrix (WHO, 2010) and CBR Guidelines (WHO, UNESCO, ILO, & IDDC, 2010), and remains a core concern (Rule, 2013). Although empowerment is not specifically noted and defined within the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), the concept is inherent throughout the Convention and optional protocol. For example, the Preamble to the Convention recognises "the importance for persons with disabilities of their individual autonomy and independence, including the freedom to make their own choices", and "that persons with disabilities should have the opportunity to be actively involved in decision-making processes about policies and programmes, including those directly concerning them" (UN, 2007). Indeed CBR was identified as a key strategy for the purposes of (among other things) facilitating empowerment and implementing the CRPD in the Sixth session of the Conference of States Parties to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (WHO, 2013).

Given the central importance of the notion of empowerment in the CBR setting, it might be expected that the major disability NGOs, INGOs and international research bodies working within CBR and inclusive development would have devoted significant resources towards conceptualising, defining, understanding and measuring empowerment as it pertains to people with disabilities in developing countries. Unfortunately, this does not seem to be the case. The dearth of research and writing in this area led one researcher to conclude that there is a pressing need for greater understanding of empowerment in CBR practice and ideology (Rule, 2013). Indeed the CBR Guideline on empowerment specifically noted the difficulty of defining empowerment across different countries, languages and cultures (WHO, UNESCO, ILO, & IDDC, 2010). This difficulty appears to be even more pronounced for measuring empowerment.

A recent systematic literature review has made some important steps in conceptualising empowerment in the CBR context by investigating key empowerment assessment tools which may have relevance to people with disabilities in developing countries (Bakker & van Brakel, 2012). In the review, the authors methodically and rigorously reviewed key dimensions of the most promising empowerment assessments available in the peer-reviewed literature.

The review was not able to identify any empowerment questionnaires focussed on people with disabilities in developing countries, or any studies of relevant measures which had been developed, validated or even translated in developing countries. While the authors were able to suggest several scales that met minimal quality criteria, they concluded that evidence was lacking about the suitability of such empowerment questionnaires in developing country contexts (Bakker & van Brakel, 2012).

Against this background, the current study sought to explore the issue of empowerment pertaining to disability and development contexts using a novel means of analysis, to suggest the need for further discussion and consideration. The study sought to address two questions:

- 1. How do the constructs inherent in conventional Western measures of empowerment align with those in comparable, empowerment-related documents which relate to a developing country context?
- 2. What are the most important concepts that emerge from documents that relate to empowerment in a developing country and disability context?

METHOD

Software

This study used 2 associated computer applications for analysing text-based, document material, namely, Text is Beautiful (TiB), http://textisbeautiful.net/ and LeximancerTM version 4.0, http://www.leximancer.com. Such programmes detect meaningful relationships in text documents using artificial intelligence. These software programmes note frequency and co-occurrence of words and concepts, and the strengths of links between then (how often they co-occur). This computer-based approach to content analysis is reported to have a substantial degree of 'objectivity' (Smith & Humphreys, 2006), since it allows researchers to perform content and concept analyses grounded entirely within the text, rather than on researcher-driven interpretations (Hewett et al, 2009). These approaches have been found to be highly efficient and effective for analysing large amounts of text data (Kuipers et al , 2013).

Procedure

The sequence of steps in the current study is noted in Diagram 1. First, based on the recent systematic review (Bakker & van Brakel, 2012), the three measures of empowerment which demonstrated adequate content validity and internal consistency were retrieved from the original publications or the authors. They were the "Empowerment Scale" (Rogers et al, 1997), the "Youth Empowerment Scale–Mental Health" (Walker et al, 2010), and the "VrijBaan Questionnaire" (Samoocha et al, 2011).

Step 1a. To explore the underlying constructs in these measures, all of the question statements in each scale were extracted and combined into a single document. This document, comprising all the items in the three highest quality empowerment scales, was analysed using the TiB software. Analysis resulted in a "word cloud", which depicted important words and concepts across the empowerment scales.

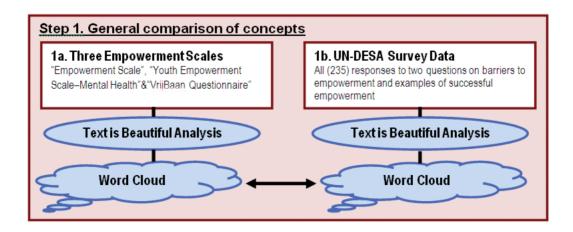
Step 1b. To provide a comparable data set pertaining to empowerment in an international development context, results of a recent UN survey on empowerment (DESA, 2013) were obtained. This survey was conducted by the Division for Social Policy and Development of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN-DESA) in late 2012. It was a global online survey to gather inputs for consideration by the 51st session of the Commission

for Social Development, which took place from 6 -15 February, 2013. The survey enabled interested persons across the world to respond to a set of questions that were related to the theme of "Promoting empowerment of people in achieving poverty eradication, social integration and full employment and decent work for all".

Responses to 2 of the questions from this survey were seen as the most relevant to empowerment in disability and development settings. That is, all responses (n=199) to the question, "What do you consider would be main barriers to the economic, social and political empowerment of people and social groups including people living in poverty, youth, older persons, persons with disabilities and Indigenous Peoples?" were extracted from the survey results document (DESA, 2013). These were combined with all responses (n=116) to the question, "Do you have any examples of successful empowerment of people, including specific social groups? Please indicate them". In 2 cases where responses were in Spanish, these were translated to English using Google Translate https://translate.google.com.au/. The text of all responses (235 free text qualitative responses to 2 questions pertaining to empowerment) were then similarly analysed using "Text is Beautiful" to produce a comparable "word cloud".

Step 2. To depict more clearly and methodically the nature of empowerment as it pertains to people with disabilities in developing countries, a more detailed method of analysis was selected.

Step 2a. First, the previously used responses to the UN-DESA survey were analysed with LeximancerTM content analysis software. This software analyses concept frequency and co-occurrence data, and creates two-dimensional concept



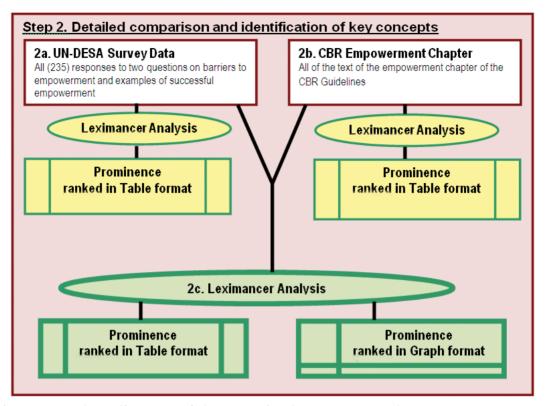


Diagram 1: Flow diagram of the steps in the current study

maps. The output reflects the most meaningful conceptual associations with a key concept, in this case, the word "empowerment".

Step 2b. To provide greater substance to these observations, and greater relevance to disability concerns, a major and more comprehensive source of text was sought. The empowerment component of the CBR Guidelines (WHO, UNESCO, ILO & IDDC, 2010) was identified as such a source. It describes key elements of empowerment as it relates to people with disabilities in developing countries. As above, the full text of the empowerment component of the CBR Guidelines was analysed with LeximancerTM. The output reflects the most meaningful associations with the term "empowerment" for that document.

Step 2c. These two descriptive sources (WHO, UNESCO, ILO & IDDC, 2010; DESA, 2013) were then combined and analysed together to produce one major overview of the concept of empowerment as represented in 2 key documents pertaining to developing countries.

This overview is reflected in Table and Graph form. Examples of the various data sources are provided in Appendix 1.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The output of the first step of this study was a "word cloud" generated through the "Text is Beautiful" (TiB) website, which is depicted in Figure 1. In this illustration, the size of each word reflects how frequently it occurs within the text. Words which are closely related to each other have the same colour and can be grouped as themes. The TiB analysis quantifies the frequency of words and identifies collections of words that are conceptually associated within each piece of text. In Figure 1, colour coding conveys relatedness between concepts (closely related concepts have the same colour).



Figure 1: Word Cloud of the items in three Empowerment Scales

Figure 1 indicates that some of the most important words across the three empowerment scales were "feel", "life" and "working", as well as words such as "problem" and "plan". Figure 1 suggests that across these three scales there is one major conceptual theme (depicted in blue). This could be interpreted as issues directly related to an individual's life, perceptions and immediate reality. The other concepts that appear to be important across the three measures of empowerment are associated with being a recipient of health or welfare services

and taking control of one's own life. In general, and in keeping with the reviewers' depiction of these three scales as measuring individual empowerment (Bakker & van Brakel, 2012), the identified concepts reflect a strongly individualised, service-related conceptualisation of empowerment.

In contrast, Figure 2 (arising from Step 1b) depicts a "word cloud" of the UN-DESA empowerment survey responses (DESA, 2013). This is a more densely populated diagram, because the source data of 235 written responses comprised over 15,000 words, whereas the three empowerment scales combined comprised approximately 2000 words. Figure 2 reflects many more concepts and a more diverse array of themes. The most important words (depicted in blue) include "people", "social", "economic", "groups" and "poverty". Importantly, the spread of colours in the diagram is more extensive, suggesting that these responses encompass a broader conceptualisation than is evident in the text of the three scales. In contrast to the previous depiction, Figure 2 suggests that respondents to a questionnaire, which arose from the area of international development, reflected a broad socio-economic conceptualisation of empowerment. In addition to the words noted above, survey responses emphasised concepts and words such as "education", "work" and "women". They emphasised livelihood, social, and community dimensions of empowerment in their responses, examples and descriptions of this issue.



Figure 2: Word Cloud of 235 responses to Questions 4 & 5 of the UN-DESA Empowerment Survey.

The substantial differences between depictions drawn from Western measures and those from an international development context indicated that a greater understanding of empowerment was required, particularly for disability and development settings. While Figures 1 and 2 provided a visually striking depiction of differences, they did not provide any numerical summary of the relative importance of concepts. More quantitative and ranked results were required (Step 2), particularly pertaining to disability in developing countries.

To provide such an analysis, the responses to the UN-DESA survey were subjected to LeximancerTM analysis, which provides a quantitative description of conceptual associations. The "ranked concepts report" which is a key quantitative output from this analysis is shown in Table 1. Rather than reflecting the general importance of words or concepts across a document, this analysis has identified and ranked the most prominent concepts associated with a particular category (in this case the word "empowerment"). Table 1 includes relative frequency which is a measure of the probability that a concept (in the first column) occurs together with the category (in this case "empowerment"). It also notes strength, which is a measure of the conditional probability of the word "empowerment" occurring, given each concept in the first column. Prominence is a summary score based on the product of the strength and frequency scores.

This Table clearly documents in ranked order, the most prominent terms associated with the word "empowerment" in the UN-DESA survey responses. It reflects that the conceptualisation of empowerment in these responses is largely social and political. The words and concepts associated with empowerment in these responses pertain to "big picture" social and community issues, such as societal factors which hinder empowerment and equality among people (extending even to the global level). As with the "word cloud", this Table clearly indicates that the scope of thinking about empowerment across responses to this UN-DESA survey, extends well beyond individual empowerment and individual concerns.

As noted above in Step 2b, the study then sought a source of text which was specifically relevant to disability concerns. The empowerment component of the CBR Guidelines (WHO, UNESCO, ILO & IDDC, 2010) was identified as such a source, which describes key elements of empowerment as it relates to people with disabilities in developing countries. As above, the text of the empowerment component of the CBR Guidelines was analysed with LeximancerTM software. The output (Table 2) reflects the most meaningful associations with the term "empowerment" for that document.

Table 1: Prominence of concepts in responses to Questions 4 & 5 of the UN-DESA Empowerment Survey

Concept	Rel Freq (%)	Strength (%)	Prominence
political	40	46	3.9
economic	47	44	3.7
main	33	41	3.5
social	55	37	3.2
barriers	36	36	3.0
living	20	33	2.8
youth	18	32	2.7
groups	33	32	2.7
including	13	28	2.3
disabilities	15	27	2.3
people	56	26	2.3
poverty	24	23	1.9
policies	7	21	1.8
world	9	20	1.7
countries	11	18	1.6
society	13	17	1.5
government	5	13	1.1
education	15	12	1.0
work	7	12	1.0
lack	9	11	1.0
able	4	11	1.0
women	15	11	1.0
human	4	9	0.8
support	4	9	0.8
local	4	8	0.7
rights	4	8	0.7
access	4	6	0.6
life	4	6	0.6
skills	4	6	0.6
families	2	4	0.4

Table 2: Prominence of concepts in Empowerment chapter of the CBR Guidelines

Concept	RelFreq (%)	Strength (%)	Prominence
important	17	8	5.4
participation	9	5	3.5
political	9	4	2.9
organisations	17	3	2.4
different	4	3	2.2
people	39	2	1.8
role	4	2	1.7
communication	4	2	1.4
community	4	<1	0.5
groups	4	<1	0.5

While this is a smaller Table due to the nature of the document, it reflects many similar concepts to those that were noted in the UN-DESA survey. The association between the word "empowerment" and other words such as "participation", "political", "organisations", "people", "community" and "groups" suggests that in the CBR Guidelines, a similarly broad, social and community conceptualisation of empowerment predominates.

In the final step of this study, both qualitative data sources (WHO, UNESCO, ILO & IDDC, 2010; DESA, 2013) were then combined and analysed together to produce one major overview of the concept of empowerment as represented by these 2 key documents pertaining to developing countries (and which included specific focus on disability). The findings from this analysis are depicted in Table (Table3) and Graph (Figure 3) format.

As with the previous Tables, Table 3 clearly reflects that across the 2 data sources broad social and community conceptualisations predominate. This Table reflects that across these documents, the term "empowerment" was closely associated with economic, poverty, livelihood, work and educational concerns including skills and training. It was linked to social concerns and issues such as gender, children, family, disability, community groups and organisations. It was also linked to formal political, government, and national concerns. Figure 3 depicts the data from Table 3 in Graph form, showing the proximity of each word to the category "empowerment" on the basis of the strength and frequency of each word.

Table 3: Prominence of concepts across all responses to Questions 4 & 5 of the UN-DESA Empowerment Survey, and the Empowerment chapter of the CBR Guidelines

Concept	RelFreq (%)	Strength (%)	Prominence
economic	27	57	7.9
society	36	37	5.2
poor	22	34	4.8
political	21	28	3.9
women	17	27	3.7
barriers	20	26	3.7
work	13	25	3.5
countries	9	23	3.2
education	16	22	3.0
human	5	21	3.0
life	7	21	3.0
government	9	20	2.8
children	7	18	2.5
training	4	16	2.3
skills	6	16	2.3
lack	9	16	2.2
development	7	14	1.9
support	8	12	1.7
different	4	12	1.7
groups	23	11	1.6
family	11	11	1.6
access	6	10	1.5
opportunities	3	8	1.2
community	13	8	1.1
organisations	10	8	1.1
local	3	6	0.9
rights	3	5	0.8
disabilities	18	5	0.8
self-help	5	5	0.7
CBR	3	2	0.3

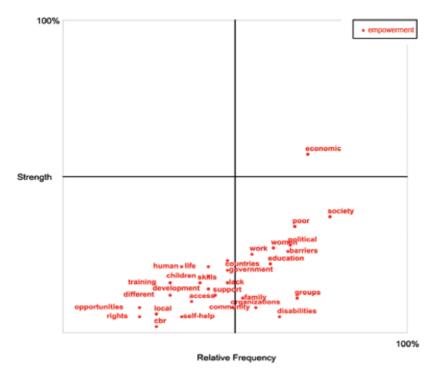


Figure 3: Quadrant diagram plotting the frequency and strength of terms in relation to "empowerment" across all responses to Questions 4 & 5 of the UN-DESA Empowerment Survey, and the Empowerment chapter of the CBR Guidelines

The findings suggest that there is considerable discrepancy between the concepts inherent in conventional empowerment questionnaires which arise from a Western context, and the conceptualisations of empowerment that appear in some key documents from disability and development settings. This discrepancy has considerable implications for the conceptualisation and measurement of empowerment in disability and development contexts.

First, regarding conceptualisation, the discrepancy may, at a fundamental level, reflect different types or dimensions of empowerment. That is, those documents which were used as a reflection of empowerment from a developing country perspective may indicate a broader, social and community understanding of empowerment which contrasts with the individualised conceptualisation which was evident throughout the measures of empowerment. Such a distinction between individual and community or collective empowerment is well

established in the literature (Rowlands, 1995; Hur, 2006). Indeed Bakker and van Brakel (2012) made a useful distinction between individual, community and organisational types of empowerment; and all the three scales used in the current analysis were from the individual empowerment category. However, the lack of overlap of concepts and the striking differences between the findings would suggest something of a polar difference in conceptualisation between Western and developing country perspectives, despite a degree of similarity of focus across the data sources. While in Western contexts, the major focus of empowerment research has been in individual empowerment (Hur, 2006), it would appear that in disability and development circles, the conceptualisation should be much more oriented to collective and community notions of empowerment. It appears that in developing country settings, individualised conceptualisations alone are inadequate for encapsulating the breadth of how key stakeholders understand empowerment (Rowlands, 1995).

Second, having indicated that in disability and development circles, collective empowerment may be more of an imperative than individual empowerment, the unique constellation of concepts identified in Table 3 and Figure 3 warrants further attention. The findings suggest that even within collective empowerment, conceptualisations may differ from accepted Western definitions of collective or community empowerment. Hur's (2006) synthesis of numerous empowerment studies found that collective empowerment comprises components of: social cohesion, belonging, involvement in and control over issues, community building and culture building, leadership competence, political control, self-awareness, group support, and advocacy. While the findings of the current study likewise emphasised political and government issues, community, and self-help concerns (which encompasses group support and advocacy), a number of other points were evident in the current findings, namely:

- economic and poverty issues were fundamental,
- work, education and livelihood skills and training were key, and
- the immediate local community, including family and children, were also important.

This provides a meaningful indication that, in relation to disability and development contexts, the concept of empowerment is associated with issues of poverty, education/livelihood, and family. As such, it is suggested that in disability and development circles, the exploration and conceptualisation

of empowerment should not only be strongly oriented toward collective or community empowerment, but should also encompass the additional concepts of poverty, livelihood, family and community.

Third, regarding measurement, these findings suggest that scales and measures which seek to quantify empowerment in a disability and development context may require an equally broad conceptual base, focusing on economic, community, livelihood and political dimensions. It is widely understood that for scales to be valid, attention to construct and content validity are vital (Punch, 2005). That is, the extent to which a scale measures the construct it purports to measure, and how well it represents the subject-matter being measured (Punch, 2005) are important. The preliminary indications from the current study are that the construct and subject matter of empowerment in disability and development circles should be oriented to collective empowerment and include reference to poverty, education and livelihood, and family. In addition to the important task of establishing cross-cultural and conceptual equivalence of measures across contexts (Herdman et al, 1998), endeavours to measure empowerment in disability in development contexts should also look more broadly at the fundamental understanding of what empowerment means in these settings.

Limitations

Clearly this study has a number of limitations which should be considered in any translation of its findings. First, while this methodology is innovative, it is also highly speculative. Attempts have been made to apply systematic processes and to quantify findings; however, this preliminary study is essentially indicative rather than conclusive. While there are implications about the nature of empowerment in disability and development contexts, they can not as yet be drawn from these findings, and further research is required.

Second, while the data sources for this study are pertinent and informative, they are not necessarily comparable. The three empowerment scales are measures of individual empowerment, so the strongly individual orientation evident from the content analysis is to be expected. Conversely, the UN-DESA survey may be seen as arising from a social development perspective, with strongly socially-oriented questions. In that regard, the discrepancy in findings is at least partially the result of comparing individual measures with socially-oriented documents. While this limitation is accepted, these were the best data sources and serve to provide a preliminary indication on which future research might be based.

A further limitation to these findings relates to the UN-DESA survey method. While the survey results have been provided in their original form, they provide no indication of who the respondents were or where they came from. While the survey was conducted in the context of international development by a UN agency responsible for development, as an open survey there is no guarantee that responses came from the frame of reference of international development (attempts were made to verify the data with the agency, without success).

Finally, another potential limitation of the current study is the possible difference in the level of focus of the data sources. That is, the empowerment measures are intended to relate at the individual level, but the UN-DESA survey responses and the CBR Guidelines may be seen as more organisationally focussed documents, and therefore are more likely to reflect a collective conceptualisation. While this observation is valid, it is also true that the UN-DESA survey was completed by individuals, and the questions were asked at an individual level. Similarly, the preamble to the empowerment booklet of the CBR Guidelines emphasises the individual nature of its focus.

CONCLUSION

In light of the understanding that community and collective empowerment are notoriously difficult to operationalise, implement and measure (Laverack & Wallerstein, 2001), these findings provide a useful contribution. As has recently been highlighted in a study in this journal, empowerment in the context of CBR is much broader than individualised Western notions (Rule, 2013). The present research suggests a more collective conceptualisation and adds a number of constructs which appear to characterise the understanding of empowerment in disability and development settings.

If CBR and inclusive development are to develop a consistent ideological approach that uses empowering strategies, it will be vital to integrate practice, conceptualisation, measurement, and research around a common understanding of the empowerment concept. This paper suggests that this understanding should be a broad social and contextual one, which extends beyond the Western understandings of both individual and collective empowerment to emphasise economic empowerment and poverty, livelihood and skills, family and community.

Appendix 1. Examples of Data Sources

Data Source and Primary Focus	Example of two questions / responses	
Empowerment Scale (Rogers et al, 1997) (Personal empowerment). Scale measures from the perspective of consumers, survivors, and former clients of mental health services.	"When I make plans, I am almost certain to make them work".	
Youth Empowerment Scale–Mental Health (Walker et al, 2010). (General empowerment). Scale measures empowerment among youth who experience significant emotional or behavioural difficulties.	 "I feel my life is under control". "I am overwhelmed when I have to make a decision about my services or supports".	
VrijBaan Questionnaire (Samoocha et al, 2011). (General empowerment). Scale measures empowerment among people with a long-term work disability.	 "I don't have much confidence in my own abilities". "I get a feeling of personal satisfaction when I do my work well". 	
UN survey on empowerment (DESA, 2013). Survey of interested persons across the world on the theme of "Promoting empowerment of people in achieving poverty eradication, social integration and full employment and decent work for all".	• "I think there are many barriers to empowerment of people in poverty and they can be very complex and varied according to country, culture, region, etc. But I think some of the most salient issues are lack of decent education, poor health care, lack of political representation, war or violence".	
	"The main barriers are: unjust distribution of resources; social, economic and educational barriers to vertical socio-economic mobility; lack of opportunities to increase one's own social capital; and group specific discrimination against persons with disabilities and indigenous peoples".	
Empowerment Component of the CBR Guidelines (WHO, UNESCO, ILO & IDDC, 2010). The Empowerment Component of the CBR Guidelines focusses on the importance of empowering people with disabilities, their family members and communities to facilitate the mainstreaming of disability across each sector and to ensure that everybody is able to access their rights and entitlements.	"Community mobilisation is the process of bringing together as many stakeholders as possible to raise people's awareness of and demand for a particular programme, to assist in the delivery of resources and services, and to strengthen community participation for sustainability and self-reliance. A lot can be achieved when people from different parts of the community share a common goal and actively participate in both identifying needs and being part of the solution".	
	"CBR experience shows that it is often easier to facilitate the formation of self-help groups in rural areas. Formation of self-help groups in urban settings can be particularly difficult because of frequent migration and difficulties in building trust and a sense of belonging among group members".	

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