

Editorial

The importance of contextualising CBR planning and practice is well illustrated in some central Asian countries that were under Soviet rule earlier. In the post-soviet era, many of these countries continued with the approach that was familiar to them in relation to persons with disabilities – government-controlled, top-down, medically dominated, welfare-orientated and institution-based. It is a little more than a decade and a half since CBR made its appearance in these countries. Early practitioners found it a challenge to shift from the Soviet approach to the way CBR is understood today – a rights-based one with the underlying philosophy of ‘nothing about us without us’, where concepts of community mobilisation and empowerment take centre-stage.

Over the last 10 years, more information is becoming available about CBR practice from some these countries; and national CBR networks are being established. The need for CBR type of approaches came from family members living in rural areas, as their children were not being accepted in the state-run kindergartens and schools. The family became the cornerstone for CBR; parent support groups have been trained to develop and manage what are known as CBR centres. These groups manage home-based and in some instances, centre-based rehabilitation, including in remote areas with difficult geographical terrain. The groups, many of whose members are not highly educated, are active in advocating for rights and entitlements for persons with disabilities, and are now being consulted by local government. They have managed to gain access to children with disabilities into kindergartens and schools. In some countries they have managed to bring about changes in government policies in favour of persons with disabilities. In another country, parental advocacy led to curriculum changes in universities to include modules on disability, along with introduction of new departments like social work, physiotherapy and speech therapy.

Examples from these countries show how local people have successfully translated CBR principles into relevant and appropriate practice to suit their social and cultural context. Empowerment of parents has shown that the philosophy of ‘nothing about us without us’ is indeed flourishing in countries that functioned in a very different socio-political milieu till recently.

The same principle underlies emancipatory research, a form of participatory action research that can be of benefit to disadvantaged and marginalized groups, and seeks to empower the 'subjects' of inquiry. Over the last decade or so, this research paradigm is being applied in relation to disability, and there are examples of how persons with disabilities are trained and mentored to take control of and carry out research of issues of concern to them, instead of being mere 'subjects' of research. The lead article in this issue deals with emancipatory research in the context of Africa. It is a lengthy article, but the editorial team felt that it would be helpful in informing, educating and encouraging people interested in research on disability issues, especially persons with disabilities from low and middle income countries.

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Disability, CBR and Inclusive Development