Developing Local Resources in Community-Based Rehabilitation Programme in Sri Lanka: Follow-up Study in Anuradhapura

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Abstract Local resources have been the purview of community-based rehabilitation (CBR) but have received little research and evaluation. This study examines the factors of developing local resources in the CBR programme in rural areas in Sri Lanka. Of all the resources, the study mainly focuses on community workshops. An action research approach based on qualitative methods was applied in the Anuradhapura district as a follow-up to the previous research. Actions include meetings with stakeholders, as well as outreach courses. The study used narrative data from semi-structured interviews with the participants of community workshops (n=24), separate focus group discussion with participants (n=34), and CBR core group officers (n=5), and the author's field notes in social work practice. Data was analyzed within the framework of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT). The results show positive and negative attributes of community workshops in both internal and external aspects. In particular, we find strong support for the strengths of developing local resources in the CBR programme from the perspective of disabled people and local government officers. The result indicates the possibility that local people take full advantage of opportunities to overcome the weaknesses of local resources. Finally, the implications of this research and recommendations for future studies are discussed.

Keywords CBR, Empowerment, Sustainability, SWOT Analysis, Disability Issues

Introduction

Various stakeholders, in particular disabled people, have made efforts to promote empowerment and inclusion in community development in developing as well as developed countries. The World Health Organization (WHO) has been strongly promoting community-based

rehabilitation (CBR) all over the world since the 1980s. CBR is positioned as a strategy within general community development for the rehabilitation, equalization of opportunities, poverty reduction and social inclusion of disabled people (International Labour Organization et al., 2004).

The concept of local resources, which is historically one of the key elements in social work (Richmond, 1922), has been a topic of special interest to practitioners and researchers in CBR (Peat, 1997; Higashida, 2014b). "Resources" or "local resources" are defined as "[a]ny existing service or commodity that can be called on to help take care of a need...[including] other social agencies, government programs, other professional or volunteer personnel, self-help groups, natural helpers, and individuals in the community." (Barker, 1999). Higashida (2014b) classifies local resources in CBR into four types: human resources, structural resources, institutional resources and financial resources. As Finkenflügel et al. (2005) and Mitchell (1999) underline, local resources including local technologies, cost effectiveness and referring system is important to enable the sustainability of CBR programmes. Although a great deal of research has been conducted on measures and indicators responding to demands for assessment and evaluation of CBR (e.g. Finkenflügel et al., 2005; Grandisson et al., 2014; Wirz & Thomas, 2002), the number of studies focusing on the use of local resources in CBR (e.g. Darain et al., 2013; Mannan et al., 2012) is noticeably low (Finkenflügel et al., 2005).

In Sri Lanka, CBR was launched as a pilot project in 1981. It has been developed as the National Programme on Community Based Rehabilitation for Persons with Disabilities since 1992 (Foundation for International Training, 2002). The objective of the programme is "(r)ehabilitation of persons with disabilities to enable them to enjoy their rights and perform responsibilities and create opportunities through social development programmes to integrate them into the society" (Ministry of Social Services, 2013, p.24). The programme has been implemented within

331 divisional secretariats in 25 districts, which cover all of the administrative divisions in Sri Lanka as of 2012. CBR core group officers, who are local government officers attached to the Divisional Secretariats, are in charge of the CBR programme at the grass-roots level (Ministry of Social Services, 2013). The Ministry, however, noted the constraints on the programme: poor planning, not following the sequence of stages when expanding the programme, inadequate or a lack of multi-sectional collaboration, and inadequacies in training and capacity building (Ministry of Social Services, 2012).

The number of studies on CBR in Sri Lanka is also limited (Peiris-John et al., 2013). As one of exceptional studies, Higashida (2014b) presents research into the local resources of disabled people in a rural area by analyzing semi-structured interviews with disabled people. The analysis reveals that the living conditions of disabled people participating in local activities were improved through the development of local resources. The previous study debates mainly individual aspects regarding to the use of local resources.

However, few studies have investigated the way stakeholders develop resources based on the local conditions and disabled peoples' needs. Research in CBR has raised questions about the promotional elements and risks of developing local resources that have yet to be analyzed. Therefore, it is worth revealing the positive and negative factors of developing local resources, whilst evaluating the outcomes of an action plan, which the previous research shows as part of the series of the action research.

The aim of this study is to examine the factors of

developing local resources in the CBR programme in rural areas in Sri Lanka.

Methods

After commencing work as a social worker in an overseas volunteer position in February 2013, the first author applied action research to social work practice (Higashida, 2014a; Higashida, 2014b; Higashida et al., 2015). A mixed-methods approach adopting more qualitative and less quantitative data was used. The research period reported in this article was from July 01, 2013 to October 20, 2014.

Study Site and Local Resources

The target study site was the Anuradhapura district, which consists of 22 government administrative divisions including the R-division, I-division, Ta-division, M-division, Ti-division and P-division (fictitious names). The first author was dispatched in the R-division. The population of the district was numbered at 855,562 as of March 2012 (Department of Census and Statistics, 2012). The total number of disabled people registered in the Anuradhapura district was 8,364 as of 2013.

Figure 1 shows the core resources in the national CBR programme. In the Anuradhapura district, CBR steering committees, which are often called self-help organizations, are held once a month in each division. CBR village steering committees are held in some divisions, including the R-division.

Figure 1. CBR core resources in Sri Lanka (revised Ministry of Social Services and Social Welfare, 2008)

The community workshops (“Puhunu Pantiya” or “Ape Iskole” in Sinhalese) were developed as a unique group activity in the Anuradhapura district, one of which started in the R-division in 2009. The object is to empower disabled youth and children as well as to increase their income, although this has not been officially documented. Regular activities include the manufacturing of daily necessities, and social activities. The participants of some community workshops also hold markets to sell their products.

There were seven vocational training centers for disabled people in Sri Lanka as of June 2014. Although no center has been established in the Anuradhapura district, selected disabled youth can participate in training. One of the most striking features of the district is that no non-government organization (NGO) has directly implemented a CBR programme, although some local NGOs, such as AKASA (2011) have conducted programmes on disability issues.

Action Strategy and Process

Using the results of research (Higashida, 2014b), the CBR core group officer in the R-division and the first author planned to develop community workshops in the Anuradhapura district in line with dialogue with the second author, who is the chief social services officer and also recommended launching community workshops in each division in reference to the model practice of the R-division. We decided to promote the launch of community workshops with disabled people and their family members in the district, towards the development of local resources to empower disabled people and improve their quality of life.

As shown in Table 1, while setting five pilot divisions (R-division, I-division, M-division, Ta-division and Ti-division) in the district, the participants of community workshops in the R-division, including disabled people, their family members and the authors, conducted outreach courses in the divisions. Whilst the contents of the activities were based on the R-division’s practice through the outreach course, regular activities such as the manufacture of daily necessities, and the operational methods were determined by participants at each community workshop: disabled people, their families and CBR core group officers. The members of community workshops were required to bring raw materials or raise funds to procure materials and equipment by selling products and vegetables, or by collecting a small amount of money at the beginning of the project. As a result, the new community workshops were launched in six divisions including the non-target area (P-division).

Disabled people and CBR core group officers in M-division, I-division, Ta-division and Ti-division visited the R-division more than once during the study period, in order to learn how to run community workshops. Progress was shared with CBR core group officers in monthly meetings in the Anuradapura Kachcheri (district office).

Data Collection

Table 2 shows the number of research participants. Two facilitators conducted interviews and focus group discussions in Sinhalese, which is the native language of the study site.

Table 1. Target divisions promoting the community workshop

Site	Opening year	Continuity	Frequency	Place	Outreach courses
R-1	2009	✓	1-2/w	Government building	-
R-2	Jul 2013	✓	1/w	Temple	3 times
I-1	2012	✓	1/w	Government building	-
I-2	Feb 2014	✓	1-2/m	Community center	2 times
Ta	Sep 2013	✓	1/w	Samrudhi* meeting room	3 times
M	Sep 2013	✓	1-2/m	Vidhata** room	5 times
Ti	Jul 2013	-	1/m	Divisional Secretariat	5 times
P	Apr 2014	✓	1/w	Montessori	-

Note: *Poverty reduction related sector

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Table 2. Numbers of research participants

Method	Disabled people (division)	CBR core group officers
Interview	1) 4 males, 9 females(R-1) 2) 1 male, 1 female (R-2) 3) 7 males, 2 females (M)	N/A
Focus group	1) 4 males, 7 females (I) 2) 7 males, 7 females (M) 3) 4 males, 5 females (Ta)	5 females (twice)

Semi-structured interviews with participants of community workshops, who were disabled people, were conducted (n=24). The mean age of males and females was 40.5 and 33.2 years respectively. The disability types of the interviewees were physical (n=9), intellectual (n=8), psychiatric (n=4) including epilepsy and higher brain dysfunction, and multi-disabilities (n=3). Their family members also participated in the interviews to support them, in case the disabled people had difficulties understanding or answering. Interviews were guided by semi-structured questions to stimulate dialogue. Free-flowing narrative was encouraged to gain unrestricted opinions on the topic of interest. Participants were briefed about ground rules to ensure confidentiality and the objectives of the study. It was emphasized that the interview was not intended as personal assessment.

Focus group discussions were separately carried out with participants of community workshops (3 groups, n=34) and CBR core group officers (n=5, twice). Questions as probes for discussions were developed based on the aim of the study. Although data from the first session of focus group discussion with CBR core group officers was used in previous research (Higashida et al., 2015), this study conducted the second session of group discussion, whilst analyzing in an integrated way.

Data from field notes in social work practice was also used to analyze the results of the study.

Data Analysis

The framework of a strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) analysis was used to analyze narrative data. Sharma & Deepak (2001) also used this method to evaluate the CBR programme in Vietnam.

The characteristics of SWOT were clarified with reference to Kuipers et al. (2003). Strengths were defined as

positive characteristics that were internal to local resources and could support future development, and advantages of the resources. Weaknesses were described as negative internal characteristics and the disadvantages of local resources. Opportunities were defined as positive characteristics and favorable trends that were external to local resources and could be harnessed. Threats were defined as negative characteristics that were external to local resources and acted as obstacles, competing demands or forces that could cause damage in the future.

On the process of the SWOT analysis, procedure of the KJ method (Kawakita, 1967) was also referred as the following: carefully transcribing and reading narratives in interviews and focus group discussions; putting transcribed data onto sticky notes; putting the sticky notes on a white board; grouping similar sticky notes together; naming each group. Two raters independently determined whether each narrative indicated a strength, weakness, opportunity or threat. In classifying narrative data, consensus was reached among the raters by discussion.

Data from the first author's field notes was used in the process of interpretation and analysis.

Ethical Consideration

The study was approved by the Department of Social Services, the local government office, and the JICA office in Sri Lanka.

Disabled people were asked to participate as interviewees after receiving information in their native Sinhalese language. They were assured that refusal to be interviewed would have no impact on the services provided. Family carers who helped a disabled person on a regular basis were asked to participate and to consent to the participation of the disabled person.

Table 3. Matrix of the SWOT by participants of community workshops and CBR core group officers

SWOT	Participants	Local Officers
Strengths	Increase of income	Increase of income
	Capacity development	Capacity development
	Making friends	Expansion of future opportunities
	Sense of unity and equality	Unity among disabled people and their families
	Operation by discussion	Awareness raising
Weaknesses	Gap of degrees in disabilities and capacities	Decrease and immobilization of the participants
	Instability of the venue	Too much time before results are realized
	Difficulty in procurement of tools and equipment	Difficulty in procurement of tools and equipment
	Lack of operating funds	
Opportunities	Presence of model activities	Accumulated past experiences within the district
	Opportunities for interaction and mutual support	Existing resources and collaborators
	Existing techniques	Evaluation of the matter at a national level
Threats	Poor transport links and accessibility	Possibility of funding from the central government
		Poor transport links and accessibility
		Lack of understanding by families
		Secondary effects of disability benefits
		Instability of support by the officers

Results

As shown in Table 3, the results are drawn from the narrative data of participants in community workshops and local government officers separately, in line with the framework of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. Although each community workshop has different situations, the content of the narrative data was generally similar, except for the R-division which had an initiative to develop community workshops in the Anuradhapura district. The following results are therefore integrated.

Strengths

Five elements of strengths were identified from data in the narratives of the participants and CBR core group officers.

"Increase of income" was noted by both groups. This element corresponds to the purpose of holding community workshops. A female interviewee in the R-1 (52 yrs, physical disability) said, *"I walk around the village to sell products which I manufacture in 'Pantiya'. I also sell products made in my house using techniques learnt in 'Pantiya'. Since coming to 'Pantiya', my daily income has increased. So, I'm happy."* A male interviewee in the M-division (45 yrs, physical disability) also stated, *"Because I learnt how to make a 'Papissa' (doormat in Sinhalese) and other products here, now I can wholesale such products. I can make a 'Papissa' in two to three days. It is possible for me to sell them in Rs 150."* The CBR core group officer in the R-division said during a focus group discussion, *"I believe that the goal of holding community workshops is to increase the income of disabled people and their families."*

"Capacity development" was described by disabled people and local officers. A male interviewee in the M-division (30 yrs, multi-disabilities) said, *"I don't like to waste time in my house without any activities. I feel pleasure when I come to 'Pantiya', because I can develop my skills to manufacture products. I want to do something rather than be helped by someone."* The CBR core group officers noted that participants can develop not only manufacturing techniques but also social skills through socializing with other participants, which can lead to "expansion of future opportunities" such as religious events, compulsory education, advanced training centers and self-employed jobs. In addition, "making friends" is important for participants. A female interviewee in the R-1 (36, psychiatric disability) said, *"It is enjoyable for me to meet peers and learn how to make products. Before I came here, I didn't have these opportunities."*

In terms of positive group dynamics, participants noted a "sense of unity and equality". A male interviewee in the M-division (75 yrs, physical disability) said, *"Everyone seems to be in the same position here."* An interviewee in the R-1 (26 yrs, physical disability) described the strengths

as *"cooperation and unity of all"*. Local officers also recognized "unity among disabled people and their families".

Participants noted "operation by discussion" as the strength of community workshops, which enhanced the unity. A female interviewee in the R-1 (19 yrs, intellectual disability) said, *"We discuss things together in meetings to solve issues or plan new activities."*

Local officers mentioned "awareness raising" in focus group discussion. For instance, the CBR core group officer in the R-division explained, *"Since our members took part in 'Pantiya', the families and local residents, who had not connected to us, have paid attention to participants' capability of development."*

Weaknesses

The participants and local officers classified four and three elements of weakness respectively from the narrative data.

All local officers agreed with the idea of the "decrease and immobilization of the participants". One of the officers, who worked in the M-division, said, *"In the beginning phase after the launch of 'Pantiya', many disabled people and their families participated in the opportunity. The number of participants, however, decreased gradually."* Another officer in the I-division stated, *"Yeah, the regular members tend to be fixed, so that the number of new comers has been fewer than the early days."* The CBR core group officers noted the issue of "too much time before results are realized", which means that it takes time to turn the community workshops into a stable operation.

Disabled people and CBR core group officers also noted the negative aspects of facilities and sources. Participants of community workshops described "instability of the venue", "difficulty in procurement of tools and equipment" and "lack of operating funds" as weaknesses. For instance, a female in the M-division (45 yrs, physical disability) said in a focus group discussion, *"We don't have enough money and tools to manufacture daily products here. Now, we bring some raw materials which are affordable or free [e.g. banana stems], but we hope to make higher quality products."*

Opportunities

Three and four elements of opportunities were respectively identified from data in the narratives of the participants and CBR core group officers.

The "presence of model activities" is drawn from narrative data from focus group discussion in community workshops in the M-division and I-division. A female participant (45 yrs, physical disability) in the M-division said, *"It was a good opportunity for us to learn how to run our 'Pantiya' through visiting to R-division. We want to develop our 'Pantiya' like R-division."* In the same manner,

local officers mentioned “accumulated past experiences within the district”. The local officer in the I-division stated, *“We need to visit R-division again. They have an initiative role in promoting ‘Pantiya’. We can learn various things from their experience.”*

With regard to continual operation, disabled people and CBR core group officers noted opportunities to use “Existing techniques” and “Existing resources and collaborators” respectively. A female participant in the R-division (26 yrs, intellectual disability) said, *“Participants usually bring raw materials to ‘Pantiya’. Because the materials and tools are insufficient in ‘Pantiya’.”* The local officer in the R-division said, *“Although it is difficult for us to procure materials and tools due to a lack of funds, now, we can manage to use existing materials such as pieces of clothes, and our techniques. Additionally, many people like other officers support us in holding our ‘Pantiya’.”*

The local officers also mentioned “evaluation of the matter at a national level”, because the holding community workshop (“Sthapita karana lada ape iskole vadasatahan sankyaava” on the official report format in Sinhalese) has been officially added as a matter of the monthly progress report by the Department of Social Services at a national level since May 2014. This means that the department has recommended that CBR core group officers in all divisions hold community workshops.

Threats

The participants and local officers respectively identified one and four elements of threats in the narrative data.

They both noted “poor transport links and accessibility”. The CBR core group officer in the Ti-division, where the community workshops have temporarily stopped running, said, *“We face difficulties gathering in one place due to the bad accessibility. So, participants have to spend long time to come and much money to access ‘Pantiya’. We cannot solve this issue immediately by ourselves.”*

Local officers also noted “lack of understanding by families” and “secondary effects of disability benefits”. The officers in the R-division and M-division said that many disabled people and their families tend to stop participating in any activities after receiving disability benefits (Rs.3,000 per month), which are provided to 50 disabled people in each division. The officer in the M-division continued and said, *“Their purpose seems to be only receiving money. Some of the families waste the money by spending it on their family rather than on the disabled person.”* These narratives imply the issues, which are barriers to promoting participation in local activities, including community workshops.

“Instability of support by the officers” was noted by local officers. A CBR core group officer in the R-division said, *“It is necessary for our members (disabled people and their families) to take the initiative to run activities such as ‘Pantiya’ and self-help groups (CBR steering committees).*

Actually, there is a possibility that the SSOs (CBR core group officers) will transfer to other divisions.”

Discussion and Conclusions

The present study attempted to examine the local resources of disabled people in rural areas in the national CBR programme. The strategy of developing local resources, limitations and recommendations are discussed in the following sections.

Summary and Implications

Using the framework of the SWOT analysis, the results indicate the positive and negative attributes of community workshops, which are one of the model local resources in the CBR programme in the Anuradhapura district. We found strong support for the importance of local resources in the CBR programme from the perspective of disabled people and local government officers. The results also show that local people can take full advantage of the opportunities and strengths to overcome the weaknesses of local resources. Therefore, this article contributes to the understanding of the way stakeholders, including disabled people, not only use but also develop local resources.

The most provocative set of findings from this study concerns the relationship between existing local resources, ownership and sustainability in terms of developing local resources. Using existing resources, which is one of the principles of the CBR strategy (Helander et al., 1989; Sharma & Deepak, 2001), including collaborators, local techniques and physical materials, local people could continually hold community workshops in rural areas where the number of resources such as funds and materials was substantially limited. This study therefore suggests the promotion of developing resources by utilizing existing resources. In addition, the CBR activities using local resources also promoted the feeling of “our” (“Ape” in Sinhalese) resources, which can lead to their ownership and sustainability. This perspective corresponds to the principles of CBR guidelines which describe that “reducing the dependency on human, financial and material resources from external sources will help ensure greater sustainability” (WHO, 2010, p.37).

Institutionalization such as adding the performance matter to monthly progress reports, and accumulated past experiences including model practice in other divisions can encourage the sustainable and stable development of local resources. In rural areas where there are no NGOs directly related to the CBR programme, such a cycle of developing resources in a win-win relationship with disabled people and government was essential (Higashida et al., 2015). In the similar context to Sri Lanka where the government manages CBR as the national programme, collaborative activities would be able to have a wide range of effects. On the other hand, even in the national programme, the results

of this study indicate the feasibility of community-based practice and the potential of promoting model practice. Therefore, the authors suggest the combination of multi-level practice based on bottom-up activities, whilst in some cases leveraging the top-down system and administrative power, such as promoting a best practice at a national level.

The process of this research indirectly indicates the effectiveness of developing local resources via collaborative activities and action research. In particular, it is fundamental for outsiders, including overseas supporters, to plan, take action and share their progress with local people in CBR (Peat, 1997; WHO, 2010). Using the framework of the SWOT analysis, participatory methods such as focus group discussions, outreach courses and dialogue in various meetings were effective in involving core stakeholders in grass-roots practices. This approach supports participatory action research (PRA) which places importance on empowerment and advocacy in the process (Greenwood et al., 1998).

Limitations

Like all studies, the present study contains some notable limitations. Firstly, data was analyzed only via the SWOT analysis. Our study would be stronger if more diversified and comprehensive methods were used to analyze data on local resources. Local resources should therefore be evaluated more comprehensively and an accurate tool for assessment and evaluation be developed in the future. Secondly, our findings are based on a self-selected sample through interviews and focus group discussions. The findings need to be carefully interpreted with these limitations in mind.

Recommendations

This study is intentionally exploratory with a limited and self-selected sample in the rural areas in Sri Lanka. Despite its preliminary character, our study contributes to growing literature that suggests the importance of local resources in CBR.

The practice and effectiveness of CBR in Sri Lanka has, however, rarely been studied and presented. Peiris-John et al. (2013) review the published literature relating to disability issues in Sri Lanka and point to gaps in existing studies of the living conditions of disabled people. We, therefore, recommend that future research focuses on CBR practices in other rural areas in Sri Lanka, because the progress and condition of the programmes would vary by district. In particular, it is essential to consider cultural context (Devapitchai, 2010) and geographical conditions including accessibility in the grass-roots level.

Future studies can also explore some of the issues implied in this research, such as developmental social work (Midgley & Conley, 2010) and skills of human resources (MacLachlan, 2011) in the CBR programme in Sri Lanka,

whilst using larger and more representative samples and cases.

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