

Mobility and Rehabilitation programme for persons with Visual Impairment in Uganda

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Introduction

Mobility and Rehabilitation (MBR) Programme is one of the programmes offered at the Department of Community and Disability Studies, in the Faculty of Special Needs and Rehabilitation in Kyambogo University. The Programme was started in 1995 –2000 as a project by professionals from Norway in conjunction with the Ugandan Project partners. It was started as a result of the experiences and recognition that visual impairment might result into helplessness and dependence of persons with visual impairment (PWVI) on other people in the family and the society, thus making them unable to initiate activities on their own and becoming inactive and passive.

This programme was started at a Certificate level from 1996 - 1999, and a total of 36 Mobility Instructors were trained. The main purpose of this certificate course was to prepare Trainer of Trainers (TOTs) who were expected to go back to their respective organizations and use a multiplier effect to train other colleagues in the organization. Later on in 1999, the certificate programme was upgraded to a two year Diploma Programme in which a total of 46 Mobility Instructors have graduated in Diploma in Mobility and Rehabilitation in the last 5 years and 07 others are yet to complete next year.

The History of teaching Orientation and Mobility to the Blind

Traditionally, orientation and mobility was taught to children with visual impairment in the integrated Primary Schools, which were referred to as annexes or resource rooms in

ordinary schools. The children were trained in orientation and mobility techniques and skills. This was done without taking into consideration the individual differences among the children. The training did not have any relationship with activities to be achieved as a goal. These techniques were only taught at school but when the children go back home for holidays they could not apply these techniques appropriately.

The approaches used had some disadvantages. The needs and interests of the individual children with visual impairment were not taken care of. The training did not aim at achieving goals in activities, but was directed to only learning the techniques and skills of moving around. Indeed, the children could not transfer the knowledge they have acquired at school to the home environment because the environment at home was different from that one of the home. It was from this background that the thought of the Mobility and Rehabilitation (MBR) Programme was initiated as a project which later became a Programme.

Aim of the Mobility and Rehabilitation Programme

The main aim of the Programme was therefore to first train Mobility Instructors in Uganda. This would be done by providing the students with knowledge, skills, values and attitudes to enable them assist a person with visual impairment to acquire life skills, to become independent and self reliant in mobility and in activities. In this way persons with visual impairment would be able to participate fully in community activities and become useful and productive members of their society. The programme therefore looks at a holistic development of an individual; physically, cognitively, socially, economically and politically.

The programme also aimed at preparing Mobility Instructors who would go down to the grass roots to train other personnel using multiplier effect, who in turn would then go and train persons with visual impairment in the communities.

The programme emphasized self initiated activity and rehabilitation actions for persons with visual impairment to develop self dependence. Available information from literature reveals that visual impairment in our communities used to result in helplessness and dependence on other people (Elmerskog 1996). This meant that when persons with visual impairments are not able to participate in desired activities, they would often have a problem in coping with daily life and would find it difficult to become part of the community. Such persons with visual impairment who would not initiate activities and actions which often made them become passive and dependent on other people.

Development of the Mobility and Rehabilitation Programme

This programme was developed by external professionals from Tambartun National Resource Centre for the Visually Handicapped, and from the University of Oslo, Norway together with Ugandan Project Partners which included:

- Uganda National Association for the Blind (UNAB),
- Uganda Foundation for the Blind (UFB),
- Uganda National Institute of Special Education (Former UNISE).
- Ministry of Gender Labour and Social Development (MGLSD),
- Ministry of Education and Sports through the Educational Assessment and Resource Services and Special Needs Education (EARS/SNE),
- Ministry of Health (MOH) and
- The National Union of the Disabled Persons of Uganda (NUDIPU).

I would like to acknowledge the valuable contribution made by the staff of Tambartun National Resource Center for the Visually Handicapped, namely: Mr. Bengt Elmerskog, (the Project Co-ordinator), Professor Jon Magne Tellevik, Mr. Medi Begdad, Mr. Steiner, Mr. Odd Ronning, Mr. Odd O, Mr. John Skadden and many others who contributed to the success of this project.

During the training, a lot of emphasis has been made on the practical part of the course where students go out to their districts to carry out a six weeks Community Practice each year. During this period, every trainee identified and trained at least six persons with visual impairments for certificate trainees. This meant that a total of 216 persons with visual impairments were identified and trained. For the Diploma trainees at least four persons with visual impairments were identified and trained in their various Districts, totaling to 184. This means that out of the 82 Mobility Instructors so far trained, each of them training six or four persons with visual impairment, this makes a total of 400 persons with visual impairments so far trained in the various districts as shown in the table 1 below.

All the trainees after completion of their course were expected to identify more persons with visual impairment (PWVI) and at the same time continue with those they had identified earlier on during their training period. Apart from the figure we have quoted from our records, no survey has been carried out to establish the exact number of PWVI so far trained, but the University recognizes the need to carry out a simple survey to ascertain the total number of PWVI so far trained in Uganda. So far, Mobility Instructors have been trained in 34 Districts out of the 56.

Table 1: Showing the number of students and persons with visual impairment trained from 1996 - 2006

Year of Completion	Number of Students trained			Number of PWVI trained				
	Male	Female	TOT	Male		Female		
				Adult	Children	Adult	Children	TOT
Certificate 1996 - 1997	09	03	12	15	08	25	24	72
1997 - 1998	06	06	12	18	19	21	14	72
1998 - 1999	10	02	12	23	05	35	09	72
Diploma 1999 - 2001	06	07	13	07	08	18	19	52
2002 – 2004	10	05	15	07	11	17	25	60
2003 - 2005	05	04	09	08	04	13	11	36
2004 - 2006	05	04	09	06	06	16	08	36
TOTAL	51	31	82	84	61	145	110	400

Programme requirements

The training of persons with visual impairment in Mobility and Rehabilitation Programme is based on six important principles. These include:

- Use of individualized approach in training,
- The training is goal directed or goal oriented
- The training is based on individual needs and interests.
- The training is based on individual abilities and potentials.
- The training should be carried out in a natural setting and
- The training should be functional

1. Use of Individualized Approach

Mobility and Rehabilitation focuses on the use of individualized approach in training. Persons with visual impairment are trained as individuals but not as a group. This means that the instructor trains one person with visual impairment at a time. This in most cases seem to be overlooked by many organizations working with persons with visual impairment whose focus is on quantity rather than quality. This approach focuses more on the quality of training on the persons with visual impairment rather than numbers.

2. The training is goal directed or goal oriented

Mobility and Rehabilitation training is based on goals set for training persons with visual impairment, where emphasis is put on the goals of the training to be achieved. Therefore, if there is no goal set for the training, then the training ceases to be effective. By the end of the training the person with visual impairment is expected to achieve the goal, that is when the training becomes beneficial to the individual.

3. The training is based on individual needs and interest.

The training is based on individual needs and interests. This emphasizes the use of intrinsic motivation, where the individual with visual impairment is given the opportunity to decide on what he or she would like to be trained in according to his/her needs and interests. His or her interest may be on activities of school, work, cultural, leisure or activities of daily living.

4. The training is based on individual abilities and potentials.

In this principle, the training is based on individual's ability and potential to carry out a particular activity or activities. Some of the activities may need a grown up person with developed muscles who is physically fit in order to carry out the activity e.g digging with a hoe. When the instructor sees that the person is too young to carry out such an activity, then it is his or her responsibility to guide and counsel accordingly without discouraging the person with visual impairment.

5. The training should be carried out in a natural setting

It is strongly recommended that the training should take place in the home of the person with visual impairment. This is what is termed as being in a natural setting. He or she must be trained in his or her home of residence, where he will be able to use the knowledge, the techniques and skills to carry out his or her day to day activities in life. When the skill is learnt in a particular place where it can be used, definitely it will have a positive impact on the person, leading to independence and self reliance in order to become a productive and active member of his/her society.

6. The training should be functional

The last principle emphasizes that the Mobility training should be functional to the person with visual impairment. It should be beneficial to the person with visual impairment. It should be able to improve the life situation or quality of life of that individual. What he sees to be more of benefit to him or her is what he or she should be trained in. That means that the training activities should therefore be selected and carried out according to the culture of the people. These may be activities which are acceptable by the society and are normal according to their culture. In the Lugbara culture there are certain activities which are not allowed to be done by women and others are not allowed to be done by men. Lugbara women are not allowed to climb to thatch the roof of a hut because it is the role of men. On the other side, men are not allowed to cook food, fetch water from the spring, carry a baby at the back as the women would do because it is their role to do so etc.

The current Mobility and Rehabilitation training for persons with visual impairment therefore relies on these six principles, which have shown evidence that they can make training very effective and efficient. As a result of the training, it is anticipated that persons with visual impairment should be assisted to:

- develop their full potential capacities
- live and work in dignity
- participate fully in community action and development
- improve in their quality of life and
- make informal decisions through their contact with the Mobility Instructors

Working Methods

A working method was developed by the Norwegian professionals in collaboration with the Ugandan project partners in order to attain a holistic and action-oriented approach. According to Elmerskog (1996), the method is based on the following 5 steps:

1. Analysis of the target person's present situation.
2. Visioning the future goals.
3. Prioritizing of initiatives.
4. Implementation.
5. Evaluation.

The working tasks are specified on five different forms. I will briefly describe what the outlined tasks or steps will involve:

1. Analysis of Present Situation

In order to work toward individual long-term Mobility and Rehabilitation goals, it is necessary to map out the present life situation of the individual with visual impairment. It is, among others, required to find out what activities the target person participates in. Five main spheres of activity are in most cases considered. These are; activities of daily living (ADL), social/cultural activities, domestic activities, work activities and educational activities. The target person's performances on identified activities are assessed.

It is assumed that a satisfactory life situation requires a reasonable balance between the different spheres of activity. However, the mapping often shows that participation in some spheres of activity is predominant. This concerns mainly ADL-activities. People with visual impairment in Uganda, who have lost their sight at an adult age, are often self reliant in these activities. They are, however, facing problems within other spheres of activity. The result is often lack of contact and social interaction that may lead to unclear roles within the family or community.

The situation for children with visual impairment is different. They are often lacking experiences in activities common for sighted children such as playing, participating in sport, performing family duties etc. They are often dependent on others in most activities.

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2. Visioning the future and defining goals

In order to define goals for the future it is necessary to set up a vision for the future. This implies that we, in collaboration with the target person and his or her social network, set up a vision, based on the information that was gathered during the mapping. The vision must be based on a realistic feasibility of better future, where we, in particular, focus on participation in activities which normally take place in the target person's home environment. If the identified activities which normally take place in the person with visual impairment's home environment are insufficient to obtain personal goals, then new activities must be planned and made available for the person with visual impairment. A reasonable balance between five earlier mentioned spheres should be considered.

3. Prioritizing activities and other initiatives:

A range of needs, wishes and suggestions for action-oriented initiatives always come forth in connection with the process of the mapping the present situation and future vision. In most cases, it is necessary to prioritize among the suggested activities and other initiatives.

Prioritization of activities might imply that new activities are introduced. Or it could also imply independence training in activities that the individual already participates in. Prioritizing of other initiatives could be school-placing, medical care or others. This normally implies referrals to requisite bodies that handle such matters.

4. Planning, organizing and implementing

Prioritized activities are to be prepared for training or other prospective. Preparation of training or other prospective initiatives, establishment of mobility routes necessary to reach the activities etc, in order to obtain structured teaching and learning situations. The training is normally accomplished in the home environment, where participation from "sighted helpers" whom we call "contact persons" are given required competence and motivation, in order to enable them to carry out the daily training.

Initiatives may also be linked to providing opportunities to participate in activities that do not require training exercises. This is in order to ensure participation in public or cultural activities such as going to places of worship, the market, the local pub or local elections.

Priorities of other initiatives may at times require referrals to professionals within health or education. It is within the Mobility Instructor's duty to ensure that such referrals are made.

5. Evaluation

Evaluation of the work is important in order to detect necessary adjustments of goals, training and other initiatives. These evaluations are carried out regularly, both in long-term and short-term perspectives.

Practical Skills to be acquired by the Mobility trainees

By the end of the two years Diploma course in Mobility and Rehabilitation Programme, the necessary skills the Mobility and Rehabilitation trainees or students should be able to acquired include the following:

- To identify persons with visual impairments in the communities
- To assess persons with visual impairment in their local communities
- To plan individual rehabilitation activities for persons with visual impairment
- To design mobility routes for persons with visual impairment
- To evaluate the goals of the training tailored for each of the persons with visual impairment
- To train persons with visual impairment, their contact persons in the village and in the community in activities, mobility and rehabilitation
- To Guide and counsel persons with visual impairments, their parents, families and the community at large
- To demonstrate Braille reading and writing skills
- To demonstrate Orientation and Mobility techniques and skills for training persons with visual impairment
- To carry out analysis and evaluation of field work experiences with persons with visual impairment, their families and the community
- To demonstrate skills in Sporting with visual impairment i.e sports for the blind such as goal ball, athletics, football, show down etc
- To Supervise other personnel working in Community Based Rehabilitation Programmes and activities
- To acquire Community Skills in order to work efficiently with persons with visual impairments and the community
- To acquire Skills of starting Income Generating Activities for persons with visual impairment
- To develop and acquire Typing skills in order to support persons with visual impairments to learn typing in schools and homes
- To identify a problem in the community and carry out a project work to find out possible ways of overcoming the problems.

- To Develop a plan of action based on the needs of persons with visual impairment and the community where they are working.

Achievements

Some of the notable achievements of the Mobility and Rehabilitation Programme in Uganda include the following:

- Over 400 persons with visual impairment have benefited from this programme
- Many of the beneficiaries are able to carry out some activities independently or are involved with other family members
- Some of the persons with visual impairment are able to move from one place to another independently.
- Some persons with visual impairment have started income generating activities such as brick laying project, hot culture etc
- Some of the persons with visual impairment are being elected on Local Councils from grassroots up to the Parliament
- Following the Government Policy of Universal Primary Education in 1997 many children with visual impairment were able to access and be retained and complete the Primary Education Cycle.
- Some of the Graduates of the Mobility and Rehabilitation Programme have been employed in Government and Non-Governmental Organizations e.g Blind But Able, Uganda National Association of the Blind, Sight Savers International Uganda etc
- Some of the persons with visual impairment have been socially integrated into the society and have become productive members of their society.

Challenges

A number of challenges have been identified during the implementation of the Mobility and Rehabilitation training. These include:

- Being a community based programme the trainees have been involved in carrying out Community Practice in the Communities, it has become very expensive to maintain the students there and to supervise the trainees effectively after the donor funding period expired.
- The community still looks forward for external support in order to provide adequate training to persons with visual impairment
- Few students are prepared to under take this training due to the expenses attached to field work
- The Government proposal to provide more sponsorship to Science students have put the Mobility Instructors at disadvantage being a very expensive course.
- Being a Community oriented Programme when the University advertises the programme in the Media, the aspiring students in the rural areas do not get or access this information at the right time, thus resulting into getting enough applicants for the course.

Recommendation

Having talked of the positive side of the programme, I would therefore like to recommend that:

- There is need to carry out a survey to establish the exact number of persons with visual impairment who have been trained in Mobility and Rehabilitation in Uganda in order to open the opportunity for others too.
- There is need to identify other sources of funding to support students in this programme both Local and International.
- There should be a deliberate effort made by the University to market the programme in the districts and beyond in order to attract many applicants.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I would like say that this Mobility and Rehabilitation Programme in Uganda has been of great benefit to all persons with visual impairment who got the chance to be trained. Many more are yet to be reached as we continue to train more Mobility Instructors. We feel confident to say that the quality of personnel we prepare here at Kyambogo University are quite capable of making a difference in the lives of persons with visual impairment. From the reliable information obtained from the various districts of the Country, the Mobility Instructors are doing quite well. We are very optimistic that this training could also benefit personnel from some of the developing Countries who are willing to sponsor their staff for this training.

Thank you for your attention.