



Combining rights and services of the blind in Ghana

Intermediate lessons learned

The Danish Association of the Blind bases its work on the involvement of the visually impaired themselves in its project in Ghana. After 3 years of implementation, the project has made progress as planned. At this early stage the project faces the following mix of challenges:

- District authorities, eye specialists, social authorities, and agriculture extension workers need to be motivated to get involved.
- Blind women have different rehabilitation needs than blind men. Age and education also influence the kinds of needs to be met.
- It takes time to establish motivated district branches.
- Fieldworkers need follow-up training in assessing the training needs of the visually impaired.



Photo: Lisbeth Rasmussen/Danish Association of the Blind
Lydia, who lost her sight at the age of 13, has begun selling peanuts, porridge and salt, Ghana.

Background

The Danish Association of the Blind has worked in Ghana since the late 80s. Based on experience from earlier projects in other countries, the Association and its partner organisation in Ghana, the Ghana Association of the Blind (GAB), designed a project that combined community based rehabilitation with organisational development among the disabled themselves. The idea was to assist in establishing 25 new district level branches of the Ghana Association of the Blind and at the same time introduce a low-cost model for mobile Community Based Rehabilitation in the branches. This initiative would complement a Government initiative for community based rehabilitation that did not include the blind sufficiently.

Location:

Ghana

Title in Danish:

Organisationsudvikling og revalidering af synshandicappede

Year of implementation:

2002-2007

Funding:

DKK 10 mill (USD 1,6 mill) channelled from Danida through the Danish Association of the Blind

Objectives of the project

- To establish 25 new district branches of the Ghana Association of the Blind
- To rehabilitate 2,000 blind and visually impaired
- To develop a low-cost mobile community based rehabilitation model
- To develop a loan scheme for income generating activities for the blind
- To establish a database on the visually impaired in Ghana.

Main activities include

Organisational development

- Establishment of district branches with members and a rehabilitation committee with participation of local authorities. A period of one year has been allocated per district.
- Advocacy seminars with decision makers at local, regional and national level – including journalists
- Leadership training seminars for members of district branches, and for the board and management of GAB
- Separate empowerment workshops for men and women
- Establishing membership with the umbrella organisation Ghana Federation of the Disabled.
- Purchase of seven tandems, six motorcycles and one car to ease communication and coordination for the blind and for field workers.



Main activities continued...

Rehabilitation activities

- Identification of blind and visually impaired people
- Referral of visually impaired to medical treatment and surgery
- Training of visually impaired people – including children - in orientation and mobility
- Training of visually impaired people in day-to-day practical activities.
- Training of young visually impaired people in agriculture
- Meeting in national forum to discuss rehabilitation from women's perspective
- Development of manual for mobile rehabilitation
- Planning of database on rehabilitation
- Purchase of a computer for the database

Employment and education activities

- Income generating activity training
- Loans extended for visually impaired, who have been trained in income generation.
- Training in Braille

Lessons learned

- *District authorities, eye specialists, social authorities, and particularly agriculture extension workers need to be motivated to get involved.*

Each district area has a one-year project cycle, but identification and treatment of the visually impaired and particularly training in agriculture relies a lot on the collaboration of local authorities. It is considered to assess authorities' interest in disability and to organise courses for them before beginning activities in a new district.

- *It takes time to establish motivated district branches.*

Limited involvement among local leaders combined with some members' perception of GAB as a service provider makes it a challenge to establish the necessary group of active

volunteers led by a strong leader to continue activities once the GAB rehabilitation team has left the district after one year. The Association considers scaling up empowerment related activities and phasing out in a more gradual way after one year.

- *The interval between training in income generating activities and access to loans must be short to keep up momentum.*

Many blind people cannot access loan schemes because of their disability. The project has experienced delays in being able to release loans.

- *Communication between district and national management of the Ghana Association of the Blind is hampered by lack of access to office facilities.*

As a consequence the national management has limited knowledge of activities in districts. District branches risk being left by themselves. Agreements with local authorities may assist in solving this problem.



Photo: Lisbeth Rasmussen/Danish Association of the Blind
Ebenezer Larwerteh, who is blind, produces salt near the Volta River.

Further Reading:

[Manual for the mobile community based rehabilitation project \(final draft\)](#) Ghana Association of the Blind, 2005

[Community-based rehabilitation \(CBR\) for blind and partially sighted: a second-rate solution, or a real way to independence?](#) Position paper by the Danish Association of the Blind, 2003

International work of the Danish Association of the Blind
www.dkblind.dk/Om_foreningen/International/bistand.htm

Danish Council of Organisations of Disabled People
www.disability.dk

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