

# TOPIC 1: INTRODUCTION TO DISABILITY AND THE CONCEPTS USED IN REHABILITATION

## 1. Definition of disability

**Disability** is an umbrella term for impairments, activity limitations or participation restrictions, which result from the interaction between the person with a health condition and environmental factors and personal factors (ICF, World Health Organization, 2011). According to the Rwandan law, disability means the condition of a person's impairment of health ability he or she should have been in possession, and consequently leading to deficiency compared to others (Official Gazette of the Republic of Rwanda, August 2009).

**Disability** is an evolving concept and results from the interaction between persons with impairments and attitudinal and environmental barriers that hinders their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others (UNCRPD, 2006)

## 2. Evolution of the concept:

Historically, disability was largely understood in mythological or religious terms, e.g. people with disabilities were considered to be possessed by devils or spirits; disability was also often seen as a punishment for past wrong doing. These views are still present to day in many traditional societies.

In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, developments in science and medicine helped to create an understanding that disability has a biological or medical basis, with impairments in body function and structure being associated with different health conditions. This medical model views disability as a problem of the individual and is primarily focused on cure and the provision of medical care by professionals.

Later, in the 1960s and 1970s, the individual and medical view of disability was challenged and a range of social approaches were developed, e.g. the social model of disability. These approaches shifted attention away from the medical aspects of disability and instead focused on the social barriers and discrimination that people with disabilities face. Disability was redefined as a societal problem rather than an individual problem and solutions became focused on removing barriers and social change, not just medical cure.

Central to this change in understanding of disability was the disabled people's movement, which began in the late 1960s in North America and Europe and has since spread throughout the world. The well-known slogan "Nothing about us without us" symbolizes the amount of influence the movement has had. Disabled people's organizations are focused on achieving full participation and equalization of opportunities for, by and with persons with disabilities. They played a key role in developing the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which promotes a shift towards a human rights model of disability.

Currently, it is estimated that One billion people across the globe have a disability, 80% of whom live in developing countries and Children with disabilities are much less likely to attend school than others. According to United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) it is estimated that over 90% of children with disabilities in low-income countries do not attend school; and an estimated 30% of the world's street children live with disabilities. For adults with disabilities, the literacy rate is as low as 3%, even as low as 1% for women with disabilities in some countries. From these figures, it is evident that steps must be taken to ensure access to education for all children with disabilities. In Rwanda, 5% of whole population have a disability and a big proportion live in rural area (5.5%) compared to urban area (3.2%). Based on these statistics the role of Community-Based Support Services for Inclusive Education will be to work with the education sector to help make education inclusive at all levels, and to facilitate access to education and lifelong learning for people with disabilities. Desirable outcomes will be that all persons with disabilities have access to learning and resources that meet their needs and respect their rights. Local schools take in all children, including children with disabilities, so they can learn and play alongside their peers. Local schools are accessible and welcoming; they have a flexible curriculum, teachers who are trained and supported, have good links with families and the community.

In September 2015 the member states of the UN set an agenda to end poverty, promote peace, share wealth and protect the planet by 2030. Based on 17 goals, Agenda 2030 is calling for action from poorer and richer countries. Attention will be given to people that are the most marginalized to make sure that no one is left behind.