

How Neo-colonial Are We in What We are Doing?

Dear Readers,

As Editor-in-Chief I am proud to present to you not only the 3rd (Autumn) issue of this year but share with you some more news, of which I wish to mention:

- 1) That this is the 4th issue published this year with slightly fewer manuscripts than usual, but we are back on track in terms of publishing issues quarterly. This has taken a lot of effort from the entire team involved in making this possible;
- 2) Within this issue you will see – immediately after this editorial – a **vision paper written by the editorial board**. We invite you to read this carefully and critically and we very much appreciate your feedback. Please do write to me; send me your feedback, share issues and suggestions, and do this either formally in the format of a letter to the editor or write to me more informally. Your ideas, suggestions and concerns are highly welcomed! We very much want this journal to become a platform to give you a voice and a community of collaborators and practitioners in particular! We want the journal to be of relevance to all stakeholders involved in the field of disability and development. We want the journal to be of value to academics on one hand but even more importantly, to practitioners and policymakers on the other hand.

The most recent announcement on the website of the DCID journal that may be of importance to you: see: <https://dcidj.org/announcement/>

With only asking the above question (see title of this editorial), I run a serious risk of being severely criticised by some people or groups in society. Giving answers will make me even more vulnerable. Does it then mean that we should not ask this question and even more forget to find answers that are not based on vague notions but are grounded in the reality of today's world in which we are living?

With all developments and development cooperation that is taking place in low- and middle-income countries, I often have the feeling that the voices of those living in these countries is hardly being heard and if we hear them, it doesn't mean that we listened to those voices. There are even initiatives with names that – explicitly or not so explicitly – refer to the importance of the voice of those who form the target of those programmes e.g., Power of Voices, Amplifying Voices; Voices for Power. These are excellent and nice initiatives in themselves. There

is of course nothing wrong with all these initiatives as long as it indeed leads to change, transformation and a more egalitarian society. However, when reflecting on the past three or four decades of my involvement in development cooperation, I wonder in how far the power basis in low- and middle-income countries has changed? I increasingly notice that there are a lot of subtle or no so subtle forms of neo-colonialism taking place in development cooperation by both large and not so large stakeholders. Unfortunately, and despite all good intentions, I see this happening in the disability field as well.

The divide that is so often made between those who are disabled and who are not disabled is an artificial one, which I have been referring to in one of my earlier publications in this journal. There I state that *“We cannot permit ourselves anymore a division among those who are disabled and those who are non-disabled as there are other divides among groups of people that are by far more profound and serious to the majority of disabled people worldwide. While the urban elite of people with disabilities who live in a conflict-free, open and democratic society may be well concerned with issues such as accessible tourism, Community Based Rehabilitation as an essential service provision is often unavailable for the poor rural masses and those living under illegal conditions in slums of the cities of Africa, Asia and South America. Community-Based Rehabilitation as a philosophy seeks for solidarity with those who live under appalling conditions, threatened by conflict, eviction and hunger (1)”*

Jan Pronk – former Minister of Dutch Ministry of Development Cooperation – describes in a recently published essay the need to decolonise what he calls the ‘under-world’ (2). He refers in his essay to the commitment of the United Nations to use development aid (as it was called then) as a means to end inequality, injustice and discrimination rooted in colonial oppression, and to counteract their repercussions in new world relations. He asks the reader if the practices of development cooperation contributed to reaching that goal but concludes that in fact nowadays, the contrary is happening. He wonders why it is that development cooperation has not been able to change that system. Change requires time, but if that was the only reason then the system would slowly get weaker. However, that is not the case. The system is stronger than before because Western economic powers tried to undermine the developing autonomy of former colonies by exercising control over investment, technology, and trade channels to safeguard their interests.

It is the voice of that ‘under-world’ that is usually not being heard: the majority of people with disabilities living in a poor isolated situation; often in conflict areas,

disaster-prone areas, living in semi-permanent refugee camps where the driver tells us to lock the doors of the car because it is too dangerous not to do so.

We, however, so often pay lip service to the true meaning of empowerment, and I am including myself here as well since it is all too simple to point to others. I had the privilege to travel the past couple of months to various countries and be a facilitator in advocacy and lobby training in 2 different countries. In one country we have a great group of trainees; disability activists; people with longstanding involvement in the disability sector in that country. They know the local laws and legislation related to disability and have an excellent grasp of the international scene. Almost all people have a laptop in front of them, multitask and perfectly cope with theory and praxis. A few weeks later we are training in another country with 18 people of whom only 5 have access to internet because they either work for an international organisation or work for the government. And it is those people who do well; who grasp what we say, who respond adequately; with whom we have easy contact. And yet the training is not for them per se. It is especially for those of whom we, as trainers, – and maybe all too soon – become critical and wonder if ever they will grasp even the essence of what we are saying and doing.

I have a responsibility to reflect, respond and act upon the differences that I notice in working with 2 apparently similar groups in the same programme but in 2 different countries, and thus need to adapt and take more time and listen better. Is that also not a large responsibility of bilateral, multilateral, and non-governmental organisations as well? I imagine that this should be the case and I hope that all those who are in power in the offices of the United Nations, professional boards of rehabilitation professionals, global disability organisations, international non-governmental organisations, Western universities and consultancies continuously reflect on their way of working in the interests of those who are belonging to that 'under-world'. The ones who have nothing, the millions of people with disabilities who are not (yet) being heard because...

Jan Pronk finishes his essay by stating that personal reflection is important. However, he continues by concluding that the structures of injustices in society that perpetuate institutional discrimination need to change. That requires a change in mindset and should start with the recognition that one needs to use the needs of people of the under-world as the point of departure for development.

The defeat of the West in Afghanistan among other developments in today's world shows us that there are groups of people who don't like western norms and values. The defeat was painful and terrible – not so much for the defeated West – but far more for all those Afghans who worked with western governments, organisations and agencies that tried to create a society that would be acceptable to western norms and values. Let us thus be careful in using these western norms and values as a point of departure or as that what we wish to achieve in developments. Let's rather use a critical lens for thinking about development and rehabilitation interventions. Let's have an open window towards the needs and desires of those who are least benefiting from developments that have taken place over the past decade and let's be open to local solutions to the problems and challenges which people face.

1. Cornielje H, (2009) The role and position of disabled people's organizations in community-based rehabilitation: balancing between dividing lines, APDRJ, Vol 20, No 1, pp 3-14.
2. Jan Pronk (2021), Essay: Dekoloniseer de benedenwereld, Vice Versa, 16th of August.

Vision Paper: DCID Journal - The Future...

Introduction

For the past 30 years the Disability, CBR and Inclusive Development (DCID) journal has played an important role in presenting debates in the area of disability, community-based rehabilitation and disability inclusive development and continues to do so. With rapid changes taking place in these and related fields, it is time to present a new vision for the future of the journal and the contribution it can make to the arena of disability inclusion within and across all sectors, particularly in low- and middle- income countries, to accelerate social justice and equity.

DCID is an open-access journal with a strong focus on communicating:

- 1) lessons from applied research in and to the fields of disability, inclusive development and rehabilitation;
- 2) experiences and learning from the field that can contribute to inclusive policy and practice; and
- 3) knowledge generated from a range of perspectives, including groups that are marginalised and oppressed.

Towards a new vision

Through the DCID journal, we are committed to inform and influence policy processes, share best practices, contribute to promoting and facilitating inclusive practices, and to inform agenda-setting that is relevant for the field of disability inclusive development. DCID aims to inspire and influence its readership to drive the much-needed transformation of society into one where persons with disability have access to services and equal opportunities to ensure their participation and inclusion in all aspects of life in their communities.

The DCID journal intends to support and contribute to the creation and building of leadership in disability inclusion, in social justice and equal opportunities in development. The editorial board of DCID wants to be action oriented and inspire action among its readers.

The DCID journal aspires to look beyond problems and instead help with identifying solutions to the many challenges we encounter in our work in low- and middle-income countries.

The journal will continue to maintain the core focus on research (particularly practice-based research and implementation research) and research methods that can inform practice in the Global South.

The editorial board of the DCID journal strongly encourages submissions from Southern authors and those from outside academia by reaching out to those who may be new to this kind of writing but have something meaningful to share!

The editorial board of DCID seeks to be a forum for dissemination and exchange of information between academics, practitioners and other stakeholders in the disability arena. We aspire to broaden the readership both in terms of types of readers and their geographical location.

An aim of the editorial board is that the scope of the journal will be broadened and deepened; the publication of special thematic issues on a wide range of topics will be stimulated and invited. There could also be special issues dedicated to the CBR Africa/Asia/South America/Caribbean Networks, AfriNEAD, OT Africa Regional group, also OT Pacific-Asia Regional group and other specific interest groups.

Other means of communication and dissemination e.g., via social media will increasingly play a role to stimulate debate and innovation. Active dialogue between authors and readers will be encouraged for example by a section for short commentaries, letters and responses.

The journal could have a section for Masters and PhD students to submit their papers, in order to encourage and build capacity in writing papers. Such papers could be part of a possible new section of articles, for example, 'Emerging Research Digest'. The Editorial Board members could play a role here, as mentors to build capacity and ensure quality of content being published.

Similarly, we aim to encourage field-level programmes to publish their experiences, aided by members of the Editorial Board. National and International organisations (INGOs and others, for example) working on disability at community level could be asked to work on a special issue related to their work.

The Editorial Board