

CIVIL SOCIETY AND COMMUNITY BASED ORGANIZATIONS IN THE ANURADAPURA DISTRICT IN RELATION TO WOMEN WITH DISABILITIES

L. R. Gonsalkorala¹, N. G. Kamalawathie² & C.K. Premathilaka³

¹*Department of Secondary & Tertiary Education, Open University of Sri Lanka*

²*AKASA Organization, Talawa, Anuradapura*

³*AKASA Organization, Talawa, Anuradapura*

BACKGROUND

About 650 million people in the world- or over 10% of the world's population-live with disabilities and frequently encounter a myriad of physical and social obstacles. They often lack the opportunities of the mainstream population and are usually among the most marginalized in society (Kent et al 2005). Persistence of certain cultural, legal and institutional barriers makes women and girls with disabilities the victims of two fold discriminations as women and as persons with disabilities. The Asia Division's Directory Plan (2003-2006) states that women with disabilities (WWDs) are ignored and discriminated by non-government organizations and even by women's movements. However WWDs are in need of support and recognition from the governments as well as from other various organizations existing in the society (Lonsdale, 1990). Various organizations the world over strive to assist persons with disabilities (PWDs) and especially WWDs to overcome the obstacles they face. One such organization in Sri Lanka is the *Abaditha Kantha Sangamaya* (AKASA) based at Thalawa, Anuradapura.

AKASA involves itself mainly with the development of the states of WWDs. Furthermore the organization is also actively involved in research related to WWDs. The present paper is presented as a part of a study conducted on WWDs with two researchers from the AKASA organization in the year 2011 under the sponsorship of the European Union. The study was conducted in the North-Central and Eastern provinces of Sri Lanka covering five districts namely Anuradapura, Trincomalee, Polonnaruwa, Batticaloa and Ampara. The main goal of the study was to collect information about the civil society organizations (CSO) and community based organizations (CBO) in relation to WWDs. However the present paper deals only with the data collected, analysed and interpreted pertaining to the Anuradapura district of the North-Central province of Sri Lanka.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- 1) Investigate the awareness of civil society and community based organizations about PWDs and WWDs
- 2) Identify the assistance that could be given to WWDs by these organizations
- 3) Find whether training is needed for these organizations to provide assistance to WWDs
- 4) Make suggestions to enlist and enhance the assistance of these organizations in respect to WWDs

* Correspondence should be addressed to L.R.Gonsalkorala, Dept of Secondary & Tertiary Education, OUSL, 0724417714, lrgon@ou.ac.lk

METHODOLOGY

The design of the study was the descriptive survey design.

Population and the sample

The population of the study is the total number of civil society organizations and community based organizations functioning in the Trincomalee district. From the population a convenient sample of 50 organizations containing both categories of organizations were selected. The composition of the sample is given below.

The number of CSOs	16
The number of CBOs	34
The total	50

Data collection

A questionnaire which included two choice or multiple choice question items as well as open ended questions was used to collect data from the organizations. Answers and responses to the questionnaire items were obtained from the Heads of the organizations or their nominated representatives. Instead of requesting them to write down their answers and responses, a trained research assistant was entrusted to record their answers and responses for better clarity.

Data collected from close ended questions were mainly analysed as frequencies and percentages while responses to open ended questions were analysed qualitatively.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table no 1: Summed up responses of awareness in legislations/conventions

Key: A- CSOs B- CBOs

Awareness	1. Act on protection of The rights of PWDs				2. National policy on Disability of Sri Lankans				3. UNO Convention On rights of PWDs (UNCRPD)				4. Convention on Elimination of All discrimination against women (CEDAW)			
	A	%	B	%	A	%	B	%	A	%	B	%	A	%	B	%
Not aware	07	43.8	26	76.5	08	50	29	85.3	08	50	29	85.3	05	31.2	30	88.3
Moderate	09	56.2	02	7.8	08	50	00		08	50	00		07	43.8	00	
High	00		00		00		00		00		00		03	18.8	00	
No response	00		06	17.7	00		05	14.7	00		05	14.7	01	6.2	04	11.7
Total	16		34		16		34		16		34		16		34	

The data indicate a somewhat satisfactory level of awareness on legislations/conventions on the part of CSOs. Out of them around 50% recorded at least a moderate awareness about the first 3 legislations/conventions related to PWDs and WWDs and for the 4th one it was around 60%. However around 43.7% of the CSOs were not aware of them. The data for CBOs indicate a very poor level of awareness. Out of the 34 CBOs 83.8% were not aware of them at all.

Table no 2: Assistance from CSOs

Area in descending order	Assistance
Financial	Financial assistance & loans for self employment, Taking steps to raise their economic states
Equipment	Equipment can be provided but equipment not specified
Training	Vocational and skill development
Counseling	Provide guidance & counseling services
Health & sanitary	Conduct medical clinics, physiotherapy, provide sanitary facilities
Environment	Can build up suitable environment
Employment	Employment facilities could be provided
Labour	Can provide labour for activities related to them
Empowerment	Programmes to empower them

Assistance from CBOs:

Make the community aware of Rights of WWDs

Conduct programmes to empower WWDs

As per responses recorded almost all organizations were willing to provide assistance to WWDs in various ways according to their expertise and resources. Prominent among them in respect to CSOs were providing loans, equipment, developing vocational skills, providing counseling and health services. CBOs were willing to raise community awareness and empower WWDs.

Table no 3: Training; Organization response on participation, willingness to participate and sharing

Organization	Participation In training Programmes		Willingness to participate in training workshops on persons with disabilities particularly women		Agreement to share the learning from workshops with other organizations	
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
CS	13	03	16	00	16	00
CB	00	34	29	00*	29	00*

* Five CBOs did not respond to this item.

While most of the CSOs had participated in some sort of training programmes related to PWDs/WWDs, CBOs had not done so. All CSOs and 85.3% of the CBOs expressed willingness to participate in training and also to share the knowledge.

CONCLUSIONS/RECOMMENDATIONS

As at least 50% of the CSOs recorded a moderate awareness about the legislations/conventions related to PWDs and WWDs and therefore it can be said that their awareness is at a somewhat satisfactory level. The awareness level of the CBOs was extremely poor.

Almost all organizations were willing to provide assistance to WWDs in various ways. The CSOs were mainly willing to assist in finance and development aspects while CBOs were willing to raise community awareness and empower WWDs.

Most of the CSOs had participated in some training programmes related to PWDs/WWDs. The CBOs had not participated in any such training. Almost all organizations expressed willingness to participate in training and also to share the knowledge.

It is recommended that awareness raising programmes on the rights of WWDs should be conducted for both CSOs and CBOs and their training needs in providing assistance to WWDs should be fulfilled.

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http://www.un.org/women_watch/enable

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