



TOWARDS SOCIAL INCLUSION

PHYSICAL REHABILITATION PROGRAMME



ICRC



ICRC

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The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) is an impartial, neutral and independent organization whose exclusively humanitarian mission is to protect the lives and dignity of people affected by war and other violence and to assist those people. Physical rehabilitation is a way of helping restore disabled people's dignity, by enabling them to regain their mobility and play an active role in their society.

Rehabilitation is a process intended to eliminate – or at least minimize – restrictions on the activities of people with disabilities, permitting them to become more independent and enjoy the highest possible quality of life. Depending on the type of disability, various measures (medical care, physical rehabilitation, vocational training, social support, help in achieving economic self-reliance, etc.) may be needed. Rehabilitation is essential to becoming a full participant in society. Persons with disabilities need mobility devices such as prostheses, orthoses, walking aids and wheelchairs, and they need therapy to learn to make the fullest use of their devices. Restoring mobility is basic justice – the first step in ensuring access to food, shelter, education, a job, an income and, more generally, the same opportunities as other members of society.

Since 1979, the ICRC's rehabilitation work has diversified and expanded throughout the world. Over time, the organization has acquired a leadership position in the field, mainly because of the scope of its activities, the development of its in-house technology, its acknowledged expertise and its long-term commitment to assisted projects. In most countries where the ICRC has launched rehabilitation projects, such services had previously been all but non-existent. And in most cases, the ICRC rehabilitation project itself has formed a basis for establishing a national service.

The ICRC's Physical Rehabilitation Programme is aimed at ensuring access to appropriate physical rehabilitation services, including mobility devices and physiotherapy. ICRC assistance in this realm is designed to help create or strengthen high-quality national services and to make them accessible, and sustainable.



Christoph Von Toggenburg/ICRC



Michael Greub/ICRC

ICRC APPROACH

The Rehabilitation Programme strives to meet the basic rehabilitation needs of disabled people affected by an environment of war and other violence, and to do this in the most prompt, humane and professional way possible. In the conflict-racked countries where the ICRC works, physical rehabilitation is needed not only by people whose disabilities are the direct result of the fighting (landmines, bombs, etc.) but also by people who become physically disabled because normal health care breaks down and

they fail to receive treatment and vaccinations. The projects assisted by the ICRC help all those in need.

ICRC physical rehabilitation projects are carried out in such a way as to bolster the physical rehabilitation services offered in the country concerned. The primary aims are to make those services better, more accessible and more sustainable.



Graziella Leite Piccolo/ICRC

- **Accessibility:** The ICRC does everything possible to ensure that all in need of rehabilitation have equal access to it, regardless of social, religious, ethnic or other considerations. Special attention is given to particularly vulnerable groups such as women and children.
- **Improving quality:** The ICRC promotes the application of internally developed guidelines based on international norms. It also promotes an approach in which patients are treated by people in a range of professions, including physiotherapy. In addition, it sees to it that the ICRC technology used to produce appliances and aids for disabled people remains suitable and up to date.
- **Ensuring sustainability:** The ICRC works with the local partner and takes measures from the start to strengthen its managerial and technical capacities. Whenever necessary, the ICRC acts through the Special Fund for the Disabled (see below) to ensure that services remain available to the people who need them. By taking this long-term view of its responsibility, the ICRC maximizes the chances of its investment in human resources, funds and materials paying dividends long after the ICRC itself has left the scene.



Zalmat Ahad/ICRC

TWIN-TRACK APPROACH

The ICRC supplies direct support to both the national system and the people who use the services of that system. To make certain that the national system has the means it needs, the ICRC furnishes support at the centre level to ensure that individual centres can do the job. This support may include building or renovating facilities, donating equipment, raw materials and components, training local staff and helping develop a national strategy for physical rehabilitation. National authorities also receive

support to ensure that they have the capacity to manage and supervise activities related to physical rehabilitation. At the same time, action is taken to guarantee people's access to the system's services. This action includes subsidizing the cost of travel, accommodation and food as well as the cost of treatment at the centres.



Isaac Brown/ICRC

DEVELOPING NATIONAL CAPACITY

ICRC projects are designed to strengthen the rehabilitation services in the countries concerned. The organization therefore supports local partners (governments, NGOs, etc.) through a combination of materials, funds, equipment and staff training. The level of support varies from country to country but the aim is always to develop national capacity, both technical and managerial. However, in certain circumstances the ICRC may substitute entirely for the authorities. Ninety percent of

the ICRC's projects have been, and continue to be, managed in close cooperation with local partners, primarily government authorities.

Since 1979, the ICRC has developed several tools (stock management, patient management, treatment protocols, etc.) to support the managers of assisted centres. These management tools have also been furnished to other organizations working in the same area.



DEVELOPING HUMAN RESOURCES

Since the quality and the long-term availability of services depend largely on a ready supply of trained professionals, the training component within ICRC-assisted projects has grown in importance over the years. The presence of trained professionals also increases the chances of rehabilitation facilities continuing to function over the long term. In 2003, an in-house training package for orthotic/prosthetic technicians (Certificate of Professional

Competency) was developed by the ICRC and recognized by the International Society for Prosthetics and Orthotics. Since 1979, the ICRC has run formal prosthetic and orthotic diploma programmes in a dozen countries, as well as formal physiotherapy training in one country. It has also provided scholarships enabling a number of candidates to be trained at recognized schools in prosthetics and orthotics or physiotherapy.



Roger Arnold/ICRC

As a means of fostering the development of physiotherapy services, and given the difficulty of manning assisted centres with trained physiotherapists, the ICRC decided to devise a course to train physiotherapist assistants, a function that exists in a number of developed countries. Physiotherapist assistants are qualified staff members who help assess and treat patients under the guidance of physiotherapists.

POLYPROPYLENE TECHNOLOGY

In the early days of its limb-fitting and rehabilitation work, the ICRC used raw materials and machinery imported from established Western suppliers to produce prosthetic and orthotic components. However, it soon started developing a new, low-cost, high-quality technology using polypropylene as the basic material in order to reduce the financial burden of providing rehabilitation. Recognition of the vital role played by the ICRC in making rehabilitative devices more widely available came in 2004 in the form of the Brian Blatchford Prize awarded by the International Society for Prosthetics and Orthotics. Polypropylene technology is now standard for production of prostheses and orthoses and is today being used by most organizations involved in physical rehabilitation.



PROMOTING ACCESS TO OTHER SERVICES IN THE REHABILITATION CHAIN

The aim of rehabilitation is to remove – or to reduce as far as possible – restrictions on the activities of people with disabilities, making them more independent and able to enjoy the highest possible quality of life. Various services may be needed such as medical care, physical rehabilitation, vocational training, social support, and programmes to promote economic self-reliance. Physical rehabilitation, though indispensable in restoring mobility, is only one of many things required to achieve full rehabilitation. Although its focus is physical rehabilitation, the ICRC recognizes the need to develop its partners' understanding of the

overall rehabilitation process and the need to ensure that people with disabilities have access to other services that promote their full integration in society.

Within all projects, a number of measures are taken to promote access to other services in the “rehabilitation chain”. They include supporting national events relevant to disability issues, developing referral networks together with local and international organizations directly involved in other parts of the rehabilitation chain, and supporting the development of national strategies for tackling disability issues.



Boris Hegler/ICRC

LONG-TERM COMMITMENT

The ICRC has successfully withdrawn from functioning rehabilitation projects in a number of instances. However, on other occasions the result, after a year or so, has been an empty centre with no materials, trained personnel or patients. In countries with limited financial resources, the needs of disabled people, including rehabilitation, are seldom given priority. The result is poorly funded and poorly supported centres. Besides the impact on patients and personnel, this represents a significant loss of human capital and materials. People with disabilities need access to functioning rehabilitation services for the rest of their lives. In order to improve the chances of these continuing to function, the ICRC takes a long-term approach when setting up and managing its projects. While the top priorities are to maintain high quality and increase accessibility, the ICRC is always attentive to fostering its partners' managerial and technical capacity from the outset. It does this by training and mentoring, by improving facilities, and by promoting an effective physical rehabilitation policy within the government.

Even when the ICRC has completely withdrawn from a country, the organization's Special Fund for the Disabled can follow up. This long-term commitment to patients and facilities, unique among aid organizations, is much appreciated by the ICRC's partners in both centres and governments. It is one of the ICRC's major strengths.



Marko Kokic/ICRC

SPECIAL FUND FOR THE DISABLED

The ICRC's Special Fund for the Disabled was created in 1983 to ensure the continuity of former ICRC programmes for populations affected by conflict or war, and to support other physical rehabilitation centres in low-income countries, and this remains its aim.

Where necessary, the Fund helps bridge the gap between the ICRC's withdrawal from a country and the time when the government or local institutions take over full responsibility for maintaining services to disabled people at rehabilitation centres formerly assisted by the ICRC. It also supports centres that have not previously

had ICRC involvement, by introducing the technology and technical expertise developed by the ICRC to strengthen the quality and sustainability of rehabilitation services in low-income countries.

The Fund's assistance is geared towards restoring and maintaining physical mobility by facilitating access to rehabilitation, and ensuring the projects' quality and long-term viability. This is achieved mainly through a combination of material, financial, and technical assistance as well as capacity-building and training.

MISSION

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) is an impartial, neutral and independent organization whose exclusively humanitarian mission is to protect the lives and dignity of victims of armed conflict and other situations of violence and to provide them with assistance. The ICRC also endeavours to prevent suffering by promoting and strengthening humanitarian law and universal humanitarian principles. Established in 1863, the ICRC is at the origin of the Geneva Conventions and the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. It directs and coordinates the international activities conducted by the Movement in armed conflicts and other situations of violence.



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