

**International conference**  
**Disability and classifications: from concepts to action**  
**Oct. 26, 27- 2006**  
**La Marsa- Tunisie**

organised by the Ctnerhi (Collaborating centre for ICF in French, <http://www.ctnerhi.com.fr>) and the French Federative Institute of Disability Research (<http://rfr-handicap.inserm.fr/>)

**Aims: From concepts to action**

After nearly 30 years of conceptual debates aiming at defining disability and its components, one has entered a new era, that of applications of the classifications. Thus, in the framework of the general theme of the annual meeting of the WHO-FIC network "Challenging the information paradox", this conference aimed at

- gathering experiences of applications and uses of classifications [ICF and DCP (Quebec classification)] with a particular focus on transition countries
  - o for framing the collection of disability data and developing statistical and administrative information systems (disability questions in censuses, population surveys, data recording)
  - o for designing observation and assessment tools focusing on living conditions and needs of disabled persons
  - o as a conceptual framework for designing and planning public policies (social, health and health related intervention programs, compensation systems, ...), with particular attention paid to Community Based Rehabilitation
- discussing applications results and their comparability, methods used and their limits, incidence in the social field
- inviting stakeholders of the region to join the French speaking network on disability measurement and setting up further North-South collaborations.

**The conference**

The 2 day conference was organised around 7 topics

- What does "disability" mean today?
- Surveys on disability in different cultural contexts
- Disability Statistics: methodological issues
- Classifications: tools to serve public policies and people's rights
- Comparability of disability data : available tools
- Classifications and clinical and rehabilitation practices
- Dissemination, promotion and training to disability classifications

27 papers in English or French reported applications of classifications in

- national disability surveys in Afghanistan, France, Kosovo, Morocco, Southern African region (Malawi, Namibia, Zimbabwe); education focused instruments and surveys (OECD in Gabon and Ethiopia)
- administrative and clinical data recording (Australia); rehabilitation programs monitoring (Tunisia, Algeria, Quebec)
- legislation (France, Tunisia)
- international programs (UN, WHO, African Decade for disabled people, Handicap International)

Over 100 persons attended the conference, with a significant participation of stakeholders from Algeria and Tunisia.

## **Main results**

### **1. A general acknowledgement of the systemic approach of disability that places the disability issue in the broader scope of development beyond health**

The definition of disability as the interaction of the person and her environment (material, social and political) has become a common reference. It has significant implications in terms of (i) broadening the field of disability and stakeholders beyond the medical and medico-social ones including town planning, transportation, education, employment, culture,...; (ii) acknowledgement of PWDs' expertise and their inclusion in debates, research, policy making.

Complementary to the progress accomplished regarding the definition of disability, the UN convention on the rights of persons with disabilities (forthcoming) puts the stress on the shift from social rights to civil rights. The evidence at the world level of a close link between disability and poverty, disability and education, places the issue of disability within the broader scope of development beyond that of health.

### **2. Surveys: why countries with the heaviest disability burden show the lowest disability prevalence rates?**

All surveys presented have common features (whether in industrialized or emerging countries) that witness the impact of the systemic model:

- population based
- main objectives:
  - o numbering the types of disability: impairments, activity limitations, but also participation restrictions. However environmental factors remain insufficiently investigated, most often limited to close environment (technical and human aids, home adaptations)
  - o living conditions
  - o assessment of needs
  - o for awareness raising and monitoring the implementation of relevant policies
- include 2 phases: a general investigation applied to all population, followed by a more thorough investigation on impairments, activity limitations, participation restrictions on a target sub-group (screened with different methods)
- the previously commonly used dichotomised coding opposing a population of disabled persons to that of non disabled is replaced by gradual scales of severity, measuring disability on a continuum. A more flexible method that allows to define more or less extended populations according to the question to deal with.

#### ***High variations of prevalence rates***

Partially due to:

- questions wording
- demographic structures
- cultural differences
- attitudes and practice

But these causes are insufficient to give account of the observed variations; a matter that needs further reflexion.

Whatever the explanations, these variations question the relevance and usefulness of looking for global prevalence rates.

#### ***Accounting for subjectivity***

The issue of the objectivity of self declaration surveys has been raised, as well as the problem of understanding the questions for persons with low level of education.

Subjectivity ranges from ignorance of one's own capacity to participate when asked to expertise of one's own experience.

An issue that deserves further investigation.

### **3- Classifications: tools to serve public policies and people's rights**

ICF becomes a reference for the development of public policies and legislations (France, Tunisia), but the interests and economic stakes of three types of stakeholders – policy makers, professionals, civil society- impact diversely on the use of information collected.

#### ***Resistance to the systemic model***

- Policy makers: a resistance due to the fear of expending compensation measures that include environmental factors
- Professionals: resistance to change in institutional settings

#### ***The role of civil society and in particular disabled persons for social change***

Evidence was brought that existing information (statistical, administrative or clinical) are often kept unused in emerging countries. Civil society and persons with disabilities in the first place need training to conceptual tools and data to get hold of them, forge an identity as pressure groups and use them on the public scene.

#### ***Expectations regarding the UN Convention***

The compelling measures contained in articles 31 and 32 of the UN Convention are expected to support civil society's action and inspire public authorities.

### **4- National and international comparability of data**

- OECD presented a method for comparing institutions (school) and resources allocated according to the type of disability.
- R.Simeonsson presented a comparison of tools to diagnose disability in childhood and the capacity of ICF CY to describe disability in childhood in a dynamic perspective of developmental evolution
- the Australian module FRHOM: an instrument of routine data recording on functioning that will allow for comparisons in time and between institutions.

### **5- Community Based Rehabilitation**

The systemic approach of the Quebec classification applied to CBR programmes in Algeria and Tunisia showed that interventions within the environments of the persons:

- bring about a redefinition of professional roles in a multidisciplinary perspective instead of hierarchic
- support families to face school and other local authorities with specific demands.

### **In conclusion**

This conference has fulfilled its objectives by showing that classifications are used as conceptual and methodological guidelines for collecting data, planning public policies, designing and monitoring intervention programmes, whether in Northern or in Southern countries.

The conference ended with a workshop intended to discuss North-South collaborative projects. It was attended by 30 people among which Algerians, Tunisians and representatives of the Secretariat of African Decade for Disabled Persons (Mohamed Fall) and WHO/DAR (Allana Officer).

