

MDG 1, 2 and 6: Improve quality of lives of people with disabilities through survival yards in Niger

Project title: The Survival Yard Program in Niger

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History

Duration: initiated in 2005 and ongoing

Key Focus Areas: Health, nutrition, hygiene, education, gardening, small loans

Target Audience: People with disabilities and their families

Partners: UNAN/PRAHN, people with disabilities and their families, and CBM

Funding: CBM (with specific funds designated by its offices in Australia and New Zealand) and UNICEF

Objective

The objective of the project is to improve the quality of life of people with disabilities and their families through activities addressing health, nutrition, hygiene, education, gardening and small loans (donkey cart and animals).

Background

Disability and poverty are interlinked: poverty increases the risk factors which may lead to disability, and people with disabilities are more likely to be poor because of lack of access to health, education, political and socio-economic programs available to others in the community. This disability-poverty cycle is directly linked to community development, or rather, exclusion of people with disabilities from the development occurring in the community. They lack nutritious food, clean water and sanitation, food for livestock, firewood, and access to education, immunization, health and rehabilitation services.

The "survival yard" program is the product of a collaboration between Paul Caswell (at the time the Country Coordinator in Nigeria) and the "Projet de Réadaptation à Base Communautaire des Aveugles et Autres Handicapés" du Niger (Community Based Rehabilitation project for blind people and other people with disabilities), CBM Australia and the local community. The project was started in 2005 as a response to the famine in the region with the aim of providing food security for persons with disabilities and their extended family throughout the year.

Niger was the bottom country on the 2005 UN Human Development Index. This project, then focuses on a particularly poor country and a particularly poor population in that country. The survival yards are situated in three areas: a zone around Ballarao (about 100 km north of Niamey), a zone around Birni N’Gaouréi (about 100 km west of Niamey), and Makalondi (about 90 km south of Niamey). The location of the gardens is to some extent determined by the availability of year round water in the hand dug wells as it is in these zones where the population tends to be concentrated. The program works together with people with disabilities and their families to develop 25 by 25 meter survival yards with a well and simple watering canals. A border of bushy trees creates a microclimate that protects the garden from the harsh winds off the Sahara. The gardeners are encouraged to grow crops on the fence to reduce the effects of the wind. The garden provides vegetables and fruit to eat and sell, fodder for livestock, and firewood. People with disabilities and their families, young as well as adults develop the survival yard and the broader community also is benefiting from the project.

Although the focus of the survival yard is a fence garden with a well and pump lifting the water, a package of services is provided to the people with disabilities and their families:

- Community education on disability inclusion, health (including HIV prevention), nutrition, clean water, sanitation and hygiene,
- Ensuring access to immunization, health, improved pre and post natal care, schooling, rehabilitation (including cataract and orthopedic surgery),
- Promotion of the Surgery, Antibiotics, Facial cleanliness, and Environmental (SAFE) strategy against trachoma, and reduced risks of blindness due to Vitamin A deficiency (improved nutrition/Vitamin A capsules given at immunization).
- The construction of latrines and wood efficient stoves,
- Creating access to markets,
- Loans of donkey carts (income generation through transport of goods),
- Loans of animals for income generation.

Achievements

- A tool was developed for the survival garden supervisor to monitor each garden. The tool is tabled to cover various parts of the program to easily identify areas that are working well or need further development. There is also a model garden for clients to visit and learn from.

- A female field worker was hired for awareness raising and information activities that target women, specifically focusing on subjects such as pre and postnatal consultations.
- In addition, seven female community workers have been trained to take over the activities such as health and hygiene
- Repayment rate on loans for animals and donkey carts are 91.6% and 90.26% respectively.
- The first phase of the project funded 40 survival yards reaching 44 people with disabilities and their families (a total 168 people). An additional 24 survival yards have been supported by CBM Australia in the second phase (2009 – 2011).



Villagers using hand operated pumps

Monitoring and evaluation

CBM's Partner, UNAN (Union Nationale des Aveugles du Niger)/PRAHN in Niger monitors the project. In addition, two project monitoring trips were conducted by CBM's Australia office. The first monitoring trip was conducted by CBM Australia in May 2009 to visit three survival yards. The clients communicated positive changes in terms of having greater access to food, improved income, and improved hygiene. Other positive changes included:

- The use of stoves has improved heat efficiency and reduced fuel usage.

- Stoves and some gardening techniques adopted and replicated by other members of the community.
- Improved access to pit latrines and composting has improved the general hygiene of the households.
- Improved attitudes towards persons with disability.
- Stories from clients indicated that some were able to use funds from their income generating activities (e.g. donkey carts etc) to purchase food to supplement their gardens during the dry season. Income was also used to fund purchases of nursery stock and some of the maintenance costs of the garden.



Energy efficient stove

The second monitoring trip consisted of visiting four gardens, one of which was the demonstration garden managed by PRAHN. The vegetation in the model garden was prolific with over fifty different species being grown even during the most difficult time of the year (the temperature is very high). This was contrasted with a nearby traditional garden that was completely dry and barren. Out of the other three gardens managed by the people with disabilities and their families, two were quite fruitful while the third was not as prolific but still providing some vegetables for consumption. Members of the Touareg tribe who are generally very conservative were tending all the three gardens. This was demonstrated by the limited use of the other elements of the program e.g. the latrine, the improved stoves, and in one house no children were attending school.

In all four gardens, vegetables were grown and were used as food even in the most difficult time of the year.

Lessons learned / Recommendations

- 1) Recognition of importance of obtaining greater commitment from participants. A comprehensive “convention” has been developed to clearly outline the responsibilities and commitment of the clients. This outlines the roles of the client, family, village head, and the role of PRAHN.
- 2) The project uses a simple system to provide water to different parts of the garden that has worked well.
- 3) The cost of installing a garden can be up to 1.5 million cfa (3000 USD) however it is considered a long-term investment that can improve the life of the people with disabilities and their family.
- 4) The gardens are a year round activity and in general some sort of harvest (e.g. ingredients for sauces) are available throughout the year to assist the family to survive even in the hottest time of the year.
- 5) By focusing development on particularly marginalized groups (people with disabilities in this example) using a community-based strategy, it is possible to contribute to positive community change both in from development and human rights perspectives.



Women and children from a the village of Kiota in Niger