

Advocacy Campaign for the Rights of People with Disabilities: A Participatory Action Research within a Community-based Rehabilitation Project in Maharashtra, India

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: This paper aimed to demonstrate how participatory action research (PAR) within a Community-based Rehabilitation (CBR) project facilitated community participation to advocate for the rights of people with visual impairment. An advocacy campaign, led by the local people with and without disabilities, was launched for the construction of an accessible foot over-bridge (FOB) at Vangani railway station in Maharashtra, India.

Methods: The PAR approach was used to explore the issues faced by the local people with visual impairment. It ensured maximum community consultation, engagement and, consequently, meaningful outcomes for the community. Advocacy tools such as video documentary, online petition, media advocacy, and signature campaign were employed to publicise the issue on a larger platform. Sources for this paper included quantitative data from the survey of Vangani community and documents such as CBR project reports, media coverage articles, minutes of the meeting and correspondence with the Central Railways during the advocacy campaign that was conducted from 2012 - 2015.

Results: After 12 months of consistent advocacy, the Ministry of Railways sanctioned INR 15 million (equivalent to USD 2,25,000) for the construction of the foot over-bridge. The construction work on the foot over bridge was completed in December 2016 and now it is open for public use.

Conclusion and Implications: This study illustrates how PAR within a CBR project successfully used an advocacy campaign as a tool for community participation, action and change. Although geographically limited to rural

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pockets of Maharashtra in India, the learning experiences brought out some of the elements that might prove crucial for the success of an advocacy intervention within CBR programmes for the rights of people with disabilities in India and in other parts of the world.

Key words: *Visual impairment, advocacy, participatory action research, community participation, safety, India.*

INTRODUCTION

The concept of Community-based Rehabilitation (CBR) was positioned by the World Health Organisation in 2004, as “a strategy within general community development for the rehabilitation, equalisation of opportunities, poverty reduction and social inclusion of people with disabilities”. As per the WHO-CBR guidelines, “role of CBR is to contribute to the empowerment process by promoting, supporting and facilitating the active involvement of people with disabilities and their families in issues that affect their lives” (WHO, 2010). Many research studies have been published that underscore the process of empowerment of people with disabilities through advocacy skills training and Participatory Action Research (PAR) within CBR programmes (Balcazar et al, 1990; Balcazar et al, 1994; Fawcett et al, 1994; Balcazar et al, 1998). Participatory action research has been defined as an approach to empower people through the process of constructing and using their own knowledge to increase the relevance of the research process (Whyte, 1991). This research approach empowers community members to collaborate with researchers to better understand their own problems and to act upon it in order to develop solutions and to promote social and/or political transformation (Selener, 1997).

As defined by Baum and colleagues (2006), PAR seeks to understand and improve the world by changing it. At its heart is collective, self-reflective inquiry that researchers and participants undertake, so they can understand and improve upon the practices in which they participate and the situations in which they find themselves. The reflective process is directly linked to action, influenced by understanding the history, culture, and local context, and embedded in social relationships.

This CBR project in Vangani used PAR and advocacy as tools to identify problems faced by people with visual impairment and develop solutions to achieve the desired change. The project was initiated by the first author (AJ) in 2011 in Karjat

and Vangani in Maharashtra, (rural areas in Western part of India), as part of his fellowship project under Mumbai's (a metropolitan city in India) Tata Institute of Social Sciences and EdelGive Foundation (the philanthropic arm of the Edelweiss Group that supports not-for-profit organisations by bringing the skills, resources and talents of the for-profit world). The main objective of the project was to enhance the access to quality healthcare, inclusive education and sustainable livelihoods for persons with disability residing in the project areas, in collaboration with the community and multiple stakeholders like government, non-government and private partners. With this aim, a Disabled Peoples' Organisation (DPO) was created. The team members in the DPO included men and women with different disabilities who were trained to work as 'Community Developers' to carry out the activities of the CBR project in the field (Jaiswal, 2012).

The PAR within the CBR project started with a series of meetings and reflective exercises involving people with disabilities and their families in Vangani. During the participatory appraisal of the community, the first issue that arose was the concern for safety and loss of life among the visually impaired people in the community. This was because there was no foot over-bridge (FOB) on the western side of the major railway station in Vangani. The local people, with and without disability, were forced to cross the railway tracks at risk to their lives every day. Community members explained that despite an alarming increase in the number of casualties, the need to construct a FOB remained unnoticed by Central Railways authorities of Vangani jurisdiction. An advocacy campaign was then launched in October 2012 (Jaiswal, 2013) through the combined efforts of people with disabilities and their families, community members, and the relevant governmental and non-governmental organisations to bring the issue to the notice of Central Railways.

Objective

The aim of this paper is to describe the process and outcomes of this advocacy campaign within the CBR project and demonstrate that it facilitated community participation of people with and without disabilities to advocate for their rights. The paper discusses how people with disabilities recognised their strengths, mobilised resources and shared the responsibility to bring about the desired change in their lives.

METHOD

Participatory Action Research

Balcazar and Keys (1998) listed four essential elements of participatory action research concerning people with disabilities which guided the development of this research study and an advocacy campaign, namely:

1. Participants with disabilities identify the issues to be studied;
2. Participants with disabilities are directly involved in the research;
3. Involvement in participatory action research supports individuals with disabilities in identifying their strengths and resources, to be applied to the identified problem;
4. The goal of the research is to improve quality of life for individuals with disabilities.

As defined by Baum et al (2006), PAR differs from conventional research in three ways. Firstly, it focusses on research whose purpose is to enable action. Second, the action is achieved through a reflective cycle, whereby participants collect and analyse data, then determine what action should be followed. Third, for the reflective exercise within PAR, rapid assessment methods and rapid rural appraisal are considered as the primary associated methods, both of which aim to produce knowledge that combines professional and community perspectives (Baum et al, 2006).

Data Collection

Based on these principles, and with the help of the DPO, a series of participatory appraisal meetings were held in the community, during which the people discussed and expressed their needs and issues. Apart from this, a survey was carried out from June - September 2012 in Vangani, and information was collected from 272 people living with visual impairment. Informed consent was obtained from the participants. The community volunteers, both with and without disabilities, were trained to collect data through the survey questionnaire. The questionnaire gathered demographic information about the participants and had questions related to major challenges in their lives, specifically in relation to access to government schemes, healthcare facilities, educational facilities and livelihood opportunities in their community.

Data sources for this paper included quantitative data from the survey, results from the discussions during participatory appraisal in Vangani, and documents of the CBR project such as project reports, media coverage articles, minutes of the meeting, and letters to and from the Central Railways during the advocacy campaign between 2012 and 2015.

Data Analysis

Survey data was analysed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS-version 15.0) for descriptive statistics. Findings were shared with the community members in order to decide on a plan of action to address the challenges faced by people with visual impairment in Vangani. Based on the discussion, an advocacy campaign was launched in October 2012 to address the major issue identified during the situational analysis phase of the study.

The paper is further divided into three sections. The first section describes the key findings of the participatory appraisal and survey, and the major disabling barriers faced by the community; the second section highlights the process and outcomes of the advocacy campaign; and the third section concludes with reflections on the overall PAR process and the key lessons learnt.

RESULTS

Section 1

Demographic Profile of the Survey Participants

Altogether 272 people with visual impairment participated in the survey. Among them, 54% were males and 46% were females. The majority (68%) were young adults between 20 - 40 years of age, with the average age of 35.5 years. More than 75% were married. Around 58% had education up to high school or above. Around 44% were in the business of selling daily-use items like locks and keys, chains, toys, card holders, etc., in Mumbai local trains; 19% were unemployed, with no source of personal income, and 11% were involved in begging. Around 76% had received some form of vocational training through National Association of Blind (NAB) workshops that included computer training, training to become printers, typists, electricians, machine operators, and telephone operators, while 24% did not have any kind of training. The gross monthly family income for 76% of them was less than INR 5000 (approximately USD 75). More than three-fourths (76%) of them did not have disability certificates at the time of the survey (Table 1).

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of the Participants (N=272)

N= 272	n (%)		
Age		Education	
Less than 20 years	18 (6.8%)	Illiterate	41 (15.1%)
20 - 30 years	92 (33.6%)	Primary (V class)	24 (8.8%)
30 - 40 years	94 (34.6%)	Middle class (VIII class)	46 (16.9%)
40- 50 years	42 (15.4%)	High school (X class)	73 (26.8%)
50 years and above	26 (9.6%)	Intermediate (XII class)	68 (25.0%)
Average age (in years)	35.5	Graduation	20 (7.4%)
Sex		Marital status	
Male	147 (54%)	Married	206 (75.7%)
Females	125 (46%)	Unmarried	58 (21.3%)
		Other (divorced, widowed)	8 (2.9%)
Gross monthly income		Current occupation	
Nil	10 (3.8%)	Cutlery business	120 (44.2%)
1000-2000	24 (8.7%)	Job/service	21 (7.7%)
2001-3000	37 (13.5%)	Self-owned business	8 (2.9%)
3001-4000	29 (10.6%)	Unemployed	50 (18.3%)
4001-5000	107 (39.4%)	Student	16 (5.8%)
more than 5,000	65 (24%)	Housewife	16 (5.8%)
		Begging	31 (11.5%)
		Massage therapist	10 (3.8%)
Training		Availability of documents	
Computer training	18 (6.7%)	Disability Certificate	36 (13.2%)
Telephone operator	26 (9.6%)	PAN Card	29 (10.7%)
Massage therapist	3 (1%)	AADHAR Card	57 (21%)
Typing and printing	136 (50%)	Voter Card	44 (16.2%)
Electrician	8 (2.9%)	Ration Card	168 (62.1%)
Machine operator	16 (5.8%)		
No training	65 (24%)		

Key Findings of the Participatory Appraisal

Vangani, a small town situated in Ambarnath taluk of Thane district in Maharashtra, is an hour and a half away by local train from Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus (CST) in Mumbai. It has a population of 12,628 (Census of India, 2011).

Nearly 350 families with at least one family member with visual impairment have settled here, after migrating from different parts of India over the last 18 years. The community members explained that in the year 1998, a politician from a regional political party announced a scheme to provide free homes to people with visual impairment. The response was immediate. More than 50 families with a visually impaired family member migrated to Vangani from different parts of Maharashtra, in search of free homes. Unfortunately the politician, who was gaining recognition because of his unique social development schemes, died before his dream scheme materialised. People who migrated were in a difficult position as they had no support systems in the village. However, they developed their own means of earning by selling items for daily use in local trains passing through the Vangani station. Since then, their community (of people with visual impairments) had grown to include more than 350 families, as people with visual impairment from different parts of India were migrating to this village on a regular basis.

According to the discussions with the community, various push and pull factors were responsible for their migration to Vangani. The push factors were the compelling circumstances in their native villages, such as unemployment, poverty, lack of skill training institutes, attitude of family members and community members towards them and, above all, the societal pressure to generate income for the family after attaining 18 years of age. However, the pull factors which attracted them to this area were the existence of apex blind welfare organisations (such as National Association for the Blind or NAB, Mumbai - that has been working for the welfare and rehabilitation of people with visual impairment for the last 6 decades), opportunities for better employment, higher wages, better working conditions and better living amenities due to proximity to the cities of Mumbai or Pune. However, the migrants with visual impairment shared that they shifted to Vangani in the hope of getting jobs in major cities such as Mumbai or Pune where there is a 1% reservation quota under the affirmative disability welfare policies of the Central Government. However, on applying for Government jobs most of them were disqualified from the advertised posts. Consequently, they contacted other people with visual impairment who were already residing in Vangani and began to follow their methods of earning a living for basic survival. They either obtained admission in vocational training workshops organised by NAB, Mumbai, or started selling items of daily use in local trains. The culture in Vangani is such that older inhabitants help the newcomers to purchase sale items, navigate in the trains, and earn better income from sales. Once the younger

ones learn these key elements of business, they start their own business and set up their families.

Some of the major disabling barriers that were highlighted by the research participants of the native community (of 350 persons with visual impairment) were related to employment, safety of life and access to government schemes and benefits (Table 2).

Table 2: Main Concerns expressed by Persons with Visual Impairment in Vangani

Concerns	No.	%
Fear of loss of life and safety	176	64.7
Daily expenses more than income	56	20.6
Lack of secured source of income	18	6.6
Not able to access government schemes and benefits	11	4.0
No secure place to stay	11	4.0

Twenty percent expressed concern that their daily expenses exceeded their income, and around 7% expressed concern about lack of a reliable source of income. Shortage of suitable jobs for people with visual impairment in the government and corporate sectors was found to be one of the major disabling barriers in their lives. They revealed that applying for government jobs and clearing the interviews were the most difficult hurdles they faced, which eventually made them to opt for selling daily-use items in local trains or begging. Additionally, due to their status as migrants, most of them were staying in rented homes and did not have any formal address- proof, which in turn led to difficulties in getting the documents required to avail of government benefits. Lack of documents like ration card, disability certificate and voting cards excluded them from various social schemes and benefits like subsidised food grains through the public distribution system.

The most pressing problem that was highlighted by 65% of the participants was the concern for safety and fear about loss of life. As explained earlier, Vangani inhabitants with visual impairment were typically selling items in local and express railway trains, on railway station platforms and adjoining areas on the route of Mumbai local trains (from Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus to Pune and Nashik). The Mumbai Suburban Railway serves the Mumbai Metropolitan Region and is operated by the Indian Railways' Zonal Western Railways and Central Railways.

Around 7.24 million passengers commute daily using this Mumbai Suburban Railway system which is “the highest passenger density of any urban railway system in the world” (Gardas, Shimpi, & Mahajan, 2013, p.1). Trains running on these routes are commonly referred to as local trains. Gardas and colleagues (2013) reported that 3,700 people die annually (on an average) on this rail network and this number of deaths on railway tracks is believed to be the highest number of fatalities per year on any urban or suburban railway system. Majority of the “deaths are caused when passengers cross the tracks on foot, instead of using the foot-bridges provided for going from one platform to another, and are hit by passing trains or by falling from running trains” (Gardas et al, 2013, p.1.).

In Vangani, there was no foot over-bridge at the western side of the station where most of the people with visual impairment and their families stayed. As a result, these people had to risk their lives and their children’s lives daily when crossing the railway tracks to catch the trains and ply their business. This was expressed by one of the participants: “...when we leave our homes in the morning, we don’t know whether we will return in the evening or not...”

There had been some serious casualties in the community. Two participants (one male and one female) revealed that they lost their limbs in accidents – one while crossing the railway tracks and the other by falling on the tracks while moving from one coach to another, respectively. Few others shared that their lives were saved when others warned them of the approaching train while they were crossing the tracks.

One of the participants shared that, “...I was crossing the tracks one day and the train was coming simultaneously. People shouted to alert me and I moved back, and then I was saved...”

Another participant explained that, “We are extremely poor and struggle every day to meet our needs. Even though we are aware of the dangers involved in crossing tracks, we cannot avoid taking this risk.”

They shared that due to the huge crowd, people often pushed them out of the coaches reserved for people with visual impairment to get into the train. They also shared that they were often ridiculed as “*maalgadi*” (goods train). This term refers to the way in which people with visual impairment navigated by forming a human chain, placing a hand on the shoulder of the person in front and moving in a line, akin to a goods train.

Section 2

Advocacy Campaign

Despite the increasing number of casualties, the issue remained unnoticed by the Central Railways authorities. The project founder (AJ) of the CBR project in Vangani organised a team of community representatives and volunteers, along with a community organisation “Video Volunteers”, to spread the awareness and publicise the issue on a social platform. A short documentary titled “MAALGADI” was prepared to highlight the gravity of the situation (online video at <http://www.videovolunteers.org/indian-railways-blind-to-disability/>). Even though the term “maalgadi” was used in a derogatory way to refer people with visual impairment there were two reasons for choosing this title of the documentary for advocacy. First, the people with visual impairment wanted to showcase the insensitive attitude of the community before a large audience through the video-documentary. Second, this term acts as a metaphor and resonates with the advocacy issue related to the railways. The documentary highlighted the stories of people with visual impairment in Vangani in their own words. The video was uploaded on YouTube and the website of Video Volunteers (Lalzare, 2012).

Several other non-governmental and governmental organisations in the field of disability rehabilitation were approached to extend their support to the campaign. Organisations such as Disability Research Design Foundation or DRDF (non-profit organisation which addresses the issues of barrier-free access in India from the perspective of design and advocacy) and Change.org (an online petition platform website that provides a tool for people to advance social causes) joined up with Tata Institute of Social Sciences in Mumbai, Video Volunteers and the Vangani community (representatives with and without disability) to move the agenda forward.

A letter was sent in November 2012 to the General Manager of Central Railways, Mumbai, requesting for a meeting to discuss the issue. Despite repeated follow-ups, there was no response from the Central Railways office. As a result, the team decided to file an online petition (with the link of documentary “MAALGADI”) on Change.org to get an accessible foot over-bridge (FOB) at Vangani. Nearly 6,000 people signed the online petition in less than 10 days. Overwhelming response to the petition was brought to the attention of the Additional General Manager (AGM) of Central Railways, who then agreed for a meeting. At this meeting in December 2012, the advocacy team consisting of the CBR project founder (AJ), a

community correspondent from Video Volunteers, the founder of DRDF, and a spokesperson with visual impairment from Vangani showed the documentary to the railway officials, demonstrating that the station does not have a FOB, is not accessible, and has led to several casualties for people with visual impairment (Jaiswal, 2012). The team stressed the need for an accessible FOB. In addition, a plea was made for strict action against the entry of people without disability in coaches reserved for people with disability (Meeting minutes, 12 December 2012). In response to this meeting, Central Railways of Mumbai sent a letter (Official letter no. G.190/PG/01/2013/Misc-10, 17 January 2013) to the team, stating that they would propose construction of a FOB at Vangani in the forthcoming Railway Budget of 2013. They also promised to issue a helpline number to file complaints against persons who enter the coach reserved for people with disabilities.

As the construction of a FOB at Vangani involved a sum of approximately 15 million INR, it was beyond the financial capacity of Central Railways authorities at Mumbai to sanction it in the forthcoming Budget. Thus, in January 2013, another online petition was filed by the advocacy team for the Ministry of Railways to include the funding for a FOB in the 2013 Budget of Central Railways of Mumbai. Along with this petition, minutes of the meeting held on 12 December 2012, letters to and from the Central Railways and a few photographs as evidence were faxed and e-mailed to the Railway Minister and the Chairman of Indian Railways before the release of the Budget on 26 February 2013. Subsequently in March 2013, letters were sent from the Tata Institute of Social Sciences to the Department of Social Affairs, Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment asking for their support, and to the Ministry of Railways emphasizing the pressing need for a FOB at Vangani (personal communication, 1 March 2013). These efforts were all unsuccessful. The Railways Ministry did not include the construction of a bridge at Vangani station in the 2013 Budget.

The team then decided to involve the media. A-media advocacy campaign was launched whereby several local and national media partners (online and print newspapers and e-magazines) provided coverage to the issue (Pawar, 2013; Rajadhyaksha, 2013; Loksatta, 2013; Mid-Day, 2013). An offline signature campaign that was started at the same time gathered over 500 signatures from the people of Vangani as well as other areas of Mumbai, to support the cause and urge necessary action.

Taking note of the overwhelming response and support that the campaign received, in March 2013 the AGM invited representatives of Vangani for another

meeting to rethink on the issue. Apart from the AGM, the meeting was attended by the Chief Engineer, Deputy Chief Engineer and Chief Commissioner Security from the Central Railways as well as 7 spokespersons from Vangani advocacy project (4 community leaders of Vangani, CBR project founder (AJ), the founder of DRDF, and a community correspondent from Video Volunteers). As recorded in the minutes of the meeting (Jaiswal,2013), the officials from the Central Railways divulged that the Railways Ministry did not sanction the construction of a bridge at Vangani station in the 2013 Budget due to the paucity of funds. However, they indicated that funds for the construction of this bridge would be allocated through the state Budget of Central Railways. Specific guidelines were also discussed for making the FOB “disabled friendly”, such as height of the hand-rails, thickness of the grip-bars, use of tactile blocks and installing proper audio systems. Recommendations for the barrier-free, accessible FOB design were provided by the DRDF to the Chief Engineer of Central Railways.

The subsequent follow-up meetings with the officials of Central Railways and the parallel media advocacy campaign finally had the desired result. In April 2013, news about the sanction of INR 15 million (from the Budget of Central Railways of Mumbai) for the construction of a FOB at Vangani was reported and confirmed in the media (Dilnaz, 2013). Two letters from the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, and Ministry of Railways were received in December 2013 stating that the proposal for the construction of FOB had been approved (official letter no. 347/1101/2013/R8130, 23 December 2013; official letter no.2013/LM(PA)/02/449, 29 October 2013). The construction of the bridge was started in late 2014 and recently, got completed in December 2016 and now it is open for public use. However, it required subsequent follow-up on the timely construction of the bridge by the local community leaders (with and without disabilities) of Vangani.

Section 3

Key Reflections and Lessons Learnt

This paper was based on the PAR within a Community-based Rehabilitation project, to demonstrate how PAR facilitated community participation to advocate for the rights of people with visual impairment. An advocacy campaign, led by the local people with and without disabilities, resulted in the construction of an accessible foot over-bridge (FOB) at Vangani railway station. This paper presented a case where the study sample ceased to be objects of research and became partners

in the whole research process: including data collection, analysis and deciding what action should happen as a result of the research findings (Baum et al, 2006). The project had its roots in the participatory research approaches that allowed people with disability to present the realities of their situation to those in power, to influence policies and effect change. The DPO formed within the CBR project played the role envisioned for it, as 'community developers' in CBR. Facilitated by the CBR project founder (AJ), the DPO held a series of consultations and meetings in the village. These meetings became a platform where people came together, realised the need to take collective action and identified the channels to pursue their goals.

The project also demonstrated the effectiveness of community leadership, participatory action and community-driven advocacy initiatives within the context of CBR. This is evidenced by the fact that when, after three years the CBR project founder moved on, the follow-up on the action of Central Railways for construction of the bridge was still being carried out by the local people (Rabarison, 2014; Mehta, 2015). The construction was half-way through, and hence, required a lot of push from time to time to expedite its timely completion.

As mentioned by Thomas (2011), CBR is a tool to achieve the goal of community-based inclusive development by adopting a two-pronged approach: working with people with disabilities to build their capacity to become self-advocates, and working with community to overcome the barriers that exclude persons with disabilities. PAR also requires researchers to work in close partnership with civil society, policy-makers and political leaders. Within this project too, the researchers realised that the advocacy campaign would not have been successful but for support from the stakeholders in the community. The identification of community power structure for community mobilisation was an important feature of this initiative, where people in positions of power who had influence in the community, e.g., local government leaders, leaders of community groups and organisations (self-help groups, Disabled People's organisations) were identified. Their involvement gave representation and voice to the unheard stories of people with visual impairment in Vangani.

"Community participation" in CBR is defined as "the organisation of activities by groups of persons who have disabilities (or their family members/friends), in conjunction with others who do not, to increase their ability to influence social conditions, and in doing so to improve their disability situations" (Boyce and Lysack, 2000). The Vangani project not only involved people with disabilities

but also people without disabilities, and gained support from both groups in the community as the absence of a foot over-bridge affected them all. This participatory approach gave power to the campaign and built community participation and ownership.

Boyce and Lysack (2000) further add that the “self-help and advocacy” type of participation is small-scale in design, and has a wider impact due to transformational processes and to public advocacy. The case of Vangani also demonstrates a bottom-up approach where the local people identified their issues, suggested the approach to be adopted, and intervened at every level to bring the transformational change along with other community stakeholders and supporters without disability. The findings of this study concur with the findings of a study evaluating the impact of two CBR projects in India (Deepak et al, 2014) which concluded that CBR programmes can promote collective action by people with disabilities to overcome barriers faced by them.

Another major component that proved significant to the campaign was the time that was invested to engage the community and develop trust, engage in team-building activities, clarify roles and expectations, and develop research tools to better assess community priorities. As described by Flicker and colleagues (2007), both ‘action research’ and ‘participatory’ traditions place an emphasis on meaningfully involving stakeholders in applied social research that is concerned with problem-solving and change. The project adopted an approach that explicitly articulated the community concern for democratic values and included stakeholders in effecting incremental change. Focus of the research was to generate actions aimed at social change (Balcazar et al, 2006).

Self-advocacy and effective communication are an important part of the empowerment process for people with disabilities (WHO-CBR guidelines, 2010). The tools that were used for advocacy proved instrumental in facilitating the communication of important messages and for voices being heard by the larger community. The online petition brought the issue onto a wider platform and immediately caught the attention of thousands in the national and international audience. The documentary “MAALGADI” was later submitted to the WE-CARE (an NGO initiative with the aim of creating awareness on disability issues through the medium of films. It won the best documentary prize in a special category for its impact.

Implications

This case sets an example for other researchers and professionals in the field of disability to use documentaries, online petitions, online and print media, and other contemporary social platform tools to showcase the gravity of issues for advocacy and bring about desired change.

Although the advocacy campaign in the study was geographically limited to rural pockets of Maharashtra state in India, the learning experiences bring out some of the elements crucial for the success of any advocacy interventions within CBR programmes for the rights of people with disabilities across the world. The steps in the advocacy campaign process will be helpful for CBR professionals in planning advocacy initiatives within PAR in CBR projects.

CONCLUSION

This study illustrates the case of a CBR project that used PAR as a tool for community participation and overcome the barriers to participation and inclusion. The interplay of the factors - migration, disability and poverty - significantly affected the lives of people with visual impairment in Vangani and disempowered them in various ways on a daily basis. Inclusion and participation seemed to be utopian goals for them. However, the CBR programme used the PAR approach and self-advocacy as tools to facilitate collective action by persons with and without disabilities to resolve issues that affected them.

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