

LOCATION

Sri Lanka and Uganda

PARTNER

INSTITUTE OF CHILD HEALTH,
UK

Through its innovative research and high-quality training programmes, the Institute of Child Health has created a world-class centre for the study and treatment of childhood disease. Together with Great Ormond Street Hospital in London, it has made a major contribution to the health and well being of children and their families worldwide.

SUMMARY

The project aims to improve the technology for identifying impairments among children, ensuring they are detected as early as possible so that appropriate follow-up interventions can be taken.

PERIOD OF FUNDING

June 2001 to March 2003

GRANT

£69,490

CONTACT

Karen Edwards on
K.Edwards@ich.ucl.ac.uk
Tel: +44 (0)20 7905 2674

Field-testing the Access Portfolio

BACKGROUND

In many developing countries, children with moderate or mild impairments are not identified until they reach school age. This delay in identifying disabled children means that intervention has less impact because it happens at a later stage in a child's development. This in turn means that disabled children participate less in their communities.

The portfolio consists of a package for screening and simple early intervention advice for parents and carers, which can be easily administered by primary healthcare staff.

THE PROJECT

The **Access Portfolio** has been developed by the **World Health Organization (WHO), Disability and Rehabilitation (DAR),** and the **Centre for International Child Health (CICH) UK.** It aims to improve early identification of, and appropriate advice for, disabled children.

The portfolio consists of a package for screening and simple early intervention advice for parents and carers, which can be easily administered by primary healthcare staff. It is in three sections:



Karen Edwards

1. Tools that enable the user to describe the community they work in, to determine which services, if any, already exist, and who supplies them. This helps with the selection of suitable identification, advice and intervention materials.

2. Questions and assessment materials appropriate for the community situation, which help identify disabled children.

3. Advice materials for parents and carers of disabled children.

The field-testing of the Access Portfolio investigates whether primary healthcare staff can use the portfolio, and if the use of the portfolio improves referrals where available, or enables primary healthcare staff to give appropriate advice.

Field-testing has been carried out in **Sri Lanka**, in collaboration with the **University of Kelaniya**, and in **Uganda**, in collaboration with the **Ministry of Health**. Each trial project lasted for six months, during which time 581 children were seen in Sri Lanka and 769 in Uganda. All children seen were causing concern to their parents.

The Access Portfolio is flexible, so it can be adapted to reflect local practice.

CICH staff have worked together with local project co-ordinators to initiate the field tests. A training curriculum was prepared to help workers become familiar with basic disability issues and confident in the use of the portfolio. Twelve public health midwives were trained in Sri Lanka and 11 nurses in Uganda. Two local co-ordinators in each country were trained to monitor field activities, provide advice and motivation to the field workers, and deal with any problems. In addition, local disability specialists were appointed to check 10% of all children assessed as part of the project to provide an independent assessment of the field workers' evaluations.

The Access Portfolio is flexible, so it can be adapted to reflect local practice. In Sri Lanka, the field workers advertise that they have been trained to identify children with impairments, and that parents who are concerned about their child should come to the local clinic for assessment. These children are seen during the normal course of work. In Uganda, each field worker holds special clinics on one day each month, which are advertised in the community.

If a child is found to have an impairment then the parent or carer is given guidance and written advice sheets in their local language. If appropriate the child is referred to specialised services.

Results of the project will look at two key issues: firstly the effectiveness of the Access Portfolio in identifying disabled children, and secondly the ease, acceptability and appropriateness of the materials for field workers, parents and service managers. Early findings reveal that in Sri Lanka, nearly 10% of the children assessed were found to have an impairment, and in Uganda, this figure rose to just over 41% (because many children known to have impairments, but who had never received support, were brought to the project for

help). Recommendations for any alterations to the Access Portfolio will be made to WHO, who will then make the portfolio available worldwide.

LESSONS LEARNED

- The need to improve early identification of children with impairments and give advice at an early age has been reinforced by the work.
- Feedback from stakeholders indicates that both the screening tools and the advice materials were appropriate and easy to use.
- Field workers at both sites felt they had developed more positive attitudes towards disabled people. The project had increased their overall confidence in their work and gained them respect from other colleagues and the community.
- Field workers suggested further training and a reorganisation of the presentation of materials in the portfolio to increase user-friendliness.
- There is a need for the Access Portfolio materials in more local languages.
- A need for a range of advice materials for a wider age group was identified, especially in Uganda.

This project will be completed by the end of March 2003.

Feedback from stakeholders indicates that both the screening tools and the advice materials were easy to use, and appropriate.