

7. Subject: Country Report

To : JICA through Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Tanzania  
From : Mrs JOYSE A. MALLYA

#### MENTAL RETARDATION

Mental Retardation is a condition that afflicts and disables more persons than any other handicap in all parts of the world. "At least one person in ten in any country is born with, or acquires, a serious physical, sensory or mental impairment which often develops into a disability. There are between 450 and 500 million disabled in the world today - blind, deaf, physically, handicapped, mentally sick or retarded - and 150 million of them are children. About 80% of these people live in the poorer countries of Africa, Asia and Latin America without access to adequate rehabilitation services."

This statement from UNESCO publication during the 1981 International Year of the Disabled Persons (IYDP) gives some facts. What it cannot convey is the loneliness, isolation, distress and constant frustration that the condition of being disabled entails.

#### AROUND TANZANIA

Among the causes of mental retardation in Tanzania are:-

- (i) difficulty in delivery
- (ii) low birthweight
- (iii) febrile convulsions
- (iv) encephalitis
- (v) meningitis
- (vi) cerebral malaria and
- (vii) the overall affects of poverty coupled with malnutrition and infections.

The International year of the Disabled helped to bring to the national level an acute and shocking awareness of the state of the mentally retarded. Active efforts were embarked upon to establish habilitative services.

A National Mental Health Program Evaluation Team Surveyed the incidence of severe Mental Retardation in Morogoro and Kilimanjaro regions. The team found:-

- (a) Severe MR less than 0.1%
- (b) Epilepsy 0.5%
- (c) Schizophrenia 0.2%

A Mission hospital in Tabora that receives patients from three regions Kigoma, Tabora, Mwanza, reported one case of severe mental retardation. The low figure could be due to the fact that most parents of severely retarded children tend to keep them hidden at home. Although there are no countrywide figures available the incidence of mild and moderately retarded is more prevalent. Most of these attend the regular school and lag behind academically.

#### WHAT IS BEING DONE

The interest and concern over the welfare of the mentally retarded has greatly accelerated in the last five years. The Tanzania Society for Cerebral Palsy and Mental Retardation was formed in 1981 with the purpose of initiating establishing, promoting and coordinating programmes for educating and training the Mentally Retarded and Cerebral Palsied. It now runs a day school for children staffed by an occupational and physical therapist and a nurse.

The Mtoni school run by the Lutheran Church caters for moderately retarded. These children live in the school Monday through Friday and spend weekends at home.

Retarded adults are taught social skills and personal care at Mirembe in Dodoma. They also receive occupational and vocational training at the center and at Yombo in Dar es Salaam. There are other voluntary agencies supplying special education services.

#### MY PERSONAL EXPERIENCE AND OBSERVATIONS

Communication disorders arising from different kinds of mental retardation far outnumber disorders caused by any other single problem. My training and work as a speech therapist involves working with children of various degrees of mental retardation and other conditions such as autistic children, specific learning disabilities, attention deficit disorder and emotionally disturbed children. Every week I attend about twenty to thirty children with these problems.

I have been working in collaboration with clinical psychologists, paediatricians, psychiatrists and otolaryngologists. My work has involved assessment and testing for mental ability, speech competence, behaviour and social development. In addition I have been involved in speech therapy, psychotherapy, family counselling, and educational guidance. My experience in this work started in 1975 in Grand Rapids, Michigan where I did my training and my first employment.

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At Muhimbili I Have found it rewarding working with mentally handicapped children. Success has been in noting improvement in behaviour and ability. I have found the parents of these children eager for help and willing to take an active role in remedial measures. There is a need to educate the community as a whole to avail themselves for this service.

Parents must be helped to overcome superstitious beliefs. More active participation by non governmental Organizations must be encouraged and community environment eg. Buildings, facilities etc be remodelled so that they can be used by physically handicapped individuals.

There is also a great need to train therapists in this area to be able to cope with rising demands. Towards this end I need to equip myself with more knowledge and skill in this subject.

