

Partnership Services with Local Government: A Successful Model for Delivering Sustained Physical Rehabilitation



Singh Jitendra Kumar, K.C. Anup & Sapkota Dip Narayan (Handicap International-Nepal), Magar Beni Bahadur Aale (Prerana), USAID's Physical Rehabilitation Activity (PRA)

Context

According to the National Population and Housing Census (NPHC) 2021, 2.2 % of population in Nepal are living with some form of disability, of which 37.1% have physical disability. Since, identification of disability is not integrated into routine health services, substantial number of persons with disabilities live without required rehabilitation services. Rehabilitation is an important part of universal health coverage and is a key strategy for achieving Sustainable Development Goal 3 – "Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages".

The NPHC 2021 findings suggests, within Madhesh Province, 37.5% of the total population of 91,400 people with disabilities accounts to physical disabilities. With funding support from USAID's PRA, Handicap International Foundation (HI) collaborated with Prerana: a non-governmental organization registered and located in Lalitpur district of the Kathmandu valley, to improve the quality and accessibility of physical rehabilitation services to people residing in Madhesh Province. Prerana is one of the five sub-partners of the USAID's PRA which has been providing physical rehabilitation services since 2005 in Madhesh province through its Physical Rehabilitation Service (PRC) located previously in Malangawa and currently shifted to Lalbandi, Sarlahi in 2021. Malangawa is the southern part of Sarlahi district adjoining with India in south and is located in approximately 200 kilometers south of Kathmandu, the capital city of Nepal.

The figure 1 shows the services coverage data of Madhesh Province that was delivered through Prerana-Physical Rehabilitation Center. The analysis still suggests that there are gaps in fulfilling equitable services for all people in need of physical rehabilitation services. Hence, Prerana developed strategic plan through system thinking approach in order to reach out to all people in need of physical rehabilitation services.

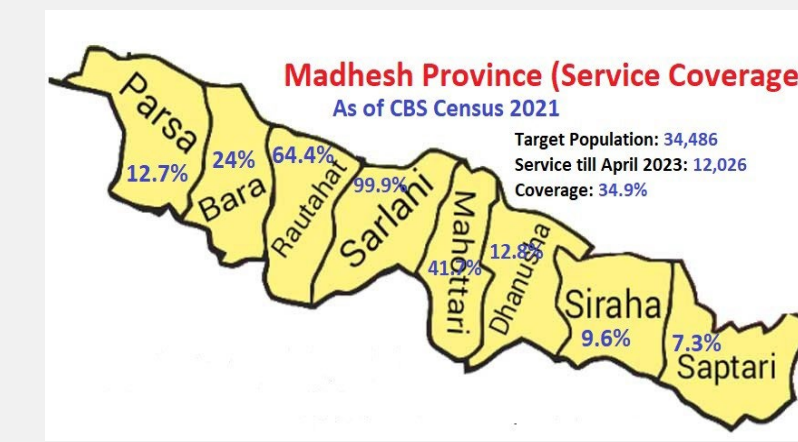


Fig 1: Physical Rehabilitation Service coverage data

Activity Description

USAID's Physical Rehabilitation Activity (PRA) adopts health systems strengthening approaches to establish an integrated rehabilitation services system in Nepal. Its aim is to ensure access to quality rehabilitation services through a public-private partnership model to improve the mobility and functional independence of people in need of rehabilitation services including persons with disabilities. In partnership with the Government of Nepal (GON), PRA supports five private Physical Rehabilitation Centers (PRCs), National Federation of Disabled Nepal (NFDN) and 19 physiotherapy units in government hospitals. USAID's PRA has also been supporting all three tiers of government: federal, provincial and local in formulating and implementing rehabilitation policies, integrating physical rehabilitation services into existing public health system, integrating rehabilitation services into the national health management information system (HMIS) for routine monitoring, promoting local government's stewardship to rehabilitation services, and improving the access to and quality of rehabilitation services particularly to all population including the persons with disabilities.

Through the continued partnerships and funding support from USAID, Prerana has been delivering the physical rehabilitation services for more than a decade. The need for rehabilitation has been growing day by day and this has also increased the demand for equitable rehabilitation services provision. Physical Rehabilitation services provision in Nepal is being delivered since more than two decades and most of the services are delivered through private physical rehabilitation centers. The ownership and commitment from government authorities has significantly improved as well which has supported immensely in strengthening the rehabilitation services through public private partnership approach.

Throughout this journey, Prerana identified that its service delivery point (center based services) was inaccessible and underutilized by service users from the surrounding districts due to the unavailability of adequate means of transportation to reach Malangawa. To address the feedbacks received from the community and stakeholders on improving access to the PRC, Prerana initiated dialogue and continued advocacy with Lalbandi Municipality, that is accessible to more districts in Madhesh Province. Since the period of USAID's Strengthening Rehabilitation in District Environments (STRIDE) project in 2018, Prerana identified Lalbandi Municipality as a potential area for rendering physical rehabilitation services to people of Madhesh province. Prerana collaborated and engaged with local civil society organizations, primary healthcare centers, services users and municipal bodies (elected representatives and government staffs) for an objective to sensitize them on the importance of rehabilitation services. There were outreach activities, sensitization events conducted in collaboration with local municipality in order to build capacity and ownership of those authorities.



Fig 2: Disabled Friendly and Accessible Prerana Physical Rehabilitation Center in ward office of Lalbandi Municipality. Photo: Prerana

In 2021, in order to meet the challenges faced by Prerana and fulfill the growing needs of rehabilitation services, the executive board of Lalbandi municipality committed and approved the proposal to provide space free of cost in its ward office for delivery of physical rehabilitation services. On September 2021, Prerana eventually shifted the PRC from Malangawa to Lalbandi Municipality, a key step to improve access to rehabilitation services to wider community. The PRC aims at improving the quality of life and functionality of persons with physical disabilities through various therapeutic interventions by providing a wide range of services, including physiotherapy, prosthetic and orthotic services. USAID's PRA provided equipment support, additionally supported PRC with capacity development interventions, practicing Rehabilitation Management System (RMS) tool, development of PRC's business plan, regular monitoring and onsite coaching to PRC.

Activity Impact

Resource Optimization

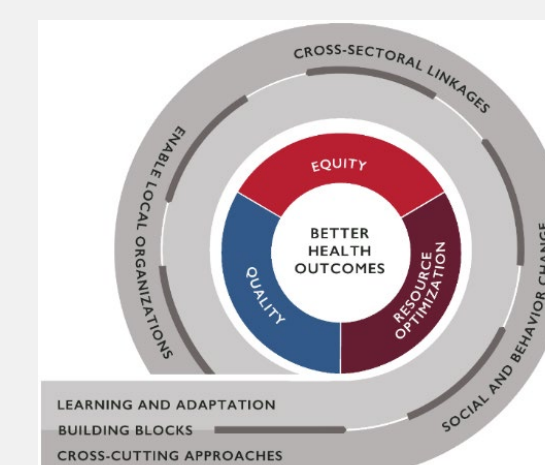
- Signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) between Prerana and Lalbandi Municipality for providing Prerana a space (land) of 3,700 Square feet to provide rehabilitation services to individuals in need. The rental value of the space is approximately USD \$ 4,540.00 per year but was provided free of cost to Prerana.
- USD \$ 5317.5 supported to Prerana for renovation expenses to set up the Physical Rehabilitation services in its ward office premise building
- In addition to the land, Lalbandi municipality has been providing regular funding support to Prerana to run the PRC since Fiscal year 2020-2021

Quality

- Prerana PRC periodically conducts exit interview with the clients to collect feedback on the services they received. Most of the exit clients interviewed also expressed their satisfaction. 30 clients interviewed during discharge from rehabilitation cycle showed satisfaction with the services delivered.
- Prerana has a pool of two physiotherapists and two Prosthetist and Orthotist to provide physical rehabilitation services. USAID's PRA supports skills enhancements of the rehabilitation professionals through Continuous Professional Development (CPD) activities.
- The PRC delivers high-quality services to both new and follow-up clients. Since September 2021, PRC has provided physical rehabilitation services to more than 300 clients of Lalbandi Municipality, providing them with a total of 1,928 therapeutic sessions and 55 assistive devices to 37 assistive device users.

Equity

- Prerana PRC has been providing rehabilitation services to all people of all age, gender, ethnicity, religion and economic status
- Prerana provides physiotherapy services free of cost to people living in Lalbandi municipality. However, clients from other municipalities need to pay a minimum fee for rehabilitation services, the amount of fee is decided based on the socio-economic status of the clients. Prerana also collaborates with other municipalities to ensure subsidy for clients services cost to reduce out of pocket expenses
- A salient feature of PRC is the provision of telerehabilitation service, which is offered free of cost to reduce out of pocket expenditure of the clients from distance location. 1,500 people were benefited through telerehabilitation services during COVID-19 pandemic (June 2020-April 2021) and 200 service users during post-covid interventions (Sep 2021-May 2023)
- PRC conducts outreach activities routinely to improve the access to hard-to-reach population, especially to those residing in geographically distanced locations and have the difficulty in accessing the services from PRC.



Evidence

- Client satisfaction: A quote from services user, "The rehabilitation center made me capable to walk on my own. Now, I am mentally very strong as well as financially independent. I can stay alone too. A lot of changes had taken place. I am also engaged in community work. Before visiting PRC, I lacked confidence, but I overcome it and now I have come a long way." - 24 years old, Female having physical disability"
- On average, 15 to 25 clients per day receive physiotherapy services from the extended PRC at Lalbandi municipality.
- Regular funding from Lalbandi Municipality for physical rehabilitation services (detail in Figure 4)



Fig 3: The client with Cerebral Palsy receiving Physiotherapy and Assistive Devices services. Photo: Prerana

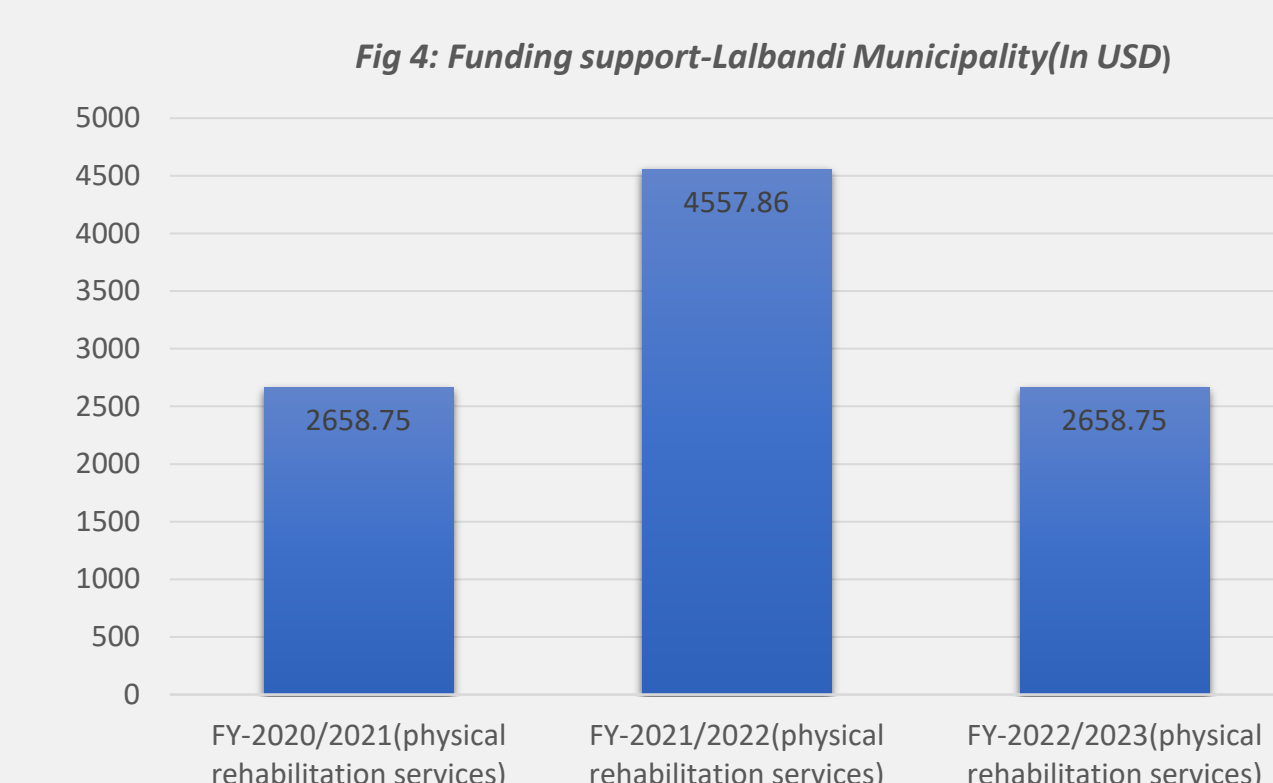


Fig 4: Funding support-Lalbandi Municipality (In USD)

Facilitators

- Commitment and ownership from local government for the provision of rehabilitation services. Federal, provincial and local level resource allocation for rehabilitation services.
- Supportive local civil society organizations and stakeholders such as people with disabilities, their families, community leaders, healthcare professionals, local organizations and government entities helped in the delivery of rehabilitation services.
- Responsive authorities like ward offices, hospitals have played supportive roles in increasing client referrals.
- Regular technical support from USAID's PRA to local government and PRC on sensitization and advocacy for integration of rehabilitation services at local level.
- USAID's PRA support to set up of services for Physiotherapy and Prosthetics and Orthotics services at Lalbandi municipality.

Challenges

- Continuity of funding support for assistive devices and rehabilitation services is still a question. The allocated funds from Lalbandi municipality has been utilized to provide free physiotherapy services to its population but the resources for free assistive devices services is still limited. Prerana has been continuing its efforts to advocate for more resources allocation for meeting the overall rehabilitation needs of the municipality.
- Limited human resource capacity at local level to manage health services is a challenge. This is often worsened by the frequent staff turnover.
- Resource constraints with local governments and their competing priorities leading to challenges on resource allocation for rehabilitation services
- Lack of rehabilitation related policies and plans at the local level.

Lessons Learned

- Repeated consultations and evidence-based advocacy with local government authorities are effective strategies to secure commitment for resources and fostering ownership of rehabilitation services. In addition, regular advocacy and lobbying with provincial and federal governments helps creating a conducive environment for increased resources mobilization as well.
- There are evidences that organizing exposure visits to PRCs for policymakers and decision makers working in provincial and local government is highly effective approach to influence them in funding related decision making for provision of rehabilitation services.
- Regular monitoring and follow-up of these partnerships from concerned authorities like Lalbandi municipality, Prerana, USAID PRA contribute to long-term partnership approach contributing to sustainability of rehabilitation services.
- Involving a wider and meaningful stakeholders such as people with disabilities, their families, community leaders, healthcare professionals, local organizations and government entities, a more comprehensive and inclusive perspective can be obtained that ensures to address the specific needs of and challenges faced by people with disabilities.

In conclusion, the establishment and successful operation of the Prerana Physical Rehabilitation Center in Lalbandi municipality, Madhesh province of Nepal is a good example of a successful public-private partnership model. The partnership between local government and Prerana is making significant contribution to improved access, quality, and equity in physical rehabilitation services resulting to positive health outcomes of the people in need. Collaborative and coordinated efforts by USAID's PRA, HI and Prerana has been instrumental in producing these results. The approach serves as an inspirational and exemplary model for others that could be replicated and scaled up in other local levels as well.



Fig 5: Prosthetist and Orthotist from Prerana fitting Wheelchair during outreach camp Photo: Prerana