

PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS ARE ESSENTIAL IN HELPING LANDMINE SURVIVORS

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The author, a landmine survivor, highlights the vital role that public-private partnerships play in landmine survivor assistance. While the U.S. government's survivors assistance efforts differ from country to country and covers a variety of programs, I believe that prosthetics, amputee education, and social reintegration are three of the most important aspects the U.S. government considers in helping survivors, says Kenneth R. Rutherford.

On December 16, 1993, a landmine accident changed my life forever. Because I had excellent medical and rehabilitation support, I learned how to live as a double amputee and pursue my dream of becoming a teacher. I am one of the lucky landmine survivors, many of whom receive inadequate assistance or die.

While reported civilian casualties from landmines are down from an estimated 26,000 annually as recently as the late 1990s to less than half that number — about 11,700 — in 2002,¹ there are more than 300,000 landmine survivors worldwide. It is estimated that it will cost more than \$3 billion over the next 10 years to rehabilitate these survivors.²

To address this need, the U.S. Department of State is partnering with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) on a range of humanitarian mine action initiatives — to include survivor assistance activities. This article highlights the vital role that public-private partnerships play in landmine survivor assistance programming. While the U.S. government's survivors assistance aid differs from country to country and covers a variety of programs, I believe that prosthetics, amputee education, and social reintegration are three of the most important aspects the U.S. government considers in helping survivors.

Survivor assistance is comprehensive and not restricted to the provision of medical treatment for

initial traumatic injuries sustained from landmine explosions and the provision of prosthetics.³ It also includes ongoing treatment to aid in the physical, mental, and emotional rehabilitation of survivors and their families. Landmine survivors themselves have defined survivor assistance as “emergency and medical care; access to prosthetics, wheelchairs and other assistive devices; social and economical reintegration; psychological and peer support; accident prevention programs; and legal and advisory services.”⁴ These activities can take the form of continued rehabilitative care, psychological and social counseling, vocational training, broader public advocacy for disability rights, and judicial reform aimed at removing barriers to persons with disabilities in an effort to achieve integration into society.

The primary source of U.S. government support for survivor assistance programming is the U.S. Agency for International Development/Patrick J. Leahy War Victims Fund (USAID-LWVF). It provides financial and technical assistance to civilian victims of war, including those with landmine injuries, in developing countries. To date, the LWVF has given more than \$112 million in more than 28 countries. During the past 10 years, the fund has financed prosthetic services and follow-up patient monitoring.

One of the LWVF's key implementing partners is the Vietnam Veterans of America Foundation (VVAFA), an NGO based in Washington, D.C. In 1992, the VVAFA

established the Kien Khleang Physical Rehabilitation Center, a treatment facility and fully equipped workshop that produces more than 140 prostheses and orthoses and 30 wheelchairs each month, in Cambodia. Especially noteworthy is that many of its employees are former patients of the Center. The Center currently treats more than 240 patients each month and has helped more than 10,000 Cambodians to date, 70 percent of whom are landmine survivors. It is the largest rehabilitation center in Cambodia and continues to receive USAID-LWVF support.

The LWVF also helps to improve survivors' lives by encouraging and increasing their accessibility to education, training, and employment opportunities. In this regard, the LWVF partnered with the Landmine Survivors Network (LSN), an NGO founded by landmine survivors to facilitate effective long-term rehabilitation and to enable persons with limb loss to resume active, productive lives. To help survivors, LSN developed a series of limb-loss educational pamphlets with input from amputees and rehabilitation professionals from seven countries and funded by the U.S. government through the LWVF.

These pamphlets are important to an amputee's recovery. Once an individual has lost a limb to an antipersonnel mine or other form of exploding ordnance, early medical, rehabilitative, and prosthetic care is vital.

Although the majority of the world's amputees live in mine-affected countries, anyone who has experienced limb loss will find these pamphlets useful. The series comprises 10 pamphlets translated into several languages: Amharic, Arabic, Bosnian, Portuguese, Spanish, and Tigrigna. The series is aimed primarily at amputees and covers a broad range of issues, from what to expect immediately after the surgery to returning to work. The pamphlets also discuss different amputee related issues:

- **Amputation Surgery:** Why people have amputations, what to expect, do's and don'ts during recovery.
- **Pain After Amputation:** Types of pain, their causes, and ways to alleviate them.

- **Wrapping Your Residual Limb:** Why and how to wrap the residual limb (the portion of the limb that remains after injury and surgery).
- **Infection Prevention:** How to prevent, recognize, and treat infections.
- **Emotions After Limb Loss:** Positive ways to deal with emotions people experience with limb loss.
- **Prosthetics:** Frequently asked questions and advice about prosthetics from others who have lost limbs.
- **Physical Rehabilitation:** Tips to help survivors recover from surgery, prepare for prosthesis, and learn to walk again.
- **Getting Back to Work:** Stories from people who returned to work after amputation.
- **Rights and Responsibilities:** What they are, and why you should understand them.
- **Information for Families:** What family members and friends should know to understand and help the amputee.

Another non-profit organization that works with the State Department to support humanitarian mine action is Freedom Fields USA, a group helping people in mine infested countries "return to a path of economic redevelopment and hope." Working with the Department of State's Office of Weapons Removal and Abatement, Freedom Fields USA has raised more than \$140,000 to alleviate the effects of landmines in the Kamrieng District in Cambodia. In addition to landmine clearance, the poorest communities within the Kamrieng District will benefit from Freedom Fields USA's restoration of its schools, roads, and water supply.

Speaking at a November 15, 2003, Freedom Fields USA benefit event entitled "Evening in Cambodia: A Benefit for Humanitarian Mine Action," Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage highlighted the vital role that can be played by civil society working in partnership with the Department of State to reinforce official mine action efforts, including those devoted to rehabilitating landmine survivors.

Finally, it is hard to be empowered and involved if you can't go anywhere, communicate, or participate. To accomplish these goals, the U.S. government, through the LWVF fund, supports a program of

assistance in Vietnam that began with a focus on barrier-free accessibility. This has resulted in passage of a comprehensive national disabilities law, which is based on the principles of the Americans with Disabilities Act. Signed into law on July 26 1990, the Americans with Disabilities Act is intended to make American Society more accessible to people with disabilities.

In Vietnam, a non-governmental organization, Vietnam Assistance for the Handicapped (VNAH), in close coordination with the Vietnamese government and funded by the U.S. Department of Labor, works to increase employment opportunities for people with disabilities, many of whom are landmine survivors. This program provides support to several Vietnamese government entities to promote creation of labor law and policy on employment opportunities for persons with disabilities.

The LWVF's programs, coupled with the U.S. government's public-private partnership initiative to support mine action, are vital to helping hundreds of thousands of landmine survivors recover. This assistance enables survivors to receive some of the benefits that I was so fortunate to have as a citizen of a wealthy, technologically advanced country.

The private organizations cited here are but a few of many humanitarian NGOs that are working with the U.S. government to provide similar rehabilitation and other assistance to landmine survivors around the world. To so many of these survivors, having one's legs and arms are critical to economic viability. They are the farmers, herders, traders, merchants, and others who, fitted with artificial limbs,

are contributing in ways small and large to the prosperity of their families, their communities, and their countries.

While serving as an NGO humanitarian aid officer on a micro-credit project funded by the U.S. government, I distributed loans to Somalis trying to recover from years of war and drought. I made it a point to tell loan recipients that this was a gift from the people of the United States of America. In the future, I would also like to say that similar U.S. government public-private partnerships were essential in helping many thousands affected by landmines successfully recover from their injuries and pursue dreams once more. ©

The opinions expressed in this article do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the U.S. Government.

¹ "Clear a Path to a Safer World: Addressing the Tragedy of Landmines," Lincoln P. Bloomfield, Jr., Assistant Secretary for Political-Military Affairs and Special Representative for Mine Action, Remarks to Smith College, Polus Center, Northampton, Massachusetts, November 15, 2003.

² *Landmine Monitor: Toward a Mine-Free World: Executive Summary 1999*, International Campaign to Ban Landmines, 1999, p. 22.

³ According to the ICBL, the definition of "landmine victim" are "those who, either individually, or collectively, have suffered physical, emotional, and psychological injury, economic loss or substantial impairment of their fundamental rights through acts or omissions related to mine utilization." Therefore, the ICBL believes that "mine victims include directly impacted individuals, their families, and communities affected by landmines." *Victim Assistance: Contexts, Principles, and Issues*, Position paper of the ICBL Working Group on Victim Assistance, p. 1.

⁴ Jerry White and Ken Rutherford, *The Role of the Landmine Survivors Network*, in *TO WALK WITHOUT FEAR: THE GLOBAL MOVEMENT TO BAN ANTI-PERSONNEL LANDMINES*, 99, 103-104 (Maxwell A. Cameron et al. eds., Oxford University Press 1998).