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Lending a Helping Hand: Victim Assistance Programs in Africa

Many landmine victims face adverse situations when returning to their communities and trying to live as productive members of society. A number of programs in Africa for landmine victims and the disabled help people not only “get back on their feet,” but also “get back in the saddle” and gain the courage and knowledge to live among their peers with confidence.

by Nicole Kreger and Sarah B. Taylor, MAIC

Introduction

In an overwhelming number of countries, people are falling victim to the landmines and UXO left behind after various wars and internal conflicts. Medical assistance and rehabilitation are often hard to come by in such countries, and where they exist, they are usually costly. Africa has a particularly notable disability crisis. It is believed that over 10 percent of Africa’s population is mobility impaired. In fact, to call attention to the continent’s problem, the Organization of African Unity Heads of State has declared the current decade (2000-2009) the “Africa Decade of Disabled People.” War, poverty, disease, hunger and poor environmental conditions all exacerbate the problems of the disabled, as do discrimination and ignorance about disabilities. In a time when those most need help often do not have access to it, a number of organizations are working to bring relief and support to them.

In recent years, programs have expanded in response to the growing demand for more comprehensive rehabilitation services, and they have developed new and innovative approaches to combatting the myriad needs of persons with disabilities. This article profiles the programs of five organizations doing victim assistance work in Africa: Handicap International (HI), the Vietnam Veterans of America Foundation (VVAF), the Jipmer Limb Campaign (JLC), the Women’s World Development Fund (WDF) and the Power The International Limb Project.Victim Assistance in Sierra Leone

The Sierra Leone program is not

landmine-specific, but rather helps all people with disabilities, a category that includes landmine victims as well as victims of UXO and improvised explosive devices (IEDs). HI is working with the Ministry of Health in this program that aims to build a sustainable network of competence and facilities that will enhance reintegration, general well-being and promotion of the rights of the physically disabled and psychologically suffering population. The program focuses on orthopedic services, psychological support and reintegration (both social and economic) of people with disabilities into society. This initiative, which is funded by One Love Sierra Leone—a British charity formed in 1999 "in response to
the horrors and devastation of the Sierra Leone civil war—"built—equips a re- 
gional center for orthopedic and prosthetic training based in the Murray Town Centre for Amputees in Freetown. The two main Sierra Leone projects that HI has undertaken this year are a psychosocial project and a functional rehabilitation project. The psychosocial project is aimed at providing support to those suffering psychologically as a result of the war. One of the highlights of this program's strategy is providing psychological support to both direct and indirect victims of the war. To help these victims, HI has created several activities, including group expression activities as well as psychosomatic activities for both individuals and groups. In order to carry out these activities more effectively, HI teamed up with the Institute of Public Administration and Management (IPAM) to provide training in Psychological Care and Social Work. The current training program is conducted in a six-week session, but HI hopes to convert the program into a year-long university training program in the near future.

As HI notes, "[I]f war created the awareness and the urge for the creation and the development of functional rehabilitation services in Sierra Leone. With this in mind, HI's functional rehabilitation project focuses on building up the appropriate functional rehabilitation capacity—... in this country to meet the needs."

Working in three areas of the country— 
Freewon, Bo and Makeni—HI is developing the needed services and integrating a multidisciplinary approach that targets people with disabilities. HI has partnered with the Ministry of Health and Sanitation (MOHS), the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), Mercy Ships, Brother Schmidle, Cheshire Homes and World Hope International to achieve its goal in functional rehabilitation.

Victim Assistance in Guinea Bissau

Joining forces with the National Association for Sanitary Development (ANDES), HI helps give support to landmine vic­tims as well as others with disabilities in Guinea Bissau. The Diana, Princess of Wales memorial Fund supports the project through its partnership with ANDES, HI provides technical and operational support for a mine risk education program, hoping to increase awareness of mines and UXO among the general popula­tion and to help risk management skills in order to reduce the number of landmine-related accidents. HI also helps strengthen the capacity of local physiotherapy services available to people with disabilities. Also, HI is improving the country's only orthopedic center, A Casa Amiga do Deficiente, by providing equipment and tools that will assist in orthopedic produc­tion and technician training, as well as lighten the burden of the center's operating costs. HI and ANDES are implementing a community-based approach to rehabilitating and reintegrating mine victims and others with disabilities. The two organiza­tions also offer their support to existing disability organizations. They work with the communities to better understand the needs of the disabled and highlight the skills that will encourage the disabled and spread awareness on disability issues.

Vietnam Veterans of America Foundation

Introduction

VVAF is a Washington, D.C.-based non-governmental organization (NGO) that is dedicated to achieving global secu­rity through the physical and psychosocial rehabilitation of people in war-ravaged countries. VVAF is involved in pro­viding rehabilitation services available to people with disabilities. The organization works on pro­moting the rights of disabled people worldwide to rehabilitate people in war-ravaged countries. VVAF is involved in projects with the goal of transferring technology to Africa for a Landmine-Free World and heavy involvement in the International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL).

Etiopia: The Omega Initiative

After a request from the United States Agency for International Development's (USAID's) Patrick J. Leahy War Victims Fund (LWVF) for international organi­zations to assist persons with disabilities in Africa, VVAF teamed up with American NGO Pact to execute the Omega Initiative. Through this program, VVAF is providing prosthetics, reaching prosthesis users with rehabilitation services to the war-wounded and disabled popula­tion of Ethiopia's Amhara region. These services focus on two locations: a small rehabilitation clinic in Addis that treats a significant number of landmine victims and a new regional rehabilitation center in Dessie. The program received $86 million (U.S.) in grants over a period of five years.

The Initiative also includes a Sub-Grant Program that provides up to $5 million for organizations providing rehabilitation-related services to people in sub-Saharan Africa. Two technical experts provided by VVAF are collaborating with two staff from the Hands of Hope Program in Naivasha, Kenya. They are working to de­termine which programs in sub-Saharan Africa would receive funding over the next five years. Countries under consider­ation include Angola, Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Rwanda, Sierra Leone and Sudan.

Angola: Regional Community Rehabilitation Center and Sports for Life Program

In 1996, with funds from the USAID LWVF, VVAF created the Regional Community Rehabilitation Center. Located in Luena, the Center manufactures and fits prostheses, in addition to providing rehabilitative care. The rehabilita­tion center has been working to reduce the worldwide threat posed by war and conflict but also promote justice and freedom. The organization works on pro­moting the rights of disabled people worldwide to rehabilitate people in war-ravaged countries. VVAF is involved in projects with the goal of transferring technology to Africa for a Landmine-Free World and heavy involvement in the International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL).

Jalpur Limb Campaign

Introduction

The JLC is a UK-based organization that was created to raise awareness of and promote the wider use of the Jalpur limb technology through projects, development of educational materials and networking. The Campaign works to raise awareness about the technology of prostheses, emphasizing knowledge sharing among developing countries. As a result, the Campaign also helps to reduce the number of amputees as a result of the indiscrimi­nate use of anti-personal landmines in various conflicts around the world.

Programs in Africa

One JLC program in Africa is the Centro Ortopedico Jalpur (COJ) in Manjacaze, Mozambique. After a 1995 feasibility study requested by the Ministry of Social Affairs (MICAS), JLC partnered with the Mozambique Red Cross Society (CMVA) to set up the COJ in 1996. The program was designed to be a center for amputees that provides limb-fitting and orthotic services. Funds from JLC paid for the construction of the center as well as the equipment, materi­als and training. The COJ is "the first rehabilitation center to be wholly run by a Mozambican NGO." Providing com­munity-based rehabilitation, the center has concentrated on: 

1. Constructing a purpose-built center in the district town of Manjacaze
2. Training technical and person­nel on appropriate technology
3. Identifying disabled people (mostly landmine victims) for rehabilitation
4. Providing mine awareness training to the disabled population
5. Providing orthotic services to the disabled population
6. Developing a new orthotic technology

One other program in Africa is the DINGNADALE, which is located in Angola. The program is a partner­ship between JLC and a local NGO, the League for the Reintegration of Disabled People (LARDEF), because finding em­ployment is one of the biggest challenges for disabled people, this program seeks to create jobs for these people and at the same time provide a service to the community. The DINGNADALE program provides services to those who lost their lives as a result of the civil war with Angola. The program hopes to continue its programs and in­crease its capacity for social and economic rehabilitative services.
World Rehabilitation Fund

**Introduction**

The WRF has programs in over 150 countries that focus on medical, psycho-social and economic rehabilitation for the disabled. One of WRF’s primary focuses is survivors of landmines and other war-related injuries. WRF is “committed to improving the lives of people with disabilities.”

**WRF Projects in Mozambique**

In Africa, WRF is working on several programs to assist the disabled people of Mozambique. WRF has teamed up with local and international partners such as Mozambique’s IND, the African Medical and Research Foundation (AMREF), the Association for the Mozambican Disabled (ADEMO) and POWER. The International Limb Project. By working with both government organizations and NGOs, WRF hopes to strengthen existing programs and develop new projects to help mine victims and their families by giving them the tools they need to be economically self-sufficient.

For one of WRF’s projects, the organization has partnered with the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) in a three-year effort “to plan and promote new approaches to the socio-economic integration of landmine victims and others with disabilities.” This effort, which began in 1999, also involves programs in Cambodia and Lebanon. One of the main goals of this venture is identifying gaps in current services and strengthening existing ones. A result of this project is the WRF Guidelines for the Socio-Economic Reintegration of Landmine Survivors, a publication intended to support the efforts of policy makers and aid organizations working in mine-affected countries.

In another project, WRF is working with the IND to help the Mozambique government adopt a national approach to victim assistance. This project focuses on two major areas of the victim assistance policy: developing policies and guidelines for effective coordination at all levels and improving the investigation and reporting of mine incidents. These focus areas are based on needs expressed by the IND, and WRF will collaborate with the IND as well as the UNDP and government ministries to meet these needs.

In July 2001, WRF provided funds for a project with the AMREF in Mozambique’s Inhambane province. The project called for an economic development plan to be followed by a pilot project that addresses the needs identified by the community. Local community members— including those with disabilities—played an important role in planning, implementing and managing the activities. This is an important aspect of the project because it gives the community (especially those with disabilities) a sense of importance and empowerment.

NGO POWER and ADEMO are working to implement two vocational training programs to which WRF has lent its support. The programs—metalworking, and computer training—are being held at the Centro de Reabilitação Infantil Malhanguane (CREM) in Maputo and are available to any disabled person with a Grade 4 level of schooling. The metalwork course, a five-month curriculum, includes learning about the production of wheelchairs and other assistive devices for the disabled. The relatively new computer training course lasts for two months. These courses also help the disabled become financially independent through assistance with self-employment and a job placement service.

In January 2002, WRF supported Mozambique’s Ministry of Health in creating a Directory of Services for the Disabled and expanding on a “grassroots” Sensibility Curriculum. The main goal of this project is to raise awareness of disability issues among the general population. The Directory will be distributed by province and include information on actually available services with the hope of improving access to information on what services are available to assist the disabled and to prevent the disability from becoming worse.” The Sensibility Curriculum will elaborate on materials currently available to create a prototype curriculum for educating communities.

**POWER**

**Introduction**

POWER The International Limb Project began in 1994 to “offer free, high-quality limbs to landmine victims in countries recently ravaged by conflict and to train local people and organizations to deliver these services.” Its mission “is to deliver enabling services for people with disabilities in low-income countries [and] to cooperate with government and others in capacity-building towards a sustainable service through education and training.” Working towards this mission, POWER has developed several programs to assist the disabled in Mozambique.

**Projects in Mozambique**

In 1995, POWER took over a program run by the IRC that included running prosthesis and orthotic clinics in Mozambique. Since then, the program has continued to flourish, and its focus has shifted from strictly physical rehabilitation to include the reintegration of the disabled into society. POWER is receiving assistance in the form of a grant from the European Commission to implement a four-year program that will help several disabled victims integrate into their current capacities.

As mentioned above, POWER, along with WRF and ADEMO, is helping to improve prosthesis with vocational training in Maputo, Mozambique’s capital. These courses include metalwork and leatherwork, taught by volunteers from the British Executive Service Overseas. POWER hopes to expand on these with bakery and carpentry courses, provided the funding is available. The organization also offers a basic education to disabled children at the school.

In a partnership with LWVF and the United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund (UNICEF), POWER established a national network of rehabilitation clinics. These clinics include staff of local professionals trained in prosthetics and orthotics. Although POWER’s contract with LWVF concluded in May, the organization still sponsors two Mozambican prosthetic and orthotic technicians getting degrees at Strathclyde University in Scotland. The course ends in September of 2003, at which time the two will return to Mozambique’s Ministry of Health. POWER also created an association of disability organizations called the Council for Action on Disability (CAD). CAD includes POWER’s partner ADEMO as well as a number of government organizations and NGOs who serve people with disabilities. POWER is seeking to expand this program to have it include partnerships with a network of European organizations.

**Conclusion**

These programs are only a few of the many being undertaken every year, in both Africa and the rest of the world. Through the help of the above organizations and various others, many landmine victims are able to overcome their injuries and regain more than just the use of their arms and legs—namely a sense of self-worth and a feeling of belonging.