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Survivors Promote Victim Assistance and Disability Rights

In 2012, the International Campaign to Ban Landmines and the Cluster Munition Coalition launched the Survivor Network Project, in which networks of landmine survivors collaborate to develop victim assistance objectives. One year after its launch, the Survivor Network Project has achieved some success.

by Megan Burke and Loren Persi [ICBL-CMC Survivor Network Project]

The International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL) and the Cluster Munition Coalition (CMC) are international networks working to free the world of landmines and cluster munitions and enable survivors and their families to lead fulfilling lives.

Building on past efforts, ICBL-CMC launched the Survivor Network Project in 2012 to offer financial and technical support to both established and promising survivor networks, with the goal of sustaining and building their capacities. ICBL-CMC brings together more than 25 national and local networks of landmine and cluster munition survivors. The Survivor Network Project enables representatives of these networks to more effectively

- Assess the needs of network members, disaggregated by gender and age, in order to shape the development of government victim assistance policies as well as contribute to the development of the networks' national strategic plans
- Empower survivors at the grassroots level and facilitate their socioeconomic inclusion
- Serve as effective national and international proponents for the universalization and full implementation of all articles of the *Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production*



At the opening ceremony of the *Fundación Red de Sobrevivientes y Personas con Discapacidad* (Foundation Network of Survivors and Persons with Disabilities), survivors prepare to launch income-generating projects in El Salvador. Photo courtesy of Fundación Red de Sobrevivientes y Personas con Discapacidad.

and Transfer of Anti-personnel Mines and on Their Destruction (Anti-personnel Mine Ban Convention or APMBC) and the *Convention on Cluster Munitions* (CCM)

- Participate in multisector victim assistance and disability coordination mechanisms and contribute to the design, coordination, implementation and monitoring of victim assistance in their countries

Prior to the launch of the Survivor Network Project, ongoing activities were conducted through ICBL-CMC victim assistance focal points (VAFP), who have worked to ensure the achieve-

ment of the conventions' action plans since 2009. VAFP are campaign members, survivors, practitioners and representatives of disability organizations who participate at the national level and in partnership with ICBL-CMC, advocating for victim assistance in countries with significant numbers of survivors. VAFP are present in almost 30 countries, of which 25 are States Parties to the APMBC.

Most VAFP-developed advocacy plans have measurable objectives that aim to ensure concrete changes in the lives of survivors and persons with disabilities. Many have already achieved some of these goals, such as the ratification of the *Convention on the Rights*



The Afghanistan Landmine Survivors' Organization's mainstreaming center.
Photo courtesy of the authors.

of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), the adoption of national laws for the rights of disabled people, the establishment of victim assistance coordination mechanisms and the development of national action plans.

The Survivor Network Project was designed to build upon the work of the VAFP and respond to the needs and interests of survivors to enhance their participation in both campaigns. The work of the Survivor Network Project also builds upon the legacy of ICBL member Landmine Survivors Network, which later became Survivor Corps and ended operations in 2010.

Achievement of Survivor Networks

Thus far, ICBL-CMC has used funding provided by Norway to support 11 survivor networks. ICBL-CMC was also able to provide technical, capacity-building support to additional networks.

Here is a brief overview of the achievements of four of the more established survivor networks:

The **Afghan Landmine Survivors' Organization** has enabled hundreds of landmine survivors, persons with disabilities and members of the community, most of whom are children, to acquire new skills in literacy, English, computers and mathematics. Having these skills increases survivors' chances of employment and helps inform them of their rights. The establishment of women's committees

has ensured the inclusion of women in advocacy and other program activities.

Through its health-, peer- and economic-support programs, the **Association for Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities** in Vietnam has empowered survivors and disabled people to lead independent lives and become more involved within their communities.

In El Salvador, the *Fundación Red de Sobrevivientes y Personas con Discapacidad* (Foundation Network of Survivors and Persons with Disabilities) held a national forum on disability rights that contributed to the development of protocols for medical attention for disabled people. Twenty local survivor organizations have advocated for disability rights at the municipal level, and the foundation's health and economic opportunity programs assisted their members in becoming mobile and gainfully employed.

Landmine Survivors Initiatives in Bosnia and Herzegovina provides peer support, health referrals, economic support and business training. In 2012, 43 survivors who had received support "paid it forward" by providing community service to 150 different survivors and family members, effectively multiplying the impact of the program.

Seven other emerging survivor networks received year-long support grants starting in July 2012:

The **Association of Albanian Assistance for Integration and Democratic Development**, more commonly known by



Survivors in Bosnia and Herzegovina display cheese produced as part of an income-generating project.
Photo courtesy of the authors.

its acronym ALB-AID and formerly the Victims of Mines and Arms Kukes, increased coverage to include three more districts of the country, strengthened links with other disability organizations and successfully advocated for the ratification of the CRPD.

The *Association Sénégalaise des Victimes de Mines* (Senegalese Association of Mine Victims) offered peer support and seed financing for small businesses through five, local survivor groups, organized a sporting event with survivors from Guinea-Bissau and hosted two trainings on gender in mine action and victim assistance.

The survivor network of the **Cambodia Campaign to Ban Landmines** met with provincial leaders of mine affected communities throughout the country to raise awareness of the rights and needs of survivors and other persons with disabilities.

A product of the Survivor Network Project, the **Consortium of Survivor Networks** in Democratic Republic of the Congo held a national forum, hosted by the Congolese Campaign to Ban Landmines, for the ratification of the CRPD. The consortium also held a peer-support training for survivor leaders from Kinshasa and North and South Kivu, the first such training ever held in the country.

The Tajik Survivor Network of the **Tajikistan Campaign to Ban Landmines** engaged government representatives to promote the ratification of the CCM and to raise awareness about the need to improve victim assistance. The campaign also opened a mainstreaming center in Rasht Valley, an affected community, to train survivors and persons with disabilities in marketable skills.

The **Uganda Landmine Survivors Association** organized local survivor networks in two districts of northern Uganda and provided health and economic support to enable survivors to become more independent.

Yitawekilgn Yeakal Gudatagnoch Mehiber (YYGM—Recognize our Disability), a local organization of survivors established by the former Landmine Survivors Network branch in Ethiopia, engaged in peer support and provided economic opportunities to survivors. YYGM has provided capacity building to three other networks including the National Association of Women with Disabilities, which also has survivors among its members.

All 11 survivor networks funded through the project carried out rights-based victim assistance advocacy, illustrating the important role that survivors have in building

strong national advocacy campaigns for all aspects of the APMBC, CCM and CRPD.

In December 2012, the Survivor Network Project hosted representatives of 15 survivor networks for the workshop “Disability Rights: Opportunities for Survivor Networks.” Facilitated by Marianne Schulze, a human rights consultant and expert in disability rights, the workshop provided practical advice to network leaders on how to become more involved in national advocacy for disability rights through the CRPD and other human rights frameworks.

At the international level, during the Twelfth Meeting of States Parties to the APMBC, all participants learned about the active role that survivors and their representative organizations have in advocating for increased victim assistance at the national level. “Survivors in Action,” a week-long multimedia exhibition and advocacy space, presented the actions of 15 different survivor networks from around the globe and was frequently used by campaigners and delegates. More than 60 delegates from governmental and nongovernmental organizations participated in a discussion on how to promote survivor inclusion in monitoring and reporting on the APMBC.

Disability Rights

Considerable overlap is recognized between groups of armed conflict victims and persons with disabilities, and increased collaboration among these communities has benefited efforts to advance the rights of both groups.

In the context of humanitarian victim assistance, survivor networks have raised awareness in mine-affected countries of the rights of persons with disabilities. Some networks have become increasingly involved at the national level and have advocated for the universalization and implementation of

the CRPD. Others are looking at how they can contribute to advocacy in their countries.

Through the ICBL-CMC’s Survivor Network Project, national networks of survivors will continue to hold governments accountable for the commitments they have made to survivors under arms treaties, particularly the APMBC and the CCM. At the same time, they will increasingly and deliberately connect this advocacy with the work of national disability organizations to improve the implementation of the CRPD and the humanitarian aims of disarmament conventions in their countries. Experience thus far has shown that

- Advocating for victim assistance opens the door to discussion on disability rights in some countries where it is otherwise not possible to discuss human rights at all.
- Vocal survivors who are involved in advocacy and victim assistance raise awareness of the capabilities of persons with physical, mental or intellectual disabilities as leaders in their communities.
- Because the majority of conflict victims are based in rural and remote areas, victim assistance efforts lead to the development of services, programs and initiatives in these areas that benefit all persons with disabilities.

ICBL-CMC, through the Survivor Network Project, looks forward to broadening these experiences to promote the rights of landmine and cluster munition victims and all disabled people. ©



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