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Boutros Hobeika
United Nations Mine Action Office, Sudan

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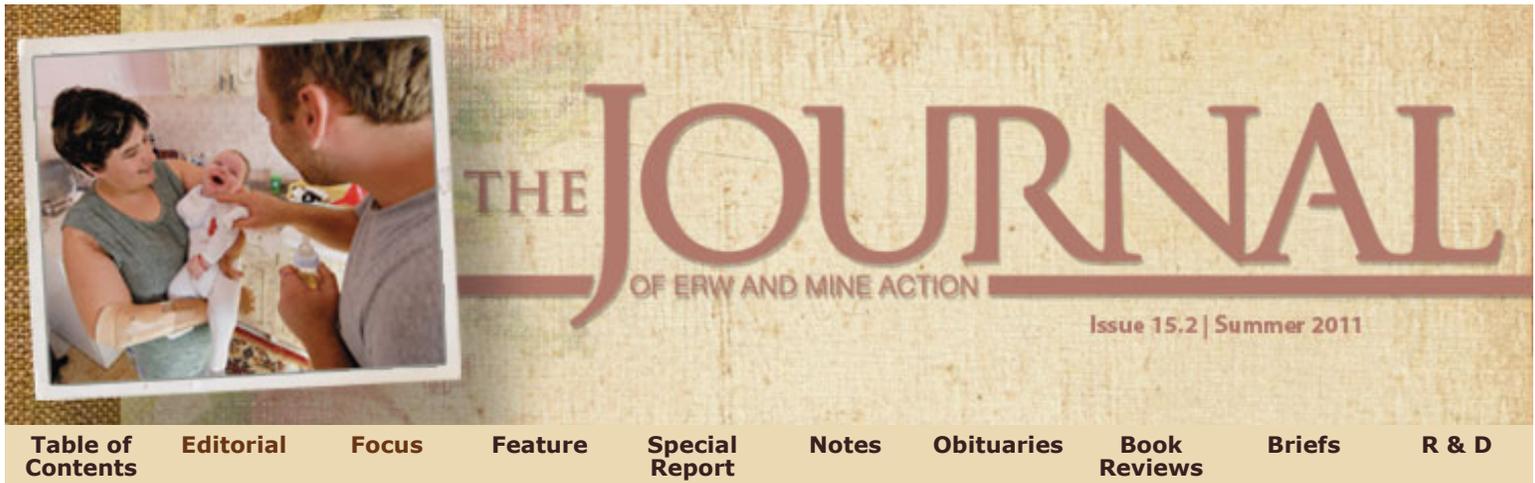
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Victim Assistance for Mine/ERW Survivors and PWDs in Sudan

by Boutros Hobeika [United Nations Mine Action Office, Sudan]

Sudan's¹ socioeconomic rehabilitation programs help mine/explosive-remnants-of-war survivors and persons with disabilities find work and reintegrate into society, but policies need to be created to ensure that victims are not discriminated against as they seek employment.



Badawy was a farmer until he stepped on a landmine in 2001. He was trained in blacksmithing and is now practicing this job in Kadugli, Nuba Mountains (Sudan).
Photo courtesy of John Hattingh/UNMIS.

Unfortunately, in Sudan, having a disability and living in poverty go hand in hand. Not all persons with disabilities are poor, but it is more difficult for a PWD living in Sudan to obtain meaningful work due to discrimination. Mine/explosive-remnants-of-war accidents cause some of the most unfortunate Sudanese physical disabilities. Often, survivors from mine/ERW injuries and survivors' families live in a longstanding state of poverty and misery. Having a physical disability can hamper the full participation of mine/ERW survivors in the economic and social life of their communities, as PWDs are subject to discrimination, marginalization and stigmatization from peers. Attitudinal barriers and lack of physical accessibility result in denying them access to education, employment, health, adequate housing, food and safe water. The income of PWDs is usually below the poverty level and this reduces their ability to contribute to their household and community, thus increasing their social exclusion. In order to enhance the quality of life of PWDs and mine/ERW survivors and to facilitate their access to fundamental rights, PWDs need

opportunities for meaningful employment.

Benefits of Employment

"Decent Work"² is the key to poverty reduction among PWDs. Employment can raise the individual's self-esteem and help him/her regain personal integrity and dignity. Being productive has a self-reconciliation effect for a PWD and can also help restore his/her relationship with the community. Decent work enables a PWD to be

"My life has changed completely, I feel I'm independent, I can now make my family happy and buy things I couldn't buy in the past. Without that training I wouldn't have been in this good situation..." said Mohammed Muslim during a monitoring visit after being trained in blacksmithing and metal work under an UNMAO-funded survivor-assistance project at Hope Medical City in Khartoum. Muslim, who suffers from a severe leg deformity and a partial foot amputation as a result of a war injury, now customizes and fabricates metallic mobility aids and corrective devices for children with disabilities at Khartoum Cheshire Home. Muslim received psychological counseling, vocational training and small business management training and plans to open his own private workshop near his house.

productive, earn a fair income, have security in the workplace by providing a safe and accessible place to work and protection from discrimination and harassment. It also provided social protection for his/her family and offers opportunities for personal development and social integration. It allows freedom for people to express their concerns and to participate on an equal basis in the decisions that affect their lives. Survivors' socioeconomic reintegration constitutes an important component of rehabilitation's holistic approach; a process involving an integrated strategy that also includes medical treatment, and physical and psychological rehabilitation.

With these principles in mind, the United Nations Mine Action Office supports local partners to implement a series of survivor-assistance projects throughout Sudan aimed at ensuring the socioeconomic integration of mine/ERW survivors and PWDs. The program aims to provide income-generating activities to beneficiaries in their areas of residence in the form of a comprehensive package including vocational training, small business management, equipment and tools, on-the-job training and monitoring. One project underway through UNMAO and a partner organization, Twasol Al-Amal Charity Organization for the Disabled, is a project plan to provide medical screening, physical assessment, psychological counseling, prosthetic and orthotic devices and small business management training to 200 mine/ERW survivors and PWDs in Khartoum state by December 2011.³

Nationally, as of 2009, more than 650 mine/ERW survivors had received help through survivor-assistance projects.⁴ Sudan created the National Victim Assistance Strategic Framework 2007–2011 as a conceptual framework advocating the rights of PWDs and survivors, encouraging policymaking to protect these rights and advocating programs that can offer physical, social and psychological survivor rehabilitation.⁵ However, due to obstacles like conflicts in the south, budget cuts for the National Authority for Prosthetic and Orthotic's program in the north, lack of skilled health workers and geographic barriers, many survivors still need

quality assistance.⁶ Improvements have been made in coordinating work between NGOs thanks to two national working groups in the north and south, but Sudan does not have a national surveillance system, which makes it difficult to monitor the number of survivors in Sudan and how many have received rehabilitation.⁷ Even without these statistics, stories from survivors who have received help show that occupational-training programs are immensely beneficial.

Ahmed Mohammed Idris Hamed, who lost both lower limbs as the result of a mine injury, described his experience as follows: *"I suffered from low self-esteem and helplessness whilst I suddenly became older due to constant restlessness I enrolled in a vocational-training program on ceramic tiling implemented by [the] Friends of Peace and Development Organization. Subsequently, I began working at local markets using the skills I acquired from the training to earn a living and support my family. With time, I was able to overcome the fear and hopelessness that overshadowed my life. I am now a living example to those in my community and elsewhere."*



Mohammed Muslim at work.
Photo courtesy of Boutros Hobeika.

Kawthar Al Balla, a 23-year-old wheelchair user and mother of one, is her family's breadwinner. She was trained in a women's development project at Hope Medical City and learned pastry production and tissue painting,⁸ as well as other handicraft skills. She produces handmade items and sells them at her community's local market while also participating in many exhibitions: *"I gained good experience which enabled me to produce and market my products. I am now known in the community and my income has increased significantly. I have bought new furniture for my house. I no [longer] depend on my brothers for my living and I can now offer my*

Disability Rights

The stories provided by Mohammed Muslim, Ahmed Mohammed Idris Hamed and Kawthar Al Balla help to shed light on how persons with disabilities in Sudan transformed their lives through meaningful employment. The provision of these small income-generating projects, in addition to their psychosocial rehabilitation and

vocational training, not only ensured an income to the beneficiaries but also helped them regain their dignity and place in society.

[child] a better living [situation]...”

The right of PWDs to employment was recognized in the *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* under Article 27. Sudan became a State Party to the CRPD in April 2009 and as a result, implemented the *Disability Act of 2009*. The act led to the formation of the National Council for Disabled Persons in 2010, which financially supports the projects of disabled people’s organizations.⁹ Despite this progress, Sudan needs to adopt more social policies to protect the rights of PWDs and give them equal workplace opportunities. Advocating rights among policymakers and disability groups would contribute to this progress.



Khaled, a mine survivor from Kadugli, Nuba Mountains (Sudan), is now earning his livelihood from selling water using the donkey cart granted to him as an income-generating project.
Photo courtesy of Johan Hattingh/UNMIS.

Conclusion

In order for survivor-assistance projects to succeed, they need support and protection by a set of legal measures ensuring the following:

- Equal employment opportunities for PWD
- Fair pay for work of equal value
- Safe and healthy working conditions
- Protection from harassment and ability to redress grievances
- Effective access of PWDs to technical and vocational guidance and training
- Career advancement for PWDs in the labor market
- Opportunities for self-employment
- Employment of PWDs in the public and private sectors
- Provision of reasonable accommodation¹⁰ to PWDs in the workplace

Survivor-assistance projects implemented in Sudan through socioeconomic integration and income-generating activities improve mine/ERW survivors’ social and economic situations. However, the need for employment and reintegration into society is still very high in light of the large number of PWDs without this support. ↴

Biography



Boutros Hobeika specializes in prosthetics and orthotics in health care management and has worked as a Technical Officer on disability and mine-action projects conducted by the World Rehabilitation Fund and Lebanese Ministry of Public Health, 1995–2001. He served as a consultant to the UNICEF Mine Risk Education program in Lebanon (2001–2002); he then joined the Lebanese Welfare Association for the Handicapped as Public Relations Manager and Coordinator of the mine-action program within the association. Since 2005, he is Mine Risk Education and Victim Assistance Regional Officer in the United Nation Mine Action Office in North Sudan.

Boutros Hobeika, B.S, M.A, M.P.H, C.P.O

MRE/VA Regional Officer

UN Mine Action Office–North Sudan

Tel: +249 9 12179073

E-mail: [boutrosh\(at\)sudan-map.org](mailto:boutrosh(at)sudan-map.org)

Endnotes

1. This article was written before Sudan held its referendum to become two countries. Most of the examples come from North Sudan, but the article is pertinent to all of Sudan.

2. This is a concept created by the International Labor Organization which focuses on creating jobs, guaranteeing work rights, extending social protection and promoting social dialogue. In the North Sudan program, we refer to the guidelines of this agenda in our practice. <http://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/decent-work-agenda/lang--en/index.htm>. Accessed 1 June 2011.
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4. Multi-Year Plan. Sudan Mine Action Sector 2009. http://www.gichd.org/fileadmin/pdf/ma_development/nma-strat/NMAS-Sudan-2006-2011.pdf. Accessed 28 March 2011.
5. National Victim Assistance Strategic Framework. National Mine Action Center. South Sudan Demining Commission. March 2007. <http://www.sudan-map.org/DocDownload/Program/National%20Victim%20Assistance%20Strategic%20Framework.pdf>
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6. Sudan: Casualties and Victim Assistance 2009. Landmine Monitor. http://www.the-monitor.org/index.php/cp/display/region_profiles/theme/502. Accessed 28 March 2011.
7. UNMAO–Sudan Third National Workshop on Victim Assistance, Juba, 3–5 February 2009. <http://www.sudan-map.org/DocDownload/Victims/Feb09-3rdVANatWorkshopRep.pdf>. Accessed 28 March 2011.
8. Painting technique that uses thin paper or tissue as its canvas to give a work a textured look.
9. Disabled peoples' organizations (DPOs) are organizations with a majority of staff consisting of disabled persons and that effectively represent disabled persons at all levels, or organizations strongly promoting the rights and self-advocacy of PWDs.
10. According to the *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*, **reasonable accommodation** means "necessary and appropriate modification and adjustments not imposing a disproportionate or undue burden, where needed in a particular case, to ensure to persons with disabilities the enjoyment or exercise on an equal basis with others of all human rights and fundamental freedoms."



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