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Clear Path International

by Allison Bartlett [Center for International Stabilization and Recovery]

Every year landmines kill or injure an estimated 24,000 people.¹ The majority of these victims suffer long-term injuries, including the loss of a limb, a physical disability, post-traumatic stress disorder or permanent internal injuries due to shrapnel. Life for landmine victims is never the same, as they require treatment for more than just physical injuries. Many victims need psychological assistance and help finding their place in society, since landmine victims are often ostracized by society.² Recovering from a landmine explosion is a life-long process. Clear Path International recognizes the need for landmine-survivor assistance and has taken great strides to help these victims.



Clear Path International

Martha Roben, James Hathaway, Kristen Leadem and Imbert Matthee—four humanitarian-aid workers—founded CPI in October of 2000. Before establishing CPI, the founders were involved in mine-action projects in central Vietnam, which is where they realized the enormous need for landmine-survivor assistance. At the time they created CPI, no organization offered assistance in Vietnam to landmine survivors; therefore, they decided to start one. They set up CPI with the mission “to serve landmine accident survivors, their families, and their communities.”³ CPI has

worked to achieve its mission by providing medical care to accident survivors, financial assistance to families and general assistance to communities. Support has ranged from physical rehabilitation and prosthetics to educational scholarships, vocational skills training, school construction, and provisional supplies for hospitals and rehabilitation centers.

Currently, CPI is active in five countries across Asia: Afghanistan, Burma (Myanmar), Cambodia, Thailand and Vietnam. Beginning in Afghanistan in 2007, CPI has worked closely with many local organizations to aid landmine survivors. In Burma, CPI established a prosthetics fabrication workshop within the Karenni ethnic state. The Cambodian program was implemented in Kampong Cham province, with the help of the local nongovernmental organization Cambodian Volunteers for Community Development.⁴ Also, with the collaborative help of *Hilfe ohne Grenzen* and Prosthetics Research Study, a medical clinic and a prosthetic workshop were established in Thailand. CPI has assisted more than 6,000 survivors in central Vietnam since 2000 and collaborated with other organizations including Kids First Vietnam, East Meets West Foundation, Help the Children and Mines Advisory Group, which is also a Cambodian collaborator.³

Achievements and Challenges

Thus far, CPI has achieved success by helping a large number of people in a variety of ways. It has given aid to more than 15,000 landmine-accident survivors, family members and persons with disabilities in five countries.³ In Battambang, Cambodia, it established a rice-processing mill as a way to aid landmine survivors economically. The survivors receive agricultural training, microcredit, storage, processing, as well as sales and marketing services from CPI. The organization has also expanded prosthetics fabrication services to ethnic refugees from Burma and created a technology center in Kabul that produces equipment for the demining profession in Afghanistan. All of these efforts have greatly improved the lives of people that CPI has assisted.

Despite these achievements and growth in the past couple of years, CPI still faces many challenges. One of the biggest challenges confronting CPI is that the plight of landmine survivors is often eclipsed by high-profile natural disasters, according to former CPI Executive Director Imbert Matthee. These disasters draw donor attention and funding away from CPI, which means less financial assistance for landmine survivors. CPI has also faced adverse fundraising conditions since the 9/11 terrorist attacks on New York. The organization has experienced a decrease in funding from some of its previous supporters due largely to their choice to stay more carefully focused on their primary missions. The current global financial crisis, coupled with the lack of donors focusing on mine-action support, has further hampered fundraising efforts. In addition, the organization faces regional challenges within each individual nation caused by inclement weather, including heavy rains and flooding, poor road conditions and conflicts with local contractors.⁵

The Future

Despite current challenges, CPI's spirit and initiative have not been hampered. The organization plans to grow its annual budget from US\$2 million to \$5 million by 2011³ with persistent lobbying efforts and the support of the Office of Weapons Removal and Abatement in the Department of State's Bureau of Political-Military Affairs (PM/WRA), which has funded several programs.

CPI intends to work with local organizations and in-country staff to teach them project management skills and help them diversify their funding bases. In the last few months, CPI has upgraded its organization-wide systems and staff by hiring professionals with better business and accounting skills, strategically positioning it to take on growth and provide more accountability to its donors. For example, CPI hired a new Controller and a Director of Communications, and trained its field office personnel to provide more capacity-building training to its implementing partners.⁶

The budget increase will also expand the Vietnam and Afghanistan programs, and the organization is reaching the size where its knowledge of effective programs can benefit more victims over time. CPI started providing victim-assistance programs directly to beneficiaries in Vietnam. It now works with a wide variety of implementing partners in multiple countries and helps teach them how to become more sustainable, gradually alleviating their dependency on CPI. For example, one of PM/WRA's programs in Afghanistan, the Afghan Mine Action Technology Center, hires landmine survivors to manufacture mine-clearance tools. CPI has helped the center design the tools based on needs and source materials to create manufacturing processes and to market them to local clearance providers. In addition, CPI began a more hands-on approach in assisting Afghanistan and is developing a curriculum that can efficiently help the country build its organizations in a more sustainable way.⁶

CPI intends to establish new programs elsewhere in the world, garnering grassroots support and a global presence while obtaining more diverse government and private-sector sponsors. In the future, CPI hopes to work more closely with refugee- and internally-displaced populations in addition to ERW survivors, so others may also benefit from vocational training.⁶

Biography

Allison Bartlett was an Editorial Assistant for *The Journal of ERW and Mine Action* from October 2009 until July 2010. At James Madison University, she pursued a Bachelor of Arts in International Affairs and minored in Business Spanish and Latin American Studies. She graduated from JMU in May 2010.



Endnotes

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