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Cultivating a Broader Base for Landmine Action

With the total number of landmine victims increasing daily and the level of donor commitment decreasing, it is more important than ever to build a broader base of interest and support for landmine victim assistance, often a lifelong need. The Coffeelands Landmine Victims' Trust is an initiative that attempts to do just that by engaging the coffee industry and consumers.

by Tammie Warmus and Maggie Emery
[Polus Center for Social & Economic Development, Inc.]

Many major coffee-producing regions of the world have also been the sites of intense conflict. In fact, six of the world's top 10 coffee-producing countries are landmine-affected.¹ Unfortunately, those areas with the heaviest concentrations of landmines and those with the best conditions for coffee production frequently overlap. Landmines are a particularly effective weapon in mountainous terrain, where movement is limited to mountain passes and trails that traverse agricultural areas—the same areas where coffee farmers live and work.

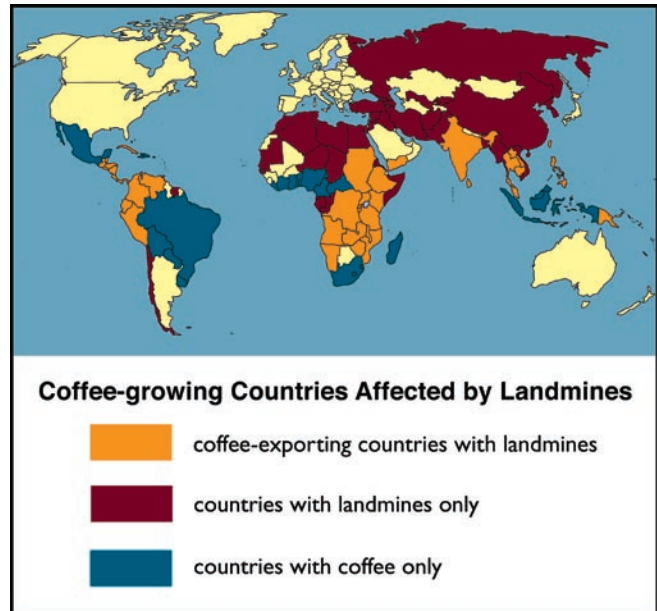
Landmines have a number of negative impacts on these coffee-growing communities. The suspicion of landmines can be just as powerful as their actual presence, and this uncertainty frequently causes good land to go uncultivated, coffee trees to go unpicked and people to lose their homes and farms. Mined roads cannot be used to transport goods to market, and people face the constant fear of stepping on a landmine. Survivors and their families spend the rest of their lives coping with the physical and emotional impact of landmine injuries, and other development initiatives may also be impeded.

The Coffeelands Landmine Victims' Trust

Established in 2005, the Coffeelands Landmine Victims' Trust is a fund dedicated to providing direct support to landmine victims who live and work in coffee communities throughout the world. The Trust connects the international coffee industry and coffee consumers to landmine victims and provides much-needed resources for a wide range of rehabilitation services and economic-development opportunities.

The Trust is administered through the Coffeelands Advisory Board, composed of representatives from the coffee industry, coffee community and civic leaders, and operates in partnership with the Polus Center for Social & Economic Development, Inc., a nonprofit, nongovernmental organization dedicated to supporting people with disabilities. With the help of established in-country partners who understand what constitutes relevant support, the Trust identifies individuals and communities in coffee-growing countries that have been negatively impacted by landmines. Funds help landmine victims access a full range of rehabilitative services and address other ancillary needs such as education or income-generating opportunities. For some survivors, their need would be funds to start or expand a small business or other economic reintegration activities; for others it would be funds to procure a prosthetic device, help defray the costs of transport to services as well as wide array of psychosocial support. The main objective is to empower landmine victims to make choices about what they most need.

The Trust, through the generosity of its donors, has already begun working with communities in Central America and Colombia. Some of the main supporters of the Trust have been the U.S. Department of State's Office of Weapons Removal and Abatement, Grapes for



Coffee-growing areas of the world.
GRAPHIC COURTESY OF THE AUTHORS

Humanity—U.S. and Grapes for Humanity—Canada and, Dean's Beans fair-trade coffee. The Trust has also received support from Starbucks Coffee®, Green Mountain Coffee Roasters®, Royal Coffee™ and various retail cafés and individuals.

The Underlying Philosophy

The driving principle behind the Coffeelands Landmines' Victims Trust is to help people help themselves. Founders Dean Cycon and Michael Lundquist conceived the Trust as a way for the coffee industry and consumers to connect with and provide direct assistance to coffee farmers and their communities. Cycon and Lundquist wanted to begin to address the aftermath of landmines and help farmers get back to doing what they are most passionate about—producing quality coffee for the world to enjoy.

One of the main focuses of the Trust is educating people about the burdens and hurdles that landmine victims in coffee communities face. Far too often, players in landmine action make assumptions about what landmine victims need without really understanding who they are and what challenges they face. Resources are lost when aid is given quickly without taking the time to learn about a person's life. For example, the Trust interviewed a man in Nicaragua who had received training from another organization to become an electrician, training that was largely wasted for one simple reason—the town where the man lives still does not have electricity. The aim of the Trust is to empower landmine victims themselves to identify and prioritize their needs, and to make the

choices about what kind of rehabilitation services are most important for them.

Another unique aspect of the Trust is the personal connection between the individual making the donation and the individual receiving it. Through its Web site, the Trust enables victims' voices to be heard as they describe their own vision for how they can help themselves. Coffee consumers find a way to connect with the people who are responsible for providing their daily cup of coffee. This feeling of being a part of the process and knowing where your hard-earned money is going, as opposed to simply writing a check, speaks to the socially conscious, community-service oriented world today. As evidenced by the success of Web sites like Kiva.org,² this generation of philanthropists increasingly wants to be actively engaged in the efforts they support.

Lessons Learned

While the Coffeelands Landmine Victims' Trust is relatively young and evolving, the experience thus far has been rich with lessons for developing effective strategies and important considerations related to raising funds, sharing information and delivering services. These lessons include understanding how to engage the industry, the role of grassroots support, and the opportunities (and challenges) associated with utilizing technology and social networking.

Engaging the industry. The nonprofit sector increasingly seeks to engage the corporate world in a way that furthers its mission; likewise, "corporate social responsibility" and "corporate philanthropy" are buzzwords of the business world. There are many challenges, however, in engaging a for-profit industry in nonprofit programs. It is essential to find corporations whose priorities and interests match the vision and mission of the nonprofit. With the Trust, this overlap seemed clear from the start. Encouraging a healthy, productive community of coffee suppliers has obvious positive implications for the rest of the industry. One lesson from the boardroom has been that framing this return in terms of its potentially positive impact on profits, rather than its moral virtues or the needs of the landmine victims, is the most effective vehicle for the message.

While the link between coffee and landmines seems clear, and a number of companies have stepped forward with key support to the Trust, there have been challenges with the association. There has been a certain reluctance on the part of coffee industry members to having their company or product associated with landmines, prosthetic limbs and the like, which can cause a negative, near-visceral

reaction. Marketing of the cause is clearly another area where the message is extremely important to the industry, and the Trust is gradually learning to couch the issue in a way that promotes a more positive association. In general, the Trust has found that a focus on personal empowerment and examples of best practices, depicting how mine survivors have developed small businesses or moved into valued roles within their communities, attract more interest than showing mines or mutilated bodies of survivors.

Grassroots support. As part of the Trust's commitment to "help people to help themselves," persons with disabilities must be given the opportunity to identify their own priorities and needs beginning at the grassroots level. Grassroots engagement is important not only in-country, but also

With all its promise, a potential drawback of grassroots support is that initially it tends to raise funds in the hundreds of dollars, as opposed to the tens of thousands that large corporate sponsorships can offer. The time and energy involved can be difficult for nonprofits with limited staff. Once this base is created, however, it has the potential to create a movement that crosses city, state and even national borders, bringing much-needed attention and resources to the issue at hand. If these types of activities could be replicated on a larger scale while maintaining the integrity of the Trust's message and philosophy, there would be an increasingly broad base of interest and support among interested segments that might not otherwise make the connection on their own. Being able to demonstrate grassroots support among their



Single mother Socorro del Carmen Varela of Jinotega, Nicaragua, lost her leg 20 years ago in a mine accident. Walking Unidos, the Trust's in-country partner, helped her develop a plan to move her small hairdressing business from her home. PHOTO COURTESY OF THE AUTHORS

here in the United States, where establishing a connection to the individual landmine survivor can help potential activists and donors see the landmine problem as a broader issue that they are willing to help solve. Increasingly, the Trust is seeing the potential in the stores of energy and enthusiasm of student groups. Beyond spreading the word to their peers about landmine action, these groups also often raise money for the specific need of an individual. Local cafés have shown a willingness to offer their venue as a place to engage customers around the issue, allowing an information table or donating a portion of their proceeds. There was even one young man who took the initiative to raise support for Coffeelands for his *bar mitzvah* service project.

consumer base also creates a stronger incentive for coffee companies to become involved, establishing a clearer link to the bottom line.

Technology and social networking. Another key strategy of the Trust has been to use technology to facilitate the kind of person-to-person connection that is so crucial to its underlying philosophy. The ability to make connections on a personal level engages the donor in a way that encourages him/her to come back to donate again. Technology provides a much-needed bridge that can overcome geographic boundaries to connect a coffee drinker in the United States to a coffee farmer in Nicaragua.

This bridge doesn't come without cost, however. Web sites can be expensive to create and maintain, costing tens of thousands

of dollars. Content must be updated continuously in order to keep drawing people back to the site, and channels must be developed to keep information flowing among the Trust, its partners, beneficiaries and donors. Building this infrastructure and synchronizing all the pieces, including technology, marketing, on-the-ground work and public outreach has been a challenge. For example, beneficiaries of the Trust are located deep in mountainous, rural areas, often one or more days' travel from the headquarters of the in-country partner. Finding the balance between the initial investment in technology and its return is difficult, and finding people and foundations to donate their time and support for Web site design and maintenance is essential for ensuring success.

The Future

As the Coffeelands Landmine Victims' Trust moves forward, it will continue to seek out individual survivors with needs, build its support base, raise awareness about mine action, encourage broad interest, award mini-grants and follow the subsequent impact. The Trust started its work primarily in Central America and Colombia in order to take advantage of strong existing partnerships and begin to make an impact; it is planning to expand throughout the coffee-growing world in the future. ♦

See Endnotes, page 110



Tammie Warmus is Director of International Programs for the Polus Center. She oversees programming around disability issues and landmine-victim assistance in Latin America and Africa. Prior to joining the Polus Center, Warmus administered development projects in Asia, with a focus on education, and worked with World Education, Inc. She recently completed a Master of Business Administration with a focus on sustainable international development and mission-driven management from Brandeis University's Heller School for Social Policy and Management. She holds a Bachelor of Arts in international relations and economics from Syracuse University.

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News Brief

Travel with a Purpose

"Experiential tourism" continues to gain attention as a pursuit of travelers worldwide, and a new book seeks to make enriching, fulfilling vacations easier. Expanding on an earlier edition that focused on North American destinations, Pam Grout's *The 100 Best Worldwide Vacations to Enrich Your Life* (National Geographic, 2007) showcases vacations that seek to change lives, including information on assisting landmine victims.

Vacation ideas are grouped into four categories—arts and crafts, volunteerism, learning, and wellness—and include information on travel planning, local culture and points of interest, and little-known facts. In the volunteer opportunities section, Grout explains how readers can assemble wheelchairs for mine victim in Cambodia. Other opportunities include chances to maintain trails on Mount Kilimanjaro, help monitor wild horses in Mongolia or help prepare for the 2010 Olympic Games in Vancouver, Canada.

For more information on *The 100 Best*, visit <http://tinyurl.com/3ggvdl>.