

# Mine Victim Assistance: Strengthening the Health Sector in Azerbaijan

In July 1998, following consultation with its UN partners, the United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS), acting in its capacity as a focal point for all mine-related activities within the UN system, offered to field a multidisciplinary inter-agency mission to assess the requirement for further UN assistance in Azerbaijan. The mission found a serious dearth of recorded data concerning mine/UXO casualties. Even agencies dealing directly with mine victims, such as hospitals and prosthetic centers, have no mechanisms to disaggregate data on mine/UXO victims from other war-related injuries.

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## Background

Humanitarian mine action in Azerbaijan has been institutionalized since July 1998, when the Azerbaijan National Agency for Mine Action (ANAMA) was established by Presidential Decree. In April 1999, the government of Azerbaijan and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) signed a joint project, the Azerbaijan Mine Action Program, as a result of the recommendations of the assessment mission authorized by UNMAS. These recommendations have also been considered in the development of the National Strategic Plan for mine action, which envisaged, along with management, clearance, survey and mine risk education (MRE), the implementation of the mine victim assistance (MVA) program based on a needs assessment of the mine victims database populated by survey data. Accordingly, MVA is important in strengthening the health sector in Azerbaijan. The Strategic Plan also provisioned the development and implementation of a long-term MVA plan for Azerbaijan, with the assistance of the World Health Organization (WHO), ensuring it conforms to the national plan and structure and that it is

based on a needs assessment in order to cover all aspects of mine victim support.

## Further Consideration

Another assessment of possible approaches to solve the mine/UXO contamination problem was conducted in early 2001 by Ms. Tehnaz Dastoor, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) Landmine Coordinator for the Northern Caucasus. The assessment discovered the necessity of addressing the potential needs of mine victims in Azerbaijan. An integrated and comprehensive assistance program cannot be set up for the mine victims of Azerbaijan until a needs assessment is carried out. The assessment must address more than prosthetic needs. It must address the social and economic needs of not only the limbless but also of the hearing, sight and mentally impaired.

The assessment also revealed that inadequate psychological trauma counseling and vocational training services were being provided for war victims. In both areas (provided an agreement is reached through the Working Group on Victim Assistance and donor funding), intervention would be extremely cost-efficient with high-impact results. It is important to include psychological trauma counseling in any comprehensive program. The assessment recommended

developing a capacity-building program to address the need for a non-disease-oriented approach to psychological intervention. It was also concluded that vocational training should be included as part of the comprehensive approach to dealing with mine victims. Vocational training should be completed by conducting a baseline survey for gathering relevant information, and then by conducting a series of trauma workshops with relevant health personnel/social workers. Prosthetic/orthopedic centers, active in Baku should also be encouraged to gather data on mine/UXO victims, which can be entered into a uniform database Information Management System for Mine Action (IMSMA) and used to better target affected communities with appropriate mine awareness messages. There should be periodic donor briefings on victim assistance programs in order to inform and solicit further support for their implementation.

## Implementation of MVA

ANAMA started MVA-related activities in April 2002. The strategy is mainly aimed at joining efforts of national and international organizations in assisting disabled people, as well as in developing and implementing the long-term MVA plan in Azerbaijan. ANAMA decided to undertake a needs assessment of the situation of



mine/UXO survivors, to help identify current needs and to suggest interventions to address these needs. The organization has worked with the United Nations and other humanitarian organizations, possesses a firm understanding of the local laws, rules and customs, could include job placement searches if needed, has sound managerial practices and was recommended by others.

The General (Level 1) Survey conducted in 2001 in 11 war-affected districts, registered about 1,200 landmine/UXO victims. It is believed that the number of mine victims is much higher as most of the victims are living in other parts of Azerbaijan not yet surveyed. A total of 52 recent mine victims were reported in 2001 and 2002. Detailed information on victims is entered into IMSMA. The existing IMSMA questionnaire, together with data gathered on casualties, makes it possible to gather information about mine incidents (conditions and location, type of explosive devices, type of injury etc.), which is verified by survivors. Despite this methodology, there is a lack of information regarding the needs of survivors in the questionnaire.

In the beginning stages of activities, an inter-agency survey was conducted in about 90 national organizations to identify those conducting MVA or involved in implementation of disabled care projects. Related ministries have been visited and, in consultation with Mr. Sayed Aqa (former UNDP/ANAMA CTA), Ms. Tehnaz Dastoor (international specialist, UNICEF), and Ms. Akiko Ikeda (UNMAS), the following facts have been identified:

- No national long-term MVA plan.
- No MVA projects/programs yet implemented in Azerbaijan.
- No liaison between relevant information sources.
- Little-to-no information and no documentary reports regarding needs of survivors.
- No unified and reliable database on MVA in Azerbaijan, which must be analyzed to serve as a base for any type of forthcoming MVA program eligible for donor funding.

## Needs Assessment Project

The strategic objective, the Needs Assessment Project, has been developed to assess needs of disabled people, with a focus on mine victims. After this information is gathered, a plan should be set up. The solution proposed should consist of the following steps:

- Gather information from United Nations, International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the government of Azerbaijan (GOA) databases on individuals who are disabled due to landmines.
- Confirm agencies and individuals chosen from the data collection; create a questionnaire for individuals that are affected by landmines.
- Analyze data, information, and surveys completed to determine the needs of mine victims.
- Develop a plan.

The project will be implemented by ANAMA through a partner organization

to be identified in a bidding procedure. The UNDP Country Office will provide the Quality Assurance Monitor. An ANAMA MVA officer will serve as project coordinator. A new questionnaire form will be developed. In addition to the previous IMSMA form, it will give comprehensive information about the needs of survivors in medical and psychosocial care, physical and vocational rehabilitation, economic assistance and advocacy, as well as in education, training and sports. The project coordinator will train and sensitize survey implementers to issues of trauma and recovery experienced by mine victims and their families before the implementers interview landmine survivors.

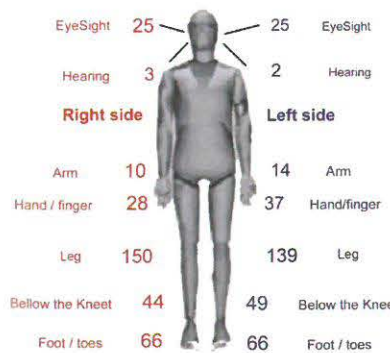
ANAMA will gather preliminary information for the needs of the survey, provide technical training for the staff of the contractor and perform survey data collection, processing (in IMSMA) and analysis (in the Agency's Information Department). ANAMA will also monitor and evaluate survey activities and prepare a Mine Victim Needs Assessment Report. The report will be reviewed by an inter-agency MVA Working Group and submitted to the GOA. Based on the needs assessment conducted, the long-term MVA strategy will be developed and the project proposals on various aspects of MVA will be drafted and presented to donors.

## Consolidated Activity Within Working Group

The Working Group on Mine/UXO Victim Assistance was established and consists of representatives of relevant ministries, governmental agencies, and national and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs). The aim of the Working Group on Mine/UXO Victim Assistance is to coordinate activities in providing support to disabled people in Azerbaijan and to extend this support to mine/UXO survivors. The following objectives for the Working Group have been identified:

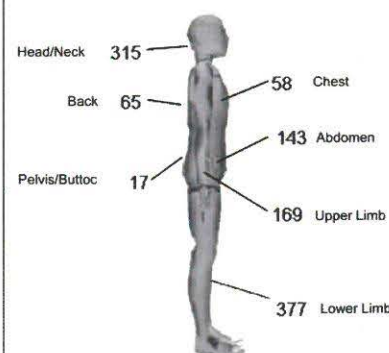
- Develop and strengthen collaboration between ministries and organizations dealing with assistance to disabled people.
- Organize special surveys to identify assistance needs of mine/UXO survivors

### Amputations / Permanent losses



■ Mine victim statistics.

### Minor injuries





with the aim of creating a united and reliable database on mine victims in Azerbaijan.

- Identify and maintain an MVA strategy based on needs and develop a long-term national program.
- Canalize and coordinate development and implementation of MVA projects and programs.
- Establish and run a special public fund to raise money for financing MVA projects and programs.
- Initiate an information network for disabled people in Azerbaijan, including individuals and associations.
- Identify possible vocational areas for disabled people in different districts in order to create occupational (professional) rehabilitation centers for mine victims and to coordinate their activities.
- Spread information on MVA activities to the public and attract donors.

The last meeting of the Working Group was held in ANAMA's office on May 7, 2003. Participants were informed that the project proposal "Azerbaijan Countrywide Mine Victim Survey" had been finalized and presented to donors. The representatives of WHO and Association Design of Invalids of Azerbaijan Republic (ADIAR) proposed some amendments to the survey questionnaire.

Mr. Lutful Kabir, the UNDP CTA for ANAMA, emphasized that project proposals, based on wide and detailed information and on an integrated database, might ensure more efficient results. He mentioned the high professional level of the ANAMA Information Department and recommended use of its capabilities for the purposes of the Working Group. ANAMA has been chosen as a focal point

for distributing printed materials and information dedicated to assisting disabled people in Azerbaijan. All information will be forwarded to members of the Working Group through the Agency. The ANAMA website ([www.anama.baku.az](http://www.anama.baku.az)) is considered an effective means of information exchange. Along with the electronic means of information exchange, it also proposed distributing a bi-monthly bulletin on the Working Group. The study of international experience is also considered important. Therefore, ANAMA has started making contact with organizations listed in the Global Mine Action Register on James Madison University's Mine Action Information Center (MAIC) website (<http://maic.jmu.edu/gmar>).

The Democratic Journalists' League, which presented at the meeting for the first time, proposed establishing a "hotline" for preliminary mine victim data collection. ADIAR announced that its Information and Consultancy Center, operational for years, could also be used for this purpose. The use of this "hotline," along with official sources of information, could serve in developing contacts or networking mine survivors. It was also mentioned that regular publication of articles on mine action, MRE and MVA will canalize the public opinion and the capabilities of society in resolving the problems in these areas. The initiative group, consisting of ADIAR, Dirchelish (Revival), the Democratic Journalists' League, WHO and ANAMA, was established for detailed study of particular problems.

The participants decided to continue discussions on establishing and maintaining special public funds on victim assistance, after detailed study of relevant regulations and development of the charter. Everybody agreed that the participation of outstanding people and leading businessmen of Azerbaijan could ensure community respect for the fund. It was decided to compile the Group Work Plan taking into account organizations' propositions and capacities in preferable activity areas.

The Azerbaijan Campaign to Ban Landmines (ACBL) informed the meeting of its project on mine victim data

collection in over 10 districts of Azerbaijan, approved by the Slovenian-based International Trust Fund for Demining and MVA. The implementation of the project will start soon. The activity of the NGO "Shefaly Eller" (Healing Hands) from Ismayilly town, involving MVA, created deep interest among participants. The organization is assisting 56 mine survivors from Fizuli and Beylagan districts. There was also discussion on the possibility of gathering data on mine victim needs during the implementation of the ADIAR organization's program for Fizuli and Goranboy districts from May to July. ■

*\*All graphics courtesy of author.*

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