January 2002

Victim Assistance: A Way Forward Emerges

Suzanne Fiederlein
CISR

Follow this and additional works at: http://commons.lib.jmu.edu/cisr-journal

Part of the Defense and Security Studies Commons, Emergency and Disaster Management Commons, Other Public Affairs, Public Policy and Public Administration Commons, and the Peace and Conflict Studies Commons

Recommended Citation

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Center for International Stabilization and Recovery at JMU Scholarly Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Journal of Conventional Weapons Destruction by an authorized editor of JMU Scholarly Commons. For more information, please contact dc_admin@jmu.edu.
Victim Assistance: A Way Forward Emerges

The place of victim assistance in mine action has been debated since at least 1999. That year, the Standing Committee of Experts on Victim Assistance, Socio-Economic Reintegration and Mine Awareness (SCVA) met for the first time since being established by the delegates at the First Meeting of States Parties in Maputo. A number of issues arose at that Standing Committee meeting that have guided its work ever since. The committee has succeeded in adding some of these, meaningfully, to the formal agenda.

However, it is interesting to note the prominence of this concern for the "place" of victim assistance in mine action even at that first meeting. Participants noted that the activities of victim assistance are more related to the field of health care than to "operational mine action," which includes clearance and mine awareness. The debate has continued ever since, with the SCVA eventually transferring responsibility for mine awareness to what is now called the Standing Committee on Mine Clearance, Mine Awareness and Mine Action Technology, because it was believed mine awareness fits more properly there than under victim assistance.

This long-standing debate should come to a head related to the Geneva International Center for Humanitarian Demining (GICH), The Role of Mine Action in Victim Assistance, released in September 2002, is analyzed and discussed.

The United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS) asked the GICH to consider the ongoing effectiveness of each debate over victim assistance's proper relationship to mine action. The GICH study provides detailed accounts of four case studies of victim assistance programming in the context of mine action operations in some very different settings: Cambodia, Eritrea/Ethiopia, Kosovo and Nicaragua. Based on analysis of the findings of these cases and deliberations among members of a UN Focus Group and a Steering Group, the study presents six findings and proposes six recommendations in response.

The study asserts that "mine action should not completely turn its back on victim assistance" but should take on a coordination role and, in "exceptional circumstances," "it should be prepared to take an active role in the provision of services." Overall, the study should generate much needed discussion and set the stage for UNMAS to launch its policy on victim assistance, which it is currently preparing.

In anticipation of the release of this report, UNMAS staff have been drafting a victim assistance policy paper that would provide guidance to all the UN-affiliated mine action centers (MAGs) as to their responsibility in support of victim assistance. While discussion of the content of that policy paper will have to wait since it is not due to be released until early 2003, indications are that UNMAS has not forsaken victim assistance, believing it remains an important pillar of mine action and that MAGs do have a role to play in support of victim assistance.

Achievements Within the SCVA Framework

Many non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and international organizations like the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) have worked with governments in mine-affected countries during the last decade to develop programs and facilities to provide medical and rehabilitative care for landmine survivors. Numerous successful programs have eased the physical conditions of survivors and helped victims resume productive lives. Much remains to be done, and NGOs have rediscovered their efforts to provide the needed services and to find more effective ways to operate, especially through enhanced information sharing and better coordination.

The SCVA also can point to some important successes that have meant progress for the field of mine victim assistance. The Working Group on Victim Assistance of the International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL-ICGW) has worked with the SCVA to compile information on programs around the world whose beneficiaries include but are not necessarily limited to landmine victims.

The first edition of this Portfolio of Victim Assistance Programs was published in September 2000 and has been updated annually. It fulfills in part the expressed need for more information about victims and programs available to provide services to them. An additional tool developed to collect information on victim assistance programs is the Form J that was designed in response to the call of the SCVA to know more about what the states party to the MBC are doing to meet their obligation to assist landmine victims, as stipulated in Article 6 of the Convention. So far, relatively few states have filed the Form J, which remains voluntary since it is not part of the MBC. Article 7 reporting requirements, but a steady increase in its use is evident. The SCVA strongly encourages states to file the form so that more can be learned about victim assistance funding and programming.

The SCVA also overrode the complicity of existing guidelines on victim assistance that NGOs and other service providers can consult when planning programs for landmine victims. Several organizations have invested considerable effort in developing guidelines that address topics ranging from providing medical and rehabilitative care to collecting data and incorporating assistance to victims into a broader development-oriented framework. Because the field of mine victim assistance had done so much work along these lines, the decision was made to postpone indefinitely the development of formal International Mine Action Standards (IMAS) for victim assistance. Detailed guidelines and standards were issued in 2001 for the field of mine clearance, and the guidelines for victim assistance issued in 1999 are in the process of being revised and released as part of the IMAS package. But at a February 2001
New Initiatives to Address Lingering Issues

Despite the progress made via the SCVA framework to aid states party to their landmine victims, three issues before the Standing Committee at that first meeting in 1999 remain stubbornly on its agenda in 2002. These issues have proved to be difficult to address and remain obstacles to overcome in the near term. They also are issues that will be affected by the ongoing debate over the place of victim assistance in mine action. In 2002, all three also have benefited from new initiatives that, when taken together, clear a forward path for victim assistance. These issues are:

1) How to collect and share needed data on victims.
2) How to gain sufficient attention from donors.
3) How to coordinate victim assistance activities more effectively.

Collection and Exchange of Data

The victim assistance community continues to lament the absence of sufficient data on mine and UXO victims, despite the many efforts of by the ICRC, World Health Organization (WHO) and various NGOs like Handicap International (HI) and Physicians for Human Rights to develop casualty viewing systems. In some cases, data exists but is not being adequately shared; in other cases, it is still not being collected in a consistent and helpful way. In a few cases, such as in Cambodia, data on victim is collected and utilized in an effective way to support the operations of various programs in mine risk education and other victims.

The expanded use of the Information Management System for Mine Action (IMSMART) by United Mine Action (UNMAS) and the Mine Action Committee (MAC) has led to greater numbers of countries collecting victim data and generating reports based on the data. However, the issue continues to arise at SCVA meetings and in other mine victim assistance venues. Sherer Bailey, in a report to the SCVA meeting in May 2002, reported that the UNMAS meeting in May 2002 favored IMSMMA, many agreed that IMSMMA incident victim functionality could be improved; they just could not agree how to do it. But there was strong support for a formal review with the goal of ensuring that what data is being collected via IMSMMA is relevant and appropriate.

This conclusion relates directly to the debate over the role of mine action in victim assistance. The most recent recommendation of Humanitarian Demining Programs of the U.S. Department of State asked the Mine Action Information Center (MACI) at James Madison University to research the problem and "formulate courses of action for the systematic and accurate collection and processing of casualty-related data." The study of landmines and unexploded ordnance (UXO) problems agreed that demining offices (NDO) played an important role in victim data collection and that they should continue to collect the data. They also recognized that there was a limit to what the MAGs/NDOs should be expected to collect, and so what they collected needed to be carefully evaluated for its relevance. The most important fact that the data "collected through IMSMMA is only part of the information that is needed for the data collection, and that both government and non-government agencies need to improve victim assistance programs." Another major set of recommendations agreed on by the participants related to the proper role of national Ministries of Health in the collection and sharing of mine victim data is that the recommendations sought to draw the Ministries of Health more actively into the data collection and management processes, recognizing that many of the mining industries in carrying out this responsibility.

The MACI casualty database study and workshop certainly have not resolved the problem of inadequate victim data, but there are several factors that they have indicated some steps to take as the mine action community continues to grapple with the challenges it faces as it works to ameliorate the dangers of landmines.

The Funding Challenge

Another lamentation of the mine victim assistance community is the inability to get sufficient funds from donors so that needed services can be provided to all victims. This challenge is complicated by the differing views about what services are needed and exactly to whom should programs apply. The services are needed and for whom is determined by whether the focus is on survivors—that is, persons who received injuries in mine accidents—or on victims more broadly—survivors along with their families and other members of communities affected by the presence of landmines. While the all-encompassing definition of mine victim developed by the WVA/ICBL is widely accepted, its use presents real difficulties for program planning and funding prioritization, a point that the GICHD study The Role of Mine Action in Victim Assistance does a good job of examining (pp. 11-13).

Regardless of this lack of clarity and its responsibility for the funding community, victim assistance programs seem to receive a smaller percentage of the funds being directed to mine action than the clearance and mine awareness pillars. The Landmine Monitor and HI both highlight that the data "issued by victims flows to victim assistance as well as the difficulties of vic­

While the regional focus of the workshop was similar to the ICBL organized South­

The regional focus of the workshop was similar to the ICBL organized South­

The regional focus of the workshop was similar to the ICBL organized South­

The regional focus of the workshop was similar to the ICBL organized South­

The regional focus of the workshop was similar to the ICBL organized South­

The regional focus of the workshop was similar to the ICBL organized South­

The regional focus of the workshop was similar to the ICBL organized South­

The regional focus of the workshop was similar to the ICBL organized South­

The regional focus of the workshop was similar to the ICBL organized South­

The regional focus of the workshop was similar to the ICBL organized South­

The regional focus of the workshop was similar to the ICBL organized South­

The regional focus of the workshop was similar to the ICBL organized South­

The regional focus of the workshop was similar to the ICBL organized South­

The regional focus of the workshop was similar to the ICBL organized South­

The regional focus of the workshop was similar to the ICBL organized South­

The regional focus of the workshop was similar to the ICBL organized South­

The regional focus of the workshop was similar to the ICBL organized South­

The regional focus of the workshop was similar to the ICBL organized South­

The regional focus of the workshop was similar to the ICBL organized South­

The regional focus of the workshop was similar to the ICBL organized South­

The regional focus of the workshop was similar to the ICBL organized South­

The regional focus of the workshop was similar to the ICBL organized South­

The regional focus of the workshop was similar to the ICBL organized South­

The regional focus of the workshop was similar to the ICBL organized South­

The regional focus of the workshop was similar to the ICBL organized South­
The Role of Mine Action in Victim Assistance

Of the five pillars of mine action, victim assistance seems to receive the least attention. At the request of the United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS), the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining (GICHD) has recently completed a research project with a view to offering guidance on the future role of mine action in mine and UXO victim assistance.

By Eric Filipponi, GICHD

Introduction

The response to the global landmine and UXO problem, generally termed mine action, is defined as including five core components: mine clearance, mine awareness and risk reduction education, victim assistance, advocacy in support of a total ban on anti-personnel landmines, and stockpiling destruction. Yet, of the five components, the mine action community has devoted the same level of attention to victim assistance as it has to the others. Though clearly part of the existing definition of mine action, few mine action organisations have much involvement in victim assistance in issues and that is equally true of the coordinating entities, such as the United Nations and the UN Mine Action Service. At the same time, practitioners of mine clearance, survey and awareness have often been unclear as to victim assistance's operational role within mine action.

Indeed, victim assistance has sometimes sat uneasily within the framework of operational mine action. Mine action centres and mine action programmes have often been unclear as to what their operational role should be in this field and in many cases—such as in southern and northern Iraq being notable exceptions—mine action has played little operational role in direct service provision. Although a number of humanitarian organisations involved in providing assistance to those injured by landmines and UXO also carry out humanitarian demining and mine awareness, the skills and knowledge required are typically very different.

Study on The Role of Mine Action in Victim Assistance

At the request of UNMAS, the GICHD has recently completed a research project with a view to offering guidance on the future role of mine action in mine and UXO victim assistance. The Study has found that generally, operational mine action has had a limited role in direct service delivery, but nonetheless, it still makes a significant contribution to the rehabilitation and social reintegration of mine and UXO victims.

Operations at field level within mine action centres and programmes to implement victim assistance programmes has been relatively limited. The gap between policy and operations is what the study has aimed to examine. Specifically, it has tried to:

- Identify and analyse ways in which mine action agencies/programmes have approached victim assistance.
- Identify lessons learned that will lead to the clarification of the respective roles and responsibilities of agencies involved in mine action in relation to victim assistance.
- Identify good practice in the field of victim assistance for mine action agencies and programmes.

The Study is comprised of five country-case studies—Cambodia, Eritrea,