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Victim Assistance Policy Planning: Decentralization as a Key?

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Wheelchairs

With regards to the distribution and quality of wheelchairs in Vietnam, VNAH has made a great deal of progress. Over 3,000 wheelchairs have been distributed and the organization sees to it that high-priority cases, such as double amputees and stroke victims, receive nichel, polio, and operate these devices. Through grants and other monetary assistance, the organization has been able to provide technical assistance to manufacturers to improve design and the overall production of wheelchairs. VNAH has donated wheelchairs to the disabled in the central and southern regions of Vietnam and hopes that their aid can expand to other areas in southeast Asia.

UNICEF

Working alongside national governments and other humanitarian agencies, UNICEF strives to accomplish many goals related to the protection of children worldwide. This organization takes on issues such as poverty, human rights, health care, and education to ensure children around the world have the opportunity to reach their utmost potential. As the severity of the landmine problem in Vietnam has come to light, UNICEF has observed that the children of Vietnam are considered at great risk from the threat of landmines and UXO. UNICEF has begun to take action to launch programs directed at this vulnerable demographic group.

Much of this focus is aimed at the population of Quang Tri, which is found along the old dividing line between the former North and South Vietnam. UNICEF has taken great lengths to address the issue of childhood disability by advocating government policy aimed at supporting the needs of the disabled by offering community-based rehabilitation programs. These community programs operate in 45 out of 61 provinces. The National Institute for Educational Sciences (NIES) project has worked with UNICEF to help facilitate rehabilitation by pushing for inclusive education for disabled children. UNICEF also has been involved in the following projects:

- "Launching a new program this year to reduce the prevalence of casualties from bombs, landmines and other ordnance across the country.
- "Supporting the production and airing of television and radio spots in numerous affected provinces throughout the country.
- "Supporting the dissemination of UXO/mining warning signs in affected areas, (as well as) information dissemination activities through existing health care networks, peer education activities for children and youth, and expanding inclusive education activities to provide additional opportunities for disabled children to attend school and increase school awareness activities."

Conclusion

At epidemic rates, landmines have claimed the health and livelihood of millions throughout southeast Asia. As the victim toll has increased to alarming proportions, many organizations have taken it upon themselves to assist these nations in any means possible. Although landmines have taken hope away from these victims, these organizations have given these disavantaged people a chance to start again and live a more productive life. "That's what it's all about," Ca Vien Tran said. "We not only need to heal the physical wounds, but deal with the emotional scars as well, and restore hope where there was none."

Endnotes


*All photos courtesy of Chabasse International

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Chabasse: Victim Assistance Policy Planning: Decentralization as a Key?

Victim Assistance Policy Planning: Decentralization as a Key?

While victim assistance is becoming an increasingly familiar topic for signatories of the Mine Ban Treaty, the problem remains of how best to implement such programs. The author suggests that it is time for a switch from "top down" to "bottom up" implementation.

by Dr. Philippe Chabasse, Co-director, Handicap International

Introduction

Three years after the entry into force of the Mine Ban Treaty, a major difficulty remains concerning implementation, evaluation and consequently funding of mine victim assistance programs. The following paper presents a regional initiative that encourages national actors to determine what they consider as priorities and locally applicable criteria for victim assistance policies and projects.

Numerous conceptual advances have been made through the intergovernmental process, which is leading to an international consensus on an inclusive definition of mine victims as well as agreement on the main components of victim assistance covering emergency aid, medical care, physical rehabilitation, and social and economic reintegration.

The proposed activities must be integrated into national policies of public health and social assistance. They must be adapted to local environmental, social and physical factors and offer the most appropriate services to the people. They must respect existing institutional and sectoral frameworks, and ensure the maintenance of commitments that have been taken during the implementation of partnerships. They will rely as much as possible on appropriate techniques and technologies and on the main principles of assistance at the national and regional level.

However ideal, these concepts come from the top down and are generated by international expertise. The time may have come when, from policy planning through implementation, "bottom up" processes must be encouraged.

A Southeast Asia Regional Initiative

In mid-2001, Handicap International (HI) began an initiative to strengthen the capacity to develop policy planning and effective implementation of projects in Cambodia, Laos, Thailand and Vietnam by identifying, supporting and linking actors at both national and regional levels.

From July to October 2001, national workshops on victim assistance have brought together governments, ministries, provincial actors, non-governmental organizations (NGO) and international organizations (IO) representatives, and associations of disabled persons. These national workshops prepared a regional conference held in November 2001 in Bangkok, Thailand.

The regional conference concluded with agreement on the necessity of the following:

- Establishing a living regional network highlighting "best practices," maintaining contacts, collecting information, and producing and updating a directory of service providers from governments, NGOs and IOs.
- Helping national actors work in a collaborative manner and developing a prioritized portfolio of programs for each country.
- Presenting the results of this ongoing process to future intergovernmental meetings in order to enlist further technical and financial support for victim assistance in the region.

Reinforcement of National Coordination

In Cambodia, such a coordination mechanism among all actors in victim assistance already exists through the Disabilities Action Council (DAC) and will soon be reinforced. In Laos, the National Council for Disabled Persons (NCDP) is instrumental in bringing all national actors together regularly. In Vietnam, the process is currently underway through the Ministry of Health and concerned NGOs and IOs.

It is worth noting that representatives from Laos and Vietnam, two signatory states, participated in the last intergovernmental meetings in Geneva.

On the eve of the Fourth Meeting of States Parties, one can assess positive results from the intergovernmental process as it has enabled the international community to develop a shared common understanding of the framework of victim assistance strategies. As far as implementation is concerned, however, the driving force no longer lies in Geneva or New York, but in Phnom Penh, Vientiane, Hanoi or Bangkok.

Donor countries are not the ones to best determine national policies. Appropriation into national policies and projects by a wide range of national actors remains the key for effective implementation and sustainability.

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