Victim Assistance Policy Planning: Decentralization as a Key?

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Wheelchairs

With regards to the distribution and quality of wheelchairs in Vietnam, UNICEF has made a great deal of progress. Over 10,000 wheelchairs have been distributed and the organization sees it to that high-priority cases, such as double amputees and victims with polio, can own and operate these devices. Through grants and other monetary assistance, the organization has been able to provide technical assistance to manufactures to improve design and the overall production of wheelchairs. UNICEF 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 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.

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 disadvantaged people a chance to start again and lead a more productive life. “That’s what it’s all about,” Ca Van Tran states. “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

14. “All photos courtesy of Clear Path International.”

All photos courtesy of Clear Path International

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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.

Introduction

Three years after the entry into force of the Mine Ban Treaty, a major difficulty remains concerning implementation, evaluation and consequentially 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 programs.

Numerous conceptual advances have been made through the intersessional process, which is leading to an international consensus on an inclusive definition of mine victims as well as agreement on the need for victim assistance covering emergency aid, hospital 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 permanent commitment of the governments through the implementation of partnerships. They will rely as much as possible on appropriate techniques and technologies and on available resources 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 national and regional levels.

From July to October 2001, national workshops on victim assistance have brought together governments, ministries, provincial actors, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and international organizations (IOs) 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, 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 intersessional 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 Disability 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 intersessional meetings in Geneva.

On the eve of the Fourth Meeting of States Parties, one can assess positive results from the intersessional 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 priorities and projects by a wide range of national actors remains the key for effective implementation and sustainability.

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