December 2002

Assisting a Disabled Population: A Look at Victim Assistance in Afghanistan

CISR JMU

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

Available at: http://commons.lib.jmu.edu/cisr-journal/vol6/iss3/18

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.
Assisting a Disabled Population: 
A Look at Victim Assistance in Afghanistan

With an already dwindling health care system, Afghanistan has one of the world’s largest disabled populations. There are a number of groups working in the area to assist and rehabilitate the numerous victims of landmines/UXO and people with other disabilities.

by Susanna Sprinkel, MAIC

Victim Assistance in Afghanistan

Nearly four percent of Afghans are permanently crippled by landmines and Unexploded Ordnance (UXO) or other tragic circumstances, making Afghanistan a country with one of the largest disabled populations in the world. In a country where the health care system is already lacking, there are limited resources available for the estimated 12 civilians who fall victim to landmines/UXO a day. Numerous organizations are working to assist Afghan landmine survivors in finding the adequate medical care, rehabilitation and vocational training necessary to integrate them back into society. Although many of these efforts were hindered following the events of September 11th, recently increased mobility in the area has allowed these organizations to re-establish and further strengthen their victim assistance programs throughout the country.

Comprehensive Disabled Afghan Program

Established in 1995 by the United Nations PEACE (Peace Education and Community Empowerment) Program, the Comprehensive Disabled Afghan Program (CDAP) is one of Afghanistan’s largest victim assistance programs. Of the 800,000 disabled Afghans, 150,000 have received treatment from CDAP facilities. Operating in nearly 45 regions throughout the nation, CDAP employs only Afghan personnel with the exception of one international advisor. They also offer training and necessary resources for smaller organizations interested in implementing their own Community-Based Rehabilitation (CBR) programs.

CDAP’s efforts are broad and include supplying wheelchairs and other mobility aids, training individuals from their homes, and addressing the psychological needs of each patient. Additionally, they work with reintegrating disabled children into the school system, teaching them Braille and Sign Language, and preparing teachers to attend to the special needs of these children. By providing both male and female patients with relevant vocational training and small personal loans, CDAP gives them a chance to rebuild their self-esteem and earn their own income. Aside from rehabilitation activities, CDAP also assists 800 widows and orphans in earning an income, and they have established 50 different primary schools in communities throughout Afghanistan.

International Committee of the Red Cross

In 1988, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) implemented an extensive Orthopedic Program for landmine/UXO victims in Afghanistan. In 1995, these services were extended to other persons with disabilities. As of March 2002, the ICRC Orthopedic Program had assisted approximately 48,000 disabled Afghans (26,000 amputees, 80% of which were landmine victims). The program is run through six centers throughout the country and operations include: producing, repairing, and fitting prostheses, orthoses, and other mobility devices; providing physical rehabilitation; and training civilians to work in the ICRC centers. They also offer weekly home care visits for paraplegics, who are better treated from home than at the center.

In order to provide disabled civilians with more job opportunities, the ICRC has only employed disabled men and women at their Orthopedic Centers since 1995. They have found this to be beneficial not only to the disabled personnel but also to the patients, who find comfort in a staff that fully understands their struggles. Additionally, the ICRC has established a micro-credit program where disabled Afghans are given a loan to start a small business in the area. Other efforts to reintegrate disabled individuals into society include vocational training for adults and school assistance for children. Their school assistance program allows the children to study either at home or at the nearest school by providing the necessary tuition, supplies and transportation.

Aside from the six ICRC Orthopedic Centers, the ICRC also supports seven surgical hospitals in Afghanistan. After the events of September 11th, they expanded this support to 18 additional hospitals by providing medical supplies and other necessary resources to keep the facilities active. They are also working to restore a few of the hospitals that were completely shut down during attacks, and they have provided on-site time runs for various first aid stations throughout the country.

Victim Assistance in Afghanistan

Nearly 80% of the civilian population is estimated to have been severely affected by the events of September 11th, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) implemented an extensive Orthopedic Program for landmine victims in Afghanistan. In 1995, these services were extended to other persons with disabilities. As of March 2002, the ICRC Orthopedic Program had assisted approximately 48,000 disabled Afghans (26,000 amputees, 80% of which were

with a slim chance of survival. Before completing this visit, the RRI team compiled a list of requested medical equipment and textbooks to bring back when conditions improved.

Shortly after Christmas of 2001, two RRI medical workers set off on a week-long mission to deliver medical supplies to smaller Afghan villages and assist at many injured civilians as possible. Each day of their trip, they visited a different village and found there was no time enough time to meet the demands they found there. Although they were unable to help everyone, they were able to treat hundreds of civilians and military officials, as well as use their leftover funds to provide food for one of the villages they visited. During this mission, the workers were also able to establish a network for facilitating future operations, as resources become available.

Handicap International

Since 1985, Handicap International (HI) has been conducting various mine action activities in Afghanistan. These activities include helping disabled persons learn to walk again by providing necessary orthopedic equipment and technical support in an Orthopedic Center in Kandahar. Additionally, HI is working with eight different refugee camps in Pakistan in rehabilitating disabled Afghani civilians. Finally, in order to make demining efforts in Afghanistan more efficient, HI workers have been

![A man learns to walk at an ICRC orthopedic center.](image-url)
Focus

Journal of Conventional Weapons Destruction, Vol. 6, Iss. 3 [2002], Art. 18

Victim & Survivor Assistance

Center for International Rehabilitation

Working with the Department of Veterans Affairs Chicago Healthcare System, Northwestern University and the Rehabilitation Institute of Chicago, the Center for International Rehabilitation (CIR) has been designing wheelchairs to fit the specific needs of each disabled individual since 1996. One of their most well known products is the CIR chair, which is the first chair designed to meet the needs of Afghanistan's harsh environment. The CIR chairs are constructed and distributed in Afghanistan by disabled civilians with parts made under CIR supervision in Pakistan. All of these efforts are a part of the CIR "Wheelchairs for Afghanistan" program.

The Mobility Project

The Mobility Project is a non-profit organization that collects and restores used wheelchairs and other medical equipment for persons with disabilities that cannot afford this much-needed equipment. Additionally, in a few of their countries of operation, they have trained disabled civilians to restore wheelchairs and other medical devices themselves, and they have established the facilities for them to conduct this work. The Mobility Project has made three deliveries to Afghanistan and Pakistan, assisting hundreds of landmine victims and other disabled individuals. In addition to delivering the material, their volunteers adjust each mobility device to fit the needs of each particular patient.

Another aspect of the Mobility Project is to enhance further rehabilitation by providing a sports program in the area. The volunteers feel that playing sports is a way to not only build the individual's physical and emotional strength but also to show them exactly how much mobility their new wheelchair brings them. Although this past year's events have halted their project in Afghanistan and Pakistan, they hope to resume operations as soon as possible.

Conclusion

"These organizations are only a few of the ones making a significant effort to rehabilitate and reintegrate landmine/UXO victims in Afghanistan. By addressing the needs of the entire individual rather than just treating the wound, they are making a huge difference in the lives of people who otherwise would have no chance of surviving in the world. These groups are not only taking steps to rehabilitate the individual but also to rehabilitate the nation by providing job opportunities to enhance a desperately struggling economy. Although the landmine problem in Afghanistan is one of the most severe and will continue to hinder the country's growth for years to come, these programs provide some much-needed hope for the entire nation."

References


Contact Information

Saania Spinakel
Mine Action Information Center
Tel: (540) 568-2810
E-mail: spinakel@jmu.edu

The Background in Vietnam

Vietnam, like any country emerging from the effects of war, has many disabled people, both adults and children. Their disabilities can be directly related to the war (e.g., amputation from unexploded ordnances or trauma), or indirectly (e.g., polio as a result of a lack of vaccination programs). Vietnam also seems to have a high proportion of children with cerebral palsy. In Vietnam, there is also the question of dioxins and the effects they may have on children of those who served directly in the military or those simply living in the worst affected areas. In many of these cases, ongoing arthritic care and rehabilitation is needed.

Changes in lifestyles, including an increased use of motor vehicles, tobacco, alcohol and illicit drugs, lead to new health problems and a need for more orthopedic devices. The case load currently seen within the VVAF facilities in Bach Mai and the National Institute for Pediatrics (NIP) indicates a broad range of diseases and impairments that can be related to both the populations of "developing" and "developed" countries. The adult population of patients in Bach Mai suffers from many of the degenerative diseases of aging, e.g., osteoporosis. There is also a large number of people suffering from lifestyle diseases, e.g., stroke and diabetes. Recent newspaper articles indicate the prevalence of diabetes is rising. The pediatric population of patients at NIP indicates a decrease in polio, but an increase in cerebral palsy.

As Vietnam emerges and develops as a country, the population will also change; however, this is likely only to increase the needs for rehabilitation and orthotic/prosthetic services.