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Lending a Helping Hand: Victim Assistance Programs in Africa

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social interaction, simply because getting out of the house was so difficult. She recently thanked VVAF for supporting the establishment of a self-help group as it has made her life worth living again. She says she looks forward to the bi-weekly meetings and has regained some joy in living.

From User Groups to Self-Help Groups

This is the beginning of a potentially wonderful transformation. This is where a group that was begun for rehabilitation and its attendant benefits is now transformed into a group for empowerment. With little facilitation, leaders emerge from within the group. They are authentic because they are also PWDs. They speak from the same place. Attendance and participation are encouraged through peer pressure and perceived value, rather than on the basis of obligation to authority. Again, with only modest facilitation from outside, the group naturally evolves from rehabilitation to mutual support to discussions on empowerment and "good use." Talks become increasingly centered on how to use their mobility toward becoming productive and self-reliant citizens. The group gains access to employment, access to public buildings (schools, hospitals, trains, buses, etc.), access to higher education and then, finally, access to the public policy debate. At this point, a core of enthusiastic PWDs has moved from rehabilitation to advocacy about "rights," the precursor to the promotion and promulgation of the basic tenets of Vietnamese socialism.

From Self-Help to Empowerment

Parallel to these developments at the community level, there should be a commensurate national and international linking. Support, encouragement and empowerment of PWDs should not be limited to borders. Again, for modest investments, the PWD user/self-help groups should now be linked both physically and electronically with other existing and emerging groups throughout Vietnam. In the beginning, like most movement, this will indeed be driven by educated PWDs, mostly those from urban areas who have been fortunate enough to benefit from a university education. They are the ones who will take leadership positions with communities and then become part of national coalitions of such emerging leaders nationwide. The low costs and increasing ease of access to electronic communications will keep this "sharing" constant and productive. Best practices and lessons learned can be communicated quickly and effectively across PWD groups throughout the country. In Vietnam, this has started through the Disability Forum of the Vietnam Union of Friendship Organizations' non-governmental organization (NGO) Resource Centre. Organizations of people with disabilities have made this Forum their own and communicate regularly through the website and an electronic newsletter (see http://forum.vso.wso). Just one step removed, but based on the same principles, both community and national groups can, at low cost, now communicate with their peers all over the world. They can connect, with only small subsidies, to the international PWD movement for support, encouragement and empowerment. The new technologies can do wonders for breaking down the isolation many PWDs feel. Being comfortable with these new technologies also represents part of the skills acquisition process that will heighten their employability opportunities in countries such as Vietnam.

As one distinguished PWD said recently, "the day when PWDs can take their rightful place in society and make a contribution to society can not arrive until the PWDs themselves are at the heart of the process". In sum, the sought-after destiny for PWDs is a process. As concerns the mobility impaired, it is a process that begins with the transition from pain to withdrawal to re-engagement, at first through the expert help of doctors, orthotists, prosthetists and physical therapists, and then from the light touch of outside "organization" facilitators, and finally "of and by" themselves. The lessons learned here are clear. The physical treatment of the mobility impaired cannot be done out of the context of another low-cost process whereby the benefits of mobility are married to reintegration and rights. To provide the wherewithal for mobility without addressing the other needs of the PWD is wasteful.

At the end of the day, the PWD movement is no more or less than a justice issue, justice defined as "right relations." A world where all persons are mutually dependent and respectful. To be part of the PWD movement in Vietnam is to participate in moving the world closer to justice."

"All photos courtesy of VVAF"

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deficiency, by providing equipment and tools that will assist in orthopedic produc-
tion and technician training, as well as lighten the burden of the center's operating costs.

In the context of the Luena Rehabilitation Center, as well as the equipment, material and personal skills that will encourage the disabled and spread awareness on disability issues.

Vietnam Veterans of America Foundation

Introduction
VVAF is a Washington, D.C.-based non-governmental organization (NGO) that is dedicated to achieving global security through its programs, which include providing prostheses, teaching prosthetic skills, and providing orthotic services. VVAF has partnered with the International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL), which is an international coalition of nongovernmental organizations that continue to work on appropriate technology and disability issues. Another important program is the Children's Multimedia Project, which aims to create and promote the wider use of the Jaipur limb technology through projects, development of prosthetic and orthotic services, and the promotion of awareness about the use of anti-personnel landmines in various conflicts around the world.

Programs in Africa

One JLC program in Africa is the Centro Ortopedico Jaipur (COJ) in Manjacaze, Mozambique. After a 1995 feasibility study requested by the Ministry of Social Affairs (MOCAS), JLC partnered with the Mozambique Red Cross (CVAM) to set up the COJ in 1996. The program was designed to be a center for amputees that provides prosthetic and orthotic services. Funds from JLC paid for the construction of the center as well as the equipment, materials, and training. The COJ is the first rehabilitation center to be wholly run by a Mozambican NGO. Providing community-based rehabilitation, the center has concentrated on:

- Constructing a purpose-built center in the district town of Manjacaze.
- Training technical and project personnel on appropriate technology.
- Identifying disabled people (mainly landmine victims) for rehabilitation.
- Providing mine awareness training.

Jaipur Limb Campaign

Introduction

The JLC is a UK-based organization that was created to raise awareness of and promote the wider use of the Jaipur limb technology through projects, development of prosthetic and orthotic services, and the promotion of awareness about the use of anti-personnel landmines in various conflicts around the world.

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The COJ has provided over 300 limb fittings since February of 2000. Besides the prosthetics provided, many of these people have taken advantage of the vocational training program. Patients are given priority for jobs as drivers and other support staff. The project helps at least 15 people and their families by giving them employment with benefits. LARDEF hopes to expand this program into other local areas and involve 36 vehicles.
World Rehabilitation Fund

Introduction

The WRF has programs in over 150 countries that focus on medical, psycho-social and economic rehabilitation for the disabled. One of WRF's primary focuses is survivors of landmines and other war-related injuries. WRF is "committed to improving the lives of people with disabilities." WRF Projects in Mozambique

In Africa, WRF is working on several projects to assist the disabled people of Mozambique. WRF has teamed up with local and international partners such as Mozambique's IND, the African Medical and Research Foundation (AMREF), the Association for the Mozambican Disabled (ADEMO) and POWER. The International Limb Project. By working with both government organizations and NGOs, WRF hopes to strengthen existing programs and develop new projects to help mine victims and their families by giving them the tools they need to be economically self-sufficient. For one of WRF's projects, the organization has partnered with the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) in a three-year effort "to plan and promote new approaches to the socio-economic integration of landmine victims and others with disabilities."{8} This effort, which began in 1999, also involves programs in Cambodia and Lebanon. One of the main goals of this venture is identifying gaps in current services and strengthening existing ones. A result of this project is the WRF Guidelines for the Socio-Economic Reintegration of Landmine Survivors, a publication intended to support the efforts of policy makers and aid organizations working in mine-affected countries.

In another project, WRF is working with the IND to help the Mozambique government adopt a national approach to victim assistance. This project focuses on two major areas of the victim assistance policy: developing policies and guidelines for effective coordination at all levels and improving the investigation and reporting of mine incidents. These focus areas are based on needs expressed by the IND, and WRF will collaborate with the IND as well as the UNDP and government ministries to meet these needs.

In July 2001, WRF provided funds for a project with the AMREF in Mozambique's Inhambane province. The project called for an economic development plan to be followed by a pilot project that addresses the needs identified by the community. Local community members—including those with disabilities—played an important role in planning, implementing and managing the activities. This is an important aspect of the project because it gives the community (especially those with disabilities) a sense of importance and empowerment.

NGOs POWER and ADEMO are working to implement two vocational training programs to which WRF has lent its support. The programs—mechanical and computer training—are being held at the Centro de Reabilitação Infantil Malangalane (CRIM) in Maputo and are available to any disabled person with a Grade 4 level of schooling. The metalwork course, a five-month curriculum, includes learning about the production of wheelchairs and other assistive devices for the disabled. The relatively new computer training course lasts for two months. These courses also help the disabled become financially independent through assistance with self-employment and a job placement service.

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Victim Assistance Programs in Africa

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