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# Recommendations for National Action Plans on Victim Assistance

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# Recommendations for National Action Plans on Victim Assistance

2010-2014



Building on International Standards,  
Lessons learned and Field Expertise  
for an effective and sustainable impact.

**Cartagena, Colombia**

December 2009

**HANDICAP  
INTERNATIONAL**

Handicap International has drawn up these recommendations to support stakeholders involved in creating and updating National Action Plans on Victim Assistance throughout the period 2010-2014 in accordance with the Cartagena Action Plan and other international humanitarian and human rights standards. These stakeholders include countries affected by mines/explosive remnants of war (ERW), survivors, disabled persons' organizations (DPO) and other civil society representatives, international organizations and countries committed to international cooperation.

We have identified the points below as being the key constituents of a National Action Plan on Victim Assistance, which should include specific objectives, indicators, budgets and timeframes, and be developed with the meaningful participation of survivors and all other relevant stakeholders.

## Guidelines for the implementation of victim assistance in 2010-2014

### 1. Sectors/policy areas:

In order to take a comprehensive approach to rehabilitation and inclusion, National Action Plans on Victim Assistance should include actions that target the provision of services in the following sectors/public policy areas: **health, rehabilitation, psychological support, adequate standards of living and social protection, education and work and employment.**

### 2. Cross-cutting issues of accessibility, empowerment and awareness-raising:

National Action Plans on Victim Assistance should systematically include actions to improve accessibility, empowerment and awareness-raising – all crucial to ensuring sustainability. **Accessibility** measures should eliminate obstacles and barriers in urban and rural areas to buildings, roads, transportation, schools, housing, medical facilities and workplaces, as well as to information and communications (media, technology, etc.) **Empowerment** measures should ensure survivors know their rights and able to advocate for them. **Awareness-raising** measures should ensure that the rights and capacities of survivors are known and respected throughout society as a whole.

### 3. Implementation support measures:

National Action Plans on Victim Assistance should include measures to collect relevant **statistics and data**, including assessments on the needs and priorities of survivors, ensure **national legislation** embodies the rights and obligations of survivors and other persons with disabilities, include a disability perspective in all **policy-making**, provide relevant **capacity-building** and **training** to all stakeholders involved in victim assistance, ensure victim assistance is governed through an inter-ministerial process that **coordinates** work through a focal point or mechanism, and **mobilize national and international resources**. All these efforts should be incorporated into, or at least linked to, broader human rights, disability and development frameworks at national level.

### 4. Guiding principles on human rights:

National Action Plans on Victim Assistance should integrate specific and cross-cutting actions

This publication was coordinated by Wanda Muñoz, Victim Assistance Officer, and Hervé Bernard, Head of Inclusion Unit. Handicap International, Lyon. October 2009

Handicap International would like to thank its partners – survivors, civil society organizations, international organizations and government representatives - who reviewed initial drafts of this document and provided insightful comments in their personal capacities. Our grateful acknowledgements also go to the various institutions that organized multi-stakeholder discussions on victim assistance throughout 2009. Finally, we would like to thank the Handicap International teams in countries affected by mines/ERW, who contributed their experience and expertise to this publication.

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to advance human rights principles, especially those of **non-discrimination, special attention to vulnerable groups, full and effective participation and inclusion, and age and gender considerations.**

**5. Monitoring and reporting:**

National Action Plans on Victim Assistance should include mechanisms for **monitoring and reporting** annually, at national and international levels, on the status and progress of victim assistance implementation. Reports should include information on the progress made during the reporting period, challenges in implementing the National Action Plan, the amount of resources allocated to its implementation, factors affecting its degree of fulfillment, and updated objectives.

**6. International cooperation and assistance:**

National Action Plans on Victim Assistance drawn up by mine/ERW-affected States should include information on the **technical, economic and other resources required** from the international community to complement national resources. State Parties committed to international cooperation and assistance should also **support the implementation of victim assistance** by: 1. Providing support to specific aspects of the National Action Plan on Victim Assistance, and 2. Ensuring cooperation policies and programs are designed to be **inclusive of, and accessible to, survivors and other persons with disabilities** (including bilateral and multilateral cooperation and support to international and non-governmental organizations).

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**I. Basic concepts underpinning victim assistance**

Ten years after the entry into force of the Mine Ban Treaty, key stakeholders involved in victim assistance (State Parties, international organizations, practitioners, survivors and civil society organizations) have established a common understanding of what victim assistance involves and how to implement it. This understanding is reflected in various official documents and in a number of publications (references can be found on the last page of this document). By way of background to the recommendations in this document, Handicap International would like to highlight the following:

- 1.The majority of the actions we commonly refer to as “victim assistance” within the framework of the Mine Ban Treaty actually refer to efforts to fulfill the rights of mine/ERW survivors. As this has been identified as a priority, it is the focus of this publication.
- 2.It is now agreed and acknowledged that the term “victim” includes those persons killed or injured by mines/ERW, their families and affected communities. Therefore, in addition to survivors, families and communities should also benefit from programs for reducing the threat posed and preventing the harm done by mines/ERW. Assisting families and communities should also be seen as part of a process for ensuring families support survivors in the best ways possible, and for ensuring communities are accessible and inclusive of survivors. The development of a common understanding of what a global approach to assisting families and communities involves should be further explored by stakeholders in victim assistance.
- 3.Survivors are part of a larger group of persons with disabilities. While this document refers primarily to survivors, it is our understanding that all legislation, strategies, policies, plans, programs and projects related to victim assistance should not discriminate, directly or indirectly, against other persons with disabilities. Victim assistance efforts should be based on the principles and concepts underpinning the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.
- 4.Victim assistance plans and programs should be incorporated, or at least linked to, national human rights, disability and development strategies (such as the Millennium Development Goals and Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers). This contributes to the effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability of victim assistance.
- 5.Survivors are in the best position to inform policy-making on victim assistance and to advocate for their rights. The quality of life of survivors and that of the broader community improves when they participate fully in decision-making processes and thus in social, economic, cultural and political life.
- 6.Survivor assistance will only be effective, efficient and sustainable if States adopt a twin -rack approach by which they:
  - a.ensure survivors meaningfully participate and benefit from all development plans, policies and programs (health, education, social protection, employment...), in urban and rural areas, and
  - b.implement specific initiatives to empower survivors to participate fully in society.
- 7.Each affected State Party has primary responsibility for providing victim assistance. State Parties can request and should receive all necessary cooperation and assistance from the international community in complying with this obligation.



## II. Main recommendations for National Action Plans on Victim Assistance

This section provides examples of possible objectives that State Parties may include in their National Action Plans on Victim Assistance, according to their context. The elements outlined in this section are general objectives that should be developed further to become specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bound (SMART), with clearly identified indicators for the next five years. To ensure their relevance and feasibility, Action Plans should be developed with the active participation of survivors and all other relevant stakeholders at the national level.

Handicap International developed these recommendations by drawing on the Nairobi Action Plan, the current draft of the Cartagena Action Plan, key elements of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the Convention on Cluster Munitions, and publications on good practices. The initial draft was then reviewed by our network of technical advisors and project managers at head office and in mine/ERW affected countries. This led to other suggestions/recommendations for improving victim assistance over the next five years. These recommendations therefore incorporate both international standards and a field perspective.

### Key developments

1. This document suggests National Action Plans on Victim Assistance should include actions that address all of the following key aspects: **specific sectors/policy areas, cross-cutting issues, implementation support measures, guiding principles on human rights, monitoring and reporting and international cooperation.** Handicap International believes these are all essential elements that provide a comprehensive framework for planning, implementing, monitoring and evaluating victim assistance and includes all the elements needed for a truly effective, efficient and sustainable response to victim assistance. .



2. This document employs a more commonly-used classification of the key sectors/policy areas of victim assistance (usually called “thematic areas” or “elements” of victim assistance). For instance, we use the terms **health** and **work and employment** to cover the range of activities referred to as **emergency and ongoing medical care** and **economic reintegration** in the Nairobi Action Plan. In doing so, we are attempting to align the victim assistance framework - initially developed in a disarmament context - with the rights, concepts and practices currently used by the majority of stakeholders in broader disability, development and human rights contexts at national and international levels.

Handicap International suggests that bringing the victim assistance framework in line with the recommendations in this document would facilitate the creation of synergies and bridges between victim assistance strategies and broader national strategies. As we would be using the same terminology and planning framework, it would also make it easier for victim assistance stakeholders to combine their efforts with those of other stakeholders working on disability, development and human rights.

It is important to note that these terms and concepts are already used in the context of victim assistance: see, for instance, the paper *Priorities and challenges during the period 2010-2014* presented by the Co-Chairs of the Standing Committee on Victim Assistance (Belgium and Thailand, May 2009) and the *Appeal for victim assistance to States participating in the Cartagena Summit on a Mine Free World* (Appeal from practitioners, survivors and other experts, Meeting on Victim Assistance hosted by the ICRC and the Norwegian Red Cross, June 2009).

Furthermore, many of the current objectives developed by the 26 Victim Assistance Priority Countries are already based on these concepts and cover activities in areas such as social protection, education, work and employment, accessibility, awareness-raising and empowerment, even though these were not explicitly mentioned in the Nairobi Action Plan. Thus, the recommendations that follow reflect ongoing practice and strengthen the coherency between victim assistance and other national strategies.

### Sectors / Policy areas

#### 1. Health

- Ensure access for survivors to continuous health care in order to maintain and/or improve their functioning and well-being.
- Train local community workers in the provision of primary assistance and referral to health facilities.
- Ensure a sufficient number of trained healthcare workers (including trauma specialists and nurses) in mine/ERW-affected areas, and provide them with initial and continuous training.
- Ensure that health facilities have adequate equipment, supplies and medicines to meet at least basic standards.
- Improve the quality of amputations and other types of surgery.
- Ensure healthcare services are free or affordable.
- Offer survivors adequate referral to complementary services as soon as possible (rehabilitation, psychological support and peer support, social services, education and employment...)



#### 2. Rehabilitation

- Ensure that orthopedic surgery and physiotherapy are available as soon as possible after the accident to prevent complications, prepare for rehabilitation and facilitate the use of suitable assistive devices.
- Ensure the provision of assistive devices and equipment by using local material and production facilities whenever possible.
- Provide support services such as physical, occupational and speech therapy, prosthetics and orthotics, corrective surgery and pain management as required by the type of impairment: physical, sensorial (loss of sight, hearing...), mental, intellectual or multiple impairments.
- Ensure a sufficient number and quality of rehabilitation professionals (physiotherapists, P&O, occupational therapists, surgeons, psychologists and social workers) are available, in accordance with the needs of the population and their geographical coverage - the rehabilitation process should be multi-disciplinary as early on as possible.
- Promote the availability, knowledge and use of assistive devices among survivors and their

families.

- Consider the requirements of girls and boys with regard to the design, durability and age-appropriateness of assistive devices and equipment.
- Ensure all services are free or affordable. Programs should aim at financial sustainability from the beginning and cost recovery and cost analysis should be part of the planning process. Mixed revenue streams and equity funds should be considered.
- When international organizations are involved, national authorities should prepare the take over of activities by developing the necessary technical, human and financial resources.

### 3. Psychological support

- Ensure survivors have the opportunity to access community-based psychological services, including via general healthcare services.
- Create, support or strengthen peer support groups and counseling to enable survivors to attain and maintain maximum self-reliance and independence.
- Develop national standards for counseling, particularly where professionals are not widely available.
- Provide ongoing training and supervision to community workers who may provide some level of psychological support to survivors.
- Ensure the families of those killed and injured also have the opportunity to access psychological support and, where appropriate, to participate in the counseling provided to survivors.

### 4. Adequate standards of living and social protection

- Carry out needs assessments and situation analyses to understand the requirements and priorities of survivors with regard to adequate standards of living.
- Ensure survivors have access to adequate food and clothing, housing, water and sanitation services.
- Ensure the provision of adequate income-support to survivors who have lost or received a reduction in their income.
- Ensure access on an equal basis with others to a cultural life, recreation, leisure, sports and other community activities.
- Create a directory of health, rehabilitation, psychological, social, education and employment services in affected communities, including procedures and conditions for accessing them
- Ensure the availability of referral services to facilitate links between survivors and service-providers.

### 5. Education

- Ensure an inclusive education system at all levels: primary school, secondary and tertiary education, university, vocational training and adult education, literacy, life-long learning...
- Provide reasonable accommodations that respond to individual requirements in the schools.
- Provide for accessible education materials and technical resources to ensure equal access to education in mine/ ERW affected areas.
- Raise awareness on the rights of persons with disabilities among teachers and train them on inclusive education methodologies and techniques.
- Promote inclusive education as part of national education plans, policies and programs.
- Support families so they provide adequate support for survivors in the education process.



### 6. Work and employment

- Ensure effective access to mainstream technical, vocational, education and training services, job placement services, and employment programs.
- Ensure training and income-generating activities meet market demand.
- Facilitate apprenticeships with master trainers or local businesses.
- Promote opportunities for participation in self-employment, income-generating activities, entrepreneurship, access to microfinance services, the development of cooperatives and starting one's own business.
- Promote and encourage the employment of survivors in the private and public sectors by raising awareness among employers to the rights, skills and potential of survivors.
- Ensure reasonable accommodations are provided in the workplace (both in the public and private sectors).
- Abolish discrimination on the basis of disability and monitor the implementation of national legislation on the employment of persons with disabilities.



### Cross-cutting issues

#### 7. Accessibility

- Identify and eliminate obstacles and barriers in urban and rural areas to buildings, roads, transportation, schools, housing, medical facilities and workplaces, as well as to information and communications.
- Train architects, construction engineers and others who are professionally and technically involved in the design and construction of the physical environment on accessibility concepts and techniques, providing them with adequate information and guidelines.
- Promote the design, development, production and distribution of accessible information and communications.
- Design services so that they may be used by all people (universal design concept), to the greatest extent possible and without the need for further adaptation or specialized design.
- Raise awareness and train stakeholders on reasonable accommodations: all necessary and appropriate modifications and adjustments needed to ensure the participation of survivors and other persons with disabilities on an equal basis with others.
- Include accessibility in all laws and policies related to infrastructure and information.
- Ensure survivors and DPO are consulted when standards and norms are being developed.
- Develop or update and monitor the implementation of accessibility standards.



#### 8. Empowerment

- Disseminate information on the rights of survivors in accessible formats.
- Encourage and support the creation, strengthening and institutional development of survivor organizations.
- Facilitate links between survivors and DPO, as well as with other members of civil society.
- Ensure survivors are able to participate in a free, informed and meaningful manner in all



processes that affect their lives.

- Clearly identify and disseminate information among survivors on the national and local agencies/ministries/organizations responsible for implementing, coordinating and reporting on specific aspects of the National Action Plan on Victim Assistance.

## 9. Awareness-raising

- Raise awareness throughout society, including that of survivors and their families, communities, service providers and authorities at all levels, on the rights of survivors and other persons with disabilities. This can be achieved through media campaigns, newsletters, public discussions, cultural activities...
- Organize and support awareness-raising campaigns to combat stereotypes, prejudices and harmful practices related to survivors in all areas of life.
- Promote the positive perception and recognition of survivors' skills, merits and abilities and their contributions to the workplace and society.
- Promote the National Action Plan on Victim Assistance among all relevant stakeholders and ensure regular information is prepared with, and accessible to, survivors and other members of civil society.



## Implementation support measures

### 10. Statistics and data collection

- Collect, analyze and systematize appropriate information, including statistical and research data and information on the situation and life standards of survivors.
- Identify barriers to accessing rights as a starting point for planning and programming victim assistance, and as baseline for its monitoring and evaluation.
- Break information down by age and sex to monitor more clearly the scope of outreach of the National Action Plans on Victim Assistance.
- Disseminate relevant statistics and data and ensure they can be accessed by relevant stakeholders in formats that guarantee respect of confidentiality for survivors.
- Collect data in conjunction with national censuses, disability and household surveys, and in coordination with other stakeholders (in particular survivor organizations).

### 11. Legislation

- Modify or abolish existing laws, regulations, customs and practices that constitute discrimination against persons with disabilities, including survivors.
- Ensure national legislation embodies specific measures for the implementation of the rights and duties of persons with disabilities, including survivors.
- As appropriate: 1. Enact separate legislation on the rights of persons with disabilities, including survivors 2. Include disability within legislation on particular topics 3. Mention disability specifically in texts that serve to interpret existing legislation.

### 12. Policy-making

- Ensure disability issues are included in all policy-making and national planning and routinely

included when assessing policy issues, options and impacts.

- Examine development strategies, policies and programs aimed at implementing internationally agreed development goals, including Millennium Development Goals, and ensure they are inclusive of issues concerning survivors and other persons with disabilities.
- Initiate and plan suitable national policies that take survivors into account, and stimulate and support the implementation of these policies at regional and local level.
- Ensure Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers include and promote the active participation of, and benefit survivors at all stages of the process, including poverty assessments, target-setting, program prioritization, and monitoring and evaluation.
- Ensure the necessary budgets are planned and prepared to implement national policies at local level.



## 13. National Action Plans on Victim Assistance

- Develop or update a National Action Plan on Victim Assistance to include SMART objectives, indicators, a budget and timeframes. These should be incorporated into, or at least linked with, existing national disability, development and human rights frameworks and mechanisms to contribute to effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability and to facilitate monitoring and reporting.
- Involve survivors and their representative organizations, other civil society organizations, practitioners and all relevant local and national authorities in the development or updating of the National Action Plan on Victim Assistance.
- Ensure the National Action Plan has a detailed budget that incorporates the planned and existing resources needed for its implementation.
- Develop manuals or check-lists targeting authorities and service providers involved in victim assistance at all levels.

## 14. Capacity-building and training

- Provide regular training for government staff, service providers, and civil society to ensure they have the relevant knowledge of and skills on victim assistance and disability issues.
- Promote institutional capacity-building and sector-specific training to make existing services inclusive of survivors.
- Support initiatives to develop the capacities of survivors to create and strengthen associations that promote activities such as peer support, referral services, promotion of rights, awareness-raising, etc.

## 15. Coordination

- Maintain, strengthen or designate a focal point within the government in charge of following up on the implementation and monitoring of the National Action Plan on Victim Assistance.
- Establish a coordination mechanism within the government to facilitate the Action Plan's implementation in different ministries and at different levels.
- Ensure this coordination mechanism is permanent and based on legal and administrative regulations. It should include a combination of representatives of civil society, private and public organizations to ensure inter-ministerial and multi-disciplinary action.
- Ensure the coordination mechanism has sufficient autonomy



and resources to carry out its missions.

- Where appropriate to the national context, integrate/link the responsibilities of the focal point and coordination mechanism with those of related frameworks.
- Ensure the different ministries guarantee their respective spheres of responsibility, provide the necessary opportunities and access to survivors: a comprehensive approach through a network of systems and stakeholders is required to ensure the sustainable participation of survivors in society.
- Ensure survivors and their representative organizations are involved and participate fully in all aspects of the development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the National Action Plan on Victim Assistance.

## 16. Mobilization of resources

- Commit sufficient technical and economic resources to guarantee the implementation of National Action Plans on Victim Assistance. This includes: 1) Mobilizing specific resources to implement the actions included in the National Plan of Action on Victim Assistance, and 2) mainstreaming disability into all development programs, especially those on poverty reduction.
- Coordinate resource mobilization with all relevant organizations: service providers, international organizations, civil society organizations, the private sector, etc.
- If necessary, request cooperation and assistance from the international community for the implementation of specific aspects of the National Action on Victim Assistance.



## Guiding principles on human rights

### 17. Non discrimination and special attention to groups in situation of vulnerability

- Ensure there is no legal, policy-based or practical discrimination against or among survivors, or between survivors and other persons with disabilities.
- Implement specific measures to accelerate or achieve equality of opportunities, including through reasonable accommodations to meet individual needs.
- Take the necessary measures, according to the context, to ensure vulnerable survivor groups (such as persons living in conditions of poverty, migrants, persons with dual or multiple disabilities, indigenous people and ethnic minorities, displaced persons and refugees) benefit from and participate in victim assistance projects and programs.
- Foster an attitude of respect for the rights of survivors and other persons with disabilities at all levels of the education system and in all children from an early age.

### 18. Full and effective participation and inclusion

- Ensure the active, free, informed and ongoing participation of survivors in the planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of plans, policies and programs affecting victim assistance.
- Ensure survivors actively participate in all the work related to the implementation and monitoring of the Mine Ban Treaty.
- Ensure survivors actively participate in all decision-making related to matters that affect their lives (health, rehabilitation, psychological support, social services, education, employment, etc.).

### 19. Age and gender

- Ensure age and gender considerations are taken into account in the design and planning of victim assistance policy and programs, to ensure every survivor equally benefits and participates.
- Provide all the support needed to enable survivors to access services and improve or maintain their quality of life with respect to and in accordance with their age and gender.



## Monitoring and reporting

### 20. Monitoring and reporting

- Monitor and report annually, at national and international level, on the status, progress and challenges involved in the implementation of the National Action Plan on Victim Assistance throughout the period 2010-2014.
- Provide the name and contact details of the institutions mandated to provide information and carry out the measures described in the National Action Plan on Victim Assistance.
- Report on the amount of national resources, including financial, material or in-kind, allocated to the implementation of this Action Plan; and the amount, type and destination of international cooperation and assistance received.
- Indicate factors and difficulties affecting progress on the realization of the National Action Plan on Victim Assistance .
- Ensure survivors and their representative organizations, other members of the civil society and service providers are fully involved in the monitoring and reporting process.
- Consult other relevant bodies on disability, development and human rights, including those created in the wake of other international treaties, to ensure coherency with their respective reporting guidelines, and avoid duplication and overlap in the performance of their functions.

## International cooperation and assistance

### 21. International cooperation and assistance

- Provide adequate, long-term and coordinated support for the implementation of National Action Plans on Victim Assistance by mine/ERW State Parties.
- Ensure international cooperation and assistance, including international development programs, are inclusive of and accessible to survivors and other persons with disabilities (including bilateral and multilateral cooperation and support to non governmental organizations).
- Analyze the effects of international cooperation and assistance on the situation of survivors, in close collaboration with their representative organizations.
- Introduce victim assistance and disability issues into general negotiations concerning standards, information exchange, development programs, human rights, etc.
- Facilitate and support the capacity-building of stakeholders involved in victim assistance, including through the exchange of information and experience, training programs and research and the sharing of good practice.
- Document and disseminate examples of development and international cooperation that promote victim assistance and the full participation of survivors in society.



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Handicap International was founded in 1982. Our first activities included setting up orthopedic centers in refugee camps in the Thailand/Cambodia border. Simple, locally-available equipment was used, enabling Handicap International to provide immediate, effective and practical services and train competent local teams. The organization has since gone on to develop a global approach to disability, aiming to reduce poverty and situations of vulnerability and ensure development and emergency responses are accessible to all.

Landmines, cluster munitions and other explosive remnants of war (ERW) are a cause of humanitarian crises and environmental disasters in more than ninety countries around the world. These weapons claim several thousands of victims each year, worsening the vulnerability and poverty of affected communities. They threaten populations physically and also threaten their livelihoods, food security and the return of displaced populations, representing an obstacle to reconstruction and socio-economic development, and preventing peace and security from being fully restored.

To prevent further humanitarian harm and to address the consequences of mine/ERW, **Handicap International works on four of the five pillars of mine action: advocacy, clearance, risk education and victim assistance.**

Fitting artificial limbs and providing psychological support, contributing to the development of inclusive education, social services, livelihoods and leisure programs, supporting awareness-raising and training, carrying out humanitarian demining and risk education, facilitating access to assistance in emergency situations, advocating against mines and cluster munitions... Handicap International's teams campaign and take action to support persons with disabilities in regaining and ensuring their independence and full participation in their communities.

Handicap International gives priority to training, partnerships and the use of local techniques and resources. We work closely with disabled persons' organizations, other local civil society organizations, professionals, service providers, local and national authorities and key economic players to contribute towards ensuring peoples with disabilities can exercise their rights and have equal opportunities to participate in the social, economic, cultural and political lives of their communities. Handicap International carries out its projects with a focus on quality, and all our activities respect our ethical values and are carefully **monitored and evaluated**. Our aim: for everyone to fully participate in society and development.

Now working in over fifty countries in Africa, Asia, Latin America and East Europe, Handicap International is a network with sections in France, Switzerland, Belgium, Germany, Luxembourg, United Kingdom, Canada and the United States.



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