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Survivor Heroes Heal Lives and Landscapes Throughout the World

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Aging of Landmines/UXO

Another factor to consider is the effects of aging on munitions. The aging effects on landmines and UXO have been studied, showing that some items will render themselves useless over time, but not all of them will follow this pattern.1 The physical state of subsurface munitions will vary greatly depending on the design and materials used, along with the munitions’ exposure to geological and weathering conditions. Items made from poor materials placed close to the surface can deteriorate to the point of becoming non-functional over the course of a few years. Some of the Chinese-made landmines and U.S.-made cluster munitions such as the BLU-26 can come apart in 10–20 years when placed in flood zones or extreme environments. However, the Yugoslavian PROM series bounding mines or the urethane-coated U.S. BLU-61 cluster munition will remain functional for much longer due to better design and materials.

Examples of the BLU-26 and BLU-61 are shown in Images 1 and 2 above. Both were dropped on Vietnam around the same period and were found in similar environments. The BLU-26 fuze was completely nonfunctional upon closer examination, but the BLU-61 was in perfect condition. Both items were found at a depth where they presented no surface hazard.

Aside from the munition design, the position in the soil has a direct effect on the functionality of the munitions. For our purposes, the soil structure can be divided into oxidizing and non-oxidizing layers. This is the amount of oxygen available to help the materials corrode or deteriorate. Items such as the BLU-26 with exposed ferrous metal components positioned in the oxidizing layer will deteriorate at a faster pace than those in a non-oxidizing layer. However, if the same item managed to penetrate into the non-oxidizing layer of the soil, it can stay fully operational for many decades.

Indispensible Facts

Post-war mineral fields close to the population usually lead to loss of limbs and lives. Anti-tank mines buried in critical roadways can kill many people on a bus in a single blast. A surface UXO visible to a child can be mistaken for a toy, and it will kill them and their friends when they decide to see if it really does go boom like the mine-risk education people said.

The demining and explosive ordnance disposal teams working in these situations carry out duties that directly prevent the loss of life and improve public safety. Clearance teams working in support of economic development tasks help to save lives and create jobs that will improve the overall livelihood of those in underdeveloped areas. These tasks deserve the most focus from international humanitarian donor funding.

Worldwide donor funding is in very short supply, and it affects all of us in this profession. The policies driving national and international goals should be readdressed to ensure that they are reasonable and that the limited funds available are maximized to save lives and support the recovery of post-conflict environments. See endnotes page 80.

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Landmine and traumatic-accident victims and their families face numerous recovery obstacles in any setting, but in a post-conflict setting resources may be scarce. Victims must deal with emotional and psychological trauma, often for years after the event. These challenges range from physical limitations and psychological aftermath to the economic impact on their livelihoods. Some victims take their traumatic experience—one in which the victim is terrified, afraid for him or herself as well as for others, temporarily helpless, humiliated, and isolated—and apply them to assisting other victims through activism and support.

by Ken Rutherford, Ph.D. ([ Center for International Stabilization and Recovery ]

I n war-ravaged countries and post-conflict regions, most landmine amputees struggle simply to survive. Victims often experience extended separations from family members, decreased employment opportunities and shifting demands. For someone missing arms or legs, tasks that were once easy to complete can become Herculean chores. This often leaves survivors and their families to face harrowing experiences and uncertain futures. Survivors may also experience psychological and cognitive damage following the accident, leaving them at risk for mental health problems, family difficulties and unemployment. Many can no longer find work and cannot afford to buy crutches, wheelchairs and/or artificial limbs. Survivors are often ostracized and are denied proper medical care. One thing is clear: most landmine survivors rarely return to normal lives.

Despite these discouraging obstacles, some victims have become survivor champions on their way to becoming leaders and productive community members by devoting their lives to helping other victims. They are committed to expanding the solid foundations of peer support by helping others build resilience and understanding through conversation and problem-solving. They provide practical instruction with care and compassion to thousands of survivors of landmines, trauma and war-related violence. Survivors’ peer skills are in many cases essential in helping other survivors recover. In addition to counseling, outreach workers help survivors obtain training, benefits and healthcare through local service providers. In the most extensive study of landmine/unexploded-ordnance survivors ever conducted, survivors in six countries reported significantly improved perceptions of their own mental and physical health following 12 months of peer support provided by trained outreach workers.8

As a token of appreciation for their leadership, I would like to highlight four of these unique and special survivor heroes—Adnan Al Aboudi (Jordan), Bekele Gonfa (Ethiopia), Jesús Martínez (El Salvador) and Nguyen Thi Kim Hoa (Vietnam). I have particularly selected them from among the hundreds of survivors I have met over the last two decades of victim-assistance work in many countries. Their leadership and capability in providing survivors with the direction to achieve their personal goals have helped—and continue to help—other victims and survivors develop their own personal strengths. Let me introduce them to you.

Bekele Gonfa, Ethiopia

Born the second son of a farming family in rural Ethiopia, Bekele Gonfa distinguished himself in school and at the Harar Military Academy. While serving in the Ethiopian Army as an Armored Forces officer, he fell victim to a landmine explosion in the town of Qore in central Ethiopia. His left leg required amputation and his painful rehabilitation took 11 months.

Gonfa enrolled in Addis Ababa University when he was released from the hospital. Access to facilities was difficult for Gonfa, who was still adjusting to life as a landmine survivor when he began attending the university. Besides getting into the library and other buildings, he had difficulty traveling between classes within the allotted time. Despite the added obstacles, he obtained a Bachelor of Science in statistics.

Gonfa became Director of Landmine Survivors Network (later renamed Survivor Corps) in Ethiopia in 2003, a position he held until 2009, when Survivor Corps closed. He tirelessly worked to assist the rehabilitation of survivors, families and entire communities throughout Ethiopia. He developed an extensive network of partnerships and collaborations that

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Image 1 (left): U.S. BLU-26 abdominal mine found at 35 ft. on during Vung Ha clearance. Image 2 (middle): U.S. BLU-61 abdominal mine found in deep search excavation spoils during Vung Ha clearance. Image 3 (right): U.S. 105-mm projectile with T-207E2 variable time fuze located at 1.6 m. deep in non-oxidizing layer, at Vung Ha clearance site.
spanned across civil society, the private sector and government agencies. His frequent and positive contact with this network made him a powerful force for advocacy and human rights for persons with disabilities. More than 2,000 survivors were rehabilitated and empowered during his tenure, and many thousands more became the beneficiaries of the work LSN/SC undertook in Ethiopia. Not limiting himself to landmine advocacy, Gonfa has been deeply involved in development activities for many years. He founded the indigenous nongovernmental organization Katar Association for the Employment of Persons with Disabilities since discussions took place to negotiate the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2003, where he serves as Vice-Chairman. Additionally, he served on the board of the Ethiopian Disability Action Network and on the executive committee of the Ethiopian National Paralympics Committee. Recently, Gonfa has turned his attention to promoting best practices for other practitioners. His research for the International Network Promoting Physical Activity for Persons with Disabilities 2011 Regional Conference on the Prevention and Universalization of the Convention on Cluster Munitions in Indonesia, Hoa said that global change requires “a clear and common goal shared across a range of actors…and a strong, active and coordinated civil society campaign.” I am proud to say that Kim Hoa is a leading voice of compassion and advocacy in all these ways.

Adnan Al Aboudi, Jordan

Adnan Al Aboudi is an example of how the post-conflict community benefits from the energies and perspectives of all types of trauma survivors. A double-leg amputee following a car accident in 1989, Aboudi has worked for the Jordanian Ministry of Youth and on the board of the Al-Mustaqbel Club for PWDs. In 1999, he was appointed director of LSN-Jordan, where he worked with a team of social workers to handle a caseload of more than 1,500 amputees. Of this number, some 500 were landmine victims. Aboudi says that he worked to ensure that all survivors received “health care, social livelihoods and the economic care needed to regain and maintain their lives.”

Seeing recreational sports as a positive path to an integrated rehabilitation, Aboudi has promoted and participated in numerous inclusive sport activities. This personal passion is evident: Besides recreational water skiing, scuba diving, swimming, discus and table tennis, he has been a national representative at regional and international competitions. Aboudi participated in the 1996 Paralympics in Atlanta, Georgia (U.S.) and the 1998 British World Championship. Aboudi has been active in global advocacy for PWDs rights since discussions took place to negotiate the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. He was the only Arab PWD at the Ad Hoc Committee Meeting for the CRPD. Adnan was elected as an NGO representative from West Asia to the convention drafting meeting. He has consistently pushed for increased awareness and participation across the Middle East, most recently in May 2011 at the Center for International Stabilization and Recovery’s “Pathways to Resilience” program for nearly 30 Arab PWDs and their providers in Hammama, Lebanon.

Kim Hoa, Vietnam

In 1999, Hoa was born, her eight-year-old brother was one of three local boys killed by a cluster bomb that they thought was a toy, a loss that continues to affect the family today.

Looking beyond her own family’s hardships, Hoa has devoted her professional life to alleviating the suffering of other conflict-affected families and communities. She joined LSN in 2001, a time she still calls her “day of destiny.” Based in Quang Binh province, LSN’s victim-assistance program continues as the Association for the Employment of Persons with Disabilities and is the province’s only opportunity for victim support and rehabilitation. Hoa serves as Monitoring and Evaluation Officer for peer-support activities, promoting access to quality healthcare, peer support, economic assistance and education services for survivors and their communities.

Hoa has provided a powerful voice in Vietnam for advocacy, promoting the recent Cluster Munitions Convention, the 1997 Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and their Destruction (also known at the Anti-personnel Mine Ban Convention or the APMB), and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Working nationally, regionally and internationally, Hoa has organized or participated in working groups, meetings and conferences that further promote the inclusion of survivors and increased attention and resources for victim assistance and human rights.

Addressing the 16–17 November, 2009 Regional Conference on the Promotion and Universalization of the Convention on Cluster Munitions in Indonesia, Hoa said that global change requires “a clear and common goal shared across a range of actors…and a strong, active and coordinated civil society campaign.” I am proud to say that Kim Hoa is a leading voice of compassion and advocacy in all these ways.

Jesus Martinez, El Salvador

By the age of 10, Jesús Martínez had moved from his rural home to the outskirts of San Salvador to study and search for work. Despite an ongoing civil war, Martínez, the second of seven children, needed to contribute economically to his extensive family. In 1989, at the age of 17, Martínez and a bus of commuters stopped at a guerrilla blockade. Leaving the bus and walking around the blockade, Martínez grew impatient in the single-file line. He stepped out of line and onto a landmine the guerrillas had emplaced around the blockade. The explosion tore off both of his legs, putting him in the hospital for five months. The civil war had taken a large toll on the civilian population, and he met many fellow survivors during his rehabilitation. The conflict ended three years after his accident, and Martínez began organizing people with disabilities and persons injured during the war. His frustration nurtured a determination to overcome physical barriers and discriminatory attitudes.

In 1994, he managed a business that produced hospital clothing and focused on integrating landmine survivors. Three years later, he applied his university studies in business administration to start his own business, manufactur- ing clothing with other landmine sur- vivors. He also became active in sports, playing competitively at regional and international sporting events.

Martínez became Executive Director of LSN–El Salvador in 2000, formalizing his role as leader and activist for an entire network of victims and their communities. His work expanded beyond El Salvador to a regional and international network promoting physical and emotional well-being as well as economic development. Today, he is the Executive Director of the Red de Sobrevivientes y Personas con Discapacidad (Network of Survivors and Disabled Persons). The organization promotes the legacy of LSN in El Salvador.
Despite his continued success and fervent defense of PWDs, Martínez still recalls the words of the soldier who carried him from the minefield after his accident: “God brought you into the world with your legs, but now he has permitted you to lose them. You can still move forward.” Martínez now says, “My greatest satisfaction is knowing that I can help others.”

Conclusion
Aboudi, Gonfa, Martínez and Hoa help survivors recover. In addition to counseling, outreach workers helped survivors obtain training, benefits and health care through local-service providers. Aboudi, Gonfa, Martinez and Hoa help start survivor support groups in their respective countries, thus allowing vic- tim communities to take that first important step in helping survivors help themselves, and continuing to assist and lead them to go on to become independent organizations. Thankfully for the global community, their work’s impact continues to greatly benefit the lives of landmine, trauma and armed-violence survivors, as well as their families and communities. See endnotes page 80

In this article, the authors describe an unprecedented study on peer-support services for landmine survivors and victims of explosive remnants of war based on the strategic approach implemented by Survivor Corps, in which survivors were trained to provide psychosocial assistance to other survivors. The study’s methodology is thoroughly explained and analyzed by the authors.

Problem Statement
Between 1997 and 2009, LSN/SC operated Peer Support networks in Bosnia, El Salvador, Ethiopia, Jordan and Vietnam. A program was also conducted with Iraqi refugees in Jordan. The programs strove “to empower individuals, families, and communities affected by landmines to recover from trauma, fulfill their rights and reclaim their lives.” The principle methodology was peer support, defined by LSN as “encouragement and assistance provided by a trained survivor who has successfully overcome a traumatic experience to another survivor in order to engender self-confidence and autonomy.” As early as 2002, research on LSN beneficiaries revealed the importance of peer support to limbo survivors. LSN’s five network programs employed a total of 44 outreach workers themselves amputee landmine survivors who received four weeks of training in basic counseling techniques—to locate and contact other survivors, many of whom suffered alone in self-imposed isolation. Forming a bond of trust and understanding is the first step toward reintegrating survivors into society, helping them regain self-confidence, find work or training, and participate in community activities. Outreach workers initially visited survivors in their homes and, in many cases, introduced survivors to support groups where they could engage in income-generation activities, sports or other forms of socialization.

Outreach workers acted as role models, demonstrating that limbo survivors can overcome physical, social and economic barriers to interact normally in society. Outreach workers accompanied (linked) survivors to agencies and institutions where jobs, education or financial assistance could be obtained, or they referred survivors to local service providers. These links and referrals constituted a major source of sur-

Kenneth Rutherford, Ph.D., serves as Director of the Center for Stabilization and Recovery at James Madison University. CSR helps support survivor-assistance initiatives around the world and has led efforts to promote peer-to-peer support on four continents, including people with disabilities in landmine-exploding areas. Until 2011, CSR’s successful programs and new initiatives were often driven by personal relationships and the desire to assist as many survivors as possible. In 2011, CSR’s ongoing programs and new projects will, for example, advocate disability rights as human rights in war-action programming, promote peace and reconciliation through survivor-led collective action and address the longer-term humanitarian assistance needs for survivors of landmines and cluster munitions.

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Peer Support and Recovery from Limb Loss in Post-conflict Settings

by Cameron Macauley (Center for International Stabilization and Recovery), Marcia Townsand (Independent Consultant), Melissa Freeman (Independent Consultant) and Brent Maxwell (Fathom Creative)

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In the largest study1 of its kind ever conducted, survivors of injuries by landmines and explosive remnants of war in six countries reported significantly improved perceptions of their own mental and physical health following 12 months of peer support provided by trained outreach workers, as measured by the internationally recognized SF-36. The SF-36 is a 36-question survey designed to measure the subject’s self-perceived physical and mental health within eight domains: physical functioning, role limitations due to physical health problems, bodily pain, general health perceptions, vitality, social functioning, role limitations due to emotional problems, and mental health. Since 1988, the SF-36 has been used in thousands of studies around the world.2

Outreach workers were landmine survivors trained in peer counseling who acted as role models to help other survivors, in group settings or through household visits. In addition to counseling, outreach workers helped survivors obtain training, benefits and healthcare through locally available service providers. This unprecedented study is the most extensive survey of landmine/ERW survivors yet completed.

Background
Between 1997 and 2000 Landmine Survivors Network later renamed Survivor Corps, operated a peer-support outreach program to provide comprehensive amputee-to-amputee peer support in countries heavily affected by landmines and ERW. LSN/SC’s programmatic model provided support to landmine survivors in healthcare, economic opportunity and human rights. The model recognized that peer support would have limited success without addressing barriers and obstacles survivors face in post-conflict settings. LSN/SC’s peer-support strategy empowered individual survivors to claim their rights and draw attention to issues of inclusion.

References
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