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Victim Assistance: Still Seeking the Way

This article looks at the progress made in the area of victim assistance since 2002 with special attention paid to data collection, funding and program coordination.

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The last time the *Journal of Mine Action* had a focus on victim assistance was in 2002 (Issue 6.3). Six years is a long time in the life of the *JMA*, which is now in its 12th year. When reviewing the progress made by this pillar of mine action, however, little change is apparent if you consider the long-standing issues of concern for those working in this field and for landmine/ERW (or explosive remnants of war¹) survivors themselves, although other changes warrant recognition.

One notable change is the use of the term ERW instead of unexploded ordnance. Spurred on by entry into force of Protocol V of the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons² and the cluster-munitions-ban movement, the subject of “victim assistance” has broadened to return to those persons Robin Coupland and his colleagues at the International Committee of the Red Cross told us about back in the 1990s—the war wounded, including all those wounded by the lingering debris of war, regardless of the weapon classification. It is worth noting, however, that Coupland and company recognized the importance of distinguishing in the victim-assistance records the different weapons that caused the injuries because the type of weapon—landmine; shell, bomb and mortar; or bullet—correlates with the type of injury and the medical treatment and rehabilitation required.³ After years of mainly distinguishing between “mine” and “UXO” in victim data collection, countries are increasingly seeing the importance of knowing more details about the device causing the accident. In fact, identifying the device is of particular interest these days, with the new focus on quantifying the impact of cluster munitions.

Another indicator of this broadening of “victim assistance” is the recent announcement that the Landmine Survivors Network has become Survivor Corps, with a mission expanded “from helping victims of landmines to helping all those who have suffered from global conflict and its lasting effects.”⁴ This name and vision change coincides with the entry into force of the *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* and its Optional Protocol.⁵ The enforcement of this international convention could help pave the way for improved access to medical and rehabilitation services as well as legal rights for all persons with disabilities, including landmine/ERW survivors.

However, the existence of an international convention recognizing these rights in no way guarantees that the rights will be protected, even if most countries in the world accede to it, just as the AP Mine Ban Convention⁶ has not led to marked improvement in the treatment and rights of landmine survivors, even in the countries that are parties to it. This discrepancy is because real progress depends upon not only the will of the governments of countries where landmine survivors reside, but also upon the international community to assist the mine-affected countries in developing the wherewithal to actually meet the needs of survivors and other persons with disabilities. In short, this case is one where mine action directly intersects with “development”—a prime topic of discussion in the mine-action community in recent years and one that requires detailed articulation in its various manifestations, including health-sector improvements, infrastructure construction and capacity building in public-sector planning and administration.



Staff prosthetist and Organization of American States official at CENAPORTO rehabilitation center in Managua, Nicaragua.
PHOTO COURTESY OF THE AUTHOR

Back in 2002, I wrote an article for the *JMA* in which I examined the progress being made on three issues of concern raised by the First Meeting of the Standing Committee on Victim Assistance and Socio-Economic Reintegration (SC-VA) in 1999.⁷ As a way to gauge progress made on the pillar of victim assistance, I will review these issues again and assess how well they are being addressed in 2008. In the 2002 article, I reported some promising developments, with lingering difficulties still confronting each issue area. The issues of concern were:

1. How to collect and share needed data on victims
2. How to gain sufficient attention from donors
3. How to coordinate victim-assistance activities more effectively

Collection and Exchange of Data

Despite the further development of the Information Management System for Mine Action and its deployment to some 50 programs, the most recent *Landmine Monitor* lamented the continued lack of effective landmine/ERW casualty-data collection systems in most

mine-affected countries, noting that “data collection is inadequate or non-existent in 64 of 68 countries with recorded casualties.”⁷ As dire as this statement makes the situation seem, the truth is that most of these countries fall into the category of having **inadequate** systems and not the **complete absence** of a system.

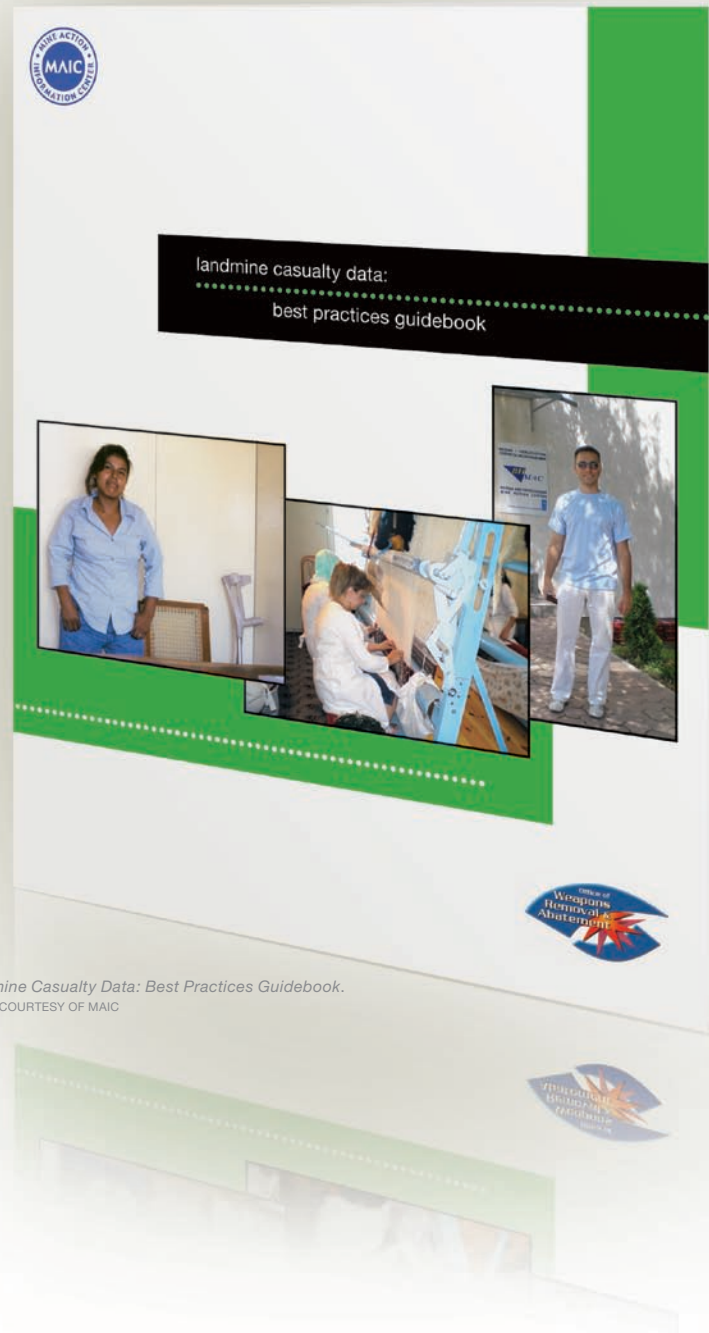
With the increasing number of national mine-action programs using IMSMA and working with technical assistance from the United Nations Mine Action Service, the United Nations Development Programme and UNICEF, landmine/ERW casualty-data collection is beginning to occur in locations as challenging as Sudan and is being improved in countries like Lao People’s Democratic Republic. Newer mine-action programs, like those in Burundi, Senegal and Uganda, are in a position to benefit from lessons learned during the past decade and the availability of more-experienced Technical Advisors and more-sophisticated information-management systems. The MAIC has recently published, with sponsorship from the U.S. Department of State’s Office of Weapons Removal and Abatement, an electronic book, *Landmine Casualty Data: Best Practices Guidebook*, that reports on advances being made in casualty-data collection and management. It also offers lessons learned that countries can reflect upon as they undertake the challenging task of building mine/ERW victim information systems that meet their needs for data to use in planning and implementing their comprehensive mine-action programs, including mine clearance, mine-risk education and survivor assistance.

While some progress in data collection can be detected, the pace of change is painfully slow, due to the fact that this component of mine action, like so many others, is very much a long-term capacity-building exercise. An initial focus on mine/ERW casualty-data collection and survivor-assistance programming can be the impetus to garner donor support needed to launch the capacity-building initiatives. Their long-term sustainment depends, however, on harnessing the attention and funding of national and international actors interested in issues such as economic development and poverty eradication—which brings us to the second issue of concern.

The Funding Challenge

Unfortunately, the trends identified in 2002 concerning getting the attention of international donors to support victim-assistance programs continue today, as this pillar of mine action still garners the smallest total amount of international monetary support. At least that seems to be the case when looking at the “official” total figures for the different pillars of mine action.⁸

As noted in 2002, however, it is difficult to arrive at an accurate total figure for funds spent on victim assistance because funding often arrives in the form of numerous small awards given to local and international nongovernmental organizations or to programs that do not readily appear to be mine-action related. Given the desirability of integrating mine action more thoroughly into development and landmine/ERW “victim assistance” more thoroughly into programs that assist all persons with disabilities, this trend will only increase. Perhaps the better gauge of progress will be to track the funding that is going into prosthetic and orthotic services, socioeconomic-



Landmine Casualty Data: Best Practices Guidebook.
PHOTO COURTESY OF MAIC

reintegration projects and other social-service programs identified as “indicators” for monitoring purposes; however, to do so would require enhanced data-collection and analysis-methods. A complexity of challenges again confronts us and the call to integrate mine action and development becomes more compelling.

Improved Coordination and Program Planning

As in 2002, the SC-VA has taken a lead role in encouraging mine-affected countries to improve coordination among victim-assistance stakeholders and has expanded this concept to include developing effective national plans for this pillar of mine action. This initiative began in the aftermath of the 2004 Review Conference in Nairobi, Kenya, when a self-identified group of 24 States Parties with significant numbers of victims was asked to complete a questionnaire designed to help identify their victim-assistance programming needs and craft specific objectives to meet those needs. This questionnaire has been followed up with initiatives by the SC-VA and the

Implementation Support Unit of the AP Mine Ban Convention to work with this group of countries to develop more specific and meaningful objectives and plans to meet them.

Once again progress has been slow and uneven, with some frustration expressed at the Eighth Meeting of States Parties⁹ that more of the group of 24 countries had not responded with sound objectives and that some had even “failed to spell out what is known or not known about the status of victim assistance.”¹⁰ A few countries, however, including Afghanistan and Sudan, have produced national victim-assistance strategies and action plans that include meaningful, specific and measurable objectives, and were developed and vetted through a series of national victim-assistance workshops. In both of these cases, specific survivor-assistance projects have been launched by government agencies,

international organizations, and international and local NGOs. With donor funding coming from a variety of sources, more progress is being made in addressing some of the needs of landmine/ERW survivors.

Conclusion

Progress, while slow even in the best cases, is discernable and is built upon many actors coming together in small ways to painstakingly create a system of services and programs that can begin to help survivors and other victims rebuild their lives. This issue of the *JMA* focuses on some of the specific developments in the field of survivor and victim assistance, as well as the local NGOs that are often the prime engine of progress in this field of action so dependent on the many small steps that must be taken down the path of rehabilitation and development. ♦

See Endnotes, page 110



Suzanne Fiederlein, Ph.D., joined the Mine Action Information Center in 1999 and is now a Senior Research Associate and Victim-assistance Team Leader. She has worked on projects related to International Mine Action Standards, victim and survivor assistance, mine-action database systems (specializing in casualty data), mine action in Latin America, and program evaluation. In addition, she has coordinated the curriculum for the UNDP Mine Action Senior Managers Course. She holds a Ph.D. in political science and a Master of Arts in Latin American studies, and has served on the faculties of James Madison and Virginia Commonwealth Universities.

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News Brief

State Department's Richard Kidd Heads to Department of Energy

In late June, Richard Kidd, Director of Weapons Removal and Abatement in the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Political-Military Affairs, announced plans to take a position at the U.S. Department of Energy. Kidd, who served seven years with the DoS and worked 10 years with humanitarian mine action, joined the Office of Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy on 7 July 2008.

"I leave the State Department with tremendous respect and admiration for the organization, its mission and its staff, particularly those in the Office of Weapons Removal and Abatement, who are some of the hardest working and most dedicated individuals with whom I have ever had the pleasure of working," Kidd said in a prepared release. "Each day the team in WRA makes decisions and manages programs that have a positive impact on our foreign policy, and on the lives of thousands and thousands of people around the world. The team in WRA demonstrates a commitment to helping others and a seriousness of purpose and integrity that reflects the very best attributes of public service."

He continued, "I will never look at the world in the same way or without the deepest appreciation for the professionalism and dedication of America's entire inter-agency foreign policy team." Forwarding information for Richard Kidd will be available through the WRA office: <http://www.state.gov/t/pm/wra/>.