December 2002

Restoring the Spirit of Asia’s Most Mine Affected Countries

Hayden Roberts
MAIC

Recommended Citation
Available at: http://commons.lib.jmu.edu/cisr-journal/vol6/iss3/10

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.
Restoring the Spirit of Asia's Most Mine Affected Countries

The various wars and internal conflicts have left the civilians of Cambodia, Thailand, and Vietnam in serious need of assistance. Today, several organizations are increasing their aid to mine victims by addressing both their physical and socio-economic needs.

**Vietnam Veterans of America Foundation**

In 1991, the Vietnam Veterans of America Foundation (VVAF) established a humanitarian program in Cambodia to provide rehabilitation assistance to landmine victims. Since then, the programs and services offered have grown in number and geographical coverage. The program is ongoing and has resulted in the establishment of facilities that provide physical therapy and prostheses to Cambodian survivors of landmine injuries.

**CAMBODIAN HANDICRAFT ASSOCIATION (CHA)**

The Cambodian Handicraft Association (CHA) was organized by Hay Kim Tha and Hong Thai Ly to assist those who have suffered from landmine and polio disabilities. The organization provides vocational training to disabled people in order to help them become employable in business and trade, but who were unable to support themselves with their craft skills after the training was completed.

**THAILAND**

Recently, Thailand has been facing a compound dilemma. The region of Thailand populated along Burma's border harbors thousands of displaced refugees fleeing from this nation. Much of this is due to the fact that Burma gained independence from Britain, about 30 ethnic minority groups have been struggling with the government—both sides rely heavily on mines. These groups
H.I-Thailand will commence a community-based rehabilitation program in selected mine-affected villages of the Tak province. 10

Vietnam

For over 20 years now, Vietnam has witnessed a long-term era of peace after several decades of turmoil and strife. The largest conflict was the Vietnam War, which ended from 1961 through 1975 and left this nation decimated and covered with millions of landmines. To illustrate this point, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) states: "There are some 3.5 million landmines and 350,000-800,000 tons of UXO scattered throughout Vietnam. It would cost approximately $35 billion to clear these mines/ordnance." Over 38,000 people have been killed by UXOs/mines since the end of the American War in 1975. At least 64,000 additional people have been injured by UXOs/mines since that time.

The Vietnamese government estimates that there are some 2,000 UXO/mines related casualties a year. 11

U.S. are primarily responsible for many of the injuries and casualties that occur in Vietnam and children are extremely susceptible to this threat.

Handicapped International (HI)

According to their website report Landmine Victim Assistance: World Report 2003, "Handicapped International has acted since 1989 along the Thai-Burma border on behalf of disabled people, mainly through the provision of prosthetic and orthopedic devices and community-based rehabilitation programs." This organization acknowledged the large number of refugees who are amputees or otherwise disabled and targeted them in victim assistance programs. To better serve those who are in need of rehabilitation, HI opened 15 orthopedic workshops in provincial hospitals or refugee camps throughout Thailand. On average, the workshops produce about 40 prostheses a month. 12 A wheelchair distribution program in Bangkok is implemented under the auspices of HI and many of the workshops throughout Thailand receive this type of equipment. As it is primarily the provincial hospitals that have been adequately equipped for the rehabilitation of victims and amputees, HI-Thailand will continue its community-based rehabilitation program in selected mine-affected villages of the Tak province. 13

Vietnam

According to VNAH statistics, the country of Vietnam contains over five million people with a disability and is a nation with one of the world's lowest incomes. 13 In order to counter and address this fact, VNAH has been manufacturing and delivering limbs and braces to those in need. To date, over 33,000 devices have been delivered, although there are still many war victims that have not been assisted. 13 VNAH handles this by conducting outreach missions in rural communities far too far from hospitals and prosthetic centers in order to meet the needs of those too poor to travel. Cao Van Tran has set up two centers in Vietnam that have the capacity to produce about 200 prostheses a month for less than $50 a piece. 13

National Policy and Programs for the Disabled

Physical aid and therapy are not the only aspects of assistance provided by VNAH—promoting national policy and legislation to acknowledge the disabled by the government is a large area of focus as well. VNAH has started a program that will work alongside the Vietnamese government to improve and update policies and programs for the disabled. VNAH's work in this area has paid off and now Vietnam has its first comprehensive Ordinance on Disabled Persons. The main priorities of this policy are to ensure barrier-free access, create employment opportunities and create groups of aid for the disabled.

A Thai boy learning to function with the help of his prostheses.
Victim Assistance Policy Planning: Decentralization as a Key?

While victim assistance is becoming an increasingly familiar topic for signatories of the Mine Ban Treaty, the problem remains of how best to implement such programs. The author suggests that it is time for a switch from "top-down" to "bottom-up" implementation.

by Dr. Philippe Chabasse, Co-director, Handicap International

Introduction

Three years after the entry into force of the Mine Ban Treaty, a major difficulty remains concerning implementation, evaluation and consequently funding of mine victim assistance programs. The following paper presents a regional initiative that encourages national actors to determine what they consider as priorities and locally applicable criteria for victim assistance policies and projects.

Numerous conceptual advances have been made through the intersessional process, which is leading to an international consensus on an inclusive definition of mine victims as well as agreement on the main components of victim assistance covering emergency aid, hospital care, physical rehabilitation, and social and economic reintegration.

The proposed activities must be integrated into national policies of public health and social assistance. They must be adapted to local environmental, social and physical factors and offer the most appropriate services to the people. They must respect existing institutional and sectoral frameworks, and ensure the permanence of community aid, hospital care, physical rehabilitation, and social and economic reintegration.

Reinforcement of National Coordination

In Cambodia, such a coordination mechanism among all actors in victim assistance already exists through the Disability Action Council (DAC) and will soon be reinforced. In Laos, the National Council for Disabled Persons (NCDP) is instrumental in bringing all national actors together regularly. In Vietnam, the process is currently underway through the Ministry of Health and concerned NGOs and IOs.

It is worth noting that representatives from Laos and Vietnam, two non-signatory states, participated in the last intersessional meetings in Geneva.

On the eve of the Fourth Meeting of States Parties, one can assess positive results from the intersessional process as it has enabled the international community to develop a shared understanding of the framework of victim assistance strategies. As far as implementation is concerned, however, the driving force no longer lies in Geneva or New York, but rather in Phnom Penh, Vientiane, Hanoi or Bangkok.

The regional conference concluded with agreement on the necessity of the following:

- Establishing a living regional network highlighting "best practices," mainstreaming contacts, collecting information, and producing and updating a directory of service providers from governments, NGOs and IOs.
- Helping national actors work in a collaborative manner and developing a prioritized portfolio of programs for each country.
- Presenting the results of this ongoing process to future intersessional meetings in order to enlist further technical and financial support for victim assistance in the region.

Victim Assistance Policy Planning

Reinforcement of National Coordination

Dr. Philippe Chabasse, Co-director
Handicap International

14 Avenue Berthelot
75243 Paris
Tel: +33 01 44 78 69 79
Fax: +33 01 44 78 69 78
E-mail: pchabasse@handicap international.org

"Supporting the production and airing of television and radio spots in numerous affected provinces throughout the country.

"Supporting the dissemination of UXO/mine warning signs in affected areas, as well as information on victim assistance programs through existing health care networks, peer education activities for children and youth, and expanding inclusive education activities to provide additional opportunities for disabled children to attend school and in school activities.

Conclusion

At epidemic rates, landmines have claimed the health and livelihood of millions throughout southeast Asia. As the victim toll has increased to alarming proportions, many organizations have taken it upon themselves to assist these nations in any means possible. Although landmines have taken hope away from these victims, these organizations have given these disadvantaged people a chance to start again and lead a more productive life. "That's what it's all about," Ca Van Tran states. "We not only need to heal the physical wounds, but deal with the emotional scars as well, and restore hope where there was none."

Endnotes

6. Personal e-mail correspondence with Hay Kim Sangkar, August 12, 2002.