

Assisting victims and their communities

A recent British Medical Journal study reported that in four of the most mine-infested countries (Afghanistan, Bosnia, Cambodia and Mozambique) an average of one household in 20 included a landmine victim. One in 10 of the 2100 landmine victims encountered by the medical researchers was a child. The researchers also found that households with landmine victims were 40% more likely to have difficulty providing food for the family. Statistics like these, and the poignant stories of personal tragedy that accompany them, have made victim assistance one of Canada's most urgent mine action priorities.

The needs of landmine survivors are much more than physical: Integrated programs must also address the economic, social and psychological impacts of trauma and loss of limbs and sensory abilities.

Globally, the nature of mine victim assistance is undergoing dramatic changes similar to those seen in mine clearance. In the past, victim assistance was largely limited to acute care and fitting prostheses. The psychological, social and employment needs of mine victims were rarely addressed and victims often faced social marginalization.

The mine action community is now recognizing that victim assistance has to meet a mine victim's broader needs, encompassing all aspects from initial emergency treatment to long-term social and economic rehabilitation. Many victim assistance programs are now offering employment opportunities to victims, often in the area of prostheses production and victim rehabilitation.

Measuring progress in delivering assistance to mine victims is difficult, since many donors and implementing agencies are reluctant to single out mine victims for support in countries with many other victims of war and disease. But we can point to some significant steps forward in this area:

- Since 1995, Mozambique has added three more orthotic centres to the six already in existence. Two more are planned for the near future.
- In Bosnia, 38 clinics have been set up as part of the World Bank War Rehabilitation Project Victims Fund, providing a full range of services to landmine victims.
- In 1998, Jordan introduced a Bill of Rights



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