

The lives of people injured by explosive weapons, survivors, other persons with disabilities and indirect victims have been transformed by years of victim assistance and related efforts, in many countries. The impact has been particularly significant when a combination of services and support was made available through specific victim assistance efforts and broader support. These have included: health care, physical rehabilitation, as well as personalised social support and empowerment, livelihood development, social protection and advancing the rights of persons with disabilities more generally.

The Mine Ban Treaty did indeed put victim assistance on the map, and now the future of victim assistance needs the help of the mine action community; our help! Let's unpack this.

Why is support needed more now than ever?

From 2014 to 2015, the annual number of mine/ERW casualties increased by 75% and by a further 23% from 2015 to 2016. High numbers of casualties continued to be recorded in 2017 with a total of at least 7,239 people killed or injured. That said, real figures are likely to be higher due to underreporting. Of course there are many more victims than casualties, including the affected families and communities.

Is the future of victim assistance in peril?

Dedicated funding for victim assistance dropped to the lowest level recorded, and made up just 2% of the identified global mine action funding in 2017. This represented only 15.8 million USD for so many countries in need.

There appears to be an assumption by the donor community that the focus on disability-inclusive humanitarian and development action can fully replace earmarked funding for victim assistance. This assumption is flawed for the following three reasons:

Firstly, it ignores the preventative aspects of victim assistance that aims to prevent the loss of life and limbs immediately after the explosion.

Secondly, it distracts from the states' commitment to report on victim assistance under the Mine Ban Treaty.

And thirdly, mechanisms for tracking activities are lacking. States need to demonstrate that survivors are being reached and assisted through broader disability-inclusive humanitarian and development efforts. The Washington Group questions on disability, increasingly being used, tell you who has difficulty in functioning, but do not inform about the cause of injury or impairment. Additional information is therefore needed to ensure that survivors are amongst beneficiaries. More generally, data should be able to capture the indirect victims amongst a given population.

So what to do?

It is clear that the future of this pillar of mine action depends on its integration into broader humanitarian, development and human rights efforts in countries affected by mines and explosive remnants of war. It is also evident that this is not yet the case. The mine action community and those with the responsibility for victim assistance have an important role to play in ensuring that broad multi-sectoral efforts are contributing to the realization of the rights of victims.

Whether you are working for a government body in charge of coordinating victim assistance in an affected state, for the department responsible for mine action in a donor state, for a mine action operator or for UNMAS, you can contribute to victim assistance by:

- Bridging gaps in data collection and service provision, and
- Advocating for, facilitating and monitoring a multi-sector response for survivors and indirect victims.

You collect data on casualties, you have access to earmarked funding with which to bridge gaps in services and with which to advocate for a multi sector response, and you are best placed to initiate and foster partnerships with those outside of the mine action community who could provide services needed by survivors and indirect victims.

You, as the mine action community, have a decisive role to play in ensuring that an integrated approach to victim assistance -- an approach that is comprised of specific and broader efforts -- is implemented and generates valuable results. Without you, the sustainability of victim assistance is in peril.

And so, I would like to restate the call made in Vienna last year. This is a call that humbly asks people in the room here, representatives of donor and affected states alike, mine action operators as well as UNMAS agencies to do three things:

First, increase your earmarked funding for victim assistance so as to support those vital specific efforts.

Second, please move out of the mine action silo! Victim assistance is not only an obligation for you, the people with designated responsibility for this pillar of mine action: it is the responsibility of the entire state. Involve your colleagues working in other parts of your government in these meetings. Or simply walk over to the office next door and talk to them about how they can also contribute. They are likely unfamiliar with the term 'victim assistance'; unfold it for them, demystify it, explain the type of activities involved.

Third, introduce a cause category and a marker on survivors of explosive weapons and indirect victims in statistics, surveys, beneficiary data and monitoring systems. Without these, we will never know if broader efforts are contributing to realizing the victim assistance obligations. From the perspective of accountability to affected populations, collecting this data is the missing link.

A country that becomes mine-free is not suddenly victim-free: the needs of victims last throughout their lifetime. Data and services for landmine victims need to ultimately be integrated into a government's broader frameworks, so that when clearance obligations have been met, assistance continues to be available for victims. For as long as you, the mine action community in donor and

affected states, is around, it is up to you to make sure that the plight of survivors and indirect victims is not forgotten!