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Economic Reintegration and Rehabilitation of Nepalese Landmine/IED Victims by Purna Shova Chitrakar [Ban Landmines Campaign Nepal]

This article examines the effectiveness of a victim-assistance program in Nepal conducted by Ban Landmines Campaign Nepal (NCBL). In the program's two phases, the organization helped rehabilitate 67 victims of landmines and improvised explosive devices and reintegrate them into society. The report details the NCBL's program goals, activities and outcomes, and addresses the challenges and future aspirations of victim assistance in Nepal.

From 1996 to 2006, the violent conflict in Nepal claimed more than 13,000 lives. Additionally, the conflict maimed, displaced and left thousands of others homeless during this period, orphaning more than 3,000 children. The Maoist rebels used IEDs and remote-activated explosives during the initial stage of the "People's War"—the Maoist name for the war—while the Nepalese government has acknowledged that security forces laid landmines and IEDs to foil and protect themselves from rebel offensives.

On 21 November 2006, both parties signed the Comprehensive Peace Agreement,¹ a ceasefire which included terms stating that "both parties shall inform each other about the demarcation and storage of ambush or mines planted during the war period within 30 days and help each other to diffuse or dispose them off within 60 days." Two years after the CPA's signing, five out of 53 anti-personnel minefields and 51 out of more than 285 IED-affected areas had already been cleared. Currently, about 50 percent of the mines and IED fields have been cleared, and the government has committed to clearing all the fields by the end of 2011.

Although the government provides treatment to the victims, such as free medical care and compensation to the families of those killed by the Maoists' explosive devices, this support has proved inadequate for victims. For example, the government reimburses bills for treatment costs, but it does not reimburse treatment in private hospitals. Victims do not receive any financial allowance for treatment until they have fully recovered and they receive no financial assistance for follow-up treatment. Even when victims do receive assistance, they must sometimes wait for months, if not years, to receive care, and sometimes that care is low-quality and lacks regular follow-up check-ups, physiotherapy and psychological treatment. Furthermore, victims often return to their villages jobless. In addition, farmers unable to attend to their crops as they did prior to their accidents cannot earn a living, leading to further stress and anguish.

NCBL's Work

In an effort to help landmine victims, Ban Landmines Campaign Nepal has carried out various mine-risk education programs, as well as IED-awareness programs in the villages. NCBL is also currently collaborating with the Women Development Society to support the education of 220 girls who are victims of conflict.

From 2003 to April 2010, it organized mine-risk education in 43 out of 75 districts. On 24–29 September 2010, with the financial support of UNICEF, NCBL held a workshop to train 90 district focal points (trainers) from 45 districts.

In an interview with *The Kathmandu Post*, Hari Bahadur Karki, a mine victim who has since received computer training from NCBL, commented, "I used to earn my living by driving a taxi



NCBL held a refresher training for mine/IED victims on 2–3 November 2010.

Photo courtesy of Sujata Kandel, NCBL

in Kathmandu. As there is no assistance for the victims of landmines, I have become a beggar now.” Similarly, Bimal Prasad Dhakal, the Director of Bheri Zonal Hospital, said, “Patients do not want to go home even after receiving treatment and being fully recovered. The food given by the hospital at least solves their problem of [surviving] hand to mouth. As there is no rehabilitation center here, the hospital is facing [an] enormous problem.”

Such situations provide evidence of a great need for mine-victim assistance in Nepal. If victims do not receive initial and continuing assistance following their accidents, they could experience physical and mental problems, which may ultimately breed hopelessness and outcasts in the society. Consequently, since 2003, NCBL, with the help of Adopt-A-Minefield, Australian Network to Ban Landmines and Japan Campaign to Ban Landmines, has conducted various programs to help rehabilitate mine victims in order to assimilate them back into their communities and society at large.

In different phases of the program, “Economic Reintegration and Rehabilitation of the Landmine/IEDs Victims,” 67 mine victims from 16 districts have thus far received support according to their needs, interests, abilities and the local job market. The program’s goals include reducing the pain of the victims, breaking their silence, boosting their self-confidence, helping them get jobs and reintegrating them into society while rehabilitating them to become mentally, socially and economically self-reliant. The program aims to publicize the progress made by victims through project activities, which in turn can help other victims learn and take inspiration from their progress.

Activities

NCBL representatives arranged field visits to remote Nepalese villages to familiarize themselves with mine victims’ situations, so they might assist them in developing job placement activities, thus furthering their rehabilitation into society. Prior to making the decision to support the victims, NCBL consulted extensively with social workers and the survivors’ representatives. The NCBL representatives mainly interacted with the victims on issues such as the nature of their accidents and their experience with their

families and communities following the accident. The representatives worked with victims to help them understand the importance of societal assimilation in order to better their lives and support themselves economically. By visiting their homes and conducting interviews, NCBL staff identified appropriate work for each particular person, taking into account their situation, interests and abilities. In addition, NCBL continues to closely monitor the victims they assisted, constantly encouraging the victims and keeping the villagers abreast of the activities carried out by the victims. Local communities are encouraged to keep a record of victims and to support them in their recovery and reintegration into society.

Phase I: Field Visits to Monitor Progress

NCBL visited the field to determine whether the Economic Reintegration and Rehabilitation of the Landmine/IEDs Victims program was successful. At the program’s end, NCBL arranged a public relations tour for the victims so they could learn from other victims’ work, discuss their achievements at organized workshops and rallies, inform communities of their activities, urge people to support them, and exert pressure on the government to introduce victim-assistance programs for their rehabilitation. The following activities took place under this program:

- Field visits by the victims:** The Madi village, in Chitwan district, which lies in south-central Nepal, was the location for the field visit. Madi is known for a tragic Maoist attack on a passenger bus that took place during the decade-long armed conflict in which 39 people lost their lives and 72 were injured. The NCBL provided assistance to 17 victims of the attack under its income-generating program.

- **Seminar for the victims:** The seminar, which employed lecture, group-discussion and other presentation methods, was divided into the inaugural session and the programmatic session. During the inaugural session, representatives of different political parties, Nepal Red Cross Society, social organizations and journalists delivered speeches. The second session focused mainly on the achievements of the income-generating activities and the victims' role in helping to put a complete ban on landmines.
- **Rally by the victims:** Mine victims carried out a rally involving students and activists from NCBL. More than 300 people marched in the rally from Sahid Chok to Pul Chok of Narayangadh city. At the end, the rally converged into a mass gathering. The author, along with Ghanashyam Kandel, Program Convenor, and Krishna Ghising, a landmine victim, addressed the meeting. A large number of journalists attended the program and interviewed many victims.

Phase II: The Target Groups

The program's second phase targeted the victims of landmines and IEDs. The project covered 25 victims from 10 out of 75 districts. The project did not discriminate on the victims' gender, age or cause of the accident (landmines or IEDs), nor did it discriminate between those victims injured from landmines laid by rebels or the security forces.

The Project's Outcomes:

- In supporting the social rehabilitation of 50 victims of landmines and other explosive devices from remote Nepalese villages, NCBL found that the program had multiplier effects on some of the victims' families. For example, the families that were taught to keep buffalo now have many calves, and are able to sell milk and manage their daily expenses. As a result, the children drink milk daily.
- Victims have found new roles in the family and society. They have become self-reliant, gained self-respect and have once again become functioning community members. Victims speak publicly about their experiences and are more confident in their ability to contribute to society.
- The project has supported the victims' education and enhanced the quality of education. Victims have become more aware of their rights and have gained access to disability organizations and networks.
- NCBL has expanded its presence to other districts as victims no longer need to borrow from the local moneylenders, which has relieved them from extremely high interest rates.
- Victims themselves are involved in mine action.

Challenges to Victim Assistance in Nepal

Solving its seemingly unlimited problems with limited resources is one of the challenges NCBL faces with victim assistance, as well as the high expectation victims hold for the project. In some cases, victims do not want to say they receive assistance. Supporting the mentally disabled is also a hurdle because of the physical damage caused by landmines and IEDs. Furthermore, NCBL has difficulty contacting victims due to geographic location, ongoing violence, and lack of victim records, road access and telecommunication services.

The Project's Unexpected Useful Results

- NCBL helped expand the victims' network.
- Organization of both the campaign and victims played a key role in appealing to the Constituent Assembly members, who are tasked with creating a Nepalese constitution.
- NCBL organized rallies and media coverage, including interviews of victims and NCBL representatives, which spread awareness of NCBL's activities and the victims' situations.
- NCBL helped establish contact with other organizations.
- NCBL became able to support seven more victims.
- NCBL encouraged other victim-assistance programs.
- The civilian victims created links with the victims from the security sector.
- NCBL enabled security forces to include their names as victims of landmines and IEDs.
- NCBL enabled non-civilian victims to be heard.

Lessons Learned from the Project

Although this program faces difficulties, its services are needed nationwide. The program is a tool that unites victims, encourages interaction, reduces feelings of isolation and increases involvement in different social activities, including mine-action ones. The program helped victims build income by creating jobs and returning them to their normal life. Only one out of the 50 victims could not continue the work. While creating and strengthening victim identities, the program also created a voice for mine victims instead of letting them remain silent and unnoticed. NCBL benefited



Ram Daiya Chaudhari sits with other victims of IEDs as they wait to participate in the Capacity Building Refresher Training organized by NCBL, 30–31 December 2008.

Photo courtesy of NCBL

from the program by gaining confidence in its ability to organize mine-action programs.

NCBL's Future Aspirations

NCBL hopes to ultimately support more victims with the program, helping break down their feeling of helplessness. By building a network, victims will be more active in mine-action activities, and by educating victims of their rights and their ability to improve their mobility, NCBL will help victims recognize their power and self-worth. It hopes to erase the divide between victim and citizen, creating a normal and easy environment for victims. The organization intends to provide more continued support over extended periods of time and coordinate other support, such as prosthetics, care of deaf, blind, etc. NCBL would also like to develop activities for those mentally disabled by landmines and IEDs, and reach out to non-civilian victims, such as security sector victims. ↴

Endnote

1. "Full text of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement held between Government of Nepal and Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist)." ReliefWeb.

<http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/rwb.nsf/db900SID/VBOL-6VSHK8?OpenDocument>. Accessed 4 November 2010.

Biography



Purna Shova Chitrakar began her social activism within the teacher's movement in 1980. She worked with a women's organization for more than 15 years, fighting for women's rights, and established the Women Development Society in 1991. Chitrakar also founded NCBL in 1995 and became a member of the International Campaign to Ban Landmines' general assembly in 1998 and an Advisory Board member in 2004. She has been a Landmine Monitor researcher since 1999 and has worked on the issue of cluster munitions since 2003. Chitrakar was a member of the Nepalese government's Central Child Welfare Board and a member of Nepal's National Mine Action Steering Committee. She is Victim Assistance Focal Point of ICBL for Nepal. She has visited more than 50

countries, is the author of two published books, and is a writer and columnist for a weekly Nepalese newspaper.

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