

DRAFT – by Margaret Arach Orech

An Integrated approach to Victim Assistance – through a Survivors Eye

When looking at an integrated approach to victim assistance, various aspects have to be taken into consideration by states. Linking with the components of victim assistance, is it inevitable that while physical rehabilitation, health, psychological support, economic reintegration etc are key to survivors reintegration, other related areas that are barriers and limits participation of survivors in the day to day life be taken into consideration. For many states, Victim Assistance falls under Mine Action but this seems to be getting lost along the way as gradually states complete clearance of contaminated areas and is declared ***Mine Free***, yet survivors will always be there. The decline in funding is more compounded in states that have declared completion of contaminated or mined areas

Through international cooperation, funding for Mine Action ideally would include a fraction for VA and in some instances, direct VA funding. We are now seeing a likely decrease in this trend as donor funding is low and there are shifts in priorities and changes within Policies by States. Some states are often “***not in a position to do so***” regarding VA and look to development partners to support their interventions. With Such intervention if any mostly targeting persons with disabilities in general leaving survivors who are termed “emerging disability categories” and not yet well versed in disability politics. Development aid funding should reach landmine survivors as it reaches persons with disabilities. Be disability inclusive in totality. As it appears, the realities of survivors’ plight are not in the minds of donor states and Donor agencies. This is the reason why we need a Victim Assistance specific funds as mine action was the only channel that survivors were able to tap into for support.

ULSA has through its support to survivors reached out to indirect victims as well as other persons with disabilities but is now on the decline due to limited funding.

The location of Victim Assistance within a given government Ministry if well strategically placed can ensure continued support to survivors even when traditional Mine Action Centers cease to be operational as is the case with my country Uganda. For an integrated approach to VA, relevant line ministries should be identified and tasked with setting desks specifically for Disability of which survivors are likely to benefit and access services if awareness is made through advocacy of such departments by concerned ministries. This is quite relevant in areas where decentralization of services helps to improve access to services by survivors, vulnerable and marginalized persons in hard to reach areas. Such ministries would include but not limited to health, education and sports, works and transport, housing, water and environment, information as well as local government. This is a positive area where Uganda has excelled and makes political space available for a selected number of persons with disabilities from Parliament to the grass root level for inclusive participation.

Establishment of the Equal Opportunities Commission with full function body has also in a way improved involvement of persons with disabilities but survivor participation is still lacking.

Coordination of activities by various stakeholders in Victim Assistance is important as it helps to reduce on duplication and making the most of scarce resources. States should take the lead and be responsible as it too will ensure sustainability rather than leaving this role to INGO or NGOs.

Formulation of disability policies should be inclusive of all disability categories including survivors.