ADVOCACY with VICTIMS

Good Practice and Lessons Learned in Influencing Policy

April 2013

ABOUT HANDICAP INTERNATIONAL

Handicap International is an international aid organisation working in situations of poverty and exclusion, conflict and disaster. Working alongside people with disabilities and vulnerable populations, we take action and raise awareness in order to respond to their essential needs, improve their living conditions and promote respect for their dignity and fundamental rights.

Since its creation in 1982, this international solidarity organisation has set up development programmes in over 60 countries and works in various emergency contexts. The network of 8 national associations (Germany, Belgium, Canada, France, Luxembourg, Switzerland, United Kingdom, United States) works relentlessly to mobilise resources, co-manage projects and promote the organisation's principles and actions. Getting a child, man or woman back on their feet in a difficult environment, aggravated by poverty, exile or famine, is simply a question of giving them the resources they need to find their own way out.

In emergency contexts, and in situations of conflict or natural disaster, Handicap International provides relief and assistance to vulnerable populations, people with disabilities, displaced persons and refugees. We carry out development work in the field, promoting health, preventive care and social and economic inclusion (access to education, professional training, and employment). Handicap International also supports local disabled people's organisations.

The knowledge and expertise the association has gained from its work in supporting vulnerable people have led it to campaign at national and international level to ensure that people with disabilities are taken into consideration in development projects and policies.

Our objective is to defend and promote access to fundamental rights for persons with disabilities. Handicap International is notably committed to the fight against anti-personnel landmines and cluster munitions. Co-founder of the International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL), awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1997, today the organisation is a recognised force for international advocacy. In 2003, Handicap International became one of the founding members of the Cluster Munition Coalition (CMC), to campaign for a ban on cluster munitions. This led to the 2008 Convention on Cluster Munitions. To support the policy work, the organisation has produced ground breaking evidence driven research reports.[1]

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This report would not have been possible without the support of the European Commission, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Royal Government of Norway and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Development of the Royal Government of Belgium.[2]

Various people have contributed to the report at different stages; from conception, formulation and logistical support to providing valuable feedback. The researcher/author would like to thank the following individuals:

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Brussels, 2013

ABSTRACT

This paper highlights the fact that advocacy with and by victims (survivors, family and community members of people injured or killed by cluster munitions) is not a straightforward process. It involves the perception of victims as people located within their historical, social, economic and political trajectories, their lives shaped by their varied experiences and their abilities honed by a complex combination of all of the above. In projects where a diverse set of victims have been recruited as advocates, a number of steps can be taken and methods applied to ensure they are respected as individuals and their capacity as advocates is strengthened. Particularly, when State Parties commit to the participation of victims in formulating, implementing and monitoring of legally binding agreements (Convention on Cluster Munition in this case and its Vientiane Action Plan), it becomes essential to understand the ways of effective and efficient application. Taking these premises as its main lessons learned, the backdrop to this paper is the interplay of victims within the broader advocacy process. The data is taken from a mix of in-depth interviews, literature reviews and informal interactions, and it has been analysed using a qualitative approach only. How to work with victims as advocates in influencing policy is therefore the central focus of the paper.

KEY WORDS

Victims, survivors, advocacy, Ban Advocates, the Ban Advocates' Initiative, victim advocacy, successes, lessons learned

GLOSSARY[3]

(Terms that are not explained in the text)

- **Abandoned explosive ordnance:** Explosive ordnance that has not been used during an armed conflict, that has been left behind or dumped by a party to an armed conflict, and which is no longer under its control. Abandoned explosive ordnance is included under the broader category of explosive remnants of war.
- **Accession:** Accession is the way for a state to become a party to an international treaty through a single instrument that constitutes both signature and ratification.
- **Affected community:** Communities that are affected or have remnants of cluster munitions/UXO in them.
- **Affected families:** Families that have lost one or more than their loved ones due to cluster munitions or have victims of cluster munitions among their members.
- **Cluster munition or Cluster bomb:** According to the 2008 Convention on Cluster Munition, a cluster munition is "A conventional munition that is designed to disperse or release explosive sub-munitions, each weighing less than 20 kilograms, and includes those sub-munitions."[4] Cluster munitions consist of containers and sub-munitions. Launched from the ground, air or water, the containers open and disperse sub-munitions (bomblets) over a wide area. Bomblets are typically designed to pierce armour, kill personnel, or both.
- **Explosive remnants of war:** Under Protocol V to the Convention on Conventional Weapons, explosive remnants of war are defined as unexploded ordnance and abandoned explosive ordnance. Mines are explicitly excluded from the definition, although it does cover unexploded cluster munitions or sub-munitions.
- **Failed cluster munition:** A cluster munition that has been fired, dropped, launched, projected or otherwise delivered and which should have dispersed or released its explosive sub-munitions but has failed to do so.
- **Psycho-social approach:** Focuses on holistic development and support: emotional, cognitive, behavioural, social and spiritual to help people feel health both physically and mentally. It focuses on individual strengths and assets as well as current social conditions and environment. It is culturally adaptive and specific.[5]
- **Sub-munitions or Bomblets:** Any munition that, to perform its task, separates from a parent munition (cluster munition).
- **Survivors:** Persons who fell victim to a mine/ERW accident and survived it.[6]
- **Oslo Process:** The diplomatic process undertaken from 2006–2008 that led to the negotiation, adoption, and signing of the 2008 Convention on Cluster Munitions.
- **Unexploded ordnance (UXO):** Munitions that were designed to explode but for some reason failed to detonate; unexploded sub-munitions are known as blinds or duds.

ABBREVIATIONS

BA	Ban Advocates
CCM	Convention on Cluster Munitions
CM	Cluster Munition
CMC	Cluster Munition Coalition
CRPD	Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
ERW	Explosive Remnants of War
HI	Handicap International
ICBL	International Campaign to Ban Landmines
Lao PDR	Lao People's Democratic Republic
MBT	Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on their Destruction, and referred to here as the Mine Ban Treaty or MBT
VA	Victim Assistance
VAP	Vientiane Action Plan

1. Introduction

"The Ban Advocates personified the impact and consequences of using these weapons. When you are a diplomat or a military expert discussing the technical details of different weapons, this is very different from seeing the human consequences."[7]

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In December 2008, 94 states signed the Convention on Cluster Munition (CCM) in Oslo, Norway (also known as the Oslo Convention). It was later ratified by 30 states[8] and entered into force on 1 August 2010. As of March 2013, the Convention had 111 signatories, with 80 States Parties.[9] Sharing many features of the 1997 Ottawa Convention on anti-personnel landmines and supported by many of the same individuals and organisations who devised that agreement, the CCM prohibits "all use, production, stockpiling and transfer of cluster munitions. It also provides countries with deadlines for clearance of affected areas and the destruction of stockpiled cluster munitions. It includes articles concerning assistance to victims of cluster munitions incidents."[10] In particular, the Convention requires States Parties to: a) destroy their stockpile of cluster munitions within eight years of entry into force (Article 3); b) undertake clearance and destruction of cluster munition remnants located in cluster munition contaminated areas under its jurisdiction or control as soon as possible, but not later than 10 years after becoming a State Party (Article 4); c) provide age and gender-sensitive assistance to cluster munition victims, including medical care, rehabilitation and psychological support as well as their social and economic inclusion (Article 5); d) submit annual reports on the Convention of Cluster Munitions' implementation activities to the Secretary-General of the United Nations (Article 7). Furthermore, each State Party may seek international cooperation and assistance for the implementation of the obligations mentioned in Article 5 of the Convention (Article 6).[11]

With regard to Victim Assistance (VA), the CCM is the first disarmament treaty that creates direct links with human rights by stipulating that State Parties must adequately "provide assistance to cluster munitions victims in areas under its jurisdiction or control and […] in accordance with applicable international humanitarian and human rights law."[12] The Convention makes it the responsibility of states to provide assistance under International Law. VA here is a "package of intertwined provisions" contained within various parts of the Convention: in the preamble, with reference to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), in Article 2, where the term victim is defined, in Article 5 on VA, and in Articles 6 and 7 as the obligation to provide assistance to the victims of cluster munitions.[13] Specifically, Article 5 (2(f)) further addresses the need to "closely consult with and actively involve cluster munition victims and their representative organisations,"[14] thus choosing to uphold and promote the human rights of survivors and other victims.[15] Furthermore, during the CCM first meeting of States Parties in 2010, the States Parties adopted the Vientiane Action Plan (VAP) to ensure the effective and timely implementation of the CCM provision.[16]

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Although not legally binding, the Plan was designed to assist State Parties and other actors in the practical implementation of the Convention. It sets out concrete and measurable steps, actions and targets to be completed within specific time periods and defines roles and responsibilities. Actions 20 to 32 are dedicated to VA and they broadly encompass the following in a gender-sensitive manner: appointing government focal points to coordinate the development, implementation and monitoring of victim assistance policies; collecting data to assess victims' needs; integrating victim assistance into existing coordination mechanisms such as the CRPD; reviewing the availability, accessibility and quality of services; raising awareness about the rights of victims and available services; and mobilising adequate resources.[17] Moreover, Actions 23 and 31 highlight the importance of actively involving cluster munitions victims in government coordination mechanisms, including them in delegations and seeking their expertise in all Convention-related activities.

By introducing a victim assistance package along with ban on the technical and military usage of weapons, the CCM emphasises the human impact and the humanitarian needs arising from weapon use - thereby referred to as: humanitarian disarmament.[18]

The achievement of a diplomatic agreement and policy on the ban of cluster munitions was not due to an isolated campaign or event. It was the result of 'strategic advocacy' and a tactical alliance of actors, the Cluster Munition Coalition (CMC) in particular, comprised of a global network of 350 civil society organisations working across 90 different countries.[19] The alliance applied an effective mix of humanitarian and technical arguments in influencing diplomats, lobbying key decision makers, distributing information about government policy positions to the diplomatic communities and to conferences, and high profile media coverage and national advocacy.[20]

While organisations such as Human Rights Watch (HRW) and Landmine Action were able to build convincing empirical evidence on the impact of cluster bombs on civilians in particular, Handicap International introduced the human element, as well as established an evidence base, by bringing the voices of victims to the fore. It replicated examples from the success of the International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL) by encouraging victims of anti-personnel landmines to speak and campaign. This strengthened the humanitarian argument by giving a human face to the policy debates.

This group of individuals, known as the Ban Advocates, i.e. victims who have compelling and moving stories to tell about their experiences with cluster munitions, work as advocates to campaign for a ban on the weapons that have had devastating consequences. They advocate adoption of the CCM by non-signatory states and implementation of all the key articles of the CCM, with particular attention to victim assistance (Article 5). The initiative echoes Actions 23 and 31 of the Vientiane Action Plan and was widely acknowledged and appreciated by the CMC as well as by diplomats, as confirmed by one member of the CMC Governance Board: "During the Oslo Process, HI carried out its Ban Advocates' Initiative. As survivors of cluster munitions, the Ban Advocates were prominent campaigners, powerful lobbyists, and source of inspiration throughout. On the last day of the conference to sign the Convention, the Ban Advocates were invited to take the floor and were met with a standing ovation. This powerful emotional scene was often referred to afterwards by campaigners as being the most poignant moment in Oslo."[21]

This report therefore attempts to explore HI's journey in working closely with victims

for advocacy, including good practice and lessons learned since 2007. It is the outcome of qualitative interviews with five Ban Advocates and one project staff based in the Lao People's Democratic Republic (PDR), desk research and informal interactions with various other Ban Advocates. It is written from the perspective of the Ban Advocates. In doing so, it attempts to highlight the importance of working with people with lived experiences to balance the policy debates, despite the potential unforeseen challenges. It highlights practical steps, approaches and techniques, for policy makers, practitioners and lobbyists, to devise effective and efficient victim advocacy programme planning through HI's successes and lessons learned.

1.1. BACKGROUND: THE BAN ADVOCATES' INITIATIVE

The Ban Advocates' Initiative was launched in Serbia in 2007, on the sidelines of the Belgrade Conference of States affected by cluster munitions.[22] The group is made up of a diverse set of 32 individual volunteers from 12 different countries, affected by cluster munitions i.e. Afghanistan, Albania, Cambodia, Croatia, Ethiopia, Iraq, Lao PDR, Lebanon, Serbia, Tajikistan, Vietnam and the United States.[23] Of these countries, as of March 2013, Afghanistan, Albania, Croatia, Lebanon and Lao PDR have acceded to the CCM and Iraq is a signatory. The remaining five countries (Ethiopia, Serbia, Tajikistan, Vietnam and the United States) are not signatories or State Parties.[24] These 12 countries were chosen according to three specific criteria: a) those most affected by cluster munitions, b) varied geographical representation, and c) location of States Party conferences in the global south.

These individuals are widely referred to as the Ban Advocates. Their aim was first to lobby for the adoption of a comprehensive Convention text, then for a ban on cluster munitions for countries that are not Party to the Convention, and to push for progress in implementing the articles for countries who have acceded. Over time, they have been actively involved and motivated to share their inspiring experiences at national and international diplomatic conferences, lobbying key policy makers alongside advocacy experts, engaging with a range of media outlets and, more recently, devising local activities to raise awareness of the issue in their communities. In light of these developments, the Ban Advocates' Initiative has evolved considerably. The initiative did not develop an overarching advocacy strategy or specific policy change objective, it adapted to a fast-changing policy and advocacy environment and the CMC goals.[25]

These individuals were identified by mobilising existing resources. HI contacted various networks across the 12 countries to find inspiring people with moving real-life experiences as victims of cluster munitions. Some were contacted through the CMC member organisations in different countries, some through in-country contacts and others via the mine action centres. Some were active in their communities around related issues, some were identified through research or were involved in different capacities in projects run by the network organisations, and all were passionate and motivated about the issue. These individuals were given a full briefing on the Ban Advocates' Initiative, including the voluntary nature of membership, so they could make an informed decision about whether or not to join the group. Luckily, they all agreed to join the initiative. After signing up, they were invited to participate in either a regional or an international conference of States Parties on the CCM. Either before or after participating in this conference, they were given more detailed information about the Ban Advocates' Initiative, and the opportunity to share expectations, as well as to participate in training sessions on the CCM, the various articles of the CCM and the CRPD, among other legal instruments. Training was also available on advocacy, media skills, etc. Some specific training sessions and strategic seminars were held independently of the CCM conference, at different times and in different countries.

Over the last six years, there have been 20 active members of the Ban Advocates group, out of a total of 32 Ban Advocates, with 7 women and 25 men. Their ages range from 18 to 60. These individuals regularly participate in lobbying states at a range of regional and international conferences. Of the 20 active members, 18 have been involved in leading local initiatives such as organising events, conducting meetings, etc., in their communities, in order to transfer the knowledge and training they have received to their friends and communities. Interested individuals are eligible to apply for small grants for local projects that are in line with the goals of the Ban Advocates' Initiative. Although they work as volunteers[26], they are entitled to compensation for their efforts in organising, participating or developing initiatives for local activities. For guidance with the planning and implementation of these activities, support staff are in place in most countries to provide needs-based contextual assistance. This can be translation, chaperoning at national events and regional and international conferences, or help in requesting small grants, among other things. Lao PDR, the country most affected by cluster munitions, has eight Ban Advocates, so a full-time project officer is available to help organise all national, regional and international events and


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activities.

With a targeted selection process, and several successes in influencing the CCM policy process, both the initiative and its respondents have naturally evolved since its inception. The Ban Advocates have gone from being individuals with emotive experiences to champions of advocacy, leading and implementing activities for their communities.

Despite these successes, there have inevitably been lessons learned during the evolution of this advocacy work with victims. This report attempts to shed some light on both of these dimensions.

1.2. SCOPE OF THE STUDY

Before this study was undertaken, a number of discussions were held internally in order to identify the ideal aims and objectives of the report, and the target readership. These are listed below.

1.2.1. The aims and objectives of the report

The overall aim of this report is "to enhance understanding on the importance of victims participating as advocates in influencing policy, and to describe the lessons learned from this process."

The three specific objectives are:

- To enhance the understanding of various practitioners who work with victims as advocates;
- To trace the progress of Handicap International's work with victims, its vital successes and key lessons learned;
- To highlight steps and entry points for programme planning, for both new and existing projects, on the importance of advocacy with victims.

The target audience of this report are policy makers and donors, advocacy practitioners and victims as advocates who would like to launch victim advocacy initiatives.

1.2.2. Methods

The study used three different methods to enable the non-biased analysis of findings and the cross-checking of information provided during interviews. They were:

- **Literature review of existing documents**
  This included all background documents for the initiative (proposals, strategic papers, evaluation reports, leaflets, activity reports, training documents, articles, blog posts…) and reports and articles written about the Ban Advocates in different national and international outlets.
- **In-depth interviews**
  Three-hour in-depth interviews over two consecutive days with five Ban Advocates were conducted, pre-selected for their diverse backgrounds, their stories and their experience with working in the local, regional and international advocacy arenas. This was to ensure that the group was well represented. The details are listed below:

S. No	Name	Country	Year of enrolment in BA
1	Anyalem Zenebe (19, female, survivor)	Ethiopia	2008
2	Bounmy Vichack (33, male, survivor)	Lao PDR	2009
3	Lynn Bradach (60, female, victim)	United States of America	2008
4	Pham Quy Thi (58, male, survivor)	Vietnam	2008
5	Umarbek Pulodov (27, male, survivor)	Tajikistan	2007

Another in-depth interview was held for approximately two hours with the Ban Advocates Project Staff, Seevanh Xaykia, based in Lao PDR, in order to understand the implications of working with victims at a local level.

- **Informal meetings**
  A number of informal meetings were held with the Ban Advocates in addition to the five interviewed above, during conferences, training sessions and workshops, on their role, activities and challenges.

1.2.3. Limitations

The study was set out to identify key successes and lessons learned from the victims' perspective. Its intention is not to evaluate the impact of the initiative and the assessment of national-level and regional-international lobbying work. The strength of the report therefore lies in its inward reflections on the initiative's work.

The second limitation is that due to the resources available and time allocated, it was not possible to interview all the Ban Advocates. We therefore made a conscious decision to select a representative group.

1.3. THE REPORT STRUCTURE

The report is based on the research findings and its analysis. The quotes used throughout the report are either from statements made during a conference or meeting by Ban Advocates or diplomats, or during the research interviews. For public statements, the name and conference of the quote is specified. For private statements, this information is not disclosed, for the protection of the people interviewed. Chapter 1, Introduction, outlines the background and objectives of this report. Chapter 2 touches on the concepts of advocacy and victims and the interplay between them. Chapters 3 and 4 give the findings, with a breakdown of the work with victims, first from a diplomatic conference perspective then from a programme viewpoint (chapter 3). Chapter 4 highlights lessons learned from each of the major components of the Ban Advocates' Initiative. Chapter 5 concludes the report with overall reflections and lessons learned.

2. Advocacy and Victims: The Interplay

This chapter looks briefly at the concepts of advocacy and victims, and the interplay between them. It defines them both in the context of the CCM environment, and assesses the value of linking these two concepts to the work being done.


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2.1. ADVOCACY

The concept of advocacy is complex, evolving and contextual. Advocacy can include many activities, from awareness raising, to lobbying, to influencing key legislation. It is "a communications process through which individuals, groups or communities influence policy makers and opinion formers to bring about changes to policy and practice."[27] In a development context, it is a process that aims to bring about change in the policies, rules or guidelines of institutions and governments, for greater aid effectiveness, improved living conditions and the well-being of target groups.[28] Effective advocacy should be based on solid evidence that leads to strategic actions, that are planned according to the intended audience, the change expected, the political agenda, the evolving opportunities, the support that can be expected from other groups, etc. It can be done through individuals or institutions concerned by the issue, media campaigns, public speaking, and commissioning research to establish evidence.

Lobbying, one of the subsets of advocacy, aims to influence specific government legislation.[29] While advocacy covers a broad range of activities which may or may not include lobbying, lobbying activities fall under the advocacy umbrella. The International Campaign to Ban Landmines and the Cluster Munition Coalition (ICBL-CMC), the campaign for the protection of women's rights, and for the introduction of child labour laws, etc. are examples of lobbying efforts.

Awareness raising activities, another subset of advocacy, is mainly used to target the general public.[30] Its aim is to change attitudes towards a given issue(s). Activities may include dialogues and exchanges between different groups, education campaigns, etc.

The work of the Ban Advocates' Initiative with victims of cluster munitions is one of the lobbying tools capitalised by Handicap International in order to influence the policy process. However, with local-level activities, the Ban Advocates are also involved in awareness-raising activities. This report broadly discusses advocacy in the context of lobbying and awareness raising.

2.2. VICTIMS

The notion of 'victims' must also be defined in context. The Convention on Cluster Munition defines cluster munitions victims as "all persons who have been killed or suffered physical or psychological injury, economic loss, social marginalisation or substantial impairment of the realisation of their rights caused by the use of cluster munitions. They include those persons directly impacted by the use of cluster munitions as well as their affected families and communities."[31] With this in mind, there are two types of victims:

- Direct victims are persons injured or killed as a direct consequence of cluster munitions.
- Indirect victims include the families and communities of those killed or injured as a direct consequence of cluster munitions. It also includes affected communities that suffer economically or otherwise due to the presence of contamination.

2.3. ADVOCACY AND VICTIMS: THE INTERPLAY

As mentioned above, advocacy can be implemented by a broad range of concerned actors, including victims. It has been widely noted that highlighting the experiences of people who have suffered is an effective strategy, putting lengthy discussions into a real-world context, and providing a poignant and complete picture. During the Oslo process, the voices of the victims played a powerful role in influencing diplomats and negotiators towards policy change. As one diplomat involved in the process said, "the [Ban Advocates] got us away from seeing victims as numbers, which don't mean much on a human level. It was much more powerful that the [Ban Advocates] were present in the form of living people with everything that implies…"[32] another diplomat noted, "the [Ban Advocates] raised the sense of significance of the whole issue. Victims were part of the purpose of the treaty, so having them there articulating their experience of cluster munitions was very powerful in bringing the issue to life."[33] This shows that empowering people who are directly affected by an issue to engage with diplomats on a personal, emotional and human level can make a powerful difference to the way officials and diplomats understand and view the issue. It can also contribute, along with other factors, to influencing government positions.[34]

However, working with victims is not limited to international lobbying. It needs to be translated into national and regional activities. The policies and promises made at international level become comprehensive and achievable with national and local lobbying, monitoring and awareness raising. The true measure of success is the "satisfaction of affected individuals, families and communities. By agreeing to involve such individuals in a diplomatic process, states understood who their clients were. By continuing to listen to the voices of affected communities, the international community has a unique opportunity to reconcile two worlds that have not much in common but that share a single goal."[35]

2.4. CONCLUDING REMARKS

Using different methods of advocacy to influence policies is essential. Lobbying with and by victims in particular is critical in bringing about significant change. When a tactical alliance for advocacy is adopted, in this case for a ban on cluster munitions, allowing the voices of the affected communities to be heard introduces the human side to the debate. This effort should be made at national, regional and international levels for a unified campaign. Engaging with victims at all these levels is indispensable. However, being involved at all levels requires adaptable skills to respond to each of the victims' contexts and needs. It is not an easy and straightforward task. The section that follows presents findings from the respondents' perspective on the value and challenges of working at these three levels.

3. The Three Levels of Advocacy with Victims

> "It is time to stop being afraid and to stand up and do what is right. How can we live with ourselves if we don't take action when we know something is so very wrong. We cannot give a child back their arms, their legs or their lives. We cannot give a parent back their child but we can prevent any more of this tragedy from happening and care for those who have been impacted."[36]

Statements like the above have been heard at the initial negotiating discussions of a potential convention, at the signing conference in Oslo in 2008, and in the follow-up, implementation and monitoring meetings and conferences that are taking place now. The symbolic signature of the CCM in Oslo in December 2008 triggered a standing ovation from all respondents to the Ban Advocates, with one Ban Advocate saying, "It is an honour for us to be here before you today. We are proud of this treaty and particularly of the victim assistance provisions. You all have made a difficult decision, but it is the right decision. On behalf of all survivors, we stand here to thank you and thank each and all of you who made this treaty a reality."[37] Since the signing, the Ban Advocates have continued to lobby different governments at international level on signing/ratification/accession for those states who are not yet parties, and monitoring implementation of the articles of CCM, particularly on clearance and victim assistance. They represent victims' voices by delivering speeches and sharing their experiences and messages. At regional level, the Ban Advocates represent victims in their regions and are active in sharing knowledge and ideas. At local level they are engaged in networking with local government, and organising various awareness-raising activities. They lobby their state to sign or accede to the convention, if it is not already a party, to ratify if it is a signatory, and to implement if it is a State Party.

Apart from these three levels of advocacy, the Ban Advocates' Initiative has successfully produced and distributed material to spark discussion around the issue of cluster munitions and their human impact. These outputs have ranged from the documentary film entitled "Ban Advocates: from Victims to Champions",[38] the publication of some of the Ban Advocates' stories in books such as the "15 Years, 15 Stories"[39] and leaflets and the recent Lao Ban Advocates documentary.[40] Members of the group have contributed to promoting and speaking about these outputs, and facilitating dialogue at all three levels.

These individuals, in their different capacities, are therefore actively involved in various forms of advocacy. These are explored briefly below, to give an overview of the Ban Advocates' engagement at local/national, regional and international levels. The participation can be categorised as:

National/Local

- Representation in national workshops, meetings
- Organising dialogues, local meetings, events, tours
- Interviews for various media outlets,
- Working with people with disabilities
- …

Regional

- Delivering speeches at regional conferences
- Participation in regional seminars and workshops
- …

International

- Delivering speeches and lobbying in conferences
- Representation in events
- Interviews in various media channels
- …

3.1. INTERNATIONAL

Since 2007, the Ban Advocates have participated in approximately 18 international States Party or expert (inter-sessional) meetings, where they have delivered speeches and actively lobbied. Ban Advocates have actively participated at every meeting for the Convention on Cluster Munition and, more recently, for the Mine Ban Treaty. Each of them played a different role depending on their capacities, skills and interests. Depending on the advocacy goals, Ban Advocates with the appropriate skills, background and stories are invited to participate. Some delivered statements (on behalf of the CMC) calling for the universalisation of the Convention, strong victim assistance provisions and their effective implementation. Others called for more comprehensive support for mine action, in particular for victim assistance, or talked to the media about their lives and the difficulties they face in earning a living. Many of them worked with lobbyists, and met with states in order to achieve specific lobbying goals, including universalisation, monitoring, implementation, commitment for further support, etc.

They made statements such as, "[…] this treaty has great meaning for the whole world because we don't want to see people suffering and we don't want to see any more tears in the eyes of mothers and fathers. We need states to ratify and implement the Convention on Cluster Munitions urgently so that no one has to be a victim of these horrible weapons. Once cluster munitions are banned, the future of humanity will be better"[41]. These statements were powerful in gaining the attention of the international community to address the issue of cluster munitions. Their poignant stories moved the policy makers and brought them back to reality. One respondent observed:

> "[…] as you know, diplomats live in good conditions without people with disabilities around them. How do we expect them to give attention to this issue? I remember when we lobbied the UK delegate, we asked him, 'if you had a son in our position, what would you do?' The delegate was shocked. He said that he could urge his government to sign the Convention. It was really like a gun for him to feel this injury."

3.2. REGIONAL

Approximately 10 regional meetings and conferences were attended by different Ban Advocates. These regional conferences included workshops, the exchange of ideas and regional-level commitments. Some regional conferences such as the ones in Uganda, Austria, Germany, Indonesia and Lao PDR were hosted by the States Parties, while others such as the ones in Lao PDR, Thailand, Kenya, Tajikistan and Jordan were organised by HI. The Ban Advocates made statements like, "[…] the reason for our success is very simple: Cluster Munitions (CM) victims are the only people in the world who know the true nature of cluster weapons and the effects these weapons have on people. Military experts and diplomats have largely theoretical knowledge about CMs. CM victims have practical experience with the CM. […] every victim and her family should have direct access to services and should know about her rights. The role of NGOs can be crucial in training the victims and teaching them how to approach national or international donors. In the current era of modern communications, with access to the internet, it is no longer impossible."[42] And "[…] It is clearly

defined that the affected State is responsible for developing an action plan, with a budget, in a process that involves all stakeholders, including relevant ministries, civil society organisations such as Disabled People's Organisations and of course survivors themselves."[43]

As well as delivering statements, the Ban Advocates took part in advocacy tours, e.g. in the US and Australia, where advocates from Afghanistan, Lebanon and the US participated. These regional tours were a success, as they provided opportunities for the general public in Australia and the US to understand the problem of cluster munitions. The Ban Advocates in turn learned about the issues and problems these countries have, and bonded with the other members of the group.

3.3. LOCAL AND NATIONAL

At national level, the Ban Advocates have been involved in a number of activities around advocacy, particularly awareness raising at community level on the impact of cluster munitions, meetings with local authorities and some participation in national events. One survivor tour in Tajikistan also took place in 2010. Umarbek Pulodov, the Ban Advocate organising this event said, "I organised a Ban Bus tour around affected regions in Tajikistan. I informed the communities about the Convention on Cluster Munition (CCM) and explained to them that implementing this Convention will prevent civilians being harmed, and will provide more assistance for survivors and affected communities. The key objective of this action was to raise awareness among people in remote affected regions and locations and to help raise their voices, in order to urge the Government of Tajikistan to join the Oslo Treaty […]"

At the launch of the documentary film, "Ban Advocates: from Victims to Champions", one Ban Advocate remarked, "membership is painful, because to be a member you must suffer true loss […] membership also brings strength, because in order to be member you agree that it is important to go beyond your pain and to strive to make a difference by using your voice and your experience to demand that countries stop using their inhumane weapons."[44]

The Ban Advocates are also involved in launching research reports and in media outreach. At some national events, the Ban Advocates delivered speeches on behalf of other victims of cluster munitions. One such statement was, "We are here to call on the government to continue its efforts, because if we look back, there is a lot we can be proud of. Our movement has won the Nobel Peace Prize. Everyone in this world needs peace, but we survivors, need peace and support! Our problems and concerns do not end here. We need continuous support and assistance. As a Ban Advocate and a member of the Albanian Survivors Network, I urge the public not to forget us."[45]

3.4. CONCLUDING REMARKS

The Ban Advocates have therefore been active not only in representing victims of cluster munitions at global fora but also in national and regional-level advocacy. This mix of different roles has inevitably led to complex support requirements for different Ban Advocates, depending on their needs, expectations and capacities. At each stage, a degree of adaptability and flexibility had to be adopted. This has enabled us to establish a number of lessons learned from working with victims. The following section details the three levels of engagement over the years, taking the initiative's strategic choice into account.

4. Key Lessons Learned on Implementing Advocacy with Victims: the Ban Advocates' Initiative

> "Being involved in advocacy work for the past four years has made me confident. I am able to give public speeches and engage people in an issue I think needs attention."[46]

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Since the initiative's inception in 2007, the role of the Ban Advocates has evolved, adapting to their needs, capabilities and context in every situation. Despite the big successes of the initiative in influencing policies at different levels in applying the VA Articles of the CCM, there was no shortage of lessons to be learned. With each step, a new success and a new challenge was encountered from which a series of lessons could be learned. This section discusses these successes and challenges in implementing advocacy with victims along with the lessons learned (in boxes) from the strategic choices made by the initiative.

4.1. BUILDING THE BAN ADVOCATES' GROUP

4.1.1. Identifying a diverse group

The biggest success came from bringing together people from varied backgrounds, who despite their different life experiences, had a similar experience of suffering from the consequences of cluster munitions, through loss of life, livelihood, physical function and/or social dynamics, among other things. A crucial achievement was to identify a diverse group who had experienced the negative consequences of CM, providing them with a platform and supporting them to share these common experiences and transform them into one voice in favour of the ban. Each of the 32 individuals was identified at different stages of the initiative. While some were involved from the very beginning, others joined in later years. The process was straightforward - contacts were made with existing networks, organisations, government bodies and research institutes, to seek candidates who were victims of cluster munitions. The information provider contacted these individuals, briefed them about the initiative and their potential role in it if they accepted. Advocacy training and workshops on the issue followed after the formal terms of the agreement were made. This selection process demonstrated:

A | THE ABILITY TO ENROL ACTIVE, PASSIONATE AND MOTIVATED INDIVIDUALS WITH SHARED LIFE EXPERIENCES

The advantage of conducting the selection process through an existing network was that many individuals who were contacted were already active in their local communities, and were passionate and motivated about the issue, having had experienced the devastating impact first hand. Combining their passion with the information they received before they joined was a successful recruitment strategy. This is confirmed by the case of one respondent,

> "[…] when my son was killed, I was going through a very rocky period of my life. My parents had passed away a few months before. When I heard the news of my son, I was distraught and angry. I never wanted him to join the army. I was devastated when he was deployed to Iraq. I never believed in this war. I later learned that most of the US marines weren't fully trained in clearing cluster munitions […] my son died while clearing. I felt it was my responsibility as a mother to let the public know of what had happened and how the situation could've been avoided. I went on television, I gave interviews… someone must've have seen or read my interview (I was on the front cover of a daily). Someone from a non-profit, called me to ask if I'd be interested to do a communications campaign with them. I said yes. I went on a tour sharing my story, and even did some fundraising events. I met a campaigner from Handicap International too. After some time, it seems HI was looking for a victim of cluster bomb, they recommended me since I had done some work with them before. When they contacted me, I was hesitant at first, I wasn't sure if I wanted to join, but when I went on the tour with two other victims from Afghanistan and Lebanon and discovered the effect of these weapons on other countries, I was determined to contribute in any way I could. I thought I should do it for my son, to hold my government responsible and of course to stop the use of the weapons around the world."

Another respondent said that he was the only one willing to 'talk',

> "After my accident while working on my farm, I lost my arm and didn't receive any physiotherapy for two years. It was difficult but my family was very supportive of me. I realised only then that in my village there were many people with disabilities, many due to cluster bombs. Luckily, in 2001 an organisation came to my area with the vision of establishing a disability club. I was quick to respond because I felt that it was my responsibility to raise awareness on the dangers of landmines and cluster bombs. I volunteered to be president of this club. We did a lot of awareness-raising activities on the dangers people could encounter in rice paddies. We even received initial support from the organisation to set up the club. From this we bought the survivors pigs, and taught them to cultivate mushrooms, raise cattle and so on. I am still the president of this club and we have 50 members, all people with disabilities out of which 10 are victims of cluster bombs. I don't recall the date but I think it was before the Dublin conference in 2008. Someone from Handicap International was looking to talk to a person who had suffered impairment from cluster bombs. No one in my village wanted to talk to them. But I wasn't afraid so I gave my interview. After the interview she invited me to come to a conference. She told me about this conference. But I only confirmed after I discussed it with

my family. I thought I would like to do what is best for my community first, that could be good for my country. So I agreed to help within my capacities. At the conference in Dublin, they briefed me about the initiative. They said that I had to be resilient, to meet with delegates, to tell them to help people like us, they said we were there to fight for our cause, for our future and for future generations […] I was really motivated by the briefing."

One respondent revealed that the work he was doing previously got him noticed by his supervisors, who recommended him for the initiative. He said,

"[…] you know I felt that I needed to prove to my friends that I was the same person as before the accident, since they did discriminate against me quite a bit. My family was very supportive; they really stopped me from going into depression and having suicidal thoughts. I didn't let the loss of my arm affect my abilities. I joined a vocational IT training course in the capital, and then I did some voluntary work in a radio station in my village. After that I started working as field assistant for an organisation in my village. I used to go to villages to talk to other victims like myself, listen to their stories and needs and help as much as I could. My supervisor saw that I was doing very well. When she heard of the initiative that Handicap International was seeking volunteers for, she immediately asked me to go. I went to the capital and met with other Ban Advocates in the region. I was so impressed with their stories and what they were doing that I thought I could also contribute […]"

B | Contextual, Socio-Economic and Educational Differences

Another choice in the selection process was to enrol victims from countries that were a priority to the international campaign and to aim for geographical balance and representation. The priority countries were: Albania, Afghanistan, Croatia, Ethiopia, Iraq, Lao PDR, Lebanon, Serbia, Tajikistan, Vietnam and the United States. Of these countries, Afghanistan, Albania, Croatia, Lebanon and Lao PDR have acceded to the CCM and Iraq is a signatory. The remaining five (Ethiopia, Serbia, Tajikistan, Vietnam and United States) are not signatories or States Parties.

The five interviewees in the study came from Ethiopia, Lao PDR, Tajikistan, Vietnam and the United States. This range of people from different backgrounds not only brought a strong voice and first-hand knowledge to the international arena but also among themselves. These individuals come from varied socio-economic backgrounds, highlighting the contextual differences among them. One respondent lived through a war, migrating from one place to another:

"[…] I was very young, but during the war we had to go to the refugee camps in Vietnam with my family. There was no choice. We had to leave all our belongings and walk for days to reach the border. We only came home after two years to find that we had to start all over again […] my family comes from a farming background, and we had to start all over again. It wasn't very easy."

Another respondent with a similar background said,

"During the war, my father lost everything. He used to have a bakery but it got ransacked. He had to leave everything and go back to his home country with no money. There in our village, we didn't have anything. So my family started some farming, and then my father passed away. My mother had to raise us single-handedly. When I was young I didn't think about it so much, but now I get emotional even thinking about all the hardship my mother has had to endure."

Contrary to these two stories, one respondent came from a fairly well-off family with educated parents. But the war and the bombardment in their cities changed everything for them:

"[…] I was only six years old when I was injured. There were others in my family that were killed in the same incident. I remember every minute of it. We had to escape during the night between the alleyways to find our aunt's house. Our house was completely destroyed. Luckily, my father had really good contacts with the authorities and with his business, he managed to have another house built in the capital. So, we were able to find refuge and a solution. But it hasn't been easy."

The anguish of war and the difficult political situations in their countries made it extremely difficult for people to go about their normal lives. Not having access to the outside world developed resilience in them to cope to any realities. In fact, they thought that this was their reality. However, meeting other Ban Advocates made them realise that the issue was bigger than they had imagined, with one saying, in agreement:

"When I went through my trauma after the accident, I thought this was a problem only in my country. But at my first conference, I met other victims like myself. I realised then that this was a global problem."

Another respondent from a developed background said how impressed she was with the talent and passion of these people, that it gave her motivation to continue:

"I thought [woaaau!] all these people are so great, so smart. If they'd worked in a corporate house, they'd be so successful and make tons of money. But they chose to do this. Most of them don't have retirement funds, health plans […] I said to myself: this is what I really need to do!"

The shared trauma of this diverse group of people produced a sense of connection and solidarity with one other. All the victims were open to sharing their experiences, helping each other and generally empathising with each other's stories. The stories that they shared were more important than the countries they represented. One respondent observed:

"[…] they said to me God! You lost your son. It must've been so difficult. And here I was feeling so guilty that it was due to my country that these people had lost their limbs, livelihood and loved ones. I felt like my country is to blame for destroying the economy and social relations of these people. But no one judged or looked down on me. For them I was another person who suffered like them. This really had a great impact on me. I really see all of us as one big family, helping each other […]"

This solidarity not only transcended social and cultural differences, it also brought people with different education levels together. Among the interviewees, one had no formal education, another had an advanced degree, one was still a student, one had graduated from high school and one had a first degree. Although they came from different educational backgrounds, they said that they felt like one big family. Even their support staff, mostly interpreters, were included in this group. This was confirmed by one respondent:

> "[…] I feel very comfortable with the group even if we are all different. I feel that the experience that we have lived through bonds us all."

However, working closely with a diverse group has had its challenges. There are difficulties at every level. For non-signatory states, the Ban Advocates were at times disappointed in terms of the outcomes, with one respondent noting,

> "[…] it is so tiring sometimes, we keep going to all these conferences, we give statements and lobby my government. But nothing changes. They often send junior staff to represent them, and we know that it is just for show. It is so disappointing […] we keep going and going."

In addition, the overarching insecurity and volatile political environments in some of the countries is an impediment to sound advocacy work, particularly while pushing for adoption of the CCM. One support staff said,

> "[…] we focused our discussion mainly on the Cartagena Summit and the ratification of the CCM. the Minister said 'we have been involved since the beginning of the Oslo process and there has been a lot of pressure on Afghanistan. We signed the CCM and now we will try to begin the ratification process but due to the election process, progress is slow."

Another challenge of working with a diverse group is the language differences. Ban Advocates required interpreters at the conferences as well as during capacity-building training sessions. One respondent confirmed,

> "Sometimes these training sessions are a little difficult for me because I need my translator all the time. I cannot communicate by myself, and sometimes my translators only summarise the information […] it can be a little frustrating."

Lesson Learned I

In order to carry out effective advocacy with and by victims, it is essential that:

a. rigorous background research is carried out on the type of people needed for each advocacy goal, through existing networks with potential contacts for referral
b. a diverse group is identified who are willing, passionate, eager to learn and immerse in the issue and able to discuss the issue and represent their communities
c. the individuals can be selected from different contexts (economic, social, cultural…) but have similar stories about the consequences of CM, which can develop a sense of solidarity among its members
d. the individuals can make an informed choice about whether to join an advocacy group
e. the project is adaptable to individual characteristics, taking due account of social, cultural and language differences

4.1.2. Type of Membership

All the Ban Advocates are motivated and passionate volunteers and work in this capacity at local, regional and international levels. The simple fact that the initiative was able to successfully recruit and retain respondents since they joined the initiative shows that despite the challenges, the various level of guidance and support available to them has nurtured their passion for the cause and their eagerness to continue. All members were fully informed about the initiative before they were recruited and are constantly reminded of their abilities. The volunteers were managed with a great deal of empathy and trust, and this is the reason why they have continued. This is particularly true for many of the Ban Advocates who have professional commitments at home. Some of them do not have the means to sustain themselves economically for a long period. Their motivation to continue could be due to a myriad of factors, including some of the following: a) international exposure; b) commitment to the issue; c) a sense of belonging and solidarity; d) refresher training sessions; e) travel; f) gaining confidence … etc. One respondent noted, in summary:

> "I am really grateful for the moral support that I have received. Being involved as a Ban Advocate has really opened my horizons. I feel more confident, and I like seeing new places and meeting with other people like myself."

Another respondent agreed:

> "Every time I repeat my story, I have to fight back my emotions. I feel sometimes it is too much. But then, I think about my condition, my family and my livelihood. And most importantly I think about the importance of this cause. So I keep coming back."

Furthermore, the voluntary nature of membership meant that the Ban Advocates are not obliged to implement any local activities. The initiative has relied on their enthusiasm and availability to do so. Those who do carry out local activities are eligible to apply for small grants. This has given some of them the opportunity to be compen-

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sated for the hours spent working on activities that take them away from their normal source of income.

However, as the campaign evolves, roles and tasks can evolve too. International advocacy requires specific language, media, computer and advocacy skills as well as knowledge of different aspects of the implementation of the convention, while local advocacy work relies more on individuals than on the group as a whole. This requires support staff to have the empathy and wisdom to work with the Ban Advocates and select the right person for each role. Another challenge, despite the availability of small grants, is that Ban Advocates who do not have an alternative source of income find it difficult to continue volunteering without earning a living. The initiative has made efforts to support volunteers in seeking livelihood, particularly in the case of Lao PDR, where there are 8 Ban Advocates, some struggling to meet their daily needs. However, the conflicting demand of advocacy work was a constant impediment to securing grants.

Lesson Learned II:

Type of membership is key in developing a strong advocacy team. There should be:

a. clarity about the voluntary nature of the arrangement and full consent
b. a delicate balance of expectation from both members and project leaders
c. livelihood needs are considered for some of advocates given the decision to recruit a diverse team
d. empathy and wisdom on the part of staff to work in coordination with the Ban Advocates to select the right person for each role

4.2. FORMULATION OF THE BAN ADVOCATES' INITIATIVE

4.2.1. Branding

Despite efforts to ensure that the Ban Advocates remain an open group, allowing different individuals to be approached for different meetings/conferences according to the current needs, in countries where they are very active and are closer to government, the brand 'Ban Advocates' has become an in-house name among policy makers and civil society organisations. This has created a level of visibility, attention and recognition for the initiative and the individuals involved. One respondent noted,

> "When I say I am a Ban Advocate in Lao to the government, they know exactly what I do and who I am. I feel very proud to be a Ban Advocate, for it gives a lot of weight to what I say and I feel people listen to me."

This is not only true for outsiders. The branding has also created a stronger sense of solidarity among the group. All respondents said that they felt empowered just by being called a Ban Advocate, for they felt that they stood together as a group.

Statements such as,

> "I am a Ban Advocate, I belong to the group of individuals who lobby towards the ban of cluster bombs and provide assistance to the victims [...]"

were a common theme in the answers to the question, "Who is a Ban Advocate for you?"

However, branding the Ban Advocates also risks stereotyping the individuals with a group identity rather than being seen as victims, each with a life of his/her own. It has compartmentalised the outsiders' perception of these individuals, who are diverse leaders of local initiatives.

Lesson Learned III:

While branding an initiative gives visibility, solidarity and even pride in being part of a recognised group. It is also vitally important to acknowledge that Ban Advocates have multiple identities and capacities beyond their advocacy work and to recognise the value of the individual work they do.

4.2.2. Independence

The second success in doing advocacy with victims was being able to create an initiative that was independent of HI and CMC, although integrated into the organisation and the coalition. The Ban Advocates' independence was partly maintained by the flexibility of the initiative and the move away from branding it as part of one organisation in particular, towards presenting it as a victim-driven initiative. This meant that they were free to decide their level of involvement. They were able to represent themselves at different conferences as victim advocates, either as part of HI and/or CMC, or simply as advocates. One respondent said,

> "I am constantly invited to participate in events and conferences that are organised by the CMC or in my country. When they ask me to represent the Ban Advocates as a victim lobbyist, I do so."

The role of HI has been to offer support, build capacity, provide access to broader networks, equip them with knowledge and provide grants for local work. This is manifested in the leadership role taken by the Ban Advocates, who have suggested projects and developed their own initiatives such as the Tajik Campaign to Ban Landmines and Action and Aid in Serbia.

Lesson Learned IV:

Facilitating a Victim-driven initiative requires listening to, acknowledging and acting on what the Ban Advocates want and need and not vice versa. This becomes particularly important when certain Ban Advocates develop their own projects related to the issue, but explore other opportunities and leadership options.

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4.2.3. Evolving

The pilot project began with the aim of providing a platform to victims from a few countries, and became a full-fledged project with the addition of new individuals. Initially, the Ban Advocates were invited to lobby states. This activity then evolved into local initiatives and national-regional exchanges. This evolution happened within a time span of six years, a considerable achievement given the skills development and enthusiasm the initiative has engendered among victims. Furthermore, in recent years, some Ban Advocates who were the victims of anti-personnel landmines were recruited to start engaging in advocacy for the implementation of the Mine Ban Treaty. Many members took advantage of the opportunity to implement local initiatives, with one respondent setting up an organisation which was subsequently endorsed as his country's campaign to ban landmines. This is a huge success in implementing a complex advocacy project with victims. Another respondent agreed,

> "Without the initiative, I wouldn't have understood the legislation and the importance of working with people like myself. I wouldn't have been given the opportunity to work for the government of my country had they not heard of me and my role beforehand."

In addition to this, the Ban Advocates' roles have also evolved with the changes in the lobby goals of the CMC from the text of the Convention and universalisation at the beginning to implementation of the Convention after the entry into force, in particularly VA.

However, different Ban Advocates being involved in different ways meant that there were inevitably some imbalances in understanding, due to a myriad of factors such as the individual's capacity, availability, interest etc. This meant there were discrepancies in the type and level of work of each of the Ban Advocates.

Lesson Learned V:

The Ban Advocates' Initiative was formulated against the backdrop of the CCM, which is constantly evolving. It was therefore important to adapt to the environment the initiative was operating in. This meant:

a. adapting to the individuals' needs and personalities and constantly seeking ways to build their capacities
b. finding ways to further motivate an already passionate group, particularly where there are changes that can lead to unforeseen resistance
c. provide information on the Oslo Process and the ICBL/CMC goals and adapt proactively to its changing environment

4.2.4. Flexibility

From the outset, the initiative was flexible in its nature. It did not set out its own strategic direction, but relied on the CMC's goals and strategies. Its flexibility was able to accommodate the Ban Advocates' needs and plans for their role in the initiative. One respondent said,

> "I am really happy that the people involved in the initiative listen to us and cater for our needs [...]"

This proved that the initiative gave a sense of empowerment to the Ban Advocates and saw them as people who had capacities of their own. Its adaptability to CMC's goals and strategies as it evolved within the Oslo process also meant that the initiative was open to any changes that had to be made. This was evident due to HI's close involvement in developing CMC's strategies.

Although the initiative created an action plan for project activities, there was no clear strategy. This led to some pertinent questions by the respondents on the long term vision of their involvement. One respondent said,

> "[...] sometimes I do feel the pressure. I am asked what I want to do locally, but I feel that it is difficult since there is a long distance between where the support officer lives and where I live. Besides this, when I do not know the overall direction, I find it difficult to adapt my needs to the expectations of me [...]"

Lesson Learned VI:

Although flexibility is required when recruiting victims as advocates, it is also important to:

a. provide working guidelines to set expectations and establish clarity of roles
a. brainstorm together on the needs and goals
b. proactively seek for new challenges and opportunities
c. fit into the bigger ICBL-CMC framework of advocacy goals and strategies

4.3. IMPLEMENTATION OF THE BAN ADVOCATES' INITIATIVE

4.3.1. Building Capacity

Being national, regional and international-level advocates is a demanding job, be it in a voluntary and/or a lobbyist capacity. Particularly with victims recruited from a range of educational, social and economic conditions and social relations, it becomes challenging yet indispensable to motivate them by identifying the potential to influence policy and building hope. Proactively seeking opportunities for respondents to hone their skills, and build their confidence through networks for their involvement is essential. Over the years, a number of training sessions have been initiated to help with their role in lobbying, delivering statements, and constantly being at the forefront of the media. As well as skills training sessions, psycho-social support was offered. The skills training sessions are listed below:

A | Specific Skills

- Knowledge of the CCM - all articles with a special focus on Victim Assistance (Article 5)
- Advocacy and lobbying skills (including awareness raising)
- Handling media - interviews, body language, etc.
- Event and project management
- Computer skills
- Writing skills
- English skills

B | Support Sessions

- Psycho-social and healing

These training and support sessions were either residential, or took place before or after the international and/or regional conference participation. All respondents agreed that these sessions were incredibly helpful to them. For all of them this was the first time they had received such professional support. One respondent said,

> "[…] in all the training sessions I participated in, I picked up a lot of knowledge and skills that I constantly use and can use in the future. Only after developing these skills was I able to start my own organisation."

Although the Ban Advocates are all enthusiastic and interested in sharing their stories and lobbying, not all of them can translate their passion into action at the same level or stage, due to personal and professional commitments, the context of the country they live in or the support they receive. At these training sessions, those who could not commit to developing and transferring their skills locally felt indirectly pressured, as shown in this observation:

> "[…] they [Ban Advocates] need some of these training sessions because they want to go home and develop similar activities, but I am involved because I believe that my story will make a difference. During the training sessions, they [HI] don't necessarily tell us what their expectations are from us. It becomes a little confusing for us that we have been asked to come here [which we love and love to see everyone] but we don't know how to apply the skills we learn, like the project management training sessions for instance […]"

Lesson Learned VII:

Constantly being proactive and trying to build capacity means:

a. seeking the right trainer who is empathic and sensitive to the needs of the victims, who may seem lively and friendly but have gone through a process of trauma and healing
b. adapting and being flexible to the varying capacities of each of the victims in terms of background knowledge, language skills, etc.
c. honouring the victim's needs and their interest in carrying out the campaign in different stages
d. respecting, encouraging and supporting the development of individual strengths and capacities

4.3.2. Imparting Knowledge

Imparting knowledge and building capacity go hand in hand. Much of the knowledge on the CCM and the policy making process was made available through the training sessions provided. This was reiterated by all the respondents. One said,

> "I think I really know CCM very well by now. I have been raising awareness, and sharing information with the other people in my village, as well as the village chiefs, on the impact of cluster munitions and the articles of the CCM. I also sometimes talk about the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). I think it is incredibly important to let people know about the issue and that there exists an international policy for me. I think it is my job as an advocate to do so. I was able to learn this from the training sessions and being involved in various conferences."

Another respondent agreed,

> "It was only after gaining this knowledge that I was able to understand what I wanted to do in life. I believe that working on the CRPD is essential, mainly since in my country there are many persons with disabilities and they live in such dire conditions. I established my organisation because I was able to combine the knowledge I had picked up over the years with my passion […]"

As well as learning about the treaties, the respondents also gained knowledge about different countries. Many respondents said that through their informal interaction with the Ban Advocates and other campaigners at conferences, they learned about the different countries affected by the issue of cluster munitions and realised that it is a global problem. Even the project staff said that she understood how the work she did translated into something of global importance:

> "Before I joined HI, I didn't know anything about the CCM or the CRPD process. But little by little I learned a lot. This knowledge has helped me a lot in working with the victims and given me the conviction to believe in this issue."

Gaining knowledge is always useful and was much appreciated by all respondents. However, some said they feel powerless when they are not able to apply it in their setting.

Lesson Learned VIII

Imparting knowledge is never wasted. It is therefore important to seek opportunities to enhance knowledge according to the individuals' capacities, needs and strength

4.3.3. The Initiative as a form of healing

All respondents expressed the feeling that joining this initiative has been a form of healing. This was achieved in two ways: a) through psychosocial training and individual counselling provided by a trained counsellor and b) by empathising with each other's stories. The psycho-social training related mostly to the process of healing from trauma and was first given to the Ban Advocates in 2009. They were able to talk to the counsellor about their traumas individually, in a confidential setting, as well as receiving psycho-traumatology training. There were three training sessions and individual follow-up in 2010, 2011 and 2012. The purpose of these training workshops and the one-to-one sessions was to equip the Ban Advocates with knowledge of psycho-traumatology, to understand the related stress factors, and offer peer-to-peer support. The support provided by these training sessions was considered to be among the most valuable that everyone received. It helped them to come to terms with their realities and gave them a new meaning. One respondent noted, in confirmation:

> "For almost two years since I have been involved, the psycho-social training I have received has helped me to cope with my situation and problems. I can do my daily work and also help other people with disabilities. I am very thankful for HI."

As well as the professional support made available, coming to conferences and talking informally to other ban Advocates has also helped them, with one respondent stating,

> "I have to say I started forgetting about my accident after I joined the Ban Advocates and began meeting other people from all over the world in the same situation."

Although all the respondents and Ban Advocates received the training sessions, the major challenges have been in following up on training sessions, and managing the different levels of knowledge and expectations of the Ban Advocates. This is confirmed by the trainer:

> "[…] the mix between the different Ban Advocates was a big issue… it was a deliberate decision during the preparation, for the group to learn from each other. But with the cultural differences, it was difficult to provide a general training."[47]

Another challenge is to recruit advocates who have overcome the initial trauma of the accident. It becomes very difficult to fully engage with and explore the potential of an individual for implementing advocacy work, when they are still going through a trauma.

Lesson Learned IX

Psycho-social support is of the utmost importance and creating a trusting environment to enable individuals to talk openly is essential. It helps people deal with loss, especially if they have to retell their stories over and over again. In these cases, the group becomes a support network and a needed escape. Other lessons learned are:

a. individual counselling by a professional counsellor can have a very positive impact even for a short term initiative
b. in some cases, it is necessary to seek follow up counselling or to refer individuals to appropriate experts
c. special attention needs to be paid to the way stories are told, where they are told, to whom and the purpose
d. acknowledging that the individual is the master of his/her story
e. respecting the individuals rights, experiences, decisions and feelings
f. finding the right trainer who not only has the skills but is able to work well with the individuals in the long run

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4.3.4. On-going guidance and moral support

All the respondents were very thankful for the support that was readily available to them. This was due to the thorough trust-building approach that the staff applied informally. It took a series of compassionate talks, listening and engaging with their contributions and taking a genuine interest in their lives, their passion and their work. Residential training sessions that included fun activities also contributed to this success. One respondent said,

> "I am so happy with Seevanh and the people in Brussels. They have been very patient, open and understanding about what we need. I feel I can go to them any time I need to say something. I don't feel scared or have to think twice."

The project staff based in Lao PDR said,

> "[…] It isn't easy working with people in different places and with such different needs, but I believe that my role is to give them as much moral support as they need. We cannot provide them with anything financially, so what we can do is to be there for them, be like their family and be compassionate."

For Ban Advocates in countries with no project staff in place, support staff were made available. The role of the support staff was essentially to work as translators and to chaperone them when they travelled to various international conferences or workshops. Where local advocacy projects were implemented, these support staff helped them set up the activities. Some of their support staff were phenomenal in helping them shape their dreams, as stated by one of the respondents:

> "My support officer taught me a lot about advocacy and establishing an organisation. I really do see him one of my advisers, because not only does he have a lot of experience with founding and operating a successful organisation, he still gives me advice when I need it […] HI helped me get connected with my support staff."

However, the challenge of having different kinds of staff available was that different respondents received different kinds of support. While some support staff were incredibly helpful, others limited their engagement to translation and some respondents didn't have access to any support staff. One respondent said,

> "I am alone and I don't have the network of support that I need. I do really want to do something, but I cannot do it on my own […]"

This particular respondent's support officer left the campaign and was not replaced by someone else. It is therefore important to note that if no support staff are available close to the Ban Advocate's location or there are no support staff at all, then there is a tendency to feel left out.

Lesson Learned X

Readily available support staff are essential, not only to help the Ban Advocates cope with their daily struggles but also to be the 'go to' persons for all kinds of needs, including at times when they need someone to talk to. It is therefore vital to build trust, and for staff to be respectful of human and cultural sensitivities.

4.3.5. Independent local work and activity coordination

Since 2009, some of the Ban Advocates have been involved in implementing local-level advocacy activities, from the time when small grants were made available. This local work and activity coordination started with the Ban Advocates' interest in continuing their advocacy work at a local level. Some of the activities that they have organised over the years include:

- meetings with local people at community level to raise awareness around the issue of cluster munitions and the various treaties
- movie screenings at village level for the purposes of awareness raising and mine risk education
- meetings with local government authorities on the need for assistance for the victims of cluster munitions
- events such as photo exhibitions, marathons, celebrations of treaty anniversaries, etc.

This local organising was particularly successful when respondents were eager to continue their work and learn from international-level advocacy, and develop independent projects. One respondent said,

> "From the training sessions that I received, I learned a lot. I felt like it was my responsibility to give some of it back and to also make people around me aware of the problems we face. I appreciate the small grants that are available for me to implement this goal […]"

The local independent work did come with its own set of challenges, with many respondents pointing out that there was some confusion in their role as Ban Advocates, from being international lobbying supporters to implementing local work. Not everyone had developed the same level of capacity to be able to implement such work, due to their diverse backgrounds. Some were very young, others had no formal education and some had daily commitments to sustain their livelihood. Projects to support local needs had to be carefully adapted to the abilities of the respondents. For some of those who had local grants made available to them, it fostered a level of dependency on HI, particularly in the case of Lao PDR, where there are 8 Ban Advocates. In this situation, all the organising and planning was done by the project officer in consultation with the Ban Advocates. On this the project staff said,

"[…] we provided shelter and training sessions to one of our Ban Advocates. But he is always asking us for help. We tell him all the time to lower his expectations, that we are only one project and if financially we run into difficulties, we may have to close it down. But we know that we are the only ones helping him. It is such a challenge for us […] but generally even when we plan activities, we host a meeting with the Ban Advocates at the end of every year. They give us a list of activities they want to do for the following year. According to their requests, with the help of my supervisors, I develop the plans for them. We have tried to fundraise for financial support many times, but it gets denied because the donors do not see financial support and advocacy going hand in hand. Eventually, I organise all the activities in consultation with them and help them to implement them […]"

Lesson Learned XI

Enabling the Ban Advocates to implement projects means:

a. helping with their inclusion in larger existing networks that they are interested in participating in
b. strengthening local projects, if they wish to initiate them, through continued guidance, grants and tailor-made assistance
c. promoting their initiatives within the framework of the coalition or the national implementation plan of the Convention
d. constantly seeking funds to support their advocacy work
e. raising awareness among stakeholders that victims in general, but particularly those who lobby for their cause, are people with abilities located within their own social and historical trajectories
f. avoiding using them as tokens of advocacy

4.4. CONCLUDING REMARKS

Based on the above, it can be seen that devising a project involving advocacy with victims is incredibly important, but also difficult. If it is done in the right way it can lead to unimaginable policy changes. It is also essential to develop sound methodologies and working tools. When dealing with people, they have to be viewed as people with needs like any other. The reflections from the lessons learned are concluded in the section below.

5. Conclusion and Reflections

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Throughout this report, the following points were highlighted. Advocacy with and by victims is essential, not only to bring the voices of those affected to the fore, but also to provide them with a platform for exposure and to showcase their abilities. This is particularly true when Conventions that encourage victims' participation on paper struggle to find ways to implement this in reality, in this case the CCM and the follow up action plans under VAP (Actions 20 to 32). This has been achieved in a variety of ways. This report is about a project called the Ban Advocates' Initiative, which since 2007 has endeavoured to strike a balance between stories from the ground and policies. The report describes the genesis and the successes of the initiative's work with victims, and lessons learned from it. It investigates the value of doing advocacy work with victims (Sections 3 and 4). The research was carried out through in-depth interviews with some of the Ban Advocates, rigorous background study and informal meetings. The report highlights the fact that while working with victims of cluster munitions, it is important to view them not only as victims but as people with abilities who have endured a terrible ordeal. By empowering victims to act as advocates, the policy makers may find themselves guilty of not attending to the needs of their citizens, their ultimate responsibility. This concluding section presents the reflections of the report, rethinking the lessons learned on working with victims, advocacy and policy making.

The Ban Advocates are commonly imagined as a group of cluster munitions victims who advocate a ban of these weapons. These individuals are people with varied abilities who are driven to become volunteers due to their passion and commitment. They come from different social, economic and political backgrounds and have united around a common goal, brought about by their common suffering. Usually, much emphasis is often placed on the differences in their backgrounds. This runs the risk of overlooking the full realisation of the potential of each of the individuals, who together can form a powerful force. The first step towards working with victims for advocacy is therefore to acknowledge the differences in their capacities and backgrounds. But it is important to also focus on what they have in common. Much effort therefore needs to be put into supporting each need and building capacity, to ensure that each individual turns a corner. Several reflections can be drawn from the lessons learned in this paper, detailed below.

Firstly, in order to carry out effective advocacy with victims it is essential to identify and recruit the kind of people who are willing, passionate and able to represent their communities and that come from varied backgrounds but have shared real-life experiences.

Secondly, there has to be a clear understanding of expectations about the voluntary nature of membership, in order to empower individuals, with their different identities, and help shape their vision by formulating their goals, and turning them into realities.

Thirdly, strategic decisions must be made in consultation with the victims, in order to understand their needs and match them with the organisational vision. In doing so, a win-win situation can be created whereby victims receive the support they need for implementing their plans, and the organisation learns from the experience of providing that support.

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Fourthly, the aforementioned three pointers demands a complex set of skills such as empathy, respect and ability to give space for the advocates to enable their leaderships. The need to adapt to individuals' needs and personalities and constantly seek to build their capacities and knowledge goes without saying. This means the project should be supported by the right project staff and the right trainer, who are readily available to help create a trusting environment for the advocates to talk openly about their issues, to build solidarity and to provide them with psycho-social support.

Fifth, as well as creating a brand to enable the Ban Advocates to explore their leadership, we need to: help with their inclusion in larger existing networks; strengthen local work if they wish to implement a project, through continued guidance, grants and tailor-made assistance; promote their initiatives within the framework of the coalition or the national implementation plan of the Convention; constantly seek funds to support their advocacy work; raise awareness among stakeholders that victims are people with abilities located within their own social and historical trajectories.

Sixth, one cannot ignore that the Ban Advocates work for a greater purpose and under the umbrella of the coalition. Hence, the work they do should reflect and be in line with the goals and strategic direction of the CMC coalition.

Finally, as an account from the above, one can safely conclude that the Ban Advocates' Initiative endeavours to provide practical steps of implementing victim participation under CCM and VAP. This report has attempted to identify the key lessons of this victim driven initiative. Therefore, particularly to policy makers who seek to capitalise on Handicap International's experience and carry forward similar activities, below are some recommendations on 'advocacy with victims' to help shape, formulate, apply and monitor policies :

Some steps in applying advocacy with and by victims for policy makers

a. understand and respect the individual context of victims who lobby for their cause
b. perceive victims as lobbyists in a balanced light, acknowledging they are people with abilities
c. identify and engage with victim lobbyists in making policy
d. ensure inclusion of victim lobbyists in the monitoring of the policies
e. support and facilitate victim lobbyists' initiatives
f. make funds available to support the victim lobbyists' livelihood
g. avoid to use them as tokens of support

"[…] I got the opportunity to work as a civil servant with the government, not only because of a fair selection process- but due to the recognition of my work as a Ban Advocate. In my country, it is extremely rare to have a person with a disability working in a government department that isn't concerned with persons with disabilities […]"

Bounmy Vichack, Administrator, 33, Male, Survivor

ENDNOTES

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46 Interviewee
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Layout and Design: Bart Behiels

Print: Nevelland (sheltered worshop)

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Citation: Handicap International, *Advocacy with Victims: Good Practice and Lessons Learned in Influencing Policy* (Brussels: HI, 2013)

HANDICAP INTERNATIONAL

NORWEGIAN MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS

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Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation

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