

## Bringing Dignity and Purpose to the Disabled

### Challenge

Angola is struggling to recover from its 27-year-long civil war that ended in 2002. One million war-affected Angolans - internally displaced, demobilized soldiers and refugees - still require direct humanitarian assistance. The American Embassy estimates that the number of landmines in Angola range from 250,000 to 500,000, making it one of the most heavily mined countries in the world. Some 70,000 Angolans are believed to have lost limbs in landmine explosions.



Photo: USAID/Angola

Participant in USAID's Sports for Life activity in Angola.

### Initiative

USAID is helping thousands of Angolan demobilized soldiers and disabled civilians regain their dignity and become productive citizens through physical and psychosocial rehabilitation. USAID is working with The Vietnam Veterans of America Foundation (VVAFA) to run an orthopedic rehabilitation center to help in the social reintegration of people who have war-related injuries, especially those injured by mines or other undetonated explosives.

The rehabilitation center staff determines an amputee's physical condition and applies therapy to strengthen the affected limb's muscles. Measurements are then made to determine how the prosthesis will be attached. Every prosthesis is made to order in the center's workshop. Tests are conducted to ensure the prosthesis will be adjustable without complications. Finally, additional physical therapy sessions enable the patient to leave the center with full mobility. In addition to prostheses, the program makes and gives patients crutches and wheelchairs.

VVAFA addresses social and psychological issues that often prevent war-wounded and other disabled Angolans from leading productive lives by partnering with a local organization to carry out educational and counseling activities. Recreational and sports activities are offered through the "Sports for Life" program, which demonstrates to both patients and their communities that those with war injuries can still be active, competitive and productive.

### Results

From 1997 to 2003, some 1,800 prostheses were produced and distributed by the center, and over 2,000 people were treated with physiotherapy, and counseled with social reintegration support. VVAFA started working in Angola in 1996, but it was not until the war ended in 2002 that the project became a regional force. Outreach activities have now expanded into Lunda Norte and Lunda Sul provinces, where many amputees have never accessed rehabilitation services.