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Programs for Vulnerable Populations

Increasing Self-Reliance Within Vulnerable Populations

The Programs for Vulnerable Populations comprises five Congressionally directed programs managed by the U.S. Agency for International Development:

- Displaced Children and Orphans Fund
- Leahy War Victims Fund
- Victims of Torture Program
- Disability Program
- Wheelchair Program



Photo courtesy Sue Eitel

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USAID's Programs for Vulnerable Populations portfolio work to reduce risks to vulnerable populations and to reinforce the capacities of communities, local nongovernmental organizations (NGO), and governments to provide services and protection for vulnerable groups. The programs help vulnerable populations gain access to opportunities that support their full participation in society.

The portfolio comprises five congressionally directed programs: Displaced Children and Orphans Fund (DCOF); Leahy War Victims Fund (LWVF); Victims of Torture Program (VOT); Disability Program; and Wheelchair Program. Each provides a dedicated source of financial and technical assistance for projects and activities in their respective programming areas.

The Vulnerable Populations portfolio has been at the forefront of developing innovative and state-of-the-art programming for children affected by war; in setting orthopedic, rehabilitation, and wheelchair standards in developing countries; and in improving treatment and healing options for survivors of torture. It has also lead worldwide policy change on barrier-free accessibility and inclusion of people with disabilities in family and community. Each fund has its own purpose and strategy, but they share a focus on providing services to poor and vulnerable people and an emphasis on community. USAID's Programs for Vulnerable Populations are collectively found in more than seventy (70) countries around the world.

Displaced Children and Orphans Fund

USAID's Displaced Children and Orphans Fund provides financial and technical assistance for projects that help vulnerable children in jeopardy of losing, or those who are already living without, the care and protection of a family. This includes children in institutions, children living on the street, children displaced from their families and communities as a result of armed conflict, and other highly vulnerable



USAID's Protecting Children in Moldova project works to provide vulnerable children and their families with access to quality social services, including systems to prevent and protect them from family separation, violence, abuse, neglect, and exploitation. Photo courtesy EveryChild.

children. Some of those children are orphans who have lost both parents; most are not.

DCOF supports projects in difficult environments, such as those conducted during and after armed conflict. Its fundamental approach is to strengthen the capacity of families and communities to protect and care for their most vulnerable children.

Most DCOF projects aim to restore or preserve family care for children. USAID uses its dedicated resources selectively to support promising projects that yield lessons that can be applied in other situations. DCOF shares those lessons as widely as possible with practitioners, funding organizations, and governments.

In addition to supporting and learning from projects, DCOF increases the impact of its limited resources by helping build networks of key actors that can improve policies and the state-of-the-art in programming to benefit vulnerable children and families. It has played a catalytic role in starting several technical networks.

Leahy War Victims Fund

Established in 1989, USAID's Leahy War Victims Fund works to increase the availability of and access to a wide variety of programs benefiting people with disabilities in conflict-affected countries.

Historically, the LWVF has devoted the major proportion of its resources to establishing and improving accessible and appropriate prosthetic, orthotic (P&O), and physical rehabilitation services. This is evidenced through its extensive investments in the establishment and maintenance of P&O workshops; promotion of professional training, standards, and accreditation for P&O technicians; and support for increased mobility and physical functioning in general.

USAID is committed to continuing its investments in appropriate prosthetic, orthotic, and physical rehabilitation services. At the same time, it is expanding its approach and embrace of overall rehabilitation programming.

Victims of Torture Program

USAID's Victims of Torture Program works to enable people and communities affected by torture and trauma to resume their roles within family and community, and to protect individuals against future incidents of torture. VOT primarily supports projects that help heal the psychological and physical trauma caused by torture. It recognizes, however, that communities, along with survivors, need to heal and recover. To this end, it supports programs that affirm the dignity of the survivor by restoring his or her position as a functioning and contributing member of the family and the community.

VOT works through NGOs that (1) provide direct services to survivors, their families, and communities; (2) strengthen the capacity of country-based institutions in their delivery of services to survivors; and (3) increase the level of knowledge and understanding about the needs of torture and trauma victims.

In keeping with the program's mission, USAID follows five principles in its programming for torture survivors: 1) improving access to and quality of services available to torture-affected communities; 2) targeting individuals who suffer reduced function due to direct or indirect exposure to torture, and communities with many such persons; 3) building on existing community networks and resources; 4) breaking the silence experienced by individuals and communities affected by torture; and 5) strengthening public response to torture in order to protect individuals against future incidents of torture.

Disability Program

In September 1997, USAID adopted a groundbreaking policy that addresses the needs of people with disabilities in two ways: It states that USAID 1) will not discriminate against people with disabilities, and 2) will work to ensure the inclusion of people with disabilities in its programs and activities. The policy also calls on USAID missions to challenge their in-country partners to lead a collaborative effort to end discrimination against, and promote equal opportunity for, people with disabilities.

To implement its disability policy, USAID works to educate its employees on disability issues through courses and workshops. It provides tools and technical assistance to its field missions as they institutionalize the policy, and it has developed self-reporting mechanisms to track the Agency's progress in implementing the policy in Washington and overseas. USAID has also established a grants program to fund inclusive programming worldwide. This program provides funds directly to missions, encouraging them to include disability in all aspects of their programming. Projects work to reduce barriers that may limit people

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with disabilities' participation in society, community, and family.

Wheelchair Program

Established in 2007, USAID's Wheelchair Program works to improve the availability of, access to, and sustainability of programs that provide appropriate wheelchairs in the developing world.

While there are many humanitarian and development agencies involved in broader rehabilitation programs, there are far fewer who provide a comprehensive approach to the provision of suitable wheelchairs and the associated training and education that must accompany their distribution.

Despite an overwhelming need, only a small percentage of people in the developing world are able to obtain an appropriate wheelchair and the requisite training needed to assist them in obtaining their maximum independence and functionality. A wheelchair is more than just an aid to mobility: it can be a means to self-sufficiency and increased self-esteem; it may be a vehicle to meaningful employment and contributions to community and society; and it reduces dependency and the associated burden placed on family and friends.



Photo courtesy Sue Eitel