



USAID
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Special Programs to Address the Needs of Survivors (SPANS) *Wheelchair Program*

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USAID's Wheelchair Program is one of five Congressionally directed programs that comprise the Special Programs to Address the Needs of Survivors (SPANS):

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

Each of these complimentary programs has its own purpose and strategy, but they share a focus on providing assistance to poor and vulnerable populations. Each emphasizes the value of family and community as the first resort in providing protection, care, and support to vulnerable children, civilian victims of war, torture survivors, wheelchair users, and people with disabilities.



Photo courtesy Albanian Disability Rights Foundation

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Conservative estimates put the number of people with disabilities in developing countries at close to half a billion. Of these, an estimated 20 million require wheelchairs to be mobile.

While many humanitarian and development agencies implement broad rehabilitation programs, few provide a comprehensive approach to the provision of suitable wheelchairs and the associated training and education that must accompany their distribution. Established in 2007, USAID's Wheelchair Program is a relatively new Congressional Directive, compared to the other programs that comprise the SPANS portfolio. However, it already supports a wide range of projects for the produce and distribute wheelchairs and provide services wheelchair users.

In FY 2010, USAID is providing \$10 million in funding to projects in more than ten (10) countries.

In administering this fund, USAID applies four (4) fundamental principles (each of the principles can be applied to the projects described in the following sections):

Appropriate to Environment and Individual

First, when the wheelchair itself is the focus, there is a great temptation for an organization to take a "one size fits all" approach and mass produce, or collect donated chairs and conduct mass deliveries. Not only are these wheelchairs generally ill-suited to the rough urban and rural environments of low-income countries, but they do not provide long-term solutions for the provision of wheelchairs to a given population. In some cases, these actions cause the collapse of local wheelchair manufacturing enterprises. USAID therefore supports projects that provide wheelchairs suitable and appropriate for use in developing countries, and that are adaptable and can be fitted to the needs and requirements of each individual. The USAID-supported Wheelchair User Support Program, implemented by Motivation, works with local partners in South and Southeast Asia, East and Southern Africa, and Eastern Europe to design and produce low-cost, environment-appropriate wheelchairs.

Sustainable Local Services

Second, while numerous non-governmental organizations endeavor to provide wheelchairs, few attempt to establish sustainable services for users. Shipments of appropriate wheelchairs may benefit a discrete group of users, but the benefit will be short-lived if support services, such as wheelchair repair services, are not available to the user. USAID-funded projects support local production of good quality, repairable, and affordable chairs. Similarly, regional production, coupled with local assembly and repair, offers opportunities for sustainability. The USAID-funded Georgian Wheelchair Production Network, implemented by World Institute on Disability, is working to establish a mid-sized wheelchair production and repair facility in Tbilisi, Georgia. It also is establishing small, networked wheelchair sales, distribution, and repair shops in Gori and Zugdidi.

Training for Service Providers

Third, the usefulness of a wheelchair is directly related to the training and expertise of the technician fitting the chair, proper assessment and prescription, and basic training in safe and effective use. In Kenya, USAID is supporting the Capacity Building for Sustainable Appropriate Wheelchair Service in Kenya project, which is implemented by the Association for the Physically Disabled of Kenya (APDK). The project provides wheelchair users with access to comprehensive quality wheelchair services, which include prescription, production, and fitting by qualified professionals. It also established a follow-up and feedback system to monitor and evaluate those services

Quality of Life for Wheelchair Users

Finally, like the provision of prostheses, providing wheelchairs is not just about the chair itself. Rather, it is about increasing the quality of a survivor's life through increased mobility, independence, and integration into society. The provision, or production, of the actual wheelchair is only the first step in enabling wheelchair users to improve their quality of life and participate in family and community. Therefore, USAID-funded projects, such as the Integrated Wheelchair Provision for Rehabilitation of People with Disabilities in Nepal, invest in local disabled people's organizations and self-help groups. Programs increase opportunities for wheelchair users to attend school and hold jobs, and they advocate on a local and national level on behalf of people with disabilities. In Nepal, USAID's partner organization, International Nepal Fellowship, identifies strategies to support people with disabilities in accessing education, health services, and employment opportunities.

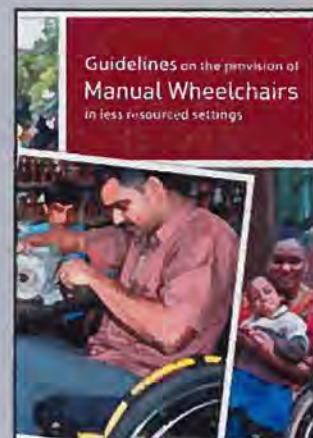


In Kenya, a team of wheelchair technicians work together to make final adjustments to a wheelchair for a young user. Photo courtesy of Norah Keitany, Association for the Physically Disabled of Kenya.

In 2007, USAID's War Victims Fund collaborated with the World Health Organization and the International Society for Prosthetics and Orthotics (ISPO), to sponsor the Consensus Conference on Wheelchairs for Developing Countries in Bangalore, India. As a result of the conference, developed *Guidelines On The Provision Of Manual Wheelchairs In Less Resourced Settings*, guidelines for the design, production, supply, and service delivery of manual wheelchairs, in particular for long-term wheelchair users, in less-resourced settings.

These guidelines are the most downloaded document on the WHO website, with more than 17,000 downloads between December 2008 and May 2010.

Copies of the guidelines can be downloaded at <http://www.who.int/disabilities/publications/technology/wheelchairguidelines/en/index.html>



Additional information on SPANS wheelchair programs can be found on the USAID website at http://www.usaid.gov/our_work/humanitarian_assistance/the_funds

Wheelchair Program Countries

Albania	Morocco
Georgia	Nepal
Indonesia	Philippines (LWVF)
Iraq	Romania
Kenya	Sierra Leone
Liberia	Togo

Project Partners

Albania Disability Rights Foundation (ADRF)
Handicap International (HI)
International Nepal Fellowship (INF)
Motivation
Motivation Romania Foundation (MRF)
Reach Out & Care Wheels, Inc. (ROC)
United Cerebral Palsy (UCP) Wheels for Humanity
World Institute on Disability (WID)



Despite the 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 to obtain 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; it reduces dependency and the associated burden placed on family and friends.

- **UNESCO estimates that 20 million people in the world need a wheelchair that don't have one.**
- **The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that by the year 2020, road traffic accidents will be the third highest cause of the global burden of disease. This is a significant jump from the current ranking of ninth, and developing countries will be largely responsible for this sharp rise.**
- **WHO data further suggests that between twenty (20) and forty (40) people per million will sustain a spinal cord injury in any one year. Many will subsequently require the use of a wheelchair.**
- **The incidence of cerebral palsy in the United States is about 1 in 93,000. In the developing world, the incidence is near 1 in 400.**
- **Estimates indicate that tens of thousands are maimed due to conflict each year, and many of the injured will require a wheelchair.**