



Sports For Life Program Inspires the Disabled

Benadito Cacoma Boeis, now 21, was 12-years-old when he lost his legs in a landmine accident. He had walked down to the river to wash his shorts and go for a swim. It was a sunny day and his friends were already in the water, calling to him to jump in. Just at the water's edge, he stepped on a landmine that instantly destroyed both of his legs.

The wounds required high, above-knee amputations, which left him with particularly short stumps. When Benadito arrived at the USAID-sponsored Vietnam Veterans of America Foundation (VVAFF) rehabilitation center in Luena, Angola it was decided that he was not a good candidate for prostheses. Instead, he was given a wheelchair which he has been using for the last three years.

Benadito accepted his disability and developed strength in his upper body to compensate for the loss of his legs. His strength made him a good prospect for wheelchair basketball. But his attitude didn't. Frequently drunk, Benadito came to practice angry and ready to pick fights with his teammates. He was asked to lead the basketball practice but the responsibility seemed to frighten Benadito at first. He went from being loud and boisterous to being very quiet. His teammates listened and respected him when he was leading exercises. He began to control his temper, even when he is fouled while driving for a shot.



Photo:USAID/Angola

Benadito Cacoma Boeis participates in the USAID-sponsored Sports for Life Program.

With the support of USAID, VVAFF has run a regional rehabilitation center in the capital of Moxico Province since 1996. The Center produces and distributes prosthetic limbs, crutches, and wheelchairs to landmine survivors and other persons with physical disabilities. VVAFF also works with local partner organizations to provide psychosocial supports to landmine survivors.

The Sports for Life Program, begun in early 2003, is one initiative that brings together physical rehabilitation and psychosocial support. Participants like Benadito benefit from the therapeutic aspects of sports but even more so from the psychological and social aspects. The disabled regain a sense of dignity and self-worth. They also have the conviction that disability does not mean incapacity, and that they can participate as productive members of Angolan society.

“Thanks to this program, I earned the respect of the people here, they no longer see me as a useless “mutilado” (handicapped person).”

- Benadito Boeis

Beni, as his fellow teammates call him, learned to dribble and collect his ball from the floor before all the others. His strength makes him fast and difficult to catch on the court. He knows he is good, and this gives him reason not to drink. He began spending time with his team outside of practice, and attended able-bodied basketball games at the gym. He knows that he has certain responsibilities and that his team will look to him if those responsibilities have not been addressed.

With his hard work and change in attitude, Beni earned himself a place on the team that represented Luena in a national competition in 2003. It was the first time he left Luena since his accident nine years ago. He went to the market looking to buy a ball, so he can get some extra practice. He told everyone he passed that he was going to compete in a big game and one of the young boys asked him if he was going to win. Beni smiled and said, “Yes.”

