

Mine Risk Education

Introduction

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The Role of Mine Risk Education || It is important to remember that removing mines is not the final goal of mine action; rather, the aim is to remove the threat and alleviate the suffering landmines cause.

The main aim of mine risk education (MRE) is to change high-risk behavior into low-risk behavior for those living or working in areas affected by explosive weapons of war, especially landmines, booby-traps or UXO (e.g., unexploded bombs or shells). This should be a two-way process: learning from community members how they survive from day to day, and helping them find alternatives to entering dangerous areas or touching UXO.

Here is an example of how a mine risk education program works in a locally affected community. In Nagorny Karabakh, Azerbaijan, a working group on mine/UXO issues that includes representatives of the local media and the relevant

ministries (defense, education, health, etc.) meets regularly to plan and coordinate mine action activities. Community-based steps, focusing on identification of solutions by the community in relation to their mine/UXO problem, are being developed in affected villages. In collaboration with the Ministry of Education, mine risk education is included in the school curriculum for grades one to eight. Children are informed of new developments and community initiatives which will be the focus of a media campaign.

In Kosovo, a community-based program was launched with 13 trained mine risk education officers. Special attention was placed on building a capacity in the local community. This included close integration with clearance agencies and working with children through interactive projects, including an open-air play based on the story of Little Red Riding Hood. By mid-2002, more than 250 volunteers had been trained, 700 villages visited and discussions held in more than 500 affected communities on how to make their villages safer. Activities are now being conducted in villages directly or indirectly affected (there are some 60 remaining dangerous areas) by village volunteers.

In addition to exchanging

information with the community to help it reduce the risk of death or injury from mines or UXO, mine risk education has an important role to play within mine action as a whole. As MRE personnel work in close collaboration with affected communities, they are privy to and collect large amounts of information. This information can help to set priorities for mine clearance, marking and remove of minefields and ensuring that the victims of these weapons receive the assistance and support they need.

For example, one organization doing mine risk education has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with a non-governmental organization (NGO) engaged in demining activities. The aim was to respond to communities requesting survey, demining and marking information by providing the NGO with data collected from the areas visited by mine risk education teams. The mine risk education program is also closely linked to projects providing assistance for mine victims, in particular by fitting amputees with prostheses. Small-scale projects with vocational (e.g., a shoemakers' course) training are also being supported.

The ongoing collection of information is also used to improve the effectiveness of the mine risk

A boy walks past a large billboard graphically depicting the dangers of landmines during the national landmine awareness day celebrations in Phnom Penh, Cambodia.



education program by changing messages that are not effective and by finding other solutions to community problems. If people are being injured collecting firewood, for example, perhaps an organization can provide firewood. Or if it is learned that the water well in a particular community is mined, perhaps a new well or water pump can be placed in a safe area.

A mine risk education program may take place in a number of different conditions. These conditions may vary considerably depending on the area and the at-risk population.

Displaced Persons || People who have been displaced by war or civil strife, either within a country (internally displaced persons or IDPs) or across an international border (refugees), are often at particular risk of mines because they leave their homes before the mines are laid. When they return, they do not know which areas are safe and which are not. Normally, mine risk education for refugees and IDPs takes place before they return and after they are back in their communities to reinforce the importance of safe behavior. But education can be difficult as these people are on the move, are not generally formed into strong

communities and are generally worried about simply finding enough food and shelter to survive.

Settled rural communities || Many areas around the world face direct threats from uncleared mines and UXO. Mine risk education has to take account of the fact that many of these settled communities have been living for many years with the threat and therefore know what mines are and what they do; realistic solutions must be found to meet their survival needs, as it may be a long time before mine clearance is possible.

Urban populations || Urban dwellers face unique threats from UXO and mines. Since community structures often differ considerably from those in rural areas, mine risk education must be carefully adapted for the people who are at special risk.

Nomadic populations || Nomadic peoples, such as the *Kuchi* in Afghanistan, pastoralists in the Sudan, Somalia, the Western Sahara, and Bedouin tribal communities in the Sinai Desert face a different kind of mine threat since they are “on the move” and cannot safeguard their living space. This represents a difficult challenge in communicating mine risk education messages.

(Top) Two instructors conduct a UNICEF-assisted landmine awareness session for children in a camp for displaced persons outside of Luanda, Angola.

(Bottom) An ICRC worker passes out information about the dangers of landmines to children in Kosovo.



Mine Risk Education

The Mine Risk Education Process

Needs Assessment || Gone are the days where “off-the shelf” programs are “parachuted” into a country. There is a great deal of assessment required when determining the feasibility of MRE projects, and it is extremely important to analyze a carefully and realistically myriad



A Cambodian father shows his children a poster of mine awareness and explains to them what to do to avoid an incident.

factors before committing to a strategy.

Additionally, one must realize that implementing and “handing-off” a community based education project involves a long-term and labor-intensive commitment. The process of doing a proper needs assessment is the first step in the establishment of an ongoing information

collection system. If a program of public awareness is to succeed it must have the most up-to-date data regarding the community and adjustable.

For example, it is often assumed that people step on mines because of blind, bad luck. In fact, the reasons for mine accidents vary greatly from place to place and audience to audience, but they tend to fall into four basic categories:

- *Unaware:* A person knows nothing about mines or safe behavior

- *Uninformed:* A person knows about landmines, but not about appropriate safe behaviors.
- *Reckless:* The person knows about mines and appropriate behavior, but approaches mines or UXO anyway. For example, a child throwing stones at a mine or adventure seeking teenagers who enter a dangerous area.

- *Forced:* The person knows of the risk and the appropriate behaviors, but must enter a dangerous area. This occurs usually as a survival necessity as when a hunter, seeking food for his family, hunts in a known mined area.

By far, the most common causes of accidents are forced—people motivated by basic survival needs entering dangerous areas or even intentionally handling mines and UXO.

In addition to the different underlying reasons for accidents, mines also affect different people in different ways. Men, women and children all approach danger differently depending on the cultural context and survival needs. Refugees, nomadic peoples or the internally displaced also are exposed to risk in different ways. Contrary to popular belief, the majority of mine accidents are among males 20–45 years of age, not children or women.

Each of these varying factors and

conditions will require a different response. The message, the technique and the materials used will all differ depending on the target audience. These basic conditions must be assessed and analyzed very carefully during the initial needs assessment phase if a program is to highlight the right messages and focus on the appropriate audience.

Program Planning || Based on the information collected in the needs assessment phase, a thorough analysis is conducted. This refined information is then used as the basis of program planning and strategizing.

In the past, there has been a great deal of emphasis placed on the production of media items that were believed to be educational in their own right. One-way communication and the media items that it often includes are only part of the process. Education in its purest form requires a two-way exchange and acceptance of information; ideally, it is participatory and active rather than passive. If we accept that the goal of mine risk education is to reduce civilian accidents through behavior modification and that the vehicle for that goal is community-based education, we can conclude that the simple dissemination of a message alone will not suffice; it must be absorbed.

It has been believed that to



A team of child mine awareness educators teaches other children about the dangers of landmines in Amran-Aden, Yemen.

achieve risk avoidance, one needs simply to inform people what mines look like and that they should not touch them. An appropriate MRE methodology will differ from one scenario to another, however, a one-way communication process will result in a program with serious deficiencies. Unfortunately, all too often this is what happens and leads to programming being initiated without proper visible assessment or consultation during the planning process. These are operational requirements that an implementing agency needs to consider.

Communication Approaches and Techniques II There are many different techniques that can be used in a community-level program. These will depend primarily on the experiences of the target audience. Though it is appropriate to introduce new methodologies and techniques in the course of a mine risk education program, a balance must be struck between proven techniques and the audience's style of learning. Some

predominant and general themes are listed below and all have their place in various MRE campaigns.

Training ♦ Training, as a process, is a precursor of a successful community-based program. Though supported (and sometimes even dominated) by the more visible mass media aspects, training of community workers or mine risk education instructors will have the furthest-reaching impact and will make up the core activity in terms of risk reduction.

Training can be done in a relatively short period of time and can be relatively low-cost. There is little need for technological input, and it is important to understand that a community educator will be far more valuable than a mine clearance professional. Since training marks the first step in a continuing relationship between the community and the program and represents the single biggest effort in program management, it should be allocated the time and resources it deserves.

A properly conducted and managed course can serve as the

fundamental driving force in promoting community awareness and providing tangible risk-reducing results. Through the development of community contacts, a sustainable presence and commitment can be established that will guide the program.

The program manager of a mine risk education program should consider the ongoing process of training a key staff development and programmatic issue. Developing the relationships necessary to promote and create true community-based awareness can be realized only through a close cooperative relationship with key actors in the affected communities. This will happen through the introduction of a comprehensive training program.

Lecture Method ♦ Sometimes known disparagingly as “chalk and talk,” this method is by far the most common educational process in the developing world. It represents the simplest form of communication, discourages participation, independent development of analytical or problem-solving skills, and tends to result in only marginal retention. That said, however, it will undoubtedly be the approach most familiar and comfortable to the audience. Therefore, it should not be discounted entirely, but used in the introduction phase to put people at

Seated in a circle on the ground, Afghan boys play an educational board game that includes landmine awareness features.



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The Mine Risk Education Process



This comic book featuring Superman and Wonder Woman teaches children in Central America about the dangers of landmines.

ease and then slowly diminished.

Participatory Activities ♦ Group work, involving the use of drawing, peer discussion and problem-solving exercises, is a relatively non-threatening way to introduce more participatory activities into the traditional classroom. Activities can vary widely, but the key aspect is the more direct involvement of the trainee and a corresponding reduction in the amount of time spent teaching by the trainer. Group or individual activities should focus on having trainees directly express their understanding and knowledge of the subject.

It is important to emphasize from the outset that in almost any given cultural or educational setting, participatory approaches to learning and the targeted use of visual aids will be the most effective (though rarely the most cost-efficient) ways of transferring knowledge about safe behavior in dangerous areas affected. Participatory approaches are based on two-way information flows that encourage dialogue and the analysis of the mine problem at the individual and community levels. The aim is to promote safe behavior around mines and to find practical, non-technical solutions to the mine threat. Examples of participatory approaches are:

- Mapping

- Child-to-child techniques
- Group and community discussions,
- Focus groups.

Participatory approaches are especially important for settled communities facing a long-term mine threat and exhibiting high-risk behaviors around mines. When conducted well, participatory approaches can mobilize the community, including children, through locally acceptable modes of communication. However, they require highly skilled and well-trained staff and significant human and financial investments by program funders and supporters.

Messages and Materials || It cannot be emphasized strongly enough that messages must be targeted to the populations most at risk and focused on the reasons for mine incidents, rather than merely adapted from those used in a previous mine risk program—even in a neighboring country.

In addition, it is not simply a matter of “throwing” together a poster or a T-shirt or copying material used in another program. A methodical and rigorous process of pre-testing and field-testing of all proposed material must be made to ensure all items produced are *appropriate, context specific, durable*

and attractive. This is an ongoing process to be undertaken before, during and after the production of each educational component.

Key Messages

- Be able to identify mines
- Keep out of mined areas
- Do not touch mines/UXO
- Stay on the safe path
- Avoid areas likely to contain mines and UXO
- Recognize warning signs
- Recognize warning clues

Examples of Educational Materials

- Posters
- Leaflets and brochures



- Silk screens
- Audio tapes
- Videos
- Photographs
- Mine models
- Drama and role-playing games

The Need for Data Collection || Mine awareness, properly conducted, should generate large amounts of data that can be analyzed by the mine risk community for its own operational needs and by other relevant mine action disciplines. In most mine risk programs, the lack of concrete, community-originated, socio-economic data seriously hampers accuracy in planning,

priority setting and operations.

For example, a nation-wide system for collecting data on mine/UXO casualties was launched in Afghanistan in 1998 in order to improve the reporting, exchange and use of information on mine/UXO victims.

In Bosnia-Herzegovina, the data-collection systems showed that 30 percent of victims had been injured or killed in areas they knew to be dangerous. Mine accidents thus resulted from people consciously taking risks with mines. It was crucial to take that pattern into consideration in adapting the message to communities in the region.

Members of the Cambodian Mine Action Center visit a family's home to educate them about the dangers of landmines.



Progress Being Made

by Huntington Associates

Nations around the world have come together in an unprecedented effort to end the threat of landmines. The United States, Britain, France, Germany, Canada, Japan, the Netherlands, Scandinavian countries, and others have galvanized resources and technical expertise. The United Nations is serving in a coordinating role and setting standards for quality clearance. Despite this impressive mobilization, there is a long way to go before the world will be rid of the deadly debris of war.

Only 15 of the 40 most mine-affected countries will be mine safe within five years. This leaves 25 nations infested with mines and unable to get back on their feet again following years of conflict. For these countries to become mine safe, individuals throughout the industrial world will need to take up the cause and embrace mine action. They must be prepared to support low-tech solutions to what are low-tech problems.

There will be no quick fixes. The support of thousands of concerned individuals will be needed for years to come if everyone is to walk the earth in safety. Humanitarian mine clearance is painstaking but thorough work that is best done by hand by trained local deminers. While it is a slow process, it is also effective. Mine awareness initiatives are saving lives and survivor assistance programs are helping put lives back together again, but a great deal more remains to be done. Increased funding—from both the private and public sectors—is urgently needed if these programs are to successfully complete the excellent work they have started.

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Challenges Faced by an MRE Program

Literacy II Among the most challenging aspects of community education in the developing world are low level of literacy and lack of familiarity with a variety of communication approaches. By and large, mine contamination tends to be felt most among the agrarian population and it is precisely those individuals who are the hardest to reach.

Semi-literate or even pre-literate conditions often prevail. Individuals who have little or no formal schooling may have only a rudimentary (if any) ability to write their own language, and in some cases may lack of familiarity with written communication of any kind. The problem of designing an educational strategy

that meets the needs of these individuals is quite challenging. Electronic media is often difficult to access or use, as is much printed material. The complexities of effecting behavioral change through an educational process among such groups are many and require extremely precise program planning and design.

Geography II In the Western world, physical proximity is no longer a prerequisite for the exchange of information. Using a myriad of electronic media, information can be disseminated globally in a matter of minutes. On the village level in the developing world, information often must be

physically transported, either by word of mouth from one individual to another or through the passage of a particular piece of material. In areas where there are few roads and even fewer vehicles, this becomes one of the largest impediments to a successful campaign. There are virtually no conduits for the information to reach far beyond the point where it is introduced. Programs therefore must be designed to be self-perpetuating and information must travel quickly using local networks and patterns and not be reliant on outside intervention. The messages must remain fresh.

Conflict II Particularly in times

A boy shows two younger children a poster describing different kinds of explosive devices in El Salvador.





of conflict, traditional systems for security and self preservation are interrupted. This reality, combined with the disruption resulting from physical violence, makes it very difficult to address the public health needs of the community. Ongoing conflict will disrupt transportation and draw away resources from donors, international organizations, local organizations, ministries and community-level interlocutors. It will also restrict access and disrupt mine action in general, and it may alter the ability to provide safety or risk-reducing information, especially if new mines or UXO are being used.

Movement II IDPs and refugees present a unique challenge for mine

risk education, as these particular groups are often the most needy. Removed from the issue, lacking knowledge about local conditions and often on the move, they are at greatest risk from mine accidents. It is precisely these factors that complicate the educational process, as these people are not sedentary, are not generally formed into cohesive communities and are usually preoccupied with meeting their basic survival needs. Designing a response to such challenging programmatic circumstances requires great flexibility and the ability to form close relationships within loose but important indigenous systems.

Conclusion: The Long-Term Perspec-

ive II Mine risk education is a behavior modification program. It seeks to alter people's perceptions of the contaminated land and their relationship to it. In an agrarian population, this can be a daunting task, as its very existence is tied directly to the land. Mine risk education must therefore have both short- and long-term goals, and any program must be developed with careful consideration for its longevity, transitional phases and eventual hand-off to local officials.

Mine risk education is not a 100% solution, but when done properly and in close conjunction with the other disciplines of mine action, it can provide much-needed protection to the civilians who suffer most from these weapons.

(Left to Right) WO2 Matikiti of the Zimbabwe Army Engineers give a lecture to school children about mine awareness in mine infected areas. A warning poster designed to teach children and adults about the dangers of landmines.