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The Role of Croatian Media in Mine-risk Education

In its work, the Croatian Mine Action Centre (CROMAC) has found that various forms of media, from new Internet applications to newspapers and the radio, are uniquely situated to raise awareness among at-risk populations about the realities of landmines. To examine the media’s effective ness in mine-risk education, in 2008, CROMAC completed a study evaluating the Croatian media’s coverage of landmine incidents and related news. With cooperation, CROMAC hopes better reporting about MRE programs will prevent mine accidents and create a more informed population.

Josip Ćerina: The Role of Croatian Media in Mine-risk Education

Landmine contamination in Croatia is a result of mass landmine use during World War II (1941–1945) and the Homeland War (1991–1995). Between 1991 and 2011, 1,329 mine incidents occurred in Croatia resulting in approximately 1,912 casualties. Since the establishment of the Croatian Mine Action Centre in 1998, the number of incidents has steadily decreased over the years to fewer than 10 incidents per year. From 2008 to 2010, six mine incidents each year occurred (nine killed/two injured). In 2011, five incidents occurred (zero killed/four injured). From 2005 to 2007, a total of 37 mine incidents resulted in eight deaths and 24 injuries, and from 2002 to 2004, 47 incidents resulted in 21 deaths and 30 injuries.1 (See Table 1 for details.)

Various activities such as massive clearance efforts funded by the Croatian Government and by some foreign governments and private donors contributed to the reduction of mines in Croatia, including conducting mine-risk education and marking mine-suspected areas with hazard signs. The media has also contributed greatly to this reduction. During a study published in Medijska istraživanja in 2009, CROMAC found that the media is a very important CROMAC partner in the implementation of different programs as well as distributing educational and preventive messages.2

In bearing in mind that mine action’s purpose is not only de-mining but also reduction of mine danger, this article elaborates on the role that the media plays in the process of solving the mine problem. Taking into account recent Croatian media practices, CROMAC investigated how extensively the media covers mine action-related topics and analyzed the effects of incomplete reporting that fails to educate or teach prevention of mine danger. This research allowed CROMAC to begin to understand more efficient solutions for MRE delivery and other mine-related information.

Mine incidents involving civilians following the Homeland War show the need for systematic communication regarding risks. Endangered communities require safe-behavior training and warning about the risks that mines and explosives remnants of war impose. This is especially important in the Croatian’s rural areas, where inhabitants live and engage in agriculture and farming near mine-suspected areas. According to the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining’s A Guide to Mine Action, four categories of persons suffer from mine incidents:

1. Unaware: The person is not aware of mine danger.
2. Uninformed: The person is informed about mines but is not aware of safe forms of behavior.
3. Inconsiderate: The person knows about and ignores the safe forms of behavior.
4. Deliberate: The person, generally without many options available, deliberately accepts unsafe behavior.3

Due to Croatia’s persistent landmine and ERW contamination, continuing mine-awareness activities and promoting behavior change is necessary.4 CROMAC uses radio, television and newspapers, along with signposts marking hazardous areas, to spread warnings and raise public awareness about risks and safe behaviors.

In addition, recent technological developments enable communication over the Internet. CROMAC website’s MISportal, launched in February 2009, allows users to obtain comprehensive information about mine-suspected areas in Croatia by selecting a desired location.5 MISportal also contains information about the location and scope of contaminated areas and mine-action activities undertaken so far. This information is necessary for citizens to take an active part in adopting priority plans. Municipalities and towns file requests for drafting country-priority lists. The priority list serves as the basis for the annual demining plan.6 Cooperation with the local community often contributes to faster socioeconomic development, especially regarding agriculture and farming, upon completion of demining operations.

Table 1. Number of mine incidents and casualties in Croatia.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>No. of incidents</th>
<th>Number of casualties</th>
<th>Fatal injuries</th>
<th>Major bodily injuries</th>
<th>Total</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>198</td>
<td>45 48 162</td>
<td>253</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>233</td>
<td>48 67 196</td>
<td>311</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>1993</td>
<td>183</td>
<td>42 67 162</td>
<td>270</td>
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<td>25 35 75</td>
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<td>26 45 63</td>
<td>126</td>
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<td>21 36 35</td>
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<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>7 10 8</td>
<td>27</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>7 8 14</td>
<td>29</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>2002</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>9 6</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>26</td>
<td></td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>4 1 9</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2004</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998-2011</td>
<td>231</td>
<td>69 113 127</td>
<td>309</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Total | 1,329 | 308 | 308 | 1,912 | 1,912 | 1

1. CROMAC’s MISportal helps combat sporadic media coverage of landmines, and serves as a platform for information exchange about the extent of mine dangers, additional and ongoing media coverage could also effectively raise mine awareness among individuals and local communities. If journalists act responsibly, newspapers could be an efficient medium, because they provide opportunities for more detailed coverage of a particular topic or event.

2. To further examine the local media’s effectiveness, in 2008, CROMAC researched and analyzed the Croatian press’ contribution to providing information and teaching MRE. Using the quantitative method, the study examined mine-related articles in two Croatian daily newspapers: Tjednik, Željani list, Jutarnji list, 24 sata, Slabodna Dalmacija, Glav Slavonije, Novi list, Zadarski list and Karlovački list.

3. This media review covered 242 randomly selected newspaper articles published in the period 2005–2007. It investigated mine-related topics and content in order to analyze what areas should be addressed more frequently—all with the purpose of achieving socially-responsible reporting about the existing mine danger, including special emphasis on informative and educational stories about the danger.

4. The analysis of mine action-related topics in the newspaper articles showed that most coverage focused on six main fields:
   - Informing the population about mine dangers
   - Providing MRE
   - Announcing mine-victim assistance
   - Advocating non-use of landmines
   - Reporting on the rights of demining staff
   - Discussing the socioeconomic impact of the mine problem

The remaining articles focused on other mine-related topics: reporting about different visits, signing cooperative agreements, demining companies’ business operations, activities of nongovernmental organizations, etc. Table 2 presents the results obtained.

5. Of the topics studied in the selected articles, the most frequent topic, advocating non-use of landmines, was addressed...
29.97 percent of the time. In the framework of this topic, the frequency of the following subtopics was analyzed:

- International Mine Action Standards
- Anti-personnel Mine Ban Convention
- Humanitarian action
- Donations for the purpose of technically surveying suspected areas and clearing known hazardous areas

The topic “informing the population about mine dangers” was covered in 20.21 percent of the articles. In the framework of this topic, the newspapers reported about different consequences of the mine problem: limitations in the use of arable land, restrictions on water supplies, and economic difficulties. The socioeconomic impact as a result of the mine problem was represented in 20.21 percent of the articles. In the framework of this topic, the newspapers reported about different consequences of the mine problem: limitations in the use of arable land, restrictions on water supplies, and economic difficulties. The socioeconomic impact as a result of the mine problem was represented in 20.21 percent of the articles.

Informing the Public

CROMAC then wanted to further analyze the articles focused on informing the population about mine dangers and providing MRE. In order to discover the informative value of newspaper articles, the presence of the following indicators was analyzed:

- Information for the public about mine-suspected areas
- Information regarding marking of hazardous areas
- General information on the current mine situation of endangered communities
- Information for the public about the commencement of demining operations
- Announcements about demining courses
- Reports about the handover of cleared areas

Table 3 presents the analysis of these results, revealing that the most frequent topic addressed—in 42.26 percent of the articles—was “general information on the current mine situation.” Other categories were represented almost equally.

Very few articles were about specific terrain clearance, i.e., demining of particular areas. The fact that CROMAC did not find any articles about the handover of cleared areas confirmed this. However, the researchers believe that mass media must inform the local community about completed clearance projects, so locals know when it is safe to access demined areas. To establish the educational value of the newspaper articles, the study analyzed the articles based on the presence of the following indicators:

- Information on organized forms of MRE
- Information about professional gatherings, symposiaums and workshops
- Information on ERW types
- Information on clearance methods
- Information on demining processes
- Information on procedures when encountering mines and ERW

The most represented indicators were information on mine and ERW types, with 31.58 percent of the articles mentioning this, and information on clearance methods, garnering 26.32 percent of the published articles (See Table 4).

Other categories were less frequent represented. The category “Information on procedures when encountering ERW” was never mentioned. According to these results, mine danger is poorly represented in newspapers except in the case of mine accidents, when such events become worthy of media attention. This analysis showed how newspapers use the space they have available. It also pointed out to researchers that this space could be better used to invite the population to adhere to all possible measures of precaution and responsible behavior in mine-affected environments.

Conclusions

Even though the press contributes to informing and educating citizens about mine dangers, a need remains for more frequent reporting about safe behavior. Information on the status of demining in particular areas and the handover of cleared areas is also important. Reporting about humanitarian actions and donations is not enough, neither is emphasizing the mine problem as an obstacle to socioeconomic development. Disseminating information more efficiently is necessary, as well as making MRE more available until all contaminated areas are thoroughly cleared and handed over to the final beneficiaries for safe use.

For this purpose, more information regarding demining activities and the demining process should be sent to media outlets. It would also be helpful if the media was invited to attend various demining activities, so that it could relay first-hand accounts of current dangers to the public and to periodically organize symposiums in which experts, journalists, activists and representatives of local communities participate in workshops designed to educate citizens about the mine threat.

The media’s social responsibility should be based on joint liability of all social subjects, because its interactive relationship with the public requires ethical behaviors in protection of civil interests and needs. CROMAC informs the population about mine-action activities and the mine situation in particular communities, but the communication with media takes place directly between CROMAC and the media, even though the assistance of a professional public relations agency would probably make communications more efficient. Good cooperation through PR services that provide reliable and timely information may contribute to quality reporting about mine problems.