The Direct Approach from Kosovo:
Mine Awareness Education

HMD Response's Philip Dive sees the inherent value in the direct approach in mine awareness training and urges the mine action community in Kosovo not to look past this approach.

By Philip Dive, *Senior Mine Awareness Educator*

Collectively, the managers of mine awareness education programs (MAEP) have helped the people of Kosovo focus on the mine threat through a complex web of approaches. These approaches include child-to-child, soldier-to-child, mother-to-child, puppet theaters, road shows and summer days. Other MAEP initiatives utilize soccer players and mosque Imans as the messengers of mine awareness. Still another program educates teachers about mines in preparation for the arrival of mine awareness in school curriculums. All of the above programs have been accredited by the U.N. Mine Action Coordination Centre (UNMACC), and together form one of the most comprehensive mine awareness packages in the world.

Among all this creative, progressive and radical thinking, there may be the danger that the so-called "direct" approach has been made redundant in the rush for an "interactive" MAEP. The direct approach simply explains the situation concerning nearby mine fields and offers advice on safe behavior to the adults of a community in the hope that they and their families can avoid these areas until demining agencies are able to clear them.

While the initial estimates for landmine clearance in Kosovo predicted that UNMACC would be busy for many years, more recent studies lean toward a less pessimistic outlook, perhaps requiring only another year to clear the vast majority of mine fields. After January 2001, it is calculated that only about 20 percent of the known mine-affected areas will remain. All of these locations are in the mountainous border areas. In Kosovo, the highest-risk groups tend to be men—usually young agricultural workers—who live non-technical, rural lives. For this group the direct approach is the only guaranteed way to exchange mine-related information and therefore should form the foundation for a national strategy.

HMD RESPONSE
MINE
AWARENESS TEAM

This article acknowledges that during the evolution of a MAEP the direct approach often lacked sensitivity to local concerns, tended to be "ad hoc" and offered no alternatives to help change people's risky behavior. These concerns focus on the lack of management during the early programs, rather than the innate potential of the direct approach itself. To be fair, though, any approach will fail if poorly implemented. As for viable alternatives, I know of no current program, direct or community-based, that actually offers the people of Kosovo a sustainable second option that allows for a real change to their daily mine-affected routine.

The MAEP presented by HMD Response in this article views the simplicity of the direct approach to be of lasting importance because mine awareness does not need to be complicated. The direct approach can demonstrate a very high level of awareness of local conditions and can be swift to implement. With competent management, the direct approach can also be easy to administer, control and evaluate.

THE DIRECT APPROACH-A MAEP OUTLINE

Program Location

HMD Response's MAEP is located in the Municipality of Dragash in the south of Kosovo. Dragash is linguistically, politically and culturally divided into two parts. Its' 34,000 residents are divided into the Albanian speaking majority residing in 19 villages to the north (an area called Opoja) and the non-Albanian speaking minority (the Goranis) who live in 19 villages to the south. Within the mountains that surround Dragash, many of which reach altitudes of up to 2,500 meters, these 38 villages coexist with few points of contact other than their faith in the Koran.

Purpose

HMD Response MAEP exists to help the people of Opoja and Gora to avoid becoming casualties of mines and UXO through education, awareness and other relevant information.

Structure

The program consists of four elements:
1. Information Center
2. Village Mine Education Teams
3. Clearance Information Liaison
4. Mine Awareness Truck

Activities

Static Display:
Provide a static UXO and mine display for the public to visit at any time.

IMSMA Maps:
Inform the public of known UXO and mine locations.

Dangerous Area Reports:
Process UXO and mine information provided by members of the public.

Materials:
Design, test and produce additional and appropriate UXO and mine awareness materials.

Establish dialogue:
Talk with president and/or religious leader.

Data Gathering:
Compile a questionnaire to find out the local level of mine awareness.

Group Presentation:
A 25-minute formal presentation.

Mingle:
A three-hour village visit stopping people in the street/coffee bars to discuss the mine situation.

Liaison:
Visit demining operations.

Information Exchange:
Help both the demining organization and the public with the exchange of mine related information.

UNMACC:
Completion of UNMACC forms clarifying public awareness of clearance operations close to their homes.

Maintain Public Interest:
Use a 4-ton truck as a large mobile platform from which mine related information is offered to the public. The truck is parked at sports events, market places and busy road junctions.

Curriculum

Through the four program elements the public should be able to do the following as a result of the HMD Respomse MAEP:

Respond to the mine/UXO threat:
- Be able to recognize dangerous areas through warning clues.
- Be able to recognize mine fields through the presence of warning signs.
- Be able to take appropriate action after realizing that you are in a mine field.



From 38 villages, 600 mine awareness quesionnaires were collected for program evaluation purposes. This will be repeated in May 2001 as an indicator of the program's impact.

Understand safe behavior:
- Understand that the best solution is to stay out of mined areas.
- Understand that safe paths must be used at all times.
- Understand that mines and UXO must not be touched.
- Be able to recognize above ground and below ground mines.
- Be able to recognize cluster bombs and grenades.
- Be able to recognize ammunition, fuses and rockets.

Know the local mine field situation:
- Know the agencies that are demining Dragash.
- Know the locations of mine fields in Opoja and Gora.
- Know that mine warning signs must be left in place.
- Know that clearance is a slow and dangerous activity.

Management

The above results are implemented via three sequential objectives:

Sequential Objectives

1. Organize, equip and train a specific team for a public information program in the Dragash Municipality.
2. Implement a public information program that is focused on MAE to the many communities within Dragash.
3. To depart from Dragash in an organized and planned manner ensuring that, where possible, non-technical tangible assets are disposed of in the best possible way.

Each objective has associated performance indicators that are tested by the director of HMD Response during his three planned visits to the program. These verification visits are copied to our donor.

Team Size

The program employs the following:

Position	*Nationality*
Kosovo Programme Manager	English
MAEP Coordinator	English
Opoja Team Leader	Albanian
Gora Team Leader	Bosnian
Opoja Team:	
MAE Teacher	Albanian
MAE Teacher	Albanian
MAE Teacher	Albanian /Turkish
Gora Team:	
MAE Teacher	Gorani
MAE Teacher	Gorani
MAE Teacher	Gorani
Artist	Gorani
Center cleaner	Gorani
Guard	Albanian
Guard	Albanian

The two MAE teams deploy under the supervision of their team leaders. From Dragash the teams go to their areas to undertake the sequential tasks shown below. Each village has its own file and as the tasks are completed within each location, the relevant boxes are checked off. A task can be repeated several times if deemed necessary by the team leader. The MAEP coordinator monitors the teams through unannounced visits throughout the week.

Village Name

1.Visit president
2.Data collection
3. Leaflets
4.Informal mingle
5.Formal presentation
6. Truck visit
7.Clearance briefing



HMD Response mine awareness coordinator formal presentation. HMD Response teachers demonstrate parts of packing boxes in a village from the Opaja area.

In addition to this simple program structure, four more complex issues are now addressed: political awareness, local capacity building, clearance integration and program evaluation. These have been chosen because they are areas of weakness often associated with MAEPs, irrespective of the chosen approach.

Political Awareness

Since the conflict touched Dragash there has been a steady outflow of Goranis. This is due to security concerns following their suspected compliance with the Kosovo Serbs, and for economic reasons as they are becoming increasingly isolated and economically limited.

The Albanian border to the west also adds to security concerns as cross-border smuggling of guns, drugs and girls has become a viable source of income to many entrepreneurial villagers who have a love-hate relationship with the new U.N.-financed administration.

UNMACC was concerned that many NGOs working in the south were recruiting mine awareness trainers that were exclusively Albanian. Not surprisingly, its delivery of MAE in whatever form was biased towards the Albanian majority. This situation had become unacceptable within a U.N. administration that promotes equal access to information and human rights to all the citizens of Kosovo. HMD Response was tasked with remedying this imbalance within the Dragash Municipality. One option was to recruit Goranis and target only the Gorani villages. However, this would have been a mistake as we considered a neutral position to be both politically correct and physically safer. A better solution was to run two teams alongside each other—a team of Albanians and a team of Goranis. Although two teams ensured our neutrality and guaranteed access to all the communities across Dragash, it did raise the potential for internal conflicts within our own organization. In part because of the following actions that we took at the very start of our program, we experienced few conflicts:

- ***Integration with other neutral agencies.***

Advice was requested and noted from the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) prior to the selection and training of local staff. The OSCE field office was asked to help us recruit suitable people from both the Albanian and Gorani communities. Also, other agencies were given the opportunity to make recommendations, such as the Red Cross, HANDIKOS and the Balkan Peace Team. Through these liaisons, HMD Response was able to obtain the support of organizations that were already respected by both communities.

- ***Location of the program office.***

After long negotiations with the Dragash U.N. Administered Council, HMD Response was allocated office space within the municipal administrative building of the education department. Located in the same corridor as the director for education, we can be clearly observed working alongside the existing civil structures of the municipality. The town of Dragash is also the political and economic focus for both Albanians and Goranis, so any other location, be it to the north or south of Dragash, would have been totally unacceptable.

- ***English as a core office language.***

All the teachers passed an English test before being recruited, allowing our office to be an English only area. This ensures that everyone understands all the discussions and that no single linguistic group can dominate the proceedings. This also eliminates the need to use interpreters in the office, helping the international staff assess developments quickly.

- ***Mine awareness materials.***

In keeping with earlier observations, the vast majority of posters produced within Kosovo are written only in Albanian. For the Gora team it was necessary to translate existing posters into local languages.

- ***Mobile displays.***

When using our 4-ton truck as a mobile platform for mine awareness education in the multi-ethnic town of Dragash, it is necessary to deploy representatives from both teams at the same time. This is important to ensure that both communities feel they have equal access to mine-related information. It is encouraging to observe our teachers openly working alongside each other, mixing and teaching across ethnic groups. The local representatives of OSCE and the U.N. administration have praised their example.

- ***Avoidance of political rallies.***

We plan our visits schedule several weeks in advance and try hard to stick to our program. Often, however, political gatherings sometimes clash with our visits. When a clash occurs, the teams are under strict instructions to leave the village and return to the office. This avoids any unintentional association with a political party.

The two teams have learned to work together and provide a good example to those who continue to express pessimism about the future of a culturally divided Kosovo. Within their own communities they are communicating effectively and ensuring that mine awareness education can take place without any unnecessary political/ethnic distractions. This has been achieved because we approached the two communities in a manner appropriate to their situations and retained our sense of balance.

While other direct approach MAEPs may have lost their sense of balance, HMD Response has been very careful not to do so. This suggests that failure to be politically sensitive is a fault of program managers, rather than an inherent flaw in the direct approach itself.

Local Capacity Building

As a part of the former Yugoslavia, Kosovo's education, training and management style was summed up by the Soviet doctrine "order is preferable



A 4-ton truck is used as a mine awareness platform and focal point in town centers, at busy crossroads and during sports events.

to change because change infers a risk." Many agencies in Kosovo, both large and small, usher in well meaning albeit fundamentally new ways of working immediately upon arrival in Kosovo. To ensure "appropriateness" and to aid local capacity building, local staff are quickly hired, trained and returned to their local communities with progressive methodologies that may or may not be fully understood either by the staff or the recipient communities. The lack of employment opportunities and the cultural acceptance of the all-knowing "boss" will ensure that teaching takes place even if learning does not result.

To its credit, the direct approach is immediately transparent to suspicious people who are in a state of total upheaval, where change is frightening and Western organizations are slow to reveal their funding and possibly their hidden agendas. All too often, those who criticize the direct approach's lack of sensitivity miss a far deeper concept—gaining the trust and respect of the local population by giving them the information they want in a manner that they recognize as agenda-free.

For HMD Response, the direct approach has enabled strong-minded international members of staff to quickly establish an ordered program that is objective-led, tightly focused and immediately understood by the local members of staff. From this starting point local members of staff feel confident to take some responsibility within a highly structured program that they are able to culturally endorse. The positions of team leaders and that of office managers were not advertised, but rather internally appointed from the initial mine awareness education teachers within our own pool. The professional growth of the team leaders and the office manger in the second half of our program is a mutually beneficial, realistic "capacity building" goal. These three individuals will very soon be running the program for short periods in the absence of the two international managers who will be needed to assess other proposals for MAEPs.

Concepts like authority, autonomy and trust are all inexplicably contained within the concept of capacity building and they are achieved slowly with very small steps. Random MAEPs, typically with only 12 months of funding, cannot expect to have the impact of long term developmental agencies such as Voluntary Services Overseas (VSO) or the Peace Corps, who hope to observe local human resource advances over a period of two or three decades. If any capacity building can occur within short, isolated MAEPs, it would probably be an improvement of existing methods, rather than newly developed teaching methods.

Clearance Integration

Mine clearance and mine awareness must be integrated. Agencies that work in the same geographic areas on these activities need to talk to each other, exchange information and follow agreed upon procedures to ensure that the local people are given every opportunity to stay safe. HMD Response has been able to establish a good relationship with the clearance companies working in the south of Kosovo for the following reasons:

• HMD Response prioritizes work that relates to assisting clearance operations. UNMACC procedures insist that clearance operations require mine awareness be undertaken in nearby villages before, during and after the demining has taken place. For HMD Response, these villages immediately become the main focus of our activities and due to the simplistic nature of our approach, we can react within hours of being informed of a new clearance operation. Also, the rapid checking and processing of "Dangerous Area Reports" that are received from the villagers are given top priority. In both cases, we try to emphasize a service philosophy.



The technical supervisor for the charity HELP briefs the awareness teams from HMD Response on the location and types of mine fields along the Albanian border.

• HMD Response invited demining agencies to help in our training course for local staff. Deminers and medical teams from demining companies within our area taught our awareness teams about the technical aspects of their work, which was followed up by several educational visits to clearance operations. When information concerning a clearance operation is gathered for a village briefing, we encourage our teams to talk directly with the deminers in order to prevent any misunderstanding. The cross checking of IMSMA maps is now a standard procedure. This physically puts our staff alongside the deminers and alongside the mine fields. Without such visits, our credibility with the demining companies and the local people would be lost.

In short, HMD Response is implementing a program that clearance agencies can relate to very easily. Deminers tend to view the direct approach as a clear and simple way to deal with a clear and simple problem—a view that HMD Response in Kosovo accepts.

Evaluation

In each village about 20 adult interviews are carried out before any MAE teaching occurs to better understand the aptitudes and previous knowledge of locals. The interview subjects are always asked if they wish to be interviewed and no attempt is made to challenge those who decline. A trained member of HMD Response staff is present throughout the entire interview. The questionnaire forms the basis of the discussion, and the questions are read out slowly and clearly and repeated as often as the subject requests. The interviewer is allowed to explain the questions to the interviewee if necessary. The interviewer checks the appropriate responses as the discussion takes place.

At the end of the discussion, the interviewer shows the completed questionnaire sheet to the interviewee and checks that the answers are a fair reflection of the interviewee's responses. If the interviewee has made mistakes, then those questions are discussed again and, where necessary, HMD Response staff will explain the reasons for the corrected answers.

Prior to going into the villages, HMD Response staff practiced their interviews with OSCE staff members at its NGO Resource Centre in Prizren. These practice sessions served to check and modify the draft questionnaire; ensure that HMD Response staff understood the need to explain any corrections to the interviewees after the interview; and to adjust the approaches and styles of all the interviewers so that they presented the questions in a similar manner.

The final questionnaire was carefully prepared in English, Albanian and Gorani. See *Annex A* for the English version.

Every village in the Dragash Municipality has now been visited and 600 interviews have been recorded. The results have been analyzed and are displayed in our information center in Dragash.

In May 2001, HMD Response staff will return to these villages and undertake the same number of interviews using the same questionnaire in order to make a before and after comparison. The outcome of this comparison will form the basis of a report that will evaluate the effectiveness of our MAE teaching.

To organize 600 interviews in 38 different villages requires good management and far-sighted vision, something that UNICEF and the Landmine Monitor have both recently recommended for all MAEPs.

Conclusion

All MAEP approaches have a place within the mine action toolkit, and no single approach can offer all the answers to every situation. However, if managed well, the direct approach can make an important contribution.

In Kosovo, the direct approach can be used even when the normal routines of children and adults are disrupted. It also has the potential to reach high-risk groups, in this case young men and adult agricultural workers, who do not typically interact in conventional social structures.

The direct approach should not be disregarded because it appears to be too easy, too cheap and too simplistic. If a good Needs Assessment exercise leads to the outcome that a direct approach will be the most effective and efficient solution for a particular landmine problem, then a direct approach should be utilized and respected as a reliable commonsense approach.

This article has been written to give the direct approach renewed credibility at a time when many MAEP managers may be opting for unnecessary, albeit innovative, complexity in mine action. ■

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All photos courtesy of the author.

Annex A:
HMD Response MAEP QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Age

a) 16 - 24
b) 25 - 34
c) 35 - 44
d) 45 - 54
e) 55 - 64
f) 65 plus

2. Home village: _____

3. Sex: Male / Female

4. Please describe the signs that are put on either wires or on poles to warn people of an area that contains landmines. (interviewer ticks as appropriate)

a) No Idea
b) Red Triangle
c) Skull and crossed bones
d) VJ sign with "Mine" painted on wood.
e) White, yellow, red tape
f) More than one sign described
g) There are no mine signs

5. Please list the possible clues / items that may help you to realize that you have ventured into a dangerous mined area. (interviewer checks as appropriate)

___ 1. Exposed mine
___ 2. Trip wire
___ 3. Fuses
___ 4. Safety pins
___ 5. Mounds and hollows
___ 6. Bullet casings
___ 7. Dead animals
___ 8. Packing boxes
___ 9. Military clothing

6. How many times have you been educated about the threat of mines by professional mines awareness teachers in the last twelve months?

a) once
b) twice
c) three times
d) four times
e) five times
f) more
g) never

7. Have you observed / studied a map that shows you the locations of the mine fields in the Dragash Municipality?

___ Yes
___ No

8. If you have unfortunately walked into a mine field please select that best action to take. (interviewer ticks as appropriate)

a) Slowly and carefully re-trace your steps.
b) Stay still, warn others and call for help.
c) Find a long stick to check the ground and slowly find a safe route out.
d) Run very fast back the way you came into the minefield.

9. If you find an item that you do not recognize but guess that it is maybe something that was left by a person within the military, probably during the conflict, what is the best action to take? (interviewer checks as appropriate)

a) Remember its location and tell UNMIK police or KFOR.
b) Pick it up and take it to UNMIK police or KFOR.
c) Just leave it and forget about it.
d) Pick it up and show your friends who served in the military and try to find out what it is.

10. In this area the problem of landmines is which of the following:

a) A big problem
b) A problem
c) A small problem
d) No problem