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From Puppets to Empowerment: the Bosnia and Herzegovina Genesis Project

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Genesis Project

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Demining Law in Bosnia and Herzegovina

In February 2002, a unique state-level Bosnia and Herzegovina Mine Action Centre (BHMAC) structure was created. The adopted law created a legal framework for demining operations in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

by Marija Alilovic

Background

Bosnia and Herzegovina is a country with the largest mine contamination problem in BiH (south-eastern Europe). There are an estimated 670,000 mines and 650,000 pieces of UxO on 10,000 locations. The contaminated area is estimated to be over 2,000 sq km, which is over four percent of the total territory of BiH.

Bosnia and Herzegovina started demining activities in cooperation with the United Nations Mine Action Centre (UNMAC). Local authorities took over the responsibility for the demining operations in 1998 (Entity Mine Action Centres and BHMAC as a coordination body, consisted of entities employees).

In February 2002, a unique state-level BHMAC structure was created. The adopted law created a legal framework for demining operations in BiH. Demining operations are being conducted in accordance with the National Demining Plan, approved by the Council of Ministers. The Council of Ministers is the authority responsible for mine action implementation—to ensure the implementation of Demining Law through the Demining Commission in BiH. The following is an overview of the structure and operations of the BHMAC since the law was created.

BHMAC Mission and Vision

The mission of the BHMAC is to undertake all available measures and procedures in humanitarian demining operations, risk-area marking and education of the population of Bosnia and Herzegovina, in order to minimize the effect of mines in Bosnia and Herzegovina by 2010.

The BHMAC vision is to enable continuity, stability and long-term conduct of humanitarian demining operations, as well as other mine action in order to eventually remove the mines and UxO in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

BHMAC Activities and Operational Goals

BHMAC activities include the following:

- Surveying (general, technical, socio-economic, area reduction)
- Planning
- Prioritization
- Definition of tasks
- Inspection/quality control (QC)
- Certification and handover of cleared areas
- Central database maintenance
- Establishing technical, safety and training standards
- Accreditation
- Coordination of all mine-related operations and activities

Currently available demining capacity includes 86 mine detection dogs and 32 ground preparation machines. Approximately 2000 trained deminers, 42 governmental and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and commercial companies are also accredited in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Table 1 outlines the required level of humanitarian demining operations for 2003.

The following are BHMAC’s operational goals for 2003:

- Increase demining operations to the level of 20 sq km per year by the end of 2003.
- Refugee returns are the first category of priority.
- Undertake emergency demining operations on risk areas in the second and third categories of priority in order to reduce mine danger.
- Increase technical survey within demining operations.
- Increase the level of risk-area permanent marking based upon national ownership.
- Improve mine risk education in highrisk areas.
- Adopt new mine action standards at the state level, on the basis of the International Mine Action Standards (IMAS).
- Assist in conducting the Landmine Impact Survey (LIS).
- Participate in preparing and presenting projects for sustainable return to relevant donors, in cooperation with authorized ministries for refugees.

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From Puppets to Empowerment: The Bosnia and Herzegovina Genesis Project

Genesis Project is a local, non-governmental, non-profit, humanitarian organization established in June 1996 in Banja Luka, Republic of Srpska, BiH.

by Mrs. Dijana Pejic, Genesis Project

What is Genesis Project?

The main project objectives are the following:

- Interactive education of children through puppet show performances representing diverse educational topics (mine risk education, children’s rights, prevention of all forms of addictions, etc.).
- Education of children and youth about healthy lifestyles.
- Community strengthening with the purpose of informing the public on freedom of speech, democracy and fundamental human rights.
- Assistance to war-traumatized children and their families.
- Development and support through various coexistence initiatives throughout BiH.
- Building of democratic governance.

Since its establishment, the Genesis Project has mainly worked with the population in the rural areas of Republika Srpska by setting up libraries or organizing puppet shows for children. Although the vast majority of Genesis Project activities have been focused on the whole entity of Republika Srpska, we have recently started to be active in some parts of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina as well.

The Genesis Project staff includes local people and an international advisor on a voluntary basis. In 2003, the Genesis Project was funded by the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) BiH. The International Orthodox Christian Charity (IOCC) and the European Union in BiH. In recent years, the Genesis Project was funded by the European Union—Commission Brussels, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), the European Community Humanitarian Office (ECHO), the Open Society Fund-Soros, the International Rescue Committee (IRC), the IOCC, and the Salvation Army.

Genesis MRE Project Goals and Objectives

The Genesis MRE Project has the following project goals and development objectives:

- Reducing the negative impacts that mines and UXO have on children and their communities in Republika Srpska.
- Achieving a permanent influence on the development of mine threat awareness, within child and adult population groups.

Bosnia and Herzegovina is one of most heavily mine-strewn countries in Europe, and it is mostly anti-personnel mines left over after the 1992-95 war that pose the greatest threat for the whole country’s population. The Bosnia Herzegovina Mine Action Centre (BHMAC) estimates that there are still more than 650,000 mines and 670,000 pieces of UXO in BiH. To date, BHMAC has recorded more than 18,500 minefields.

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Genesis MRE Project Components

The Genesis MRE program consists of the following components:

- MRE interactive puppet show for children aged five to seven, performed in preschool education institutions.
- MRE interactive puppet show for children aged seven to 11, performed in primary schools.
- MRE discussions with adults on the topic of impacts of mines on their daily lives.
- MRE education of adolescents
through distribution of Geneva/ UNICEF MRE pamphlets, facilitated by school libraries/ libraries.

- Local communities’ capacity building (children and adults) for internal “fight” against mines.
- TV puppet shows for MRE of children throughout BiH.

MRE Puppet Shows for Children

The basic feature of our puppet show is interactive learning. Children are not just passive observers and receivers of information during the performance—instead, they are active participants. Through the puppet show performance, children easily acquire new information and transform the info into permanent and sound knowledge. Games, music, and verbal communication between the actor, puppet, and child contribute largely to the interaction.

Active Involvement of Schoolteachers in the Community/School-based Activity Against Mines and UXO

The Genesis Project has recognised the need to move from its role of “external” and the only Mine Risk Educator in the area toward the role of facilitator, mediator and facilitator of activities that will be implemented in the future by the local community. Therefore, we have initiated a co-operation with schoolteachers that will lead toward independent and self-sustainable continuation of community/ school-based MRE activities. To that end, the Genesis Project has introduced numerous activities as an important part of this project with the aim of empowering schoolteachers to provide good quality MRE for their pupils.

First, we insist on having the largest possible number of teachers present during our MRE puppet show performance in order to have them see the methodology of our work, especially the part related to the interactive workshop. It is our goal to introduce them to the methods/skills of using interactive education in their work with children.

After schoolteachers see for themselves how we involve children actively in our MRE or disability awareness workshops, we present them with a Teacher’s Manual—a booklet written by one of the Genesis project team members, a professor of psychology and pedagogy, Mrs. Dijana Pejcic, a “headteacher of the affected children,” future teachers and, frequently used miners.

- Interactive education workshops (children, together with actors, conducting “role plays” of different situations).
- Distribution of educational leaflets with basic MRE messages.

From November 1999 until June 2003, we have been implementing MRE projects in primary schools and preschool education institutions in Republika Srpska and Brcko District. During this time, the Genesis Project/UNICEF mobile puppet theatre performed various MRE puppet shows more than 630 times. These were seen by 60,000 children ages five to 12.

One of the goals of the show is not just to change children’s behaviour but also to try to develop and “train” their attitude toward and awareness of all kinds of danger that could come from mines and unexploded devices as well as to warn them about the consequences of their careless actions and thoughtlessness when faced with possible danger. Also, through the puppet shows, we hope to encourage a positive attitude toward children mine victims and physically disabled persons and to provide some guidelines on how they could assist the process of integration of physically disabled children into society and into various social groups.

The Genesis Project MRE puppet show consists of three parts:

- Puppet show (consists of two action/motivators—a “deminer” and an “adventurous boy-fisherman,” two puppets, and frequently used miners).
- Interactive education workshops (children, together with actors, conducting “role plays” of different situations).
- Distribution of educational leaflets with basic MRE messages.

Actively and in cooperation with UNICEF BH and BHMAC, on how to make this group more aware of danger from mines and UXO.

In close cooperation with UNICEF BH, we have produced an “MRE Brochure” for adults. In the course of making the brochure, we made sure that all information and advice is correct and understandable for people of different ages and education groups. We tried to make this written material attractive and interesting to the readers so that they continue using it even after they have participated in our MRE discussion sessions.

After that and with the assistance of the project team members, a psychologist, we developed a broad and flexible strategy of approach. The strategy is designed for adults and its goal is to make them fully aware of the influence of mines on their everyday life and activities. In the course of our discussion session with the adults, it was an excellent idea and a useful strategy to use maps of minefields. The maps were provided by BHMAC and allowed the participants to see that the mines and UXO are situated in the immediate vicinity of their own homes.

Our aim is also to develop, together with them, a joint plan of community action for the fight against mines. A general idea is that the Genesis Project acts as a liaison between the local community and governmental and non-governmental institutions in charge of demining and MRE activities. Within the framework of our activities, we have developed an instructional leaflet through which we are introducing the adults to the procedure that should take place during the period from the moment when an unregistered minefield is discovered, until the moment when the demining process can be considered completed. The leaflet also contains information on all problems and difficulties that the demining procedure encounters.

The generation of this instruction leaflet contains a list of institutions (including their contact telephone numbers) where citizens can report mines and UXO, as well as weapons they want to hand over. The leaflet also contains a list of priorities used while a certain location is being elected for the demolishing process. In all our MRE discussion sessions, we distribute both the leaflet and educational brochures to all participants and guests.

Need for Change/ Further Improvement

Thanks to our experience in the field to date, we have realized that there is a need for capacity building among children, teachers, and local community members—something which would ensure continuity in MRE. There is also a need to address the issue of disability awareness and to interact with survivors for assistance. Also, we fully recognize that Genesis Project, through its MRE programs, can only benefit from closer liaison with BHMAC. Therefore, we have decided to introduce a new approach through:

- Peer education
- Disability awareness and referral of mine survivors to assistance projects
- Active collaboration with teachers and with local communities
- Connection between local communities and BHMAC.

It is the aim of the Genesis Project to develop the peer-education methodologies with children ages six (1st grade) to 12 (6th grade) at the beginning of the new school year (2003/2004). The peer-education methodology is considered one of the most effective methods of transferring knowledge to children. In previously selected schools, the Genesis Project members will carry out a series of interactive workshops on diverse educational topics, such as MRE, children’s rights, healthy lifestyles (emphases on prevention of sexually transmitted diseases), and tolerance and coexistence. Through these activities we would generate a core group of future peer-educators.

In all targeted communities, the project will try to increase the level of MRE of children and community members and encourage them to adopt new, safer ways of behavior that will help them from potential physical injuries and death.

Conclusion

From puppets to empowerment, the Genesis Project has completed the following initiatives:

- Moving from its role of “external” and the only Mine Risk Educator toward the role of initiator, mediator, and creator of activities that will be implemented further by members of the local community.
- Cooperating with teachers for independent and self-sustainable continuation of MRE.
- Developing instruments/tools that will assist the teachers, pupils and members of local communities to perform MRE activities.

All graphics courtesy of the author.

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