UNICEF: A Leader in Mine Awareness

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UNICEF: A Leader in Mine Awareness

As the UN's lead agency on mine awareness/mine risk education (MRE), the United Nations Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) has done work in about 30 countries that suffer from the effects of landmines. Their programs help affected populations cope with the problems of landmines and give them the means to carry out their daily lives as safely as possible until their land can be cleared and returned to productive use.

by Nicole Kreger, MAIC

Introduction

UNICEF is the UN focal point for mine awareness. As such, its mission is to "provide appropriate guidance for all mine awareness programs, focusing closely with concerned partners..." In many cases, this means that UNICEF oversees or provides funding for projects that are actually implemented by other already established in-country organizations. While UNICEF's mine awareness responsibilities encompass all groups regardless of age, the organization tends to conduct most of its awareness programs in school-based settings and other locations in which children are the main target audience.

Examples of UNICEF Programs

The following highlights the country programs in which UNICEF has been instrumental over the past year. While the list provided here is not exhaustive, it is meant to emphasize the broad range of impact that UNICEF has on mine awareness around the world.

Albania

UNICEF supports an extensive mine awareness campaign in Afghanistan, which involves 12 districts in Kabul. Mine awareness messages are spread in mosques, on the radio and in schools, where they are being incorporated into the curriculum. Currently, UNICEF is supporting a "quick-impact" mine awareness campaign that targets 3,800 schools in Afghanistan. This program teaches students directly and also trains teachers how to reach students about the risks of landmines. With the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Assistance to Afghanistan (UNOCHA), UNICEF has developed a mine awareness country plan and has begun to implement it this year. Some of the objectives include building local capacities for sustainable community-based mine awareness programs, incorporating mine awareness into the health and education sectors, and outlining resources to meet the needs of those communities that are the most affected. UNICEF is providing support for radio programs on mine awareness and conducting a nationwide mine/UXO impact survey that includes information on mine awareness. Additionally, UNICEF is assisting local NGO METAs in developing train-the-trainers courses and materials. This information is then being used to teach trainers who will in turn instruct health workers, teachers and community volunteers. META and UNICEF are also developing a system to monitor and evaluate mine awareness in Afghanistan.

Angola

Partnersing with Norwegian Peoples Aid (NPA), UNICEF has trained 180 instructors on mine awareness in Angola. These people now in turn spread awareness to over 300,000 people. UNICEF has also funded an Angolan theater group to teach mine awareness through theatrical productions. This method of information dissemination is popular because it is entertaining to the audience and costs relatively little in comparison with other teaching methods.

Along with the Angolan National Institute for the Removal of Obstacles and Explosive Remnants (INARO), UNICEF has created mine awareness messages for television and radio. UNICEF is also focusing its efforts in

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Angola on getting the community involved by encouraging local leaders and teachers to disseminate the messages to others. UNICEF has educated almost 1,000 teachers using the train-the-trainer method. By February of 2002, over 140,000 students had received mine awareness education through this method. Continuing the trend of teaching mine awareness in schools, the Ministry of Education formally incorporated mine awareness into the national curriculum this year.

Bosnia-Herzegovina

UNICEF is implementing a three-year project targeting all Bosnian schoolchildren. This involves producing and distributing updated Mine Awareness Education Kits to all pre-schools, primary schools and secondary schools. UNICEF has also recruited an experienced advisor to assist the Bosnia-Herzegovina Mine Action Center (BHMAC) with mine awareness by providing technical assistance. This advisor will help the BHMAC develop a national mine risk education policy and be UNICEF’s focal mine awareness partner. Other projects to which UNICEF provides support include an interactive puppet theater in the Republika Srpska and mine awareness summer camps.

Cambodia

In late 2001, the Cambodian Mine Action Center (CMAC) began a pilot project supported by UNICEF and Handicap International Belgium to conduct community-based mine/UXO risk reduction. This phase ended in May after which an evaluation was conducted and recommendations were made for a second project. Additionally, UNICEF has been providing technical support to the Cambodia Mine Action/Victim Assistance Authorities’ (CMAM) newly appointed Mine Awareness Focal Point.

In a program targeting 30 districts, UNICEF has planned to teach mine awareness to children in the most affected areas in Cambodia. Known as the "Children in Post Conflict Project," this three-year program will allow for primary school teachers to provide children with mine risk education. The program aims to educate children both inside and outside of schools and hopes to incorporate community participation in mine action.

UNICEF also chairs a recently formed mine risk education working group that consists of all parties in Cambodia involved with such work. The goal is to fund this sector that would enable the implementation of advocacy, mine risk education, victim assistance and mine data collection.

UNICEF is also emphasizing the need for community involvement in spreading mine awareness in Bosnia. In order to increase involvement of community members, UNICEF’s program involves developing a community action kit with mine injury prevention tools for 20 local communities. Similarly, UNICEF is working on training select communities in its use. Community involvement like this is important, because without it, "there is little hope of maintaining these activities at a high enough level."

Burundi

UNICEF is the only organization in Burundi conducting mine awareness education. Thus far, they have trained 100 people and developed five educational posters. UNICEF is helping the government of Burundi build up its technical capacity for carrying out mine awareness in affected areas of the country. They have planned to develop Burundi-specific mine awareness materials and use a train-the-trainer approach to educate the population. Unfortunately, as of May, UNICEF stated in a press release that its planned effort for the program had been unsuccessful. They also stated, "Highlighting the current intensity of fighting in Burundi, UNICEF insists that it is urgent to fund this sector that would provide support to mine risk education activities in Guinea-Bissau.

One of UNICEF’s biggest roles in the country was in establishing a Mine Awareness Committee (COM), which has met bi-weekly since April 1999. The COM focuses its efforts on information, training and logistics, which has included the production of tools such as marking ropes and triangles, billboards, posters, labels, t-shirts and comic books. Plans for 2002–2003 include increasing community involvement in mine awareness, incorporating mine awareness into school curricula and disseminating mine awareness messages via radio and TV.

Kosovo

UNICEF helped fund Operation Normal Life (ONL), a project that helped "make all communities in Kosovo aware of the extent of mine action in their area." Its aim was to make up for the fact that mine awareness had previously been conducted independently of other mine action activities, which had often led to confusion among citizens about what work was being done to clear minefields. This project, managed by the MacC and involving most of the 20 mine awareness agencies in the country, concluded in April 2002.

Along with the Department of Education and Science (DoES), UNICEF ran a pilot program earlier this year called Life Skills. The program included mine awareness training and was scheduled to enter into the curricula of 100 schools and surrounding communities in September. The program will continue through September 2003.

Laos

The Laos National UXO project (UXO LAO) carries out mine/UXO risk education through its Community Awareness (CA) teams. Much of the funding for such awareness programs comes from UNICEF. Although UNICEF has not confirmed the extent of involvement in MRE based on the International Mine Action Standards by working with the UN Mine Action Advisory Team and Burundi Mine Action Office (EMAO).

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Working in conjunction with the National Demining Commission (NDO) and its Sub-Commission on Education, Prevention and Re-Integration, UNICEF has plans to establish national standards for mine awareness in Laos. This work is expected to be completed in 2002 and 2003. The organization is looking to improve coordination between clearance and education activities as well as better synchronization among mine action organizations in Nicaragua. The standards will encompass the following areas: planning, methodological approaches, community participation, material production, monitoring and impact evaluation. They are also developing curricular modules on MRE and create mine/UXO awareness materials.

Another of UNICEF’s ongoing projects in Nicaragua is the National Demining Commission (NDO) and its Sub-Commission on Education, Prevention and Re-Integration. UNICEF has plans to establish national standards for mine awareness in Laos. This work is expected to be completed in 2002 and 2003. The organizations hope this will lead to improved coordination between clearance and education activities as well as better synchronization among mine action organizations in Nicaragua. The standards will encompass the following areas: planning, methodological approaches, community participation, material production, monitoring and impact evaluation. They are also developing curricular modules on MRE and create mine/UXO awareness materials.

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mined-related activities both of the UN and NGOs. A number of organizations, including UNICEF, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) as well as local NGOs, have begun a comprehensive program for MRE and survivor assistance. The program focuses on training over 190,000 children in the region. This begins with a train-the-trainer course for 460 teachers, who will in turn pass this information on to children ranging in age from 6 to 17. These children will receive an MRE course plus booklets, posters, television programs, press, pencils, notebooks and drawing sets with relevant messages. This yearlong program will conclude at the end of 2002.

**Vietnam**

UNICEF Vietnam’s mine awareness activities have had a significant and wide-reaching impact on the population’s level of awareness, but more importantly, they hope to develop “long-term, sustainable approaches to mine action.” To accomplish this, UNICEF proposed a survey to be carried out in Quang Tri province that will determine the level of mine-safety knowledge among local people. Through this survey, UNICEF will be able to determine what messages they should send to the population and who the target audience should be. UNICEF plans to carry out the survey by the end of 2002, and a national MRE media campaign will follow including: print ads, radio spots and TV commercials. Most messages will be aimed primarily at children.

UNICEF Vietnam, with the help of the Ministry of Education and Training, has also introduced a school-based mine/ Unexploded Ordnance (UXO) education at schools in 15 provinces incorporating MRE messages into their curriculum. Additionally, UNICEF is supporting child-to-child learning activities that the organization hopes will bring the messages to children out of school as well as other members of the community.

**International Guidelines**

Due to widespread belief that mine awareness programs were insufficiently structured, UNICEF’s Office of Emergency Programs began developing the International Guidelines for Landmine and Unexploded Ordnance Awareness Education. The Guidelines, released in 1999, were created “in order to promote the effective planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of mine awareness programs.” They are designed as a reference for people involved in mine awareness.

The Guidelines, taking into account that mine awareness is “a process that encourages populations to become involved rather than...an imposed solution,” aims to apply a fully integrated approach to mine action. This means making sure that mine clearance and mine awareness operate in conjunction instead of separately, as they have in the past. Issues are addressed in four sections, namely:

- **Feasibility Study**
- **Needs Assessment**
- **Program Planning**
- **Monitoring and Evaluation**

UNICEF intended the Guidelines to be an overview of issues that are common to mine/UXO awareness, primarily for policy makers and donors. The publication has been endorsed by the Ottawa Treaty States Parties’ Standing Committee on Victim Assistance, Socio-economic Reintegration and Mine Awareness and translated into French and Spanish for widespread dissemination.

**Conclusion**

UNICEF has proven from its past and current activities to be a world leader in bringing mine awareness to populations in mine-affected areas. The programs listed above are only a few examples of how UNICEF has helped prevent mine incidents. Continuing in this tradition, UNICEF will be releasing some publications in the next few months about mine awareness programs. The first is a new portfolio of their programs with updates from the past few months, which will be released by the end of November. The second is a “Lessons Learned” publication that will include information gained from the experiences of people involved in mine awareness programs. UNICEF hopes to release this document by January 2003.