

Mine Risk Education in Vietnam

Catholic Relief Services (CRS) has focused their recent efforts on successfully implementing mine risk education (MRE) programs in Vietnam that have proven to increase knowledge and awareness about landmines and explosive remnants of war (ERW). This teacher and student MRE training prevents mine/ERW incidents in high-risk areas of Vietnam.

by Ta Thi Hai Yen [Catholic Relief Services]



An MRE lesson at Tan Hop primary school, Huang Hoa district, Quang Tri province, Vietnam.
All photos courtesy of Catholic Relief Services.

Catholic Relief Services (CRS) has worked in Vietnam since 1994. The humanitarian agency's programming in Vietnam focuses on two areas—education and health/HIV—and aims to help disadvantaged people, including individuals with disabilities and those living with HIV. CRS has also launched new programs in the areas of climate change and disaster risk reduction. Projects managed by CRS are underway in 11 provinces spread across Vietnam in the northern, central and southern regions. Currently there are 20 implementing partners working with CRS, including two ministries at the national governmental level, nongovernmental (NGO) and civil society organizations.

For over a decade, CRS has worked to reduce the risk of injury and death from landmines and unexploded ordnance (UXO) in the high-risk communities of Quang Tri, Quang Binh and Quang Nam provinces. CRS developed a mine risk education (MRE) curriculum for grades one through five, now approved and widely used by the three provincial Departments of Education and Training (DOET). To date, CRS has

trained more than 55,000 children and 79,000 teachers, parents and community members on MRE, contributing to declining UXO/mine casualties in targeted areas.

Through the project, Responding to Social and Economic Effects of Landmine/UXO in Vietnam: Reducing Landmine/UXO Risks for Children and Communities and High Risk Areas, CRS integrated MRE within schools' compulsory curriculum in high-risk provinces. Funded by the Office of Weapons Removal and Abatement in the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Political-Military Affairs (PM/WRA), CRS worked to better equip communities to support mine/ERW survivors and other persons with disabilities. The project employed the following strategies to achieve these aims:

- CRS piloted, together with DOET, the MRE Integration Guidelines (MREIG) in 44 schools. These provincial DOETs subsequently institutionalized MRE in their schools.
- CRS developed nine volunteer networks in the three targeted provinces, equipping them to identify needs of survivors and link them to services; trained survivors on improved livestock practices; engaged the local authorities and communities to identify survivors for livelihood training; and provided a forum for survivors to share their challenges and life stories with others in their communities.
- CRS involved landmine survivors in community awareness initiatives to improve their participation in project activities and involvement in their communities.

Methodology

In the first 10 years of the program (2000–2010), CRS and its partners developed a set of five MRE textbooks for students in grades one through five and a set of five MRE guidebooks for primary school teachers.¹ During the project implementation

between 2010–2014, CRS and its partners developed MRE integration guidelines for primary school teachers, enabling MRE contents to be integrated with compulsory coursework in primary schools. This approach allows CRS and its partners to increase distribution of MRE across the provinces.

Recognizing the important role primary teachers play in transferring MRE messages, trainings were designed and implemented in two different ways:

- Delivering five stand-alone MRE lessons for five weeks
- Integrating MRE into compulsory subjects throughout the school year

In March 2013, 366 primary school teachers attended nine three-day MRE training courses to present five teacher guide-books and five student textbooks. The materials included both theory and practice through active teaching methodologies such as group discussion, role play and storytelling. As a result of the training, 90 percent of teachers felt confident to teach students using the CRS MRE materials.

For the integrated MRE lessons, three three-day trainings were conducted for 182 key teachers in Quang Binh and Quang Tri from May to June 2012 and in Quang Nam in September 2013. Following the training, 182 teachers conducted replication trainings for an additional 965 teachers in their schools. The trainings focused on the following key principles:

- MRE integration into curriculum
- MRE integration methods
- Practical teaching tips for MRE integration lessons
- Feedback and comments after practicing MRE integrated lessons

Nearly half of the training was allocated to practicing the activity-based teaching methodology. As a result, around 90 percent of key teachers (those who are selected by DOET based on certain criteria) expressed their confidence in implementing replication training at 44 schools in the three provinces. After replication training, key teachers developed follow-up plans to further support peer teachers in implementing MRE the following school year. Key teachers provided support to their peer teachers on a monthly basis through class observation and teachers' meetings in order to monitor the integration of MRE and document behavioral changes in students.

Outcomes

The project trained 60 Parents' Association members and 366 primary school teachers. In addition, 4,867 primary school children in 15 schools were taught MRE in separate lessons, while 14,614 other primary students in 44 schools were taught MRE through integration in their compulsory, base curriculum. Teaching activities included children's performances



Tan Hop primary school children participate in an MRE lesson. Huong Hoa district, Quang Tri province, Vietnam.

of dramas and story-telling, as well as interactive games and surveys with participants relating to MRE. Pre- and post-tests among the targeted primary school children indicated that unexploded ordnance (UXO) and accident prevention comprehension levels increased among students in Quang Binh province from 34 to 74 percent; 28 to 64 percent in Quang Tri; and 42 to 71 percent in Quang Nam. In addition, familiarity with the appearance of UXO and landmines, their negative effects, and how to avoid accidents increased from 31 to 70 percent.²

Additionally, over 10,000 parents and community members participated in school events organized by the project, leading to changes in community attitudes and behavior. Scrap metal (including UXO) collectors and traders demonstrated safe behaviors such as storing their scrap metal far from their house, not taking their children into the forests to collect scrap metal, and sharing what they learn from project events with other scrap metal collectors. No deaths or injuries were reported in the targeted districts.

The Volunteers' Network (VN) support, a group that connects landmine survivors to NGOs and social organizations for support, worked to ensure that 160 UXO survivors were successfully directed to appropriate medical services. Additionally, VN successfully linked survivors' families with the Department of Agriculture in Quang Binh and Quang Tri, which provided livelihood trainings to the survivors.

Challenges

Securing partner ownership and buy-in for the new project areas was initially a challenge since partners were not fully convinced that the project could help children and communities protect themselves from UXO/mine accidents; this slowed the project's startup. To address the challenge, CRS adjusted

the activity schedule and brought these partners to previous project sites. This gave them a chance to interview primary school principals, students, parents and community members on their perspectives about the project's impact on the community. CRS staff also accompanied them during implementation to be able to provide immediate answers to partners' questions.

In addition, teacher turnover created a challenge as those who had the MRE training phased out and new teachers were not equipped with the skills to conduct the lessons in their classes. Partners agreed that MRE-trained teachers are responsible for training new teachers as well as providing frequent follow-up support. In addition, school principals now ensure that new teachers are fully equipped with MRE knowledge and teaching methods through routine collaboration with trained teachers.

Impact

According to provincial DOET partners' reports and the five-year report from Clear Path International Vietnam, there have not been any reported UXO/mine accidents in project areas, including the districts of Quang Ninh, Quang

Trach, and Dong Hoi in Quang Binh province; the Hai Lang and Quang Tri districts in Quang Tri province; and Que Son district in Quang Nam province. The project evaluation report conducted in February 2014 also provided evidence that children practice safe behaviors.² These results reinforce the theory that MRE reduces the number of UXO/mine accidents.

Scale and sustainability

DOET has endorsed the MREIG to be used by all primary schools in affected provinces. The Quang Binh DOET has expanded the program to non-targeted areas in the province, and has committed to ensuring that all elementary students in the province will study MRE after the project's completion. MREIG has also been introduced to Binh Dinh, Kon Tom, Nghe An, Quang Ngai and Thua Thien Hue provinces in central Vietnam. CRS' MRE textbooks have been adopted up by other stakeholders in their projects, such as UNICEF. Additionally, CRS is replicating its Vietnam MRE model in Burma and Laos with local government and NGO partners. ©

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