

Journal of Conventional Weapons Destruction

Volume 18
Issue 3 *The Journal of ERW and Mine Action*

Article 13

November 2014

GICHD Linguistic Outreach Programs

Faiz Paktian

Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining (GICHD)

Follow this and additional works at: <https://commons.lib.jmu.edu/cisr-journal>



Part of the [Other Public Affairs, Public Policy and Public Administration Commons](#), and the [Peace and Conflict Studies Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Paktian, Faiz (2014) "GICHD Linguistic Outreach Programs," *The Journal of ERW and Mine Action* : Vol. 18 : Iss. 3 , Article 13.

Available at: <https://commons.lib.jmu.edu/cisr-journal/vol18/iss3/13>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Center for International Stabilization and Recovery at JMU Scholarly Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Journal of Conventional Weapons Destruction by an authorized editor of JMU Scholarly Commons. For more information, please contact dc_admin@jmu.edu.

GICHD Linguistic Outreach Programs

The Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining (GICHD) introduced linguistic outreach programs (LOP) to provide mine action training and information in multiple languages. The LOP also promote communication between countries and organize regional workshops and meetings. By providing non-English training and information exchange opportunities, GICHD improved outreach and broadened potential beneficiaries, as well as strengthened mine action centers and organizations worldwide.

by Faiz Paktian [Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining]



Arabic linguistic outreach programs environmental impact workshop in Kuwait.
All photos courtesy of GICHD.

The importance of languages for international organizations in today's business climate is indisputable. As an international organization, GICHD's objectives are to improve global clarity on explosive hazards and to enhance the capacities and performance of national authorities in states affected by landmines and explosive remnants of war (ERW). Can this be accomplished by using only English as a communication medium whereas a majority of mine- and ERW-affected states communicate in other languages?

To effectively reach out to different segments of the mine action community, the GICHD, in partnership with national authorities, regional and international organizations, initiated the linguistic outreach programs (LOP) in Arabic, French, Persian (Farsi/Dari) and Russian. The program began in 2006 with the French-language outreach program, followed by programs in Arabic (2012), Persian (2013) and Russian (2014). In 2011, French LOP coordination and management was handed over to the *Centre de Perfectionnement aux Actions post-confliktuelles de Déminage et de Dépollution* (CPADD) in Benin.

Goals

LOP goals vary and encompass what stakeholders in the respective language identify as their priorities. The overall goal is to promote best practices in the major languages spoken within the mine action community. Another goal is to enhance regional cooperation among affected states by sharing information and exchanging experiences. Moreover, the provision of advisory services and specialized training in a respective language permits different national mine action authorities and their national and international partners to learn from training sessions and develop capacity in all aspects of mine action, including strategic, operational, quality and information management.

Approach

The LOPs plan and implement activities in close consultation and partnership with mine-affected states as well as regional and international organizations. As a facilitator, GICHD designs and executes these activities in a gender-sensitive manner to help

states meet operational and capacity-development objectives. GICHD also works closely with donors, national governments and regional institutions to provide required resources in order to meet these needs. After three to five years, GICHD entrusts the program to a well-established regional mine action entity. Existing GICHD-staff manage and implement LOPs, taking into account GICHD staff's linguistic competencies. When programs require more resources, GICHD recruits additional personnel. Where possible, GICHD engages with potential donors in their respective languages to seek funding or in-kind contributions for the relevant linguistic program.

Achievements

The following are a few examples of achievements in linguistic outreach initiatives:

- **Bibliomines.** As a result of the collective effort by all stakeholders in the French-speaking community, the French LOP established an impressive online mine action library. In this digital library, one can find all necessary documents for mine action, including translation of the International Mine Action Standards (IMAS) and the associated Technical Notes.¹ The Arabic-speaking community also emphasized the need for an online platform to share information, which resulted in the establishment of an Arabic website for mine action.² The Egyptian Mine Action Centre established the Arabic LOP website, while Arabic LOP partners contribute materials. GICHD manages the process.
- **Workshop on national standards in Tajikistan.** Another achievement in the linguistic approach was the organization of the first regional workshop in Farsi/Dari, the language of Persians, in Dushanbe, Tajikistan, in February 2013. GICHD organized the workshop in partnership with the Mine Action Coordination Centre of Afghanistan (MACCA), Islamic Republic of Iran Mine Action Center and Tajikistan Mine Action Centre, with the support of the U.N. Development Programme (UNDP) and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe. The workshop gathered experts, operators, national authorities and other key mine action actors from three mine-affected countries that share the same language. The aim was to exchange information, review and suggest changes to the national mine action standards of Tajikistan, and to discuss future regional cooperation. The event offered the management of the three mine action programs an opportunity to learn from each other's experiences. Participants discussed joint activities such as regional training, exchange visits, cross-border risk reduction operations and information sharing. An interesting outcome of this workshop was the revision of the Tajik Mine Action Standards with support from MACCA.
- **Workshop on the environmental impact of mine action in Kuwait.** In December 2013, GICHD, the Kuwait Institute for Scientific Research and the Kuwait National Focal Point organized a three-day workshop in Kuwait. The event gathered more than 80 participants from a dozen Arabic-speaking countries, along with experts from international organizations, donor countries, nongovernmental organizations, research centers, militaries and commercial operators to discuss the environmental impact of landmine/ERW contamination and mine-clearance operations. The workshop marked a significant step toward broadening participants' understanding and awareness of the mine/ERW impact on ecosystems and human health. Moreover, the event facilitated discussion on environmentally safe demining operations and reversal of environmental damage. A report of the event is available in Arabic and English on the GICHD and Arabic LOP websites. Although the workshop's focus was regional, conclusions and recommendations are highly relevant to the global mine action community.
- **Mine action terminology in Arabic.** Stakeholders in the Arabic LOP highlighted the need for a standard terminology of mine action terms and definitions in Arabic. As a result, GICHD partnered with the Lebanon Mine Action Centre and UNDP Lebanon to organize a regional workshop with participants from 10 Arabic-speaking countries and from relevant stakeholders held in Beirut, Lebanon, in February 2014. This three-day workshop debated the meaning of previously disputed terms and definitions that had hindered the translation of documents and standards among the Arabic speaking community, and came up with an agreed-upon list of terms and definitions usable for mine action. Since then, many of the national and international documents were translated or updated, including IMAS. Another workshop outcome was the establishment of a regional board consisting of representatives from each country that will review and revise Arabic translations as needed.

Recommendations

It is essential for mine action organizations to promote their services and products in local languages. Many quali-

fied individuals holding important roles in national programs are unable to participate in training courses conducted in English. Mine action training and advisory services conducted in local languages enable a greater number of individuals to benefit from educational and exchange opportunities.

Regional events in local languages have a greater effect on raising subject-matter awareness, particularly when events include case studies from programs in the region that are delivered in the local language by a representative of the respective program. Beneficiaries of such events extend beyond mine action personnel within the affected states to military personnel and other humanitarian practitioners in non-affected states who engage in peacekeeping or humanitarian assistance operations.

Mine action is an increasingly demanding process, involving evidence-based decision-making; proper land classification and subsequent application of the land-release method; and quality, safety and environmental requirements. National authorities need to adopt improved policies and procedures to handle landmines/ERW safely and efficiently. Similarly, they need to build national capacity and keep their

staff up-to-date on mine action issues and topics to better satisfy their local and international partners and donors. In this context, linguistic approaches and regional cooperation prove very effective.

Regional activities save costs and deliver better quality results, as illustrated in the IMAS translation process. Most national programs invest in the translation of IMAS and make it available for their own program's use. When such documents are translated regionally in a consultative manner, quality of translation increases indisputably; when shared on a regional platform, they reduce costs and save time and effort at the national level.

Moreover, such initiatives boost regional cooperation and South-South cooperation.³ These collaborations benefit individuals, programs and countries in the region by understanding each other's needs and strengths, and by sharing experiences and support. Good examples include training quality-assurance officers for the Egyptian demining teams by officers of the National Committee for Demining and Rehabilitation in Jordan, and the review and revision of the national standards for Tajikistan by MACCA colleagues. ©

See endnotes page 66



Faiz Paktian is assistant director and head of the Standards and Linguistic Outreach Programmes Division for GICHD. He has been involved in humanitarian mine action for the past 24 years in a variety of positions in the field and at the senior-management level. He has worked for nongovernmental organizations, international organizations and the U.N. in several war-affected countries. Paktian holds a bachelor's and master's degree in mechanical engineering and a master's degree in business and administration.

Faiz Paktian
Assistant Director and Head
Standards and Linguistic
Outreach Division
GICHD
P.O. Box 1300
Geneva, CH-1211 / Switzerland
Tel: +41 22 906 16 87
Fax: +41 22 906 16 90
Email: f.paktian@gichd.org
Website: <http://gichd.org>



Arabic linguistic outreach programs terminology workshop in Lebanon.