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Handicap International's Risk Education Challenges

Handicap International advocates an integrated approach to mine/explosive remnants of war education that on one hand involves participants ranging from actors in the field to national and international policymakers, and on the other hand includes all pillars of mine action. This article examines some prominent challenges facing these practitioners.

by Valentina Crini [Consultant]

In February 2011, I monitored a mine and explosive remnants of war risk education session at a primary school in Ziguinchor, in the Casamance area of Senegal. During an awareness-raising session in class performed by Handicap International's local partner, *Association Sénégalaise des Victimes des Mines* (Senegalese Association for Mine Victims), one of the students reported that he saw a suspicious object in the forest while collecting wood for his family. ASVM's risk education agents promptly informed the Senegalese National Centre for Mine Action, which then phoned HI's chief of operations. The suspected dangerous item was checked the same day and found not to be dangerous.

This is an example of collaboration between mine action actors at local levels and the community based reporting system technique, which is the clear result of an integrated approach by various mine action stakeholders in Casamance, such as HI, the national mine action center and ASVM, a local nongovernmental organization supported by HI. While

the suspected dangerous item was not a mine or ERW, this story highlights how well the reporting mechanism worked. Similarly, HI's integrated approach continues successfully at the field level in many countries. HI has a holistic response to mine/ERW contamination, linking interventions in advocacy, victim assistance, clearance and risk education to achieve positive impacts on affected populations.

Risk Education Challenges

While the integrated approach has been theorized and widely applied, current challenges in the mine risk education sector are still not properly discussed at international and national levels. As a result, risk education practitioners and mine action actors also do not address them appropriately.

Completion deadlines. As is widely known, several countries, including Mozambique and Uganda, are approaching the end of their mine action activities, while others are already mine free, such as Malawi, Nigeria and Rwanda. Despite this triumph, additional questions often remain: How will the affected populations and national and local authorities face the residual risks? What precautions will reduce the risks of potential accidents?

HI is working on this issue in Uganda. HI's risk education/community liaison activities ended in conjunction with the completion of mine clearance in July 2012. HI coordinated a handover of its responsibilities to Ugandan national and local authorities, including

- Monitoring and supporting established, trained and equipped Community Focal Points to continue the community based reporting system and risk education sessions¹
- Managing the free hotline the population uses to report suspicious objects or mine/ERW accidents
- Consolidating a local referral system linked to the Uganda Mine Action Centre



Handicap International's partner risk education session in Sebdou, Algeria, 2010.
Photo courtesy of Marco Pesce.

In the final stages of its engagement in Uganda, HI will assist UMAC as much as possible in these tasks.

Other questions often arise as countries near completion of mine clearance: What initiatives do national and local authorities identify and plan? How can international NGOs support them? International standards for residual clearance and related activities after a country is mine-impact free have yet to be established.

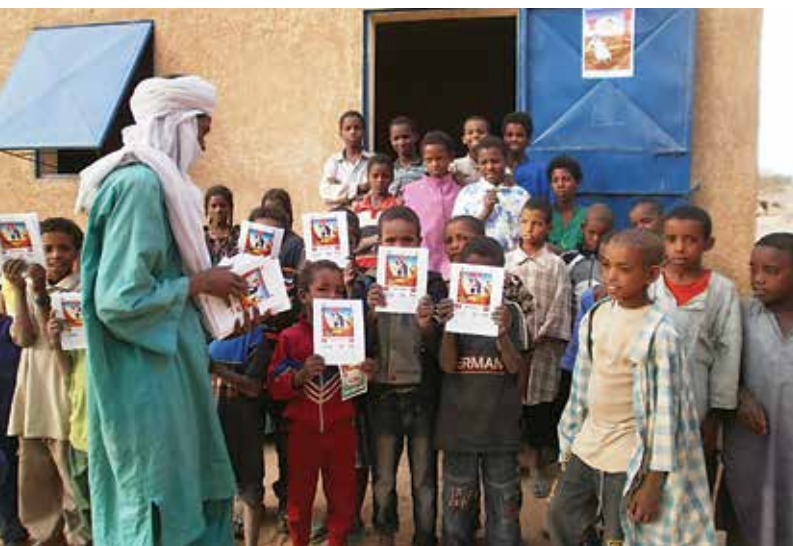
Sustainable livelihood alternatives for risk reduction and management. Following the results of several Knowledge, Attitudes and Practices surveys implemented by HI from 2007–2012 in Afghanistan, Iraq, Laos, Senegal and Uganda, the main gaps largely concern the behaviors of mine/ERW affected people. After years of exposure to mine/ERW risk education sessions, the level of knowledge and awareness of at-risk and risk-taking groups improved. However, economic and social needs still pose real obstacles to the application of safe behaviors, creating a dangerously high likelihood of munitions incidents. Those working in mine action need to better address this particular point, not only through improved coordination with development actors, but also with risk-education/community liaison meetings where affected communities participate in identifying and implementing alternative solutions for serious risk reduction in the medium- to long-term future.

One such example is HI's project to link mine action and development in Bosnia and Herzegovina, called Participa-

tory Mine Action and Development in Stolac and Berkovici municipalities. Launched in 2007 and financed by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation and more recently by the *Direction de la Coopération Internationale Principauté de Monaco* (Directorate of the International Cooperation, Principality of Monaco), this project promoted socioeconomic development by working with local communities to identify their priorities using a systematic and participatory approach, which directly involves them in decision-making. In total, 16 communities benefited from the project activities, which largely focused on promoting agriculture, tourism, community infrastructure, irrigation and social inclusion. Where mine/ERW contamination was identified as a development constraint, program funding was allocated to mine action.

Risk education rapid response during emergencies. NGOs have improved their capacity and planning for quick response in the last few years, as per the recent interventions in Gaza, Libya and Mali where the mine action actors successfully integrated emergency relief efforts. However, mine action organizations still face issues that require better coordination, strategic solutions and more discussions between relevant risk education actors, including

- Lack of guaranteed access to highly unstable contaminated zones
- Understanding of the national government's role
- Implementation of proper data collection processes in conflict zones



Risk education school in Niger.
Photo courtesy of the author.



A risk education session in Sebdou, Algeria, 2010. Photo courtesy of Marco Pesce.

- Rapid deployment of human resources and partner organizations
- Relationship and coordination with armed violence reduction activities
- Rapid adaptation and contextualization of awareness-raising materials for mass distribution

To facilitate a quick response, HI emplaced guidelines and a tool kit for its project managers and field staff. This tool kit includes guidelines, a sample poster and leaflet, and notebook for children, as well as a CD-ROM of the information. The guidelines explain in which context to intervene, for whom, for how long and through which communication channels information should be disseminated. The tool kit provides practical and straightforward support to any HI project manager for implementing risk education activities in a timely and efficient manner during an emergency phase, taking into consideration the different emergency contexts (for example, new contamination, a natural disaster or the stabilization of a long-term conflict). The tool kit is created for interventions in four main geographical areas of the world (two areas in Africa, one in Eastern Europe and one in Southeast Asia), where emergencies are likely to oc-

cur. These emergencies consist of any types of landmine/ERW related catastrophes that could pose a threat to the population.

The tool kit also includes a sample of a radio and television advertisement script, a field-test questionnaire and simplified data-collection forms. The goal is making a base of awareness-raising materials easily and rapidly adaptable to various countries and emergency contexts. The tool kit was successfully tested in HI emergency projects in Pakistan and Libya, and it helped improve HI's risk education rapid-response capacity.

Monitoring and evaluation of risk education interventions. Improved and adapted Knowledge, Attitude and Practice surveys and impact assessments have advanced impact monitoring methodologies and tools. However, much remains to be done and agreed upon when evaluating the long-term effects of these activities. NGOs and U.N. agencies created and consolidated their monitoring and evaluation processes for risk education, but no standards and common methods or tools were discussed or developed in a participatory and systematic way. The amended *Guide for the Application of International Mine Action Standards* and the *Landmine Casualty Data: Best Practices Guidebook* contain

chapters on the matter, but they mostly set minimum principles, give general suggestions and assign responsibilities among stakeholders.^{3,4} A shared practical guideline for practitioners on how to implement monitoring and evaluation activities in the most efficient way is missing. This guideline should consider the specificities of MRE activities and their links with other mine action, emergency and development interventions. Risk education can, in fact, be implemented in several different country contexts, and we should have an agreed way of evaluating progress and results for each. Depending on the local and national needs, education initiatives and activities are integrated differently, all of which require different evaluation monitoring tools and procedures. Systemizing the different procedures needed for the various situations is necessary to objectively evaluate the results.

“Effective and locally-owned MRE is not sufficient to encourage them [local residents] to stop high risk behaviors. As a result, there is increasing recognition of the need for new approaches to reducing risk. These should be linked to livelihood assistance and enterprise development opportunities, to discourage risk-takers and provide them with other livelihoods.”

~GICHD

Conclusion

All of these challenges, and more, should be better discussed and appropriately analyzed at international and national levels. Potential solutions can be envisaged and evaluated for maximizing the impact of risk education interventions by each stakeholder. A formal space for practitioners to exchange ideas, good practices and lessons learned about risk education activities is needed.

Risk education practitioners meet informally during the Member State Parties conferences, during their missions in the field and by exchanging information through email when possible. However, this is clearly not enough. Practitioners need a formal space where they can analyze situations, discuss methodologies and opinions, compare practices, and share lessons learned to benefit each and every organization and individual working in the sector and to maximize the efficiency and effectiveness of all interventions in the field, for the sake of beneficiaries. 🌐

This article is dedicated to the loving memory of Rachid Dahmani, HI's key member of the Risk Education/Victim Assistance project team in Algeria, who died in 2011.



Valentina Crini was Handicap International's risk education/community liaison technical advisor and is now a consultant with 10 years' experience in the mine action sector, particularly in coordinating, managing, evaluating and supporting risk education programs and knowledge, attitude and practice surveys worldwide. Crini has a Master I Level in political science and a Master II Level in peacekeeping and security studies. She has worked in risk education with international NGOs and with UNICEF as a consultant in Afghanistan, Algeria, Angola, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Chad, Lebanon, Niger, Senegal, Tajikistan and Pakistan.

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HI data collection in Kurdistan. Photo courtesy of the author.