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Mine-risk Education in Nepal, 2009

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Ban Landmines Campaign Nepal

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The approach of linking funding to progress toward an AP mine ban was not unanimously accepted. The Tamil Rehabilitation Organisation, which operated humanitarian-demining teams in LTTE-controlled areas, expressed that the pressure placed on parties involved in the conflict to make mine-ban commitments amounted to "politicization" of mine-action funding, and that it led to very short-term funding and was problematic for agencies carrying out the work.26

During the early years of the cease-fire, there were a number of national and international actors involved in attempts to convince the parties to move toward a ban on the use of AP mines. However, progress was limited, the government linked accession to the AP Mine Ban Convention to reaching an agreement with the LTTE. There was no public clarification by government officials of the importance of mine-action agencies in LTTE-controlled areas— including at that time the Tamil Rehabilitation Organisation, which was working under the coordination of the National Steering Committee for Mine Action—there was no public clarification by government officials of the important humanitarian role played by the mine-clearance agencies.

Conclusion
The escalation of conflict in Sri Lanka profoundly affected mine action. Some of the challenges were predictable, though others could not have been foreseen. To ensure that they remain effective, mine-action agencies and donors working in the context of ongoing conflict must be able to carefully monitor and assess developments, and respond quickly and appropriately to new challenges as, and when, they emerge. Similarly, affected states must ensure that, even in the midst of conflict, they strive to cultivate an environment conducive to mine action. However, since the collapse of the LTTE in May 2009, recent efforts have been made to improve mine action. Organizations including UNICEF, U.N. Development Programme, Mines Advisory Group and Handicap International are conducting mine action in Sri Lanka, with numerous other projects taking place.27,28

See Endnotes, Page 77

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Despite the signing of a 2006 peace agreement between the Nepalese government and the Maoists, Nepal’s mine clearance remains a work in progress due to the after-effects of its decade-long Maoist conflict and the emergence of small, armed groups. Ban Landmines Campaign Nepal (NCBL) is at the forefront of the country’s mine-risk-education efforts. This article examines NCBL’s MRE program objectives, expectations, methods, and achievements, as well as the many challenges it faces.

by Purna Shova Chitrakar | Ban Landmines Campaign Nepal |
No progress has been made on collecting the data and destroying the mines and IEDs planted by the Maoists. The mines and IEDs from the conflict continue to injure, maim and kill the civilian population. Furthermore, the Maoist breakaway factions and the emerging armed groups in the Terai (the stretch of foothills at the base of the Himalayas) exacerbated the situation with their use of explosives, resulting in 182 incidents within 28 districts in 2008. That year, media reports and information available to NCBL indicated 330 civilians were injured in Nepal, which included 240 men, 46 women and 44 children. Eighteen people died from their injuries. From January to June 2009, there were 96 civilian victims: 46 men, 25 women and 25 children. Among them, 11 died.

When the CPA was signed, elections for the Nepalese Constituent Assembly were held. A functioning interim government formed, and the top leader of the Communist Party of Nepal became the prime minister. However, the government has yet to encourage development and provide stability within the country. The decade-long armed conflict encouraged various groups, divided by caste, race and language, to continue fighting. Small, armed groups have emerged in the Terai and hills of Nepal, fueling violence and further destabilizing the region.

NCBL MRE Program

Despite the challenging political situation, from January to March 2009, NCBL conducted mine-risk education in 10 districts in the hills and Terai with the objective of protecting people’s lives and property from mines and other explosives. NCBL also ran emergency MRE in two additional districts, including Bardiya and Rautahat, which suffered losses from explosions of mines and other explosive remnants of war. The districts were selected based on the number of explosions and casualties within each district. Ten facilitators were selected to run the MRE program, and the International Committee of the Red Cross, NCBL, Nepal Army and UNICEF implemented the introductory training. In addition, NCBL published a brochure and distributed 100,000 copies of MRE literature during the introductory program. NCBL started providing MRE in 2003 and has conducted education programs in 39 districts.

Objectives of the MRE program included the following:

- Conduct MRE in schools and motivate pupils to share their knowledge with their families and communities
- Encourage security forces, local government and relevant authorities to conduct MRE around security posts and high-risk areas to protect civilians
- Publish and distribute MRE materials
- NCBL expected the following from the MRE program in 2009:
  - Civilians from 10 districts would participate in MRE
  - Fifty thousand civilians (including schoolchildren and teachers) from 12 districts would receive MRE
  - NCBL’s published materials would reach 50,000 local people
  - The government and security forces would be encouraged to conduct MRE

NCBL had planned to run MRE in 10 districts, but it added the Rautahat and Bardiya districts, as they had substantial mine-contamination threats for the residents. Altogether, 32,831 people, including teachers, students, farmers, security personnel, journalists and intellectuals, participated in and benefited from the program.

NCBL applied various learning techniques to civilians in these districts. Methods of mine-risk education included:

- Lectures
- Group discussions
- Door-to-door visits
- Media mobilization: local, regional, and national print and broadcast media
- Discussions about MRE pictures
- Question-and-answer sessions
- MRE charts
- Speeches by teachers

Program Achievements

NCBL’s MRE program accomplished several objectives, grouped into six categories of achievement, explained below.

Success in numbers. An overwhelming 32,911 students and teachers in 160 schools and 40 communities in 12 districts benefited from the MRE program, namely Bardiya, Bardia, Dang, Doti, Jajarkot, Panchthar, Parsa, Bara, Ramechhap, Rautahat, Saptari, Siraha and Sunauli. The program taught MRE participants to recognize and not tamper with suspicious objects, avoid suspected hazardous areas and inform the authorities about possible minefields.

Cooperation. The MRE program was a joint effort between the Nepal Army, International Committee of the Red Cross, and UNICEF; social workers, journalists, human-rights activists, students, teachers, members of school-management committees and rural women from different districts.

Political pressure. The MRE program put pressure on the government to remove mines and to sign the Anti-personnel Mine Ban Convention.

Keeping at-risk youths safe. The Maoists engaged children and youths in war and in the making of explosives. Even after the guns fell silent, the children and youths maintained an interest in bombs. The MRE program sensitized the youths to the risks associated with mines and other explosive devices.

Expanded influence. The MRE program strengthened the anti-mine campaign and expanded the network of NCBL.

Community involvement. The program received suggestions from the local community, teachers and students on conducting and improving MRE. Additional achievements included:

- Conducted MRE in two additional districts.
- Distributed more than 100,000 copies of previously printed publications.

- Expanded NCBL’s impact and outreach in additional districts.
- Established the ability to organize an efficient response to landmine/ERW incidents affecting the Madhesi people. In this case, NCBL organized a rally of 150 women, eliciting a positive reaction from the local community.

Monitoring and Evaluation Meeting

A monitoring and evaluation meeting was organized to assess the work carried out by the facilitators in the different districts. They discussed the following agenda items during the meeting:

- Objectives, methodologies and achievements
- Experiences from the different districts
- Further difficulties in carrying out MRE

Suggestions. Various suggestions were received during the evaluation. NCBL believes these suggestions will be helpful in planning and implementing future MRE:

- Organize district-level seminars. Such seminars would support the mobilization of the district-level government agencies, political parties and the media.
The Rapid Response to Operation Cast Lead

When the United Nations Mine Action Service was asked to assess the need for a mine-action presence in the Gaza Strip following Operation Cast Lead, a 23-day conflict involving the Israeli Defence Forces and Palestinian militias in 2008, it was thrust into one of the world’s most complicated humanitarian operating environments. This article provides a background for the mine-action program in Gaza, summarizing the key challenges and lessons learned during the first four months of operations in this complex environment.

by Elena Rice [United Nations Mine Action Service]

Between 27 December 2008, and 18 January 2009, the Israel Defence Forces conducted Operation Cast Lead, a military campaign with the objective of preventing Palestinian militants from firing homemade rockets into Israeli territory. The campaign caused severe damage to infrastructure, including roads, government offices, nongovernmental organizations, U.N. facilities, schools, hospitals and cultural land. Following the Israeli withdrawal, the United Nations Mine Action Service—at the request of the U.N. Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator for the Occupied Palestinian Territories, and in coordination with the U.N. Mine Action Team—agreed to initiate a Technical Assessment Mission under the United Nations Framework for Mine Action Planning and Rapid Response. This team arrived in Gaza on 23 January 2009, with these objectives:

• Establish the level of unexploded-ordnance contamination
• Determine what assistance UNMAT and the international mine-action community could provide to the affected civilian population, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, the U.N. Country Team and other humanitarian actors

Chitrakar: Mine-risk Education in Nepal, 2009

Mountain Tigers questioned NCBL, suspecting it of propagating fear among the people. The Tigers questioned NCBL, suspecting it of propagating fear among the people. They also questioned NCBL’s access to the villages of the Terai. This is because the government of Nepal’s National Mine Action Steering Committee was on its way to Pakari in the Saptari district to conduct MRE. The Tigers questioned NCBL, suspecting them of propagating fear among the population. NCBL was able to carry through with MRE, but an armed sentry watched over the sessions at all times. Conflict erupted in the Terai districts, further exacerbating the situation as armed groups continued to keep an eye on MRE program facilitators, inspecting the resource materials for possible propaganda against the armed groups.

Conclusion

NCBL constantly faces obstacles to its MRE programs in Nepal. Mines continue to injure, maim, and kill men, women and children in the rural areas. The emergence of various armed groups in the Terai has further necessitated conducting MRE, and it has become essential for the government to sign the AP Mine Ban Convention and to ensure assistance is provided to mine victims. Furthermore, engagement in MRE and various peace-building processes has become imperative in order to restore lasting peace in Nepal.

See Endnotes, Page 78

Difficulties

Ban Landmines Campaign Nepal faces numerous challenges in carrying out its MRE programs. For instance, an incident occurred while NCBL was on its way to Pakari in the Saptari district to conduct MRE. The Tigers questioned NCBL, suspecting them of propagating fear among the population. NCBL was able to carry through with MRE, but an armed sentry watched over the sessions at all times. Conflict erupted in the Terai districts, further exacerbating the situation as armed groups continued to keep an eye on MRE program facilitators, inspecting the resource materials for possible propaganda against the armed groups.

Stikes, highway blockades and arson continue to create obstacles for NCBL facilitators. Furthermore, limited resources remain a problem.

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• Facilitate the opening of humanitarian corridors and the delivery of humanitarian aid in line with United Nations Security Council Resolution 1860

It became clear to the Technical Assessment Mission team that in the days immedi-