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UNDP Involvement in Bosnia and Herzegovina

By Megan Sarian [Center for International Stabilization and Recovery]

The United Nations Development Programme was created in 1956 by the General Assembly of the United Nations. Its influence stretches across the globe as it helps nations establish democratic governance, reduce poverty, carry out crisis prevention and recovery, solve environmental and energy issues, and prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS.



Bjelašnica mountain, popular with skiers.
All photos courtesy of UNDP

The United Nations Development Programme establishes a presence in the countries it assists, not only to offer its resources, but also to equip the population and government with knowledge and experience to manage the country's own development. Part of this self-sustainability involves UNDP teaching nations how to acquire and utilize aid more effectively. UNDP also places a heavy emphasis on human rights and the reduction of armed violence.¹

Bosnia and Herzegovina has benefited from UNDP's global objectives since 1996, when the organization began its involvement in BiH. UNDP's specific goals for BiH include building national capacity, executing activities in key areas and shifting the country's focus from post-conflict recovery to long-term growth. UNDP has provided a variety of resources to support this progress. BiH has received over US\$181 million in aid from international entities through the UNDP since 1996. Also, approximately 1,600 U.N. volunteers have contributed their professional skills to help the population.²

Mine-action Program

Part of UNDP's efforts to improve the quality of life in BiH includes strongly supporting the country's Integrated Mine Action Programme. Without safe land to inhabit, the citizens suffer, particularly with regard to their socioeconomic life. The IMAP aims to carry out clearance in areas where refugees and community members are attempting to settle and establish their livelihoods.

The program also seeks to reorganize the mine-action operations and organizations to make mine action more efficient. Specific objectives include managing the strategy and activities fully taken over by the state, demining key areas and continuing the Armed Forces of BiH's mine-clearance activities.³ The program began in 2004 and is scheduled to end in December 2009.

Mine-action Achievements

With UNDP's support, IMAP has taken strides toward making BiH mine-free by developing both legislative and strategic measures, such as reworking the National Mine Action Strategy, a 10-year plan expected to begin in 2009 and end in 2019.⁴ IMAP also hopes to see the Mine Action Law approved by the government. The law aims to acquire funding for the national strategy from multiple levels of government, as well as stimulate donor interest.⁵ It also will expand the mine-action responsibilities of the local government in areas such as planning and prioritization, reviewing and reporting, and mine-risk education activities.⁶



The site in Brčko, micro location AČEaÄavac.

In an effort to enable the BiH government to take control of its own development, UNDP helped change the funding for the Bosnia and Herzegovina Mine Action Centre from donors to the government. BHMAC is now fully funded by the government.

Also, as of December 2009, over 741 acres (3 million square meters) of land had been cleared through the IMAP program in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The BiH Armed Forces hope to assist with additional clearance due to the communication, surveying and specialized demining equipment they received through IMAP. Indeed, the effects of the IMAP's support are already reflected in the Armed Forces 2009 results. The Armed Forces increased their participation in the national annual demining results by more than 20 percent.³

Small Arms and Light Weapons

Residual SA/LW and ammunition in BiH from the 1992–1995 Bosnian War have a major presence in the country. This problem prompted the UNDP to begin a Coordination Board on SA/LW in 2005 and a National Strategy and Action Plan for SA/LW control, which was endorsed by the government in May 2006.^{7,8} The board will be reinforced in the coming years, helping to coordinate SA/LW policies and initiatives that accomplish the goals of the national strategy.

The board's increased activity is one of several objectives of the UNDP's Small Arms Control and Reduction Project in BiH. Other goals include decreasing risk by destroying the military's surplus SA/LW stocks and confiscating illegally owned weapons from the population. Another objective is to increase Bosnian capabilities for ammunition destruction and demilitarization.⁷

In addition to establishing the Coordination Board, UNDP effects change in the control and management of SA/LW through a partnership with the Joint Committee on Defense and Security Policy, created in December 2003 by the BiH Parliamentary Assembly. The Committee oversees several government-run, security-related departments, among which is the Bosnia and Herzegovina Mine Action Centre.⁹

Progress in SA/LW Destruction

The partnership between UNDP and the parliamentary security committee has led to several important developments. In June 2009, UNDP pledged its assistance to help carry out the revised Small Arms Control and Reduction Project in BiH by authorizing the project with the support of the security committee and other organizations that are concerned with the large presence of SA/LW in BiH.¹⁰ UNDP and the security committee also coordinated a workshop on the implementation of the National Strategy and Action Plan for SALW Control in May 2009. The event was ideal for sharing information and stimulating dialogue between organizations concerned with SA/LW control.¹¹ UNDP also offers technical assistance for the parliamentary security committee, as well as for national policing teams.

UNDP has helped establish an SA/LW awareness campaign to complement the efforts of the SALW Coordination Board and National Strategy and Action Plan for SALW Control. UNDP also helped create a Draft Law on Arms to regulate arms acquisition and possession. In addition to the campaign and Draft Law, the Ministry of Defense is facilitating Ammunition Disposal and Explosive Training for the BiH Armed Forces.

The profusion of SA/LW has been dwindling, as over 95,000 pieces of SA/LW and 3,600 tons (3,266 metric tons) of unstable ammunition have been destroyed. Surplus ammunition has also been targeted, with 3,500 tons (3,175 metric tons) having been demilitarized. These clearance measures have certainly improved conditions for BiH citizens and may be responsible for the 31-percent decrease of SA/LW-related incidents in 2008.⁷

Recent Donations

Progress in mine action for BiH largely depends on generous donations from international sponsors, and the effective use of that aid. In early 2008 and 2009, the Swedish International Development Agency contributed US\$2.6 million to BiH through UNDP. This donation allowed UNDP to target for clearance three minefields on the Sarajevo Olympic mountain of Trebević. These funds also aimed to support demining in Bijambare Natural Park, agricultural lands in Bugojno and Kalesija, the Bihać river Una rafting zone, Kupres mountain ski resort, and Bunica river spring. As of

December 2009, these projects had been completed.¹²



Along with the donation of funds, BiH has received assistance in the form of two new mine-clearance machines. This contribution was a collective gift to UNDP in March 2009 from the Canadian International Development Agency, the government of the Netherlands and the Ministry of Defense of BiH through the IMAP program. UNDP will use the machines to fortify the technical efforts of the BiH Armed Forces.¹³

Conclusion

UNDP has worked in collaboration with the BiH government to achieve encouraging results in the sector of mine action and SA/LW control. A large part of UNDP's goal is to not only implement change, but also foster continued growth in BiH, which is done by ensuring that the BiH government has the resources and skills needed to continue developing its mine-action and SA/LW-reduction strategies. International aid has played a vital role in assisting with mine clearance and SA/LW control, and UNDP

strives to distribute the aid effectively and efficiently. BiH has years to go before it is completely mine-safe, but with the help of UNDP and other international programs, the future looks promising. ↴

Biography



Megan Sarian joined the Center for International Stabilization and Recovery in January 2009 as an Editorial Assistant. She plans to graduate from James Madison University in May 2010 with a Bachelor of Arts in English and a minor in creative writing.

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