August 2003

DDG Initiates MRE in Ingushetia and Chechnya

Michaëla Bock Pedersen

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

Part of the Defense and Security Studies Commons, Emergency and Disaster Management Commons, Other Public Affairs, Public Policy and Public Administration Commons, and the Peace and Conflict Studies Commons

Recommended Citation


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.
DDG aims to educate Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in MRE through public institutions, food distribution points, traffic junctions, services at mosques and school programs.

by Michaela Bock Pederson

Introduction

In August 2000, DDG established a MRE program in Northern Caucasus, more specifically Ingushetia and Chechnya. While the conditions for a clearance operation were not present in 2000, our only option was to conduct information campaigns on the proper behavior in relation to landmines and UXO found on the roads. Going to the Chechnya in order to keep the families together. The war in Chechnya was still in progress.

Working in mine action always demands great sensibility as the presence of mines always reflects political acts and boîteur's behavior. The need to deal with the fact that the initial refugees have relatives in Ingushetia.

What made the need for MRE so urgent was the fact that the IDPs would often go back to Chechnya in order to keep the claim to their property and provide for the relatives who stayed behind.

The safety precautions dealt with the fact that expatriate staff was needed for management in the initial period. In 2000, the safety conditions in Chechnya were not satisfactory since the expatriates were, and still are, popular targets of kidnapping. This means that special safety precautions have to be taken whenever travelling in the area. Armed guards are part of the everyday life of the expatriates.

Initially, DDG formed two mobile teams of three instructors and two drivers, all national staff, in order to follow the movements in the refugee camps established by the Russian government and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). The DDG also aimed to provide MRE for long-term settlements where most of the IDPs lived. The national staff uses their private cars to ensure that they are not mistaken for expatriate staff. Every week operations are planned in consultation with local authorities and safety officers in other NGOs situated in Nazran.

This shows that both the Russian bureaucracy and all the necessary safety precautions make projects like this difficult and slow. However, MRE has proven to be effective and the landmines and UXO awareness has risen remarkably. By the end of 2002, all of Ingushetia was educated on the risks of mines.

Conditions

The situation has developed rapidly since the program was set-up in 2000. All the refugee camps and settlements have been covered and the number of mobile teams has been extended to three.

The teams are now working inside Chechnya. The targets here are both the people who stayed behind in Chechnya and the IDPs who were forced to leave Ingushetia and return to Chechnya when the refugee camp Aki Yuri in Malogoskovsky district was closed.

The number of people influenced by the war and still situated in Chechnya is approximately 700,000. These people will all be covered by the end of the program in April 2005, either by individual training or through train-the-trainer teams or school programs.

The risk, staff, both national and international, is facing has increased since the operations moved from Ingushetia to Chechnya. The risks include kidnappings and mock-up operations by the Russian soldiers. On one occasion only has DDG's MRE instructors been the target of harassment by the Russian military.

The cooperation of the Russian authorities has been achieved due to DDG's extended effort to keep the Russian authorities informed on all work.

Conclusion

Initially the target of DDG's program in Ingushetia and Chechnya was to prepare the IDPs in Ingushetia for the conditions they would return to in Chechnya. The MRE campaign was mainly targeted to school children through their parents and teachers. A secondary effort was made to reach the adult population. This was done through public institutions, food distribution points, traffic junctions and services at mosques.

The good relations DDG enjoys with the local authorities has taken a great deal of effort to bring about but in the daily work this has proven useful. There have only been very few incidents involving the authorities.

Up to now the program has been a success and an indispensable step in the development in the area. It is very important to prepare the returnees for the mine situation they will be met by in Chechnya and of course the mine risk education of the remaining 700,000 Chechnys is crucial. Until all clearance programs can be set up, this effort is vital for the life and well-being of the Chechnyans.

*All graphics courtesy of the author.

Contact Information

Michaela Bock Pedersen
Danish Demining Group
Borgergade 10
1002 Copenhagen K
Email: michaela.bock.pedersen@drc.dk
Phone: +45 3373 5011