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From Puppets to Empowerment: the Bosnia and Herzegovina Genesis Project

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Genesis Project

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Demining Law in Bosnia and Herzegovina

In February 2002, a unique state-level Bosnia and Herzegovina Mine Action Centre (BHMAC) structure was created. The adopted law created a legal framework for demining operations in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

by Marija Alilovic

Background

Bosnia and Herzegovina is a country with the largest mine contamination problem in BiH. By the end of 1995, there were estimated over 670,000 mines and 650,000 pieces of UXO. Of UxO's locations, the contaminated area is estimated to be over 2,000 sq km, which is over four percent of the total territory of BiH.

In February 2002, a unique state-level BHMAC structure was created. The adopted law created a legal framework for demining operations in BiH. Demining operations are being conducted in accordance with the National Demining Plan, approved by the Council of Ministers. The Council of Ministers is the authority responsible for mine action implementation—to ensure the implementation of Demining Law through the BHMAC. The following is an overview of the structure and operations of the BHMAC since the law was created.

BHMAC Mission and Vision

The mission of the BHMAC is to undertake all available measures and procedures in humanitarian demining operations, risk area marking and education of the population of Bosnia and Herzegovina, in order to minimize the effect of mines in Bosnia and Herzegovina by 2010.

The BHMAC vision is to enable continuity, stability and long-term conduct of humanitarian demining operations, as well as other mine actions in order to eventually remove mines and UXO in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

BHMAC Activities and Operational Goals

BHMAC activities include the following:

- Surveying (general, technical, socioeconomic, area reduction)
- Planning
- Prioritization
- Definition of tasks
- Inspection/quality control (QC)
- Certification and handover of cleared areas
- Central database maintenance
- Establishing technical, safety and training standards
- Accreditation
- Coordination of all mine-related operations and activities

Current available demining capacity includes 86 mine detection dogs and 32 ground preparation machines. Approximately 2000 mine detection, 42 governmental, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and commercial companies are also accredited in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Table 1 outlines the level of humanitarian demining operations for 2003.

The following are BHMAC's operational goals for 2003:

- Increase demining operations to the level of 20 sq km per year by the end of 2003.
- Refugee return is the first category of priority.
- Undertake emergency demining operations on risk areas in the second and third categories of priority in order to reduce mine danger.
- Increase technical surveys within demining operations.
- Increase the level of risk-area permanent marking based upon national ownership.
- Improve mine risk education in high-risk areas.
- Adopt new mine action standards at the state level, on the basis of the International Mine Action Standards (IMAS).
- Assist in conducting the Landmine Impact Survey (LIS).

BHMAC Vision and Operation

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MRE Puppet Shows for Children

The basic feature of our puppet shows is interactive learning. Children are not just passive observers and receivers of information during the performance—instead, they are active participants. Through the puppet show performance, children easily acquire new information and transform the info into permanent and sound knowledge. Games, music, and oral communication between the actor, puppet, and child contribute largely to the interaction.

Active Involvement of Schoolteachers in the Community/School-based Action Against Mines and UXO

The Genesis Project has recognized the need to move from its role of "external" and the only Mine Risk Educator in the area towards the role of facilitator, mediator and facilitator of activities that will be implemented in the future by the local community. Therefore, we have initiated a co-operation with schoolteachers that will lead toward independent and self-sustainable continuation of community/school-based MRE activities. To that end, the Genesis Project has introduced numerous activities as an important part of the project with the aim of empowering teachers to provide good quality MRE for their pupils.

One of the goals of the show is not just to change children's behaviour but also to try to develop and "train" their attitude toward and awareness of all kinds of danger that could come from mines and unexploded devices as well as to warn them about the consequences of their careless actions and thoughtlessness when faced with possible danger.

Also, through the puppet shows, we hope to encourage a positive attitude toward children mine victims and physically disabled persons and to provide some guidelines on how they could assist the process of integration of physically disabled children into society and into various social groups.

The Genesis Project MRE puppet show consists of three parts:

• Puppet show (consists of two actors/mediators—a "deminer" and an "advocative boy-fisherman, ") featuring puppets, and frequently used mines.
• Interactive education workshop (children, together with actors, conducting "role plays" of different situations). 
• Distribution of educational leaflets with basic MRE messages.

From November 1999 until June 2003, we have been implementing MRE projects in primary schools and preschool education institutions in Republika Srpska and Brcko District. During this time, the Genesis Project/UNICEF mobile puppet theatre performed various MRE puppet shows more than 630 times. These shows were seen by 60,000 children ages five to 12.

Thanks to our experience in the field to date, we have realized that there is a need for capacity building among children, teachers, and local community members, which would ensure continuity in MRE. There is also need to address the issue of disability awareness and to interact with survivors for assistance. Also, we fully recognize that Genesis Project, through its MRE programs, can only benefit from close liaison with BHMAC.

Therefore, we have decided to introduce a new approach through:

• Peer education
• Disability awareness and referral of mine victims to survivor assistance programs
• Active collaboration with teachers and with local communities
• Connection between local communities and BHMAC

It is the aim of the Genesis Project to develop the peer-education methodology with children ages six (1st grade) to 12 (6th grade) at the beginning of the new school year (2003/2004). The peer-education methodology is considered one of the most efficient methods of transferring knowledge to children.

In previously selected schools, the Genesis Project members carried out a series of interactive workshops on diverse educational topics, such as MRE, children's rights, healthy lifestyles (emphasis on prevention of sexually transmitted diseases), and tolerance and coexistence. Through these activities we would generate a core group of future peer-educators.

In all targeted communities, the project will try to increase the level of MRE of children and community members and encourage them to adopt new, safer ways of behavior that would shield them from potential physical injuries and death.

Conclusion

From puppets to empowerment, the Genesis Project has completed the following initiatives:

• Moving from its role of "external" and the only Mine Risk Educator toward the role of initiator, mediator, and creator of activities that will be implemented further by members of the local community.
• Cooperating with teachers for independent and self-sustainable continuation of MRE.
• Developing instruments/tools that will assist the teachers, pupils and members of local communities to perform MRE activities.

All graphics courtesy of the author.

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