Funding Mine Risk Education: Saving Lives Around the Globe

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Funding MRE

Funding Mine Risk Education: Saving Lives Around the Globe

Mine risk education is an important tool in preventing mine-related injuries and fatalities. The U.S. State Department has provided funding to many mine risk education programs in several different countries, giving mine-affected communities the knowledge necessary to live their daily lives with more caution and less fear.

by Jenny Lang, U.S. State Department Fellow

Background

The United States has been involved in humanitarian demining since 1988 when the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) sent a team to Afghanistan to assess the landmine situation. In 1989, USAID established the Patrick J. Leahy War Victims Fund, which provides support to people living with disabilities, primarily those who suffered from mobility-related injuries caused by unexploded ordnance, including amputees, personnel landmines and other direct and indirect causes of physical disability. While USAID continued to support mine action in Afghanistan and elsewhere, by 1993, the United States established a broad-based program of humanitarian demining support that included the Department of State, the Department of Defense and USAID. As the saying goes, "We’ve come a long way since then." Since then, the U.S. has provided more than $600 million (U.S.) to 43 countries and is committed to continue supporting mine action around the world.

Goals of the Program

The goals of the U.S. Humanitarian Demining Program are to reduce the loss of life and limb of innocents, to create safe conditions for the return of refugees and internally displaced persons, and to afford opportunity for economic and social reconstruction. Fortunately, there has been much success in reaching these goals due to the commitment of the United States and other donors and to the energy, professionalism and dedication of implementing partners and affiliates. Hundreds of thousands of refugees and internally displaced persons have returned to their homes. Thousands of acres of land formerly contaminated with mines and antitank obstacles for farming are in use and are producing agricultural commodities necessary to sustain life. Potable water is available; roads are open and in use; schools that were once shut down due to danger of mines are now open and continuing education. Landmine survivors are being integrated back into their communities and are resuming their lives. And most importantly, the amount of reported landmine casualties is greatly declining. While some of these successes can be attributed to the clearance of landmines and unexploded ordnance, USAID points to the role credit for these achievements and the emergence of mine risk education programs. Mine risk education helps to inform and affect population in danger of landmines and provides suggestions on how to minimize the risk while performing necessary and recreational activities. Mine risk education programs are especially beneficial to children, emphasizing the need to stay clear of specific areas and unknown objects.

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Regrettably, many children are still playing in or around landmines.

Mine Risk Education

Mine risk education is one of the major components of mine action. The United States has been an active supporter of and has provided or contributed to mine risk education programs in a variety of materials and media to convey important messages. These messages must be sensitive to the cultural traditions of the local populations, and the material may not be conveyed properly. Educating whole populations may open them to incorporate safety procedures into their daily lives, is one main goal of mine risk education.

Funding

The Department of State, through the Bureau of Political-Military Affairs, Office of Humanitarian Demining Pro.
Mine Awareness Education

Afghanistan

The U.S. Department of State currently funds a complex mine risk education program in Afghanistan through UNICEF. After more than two decades of war, Afghanistan is one of the most landmine-affected countries in the world. This program is focused on training, educating, and supporting communities in order to train, educate, and support children in the world.

The current activities include programs in Afghanistan, Colombia, Eritrea, Vietnam and Ethiopia.

Colombia

Colombia's mine risk education activities are carried out by UNICEF and are funded by the U.S. Department of State. The budget for the project is approximately $152,000. The current project is being implemented in three phases, with each phase increasing the project's geographic coverage in order to educate as many people as possible.

Specific projects include initiatives to build communities and support government and local authorities, communities and public opinion about the risks of landmines and related issues through communication campaigns. Activities include the training of at least 200 community-based trainers to act as trainers, developing a media campaign, organizing mine risk education training sessions, and disseminating mine risk education materials for children, educators, and adults.

Eritrea

Since 2000, UNICEF has achieved goals in many areas of mine risk education in Eritrea. These goals include launching critical emergency awareness activities in high-risk areas, assigning full-time officers to the UNMEE-MAC, and the mobilization of financial and human resources to conduct mine risk education. Even though these goals have been reached, landmine casualties continue to rise, with 40 percent of the victims being children. In order to reduce casualties among children, current activities include providing direct interaction to populations at risk, building and enhancing capacities of MAMA mine risk education agencies, training children and adults in mine risk education initiatives into available mass media and public information systems, and improving information collection and analysis.

These activities will expand and improve Afghanistan's mine risk education program and will effectively distribute information to civilians, including women and children, in order to dynamically reduce the number of casualties due to landmines.

Vietnam

Vietnam is one of the most heavily mined countries in the world, with 350,000-800,000 landmines in the country. In 2004, UNICEF funded training for the Rehabilitation and Development Organization (RDO) and the Vietnamese Mine Action Office (VAMAO) staff and the development of materials and information management. The project has developed two generations of materials, including posters, leaflets, t-shirts, banners, pamphlets and training materials. These activities will help fulfill the project goal by reducing the number of casualties among civilians.

Due to achievements already made, the number of landmine casualties drastically reduced between 2000 and 2001 from 149 to 49.

Successful Past Projects

Namibia

In Namibia, between 2000 and 2001, there was a significant decrease in landmine-related casualties. The Namibia mine risk education program funded by the U.S. Department of State helped contribute to the dramatic reduction. The 2001 mine action campaign reached over 400,000 people. Included was the production of two eight-page newspaper inserts about mine risk education published by the Republican Daily Press. Over 500,000 copies were printed in four languages and were distributed in mine-affected areas. One of the inserts included instructions for a contest that called upon students to draw a picture of "Namibia Without Landmines." More than 25,000 drawings were chosen as the winners and were made into posters and distributed among schools.

This project was an effective way to make communication efforts reach a wider audience.
Need To Know?

Mine Action Education Resources

This article reports on a U.S. Department of State (DOS) supported programme to gather and share mine action knowledge in parts of southern Africa. Information was gathered during 2000 with help from Programa Acelerado de Desminagem (PAD, formerly UNADP), People Against Landmines (MGM), Mines Advisory Group (MAG), the HALO Trust and Norwegian People's Aid (NPA).

Training resource packs for Mozambique and Angola were then produced.

by Andy Smith, for Golden West Humanitarian Foundation (GWHF)

Mine Action and Demining – "Black-Arts"?

Surveys and deminers practice a profession that is often represented as being both brave and mysterious. This myth may seem harmless, but it is not. It is a form of intimidation. You, the public, are supposed to accept that demining is dangerous, macho-man stuff and you should shut up and trust us. That's fine if you live in Washington, D.C., but not if you live in a mined area.

If you live in a mined area, you usually cannot learn what you need to know by simply getting hold of a training course. Practical mine action training courses for deminers, surveyors and the general public are often more than a list of topics that must be covered. Training is often limited to cover what the trainees must do, not what they may want to understand.

Training of the public is usually limited to admonitions not to do things...

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Unboxed Trainers with PAD in Maputo, Mozambique, helped in the production of the Mozambique training resource and have been using it for more than six months. Right All The Mozambique and Angola training resources...

Information, Not Intimidation

Most of the information needed for training is available. There is an encyclopaedic range of technical data on mines and ordnance (fascinating if sometimes contradictory). There are many works on training methods and cross-cultural communication, adult learning and competence building. What are not often available are technically correct training resources for use with the courses that are already being run throughout the humanitarian mine action industry.

I recognised the need for training resources two years ago and set out to produce some with the GWHF. Colin King advised and was the technical editor. I began by producing a pilot for field review. The pilot was widely applauded and is still in demand. Based on the success of the pilot, we were able to gain U.S. DOS support to produce two country-specific packs. The training resource pack for Mozambique is in the field, and the resource pack for Angola is ready for release.

Each resource pack is a large format ring binder containing 55 plastic-laminated sheets (A3, or USB). One side shows a photograph or photographs. The other side has text in Portuguese and English explaining the pictures and suggesting teaching uses. Pages can be separated for sharing or for pinning to the wall. The pictures illustrate a generic mine action education course, covering information needs of the surveyor, deminer and general public in that country.

The training resources are not designed as complete courses but are intended to enhance existing ones. However, where no course exists, the resource provides a comprehensive starting template.

The photographs show real devices in a relevant context and include varied levels of technical detail that the teacher can choose to stress or gloss over depending on the needs of the audience. When possible, aged mines and UXO are featured. These can look very different from the same item direct from the stores. Photographs taken in the region are used to give the images an immediate relevance to people who have not travelled far. They are also proving compelling to ex-pat visitors.

Youth learn mine awareness from their teacher.