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Need To Know? Mine Action Education Resources

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Youth learn mine awareness from their teacher.

Kosovo
UNICEF, with a grant of $800,000 from the Department of State and with the support of other donors, initiated a mine action campaign in Kosovo in June 1999. Many different types of media were employed as part of the UNICEF effort. Since then, hundreds of thousands of posters have been distributed to schools, hospitals and public places throughout Kosovo. Fourteen television spots and 11 radio messages have been produced and broadcast in the languages of Albanian, Serbian and Turkish through local media outlets. Testing the messages evaluated the impact of the television and radio messages and revealed that they are powerful and effective.

In a different approach, refugees from Kosovo were informed of the landmine situation before arriving home to cut back on the number of immediate casualties. This was a watershed project due to the fact people had never before been informed of the situation before returning home to mine-infested land. To ensure that refugees returned to Kosovo were informed of the dangers of landmines, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) provided information on the dangers of landmines and how to seek help after finding one. UNICEF and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) organized training for IOM escorts and supplied a variety of mine risk education materials including videos to be shown on airplanes and audiotapes to be played on buses transporting refugees back home.

UNICEF strives to make teaching people about the risk of landmines more than just a transfer of information; they attempt to make the population active partners in promoting mine awareness in their communities. It has been found that the child-to-child approach is an effective means of reaching mine education because it encourages children to create their own means of communication, which has maximum impact when passing the information on. UNICEF works with a number of partners in schools throughout Kosovo, one of which is the Vietnam Veterans of America Foundation (VVAF). Children between the ages of 10 and 14 are trained as educators on mine risk education and are actively involved in developing games, plays and interactive sessions with other children. UNICEF and VVAF trained five teams of educators, and the teams conducted a series of sessions for children, and recruited over 600 volunteers between the ages of 15 and 24 to form youth Mine Action Education Teams. The volunteers are in charge of designing and implementing activities to raise awareness among peers and children in their communities.

During October and November of 1999, VVAF along with UNICEF organized the “Spirit of Soccer,” a program that combined soccer and mine risk education. More than 500 young players became involved. UNICEF also supported local drama groups and a puppet theater program to perform shows in a dramatic sense. A series of mine risk education days were held in July and August 2000 where the topic was integrated into a day of sports, competitions, workshops and games. UNICEF supplied over 3,500 exercise books with covers displaying mine messages.

UNICEF also brought mine risk education into the classroom in Kosovo. In August 2000, over 1,500 teachers were trained to teach the subject, which passed the message on to thousands of children.

Conclusion
Mine risk education is vital to communities whose lands are plagued with landmines. Without the benefit of this information, the world would continue to experience casualties at an unacceptable rate. With the support of the U.S. government and other donors, and with the efforts of a host of implementing partners, mine risk education is a main component to mine action around the globe. Many programs have been implemented with successful results, and efforts will continue until people are able to walk the earth in safety.

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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 UNANOP, People Against Landmines (MyM), 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 (GWFH)

Mines Action and Demining – “Black-Arts”?

Surveys and dermatists 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 about getting hold of a training course. Practical mine action training courses for deminers, surveyors and the general public are often no 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, with no real attempt to explain why or offer alternatives.

Information, Not Intimidation
Most of the information needed for training is available. There is an encyclopedic 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 something similar. The Golden West Humanitarian Foundation in the U.S. is the main funder of the work. 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 training 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 manufacturer. They are also proving compulsive to expat visitors. The photographs taken in the region are used to give the images a more immediate relevance to people who have not travelled far, they are also proving compelling to ex-pat visitors.

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Range of Indicators

The following is an abbreviated list showing the broad range of the generic mine action training course covered in the "Mined Area Indicators - Mozambique" pack.

A list like this will leave many readers cold. Using the same teaching approach as the resource, the following examples "show" you what the resource is like.

1. The context, covering why mines were placed.
   - Offensive - military. Offensive - areas to support and maintain offensive actions. Offensive - areas to support and maintain offensive actions. Offensive - areas to support and maintain offensive actions. Offensive - areas to support and maintain offensive actions. Offensive - areas to support and maintain offensive actions.

2. Basic mine and UXO information.
   - Explaining the appearance of each type and how it may be set off. Covering AP blast, AP fragmentation (stake mounted), AP fragmentation (bounding), AP fragmentation (directional), anti-vehicle mines, UXO, and generic identification of other ordnance. Also covering the kinds of injury associated with mines.

3. Official and improvised marking.
   - Covering official warning signs, fencing and examples of the locally improvised marking in use.

4. Indicators of suspect areas.
   - Evidence of military presence and/or fighting. Visible parts of mines/UXO. Evidence of defensive works in the form of mounds, hollows or trenches, Unmanned areas alongside roads where ambushes were carried out. Parts of clothing or footwear. The remains of camps, latrines or temporary structures. Wire defences. The debris of vehicles damaged in fighting or explosions (civilian). Abandoned military vehicles and equipment. Remains of ammunition cases or packaging and munition boxes, ration tins, etc. Ruined buildings marked by battle. Road damage in ambush or checkpoint areas. Unused-abandoned areas close to land that is used. Fruit and nut trees that are not harvested. Wooded areas close to villages where wood is not gathered. Unexpected diversions on roads or paths. Abandoned roads and paths. Abandoned buildings, especially where items of value (contents, but also doors, window-frames, guttering and roofing material) have not been removed. Washout areas where water may have carried items from their original place. 

5. Technical detail.
   - Direct indicators of mine and UXO use in the area such as packaging, wires, spikes, stakes, safety pins/caps and parts discarded when munitions are used. Mines, detailing the common mines and UXO found in Mozambique and covering how mines age, fuzes and detonators, and booby traps.

Example 1: Recognising Mined Areas

For many audiences, a trainer will want to show how to recognise areas that are obviously dangerous. The scenes above all include an obviously suspicious area.

There is not enough space to explain each image here. The general message is that while sometimes you can recognise a suspicious area, more often you can tell when an area is safe, which is just as useful.

Example 2: Levels of Detail

(Below) The resource uses appropriate scenes like these to introduce each topic.

(Right) The introductory pages are followed by pages in which mine and ordnance are clearly shown.

Technical audiences want to know more about the devices and how they work. So in many cases a third level of detail is included.

The pictures are selected from both the Angola and the Mozambique packs.
A Revolutionary Approach to Mine Awareness: The Demining Support System

This versatile tool is designed to provide support to a mine action program on a range of topics. Its high-tech components are designed to provide on easily accessible, customizable, professional and portable element to any mine awareness campaign.

by Nicole Kreger, MAIC

Background on the System

The Demining Support System (DSS) is the wave of the future in humanitarian mine action, a wave that is quickly catching on. As 22 countries are already employing it in their mine action activities. It simultaneously serves as an aid in training staff, managing equipment, maintaining databases and developing instructional materials, among other things. Being customizable, mobile and ruggedized, the DSS is designed to cater to the needs of any mine action center (MAC) or other demining programs. Created by Star Mountain, Inc., at the request of and with assistance from the U.S. Department of Defense, Humanitarian Demining Program, Night Vision and Electronic Sensors Directorate at Fort Belvoir, the DSS has been used by U.S. Army Special Operations Forces.

So what exactly is the DSS, and how can it be so flexible? The System is essentially a box. It makes use of modern technology with features like a touch-screen display, digital camera and portable color printer, and its versatility displays itself through the many ways in which it can be used. For example, the medical modules trainees on everything from sanitation to trauma medicine, while the manual module can produce manuals on operations and training. Additionally, the DSS Content Manager software can be translated into any one of several languages, such as Vietnamese, Arabic, Spanish, Serbo-Croatian, Portuguese or Cambodian. Also, the System can integrate with existing applications such as the Information Management System for Mine Action (IMSSA). In addition to all these features, probably the most important aspect of the DSS is its mobility. The System is designed to work out in the field, not just sit in a headquarters where few have access to it, as often happens with other equipment. It is designed specifically to travel, and is even capable of withstanding the harsh conditions of the locations where it will be deployed. Thus, no matter where the user is, the system can travel to him or her, as opposed to vice versa.

MAC in a Box

The DSS has more recently spawned a new design known as the "MAC in a Box." It was "designed to be an immediately deployable MAC technology base" that can "support a MAC office with any or all of the following operational services: mine and UXO clearance database (IMSSA) mine awareness, administration and finance, operations, logistics, training, information management and other MAC functions. It uses commercial off-the-shelf hardware and software and is designed to be lightweight and therefore easy to transport. It contains many of the same resources as the original DSS platform, but it is designed to be a ready-to-use wireless network that serves as the foundation of a mine action operation. The hardware is more compact, containing several laptop computers and network equipment, and peripherals such as a scanner and projector are available as well.

The Demining Support System

DSS Mine Awareness Uses

While the DSS has many other functions that are more commonly used than the mine awareness module, many users see the DSS as a helpful means of spreading the word about the dangers of mines. There are some pre-made mine awareness materials provided with the DSS, demonstrating such mine-related messages as how to identify a mine area and what to do when encountering mines. However, according to an assessment study conducted after the DSS was deployed, in most cases, the DSS helps spread mine awareness through the hardware components, not through the images provided with the DSS.

This further demonstrates the customization of the System. Users are encouraged to actually create their own materials, so that they can use the most relevant information for their audience. This method is especially helpful for customizing the materials for the country in which they will be used, since no one

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*All photos courtesy of the author.