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UNICEF: A Leader in Mine Awareness

As the UN's lead agency on mine awareness/mine risk education (MRE), the United Nations Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) has done work in about 30 countries that suffer from the effects of landmines. Their programs have helped to reduce fatalities and improve children's daily lives as safely as possible.

Introduction

UNICEF is the UN focal point for mine awareness. As such, its mission is to "provide appropriate guidance for all mine awareness programs, focusing closely with concerned partners." In many cases, this means that UNICEF oversees or provides funding for projects that are actually implemented by other already established in-country organizations. While UNICEF's mine awareness responsibilities encompass all groups regardless of age, the organization tends to conduct most of its awareness programs in school-based settings and other locations in which children are the main target audience.

Examples of UNICEF Programs

The following highlights the country programs in which UNICEF has been instrumental over the past year. While this list provided here is not exhaustive, it is meant to emphasize the broad range of impact that UNICEF has on mine awareness around the world.

Albania

UNICEF supports an extensive mine awareness campaign in Afghanistan, which involves 12 districts in Kabul. Mine awareness messages are spread in mosques, on the radio and in schools, where they are being incorporated into the curriculum. Currently, UNICEF is supporting a "quick-impact" mine awareness campaign that targets 3,800 schools in Afghanistan. This program teaches students directly and also trains teachers how to teach students about the risks of landmines.

Angola

Partnering with Norwegian People's Aid (NPA), UNICEF has trained 180 instructors on mine awareness in Angola. These people have in turn spread awareness to over 300,000 people. UNICEF has also funded an Angolan theater group to teach mine awareness through theatrical productions. This method of information dissemination is popular because it is entertaining to the audience and costs relatively little in comparison with other teaching methods.

Along with the Angolan National Institute for the Removal of Obstacles and Explosive Remnants (INAROUE), UNICEF has created mine awareness messages for television and radio. UNICEF is also focusing its efforts in the coming years on implementing a comprehensive national mine education strategy for the country.

by Nicole Kreger, MAIC

Indirect/Community Based MRE

A third way mine action agencies can provide MRE is through indirect or community-based programs. This usually occurs in areas where the population is relatively settled. Organizations then send their teams of trainers to the communities to reach volunteers how to conduct MRE sessions. Once a community-based volunteer program has been established, the partner-agencies continue to follow up on their progress and address any additional concerns.

Since 1996, HIB has also been instrumental in implementing a Community-Based Mine Awareness Program (CBMAP). The program is expected to continue through 2004 and benefit almost 1,500,000 Afghan people, including rural villagers, Kuchis, internally displaced persons (IDPs) and returnees. HIB's objective is to place the responsibility of mine awareness activities on community members in order to "foster a spontaneous and independent spreading of the messages." The goal of the HIB CBMAP is to:

- Directly train 559,000 people by HIB staff
- Indirectly train 950,000 people by HIB volunteer Mine Committees (MGCs)
- Strengthen and support existing MGCs
- Create an additional 1,300 new MGCs
- Gather data on activity reports and mine victim and incident reports
- Spread information on mine and UXO locations and accidents
- Identify and refer mine victims

The CBMAPs are currently located in the six most heavily mined provinces of south and west Afghanistan. Herat, Farah, Helmand, Kandahar, Zabul and Ghazi.

Conclusion

Together the MACA and UNICEF are working in Afghanistan to provide MRE for all at-risk populations. Technical support and funding are provided to help a wide range of partners run effective programs throughout the country. Continuous efforts by NGOs and other governmental organizations are vital to protect the lives of millions of Afghan people.
Angola on getting the community involved by encouraging local leaders and teachers to disseminate the messages to others. UNICEF has educated almost 1,000 teachers using the train-the-trainer method. By February of 2002, over 140,000 students had received mine awareness education through this method. Continuing the trend of teaching mine awareness in schools, the Ministry of Education formally incorporated mine awareness into the national curriculum this year.

Botswana-Herero Region

UNICEF is implementing a three-year project targeting all Bosnian schoolchildren. This involves producing and disseminating updated Mine Awareness Education Kits to all pre-schools, primary schools and secondary schools. UNICEF has also recruited an experienced adviser to assist the Botswana-Herero Mine Action Center (BHMAC) with mine awareness by providing technical assistance. This adviser will help the BHMAC develop a national mine risk education policy and be UNICEF’s focal mine awareness coordinator. Other projects to which UNICEF provides support include an interactive puppet theater in the Republika Srpska and mine awareness summer camps.

UNICEF is also emphasizing the need for community involvement in spreading mine awareness in Bosnia. In order to increase involvement of community members, UNICEF’s program involves developing a community action kit with mine injury prevention tools for 20 local communities. UNICEF is working on training select communities in its use. Community involvement like this is important, because without it, "there is little hope of maintaining these activities at a high enough level."72

Burundi

UNICEF is the only organization in Burundi conducting mine awareness education. Thus far, they have trained 100 people and developed five educational posters. UNICEF is helping the government of Burundi build up its technical capacity for carrying out mine awareness in affected areas of the country. They have planned to develop Burundi-specific mine awareness materials and use a trainthe-trainer approach to educate the population. Unfortunately, as of May, UNICEF said in a press release that its coordinating efforts for the program had been un成功的. They also stated, "Highlighting the current intensity of fighting in Burundi, UNICEF insists that it is urgent to fund this sector that would enable the implementation of advocacy, mine risk education, victim assistance or mine data collection."73

Camodia

In late 2001, the Cambodian Mine Action Center (CMAC) began a pilot project supported by UNICEF and Handicap International Belgium to conduct community-based mine/UXO risk reduction. This phase ended in May after which an evaluation was conducted and recommendations were made for a second project. Additionally, UNICEF has been providing technical support to the Cambodian Mine Action/Victim Assistance Authorities (CMAssA)’s newly appointed Mine Awareness Focal Point.

In a program targeting 30 districts, UNICEF has planned to teach mine awareness to children in the most affected areas in Cambodia. Known as the "Children in Post Conflict Project," this three-year program will allow for primary school teachers to provide children with mine risk education. The program aims to educate children both inside and outside of schools and hopes to incorporate community participation in mine action.

UNICEF also chairs a recently formed mine education working group that consists of all parties in Cambodia involved with such work. The group determined that Cambodia still has a need for mine risk education, since there is still a high number of incidents and the rate of clearance is slow. One recommendation that came out of the program was to consider the approach of MRE from traditional methods in order to get community participation and make use of community human resources.

Eritrea

Recently, UNICEF and the Eritrean Mine Action Program (EMAP) established an inter-agency MRE Working Group in order to create an MRE program for Eritrea. Together they determined what was necessary for a long-term national MRE strategy, which includes creating a process for accepting MRE managers, distributing MRE materials to returning refugees and organizing MRE activities for IDP’s in camps. These projects will be carried out through 2003.

Additional mine awareness activities in Eritrea include weekly and bi-weekly radio broadcasts and a roadside billboard program. An MRE focal point for school teachers has been established, and by now, almost all teachers in highly affected areas of the country have received training. UNICEF has also gotten the United Nations Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea (UNMEE) Mine Action Coordination Center (MACC) to integrate mine awareness into its quality assurance process.

Ethiopia

UNICEF’s support for Ethiopian MRE activities began in 1999, and they are carried out by a local NGO. Current efforts are focused on mine-affected communities in 10 districts of the Tigray and Afar regions. Their current project is implementing a community-based approach to educate local communities, religious groups, women’s and children’s organizations and local radio. Since 2001, UNICEF has focused its support on building the country’s capacity in MRE based on the International Mine Action Standards by working with the UN Mine Action Advisory Team and Ethiopian Mine Action Office (EMAO).

Guinea-Bissau

UNICEF is one of three organizations that provide support to mine risk education activities in Guinea-Bissau. One of UNICEF’s biggest roles in the country was in establishing a Mine Action and Awareness Committee (COMMA), which has met bi-weekly since April 1999. The COMA focuses on effects of information, training and logistics, which has included the production of tools such as marking ropes and triangles, billboards, posters, labels, t-shirts and comic books. Plans for 2002-2003 include increasing community involvement in mine awareness, incorporating mine awareness into school curriculums and disseminating mine awareness messages via radio and TV.

Kosovo

UNICEF helped fund Operation Normal Life (ONL), a project that helped "make all communities in Kosovo aware of the extent of mine action in their area." Its aim was to make up for the fact that mine awareness had previously been conducted independently of other mine action activities, which had often caused confusion among the general public about what work was being done to clear minefields. This project, managed by the MACC and involving most of the 20 mine awareness agencies in the country, concluded in April 2002.

Along with the Department of Education and Science (DoES), UNICEF ran a pilot program earlier this year called Life Skills. The program included mine awareness training and was scheduled to enter into the curriculums of 100 schools and surrounding communities in September. The program will continue through September 2003.

Laos

The Lao National UXO project (UXO-LAO) carries out mine risk education through its Community Awareness (CA) teams. Much of the funding for such awareness programs comes from UNICEF. A survey conducted by the two agencies revealed that citizens in villages visited by CA teams had a high level of understanding regarding UXO issues. The study also showed, however, that understanding does not necessarily lead to behavior change; thus, a new study is planned to investigate UXO awareness and the factors related to UXO incidents. UNICEF is also collaborating with the Ministry of Education (MOE), UXO LAO and the Lao Youth Union on a two-year project to educate children on mine awareness. Targeting children both in and out of school, the project began as a pilot program in four provinces of the country, and plans to expand nationally. The program will encourage participation from the children by having them create and later disseminate the safety messages. Children not in school will receive messages with the creation of safe play environments. Other parts of this program will include "Sports-in-a-Bus" activities, which incorporate games and recreational activities with UXO awareness, and puppet shows and songs performed by children.

Nicaragua

Working in conjunction with the National Demining Commission (CON) and its Sub-Commission on Education, Prevention and Re-Integration, UNICEF has plans to establish national standards for mine risk education for the mid-term plan 2001-2003. The organizations hope this will lead to improved coordination between clearance and education activities as well as better synchronization among mine action organizations in Nicaragua. The standards will encompass the following areas: planning, methodological approaches, community participation, material production, monitoring and impact evaluation. They also cover the development of curricular modules on MRE and create mine/UXO awareness materials.

Another of UNICEF’s ongoing projects in Nicaragua is a community liaison project which will be implemented by the Organization of American States (OAS). The plan for the project is to "identify those key NGOs which could act as focal points for further mine action activities in the most affected communities." This project will later merge with the effects of the two ongoing projects to integrate mine clearance and mine awareness activities nationwide more effectively.

Russia (Chechnya/Ingushetia)

UNICEF’s main role in Chechnya and Ingushetia is as the coordinator of all
Geneva Diary: Report from the GICH
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The Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining provides operational assistance to mine action programmes and operators, conducts research, and provides support to the Anti-personnel Mine Ban Convention.

by Ian Mansfield, Operations Director, GICH

During the past 12 months there has been an increase in the general activities of the Centre, the publication of a number of significant studies, and some changes to key staff.

By way of a brief review, the GICH Centre established in 1998 and it has three primary functions, all designed to support mine action: operational assistance; research work; and support for the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention.

This assistance is provided to the mine action efforts of national mine programmes and field operators, as well as the international community and the United Nations.

The Centre is staffed by 44 people, including a total of five individuals seconded by various governments. Funding for the Centre comes from the Swiss government, and a number of other donors.

Operational Support and Assistance

The Centre is well known for the development of the Information Management System for Mine Action (IMIS). Further installations of IMIS have been carried out and it has now been provided to 28 different field programmes around the world. Version 3.0 of IMIS is currently being field tested and it is planned for release to the field in early 2002. The Centre will offer enhancements to the database system, and it includes Mine Risk Education data fields.

Work on the next set of the International Mine Action Standards (IMS) is well under way, to complement the fine 23 standards endorsed by the UN in 2001. The next 15 standards will cover areas such as the use of mine detectors, risk education, contact procedures, and management training. The IMAS outreach programme has continued with workshops in North America, the Far East and Central Asia.

The Centre has continued to provide both general and specialised advice to the field, through providing training support for 200 practitioners. This includes 30 permanent staff members, plus 28 field support officers.

Research & Publications

One of the primary aims of the Centre is to formulate the development and dissemination of improved procedures, technologies and practices in mine action. This research, to support mine action, is a particular priority, the story of demining and the cost-effectiveness of mine action programmes in the field. A number of studies have recently been published including:

Endnotes


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Implementation Support Unit

The Third Meeting of States Parties to the Ottawa Convention mandated the GICH to form an Implementation Support Unit (ISU), which became operational in January 2002. The purpose of the ISU is to support the activities of States Parties to the Convention especially: the work of the Co-ordinating Committees and the International Work Programmes; and to provide support to the President of the Meeting of States Parties; assistance to States Parties and States Parties to the work of the Convention. In addition, the ISU has engaged work to establish a documentation centre on the Convention and its implementation. The Implementation Support Unit is Kerry Drinkard who can be contacted by email at kdrinkard@gichd.ch.

Contact Information