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Aisha Saeed Nalya
Save the Children Sweden

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Mine Awareness Education in the Republic of Yemen

The Yemen Mine Awareness Association works with a number of other organizations to spread mine awareness and conduct mine surveys in the hopes of increasing the safety of its people now and in years to come.



An MAE child-to-child team in Amran-Aden.

by **Aisha Saeed Nalya, Senior Program Officer, Save the Children Sweden, Aden; Chairperson, Yemen Mine Awareness Association**

Introduction

The Republic of Yemen is situated on the southern tip of the Arabian Peninsula between the Gulf of Aden and the Red Sea. It is a country of beautiful scenes and architecture. The Republic of Yemen has 17 million people and is growing at a rate of 3.7 percent annually.

Until 1990, Yemen was divided into two independent countries: North Yemen and South Yemen. For

several decades prior to unification both countries engaged in armed conflicts where AT and AP mines were deployed. However, most of the mines were planted in 1962–1975, when republicans fought the royalists in the North from 1963–1967, when the South fought for independence from the British during the border conflicts (1970–1983) and during the May–July 1994 civil war when separatists in the south fought for dissolving the union.

Yemen signed the Ottawa Convention on 4 December 1997 and ratified it on 1 September 1998. The bill ratifying the Ottawa Convention was passed in the parliament on 12 May 1998, and the ratification

instrument was deposited at the UN in New York 1 September 1998, making the Republic of Yemen the 34th country to ratify the convention.

Background

After the two-month war in 1994, Save the Children Sweden conducted some interviews in the Aden, Sana'a, Lahej and Abyan governorates with war-affected children. They found that there were problems with not only landmines but also UXO, which remained in several places and which many children were tempted to pick up.

Save the Children Sweden invited partner organizations such as the

Child-to-Child Association, the Girl Guides and the Boy Scouts, the Red Crescent and the Committee for War Traumatized Children; representatives from Ministries of Education, Defense, Interior, Health and Social Affairs; and international agencies such as UNICEF, UNHCR, UNDHA and ICRC to a workshop on landmines in April 1995 in Aden, where the focus was on mine awareness education.

Mine awareness materials used in Somali and Rwandan campaigns were introduced by UNESCO PEER staff from Nairobi, and the landmine situation in the south of Yemen was presented by two officers from the Ministry of Defense's demining unit and the UNDHA demining expert. As a result of this workshop, the Yemen Mines Awareness Committee was established.

Together with Save the Children Sweden, the Yemen Mines Awareness Committee has worked with mine awareness education in the three southern governorates—Aden, Lahej and Abyan—since 1995.

In December 1995 and January 1996, a mine awareness campaign was carried out in most of the primary schools in the three southern governorates. The preparations for this campaign started in April 1995 in

■ Field testing an MAE game in a school.



■ MAE in Lahej.

cooperation with Save the Children Sweden. Fifteen training of trainers workshops for 502 school staff in the three governorates were implemented. Also, 10,000 posters, 150,000 booklets with 10,000 teachers' manuals were designed by members of the Mines Awareness Committee and printed in time to reach over 140,000 school children, who in turn gave mine awareness messages to their families and communities.

In addition to this campaign, a special in-depth program on mine awareness was implemented with the Child-to-Child approach in 19 schools, where 109 school staff members were trained to involve 25,150 pupils.

In December 1998, the Yemen Mines Awareness Committee registered as an NGO named Yemen Mine Awareness Association (YMAA). Save the Children Sweden and YMAA carried out a community-based mine awareness pilot project in four villages: Al-Kood (Abyan), Amran (Aden), Masabeen (Aden) and Al-Habil (Lahej).

In connection with this project, a survey on mine victims/survivors has also been conducted. This is the first real survey on mine/UXO accidents, including deaths, to be undertaken in Yemen. In 1996, a team of YMAA also interviewed police, security and hospital staff in the three governorates of Aden, Abyan and Lahej.

Mine Awareness Department at the Regional Mine Action Centre (RMAC)

In 1998, the U.S. team trained 12 mine awareness educators within the RMAC in Aden. They have mobile village presentations in the villages around the C6 area, which was cleared recently by the new trained demining companies.

The work of the mine awareness department (six staff) at the RMAC in Aden concentrates on raising the awareness of different target groups living in villages close to the mine fields and supporting the work of the deminers in these fields.

Mine awareness is mainly raised by village presentations that are preceded by meetings with the key people (e.g., sheikhs, akles, imams and teachers) where information is gathered regarding accidents, mine victims, and places where mines and UXO have been found. Special forms are filled out to record the information that will also be valuable to deminers.

The village presentation consists of lectures to the communities in large meetings. The materials used are plastic models of frequently found mines/UXO and circulars.

Joint Mine Awareness Activities

The YMAA has been granted \$31,000 (U.S.) for its community-based Mine Awareness Education Program (MAE) for which it collaborates with the NMAC and RMAC. The money is also used for advocacy work around the Mine Ban Treaty. New mine awareness education material was produced specifically for children, and a quarterly newsletter featuring current mine action activities, the progress in the Mine Action Centres and interviews with the villagers in the mine-infested areas is circulated regularly. Eight issues have already been printed and distributed to the media as well as among the staff at the mine action

centres, the members of the National Demining Committee, concerned ministries and the community members involved in mine awareness education. International news events on landmine issues of children's, mine survivors' and villagers' voices are highlighted in the newsletter.

The mine awareness department at RMAC does not have the community-based approach that the YMAA uses in their MAE, which includes directly involving the community members in an MAE project in their village so that they disseminate mine awareness messages, as well as keeping the information flowing even after the mine awareness teams have left. Since they also help conduct mine victim surveys and evaluate the MAE project, it is now an advantage that the YMAA members have asked to cooperate in the villages to blend in their approach with that of the mine awareness department.

It has also been difficult for the mine awareness department to reach the women, since they do not have any women in their team, while half of the YMAA members are women and many are trained teachers.

A Level One Survey was finished in Yemen in July 2000. The survey identified 592 affected communities. To meet the needs of these communities, mine awareness programs have been developed jointly by YMAA and the mine awareness department at the Regional Mine Action Centre.

Both Qataba (Al-Dhala governorate) and Al-Nadra (Ebb governorate) were identified by Level One Survey as high-risk areas. Therefore, YMAA members supported by the American Embassy¹ (Sana'a) utilized their community-based experience and trained the key personalities in 10 villages during the time from April–September 2001 to disseminate mine awareness education among their

communities and practice safe behavior.

New mine awareness materials depicting mine survivors and cartoon stories for children will be produced during 2001.

Advocacy in the Region

In November 1997, a Regional Seminar on Landmines was organized by the Yemen Mines Awareness Committee and Save the Children Sweden. The event was sponsored by Save the Children Sweden, the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), and it was hosted by the President's Office. Eleven regional governments were represented: Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Sudan and the United Arab Emirates. NGO representatives came from Egypt, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, Saudi Arabia and Sudan. The Sana'a Declaration was approved by all the participants. The declaration urges all countries to sign the Mine Ban Treaty and calls for assistance from the international community to support humanitarian demining assistance not only for those countries that sign the treaty but also for those countries whose populations suffer from the mine threat but have not yet signed the treaty.

A regional Mine Awareness Education workshop with the Child-to-Child approach was organized in

■ MAE regional workshop with CTC approach.



Middle East



■ MAE in summer camp.

Yemen by Save the Children Sweden and took place 27 November–3 December 1999. Twenty-five participants from Sudan, Jordan, Palestine, Lebanon and Yemen took part in the weeklong workshop in Aden. Among the Yemeni participants with facilitators from the Yemen Mine Awareness Association were teachers from primary schools in Aden, Abyan and Lahej and also staff from the National and Regional Mine Action Centers. A field visit to Al Kood community was also on the program. The participants here had the opportunity to meet with school children and community members who are involved in the community-based MAE pilot project.

The November 1999 Regional Mine Awareness Workshop, with the Child-to-Child Approach, led to two workshops in Jordan and Lebanon. Shafica Moh'd Saeed, member of the YMAA and Chairperson of the Child-to-Child Association, facilitated a mine awareness education workshop on 17–18 April 2000, which was funded by Save the Children U.S. for youths in Tyre in the

south of Lebanon. In August 2000, Aisha Saeed, Chairperson of the Yemen Mine Awareness Association and Program Officer for Save Children Sweden, facilitated a mine awareness workshop for supervisors of youth center held on 8–17 August 2000 in Aqaba, Jordan.

Designing, Field Testing and Producing Materials

In 1995, the Yemen Mine Awareness Committee designed and published two booklets and a poster in cooperation with the Ministry of Defense and UNDHA expert Paul Kelly. This material was used in a 1995 mine awareness campaign reaching school children in the primary schools in Aden, Lahej and Abyan. In 1996, the mine awareness campaign was evaluated, the material was revised and it was decided that in the future all newly produced material should be field tested.

In July 2000, a game and a new poster on frequent mines and UXO in different parts of Yemen were designed. During the summer camp, this new mine awareness material was field tested in schools, and children gave valuable comments that were considered during final production. Also, comments from the communities in the pilot areas and the staff of the mine action center were included.

Both YMAA and the staff from the mine action program participated in the international workshop on "The Design of Material, Resources and Other Media in Mine Awareness Program," held on 19–22 February 2001, which will have an impact on mine awareness material produced in Yemen.

Lessons Learned

- Good cooperation and coordination between the NGOs, the government and communities is a must for the mine awareness program to succeed. Also, work at all levels (e.g., local, national) is essential.

- Mine awareness messages must be repeated several times, using different methods but giving the same message.

- Community-based mine awareness activities should be followed up involving all members of the communities.

- It is important to use the appropriate mine awareness materials for different target groups.

- Nomads, shepherds and children not attending schools should be reached at their gathering points.

- Children are resourceful and can influence other children in their community, especially those with less opportunity and education than themselves. ■

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**All photos courtesy of the author.*

Contact Information

Aisha Saeed Nalya
Senior Programme Officer
Save the Children Sweden
Chairperson of YMAA
P.O. Box: 476
Khormaksar, Aden
Republic of Yemen
Tel. (Office): 967-2-231602/231507
Fax: 967-2-232035
E-mail: rbyemcaccd@y.net.ye