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IMPLEMENTING LANDMINE AWARENESS PROGRAMS

Constraints & Strategies

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Socio-Economics and Landmine Awareness

Background

Among the wider mine action community, recognition is steadily growing of the need to incorporate socio-economic data and analysis into the planning, prioritization and evaluation of mine action. Shifting the focus away from the achievement of straightforward targets of land cleared or numbers of mines removed, onto improving the lives of communities threatened by landmines and unexploded ordnance (UXO), represents a major change in mine action thinking. Mine awareness, which also seeks to integrate socio-economic analysis into its work can play an important role in rounding out this concept.

Definitions

The traditional definition of mine awareness is that of a community-based education project. Its aim is to provide information and possible options to individuals living in mine-affected communities with a view to altering behavior among those individuals and groups engaged in high-risk activities. This definition, though technically accurate, is, unfortunately, rather narrow and has, in general, been debilitating. Of course, the ultimate goal of mine awareness is to mitigate the effects of landmines and UXO on the community and to reduce the number of civilians killed or injured by these weapons, but it is also much, or should be, more than this.

Perhaps a better way to define mine awareness is to think of it as community liaison. This community liaison function is not only the conduit for educational messages and activities but it also can help

generate large amounts of community survey information, and unlike in a formal survey, this data flow can be maintained over a long period of time. As a liaison function, it can also engender support and involvement of the community that, in turn, can lead to better co-operation, better information exchange, local involvement in things such as mine and mine field reporting, maintenance of mine field marking and greater facilitation of mine action at the community level.

Common Institutional Constraints in Implementation

Institutional Perceptions

The speed with which mine action has evolved over the past decade, combined with the natural human inclination toward seeking quantifiable results, has led some of us in the mine action community to hold mine awareness activities at the periphery of the discipline. Mine clearance, with its physicality, easily quantifiable progress and tangible, visible, product-oriented results, has lent itself to greater feelings of satisfaction and performance and has become the predominant mine action activity. Mine awareness, on



Warning signs illustrating the dangers of mines are placed at regular intervals along Route 58, Battambang Province
Photo c/o ICRC/Tim PAGE

the other hand, enjoys no such easily measurable or quantifiable products. It has been perceived mainly as a complement to the core activity of clearance and at times a drain on much-needed funds. Nor, in all honesty, has mine awareness taken steps to quantify its impact and thus correct this perception.

Therefore, mine awareness programs, in general, have not been included in the overall planning of mine action. To date, few mine action organizations have recognized the need to integrate mine awareness into their operations. As mentioned, mine awareness programs should strive to offer more than simple teaching. Fortunately, this trend has begun to reverse itself as mine awareness and the data it collects are increasingly being recognized as vital to ensuring and measuring the effectiveness of mine action.

Misperceptions

Some parts of the mine action community believe mine awareness is important, others do not, though the latter are, generally speaking, unable to accurately describe what mine awareness involves or appreciate how it can be an effective part of the mine action process. Only when there is a fuller under-

standing of the important role mine awareness plays in data collection, community mobilization, monitoring and evaluation, and of course, short- and medium-term risk reduction will the discipline be appropriately housed within the mine action operating framework.

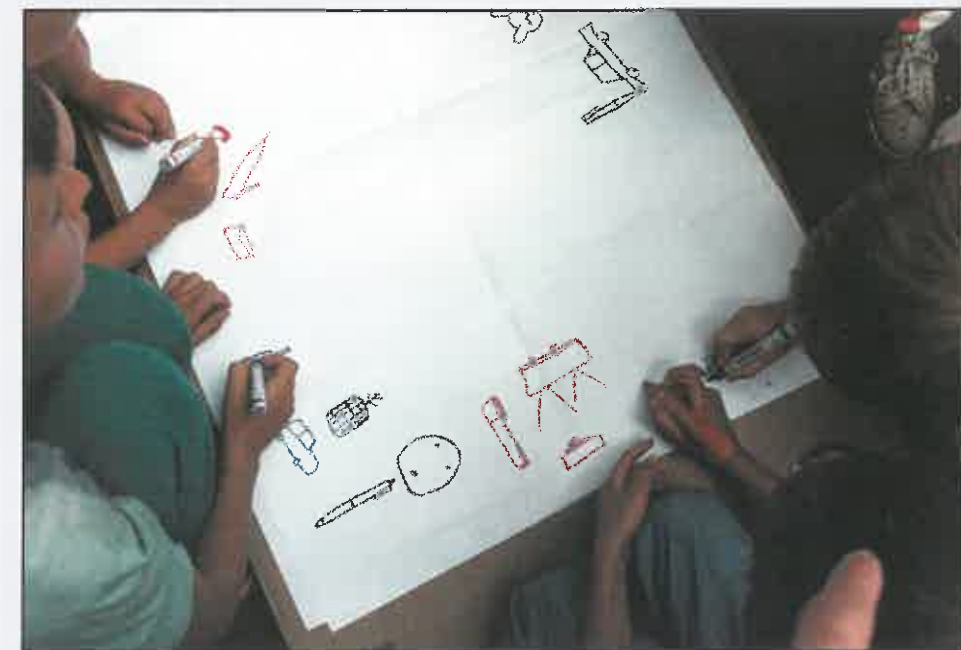
Expertise

As mine awareness often functions as an adjunct to mine action, there has been a significant problem of relevant expertise with technical staff often being miscast in the role of the educator. In fact, mine awareness is an educational activity with little emphasis on the technical aspects of mine action. The technical knowledge required to conduct a mine awareness program alone can easily be outsourced or learned in a relatively short period of time, whereas the skills required for competent pedagogy can take considerably longer to acquire.

Conversely, many landmine awareness education practitioners tend to be long-term community NGO workers with only limited experience in either formal or non-formal community education, child-to-child technique, adult education, media, marketing or even public health.

Mine Awareness and Mine Action

Mine awareness and its role in mine action has, in the past, represented a blind spot for the mine ac-



Children identify mines and UXO as part of their mine awareness education.
Photo c/o ICRC/Bernard Oberson



Mine awareness should be considered a vital first step in establishing a mine action strategy
Photo c/o ICRC/Laurence Desvignes

tion community. On the one hand, we have advocated mine awareness as an important pursuit necessary to alleviate the terrible suffering caused by this type of weapon. On the other, we have kept our distance from it and allowed organizations with little experience in either mine action or community education to conduct mine awareness on our behalf. This represents an operational problem because, again, the full community liaison role mine awareness should fulfill cannot effectively be realized by organizations functioning outside of the mine action information loop. The various disciplines that make up mine action, mine awareness included, cannot easily be separated from one another. Integrated mine action demands all elements work in concert in order to be effective.

The mine action community must, therefore, be careful to avoid sanctioning untested organizations to do mine awareness. The publishing of *The International Guidelines for Mine and Unexploded Ordnance Awareness Education* will undoubtedly facilitate this process if they are embraced and incorporated into all mine action organizations' modus operandi. Further, they should demand more of mine awareness than posters and lectures.

Communication vs. Education

A great deal of emphasis has been placed on the production of media items that are mistakenly considered to be effective educational instruments in and of themselves, but an input is not an outcome. Education in its purest form requires the two-way exchange and acceptance of information; it is participatory, and ideally active rather than passive. If we accept that the primary goal of mine awareness is to reduce civilian accidents through behavior modification within the community, then it becomes clear that the simple dissemination of a message will not suffice.

Furthermore, it is often believed—mistakenly—that mine awareness is based on simple, universal messages that can be duplicated from one context to another, that it is enough to inform (presumably ignorant) people what mines look like and that they should not touch them. In fact, the appropriate methodology for mine awareness is wholly context-dependent. This approach demands careful assessment and consultation during the planning process.

Implementing Partners

Solutions to the mine problem are by necessity long-term, and mine awareness, which is by its very nature community-oriented, is no different. Indeed, it is nearly impossible for any sustainable mine aware-

ness project to be implemented without the direct participation of a local partner with strong ties to the communities at risk. Without the central participation of the community, mine awareness education is doomed to be short-lived.

In contrast, the approach of the wider mine action community has tended to be top-down and non-participatory. Too often, mine clearance has been planned and implemented without a true local partner, a position that has repeatedly proven problematic, though in fairness, getting national governments to participate in mine clearance planning has often been initially very difficult. In order to address the long-term needs of countries living under the specter of mine contamination, closer cooperation between the development and mine action communities would undoubtedly enhance the effectiveness of each other's work, a fact that both sides need to realize.

Common Operational Constraints in Implementation Literacy

One of the single most challenging and most often misunderstood aspects of community education in the developing world is indigenous literacy levels and familiarity with various communication approaches. By and large, mine contamination tends to be felt most among the agrarian, rural population in mine-infested countries, and it is precisely those individuals who are the hardest to reach.

Semi-literate or even pre-literate conditions often prevail. Individuals often have little or no formal schooling, may have either only a rudimentary or no ability to write their own language and, in some cases may be unfamiliar with written communication of any kind. Designing an educational strategy to meet the needs of these individuals is challenging. Electronic media are quite often impossible or impractical to use, as are most printed materials. Accordingly, changing behavior in such contexts through an educational process demands extremely precise program planning and design.

Geography

In the Western world, physical proximity is no longer a prerequisite for the exchange and flow of information. Using a myriad of electronic media, information can be disseminated globally in a matter of minutes. Oppositely, on the village level in the developing world, information must be physically transported either by word of mouth or through the passage of a particular piece of material. In areas where there are few roads and even fewer vehicles this becomes one of the single largest impediments to a suc-

cessful mine awareness campaign. There are virtually no conduits for the information to reach far beyond the point where it is introduced into the country. Messages must therefore be designed to travel using local networks and patterns and not be reliant on outside intervention if they are to outlast the program cycle.

Conflict

It is also important to remember that mine awareness can actually be an imported priority. Though of concern to individuals forced to live in mine-affected environments, it does not necessarily take precedence over other problems, especially in the

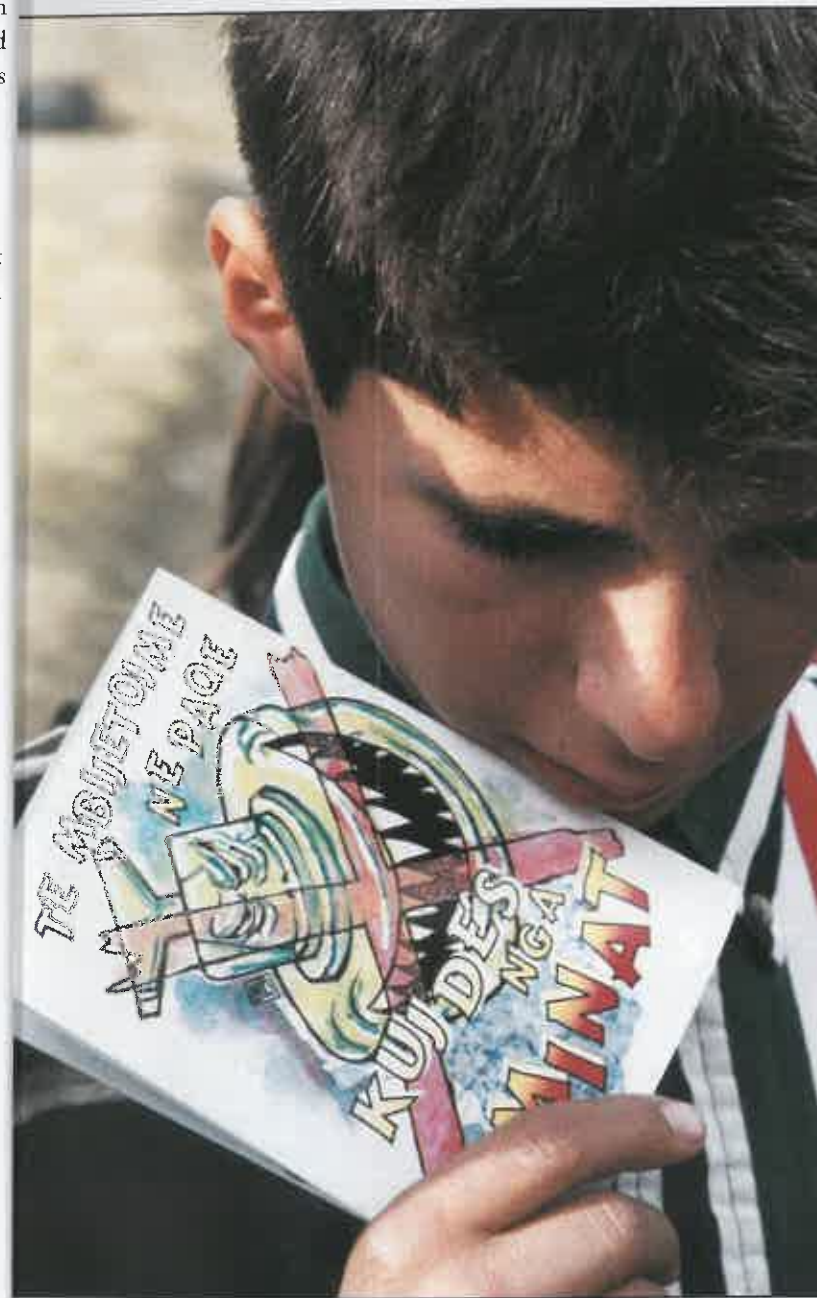
eyes of urban, local and national governments. Risk is an individual perception, and for one group to impose their assessment of risk on another is inappropriate and is a faulty foundation for a program planner. Particularly in times of conflict, traditional systems for security and self-preservation are interrupted, which, combined with the disruption resulting from the physical violence of internal or external conflict, makes it very difficult to address the public health needs of the community.

Movement

IDPs and refugees present a unique challenge for mine awareness education. Removed from their context, lacking knowledge about local conditions and often on the move, they are at great risk from mine accident. But these very factors, however, further complicate the educational process as the target population is not sedentary and is, by and large, preoccupied with meeting basic survival needs. Designing a response to such challenging programmatic circumstances requires great flexibility and an extremely close relationship with indigenous systems.

Profiles of Risk-Taking Behavior

It has often been assumed that people step on landmines by chance: a combination of factors that combine to create simple bad luck. The reality of exactly why different individuals have mine accidents is, in fact, quite complex. In essence, an individual's risk-taking behaviors are dependent upon a number of pa-



Because children learn in a different manner than adults, mine awareness programs should be specifically designed for children.
Photo c/o ICRC/Laurence Desjardins

rameters, both intentional and unintentional.

Unintentional risk-taking can often be the result of pure curiosity or a lack of knowledge about the actual threat. This tends to happen to children and individuals on the move, refugees and the internally displaced. This group of risk-takers is by far the most often targeted. It is easier to affect change among these individuals, as they are generally receptive to the risk-reducing information.

Intentional risk-taking is more nuanced and poses the greatest challenge when designing behavior modification strategies. Fate, feelings of invincibility, adventure seeking, and, often the most common, economic necessity are all factors leading to intentional risk-taking, which has often been ignored in the messages and strategies of mine awareness campaigns. Linking mine awareness to the pantheon of development activities is the only viable way to provide real options to those living in a mine-contaminated environment. It is not adequate to give a series of negative messages on what an individual cannot do while never offering any alternatives for meeting the very survival needs that are motivating the dangerous behavior.

Recommended Practices

Community-Based

A drastically misrepresented methodology, community-based educational activities, are more than a geographic position. A program or activity is not community-based by virtue of its location in an affected community. It is not enough to simply have a representation in local communities, activities must actively involve relevant leaders and authority figures within the community in every aspect of the program cycle from initial data collection and program planning and priority setting to actual implementation.

Such an approach must be embraced by all mine action disciplines and not simply be restricted to the design of a poster or the selection of an instructor. This close contact and respect for the specific concerns of a community will also assist in the survey process as greater and more accurate information can be collected (and updated). It assists in setting more relevant priorities for mine clearance and helps to ensure mine-field marking signs are left in place and maintained.

Child-to-Child

Again, this is a term that has been applied to many programs without clear consideration or understanding of its true meaning. Child-to-child is a

specific approach to learning developed by the Child-to-Child Trust, which operates under the Institute of Education at London University. Though too lengthy to adequately describe in these pages, as an approach it consists of four fundamental precepts. The approach requires children to participate in developing and designing activities, in defining and suggesting solutions to the context-specific problems they face. Furthermore, child-to-child is neither bound by time or by the limits of the classroom. It is not simply kids teaching kids. True, child-to-child, performed as the designers of the methodology intended, is a great asset; the value of the adulterated version is questionable.

Community Data Collection

The new buzzword in mine action, community data collection, has long been part of the mine awareness program cycle. Any community-based education program must have a data collection component as part of their regular monitoring and evaluation procedure. This process of generating community level data can easily be adjusted to include certain vital types of data of universal interest to mine action. This being said however, there is an important caveat.

Though numerous organizations involved in mine awareness profess to collect data, little or nothing is ever seen of it. Data is not in and of itself information. For data to be useful, it must be analyzed, turned into useful information and infused into the programming cycle. All too often, data is collected and stored, not analyzed and certainly not used in the decision-making process. Collecting data for collection's sake serves no purpose.

Employee Development

The role of mine awareness within mine action must be clearly introduced as an operational prerequisite for all mine action staff working at the headquarters and field level. Furthermore, individuals within the mine action community must be identified and tasked with professional development in community mine awareness education and socioeconomic perspectives. There is nothing sacrosanct about landmine awareness that precludes the involvement of technical or other mine action professionals.

Links to Mine Action

The majority of national mine action coordinating bodies, be they United Nations or host country, have been more than willing to sub-contract mine awareness initiatives to other ministries, U.N. bodies or NGOs. It has appeared intentional that mine awareness is placed to the side so the other mine ac-

tion initiatives can proceed unhindered. This is often done because the mine action coordinating body does not feel qualified or prepared to engage in such a specialized endeavor; unfortunately, to leave the pursuit to others has only reinforced its exclusion. Where specialist mine awareness staff have been hired by mine action coordinating bodies, the salary offered has not attracted staff of professional caliber.

Mine Awareness as a Socio-Economic Foundation

The factors of severity that affect a country are ultimately what any mine action program seeks to alleviate. Removing mines is not the priority, but removing the threat and alleviating the suffering is. Mine awareness should be considered a vital first step in establishing a viable mine action strategy. It provides the conduit wherein the mine action community can monitor the progress of its work, receive community feedback on mine contamination and contribute to priority-setting procedures.

In most mine action programs, the lack of concrete community-originated, socioeconomic data seriously hampers accuracy in planning, priority setting and operations. This is especially so when mine action has been initiated before the completion of a proper Level 1 survey (as is quite often the case). In the absence of this vital survey information, mine awareness data-gathering mechanisms can, within certain parameters, compensate for this loss. And once a Level 1 survey has been conducted, mine awareness can update the information on an ongoing basis. It can also help provide relevant socioeconomic information by which other mine action disciplines can judge their relative performance.

Links to Development

Of the mine action disciplines, mine awareness along with victim assistance is, at heart, a development activity which has been adapted to fit the needs of mine-affected communities. Thus, mine awareness can provide the vital link between mine action and development that can help bring the two disciplines closer together. Using the contacts and data-gathering component of a mine awareness program, mine action can begin to address the wider needs of the community.

Monitoring and Evaluation

There is a nasty question that has plagued mine awareness practitioners for years: how do we know

mine awareness works? Unfortunately, those practitioners who have been forced to answer this question have avoided accuracy and have replied with numbers (numbers of facilitators trained, individuals briefed or posters distributed), none of which measure either the effect or the efficiency of the mine awareness program.

The monitoring and evaluation of education projects are not only possible, but they are a common occurrence in the education field. For mine awareness to gain the credibility it deserves, it must be able to demonstrate it has a positive impact and ultimately is good value for its money. Without proper monitoring and evaluation of programs, the greater mine action community, as well as the donor community, will never have full confidence in mine awareness education.

Conclusion

Mine awareness must become an integral part of the thought processes of mine action personnel by being fully incorporated into the training and recruitment mechanisms of those engaged in mine action. Mine awareness must take the additional step of effectively monitoring and evaluating its work, concretely demonstrating its value. Greater links between mine action and the development community must be established in order to share resources and better meet the needs of those living under the specter of mine contamination.

Through mine awareness and its links to the affected communities, a positive exchange of important data and information can flourish. This data will provide the backbone of any well-conceived mine action program and will, in turn, provide the wider parameters by which its own successes and failures can be measured. ■

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