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Funding Mine Risk Education: Saving Lives Around the Globe

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Funding Mine Risk Education:

Saving Lives Around the Globe

Mine risk education is an important tool in preventing mine-related injuries and deaths. 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 Lange, 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 there. In 1989, USAID established the Patrick J. Leahy War Victims Fund, which provides support to people living with disabilities, primarily those who suffer from mobility-related injuries caused by unexploded ordnance, including anti-personnel landmines and other direct and indirect causes of physical disability. While USAID continued to support mine action in Afghanistan and elsewhere, in 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 to support 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 conditions for the safe 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 unsuitable for farming conditions 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 the 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, much credit for these achievements is due to the emergence of mine risk education programs. Mine risk education helps to inform affected populations of the dangers 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 steer clear of specific areas and unknown objects.



■ Angolan boy performing a skit where he steps on a landmine.

Mine Risk Education

Mine risk education is one of the major components of mine action. The United States may assist with one, some or all components of mine action in a mine-affected country based on specific needs. In many cases, the affected nation will establish a Mine Action Center or National Demining Office to coordinate mine action activities. Mine risk education entails teaching people how to recognize, avoid and inform demining authorities of the presence of landmines. Teaching people this information, in most cases, significantly reduces the number of casualties. Mine risk education uses a variety of materials and media to convey important messages. These materials must be sensitive to the cultural traditions of the local populations, or else the material may not be conveyed properly. Educating whole populations, allowing 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-

grams (HDP), is the lead agency in coordinating U.S. humanitarian demining programs worldwide and oversees the daily management of bilateral demining assistance programs. The Nonproliferation, Antiterrorism, Demining and Related (NADR) programs appropriation funds mine action operations around the world, having provided nearly \$180 million since 1993. The following countries currently receive NADR support for mine risk education programs: Afghanistan, Armenia, Guatemala, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Mozambique, Rwanda, Senegal, Vietnam and Yemen. Countries that have received such assistance in the past include: Macedonia, Namibia, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Oman, Thailand, Zimbabwe, Angola, Croatia, Ecuador, Ethiopia, Honduras, Jordan, Lebanon and Nicaragua.

The Department of Defense also funds mine action activities through the Overseas Humanitarian, Disaster and Civic Aid (OHDACA) appropriation fund. Other U.S. Government agencies funding mine action are the USAID Patrick J. Leahy War Victims Fund, and the Center for Disease Control. In addition, the United States channels all of its mine action support for Balkan states through the Slovenian International Trust Fund (ITF).

Current Activities

Mine risk education activities funded by the U.S. government are carried out by the Special Operation Forces, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and its implementing partners and other non-governmental organizations (NGOs) such as HALO Trust, CARE and Norwegian Peoples Aid (NPA). The U.S. Department of Defense's Special Operations Forces (SOF) provide mine risk education training in many different counties. SOF personnel are fluent in the languages of mine-affected countries and undergo country-specific cultural training prior to engagement in any of these countries in order to be more successful and efficient in their training.

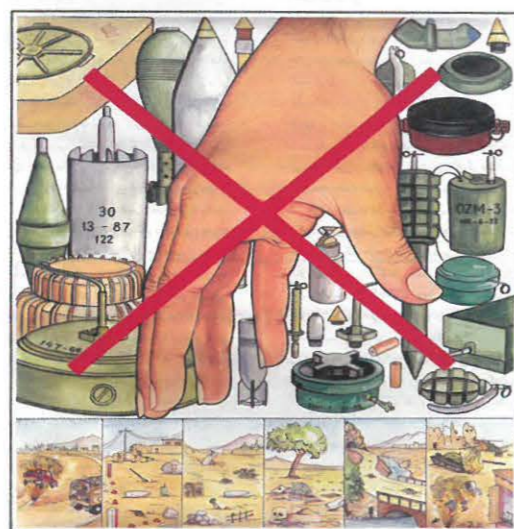
UNICEF is involved in implement-

ing many State Department funded programs around the world spreading mine risk education, specifically to women and children. Their current activities include programs in Afghanistan, Colombia, Eritrea, Vietnam and Ethiopia.

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-afflicted countries in the world,

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هرگز به ماينها و مهمات منفرناشده دست نزنيد زيراسب گشتان و زخمي ساختن شما شده مي تواند.

■ Mine risk education poster in Afghanistan.

and with a high number of victims per month, a mine risk education program in Afghanistan is vital to the survival of the country. Since 1989, a mine risk education program has been a component of the Mine Action Program for Afghanistan (MAPA) and has implemented a variety of mine risk education projects.

UNICEF and the Mine Action Center for Afghanistan (MACA) have developed a joint plan of action, which will be implemented through MAPA in order to ensure success of mine risk education in Afghanistan. Three projects expected to be completed by the end of December 2002 include Capacity Building, Community-and School-Based Mine Risk Education, and Information Manage-

ment in order to train, educate and survey mine risk education among civilians in a variety of ways. A number of activities exist within each project to facilitate the program objectives, which include providing direct instruction to populations at risk, building and enhancing capacities of MAPA mine risk education agencies, further incorporation of mine risk education initiatives into available mass media and public information systems, and improving information collection and analysis initiatives.

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.

Colombia

Colombia's mine risk education activities are carried out by UNICEF and are funded by the U.S. Department of State in the amount of \$152,000. The current project is being implemented in three phases, with each phase increasing the project's total geographic coverage in order to educate as many people as possible. Objectives of the project include instituting programs in 15 affected communities and sensitizing 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 leaders to act as trainers, developing a mass media campaign, organizing mine risk education training sessions, and developing 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 a full-time officer 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, with a grant of \$120,000 from the U.S. State Department, are now focusing on education among communities, specifically designing school-based mine risk education training. Between December 2001 and January 2002, UNICEF, laying the foundation for in-school mine-risk education, trained 270 schoolteachers. Specific objectives include ensuring that 100 percent of school children in all schools in the Temporary Security Zone (TSZ) have access to information on landmines, developing peer educators on mine risk education through formal education systems and integrating landmine awareness into school curriculums. Through this community-based program, a mixture of strategies and activities will reduce casualties among children dramatically.

Vietnam

Vietnam is one of the most heavily mined countries in the world, with 350,000-800,000 tons of UXO and 3.5 million landmines. In the past, mine risk education programs among communities have been very limited; therefore the need for present activities is demanding.

UNICEF, with \$171,000 from the U.S. Department of State, has developed current activities, which include a multimedia awareness campaign, information dissemination, UXO/mine warning signs, child-to-child peer education groups and an in-school mine risk education curriculum. These programs will help children and adults have a better baseline understanding of the threats that landmines pose and will help them execute mine safety. Because there was very little knowledge of the mine situation among residents before these programs, it is anticipated that the community participation in the development of sustainable solutions to the problem will rapidly rise, and the threat of casualties will decline.

Ethiopia

A mine risk education project was established in late 1999 by UNICEF due to the increasing vulnerability of children and women to landmines placed during Ethiopia's border war with Eritrea. U.S. State Department funds (\$150,000) will support training for the Rehabilitation and Development Organization (RaDO) and the Ethiopian Mine Action Office (EMAO) 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 Finishing

Namibia

In Namibia, between 2000 and 2001, there was a significant decrease in landmine-related casualties. The 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 Paper. Over 500,000 copies were printed in four indigenous 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 submitted from 60 schools in hopes of winning small prizes. Five drawings were chosen as the winners and were made into posters and distributed among schools. This project was an effective way to make com-



■ Civilians in Laos attend a Mine Education class.

Mine Awareness Education

■ Youth learn mine awareness from their teacher.



munity members active in mine risk education.

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 Commit-

tee 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 audiocassettes 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 teaching mine risk 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 (VVAFA). Children between the ages of 10 and 14 are trained as educators on mine risk education and are actively involved in developing games, plays, songs and interactive sessions with other children. UNICEF and VVAFA 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, VVAFA 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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