International Workshop on the Design of Materials, Resources and Other Media in Mine Awareness Programmes

Organised by Rädda Barnen in Aden, Yemen

19-22 February 2001

Summary Report

At the invitation of Rädda Barnen (Save the Children Sweden), 35 participants from 20 countries gathered in Aden from 19-22 February 2001to discuss the design of all forms of media (that is, all tools and resources, and not only mass media) used in mine awareness programmes. Through a combination of presentations, working groups and plenary discussions,[1] the workshop sought to exchange experiences, draw together lessons learned and identify unmet needs, with a view to strengthening the effectiveness of future programming.

The participants benefited from presentations on a number of ongoing research initiatives and operational supports, including Handicap International's in-house evaluation of mine-risk education tools from its programmes in Afghanistan, Angola, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Ethiopia, Mozambique and Senegal. The evaluation looks at whether the tools managed to create a sustainable educative dynamic within the community, and considers the appropriateness of the messages and the conduit for their transmission. Methodology is based on interviews and an analytical workshop. The results are due to be published before the end of the year.

In the course of the discussions participants identified a number of key principles that will require further elaboration in the future and discussed their effective implementation at field level:

1. *A careful needs assessment should be the basis on which all tools, media and other resources are elaborated.*

A needs assessment is necessary to determine the nature, extent and perception of a mine/unexploded ordnance problem, the at-risk populations and risk-taking behaviour, the existing resources available to address the problem, and the appropriate mine awareness messages and their effective delivery. A mine awareness communication strategy must be underpinned by the findings of the needs assessment and any subsequent information obtained through formative research and ongoing monitoring.

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[1] The final agenda of the workshop is attached as Appendix 1.

2. *Community participation in mine awareness is essential to the effectiveness and the sustainability of the programme.*

Those who are to be targeted by mine awareness must be specifically and substantially involved in the initiative from the outset. Not only does this promote the longevity of the programme, it also strengthens the effectiveness of the delivery of mine awareness messages and can help to build confidence in affected communities in mine action as a whole. In terms of media, the community should help to direct the design and distribution of any materials, as well as to monitor the effectiveness of the strategy at local level.

3. *Adaptation of the content of existing resources, tools, media and messages from one context to another is not recommended.*

In designing mine awareness messages, tools and other media, adaptation of text and images from an alien environment tends to be not only ineffective, it may even be dangerous. Messages and materials may be inaccurate or culturally inappropriate, there may be mistakes in translation, and there is often a tendency to omit the necessary field-testing before use. This indicates that storage of "pre-planned" mine awareness kits at country or regional level as part of emergency preparedness is not advisable. Media concepts, however, may be appropriate across different contexts and environments.

4. *Field-testing of resources, tools, media and materials is essential prior to their widespread dissemination.*

Too often, mine awareness media have been used without testing their accuracy, appropriateness or effectiveness among the target populations. Many of the errors that have been committed in the course of mine awareness programmes could have been avoided if materials had been formally tested with a representative sample, and then revised on the basis of the test results.

5. *Except in emergency situations, the core objective of mine awareness is to effect behavioural change. As such, mine awareness must continue to exchange lessons with similar public health information programmes.*

In situations other than emergency, mine awareness programmes should be seeking to bring about behavioural change, reducing risk-taking behaviour to an absolute minimum. As such, mine awareness must continue to learn from and exchange lessons with similar public health education programmes, such as those seeking to prevent HIV/AIDS infection, drink-driving, or to encourage people to give up smoking. Research has suggested that the use of shocking imagery may attract public attention in the short term, but is unlikely to be effective in the longer term; such an approach must therefore be supplemented by more positive images that encourage alternative behaviour. In addition, public advertising campaigns that attempt to effect behavioural change may also have important ramifications for mine awareness.

*6. **In emergency situations, mine awareness is likely to concentrate more on providing information than on seeking to educate.***

In an emergency situation characterised by rapid and mass population movements, usually provoked by armed conflict or oppression, the chief task of mine awareness programmes is to reach the maximum number of people with basic safety messages in the shortest possible time. Accordingly, although this does not obviate the requirement for needs assessment and testing of materials and messages, such assessment and testing is likely to be swifter and less thorough than would normally be the case.

*7. **Mine awareness can make greater use of the mass media.***

Although some mine awareness programmes have effectively tapped in to existing mass media, such as through radio and television, many have failed to exploit these existing resources that have wide outreach. The use of individual storytelling that emphasises the human aspect can be an easy way to interest the commercial media in broadcasting information about the mine and unexploded ordnance threat in a given context. A good example is the introduction into soap operas of mine awareness and other public health messages, such as has occurred in Afghanistan, though care must be taken not to overload the educational input and thereby reduce viewer/listener input.

*8. **Mine awareness must seek to integrate itself better within wider mine action.***

Experiences in a number of countries, including Cambodia, Kosovo and Yemen have shown the benefits of improved integration of mine awareness within mine action, either through the deployment of integrated or co-ordinated mine action teams, or through the improved exchange of information.

*9. **Child-to-child mine awareness programmes can promote the active participation of children in society as well as help to ensure their protection against mines and unexploded ordnance.***

In designing mine awareness media for children, materials should be attractive, clear and relate to their known environment. Different materials will be needed for different age groups. The goal is that ultimately children themselves should develop the materials and resources used. In implementing child-to-child programmes, it is important not to forget the gender aspect, particularly the involvement of girls, both in the design and dissemination of information or education materials.

*10. **Care must be taken to select appropriate delivery mechanisms for mine awareness media and messages.***

It is widely agreed that personal message delivery is the best medium and that posters should be the last – not the first – resort. The mass media should not, therefore, be made responsible for behavioural change: "media has to be part of a process" in the words of

one participant. There was some discussion of the role of the military, which in the past has been dissuaded because of the danger of an overly technical approach to mine awareness, with the suggestion being made that where the military are both well trained in mine awareness education and well perceived in the community, they should be considered as a possible conduit for mine awareness.

11. Mine awareness should promote positive images of mine victims and the disabled in general.

In many countries, the disabled, including mine amputees, are frequently marginalised by society and their rights abused. On occasions, mine awareness has depicted mine amputees as beggars or individuals with little or no future. If they refer to the disabled, programmes and materials should strive to demonstrate the *abilities* rather than *disabilities* of the victims of war and other disabled. This addresses both community awareness of the strengths of the disabled and promotes their social reintegration.

12. Mine awareness programmes must take care not to create panic among the wider populations in affected countries.

In those countries in which the mine and unexploded ordnance problem is finite, there is a risk of causing "mine panic", which may undermine confidence in using land that has been cleared or has been declared free of contamination. Programmes must balance the need to reach all at-risk communities with the concern not to engender fear among those who are not in danger.

13. Mine awareness may not be the appropriate response to a mine and unexploded ordnance threat.

Where community risk-taking is intentional, conscious and borne out of the overriding imperative for food, water and fuel, providing information on safe behaviour is not only ineffective, it undermines community confidence in mine action operators. In such situations, community liaison teams, such as those deployed by the Mines Advisory Group in Cambodia, can serve as the conduit through which communities can affect the prioritisation of mine clearance or other community development projects that will effectively reduce risk (e.g., provision of firewood or safe access to water).

14. Effective improvement in mine awareness programmes demands greater co-ordination and operational support internationally and locally.

Concerned by the challenge of incorporating the lessons learned during the workshop at field level, participants noted a number of planned initiatives, including the international standards on mine awareness and emergency preparedness packages to be developed by UNICEF in co-operation with UNMAS, and suggested that they be complemented by a series of "how to" handbooks to ensure the effective implementation of standards in future programme.

UNICEF further suggested that the creation of an international "User Focus Group" would help to monitor the implementation of good practice across the discipline (a first meeting is planned to take place in Geneva on 10 May 2001 during the intersessionals of the Ottawa Convention); this can supplement the efforts of the Working Group on Mine Awareness of the International Campaign to Ban Landmines. In this light, Handicap International has proposed the development of a code of conduct on how to share mine awareness tools; this initiative will be discussed at the first User Focus Group.

The Comprehensive Minutes and Appendices of the International Workshop on the Design of Materials, Resources and Other Media in Mine Awareness Programmes can be obtained upon request from Save the Children Sweden's Middle East Office in Beirut.

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