

Consultation on Landmine and Unexploded Ordnance Risk Education in the Mekong Sub-Region

Siem Reap, Cambodia
15-16 November 2004

FINAL STATEMENT

We, the 67 participants in the regional workshop on Mine and UXO Risk Education sponsored by the Fund for Reconciliation and Development and Cambodian Red Cross, are governmental and non-governmental practitioners and managers of MRE programs in Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar (Burma), Sri Lanka, Thailand, and Vietnam. At the conclusion of the two-day participatory workshop, we jointly wrote the following summary of best practices, lessons learned, and recommendations in mine and UXO risk education.

BEST PRACTICES

We find that MRE initiatives have been most successful when using the following methods and approaches:

1. Community-based initiatives, such as Participatory Rural Appraisal techniques of village mapping, with full local participation in all aspects of projects including monitoring and evaluation.
2. Integration of MRE with other mine action activities, such as mine/UXO clearance, as well as with other community development activities.
3. Use of mass media, including television spots, radio programs, and production of video documentaries
4. Public meetings featuring a variety of activities, from speeches to drama and role playing.
5. Adoption of MRE curricula in schools, including visual aid materials.
6. Use of child-to-child, child-to-adult and peer education models.
7. Establishment of volunteer networks and Village Development Committees in the community.
8. Organizing public performances and contests.
9. Use of international MRE standards, while taking local conditions into consideration.
10. Emphasis on capacity building for local partners.
11. Combining MRE data reporting systems with mine/UXO casualty information management systems.

LESSONS LEARNED

Through our experience with MRE programs to date, we have drawn the following conclusions:

1. As the Mekong sub-region countries are enjoying a prolonged period of peace and stability, the composition of the landmine/UXO problem in our countries is changing. In many settings, UXO now pose a greater threat than landmines.
2. We recognize that MRE programs have often had a limited mandate of educating people who are not yet aware of the dangers posed by landmines and UXO. At the same time, an increasing number of mine/UXO casualties are occurring to those, especially adult males, who are already cognizant of the risks they are taking. MRE initiatives have often been more successful at raising awareness than changing behavior.
3. Even after successful MRE interventions, poverty still leads many people to take high risks in support of their daily livelihoods. This can take the form of scrap metal collection, firewood collection, hunting and gathering in forested areas, and use of mine/UXO affected land for agriculture.
4. The rising incidence of mine/UXO casualties relating to scrap metal and explosive collection is a particular challenge for MRE programs in this region. This phenomenon has a variety of causes, not all of which can be addressed by MRE. However, MRE programs need to take into account the livelihood pressures that lead desperate and marginalized people to engage in high-risk behavior, and propose concrete alternatives.
5. MRE programs have also had difficulty in reaching people in remote and mountainous areas, who may be among those at highest risk of mine/UXO casualties. One aspect of this difficulty is the need to develop materials and curricula that are relevant to local cultures, languages and conditions. Local people can help to pass on messages in local languages and in culturally appropriate ways.
6. In some instances, MRE activities have been carried out without a clear strategy. Local, national and regional coordination and collaboration amongst actors and across sectors, including international NGOs and related agencies, has been limited. MRE is sometimes seen as conflicting with other community priorities.
7. The cooperation of local authorities, including law enforcement, is essential for MRE efforts to succeed. In particular, messages to report or inform about mines and UXO to authorities are only effective when specific contact addresses and locations are provided.
8. Research studies can help to better inform MRE activities dealing with high risk behavior, how to approach target groups, and develop appropriate materials and curricula.

9. Local educators can be effective at passing on MRE messages to other members of the community—child to child, child to adult, etc. MRE operators also need to learn how to change their approach and build trust with the community.

RECOMMENDATIONS

We recommend that future MRE programs in our countries include the following components:

1. Flexible application of the best practices identified above. For instance, teaching practices should use innovative techniques such as theatre for children and by children. Village scrap metal collectors can be educated by visiting families of mine/UXO victims and survivors
2. Full two-way participation of communities in MRE, with integration to livelihood activities and larger-scale development interventions. Activities must be community-driven, not donor-driven. Communities affected by mines should share their experiences and lessons learned with others.
3. MRE materials should be simple and have clear messages.
4. MRE programs should continue to advance and develop the role of local educators.
5. Common strategies for MRE initiatives should be developed together with other humanitarian mine action operators and development agencies. Multiple stakeholders implementing mine/UXO-related programs or development projects in an area should coordinate these activities in advance.
6. In places where accurate data on mine/UXO contamination is lacking, additional field surveys and mine marking should be conducted in order to better target MRE interventions. Clearer information on contamination and casualties will result in better MRE.
7. Greater emphasis should be placed on community-based monitoring and evaluation systems for MRE programs.
8. Closer cooperation in MRE and mine clearance among the Mekong sub-region and neighboring countries, with increased financial and technical support from international organizations, particularly for explosive ordnance removal (EOD) programs.
9. Development of feasible solutions for reaching people involved in the scrap metal trade. These components should include provision of alternative vocational training and job placement services, involvement of collectors in village MRE and mine action activities, and targeted community development programs.
10. Local police, government and military should be more involved in enforcing existing laws relating to high-risk activities, including tampering with explosives and scavenging for war waste. International cooperation in these efforts should be strengthened and encouraged.

11. Countries that have not yet done so should develop formal mine/UXO casualty information systems that can help to better target high-risk communities, develop MRE messages, and measure impact.
12. MRE practitioners should acquire additional training and familiarity with international MRE standards, followed by the formulation and adoption of regional or national standards for Mekong sub-region countries. This could include development of a mechanism for official training and MRE practitioner licensing.
13. Organization of a yearly regional workshop of this nature to facilitate information sharing and assess the implementation of these recommendations. The Fund for Reconciliation and Development should be approached to organize the next workshop, which could be held in another Mekong sub-region country.