

Children's role in Mine Risk Education

- Thank you for being given the opportunity to stress our concern about the Children's role in Mine Risk Education. Save the Children Sweden bases all its work on the UN Convention the Rights of the Child and therefore sees its role also in MRE as a natural part of its programme. The articles about children's survival, protection, development and participation indicate this.
- I want to congratulate the UNICEF team that is putting together the MRE standards, which are at the moment in the last draft. It was a gigantic job in such a short time. I thank UNICEF for understanding the importance of collecting Mine Risk Education information from many experienced MRE organisations. It has felt useful to be part of the MRE meetings especially organised for this purpose and for the opportunity to also share information by the special e-mail address set up. Cooperation between our MRE organisations and other Mine Action organisations is crucial for achieving the best results.
- In the International Standards the role of the communities as being vital members of the MRE programmes has been emphasised in order to get the most sustainable and best impact. Don't forget that the children also are members of the communities and in many countries even outnumber the adults!
- We have today heard Laurence Devignes from ICRC talk about that 50 percent of the landmine/UXO victims in Afghanistan are children and Stan Brabant from HI that the community based approach is the most useful method for MRE.
- The Community based approach means to actively involve the children in all the phases of an MRE programme: the needs assessment, the planning, the implementation and the evaluation. For the children's Mine Risk Education the Child-to-Child approach has proved to be a fun and reliable way of learning. Children are in charge of their own activities.
- I would here like to give a few examples to illustrate where children should be consulted and their voices listened to:

When for instance a need has been identified for building a safe playground in a mine affected community, it should be a rule to consult the children in the area and to listen to their voices before starting the preparations. Because if the playground is not built where the children will feel happy to play, there is a great risk that it will not serve its purpose and instead one might see the children risking their lives in a not cleared but more popular place. The environment is an issue and of concern not only to the adults but also to the children.

In many countries children are working as shepherds. The children here know very well where the best grazing areas are to be found and the shortcuts to reach them. Therefore when a mine clearance team comes to their area, and the priorities must be set for where to clear, it would be rational and logical to consult the shepherd children.

In one of the countries where Save the Children Sweden works with MRE, we have encouraged the children to make their own Mine Risk Education material. In a weeklong workshop last summer in the South of Lebanon a group of children of different ages, but all from mine affected areas, created two booklets, one clay animation and one cartoon film to be shown to other children in the area. The children first got their training in MRE, they did needs assessment in their communities and they did all the work based on their experience from the field to make credible and convincing Mine Risk Education material. The children also did the field-testing of the material in a few schools before the material was printed and finalised.

In Yemen the children who have carried out a MRE project with the Child-to-Child approach are now being trained to evaluate the impact of their project.

- These examples reflect that we must not forget that the children should be actively involved in the MRE programmes and that children are not only good MRE implementers to forward the safe messages to other children, but can also be successful advocates for a mine free world and to lobby for their countries to sign and ratify the Mine Ban Treaty. Children have a right to be taken seriously!
- However, to make the International Standards for MRE a reality it is important that all of us working in the field make sure that not only the international and national NGOs but that the governments, first and foremost, will implement the standards since they have the role as the overall monitoring body of the Mine Action programmes under the Mine Ban Convention.
- To make the governments live up to the standards, the UN agencies have a special role to play. There are some countries with Mine Action Programmes where the Army takes upon it not only to be the overall decision-making body for Mine Surveys and Mine Clearance but also for MRE and Mine Victim Assistance. I do not see however the military professionals necessarily to be the best implementers for the last two issues, but rather other civilian authorities and civil society actors who have established relationships to local communities and can build upon a platform of mutual trust and established patterns of communication. Putting the army in charge of all the mine action pillars can sometimes harm more than it helps. I therefore call specifically on the UN agencies to take a clear position here, not to see any rules bent but to convince the receiving partners of which actors are best deployed for each particular task, and make sure that the standards for all Mine Action areas will be adhered to!

Thank you for your attention