

**GROUP OF GOVERNMENTAL EXPERTS OF THE STATES PARTIES TO THE
CONVENTION ON PROHIBITIONS OR RESTRICTIONS ON THE USE OF
CERTAIN CONVENTIONAL WEAPONS WHICH MAY BE DEEMED TO BE
EXCESSIVELY INJURIOUS OR TO HAVE INDISCRIMINATE EFFECTS**

Discussion Paper

The provision of Warnings and Risk Education for Explosive Remnants of War.

Prepared by the
Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining (GICHD).

Introduction

Supported by the Coordinator for ERW, the GICHD undertook a study on the provision of warnings and risk education for ERW.¹ The aim of this report is to provide the Group of Governmental Experts on ERW with an understanding of the main issues and challenges concerning warnings and risk education. This discussion paper summarises the main findings of that report.

The aims and effectiveness of warnings, and mine/UXO risk education programmes

Warnings² are the punctual provision of cautionary information to the civilian population, intended to minimise an impending or ongoing risk from ERW. Warnings are often given in advance of, or immediately following, the use of ordnance. They are sometimes provided by the weapon users themselves.

Mine and unexploded ordnance (UXO) risk education (MRE) programmes seek to facilitate information exchange between affected communities, including authorities, and humanitarian agencies so that individuals and communities are informed about the UXO and mine threat and humanitarian interventions can be tailored to communities' needs.

Warnings alone are unlikely to have a positive long term impact on behaviour, they should always be followed by community-based risk education.

The process of providing risk education

The process of establishing a risk education programme is common to both ERW and mines. Information gathering, community involvement and integration of activities have to be carried out whatever the devices involved are. ERW, however, present some specific challenges, which have to be taken into consideration for the implementation of risk education activities. ERW pose a different threat to mines because: they can usually be seen, which may lead to greater interaction with the population; they are generally

¹ Explosive Remnants of War – Warnings and Risk Education, published by GICHD, May 2003.

² See United Nations, *Amendments on the Protection of the Civilian Population from the Effects of ERW*, Proposal by the International Committee of the Red Cross, CCW/GGE/IV/WG.1/WP.4, 12 March 2003.

more powerful (and therefore more lethal) than anti-personnel mines and; they are unpredictable because they have failed to operate as designed. The particular problems associated with ERW may require specific messages, highlighting the fact that these munitions are dangerous. While other messages are common to both ERW and mines, such as, do not enter danger areas.

Information collection: a key element of risk education programmes

To respond to the needs of affected communities and therefore reduce the number of victims, information gathering must be conducted both prior to and during the implementation of risk education activities. In an emergency situation, information gathering must also be conducted, but will certainly be more difficult and more limited than in other contexts.

Accurate and rapid collection of information – such as munitions used, location of danger areas, attitudes and behaviours of affected communities – is crucial to a quick and successful implementation of risk education. For ERW, information must be collected from weapon users, communities, local authorities and other organisations as soon as possible. The sooner the information is available and accessible, the better mine action agencies will be able to protect civilian populations from the effects of ERW. Certain technical information on weapons is crucial to the effectiveness of risk education activities.

To understand the knowledge, attitudes, practices and beliefs of affected communities, information must also be collected from communities and authorities, in order to ensure that appropriate techniques are employed to convey warning and risk education messages.

A lack of knowledge or awareness is one of the reason for accidents, but other injuries or deaths occur because of risk taking due to economic necessity. In this case, raising awareness is not sufficient and socio-economic factors must also be used to prevent those injuries and deaths. This can only be achieved if communities are involved in looking for alternative solutions, a process depending on other humanitarian interventions.

Providing risk education to affected communities

The solutions identified for affected communities can be technical (marking, demining, etc.), socio-economic or information-based. In the case of solutions based on the provision of information (i.e. risk education activities), the analysis of the information previously collected allows for risk education messages to be tailored to communities' needs. Those risk education messages should provide affected communities with information (e.g. about the threat involved, the potential effects of ERW etc.) that they can use to reduce the risks to themselves.

Information-based solutions can be divided in two categories which can each be differentiated by the target groups, the type of organisation disseminating the

information, the timing involved (long-term or short-term) and the techniques and methods employed:

- *Warnings* are most useful in specific situations, where civilian populations are not accessible, a short-term emergency response is needed, and the delivering agency is aiming to cover as many people as possible. Warnings alone are unlikely to have a positive long-term influence on behaviour, and therefore need to be followed by community based risk education.
- *Risk Education or awareness information/messages* are disseminated by mine action or/and other humanitarian agencies once the threat exists, using community-based techniques requiring the involvement of affected communities or/and public information campaign using mainly local media and/or printed materials. It is usually a long-term strategy.

Specific messages often have to be developed to deal with the particular problems caused by explosive remnants of war in addition to more generally applicable messages.

Who should provide warnings and risk education?

Nationals from the affected country with the requisite communication or teaching skills should be hired to conduct risk education activities. The military will have the information necessary to provide warnings. Humanitarian organisations and authorities can also be involved in disseminating advance warnings, depending on the circumstances and recognising the potential issues it may raise, for example regarding their organisational neutrality. Organisations involved in providing risk education usually deal with unexploded ordnance and mines as part of the same programme. Advance warnings can be delivered by parties to the conflict and humanitarian organisation depending on the context and on the information available.

Conclusion

The provision of warnings and risk education is a complex task involving the disciplines of anthropology, education and communication. A long term, community based risk education process is likely to be most effective. Warnings have a more limited effect. The key to the success of any risk education or warnings programme is the collection of information, including data which will be known to parties to the conflict, such as types of weapons employed.