



MINE RISK EDUCATION



Man-made emergencies arising from war and political unrest have exacted a heavy toll on Ethiopia. There is extensive landmine and unexploded ordnance (UXO) contamination as a result of border disputes with Eritrea, Somalia and Sudan. Many of the mines and minefields are near populated areas and inflict casualties on both people and livestock. Mines pose dangers to resident populations, internally displaced persons (IDPs) and humanitarian relief efforts.

During the 1998-2000 conflict with Eritrea, a total of 315,936 persons were displaced in Tigray and 33,000 in Afar regions. Experts estimate that as many as 1 million landmines and UXO may be present along the 1,000-kilometre border extending from Humera to Bure. Preliminary results from the NPA Landmine Impact Survey found 16,000 people have been victims of mines and UXO primarily in Somali, Tigray and Afar regions, with pockets of other areas affected. Many of these victims are young children shepherding their families' herds or searching for water when they were injured.

To address the landmine problem, UNICEF has been supporting Mine Risk Education (MRE) activities in

Tigray since 1999. Implementation is carried out through an indigenous NGO, the Rehabilitation and Development Organisation (RaDO), working closely with regional and community-level counterparts. A similar project, supported by UNICEF and implemented by RaDO, has been operating in Afar since August 2001. The goal is to hand over the MRE programme to Regional Governments by August 2005. UNICEF also is helping build capacity for the Ethiopian Mine Action Office (EMAO) through training in basic MRE management and Community Liason (CL). EMAO CL Officers are now deployed to work alongside mine clearance teams and serve as a vital link with the community.

UNICEF's MRE project has been made possible through the generous support of Donor Governments and UNICEF National Committees. But more funding is needed to make MRE implementation available in mine-affected Somali Region and for the hand-over of the project from RaDO to Regional Governments. Mine clearance is a slow, arduous process. To protect communities in the mine-affected regions of Ethiopia, we must continue to promote MRE activities so that children and their families are not maimed or killed by these brutal remnants of war.

Bjorn Ljungqvist
Representative

DROUGHT INCREASES RISK OF LANDMINE ACCIDENTS

Mehari Gebre Egziabiher, a 14-year-old shepherd, was looking after cattle when he stepped on a land mine in Gerhu Sernay. The accident cost him his eye and part of his finger.

Last year, as the drought in the region worsened, the possibility of accidents increased, especially in heavily mined border districts. Young herders, desperate to find grazing land, were increasingly at risk.

Although the border war with Eritrea ended in 2000, one of the war's most tragic legacies are an estimated 1 million land mines and thousands of unexploded ordinances (UXOs) that still litter the 1,000-kilometre border.

UNICEF in partnership with the Rehabilitation and Development Organisation (RaDO), an indigenous NGO, has been conducting mine risk education since 1999 in Tigray. The network of local community agents in the worst affected *woredas* (districts) operates a number of different education initiatives to warn of the danger.





Guenet Hawush, 15, is a member of the Sebeya anti-mine club, one of 700 operating with RaDO and UNICEF support. Through their dramas, poems and songs, she is committed to warning as many of her friends as possible about the dangers of landmines.

Guenet still vividly remembers when her family was forced to flee their home, leaving their few belongings behind. They were entirely dependent on humanitarian assistance, and although they have now been able to return to their home, many parts of the surrounding country are still mined. Unable to farm their land, they are still dependent on food aid.

Guenet believes the anti-mine club's work has saved lives and prevented more people from becoming disabled. Since Mine Risk Education (MRE) activities have started, the number of accidents has decreased dramatically, but it will be many more years before the landmines are removed.

"There were many people who became victims," said 12-year-old Shimbaher Berha, a club member who demonstrates how landmines and UXOs are camouflaged and hidden in a model landscape they have cleverly constructed at Sebeya Primary School. "I thought if these people are dedicated to increasing awareness, why not me? So I decided to serve the community by being a member."

Tuem Abdae, a local RaDO agent, is responsible for co-ordinating MRE activities in Sebeya and the surrounding villages. He finds the job challenging, especially since drought has increased the danger that people, especially children, will go into high risk areas in search of water and grazing land.

Hayelom Giday, 18, lost his leg while herding his animals. He and 14-year-old Gebresilassie Kassa,

have been trained by RaDO with support from UNICEF. They teach young shepherds how to identify different types of mines and dangerous areas. "At first the boys were shy, but now they always want to test their knowledge and learn more," said the peer educator. Being a shepherd himself, Gebresilassie is trusted by the other children.

On a misty Saturday morning in Fatsi Town, a heavily mined border area, 15 people crowd into a one-room home. Sitting around a radio, they listen to a 15-minute weekly radio programme on land mines. Everyone listens intently and a number of younger members frantically take notes. The listening group is one of 35 in Tigray.

At the conclusion of the programme, the host offers coffee and popcorn and discussion begins. One woman shares that she lost her 15 year-old son before the MRE began, while another woman had a son disabled from a mine injury.

Lelay Gebertinsea, the local RaDO agent is adamant that continued MRE is necessary. "The children need to be constantly reminded of the dangers," she said. "The drought has definitely increased the danger as people are more and more desperate for water and food."

In addition to providing support and technical advice to RaDO, UNICEF is working to ensure high risk and drought-affected communities are prioritised for water interventions, which ensure children are not tempted to go into mined areas. As demining efforts expand, UNICEF also is supporting EMAO to provide Community Liaison Officers who share information about demining activities and warn villagers of potential dangers.





INTERVIEW WITH ORLAITH GALLAGHER, MINE RISK EDUCATION PROJECT OFFICER

Can you tell me the objective of UNICEF's Mine Risk Education (MRE) programme?

The objective of the programme is to build the capacity of

communities, Regional Governments through the Office of Rehabilitation and Social Affairs (ORSA) in Tigray and the Disaster Prevention and Food Security Bureau (DPSFB) in Afar, and the Federal Government through the Ethiopian Mine Action Office (EMAO) for MRE.

Are children more at risk of mine accidents?

In Tigray and Afar we see mainly young people injured between the ages of 11 and 18 but it goes up to 29 years of age. They are mainly herders. In December we had three school children killed who tampered with a landmine. This is our main problem — children tampering with landmines. Even though they have received MRE, they still manage to go and play and tamper with landmines. We are now going to use their story when we are talking with the villagers to tell them what happened and develop a strategy with them to try and prevent it from happening again.

How do you work with communities to ensure behavioural change?

We have to constantly work with communities. We have a radio programme and both small and large media programmes. The main thing is people working with people – we find out what their problems are so that we can build their capacity, and they can take ownership of the project. Mine incidents then will be reduced.

Does last year's humanitarian crisis and internal displacement make your job more difficult?

There were a lot of people who had to move from certain areas because of the drought, and they had no idea of the landmine situation at their new locations since they were new to the area. They were being employed as laborers and herders. We developed a strategy working with *woreda* (district) administrations. Village taskforces were set up to

work with RaDO. They decided that all displaced persons new to a village had to receive MRE, and it was the responsibility of the person who hired that displaced person to report that they were new to the area and get the taskforce to give them MRE.

What is your relationship with your Government counterparts?

UNICEF is working closely with Federal and Regional Governments to build capacity so that they can take ownership of MRE and implement activities at the community level where the mines are.

What are the challenges of trying to implement these programmes on the ground?

MRE was first implemented in Ethiopia in 1999 at the regional level. We are now at the stage where we are handing over this project from the indigenous NGO RaDO to Regional Governments. The difficulty sometimes is co-ordination. We want to make sure there is no duplication between the Federal and Regional Governments and RaDO when working in the field.

Another challenging aspect is that it is very difficult to secure funding. The assistance we mainly receive is from the Italian Government, the US Department of State and UNICEF National Committees. Although the Ethiopian Government has worked extremely hard to rid their country of landmines through the establishment of EMAO, they have not ratified the Ottawa landmine treaty. The delay in ratifying the treaty has a negative impact on securing funding from countries that support the treaty.

How do you see the future of MRE activities?

I would hope that we continue to build the capacity of Regional Governments and EMAO so that all MRE activities will be co-ordinated in an effective and efficient manner to reach the people most affected. People at the village level who are most affected by land mines are our priority and will continue to be our focus.

NEWS FILE



23 February - Responding to the acute water shortage in Harar Town, the Harari Regional Water Bureau and UNICEF reprogrammed water and sanitation financial assistance to provide emergency water to the town. Five water tankers began intense emergency operations on 23 February, transporting water to town dwellers from distant sources. The operation will continue for four months, which is the anticipated period of critical need. UNICEF will also supply five de-watering pumps and 33 Roto-tanks of different capacities for emergency water storage in Harar schools and town kebeles.

3 March - The Ministry of Youth, Sport and Culture, the HIV/AIDS Prevention and Control Office (HAPCO) and UNICEF held a three-day workshop launching the findings of a national study on anti-AIDS clubs in Ethiopia. The workshop explored strategies and developed guidelines on strengthening the role of youth clubs in development activities and the fight against HIV/AIDS.



4 March - The Ethiopian Teenagers' Forum held its fourth meeting deliberating on the issue of Girls' Education. The meeting featured perspectives on girls' education by male and female high school students. At the end of the full-day session, the Forum developed ten recommendations directed at the Government, NGOs, development organisations, civil society, community-based organisations and the public in general.

8 March - Four hundred high school students and refugees living in Addis Ababa joined the HIV/AIDS Prevention and Control Office (HAPCO), UNICEF and other UN agencies at an event commemorating International Women's Day under the theme of Gender and HIV/AIDS. The event explored the impact of HIV/AIDS on girls and women and encouraged youth to be proactive in devising strategies to fight the epidemic.



15 March - Hope for Children, the Addis Ababa HIV/AIDS Prevention and Control Office (HAPCO) and UNICEF sponsored an exhibition featuring photographs and stories created by young people whose parents have died of AIDS. Working in collaboration with American photographer, Eric Gottesman, the children offered a window into the dreams and realities of people affected by HIV.

22 March - UNICEF joined the Ministry of Water Resources and regional water bureaus for the celebration of World Water Day in the town of Metehara in Oromia Region. The event highlighted the threat posed to the town, transport infrastructure and surrounding pastoralist communities, as well as to the Awash River, one of Ethiopia's major river systems, by the expanding volcanic Lake Beseka. UNICEF teamed up with Ethiopian Television to produce a documentary on the water-supply crisis in Harar town, the Lake Beseka crisis and the continuing plight of Kereyu pastoralists who depend on unprotected rain-fed ponds in drought-prone Fentale district for their water supply.



29 March - UNICEF Representative Bjorn Ljungqvist gave opening remarks at the Emergency Nutrition Intervention Guidelines Consensus Building Workshop in Nazareth. Over 85 per cent of Ethiopia's population relies on subsistence farming or pastoralism in an environment where rains are often erratic, leading to cyclical patterns of malnutrition affecting the country's children and increasing the demand for food aid. The Representative said the key to a child's nutritional status depends on ensuring food security, adequate access to health care and appropriate feeding practices, including breastfeeding for the first six months of life and hygienic food preparation.