



Somalia: Partnership in Humanitarian Mine Action

In October 2009, three INGO's all working in Somalia sat around a table in Hargeysa, Somaliland and embarked on an ambitious plan to design, field test then gain national accreditation for Mine Risk Education (MRE) materials suitable for dual use in Somaliland and Puntland.

Danish Demining Group (DDG), Handicap International (HI) and Mines Advisory Group (MAG) agreed that rather than generate their own individual materials in relation to MRE, they would pull their collective experience and creative talents to work together standardising, where possible, images, messages and delivery methodologies to make the education of Somali communities in MRE more effective and in doing so, the hope was that the impact of each organisation's work in different areas of operation would be maximised for the benefit of all the targeted communities.

During the course of initial meetings, it was decided that prioritising the children of Somaliland and Puntland was essential because accident statistics reflect that inquisitive children are especially vulnerable to injuring themselves while tampering with items of ERW. All three actors agreed to collaborate by designing an Explosive Remnants of War (ERW) recognition poster and an educational leaflet that focused on the Four Steps of Safe Behaviour taught to children if they encounter an ERW: STOP, DON'T TOUCH, LEAVE, and TELL. The aim was to teach children how to identify sites or areas which might be dangerous because of ERW presence and what to do if they found an item of ERW.

The two MRE tools were duly produced with different versions bearing slightly different illustrations being sent for field testing. The process of identifying the clearest messages which children and adults understand, identify with, and remember, takes time and patience to establish. Each organisation duly fed back and the data collected, resulted in set messages being agreed upon. It was at this point the Somaliland Mine Action Centre (SMAC) and Puntland Mine Action Centre (PMAC) were approached to input their in depth country knowledge to the materials created.

Both national authorities provided very pertinent input which further honed the materials for the local contexts. After a final round of field testing, both SMAC and PMAC were happy to have their logo's displayed alongside DDG's, HI's and MAG's and so national accreditation was given.

The different regions of Somalia have experienced nearly three decades of instability and intrastate conflict. The legacy of this armed violence is that individuals and communities face the daily danger of living in areas contaminated by landmines and ERW. The cooperation of DDG, HI and MAG with the assistance of SMAC and PMAC should, in the future, keep people of Somaliland and Puntland, and especially their children, safer as they go about their daily lives.

