

PLENARY SESSION 7 - “Community-based Approaches for Effective Action”

MYANMAR Presentation

U Myo Set Aung, Director, Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement

Thank you Chair,

Ladies and Gentlemen, Colleagues and Friends,

This is a great privilege to be here and I am very much delighted to share our experience from Myanmar on Community Based Mine Action.

Myanmar is a very beautiful country with very diverse communities.

We have 135 ethnicities, we speak more than 40 languages, and we have all the religions.

Unfortunately, as you may know, due to past and ongoing conflicts, our country is affected by landmines and Explosive Remnants of War (ERW).

It is very difficult to have a complete picture of contamination, and to know how many civilian casualties have been injured or killed. However, some data shows that 9 out of 14 States and regions are contaminated with landmines and ERW.

Issue of landmines is not an issue from the past for Myanmar, and landmines are still TODAY a prominent risk in my country. In fact, in 2016, the Mine Risks Working Group documented 159 casualties which is more than the previous year in 2015.

And in January 2017, during the very first month of the year only, there was already 10 incidents of landmines, with 17 causalities.

Over the last 2 years, on an average basis,

- there was at least a landmine incident every 5 days
- 1 survivor out of 3 was a child
- 1 survivor out of 4 died.

There are ongoing efforts to put Mine Action at the centre of the peace process. The Ceasefire agreement, signed in October 2015, includes a provision on demining.

We are aware that Peace Processes take a long time, and we need to urgently advance the mine action agenda.

Until the time where we can clear for good the threat of landmines from Myanmar, working with local communities to develop efficient strategies to mitigate the threat is essential.

Over the last 3 years, we have accelerated our efforts on Community-Based Mine Action. Communities drive our work on:

- Mine Risk Education,
- Victim Assistance, and
- Decentralized advocacy and coordination.

Dear Ladies and Gentlemen,

Allow me to share, first, our experience on Community Based MRE in Myanmar. It took us 3 years from the time we conducted a comprehensive Knowledge, Attitude and Practice (KAP) survey in 2014 to the day last year when we secured final approval by the Government of the Myanmar Common Mine Risk Education Tool Kit, after field testing it with communities. More than 40 organizations have now adopted the kit to roll-it out throughout the 9 contaminated States and regions!

Believe me, this process has been intense, and sometimes felt like a very long process – but we would not have had succeeded to significantly involve communities without investing time. For instance, it took 200 workshops and meetings with the different communities and local authorities just to validate the messages and the images. But this has been a unique experience for Myanmar: it has helped us to break the silence in communities, created ‘safe spaces’ and built confidence for communities to speak about landmines, an issue that is still widely considered as a very sensitive issue in Myanmar.

Thanks to the Myanmar Mine Risks Working Group members including Community-based/grass-root organizations, International Organizations and NGOs and the Red Cross Movement, last year we reached 115,000 people with messages on safe behaviour towards mines, and we also trained and certified 200 community MRE facilitators from the most remote locations and conflict-affected areas.

Our preliminary analysis showed that it’s difficult to reach the male population, and this year efforts are underway to improve and engage more adult men in MRE activities, as often they are also the most at risk.

You can see on the pictures the different steps from collecting data during the KAP survey, designing the kits and how it is now used at village level with male farmers or with kids at schools or to handover to high-level officials, state authorities and stakeholders.

Now, let me share another example where engaging communities has significantly improved the quality and scope of our action – this is on Victim Assistance.

One Victim Assistant Center model was piloted in 2016, it has been successful and we now have three!

It has been a successful model because the victim centres are managed and led by community members and mainly by people living with disabilities, including landmine survivors.

Community staff of the Victim Assistance Centre are empowered to address stigma and discrimination, and contribute to establish inclusive communities.

As I said at the beginning, we do not know exactly how many landmine survivors we have in Myanmar, and where they are. But with the community staff and the volunteers of only 1 Victim Assistance Centre only, in only one year, more than 1,500 survivors of landmines/ERW and person with disabilities were identified.

Engaging communities makes survivors and their needs VISIBLE.

As you can see in the pictures, Victim Assistance Centres or Rehabilitation centres provide a wide range of services including assistive devices, counselling including with peer to peer sessions, physical rehabilitation and referral to other services. Mapping of services has also started so we can have repertoires for each State.

Finally, putting communities at the centre allows us to DRAW LOCAL SOLUTIONS. We decided to decentralize our national coordination platform created in 2012, and we now have 4 State level mine action coordination platforms in the most affected areas (in Kachin, Shan, Kaya and Kayin).

This has helped us to coordinate better with grass-root, ethnic and faith-based organizations as well as to mobilize local authorities for advocacy. The coordination nationwide include 41 national and international organizations, 11 ministries and the Army.

In some locations, this has fostered trust among government agencies and ethnic groups, and discussions on sensitive topics like land release activities could start.

The community voices are becoming much stronger also through their representatives at the Parliament. In one State, we were able to mobilize and train the 50 State Parliamentarian including the military parliamentarian, to better represent community needs on Mine Action.

As a summary, there are very positive benefits to adopt community-led action, there are some challenges too.

For instance, with community-led action it is sometimes difficult to maintain quality assurance and to properly monitor hard-to-reach communities.

Investing in communities has also a COST – time but also money. It takes longer, and investing in the human capital with training and education material costs more than a radio campaign...

However, we believe the benefits of community based-mine action are greater than its challenges.

Communities gain ownership, and mine action is sustainable. Through communities, we can also be present, and access the most remote areas, and locations where humanitarian access is sometimes reduced. And that allows to provide a timely response – as the first responders are part of the affected communities and closer to the survivors.

I speak on behalf of my ministry, the Ministry of Social Welfare Relief and Resettlement, UNICEF which is co-Chairing with us the national mine action coordination platform, but I also speak on behalf of 10 other ministries and 41 national and International organizations that composed the Myanmar Mine Risks Working Group.

I would like to thank you for your attention but mainly thank them for their support!

9 February 2017, Geneva