

Reducing mine casualties and delivering mine awareness education

In the mid-1990s, rough estimates suggested anti-personnel mines claimed 500 new victims a week – or 26,000 new victims a year. These estimates, while only educated guesses, indicated that anti-personnel mines were a dramatic source of human suffering.

Since then, the Ottawa Convention has established a new international norm which is already making a difference in preventing new use of AP mines. The Convention obliges states to clear mined land and ensure that mines in the ground do not claim lives or limbs. In recent years, dramatic progress has been made in identifying and marking minefields and clearing mined land.

The international community's response to reducing mine casualties also involves mine awareness education which attempts to reduce high risk behaviour in mine affected areas by increasing knowledge of the dangers of landmines.

The mine action community's understanding of the impact of mine awareness education has evolved in recent years to display more creativity and sensitivity to community needs and context. New mine awareness programs use participatory approaches and educational materials that aim to be simple, clear, relevant and in appropriate local languages.

Promoting best practices in the delivery of mine awareness education has been greatly aided by UNICEF's development of *International Guidelines for Landmine and Unexploded Ordnance Awareness Education*. The Standing Committee on Victim Assistance, Socio-Economic Reintegration and Mine Awareness, which was established by States Parties to the Ottawa Convention in May 1999, has devoted a great deal of attention to

promoting these guidelines and ensuring that their principal elements are considered in program planning.

While changes in behaviour brought on by mine awareness education are difficult to measure, it is encouraging to see some level of mine awareness activity is being undertaken in most mine affected countries and comprehensive programs are in place in almost all of the world's most seriously affected states. It is also difficult to draw a causal link between mine awareness education and its effect on casualty rates. However, we do know that in every case where mine awareness education is delivered in a comprehensive manner, casualty rates are declining.

Some of the most significant examples of the decline in casualty rates include:

(Right) As part of CIETcanada's evaluation of mine awareness education in Angola, interviewers administer a pictorial questionnaire to children in Huila province.