

NDM-UN 23
Plenary Session IV

Thinking Safety and Acting Safely in the Digital Age
Opening Remarks - Meritxell Relaño
Check against delivery

Thursday 13 February 2020

Your excellencies. Dear colleagues. Dear friends. I am pleased to open the session on “Thinking Safety and Acting Safely in the Digital Age”.

Before I introduce our distinguished panelists, allow me to say a few words to set the scene of this plenary on digital explosive ordnance risk education.

I will outline three points. Starting first, with the humanitarian caseload: what brings us together today is the global increase in numbers of victim of explosive ordnance, we urgently need to reverse casualty trends; second, the digital opportunity: how can we take advantage of the formidable potential of digital technology to save more lives?; and third, the digital limitations: what are the digital divides and boundaries that we must consider for more effective risk education?

The humanitarian caseload

Our sector is challenged with the number of new casualties - that is almost twice as high as in 2013. For the first time we have evidence from the Landmine Monitor that children made up over half of civilian casualties in 2018, a 12% increase compared to 2016.

Despite our collective commitments and our collective statements that we care so much about children, we continue failing too many of them!

In 2020, there are millions of children and adults at risk who have not yet received any form of risk education, and millions others who have not received enough risk education, either qualitatively or quantitatively, or both.

Every at-risk child, every refugee or IDP, every host community has the right to receive explosive ordnance risk education. We therefore need to rethink the way we deliver risk education services and improve quality and coverage.

This brings me to my second point, **the digital opportunity**.

Technology has become and will continue to be a driving force in the life of adolescents, youths and their communities across the world where more than four billion of us now have access to internet and five billion of us have mobile phones. Digital technology is already one of the great game

changers of our time – and it could be transformative for those who are at risk of exposure to explosive ordnance.

For communities living in remote contaminated locations, or those held back by poverty and exclusion, for displaced people returning to their villages and cities devastated by conflict or forced to flee their homes, digital technology and innovation can offer protection. Digital tools offer greater access to vital prevention messages, they propose feedback mechanisms to report an incident or information on a new explosive hazard, they can also be used by a community member to request individualized guidance to manage a specific explosive ordnance risk.

Mobile technologies can support organizing instant polls, live chats, self-skilling, they can measure awareness, attitudes and behaviour change and can be used for community action.

Mobile applications for example can help children and young people with disabilities be more independent. They can be used for instant explosive ordnance risk education and activities that address unique sensory, physical and cognitive needs.

Let me take a minute to introduce a unique and cross-cutting digital participation platform for young people and communities that is not well known in mine action, yet it has the full potential to integrate digital explosive ordnance risk education. It is called the '[U-Report](#)'. U-Report is a real-time social messaging platform created by UNICEF in 2011, available via SMS, Facebook and Viber where young people can express their opinion and be positive agent of change in their communities on issues that matter to them. It works by gathering opinions and information from young people on topics they care about – ranging from employment to discrimination and providing lifesaving information during emergencies. U-Reporters respond to polls, report issues and support child rights. The data and insights are shared in real-time back with communities, and connected to policy makers who make decisions that affect young people.

U-Report is now active in 65 countries, benefiting 9 million young people and communities all over the world. Country U-Reports are run by UNICEF and partners on the ground, including local government, non-governmental organizations and young people themselves. U-Report is available via numerous messaging, social media and SMS channels, and even works on a basic mobile phone. It is free, anonymous, accessible in many languages and easy to use.

In Ukraine, in order to design and improve our behaviour change strategies, we used polls with U-Reporters in bombarded areas in and around the contact zone to get a better sense of their perception of the mine risk, and to better understand what affected children considered to be the best approaches for risk education. Through U-Report the people, especially young people become the heart of our programming design and response to better deliver for results. U-Report as a partner platform can be utilized during emergency and development context.

In this session we will hear about many other concrete initiatives that use technology and digital engagement to improve coverage, quality, integration and equitable access, as well as to enhance the cost-effectiveness of explosive ordnance risk education campaigns.

And I conclude with my final point: **the digital limitations.**

Millions of children and adults still do not enjoy the access, or their access is intermittent or of inferior quality – and they are most often those who are already most vulnerable to the explosive ordnance risk.

It would be for example extremely informative to know the percentage of mine casualties in 2019 who had access to mobile technology prior to their incidents.

Nearly 9 out of 10 of the young people who do not use the internet, live in Africa, Asia or the Pacific. Africa has the highest share of non-users.

Another issue or limitation is that digital engagement may exacerbate or create new risks, including for communities when data protection and privacy are not well protected. For example, reporting online information on explosive ordnance belonging to a party engaged in an ongoing conflict may lead to retaliation against the provider of the information.

We also have to deal with a persistent gender gap. The world over, more men than women use the internet, and this gap is not narrowing but widening.

Finally, research has shown that technology alone cannot fix all education issues. If digital technologies are to have any chance to improve behaviour change, they need to be supported by strong educators, motivated learners, sound pedagogy and other risk education tools and risk reduction strategies.

Our key challenge for the explosive ordnance risk education community will be to expand the opportunities of digital technology, while at the same time operate within and mitigate these digital limitations.

Today, we will particularly hear from our panellists in two key areas:

- o What kind of digital risk education practices do you have in place — or what kind have you seen — that can help protect children, young people, and their communities?
- o And second — how can we work together to scale-up these ideas?

1. I am pleased to introduce you our first speaker, **Mr. Moamar Salah AL Deen Abdul Salam Al hete**, from the Directorate for Mine Action, Iraq.
2. **Mr. Reuben McCarthy**, Regional Manager on Weapon Contamination for the Near and Middle East, ICRC

Reuben is the ICRC's Regional Manager for Weapon Contamination in the Near and Middle East. He is joining today to provide an overview of ICRC's study on the use of digital communication in risk and awareness and safer behaviour.

3. **Mr. Abel Tesfai**, Mine Action Advisor, United Nations Office to the African Union

Abel has 19 years of mine action experience. His presentation is about a project that UNMAS is sharing from Darfur, Sudan. Operating in remote areas of Darfur, Abel sought an opportunity to introduce a new Risk Education dissemination approach tailored to accessing those vulnerable and inaccessible communities. The UNMAS Risk Education Talking Device (RETD) which will be presented to you now has shown a promising prospect to improve the quality of risk education, but most importantly, to ensure to leaving no one behind. The primary driving force for RETD is to address the lack of access, the digital divide, and illiteracy rate.

4. **Ms. Sylvie Bouko**, Consultant, GICHD

Sylvie has been working in Mine Action for the last 18 years from grassroots to top-levels in 30 countries comprising fragile & conflict-affected states. She supports NGOs, UN agencies, Governments and communities to protect human safety and security, and to foster sustainable peace and development.

As GICHD Consultant and Explosive Ordnance Risk Education Specialist, she will present an outline of a Review of New Technologies and Methodologies for EORE in Challenging Contexts currently led by the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining.

5. **Mr. Danee Luhar**, Child Protection Specialist, Myanmar, UNICEF

Danee is a Child Protection Specialist working with UNICEF. He has been working in Child Protection and the Mine Action sector for the past fourteen years. Currently, he is working in Myanmar and leading UNICEF's Mine Action programme. Danee has been involved in developing various kinds of Explosive Ordnance Risk Education tools. One of these tools is an Interactive EORE Application, which was developed by UNICEF Myanmar and DanChurchAid, in coordination and collaboration with the Government of Myanmar.

6. **Mr. Solomon H. Black**, Programme Manager, U.S. Department of State

Solomon serves in the U.S. Department of State's Office of Weapons Removal and Abatement as the Program Manager for Global Assessments, Analysis, and Emergency Response as well as for U.S. Conventional Weapons Destruction Programs in Lebanon and Yemen. In this role, Sol is responsible for initiatives that relate to hazard risk education, stockpile destruction, and increasing partners' PSSM capacity. Sol will be presenting on a joint State Department-MAG-Facebook project that pioneered the delivery of lifesaving EORE through targeted facebook ads and underscores the

significant potential value of using social media ads to deliver agile and cost-effective EORE across the globe.

7. **Ms. Annemarie Swai**, Regional Emergency Advisor, Europe and Central Asia Regional Office, UNICEF

Annmarie is supporting countries to enhance emergency preparedness and response. In Ukraine, UNICEF is supporting children impacted by the protracted crisis, which has propelled the country to the unenviable position of being one of the most mine-affected countries in the world. With children at heightened risk of mine and ERW accidents, UNICEF has been at the forefront in promoting EORE, using innovative, engaging digital approaches to capture the attention of school children and motivate safe practice around mines. Annmarie is excited to share this and learn from other examples around the world.

8. **Mr. Ivan Martinić**

Ivan is the innovator from Croatia who invented the Minefields.info app, which saves lives by alerting the user when approaching a minefield. His app won the Prize for Innovation in Global Security 2019 by the Geneva Centre for Security Policy among almost 200 innovations. He will tell us how the new technology can be used for safety purposes, and more about his application.