The Gradual Process of Nationalizing MRE in Afghanistan

Samim Hashimi
MACCA

Mutahar Sha Akhgar
Mine Action Programme for Afghanistan

Follow this and additional works at: https://commons.lib.jmu.edu/cisr-journal

Part of the Defense and Security Studies Commons, Emergency and Disaster Management Commons, Other Public Affairs, Public Policy and Public Administration Commons, and the Peace and Conflict Studies Commons

Recommended Citation

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Center for International Stabilization and Recovery at JMU Scholarly Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Journal of Conventional Weapons Destruction by an authorized editor of JMU Scholarly Commons. For more information, please contact dc_admin@jmu.edu.
The Gradual Process of Nationalizing MRE in Afghanistan

Afghanistan, a country torn apart by decades of conflict, is implementing a successful plan for national mine-risk education. Successes, strategies and at-risk populations are discussed and analyzed in this article.

by Samim Hashimi and Mutahar Sha Akhgar | MACCA

A one of the countries most affected by landmines, Afghanistan has a responsibility to ensure mine-risk education is carried out in an effective and sustainable way in each part of the country. According to the latest figures, mines and explosive remnants of war killed or injured over 700 Afghans in 2007. This number equates to an average of almost two mine-related accidents every day. Although it is a significant decrease since 2002 (see Table 1), this figure is still too high.

The Mine Action Programme for Afghanistan, which is coordinated and supported by the Mine Action Coordination Centre of Afghanistan, has a 20-year track record of successful mine action. MACCA is now the lead agency in charge of handing over the responsibility of mine action to the government of Afghanistan. MRE and victim assistance are on the forefront of this transition and some existing steps have been taken toward creating a sustainable national authority delivering quality MRE. This article outlines the way in which the steps taken toward nationalization of the MRE program in Afghanistan have resulted in high-quality, sustainable MRE being delivered where it is most needed. The Mine Action Programme for Afghanistan financially supports the Ministry of Education with the production of a quarterly magazine for schoolchildren called Terabayz, which is distributed in most provinces of Afghanistan. Four of the 50 pages in each issue are used for MRE/VA messages.

A directorate of mine action has been included in the new structure of the MoE. This directorate will take all responsibility for MRE activities within the MoE in the future.

Continuing Community-based MRE

Unfortunately, there are at-risk children who are not in school and, therefore, will not be reached by the national curriculum, nor will the large number of adults who also need access to MRE. For this reason, continuing community-based MRE is essential.

Community-based MRE in Afghanistan is based on the findings of MACCA’s latest Landmine Impact Survey. viewm data and data on movement of internally displaced people and returnees. MAPA’s regional offices design the MRE strategy for their respective areas based on this information, directing teams to focus on the most at-risk areas and groups.

Teams from various nongovernmental organizations are then tasked with responding to the needs of communities through emergency response, community liaison and community monitoring for low-risk areas. There are also a variety of creative methods employed by the NGOs, for example, the Mobile Mini Circus for Children and the mobile theater. The mini circus communicates MRE messages through the medium of performance theater, which engages the children’s attention and helps them remember the messages. Another MAPA partner has a mobile theater, which is an effective way of drawing a variety of people from a community to listen to MRE messages.

Sustained MRE through Mass Media

Although it is important to focus national MRE efforts through the MoE due to the high number of child mine victims, we believe it is important not to neglect communications to other audiences. One such example is mass media communications including radio, TV and newspaper campaigns. Currently, this method of MRE includes messages conveyed in five languages through five different radio stations, as well as through the MoE’s educational radio and TV networks.

Specialized Approaches for Specific Situations

There is also the need to assess country-specific issues when designing MRE and making the transition to national-government responsibility. For example, Afghanistan has a large number of refugees and returnees who are particularly vulnerable to mine accidents, as they are new to an area and often the first to pass through transit centers, which returnees pass through as part of the repatriation process.

Lessons from Afghanistan

In conclusion, this article highlights the potential for successful transition of MRE to national/governmental authority. However, given the immense range of demands on the government of mine-affected countries and the need for any change to be gradual, we believe that a staged, gradual approach is vital. MRE is literally a case of life and death since neglecting some of the audiences served by traditional forms of MRE could result in a fatal accident. In the case of MRE, we cannot afford to let our guard down at any time. We must push toward nationalizations as the most effective, sustainable way of carrying out MRE in a country, while maintaining the range of methods that ensure all at-risk populations are reached by the messages they need to hear.

See Endnotes, Page 112

Table 1: Afghan mine casualties, 2002–2007.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Mines/ERW</th>
<th>MRE/VA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>1,200</td>
<td>900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>1,100</td>
<td>800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>1,000</td>
<td>700</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>900</td>
<td>600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>800</td>
<td>500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>700</td>
<td>400</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Hashimi and Akhgar: The Gradual Process of Nationalizing MRE in Afghanistan

Samim Hashimi coordinates and monitors MRE operations for the Mine Action Programme for Afghanistan, including oversight of Mine Action implementing partners, returnee activities, community-based MRE, teacher training and landmine-safety initiatives. He also provides technical support to the MAPA MRE/VA assistance partner NGOs and government ministries. He has over 10 years of experience in the field of MRE.

Mutahar Shah Akhgar is the Mine Action Advisor to the Afghanistan Ministry of Education. He has been responsible for the integration of MRE activities into the new national curriculum of school textbooks in Afghanistan and the nationwide training of trainers for Afghanistan’s national training office in MRE. He has a degree in literature.

Published by BMJ Scholarly Commens, 2009