From Interventions to Integration: Mine Risk education and Community Liaison

Jo Durham
MAG (Mines Advisory Group)

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From Interventions to Integration: Mine Risk Education and Community Liaison

Miné Risk Education programmes have been based on the medical model of injury prevention and supported by socio-behavioural theories of behaviour change such as the Health Belief Model and Social Cognitive Theory. These models focus mainly on individual behaviours and lifestyles. Under these paradigms, causal factors for unsafe behaviour are seen to be located primarily within the target group’s knowledge, attitudes, skills and beliefs. This focus on the individual has placed the main responsibility for change on the individual, and developing and disseminating culturally specific educational materials has been a key part of the strategy to promote safe behaviour. From this perspective, the need for an MRE programme is first identified by a risk assessment based on explosive remnants of war contamination and injuries. Programme content and delivery is then determined by normative needs, usually defined by activities and messages MRE practitioners believe a given population needs in order to reduce risk. As with many mine risk education programmes in the 1990s, MRE programmes targeted mainly the end users or recipient communities through what was essentially a message-based process. Most MAG programmes utilised two main strategies:

1. Public awareness approaches, including the use of the mass and traditional media
2. Educational approaches (i.e., developing school-based curricula)

MAG MRE teams have either operated as stand-alone units or they have been integrated with other parts of MAG’s operations. In Lao, for example, mobile community-awareness teams were deployed ahead of Technical Survey and explosive ordnance disposal teams to disseminate awareness messages and gather data for technical operations. In northern Iraq, MAG has a community-based programme working with schools and the militias. In Kenya, MAG worked primarily on a child-to-child approach. In other contexts, MAG uses integrated teams, such as the mine action teams in Cambodia and Angola. A MAT is a 14-person, flexible, multi-skilled mine/unexploded ordnance clearance team skilled in minefield surveying, mapping, marking, clearing and community mine awareness techniques. A MAT helps to ensure that MAG teams work in close collaboration with communities. The community works with a mine action team to identify safe behaviour and communities. When MAG’s community-awareness teams have reached large numbers of people, there is little empirical evidence that the MRE programmes have had knowledge of safe behaviour but continues with high-risk activities. Recognising the limitations of MRE, MAG developed a new approach.

Community Liaison

This article focuses on the importance of improving communications between mine- and UXO-affected communities and MAG deminers. CL developed in three phases: pre-clearance, during clearance and post-clearance. Community liaison is used throughout all stages of the mine action operation and helps ensure affected communities are fully involved in and informed about all mine action activities, which allows the community to be confident cleared land or resources are safe.

Community liaison has now become an established component of mine action. IMAS regards it as a “strategic principle” of mine action and the standards recommend all operators use CL “to exchange information between national authorities, mine action organisations and communities on the presence of mines, UXO and abandoned munitions and of their potential risk.” The standards also say that CL “enables communities to be informed when a demining activity is planned to take place, the nature and duration of the task, and the exact location of the areas that have been marked or cleared.”

MAG CL teams have helped identify community needs and have developed strategic partnerships with other organisations so that existing infrastructure can be used to maximum effect and has enabled development. In Angola, for example, MAG’s cleared land is used by the national demining agency to train its cadres in the use of the mine. In addition, community liaison may be used to facilitate access to survivor assistance and rehabilitation services and advocate for the development of local capacity.

Concept Supporting MAG’s Community Liaison Approach

Unlike IMAS, MAG views community liaison as a component of all MAG activities. As an operational matter, MAG has a community-based approach to mine action. MAG places a priority on engaging with communities as an integral part of the mine action process. MAG CL teams to work to identify and develop strategic partnerships wherever possible to reduce risk. These partnerships may be informal or formalised and operate at the level of affected communities, villages or individuals, and commercial and non-commercial service providers, as well as at the policy level. Regardless of the level of formality, MAG works towards developing partnerships that are mutually beneficial, work towards the same goals, share risk, and are characterized by continued dialogue and evolution.

At the village level, for example, this partnership development may include identifying needs and resources and negotiating village levels of involvement and support for clearance. This may also include involving local communities in setting goals and objectives for training, recognizing the community’s ownership of the process, and identifying targets for clearing, agreeing on post-clearance land use and mutually agreeing on post-clearance indicators.

Figure 1: An ecological approach to mine action.

MAG may also establish partnerships with relevant officials or groups to facilitate reporting of explosive devices. Depending on needs, this may include providing training and methodology for collecting and reporting data, setting up a communication network, training and supporting local authorities to monitor and report on explosive devices, and training and supporting local authorities to monitor and report on explosive devices. Depending on needs, this may include providing training and methodology for collecting and reporting data, setting up a communication network, training and supporting local authorities to monitor and report on explosive devices.

As discussed, community liaison is not restricted to communicating solely within MAG’s community. It operates on multiple levels. MAG’s community liaison is integrated into the broader socio-ecological environment in which it programmes operate. This approach can be divided into three broad themes: establishing strategic partnerships, supporting EOD and engaging with at-risk populations.

Facilitate the establishment of strategic partnerships. MAG CL teams work to identify and develop strategic partnerships wherever possible to reduce risk. These partnerships may be informal or formalised and operate at the level of affected communities, villages or individuals, and commercial and non-commercial service providers, as well as at the policy level. Regardless of the level of formality, MAG works towards developing partnerships that are mutually beneficial, work towards the same goals, share risk, and are characterized by continued dialogue and evolution.

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Figure 1: An ecological approach to mine action.

MAG’s mine risk education, mapping problem areas with locals in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

MAG CL teams may draw on a number of different strategies and approaches to ensure that community liaison (and mine action activities in general) is integrated into the broader socio-ecological environment in which it programmes operate. This approach can be divided into three broad themes: establishing strategic partnerships, supporting EOD and engaging with at-risk populations.
The post-clearance phase includes handover of safe land and an evaluation of impact. CL may also identify stockpiles of landmines or other explosive devices and identify and negotiate with the appropriate people to facilitate destruction. All phases may include an MRE component and may also include linking individuals and communities with survivor assistance services and relief and development agencies.

Conduct MRE and engage with at-risk populations. Where appropriate, MAG CL teams also undertake MRE activities. These activities may include working with schools, training community volunteers and using multimedia tools. CL teams also seek to engage with high-risk populations that are unlikely to feel able to respond to MRE messages such as “don’t touch” or “know your area”. These populations are often motivated to handle or tamper with explosive remnants of war for pragmatic reasons. In this context, CL can play a facilitating role to enable at-risk populations to identify appropriate levels of risk or standards of risk and/or ways of minimizing risk. They can then introduce and use community-based sanctions when community members contravene those standards.

Conclusion

Over the last decade, MAG has moved from interventions that focused on the individual and ex-mine/UXO injury survivors to a far broader and more integrated community liaison approach.7 Under this paradigm, elements contributing to risk, thereby modifying the risk profile of the whole system. Table 1 provides a practical example of Laos from analysing risk from a socio-ecological perspective. In this example, a risk behaviour, i.e., handling or tampering with UXO, has been analysed using Green and Kreuter’s socio-ecological framework.8 Under this paradigm, elements contributing to risk behaviours (risk factors) can be separated into behavioural and non-behavioural causes of mine/UXO injury as follows:

- **Predisposing (motivating)**—knowledge, beliefs, values and attitudes.
- **Enabling (facilitating)**—those factors that enable a behaviour or situation to occur.
- **Reinforcing**—those factors that provide incentives for positive health behaviours to be maintained.

Reinforcement may come from an individual or group, from persons or institutions or society. As the table helps to highlight, reducing risk and preventing injuries require an integrated, multi-sector approach based on the important structural issues underlying risk behaviour. Therefore, reducing risk requires effective underpinning. While explosive ordnance disposal specialists and MRE practitioners have some of the specific expertise required to prevent or reduce the threat of MRE, they also need partners of other types and functional expertise to mount a successful risk-reduction programme. This more integrated approach to safety is a central tenet of MAG’s mine action strategy, with community liaison playing a key role.

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Table 1: Using an ecological approach to analyse risk.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Risk behaviour: Men and adolescent boys deliberately handle or tamper with UXO by mining, burning in situ or opening and dismantling UXO to sell</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Predisposing factors</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• A belief that they have the necessary skills and understand how to disarm UXO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• A belief that some UXO, for example BLU-24, are relatively easy and safe to dismantle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• A belief that big bombs are less dangerous than “bombies”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• En-soldiers have experience of dismantling UXO from the war</td>
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<tr>
<td>• People do not consider the risk that their behaviour poses to others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• UXO is seen as a cash crop</td>
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<tr>
<td>• A belief that burning small types of ordnance removes the threat to their families and children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Cultural beliefs in karma and fatalism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Enabling factors</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Insufficient reporting of UXO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Insufficient capacity to respond to threat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Scrap metal and explosives from UXO can be traded for supplemental income</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Free alternates income generation activities which attract similar income for return for removing and destroying forest resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Vietnamese and Thai communities will purchase bomb casing and explosive once dismantled</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reinforcing factors</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• No fines or sanctions imposed against people who dismantle UXO or trade in ordnance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• No micro-credit or bank lending schemes for people who dismantle UXO or trade in ordnance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Insufficient reporting of UXO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

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New playgrounds in mine-affected areas of Croatia provide a safe gathering place for children, families and the community. This local project of the Croatian Red Cross helps 45 communities enjoy the simple pleasures of life again.

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n some areas of Croatia, mine contamination still causes serious economic and social upheaval within the community, reduces social recovery and disables activities necessary for normal life. Until recently, carefree childhood years were abruptly interrupted by the loss of safe places to play in Croatia, and formerly available facilities became mere memories. However, with the help of several donors in 2001, the local Vinkovci chapter of the Croatian Red Cross began to construct safe playgrounds for children. To date, 45 children’s playgrounds have been completed in 31 villages surrounding Vinkovci, and another 14 in Beli Manastri, Berkovci, Đaraž, Donja, Krsn, Novčak, Otočac, Pakrac, Petrinja, Sinj, Slunj, Topolnica and Virovitica. The idea to construct new playgrounds to prevent injuries and deaths of children soon spread to other mine-contaminated areas of Croatia. Fundraising through a humanitarians action called “Watch Your Step!” and a concert by the Scala Philhammonic Orchestra of Milan, held in Zagreb in 2003, supplemented donations by the International Committee of the Red Cross, the Croatian Red Cross, Coca-Cola, McDonald’s, different banks and friendly towns from abroad to fund this important Croatian Red Cross project.

The opening of every playground is a festive occasion with recitals and singing or short mine-action related plays by local children. The (nearly) new playgrounds encourage exhibitions, concerts, theatre performances, plays, sports competitions and other events in the community. So far, almost 100,000 visitors have attended these events and learned about the danger of mines.

Developing a new playground and gathering space for families has made a significant difference in the quality of life for the people of Croatia. It is an idea that can help other war-torn and mine-affected countries around the world. In fact, UNICEF, with additional funding from the Canadian International Development Agency, recently began setting up “alternative safe play areas” in the Gaza Strip, bringing MAG’s mine action strategy, with community liaison playing a key role.

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Since 1997, Dr. Vojka Roseg has been the mine risk education program manager for the Croatian Red Cross. She manages the program in 14 mine-affected counties and 40 local Red Cross branches in Croatia.

Vojka Roseg, MD
MRE Program Manager
Croatian Red Cross
10 000 Zagreb / Croatia
Tel: +385 1 4655 814
Fax: +385 1 4655 304
Cell: +385 98 484 089
E-mail: Vojka.Roseg@hck.hr
Web site: http://www.hck.hr

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That Landmine Thing: Students Take On the Landmine Crisis, Hudson and Fuentes [from page 77]

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Playgrounds Without Mines, Roseg [from page 81]

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