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# New Mine/ERW Risk Education Initiatives in Afghanistan

Many steps, including training midwives, police officers and teachers in mine and explosive remnants of war risk education (mine/ERW RE), have been taken in Afghanistan to ensure that mine/ERW RE is integrated into local networks. This article outlines the move toward integrating mine/ERW RE within local networks in Afghanistan to assure that high-quality and sustainable material is delivered in the areas that need it most.

by Samim Hashimi [ MACCA ]

Torn apart by decades of conflict, Afghanistan is one of the world's most mine-contaminated countries.<sup>1</sup> Addressing the problem of mines and explosive remnants of war (ERW) in Afghanistan will remain a major challenge over the next decade. In order to foster government ownership and ensure that affected communities across the country have access to relevant information, mine/ERW risk education (RE) must be integrated across government networks.

The Mine Action Coordination Centre of Afghanistan (MACCA) successfully mainstreamed mine/ERW RE across several government networks, providing training to various groups including

- Ministry of Education (MoE) (schoolteachers)
- Norwegian Afghanistan Committee (NAC) (midwives)
- UNICEF (vaccinators)
- Child Fund Afghanistan (community health workers)
- Ministry of Interior (*police-e-mardumi* [community-based police officers])
- Ministry of Religious Affairs (MoRA) training of Mullah Imams (pastors)

MACCA is examining innovative ways to institutionalize mine/ERW RE activities and succeeded in expanding the program to reach more impacted communities thanks to these networks.

As one of the countries most affected by landmines and ERW, Afghanistan has a responsibility to ensure mine/ERW RE is carried out in an effective and sustainable way throughout the country. According to the latest figures, mines and ERW injured or killed 8,986 Afghans from 2002 to 2013.<sup>2</sup> The reported figures have significantly decreased since 2002 (see figure 1, page 33).



A mine/ERW RE facilitator with his class in Afghanistan.  
Photo courtesy of OMAR.

For more than 10 years, U.N. Mine Action Service (UNMAS) has supported MACCA's mine action activities in Afghanistan. MACCA coordinates the Mine Action Programme of Afghanistan (MAPA), which has more than 20 years' experience in successfully working mine action in the country. UNMAS and MACCA work toward the gradual transition of mine action responsibilities to the government of Afghanistan. MRE and victim assistance lead this transition, and exciting steps were taken in ensuring a sustainable, national authority delivers quality mine/ERW RE.

## Mine/ERW RE in Afghanistan's Midwifery Networks

Accessing women in mine/ERW-impacted communities is often challenging. MACCA recently collaborated with NAC

to train all NAC midwives in different provinces of Afghanistan. This initiative aimed to provide landmine and ERW awareness to women and girls in communities impacted by mines/ERW to ensure informed decisions can be made regarding the threats posed when conducting everyday tasks. While responding to medical treatment referrals, the trained midwives will provide awareness to housewives as well as girls in their houses and health facilities.

NAC trained 135 midwives in Wardak province to provide awareness workshops to other women and girls in their areas of responsibility. The workshops provide information for women and girls about the location of safe water and firewood collecting areas as well as where to graze livestock. This process will continue to train remaining midwifery networks in other provinces of Afghanistan.

#### Mine/ERW RE Training for *Police-e-Mardumi*

MACCA has trained around 130 male and female community-based police officers, or *police-e-mardumi*, in seven Afghan provinces. The officers provide training to mine/ERW-affected communities and to other police officers, community members and schoolchildren. Results show that this successfully raised awareness among community members and built relationships between police and communities.

#### Mine/ERW RE in the MoE

In Afghanistan, as in many other countries, a high proportion of mine-accident victims are children. Therefore, MACCA identified the need to incorporate mine/ERW RE into the national education system. The three main initiatives were to:

- Train teachers in mine/ERW RE
- Incorporate mine/ERW RE into the new national curriculum
- Distribute mine/ERW RE materials to schools

The mine/ERW RE messages are now integrated into the curricula for grades seven through 12. The curriculum for grades one through six was nearly finalized by the end of 2013, and it is expected that funding to complete the curriculum will soon be available in a grant from the U.S. Embassy in Kabul.

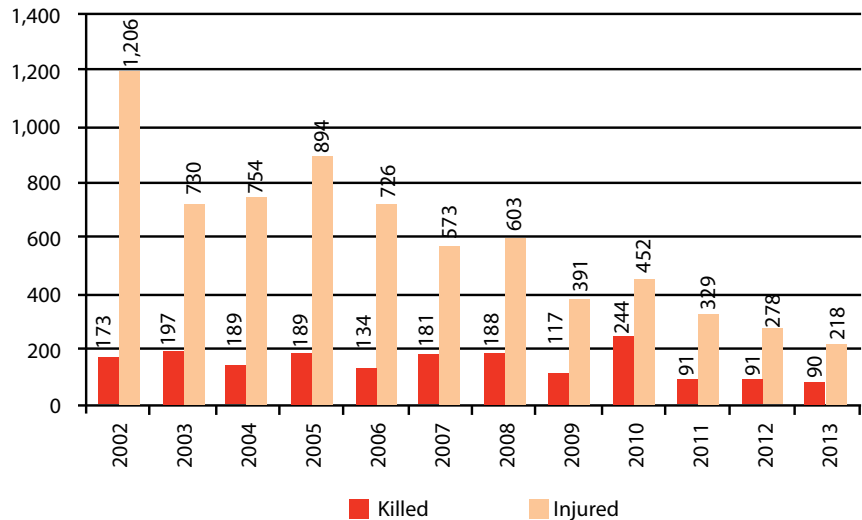


Figure 1. Mine/ERW casualties in Afghanistan, 2002–2013.  
Figure courtesy of MACCA/CISR.

MoE child-protection officers (CPO) trained a total of 23,237 male and female teachers in more than 11,000 schools in 34 Afghan provinces to teach mine/ERW RE to children. This curriculum ensures children know to avoid dangerous areas, understand warning signs and recognize clues that an area may be unsafe. Moreover, parent-teacher committees were established to discuss child safety outside of school and during times of outdoor activity.

CPOs and schoolteachers received more than 11,000 mine/ERW RE kits to support their sessions with students and community groups. These kits include three posters of life-size mines and ERW, 10 mine/ERW RE/victim-assistance activity cards (seven mine/ERW RE and three disability-advocacy cards) and a guideline for those helping to conduct the trainings for schoolteachers. This effort helped to mainstream mine/ERW RE within the government sectors, in particular MoE. More than 60 percent of Afghan children attend school and learn about mine/ERW risks and unsafe behaviors. In addition, children receiving mine/ERW RE pass on lessons learned and related textbooks to family members and others who are not attending school. The mine action and livelihood survey shows that the majority of women and girls unable to attend mine/ERW RE classes were provided with RE sessions through their elders and family members whom MAPA teams and schoolteachers had visited. MoE has recruited more than 70 people to serve as mine/ERW RE focal points in all 34 Afghan provinces to support the integration and expansion of future mine/ERW RE activities.





Using model anti-personnel mines, a man conducts a landmine awareness class for girls and boys in the village of Chargata, Afghanistan.

*Photo courtesy of UNICEF/Robert Semeniuk.*

#### **Integration of Mine/ERW RE within MoRA**

MACCA has also trained over 1,000 Mullah Imams in early 2014 and plans to train a total of about 15,000 Mullah Imams throughout the country to provide awareness to their communities.

#### **Community Mine/ERW RE**

In order to expand the outreach of MRE activities, MACCA trained around 41 out of 49 survey teams from various organizations, including the Mine Clearance and Planning Agency, Afghan Technical Consultants, Danish Demining Group (DDG), The HALO Trust and Sterling International (now Sterling Global). These survey teams conduct mine/ERW RE sessions with affected communities across Afghanistan. Recent reports indicate this resulted in greater mine/ERW awareness among communities.

To reach the roughly 35 percent of Afghan children who do not attend school, MACCA and MAPA work together through Afghanistan's Community Based Mine Risk Education (CBMRE) program, which reached around 20 million Afghans from 1992 to 2013.

CBMRE is implemented by MAPA mine/ERW RE partners including the Afghan Red Crescent Society, Organization for Mine Clearance and Afghan Rehabilitation, DDG,

Association for Aid and Relief Japan, Handicap International and Mobile Mini Circus for Children. CBMRE programs target impacted communities by directly implementing MRE and training community volunteers in collecting data on mine/ERW casualties. Around 45 CBMRE teams are currently providing awareness sessions for mine/ERW-affected community members.

#### **MACCA's New Hotline Number**

MACCA recently created a hotline number to promote information gathering and to ensure a rapid response to mine/ERW problems. Beginning in September 2012, a pilot program introducing the hotline began in two provinces—Kabul and Parwan—before gradually expanding to other Afghan areas. The new hotline has also supported the MRE program as a means for communities to report mines/ERW. The analysis shows that MAPA demining organizations removed several mines/ERW, which helped to avoid mine/ERW accidents and casualties. The hotline also improved the emergency response in affected communities.

During the pilot phase, different community members received 25 calls reporting the existence of mines/ERW. Locals found six mines, 121 ERW, one bomb and 1,000 pieces of small-arms ammunition; and these items were subsequently

destroyed as a result of reports received from community members.

The second phase began in January 2013, and the hotline expanded to other Afghan provinces. Calls were received from Badakhshan, Badghis, Balkh, Bamyan, Faryab, Kabul, Kapisa, Khost, Kunduz, Laghman, Logar, Nangarhar, Paktya, Panjsher, Parwan and Takhar provinces. Data shows that 122 calls were received from January to November 2013 including

- Six calls related to minefields
- Four calls for new minefield surveys
- 47 calls for mine-related problems
- 34 calls for ERW-related problems
- Five calls related to aircraft bombs

The calls led to the discovery of 37 mines, 931 ERW, five aircraft bombs and 1,990 pieces of small-arms ammunition.

Assessment showed that the expanded hotline received more calls, resulting in a rapid emergency response for affected communities and those living

or working near contaminated areas in Afghanistan. Response times ranged from one day for emergency ERW spot check to two or three days for other tasks.

### Conclusion

In its capacity as a coordinating-body, MACCA arranged for its implementing partners to train relevant personnel across the government networks of health, education and security in Afghanistan in order to expand mine/ERW RE's reach, which ensured that a greater number of men and women were aware of the threats posed by landmines and ERW. In the context of transition, the success of this mainstreaming initiative has been to strengthen the capacity of Afghanistan's national authorities to directly implement future mine and ERW RE. ©

See endnotes page 51



Samim Hashimi coordinates and monitors all mine/ERW RE and victim assistance operations for the Mine Action Programme of Afghanistan (MAPA), including oversight of implementing partners, returnee activities, community-based MRE, teacher training and landmine-safety initiatives for U.N. aid workers, nongovernmental organizations (NGO), international NGOs and government staff. He also provides technical support to MAPA MRE/victim assistance partner NGOs and government-related ministries. He has more than 15 years' experience in the field of mine/ERW RE and victim assistance, and represents gender in mine action within the U.N. country team in Afghanistan.

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## News Brief

### Ghana Begins Marking SA/LW

In March 2014, the Ghana National Commission on Small Arms and Light Weapons (NACSA) began marking Ghanaian national security forces' small arms. As of 19 March, 1,000 military weapons received unique identification numbers, which will be used to create a database of state-owned arms.<sup>1</sup> Marking will soon commence on police and Custom Excise and Preventive Service weapons, among others.

According to Small Arms Survey, weapons marking is an often overlooked component of arms control, and "legislation and practical measures concerning the marking of firearms...are weak in a majority of African countries."<sup>2</sup> Likewise, adequate marking improves arms tracing capabilities, which can reduce the illicit flow of small arms and light weapons (SA/LW) throughout countries.

In 2004, an estimated 56.8 percent of civilian-owned guns in Ghana were illicit (125,000 illicit small arms out of 220,000).<sup>3</sup> In 2005, however, NACSA unofficially estimated that 400,000 or more illicit SA/LW could be in Ghana.<sup>4</sup> Craft-production guns, part of traditional Ghanaian blacksmithing, remain prevalent throughout the country;

in 2005 Ghana had the potential "to produce... 200,000 illicit [craft-production guns] annually."<sup>5</sup>

NACSA Executive Secretary Jones Applerh said NACSA plans to mark all civilian and security force SA/LW and also hopes to develop a computerized data-management system to replace the current "laborious and unreliable" paper record-keeping system.<sup>1</sup> Applerh stated that "the marking exercise was the first of its kind in the West African sub-region."<sup>1</sup>

Ghana is one of several Economic Community of West African States member countries receiving support for arms marking.<sup>6</sup> The European Union is funding this project, which is coordinated by the African Union and the Regional Centre on Small Arms in the Great Lakes Region, the Horn of Africa and Bordering States (RECSA), through July 2016.<sup>7</sup> RECSA hosted NACSA representatives during an arms marking study trip in June 2011 and provided Ghana two weapons-marking machines in 2012.<sup>8,1</sup> ©

by Alison Domonoske, CISR staff

See endnotes page 51