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## Mine/ERW Risk Education in Afghanistan

Samim Hashimi  
MACCA

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# Mine/ERW Risk Education in Afghanistan

Afghanistan continues to face many challenges from landmines and explosive remnants of war. The Mine Action Coordination Centre of Afghanistan and its many partners coordinate to reduce risk for affected communities. Teacher training, mass media and a revamped mine risk education curriculum for schools are important facets of recent efforts. In addition, regular monitoring of MRE ensures quality education for all citizens in at-risk areas.

by Samim Hashimi [ Mine Action Coordination Centre of Afghanistan ]

Mine/explosive remnants of war risk education refers to all educational activities seeking to reduce mine and ERW injuries by raising awareness and promoting behavior changes among at-risk groups. The objective of MRE is to provide sufficient information to recognize and report these items to the appropriate authorities. The authorities can then remove the items, making the area safe for people and creating an environment where economic and social development can occur free from the constraints imposed by contamination.

The Mine Action Programme in Afghanistan represents the 40 nongovernmental organizations working in humanitarian mine action in Afghanistan. MAPA is involved in every aspect of mine action, including advocacy, clearance, stockpile destruction, victim assistance and MRE.<sup>1,2</sup> After Coalition Forces ousted the Taliban-controlled government, the Afghan Transitional Authority asked the United Nations to assume control of mine action in Afghanistan. In 2002, the Mine Action Coordination Centre of Afghanistan, funded by the United Nations Mine Action Service, assumed national responsibility for the coordination of all mine action activities throughout Afghanistan, with the eventual objective of returning responsibility to MAPA.<sup>1</sup> Despite MACCA assuming command of MRE and victim assistance projects, progress to assume accountability over the country's mine action has been slow.<sup>3</sup>

MACCA's MRE operations within Afghanistan are based on the ability to

- Understand the mine/ERW threats to communities and individuals
- Identify vulnerable or target groups
- Provide appropriate and targeted messages
- Confirm new knowledge used in MACCA/MAPA annual planning and priority settings



The Afghan Mini Mobile Circus for Children performs an MRE presentation.  
All photos courtesy of Afghan Mini Mobile Circus for Children.

## Afghanistan's Landmine and ERW Challenges

Based on recent MACCA analysis,

- ERW and landmines injure or kill 40 people each month, and 65 percent of these victims are children.
- More than 75 percent of casualties occur while playing or tampering with/collecting scrap metal.
- Mines/ERW contaminate 563 sq km (217 sq m) of Afghanistan's land, affecting 1,847 communities.
- Large numbers of internally displaced persons and returnees from Pakistan and Iran face increased risks from the ongoing conflict and the possibility of moving/returning to contaminated land.

These problems will continue affecting Afghanistan for years to come. MACCA works with the Department of Mine Clearance and other government entities, in particular the Ministry of Education, to provide technical and management support to assist the government of Afghanistan. MACCA focuses on building national capacity for oversight and

coordination of MRE activities within its designated mine action focal point, the Department of Mine Clearance under the Afghanistan National Disaster Management Authority.

## Developing Community Based MRE

Before 2003, MRE activities were not standardized within MAPA. Each MRE implementing partner used its own methodologies and materials when delivering MRE. In order to ensure that MAPA's MRE activities met national standards for Afghanistan's MRE, MACCA started working with MAPA MRE-implementing partners and UNICEF.

In 2003, MAPA's MRE program shifted from an emergency modality to a long-term, community based approach. This program was designed using the standard mine/ERW package developed by MACCA/MAPA in 2003 to ensure all MAPA MRE activities are coordinated under the MACCA umbrella and comply with the new standards package (guidelines and materials) in Afghanistan. This coordination also enabled the creation of a network of community volunteers throughout Afghanistan to act as focal points for mine/ERW-related issues.

The community based MRE program aims to understand the needs of mine/ERW-affected communities, provide MRE and training for community members and volunteers, and link mine action and the affected communities to ensure the awareness of threats posed by mines/ERW. The program also encourages community members and volunteers to mobilize, take responsibility for their safety in mine/ERW-impacted areas, educate others on mine/ERW risks, liaise with survey, demining and MRE mine action teams, and share any recent changes with their communities, in particular by reporting mines/ERW as well as new hazards/minefields.

The community based MRE program consists of the following MAPA mine/ERW risk education implementing partners:

- Organization for Mine Clearance and Afghan Rehabilitation
- Afghan Red Crescent Society
- Association for Aid and Relief
- Mobile Mini Circus for Children
- Danish Demining Group

MACCA conducted two Knowledge, Attitudes, Practices and Beliefs surveys in Afghanistan in 2004 and 2005 and another KAPB survey in 2009 and 2010 to assess the impact of mine/ERW-risk education on affected communities as well as returnees. The KAPB surveys highlight target areas for future MRE programming.<sup>4</sup>

Following the community based MRE program, all MAPA MRE implementers and other entities including the Ministry



Humor used during an MRE performances engages children.

of Education, community networks and media, made an effort to extend MRE's reach using standard messages and materials distributed through religious leaders, the Swedish Committee for Afghanistan, UNICEF vaccination teams, police officers and community based first-aid volunteers of the Afghan Red Crescent Society networks.

From 2010–2011, MACCA and the Department of Mine Clearance, under the supervision of the Afghan National Disaster Management Authority, began working with the Ministry of Information and Culture, the Ministry of Religious Affairs and the National Solidarity Programme. This last organization works under the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development and has 29 facilitating partners in Afghanistan to support MRE activities. Joint field visits and spot checks started in collaboration with the Ministry of Education, the Department of Mine Clearance and area mine action centers to monitor MRE activities and ensure MRE teams were allocated to the most-affected communities. In 2010, MACCA began working with the Ministry of Education's Educational Radio and Television to release MRE radio and TV advertisements.

MACCA, in collaboration with the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining, Afghanistan's Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development, and MAPA implementing partners, facilitated the Mine Action Sustainable Livelihoods Surveys (2010–2011). The results of the surveys indicate the requirements for prioritization of mine action programs and specify the need to target specific groups with MRE, e.g., reaching women in their homes through MRE female teams and distributing additional MRE materials in contaminated communities.<sup>5</sup>



**Priority Settings for Mine/ERW Risk Education**

As seen in the previously mentioned surveys, MACCA continuously analyzes MRE activities with the intent of improving outreach and outcomes. Communities are classified according to their MRE needs. Any community where an incident has occurred every year for the past five years (called a killing zone) is automatically classified as high priority. The classification of remaining communities is dependent on scores resulting from the indicators shown in Table 1.

Indicator	Score
Victims recorded in the last 24 months (score is per victim, not per accident)	3
Community with no school	1
Community with ERW (because more accidents result from ERW than mines)	2
Community with mines	1
Community with cumulative hazards smaller than 200,000 sq m	1
Community population > 200 families	1
Casualties aged 18 or younger	1
Casualties resulting from "playing"	1
Casualties resulting from "traveling"	2
Communities with minefields within 1 km of the community center	1

Table 1. Community need indicators for risk education and associated scores.

Communities without schools are given higher priority, as they are less likely to have access to MRE through the Ministry of Education system. MACCA's casualty data from the last year shows that ERW rather than landmines caused more than 75 percent of casualties; therefore, ERW-contaminated communities are given higher priority than communities containing only mines.

Indicators 5 and 6 in Table 1 are based on factors from the Survey Action Centre's Victim Prediction Model, which indicates hazards smaller than 200,000 sq m (49.42 acres) are more likely to cause incidents than hazards larger than 200,000 sq m, and that affected communities with more than 200 families are also more likely to suffer from accidents.<sup>6</sup> After adding all indicators, communities scoring above six are designated high priority; those between four and five are medium priority; and communities scoring three or under are low priority.

**Teacher Training**

In 2008, MACCA trained 122 Ministry of Education child-protection officers to train schoolteachers in MRE. In turn, these schoolteachers provide MRE activities to protect the lives of students, fellow teachers and community members. Participants are instructed to report dangerous objects and mine/ERW incidents in their areas to MACCA regional offices and the Department of Mine Clearance. The Ministry of Education child-protection officers trained 19,756 teachers, in approximately 9,000 schools throughout Afghanistan (17,451 male teachers and 2,305 female teachers). These trained teachers also received MRE kits to use in their

classrooms. Recently, a joint action plan was developed between MACCA/the Department of Mine Clearance and the Ministry of Education to monitor the implementation of MRE activities within target schools.

MRE lessons appear in textbooks that are printed and distributed to most of the target schools throughout the country. MRE messages have been translated into the Pashto and Dari languages and integrated into the new national curriculum for grades seven to nine (ages 13–15). The MRE lessons include "Malumat-e-Madani," a program that teaches Afghan children about social issues. MRE messages were also integrated into the curriculum for grades 10–12 (ages 15–18). Integrating MRE messages in grades one to six (ages seven to 12) was delayed due to recent changes the Ministry of Education is making in textbooks; these textbooks are expected to be published after the changes are finalized in 2013.

MACCA and the Department of Mine Clearance provide technical and management support aimed at the development of the Ministry of Education Mine Action/MRE Directorate. Ministry of Education mine action advisors are responsible for the national curriculum, school and textbook development, continued teacher training and monitoring of MRE activities in schools. The Directorate ensures that the child-protection officer project is implemented to

- Provide MRE training for new teachers/new schools
- Conduct refresher trainings and distribute MRE materials to trained teachers throughout Afghanistan
- Regularly monitor MRE activities in Afghanistan
- Report regularly to MACCA and the Department of Mine Clearance on MRE activities within the Ministry of Education, including Directorate and Educational Radio and Television of Afghanistan activities as well as field and mission reports.

Region	Trained Teachers		Total
	Male	Female	
Central	3,653	801	4,454
Northeast	3,203	236	3,439
East	2,728	40	2,768
South	1,194	92	1,286
Southeast	2,109	142	2,251
North	2,784	587	3,371
West	1,783	407	2,190
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>17,454</b>	<b>2,305</b>	<b>19,759</b>

Table 2. Number of teachers trained by region in Afghanistan since 2008.

**Mine/ERW Risk Education Materials**

The mine/ERW training materials and kits are equipped with 10 activity cards that each present a key message: sev-



Board games and graphics reinforce MRE lessons.

en are related to mine/ERW safety and three to victim assistance and mine survivors. Pictures also feature true-to-scale anti-personnel and anti-tank mines. All target groups—men, women, boys and girls—can access the materials. A MAPA review committee and the related government organizations ensure that target audiences can understand the mine/ERW materials in all parts of the country.

**Mass Media**

To reach the general public and provide MRE messages in remote or insecure areas, in 2003, mass media began broadcasting MRE messages at different times on different days and through different radio and TV channels.

The MACCA MRE department and partner NGOs, including the Association for Aid and Relief, Japan, developed the MRE radio messages, which are broadcast through local public and private radio stations, on national TV and in government newsletters. To date, 443 radio programs and 12 TV advertisements were developed and broadcast through national radio and TV, as well as Aryana, Arman, Salam Watandar, Killeed, Takharistan and Lahza radio stations. Countrywide coverage focuses

on areas with high impact and communities with no or limited access to MRE teams in the southern, southeastern and eastern areas.

The MRE radio and TV ads target community members, particularly children. The media spots focus on risky behaviors according to the MACCA/MAPA victim data and risk analysis. They are transmitted in local languages: Dari, Pashto, Uzbeki and Balochi. In addition to these regularly programmed messages, more than 10 radio and TV messages were developed and broadcast supporting the annual International Mine Awareness Day and other mine action related events.

**Quality Assurance**

MACCA continues the review and updating of Afghanistan Mine Action Standards for MRE. The MACCA MRE department ensures the accreditation of MRE implementing partners through a desk and field review process and provides feedback to the MACCA Quality Management department and MRE implementing partners.

To ensure the overall quality assurance of MRE activities, MACCA's MRE/Victim Assistance department and the Department of Mine Clearance conduct



Samim Hashimi has worked for more than 15 years within the Mine Action Programme for Afghanistan and is currently serving as Senior Project Manager (MRE and Victim Assistance) for the Mine Action Coordination Centre of Afghanistan. Hashimi represents the Mine Action Programme regarding gender and human rights as part of the United Nations Country Team. He also represents the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) on the Asia-Pacific Working Group. He is a graduate of the Center for International Stabilization and Recovery's 2012 Senior Managers' Course in ERW and Mine Action held at James Madison University.

Samim Hashimi  
Senior Project Manager—MRE/VA  
Mine Action Coordination  
Centre of Afghanistan  
PO Box 520  
Kabul / Afghanistan  
Email: samimh@unops.org

regular monitoring missions of MRE field activities. The MRE department conducts regular MRE technical working group and materials development review activities, providing a venue for MRE agencies and the government to discuss planning, methodologies, materials development and implementation.

**Conclusion**

Following 20 years of MRE delivery, MACCA conducted an evaluation of its MRE activities in 2012 through an independent organization, Samuel Hall. The evaluation assessed the effectiveness of MACCA's MRE approaches to change public behavior. The final report is available on MACCA's website.<sup>4</sup> An action plan was developed with MAPA implementing partners to execute the recommendations to further strengthen Afghanistan's MRE activities.

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