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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. 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. Despite MAPA assuming control of MRE and victim assistance projects, progress to assure accountability over the country’s mine action has been slow.1

MAPA’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

Coordination of MRE activities within its designated mine action focal point, the Department of Mine Clearance under the Afghan 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 training for community members and volunteers, and link mine action and the affected communities to ensure the awareness of threats posed by mines/ERWs. 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 surveys, demining and MRE mine action teams, and share any recent changes with their communities, in particular by reporting mine/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 an other KAPB survey in 2009 and 2010 to assess the impact of mine/ERW risk education on affected communities as well as returns. The KAPB surveys highlight target areas for future MRE programming.

Following the community based MRE program, all MAPA MRE implementers and other entities including the Ministry 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 20 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.

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[Image: 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/ERWs contaminate 563 sq km (217 sq m) of Afghanistan’s land, affecting 4847 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

Humor used during an MRE performances engages children.

[Image: Humor used during an MRE performances engages children.]
Board games and graphics reinforce MRE lessons 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 regular monitoring missions of MRE field activities. The MRE department conducts regular MRE technical workgroup 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, Sammil Hall. The evaluation assessed the effectiveness of MACCA’s MRE approaches to change public behavior. The final report is available on MACCA’s website. An action plan was developed with MAPA implementing partners to execute the recommendations to further strengthen Afghanistan’s MRE activities.

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