The Gradual Process of Nationalizing MRE in Afghanistan

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by Samim Hashimi and Mutahar Sh. Akhgar | MACCA |

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.

Getting MRE into Education

In Afghanistan, as in many other countries, a high proportion of mine-accident victims are children. Therefore, MAPA identified the need for MRE to be incorporated into the national education system. There were three main parts to this plan: training teachers, incorporating MRE into the national curriculum and distributing MRE materials to schools.

In order to train Afghanistan’s 18,000 teachers, a strategy for providing “training of trainers” to the provincial child-protection officers was conceived. These officials train and monitor the teachers in order to increase effectiveness. This training is now almost complete, with 18,000 teachers trained. In a country with many remote and inaccessible areas as well as ongoing insecurity due to anti-government elements, this achievement is quite significant. The government of Afghanistan itself largely funded the training.

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, victim 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 Circuses 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 country.

The approach taken involves running a specific program at the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees’ 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 governments 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 ensures all at risk populations are reached by the messages they need to hear.

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