The Challenges of IED Awareness and MRE in Afghanistan

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In this context, messages evolve from discussions and focus on practical, detailed and precise alternatives as a way of promoting a realistic risk-taking behavior. A key component is to separate risk from risk mapping, which can also be tied into the mine-mapping and prioritization process. In addition, as noted in the 2011 Landmine Monitor Report, “as a result of its community focus, mine awareness/community liaison is also well placed to identify mine survivors who have unmet needs. Although community liaison teams should not necessarily be expected to have technical expertise in mine-survivor assistance, sometimes amputees are not aware of the existence of prosthetics clinics, or believe that being fitted with a replacement or even a first artificial limb will be prohibitively expensive. In such a case, the simple transfer of information—and possibly the provision of transportation—can suffice to make a world of difference to an individual and his/her family.”

Similarly, a broader community-liaison approach can include rapid-response “spot explosive-ordnance-disposal activities. In Cambodia, the focus of MRE is now on risk reduction in the widest sense. The country modified its traditional information-based approach in favor of one focusing more on understanding and mitigating the actual risk. The approach is aided by the fact that a team may spend many days in a village undertaking unimpeded ordnance reconnaissance, to improve mapping and removal of known and dangerous ordnance. The approach is aided by the fact that a team may spend many days in a village undertaking unimpeded ordnance reconnaissance, to improve mapping and removal of known and dangerous ordnance. The approach is aided by the fact that a team may spend many days in a village undertaking unimpeded ordnance reconnaissance, to improve mapping and removal of known and dangerous ordnance. 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Insurgency Activity in Afghanistan 2008

Prior to creating the IED-awareness booklet, ISAF was engaged in MRE and IED-awareness independently in the field when the military provided training on an ad hoc basis. The United Nations and NGOs have criticized some of these MRE and IED-awareness initiatives for disrupting the civilian MRE system already in place by not following the guidelines UNMACA adopted.

For the development of the IED-awareness booklet, an organizational framework for cooperation was established. UNMACA was the primary agent in the practical development and design of the booklet, working with ISAF to develop a set of IED-awareness messages that were compatible and complementary to the current MRE system of messages. Both the Ministry of Education and ISAF were able to evaluate the IED-awareness campaign and implementation of the material regarding Afghan cultural sensibilities and political issues that could become problematic in the everyday lives of such a booklet.

It soon became clear that a new framework was needed to sufficiently address problems concerning IEDs. Consequently, the Ministry of Education, UNMACA and ISAF developed a three-pronged IED-awareness message that included the recognition of IEDs and dangerous areas, the detection of IEDs, and safe behavior. One of the most important messages is to help children recognize IEDs, so the booklet constructed a separate message specifically for children.28 The booklet also warns of odd and out-of-place objects. Out-of-place objects were often used as booby traps during the Soviet war in Afghanistan and are still used today.30,31 Out-of-place objects are often used by insurgents today.32

In the safe behavior section of the booklet, the last two messages are fundamental and different and break with the post-conflict scenario through which MRE messages are commonly developed. The messages reflect the dangers of reporting an IED and emphasize that Afghanistan is a conflict zone. The need to inform the public of the serious danger of including children in the IED-awareness campaign. "Don't be afraid to mention something that seems odd" is an attempt to ensure that countermessages against the IEDs are taken.

Implementation in a Conflict Environment

It is impossible to measure how much danger a child puts himself and other family members in by reporting an IED, but it constitutes a serious dilemma that the reporting of an IED might trigger a military response. This reality makes it difficult for the mine-action organization to be a purely neutral humanitarian agent. The direct cooperation between ISAF, UNMACA and the Ministry of Education, along with the transfer of jurisdiction over the MRE field to the Ministry of Education, undermines that MRE in Afghanistan has indeed become a part of the ongoing state-building project (i.e., construction of a functioning state).

The state-building project that began at the Bonn conference in 2001 and the following IED-awareness campaign. In order to properly address the IED problem raises many of the core issues humanitarian agents find themselves facing when working in conflict zones. The mine-action community's neutrality is challenged when it develops MRE materials in cooperation with the state and government. The community also needs to negotiate with other non-state actors to gain access to areas outside state control to protect the civilians there.

Including IED awareness in the national MRE program in Afghanistan is in many ways the responsible choice by the Ministry of Education, UNMACA and ISAF to deal with the actual problems facing human security in Afghanistan; however, it does open a Pandora's box of serious challenges that need to be addressed. The reason for the choices made during the development of the IED-awareness booklet are best to see and examined. The choice to make a challenge of including IED awareness the IED-awareness campaign. The illustrations could conceivably exacerbate a security risk if the field staff and the people they are trying to reach, as there is a danger of triggering the military and humanitarian sector. This challenge, combined with the transfer of jurisdiction of MRE to the Ministry of Education, could pose a significant obstacle to the ability of IED campaigns to reach their audiences, especially outside state-controlled territory. A well-functioning institutional framework that is able to work in Afghanistan as a whole is therefore vital to the success of the IED-awareness campaign.

The development of the IED-awareness booklet has meant a much-needed transfer of knowledge from the military to the civilian sector in dealing with IEDs. This cooperation and the commitment to IED-awareness is pushing the mine-action community to work beyond the initial work of the IED booklet. In order to properly address the IED threat, comprehensive research and field testing are needed so risk-education materials can address the new challenges that face human security in Afghanistan.

See Endnotes, Page 112

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Web site: http://www.landmine-awareness.org