December 2002

Mine Risk Education and Mine Awareness in Afghanistan

CISR JMU
Center for International Stabilization and Recovery at JMU (CISR)

Follow this and additional works at: https://commons.lib.jmu.edu/cisr-journal

Part of the Defense and Security Studies Commons, Emergency and Disaster Management Commons, Other Public Affairs, Public Policy and Public Administration Commons, and the Peace and Conflict Studies Commons

Recommended Citation
Available at: https://commons.lib.jmu.edu/cisr-journal/vol6/iss3/30

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Center for International Stabilization and Recovery at JMU Scholarly Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Journal of Conventional Weapons Destruction by an authorized editor of JMU Scholarly Commons. For more information, please contact dc_admin@jmu.edu.
**Mine Risk Education and Mine Awareness in Afghanistan**

Recently, UNICEF joined the UN Mine Action Center for Afghanistan (MACA) to coordinate mine awareness programs. Together, they support a number of Mine Risk Education (MRE) partner agencies and their activities.

**Introduction**

The International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL), has estimated that there are nearly 724 million square meters of contaminated land in Afghanistan. Many areas are not accessible because of the high risk factor they present, while new minefields continue to be discovered at an alarming rate. Every month, landmines kill or injure 150 to 300 people in Afghanistan. The threat to the civilian and refugee populations is great. Mine risk education (MRE) and mine awareness programs are conducted throughout the country to warn and educate the local population.

**Contact Information**

- **Jodie Clymer Lee**
  - Project Manager
  - Humanitarian and Security Training Group
  - Star Mountain, Inc.
  - 1101 King Street, Suite 500
  - Alexandria, VA 22314
  - Tel: (703) 560-7000
  - Fax: (783) 560-7009
  - E-mail: Jlee@starmountain.com
  - Website: www.starmountain.com

- **Nicole Kinger**
  - MACA
  - Tel: 540-568-8176
  - Fax: 540-568-8176
  - E-mail: kingerne@jmu.edu

**Conclusion**

Overall, the DSS and the MACA in a Box is a valuable tool in the world of mine awareness. While they are not meant to be an all-inclusive planning solution to the landmine problem, we should remember that they are a demining support system thus, their role is to provide the assistance program needs to accomplish its objectives. Although the mine awareness module is just one small part of the overall system, it is an important one. It enables the mine action community to carry out its work more efficiently and hopefully reach more people than it otherwise could. And with the systems flexible and customizable nature, this can be done in a way that fits the users needs and that engages the audience in a meaningful and relevant way.

---

**Endnotes**


**MAC in a Box Mine Awareness Uses**

The MAC in a Box, like the DSS, contains several hardware items that can be used for mine awareness, such as a projector, camera/video camera and a projector. Two of the systems six or more laptops are designated the "mine awareness module workstations." Other mine awareness items that are included with the system include guides from the James Madison University (JMU) Mine Action Information Center (MACI). Booklets, materials specifically designed for children and videos from the United Nations Childrens Fund (UNICEF). Other items can be added to this list at the request of the MAC.

The mine awareness module of the MAC in a Box is very similar in concept to that of the DSS. It incorporates various ready-made materials that can be printed, distributed or viewed immediately. It also allows users to customize their mine awareness lessons. With the inclusion of the laptops, the MAC in a Box is even easier to transport than the original DSS, thus facilitating quicker implementation of awareness programs.

**In-Country Mine Awareness Implementation**

Currently, of the two systems, only the DSS is being used for mine awareness. The first recipients of the MAC in a Box, the staff at the Armenian Humanitarian Demining Center, have received training on all aspects of the MAC in a Box, including the mine awareness features. However, they have not yet implemented or planned implementation of these tools. A number of DSS users, however, have employed the mine awareness module in their mine awareness activities.

**Zaribah is the most recent recipient of the DSS. The in-country users there are the staff at the Zambia MAC (ZMAC), they received training on its use in September and are planning to implement it very soon. One of the ways in which they plan to use the System is to expand on their mine awareness campaign, which began last year. The ZMAC staff will be showing videos and making posters and t-shirts for three provinces in Zambia. They plan to go to villages, clinics and other community locations in order to reach their varied target audience, which covers about a third of the country.**

**Of the countries to which the DSS was deployed, Jordan used the mine awareness module the most. In fact, according to an assessment conducted by Star Mountain Inc., Jordan uses the DSS for mine awareness more than any other function. Jordanian users make materials for use in their mine awareness program and also use it in preparatory training for mine awareness demonstrations. One example of the DSS in action is in Jordan is the mine awareness brochures created in Jordan for general distribution. Several other countries have made use of the DSS' mine awareness module as well. In Germany, one of the instructors using the DSS makes posters and Training materials that are used to mine awareness training for soldiers in Denmark. A New Zealand instructor has used the DSS to create T-shirts promoting mine awareness. In Bosnia-Herzegovina, the users have employed the mine awareness module to develop training materials and provide mine awareness training.
**Mine Awareness Education**

Currently there are 35 trained male and female facilitators working in community centers. In addition, Save the Children trains volunteers to promote further community participation. All volunteers receive educational pamphlets and materials, and their aim is to create a continuous program.

MRE for Aid Workers and Journalists
Since September 11, 2001, there has been an increased amount of aid workers, peacekeepers and journalists entering Afghanistan. Handicap International Belgium (HI) has assumed the role of providing these workers—some of whom have never been exposed to the threats of landmines—with mine awareness training. The project started on October 1, 2001, and is expected to conclude on December 31, 2002. After this time, however, HI will continue to provide training to newcomers on a regular basis. A total of nearly 5,000 people are expected to attend these information sessions held in all five regions of the country. The main participants include Afghan employees of UN agencies and NGOs, UN and NGO expatriate staff and consultants, and expatriate journalists. The program operates with two teams of two trainers providing direct mine awareness training at each of the different training locations. The teams also conduct revision training when required. All sessions are held in English, Pashto and Farsi.

**MRE Public Information Approach**

The public information approach is the second most common form of MRE. During emergency situations, MRE agencies are able to quickly pass basic mine risk information to a large number of people. This approach is necessary when there is a large population movement or when certain groups of people are exposed to new threats as a result of changing frontlines, bombings, etc. To relay safety messages, organizations using this method hold demonstrations in highly trafficked areas, print and distribute posters and leaflets, set up billboards, and broadcast messages through radio and TV outlets.

**Radio Programs**
The IRE World Service began a series of radio programs in Afghanistan to help the millions of refugees in the country and in camps located in Pakistan and Iran. The people of Afghanistan have been directly affected by the military campaign against the Talibans. New hazards have arisen from unexploded cluster bombs in addition to the already existing minefields left from years of war. The daily broadcasted programs intended for both adults and children give advice on how to avoid the threat of landmines and other life-saving information.

In Afghanistan, radio is the most efficient manner to address the population. Only 47 percent of men and women can read and cannot receive other means of communication. At this time, there are 25 radio relay centers throughout the country in addition to the 10 networked radio relay centers. The IRE World Service has seven radio relay centers in Afghanistan. Two relay centers are located in the city of Kabul. The remaining five relay centers are located within the provinces of Herat, Bamiyan, Baghlan, Paktia and Paktika. A total of 25,000 people frequently tune into the relay centers due to the severe infrastructural problems in Afghanistan.

**MRE in Afghanistan**

MRE, MRE public information, indirect or community-based MRE, and capacity building. The different MRE partners working in Afghanistan are responsible for different activities depending on their area and target population. This article will discuss the four MRE approaches in detail and highlight specific programs currently taking place within the country.

**Direct Mine Risk Education**

Direct MRE is the most common approach to MRE activities. Organizations using this approach send out teams of trainers to the at-risk populations to conduct awareness sessions. The teams evaluate the needs of the target population and create specific classes for these people. The sessions are normally held in common, easily accessible areas such as mosques, community centers or clinics.

Programs continue until the MRE partner feels that most of the people in the area have attended a program. There are a number of different targeted groups for direct MRE. Activities are divided to focus on returning refugees, children, and aid workers and journalists.

**Returning Refugees**
Refugees traveling through the countryside are very vulnerable to landmines and UXO. MRE teams therefore engage in quick mine awareness sessions for returning refugees. This training has become part of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) repatriation process. MRE teams are stationed in different locations such as refugee camps, border crossing points, transit camps and encampment centers throughout Afghanistan and neighboring countries. Since refugees are on the move, their training is short and to the point.

The different MRE partners each choose a teacher package most appropriate for the region they operate in. These will be distributed to teachers to use with their students after they have completed a four- day training session. It is projected that a total of more than 16,000 teachers will receive training during this phase. The final phase of the program involves the Ministry of Education’s public announcement at the ICBL conference in Kabul that they intend to incorporate these sessions into Afghanistan’s formal school curriculum.

In addition to the MRE sessions performed in schools, Save the Children has been working in Afghanistan to educate children outside of the formal school setting. They chose to conduct awareness sessions outside of schools as a result of the restrictions on girls’ education imposed by the former government. Save the Children therefore operates in community centers and health-care institutions.

Their program utilizes a non-formal teaching methodology by including games and activities to teach the children how to live in mined communities. The educational materials used tie in a number of other issues and try to get the children to make references to their personal experiences. The premise of the program is “that landmine education should be fun, but not funny.”

![Image](https://commons.lib.jmu.edu/cisr-journal/vol8/iss3/100)

![Image](https://commons.lib.jmu.edu/cisr-journal/vol8/iss3/101)
UNICEF: A Leader in Mine Awareness

As the UN's lead agency on mine awareness/mine risk education (MRE), the United Nations Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) has done work in about 30 countries that suffer from the effects of landmines. Their programs help affected populations cope with the problems of landmines and give them the means to carry out their daily lives as safely as possible until their land can be cleared and returned to productive use.

by Nicole Kreger, MAIC

Introduction

UNICEF is the UN focal point for mine awareness. As such, its mission is to "provide appropriate guidance for all mine awareness programs, following closely with concerned partners..." In many cases, this means that UNICEF oversees or provides funding for projects that are actually implemented by other already established-in-country organizations. While UNICEF's mine awareness responsibilities encompass all groups regardless of age, the organization tends to conduct most of its awareness programs in school-based settings and other locations where children are the main target audience.

Examples of UNICEF Programs

The following highlights the country programs in which UNICEF has been instrumental over the past year. While the list provided here is not exhaustive, it is meant to emphasize the broad range of impact that UNICEF has on mine awareness around the world.

Albania

UNICEF supports an extensive mine awareness campaign in Afghanistan, which involves 12 districts in Kabul. Mine awareness messages are spread in mosques, on the radio and in schools, where they are being incorporated into the curriculum. Currently, UNICEF is supporting a "quick-impact" mine awareness campaign that targets 3,800 schools in Afghanistan. This program teaches students directly and also trains teachers how to reach students about the risks of landmines.

The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Assistance to Afghanistan (UNOCHA), UNICEF has developed a mine awareness country plan and has begun to implement it this year. Some of the objectives include building local capacities for sustainable community-based mine awareness programs, incorporating mine awareness into the health and education sectors, and funneling resources to meet the needs of those communities that are the most affected. UNICEF is providing support for radio programs on mine awareness and conducting a nationwide mine/UXO impact survey that includes information on mine awareness. Additionally, UNICEF is assisting local NGO META in developing train-the-trainer courses and materials; this information is then being used to teach trainers who will in turn instruct health workers, teachers and community volunteers. META and UNICEF are also developing a system to monitor and evaluate mine awareness in Afghanistan.

UNICEF: A Leader in Mine Awareness

15 percent of women in the country are literate and although the ban on television was lifted after the Taliban's withdrawal, TV transmissions are very few. Through radio, the BBC World Service is able to reach even the remotest areas of Afghanistan on shortwave and can broadcast the programs in all local languages.

In addition to transmitting mine awareness information, the BBC program contains information on health and matters relating to women and children. The radio programs are called On the Road and New Home, New Life, the second of which is a soap opera and has been running for eight years. The shows incorporate education and entertainment to relay their messages. This media outlet also allows refugees to share their stories. By outwardly talking about their situations, Afghans can help each other in dealing with their fears and concerns.

Indirect/Community Based MRE

A third way mine action agencies can provide MRE is through indirect or community-based programs. This usually occurs in areas where the population is relatively settled. Organizations then send their teams of trainers to the communities to reach volunteers how to conduct MRE sessions. Once a community-based volunteer program has been established, the partner agencies continue to follow up on their progress and address any additional concerns.

Since 1996, HIB has also been instrumental in implementing a Community-Based Mine Awareness Program (CBMAP). The program is expected to continue through 2004 and benefit almost 1,500,000 Afghan people, including rural villagers, Kuchi's, internally displaced persons (IDP's) and returnees. HIB's objective is to place the responsibility of mine awareness activities on community members in order to "foster a spontaneous and independent spreading of the messages." The goal of the HIB CBMAP is to:

- Directly train 559,000 people by HIB staff
- Indirectly train 950,000 people by HIB volunteer Mine Committees (MGC)
- Strengthen and support existing MGs
- Create an additional 1,300 new MGs
- Gather data on activity reports and mine victim and incident reports
- Sporad information on mine and UXO locations and accidents
- Identify and refer mine victims

Partners Capacity Building

A final approach to MRE is through the training and capacity building of other non-mine action partners. The MACA and UNICEF locate partners who have educational and/or other social service programs to integrate MRE into their programs. The type and extent of MRE training depends on the type of services the partners provide.

Conclusion

Together the MACA and UNICEF are working in Afghanistan to provide MRE for all at-risk populations.

Technical support and funding are provided to help a wide range of partners run effective programs throughout the country. Continuous efforts by NGOs and other governmental organizations are vital to help protect the lives of millions of Afghan people.

References


Contact Information

M. Shaif Reiter
UNICEF MRE Officer, UNMACA
E-mail: shaif@UNMACA.ORG

Handicap International Belgium
Jean-François Michel
Rue de Spa, 67
B-1000 Brussels
Tel: +32 2 280 16 01
Fax: +32 2 230 60 30
E-mail: jean-francois.michel@handicap.be

HIB Afghanistan
Bruce Todd
Gourdieh De Licht
PO Box 477
Arbub Karam Khan Road
Quetta, Pakistan
Tel: +92 81 444 142
Fax: +92 81 444 703
E-mail: hipakis@ipta.paknet.com.pk

Save the Children
Tel: 1-800-728-3843
Fax: (202) 293-416
E-mail: rshot@savechildren.org
Website: www.savethechildren.org

landmines

Two instructors conduct a UNICEF-assisted mine awareness session for children at an Angolan camp for displaced persons.