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Mine Risk Education and Mine Awareness in Afghanistan

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method or message is universally effective. In order to create such custom-made materials, a small color printer, poster printer, color scanner and heat press are available with the DSS. With these, users can create posters, handouts and stickers to give to local populations. However, since paper will not last long in many countries—especially since it is burned for fuel in some places—these items are often not appropriate. When more durable and long-lasting items are necessary, DSS users can create their own T-shirts with the heat press.

Newer versions also include a digital camera for taking still photos and a camcorder for recording video footage, as well as video editing software. A microphone allows people to narrate such videos in the host country’s native language. All of these items give users the opportunity to make professional quality materials without having to rely on mass-produced tools that may not suit the individual needs of the local population. Also, because the DSS is portable, mine action personnel can travel to villages and show mine awareness videos and slides, in this way hopefully reaching more people.

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 printer/scanner, camera/video camcorder and a projector. Two of the system’s six or more laptops are designated the “mine awareness material workstations.” Other mine awareness items that are included with the system include guides from the James Madison University (JMU) Mine Action Information Center (MAC). Booklets, materials specifically designed for children and videos from the United Nations Children’s 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 some ready-made materials that can be printed, distributed or viewed immediately, but it also allows users to customise 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 information dissemination.

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 of 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.

Zarabia 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 in Jordan is the mine awareness brochure 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 instructions using the DSS makes posters and T-shirts for use in 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.

Conclusion

Overall, the DSS and the MAC in a Box are valuable tools in the world of mine action. While they are not meant to be an all-encompassing 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. With the systems flexible and customisable 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


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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 (HIB) 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, HIB 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, Farsi and Pashto.

**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 IRC 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 Taliban. 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 have access to radio.

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**Using model anti-personnel (AP) mines, a man conducts a landmine-awareness class for girls and boys seated on the floor in the village of Chegara, c/o UNICEF/Robert Semmekuk**

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 country 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, transition camps and encampment centers throughout Afghanistan and neighboring countries. Since refugees are on the move, they receive short MRE sessions. Teams of trainers therefore follow refugees back to their previous homes to provide more relevant and in-depth information and to determine if they live in areas at high risk. So far, according to MACA, more than 1.6 million Afghan refugees from Pakistan and Iran have received MRE sessions.

**School Programs**

Children can be the most vulnerable targets for landmine and UXO injury if they do not fully comprehend the dangers of playing with them or recognize high-risk areas. Since the reopening of Afghan schools, UNICEF and MACA have developed an MRE school program to reach all schools and students throughout the country. The program consists of three phases. The first phase is an MRE Quick Impact Campaign. Partner agencies send trainers to every school to conduct awareness campaigns, exhibitions and other events to raise awareness. This phase also serves as an initial orientation to the dangers of mines and UXO before the students participate in more comprehensive classes. UNICEF claims that so far, more than 70 percent of the targeted schools have completed this phase.

Phase two of the school program involves training school teachers on MRE and providing them with materials to conduct awareness sessions on a regular basis. The Ministry of Education in Afghanistan is involved in this effort. The goal is to train at least two to six teachers in each school and to organize non-formal or home schools. 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 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.
15 percent of the 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 programs contain 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.\(^1\)

**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, Kuchis, internally displaced persons (IDPs) and returnees. HIB's objective is to place the responsibility of mine awareness education 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 (MCs)
- Strengthen and support existing MCs
- Create an additional 1,300 new MCs
- Gather data on activity reports and mine victim and incident reports
- Spread 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 other social service programs to integrate MRE into their programs. The type and extent of MRE training determines 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.\(^1\)

### References


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### Afghanistan

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.

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2. **Conclusion**

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