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 MACCA assuming command of MRE and victim assistance projects, progress to assume accountability over the country’s mine action is slow.

MACCA’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

The Afghan Mine/ERW Risk Education Program within Afghanistan includes several key aspects of mine action, including advocacy, clearance, stockpile destruction, victim assistance and MRE. These programs are coordinated under the MACCA umbrella and comply with the new standards package (guidelines and materials) in Afghanistan. This coordination also ensured quality education for all citizens in at-risk areas.

The community based MRE program aims to understand the needs of mine/ERW-affected communities, provide MRE and training for community members and volunteers, and link mine action and the affected communities to ensure the awareness of threats posed by mines/ERW. 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 surveying, 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/minesfields.

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
- Islamic Relief

MACCA conducts the Knowledge, Attitudes, Practices and Beliefs surveys in Afghanistan in 2004 and 2005 and another KAPB survey in 2009 and 2010 to assess the impact of mine/ERW risk education on affected communities as well as returnees. 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 29 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.
Priority Settings for Mine/ERW Risk Education

As seen in the previously mentioned surveys, MACCA continuously analyzes MRE activities with the intent of improving outreach and outcomes. Communities are classified according to their MRE needs. Any community where an incident has occurred every year for the past five years (called a killing zone) is automatically classified as high priority. The classification of remaining communities is dependent on scores resulting from the indicators shown in Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>Score</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students exceeding the last 34 months (not a victory, not an accident)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community affected by landmines</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community with mines</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community with no school</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community with mine/ERW fields within 1 km of the community center</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community with only mines</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community with accidents smaller than 200,000 sq m</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community with accidents between 200,000 and 1,000,000 sq m</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community with accidents larger than 1,000,000 sq m</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minimum age trained</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary education</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community affected within 5 miles of the community center</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

MACCA and the Department of Mine Clearance provide technical and management support aimed at the development of the Ministry of Education Mine Action/MRE Directorate. Minors of Education mine action advisors are responsible for the national curriculum, school and textbook development, continued teacher training and monitoring of MRE activities in schools. The Directorate ensures that the child-protection officer project is implemented to:

- Provide MRE training for new teachers/new schools
- Conduct refresher trainings and distribute MRE materials to trained teachers throughout Afghanistan
- Regularly monitor MRE activities in Afghanistan
- Report regularly to MACCA and the Department of Mine Clearance on MRE activities within the Ministry of Education, including Directorate and Educational Radio and Television of Afghanistan activities as well as field and mission reports.

Mass Media

- To reach the general public and provide MRE messages in remote or insecure areas, in 2008, mass media began broadcasting MRE messages at different times on different days and through different radio and TV channels.

The MACCA MRE department and partner NGOs, including the Association for Aid and Relief, Japan, developed the MRE radio messages, which are broadcast through local public and private radio stations, on national TV and in government newsletters. To date, 443 radio programs and 12 TV advertisements were developed and broadcast through national radio and TV, as well as Aryan, Arman, Salam Watander, Killeed, Tahkarkhah and Lhaza radio stations. Countrywide coverage focuses 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 Baluchi. 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 working group 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, Samual 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. See endnotes page 66.