Chapter 7

RISK EDUCATION
KEY MESSAGES

- Mine/explosive remnants of war (ERW) risk education (MRE) and Community Liaison are integral to mine action planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation.

- MRE seeks to encourage behavioural change and promote safe behaviour.

- Community Liaison/MRE teams can be seen as the ‘eyes and ears’ of mine action.

- IMAS categorises Community Liaison as a strategic principle of mine action.

- Gender analysis should be an integral part of MRE projects, ensuring that materials and methods are gender-sensitive and that all sex and age groups are reached and targeted in the most inclusive and effective manner.

WHAT IS MRE?

Definition

IMAS 12.10 defines mine/ERW MRE as ‘activities that seek to reduce the risk of death and injury from mines and ERW (including unexploded sub-munitions), by raising awareness and promoting safe behaviour. These activities include information exchange with at-risk communities, communication of safety messages to target groups, and support for community risk management and participation in mine action.’

IMAS 12.10 further highlights that the objective of MRE is to ‘reduce the risk to a level where people can live safely, and to recreate an environment where economic and social development can occur free from constraints imposed by contamination.’

It is important to note that though the discipline is called MRE, it seeks to prevent harm to civilians from all types of explosive devices including abandoned or unexploded ordnance and cluster munitions.
The main goals of MRE are to:

- Minimise deaths and injuries caused by mines/ERW
- Reduce the social and economic impacts of mines/ERW
- Support development

A number of mine action operators no longer use the term MRE to describe these activities. Acknowledging that, for example, armed violence more generally, and small arms and light weapons more specifically, constitute the main risks in many communities, several operators have replaced MRE with terms like Risk Reduction Education and Conventional Weapons Risk Awareness. While recognising these developments, this chapter uses the term MRE, as defined in IMAS 12.10.

**Key components**

**Communicating safety messages**

The principal aim of safety messages is to minimise mine/ERW-related injuries and deaths among at-risk communities through raising awareness and by promoting safe behaviour. MRE safety messages can be communicated in several ways, including interpersonal communication, mass media (TV, radio and newspapers), theatre, role plays, etc.

MRE at school (South Sudan)
Communication through public information channels may be the most practical means of communicating safety information in emergency/post-conflict situations. UNICEF’s *Emergency MRE Handbook* is a useful reference for MRE in emergency contexts.  

Communication of safety messages in more stable contexts is commonly carried out as part of a more comprehensive risk-reduction strategy within a mine/ERW programme. Examples include integration of safety messages into school curricula and community based activities, including development of community voluntary networks. Peer-to-peer and child-to-child strategies are other ways in which safety messages are communicated.

**Information management**

The collection and analysis of information is a central aspect of MRE activities. A wide variety of information is commonly shared during MRE-related activities, including in relation to known and/or suspected mine/ERW hazards, victim and incident data (recording time, place and activity at the time of the accident/incident), blockages and impacts resulting from contamination, victim assistance, etc.

To ensure that the distinct and different needs and priorities of women, girls, boys and men are identified and acknowledged, it is critical to collect and analyse all data in a sex and age-disaggregated manner (SADD). Data analysis is an important aspect of the project management cycle. Findings from the analysis must inform future programming, so that plans and strategies can be modified and lessons learnt. Information management is also essential for monitoring and evaluation purposes.

**Community liaison**

The right of affected communities to receive accurate and timely information about mines/ERW risks is a fundamental principle underpinning MRE, but MRE incorporates much more. The discipline has changed from a narrow focus on awareness-raising to seeking to understand the realities facing affected communities, and the underlying reasons why women, girls, boys and men are involved in mine/ERW accidents, and why they sometimes knowingly expose themselves to danger.

A key aspect of MRE is to encourage behavioural change and promote safe behaviour. Active participation of affected women, girls, boys and men in this process is a precondition to accurately identifying their distinct exposures, needs and priorities. The focus is on information exchange – collecting the information
necessary to understand the situation facing impacted communities and then providing them with relevant information to reduce the risks they encounter.

Information exchange is a pre-requisite for mine action organisations to understand community priorities and how they are impacted by mine/ERW contamination. It is also important for ensuring that communities understand the organisations’ plans and the purpose of the different activities that are implemented in communities. This process is commonly referred to as Community Liaison; it is closely interlinked with MRE.

IMAS 04.10 defines Community Liaison as ‘Liaison with men and women in mine/ERW-affected communities to exchange information on the presence and impact of mines and ERW, create a reporting link with the mine action programme and develop risk reduction strategies. Community liaison aims to ensure that the different community needs and priorities are central to the planning, implementation and monitoring of mine action operations.’ Recognising its importance, IMAS categorises Community Liaison as a strategic principle of mine action.

MRE in a convention context

Under the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention (APMBC), States Parties in a position to do so shall provide assistance for mine awareness. Article 6 of the APMBC on International Cooperation and Assistance highlights that States Parties
may request assistance in the elaboration of a national demining programme to determine; ‘mine awareness activities to reduce the incidence of mine-related injuries or deaths.’

The Cartagena Action Plan 2010 – 2014: Ending the Suffering Caused by Anti-Personnel Mines includes a number of action points that make reference to MRE. Action point 19 focuses specifically on mine risk reduction: ‘Provide mine risk reduction and education programmes, as part of broader risk assessment and reduction activities targeting the most at-risk populations, which are age-appropriate and gender-sensitive, coherent with applicable national and international standards, tailored to the needs of mine-affected communities and integrated into on-going mine action activities, in particular data gathering, clearance and victim assistance as appropriate.’

The Convention on Cluster Munitions (CCM) adopts the term risk reduction education instead of MRE. Article 4 is titled ‘Clearance and Destruction of Cluster Munitions Remnants and Risk Reduction Education.’ Article 4 states that in fulfilling their clearance obligations, States Parties shall take, as soon as possible, a series of measures, including: ‘Conduct risk reduction education to ensure awareness among civilians living in or around cluster munition contaminated areas of the risks posed by such remnants.’

The Vientiane Action Plan 2010 – 2014 includes several action points that make reference to risk reduction education. Action point 17 focuses exclusively on risk reduction education: ‘Develop and provide risk reduction education programmes that focus on preventing and providing alternatives to risk-taking behaviour and target the most at-risk populations. Risk reduction education programmes should be tailored to the needs of affected communities, gender-sensitive and age appropriate, consistent with national and international standards and integrated into clearance, survey and victim assistance activities. Risk reduction education activities should also be integrated, as appropriate, into schools, community-based programmes and public information campaigns. Large-scale awareness raising should be mainly used in immediate post-conflict situations.’

CCW Protocol V stipulates that High Contracting Parties ‘shall take all feasible precautions in the territory under their control’ affected by ERW, including warnings and risk education to the civilian population.

**MRE Project Cycle Management**

A MRE project, just like any other project should incorporate all stages of the project management cycle:
Needs assessment

The first step of the project management cycle is to carry out a needs assessment, to identify and understand the capacities, needs, priorities and vulnerabilities of affected women, girls, boys and men. It is important that any needs assessment is transparent and implemented in a participatory manner and that the results are shared with the beneficiaries. Although a needs assessment is an important first step, it should not be seen as a one-off activity, but be implemented on a regular basis, and form part of on-going monitoring activities.
Knowledge, Attitude, Practice and Beliefs (KAPB) surveys can form an important part of a needs assessment. The purpose of KAPB surveys is to gather a wide range of information that will result in a more in-depth understanding of MRE-related issues.

Women, girls, boys and men are affected differently by mines/ERW, owing to their gender specific roles and responsibilities within their community. It is essential that needs assessments include all sex and age groups in affected communities, to ensure that the information collected accurately reflects reality. In some contexts it is necessary to deploy all-female teams in order to reach affected women.

It is also important to recognise diversity issues more generally, and ensure that individuals from different socio-economic backgrounds, persons with disabilities and female-headed households are included. ‘Communities’ consist of highly diverse groups of people. Deeply embedded power relations influence their structures and decision-making processes. Age, gender, tribe, social and economic status, and religion are a few of the important factors that influence power relations in communities.

Planning

The planning phase draws on findings from analysis of the needs assessment data. Projects should be planned and designed so that they respond to the needs of, and provide needed benefits to, the beneficiaries. Planning is a precondition to effective implementation and should be based on on-going assessment of the needs of the beneficiaries. A gender analysis of all data collected in the needs assessment should be conducted. The findings of this analysis inform the planning process, to ensure that the project is effective in responding to specific needs, priorities and vulnerabilities.

Planning in a MRE context typically takes place at several levels, with a number of different plans and strategies, including and MRE strategy, action plan, work plan and community plan.

Developing safety messages

Safety messages are at the heart of any MRE initiative. IMAS 12.10 recommends that a communication strategy should be developed, and that it should include:

- risk-taking behaviours to be addressed;
- target groups;
• safety messages;
• communication channels; and
• means of dissemination.

Messages should be tailored according to the specific exposure patterns, needs and priorities of target groups. The tailoring and design of messages should respond to findings in the needs assessment and the analysis of accident data. Messages, materials and any symbols must be gender and age-sensitive and culturally, linguistically and socially appropriate.

It is crucial to ensure that field-testing of safety messages and material is done with a sample group that is representative of the beneficiaries. Field-testing may (and often should) result in changes and adaptations to the safety messages and material.

Implementing activities

MRE is implemented in all stages of a mine action programme life cycle: conflict/emergency, stabilisation, reconstruction, assisted development and development. In an emergency setting, MRE generally focuses on raising awareness related to the danger of new risks from mines/ERW and emphasising safe behaviour.

In later stages of the life cycle, the emphasis shifts to collecting community information on the particular threats that women, girls boys and men are exposed to. Activities are then tailored on the basis of that information, responding to the identified behaviour patterns, exposure and needs.

MRE is mainly integrated into school curricula in countries that face a significant and protracted mine/ERW problem. This is an effective way of reaching school children. In several mine/ERW-affected countries many children do not have the opportunity to go to school. A child-to-child approach, where a child who is not attending school can be sensitised by his/her peers and/or siblings is implemented in a number of programmes.

Application of national ownership and sustainability principles, mean that it is important that capacity development plays a central role in all MRE projects. Capacity development takes place at several different levels and targets a multitude of actors, including national staff, beneficiaries, national organisations, the NMAA/MAC and relevant Government ministries.
Many operators have volunteer structures in place, whereby women and men from affected communities serve as MRE focal points in their communities. Volunteer networks have been praised on many occasions for strengthening community ownership and capacity to implement activities in a sustainable manner.

MRE further plays an important role in countries where all known hazardous areas have been cleared, to prevent accidents stemming from so-called residual mine/ERW contamination.\(^9\)

**Monitoring and evaluation**

Monitoring should be an on-going activity throughout the MRE project cycle, whereby activities are monitored against the plans and strategies developed in the planning phase, ensuring that the project is on track and is delivering expected outputs. Activities are monitored to ensure that the project delivers the needed benefits, and that it accurately and effectively responds to the needs identified in the needs assessment.

Monitoring usually takes place both internally and externally. The NMAA/MAC is generally responsible for external quality assessments, whereby it conducts visits and accompanies MRE teams to the field to ensure that activities are of the required standard.\(^10\)

KAPB surveys are frequently implemented in MRE projects. Findings from KAPB surveys assist in better design and targeting of MRE activities for the different sex and age groups. KAPB surveys also provide a useful baseline, against which subsequent data should be measured, to determine results. KAPB surveys often play a central role in pre- and post-impact assessment activities.

Monitoring generally focuses on the activities and output level (number of MRE sessions delivered, number of women, girls, boys and men targeted, type of delivery etc.) – and seeks to answer the question ‘are we doing the job right?’ Evaluations on the other hand tend to focus more on the performance, outcome and impact level – ‘are we doing the right job? Do we make a difference?’ Evaluations can be conducted at any stage of the project cycle, and not just at the end. IMAS 12.10 highlights four good reasons for conducting an evaluation of a MRE project:

- to improve performance;
- to enhance accountability;
- to improve communication among stakeholders; and
- to improve learning and empowerment.
The benefits of monitoring and evaluation are dependent on how organisations respond to the findings. If necessary, activities, plans, strategies, future projects should be adapted accordingly. The monitoring and evaluation feedback loop is the main driver for the continual improvement of a MRE project/programme.

**Role of community liaison and MRE in broader mine action**

While Community Liaison and MRE are central and integral parts of mine action, they also serve as an important support function to a number of other mine action activities. Community Liaison/MRE teams can be seen as the ‘eyes and ears’ of mine action. They are instrumental in sharing information and building trust between mine action organisations, affected communities and other stakeholders.

Gender-balanced teams facilitate access to all sex groups and enable organisations to carry out other activities in a more inclusive, participatory manner, resulting in more people-centred, effective and sustainable results. ‘Community Liaison/MRE teams’ support includes, but is not limited to:
Demining/Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD)/Battle Area Clearance (BAC)

Pre-clearance/survey:

- Identify and register suspected and/or known hazardous areas.
- Initiate consultations with women, girls, boys and men in affected communities.
- Conduct pre-clearance/survey impact assessments to identify needs and priorities.
- Facilitate task prioritisation.

During clearance/survey:

- Share information with communities on the survey/clearance plans and the importance of respecting and understanding marking and fencing.

Post-clearance/survey:

- Facilitate handover of released land.
- Inform women, girls, boys and men about areas that have been cleared and those that remain hazardous, including markings of cleared and un-cleared areas.
- Conduct post-clearance/survey impact assessments to determine if anticipated results were reached.
- Share the impact assessment results with communities.

Stockpile destruction

- Build trust between local communities, authorities, and mine action organisations.

Victim assistance

- Contribute to mine/ERW victim data collection or surveillance systems.
- Identify national and local capacities for victim assistance, and under what conditions assistance is available.
- Provide survivors with detailed information on the availability of assistance and how this assistance can be obtained.
• Liaise with physical rehabilitation centres to ensure assistance is provided.
• Encourage the employment of survivors and victims, if possible and where appropriate, as MRE facilitators.
• Deliver emergency MRE to communities affected by recent incidents as a component of a psychosocial support campaign.

Advocacy

• Raise the awareness of mine action locally and nationally, especially in contexts where demining and survey activities are not yet feasible for security/political reasons.
• Promote International Humanitarian Law.
• Advocate for, and raise awareness of, the rights of mine victims and persons with disabilities more broadly.

ENDNOTES


9 IMAS 04.10 defines ‘residual risk’, in the context of humanitarian demining as ‘*the risk remaining following the application of all reasonable efforts to remove and/or destroy all mine or ERW hazards from a specified area to a specified depth.*’

10 The MAC/NMAA is also responsible for accrediting MRE teams prior to the implementation of activities.