



## MINE ACTION PROGRAMME OF AFGHANISTAN (MAPA) NEWSLETTER: AUGUST 2014



### A Trip to Bamyan

#### Untold Stories of Mine and ERW Survivors

Bamyan can be translated as 'the Place of Shining Light'. Located in the centre of Afghanistan, Bamyan Province is one of the country's thirty-four provinces. Its capital city is also called Bamyan.

Bamyan has several famous historical sites, including the famous Buddha statues with more than 3,000 caves around them, Band-e Amir Lake, the ancient towns of Dara-i-Ajhdar, Gholghola and Zakhak, the Feroz Bahar, Astopa, Klegan, Gaohargin, Kaferan and Cheldukhtaran. Every year, tourists from both Afghanistan and abroad visit these historical sites. UNESCO has classified Bamyan's historical and archaeological areas as World Heritage sites. The historical sites date from between the 1st and 13th centuries and had a significant influence on the Gandhara school of Buddhist art. Bamyan as a whole is renowned as one of Afghanistan's archaeological riches.

Like the rest of the country, more than 30 years of conflicts have left the soil of Bamyan contaminated by mines and ERW. This contamination has resulted in around 80 casualties in the last ten years.

In this issue, we will bring to life the true stories of this tragedy in Bamyan, while also reflecting the stories of courage of the province's survivors.

Our first story is that of Mr. Ghawosuddin from Kakrak Village. It is a story from a long time ago but it still resonates today.

#### **Ghawosuddin, a father from Kakrak Village, Bamyan**

Ghawosuddin's family is one of more than 20 families living in Kakrak Village. He has two sons and four daughters. Most of the villagers are farmers and cultivators. The village is located next to a hill, also known as Kakrak. Ghawosuddin told us his story: "I was going for firewood and taking my cattle for grazing, when I accidentally stepped on a mine at Kakrak Hill. It was not my first time going to the hill. We usually went to the same place. Our neighbours used to go there, but I was the one who fell victim to a mine."

He continued: "After the accident, my cousins took me to Bamyan Hospital on a donkey. There, I was operated on and the doctors cut off my leg. I was in treatment for a month. I was later given a prosthetic leg by the Afghan Red Crescent Society. After my accident, everyone was told not to go to that site. Nine years later, my daughter became the victim of a mine in the same area. Even today, we are not sure of our safety in the area."

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The famous Buddha statues site, Bamyan—Afghanistan



Ghawosuddin  
Mine Survivor

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Experience has shown that, if one mine is found or explodes in an area, there is high probability of more mines.

Due to poverty or lack of awareness, people sometimes put their own safety at risk by entering mined areas.

Collecting firewood, taking cattle to pasture areas or just sight-seeing may result in disability or the loss of life.

When asked how the incident changed his life, Ghawosuddin replied: "My life completely changed. Before I could walk and run. I could work hard on my fields and take my cattle to the pasture sites far away. But now I can't do any of those things. Even if there is a wedding party of one of my relatives in a nearby village or another event where I am supposed to be, I cannot go. And my relatives have stopped inviting me to such events if it takes a long time to walk there."

In spite of the fact that Ghawosuddin lost his leg and became disabled, he worked hard in life and has raised a family of six, including two sons and four daughters. He is still able to work in his garden and on his land. His spirit has not been broken.

### **Rayza Gull 13, Ghawosuddin's daughter**

We met with Ghawosuddin's daughter, Rayza Gull, who told us her story.

She said, "It was a sunny day in May 2014. I took the sheep and cows to the nearby pasture site behind our village called Kakrak Hill. Some of the sheep ran a little farther and I followed them when suddenly I was blown away. For a few moments, I didn't feel anything and then fell unconscious. When I woke up, I realised there was a bad smell and smoke. I saw my fingers were broken and I saw that, with one hand I was holding my amputated foot. I didn't know how I was holding it. I started shouting and screaming. Then I realised that something really bad had happened to me. Our neighbours, who had already heard the explosion, reached me and carried me to Bamyán Hospital. The doctors examined me there and did something to stop the bleeding. They gave me injections for my pain. Then the doctors told my father that I needed to be taken to Kabul Emergency Hospital."

After an hour of emergency treatment at Bamyán Hospital, Rayza Gull was taken to Kabul Emergency Hospital by a local police car. She had already lost one leg, three teeth and four fingers. She subsequently spent one and a half months in treatment at Kabul Emergency Hospital.

Before the accident, Rayza Gull was in fifth class at school. She told us how the accident had impacted her life: "I feel very grieved now that I lost so much. Prior to the incident, I could go anywhere and play with my friends and sisters but now I can't do any of those things. When I see other girls my age going to school, playing and running, I feel very sad and sometimes I cry

by myself. I still wish to study and work in life. I want to go to school but I hate it when I feel that people feel sorry for me. I feel very shy and lonely now. Prior the incident, we were educated about the risks of mines and ERW. We are poor; the only way to feed our family is through our cattle and cultivation. We have to take our cattle to green fields and hills. That is the only way of life for us."

Rayza's father, Ghawosuddin, who is also a mine survivor having lost his leg in an accident, spoke of his grief over his daughter's accident: "When I lost my leg, I was very disappointed and sometimes I felt sorry for myself. That was the most terrible accident of my life and it made me weep sometimes. Now that my daughter has become a mine victim and has lost her leg, I wish that I could take her place. I wish I had lost both of my legs so that my daughter would have been safe and sound. But unfortunately we can't undo what has been done." With tears in his eyes, he said: "We sold all of our sheep and cows. However it was a good source of livelihood for us, but since I and my daughter are not able to take them to the fields for grazing the cattle."

We encouraged Rayza Gull to go to school and spend time with her friends. To this end, we introduced Rayza Gull to the Afghan Landmine Survivors Organization (ALSO), one of the implementing partners of the Mine Action Programme of Afghanistan (MAPA) working on victim assistance. ALSO assigned one of its staff members to mentor Rayza Gull and act as her peer support assistant. The peer support assistant will work with her to raise her self confidence and provide psychosocial support. Furthermore, ALSO informed her school's administration office about her accident and requested the school to admit her back to the class after a few months, by which time she will be physically and mentally ready to go back to school. ALSO personnel contacted the Afghan Red Crescent Society to ensure that Rayza Gull is registered to receive a prosthetic limb once her leg is ready for it.

Immediately after Rayza Gull's accident, Mine ERW Impact Free Community Survey (MEIFCS) and Mine/ERW Risk Education (MRE) teams were sent to the village. The affected area has been fully surveyed and the local people were informed of the dangers that exist in the area.

There is also hope and light in Bamyán. I met with other survivors who had become disabled as a result of mines but were now leading normal lives. They study or work and hope for a better future. Below are their stories.



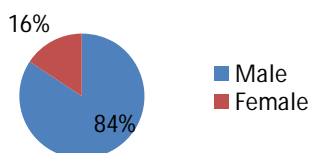
Rayza Gul and Ghawosuddin  
Mine Survivor s

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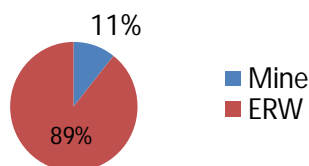
## **CASUALTIES DURING AUGUST 2014**

During this month, 19 civilian casualties due to mines and Explosive Remnants of War (ERW) were recorded in Afghanistan.

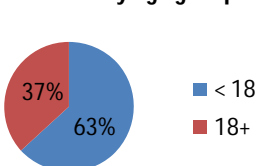
### **Casualties by Gender**



### **Mine, ERW and AIED Casualties**



### **Casualties by age group**





### **Sayed Eywaz Mahdeyar, Regional Peer Supporter, ALSO**

In 2008, Mahdeyar was a local policeman working in Kabul. It was another normal day on the job. He was marching towards a check point, when he and his team were blown up by an anti-personnel mine at Afshar Mountain. The mine took the lives of six of his colleagues and left him and one other policeman injured. He lost his right hand. He spent 16 days in treatment at Kabul Emergency Hospital. After he recovered, he was discharged from his post as a policeman. The government paid him his salary for one year and after that he received 50% of his salary, which is about USD 40 a month.



Sayed Eywaz Mahdeyar  
Mine Survivor

Mahdeyar told us his story: "I was very sad and I grieved during the early days of my disability. I used to stay at home all the time and tried to stay away from society. Later, I was encouraged by my family to finish school. I went back to school and started my studies. After some time, the staff from ALSO contacted me and informed of the training courses and mentoring programmes that they provide to people with disabilities. They informed me that they also provide English language training and computer courses. I joined the English language and computer classes for 10 months."

Mahdeyar has since graduated from 12 grades of school and is now working with ALSO as a regional peer supporter; he works closely with fellow disabled people. He is a good mentor, bringing hope to other survivors of mines and ERW who are also disabled. Mahdeyar encourages survivors to accept their disability and play a vital role in society.

"I thank the victim assistance programme of UNMAS and ALSO for giving us new hope in our lives."

### **Mohammad Hussain Ahmadi, Regional Manager at ALSO**

Mohammad Hussain Ahmadi's story is an impressive one. It is a story both of a struggle but also the true courage of a man with a disability. It is the story of a survivor who has managed to lead a normal life even after becoming disabled.

"Yes, I am a victim of mine. I still remember that horrible day. It was New Year's Day. All the children and youngsters were very happy. Most of us were wearing new clothes and we were all laughing and playing at Karte Sakhi Hill, Kabul City. We went to Sakhi Shrine, as it is the custom of our people to visit the shrine on the New Year's Day. We were very happy that day. But the happiness didn't last long for me as I stepped on an anti-personnel mine and lost both of my legs. I was carried to Emergency Hospital and I was treated for 17 days. I was in pain and I grieved in the aftermath. I felt hopeless. I isolated myself from society. I felt like an outcast among my friends and family members. I felt very shy. I used to cry with myself."

"My family never left me alone. They made me finish school. After school, I joined university and continued my studies. I was a student of Dari Literature at Kabul University."

"In 2010, I was informed by one of my friends about ALSO (MACCA Implementing Partner) training sessions. I joined the computer and English language training classes. I also participated in other sessions and activities held by the organisation. I was also selected as an announcer for different ceremonies conducted by ALSO."

"I was still in psychological pain due to my disability. I was feeling like a burden on my family and society. However, colleagues from ALSO worked with me and I attended special mentoring sessions. ALSO first explained disability to me and convinced me to accept my disability. They educated me that disability never limits a person's development but it is an individual limitation. All disabled people should work hard to have a positive role at the society and even work for the society and serve his or her community the best way possible."

"After attended trainings, mentoring sessions and different workshops on advocacy and the rights of persons with disability, I no longer feel hopeless. Now I am the Regional Area Manager for ALSO in Bamyán. I have a good income; I just got married in May 2014. I have all the help and support that I need from my family, friends and colleagues. I never feel hopeless because of my disability now."

"I thank MACCA, UNMAS, the Norwegian Government, and Clear Path International, who have all funded our victim assistance projects."

"My message to all young boys and girls with a disability is that they should trust that they can do better for themselves. They should be optimistic and self-confident. They should use their abilities in the right way. And never let their talents go to waste. They should struggle to have the same role in society as any other person."

### **Sayed Reza—Mine Survivor**

Sayed Reza is a resident of Yakarang, Band-e-Amir in Bamyán. Reza was eight years old when he lost his father. This pain alone was already crushing him. But further challenges lay ahead for Reza. One day, when he was playing in an area close to his village, he stepped on a mine, which left him severely injured and caused him to lose his left leg. He was taken to Bamyán hospital for treatment.

Combined with being an orphan at such young age, Reza's disability forced him to leave school at the age of nine and work for a very low wage in his neighbour's garden in order to feed his family. After eight years, Reza went back to school at the age of 17. He is now in the final semester of his studies at the Agriculture Faculty at Bamyán University.

Reza has been attending ALSO's computer classes for the last six months. He is optimistic about his future and believes that, after learning

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Mohammad Hussain Ahmadi  
Mine Survivor



Sayed Reza  
Mine Survivor

the computer programmes required, he will be able to get a good job.

Reza told us: “Besides the computer classes, coming to ALSO has also raised our awareness and knowledge regarding disability, our rights and how to overcome the challenges that come with disability.”

#### **Khatera, Mir Hashim Village, Bamyan**

Khatera is married; she has two daughters and one son. Her husband is a driver.

Khatera was 6 years old when she became a victim of mine. When fighting began in Bamyan, Khatera's family planned to leave their land and move to the north of the country. On the way, Khatera stepped on an anti-personnel mine that had been planted on a mountain. The mine injured her right leg. Her family took her on a donkey to a nearby village, where a local doctor treated her for 10 days. The impact of the mine was not severe but, due to the loss of blood and the lack of professional treatment, Khatera lost four toes, which affected her ability to walk normally. Now, Khatera needs another person to assist her while walking.

Khatera joined a tailoring course run by ALSO. She was trained for six months and received a certificate of completion and a sewing machine set for her use at home. Khatera is now able to sew her own family's clothes and those of her relatives and neighbours. She charges about USD 5 per item of clothing.



Khatera— Mine Survivor

Khatera says: “Life was very difficult when I was younger. My message to all disabled women is that they should never be disappointed from life. They should continue working at what they are best and trust that Allah will guide them to the right path.”

#### **Conclusion**

The stories of these survivors demonstrate the struggles, the courage and the hard work of people living with a disability.

These are men and women who have battled through life's difficulties and survived through harsh times. Yet, they are full of hope and optimism for the future.

MACCA and UNMAS are working hard to provide training courses and mentoring sessions for people with a disability through their implementing partners in Bamyan. In parallel, clearance organisations will work to clear and destroy all mines and ERW from the remaining contaminated sites in Bamyan once the clearance projects restart in the Province. MACCA will continue to work to make Bamyan a safer place and prevent further casualties.

#### ***Case study: A story of mines and a mother***

The United Nations Mine Action Service and its project, the Mine Action Coordination Centre of Afghanistan (MACCA), are working hard along with their implementing partners to clear all known areas contaminated by mines and ERW in Afghanistan. The districts of Chahar Burjak and Zaranj in Nimroz Province were recently declared free of all known mines and ERW. In this case study, we would like to reflect on the impact of mines and ERW on a local community member.

Khadija is a housewife. She told us of her experiences back when the districts of Chahar and Zaranj were still contaminated.

“Mines and ERW caused us many problems before the clearance programme started. We did not feel safe when our children were out of the house. Every day, we as mothers were terribly worried about our children. Taking the cattle to the hills for grazing and bringing them back home was not an easy job for us and our children. We were really terrified and felt uncomfortable when our children went outside to play or to collect firewood. The contamination even stopped some of us from working on our land; we couldn't cultivate our lands or build any infrastructure due to mines. The lack of work in our homeland meant that some of the men from our villages went outside the district, even outside the country, for work.”

Khadija continues: “We are extremely happy that our communities were cleared by the Mine Action Programme of Afghanistan (MAPA). Now we can live on our land without the fear of losing someone or becoming the victim of a mine or ERW. The clearance will bring big changes in our lives; now that we can farm and cultivate our own land, we will be self-sufficient and our men will not need to leave the area for work elsewhere.”

In addition to coordinating and ensuring all mine action activities in Afghanistan are carried out to international standards, UNMAS and its project MACCA also work to develop the capacities of the communities where the programme works and to create jobs. Khadija explained to us how the programme had had a direct impact on her family. “I am also happy that my son is working as a deminer with MAPA. He is earning a salary in his own country instead of going abroad for work. I wish that I could be a deminer to clean and clear all our land. But I am happy that at least one of my family members is working in this noble occupation.”

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