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Mine-action Funding: GICHD Survey of Donor Countries

A recent survey of donors conducted by the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining found that, while short-term donor support remains strong, levels of funding may decrease and become more unpredictable over the coming years.

by Jean Devlin [Consultant] and Sharmala Naidoo [GICHD]

In May and June 2010, the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining commissioned a survey of 25 donors that have contributed to mine-action programs. The study's objective was to gain insight into the donors' motivation in funding mine-action programs, the issues that play a role in driving their continued support and the factors that will influence future funding. The findings indicate that short-term commitment and financial support remain strong. However, the sustainability of the current level of support for mine action beyond 2015 is difficult to ascertain.

A few donors responding to the survey indicated that in the near future they would be subject to program reviews, multi-year approvals for the renewal of funding for mine action or broader-defined programs that include mine action, anticipated budget cuts this year or in the next, and planned reductions in expenditures in mine action. Nevertheless, the majority of donors responding indicated that their commitment level would stay about the same for the next two to three years. Support will likely decrease beyond the next five years, with increasing unpredictability in funding. The study concluded that if less money will flow to mine action in the future, more cost-effective methods that result in concrete progress will be necessary.

In the future, a number of factors will converge, posing challenges and offering opportunities to officials concerned with mine action. Growing competition for financial resources in the broader peace and security field, a more pronounced desire to integrate mine action in the security-development nexus, reduced human resources in donor administrations dedicated to mine action and greater affected-country ownership

and capacity for dealing with residual mine and explosive-remnants-of-war contamination demand new approaches to a continual problem. Officials will need to work on strategies for integrating capacity-building into government priorities in affected countries, ensuring maximum protection of at-risk populations, reducing the size of suspected areas and concentrating on priority areas for socioeconomic development.

These elements constitute a strong argument for sustaining dialogue between donors and affected countries on how to assist the countries in their gradual takeover of Ottawa Convention responsibilities and obligations. The current explorations, such as those of GICHD into the best way of instituting this dialogue, are a positive step in this direction.

What Led to the Current Study?

Mine action has traditionally benefited from generous donor funding. According to the *Landmine Monitor Report 2009*, total funding for mine action amounted to US\$626.5 million through May 2009. Of this amount, \$517.8 million¹ came from international sources and \$108.7 million from mine-affected countries themselves. Despite recent adjustments, this amounted to some of the highest levels of investment to reduce the landmine threat since financial contributions to mine action were first recorded in 1992. Despite minor fluctuations in donor data, the *Landmine Monitor* has also recorded constant growth in annual mine-action contributions since 1996. Contrary to this encouraging trend, concerns remain about the effectiveness of mine-action programs, the uneven distribution of support and the sustainability of funding. While funding for

mine action has remained relatively high and donor commitment has been positive, there is some concern that funding over the coming years might be limited and difficult to secure. This is particularly true for less developed countries that have applied for deadline extensions to fulfill their clearance obligations.

Methodology

The study carried out between May and June 2010 consisted of a written questionnaire sent to 25 donors, including the European Commission, as well as telephone interviews with 10 donors selected from the study group.² The findings are based on the answers 18 donors (85.3 percent of total external funding) provided and a review of donor documents and websites.

Key Findings

1. Broader environment and mine action.

Even though the Ottawa Convention remains the central anchor of donor policy-making, it is no longer the only point of reference. Most donors view mine action as part of broader development cooperation, which includes humanitarian assistance. Donors no longer view mine contamination strictly as an emergency issue requiring an immediate humanitarian response.

2. Policy and strategic planning for mine action.

Donors are pragmatic in the way they relate to mine action. Donor policy language is now more nuanced and realistic in terms of what is achievable. Thinking has shifted toward placing greater emphasis on socioeconomic impact, protection, reintegration, livelihoods, gen-

der equality and care for survivors than on the number of mines found and destroyed.

Unless there is an unexpected turn of events, donors are unlikely to launch new initiatives and increase mine-action funding levels.



A female deminer in Jordan.
PHOTO COURTESY OF ERIK TOLLEFSEN/GICHD

This could well be the preview of a leveling off in programming. It also presents a challenge and an opportunity for mine-affected countries and mine-action operators to adjust programming during these strategically important next five years, in order to not only prioritize funding, but also to improve efficiency and transparency in mine action.

Donors are increasingly concentrating their support on a smaller number of countries. Fifteen out of 18 donors said that to varying degrees, the countries receiving assistance for mine action are also partner countries for other forms of aid. This is consistent with the

calls made by the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness and the Accra Agenda of Action³ for donors to focus their development assistance on a smaller number of partner countries. It is also in line with the desire expressed by

donors and recipients to ensure all government departments involved offer a coherent and consistent approach in providing assistance. For fragile states and states coming out of conflict, this means placing greater attention on ensuring that security and development programs are planned in tandem, which further supports the argument not to isolate mine action.

Putting these principles into action is not an easy task. Donors generally favor coordination among themselves and mine-affected countries but are not proactive in pursuing this coordination. They tend to respond to invitations from

national authorities to become part of a joint evaluation or assessment rather than initiate the project (with the notable exception of Japan which has emphasized this aspect in its recent aid policy). They remain divided about instituting new structures like a standing committee on international cooperation and assistance.

3. Budget and program management.

The budget process varies considerably from country to country. In most cases, mine-action allocations are not highlighted as specific line items in budgets, but rather are subsumed in humanitarian, development, security or other related programming. Eight donors of the 18 that provided answers choose to dedicate a portion of their budget allocations for mine action or a mix of mine action and ERW/cluster munitions. Two of these donors dedicate part of their budget allocation for mine action for a specific purpose such as victim assistance.

The majority of mine-action funding is channeled bilaterally (directed to a specific country), typically through a multilateral organization, a nongovernmental organization or an operator. Most donors provide some un-earmarked funding, for example, core funding through multilateral channels (the United Nations Mine Action Service, GICHD), and through NGOs (International Campaign to Ban Landmines, Geneva Call, International Committee of the Red Cross), but these amounts are substantially smaller. The preference for bilateral funding is based on foreign policy and strategic reasons, as well as a desire to focus aid on those countries most in need. This partly explains why the majority of mine-action funding focuses on less than 10 mine-affected countries: Afghanistan, Angola, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cambodia, Iraq, Jordan, Lao PDR, Lebanon and Sudan.¹

Within donor agencies, the growth of competing fields, such as peacebuilding, security-sector reform, and conflict prevention and recovery, have affected mine-action programs. Competition for time and budgets has become a serious challenge. As a result, fewer people are tasked with primarily mine-action responsibilities than in previous years, and there has been a rapid turnover of mine-action personnel, resulting in a loss of corporate memory and in-house expertise.

Donors typically channel their support for mine action through a small number of intermediaries with limited direct support provided to national mine-action authorities. Of the 18 responses, only two donors mentioned clearly that their funding decisions took consultations



A village development committee in Cambodia.
PHOTO COURTESY OF SHARMALA NAIDOO/GICHD

with mine-affected governments into consideration. This is at odds with the general trend by donors calling for greater national ownership and enhanced national mine-action capacity.

The main criteria that donors take into account when considering funding proposals and making funding decisions include:

- Measurement and prioritization of needs, i.e., focusing on clearing areas that yield the most measurable benefit
- National ownership and capacity
- Commitment to meeting Ottawa obligations
- Measuring the developmental outcomes resulting from mine action
- Measuring the experience and the capacity of local and international partners
- Aid effectiveness factors (coherence, coordination, sustainability, capacity development, etc.)
- Gender equality
- Proven effectiveness and experience of local and national mine-action programs and agencies

4. Relationships with mine-affected countries and mine-action organizations.

Due to competing demands and reduced capacity, donor engagement at international mine-action meetings and at field level is weak. Donors typically function in response mode, reacting to proposals submitted to them as opposed to developing their own programs. Visits from donors are few and far apart, and are typically for monitoring and evaluation purposes. Most of the liaison work is left to embassies.

Donors tend to have a light footprint in host countries in terms of informing mine-affected governments of their decisions to fund a mine-action project, with

the exception of the United States and the European Commission. Direct contacts with central agencies occur more frequently when countries integrate mine action with development, such as in the case of Australia and Sweden.

5. Funding trends and prospects.

While the total flow of official assistance to developing countries may still be growing despite the current economic climate, there is little evidence that mine-action funding will follow this trend. On the contrary, mine action's relative importance, combined with mounting donor interest in other global challenges, and the fact that the Ottawa Convention has delivered tangible results, will probably mark a turning point in the next three to five years. Beyond the next five years, the picture becomes difficult to predict. However, it is quite plausible that funding will take a further downward trend.

Donor reaction to the recent extension process is prudent. As other countries join the extension process with their list of additional resources needed, the gap between needs and available resources will likely widen considerably.

In terms of change between channels, programming types and modalities, donors do not anticipate any major changes in the way they do business. Donors are open to integrating mine-action projects in broader development programs if mine-affected countries take the lead in raising the issue. Opportunities within donor administrations for initiating new funding avenues for mine action are marginal.⁴

In terms of commitment to support mine action, 17 donors stated their commitments (which differ from actual expenditures) would hold until the end of the current funding period (usually part of an official strategy, a mine-action plan or a public commitment of some sort). Donor funding for mine action may well have peaked in 2008–09 and has reached a new plateau for the immediate future (2010–11). In the medium-term (2012–15), funding will likely fall to a lower plateau. This situation could change during the 2014–15 period, as some major donors review their multi-year, mine-action assistance.

Many reasons explain this slow but predictable trend toward gradually reduced funding levels including lack of transparency and progress on clearance, lack of value for funds invested, extension requests with unreasonable financing estimates, budget restrictions, and competition for limited funding. Many donors and experts, however, contend that it is not the level of funding that counts as much as the effectiveness of assistance programs, socioeconomic impact, national authorities demonstrating ownership and pace of progress in land release. ♦

The full report will be available for download through the GICHD website (<http://gichd.org>) by late 2010. For further information, contact Sharmala Naidoo at s.naidoo@gichd.org.

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Jean Devlin works as an international development consultant. Prior to this, his professional career was with the Canadian International Development Agency. He occupied successive program management positions, among other areas, for humanitarian assistance, academic cooperation, policy, strategic planning and program development. Prior to retiring in 2008, he was Manager of the Peace and Security and Mine Action Programmes for CIDA.

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