Mine Action Program for Somalia

Jab Swart
The Mine Action Program for Somalia

Aiming to set up a sustainable institution for resolving Somalia's mine problem and to provide direct support for mine action activities there, the United Nations Mine Action Program for Somalia is making a difference in a country ravaged by years of conflict.

by Jab Swart, UN MA Manager Somalia

Introduction

Following years of devastation caused by civil war, clan conflict and power struggles, large areas of Somalia have regained a measure of peace and security and began to move towards recovery. The experience of northwest and northeast Somalia particularly in terms of security and restoration of law and order as essential to the creation of an enabling environment for the advance towards economic and social recovery, and in many areas, creditable authorities have emerged. However, Somalia is still a divided country, and in some instances, such as Mogadishu, even single cities are ruled by up to four different authorities. The end of conflict in these areas has, however, not eliminated continued threats to security. The lack of resources to reestablish peace and security is often reflected in continuing instability and while basic rules of law are being established by the emerging administrations, their actual capabilities remain limited. Large numbers of landmines deployed during the conflict of the past two decades pose serious threats to people and their livestock and limit access to valuable resources.

The United Nations Development Program (UNDP) strategy for the Somalia program is based on an integrated and coordinated approach aimed at bridging the gap between conflict development and fostering an enabling environment for sustainable human security and development. The UNDP country program is implemented through interventions in three broad program areas: Peace and security, including civil protection; Recovery and economic recovery; and poverty reduction.

The Somali Civil Protection Program (SCP) aims to consolidate and reinforce the still fragile peace and enhance economic and social recovery, by establishing a secure environment. This will be achieved through the SCP's program activities in five project areas: Social mobilization; Disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of former military; Local and small area rules; Police and AMISOM; Mine Action.

For the purpose of post-conflict recovery and development and in this case, Mine Action Somalia is divided into four regions, namely northeast (Somaliland), northwest (Puntland), central and south Somalia.

The UNDP Mine Action Program for Somalia (UNMA) is in effect managing four separate projects, with an additional fifth sub-project in Mogadishu to provide for the operating costs of the project.

The Mine/UXO Problem

Mines were first laid in significant numbers in 1986, during the conflicts with Ethiopia primarily along the border (mostly as barrier AT mine fields), and later in the 1990s, again between 1997 and 1998. With the rise of resistance movements and civil conflicts, in the early 1990s, these mine fields were expanded further into Somali territory to deter incursions, and the Somali Army laid additional mine fields throughout the territory in places of strategic importance. When civil war broke out in 1991, the Army heavily militarized all its defensive positions and around military camps. Both the resistance movements and the government mined roads and paths used by one or the other, and mines were used randomly to terrorize the nomadic and rural populations. Since 1991, some additional mines (mostly in the form of AP mines) have been placed in towns where local conflict has erupted.

In the northwest, the most heavily mined areas were around Zeyla, Berbera, Hargeisa and Burao. Most of the mines in Hargeisa and Bor in the center have been removed. In addition to this, most of the roads between major towns were mined. However, the Hargeisa-Burera-Burao road has now been cleaned. Most of the mine fields along the Ethiopian border are still in place. In northeast Somalia, mines are mostly concentrated along the Ethiopian border. In the 1990s, mine fields along the border were also used in counter-clan conflict line running through Galkayo. Although some defensive mine fields were also laid along the central and south Somalia borders with Ethiopia, most of the mining took place during the counterinsurgency war in the central and southern parts of Somalia 1991 to 1993 and the subsequent clan conflicts. The regions most severely affected were Baidoa, Hargeisa, Berbera and Baladweyne.

Defensive mine fields were laid around strategically important towns and military bases (such as Belet Weyne and Hadda), while mines were laid extensively for route denial between Galkayo, Belet Weyne, Baidoa and Mogadishu.

The Rahalintimmada Resistance Army makes no secret of the fact that they are still mining the road between Baidoa and Mogadishu to discourage the perceived threat of government forces. Before 1993, very little mining took place in the Mogadishu area. Since then, mines have been used extensively in ambushes against AMISOM forces, in strategic protection of areas such as the airport and seaport, as well as in defensive mine fields between warring clans. Workload in Mogadishu is reportedly increased but cannot yet effectively prioritize and coordinate mine action. This is the most urgent need at present, particularly as some activities increase throughout the territory. Effective institutions to coordinate mine actions are also needed for long-term sustainability. UNDP Somalia mine action arranged a workshop in January 2002 to formulate a strategic mine action plan for northwest Somalia and prioritize mine action activities based on existing information. In addition to this, UNDP mobilized resources for a comprehensive Landmine Impact Survey (LIS) in Somalia, during 2002. This survey will also assess and analyze the socio-economic impact of the mine/UXO contamination on a village-to-village basis. This information, in turn, will be utilized to update the mine action priorities in the region.

The significant negative socio-economic impact of landmine and UXO contamination can be seen in almost every aspect of Somali society: reduced land available for livestock and crop cultivation, increased transportation costs, obstacles to reparation and reintegration of communities, poor performance of rehabilitation efforts, loss of lives, disability, psychological problems and general lack of security of communities. In 2000, the reported mine victims were 107 in the northwest, 101 in the northeast, 147 in central and southern Somalia. Additional 821 mine victims were recorded in Mogadishu, of which roughly 40 percent resulted in fatalities. These figures are by no means complete, as the reporting system is very fragmented. The presence of mines has prevented the return of approximately 200,000 refugees from Dadaab since 1998.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) had anticipated closing those camps by 2001 but has continually fallen short of their targets, in large part because of mine fields—real or perceived. The Mine/UXO threat is a finite problem, however, and given sustained peace and funding, it could be solved within seven to 10 years.
SMA.

The HALO Trust, Mine-Tech and SBF as a result, almost 30 million square meters of land were released to communities in northwest Somalia through survey and clearance. It is expected that the SMAC will be subcontracted to the network of SMACs activities in 2002. Elements of the Somaliland Police were equipped and are currently undergoing explosive ordnance disposal (EOD) training which is provided by MACs.

Following consultations in northeast Somalia, the Department of Demining, Demobilization and Reintegration was identified as SCPP-MA mine action counterpart. A core Punland Mine Action Center (PMAC) was established in northeast Somalia. The PMAC staff undertook training in technical, demining general management and database management.

Consultations with the authorities to extend the Mine Action program to central and southern Somalia were quite successful. The TNG is currently reviewing the draft Mine Action policy provided by SCPP-MA, and UNDP Somalia gave the go-ahead to establish a Mogadishu Mine Action Office. A Mine Action Office was planned and was established in Baidoa.

SCPP-MA assisted the authorities in northwest Somalia and northeast Somalia in drawing up mine action policies, which are to be given due weight by the government in the Somali parliament and were already ratified in Puntland. SCMP assisted in the preparation of the Draft Standard Operating Procedures for Mine Action in northwest Somalia. SCPP-MA advised the authorities on the principles of the OCHA/MAC and developed a work plan for northwest and northeast Somalia to implement the international ban on AP landmines, and presented the plan to the Regional Conference on Landmines in Djibouti, the northeast Somalia Administration has already ratified this plan.

Two management-level staff members of the programs attended a two-month intensive mine action managers course at Cranfield University in the United Kingdom. The regional structure of the mine action are now totally supported by the project. An exit policy that will shift all the capacity to local authorities is discussed.

Mine Action is closely coordinated with other agencies and international organizations. SCPP-MA establishment of coordination mechanisms secured donor confidence and funding of $4.5 million (U.S.) in mine clearance activities annually in northwest Somalia. This initiative has the potential to generate more than $10 million for Mine Action in the whole of Somalia. Mine risk education (MRE) and mine victim assistance are coordinated through the Mine Action Centers (MACs) with SCPP-MA assistance, but the focal points for execution in the United Nations are the United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund (UNICEF) and the World Health Organization (WHO), respectively. Until these capabilities are fully developed within those agencies, SCPP-MA embarked on limited assistance in this regard. In this respect SCPP-MA recently completed a mine awareness program in the Somali refugee camps in Djibouti, with full cooperation of UNICEF, UNHCR, the World Food Program (WFP) and Handicap International (HI). UNICEF has now created a focal point for MRE in northwest Somalia, as a pilot project for the rest of Somalia, and established a working group for MRE. An MRE strategy was presented to the northwest Somalia authorities for approval.

Demining

DGK has been running mine clearance operations in northeast Somalia since June 1998 and currently comprises three demining teams of 24 deminers each, three mine detection teams of 12 deminers each with two dogs and one explosive dog handler, and for Survey and EOD tasks, two quick response teams (QRTs) are deployed. DGK’s area of responsibility is the Galbedh and western Togheer regions of northwest Somalia, especially the area defined by the Hargeisa-Bebera-Balig-Borane triangle, and south of this to the Ethiopian border. DGK finishes clearing mine fields in the Adaday and Hargeisa areas and are currently working in the Togheer region. Several mine fields in Golbahad, Dhibano and at Hargeisa Airport. They have also been heavily involved in EU-funded road rehabilitation projects in the region. They have employed around 400 people and used 41 bridges and culverts for rehabilitation. At present, DGK is clearing the important road between Adaday and Mandera.

Northwest Somalia had a large contamination of SA-2 and SS-21 missiles at sites in Berbera and Hargeisa, where DGK has been working for more than one year. In addition, many thousands of UXO have been cleared, the types ranging from grenades to rockets. In addition to manual demining, HALO has exploited a mine detection dog team (for about three months a year) and an EOD/Survey Team. Collectively, all of the above have cleared almost 23 million square meters of land, resulting in the return and resettlement of thousands of refugees from Ethiopia. In the near future, HALO will introduce mechanical mine clearance and area reduction capabilities, with equipment currently being prepared in the United Kingdom. Another Bottle Area Clearance (BAC) Team will be added and operations will move south and east, as current tasks are completed and new priorities identified. The main donors supporting HALO in northwest Somalia are the United States and the Netherlands.

Mine Action Strategy

The vision of UNDP Somalia Mine Action Program is to ensure that the mine action program is executed in a coordinated and efficient manner that support the national development plan, including activities of implementing partners. This will result in national Mine Action institutions capable of planning, prioritizing, managing and coordinating the national Mine Action Program. The basis of any Mine Action activity, specifically survey, is a sound national policy. Authorities are assisted to properly support Mine Action policy in Somalia. An interdepartmental commission for Mine Action is established and supported by the national MRE. The review Mine Action policy and priorities at least every year. Information, execution and Mine Action standards are coordinated from central institutions. In this case, UNDP supports the capacity building and technical assistance of regional and national MACs. The following specific actions are undertaken:

- Assisting the authorities in the four major regions of Somalia in formulating and promulgating mine action policies.
- Assisting in the establishment of interdepartmental commissions responsible for making and reviewing mine action policy and priorities for mine action activities.
- Providing advocacy for the adherence to international mine ban treaties.
- Providing technical assistance to national Mine Action authorities and further assistance for electricity, office and operating expenses.
- Establishing the establishment and maintenance of MACs in the four regions, consisting of information, operations, standards and training and administrative cells and responsible for the coordination of all mine action activities, including advocacy of mine ban treaties, survey and MRE (120 aspects, MME/SCPP-MA), mine awareness and victim assistance.
- Establishing Regional Mine Offices in areas of high mine/UXO threat.
- Providing technical assistance, equipping, training and operating support for the above.

Mine Field Survey, Marking and Database

The uses of surveys, mapping and databases (USM) is understood to ensure that the mine action program is executed in a coordinated and efficient manner in support of the national development plan, including activities of implementing partners. This will result in national Mine Action institutions capable of planning, prioritizing, managing and coordinating the national Mine Action Program. The basis of any Mine Action activity, specifically survey, is a sound national policy. Authorities are assisted to properly support Mine Action policy in Somalia. An interdepartmental commission for Mine Action policy is established and supported by the national MRE. The review Mine Action policy and priorities at least every year. Information, execution and Mine Action standards are coordinated from central institutions. In this case, UNDP supports the capacity building and technical assistance of regional and national MACs. The following specific actions are undertaken:

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Mine Risk Education

The scope, target groups and coverage of MRE in Somalia will be expanded to cover all the mine-affected areas and populations. In particular, mine awareness policies are established, and plans are formulated and implemented in cooperation with UNIFEC-NGOs and authorities.

Conclusion

At the end of the project, it is expected that an appropriate mine action strategy and policy based on thorough consultation will be in place and the following will have been achieved:

- Strengthening appropriate institutional management, financial and administrative mechanisms, which will allow Somalis to effectively manage, coordinate, oversee and support all components of the mine action program in a transparent and responsive manner.
- Strengthening the process for elaborating National Mine Action Plans, including setting priorities.
- Improving a sustainable mine clearance indigenous national capacity that is competent in technical, administrative and policy matters and that will require reduced external technical assistance in the future.
- Developing mine awareness policy and expanding MRE activities to additional populations.
- Developing victim assistance policy and strengthening mine victim treatment centers.
- Improving the efficiency and effectiveness of the overall mine action program within the country.
- Increasing the level of donor confidence.

These measures will in turn result in:
- Quicker clearance of contaminated areas resulting in reduced deaths and injuries and appropriate medical care for mine-victims.
- Released land for resettlement of displaced persons and returning refugees and for agricultural development. Reconstruction and rehabilitation of public infrastructure including schools, roads, bridges and commercial and industrial enterprises will also be accelerated.

While it is not expected that Somalia will be totally free of mines within the duration of the project, the objective is to set a sustainable institution for resolving the mine problem in place and to provide direct support for mine action activities. Regional administrations have already taken important steps toward that end, and this project will result in considerable further advances. Nonetheless, based on discussions with administrations and experience with mine action programs in other countries, it is expected that the local institutions involved will require further assistance for several years beyond the end of this project, including both technical assistance and resources for mine action operations.

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The United Nations Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea, along with eight other local NGOs, are working to rid their lands of the mixture of AT and AP mines laid in conventional military patterns during conflicts dated back to 1935.

By Bob Kudyba, United Nations Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea Mine Action Coordination Center

Background

The conflict between Eritrea and Ethiopia can be traced back to before the period of Italian colonization, which commenced in 1935. Many attempts to secure an independent Eritrea finally succeeded in 1993, when Ethiopia gained formal independence from Ethiopia. However, relations soured between the one-time allies when Eritrea introduced its own currency (the Nakfa) in November 1997, creating a trade war between the two nations.

On May 13, 1998, Ethiopia's Parliament declared war on Eritrea. After the 1998 fighting failed to achieve any clear advantage to either side, the Ethiopians and Eritreans fell into a trench warfare situation reminiscent of World War I. In order to reinforce this system of trench lines, extensive patterns of mines—both AT and AP—were laid to strengthen and reinforce the positions. As one side gained advantage and took control of a trench system, mines were laid on the opposite side, creating a confusing array of defense systems. Shelling of targets by artillery and bombing attacks by aircraft contributed to the problem with UXO littering the battlefields. In fact, some estimates say that UXO outnumbers the problem of mines 15:1.

The Agreement on the Cessation of Hostilities signed by Ethiopia and Eritrea in Algiers on 18 June 2000, provided for an immediate cessation of all armed and air attacks and requested the assistance of the UN and the Organization of African Union (OAU) in its implementation. In particular, the parties called on the UN to deploy a peacekeeping mission under the auspices of the OAU to monitor the cessation of hostilities.

This process is for the continuation of proximity talks between the two parties, leading to a comprehensive peace agreement on issues related to the final definition of the border between the two countries: the current border is the old Italian Colonial border. This undertaking has yet to be resolved, particularly the agreement on the final border definition and line.

With respect to demining and mine action activities, the agreement says, "...both parties shall conduct demining as soon as possible with a view to creating the conditions necessary for the deployment of the Peacekeeping Mission, the return of civilian administration and return of the population as well as the demilitarization and demarcation of their common border. The Peacekeeping Mission, in conjunction with the United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS) will assist the parties' demining efforts by providing technical advice and coordination. The parties shall, as necessary, seek additional demining assistance from the Peacekeeping Mission."

Landmine and UXO Situation

In addition to the residual threats posed by landmines and UXO from old conflicts, the recent conflict between Ethiopia and Eritrea (1998-2002) poses a significant threat throughout the conflict area. This threat is primarily confined to the "no man's land" that runs between the trenches along the confrontation lines (May 1998 and May—June 2000).

These mine fields contain a mixture of AT and AP mines that are laid mainly in conventional military patterns. Additionally, unmarked and unrecorded out-