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Mine Action in Azerbaijan

Since April 2, 1999, the Azerbaijan National Agency for Mine Action (ANAMA) has sought to establish a mine/UXO impact free Azerbaijan by addressing the landmine problem in currently accessible areas and building a national capacity to meet the challenges of mines and UXO in areas that will become accessible once a peace agreement is finally negotiated.

by Sayed Aqa and Josef Strebel, Azerbaijan National Agency for Mine Action

Introduction

Azerbaijan, located south of the Caucasus on the western shore of the Caspian Sea, is a small country blessed with considerable oil resources. As of January 2000, about 8.1 million inhabitants were living in the country's 65 regions and the autonomous enclaves of Nakhchivan in the west. One-fifth of the Azerbaijan territory is currently occupied by Armenia.1

Brief Historical Context of the Conflict

A conflict erupted in 1988 between Azerbaijan and the neighboring state of Armenia over the region of Nagorno and Karabakh, an autonomous region of Azerbaijan. At that time, 70 percent of the inhabitants were ethnic Armenians and 30 percent were Azerbaijanis. The Armenian population of 160,000 demanded that this region join Armenia. This sparked an armed conflict between the neighboring states. Armenia declared its independence from the Soviet Union in September 1991, as did Azerbaijan one month later. The war continued until 1994, when a cease-fire was reached. This cease-fire resulted in the occupation of Nagorno and Karabakh and five more districts in full. Two other districts, Fnali and Agdam, remained divided into two portions by the confrontation line, and several more districts were occupied partially and thus liberat ed. About 15 percent of the population of Azerbaijan was forced to become internally displaced persons (IDPs) living in IDP camps.

These six years of conflict left Azerbaijan with an acute landmine and UXO problem.

Scope of the Landmine Problem

A changing front line resulted in mass destruction of housing, infrastructure and productive resources not only in occupied regions, but also in surrounding areas. Among the front line regions, Fnali and Agdam were affected the worst; there, 31,411 people were forced to leave their homes.2 Large areas were mined during the conflict, and pieces of UXO were scattered across farmlands and other areas of importance.

Neither Armenia nor Azerbaijan has signed the Ottawa Convention on landmines. The Azerbaijani government has indicated its intention to sign this treaty as soon as a peaceful settlement of the conflict is achieved, which would include provisions related to the exchange of information on landmines and to the clearance of all affected areas.3 At this stage, it is not possible to measure the scope and size of the landmine/UXO problem in the occupied areas. However, it is believed that the size is severe and an estimated area of 50 square kilometers may be affected.

In November 2000, Azerbaijan National Agency for Mine Action (ANAMA) commissioned a general survey in 31 mine-affected currently accessible districts. This findings of this survey, carried out by the International Eurasia Press Fund (IEPF), a national non-government organization (NGO), indicates that there are 64 villages affected in these districts covering a total area of about 50 million square meters of productive land. Most of the population of these areas is currently living as IDPs in other parts of Azerbaijan and therefore could not be interviewed. However, 74,809 individuals had a chance to provide information through the surveys. As a result, 84 mine-fields and 85 battlefields were identified. The overall number of mine victims identified during this survey exceeds 1,000; of these, 12 were killed and 36 were injured during the last two years. It was confirmed that Fnali and Agdam districts were heavily affected. Two districts, Terter and Gencebey, were added to the list of affected regions.4 Furthermore, seven square kilometers of heavily contaminated battlefields were found in the Agstafa district.

Data gathered at hospitals and psychologic centers and received from local administrations and NGOs for the Mine Awareness needs assessment revealed 1,427 mine victims. This specific survey focused on mine victims and covered a bigger area than the general survey mentioned above. It is unknown to what extent those figures overlap. To get a better overview on all aspects of the mine/UXO impact, a comprehensive impact survey is planned to start in the spring of 2002.

Azerbaijan National Agency for Mine Action

Based on the Presidential Decree of July 1998, ANAMA was established on April 2, 1999. The Azerbaijan Mine Action Program was formed after signing a joint project agreement between United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and the State Commission on Reconstruction and Rehabilitation, on behalf of the Government of Azerbaijan.5 This agreement outlines the development of mine action capacity in Azerbaijan.

ANAMAS mission is to make the mine-affected areas safe for returnee and indigenous populations. The Mine Action Program aims to build a national mine action capacity to address the problem in liberated areas as well as prepare to expand operations rapidly when occupied territories are returned to the control of Azerbaijan.

Table 1: Summary Of ANAMA Work Plan For 2001 – 2002

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Planned Activity</th>
<th>Existing National Capacity</th>
<th>Major Outputs</th>
<th>Estimated Budget (US $)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Refinement and expansion of the National General Survey</td>
<td>Limited 16 Enumerators</td>
<td>• General Survey of all 14 accessible mine affected areas will be completed</td>
<td>50,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technical Survey of high impacted areas, Expansion by 1 team</td>
<td>Limited 8 Surveyors</td>
<td>• 30 National staff will be trained in Impact Survey, Planning and MIS</td>
<td>215,560</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expansion of the National Manual Demining Capacity by 1 team</td>
<td>Limited 19 Deminers</td>
<td>• Expansion by at least one survey team (5 additional Surveyors)</td>
<td>1,113,230</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mine Detecting Dog Support Capacity building</td>
<td>No National Capacity in place</td>
<td>• 63 National staff will be trained in Demining Skills</td>
<td>1,675,600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National EOD Capacity Building</td>
<td>No National Capacity in place</td>
<td>• 10 National EOD staff will be trained and equipped to form 2 teams</td>
<td>142,640</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Mine Action Training and Monitoring Capacity Building</td>
<td>No National Capacity in place</td>
<td>• 5 Demining instructors will be trained</td>
<td>85,180</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feasibility Study of Mechanical Support to Mine Action</td>
<td>No National Capacity in place</td>
<td>• 10 monitoring missions</td>
<td>19,100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socio-Economic Impact Survey and National Mine Action Planning</td>
<td>Limited 16 Enumerators with basic skills</td>
<td>• 10 revision training courses will be conducted</td>
<td>800,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management Information System improvement</td>
<td>Limited 3 National Staff</td>
<td>• 30 National Staff will be trained in Impact Survey Procedures</td>
<td>Covered under Resource Mobilization and Capacity Building</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality Assurance Capacity Building</td>
<td>No National Capacity in place</td>
<td>• 4 Local Staff will be trained in Mine Action data management tools</td>
<td>Covered under National Mine Action Training and Monitoring Capacity Building</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mine Awareness Education</td>
<td>Limited 15 Master Trainers</td>
<td>• National QA standards will be established</td>
<td>240,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mine Awareness Education</td>
<td>Limited</td>
<td>• MA training for 800 health workers and 500 teachers</td>
<td>Covered under Resource Mobilization and Capacity Building</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management Training Capacity</td>
<td>Limited</td>
<td>• MA training for 800 health workers and 500 teachers</td>
<td>453,300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resource Mobilization and Capacity Building</td>
<td>Not Existing</td>
<td>• 5000 clearance tasks would be performed</td>
<td>437,340</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Nations Technical Support</td>
<td>Technical Advisors</td>
<td>• Assist ANAMA with technical, planning, and management skills</td>
<td>Covered under Resource Mobilization and Capacity Building</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Objectives

Vision

The vision of ANAMA is to make the territory of Azerbaijan free from the impact of landmines and UXO within the next 10 years. This is to be achieved in accordance with relevant national and international mine action and humanitarian standards.

Mission

With a clear vision, ANAMA's mission is to develop a sustainable national mine action capacity in order to alleviate human suffering caused by landmines and UXO, facilitate relief and development activities in support of IDP repatriation as well as to facilitate a conducive environment for resuming normal social and economic activities in areas currently affected by landmines and UXO.

Goals

Six goals are set in the strategic plan for ANAMA:

- Develop national mine action management, planning and coordination capacities.
- Develop national mine clearance, survey and information management capacities.
- Develop a national mine awareness capacity.
- Develop a national mine action training capacity.
- Develop a national mine action quality management capacity.
- Coordinate resource mobilization and be the focal point for donors and other organizations for procuring all mine action related activities and for obtaining the logistic capacity to support the overall objectives of ANAMA.

Setting Priorities

Areas meeting the above-mentioned criteria would be considered for mine action operations by ANAMA. In order to further maximize effectiveness, the tasks would be prioritized based on the following guidelines:

- Alleviating human suffering through clearance of areas with life-threatening dangers and with high civilian casualties.
- Addressing socio-economic needs of the local communities as identified by surveys conducted in accordance with the international standards.
- Restarting IDPs by clearing houses, settlements and associated areas such as fields and irrigation systems to support populations returning to their homes.
- Facilitating reconstruction and rehabilitation projects as set forth by the Agency for Reconstruction and Rehabilitation of Areas (ARRA) under the State Commission for Reconstruction and Rehabilitation. Such projects must be funded and ready to be implemented as soon as a mine action operation is complete.
- Securing a food supply by clearing agricultural and grazing land, with land type selected based on potential socio-economic return.
- Identifying other areas requiring mine action support.

Achivements to Date

Capacity Building

ANAMA headquarters and one regional office have been established, and staff has been recruited for the Operations, Information Management and Support departments. The United Nations Office Project Service (UNOPS) is the Co-operating Agency of the government of Azerbaijan to provide technical assistance to ANAMA in the form of international advisors and contracted services. Currently, a chief technical advisor and a regional technical advisor are working together to support ANAMA. The Information Management System for Mine Action (IMSMA), national standards and operating procedures have been established. A strategic plan and two work plans have been developed.

A national demining NGO, Relief Azerbaijan, was selected to carry out demining, survey and field operations. Skill development for its staff was achieved by contracting an international agency, Mine Advisory Group (MAG), who conducted initial training and supervised operations. Demining operations are carried out based on one-man drill procedure. RONCO, replacing MinTech after Fall 2001, is the international organization providing mine detecting dog (MDD) support for manual demining.

A Quality Assurance (QA) system has been implemented to maximize quality within the mine action program and to cover all program components. Quality Control (QC) is a part of the quality management to provide for the overall confidence levels in the process. A Monitoring and Testing Team (MTT) became operational at the beginning of this year. All mine action components are carried out according to humanitarian standards as established in the Azerbaijan Mine Action National Standards. Close coordination is taking place with reconstruction and other aid and development organizations.

Mine Clearance and Technical Survey

Demining began with the deployment of a 27-man team from the local NGO Relief Azerbaijan. The group is divided into two parts: the clearance team and the technical survey team. Currently, there are 38 deminers and six surveyors operating in the field. The demining operations took place mostly in the Fizuli region. With the support of six MDDs, a total of 8607.13 square meters in high-impact areas has been cleared so far. The ARRA requested major mine clearance task in support of the rehabilitation of a power line in Fizuli region, which was funded by the European Union. This task was successfully completed. Other examples are a Basil Area Clearance (BAC) task enabling ARRA to reconstruct a school in Garabakh region and clearance of Alakhan village requested by IFRC to reconstruct 68 houses for returning IDPs. A total of 74,764 square meters of suspected area was cleared, and 381,631 square meters were cleared manually, including battle area clearance. Seven mine fields were cleared and handed over to local authorities; five more are currently undergoing clearance. QA was handed over to the Ministry of Reconstruction. By the first of January 2002, ANAMA-sponsored teams had safely disposed of 1,208 UXO and 68 mines.

Due to lack of resources, technical survey teams had to be deployed to conduct emergency landmine and UXO clearance tasks until Fall 2001. Because of this, tasks unfortunately had to be cleared without technical survey or area reduction. This has affected the cost-effectiveness of ANAMA operations. The productivity of demining substantially increased when MDDs were introduced into the program in early 2000.

Mine Awareness

Mine awareness (MA) in Azerbaijan has been an ongoing activity that has enjoyed the participation of many international as well as local organizations and agencies. It began in 1996 with the dissemination of information among IDPs and people returning to territories under reconstruction. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) was the lead agency for MA in Azerbaijan. In Spring 2000, the ICRC handed MA over to ANAMA. Based on a reassessment of MA needs, the United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund (UNICEF), funded by the U.S. government, and working in close cooperation with ANAMA, decided to launch a major MA training operation. To ensure a multiplying effect and to institutionalize MA education, the Ministries of Health and Education became partners. In Phase One of the project, 15 master trainers were prepared to train 508 health personnel...
Mine Victim Support
By February 2001, ANAMA was contributing to a mine victim needs assessment and was processing the gathered data of 500 victims. As a result, a project proposal for Mine Victim Support was developed and submitted to UNICEF to secure financial support. With the data received from ANAMA, the ICRC and the Azerbaijan Ministry of Health are working together with NGOs in the field of humanitarian mine action. The Ministry of Labor and Social Protection and the ICRC are running two orthopedic centers in Azerbaijan.

Plans for 2002
Capacity Building
Developing more national capacity for mine action and the mine action operations in the field will be ongoing activities during 2002. The focus will be intensified on national capacity building. This unique approach is reflected in the progress indicators 3.4.5.6 and 12 of the work plan.

Overall, the approach is to build or expand the national management capacity, the training and monitoring capacity, the Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) capacity, the MDD capacity and the manual demining capacity. This nationalization is mainly on-the-job training with few international experts involved. Therefore, it is a cost-effective investment to create employment in rural areas. To facilitate IDP return and re-integrate them with local socio-economic activities, ANAMA aims to expand its operational capacity. Two other main activities to achieve this aim are U.S. military training of EOD demining and EOD staff in mid-2002 and conducting a comprehensive landmine impact survey funded by the European Union.

Impact Survey
A comprehensive impact survey has been planned and will be executed during 2002 with funds from the European Union.

Demining Training
While on-the-job training by the UN technical staff will continue, the U.S. military will provide basic demining, EOD, mine awareness and information management training to ANAMA and relevant NGO staff in mid-2002.

Clearance Operations
The demining and QA work will continue with the limited resources available. ANAMA will intensify efforts to raise more funds for demining activities.

Mine Awareness
MA education will continue to be conducted in close cooperation with UNICEF. Furthermore, MA will be embedded in the syllabi of schools. The project under way will enter Phase Three in summer 2002, when a follow-up on the impact of the MA training held will take place with support from the U.S. European Command (EUCOM).

Donor Support in 2001
For 2001, UNDP/UNOPS provided primary technical support to ANAMA and other components. This support included mobilization of resources and provision of administrative support and training as well as four international technical advisors for specific project activities. UNDP/UNOPS support is provided with the clear aim of assisting a national mine action capacity building process.

UNICEF provided support in MA education. The United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS) and the Geneva International Center for Humanitarian Demining (GICHD) assisted ANAMA with information management capacity building and training on IMAS and policy. Financial support for all components of the program was received primarily from the United States. Switzerland made an in-kind contribution. The government of Azerbaijan supported the program with financial and legal assistance as well as in-kind contribution of facilities. An overview of all donations is shown in Table 2.

It must be mentioned that Norway contributed $133,000 (U.S.) in 1998, before a national mine action body was established and facilitated here with the Humanitarian Mine Action survey activity. ICRC’s appreciated work in initial MA training and ongoing mine victim support is a big asset for those suffering from the impact of mines/UXO in Azerbaijan.

Conclusion
Upon its establishment in 1998, ANAMA has worked hard to develop a thorough mine action program that is capable of addressing the landmine threat in areas that are no longer occupied by Armenian forces and areas that will be liberated in the future. Overall, ANAMA hopes to make the lives of Azerbaijan’s people as easy as possible as they return to their native lands. By surveying and clearing hazardous land throughout Azerbaijan, ANAMA can eliminate one more hardship for these people.