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Ensuring Effective Coordination: UNMAS and Mine Action Coordination Centres in Africa

Effective coordination is an essential part of mine action efforts worldwide. The author discusses the United Nations Mine Action Service's (UNMAS) coordination strategies, focusing on examples from Mine Action Coordination Centres (MACCs) in Africa.

by Sarah Campbell, UNMAS

Introduction

Given the range of activities and the number of players involved in mine action, coordination is a prerequisite to the effective implementation of mine action programmes in the field. MACCs are therefore a central component of mine action programmes. Support for their establishment and development has been a core of UN mine action ever since the first such centre was established for Afghanistan in 1989.

MACCs are normally initiated and developed under the direct auspices of local authorities. The role of the United Nations is to provide them with the assistance they need to support international cooperation. This assistance is provided through the United Nations Programme Development (UNDP) for long-term capacity-building programmes, and through UNMAS for programmes developed in the context of peacekeeping operations or in response to immediate humanitarian needs.

The main principles under which MACCs are supposed by the United Nations are enshrined in the policy document of 1998, "Mine Action and Effective Coordination: The United Nations Policy." This document has been further refined with the formulation of guidelines clarifying the role of the military in mine action, and a sectoral policy on information management. This year, additional guidelines will be circulated defining the role of MACCs in relation to victim assistance.

While the responsibilities of MACCs vary from country to country, they typically include:

- The planning and operational coordination of all mine-related activities, surveys, demining and mine-risk reduction activities.
- Quality management, in accordance with the International Mine Action Standards (IMAS) adopted by the United Nations in 2001, which now form the basis for the development of country-specific national standards and Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) across all UN mine action programmes.

Information management for which MACCs collect, analyse and disseminate the mine-related data necessary to operations, most of the time using the Information Management System for Mine Action (IMMSA), developed by the Geneva International Center for Humanitarian Demining (GICHD).

Result and Methodology

In Africa, the United Nations system, through UNMAS, UNDP and the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), is involved in mineaction in Angola, Burundi, Chad, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Ethiopia, Eritrea, Guinea-Bissau, Mozambique, Sierra Leone, Somalia and Sudan. The source and scope of the landmine and UXO problem in each of these countries is unique, and therefore the mine action activities undertaken vary from country to country. UNMAS, working with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) as its executing partner, is currently directly responsible for supporting MACCs in the DRC, the Temporary Security Zones (TSZ) between Ethiopia and Eritrea, and Sudan.

The Democratic Republic of the Congo

Since 1997, the DRC has been engulfed in a conflict involving six neighbouring countries. The humanitarian consequences of the conflict have been devastating. Since January 2001, the political situation has improved, allowing for the deployment of the United Nations Mission in Congo (MONUC). Operating Procedures 1291 of 2000, UNMAS recently established a MACC as part of MONUC. The primary objectives of the MACC are the following:
- Developing a reliable mine and UXO information system based on IMMSA
- Develop emergency surveys and required
- Implement emergency mine action using expertise to MONUC and the humanitarian community
- Assist UNICEF in developing a national mine-risk reduction campaign

As soon as the situation allows, the ultimate goal of the MACC will be to assist the national authorities in developing a medium-to-long term mine action plan to establish a national capability to coordinate and conduct mine action and to contribute to the protection of civilians (UXO). In the immediate future, the MACC will also assist MONUC in implementing urgent survey operations of suspected mined areas that are a threat to further deployment of the Mission.

Eritrea/Ethiopia TSZ

Following the cessation of hostilities between Eritrea and Ethiopia in June 2000, UNMAS established the United Nations Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea (UNMEE) MACC. The UNMEE MACC has been designed to support the peacekeeping operation and humanitarian relief efforts within the TSZ, as well as to assist the government of Eritrea to strengthen its local and national capacity to address the long-term needs of its people. The Programme in Eritrea also has a liaison officer in Ethiopia who provides specialized mine action advice to the government of Ethiopia.

The UN response requires a collaborative and closely coordinated effort by UNMAS, UNDP, UNICEF and the other mine action partner to ensure a well-linked and continuous transition from the emergency operations to the long-term developmental activities, as well as to ultimately provide a clear and coherent exit strategy. UNMAS, UNDP and UNICEF therefore carry out these responsibilities based on an agreed and integrated workplan, which will evolve over time as required by changing circumstances and needs.

Sudan

Sudan has been at war for nearly 40 years. While the ongoing civil war does not currently allow for the implementation of a typical Mine Action Programme (MAP), there are a number of immediate actions that can be taken to address some of the emergency needs of the civilian population. Many of these actions have already been identified as a result of the field assessment conducted in November 2000 on behalf of the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD) Partner Forum Working Group. These activities are currently being implemented through the European Union (EU)-funded Sudan Landmines Information and Response Initiative (SLIRI).

One of the initial responsibilities of the UN MAP in Sudan will be to develop a more comprehensive understanding of the scope of the problem and its impact on the people of Sudan. In addition, the following actions will be taken to begin addressing the landmine and UXO problem:
- Developing an effective information distribution network
- Developing an effective information management system

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A young man demonstrating the method used to deactivate a mine, c/o UN/DW/M. Monat