Community Liaison in Mine Action: Partnerships for Growth

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Community Liaison in Mine Action: Partnerships for Growth

Using a Community Liaison (CL) model that emphasizes community participation, Mines Advisory Group (MAG) prioritises minefield clearance to lessen landmine’s impact on communities in Angola.

by Tim Carstairs, MAG

A recent visitation at the May International Standing Committee Experts (ISCE) meeting in Geneva was paraphrased in this way: “The humanitarian impact of landmines must guide the priorities of donor countries.” This statement made by the representative of Norway goes directly to the point and presents us all with the real problem of ensuring that our resources are used most wisely and effectively to address these needs.

This article seeks to briefly explain how MAG conducts the process of prioritisation as part of its mine action response.

What seems clear to us is that mine action is not and should not be allowed to remain a “stand-alone” discipline. Mine action is an integral part of wider rehabilitation and development. As the opening quote says, we have to deal with the impact of mines on people. In this case, the impact of mines and UXOs must be considered to be within a wider context of economic, social and political recovery from conflict. Prioritisation and appropriate action are therefore taken at the same level.

Furthermore, the individuals and groups in the equation are not passive and helpless but active parts of the process and worthy of respect.

In the mid-1990s, MAG developed the practice of applying a CL model to mine action situations in Angola. We believe in working together with all actors to find the best way to address these problems. The human subjects—the communities that live in mined areas or that have been driven from mined areas and wish to return—become key players within the prioritisation process. This is a good development practice that has been encouraged since the late 1990s. The concept of CL is being mentioned more frequently now in relation to mine action, and we hope that this short article will help explain how we understand it.

The Global Impact Survey process enables us to ensure we understand the impact of landmines and UXOs on basic human needs and on the longer-term developmental process and economy and thus is a factor in establishing in long-term priorities for humanitarian mine action.

I was able to see the survey process in action in one area.

Returning home after doing the family washing in the Luena river, I passed Magalí, an area located to either side of the path we walked, where three people had been injured.

[Image of a bridge]

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**FOCUS**

**Landmines in Africa**

Water Supply In Luena

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Water and access are as much immediate and urgent concerns for a belligerent community and an IDP population as they are for development needs in the longer term. In 1993, mines were laid to protect the water treatment and pumping station against attack by rebels of the National Union for the Independence of Angola (UNITA). However, the mines did not stop the station from being damaged in fighting, and since then, fresh water has been in short supply. In an emergency, the water towers of Luena ran with fresh water again for the first time in eight years. Just 17 AP mines had impacted on some 300,000 people.

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The local community asked MAG to help with this situation. The area was cleared. In 1998, 17 AP mines were removed and destroyed from along the perimeter of the pumping station, including several just inches from the path. Clearance has enabled repairs to the pumping station to be carried out, and in April 2002, the water towers of Luena ran with fresh water again for the first time in eight years. Just 17 AP mines had impacted on some 300,000 people.

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The community liaison process

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A MAG office or a MAG team is usually contacted by a village leader and informed of problems relating to mines or UXO or asked to clear a particular area. It is true to say that MAG's flexible, mobile teams (MATSs) facilitate and strengthen the process as they are accessible to the local people and are already skilled in CL. The request will be recorded, and a community liaison team will visit the village and assess local needs, discuss village mapping, collect village history, identify the beneficiaries of clearance tasks and prioritise the minefields to be cleared.

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MAG will also coordinate with local authorities and NGOs to make sure that the agreed prioritisation matches with national or provincial clearance and development plans. The CL team will then negotiate land ownership and the use to which the land will be put post-clearance. In some countries where MAG works, land ownership is handed down through families and knowledge of it is carried with tribal and village chiets. In other areas, ownership is recorded and registered with local authorities.

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If required, the CL team will conduct mine risk reduction education in the community prior to completion of the mine clearance. Once clearance has been undertaken, the CL team will continue to liaise with authorities locally to ensure that agreed development of the land goes ahead smoothly, and that the identified beneficiaries are indeed benefiting.

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MAG has 12 years’ experience implementing mine action around the world. The agency currently conducts a variety of programmes, such as community mine action, and demining programmes, as well as CL, training, and development programmes in a number of areas including Angola, Cambodia, Laos, Lebanon, northern Iraq, Somaliiland, and countries on both sides of the Andes. In the United States, MAG’s work is carried out by MAG’s U.S. operation.

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MAG operates in 40 countries and has a staff of about 2,500 people.

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MAG has had a presence in Angola for over 12 years, and the majority of its work involves mine clearance and UXO disposal.
Landmines in Africa

July 5, 2002: MAG Opens Main Road from Luena, Moxico Province, Angola

Allowing Aid to be Distributed to Thousands of Starving Families

The Lucusse Road between Luena and Lucusse in Moxico province in eastern Angola has been the scene of heavy fighting for decades. There was fighting many years ago between Cuban and South African forces and over much of the last decade between the government and forces of the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA). The road is littered with the wrecks of trucks and armored vehicles destroyed in anti-tank mine blasts and ambushes. It is said that over 6,000 soldiers died here trying to get convoys of supplies in and out of Luena. The road itself serves thousands of people living in its vicinity. Opening it up can dramatically change the socio-economic situation in the province.

On July 3, 2002, Mines Advisory Group (MAG) staff met with the Angolan Technical Unit for Coordination of Humanitarian Assistance (UTCAH). Lucusse will be used as a quarterming area for 4,000 UNITA soldiers being disarmed and demobilised under the new peace agreement. While the Lucusse Road has been closed, thousands of families have not received aid of any sort. It is reported that 38 percent of the children in the area are severely malnourished. The World Food Program (WFP), the Angolan Ministry of Social Assistance and Reintegration (MINARIS) and the United Nations all agreed that the major demining priority in the province was this road.

Due to the grave humanitarian situation, MAG undertook an emergency survey of the road immediately following the request from UTCAH to see how much the situation had changed since 1997/98. Previously, during this brief period of peace, MAG had surveyed and cleared 92 kilometers of the 148-kilometer route. After re-survey on July 3, 2002, it was clear that there had been no new vehicle wrecks since that time; however, using the route still requires extreme care. The survey team was able to travel to Lucusse where they met with the Police Commandant and UNITA officials who explained they were desperate for food and other emergency aid.

MAG teams returned July 4th to clear and destroy several items of UXO seen on the road. Areas where vehicles will have to travel off the edge of the road to get around mine craters or vehicle wrecks will also be checked for mines. MAG has already identified several suspect mined areas on the roadsides that will be marked. Possing areas are being targeted for special clearance efforts to minimize the risk in the immediate future. MAG has made it clear that all drivers intending to use the route must first attend a mine safety briefing conducted by MAG. Although it can be safe to use the road, there is a very good chance that any deviation from tracks of the previous vehicle may lead to a fatal mine accident. It is hoped that funding can be raised to enable complete clearance of the verges and other suspect areas along the route.

On July 6th, MAG escorted Médecins sans Frontières—Doctors Without Borders (MSF) to Lucusse so that medical assistance would be made available to the UNITA quarterming areas. MAG has also facilitated the access of Dom Bosco, a respected Angolan non-governmental organization (NGO) to the quarterming area. Dom Bosco has already begun registration and identification of needs. It is hoped that WFP deliveries will be authorized within the next week. These are all vital elements in the peace and confidence-building, demobilisation and normalisation process. MAG is proud that mine action can play its role and is grateful to all those parties in Angola and to its donors for enabling such progressive and positive outcomes.

For additional information, visit www.magclearmines.org

Locating Landmines and UXO: A Methodological Lesson from the Ethiopian Landmine Impact Survey

One of the most important parts about implementing effective Landmine Impact Surveys is first identifying which communities have a landmine/UXO problem. The author describes how Expert Opinion Collection (EOC) is used in Ethiopia to overcome the obstacles survey teams face when gathering their information.

by Michael L. Fleisher, Ph.D., Deputy Team Leader/Operations Manager, Ethiopian Landmine Impact Survey

Introduction

In every country where a Landmine Impact Survey is being implemented, those charged with conducting it are faced with the challenge of compiling a reliable list of the communities that need surveying—because before a community can be surveyed to assess the landmine/UXO impact, it must first be accurately identified as a community having a landmine/UXO problem.

Owing to its vast size and its ongoing, highly variegated history, Ethiopia presents Landmine Impact surveyors with particularly daunting difficulties. The Italian invasion of the 1970s, Ethiopia's protracted, and ultimately successful, war for independence; the 1990s Ogaden war with Somalia; the 1990s Ogaden war with Somalia; the 1998-99 Oromo conflict; and the 2000s Oromo conflict have all had an impact on the current situation, which is the most recent of many conflicts to have affected Ethiopia.

This technique developed for summarizing this problem, EOC, entails gathering information from all available sources—civilian government administrators, military authorities, UN agencies, IOs and NGOs, OCHA and NGOs—in-country scholars and so on—and using this information to compile a gazetteer of the affected communities to be surveyed. However, because time and resources are inevitably limited, survey teams are pressed to devise methodologies that will enable them to separate the landmine/UXO-affected communities from the non-affected communities as quickly and as efficiently as possible. To accomplish this, they must first devise a strategy that will enable them to determine where the most thorough, most reliable information regarding the locations of landmines/UXO may be obtained and how to acquire this intelligence as swiftly, systematically and cost-effectively as possible.

This article aims to facilitate this information-gathering process for all countries undertaking Landmine Impact Surveys by sharing some lessons learned by the Ethiopian Landmine Impact Survey (ELIS), which is currently being carried by the Norwegian Peoples Aid (NPA), under the auspices of the Swedish Action Center (SAC), in Washington, D.C., and in close partnership with the Ethiopian Mine Action Office (EMAO) in Addis Ababa.