One Leg Dancing (Um Pé Que Dança) Angola Embraces the Future

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One Leg Dancing (Um Pé Que Dança)
Angola Embraces the Future

During a period of peace, demining efforts in Angola continue to require top priority in order to reopen the country to desperately needed aid programs. Unfortunately, funding by countries and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in recent years has been low due to a sense of confusion and an unsuccessful history of previously under-funded projects.

by Joe Lokey and Ken O'Connell, MGI

Current State

Peace has broken out in Angola, or so it seems. The world has seen this before and their cautious optimism is understandable. To the people of Angola, the promise of a brighter future is everywhere and the motivation to ensure a lasting peace has never been stronger. But the roads to prosperity are littered with deadly remnants of their dismal past.

Angola suffers due to the series of internal power struggles and civil wars that have inflicted a tremendous amount of destruction on this country since their independence from Portugal in 1975. Three attempts at peace (1975, 1991, 1994) have all collapsed for various reasons. The Angolan government and National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA) officials are building an incremental settlement that follows the 1994 Lusaka peace accords. The momentum for this latest effort began in earnest after the leader of the instigating group was killed.

Conclusion

EOC is a worthwhile, entirely practical and extremely valuable technique, but like any research method, it is valuable only to the extent that it generates accurate, verifiable data. The experience of the ELIS team in North Wollo argues strongly for thorough verification/authorization of expert opinions obtained at the higher administrative levels—in the ELIS case, the woreda—through sensitive but rigorous interviewing of ordinary citizens at the kebele/gep level, where people's lives are at stake.

*All photographs courtesy of Nils Jorgensen, GIS Specialist, Ethiopian Landmine Impact Survey

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Landmines in Angola

The war destroyed over 5,000 schools in Angola and those who do manage to periodically make it to overcrowded classrooms—sometimes holding as many as 90 in one room—have few resources with which to learn. Even with access to education, children frequently arrive late or leave early to earn money for a living for their families. About three out of ten rural women over 15 can read or write. Only a third reach fifth grade and none but the children of Angola’s rich governmental elite have the opportunity for higher education. Teachers must overcome roads to reach students. The camps are the focal points of international attention but the greater human tragedy swirling around them are millions of displaced Angolans that have been avoiding the fighting for decades. Adding to this number is another half million or so emerging from previously held UNITA area. Women and young girls are particularly at risk as they forage for food, wood, and water. The number of displaced people in Angola is difficult to measure but NGOs indicate it could be over four million with about half being children. In Malanje alone, there are over 250,000 displaced and they are expecting another 350,000 to emerge from former UNITA area. As the daily horror of the exposure of war were not enough, as many as half of those reported to have witnessed a landmine incident. Trying to address this has been difficult since less than 30 percent of the $233 million (U.S.) sought in an inter-agency appeal has actually been received.

The UN Role

The UN is not viewed in Angola as an entity that can be trusted, and for good reason. The government of Angola has resisted giving UN aid agencies any definitive role in the process and almost no involvement in the administration of the camps. The Angolan government quickly points out that the UN peace agreements brokered in 1991 and 1994 enabled UNITA to learn and rebuild and that further UN involvement could once again fortify UNITA both logically and politically. They are determined that this will not happen again.

The recent survey report from the Geneva International Center for Humanitarian Demining (GICHED) (The Mine Action Section in Angola-Mission Report) is an example of the UN’s desire to expand UN influence and control over the landmine process in Angola. While minimizing and dismissing the role of INAROE, the report does support the new inter-ministerial coordination body (CNDAD) but recommends the injection of UN advisors and the replacement of the Angolan landmine database with the UN’s Information Management System for Mine Action (IMSSMA) system that was designed to give eventual UN oversight over funding and resources going into national programs. While the report acknowledges many of the challenges, it did little to recommend Angolan solutions on Angolan problems. The United Nations had also been a major obstacle toward peace by continuing travel sanctions on members of UNITA that hampered the free movement of party representatives so crucial to the political reintegration of UNITA as a viable political party in Angola. This ban has since been lifted, but the continued obstacles to a workable peace presented by the United Nations are not unnoticed.

INAROE remains a viable entity in Angola though plagued with the same resource constraints as other governmental activities. They have put together a mobile team in Bie Province working with T-55 tanks equipped with KMT-5 rollers. They have also begun coordinating with the Angolan Armed Forces (FAA) combat engineers who will have a 25 percent representation on their demining teams. The INAROE Demining School at ETAM is operational and the instructional materials at the School were trained by South Africa are in camp and preparing for an influx of deminers, surveys, explosive ordnance disposal (EOD) personnel and team leaders ready for retraining.

Demining Priorities

The majority of mine clearance in Angola continues to be done by a small group of NGOs unilaterally funded via governments and private donations. A major priority in this area is clearing the landmines planted in Angola during the Civil War. This includes the landmines planted by the Angolan government during its war against the Angolan National Liberation Front (FNLA). These landmines are frequently cleared by the NGOs themselves or by local communities. In some cases, the landmines are cleared by local communities who have little knowledge of the dangers of landmines. In other cases, the landmines are cleared by the NGOs themselves who have the knowledge and equipment to do so. The NGOs that are involved in clearing the landmines in Angola include the Angolan Mine Action Group (AMG), the International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL), and the Angola Mine Action Group (AMG).

Two other demining organizations, the INAROE (the Angolan National Demining Agency) and the HALO Trust, are also involved in clearing the landmines in Angola. The INAROE is a government agency that is responsible for clearing the landmines in Angola. The HALO Trust is a non-governmental organization that is dedicated to clearing the landmines in Angola. The HALO Trust has been successful in clearing the landmines in Angola and has cleared over 200 million landmines since its inception.

Provinces

- Huila, Malanje, Kwanza Norte, Macedo, Malanje, Cunene, Huambo, Bie, Benguela (Cubal)

Only thoroughly trained explosives detection dogs are being deployed in the mine-sweeping projects of Bie, Bie, People Against Landmines.
the NGO level, there is still a certain amount of confusion as to what is happening inside the country. It is reported that the UNITA fighters are going into their designated holding camps, handing in their weapons in preparation to be integrated into the FAA as well as being fed and receiving a salary, though this may only be the officer corps for the moment.

The main fear for some organizations is that those troops designated for demobilization may not be trained adequately for reintegration into society.

Much of the donor hesitation revolves around the simple fact that Angola is, in paper, one of the wealthiest countries on the African continent in terms of its natural resources. Almost all agree that the Angolan government itself may play a larger role in clearing landmines and addressing the paraplegy of its afflicting the victims of mines. Toward that end, a pledge of $57 million was set aside by Angola from which demining was to have received around a 30 percent share. The NGOs in Angola all report little optimism that this will ever reach them and none believe it will actually get spent.

**A Matter of Access**

Demining is an important part of the peace process. Particularly, it helps to provide safe access to aid groups, while also allowing them more freedom of movement. Unfortunately, the problem is that the same freedom is afforded to the Angolan population. On a positive note, however, there does seem that the usual military-organized convoys are a thing of the past. As an example, there are large groups of people who gather to the east of Viana, who then proceed homewards. This is not thought to be a spontaneous migration out of Luanda, but rather family members returning to their homes to grow crops to return and settle in these areas. The rest of the family stays in Luanda to continue as they have for the last few years since they relocated to the capital.

Throughout the country there are IDP camps and people residing in safe cities. These displaced peoples are the ones who wish to return to their homes; they are also the ones who have risks from the threat of mines. Also, there are people who are in areas formally under the control of UNITA who have been isolated and require immediate aid. In both cases, access is the watchword: safe access to allow people to return to their homes, and access to aid agencies and organizations to support isolated communities most at risk.

This is the type of operation that MgM specializes in, having cut its teeth, so to speak, in opening up over 270 kilometers of roads in the jungles of northeast Bengo Province and allowing over 50,000 people to safely return to their homes. Negotiations will soon begin to start integrating these people into with Provincial Authorities, WHO and other bodies to draw up new plans and priorities. It is certain that in Malanje province the priorities will now change from opening up land for use by IDPs close to the city to opening roads to allow the IDPs safe access to their homes, and also to new access to markets.

**Mgm Solutions Need Support**

When priorities were being prepared for proposals for year 2002, MgM had been asked by the WFP to start demining operations in the provinces of Malanje and Huila. This also fits in with priorities requested by the U.S. Department of State (DOS) for funding purposes for 2002 funding. It also helped for DOS funding that WFP is the lead agency. This means that, on an ongoing basis, MgM will be working in the same provinces as Norwegian People's Aid (NPA) while, on the other hand, there is no funding available for MgM's traditional operational areas of Bengo and Cunene Provinces. Funds are now being sought to expand on these projects, especially MgM wishes to continue in Bengo and Cunene.

In Bengo, there are over 60,000 IDPs in two camps outside Caima. Although the UNHCR and other aid agencies have already started to relocate areas where access is open, there are a further 35,000 who come from an area (Dembos) that is completely blocked. Access is available also along tar roads to towns of Ueça, Piru, Quixaba and Alto Galung, while roads to towns of Bula Atumbe and Beke Alto are blocked. Access is also in the village of Kungu. Kungu has an estimated population of 1,000 people. The area of the serviceable ordinance has been moved, though a substantial amount was left spread over a large area close to the International Airport of Luanda. No clear has been done of what was left in the soil, and a simple task can pull up unexploded munitions where children play daily.

The second survey was carried out on the Benguela railway line in Huambo. It is now obvious that the railway network in Angola is central to the regeneration of the interior of the country and especially the towns and cities that lie along those lines. There appears to be Economic Union (EU) and possibly Angolan funding available for the reconstruction of these lines, most of which have to be checked and cleared of landmines prior to engineers starting work on them. Initial contacts have been made to introduce MgM to the possible main contractor for the development of these lines and MgM's extensive experience clearing the Limpopo rail lines in Mozambique are a valuable reference. The key to the future may be the opening of the rail line to the rich coffee growing area of Namibe Province. Both these projects are looked upon as high priority, for the safety of the people living in an ammunition dump who with all likelihood will not return to their original homes, and for those who would like to eliminate their dependency on aid in the long term.

**Conclusion**

The fragile peace in Angola appears to be a reality, and demining is an integral part of sustaining this very delicate process. There have been discussions about large amounts of aid pledged for Angola, but this appears to be a case of wishful thinking. The donor community seems to be waiting for more developments and possibly small successes in the short term before committing. The problem is that all NGOs in Angola have been under-funded for years relative to the task at hand, and their equipment needs alone may not permit the kind of progress needed. Donor reluctance may be responsible for hundreds of preventable Angolan deaths. Mines can be cleared now. Without increased support at this critical juncture, the lack of access by WFP and other aid groups and the lack of simple information will indeed doom thousands of Angolans to starvation as they continue to roam the mine infested roads and fields in search of life itself.

MgM is dedicated to resolving this and has pledged itself to continued relief in one of Africa's key future economic growth, rich in both resources and culture, MgM remains at the front and welcomes additional assistance and support. We also gratefully acknowledge the tremendous financial contributions of the U.S. State Department's Humanitarian Demining Program Office in recognition of the value of our efforts. Please visit our website or contact us to learn more. The wonderful people of Angola deserve your thoughts, prayers and consideration.

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