

Building National EOD Capacity in Mali

Since January 2013, the United Nations Mine Action Service has worked to build Mali's national capacity in explosive ordnance disposal.

by Jin-Hee Dieu [UNMAS]



Participants from the Malian Defense Security Forces receive their EOD Level 1 training certificates.
Photo courtesy of UNMAS/Marc Vaillant.

Recent and ongoing armed conflicts in Mali have resulted in small arms and light weapons proliferation and explosive remnants of war (ERW) contamination, threatening civilians and impeding stabilization efforts. In the northern affected communities, ERW contamination increases risks of accidents and injury, and hinders the safe return of more than 170,000 refugees and 187,000 internally displaced persons.¹

The United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS) has operated in Mali since January 2013 with the principal goal of

enhancing Mali's national capacity to mitigate the explosive threats that emerged following the outbreak of armed conflict in 2012.² UNMAS coordinates training activities with the Malian Defense and Security forces and operates under the U.N. Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), which the U.N. Security Council established in April 2013.³

Historical tensions in northern Mali and border fighting between Tuareg tribes created thousands of refugees. The instability and conflict progressed until Alpha Oumar Konaré



A simulation exercise in a city environment. After having secured a safe perimeter, the trainee is creating a safe path to the suspicious car.

Photo courtesy of UNMAS/Donat Blugeon.

became president in 1992 and issued a peace agreement alleviating ethnic disputes.⁴ However, the political stability in Mali was disturbed again during a 2012 rebellion within the northern region.⁵ At the start of 2012, insurgents gained control of the Malian army's weaponry, leaving civilians and militants at risk.⁶ Fatalities of Malian armed forces during Islamist insurgent attacks yielded a military coup ousting former President Amadou Toumani Touré in March 2012.⁷ The administration and military were then reorganized. UNMAS continues responding to these changes and providing assistance to Malian authorities as they work to restore peace and security.

Addressing the Explosive Threat in Mali

Improvised explosive devices, ERW and landmines affect livelihoods—especially agricultural activities—restrict

freedom of movement and inhibit economic recovery within northern Mali. ERW contamination also limits the deployment of national and international forces tasked with stabilizing the north and consolidating security. UNMAS technical assistance enhances awareness of this threat and equips units to address this danger.

UNMAS aims to build Mali's capacities to plan, lead and conduct explosive ordnance clearance. To this end, UNMAS and various partners provided explosive ordnance disposal (EOD) training for Malian military engineer units, gendarmerie, national police, civil protection force, national guard and air force. The Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency (MSB in Swedish) provided the initial training, which ran from February to March 2013, and taught 36 participants about EOD methodologies, safety procedures, and types of ammunition and their components. MSB coordinated the second training session in

August 2013, and coached 32 members of the Malian Defense and Security Forces staff in equipment maintenance, first aid, preparation, demolition and search methods, among other topics.

After completing their first EOD training in August 2013, 20 students were sent to the *Centre de formation au déminage humanitaire-Afrique de l'Ouest* (Humanitarian Demining Training Center) at the *Centre de Perfectionnement aux Actions post-conflituelles de Déminage et de Dépollution* (Center for the Development of Post-Conflict Actions in Demining and Remediation, or CPADD) in Benin to pursue EOD Level 3 training from September to November 2013.⁸

In March 2014, 20 additional students graduated from a fourth training, the CPADD EOD Level 1 course, funded by the U.K. Foreign and Commonwealth Office. Sgt. Idrissa Coulibaly, member of the Directorate of Military Engineering and participant in the March 2014 CPADD training, testifies, “My only wish is for Mali to have such a center [like CPADD], so that more people could benefit from it. In our own infrastructure, we could train the military, but also the civilians, and educate them about the risks.”⁹ These 20 students will next undergo EOD Level 2 training in conjunction with the EU Training Mission before deployment to northern Mali in support of stabilization efforts.

Throughout the trainings, the *Comité Européen de Normalisation* (European Committee for Standardization, or CEN) Workshop Agreement and the U.N. International Mine Action Standards were incorporated into Malian mine action standards.^{10,11} The Malian authorities approved the standards and will accordingly draft their own standard operating procedures. This guarantees that Malian clearance efforts meet

international standards in the field and ensures safe and efficient demining and ERW demolition operations.

Recent Activities

In March 2014, UNMAS tasked six trainees to prepare a demolition of 85 missiles, which required about 270 kg (595 lbs) of net explosive quantity in total. Between April and May 2014, the Malian army demolished its own obsolete and non-serviceable surface-to-air missiles (SAM). After dismantling the missiles, the propellants were burned, and the rest was destroyed. The demolition's closing ceremony took place 6 June 2014. This was the first instance in which the Malian army demolished SAM in such a large quantity. In the future, UNMAS will proceed with demolishing an additional 60 tons of obsolete ammunition.

One challenge for the participants who have trained as EOD experts is using their skills in everyday work. According to Malian Military Engineering Deputy Director Col. Boubacar Diallo, the 2014–2018 national reform of the Malian army will have among its interarmy tactical groups 30 deminers and six EOD personnel. Some of the trainees will subsequently be deployed in the north.¹²

Keeping all trainees up to date in EOD developments, especially new threats in the field, is challenging. UNMAS plans to train more personnel and institute a train-the-trainer approach.

UNMAS Mali Programme Manager Charles Frisby states that “UNMAS is very pleased to be working in partnership with the Malian Defense and Security Forces to strengthen national capacities. There is a need to mitigate explosive threats, and it is important that a range of defense and security institutions have broad capabilities based on the very extensive geography of Mali and the need to work on joint operations.”¹³

Setting up a training plan for the newly reorganized Malian military is also challenging for UNMAS. The process begins with the Directorate of Military Engineering developing a list of potential candidates for EOD Level 1 training. From there, UNMAS proceeds to a written test, ranking candidates based on capability. The frequency of the trainings and the number of students involved varies based on CPADD's availability. Once the Malian participants are EOD Level 1 certified, the army deploys them to different regions where the students gain practical skills. UNMAS is in the training's first phase, EOD Level 1. UNMAS aims to train a base of EOD Level 1 students in order to select the top-ranking individuals and train them into EOD Level 2 and EOD Level 3. ©

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