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Applying NGO Resource-mobilization Strategies to the Mine Action Community

Due to funding concerns, the mine action sector is shifting its approach to resource mobilization and allocation. Emerging funding trends suggest that it would be advantageous for mine action centers and nongovernmental organizations to increase sustainability by seeking financial and technical support from a variety of sources.

by Dane Sosniecki and Suzanne Fiederlein [CISR]

Mine action centers (MAC) and nongovernmental organizations (NGO) are re-evaluating the ways in which they procure financial and technical support due to concerns regarding the future prospects for donor support to mine action. Although international funding for mine action has remained relatively stable since 2006, the weak global economic recovery and competing demands have funders reassessing how to allocate resources more effectively.¹ As a result, the mine action sector is undergoing a paradigm shift in its approach to resource mobilization and allocation. More emphasis on seeking nontraditional revenue sources, integrating mine action objectives with greater development goals and leveraging existing resources are now regularly touted as ways to manage increasingly scarce resources. Reviewing best practices from nonprofits, NGOs and other civil-society organizations in larger, more traditional fields may assist the mine action community in enhancing its resource-development strategies and ensure its continued relevance in the wider humanitarian sector.

Funding Trends in Mine Action

International assistance for mine action continues to fall short of what affected states request. In 2012, nearly US\$500 million was provided in international support. However, according to the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining (GICHD), the total cost of extensions to Article 5 of the *Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-personnel Mines and on Their Destruction* (Anti-personnel Mine Ban Convention or APMBC)—which obliges States



With not enough safe land available, local people often have no choice but to risk living and working near mine fields.

All photos courtesy of Sean Sutton/
MAG (Mines Advisory Group)

Parties to clear all known mined areas within their initial 10-year signing period—is estimated at \$2.78 billion from 2009 to 2019. This number represents more than half of the total funding international donors provided from 1992 to 2008.^{1,2}

Moreover, according to the International Campaign to Ban Landmines, a lack of adequate engagement and political support by donor and affected states creates a disconnect between the amount of dollars spent on mine action and the level of progress on the ground, thereby harming the prospects of increased international support.³

The fiscal year 2015 budget request for the U.S. Department of State's Conventional Weapons Destruction program, managed by the Office of Weapons

Removal and Abatement in the Bureau of Political-Military Affairs (PM/WRA), is \$127,595,000, representing a near 20-percent decrease in resources from fiscal year 2010.⁴ MAG America, cognizant of these trends, acknowledged that it expects funding from government sources to decrease in coming years. One of its top strategic priorities is diversifying its funding base and increasing unrestricted income.⁵

Thus, a rising trend toward a more efficient, performance-based mine action sector is developing. According to GICHD, stakeholders are less willing to fund or support activity without a measurable positive impact on affected communities or accept time-consuming, expensive mine-clearance work in areas that do not prove to contain mines.⁶

With traditional funders becoming more hesitant to back costly mine action activities, MACs and mine action NGOs must modify the nature of their dependencies and broaden the scope of their key development inputs to include more nontraditional sources. The process of reviewing best practices for NGOs seeking resource diversification in more established fields can facilitate new diverse resource streams. Such tactics are potentially transferable to MACs and NGOs in the mine action field. By adopting a variety of these strategic responses and adapting them to a mine action context, MACs can successfully navigate the changing economic environment and achieve sustainable resource dependency.

The Importance of Resource Diversity

Academic literature on transnational NGO-funding strategies—much of which is applicable to various actors in the mine action field—confirms that forming strategic partnerships with a diversified selection of resource providers helps alleviate the consequences of resource scarcity.^{7,8,9} According to resource-dependency theory, an organization is subject to external control when it depends on its external environment for a large proportion of a critical resource, such as funding. In his article “Strategic Responses to Resource Dependence Among Transnational NGOs Registered in the United States,” George Mitchell argues that the competition for increasingly scarce financial and technical resources may cause NGOs to become more donor-driven instead of need-driven, causing them to misalign their missions with donor preferences—which can lead to goal displacement, mission creep or mission vagueness. Ultimately, the pursuit of financial security forces NGOs to abandon their primary mission.⁷



Defused anti-personnel mines are sorted before being destroyed in a controlled demolition.

In the most extreme cases, a lack of diversified revenue streams can devastate an organization, such as the closing of Survivor Corps in 2010. The abrupt cancellation of a major grant from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services—a funder that had consistently supported Survivor Corps since 2000—triggered the organization’s decision to cease operations. The enormous pressure put on its annual budget by the grant’s termination (and the 2009 economic crisis) forced the organization to formally close its doors.¹⁰

Such outcomes can be avoided if MACs and mine action NGOs diversify dependencies. By adopting a holistic range of strategic responses used regularly by transnational NGOs, MACs can ensure continued relevance and survival in their operating environment. Such tactics include⁷

- **Resource diversification:** Diversify funding bases to include private contributions, government funding and earned-income activities to achieve less revenue volatility. For instance, in 2010, the Lebanese Mine Action Center successfully entered a strategic partnership with Lebanon’s largest bank, BLOM Bank, and received a percentage of cardholders’ annual fees and retailers’ transaction fees to fund mine clearance activities.¹¹
- **Alignment:** Adjust an organization’s focus to suit more nontraditional donor preferences. Mozambique’s partnership with the United Nations Partnership to Promote the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Multi-Donor Trust Fund represents one such cross-sectorial approach that enables MACs and mine-related NGOs to accomplish their goals with nontraditional funding.¹²

- **Perseverance:** Secure grants and contracts simply to maintain cash flow, also known as “bridge funding.” Since 1994, the Voluntary Trust Fund for Assistance in Mine Action has provided resources for mine action projects or programs in situations where funding is not immediately available.¹³
- **Subcontracting:** Change from a mission-driven organization to a contract-driven one in an effort to secure substantial resources from large funders. In countries where landmines have been eclipsed as a funding priority, MACs and related NGOs have expanded their purviews by encompassing more prevailing issues into their fold, such as weapons and ammunition security, thereby essentially becoming more contract-focused instead of mission-driven.¹⁴
- **Specialization:** Different from others with a core competency in a specific programmatic area characterized by high donor demand and relatively low organizational supply. The Center for International Stabilization and Recovery represents one organization that leverages its academic relationships at James Madison University to provide high-level management training to senior mine action managers around the globe.

When the international community met in Cartagena, Colombia, in 2009 to reaffirm the commitment of States Parties, international organizations, and civil society to achieve a mine-free world, the Cartagena Action Plan was adopted with the aim of supporting enhanced implementation and promotion of the APMBC. Thus far, its implementation has reflected the more pragmatic realities of an increasingly resource-scarce and results-based field and has incorporated many of the strategic responses discussed previously.

According to the latest Geneva Progress Report, some emerging themes from the Cartagena Action Plan include:

- Raising national funds and seeking alternative funding sources from a wide range of international sources, including the European Commission, United Nations Trust Funds and the NATO Partnership for Peace Trust Fund.¹²
- Forming more strategic partnerships between States Parties in the APMBC to ensure resource sustainability and to overcome capacity constraints, such as the partnership between Mozambique and Norway aimed at an efficient completion of Article 5 obligations.^{3,12}



A deminer works in a field adjacent to a working farm in Angola.

- Creating greater synergies for technical assistance and information exchange between non-affected States Parties and affected States Parties in the APMBC, such as GICHD’s Arabic Language Outreach Programme.¹²
- Increasing South-South cooperation to leverage existing resources and enhance cost-effectiveness, such as the Laos-Cambodian South-South Cooperation Workshop on UXO/Mine Action Sector (supported by the Japan International Cooperation Agency).^{12,15,16}
- Improving national ownership of mine action activities, including good management and coordination, solid planning and clear reporting, such as Peru’s work to increase national budget expenditures on implementing plans and programs for persons with disabilities including landmine and other explosive remnants of war survivors.^{12,17}

Moreover, these emerging themes and strategic responses are not exclusive to States Parties of the APMBC. PM/WRA has long been a proponent of developing strategic partnerships through its Public-Private Partnership Program. With over 65 members in the program, PM/WRA engages with various NGOs, foundations, and civic, religious and educational groups to raise awareness, facilitate private contributions and foster cooperation between the private sector and affected countries in support of humanitarian mine action and efforts to control or destroy illicit conventional arms.¹⁸

Further evidence that these themes are beginning to take root has emerged in Southeast Asia where locally based NGOs in Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam have made

significant strides to forming a community of collective mine action despite significant political and bureaucratic obstacles. In her article in *Global Society* on building communities of practice, Julie Gilson notes that, given the increased competition and the need to be more efficient in their resources, there was increased incentive for these NGOs to form strategic partnerships as it helped better their responses to the demands of the environment.¹⁹

These partnerships are still nascent, according to Gilson, as cooperation between these NGOs has been purely functional, driven by experiences, subject matter, the issue in question, personal ties, the immediate locality, and the collective realization that resources can be used more effectively. In many cases, meetings are held strictly as a desire to “see what other groups are doing,” but technical information exchange and resource sharing have also occurred.¹⁹ Nevertheless, such partnerships that leverage funding and technical support represent a new norm in the mine action field and will become even more necessary as organizations are forced to navigate the increasingly turbulent environment.

Conclusion

Given the emerging funding trends in the mine action sector, it would be advantageous for MACs and mine action NGOs to become more sustainable by seeking financial and technical means from a variety of sources. A review of the current literature on NGO responses to resource dependency suggests this can take many forms, some of which have become clearly evident in the mine action community in recent years. In particular, the Cartagena Action Plan urges MACs and NGOs to form more strategic partnerships, leverage existing resources and employ tactics already being advocated by PM/WRA through its Public-Private Partnership Program. Evidence from the field also suggests diversifying streams of revenue by including private contributions and aligning organizational focus with nontraditional funders have been utilized. Regardless of the tactics taken, MACs and mine action NGOs must become serious about resource development as their continued relevance and place in the changing mine action sector is increasingly at risk. ©

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