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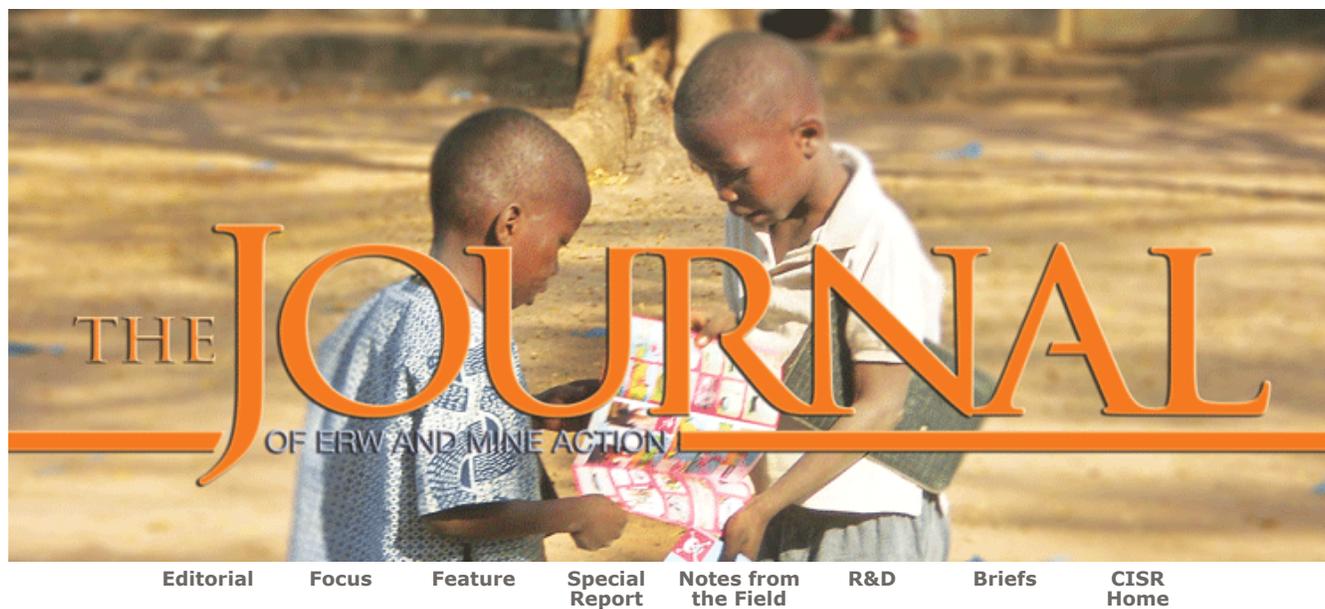
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Relationship between IMAS, NMAS and SOPs

by Faiz Paktian [Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining] - [view pdf](#)

To avoid confusion in application, this article clarifies the roles and responsibilities of mine action entities in relation to International Mine Action Standards, National Mine Action Standards and Standard Operating Procedures.

The relationship between International Mine Action Standards, National Mine Action Standards and Standard Operating Procedures seems fairly clear to many in mine action.^{1,2} However, in some mine action programs, a degree of misunderstanding and misinterpretation comes with the development of NMAS and their contents, or distinguishing between NMAS and SOPs.

NMAA	Approves/endorces NMAS
NMAC	1. Drafts NMAS in consultation with stakeholders 2. Develops SOPs for tasks it implements 3. Develops SOPs for the tasks it implements
Operators	Develop SOPs for the projects/tasks they implement

Defined roles of NMAA, NMAC and operators.
All graphics courtesy of the author.

Questions often raised include, "Why do we need IMAS when we have national standards?" or "Why do we need to develop National Mine Action Standards when we have national SOPs?"

To answer these questions, it is important to understand the differences between IMAS and NMAS and between NMAS and SOPs to clarify how they relate to each other and to appreciate how these documents are applied in a national mine

action program. It is also important to understand which mine action entity is responsible for each document and how consistency and compliance among these documents can be maintained.

IMAS

IMAS are the mine action community standards endorsed by the United Nations. They were developed to improve safety and efficiency and to promote a common and consistent approach to the conduct of mine action operations. IMAS follow the format of the International Organization for Standardization and draw on the three main treaties in international law, which deal with landmines and other explosive remnants of war:

1. *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 APMBBC)
2. *Amended Protocol II and Protocol V to the U.N Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons*
3. *Convention on Cluster Munitions*

In addition, IMAS provide general information on existing regulations and treaties which affect mine action, particularly those referring to basic human rights, clearance requirements, hazard-marking and general safety issues.

The central purpose of IMAS is to assist national mine action authorities in developing National Mine Action Standards. This means that national authorities should not reinvent the wheel by developing and establishing NMAS, but rather, carefully study the requirements of the individual IMAS and put national requirements in place, keeping in mind the local laws and norms of each respective country.

IMAS can be adapted as the national standards where the United Nations or another international body temporarily assumes the responsibility of a national mine action authority. In such cases, IMAS will be the *de facto* national standards until appropriate local modifications are established. They can also provide the framework for legal contracts between donors and implementing organizations.

Division of Responsibilities

To understand the relationship and differences between IMAS, NMAS and SOPs, understanding where responsibility lies is important in a national mine action program. Mine action is typically managed and implemented at three levels in a country:

- National mine action authority
- National mine action center
- Implementing organizations, also known as operators

The national mine action authority refers to the government committee, typically inter-ministerial, in mine-affected countries, and is responsible for the regulation and overall management of the national mine action program, as well as policy. The national mine action authority plays a critical leadership role in implementing national mine action policies, ensuring that international legal obligations are met and resources mobilized. An important function of the national mine action authority is to establish the regulatory framework for mine action by adopting clear national standards.

The national mine action center usually refers to the operational office of the national mine action authority. It is responsible for the day-to-day coordination of the national mine action program and acts as the focal point of mine action activities on the ground. The exact division of responsibilities between the national mine action authority and the national mine action center varies from country to country. However, a typical national mine action center does the following:

- Develops draft strategies and other policies for review and adoption by national mine action authority
- Carries out the policies of national mine action authority
- Develops annual plans for operations and coordinates the work of various organizations
- Conducts reconnaissance of hazardous areas
- Manages information and reports on the achievements of the overall national program
- Implements quality management (e.g., carries out accreditation, monitoring and post-clearance sampling)

In the development of NMAS and SOPs, the national mine action center holds two responsibilities:

1. On behalf of the national mine action authority, it takes responsibility for drafting NMAS through a consultative process involving all stakeholders.
2. As an implementing organization, the national mine action center needs to establish SOPs for the projects or tasks it implements, in accordance with the requirements of the national mine action standards.

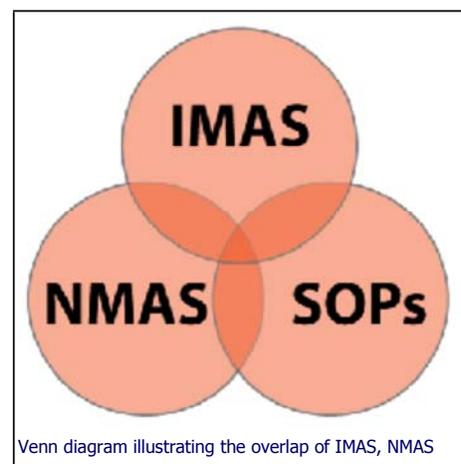
An implementing organization or operator refers to any government agencies, nongovernmental organizations, military units or commercial companies responsible for implementing mine action projects or tasks. The implementing organization may be a prime contractor, subcontractor, consultant or agent. It establishes SOPs for whatever tasks or projects it oversees, in accordance with NMAS requirements.

The roles and responsibilities of these entities need clear establishment in national legislation. In countries where one entity carries out two or three functions, the potential for mixing NMAS with SOPs is high. In such situations, national mine action standards do not carry much weight.

NMAS and SOPS

NMAS are not standard operating procedures. NMAS do not define the way in which mine action requirements should be achieved in the field—those are covered in national and local SOPs.

NMAS are agreements that set the minimum requirements for mine action in a given country. They adhere to IMAS principles, reflect local laws and conditions, are drafted through a consultative process involving all stakeholders and are endorsed by the national mine action authority. NMAS are legal documents regulating national mine action programs and apply to all implementing organizations equally, including national mine



action centers. NMAS discuss the government's minimum requirements; for example, identifying requirements for accreditation of demining organizations, land clearance and cancelling suspected hazardous areas. and SOPs.

SOPs are standard procedures which are established to achieve national requirements safely and efficiently. They are developed by implementing organizations keeping in mind their projects, tasks and subtasks. SOPs should conform to NMAS, and the national mine action authority or national mine action center should approve them on their behalf. SOPs differ from NMAS mainly in that they discuss **how** to do things; for example, how to carry out safe manual clearance, how to mark hazardous areas, how to prepare and document clearance progress reports, etc.



Deminers working in Afghanistan.
Photo courtesy of Matt Bolton.

SOPs of one organization may differ from another, depending on how it plans to achieve NMAS requirements. For example, to meet NMAS requirements for clearance (such as clearing land to a depth of 13 centimeters), one demining organization may carry out clearance using manual methods, while another uses demining machines or dogs. The SOPs of these two organizations will be very different, even though both strive to meet the national clearance requirements.

SOPs can also overlap with NMAS. In certain circumstances where SOPs have a national application, they may be an integral part of NMAS as an annex. For example, a relevant annex could outline standardized procedures for reporting operations, therefore ensuring all operators reported in the same format and with the same frequency. In this case, the reporting SOPs would become a part of NMAS. Operational details, such as how to use a prodder in manual demining or how to prepare explosive charges for a demolition, should not typically be placed in NMAS.

IMAS versus NMAS

The International Mine Action Standards were developed through a consultative process with representatives of the broader mine action community, including U.N. agencies, donors, national mine action authorities, national mine action centers, NGOs, commercial companies and independent individuals. As such, IMAS do not

belong to a particular country or region, but apply equally to all countries and situations. They do not have a legal standing unless a national authority has adopted them as national standards, or a contract or other legal instrument, such as a memorandum of understanding, specifies one or more IMAS

Having NMAS for each IMAS or capturing every IMAS requirement in NMAS is unnecessary. The chapters and contents of NMAS should, rather, be established based on a careful analysis of local requirements. As a minimum, a program may need to establish national requirements for information management, land release (surveys and clearance) and quality management (accreditation, quality assurance and quality control of mine action organizations). For others, such as medical support for deminers, provision of personal protective equipment, explosive ordnance disposal, etc., normative references should be made to the relevant IMAS, unless the requirements in the national program significantly differ from those specified in IMAS.

In general, IMAS are guidelines and contain recommendations for inclusion in NMAS or national SOPs. Contrarily, NMAS are a country's specific requirements. As such, the level of requirements in IMAS differs than the level articulated in NMAS. To clarify this further, IMAS use the terms **should** and **may**, and use only **shall** when safety is a concern. On the other hand, in a typical NMAS, the terms **shall** and **should** are generally used more frequently, or **may** is used rarely.³

In short, IMAS are broad guidelines and do not have a legal status, unlike NMAS, which are legally binding. However, IMAS should be referenced in order to ensure that no gaps exist in applying NMAS in the national context.

Inter-relationship

In summary, IMAS are developed and made available on an international platform to communicate best practice and efficient demining, in order to save national authorities' time and energy in establishing and developing national standards. NMAS and SOPs should build on IMAS' principles and recommendations. A clear line of communication among IMAS management and the national authorities is necessary as well as a clear link between these documents. Staff of the national mine action authority responsible for development and maintenance of the national standards should keep themselves up-to-date and participate in IMAS development and discussion.

Finally, while IMAS, NMAS and SOPs greatly differ in their application in a national mine action program, their relationships to each other are so close that changes in one will make changes in the other necessary. 🌐

Biography



Faiz Paktian is the Head of Standards at the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining and is responsible for the continual development and review of the International Mine Action Standards and the associated Technical Notes for Mine Action. He also provides assistance to the national authorities in the development of national mine action standards. He has been involved in mine action in a variety of roles for the last 22 years in several mine-affected countries. He holds a master of mechanical engineering from the Pole-technique Institute in Kabul, Afghanistan and a master of business administration from Preston University.

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Endnotes

1. "List of IMAS." *International Mine Action Standards*. <http://www.mineactionstandards.org/international-standards/imas-in-english/list-of-imas/>. Accessed 16 May 2012.
2. The U.N. Mine Action Service and the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining, with support from the mine action community represented through the IMAS review board, develop and maintain IMAS.
3. Even when IMAS are adopted as national standards in a country temporarily, the level of the requirements should be adopted accordingly, clarifying for example that "should" should be read "shall." Otherwise, they will create confusion in a given situation, as IMAS are not specific.

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