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Congoese Soldiers Learn to Combat UXO and Mines

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USAFRICOM

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sponders. Additionally, OASIS enables data-sharing with other reconstruction and relief organizations, allowing these groups to safely implement a wide range of field projects in Iraq.

Conclusion

Using OASIS and IMSMA, iMMAP works to make HMA in conflict and post-conflict areas safer and more efficient. The security-information gap hampers efforts by the U.N. and other national, international and nongovernmental stakeholders. With accurate information about security incidents and ERW locations, people with little field experience can make informed decisions, increasing the safety of all operations. iMMAP provides a solution for minimizing the security-information gap—not only does iMMAP provide quality information management and data-sharing, but it also offers greater security for the individuals implementing humanitarian programs through increased information availability. Additionally, Iraq’s ERW victims receive improved service and assistance to speed their return to productive lives as a result of iMMAP’s HMA information-management analysis.

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CISR staff member Blake Williamson contributed to this article.

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Figure 4. Map showing the ongoing efforts of PM/WRA to fund mine-action projects in Iraq.

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This article focuses on how U.S. Africa Command (U.S. AFRICOM) supports the Democratic Republic of the Congo in carrying out its mine-action objectives by providing train-the-trainer and supervisory services and mine-action equipment to the DRC.

by Staff Sergeant Amanda McCarty | U.S. AFRICOM |

“African solutions to African problems,” a motto for U.S. Africa Command engagement in Africa, stands as a reminder that helping African militaries self-sustain their operations is often just as important as the activity itself. Recent mine-action training in the Democratic Republic of the Congo provided an example of how U.S. AFRICOM incorporates sustainability into its activities with African partners. AFRICOM teamed with Congolese Armed Forces soldiers as part of the command’s humanitarian mine-action program to help re-establish a mine-action company at Camp Base in Kisangani, DRC.

In coordination with the Office of Weapons Removal and Abatement in the U.S. Department of State’s Bureau of Political-Military Affairs (PM/WRA), the command began its mission to assist the DRC’s Forces Armées de la République...
remnants of war. Activities including identification, removal, destruction and then to build and train a company to conduct mine-action after the country requested support.

Although Handicap International did not provide funding, they did contribute to the AFRICOM project in Kisangani with in-kind support in the form of training/awareness programs on humanitarian demining and the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-personal Mines and on their Destruction’s five pillars, as well as deconstruction components for explosives.

Contamination varies throughout DRC’s provinces; however, mine threats are believed to be significantly less than that of ERW. AFRICOM’s HMA training teaches identification and safe disposal of both. “Unexploded ordnance is the leading cause of injuries in Africa, surpassing that of landmines,” Holly points out.

Kisangani, located in the north-eastern province of Orientale, has had significant problems with mines and UXO as a result of successive wars and conflicts during the last two decades. About the size of Spain, the province has a population of 5.5 million, and suspect landmine/UXO-contaminated land totals about 8 million square meters (1,977 acres). This area represents more than half of the DRC’s remaining hazardous areas, making Kisangani a prime location for a mine-action company.

The Congolese Minister of Defense has expressed his intent for Camp Base to become a national demining training center, capable of assisting the population and working with the United Nations Mine Action Coordination Center in Kinshasa to conduct other operations in-country.

“HMA demand in Africa, not only in the DRC, is growing, and more assistance is needed,” says Holly. U.S. AFRICOM also conducts HMA training with militaries in Burundi, Chad, Kenya, Mozambique and Namibia, and expanding operations to Mauritania and Tanzania next year. "AFRICOM’s HMA program has expanded to the point that we’ve exceeded our capacity to sustain our current level of engagement," Holly points out. “We won’t be able to expand into new areas without passing the planning and execution phases of the program to [U.S. AFRICOM’s] component commands.”

The goal of HMA activities—specifically in the DRC—is enabling and helping equip the Congolese with the skills and abilities to safely address their mine problems. Something the AFRICOM HMA coordinator Jack Holly said the Congolese are well prepared for.

The final training with the mine-action company at Camp Base was completed 29 July 2011; however, Holly says this is not the end of AFRICOM’s engagement. “U.S. Africa Command’s HMA program will continue to support this important project into the future, promoting mine action, engagement and mentoring the FARDC/HMA instructors.”

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