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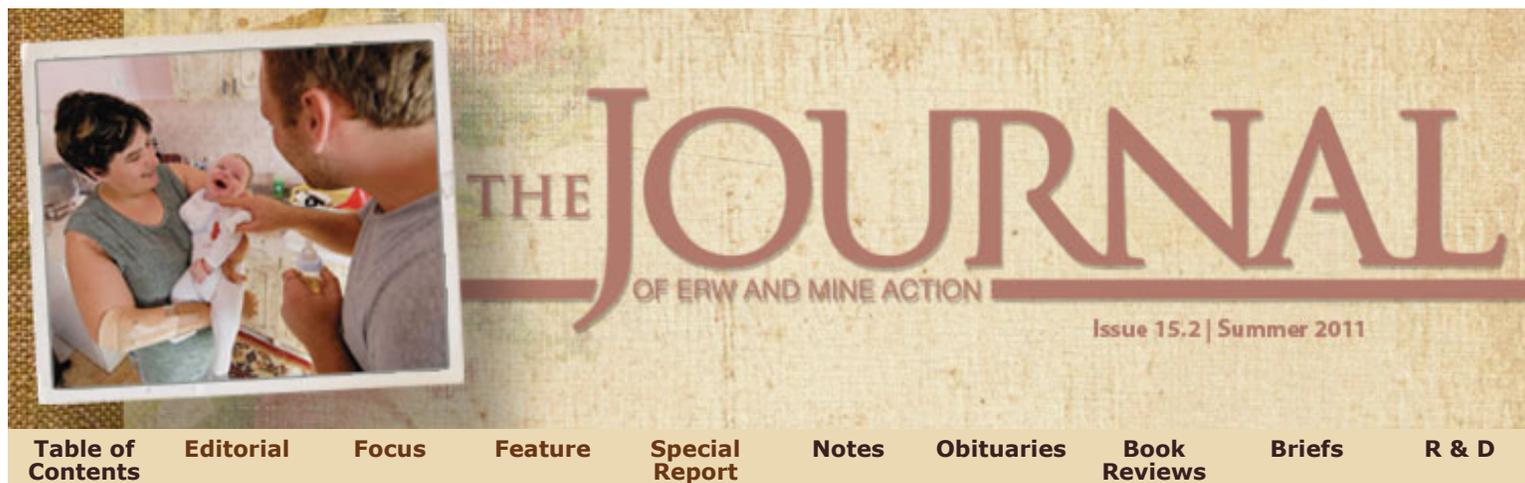
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Strategic Planning and Information Management in Angola

by Charles Downs [Downs Consulting]

CNIDAH is in charge of coordinating mine action and developing a mine-action strategic plan for Angola—one of the most mined countries in the world. To best implement its plan, in collaboration with national mine-action partners and with the help of the Survey Action Center, CNIDAH has begun to review and update its database of cleared suspected hazardous areas and those still in need of demining efforts.

In late 2009, Angola's National Inter-Sectoral Commission for Demining and Humanitarian Assistance (*Comissão Nacional Intersectorial de Desminagem e Assistência Humanitária*) contacted the Survey Action Center regarding potential support to complete and update the CNIDAH database, which is based on the Landmine Impact Survey conducted from 2004–07. CNIDAH was convinced that the database information failed to reflect the extent of operator work conducted and the LIS did not include areas of concern to infrastructure-development projects nor hazardous areas in communities inaccessible at the time of the LIS.

“To improve the national database, SAC began review of database discrepancies with requests to five major operators: The HALO Trust, National Demining Institute, MAG (Mines Advisory Group), *Menschen Gegen Minen* (People Against Landmines) and Norwegian People's Aid.”

Such issues are a continuing concern in many national programs. CNIDAH became increasingly aware of this problem when it tried to review progress under the 2006–11 National Mine Action Strategy, and its concern grew with the need to justify a request for extension of its State Party Article 5 obligations of the *Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-personnel Mines and on their Destruction* (also known as the Anti-personnel Mine Ban Convention or APMBBC). In response, CNIDAH proposed to conduct a new national survey. SAC confirmed its willingness to work with CNIDAH to update the database but suggested that all operator work be incorporated into the database prior to resurvey of areas included in the LIS. The German Federal Foreign Office and the United Nations Development Programme financed SAC's work.

The Review Procedure

To improve the national database, SAC began review of database discrepancies with requests to five major operators: The HALO Trust, National Demining Institute, MAG (Mines Advisory Group), *Menschen Gegen Minen* (People Against Landmines) and Norwegian People's Aid. They also requested copies of lists of all recorded CNIDAH tasks. In October 2010, datasets provided by HALO, MAG, MgM and NPA were compared to that of CNIDAH, with results presented in a multi-day workshop CNIDAH organized in November 2010. At the time of the November workshop, the CNIDAH database reflected a total of 452 eliminated suspected hazardous areas of the original LIS total of 3,293, meaning that roughly one in seven SHAs were resolved, resulting in 322 communities (one in six) free of known or suspected mined areas.

The number of tasks the operators reported resolved, however, was much greater. The five operators reported they had worked on a combined total of more than 2,000 tasks, but slightly less than one half of those tasks matched SHAs recorded in the CNIDAH database. Furthermore, even among the cases with matching SHA locator codes, the operator-reported status of the tasks (mostly completed/discredited) matched the status CNIDAH recorded in only about half of the cases.¹ Considerable work remained to reconcile the discrepancies. They hoped to discover that more work was completed than previously documented and provide a clearer perspective on the work remaining, strategic considerations for future planning and the steps needed to improve data quality.

“By the conclusion of the workshop, the number of eliminated SHAs had risen to 1,056, which is one-third of the total originally identified in the LIS, with 588 initially impacted communities (nearly one-third) free of known or suspected mine areas.”

Discussions at the November workshop were constructive. It was agreed that a CNIDAH team, including database and operations staff, should visit each operator for a detailed review of cases using all files available. SAC provided each party with a Microsoft® Excel file indicating which reports were in the CNIDAH database (according to the respective SHA locator code), which of those had divergent status and which did not match the database in other ways so each could begin its own review. The CNIDAH team visited HALO, MAG and NPA in January 2011. The joint working groups focused on the cases with matching locator codes but with divergent statuses. Documentation was confirmed for all cases reported by operators as “completed/discredited.” A breakdown in information flow from the province to CNIDAH headquarters was identified as a major contributor to the discrepancies. Operators reflected some cases as “active” which had been resolved by other operators. Lapses in Information Management System for Mine Action data entry left some records in the database as “active” when, in fact, CNIDAH had processed the completion report.

	High	Medium	Low	No SHAs	Total
Initial LIS	40	455	1493	0	1988
Nov-10	20	350	1296	322	1988
Jan-11	16	283	1101	588	1988

Table 1: CNIDAH Database Review and Community Impact Changes

(Click image to enlarge)

In January 2011, the Planning and Information Management for Land Release Workshop further reviewed the revised CNIDAH dataset, identifying several issues. These included missing links within IMSMA, duplicate locator codes used for different SHAs and obvious errors in operator locator codes (e.g., wrong province code), which when corrected, matched with existing CNIDAH records. By the conclusion of the workshop, the number of eliminated SHAs had risen to 1,056, which is one-third of the total originally identified in the LIS, with 588 initially impacted communities (nearly one-third) free of known or suspected mine areas. Table 1 indicates the number of high-, medium- and low-impact communities identified at the time of the LIS, prior to the review process reported in this article and as of the beginning of

February 2011.

Future Plans

CNIDAH plans to visit the operators to review records and resolve discrepancies together. With the assistance of the original four nongovernmental organizations, this review will focus on tasks containing unmatched locator codes. It will also be a comprehensive review of all reports. It is suspected that more work was completed than recorded. Therefore, all parties expect the review will result in more recorded work in the national database, enabling more accurate future planning.

Factors leading to discrepancies identified during this process of joint review include the following:

- Breakdown in flow of reports between the CNIDAH provincial office and headquarters
- Errors in SHA locator codes submitted by operators
- Missing links between records in IMSMA
- SHA identified during LIS as affecting more than one community but only one was selected for the database, and the operator may have used a different community code for reporting
- New SHA not previously identified (small percentage expected)
- Task concluded prior to the LIS and thus not belonging in the national database
- Operational subdivision of large SHA into multiple SHAs for ease of tracking and handover

In addition to the comprehensive review to resolve existing discrepancies, a few basic steps were identified to minimize the recurrence of the preceding factors. These include:

- Reduce risk of breakdown in data flow by providing for simultaneous direct transmission of reports from operators to CNIDAH's provincial and HQ offices, ensuring that all reports are provided to the CNIDAH database unit
- Data quality-assurance efforts including 100 percent review of manual data entry against records received, and weekly testing for known errors to ensure that data entered accurately reflects reports received
- Monthly return by CNIDAH to operators of data-entry report with all changes in records to enable operators to verify and correct any detectable errors (to ensure that data entered into the national database is correct and matches operator data)
- Periodic exchange of datasets between CNIDAH and operators to enable broader review
- Public availability of all information to inform potential users and enable correction
- Several of the above steps can be replaced under IMSMA ^{New Generation} with operator data entry
- Continuing close cooperation between CNIDAH and operator database staff

As this CNIDAH-operator effort becomes standard practice, the national database will provide a complete and up-to-date picture of the landmine problem and its progress. ↴

Biography



Charles Downs is a mine-action management consultant. He has worked in international development for more than 30 years and was Chief of the Mine Action Unit of the United Nations Office for Project Services from 1999–2004. He has been part of the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining and SAC efforts to encourage national governments to integrate land release in their survey and clearance efforts, and in recent years has worked closely with the national mine-action programs of Angola, Colombia and Mozambique. Downs is also a Professor of International Project Management at New York University's Wagner School (U.S.).

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Endnotes

1. HALO Trust, MAG and NPA were all LIS implementing partners and work today on tasks which they identified. Through Non-Technical and Technical Survey, they have discredited nearly as many tasks as they have cleared.

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