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## Mine-action Success Story: Nepal

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# Mine-action Success Story: Nepal

After a decade of conflict in Nepal, the signing of the 2006 Comprehensive Peace Agreement initiated mine clearance. By December 2009, all explosives in the Maoist cantonment sites had been eliminated. This article examines the extent of Nepal's mine-action successes, while offering a number of lessons for mine-afflicted states to consider in their programs.

by Stephen Robinson [ United Nations Mine Action Team ]

The name Nepal conjures up images of huge mountains and fearless warriors, but few realize that a fierce insurgency and subsequent “people’s war” claimed more than 13,000 lives and disrupted the entire country’s development between 1996 and 2006. The conflict officially came to an end in November 2006, when the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoists) and the government of Nepal signed the Comprehensive Peace Agreement. However, the war left behind a violent legacy of landmines and explosive remnants of war.

The war was fought with government security forces holding key points and using minefields and booby-trapped munitions to disrupt Maoist Army attacks and the Maoist Army using handmade explosive devices such as socket bombs,<sup>1</sup> as well as other improvised explosive devices in place of rifles. Consequently, the insurgency left behind ERW and the retained knowledge of how to design, produce and use IEDs, which various armed factions use to this day.

The CPA contains the provision that both sides mark and clear minefields and other ERW within 60 days of the signing. While this timeline was far too ambitious for the parties to keep, it did demand mine-action and other ERW issues be addressed. The CPA also contains the provision that the Maoist Army’s weapons be secured in cantonments, including IEDs and their components.

## The U.N.’s Role

Upon deployment of the U.N. Mission in Nepal to support the parties in bringing the peace process to a logical conclusion, the U.N.

Department of Political Affairs asked the U.N. Mine Action Service to provide a small project to support them. As a result, UNMAS established the UNMIN Mine Action Unit to assist in the management and destruction of IEDs and explosive components.

The UNMIN MAU engaged ArmorGroup, a commercial company, to implement IED management and destruction held in the seven Maoist cantonment sites and satellite camps. ArmorGroup then conducted an audit of the items held in these military camps, dividing them into “safe” and “unsafe” and proceeding with the immediate destruction of the unsafe items. These operations were coordinated through the Joint Military Coordination Committee, a body chaired by UNMIN that hears grievances and discusses possible issues involving the CPA.

The first phase of IED destruction was completed in 2008, destroying 18,642 items. During this time, the Nepal Army asked the UNMIN MAU to provide training and advice to its demining teams. Therefore, UNMIN MAU started a small mine-action project to train the Nepal Army in demining techniques and provide international advisers as team managers.

At the time, UNMIN and UNMIN MAU were due to close in 2008. However, the government of Nepal requested that UNMAS remain to continue supporting the Nepal Army’s demining efforts.

This work is not the first U.N.-supported mine-action activity in Nepal, however, as UNICEF has been involved in the area since 2005, providing risk education and developing globally recognized emergency resources

that have since been exported to other mine-action programs. UNICEF has also taken great initiatives to further public awareness in the identification and differentiation of IEDs and landmines.

After consultation with other U.N. agencies, UNMAS implemented the United Nations Mine Action Team concept currently used with the Inter-agency Standing Committee for Mine Action at the field level. As a result, UNMAS and UNICEF in Nepal joined forces, forming UNMAT Nepal.

With the establishment of UNMAT, the clearance focus shifted from employing international staff in management roles to training the Nepal Army to run all aspects of minefield clearance. This vision is embodied in a two-year Capacity Development Plan, jointly devel-

quality-management role of UNMAT for the IEDs/booby traps laid around security posts and other key points. Nepal expects to have all its minefields cleared in 2011 and a government body established to address residual issues.

#### Is This a Success?

For a number of reasons, Nepal's mine-action program has indeed been a success. First and foremost, its minefields will be cleared within a short time frame, thus freeing the country from the impact of mines. The government is engaged in addressing the issues and provides a number of resources to achieve its mine-action objectives, such as the in-kind contribution of army personnel for demining. Mine and ERW issues are being



Final demolition of explosives stockpiled at Maoist Cantonment Site 6.

PHOTO COURTESY OF UNITED NATIONS MISSION IN NEPAL—PUBLIC INFORMATION OFFICE

oped by the Nepal Army and UNMAT, that details the capacity-development requirements of a company-sized group within the Nepal Army to complete the clearance of all the minefields within Nepal.

The development of UNMAT-Nepal included joint planning and strategies for U.N. support. UNMAT has successfully been addressing mine, IED and other ERW challenges, including risk education, advocacy for the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention and clearance since then. Although clearance operations have been restricted to minefields, there are plans to expand the

addressed in a holistic fashion with the U.N.'s joint, coordinated support, utilizing appropriate implementing partners and resources. In summary, Nepal's landmine clearance is underway and will be completed within the stipulated time period.

#### What Made it a Success?

Nepal provides an excellent environment for mine action. The government is supportive, and highly educated staff members run a number of potential partner organizations.

The CPA provides a strong legal basis for mine action to be conducted, while the Joint Monitoring Coordination Committee acts as a conduit to solve problems between the military parties. ArmorGroup, under contract with UNMIN, destroyed all unsafe explosive items held in the Maoist cantonment sites in 2008, with the rest being destroyed in December 2009. While the eradication of explosives in the Maoist cantonment was not technically difficult, UNMIN and ArmorGroup spent a great deal of time in negotiations with the Maoist Army. The ultimate destruction of more than 52,600 items of unexploded ordnance was a landmark event in the peace process, illustrating a positive development during a time when the peace process was stalling.

Furthermore, Nepal's minefields are marked and mostly recorded, and the areas with IEDs and booby-traps are also largely known, although not to the same extent as the minefields. The United Nations, through the UNMAT concept, is addressing the issue in a coordinated and supportive fashion. The commercial company used for the initial operations was successful in addressing the emergency needs and establishing a baseline of mine-action knowledge that UNMAT later utilized. Finally, funding for these activities was available in a timely and consistent manner.

#### Lessons Learned

UNMAS learned a number of lessons throughout the course of the mine-action program in Nepal:

**Planning:** There is a need to plan for the end of mine-action programs, and Program Managers



Nepal Army deminer at work.

PHOTO COURTESY OF UNMAT

should have an idea of how the program will evolve from its initial establishment to its completion.

**Organizational involvement:** Research should be conducted to determine the right organizations to use in the clearance process, as non-governmental organizations and U.N. staff exhibit diverse strengths and weaknesses. In the case of Nepal, it was vital to employ commercial companies at the program's start, while utilizing U.N. Technical Advisors from the middle to end of the project's clearance component proved successful.

**Funding:** Funding should be secured in the early stages of the project. The Nepal program was able to obtain funding to achieve its end state early as donors were willing to fund the project's short time frame.

**Coordination:** U.N. agencies need to coordinate and work together, and it is important to recognize and accept the differences in processes and capacities.

#### Conclusion

Nepal's mine-action success and lessons serve as a framework for other mine-affected countries to follow, demonstrating the triumph of combined military, NGO, U.N. and commercial efforts. The CPA and a supportive government further facilitated Nepal's resolution of its mine problem. †

See Endnotes, Page 81



**Steve Robinson** has been involved in mine action for 11 years, holding posts with various organizations, including the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the United Nations Mine Action Service. Recently, he oversaw the development of U.N. Mine Action Team–Nepal, the first time this multi-agency concept has been deployed on the ground. Robinson is now the Senior Technical Advisor to *Programa Presidencial para la Acción Integral contra Minas Antipersonal* (the Presidential Program for Mine Action) in Colombia.

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