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Linking Mine Action and Economic Development

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There is often a separation between mine-action programs and economic development, which is unfortunate because mine action is an important part of economic progress. This article focuses on potential strategies for the integration of support to economic development into mine-action programs.

A repaired aqueduct in Azerbaijan supported by ANAMA. *All photos courtesy of Charles Downs*

How can national mine-action programs support economic development most effectively? This article, which reviews and discusses current practices in a variety of national programs, suggests the answer: Be proactive and engage directly with individual public and private investors to identify and remove landmines and explosive remnants of war obstructing their projects. Such engagement reinforces the *de facto* practice of some programs and represents a significant change in approach for many programs and donors. The review also identified several other measures that should be taken to ensure positive results of such engagement for both economic development and mine action. This article presents highlights of a Survey Action Center study conducted from September 2008 to September 2009, which was funded by the Office of Weapons Removal and Abatement (PM/WRA) in the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Political-Military Affairs.

Study Background

From September 2008 to December 2009, the author led a SAC project that sought to improve planning for economic development and mine action by increasing the use of mine-action information by development actors. Greater use of this information by such actors will improve the planning of their investment projects, improve planning for mine-action operations to support the projects and increase the overall contribution of mine action to development.

The first phase of the project was a broad survey of national mine-action programs regarding information requests from non-mine-action organizations. The results of the initial survey (summarized in an article in *The Journal*, Issue 13.1)[1] provided a general map of organizations that have requested mine-action information, and the types of information and other support provided to them.[2]

The first phase was based on the experience and impressions of mine-action organizations. The project continued to examine the issues in greater depth through casework in three focus countries—Azerbaijan, Cambodia and Colombia—and, in particular, through interviews with economic-development actors.[3] The SAC team derived lessons based on this understanding of development organization needs and mine-action programs' best practices. The results complement other international advice on linking mine action and development, such as the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining Linking Mine Action and Development project,[4] which tends to focus on either community development or national development policy. This project brings greater attention to private-sector requirements and opportunities. The key lessons are summarized below.[5]

The Missing Link

Mine-action programs often proclaim the importance of mine action for development. Most are quite forthcoming with information when asked, and some have made their entire database readily available, whether on CD-ROM (Angola) or posted online (Colombia,[6] Croatia[7]). Often missing from this approach, however, is direct outreach to individual development actors in order to identify and eliminate the specific obstacles that landmines and ERW may pose to their development projects. For mine-action programs to support development successfully, national mine-action programs and demining organizations must understand the specific needs of development organizations.

Landmine and ERW problems are, by definition, embedded in very specific parcels of land. When an investment project is sited on or will cross a suspected hazardous area, the development actor needs information to identify the possible problem, including survey support in the field and possibly clearance support. These requirements of specific projects and actors can be best identified through direct discussion. While some development actors may know to request such support, many will not be aware of the possible obstacle until they encounter problems in the field. In order to minimize the disruption, costs and risks that this discovery may cause, the mine-action program should actively reach out to identify and work with development actors whose projects in mine-affected regions may face such problems. To do so effectively requires an attitude that recognizes public and private development actors as "clients" as well as "stakeholders." Mine action should ensure that its clients (i.e., the development actors) are satisfied with the support they receive and are able to be successful on their own terms.


A suspected hazardous area requiring further survey in Bosnia.

Identifying Relevant Development Actors

It is a mistake to assume that most development actors in mine-affected regions are themselves affected by landmines. Experience indicates that many development actors operate in mine-affected regions without ever encountering landmine/ERW obstacles to their programs. Among the most striking discoveries in the discussions with development actors during this study was that many of the bilateral and nongovernmental organizations conducting health and education projects in the most mine-affected regions had concluded that the landmine problem did not affect their own programs. They were aware that their projects were in mine-affected regions, and some of them included risk education as part of their staff security briefings, but the issue of landmines was not a factor in their programming or daily activities. This separation between mine-action activities and development organizations may be explained in part by the fact that the schools, hospitals and clinics where they work have already been deemed safe and because their staff always travels with local colleagues on safe routes. In another example, Colombian farmers producing for export reported that their activities were made more difficult due to conflict in their areas, but did not find that landmines had a direct impact on their ability to produce and transport products to market.

The general survey of mine-action programs summarized in the first project report presented an extensive mapping of non-mine-action organizations that in one country or another has requested mine-action information. While the global mapping provides a good starting point for any given country, the development organizations that are actually relevant can only be determined through proactive outreach in the specific country. The development actors likely to be relevant are concentrated among those who undertake infrastructure projects, natural resource exploration and extraction, integrated rural development and nature tourism. For the three focus countries in the second phase of the project, the development actors identified some of their projects affected by landmines and ERW as:

- IDP resettlement
- Mineral exploration
- Petroleum exploration
- Petroleum pipelines
- Electric power transmission
- Road construction
- Railroad rehabilitation
- Integrated rural development
- Tourism, national parks and historic sites

The national mine-action authority should actively map the non-mine-action organizations interested in mine-action information and conduct targeted outreach to individual development actors to identify projects that could face landmine/ERW obstacles and plan jointly to overcome such obstacles. The outreach should develop an inventory of planned projects requiring mine-action assistance, identify the services that may be required, inform the development actors of the services and operators available, and provide assistance with developing statements of work for eventual tenders or contracts. The effectiveness of the outreach should be periodically assessed through client surveys to understand what information and assistance is most useful for development actors, how it is used and what else may be required.

Information Development Actors Find Useful

EMAO Technical Survey in support of highway construction.

Development actors generally use only a small subset of the extensive information contained in a mine-action database. While they welcome general hazard information maps at the national and regional levels, development actors' primary interest is for hazard maps and accident information about the specific sites they are considering for their investments. In addition to information normally already contained in the national database, they seek information about areas where the site or route of their specific project will cross suspect land. When there are such areas, development actors generally want the information necessary to arrange for survey support to determine whether they can safely work in the specified area and eventually have mine action authorities or operators clear the land, if necessary.

On the other hand, there is a range of information in the mine-action database that has proven to be of little (if any) use to development actors. This information includes data that may be of use to the mine-action community, such as minefield maps, landmine impact survey blockages and impact scores, types and number of mines found, soil characteristics, and public facilities and social services available in the region. It also includes broader socioeconomic information that mine-action programs often collect, such as community population and economic base, which is not generally used by development actors.

Measures to Improve Mine-action Information

The mine-action database is the best information available at the national level, yet the quality of the information varies greatly within and among countries. This information is the starting point for responding to development actors seeking knowledge about the hazards they may face in their investment projects. Existing information should be considered as "public information," which should be easily available to all. Improving the information in the database depends on continuing efforts at three levels.

First, there is a need in all countries to continually update the national database: more and better sources become available and better qualified survey teams provide more accurate information; regular use of suspect land may greatly reduce suspicion, which should be reflected in the database; and demining activities carried out by all accredited operators should also be reflected in the database. Many national programs have decided to conduct a full resurvey to capture such changes. Second, continuing efforts on data quality management are important to ensure that the multiple sources of potential error are minimized and the data collected are accurately reflected in the database. Third, in those places where a development project crosses a suspected hazardous area, there is need for survey to provide more precise information regarding the area of concern to the project.

An ongoing public-information campaign should highlight landmines as a humanitarian issue affecting victims and communities, as a safety issue, and as a development issue, while identifying the national mine-action authority as a one-stop resource for landmine problems. Furthermore, the NMAA should provide easy access to the list of accredited operators, their contact information and any noteworthy comments on their track record, such as safety record and compliance with national standards. The operators, particularly NGOs that may have worked in specific areas for long periods of time, are a valuable source of information at the project-site level. Finally, the NMAA should seek to create broader awareness of the landmine problem by stimulating research and debate in academic and public policy circles regarding landmines and their impact on the country. In addition to improved qualityof information available in the database, these measures will increase the ability of development actors to pursue their own interests.

Services Required by Development Actors

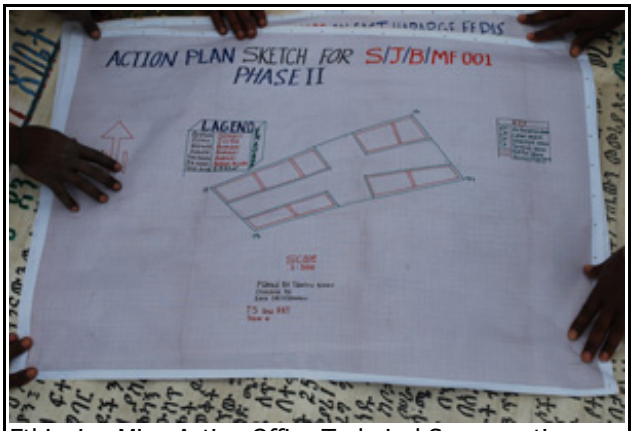
Once the available information indicates that a project involves a SHA, the development actor typically requests a specific range of mine-action services. These services are most often provided by mine-action operators, whereas the database is typically managed by the national mine-action authority. The first mine-action service required is for a survey team to inspect the planned project site or accompany the field design team. The survey team will identify specific areas that contain risk, provide advice regarding alternatives and their feasibility, and plan or conduct demining of those suspected areas that are unavoidable. In addition, the development project staff who will work in or around the suspected area typically require mine-risk education.

Adjustments Needed

The key to effective mine-action support to development is for NMAAs to accept that they are responsible for providing service to development clients. This responsibility is already recognized in some countries, but in others this approach implies several adjustments to the institutional framework of mine action. First, acceptance of support to economic-development actors as part of the role of mine action implies recognition that there are multiple priority sets to which mine action should respond. These concerns include the following:

- Future victims
- Areas prioritized by national government, including reduction of socioeconomic impact
- Areas prioritized by local communities
- Areas prioritized by economic-development actors

Second, development actors are interested in specific parts of the national territory, and the mine-action authority can respond more effectively if it too is present in the same region. In general terms this level of cooperation implies an increased organizational focus at the sub-national level, which usually involves some degree of decentralization. Third, survey teams equipped with the technical capability to resolve small explosive ordnance tasks may be a crucial operational asset to support development actors, and the number of survey teams should be increased in most programs. Fourth, national heads of Technical Survey in the countries visited are convinced that national mine-action standards could be modified to increase efficiency of land released by survey without loss of safety. Such review of national mine-action standards regarding use of assets for survey would build on considerable national experience. Finally, just as clearance certificates document that land has been cleared of mines, there is a need for a certificate to document that previously suspect areas have been inspected according to national standards and found to be "areas without evidence of hazards." Such documentation is a business requirement of many development actors to obtain insurance for equipment and workers, or for payment under World Bank or other development-bank-financed projects.



Ethiopian Mine Action Office Technical Survey action plan.

In terms of broader public policy, there are three measures that governments should take to ensure the mine-action component is considered whenever relevant to an economic-development project. First, the government should adopt the policy that all development projects, regardless of source of funds, be required to consider demining costs whenever relevant. If a project were to encounter a landmine/ERW obstacle requiring clearance, it would be the responsibility of the project and its funder to find a resolution. This policy would be enforced through the Ministries of Finance (national budget resources), Development Cooperation (grants and international NGOs), and Private Sector Investment. Second, given the importance of mineral and petroleum projects as clients for mine-action support, all proposals for territorial concessions should be required to have a risk-mitigation plan and financing as part of the approval process. Third, broadly speaking, landmine/ERW risks should be treated in a manner similar to that applied to seismic areas, flood plains and other environmental risks. This way of handling a threat would mean that it is the responsibility of the developer to obtain confirmation from the appropriate authority whether there is such a risk, and then to take appropriate action to mitigate any risk identified.

Implications for Donors

There are a few implications for donors that can be drawn from this review of national mine-action efforts to support economic development. Of course, donors should include funding for mine-action requirements in the development projects they support. More generally, donors should recognize that national mine-action programs are broader than

just the humanitarian activities donors most often support, and that national ownership of the program may imply support to priorities different from the solely humanitarian concerns with which many donors are comfortable. This divergence is increasingly true as programs continue and largely resolve the critical humanitarian issues of their first years. Thus, donors should not try to constrain national mine-action programs to respond to some clients rather than others but should instead support transparent priority-setting processes that integrate development planning and other priorities.

Conclusion

Mine-action support to economic development is most effective when it is provided in direct support to development actors that are prepared to promptly carry out their project when the landmine obstacle is removed. Such cases are best identified through active outreach by the mine-action center. The center should identify such actors and the potential landmine/ERW obstacles their projects will face so that the necessary actions to remove those obstacles are included in planning for both the project and mine action priorities. While national mine-action authorities usually respond well to requests for information, most have not yet structured themselves to actively seek out and engage with development actors, to recognize development actors as clients who should be supported by mine action in order to achieve their own project goals, and to ensure that they are satisfied with the support they received. To carry this objective out effectively requires continuing improvement in available information, expansion of a technically qualified survey capacity and adjustments in public policy to ensure that the costs of demining are properly provided for as part of project costs whenever relevant. It also implies a change in approach for many mine-action organizations and donors to accept these public and private development actors and their priorities as increasingly important clients of the mine-action program. These highlights are developed in greater detail in the SAC project reports.[2] SAC looks forward to assisting interested national programs in strengthening their support to economic development.

This material was presented to the Contact Group for Landmines and Development at the Second Review Conference of the Ottawa Mine Ban Convention. SAC gratefully acknowledges Canadian International Development Agency support in its participation in this panel in Cartagena, Colombia. More details are available in the full report.[2] Questions, comments and suggestions are welcome (see contact information below).

Biography

Charles Downs is a development, management and mine-action 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 is currently conducting an evaluation of the GICHD Information Management Section support to mine action programs. Downs is also a Professor of International Project Management at New York University's Wagner School.

Endnotes

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4. *Geneva International Center for Humanitarian Demining*. Geneva, Switzerland. http://www.gichd.org/operational-assistance-research/linking-mine-action-and-development/overview/. Accessed 24 March 2010.
5. The author greatly appreciates the information provided and discussions with mine-action and development actors in all countries. The conclusions are richer and more realistic as a result of their inputâ€"but remain the responsibility of the author rather than of any programs or organizations mentioned.
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