

Making Land Release in Mozambique Operational

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Mozambique's national program for land release has cleared many Suspected Hazardous Areas in the past eight years, but the *Instituto Nacional de Desminagem* (National Demining Institute) aims to make the program even more effective. In March 2009, IND collaborated with the Survey Action Center to host a workshop at which land release terminology and concepts were discussed, hoping that improved survey methodologies would lead to a more efficient land-release process. The workshop resulted in the creation of national land-release draft elements and criteria that will help to develop practical land-release standards in the near future.

Mozambique's *Instituto Nacional de Desminagem* is interested in the land-release approach as a practical method to increase the efficient use of demining resources and to more rapidly eliminate the threats to life and obstacles to development caused by landmines and other explosive remnants of war found in Suspected Hazardous Areas. Land release emphasizes the continuous collection of information to determine where mine clearance is necessary to eliminate community suspicion and support full use of land.

In Mozambique, land release builds on existing good practices of the national program. The 2000–02 Landmine Impact Survey estimated there were 558 square kilometers (215 square miles) of suspected areas, with 1,374 SHAs affecting 791 communities. While approximately 60 square kilometers (23 square miles) have been cleared over the past eight years, the current best estimate is that 12 square kilometers (5 square miles) of SHAs remain. The difference is primarily the result of cancellation through continuing survey and improving information. In addition, demining operators regularly clear only a portion of a demining task area, with the remainder reduced through “lighter” methods. Nonetheless, a majority of tasks completed in 2008 detected no mines or explosive remnants of war. There is still room for improvement, and a deliberate application of the land-release approach is expected to improve the efficiency and progress of the national program as a whole.



A visit to Handicap International task site—the landowner confirmed that the Suspected Hazardous Area on the right (identified a decade earlier) was actually overgrown by choice and not because of mine threat.

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The Workshop

Discussion regarding land release in Mozambique began in 2008 when IND management, with the support of the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining, introduced the subject within IND and with other stakeholders. As a second step, IND invited the Survey Action Center to help develop a policy approach and facilitate a workshop for its operations/quality-assurance staff. The purpose of the workshop was to develop operational procedures related to



IND-SAC workshop participants discuss principles of land release.



Workshop participants visit HI task site.

land release, particularly through Non-technical and Technical Survey, for quality assurance of the process, and for the documentation of results. These issues are particularly relevant in Mozambique, since land-release activities will most often be carried out by demining operators, with the IND providing quality assurance and acceptance of the results. Thus, IND staff would need to understand the typical operator steps to conduct land release through survey and the appropriate measures for quality assurance of that process.

The workshop effectively combined conceptual discussions, working groups and site visits. The training centered on a few key topics: quality management and quality assurance for mine action, concepts and methods for land release, land release through Non-technical and Technical Survey methods, specific criteria for land release relevant for Mozambique, and practical use of the criteria. This resulted in agreement on draft elements for two important documents: “Elements of National Standards for Land Release” and “Criteria for Release of Suspect Areas Through Survey.” Additionally, the workshop resulted in the revision of the terms of reference, procedures and forms for quality assurance of demining.

The participants evaluated the workshop in very positive terms. They believed that the combination of theory and practice provided a level of understanding and technical capacity that will enable them to participate in the field with operators and communities to objectively and responsibly evaluate and validate suspect areas proposed to be cancelled, confirmed or cleared. Participants emphasized the need for quality-assurance teams to be directly involved with the reclassification of SHAs, that this should be done in permanent dialogue with the local communities and operators on the ground, and that this will result in greater confidence in the data eventually contained in the official information-management system.

Implementation

The next steps for starting to use the land-release approach in Mozambique include:

1. Finish the current internal IND discussion regarding the draft norms and criteria
2. Expand the discussion to include humanitarian and commercial operators active in the country
3. Refine the draft norms and criteria
4. Determine how the operators will apply the norms

This will lead to a pilot application of the interim standard, criteria and procedures for land release, which will be evaluated after a period of six months.

The implementation of the methodological principles of land release through survey is expected to provide greater rigor and objectivity both in the process of reduction/cancellation of suspect mined areas and in the treatment of information regarding newly identified SHAs. The IND leadership looks forward to the improvements this may bring to the national program as well as to the communities, institutions and individuals whose lives and work are still affected by the remaining landmine problem in Mozambique. This experience should also bring useful lessons for other programs.

The IND staff in the workshop concluded that the IND should take the lead in developing national land-release standards and procedures in full discussion with operators and other stakeholders, and that the national database should be promptly updated to reflect land-release decisions.

Draft Elements and Criteria

Draft elements for national land release standards include the following:

- Each specific SHA should be identified and investigated; that is, the process is not simply completed by general actions or adjustments to consolidated totals in the database.
- Objective criteria should be established to decide whether a given area will be reclassified or kept as previously defined. The criteria should not be applied mechanically; they may be applied to entire SHAs or to portions thereof.
- Local communities must be involved in the land-release process, both as sources of information and in the acceptance of any decision regarding released land.
- The decision to cancel a SHA should be made in agreement between the IND, the operator and the community. Cancellation should not be forced on any party and should be reflected in the signature of representative parties on the corresponding documentation.
- Areas should be handed over by IND to the community promptly after conclusion of work.

Draft criteria for release of specific parcels of land through survey developed in the workshop for further discussion included:

- Any specific area that has been used regularly for at least five years without evidence of mines



Working groups debate operational criteria for land release.

- Agricultural land that has been plowed for planting by animal or mechanical means for two years without any evidence of mines
- Areas where the local population has freely moved for two years without evidence of mines
- Areas where surface vegetation has been removed by hoe for planting of cereal or other crops, where seeds are planted about 30 centimeters (12 inches) apart, for five years without evidence of mines
- Areas used intensively as pasture (e.g., cattle grazing) for two years without evidence of mines
- Forested areas cleared by powered logging equipment without evidence of mines should be cleared immediately
- Forested areas used for gathering wood for fuel, roots, etc., without evidence of mines should be investigated further

- Areas subject to other types of intensive use without evidence of mines for two or more years
- Areas sufficiently checked by Technical Survey without finding any evidence of mines
- When the local population and a technical team agree that there is no evidence of mines

The IND will finalize the standards and detailed criteria in discussion with the demining operators active in Mozambique. This will provide the framework to implement land release and increase the efficiency of mine action in Mozambique. These changes will improve the national program and may provide an interesting paradigm for other national programs and organizations. ♦



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