Linking Mine Action and Development: Local-level Benefits and Challenges

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There are few things more discouraging than land that has been painstakingly demined only to remain unused following clearance. Cleared land that goes unused because of that land not development priority is a waste of money and effort. In addition, the risk of deminer injury or death for no obvious benefit is frustrating and demoralizing.

If land that is considered a high priority for community or economic development can also be prioritised for clearance, there can be some valuable results and the benefits can multiply. Linking mine action and development not only helps to eliminate wasteful demining but also has the ability to optimise the impact of mine action in several other ways. However, linking mine action with development has some serious consequences for the way that mine clearance undertakes both prioritization and clearance at a local level.

Broad interest in linking mine action and development has led to a "contact group," consisting primarily of representatives attending the States Parties meetings for the Anti-Personal Mine Ban Convention. The group also includes other invited partners and is coordinated through the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining. In June 2009, the GICHD published extensive draft guidelines for linking MA and development for use by demining partners, mine-affected states, official development agencies and mine action organisations.

What Does "Linking MA and Development" Really Mean?

One current definition of this approach states that linking mine action and development simply means that mine action is aligned with broader development priorities and programs at all levels. This definition is based on the recognition that landmines and explosive remnants of war constrain post conflict reconstruction and development. Linking the two is not a single option, however, nor is it a simple yes or no decision. There is an entire spectrum of possible relationships between mine action and development, with no one correct approach suitable for all situations. Here are some of the possibilities:

Integration. In this final possibility, mine action is fully integrated with development, as prioritization and implementation are based on the overall development impact and not the mine action impact alone. A low priority suspected hazardous area that is a severe blockage to development might be cleared ahead-of medium- or high priority SHAs, as defined by mine-action priorities. This approach goes a significant step further than the use of socioeconomic data in prioritization by using key development goals as the overriding criteria. Mine-action methods, especially demining methods, may need to be significantly altered to increase overall development impact. This approach to demining is likely to result in mine clearance that is more expensive and less efficient than optimised mine clearance. However, less efficient costing in the mine action part of a project may allow for far greater gains in costs and efficiency in the overall development project. Full linkage of mine action and development requires that a large-scale development view be used in setting priorities and determining costs.

Tying can be a key requirement for linkage between mine action and development. Selecting the tasks that are going to hold up the "critical path" for the overall development activities as the highest priority is different from a national or local mine-action center setting priorities to clear as efficiently as possible. This may not be an easy or entirely comfortable shift in roles and responsibilities. Enabling this transition without causing mine-action specialists to feel that they have to play "second fiddle" to development planners while ensuring that they do not feel that this transition diluted the authority and lowered the standing of mine action, will require care. The closer the linkages, the more change may be necessary to mine clearance prioritization and implementation.

No relationship, no linkage. In this case, mine action and development work independently, with separate goals, and separate prioritization and project selection mechanisms. Development agencies adhering to this approach are likely to regard contaminates areas as insurmountable, deciding not to plan development projects in these areas.

Leader-follower relationship. Usually, development staff wait for de-mining to be completed before starting development projects. Sometimes, mine action waits until development funding is available before starting mine-action work. Initial planning of development work in areas intended to be cleared may be undertaken, but there is a likely delay between the end of demining and the start of development activities.

Development priorities in this case may not be able to make the best use of completed mine clearance.

Coordination. In this option, mine action and development are informed of each other’s priorities, and work together as far as possible without a major change in approach to either. Coordination can lead to much shorter delays in take-up of cleared land, but it does not significantly change the prioritization of mine action to take development needs into full account. For example, the actions most needed to address the causes of poverty in a region may not be those indicated by mine-action priorities. This approach goes a significant step further than the use of socioeconomic data as defined by mine-action priorities. This approach goes a significant step further than the use of socioeconomic data as defined by mine-action priorities. This approach goes a significant step further than the use of socioeconomic data as defined by mine-action priorities. This approach goes a significant step further than the use of socioeconomic data as defined by mine-action priorities. This approach goes a significant step further than the use of socioeconomic data as defined by mine-action priorities. This approach goes a significant step further than the use of socioeconomic data as defined by mine-action priorities. This approach goes a significant step further than the use of socioeconomic data as defined by mine-action priorities. This approach goes a significant step further than the use of socioeconomic data as defined by mine-action priorities. This approach goes a significant step further than the use of socioeconomic data as defined by mine-action priorities. This approach goes a significant step further than the use of socioeconomic data as defined by mine-action priorities. This approach goes a significant step further than the use of socioeconomic data as defined by mine-action priorities. This approach goes a significant step further than the use of socioeconomic data as defined by mine-action priorities.

Examples of Local Linkages

Bosnia and Herzegovina. Following mine clearance of their house and land, a family returned to their small farm in a former heavily mined area. Life was not easy, but a living could be made. When the young daughter of the family reached school age, however, the family seriously considered moving back to the nearest towns, as there was no affordable transport available to take her to and from school. Denying the village could have been in vain if the children did not have access to education. If the farmers left the area again, the funds invested in road repairs and support to agriculture, as well as demining, would be wasted and the local economy would suffer. Like many development problems, this issue was unexpected and required community involvement, acting with the municipal authorities, to find a solution based on a bus service. Mine-action prioritisation alone could address or resolve problems like these.
Injury, Fire, Lack of Funding Complicate Demining in Lebanon

While most of the immediate landmine danger has been removed from southern Lebanon along its border with Israel, multiple factors have complicated the demining process throughout the country. In southern Lebanon, 43 percent of the contaminated land has been fully cleared, while another 49 percent was surface-cleared, according to the Mine Action Coordination Centre, South Lebanon (MACCSL). However, because of a lack of ministerial involvement in the area, many of its clearance teams stopped working at the end of August 2008. As a result, the injury risk is expected to escalate because, as in the past, locals will likely attempt to remove contamination themselves when faced with a lack of assistance.

In late July 2008, a Lebanese citizen, Abbas Akrout, working with the Mines Advisory Group, was injured by a cluster bomb that detonated near him while he was attempting to disarm landmines in Jzakr, a village in southern Lebanon. The cluster bomb was identified as one of the bombs dropped by Israel in southern Lebanon during 2006. Akrout sustained moderate damage to his hands and legs. More than 50 Lebanese and international workers, as well as over 250 civilians, have been injured by these cluster bombs.

In July 2008, emergency crews fighting a forest fire in an area where cluster munitions from the Israeli-Hezbollah conflict of 2006, as well as landmines from the Lebanese Civil War, were still polluting the land. The resulting explosions and decreased visibility in the area caused several hectares of forest (one hectare equals approximately 2.5 acres) to be destroyed before the fire was eventually extinguished.

United Nations

The U.N. has indicated that the demining operations in Lebanon may need to be eliminated without extra funding. The U.S. Department of State has given an initial sum of US$825,000 and is working with the American Task Force in Lebanon in the search for additional funding to keep the program afloat.