

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

In many post-conflict regions, landmines and explosive remnants of war<sup>1</sup> remain, limiting recovery and development even after mine-clearance projects are completed. A number of mine-clearance organizations are starting to promote “linking mine action and development” as a better alternative to a separate and uncoordinated approach.

by Russell Gasser [ Humanitarian Technology Consulting Ltd. ]

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 use of that land is not a 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 prioritized for clearance, there can be some valuable results and the benefits can multiply. Linking mine action and development not only helps to eliminate wasted demining but also has the ability to optimize 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-personnel Mine Ban Convention.<sup>2</sup> The group also includes other invited partners and is coordinated through the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining. In June 2008, the GICHD published extensive draft guidelines for linking MA and development for development partners, mine-affected states, official development agencies and mine-action organizations.<sup>3</sup>

## 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.<sup>4</sup> 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:

**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 mine-contaminated areas as inaccessible, deciding not to plan development projects in these areas.

**Leader-follower relationship.** Usually, development staff wait for demining 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 the Landmine Impact Survey data used to decide demining priorities.

**Support and promote.** Using this approach, mine action supports development by giving priority to work in areas where development projects are to be funded. These areas may be given higher priority within an existing priority mechanism, for example, by considering overall socioeconomic and development impact beyond the Landmine Impact Survey data. Also, mine action may be started in these areas by working outside of, and therefore effectively ignoring, the established national or regional priority-setting mechanism. Mine-action organizations and structures may themselves promote development in areas that have been cleared or are about to be cleared. Mine action follows established technical approaches and generally works in the same way as usual, irrespective of the nature of the development activities.

**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 optimized mine clearance. However, losing efficiency 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.

Timing 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 linkage, the more change may be necessary to mine-clearance **prioritization** and **implementation**. Without



A farmer in Bosnia-Herzegovina returns to his land after it was cleared but finds there are still mines very close to the area.  
ALL PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE AUTHOR



This bridge in Angola was demined but not repaired.

a clear understanding of what linking MA and development is about and an understanding of the potential benefits of this change, the loss of hard-won efficiency and impact is not likely to be welcomed by deminers.

Full linkage of demining and development demands a new paradigm for mine action at a local level, where clearance is seen as an **enabling activity** or a **service in support of development**, rather than a separate activity or a precursor to development. When fully linked to development goals, mine action is a “team player,” with a specific role of ensuring that it makes the greatest possible contribution to reducing poverty by enabling development, a significant change from the role of maximizing the reduction of the humanitarian or socioeconomic impact of mines.

## Examples of Local Linkages

**Angola.** Clearance and verification of roads are key in assisting the return of refugees and internally displaced persons to their villages. In some regions, roads that are mined, or believed to be mined, can rapidly become overgrown and impenetrable, so there is no way to find out what lies along the former route. In some areas there are rivers that need replacement of substantial bridges that are 5 meters (16 feet) long or more. Unless bridges are rebuilt, roads cannot be used by vehicles, and if they remain unused for several years while money and materials are found to build a bridge, then the vegetation will return and the roads will disappear again. Local memory of what is still a suspected area and what has been cleared can be fickle, and rumors that the mine-free road is not used because it is still not safe can start and spread. Linking mine clearance to civil works like bridge building has obvious benefits in cases like these.

**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 town, as there was no affordable transport available to take her to and from school. Demining 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 set back. 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 prioritization alone cannot address or resolve problems like these.<sup>5</sup>

**Southeast Europe.** Finally, there is another case from Southeast Europe, where a large development agency was planning a substantial project in support of rural reconstruction. The funding timetable was set and required tight coordination of the various aspects of the project if the ambitious goals were to be achieved. Should the whole project be delayed, risking a reduction of the impact, or even a total loss of financial support, to allow 12 months and a lot of money for mine clearance of affected areas? Or, should the mine-contaminated areas suffer "double jeopardy" by being excluded from the development funding in order to keep the rest of the project on track and on budget?

Linking mine action and development may offer a potential solution that is outside the usual way of working and prioritizing of demining: gradual clearance, which aims to clear just enough land, just in time, to ensure that key intermediate development goals of the overall large project can be met. One part of the project, for example, building up a goat farm, was planned to take several years, but the necessary land was mined. Immediate demining of access routes and the key buildings was needed so that the infrastructure

could be rehabilitated before the project started. Demining of the first part of the pasture could, if necessary, wait a year. Clearing further buildings would take a little longer, but finally, as the herd of goats gradually increased, the rest of the pasture would be cleared. This all makes for slow, inefficient and hence relatively expensive demining, but the overall gains in development activities could be considerable. In this approach, prioritization and task planning for mine clearance would be dominated by the development project and its time frame and not by demining or LIS criteria.

### Conclusion

Many approaches exist concerning demining and its connection to development within affected communities. Clearance projects can be successfully completed, but afterward the cleared land remains unused, as no development program exists to assist the community in rebuilding what was lost through war and violence. Linking MA and development helps to ensure that clearance projects in mined communities are not in vain by approaching the process in a new, more integrated way. ♦

*See Endnotes, page 110*



**Russell Gasser** is an engineer who became interested in mine-action while helping start a wheelchair repair workshop in Nicaragua in the late 1980s. He returned to university in 1996 to write a Ph.D. thesis about advanced technology research failing to deliver new demining tools and equipment. After three years working for the European Commission, he left to be an independent consultant and program evaluator in mine action.

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