The Mine-action Process in Iraqi Kurdistan

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Iraqi Kurdistan Mine Action Agency

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picked it up and moved it out from the bomb crater to a nearby area. I was afraid when moving the bomb but I needed the money. In one crater I could get 60 kilograms (88 pounds) of scrap metal.” Currently, scrap metal is approximately 1,700 kip per kilo (approximately $3.33). Thus, pretty nearly all UXO contamination is in rural Laos where most people—about 80 percent of the population—are subsistence rice farmers and have limited options for generating a cash income if they stay within their communities. Almost all respondents who reported voluntary exposure potentially live ordnance were able to provide examples of the risk-reduction strategies they took. These indigenous risk-reduction strategies are often at odds, however, with expert views of safe handling of UXO. Indeed, some respondents also recognized that their strategies might still result in injury or death. Those who tried to learn more by watching village experts or by observing UXO clearance teams to learn from the way they handle UXO. Scrap-metal collectors, including men, women and children using locally-pressed metal detectors also had a number of risk-reduction strategies including one described in the following statements: “I feel safer when digging, more confident if I know I have a UXO when I hear the beep.” While a number of respondents were able to describe strategies they use for distinguishing between safe and unsafe ordnance, respondents identified accurate recognition skills as an area in which they felt they needed more knowledge, according to one scrap-metal dealer: “Without knowing it, I have bought many things from villagers—BLAST! with explosives, hand grenades with no pins, bullets, mortar shells with grenades inside.” The survey also identified a number of contradictions. For example, scrap-metal collection on the one hand, was potentially risky but on the other hand is not necessarily associated with accidents. This may be due to a cognitive coping strategy whereby the risk is explained away as being exaggerated or a belief that the person has the necessary skills to reduce risk.

Conclusion
The assessment found UXO risk-takers, including women and children, are generally aware of the risk and engage in some form of risk-assessment process, which they use to make rational and deliberate decisions regarding acceptable risk. However, from other stakeholders’ perspectives such as humanitarian mine-action experts, regulatory bodies, educators and decision makers, there are different views on acceptability and rationality of local risk-assessment processes. This conflict is largely about a divergent definition of risk, differences in how problems are structured and solved, differences in judgments about the probability of an accident, and different kinds of knowledge. While awareness is an important pre-requisite to change and ongoing awareness campaigns may be essential for children, the assessment did not identify it as a major determinant of risk behaviour. Focussing on traditional message-based approaches to MRE is likely to result in developing an intervention that does not address the major underlying determinants of behaviour. Traditional messages on expert perceived positive behaviours common in MRE programmes may include “Don’t touch UXO” and “If you see UXO, report it to a mine-action agency!” However, this approach could be counterproductive in MRE planners falling into the common pitfall of developing an intervention that does not address the major determinants of high-risk behaviour. To be effective, the MRE programme will have to take into account the determinants of behaviour identified in the assessment. This in essence, represents a paradigm shift from current “experts” MRE practice and message-based MRE. With its emphasis on standards, safety, technical expertise, and zero- or minimal risk, implementing such an approach, which actively engages high-risk populations and builds on current coping strategies and knowledge, is likely to be challenging. Such an approach will require a change from zero- to risk minimization and recognition of the often valid risk-assessment processes and risk-reduction strategies indigenous communities employ. It may also involve a more meaningful and useful transfer of knowledge from experts to laypeople. As M. Wood[1] noted, speaking to the field of health promotion, even when it is known how to undertake successful prevention activities and the people are aware of the preventative tools, such interventions are often unpopular with policy makers, lobby groups, the public and even practitioners themselves. Recent examples of risk-minimisation programs have often taken a face-saving approach like safe needle exchange and safe injecting practices may provide some insight into effective strategies in taking a pragmatic approach to UXO risk reduction.

As shown, the complex milieu in which behavioural decisions are made calls for a shift to a risk-minimisation approach. A range of integrated interventions that aim to address the underlying vulnerabilities of UXO-affected communities is also needed. From this perspective UXO contamination in Laos PDR requires a collaborative, multi-sectoral and multi-level response that includes a range of legislative and regulatory strategies, improved UXO clearance methodology and targeting of resources, skills training, MRE and an integrated approach to UXO action that enables the implementation of broader poverty alleviation and sustainable-livelihoods strategies. Such an approach will save lives, reduce injuries and promote economic growth and development, which in turn will contribute to addressing underlying vulnerabilities and reduce UXO risk.

See Endnotes, Page

Hussein: The Mine-action Process in Iraqi Kurdistan

The Iraqi Kurdistan Mine Action Agency has been working to clear Kurdistan of landmines and unexploded ordnance that were placed by the former Iraqi government over the past 40 years and the Iranian Army during the Iran-Iraq War from 1980–1988. The Agency is overcoming many challenges and has cleared a vast number of minefields so the land can be handed back to the owners. Casualties from explosive remnants of war are extremely high but a new mine-risk-education program will inform people who live in dangerous areas how to minimize the threat of explosive remnants of war.

by Jamal Jalal

The Mine-action Process in Iraqi Kurdistan

The Iraqi Kurdistan Mine Action Agency is to rid Kurdistan of ERW. Currently the mission is to reduce the impact of mines and unexploded ordnance in the afflicted communities of Kurdistan. This will be achieved through the demining process (survey of contaminated communities, mapping, marking of hazardous areas, and destruction of mines and UXO), mine-risk education and victim assistance. It is a great challenge to clear mines from Kurdistan due to the difficulty of the demining process, the large areas that were contaminated and the approximate quantity of emplaced mines numbering in the millions.

Clearance Goals
The vision of the Iraqi Kurdistan Mine Action Agency is to rid Kurdistan of ERW. Currently the mission is to reduce the impact of mines and unexploded ordnance in the afflicted communities of Kurdistan. This will be achieved through the demining process (survey of contaminated communities, mapping, marking of hazardous areas, and destruction of mines and UXO), mine-risk education and victim assistance. It is a great challenge to clear mines from Kurdistan due to the difficulty of the demining process, the large areas that were contaminated and the approximate quantity of emplaced mines numbering in the millions.

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Factors Influencing Demining Difficulties
Experience shows many factors directly affect the clearance process and lead to a slowdown in progress. The age of the minefields, as they are already 20–26 years old, leads to a number of complicating factors and difficulties in conducting demining operations. Some of these factors are related to Kurdistan’s natural terrain and topography while other factors stem from the difficulty of mine clearance, the risks associated with mine clearance and difficulty of implementing the International Mine Action Standards due to safety concerns. Specific factors that affect mine clearance are:

• Limited period of time to work in some minefields due to weather
• Hard ground
• High, dry vegetation in most mined areas
• Lack of desire by deminers to work in mine clearance because of the threat of dealing with suspected areas
• The existence of high numbers of metal fragments that slow progress because mine-clearance personnel must check each square meter of ground with metal detectors. Most of Kurdistan’s large minefields were battle areas during the Iran–Iraq War (1980–1988).

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The role of mine-risk education in understanding children’s rights while also using the environment, administering first aid and instructing the children regarding the danger of mines/UXO; pupils regarding the danger of mines/UXO; and community inclusion. It has extensive experience in working with local partners to create and implement projects to assist people with disabilities, particularly landmine survivors, in several countries. It effectively meets the needs of landmine survivors and other people with disabilities in their countries. The Polus Center takes a social approach to landmine survivor assistance. It is focused on developing sustainable, person-centered projects for full social integration of landmine survivors.

Polus began working internationally in 1997 in Nicaragua and later expanded to El Salvador, Guatemala, El Salvador and Mexico. These collaborative efforts have resulted in two community-based prosthetic outreach projects, an accessibility project, a disability and a series of capacity-building mini-grants to local organizations and individuals. The Polus Center uses a locally based, holistic approach to ensure that project beneficiaries are the ones driving services forward, and broad support is created in the community where they live.

The MAIC staff and JMU’s faculty consist of subject-matter experts in survivor assistance, mine action and management; we are also experienced in developing and delivering curricula for a variety of constituencies, including program planners and project implementers, such as those for whom this survivor-assistance training program is designed.

MAIC Survivor Assistance Projects

New projects underway at the Mine Action Information Center are described here, including a best-practices guidebook on casualty data, survivor-assistance training and a catalog of adaptive technologies.

by Lois Carter Fay and Dr. Suzanne Fiederlein (Mine Action Information Center)

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ost of our Journal of Mine Action readers know the MAIC at James Madison University as an information clearinghouse, complete with a robust Web site, training programs and various publishing ventures including this journal. And our newest products are no exception. Recently, the Mine Action Information Center was chosen to work on three survivor-assistance projects:

1. Casualty data/best-practices guidebook
2. Survivor-assistance training
3. Adaptive Technology Catalog

All three projects being conducted at the request of the U.S. Department of State Office of Foreign Remediation and Abatement Bureau of Political-Military Affairs. The survivor-assistance training is being conducted under the leadership of The Polus Center for Social and Economic Development.

Casualty-data “Guidebook” Project

Many in the mine action/unsupported-ordinance community have trouble effectively gathering, managing and interpreting casualty data, although some mine-affected countries have created good casualty-data systems and planning procedures. In our research, we have found that while there is a significant amount of casualty data collected by various entities around the world, it is often not effectively used to inform the decision-making and planning processes in mine action. It is the use of the data that is really driving this guidebook, which will be published in September 2007.

Some countries and programs are challenged to effectively collect and use landmine/UXO “accident” data to inform their mine-risk education and clearance programs. The “guidebook” will show that there is sometimes one or more casualties in a particular location, the country’s mine-elimination authority believe there is a pocket of landmines or unexploded ordnance located there and consequently choose to mark and clear the area. More recently, with the increased focus on developing mine-risk education, many countries, national authorities are more interested in obtaining additional information about accident survivors in order to plan and deliver rehabilitative services. The guidebook will re-search what is already being done in selected mine-affected countries and assess their efforts, drawing conclusions regarding which approaches should be considered “best” practices. The guidebook will be comprised of lessons learned and identified “best practices,” instructive, detailed case studies, and a set of recommendations to guide planners, which will be short and broadly applicable to most settings.

Survivor-assistance Training

In a recent survey conducted by the MAIC (as a follow-up to the Senior Managers Courses we have presented for the United Nations Development Programme), more than half of the mine-action centers responded that landmine survivor assistance was a “top” or “high” priority, yet an even greater number reported that “no one [in their mine-action center/agency] had received any training” in survivor assistance. Consequently, the MAIC and The Polus Center for Social and Economic Development are working together to create a series of training workshops for national mine-action and survivor-assistance staff to aid them in developing and implementing programs that effectively meet the needs of landmine survivors and other people with disabilities in their countries.

The Polus Center assembles people with disabilities in developing countries to become valued members within their communities. In programs emphasize community-based rehabilitation, self-advocacy and community inclusion. It has extensive experience in working with local partners to create and implement projects to assist people with disabilities, particularly landmine survivors, in several coun-

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Table 1: Mine and UXO victims in four Kurdistan governorates from 1950 to 2003.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Governorate</th>
<th>Years of Accidents</th>
<th>Mine</th>
<th>UXO</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Duhok</td>
<td>1965-1969</td>
<td>165</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>192</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1990-2003</td>
<td>514</td>
<td>190</td>
<td>704</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Erbil</td>
<td>1963-1989</td>
<td>469</td>
<td>275</td>
<td>744</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1990-2003</td>
<td>1000</td>
<td>584</td>
<td>1584</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sulaimaniyah</td>
<td>1960-1989</td>
<td>460</td>
<td>277</td>
<td>737</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1990-2003</td>
<td>2228</td>
<td>1403</td>
<td>3631</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kirkuk</td>
<td>1955-1989</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>218</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1990-2003</td>
<td>700</td>
<td>567</td>
<td>1267</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total 5680 3483 3441 1068 9121 4551