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Perspectives on Capacity Development

Richard Kidd, PM/WRA
by Daniele Ressler [Mine Action Information Center]

On 5 March 2007, Daniele Ressler interviewed Richard Kidd, Director of the U.S. Department of State's Office of Weapons Removal and Abatement in the Bureau of Political-Military Affairs. The interview was conducted to discuss Kidd's perspectives on capacity development and how it is tied into mine action. Through the course of the interview, Kidd addresses how PM/WRA understands capacity development, successful examples of capacity-development project implementation, lessons learned and the future of capacity development in the mine-action process.

Daniele Ressler: *How do you, as a representative of PM/WRA define or understand capacity development in the context of mine action and what are the underlying things that make this concept important to PM/WRA?*

Richard Kidd: While there is no simple or direct definition for capacity development ... the United States basically considers that the indigenous capacity exists within a mine-affected country to get itself to an impact-free¹ status and to maintain some form of residual capacity to respond after that as new trends emerge. That's the closest thing we have to a definition, and it takes on a different sort of form and structure in different countries, based on both the mine threat and the capacity that may have existed in that country to begin with. This belief is what we in WRA operate under as we do our country planning: impact-free status—can the country get there? What makes this concept important? The underlying foundation of why this is important is a major component of U.S. political philosophy and international-relations philosophy: States must be responsible for providing the public goods that states provide; and they cannot walk away from those responsibilities. So in this case the public good that might affect its states' need to provide is safety—safety for their citizens, access to land and livelihood. That is a responsibility of states to provide and, we, the U.S. government, will help them get there.

DR: *Does PM/WRA usually look at capacity development in terms of working at a national level, such as large-scale funding and support for the national mine information centers, or do you view capacity development in terms of a smaller-scale level of application, such as funding and support for specific individual institutions or tasks like technical support?*

RK: It depends on the country because for each country we do a country-support plan. And that plan is based on that country's specific approach to solving their mine-action problem and what that country's strategic plan contains. As you know, the United States has been a strong champion of strategic planning, and back in 2004 we made our assistance contingent upon countries producing strategic plans. So, we don't by policy say that we are going to do national capacity development over a more local capacity development. We say that countries need to articulate how they are going to structure the response to their mine threat, and then we will support them within that structure.

DR: *In your opinion, what are some examples of successful capacity-development initiatives in mine action and what are the key components leading to this success?*



Richard Kidd in Cambodia visiting a U.S.-sponsored Mines Advisory Group program, March 2007.
PHOTO COURTESY OF JOHN FLANAGAN/UNMAS

RK: Well, two countries just jump right out in terms of great success stories and they are Yemen and Azerbaijan. What makes them successful is that those governments have committed resources. It's a very simple rule of thumb, proven throughout the world that if a country, no matter how poor it is, doesn't choose to

commit any of its national resources, it's not invested in the process. You have a number of mine-affected countries that have basically set up their mine-action programs as the catch-basin for foreign assistance. Now both Yemen and Azerbaijan obviously have some resource constraints, but in both cases they have chosen to put their own government money into the program. And as a result, they have a sense of ownership. They want efficiency and they want accountability, which sadly, seem to be less important when countries don't commit their own resources toward the problem.

DR: *Are there any projects, activities or general initiatives that you are presently doing or planning for the future to promote or sustain capacity development in mine action that you think are particularly interesting for our readers to know about?*

RK: More important than any projects or activities is U.S. policy, in terms of assistance. As I mentioned earlier, U.S. policy makes our assistance contingent upon national strategic planning because that forces countries to address hard questions about their future and to hopefully look at their structures, training needs and requirements in a focused, analytical way. I think that has been the United States' greatest contribution to this issue. We were the first country to expect the existence of a strategic plan, a policy that has been copied, in a related manner, by the United Nations and by the Ottawa Convention.² So that has been our biggest contribution to the issue of capacity development. In terms of project specifics, integrated into a lot of our programs are management training, strategic-planning training and quality-assurance training for the actual demining. Our assessment in terms of capacity development is that it's not a matter of technology or technique. The countries have learned how to demine safely. The key issue is one of management, leadership and planning skills, and that's what we're focusing our efforts on.

DR: *When did the U.S. start moving toward this policy of asking for and requiring strategic plans?*

RK: 2004.

DR: *Has there been a large increase since that time in the number of countries that have been providing strategic plans?*

RK: Yes ... not only an increase in the number of strategic plans but a gradual increase in the quality of those plans. Back in the early 2000s, you had plans that said, "It will take 200 years to clear our country of landmines, please give us [US]\$50 million a year to do that." That was the extent of the articulated strategic vision of a lot of these countries. Fortunately we are well past that and countries are now able to differentiate between the contamination that causes impacts and the contamination that doesn't. [They now] prioritize their resources and construct mine action programs that are matched to the impact.

DR: *So it sounds like you are seeing progress in this aspect of working on capacity development.*

RK: We are, and the other way you can measure progress is by looking at what is no longer there. Previously, say five years ago, the model was massive U.N. bureaucracies that ran mine-action programs in Cambodia, Afghanistan, Bosnia, Mozambique, and northern Iraq. Those bureaucracies have disappeared and they have not been replaced by an expatriate presence on the same scale. And that alone is indicative of the development of national capacity.

DR: *What, if any, innovative lessons learned has PM/WRA identified after working on capacity-development initiatives in mine action?*

RK: The lesson learned is this: Is the country making some form of investment? If not, then the capacity-development effort is probably not going to lead

anywhere. And we have an example recently of a country [in which] we've just basically said we've given up attempting to develop national capacity. Instead we're going to pay [a nongovernmental organization] to clear the highest impact areas and then we're going to go home. The precursors for successful capacity development were simply not there.

Of course there is the issue of corruption and accountability—if states do not hold people accountable or allow transparent assessment of donor funds, then that is also a good sign that they are not interested in developing the capacity to clear mines and are more interested in the employment or the access to resources. We've learned that if you take a look at the number of expatriates in an organization, generally the more expatriates, the less national capacity. That doesn't mean there should not be any expatriates; it just means that if expatriates are doing the job that could be done by the host nation, then the national capacity is not where it should be.

Another lesson learned, finally, is that South to South³ transfer of knowledge and expertise is often better than North to South and the United States I believe is the only country that funds the [United Nations Development Programme] South to South technological and expertise exchange. We've also encouraged NGOs and the U.N. to hire people from one mine-affected country and then deploy them to others, the best case being the movement of Afghan NGOs and Afghan individuals around the world as part of various NGOs of the U.N. program.

DR: *Where do you see the greatest areas of hope or promise for future success in capacity development in mine action? What about the greatest challenges for the future?*

RK: The future success for capacity development and mine action is primarily dependent upon the will of the mine-affected countries. Do they really want to develop capacity and are they prepared to make hard choices that come in an environment based on sound management practices? That's both the hope and the challenge.

DR: *Any other comments, quotes or important issues you would like to ad-*

dress in regards to capacity development and mine action that you would like to share with readers?

RK: I think this is a very important issue. One of the key challenges is for countries to think through what capacity they need to be in place after the majority of the

are they becoming an impediment to the transfer of skills, expertise and, most importantly, ownership? I think that is a fair question to start being asked by the mine-action community. ♦

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mine impacts are removed. In other words, what will need to be there for the long term? Many countries in Europe are still affected by mines and ordnance from the First and Second World Wars. They do not have massive bureaucracies designed to search these out and remove them, as is the case of many current mine-affected programs. Instead, they have monitoring systems as well as response systems in place. So long after major industrial-scale demining ends in, say, Afghanistan or Cambodia, there is still going to be a need for a residual response mechanism, and what are countries doing now to prepare for that?

This also includes labor law and labor benefits. We're now reaching the point where the capacities in terms of national clearance capacities that were built up during the peak of mine action cannot be sustained. So what do you do with those deminers? It's a matter of responsibility both for the donors and for the mine-affected countries. What do you do with these men and women who spent 10 years doing dangerous work and now they are no longer needed?

The second issue, along the same lines is what is the role for the major humanitarian-demining NGOs? What about MAG,⁴ HALO Trust or Norwegian People's Aid? They are tremendous humanitarian organizations, initially the first responders, the ones who have made, in many countries, the greatest contribution to public safety—but are they now becoming redundant as they basically work themselves out of a job? And



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