Mine Victims Needs Assessment and Assistance Coordination

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Mine Victims Needs Assessment and Assistance Coordination

A UNICEF feasibility study conducted in early 2001 showed that medical and surgical facilities in Azerbaijan are adequate to meet the immediate needs of mine survivors. In general, physical-rehabilitation facilities are also considered suitable; however, the lack of psychosocial support to assist mine survivors with a disability is of particular concern. The study concluded that an integrated and comprehensive assistance program could not be established for the mine victims of Azerbaijan until a needs assessment was completed. In response, Azerbaijan planned and conducted a national survey to assess mine victims’ needs, including prosthetic, social and economic needs, as a first step to developing national mine-victim-assistance priorities and programs. The results of the assessment are discussed in this article.

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n January 2001, UNICEF Mine Action Coordinator Telnaz Dastoor conducted a national mine-action feasibility study in Azerbaijan, which highlighted the need for a comprehensive mine-victim assistance program. Since then, the Azerbaijan National Agency for Mine Action has been developing mine-victim assistance and implementing MVA-related activities. ANAMA’s strategy involves combining the efforts of national and international organizations in serving disabled people as well as in developing and implementing a long-term MVA strategy for Azerbaijan. The Countrywide Mine/ UXO Mine Action and Assessment Survey project was developed in 2003 and implemented in 2004 to collect the data necessary to address MVA needs in Azerbaijan.

The MVA Assessment Survey’s objectives included establishing an extensive database, developing a well-articulated strategy and creating an effective network of relevant stakeholders in MVA. This survey was an integral part of the overall project entitled “Support to Azerbaijan Mine Action Programme,” which was funded by the European Commission. An MVA working group was established to complete the project planning, design and logistics phases. The working group consists of representatives of relevant ministries, governmental agencies, and national and international nongovernmental organizations.

The working group thoroughly discussed project-related issues and predetermined partner organizations for the implementation phase. These discussions also encouraged ANAMA to conduct a pilot survey in the Fundu district. The results became part of the data of the MVA Assessment Survey. The working group will continue coordinating future activities based on the needs-assessment survey results.

The International Eurasia Press Fund was chosen to administer and lead the survey as this nongovernmental organization had experience gained from conducting two previous surveys in Azerbaijan. Representatives of three other NGOs actively taking part in the MVA working group—Doshchen, Shehfi Elfer and Babakudov—were also involved in this survey.

The Ministries of Defense and Domestic Affairs supplemented preliminary information on mine/landmine ordinances, statistics in addition to data from ANAMA’s Information Management System for Mine Action database. The local branches and local authorities of the Republic Military Commissariat also provided information on mine/UXO survivors. The Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection of Population actively facilitated arrangements related to the survey.

IMDSA and an MVA Assessment Add-on

Data on almost 2,300 survivors was extracted from about 70 different source lists. The most comprehensive list was from the ANAMA IMDSA database, although much of this information was already outdated. Unfortunately, media announcements failed to attract participants who could offer additional information about mine/UXO victims.

In addition to information gathered to answer the standard IMDSA, this form is mainly focused on details of each incident and emergency medical care provided, an MVA Assessment Survey questionnaire gathered comprehensive information on the needs of survivors for medical and psychosocial care, physical and vocational rehabilitation, economic assistance and advocacy, as well as for education, training and sports.

Consequently, the incident details and needs of 1,883 mine survivors were entered into both the standard IMDSA incident casualty report and another relational Microsoft Access database for the additional comprehensive questionnaire data. This new database consisted of seven tables for medical care, physical rehabilitation, social adaptation, economic assistance, professional rehabilitation, education and sport needs, and additional information, which mainly reflects economic status of the survivors. The data was prepared in tables and charts, which were analyzed and combined.

This Access add-on database is related to the various tables in the IMDSA database and further relations can be added if necessary.

Technical assistance was provided for the MVA Assessment Survey to develop the special add-on to IMDSA, ensure accurate data entry, check quality, and extensively review and analyze the data. Together with the information already stored by IMDSA about devices, general survey victim data and impact data from the Landmine Impact Survey, this add-on included multiple references of the newly gathered victim data and identified needs.

A special Geographic Information System function was introduced to allow the team to present all the data according to geopolitical distribution as well.

Capacity Developed

As a result of the project being implemented, 15 people were trained in survey procedures and interviewing techniques; 10 of them gained wide experience in the practical application of this knowledge. Seven people learned the data-entry process, having been introduced to it through IMDSA and Microsoft Access. Shamil Yagizarov, ANAMA Mine Information System Supervisor, developed various themes with IMDSA’s Geographic Information System function to represent the spatial data. Extensive expertise was arranged in multi-criterion data analysis as well by finding patterns, correlations and conclusions from the responses to the different survey questions. Some results of the Countrywide Mine/UXO Victim Needs Assessment Survey are presented below.

MVA Assessment Survey Results

Medical care. Surgical intervention needs were mentioned in 1,397 cases. Fragment extraction accounted for the greatest number of these interventions (544 cases). Some expressed a need for additional surgery, including 21 operations on residual limbs. Eighty people emphasized their need for plastic surgery.

Medical treatment or consultation with specialists was also a predominant need. The need for a neuropathologist was mentioned by 1,552 people. A vast number of traumatic cases was treated by 850 people.

While 802 people required the services of a general surgeon, just over one-seventh of this number—127 persons—actually needed surgical operations due to recent mine/UXO trauma. The rest were suffering from age-specific problems years after the incident, such as back problems, joint pain, limb pain, or body growth or shrinkage.

Some 1,607 interviewees (1,407) answered the question of general health problems, allowing the researchers to record and evaluate the number of people suffering physical disabilities. Some 382 people expressed their need for other specialists. It became clear that the most needed medical specialists were dermatologists (kidney), ophthalmologists and especially orthopedic surgeons.

Physical rehabilitation needs: limbs. Prosthetic needs were as follows:

- 620 people (620 cases, of which 220 required prosthetic devices)
- 250 people (250 cases, of which 53 required prosthetic devices)
in sign language and lip reading or additional technical means of communication. At the same time, there were many people with other losses and injuries also in need of adaptation due to hearing or vision loss.

The same situation occurred with eye-sight adaptation. 132 people reported eye-sight problems resulting from mine-related accidents. Of these, 111 people reported loss of vision. Forty-nine mine/USO survivors totally lost vision in one eye and 20 lost all vision. Social adaptation for this category of disabled people requires specific training and equipment.

The social adaptation section of the questionnaire opened new prospects for related activities. Namely, 708 survivors indicated an interest in providing mine-risk education, 693 would have liked to participate in victim support groups, 625 offered to provide income and 745 were genuinely interested in a need to belong to an association for the disabled. These results reflect a great desire for such an association to help people with social adaptation issues, and they should be kept in mind while developing mine-victim-related projects.

Economic assistance. This section of the questionnaire consisted of two distinct parts that could be named “support” and “assistance.” The support area identified daily needs for help. The assistance area asked the question: “What would be of help to you to economically reintegrate into society?”

Answers were twofold. A great majority (1,250) of the 1,839 survivors who answered this section needed money for medical treatment. Many people (941) expressed a similar need for medications. Cars and housing were desired forms of assistance for 916 and 1,081 persons, respectively.

Help with starting a business was needed by 1,428 people who dreamed of running their own businesses and would have appreciated startup loans to make that possible. Raising livestock, plant husbandry, and establishing small enterprises to meet local needs were the main types of businesses

Needs for prosthetic and assistive devices are outlined in Table 1. The four most common forms of devices were (1) hearing-aid equipment, (2) training and education, (3) prosthetic and assistive devices, and (4) professional rehabilitation.

for this group of mine/USO survivors. Professional rehabilitation needs. The survey section about professional rehabilitation needs contained more questions than any other single section in the questionnaire; there were 445 respondents who were currently employed at the time of the survey. The most common professions were drivers (29 respondents), farmers (26), and workers (24). A total of the 3,862 respondents were registered as disabled or on pension.

As the interviewees’ previous medical history included a variety of medical issues and only 23% of the 41 expressing problems mentioned that they had not yet been classified. 166 needed to change their classified disability degree to a higher one—90 from second to first, 53 from third to second, and those whose degree was still unknown.

A total of 1,257 persons answered the question about pension receipt. Among them, 231 were first-degree, 882 were second-degree and 110 were third-degree disabilities. Another 403 people were receiving a pension but were not classified with a disability degree.

Unemployment. Of the 3,883 people interviewed who answered this question, 1,397 of them had no job. The greatest unemployment found among interviewees is shown below: • Baku city: 293 of 832 • Sumgayit city: 51 of 97 • Ganja city: 67 of 54 • Terter district: 148 of 213 • Garadagh district: 105 of 354 • Tovuz district: 61 of 67 • Agstafa district: 164 of 84 • Qazakh district: 55 of 87

In analyzing the unemployed mine/USO survivors, the researchers found 206 were of the first degree, 780 of the second degree and 99 of the third degree of disability. 312 people with no job had no disability degree.

Monthly Personal Income

According to the Azerbaijani Free Trade Unions Confederation, 6 per-month earning and minimum cost of living estimates by experts at the time of the survey were as shown in Table 2. A total of 1,264 people answered the question on their personal income. Income varied from US$54 to $250 per month, and 90 percent of interviewees earned a much lower-than-average salary. Eighty-five people had an income in the range noted and only 48 people had a higher monthly income. A total of 98 people had an income less than the minimum salary mandated by law ($29 per month at the time of the survey).

Monthly family income. In 1,605 cases of the 1,883 surveyed, the respondents answered questions on the question of family income. It appeared that 167 families had an income less than the minimum salary mandated by law. Monthly family income exceeded $200 in only six cases, an amount at the higher end of income distribution.

Many cases the disability pension of the mine victim was a big portion of a family’s income. Since the unemployment rate was very high, the other sources of income were the pensions of other family members and, in some cases, additional allowances provided for children, the disabled person’s spouse, or other reasons.

The highest incidence of families with an income not exceeding $300,000 Azerbaijani manats per month (as of the time of the survey) was found in the districts of Terter (168 of the 184 that answered), Garadagh (76 of 85), Agstafa (55 of 67), Gubakh (48 of 78) and Tovuz (61 of 67) and in Baku (320 of 357) and Ganja cities (43 of 50).

Distribution by age. Of a total 1,883 interviewees, 1,775 people had information on the incident date and the distribution by age was considered to be applicable only for them. Several years had passed since many of the respondents’ mine incidents. As they aged, they experienced health problems related to the incident as well as other environmental and the economic difficulties of life as IDPs. In addition, their situations became much harder due to the onset of other diseases.

Average salary $100

Minimum consumer basket per person $75

Minimum expenditure per working person $85

Table 2: Average salary and minimum cost of living estimates in US dollars

CIVILIAN MINING INCIDENTS

Civilians mining UXO. Of 1,883 mine victims, 1,530 people were members of the military or were civilians working with the army or militia at the time of their incident.

Of the other 373 civilian casualties at the moment of incident were traveling to animals and plants—85 and 73 people, respectively. Forty-three people were doing household chores and 32 people were playing or engaging in recreational activities when the incident occurred. Only three people stated that they were tamping with mines. Eighteen people were collecting firewood or water, 13 were traveling and two people were hunting. Ninety people did not reveal the circumstances in which they were injured by mines or UXO. Six people were policemen on law enforcement duty and one was involved in humanitarian mine clearance. Seven people did not classify their activity at the moment of incident.

This mine victim, interviewed during the survey, was a child when his accident happened. (Photo courtesy of EIP/ANAMA.)
Most of the losses and injuries of civilians arise due to negligence and carelessness. Civilians involved in non-military activities accounted for 103 of 145 cases with loss of an arm or hand, eyesight or hearing and 43 of the 192 cases of lower limb amputations. In some cases, civilians were tampering with explosive devices and in other cases they were crossing into restricted areas. It can be concluded that in a number of cases civilian casualties resulted from treating explosive ordnances carelessly.

Recommendations

The main recommendations derived from the survey are as follows:

• Further coordination of mine-victim-assistance activities: Activities of various governmental and nongovernmental entities should continue their joint efforts within the MVA working group, ensuring constant efforts toward sensitizing society to the problems of mine victims and persons with disabilities in general.

• Development of MVA projects and identification of implementing agencies: For projects developed using the needs-assessment survey data, emphasis should be on projects empowering the community, e.g., through establishment of associations for mine/UXO victims.

• Establishment of a charitable fund for MVA: Acting within the Azerbaijani legislative framework, a charity should be established to attract money from national and international organizations and individuals to fund various MVA projects.

• Monitoring of the level of mine/UXO victim assistance: For each victim, the level of medical care and physical rehabilitation measures, together with the degree of social reintegration and professional rehabilitation, should be evaluated over the course of a year using various methods. Articles about MVA should be published in international and national journals, newspapers and magazines whenever possible to continue educating the public on mine victims in Azerbaijan.

See Endnotes, page 111

Effects of Landmines on Sri Lanka

The Tamil people moved from the southern part of India to Sri Lanka around the 14th century and they struggled with the kingdom of Sri Lanka on and off throughout history. Since 1983, a Sri Lankan separatist group, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, has fought with the central government of Sri Lanka for a separate homeland for minority Sri Lankan Tamils. The decades of conflict have resulted in the demolition of large areas of fertile agricultural lands, commercial areas, residential areas, roads and water resources. Later, as people tried to reculture these areas, they encountered landmines and many became disabled.

Mine Ban Convention

The Sri Lankan government has not signed the Antipersonnel Mine Ban Convention. Both the government and Tamil Tigers formally committed to a ceasefire in 2002, but there has been a sharp increase in violence since President Mahinda Rajapakse came to power in November 2005. Government security forces are currently engaged in a limited operation in Trincomalee to reopen the Mawilaru anicut that was closed by the Tamil Tigers. It provides water to over 15,000 families and approximately 30,000 acres of paddy lands in the Seruwila, Mutur and Elalangaturu areas in the Trincomalee district. According to government sources, the Mawilaru area was heavily mined by LTTE forces in an attempt to slow Army progress. According to the Landmine Monitor 2002 Report for Sri Lanka, there still are 701,000 anti-personnel mines in the ground.4

Mine Clearance

Mine-clearance activities have expanded greatly since the February 2002 ceasefire. The HALO Trust, Tamil Rehabilitation Organization’s Humanitarian Demining Unit, Mines Advisory Group, Norwegian People’s Aid, Fondation Suisse de Démintage, the Sri Lankan Army and RONCO Consulting Corporation are engaged in demining work in Sri Lanka. Currently there are three main approaches to humanitarian mine clearance in Sri Lanka:

1. Manual clearance—an effective but slow process.5
2. Manual clearance with support of mine-detecting dogs—a good method but very difficult in some areas, because the dogs can become confused if they smell explosives coming from several sources at once.
3. Mechanical clearance—the fastest method, but less effective.7

The speed of manual demining is approximately 25 square meters (30 square yards) per hour. Using explosives-detecting dogs is also a rather difficult process because the effectiveness of the dogs depends entirely on their level of training and the skill of their handlers. Also, all EDDs are brought from foreign countries and are not used to the Sri Lankan climate, so they tire quickly. Mechanical mine clearance is the fastest method employed in Sri Lanka. The MVE-4 Mini Flat System has an average speed around 2,000 square meters (2,400 square yards) per hour for light soil and 1,000 square meters (1,200 square yards) per hour for heavy soil. The Borenius 6 clear about 2,500 square meters (3,000 square yards) per hour for light soil and 500 square meters (630 square yards) per hour in heavy soil.10