February 2006

Afghanistan Landmine Impact Survey

Patrick Fruchet
U.N. Mine Action Centre for Afghanistan

Mike Kendellen
Survey Action Center

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The fieldwork for the Afghanistan Landmine Impact Survey was completed in January 2005, and the United Nations certified it 30 Sept. 2005. The final ALIS report is expected to be published in March 2006. This article provides an overview of the findings and how the mine action community in Afghanistan is using the results in its strategic planning.

The Afghanistan LIS

The Mine Action Programme for Afghanistan is one of the largest and longest-running mine action programs in the world. In 1993, the Mine Clearance Planning Agency, an Afghan non-governmental organization, conducted the first Level One Survey, the predecessor to the Landmine Impact Survey. Over the years, new suspected hazard areas were periodically added to the MAPA database. As years passed, however, the database was unable to meet the increasing needs of mine action stakeholders. The situation called for a proactive response.

In 2000, the United Nations Mine Action Service, the Survey Action Center, and the government of Afghanistan discussed the need for an LIS for Afghanistan. The lack of international interest in mine action in Afghanistan while under the Taliban, and the subsequent Coalition operations against al-Qaeda and the Taliban after 9/11, however, postponed implementation of an LIS until 2002, when conditions were more conducive to executing a national survey. In November 2002, the U.N. Development Programme and the European Commission signed a contract for SAC to oversee the ALIS and provide technical support to the Mine Clearance Planning Agency. In May 2003, SAC and MCPA fielded teams to commence the survey.

MCPA teams were able to travel to all but five of the 329 districts in the 32 provinces. The teams operated under severe security constraints and in potentially dangerous conditions and deserve commendation for their extraordinary achievement. During this time, MCPA survey teams visited over 5,000 communities suspected to have landmine and unexploded ordnance problems. The ALIS was funded by the EC through UNDP and the UNMA’s Voluntary Trust Fund for Assistance in Mine Action, as well as the governments of Canada and Germany through SAC.

Background

The Afghan mine action community is currently one of the largest and longest-running mine action programs in the world. The mine action community has conducted surveys in Afghanistan since 1993. The Mine Clearance Planning Agency, an Afghan non-governmental organization, conducted the first Level One Survey in 1993, the predecessor to the Landmine Impact Survey. Over the years, new suspected hazard areas were periodically added to the MAPA database. As years passed, however, the database was unable to meet the increasing needs of mine action stakeholders. The situation called for a proactive response.

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by war are the main reasons why villages were abandoned and remain empty.

Victims of mine incidents. In the LIS, “recent victims” are defined as persons who have been killed or wounded within the 24-month period prior to the survey. The survey recorded 2,245 recent mine/UXO casualties (922 killed and 1,323 injured), which averages to approximately 1.100 victims per year over the course of the two-year period covered by the survey. Of the 2,245 casualties, 90 percent were male and 7 percent female. The gender of the remaining 3 percent is unknown. The fatality rate is nearly the same for males (41 percent) as for females (42 percent).

Age in Afghanistan is one of the determinants for describing the serious consequences from landmines. Although two-thirds of the victims in Afghanistan are males (55–59 years of age, 609 victims, or 18 percent of the total, are 5–14 years old. The LIS data on casualties show the devastating effects of mine accidents on livelihoods. Comparing current and pre-incident occupations, the data indicate some major changes. Unemployment among all survivors increased by 58 percent, and there were notable decreases in the percentage of farm workers, factory personnel, deminers and laborers among the survivors—all occupations requiring mobility over difficult terrain (a challenge for any landmine/UXO survivor who becomes an amputee)—and increases in the numbers of those doing household work.

The ALIS survey made it possible to identify nine or more recent victims including three community victims: Twenty-six communities reported having nine or more recent victims including three community victims reporting 22, 33 and 35 recent victims.

Blockages. The more commonly reported economic blockage was pastureland, which was reported in 71 percent of the impacted communities. Cropland was the second most commonly reported blockage. The LIS included “development and economic activities” as a potential blockage by landmines, but only 9 percent of impacted communities, or 217 of them, reported this type of blockage.

Consequences for Mine Action Planning

The results of the ALIS indicate a foreseeable and reasonable end to the landmine problem within the next decade. The survey findings make it possible to plan mine action activities with an integrated humanitarian and development perspective that influences mine action strategic planning at the national level. The survey findings will allow UNMACA to undertake regular analysis and monitoring to ensure planning is effective. Priorities can be updated on an ongoing basis to ensure high-impact communities are kept at the top of the agenda, including communities newly categorized as impacted because of recent victims or new blockages. By periodically publishing the critical two-year window of information driving community impact scoring, UNMACA will base MAPA planning on the best available information.

Conclusion

The LIS has advanced the planning for mine action in Afghanistan. The survey has provided MAPA with an updated and verified database in which baseline data can be used in planning and measuring achievement and success. Specifically, the LIS identified areas seriously affected by landmines as well as areas not affected. The survey exceeds the idea that landmines are everywhere in Afghanistan.

The government of Afghanistan, the ultimate user of the survey, expressed its satisfaction with the LIS findings at a press conference in Kabul on 8 Nov. 2005 when Dr. Mohammed Haider Reza, the deputy minister of social affairs and that of the Mine Action Consultative Group, said, “With the LIS data, we can now plan to clear all high-impact mined areas by 2007, all medium-impact SHAs by 2009, all remaining mined fields by 2013 and UXO SHAs by 2015. The ALIS data will also assist in further refining the MAPA’s casualty reduction strategy. Additionally, the LIS results allowed mine risk education programs to develop new strategies for risk reduction that will better use limited resources and encourage safe behavior among various community members targeting communities based on the level of impact from landmines according to the ALIS.

The LIS can also impact planning for development. Based on information from governmental, international and non-governmental organizations, as well as the results from the ALIS, cost estimates can be calculated for mine action that affects road construction, power lines and irrigation. However, such estimates require definitively ranked priorities and time frames for development projects.

In order to make more effective use of the LIS, Afghanistan is one of the first mine action programs to create monitoring teams to ensure the database stays current. The Landmine Impact Assessment Teams were assembled at UNMACA soon after the ALIS was completed. They conducted community visits countrywide to both validate and update the ALIS findings. The LIAT-based monitoring systems ensures the database is consistently maintained, which, in turn, will allow UNMACA to undertake regular analysis and monitoring to ensure planning is effective. Priorities can be updated on an ongoing basis to ensure high-impact communities are kept at the top of the agenda, including communities newly categorized as impacted because of recent victims or new blockages. By periodically publishing the critical two-year window of information driving community impact scoring, UNMACA will base MAPA planning on the best available information.

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See “References and Endnotes,” page 105
References