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Margaret S. Busé

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The Role of the United Nations in Mine Action
An Interview with Ian Mansfield

Ian Mansfield of the United Nations Development Programme talks candidly about the various mine action issues in the UN, how the UN organizes mine action, the role of host governments, donors, and the successes and challenges of coordinating integrated mine action activities with infrastructure development and capacity building.

by Margaret Busé, Editor

Ian Mansfield (IM): Mine action is relatively new for the United Nations; the whole UN was about 10 years old. The first time the UN ever became involved with humanitarian demining was in 1988 in Afghanistan. Landmines were a big problem at the time the Soviets pulled out, and with 3 million refugees in Pakistan and 2 million in Iran, the UN recognized that this could look like a great humanitarian tragedy once the refugees started to return. So, in October 1988, the UN launched a call for assistance to Afghanistan, and the appeal included an allowance for humanitarian demining. The UN also looked around for implementing partners, which is how we normally conduct projects, but there weren't any NGOs working in demining in Afghanistan at the time, so we decided to set up a local program. The first strategy of that was to train hundreds of Afghan men, to clear up their own villages, but that didn't work because for various reasons, and the refugees ended up not returning en masse anyway. Based on this early experience we had in Afghanistan, we realized that there was need for demining, as it was called then, to be done on a more controlled and organized basis.

Margaret Busé (MB): Where did you look for your technical capabilities for that project?

IM: In the early days, it was mostly military or ex-military personnel. Countries like the US, Canada, Australia—about seven countries in total, provided military experts to train the Afghans. After we realized that, it could be done on a more structured basis, the UN oversaw the creation of a number of Afghan NGOs. This was very successful and today they now employ around 5000 people. One or two international demining organizations also get their start in Afghanistan around that time.

MB: What was your role?

IM: I was the UN Programme Manager for the Mine Action Programme for Afghanistan from late 1991 until the end of 1995. MartinBarber (now the Chief of UNMAS) was also there at the time with the overall UN coordinating body.

MB: What was the next milestone for mine action?

IM: The next big event for the landmine issue was the Gulf War. The UN wasn't involved in demining activities in Kuwait, but the war really brought landmines and UXO to the world's attention. The way Kuwait dealt with the mines was interesting. They had lots of money, so they used commercial demining contractors worth about US$700 million. Within two or three years, the mines were cleared. That just goes to show that a landmine problem can be solved, if you've got the money and the resources; it's not mission impossible. However — this situation obviously isn't typical, because most of the countries that are mined are poor, so there have to be other ways to deal with the issue.

The next time the UN got involved in mine action was in Cambodia. After the United Nations Office of Project Services (UNCHC) was established in 1993, the UNDP was asked to continue providing assistance. We helped to set up the Cambodian Mine Action Centre, which is now one of the largest national institutions. Since then, it's just grown. Mozambique, Angola, Bosnia and so on, and even more countries since the Ottawa Treaty was signed, have all asked the UN for assistance with mine action.

That's the headquarters, policy level. However, most of the UN mine action programs by the world agencies are done on a day-to-day basis by agencies like UNMAS, UNHCR, UNIFEM and UNOPS.

MB: Who is responsible for what at what level?

IM: As mentioned, UNMAS was created within the UNDP to be the primary focal point for all mine action activity within the UN system. They coordinate the work of all the other agencies involved and have primary responsibility for policy issues. They also manage the Voluntary Trust Fund. Practically speaking, they also deal with emergency mine action issues—like those related to peacekeeping missions—they were the first ones out in places like Kosovo, Southern Lebanon, and the TSR between Ethiopia and Eritrea. They also organize assistance missions to countries. Colombia and Mozambique, for example, both recently asked the UN for assistance, so UNMAS is putting together a team from the different agencies to assess what needs to be done. Another significant thing UNMAS has done is to develop (in conjunction with the GICHD) the International Mine Action Standards (IMAS). UNICEF is responsible for physical education, awareness, or mine risk reduction education as it is now called, and advocacy programmes. This seemed to lead on naturally from their child education and protection programmes.

Other agencies like the World Health Organisation (WHO), World Food Programme (WFP) and the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) also get involved in mine action, as it relates to their various mandates. The WFP for example, paid two trains to Angola so they could deliver food and UNHCR have funded the clearance of houses in Bosnia so that refugees could return.

Finally, there's UNDP—who I work for. We do capacity building in mine affected countries. At the moment, we're helping 16 different countries with various types of programmes. The way we work is a little different to UNMAS. We don't really run the show at all, but rather assist the government and the community to implement programmes. In Cambodia, for example, we extracted the government there with training, funding, and we also provide technical advisors. What we're trying to do is develop an overall mine action structure and capacity in the countries—we don't actually clear the mines from the ground ourselves; UNDP also looks at the socioeconomic aspects of landmines. It's important to know the benefits of spending money on mine action. If we clear this paddy field, people start growing rice again and will that generate income and employment? We've done studies like that in Laos and Mozambique, for example.

MB: What is the best way of studying the impact of mine action?

IM: It is. In fact, studies like those have three objectives. One is to define the structures/mine areas that are having. The Landmine Impact Survey fairly well cover this area now. Second, we want to give managers the tools to let them set priorities. And finally, it gives us the chance to tell donors what we're doing with their money. They'll say, "We've given you a million dollars, what have you done with it?" And... And... But, more importantly this has led to so many jobs created, reduced transport costs, increases in income generated, etc.

MB: Do you carry out this work in-house?

IM: It depends on the situation. UNDPs prefer to use what we call "national execution" where the government ministry is responsible to oversee the UN project. We have this in about 5 of our country programmes. Otherwise, we tend to use the United Nations Office of Project Services (UNOPS) to execute many of our projects. They're basically a contracting agency within the UN, who specialize in international recruitment and project management services.

MB: Does UNOPS charge a fee for their services?

IM: They do. They're not allowed to raise money directly, the way NGOs do. They generate their income by charging for their services. I always compare it to putting up a building. UNDPs has the idea for a building and where it should go, we design it and arrange the money for it; then we need someone to build it for us, and we have to pay UNOPS to come in. If we design a project in a country, we need technical advisors, specialized equipment procurement, service contracts, office equipment, all of that stuff—and UNOPS arranges all those sort of details.

MB: What are the criteria that the UN uses to prioritize mine action assistance to a country?

IM: The UN encourages all countries to sign the Ottawa Treaty, but they wouldn't necessarily be excluded from receiving assistance if they hadn't. In most cases, however, we see the impact that such policies are having. The Landmine Impact Survey fairly well cover this area now. Second, we want to give managers the tools to let them set priorities. And finally, it gives us the chance to tell donors what we're doing with their money. They'll say, "We've given you a million dollars, what have you done with it?" And... And... But, more importantly this has led to so many jobs created, reduced transport costs, increases in income generated, etc.
help people, so projects were started. In both of these cases though, it's important to note that there were things that we wouldn't and wouldn't do. With the Afghan government admitting to still using mines for example, we wouldn't help the government, but we did help fund NGOs working there.

**MB:** Mine action now covers a whole range of activities—clearance, stockpile education—but did the UN ever fund such operations?

**IM:** When Afghanistan started off, it was just clearance. We trained Afghans to clear the mines, but first we had to find out where they were. So we set up an NGO to do surveys. Then, when refugees started to come back, we had to do something about the problems. Of course there was always need to assist mine victims. Also, when the Ottawa Treaty came along, stochastic destruction became an important pillar of our support—so you don't have to clear the mines if they don't ever get planted. So things really evolved according to need, in line with what we were seeing was happening. It's probably fair to say though, that the concept of mine action has been around since the start, but the term was only formally defined in the 1998 UN policy on mine action.

**MB:** What's happening in Afghanistan at the moment?

**IM:** Within the UN system, UNDP is responsible for leading the overall recovery effort there. In conjunction with the World Bank, and the Asian Development Bank, UNDP calls for programmes an outline needs assessment and presented it to donors in Tokyo in January. It contained sections on mine action, which included that within 7 years and US$650 million, Afghanistan could be free from the impact of mines.

**MB:** Has the situation in Afghanistan changed at all since your implementation goes, as I said before, UNODA has historically been responsible for the oversight of the Mine Action Programme's activities in Afghanistan (MAC). However, with the establishment of a new UN structure there, this may change, and UNMAS may take on a stronger role. The good thing is that the interim Government there is saying that the UN is not staying involved in mine action. UNDP will continue to give assistance in this as a number of funding, management training, rehabilitation projects and oversight of a Landmine Impact Survey (ILS).

**MB:** How does the management training work?

**IM:** We run a few different types of programmes. Together with Cranfield University in the UK, we set up some training courses for senior and middle managers of mine action programmes. In the first course, 14 senior managers from 14 different countries went to Cranfield. Since then we have conducted more senior managers courses, and a number of middle managers courses. Everyone got on really well and at the end of this training, and we realized that this sort of interaction between nations of mine affected countries was really valuable. So we decided to build on it and encourage this exchange of knowledge and ideas even more by setting up a staff exchange programme called MAX. For instance, Azerbaijan wants to begin a dog programme; Afghanistan has the oldest dog programme; so why not send someone from Afghanistan to Azerbaijan to spend some time teaching? Or for the new programme in Gaza-Binaw, why don't we send some Portuguese-speaking people from Mozambique there to demonstrate the oldest database system? Basically, this sort of thing is on the job training and about four exchanges are underway at present.

**MB:** What about the Landmine Impact Survey Projects? Can you describe what happens there?

**IM:** The surveys are very useful tools for defining the socio-economic impact of landmines on communities and to mine action NGOs undertaking field work. The survey is part of an integrated response to a landmine problem. It's one of the tools used to work out what the problem is and where the priorities should be. And now, because we've been doing surveys for a while, there's a standard methodology developed by SAC's next—this gives us a common ground to talk about when describing the global landmine situation.

**MB:** What other activities does UNDP get involved in?

**IM:** There's the socio-economic studies that I've talked about. We're also doing a project on reintegration of landmine victims. In the first stage, we're in Slovenia, but a programme in a number of countries to help mine victims rehabilitate meaningfully into society. For example, we are doing an extension of vocational training in Cambodia, where they're great at making handicrafts, but not so good at marketing them. So we've set up a business in which we will work. We're also partnered with the A- Minefield programme, which has been very successful in training the private sector and civil society in support of the UN mine action effort. UNDP has 137 country offices around the world, which gives us the broadest reach of any UN agency. If Mauritania asks for assistance, we have a programme director in a UN office there too. That makes our ability to understand a problem and react accordingly very effective.

**MB:** Where do the funds come from for the programmes that you run?

**IM:** Nearly all the mine action work funded by the UN comes from voluntary contributions provided by donors. Each year the UN puts together a portfolio of mine action projects from around the world. This year's edition has just been released, and it includes activities in 30 countries. Trust Funds are often used to help channel the funds to the programme. This is a lot of very significant effort and shows how much individual countries are becoming involved. For example, 90% of the Croatian programme, is now government funded. We're just about to pull out of there, because we see our job as being done. We've helped set up the structure, we trained the staff, given them the IMASMA system and standards, and helped to organize projects. The same thing is happening in Cambodia, where the government gives more and more money each year. It is currently the sixth largest donor to our own programme. In other words, donors may want to fund a programme, but not through a UN trust fund. That's fine too as long as the host government approves, and the work is consistent with the government's wishes and the operations of the MAC. One place this didn't happen so well was in Mozambique in the early days, when donors started programmes bilaterally because they were interested in doing activities in certain places. When that stage was just recovering from the conflict, and donor activities weren't always as effective they could be, because they were not coordinated. Now though, the new National Demining programme (IND) is quite organized, so the situation has settled down.

**MB:** With donors being such a critical factor, how has donor interest in mine action changed?

**IM:** All the figures indicate that global funding for mine action has grown slowly over the past few years. To be honest, it didn't start very high on a list of donor priorities — when Afghanistan appealed for money in 1988, many donors believed there was little to be gained. And that the army should clean up after a war. But then, in the early 1990s, awareness of the huge impact of landmines was raised due to the situations in Angola, Kuwait, Cambodia and Afghanistan and the like. Along with the Ottawa Treaty and factors like the involvement of Prince Charles, the Dianas, and the Nobel Peace Prize. Now, more attention became more focused on the issue and donor consciousness was raised. At the moment, the number of countries that contribute to the UN mine action efforts stands around 24, although only around 15 of them are regular donors.

**MB:** Do you have to ask certain programmes around to get them funded?

**IM:** Sometimes it can work that way. The UN puts together a portfolio of mine action projects every year for instance, which donors can reference. We may also give a list of programmes to certain donors, and the like. We've been monitoring 16 countries at the moment, so at times like this, we can say 'Las is running a little short, you could fund that.' This happened recently with the Koreans. They came to us and said they wanted to provide mine action assistance in south-east Asia, so I said, 'We've got needs in Laos, Thailand and Cambodia — here's what needs to be done, and here's how much money is required.' They will then make

**MB:** So does that mean there's no donor fatigue?

**IM:** Actually, I don't agree with the notion of donor fatigue, it's an unhelpful concept to talk about. I think if you have a well-run programme, and you can demonstrate a need, you will get funding. "Fatigue" will only set in if there's mismanagement or you can't demonstrate that the work you're doing is useful.

Besides, there may be other factors that explain why some donors reduce their contributions. Realistically, contributions can be made for all sorts of reasons, not just political, commercial as well as the humanitarian needs. A slowdown or change in funding on the part of the donor may not be completely linked to the performance of the programme in question.
their decision on which one to fund.

**MB:** Does UNDP recommend the priority areas for mine action?

**IM:** Yes, small country governments that are inter-ministerial in nature and need to oversee what's happening in their country, help plan mine action. This is the operational headquarters for mine action and through various tools, including the INMSA database, they can work out what the priorities are, and we will help where we can.

Then, actually carrying out activities related to the priorities — that's where local and international NGOs come in.

**MB:** How do you coordinate the activities of the different bodies involved?

**IM:** That's an integrated national mine action strategy and work plan comes in. Based on all the information that has been gathered from the various sources, one of the most important tasks for the government is to develop this type of plan, that sets out the objectives and priorities, as well as how to do it, and when. Usually, this plan is linked into our overall development goals like landmine action plans, such as reducing poverty. UNDP has helped a number of countries — Mozambique, Cambodia, Laos, Azerbaijan — for example, to develop these type of plans. Various coordination mechanisms can be set up at the country level to assist the planning process.

**MB:** Do all programmes have national plans?

**IM:** Some have developed very comprehensive plans, and most produce something to a certain degree. It's certainly the ideal that UNDP aims for. When the Koreans came along like I mentioned and said that they wanted to help — because of the large landmine problem and were able to say "here's what needs to be done, take your pick." A donor can clearly see what the national priorities and activities are.

Some people feel that you need to wait for a full Landmine Impact Survey before you can do anything, but that doesn't mean that you should be excluded entirely. So UN policy was revised to allow for this in cases where there was overall civilian control of the national structure. It's important to note though, that we won't pay the salaries of soldiers, but we will ask donors to buy the necessary equipment, or pay for insurance.

Whatever work the military, and the NGOs for that matter, does, it needs to be coordinated. It's not much use clear- ing land that will not be used by anyone. Unfortunately, this is still happening. One country we've worked in, the government asked us to clear land for a school, so we did, but three years later still no school. This goes to show that mine action, by directing them to the areas that need a response, and as long as the work they do is seen to a certain standard, and they report back on the work they do — fine! Of course NGOs are fairly independent, but this way of working seems to work. Kosovos in particular, showed the benefits of a strong, central organization.

**MB:** What are some of the pros and cons of working with local NGOs?

**IM:** The big advantage is that they use local people, so they're cheaper. We've used local NGOs in Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Mozambique, and helped to develop their skills and capacities. However, this may not always be the best way to go — especially in an emergency situation like Kosovo, where there's no time to train new staff. In these cases, an international NGO that can bring people in quickly may be the best way to go. Another advantage of working with a local NGO is that they're vital to the local community of people. In the respect, that's what UNDP's capacity building ideas are all about.

Quite often though, it also comes down to exactly what resources are available. Commercial companies for example, may not want to work in a country like Angola because there's too much risk — so we have to use local NGOs. As I said though, they may be the most suitable for the job anyway.

**MB:** How does the military fit in?

**IM:** When we began working in mine action, the UN wouldn't support the military of a country. That policy came out of working in countries where the military was often the cause of the prob- lem in the first place. However, the angu-


dent then came up that in some cases, the military are a good option for certain aspects of mine action, like clearance. They may not be good at mine aware-

ness, but there are always roles for the military. For example, with mapping, that's clearly something the military can do. In others, survey work, it's something that the military can do. In others, survey work, it's something that the military can do.