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Afghanistan's National Mine Action Strategic Plan (2016-2021)

by **Mohammad Akbar Oriakhil** [**United Nations Mine Action Centre for Afghanistan**]

Afghanistan suffers from severe landmine and explosive remnants of war (ERW) contamination, mostly as a result of the Soviet-Afghan War (1979–1989), internal conflict lasting from 1992 to 1996, and the United States-led coalition intervention in late 2001.¹

There are around 617 sq km of areas remaining to be cleared as of end of March 2016, new contamination is arising as a result of the ongoing nationwide non-technical survey which covers both the contaminated areas left from the fighting (1979-2001) and the contamination resulting from the ongoing war since 2001 between the international forces allied with the Afghan government against the non-state armed groups. Additionally, firing ranges used by international forces throughout the past 14 years have also produced ERW contamination. Based on the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention (APMBC) extension request work plan, all confirmed hazardous areas (CHA) and suspected hazardous areas (SHA) within the territory should be cleared by March 2023.²

The vast mine/ERW contamination poses an immediate risk to personal safety in Afghanistan. In 2014 alone, there were 1,296 recorded mine/ERW casualties (575 killed/721 injured), of which more than 98% were civilians.³ In total, there have been 24,300 recorded casualties (4,802 killed/19,498 injured) between 1979 and 2014.⁴ Access to the scarce victim assistance services in Afghanistan is severely hindered by poor infrastructure, continued conflict and poverty.⁵

The Mine Action Programme of Afghanistan (MAPA) has surveyed and cleared almost 80 percent of all known mine/ERW contamination throughout the country. MAPA's main functions are coordinating, planning and setting priorities, information management, mobilizing resources, and ensuring quality of mine action services, advocacy and communication. The Directorate of Mine Action Coordination (DMAC), which works under the Afghanistan National Disaster Management Authority, partners and coordinates with the United Nations Mine Action Centre for Afghanistan (UNMACA) under the United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS).



The National Mine Action Strategic Plan (NMA SP) workshop, 18 October 2015.
All photos courtesy of UNMACA.

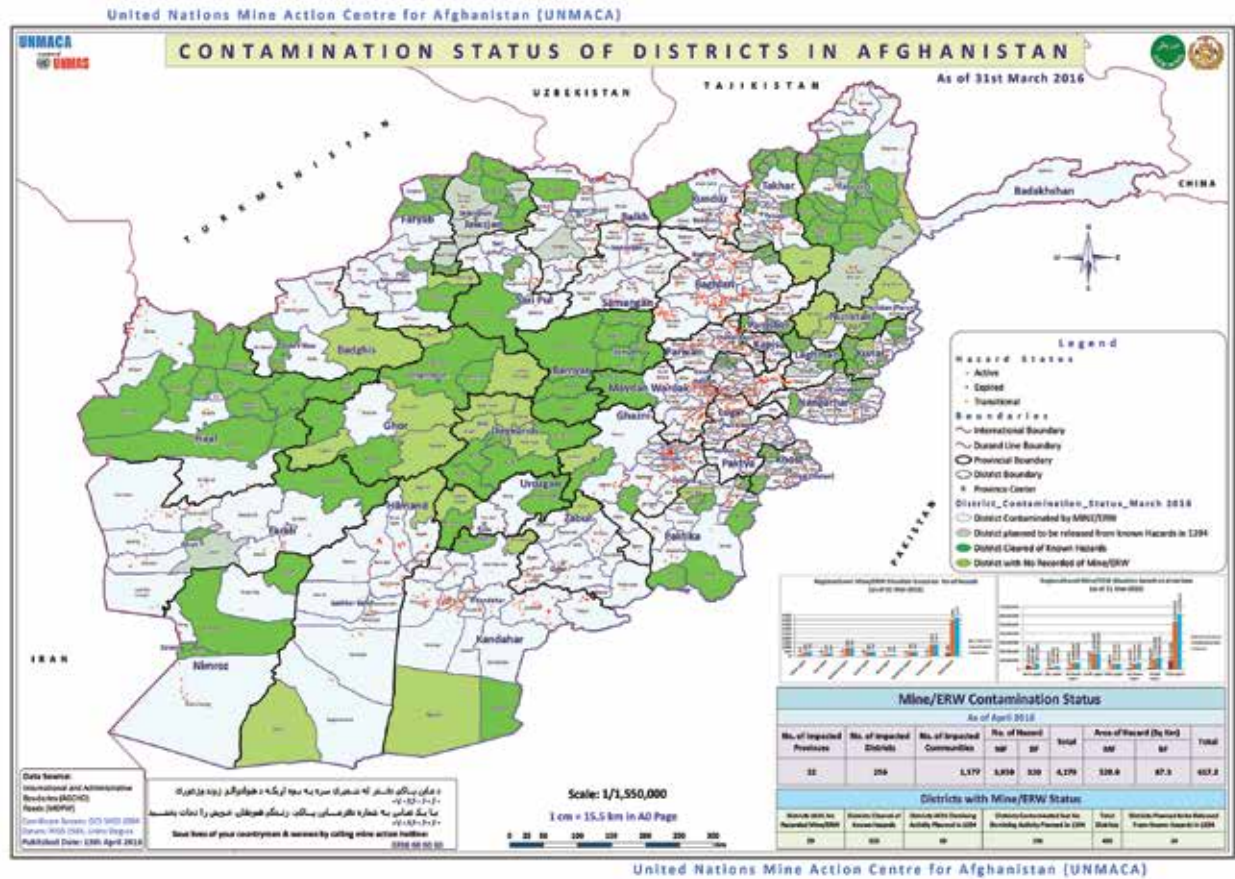


Figure 1. Contamination status of districts in Afghanistan as of 31 March 2016. Figure courtesy of UNMACA.

There are approximately 50 mine action nongovernmental organizations (NGO) and commercial demining companies implementing mine action projects in Afghanistan.

Based on the March 2016 UNMACA report, there are still 617 sq km (235.9 sq mi) of residual contamination left to be cleared excluding the firing-range contamination.⁶ Figure 1 shows the scope of the current contamination levels in the country.

Need for a Strategic Plan

UNMACA developed the first MAPA strategic plan for 2008–2013, as well as a document titled “Mine Action in Afghanistan: The Way Ahead,” which was released in May 2006, outlining mine action end goals for Afghanistan and a plan for transitioning the mine action program to the Afghan government.^{2,3,7} These strategic plans were developed by only a few experts and were not properly communicated to various stakeholders, thus reducing the plans’ effectiveness. Since 2013, the APMBC extension work plan is the only available strategic plan. This document mainly focuses on the survey and clearance of mines and ERW, while other aspects of mine action (i.e., facilitating development, gender mainstreaming, mine/ERW risk education, advocacy and victim assistance) are not covered. Hence, stakeholders needed a comprehensive strategic

plan covering all aspects of mine action that could steer the program and coordinate activities among its stakeholders to achieve the program’s end goals.

NMASP Development Process

Two workshops were conducted in October 2015 and between January and February 2016 in Kabul, where participants representing DMAC, UNMACA, implementing partners, relevant government ministries and donors attended. Participants in the workshop reviewed the program’s vision and mission statements, conducted SWOT and PESTLE analyses, and determined strategic risks and mitigating factors of the program.^{8,9} At the early stages of deliberation, five strategic goals were determined:

1. Transition to national ownership
2. Facilitate development
3. Engage with other sectors
4. Implement the five pillars of mine action
5. Gender and diversity mainstreaming.

However, after further discussion among the management of DMAC, UNMACA, UNMAS and the implementing partners, the first goal was deemed to already be in progress. Additionally, the stakeholders decided the fourth step on the

implementation of the five pillars of mine action would be divided into two parts to address both preventive functions (clearance, mine/ERW risk education, stockpile destruction and advocacy) and responsive functions (victim assistance and advocacy). The initial strategic goals were as follows:

1. Facilitate development
2. Engage with other sectors
3. Implement the five pillars of mine action
 - 3.1 Preventative functions to reduce impact of mines and ERW
 - 3.2. Responsive functions to mitigate the consequences of mine/ERW accidents
4. Gender and diversity mainstreaming.

In addition, five working groups were assigned and each group conducted a number of sessions to determine 33 objectives and 108 action plans as well as indicators, milestones, potential risks and how to mitigate risks. During the second workshop, the working group outputs were reviewed and the statements for each goal were updated. The template and format of the National Mine Action Strategic Plan (NMAPS) were discussed and participants determined that a follow-up session for governmental approval was necessary.

Strategic Goals and Objectives

Goal 1: Facilitating development. *To establish and maintain confidence that all aspects of MAPA's planning, prioritization, operations, monitoring and evaluation are informed by and assessed against the development requirements of the people and government of Afghanistan.*

Objectives include:

- Identify development projects for the next five years, assess mine/ERW contamination of these project sites, mobilize resources and plan clearance operations from 2016 to 2020
- Incorporate mine/ERW challenges into national priority programs and sustainable development goals as well as other government development frameworks
- Implement the mine action program as part of development policies for projects and provincial strategic plans in key government ministries.

Goal 2: Engaging with other sectors. *To ensure that ministries, departments and agencies of the government of Afghanistan, as well as national and international NGOs, and private sector stakeholders take into account the significance of MAPA's strategies, priorities and activities.*

Objectives include:

- Incorporating mine action into the following sectors: education, health, economic, private, agriculture, rural

rehabilitation, social protection, security, infrastructure, and natural resources

- Drafting bilateral agreements with regional and international organizations on joint programming.

Goal 3.1: Preventive functions to reduce the impact of mines and ERW. *To determine and implement appropriate and effective actions to reduce current and future impacts of mine and ERW contamination on Afghan people and government through clearance, stockpile destruction, mine/ERW risk education and advocacy.*

Objectives include:

- Enhance fundraising efforts to keep mine action activities on track
- Quantify hazards resulting from post-2001 contamination
- Complete survey of remaining non-surveyed areas
- Keep the extension request plan on track
- Improve the capacity of the program to respond to new types of contamination
- Mainstream mine/ERW risk education into government line ministries, community networks and civil society organizations
- Support the government on destruction of unrecorded, sporadic, stockpiled and unserviceable ammunition
- Reduce civilian casualties, especially the protection of children from mines and ERW
- Adopt and update policies and Afghan mine action standards/procedures in accordance with International Mine Action Standards (IMAS).

Goal 3.2: Responsive actions to mitigate the consequences of mine and ERW accidents. *To determine and implement appropriate and effective actions to reduce the impacts arising from mine/ERW accidents on the people and government of Afghanistan.*

Objectives include to advocate for and support

- The government of Afghanistan in developing national disability and victim assistance policies
- Relevant line ministries (Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs, Martyrs and Disabled [MoLSAMD], Ministry of Women's Affairs [MoWA], and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs [MoFA], etc.) in developing disability and victim assistance inclusive policies and strategies
- MoLSAMD and other line ministries/institutions in conducting national disability and victim assistance surveys and development of a disability database
- The allocation of funds for direct services provision for disability and victim assistance activities.

Goal 4: Mainstreaming gender and diversity. *To ensure*



The end of the first workshop, 22 October 2015.

that all gender and diversity groups participate in and benefit from the work of MAPA and that MAPA benefits from the insight and participation of gender and diverse groups in all aspects of its work.

Objectives include:

- Develop a MAPA gender and diversity policy
- Increase employment of women, people with disabilities and other marginalized groups
- Manage, design, implement and evaluate gender and diversity-sensitive projects
- Raise awareness within MAPA and its stakeholders of gender issues
- Improve consideration of gender and diversity issues in coordination mechanisms (building State capacity, problem-driven integrative adaptation, etc.)
- Establish a gender department and allocate a budget for gender-based activities
- Continue to build capacity of gender departments and promote their role in mainstreaming gender and diversity policy.

The Way Ahead

This NMASP document was launched in early April 2016 and a review committee was established to monitor and regularly review the process of implementing the objectives while providing progress reports to UNMACA and DMAC.

Conclusion

Compared to the previous strategic plans, the preparation of these goals and objectives is more inclusive of a wider range of stakeholders. Participants agreed to all goals and objectives in the NMASP. Additionally, the plan incorporates the pillars of mine action and is concurrent with the Maputo Action Plan 2014. ©

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Mohammad Akbar Oriakhil was born in Kabul, Afghanistan and graduated from Habibia High School before immigrating to Pakistan where he studied under the International Rescue Committee Construction Engineering Program. In August 1995, he joined Afghan Technical Consultants and worked as assistant operations officer, assistant site officer, supervisor and operations officer until February 2003. He then joined UNMACA as operations assistant and was promoted in 2006 to area manager. Oriakhil is now the planning and program manager with UNMACA. He is also a graduate of the Center for International Stabilization and Recovery's 2010 Senior Managers' Course in ERW and Mine Action.