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The Mine Action/Mine Risk Education Integrated Approach

Integration is a popular buzzword in current dialogues among United Nations' experts and practitioners. The integration of mine risk education (MRE) into mine action programs is crucial if a program is to be successful in addressing the mine threat in a holistic and comprehensive way.

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The Challenge of Integration

According to the recent *Landmine Monitor Report 2002*, "In 2001 and the first half of 2002, two trends became more visible: more standardization of MRE, and increased integration of MRE with other humanitarian mine action programmes and activities."

These trends are positive and encouraging. However, while such trends exist, a guaranteed course of action to ensure that MRE is consistently and adequately integrated in a mine action program or project still does not exist. There are several reasons why a standard process for integrating an MRE component to a mine action program has not been established:

- The responsible Mine Action Coordination Centre, in charge of a particular mine action program, simply does not comprehend the idea of a holistic approach to mine action.
- The responsible MRE staff of a particular program fails to comprehend the globally accepted mine action philosophy; MRE forms an essential and integrated component of mine action and does not simply stand alone.
- There is simply an inadequate MRE capacity at hand to cope with the actual MRE requirements of a mine action program.

Successful mine action programs of the past and present are those that have comprehensively integrated the various components of mine action, such as mine clearance, victim assistance and MRE.

Effective Data Collection

From the onset of implementing a mine action program, it is imperative to determine the needs for a local response to the landmine/UXO threat of an affected area. To do so, the gathering and analyzing of relevant information and data related to the mine/UXO threat is essential. This collection and analysis of data and information allows all involved mine action partners to adequately prioritize the required mine action activities and thereby to address the landmine/UXO problem in the most effective and efficient manner.

It is believed that the collection and exchange of relevant mine/UXO information is best achieved by adopting a holistic and integrated mine action approach. One example is applying "participatory methodologies," which are often used for MRE activities. In fact, the MRE participatory methodology, which has been applied in various programs around the world, primarily aims to place affected communities in the center of a particular MRE

activity, thus demonstrating to the population the importance of their participation in conducting effective mine action activities. The purpose of these methodologies is to illustrate to the community that the mine/UXO problem is, first and foremost, a community threat and thus must be addressed from a community level. In addition, the aim of such a methodology is to make the affected population aware that much of the relevant mine/UXO information lies in the hands of the community members. It is imperative that the community understands this and that they learn to work in cooperation with all involved mine action partners so that they will feel comfortable telling the partners everything that they know about mines and UXO in their surrounding areas.

A Coordinated Effort In Eritrea

An "Agreement on the Cessation of Hostilities" (ACH) was reached between Ethiopia and Eritrea in Algiers on June 18, 2000. The ACH and the UN Policy for Mine Action provided the framework for both emergency and long-term activities conducted by national and international mine action entities in Eritrea.

Eritrea's landmine and UXO problem stems from its struggle for independence, and more recently from the 1998–2000 conflict with Ethiopia. Both struggles left many areas of the country affected by landmines/UXO. In particular, the recent conflict with Ethiopia affected large areas along the Ethiopian Border—a 25-km-wide band designated by the United Nations as a "Temporary Security Zone (TSZ)."

Since the cessation of hostilities between Ethiopia and Eritrea in June 2000, the United Nations has had a peacekeeping mission in the region, known as the United Nations Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea (UNMEE). Since then, various UN agencies and mine action partners are involved in planning and implementing an integrated emergency response in cooperation with the Government of Eritrea.

As mandated by the Security Council in a number of Resolutions, UN assistance in mine action for Eritrea is designed to address the emergency landmine problem in the TSZ as well as to assist Eritrea in strengthening its national and local capacity to mitigate the effects of landmines/UXO on the local population in the long term.

Since the beginning of UN involvement in mine action in Eritrea, the UN response has required a collaborative and closely coordinated effort by the various mine action partners, including the UN Mine Action Service (UNMAS), the UN Development Program (UNDP) and the UN International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF). The coordinated effort of these groups ensures a well-linked and continuous transition from the current ongoing emergency operations to the longer-term developmental activities, as well as ultimately providing a clear and coherent exit strategy.

So far, UNMAS, UNDP and UNICEF have carried out their responsibilities based on an agreed and integrated work-plan that has evolved over time because of changing circumstances and needs.

The MACC was established in August 2000. The MACC is a UNMAS project that is executed with assistance from UN Office of Project Services (UNOPS). The Centre is located in Asmara and consists of an Operations Department, Information Department, MRE Cell (where an MRE Coordinator has been seconded by UNICEF), a Medical Cell and an Administration/Finance and Logistics Department.

The MACC Approach in Eritrea

The Central Level

Co-location of an MRE Coordinator (MREC) within the MACC office compounds:

The co-location of a UNICEF-seconded MREC and the establishment of an MRE office within the office compounds of the MACC greatly facilitate efforts to integrate MRE activities with all other mine action activities that are required in Eritrea.

Technical collaboration between the MACC Operations Department and the MRE

Cell: Efforts by the Chief of Operations and by the MREC to regularly liaise and communicate with each other have led to integrated tasking of MRE as a relevant

component of mine action-tasking procedures.

From the onset of the development of the MACC work plan, MRE was considered a key component. Thus, as a joint-effort between the Ops Department and the MRE Cell, MRE has been integrated into the overall work plan and objectives of the MACC, as well as into the individual departmental work plans, when appropriate.

Efficient cooperation between the MACC Information Department and the MRE Cell:

From the very onset of the MACC operations, the MRE Cell, in collaboration with the Information Department, began to develop an MRE-specific information management system as an add-on Information Management System for Mine Action (IMSMA) tool. This has facilitated the monitoring and tracking of all MRE activities in the field. The aim of this tool is to enable all involved stakeholders to easily and regularly access all relevant data and information about ongoing activities in the field and thereby determine whether additional MRE requirements are needed or not. In the process of developing and implementing such a monitoring system, specific standard forms were designed and field tested, and they are now being implemented for the use of all MRE partners. These forms include "Weekly MRE Activity Report" forms, "Knowledge Attitude Practice" (KAP) questionnaires and "MRE Quality Assurance Monitoring" forms.

Collaborative efforts between the MACC's Quality Assurance (QA) Staff and the MREC:

Together with the QA Staff of the MACC, the MREC developed specific QA procedures for MRE activities and integrated these into the national QA Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for Eritrea. The purpose of integrating these MRE QA procedures is to ensure that MRE activities are conducted in concert with clearance operations (before, during and after) and to provide a nationally consistent framework for the implementation of an MRE QA monitoring system.

Development and integration of an MRE training capacity: A further step undertaken by the MACC, which allowed for the successful integration of MRE into the overall mine action program, was to establish an MRE-specific training cell within the establishment of the National Training Centre (NTC) of Eritrea. In line with this step, the MACC also hired an MRE trainer. Under the supervision of the MREC, the MRE trainer has been responsible for developing the local training capacity of specialist MRE instructors for the NTC. The aim of this MRE training infrastructure within the NTC is to develop, for the longer term, a sustainable and high-quality national MRE training capacity for Eritrea.

So far, the MRE training cell at the NTC has focused on training and monitoring mine action agencies that are involved in MRE activities in Eritrea. The cell has also developed MRE specific training manuals. In addition, deminers and MRE staff, were given the opportunity for the first time to participate in an integrated Mine Action Team Leader Course, which combined general management training with MRE-specific training. The management component of the training was conducted by the non-governmental organization (NGO) CARE.

UNMEE's consistent support of MACC MRE activities: UNMEE's active and regular support to the MACC in the development and implementation of integrated MRE activities has further facilitated an integrated and holistic mine action approach in Eritrea. For example, UNMEE was helpful in the production of certain MRE tools such as the MRE road billboards, which were erected in 12 high-risk areas around the TSZ. Also, on a monthly basis, a specific UNMEE team has been responsible for landmine safety training courses for peacekeepers, while a specific MACC team has been responsible for this kind of training for personnel of the various UN agencies and other NGOs operating in Eritrea.

In addition, with funds provided by UNMEE, the MRE cell was able to conduct landmine safety trainings. The funds were also used for the production of safety training course material.

Centralized support for resource mobilization for MRE activities: The mobilization of required resources to support integrated MRE activities and efforts in Eritrea was effectively coordinated and executed by the MREC within the MACC. The MREC's key positioning within the MACC facilitated this means of mobilizing the necessary resources

for the cell's activities. Indeed, it allowed the MREC to access a variety of sources for funding, including the Mine Action Voluntary Trust Fund (VTF), UNMEE assessed contributions and UNICEF donors as well UNDP donors.

The Community Level

Effective integration of MRE on the community level was possible in Eritrea because MRE teams were trained to act as multi-skilled MRE teams. The aim of these multi-skilled MRE teams has been, and continues to be, to change the behavior of at-risk communities by applying a variety of MRE-specific educational and communicative tools and methods. This approach aims to facilitate communication and cooperation between mine clearance operators and the communities in areas where clearance operations are conducted, in particular, to share relevant mine/UXO information between community members and mine clearance operators. In this sense, the role of these MRE teams is also to work closely with Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) Quick Response Teams and the Peacekeeping Force's assets.

MRE is integrated with other sectors and agencies (Community Health, school systems, etc.). Also, it is worth noting that a particular community-based MRE approach was adopted in Eritrea, which also facilitated the effective integration of MRE into the mine action program for Eritrea.

Ongoing IMSMA data collection and inputting: When MRE activities are conducted on the community level, mine action information and data is collected, which contributes to a program's data-gathering and analysis process.

Regular community-based liaison efforts: Through regional mine action offices, MRE teams have been able to assist with the mine action prioritization process by regularly cooperating and communicating with community volunteers, demining agencies, local authorities and other relevant mine action partners in the field. Some liaising efforts by MRE teams with the various mine action actors in the field (before, during and after clearance activities) were taking place in the Eritrean Mine Action Program. There is room for improvement to standardize such behavior and practice in the future.

The development and maintenance of open, transparent cooperation and communication channels among all concerned mine action players is imperative. All relevant mine action players and community populations must be kept sufficiently informed, at all times, about mine action activities, dangers, the safety of their surrounding areas, etc.

Lessons Learned

The Central Level

It is essential to establish and maintain transparent and close professional relationships with the relevant and concerned national Ministries (including the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Information, etc.) so that MRE can be effectively integrated into the overall mine action program of a mine-affected country. Furthermore, it is important to cooperate and work closely with the QA staff of a mine action program so as to be able to integrate a QA system for MRE activities from the very onset of a mine action program.

Also, in order to ensure that the importance of integrating MRE into a mine action program is fully understood and supported, close-working relationships with the operations department are required from the very onset of a program. Preferably, the MRE cell, and its responsible coordinator, should be located in the same office facility to avoid any lapses of communication or cooperation between MRE mine action partners and all other operational mine action players.

The development and immediate implementation of a comprehensive, integrated mine action information management structure within a program is also fundamental. An MRE component in this regard is crucial and must be integrated into the information system; it cannot stand alone.

The development and implementation of a national MRE training capacity ought to be considered in the planning of a mine action program for an affected country from the very onset. MRE training for deminers before they are deployed to the field is imperative.

Once the MRE training cell was established at the NTC, the collaboration and cooperation between all those working in the NTC developed smoothly over time. A proof of this was the fact that, for the first time, deminers and MRE staff attended an integrated mine action supervisors' course together. This was commendable. Also, cross training of mine action teams (with limited MRE training) was provided to demining teams. This too is progress.

In the future, it would be advised that an MRE component be included in the initial stages of developing a mine action strategy for an affected region/country. MRE should not be "attached" as an extra component to a strategy at the end stages of developing or implementing such a strategy. In the case of Eritrea, an MRE component was integrated from the very onset of the program's development. This was critical to the success of the MACC's integrated mine action approach.

In terms of resource mobilization for MRE activities, it is also recommended that the MRE Coordinator/Cell be co-located within the facilities of the mine action program. This sort of physical setup, for example, allows the MREC to access and benefit from the various UN sources for funds in a transparent and coordinated fashion.

The Community Level

If an efficient, friendly and professional system of cooperation is developed between MRE teams and EOD Quick Response Teams, as in Eritrea, a more effective mine action response to affected communities will be more likely. Well-trained and integrated MRE teams have demonstrated in Eritrea that they can be very useful in collecting relevant mine/UXO information and data on a community level. This is important since the collected info and data from the community is inputted (together with all other collected mine/UXO info/data) into the national mine action database systems for Eritrea, which then serve all mine action partners involved in mine action in Eritrea. Because MRE teams assist with the collection of relevant information and data, they play a very crucial role within a mine action program.

Extensive community liaison efforts/activities by MRE teams in an attempt to effectively address the community needs of an affected area proved crucial for both the deminers and the population of an affected community. Such efforts were, and continue to be, an effective mechanism for the exchange of relevant information between affected communities and all involved mine action partners. The importance of developing and maintaining sufficient liaisons and communication channels with affected communities cannot be emphasized enough. Establishing such grassroots contacts not only builds trust between the affected population and the operating mine action entities, but in turn also allows for greater and more direct access to relevant mine/UXO information and data. This is so because often the affected local population can tell you much more about the presence of mines/UXO than any other person or organization.

Conclusion

The integration of a MRE component into a mine action program is crucial if a program is to be effective in addressing the threat in a holistic and comprehensive way. If MRE is adequately and effectively integrated (as it was done in the mine action program for Eritrea), it benefits the program in multiple ways. Most importantly, the MRE component of mine action can support the program by assisting with the collection of relevant mine/UXO-related information and with developing additional communication and cooperation channels between the various concerned mine action players. It may be necessary to build communication between the affected communities and the clearance agencies, or between clearance agencies and other humanitarian agencies. Either way, it is crucial to establish communication and cooperation bridges between the affected local populations and the international humanitarian mine action operators so that a level of trust can be built. In turn, communication will provide access to more mine/UXO-related information, which will benefit the entire mine action program.

While trends indicate that MRE is increasingly incorporated into mine action programs in a standardized fashion, room for improvement in this regard remains. In the future, mine action programs must continue to give MRE serious attention and consideration if the program is to be effective and successful.

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