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Azerbaijan Mine Action Program: The Information Leverage

The effective and steady working partnership between the Information Department of the Azerbaijan National Agency for Mine Action (ANAMA) and the Geneva International Center for Humanitarian Demining (GICHD) has enabled the development of the Information Management System for Mine Action (IMSMA). The following article outlines the relationship between ANAMA and GICHD and their joint success.

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Background

In July 2002, ANAMA participated in the Workshop on Data Integrity and Reliability, the joint venture of the GICHD and the James Madison University (JMU) Mine Action Information Center (MAIC), hosted by the university. This year, the GICHD invited ANAMA to attend another workshop on Geographic Information Systems (GIS) for Mine Action Centers' information staff members. Recently, the Mine Information System Officer of ANAMA, Mr. Timur Obukhov, was hired by United Nations Office of Project Services (UNOPS) to be the Mine Information Advisor for the Ethiopian Mine Action Organization. All of these events should be recognized as the efforts of the ANAMA Information Department in providing information management support to the field activities and in efficient implementation of IMSMA over the past three years.

At the same time, the Information Department should facilitate effective communications within ANAMA and with contractual agencies, donors, and aid and development organizations, as well as provide conditions for free circulation of information.

We received IMSMA in 1999, but we have been actively using the system and its GIS functionality since 2000 for entering, mapping, analyzing and reporting Level 1 Survey data for 11 mine-affected districts of Azerbaijan. Surveyors were trained on the IMSMA reporting system by Information Department staff members. About 650 communities were surveyed, and 65 of them were identified as mine/UXO-contaminated with a total of 84 mined areas and 85 battlefields. According to the interviewees, the total mine/UXO-affected area was 50.7 million sq m. However, as of June 2003, the total area of minefields and battle areas, as recorded in the ANAMA database, was over 100 million sq m.

The General Survey format was specific. It was accompanied by a mine victim survey, and 1,222 records were entered into the database. For a period of almost two years after the completion of the General Survey, about 200 more records were added based on reports from different sources.

Technical assistance was successfully provided to the Survey Action Center (SAC) for Landmine Impact Survey (LIS) data gathering. We now have 647 records on affected

communities. All the data is available and being analyzed and prepared for reporting purposes and for further use in strategic planning and operational prioritization.

But the main activities of the department since mid-2001 have been technical surveys and reports on minefields, clearance, completion, dangerous areas, mined areas and mine incidents (in addition to those previously reported). Progress reports are scheduled to be given fortnightly. The information flow had been revised and the new scheme was also demonstrated to attendees at the IMSMA training at the GICHD in November 2001.

The information quality assurance system of ANAMA, measured and built on facts, had been developed based on the set of management controls at every stage of reporting. The aim was to eradicate root causes of non-performances. The questions were: "Is there an effective structure for quality in place?" and "Is the quality system adequate?" We reviewed how the information processes met the requirements, analyzed personnel qualification and training, and verified if the process was under control and monitored. As a result, corrective and preventive actions have been planned to identify and investigate the processes implemented. The quality warning system, the Quality Chain called "XYZ check" has been created based upon quality measuring points with the goals identified for each step of the process filed at the headquarters level. Quality is now continuously improving and improvements are followed up by measuring the extent to which the goal is being fulfilled.

We conducted many training sessions on IMSMA reporting, land navigation and map reading with operational staff in ANAMA and field personnel. Such training has also been given in the course of numerous corrective actions.

Upon request from the former UNDP/ANAMA Chief Technical Advisor, Mr. Sayed Aqa, there were some changes introduced in Clearance and Technical Survey reports that made the use of User Defined Functions (UDFs) necessary. The main achievement in maintaining the information management system is the development of the ANAMA Activity Report "Add-On" to IMSMA, which allows one to follow up on operational progress and to analyze different statistics on mine action activities.

During the history of the ANAMA IMSMA, we had close contact with the GICHD and the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology at Zurich (ETHZ). They were introduced to us by our former Information Technical Advisors from Switzerland, Messrs. Karl Heinz Stierli and Josef Strebel. They established, developed and maintained these relationships during their stay in Azerbaijan. We are now doing our best to keep the ball rolling.

Through the regular trainings hosted by the GICHD, it was possible for five people from Azerbaijan (four information staff and one from a non-governmental organization [NGO]) to gain indispensable knowledge and skills, empowering the Azerbaijan Mine Action Program, the joint project of the UNDP and the government of Azerbaijan.

In July 2002, we received the GICHD IMSMA team and worked together in conducting comprehensive training for operational staff of the Agency and NGOs. It was done during the course of Staff Managerial Training of U.S. Special Forces European Command arranged for Azerbaijan last summer. We had good working relations with the IMSMA team, as if we had worked together for years. The good relationship was primarily due to having the same platform—IMSMA. The report of the team became a base for further development of the ANAMA information management system.

We also helped develop a mine information system in the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) Office for the north Caucasus, conducting training in May 2001 in Vladikavkaz and hosting two trainees in September 2002. The achievement in the series was the "Train-the-Trainer" approach. Agency Mine Information System Officer Mr. Obukhov successfully graduated from the courses in April 2003.

Having been composed of highly educated and skilled persons, the Information Department of ANAMA is quite confident that we will continue to develop and maintain IMSMA. This will continue to remain effective thanks to our steady working relationship with the GICHD.

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