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Priority Setting for Mine Action

Due to a lack of resources to enable all mine-affected communities to be cleared, countries must prioritize mine action activities. The following article addresses prioritization and suggests a new model to help improve the process.

by Lutful Kabir and Emil Hasanov, ANAMA

Strategy and Approach

The focus for the UNDP and the government of Azerbaijan's joint project, the Azerbaijan Mine Action Program, is to develop the institutional capacity of the Azerbaijan National Agency for Mine Action (ANAMA) to ensure the mine/UXO safety in currently accessible war-torn territories and enhance its capability to rapidly expand and cope with mine/UXO issues of occupied areas after their liberation. The framework for continued collaboration and eventual nationalization of the Azerbaijan Mine Action Program was designed in 2001. An effective mine action programme relies heavily on pro-active collaboration among its various components. Also, the expansion of the scope of work (SOW) for existing national non-governmental organization (NNGO) partners, the establishment of new regional offices, the continuance of a mine action programme in more creative ways and the improvement of other key components of the programme are ANAMA's priorities. These priorities are essential to ANAMA's mine action strategy.

The mine action framework in Azerbaijan is based on two approaches. The first approach is to build an optimum national capacity. The objective of this approach is to establish and develop national bodies to assume mine action responsibilities and minimize reliance on outside technical support. The second approach is to continue to respond effectively to the priority needs of affected areas. This approach is obviously dependent on the level of effective inter-component collaboration. To further develop the operational capability of the two implementing NNGO partners of ANAMA is yet another essential component of ANAMA's ongoing strategy. Training and other kinds of capacity-building measures are in place, and further development of this approach is envisaged. With the development of a National Monitoring, Training and Quality Assurance (MT&QA) Team, the need for international experts has been minimized. These trainers continue to train the staff-members of these NNGOs on various facets of their work.

Based on ANAMA's observation, although most mined areas in Azerbaijan are suitable for mine detection dogs (MDDs) and cost-effective, there is a substantial number of mined areas that are more appropriate for mechanical demining machines (MDMs). This not only is true for accessible mine-contaminated areas, but it will also obviously be an incomparable and compatible tool for a cost- and time-effective mine action programme for ANAMA. Given this, establishment of an MDD capacity and procurement of MDMs are two very important goals of ANAMA for the coming years. To help realize its MDD capacity, ANAMA has been working closely with the RONCO Consulting Corporation (contractor of the U.S. Department of State [DOS]) since September 2001. Thanks to RONCO's support, ANAMA now has one trained MDD Officer, 20 MDD Handlers, two Supervisors and 60 operational MDDs. Likewise, all efforts are being made to procure an MDM and the capacity to manage it effectively. Two staff-members of ANAMA have been slated to get firsthand MDM experience from Lebanon and Croatia through the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)-funded Mine Action Exchange (MAX) programme.

Given its experience in the Fizuli and Goranboy districts, ANAMA has envisaged to make substantial improvement in its UXO clearance and explosive ordnance disposal (EOD)

response capability. The support that ANAMA has received so far from the U.S. European Command (EUCOM) in developing this capability is indeed worth mention. Another critical requirement of ANAMA's mine action programme is to further build up the capability to carry out the accreditation, licensing, external monitoring and quality assurance of the two NNGOs operating in Azerbaijan. Once these capacities are developed, it is expected that the programme will reach a level of productivity and efficiency that is proportioned to the expected outcome of the programme.

Operations

The Operations Department of ANAMA is responsible for the prioritization, planning, tasking, coordination, accreditation, licensing, external monitoring and quality assurance (quality management) of demining organizations; controlling all clearance- and survey-related operations; and establishing constant review of standards and standard operating procedures (SOPs). The Operations Department is also responsible for receiving and checking technical reports, conducting quality control of cleared areas and monitoring ANAMA contracts by visiting operations sites to ensure that technical standards and SOPs are maintained and followed.

Technical Survey (TS)

As a result of the training conducted by USEUCOM from July to August 2002, an additional five-man TS team of Dayag (Relief Azerbaijan), one of the implementing NNGOs of ANAMA, was trained and equipped. Thus, Dayag now has eight Surveyors, two Team Leaders and one TS Supervisor on its TS Team. During 2002, Dayag operated in the southwest and northwest parts of the country. The TS SOPs were revised and updated based on the lessons learned from the previous years.

Manual Demining (MD)

At the beginning of 2002, ANAMA had one Manual Demining Team of 38 deminers from Dayag, of which, sometime during mid-2002, three deminers were trained and promoted to national supervisors and 10 deminers became UXO experts. However, a batch of 56 manual deminers was trained by USEUCOM from July to August 2002 and made operational right away. ANAMA added a batch of 10 more deminers along with their affiliated superiors who were trained by the MT&QA Team of ANAMA to the existing team of 52. Subsequently, five deminers were selected to join the UXO team and one left the team. Thus, a total of 84 individuals including eight paramedics are now in the demining teams' implementing partner NGOs Dayag and International Eurasia Press Fund (IEPF). The Manual Clearance SOPs were revised and updated in compliance with International Mine Action Standards (IMAS).

The ANAMA Operations Plan for 2003 includes:

- Technical survey of 900,000 sq m of high-priority land
- Clearance of 1,500,000 sq m of high-priority minefields and battle areas
- Clearance of 750,000 sq m of minefields by MDD support
- Testing and procurement of demining machines
- Reduction of 1,000,000 sq m by mechanical means
- Clearance of a UXO site in Agstafa district (former Soviet army ammunition warehouse) with support of North Atlantic Treaty Organization's Maintenance and Supply Agency (NATO-NAMSA)
- Establishment and training of two additional five-man UXO Operations Teams
- Training of an additional six dogs and handlers
- Continued training for MDD Instructor and Supervisors
- Training of personnel to support mechanical equipment
- Identifying and addressing training needs of the field staff
- Continued participation in UNDP MAX Programme as well as Cranfield University and SEEMACC hosted trainings

The first ever NNGO partner, Dayag of ANAMA, operates mostly in the southwest part of Azerbaijan (Fizuli and Agjabedy districts). However, during the summer of 2002, a Dayag MD Team was deployed to undertake mine clearance in support of ongoing reconstruction activities in the Ashagi Agjakend village in the Goranboy district. The request for this

demining intervention came from the government of Azerbaijan intended to return 1,400 internally displaced person (IDP) families to the above-mentioned village. The government has funded the clearance operations. The demining team has cleared the entire village of mines and has additionally cleared 800 pieces of UXO from an adjacent battlefield area of approximately 300,000 sq m. Also, in June 2003, ANAMA began a mine clearance programme in Agjabedy district, an area that has been affected by landmine problems.

The second NNGO partner of ANAMA, the IEPF, has implemented a mine clearance operation in the Gushgara settlement of Khanlar district, with a limited capacity of 10 deminers supported by MDDs. Funding for the project was provided by the government of Japan on a bilateral basis. Upon completion of the Gushgara task, the team was deployed to the Topalhasanli village of the Khanlar district where an area of more than 22,000 sq m (AP mine belt around former Soviet military site), has been cleared. Eleven AP mines were found in close proximity to the village. These AP mines were destroyed in place. Currently, IEPF operates with one full demining team trained for the most part by USEUCOM. Three national supervisors trained during April–September 2002 by UNDP Technical Advisor Mr. Johan Eklof (SWEDEC) are supervising the teams. Training of national-site supervisors enabled ANAMA to minimize its dependence on expatriate supervisors.

UXO Operations

Up to September 2002, ANAMA had a limited UXO capacity. Battle Area Clearance (BAC) operations were carried out by Dayag deminers, who were merely trained to identify locations of UXO and mark them for further destruction. In October 2002, ANAMA began to operate with two fully equipped five-man UXO Operations teams. These teams were trained by USEUCOM on UXO clearance operations including various aspects of clearance and destruction techniques to ensure maximum safety on site. Operators were selected from a number of experienced deminers. A draft UXO Operations SOP was developed and provided to the teams for reference and testing.

From October to December 2002, the two newly commissioned UXO Teams cleared more than 130,000 sq m of battle areas and destroyed more than 110 pieces of UXO in Fizuli district. Besides specific tasks, the aim of UXO Teams is to conduct demolitions in the minefields and battle areas as well as destroy individual pieces of UXO, based on emergency requests from local communities and executive authorities. In January 2003, two UXO Teams started operations in Agstafa district, Saloglu village (northwest), where an area of about 5,683,789 million sq m (according to TS) is heavily contaminated by various types of UXO. This was a result of explosions that took place in 1991 in a former Soviet military ammunition warehouse located in close proximity to this village.

#	Type of Operation	As of December 2002	January–August 2003	September 2003	Total
1	Total Mined Area Identified	58,561,338	2,642,650	0	61,203,988
2	Minefield Marked by TS	893,109	944,925	139,500	1,977,534
3	Minefield Manually Cleared	313,884	529,888	69,505	913,277
4	Minefield Clearance With MDD Support	955,597	426,587	68,704	1,450,888
5	Area Cleared/Reduced by TS	92,011	90,221	25,802	208,034
6	Total Battle Area Identified	9,285,912	35,265,000	0	44,550,912
7	Battle Area Marked by TS	814,875	3,154,216	0	3,969,091
8	Battle Area Cleared	748,639	2,229,044	467,789	3,445,472

Table 4: Summary of mine action progress as of September 2003.

Approximately 50 million sq m of the mined area has been identified during the General Survey undertaken by NNGO IEPF, some time during late 2001. The reader will notice that the "total minefield technically surveyed" is a bit below "the actual minefield cleared"-manually and with MDD. This is because of the fact that a substantial amount of

contaminated land has been cleared without undergoing the technical survey until mid-2001 and secondly, occasionally owing to unknown topography of the land the area between the two stages varies. As a result of IEPF's activity, about 1,414,789 sq m of contaminated land has been cleared and 1078 pieces of UXO have been destroyed in Saloglu village to date. The third (five-man) team was trained in July–August 2003 by USEUCOM and included into the existing capacity of two UXO Teams.

MDD Capacity Building

Dogs play many different roles within a mine action programme. They are used as demining tools for area reduction, to detect explosive ordnance and mines and verify the presence of mines/UXO in the suspected areas, and to perform quality control (QC). They can also be used to verify the boundaries of minefields, to clear road verges, and to search houses and ruins for explosives. Currently ANAMA has a sustainable national MDD capacity in place with 16 MDDs, 20 handlers, one MDD Officer and two Supervisors in operation. They are being trained by RONCO. The MDD teams are supporting the demining and TS operations throughout the southwest and northwest districts of Azerbaijan. It is envisaged that by the end of 2003, ANAMA will have a qualified national MDD Trainer capable of operating with no outside support. In April 2003, ANAMA prepared a new fenced testing site for MDD accreditation in Horadiz township of Fizuli district. This site is being used for the accreditation of four MDDs that ANAMA has received.

MT&QA Capacity

The National MT&QA Team was established in September 2001. The MT&QA Team is unique in ANAMA, particularly with the general and implementing unit of ANAMA's Operations Department. The team strives to achieve its objective of ensuring professional clearance of contaminated land through training, monitoring and QC at all levels of mine action activities, and by holding training/discussion session on MRE with the communities during emergency situations. The team in essence monitors the field operations to ensure that ANAMA standards are maintained and followed with no exception. The MT&QA Team advises the deminers and ANAMA NNGO partners on technical matters and addresses problems being identified during monitoring visits. The MT&QA Team is also responsible for general survey activities within Fizuli district; however, if necessary, the team members are also sent to other districts for reconnaissance missions. During the USEUCOM trainings in the summers of 2002 and 2003, the MT&QA Team received additional knowledge and skills in UXO operations. Two members of the Team acted as instructors on the second phase of USEUCOM training. Currently, the MT&QA Team is capable of training specialists such as deminers, surveyors, BAC operators and site supervisors. A major revision on the technical SOPs was done in September–October 2003 by the MT&QA Team. Revised and amended SOPs were submitted to the ANAMA Operations Department for final check and approval.

Development of Mechanical Demining Capacity

In June 2002, ANAMA hosted a research and development (R&D) mission of the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) to study the feasibility of an MDM in Azerbaijan. The mission confirmed the need for the integration of MDMs into the Azerbaijan Mine Action Program. Integrating mechanical means will allow for rapid reduction of large-size mine-suspected areas and increase cost effectiveness of clearance operations. Usage of MDMs will also increase the safety of the manual deminers and MDDs during a follow-up operation. ANAMA is exploring all possibilities to acquire the MDM as well as the capability to manage it in sustainable ways. In April 2003, two specialists from Communications and Electronics Command (CECOM)/Research, Development and Engineering Center (RDEC)/Night Vision & Electronic Sensors Directorate (NVESD) of the U.S. government (USG)/DoD visited ANAMA HQ. The purpose of their visit was to discuss the proposed future testing of mechanical demining machine in Azerbaijan, its related scope of work and terms and conditions.

Operations Staff Capacity Building

During 2002 and 2003, a number of training sessions were conducted for ANAMA staff both by UN Technical Advisors and by USEUCOM Instructors. The training sessions were aimed at developing the mine action management, as well as the technical skills of ANAMA staff personnel. ANAMA was one of the first mine action centres (MACs) that got an opportunity to participate in the Mine Action Senior Managers' Course conducted by

Cranfield University of Great Britain. Since 2000, three ANAMA staff members have attended the course. ANAMA's Operations Manager participated in the Senior Managers course for southeast European countries in the first quarter of 2002, which was organized by UNDP and Cranfield University with financial support from the U.S. DOS. At the end of the year, five ANAMA HQs, the Regional Office and NGO staff members participated in the Cranfield University Mine Action Middle Managers' Courses conducted by Amman University in Jordan. Two key staff members from the ANAMA Operations Department participated in the UNDP MAX programme in Croatia, Afghanistan and Lebanon. The aim of the programme is to allow participants to broaden their knowledge on different perspectives of mine action. The Operations Officer from the Afghanistan Mine Clearance Planning Agency (MCPA) was hosted by ANAMA as part of the programme. The Director of the Tajikistan MAC participated in an one-month MAX programme with ANAMA during July–August 2003. Also, two ANAMA Operations Department staff members will soon receive training and exposure on MDM management in Lebanon and Croatia under the UNDP-funded MAX programme.

Contact Information

Lutful Kabir
UNDP Chief Technical Advisor for ANAMA
69, Fizuli street 4th floor
AZ1014 Baku
Azerbaijan
Tel: (99412) 97 38 51
E-mail: lutfulk@anama.baku.az
Website: <http://www.anama.baku.az>

Emil M. Hasanov
Operations Manager, ANAMA
69, Fizuli street 4th floor
AZ1014 Baku
Azerbaijan
Tel: (99412) 95 04 91
E-mail: ehasano@anama.baku.az
Website: <http://www.anama.baku.az>