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Current Landmine Impact Surveys by the Survey Action Center

The Survey Action Center (SAC) envisions post-conflict societies being free from the impact of landmines in order to boost peace, stability and economic development. Since 1998, 14 surveys have been conducted, including one in northern Iraq by United Nations Office of Project Services (UNOPS) and one in Lebanon through the Mines Advisory Group (MAG) and the Vietnam Veterans of America Foundation (VVAFA). In 2003, seven surveys are being conducted with SAC support. This article describes the current status of the Landmine Impact Surveys (LISs) in Afghanistan, Angola, Azerbaijan, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Eritrea, Ethiopia and Somaliland.

by Kristen Frahler, MAIC

Introduction

SAC is an independent, international, non-profit organization based in Takoma Park, Maryland, USA. It is the executing agency of the Survey Working Group (SWG). Each survey is conducted in accordance with the principles and operating protocols established by the SWG in 1998. SAC's main goal is to better describe and characterize the landmine problem in countries that are affected by these weapons. The LIS is the tool used in trying to achieve this goal. The LIS provides a snapshot in time of the landmine problem for countries struggling under post-war reconstruction by identifying which communities are impacted by landmines, the approximate location of the suspected hazard areas (SHAs) and landmine victims within the 24 months prior to the survey.

Afghanistan

The massive post-Taliban reconstruction effort, which includes the return of over one million refugees and displaced persons to their homes, requires an assessment of the impact of landmines throughout the country. It is critical for communities to have access to roads, bridges, farmlands, water, shelter and irrigation systems in order to boost the national economy and rebuild the country. The LIS will provide vital information for the reconstruction planning.

The European Commission has provided \$1.8 million to SAC and Mine Clearance Planning Agency (MCPA) for the survey. More than 2,000 communities with 5,454 SHAs have been identified by the Mine Action Center for Afghanistan (MACA) as being mine-impacted and in need of database verification and remeasurement. The LIS will verify the SHAs in the current database as well as measure their impact on the communities. Since the survey began in May, SAC has trained the MCPA senior staff and 90 interviewers, and the pilot test was conducted in October. Data collection will take place between November 2003 and August 2004, which will include verifying the existing SHAs in the MACA database.

Angola

The U.S. Department of State (DOS), the government of Germany and the government of Canada have provided funding to begin the survey in Angola. The LIS is being executed in partnership with National Inter-Sectoral Commission for Demining and Humanitarian Assistance (CNIDAH), Hazardous Area Life-Support Organization (HALO) Trust, Norwegian Peoples Aid (NPA), Mines Advisory Group (MAG), Santa Barbara, Intersos and Development Workshop.

In October 2003, SAC established an office in Luanda with a four-person coordination team. This team will oversee all the survey activities and provide technical support. NPA and HALO Trust began survey operations in September. It is estimated that 2,500 mine-suspected communities in 18 provinces will be surveyed. By January 2004, the training of survey supervisory field staff is scheduled to be complete. Data collection will commence in April and is expected to take 12 months.

Azerbaijan

Through funding provided by the European Commission (EC) to SAC via the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), a survey was conducted in Azerbaijan from September 2002 to June 2003. The International Eurasia Press Fund (IEPF) under a contract with SAC completed the data collection in May.

The final report will be available in December. Preliminary results show the survey identified 643 communities with 970 SHAs being mine-impacted. Mines and UXO have impacted 514,000 people with 52 recent victims identified. All but two victims were males and 60 percent of the victims ranged between the ages of 15 and 44. Seventy-one percent of the victims were harmed while farming or herding. The majority of the landmine blockages are affecting resource gathering from croplands and pastures. In the past two years, 287 communities reported mine risk education (MRE) measures that have helped them acknowledge and learn more about mines.

Bosnia-Herzegovina

The U.S. DOS, the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), the EC and the International Trust Fund (ITF) all provided funding for the LIS, which was conducted by Handicap International (HI) France under contract with SAC. The data collection was completed in September. Out of the 6,200 populated areas in the country, over 3,200 surveys were conducted and 1,480 were identified as impacted by landmines, thus, creating a mine-affected rate of 24 percent of all the communities in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Furthermore, three percent of the communities are categorized as high impact, 43 percent are medium impact and 54 percent are low impact.

The Bosnia-Herzegovina Mine Action Center (BHMIC) is implementing a pilot project of Task Assessment and Planning (TAP) under a contract with SAC. The project was implemented in 15 high-impact communities identified by the LIS and will form a model that determines priorities for mine action planning and development. The final LIS report will be available in early 2004.

Eritrea

A local non-governmental organization (NGO), Eritrean Solidarity and Cooperation Association, is conducting the LIS through the Eritrea Demining Authority and the UNDP. The EC and CIDA are funding this survey, and SAC is serving as the technical advisers to UNDP.

The preliminary opinion collection identified 2,400 possible mine-impacted communities. As of October 2003, 1,887 surveys had been conducted, identifying 445 communities impacted by landmines or UXO. January 2004 is the expected completion date for all data collection.

Ethiopia

The U.S. DOS, the government of Norway, the government of Germany and the EC have provided the funding for the survey. NPA, under a contract with SAC, is conducting the survey through Ethiopian Mine Action Office (EMAO).

Data collection began in April, and by January 2004 NPA will have surveyed more than 3,300 mine-suspected communities. There are more than 40 survey teams collecting data, which are placing a special focus on Ethiopian pastoral and internally displaced person (IDP) populations to see how they are being impacted by landmines. SAC has held senior staff training and conducted three days of pre-testing of survey instruments.

Somaliland

The Danish Demining Group (DDG) initiated the LIS in March 2002 and completed the survey in March 2003. The survey was limited to 45 percent of the country due to security issues in the Sanaag and Sool regions. The survey identified 357 mine-impacted communities and 772 SHAs associated with them that are impacting the lives of 1.34 million people. The LIS identified 276 recent victims. The EC, the Swedish International Development Agency, the government of Finland and the CIDA provided the funding for the survey.

Most of the highly mine-impacted communities are clustered together. Some of the most prevalent blockages of SHAs are of roads and pasturelands with the most serious being those of water and cropland. Proper MRE is desperately needed.

Conclusion

The LIS provides information that can improve the planning and resource allocation process for the donors, national authorities, NGOs, commercial firms and UN agencies in mine action. Through its LISs, SAC is helping to make our world a safer place. Although their goal may be difficult to accomplish, hopefully 2010 will be a year for all mined communities to be impact-free.

Contact Information

Mike Kendellen
Director of Survey
Survey Action Center
6930 Carroll Avenue, Suite 240
Takoma Park, MD 20912
USA
Tel: (301) 891-9192
Fax: (301) 891-9193
E-mail: sac@sac-na.org
Website: www.sac-na.org