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The Role of Mine Action in Victim Assistance

The Role of Mine Action in Victim Assistance

Of the five pillars of mine action, victim assistance seems to receive the least attention. At the request of the United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS), the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining (GICHD) has recently completed a research project with a view to offering guidance on the future role of mine action in mine and UXO victim assistance.

by Eric Filippino, GICHD

Introduction

The response to the global landmine and UXO problem, traditionally termed mine action, is defined as including five core components: mine clearance, mine awareness and risk education, victim assistance, advocacy in support of a total ban on anti-personnel landmines, and mine action. 

The GICHD Study on the Role of Mine Action in Victim Assistance has aimed to:

1. Examine the current landscape, focusing on the clarification of the respective roles of mine action in relation to victim assistance.
2. Identify good practice in the field of victim assistance for mine action and agencies.
3. Identify lessons learned that will lead to the clarification of the respective roles and responsibilities of agencies involved in mine action in relation to victim assistance.

The Study is comprised of five country case studies—Cambodia, Eritrea, Latvia, Kosovo, and Nigeria—representing five critical regions in which the ability to support all of the five components of mine action is not currently possible. Each case study has been designed to provide insight into the status of victim assistance in each country, the current roles of the various mine action organizations, and the challenges and opportunities for improved victim assistance delivery. The case studies also serve as a basis for discussing the role of mine action in victim assistance.

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Ethiopia, Kosovo and Nicaragua, which were selected for the distinct mine action scenarios and developmental settings they reflect.

**Study Findings, Analysis and Recommendations**

**Study Finding 1**
There is a widespread lack of clarity about the operational role of mine action in providing assistance to victims of landmines and UXO. One of the sources of this in a lack of clarity is the use of certain terminology and conceptual frameworks.

**Mine Action Definition**
It is important to remember that the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention, which is generally considered to be a hybrid arms control and humanitarian law treaty, does not provide a definition of operational mine action. Similarly, international law provides no real definition. To a large extent, this allows the mine action community great freedom to define the term.

Operational assistance to mine and UXO victims clearly falls within the current definition of mine action, but in most cases, mine action professionals take a much narrower definition of their mandate. This has left us in somewhat of a quandary when it comes to time it comes to define our profession with any accuracy.

**The Definition of “Mine Victim” and “Victim Assistance”**
There is no universally accepted definition to the term “victim assistance.” Without going into the various nuances and definitions it is noteworthy to mention that through the course of the Study we were repeatedly urged not to resurrect a debate that the victim assistance community itself has been unable to resolve. This level of uncertainty in fundamental definitions can only lead to greater confusion when it comes to time it comes to implement.

**Recommendation 1**
There is still a need to clarify, and if possible, standardise the various definitions attached to the following terminology:
- Mine action
- UXO
- Mine victim assistance

In particular, a definition of operational mine action should be elaborated, with due attention paid to the central importance of information management, and the need to integrate mine victim assistance within the wider war-wounded and disability contexts and mine clearance within wider relief and development initiatives. This definition should be distinct from the all-encompassing political definition.

This does not mean that only one definition may be applied to each term, but that the range of definitions commonly used, and, equally importantly, the corresponding implications for programmatic interventions, be clarified and explained in layman’s terms.

In this regard, a definition of operational mine action might be conceptualised as shown in the following diagram:

- **Public Health**
- **Min Action**
- **Development**
- **UXO**
- **Mine**
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