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Ensuring Effective Coordination: UNMAS and Mine Action Coordination Centres in Africa

Effective coordination is an essential part of mine action efforts worldwide. The author discusses the United Nations Mine Action Service's (UNMAS) coordination strategies, focusing on examples from Mine Action Coordination Centres (MACCS) in Africa.

■ A United Nations deminer sets explosives around an AP mine in Mozambique. c/o AP



by Sarah Campbell, UNMAS

Introduction

Given the range of activities and the number of players involved in mine action, coordination is a prerequisite to the effective implementation of mine action programmes in the field. MACCs are therefore a central component of most mine action programmes. Support for their establishment and development has been at the core of UN mine action ever since the first such centre was established for Afghanistan in 1989.

MACCs are normally initiated and developed under the direct auspices of local authorities. The role of the United

Nations is to provide them with the assistance they need and to support international cooperation. This assistance is provided through the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) for long-term capacity building programmes, and through UNMAS for programmes developed in the context of peacekeeping operations or in response to immediate humanitarian needs.

The main principles under which MACCs supported by the United Nations operate are outlined in the policy document of 1998, "Mine Action and Effective Coordination: The United Nations Policy."^[1] This document has been further refined with the formulation of guidelines clarifying the role of the military in mine action, and a sectoral policy on information management.^[2] This year, additional guidelines will be circulated defining the role of MACCs in relation to victim assistance.

While the responsibilities of MACCs vary from country to country, they typically include:

- The planning and operational coordination of all mine-related activities, surveys, demining and mine risk reduction activities in particular.

- Quality management, in accordance with the International Mine Action Standards (IMAS) adopted by the United Nations in 2001, which now form the basis for the development of country-specific national standards and Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) across all UN mine action programmes.

- Information management for which MACCs collect, analyze and disseminate the mine-related data necessary to operations, most of the time using the Information Management System for Mine Action (IMSMA), developed by the Geneva International Center for Humanitarian Demining (GICHD).

- Resource mobilisation.

In Africa, the United Nations system, through UNMAS, UNDP and the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), is involved in mine action in Angola, Burundi, Chad, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Ethiopia, Eritrea, Guinea Bissau, Mauritania, Mozambique, Sierra Leone, Somalia and Sudan. The source and scope of the landmine and UXO problem in each of these countries is unique, and therefore the mine action activities undertaken vary from country to country. UNMAS, working with the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS) as its executing partner, is currently directly responsible for supporting MACCs in the DRC, the Temporary Security Zone (TSZ) between Ethiopia and Eritrea, and Sudan.

The Democratic Republic of the Congo

Since 1997, the DRC has been engulfed in a conflict involving six neighbouring countries. The humanitarian consequences of the conflict have been devastating. Since January 2001, the political situation has improved, allowing for the deployment of the United Nations Mission in Congo (MONUC).

Under Security Council resolution 1291 of 2000, UNMAS recently estab-

lished a MACC as part of MONUC. The primary objectives of the MACC are the following:

- Develop a reliable mine and UXO information system based on IMSMA
- Implement emergency surveys as required
- Implement emergency mine action
- Provide mine action expertise to MONUC and the humanitarian community
- Assist UNICEF in developing a national risk reduction campaign

As soon as the situation allows, the ultimate goal of the MACC will be to assist the national authorities in developing a medium-to-long-term mine action plan to establish a national capability to coordinate and conduct mine action and to clear the country of mines and UXO. In the immediate future, the MACC will also assist MONUC in implementing urgent survey operations of suspected mined airfields that are a threat to further deployment of the Mission.

Eritrea/Ethiopia TSZ

Following the cessation of hostilities between Eritrea and Ethiopia in June 2000, UNMAS established the United Nations Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea (UNMEE) MACC. The UNMEE MACC has been designed to support the peacekeeping operation and humanitarian relief efforts within the TSZ, as well as to assist the government of Eritrea to strengthen its local and national capacity to address the long-term needs of its people. The programme in Eritrea also has a liaison officer in Ethiopia who provides specialized mine action advice to the government of Ethiopia.

The UN response requires a collaborative and closely coordinated effort by UNMAS, UNDP, UNICEF and the other mine action partners to ensure a well-linked and continuous transition from the current emergency operations to the long-term developmental activities, as well as to ultimately provide a clear and coherent exit strategy. UNMAS, UNDP and UNICEF carry out their responsibilities based on an agreed and integrated workplan, which will evolve over time as required by changing circumstances and needs.

Sudan

Sudan has been at war for nearly 40 years. While the ongoing civil war does not currently allow for the implementation of a typical Mine Action Programme (MAP), there are a number of immediate actions that can be taken to address some of the emergency needs of the civilian population. Many of these actions have already been identified as a result of the field assessment conducted in November 2000 on behalf of the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD) Partner Forum Working Group. These activities are currently being implemented through the European Union (EU)-funded Sudan Landmines Information and Response Initiative (SLIRI).

One of the initial responsibilities of the UN MAP in Sudan will be to develop a more comprehensive understanding of the scope of the problem and its impact on the people of Sudan. In addition, the following actions will be taken to begin addressing the landmine and UXO problem:

- Implementing an effective information distribution network
- Assisting with the creation and development of an emergency national mine clearance capability
- Assuring that all mine action needs in the Nuba Mountains are carried out swiftly and effectively
- Developing a relevant and effective mine awareness/information distribution package
- Establishing a management presence in Khartoum with field offices at the local level

In June 2000, the UN Emergency Mine Action Project in Sudan was in its third month and was making steady progress. The Mine Action Coordination Office in the Nuba Mountains was operational and detailed cooperation and liaison mechanisms with the Joint Military Commission (JMC) were fully functional. The UNMAS Technical Advisor (TA), in close cooperation with the JMC, the government of Sudan (GoS), the Humanitarian Aid Commission (HAC), Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) commanders and the local community, is now rapidly building a comprehensive picture of the mine/UXO threat in the

country. The IMSMA system is now capable of receiving and displaying such data.

In accordance with the Outline Concept Plan for Sudan, UNICEF is deploying a Mine Risk Education (MRE) officer to assist with coordination and development of the increasing number of MRE activities commencing in Sudan.

The Key to Effective Coordination

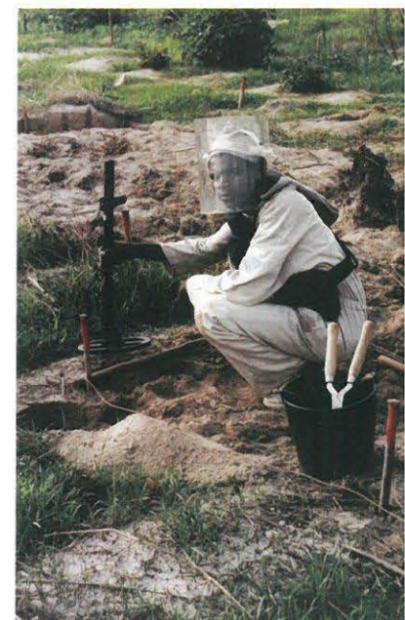
To be successful, MACCs rely primarily on two things: the commitment of national governments to mine action and the strength of the partnerships they build with a variety of partners, including donors, operators—in particular, non-governmental organizations (NGOs)—humanitarian agencies and the local communities themselves. The United Nations aims to play a supportive and catalytic role in this regard and will continue to be an active advocate of the importance of coordination in the field of mine action. ■

References

1. A/53/496, Annex II, available at www.mineaction.org
2. A/56/448/Add.2

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■ A young man demonstrating the method used to deactivate a mine. c/o UN/DPI-J. Monua