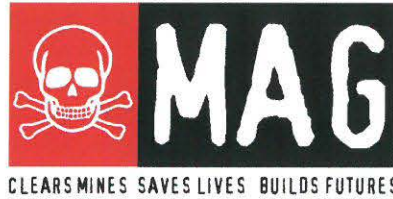


# Community Liaison in Mine Action: Partnerships for Growth



Using a Community Liaison (CL) model that emphasizes community participation, Mines Advisory Group (MAG) prioritises minefield clearance to lessen landmines' impact on communities in Angola.

by Tim Carstairs, MAG

A recent intervention at the May International Standing Committee of Experts (ISCE) meeting in Geneva was paraphrased in this way: "The humanitarian impact of landmines must guide the priorities of donor countries." This statement made by the representative of Norway goes directly to the point and presents us all with the real problem of ensuring that our resources are used most wisely and effectively to address these needs. This article seeks to briefly explain how MAG conducts the process of prioritisation as part of an integrated mine action response.

What seems clear to us is that mine action is not and should not be allowed to remain a "stand-alone" discipline. Mine action is an integral part of wider rehabilitation and development. As the opening quote says, we have to deal with the impact of mines on people. In this case, the impact of mines and UXO is most often to be considered within a wider context of economic, social and political recovery from conflict. Prioritisation and appropriate action are therefore to be taken at the same level. Furthermore, the individuals and groups in the equation are not passive and helpless but active parts of the process and worthy of respect.

In the mid-1990s, MAG developed the practice of applying a CL model to mine action situations in Angola. We believe in working together with all actors to find the best solution to problems. The human subjects—the communities that live in mined areas or that have been driven from mined areas and wish to re-



Returning home after doing the family washing in the Luena river. Before MAG's intervention, the area to either side of the path was mined; three people had been injured.

turn—become key players within the prioritisation process. This is good development practice that has been encouraged since the late 1980s. The concept of CL is being mentioned more frequently now in relation to mine action, and we hope that this short article will help explain how we understand it.

The Global Impact Survey process enables us to understand the impact of landmines and UXO on basic human needs and on the longer-term developmental process and economy and thus is a factor in establishing the long-term priorities for humanitarian mine action. That being said, the sur-

vey process is not designed to cope with the immediate needs of communities faced with life-threatening mine/UXO contamination. We also need to provide mine action to those that need it now, at the same time placing that action firmly within the development sphere, working



Following clearance, a safe IDP camp has developed in Muachimbo, outside Luena. A school and health centre have now taken root.



**Water Supply in Luena**

Water and access are as much immediate and urgent concerns for a beleaguered community and an IDP population as they are development needs in the longer term. In 1993, mines were laid to protect the water treatment and pumping station against attack



The water station, Luena, Angola.

by rebels of the Capitalist National Union for the Independence of Angola (UNITA). However, the mines did not stop the station from being damaged in fighting, and since then,

fresh water has been in short supply. Deprived of running water, most townspeople would come to wash clothes, bathe and collect water using a well-worn path beside the pumping station. There is a market garden area just near the river. Three people have been injured in the area.

The local community asked MAG to help with this situation. The area was cleared. In all, 17 mines were removed and destroyed from along the perimeter of the pumping station, including several just inches from the path. Clearance has enabled repairs to the pumping station to be carried out, and in April 2002, the water taps of Luena ran with fresh water again for the first time in eight years. Just 17 AP mines had impacted on some 300,000 people.

where possible within national and provincial development parameters. In an emergency and emerging situation—Luena in eastern Angola is a good example—CL skills as developed by MAG can be a good way to fulfill this function at reasonable cost. CL enables us to carry out emergency mine and UXO clearance and at the same time build up a community-based picture of the wider development needs within society.

**Partnership: Mine Action for Development in Angola**

No single agency or person has all the answers. No single agency or NGO can provide all services or help with the post-conflict rehabilitation of every aspect of community development; that is why partnership is so important. Our experience points to partnership as being a very

real element in the ability and capacity to appropriately prioritise, organise and coordinate the various elements of mine action for development. Partnerships enable us to bring to bear the most relevant expertise—which may not always be a mine action solution. MAG's CL teams will regularly provide information about other needs to appropriate partners. If we can not fix it, someone else will be able to.

In Angola, MAG works with a variety of other partners in such fields as:

- Water and Food Distribution
  - Action Against Hunger
  - World Food Programme (WFP)
- Refugee/IDP matters
  - Ministry for Reconstruction and Social Affairs
  - United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR)
  - Lutheran World Federation (LWF)
- Medical Care and Prosthetics; Social Reinsertion
  - CAPDC
  - Vietnam Veterans of America Foundation (VVAFA)
  - Trauma Care Foundation
  - Medico International (MI)

As in many other areas of the globe, relative peace and stability bring with it added dangers. Luena, the capital city of Moxico province has been home to over 300,000 people. Many of these people were displaced in 1998 when conflict flared again after the elections of that year. Almost under siege for several years, movements were restricted and the population became reliant on WFP food deliveries. Mines ringed the town. Mine action became impossible between 1998 and 2000; in fact, mine clearance was not permitted during that time. Security has improved since 2000, and people are again able to think longer-term.

Today, the Ministry for Social Assistance and Reintegration (MINARS)—the government authority charged with social and refugee matters—is gradually relocating internally displaced persons (IDPs) in different and previously unused areas to relieve pressure on space and resources. MINARS consults with MAG before planning new refugee and IDP camps. The Muachimbo camp is just one such example. In 2001, in response to CL

interventions, MAG cleared the road of mines that had cut off the village since 1993. LWF started rebuilding basic infrastructure, IDPs began arriving, and a new community is building itself once more. CL plays a key role in creating the means on the ground to build community and economy.

Rebuilding is not enough in itself: as the IDPs find their feet and expand their activities from their new base, they begin to find landmines and UXO. MAG's CL teams work within the IDP

**Community Liaison: An Academic View**

Development writers also argue for approaches like CL. "[A]s development is an essentially humanising process, participatory development must be consciously based on people, their needs, their analysis of issues and their decisions," writes Peter Oakley. There is a strong body of opinion that argues that participation, the basis for CL, brings the following benefits:

- Enables development practitioners, government officials and local people to work together to plan context-appropriate programmes (World Bank Sourcebook).
- Ensures greater efficiency of resources.
- Improves cost effectiveness.
- Makes projects more effective as instruments of rural development.
- Helps to break the mentality of dependence that characterises so much of development work.
- Promotes self-awareness and confidence.
- Has a much wider coverage than government—participation increases peoples' control over the issues which affect their lives; they learn how to plan and implement development projects.
- Ensures sustainability as people maintain a project's dynamism (Paulo Freire).
- Stresses the importance of community participation during data-gathering, shared analysis, and transparent negotiation of priorities to the development of national Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (World Bank/IMF).

*Applied to mine action, MAG believes that these approaches make sense. After five years of practice, we can say that they do indeed work.*

communities to help lessen the risk. The teams provide appropriate safety and avoidance messages and discussion. At the same time, they gather information about mines and ordnance to pass on swiftly to the Mine Action Team's (MAT's) rapid response teams to clear the danger. MAG is currently seeking funds to create more such teams to "accompany" the peace and renewed confidence that is breaking out in the province.

Despite the conflict situation, MAG teams have continued to work in Moxico and to conduct mine awareness and data gathering work even when clearance was no longer possible in the late 1990s. This work was supported by Save US and by MI. Over the years, donors have been encouraged to set aside their reluctance to fund mine action work in conflict areas and to support humanitarian operations on behalf of populations beleaguered by the war. We wish to thank the donors that have "kept the faith" and continue to support MAG's mine action work in Angola (Moxico and Cunene provinces): the government of Germany (Foreign Affairs), LWF, Misereor, Brot fur die Welt, UNOCHA, Anti-Landmijn Stichting

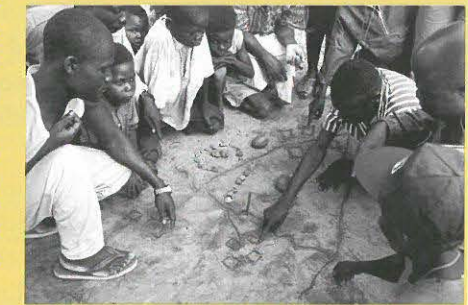
**STOP PRESS: Community Liaison Assists Demobilisation**

In the Cunene province of southern Angola, MAG was recently requested by the provincial authorities to help with the establishment of resettlement camps for former UNITA soldiers and their families in Londe. The actual quartering area is reported free of mines, but the roads and towns in the area are heavily mined. Working with the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA), MAG's CL team has been gathering data and has conducted initial visits, locating eight minefields to date.

The soldiers' families are expected to join them, and as many as 300,000 people may be involved. As of mid-May 2002, 697 soldiers in the camps were accompanied by 633 married women, 373 male children (10–16), 441 male children (under 9), 41 female children (10–16), 520 female children (under 9), 56 widows, 47 male orphans and 54 female orphans.

**The Community Liaison Process**

A MAG office or a MAG team is usually contacted by a village leader and informed of problems relating to mines or UXO or asked to clear a particular area. It is true to say that MAG's flexible, mobile teams (MATs) facilitate and strengthen this process as they are accessible to the local people and are already skilled in CL. The request will be recorded, and a community liaison team will visit the village and assess local needs, discuss village mapping, collect village history, identify the beneficiaries of clearance tasks and prioritise the minefields to be cleared.



Village mapping being conducted by MAG's CL team in Lumege, Moxico province. Stones represent mines and mangos represent UXO.

MAG will also coordinate with local authorities and NGOs to make sure that the agreed prioritisation meets with national or provincial clearance and development plans. The CL teams will if necessary negotiate land ownership and the use to which the land will be put post-clearance. In some countries where MAG works, land ownership is handed down through families and knowledge of it is carried with tribal and village chiefs. In other areas, ownership is recorded and registered with local authorities.

If required, the CL team will conduct mine risk reduction education in the community prior to completion of the mine clearance. Once clearance has been undertaken, the CL teams will continue to liaise with authorities locally to ensure that agreed development of the land goes ahead smoothly, and that the identified beneficiaries are indeed benefiting.

and the U.S. State Department. We believe that this continued funding has saved many lives and contributed to growing confidence in Angola. ■

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**About MAG**

MAG has 12 years experience implementing mine action around the world. The agency currently conducts a variety of integrated mechanical, manual and dog clearance programmes, as well as CL, training and development programmes in a number of areas including Angola, Cambodia, Laos, Lebanon, northern Iraq, Somaliland, southern Sudan, Sri Lanka and Vietnam.

*\*All photos courtesy of Sean Sutton/MAG.*



■ Cultivating land in Luena that was previously a minefield.



### **July 5, 2002: MAG Opens Main Road from Luena, Moxico Province, Angola Allowing Aid to be Distributed to Thousands of Starving Families**

The Lucusse Road between Luena and Lucusse in Moxico province in eastern Angola has been the scene of heavy fighting for decades. There was fighting many years ago between Cuban and South African forces and over much of the last decade between the government and forces of the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA). The road is littered with the wrecks of trucks and armored vehicles destroyed in anti-tank mine blasts and ambushes. It is said that over 6,000 soldiers died here trying to get convoys of supplies in and out of Luena. The road itself serves thousands of people living in its vicinity. Opening it up can dramatically change the socio-economic situation in the province.

On July 3, 2002, Mines Advisory Group (MAG) staff met with the Angolan Technical Unit for Coordination of Humanitarian Assistance (UTCAH). Lucusse will be used as a quartering area for 4,000 UNITA soldiers being disarmed and demobilised under the new peace agreement. While the Lucusse Road has been closed, thousands of families have not received aid of any sort. It is reported that 38 percent of the children in the area are severely malnourished. The World Food Program (WFP), the Angolan Ministry of Social Assistance

and Reintegration (MINARS) and the United Nations all agreed that the major demining priority in the province was this road.

Due to the grave humanitarian situation, MAG undertook an emergency survey of the road immediately following the request from UTCAH to see how much the situation had changed since 1997/98. Previously, during this brief period of peace, MAG had surveyed and cleared 92 kilometers of the 148-kilometer route. After re-survey on July 3, 2002, it was clear that there had been no new vehicle wrecks since that time; however, using the route still requires extreme care. The survey team was able to travel to Lucusse where they met with the Police Commandant and UNITA officials who explained they were desperate for food and other emergency aid.

MAG teams returned July 4th to clear and destroy several items of UXO seen on the road. Areas where vehicles will have to travel off the edge of the road to get around mine craters or vehicle wrecks will also be checked for mines. MAG has already identified several suspect mined areas on the roadsides that will be marked. Passing areas are being targeted for special clearance efforts to minimize the risk in

the immediate future. MAG has made it clear that all drivers intending to use the route must first attend a mine safety briefing conducted by MAG. Although it can be safe to use the road, there is a very good chance that any deviation from tracks of the previous vehicle may lead to a fatal mine accident. It is hoped that funding can be raised to enable complete clearance of the verges and other suspect areas along the route.

On July 6th, MAG escorted Médecins sans Frontières—Doctors Without Borders (MSF) to Lucusse so that medical assistance would be made available to the UNITA quartering areas. MAG has also facilitated the access of Dom Bosco, a respected Angolan non-governmental organization (NGO) to the quartering area. Dom Bosco has already begun registration and identification of needs. It is hoped that WFP deliveries will be authorized within the next week. These are all vital elements in the peace and confidence-building, demobilization and normalization process. MAG is proud that mine action can play its role and is grateful to all those parties in Angola and to its donors for enabling such progressive and positive outcomes.

*For additional information, visit [www.magclearsmines.org](http://www.magclearsmines.org)*