

One Leg Dancing (Um Pé Que Dança)

Angola Embraces the Future



During a period of peace, demining efforts in Angola continue to require top priority in order to reopen the country to desperately needed aid programs. Unfortunately, funding by countries and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in recent years has been low due to a sense of confusion and an unsuccessful history of previously under-funded projects.

by Joe Lokey and Ken O'Connell, *MgM*

Current State

Peace has broken out in Angola, or so it seems. The world has seen this before and their cautious optimism is understandable. To the people of Angola, the promise of a brighter future is everywhere and the motivation to ensure a lasting peace has never been stronger. But the

roads to prosperity are littered with deadly remnants of their dismal past.

Angola suffers due to the series of internal power struggles and civil wars have inflicted a tremendous amount of destruction on this country since their independence from Portugal in 1975. Three attempts at peace (1975, 1991, 1994) have all collapsed for various reasons. The Angolan government and National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA) officials are



building an incremental settlement that follows the 1994 Lusaka peace accords. The momentum for this latest effort began in earnest after the leader of the insur-

■ The Ludana slums. c/o
Rodger Bosch for MgM



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The war destroyed over 5,000 schools in Angola and those who do manage to periodically make it to overcrowded classrooms—sometimes holding as many as 90 in one room—have few resources with which to learn. Even with access to education, children frequently arrive late or leave early to help earn a living for their families. About three out of ten rural women over 15 can read or write. Only a third reach fifth grade and none but the children of Angola's rich governmental elite have the opportunity for higher education. Teachers must overcome landmines to reach the students.

The camps are the focal points of international attention but the greater human tragedy swirling around them are millions of displaced Angolans that have been avoiding the fighting for decades. Adding to this number is another half million or so emerging from previously held UNITA area. Women and young girls are particularly at risk as they forage for food, wood and water. The number of displaced people in Angola is difficult to measure but NGOs indicate it could be over four million with about half being children. In Moxico alone, there are over 250,000 displaced and they are expecting another 350,000 to emerge from former UNITA areas. As if the daily horror of the exposure of war were not enough, as many as half of those are reported to have witnessed a landmine incident. Trying to address this has been difficult since less than 30 percent of the \$233 million (U.S.) sought in an inter-agency appeal has actually been received.

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The UN Role

The UN is not viewed in Angola as an entity that can be trusted, and for good reason. The government of Angola has resisted giving UN aid agencies any defi-

gent UNITA rebels, Jonas Savimbi, was killed in February of 2002. A peace memorandum was signed on April 4th that allows the movement of former UNITA soldiers into 35 cantonment areas where demobilization and disarmament activities coincide with retraining and repatriating former combatants and their families. Of particular concern, though, is that the government underestimated the numbers of returning soldiers and their families with more than 79,000 arriving with 236,000 family members. This has overwhelmed the Angolan government and their movement throughout the country is only exacerbated by the landmine problems. Thus far, the demobilization process has been less than efficient with the confusion between the government and United Nations (UN) effectively isolating the NGOs and aid groups. Confusion is preventing action. Landmines don't care.

Impact of the War

The horror of landmines only magnifies the crisis in basic health provision in Angola. Health professionals and aid groups cannot travel safely on mined roads to address basic health needs. Nearly every hospital, clinic and health facility in the country has been destroyed. It is not uncommon to find shocking daily deaths due to malaria, malnutrition and other preventable diseases. Immunization rates in Angola are among the lowest in the world. About half of the children under five in Angola are underweight and at critical risk to a variety of diseases. No trained attendant at births directly contributes to the astonishing 172 deaths per 1,000 births in Angola. Angola is one of five countries not to eradicate polio. Opening access routes is the first step.

The educational systems in Angola are in a shambles. Since children are the future of any country, Angola is guaranteed a generational dependency on outside aid.

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Of the 2,610 known minefields in Angola, less than a fifth have been cleared and released for public use. Many more minefields remain in former UNITA-controlled areas and the extent to which roads, airports, bridges, railways and other infrastructure may be mined is unknown to anyone. While much of the world has abandoned Angola for petty political reasons, a small handful of mine clearance

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nite role in the process and almost no involvement in the administration of the camps. The Angolan government quickly points out that the UN peace agreements brokered in 1991 and 1994 enabled UNITA to rearm and rebuild and that further UN involvement could once again fortify UNITA both logistically and politically. They are determined that this will not happen again.

The recent survey report from the Geneva International Center for Humanitarian Demining (GICHD) (*The Mine Action Sector in Angola-Mission Report*) is an example of the UN's desire to expand UN influence and control over the landmine process in Angola. While minimizing and dismissing the role of INAROOE, the report does support the new inter-ministerial coordination body (CNIDAH) but recommends the injection of UN advisors and the replacement of the Angolan landmine database with the UN's Information Management System for Mine Action (IMSMA) system that was designed to give eventual UN oversight over funding and resources going into national programs. While the report acknowledges many of the challenges, it did little to recommend Angolan solutions to Angolan problems.

The United Nations had also been a major obstacle toward peace by continuing travel sanctions on members of

UNITA that hampered the free movement of party representatives so crucial to the political reintegration of UNITA as a viable political party in Angola. This ban has since been lifted, but the continued obstacles to a workable peace presented by the United Nations are not unnoticed.

INAROOE remains a viable entity in Angola though plagued with the same resource constraints as other governmental activities. They have put together a mobile team in Bie Province working with T-55 tanks equipped with KMT-5 rollers. They have also begun coordinating with the Angolan Armed Forces (FAA) combat engineers who will have a 25 percent representation on their demining teams. The INAROOE Demining School at ETAM is operational and the instructors who were trained by South Africa are in camp and preparing for an influx of deminers, surveyors, explosive ordnance disposal (EOD) personnel and team leaders ready for retraining.

Demining Priorities

The majority of mine clearance in Angola continues to be done by a small group of NGOs unilaterally funded via

governments and private donations. A major problem is that demining is only being conducted in eight of Angola's 18 provinces. The following demining organizations have operational bases, with adequate funding levels, in these provinces:

NGO	Province(s)
Norwegian Peoples Aid (NPA)	Huila, Malanje, Kwanza Norte, Moxico
Mines Advisory Group (MAG)	Moxico, Cunene
HALO Trust	Huambo, Bie, Benguela (Cubal)

Two other demining organizations, INTERSOS of Italy and Sta. Barbara of Germany, have no funding committed for 2002 and are not active in their operational province of Huila. This means that the following provinces have no demining cover at the moment: Luanda, Kwanza Sul, Uige, Zaire, Benguela (except Cubal), Cuando Cubango, Lunda Norte, Lunda Sul, Namibe and Cabinda. This may change as coordinating committees in provincial capitals work with government officials to get their mine action needs into the national Critical Needs Assessment and adequate resources are allocated as a result.

The World Food Program (WFP) continues to address the hunger situation in Angola, compares it to the mine threat in former areas of hostilities, and sets priorities. In Malanje, WFP needed to clear and prepare areas outside the city to allow all Internally Displaced Peoples (IDPs) within the city limits at least 0.5 hectare of arable land. This was done to reduce dependency on food aid received from WFP. Likewise in Huila, WFP feels that one of the biggest threats to the development of safe areas for safety of the population and resettlement is large stockpiles of ammunition. The first priority given to MgM is the clearance of a huge cache that exists at the end of the runway, next to the hospital in the town of Caconda. There are more sites to follow.

These priorities were written up last year when there was little hope of peace in Angola. Now the situation is continually changing. At



■ Only thoroughly trained explosive detection dogs are being deployed in the mine sweeping projects of MgM. c/o MgM, People Against Landmines

the NGO level, there is still a certain amount of confusion as to what is happening inside the country. It is reported that the UNITA fighters are going into their designated holding camps, handing in their weapons in preparation to be integrated into the FAA as well as being fed and receiving a salary, though this may only be the officer corps for the moment. The main fear for some organizations is that those troops designated for demobilization may not be trained adequately for reintegration into society.

Much of the donor hesitation revolves around the simple fact that Angola is, on paper, one of the wealthiest countries on the African continent in terms of its natural resources. Almost all agree that the Angolan government itself must play a large role in clearing landmines and addressing the panoply of ills afflicting the victims of mines. Toward that end, a pledge of

who then proceed homewards. This is not thought to be a spontaneous relocation out of Luanda, but rather family members returning to their homes to grow crops to return and sell them in Luanda. The rest of the family stays in Luanda to continue as they have for the last few years since they relocated to the capital.

Throughout the country there are IDP camps and people residing in safe cities. These displaced peoples are the ones who wish to return to their homes; they are also the ones who are most at risk from the threat of mines. Also, there are people who are in areas formally under the control of UNITA who have been isolated and require immediate aid. In both cases, access is the watchword: safe access to allow people to return to their homes, and access to allow aid agencies and organizations to support isolated communities most at risk.

This is the type of operation that MgM specializes in, having cut its teeth, so to speak, in opening up over 270 kilometers of roads in the jungles of northeast Bengo Province and allowing over 50,000 people to safely return to their homes. Negotiations will have to be entered into with Provincial

Authorities, WFP and other bodies to draw up new plans and priorities. It is certain that in Malanje province the priorities will now change from opening up land for use by IDPs close to the city to opening roads to allow the IDPs safe access to their homes, and also in turn access to markets.

MgM Solutions Need Support

When priorities were being prepared for proposals for year 2002, MgM had been asked by the WFP to start demining operations in the provinces of Malanje and Huila. This also fit in with priorities requested by the U.S. Department of State (DOS) for funding purposes for 2002 funding. It also helped for DOS

funding that WFP is the lead agency. This now means that, on the one hand, MgM will be working in the same provinces as Norwegian Peoples Aid (NPA) while, on the other hand, there is no funding available for MgM's traditional operational areas of Bengo and Cunene Provinces. Funds are now being sought to expand on these projects as well as projects that MgM wish to continue in Bengo and Cunene.

In Bengo, there are over 60,000 IDPs in two camps outside Caxito. Although one group of around 25,000 have already started to relocate to areas where access is open, there are a further 35,000 who come from an area (Dembos) that is completely blocked. Access is available along tar roads to towns of Ucuia, Piri, Quibaxi and Alto Galungo, while roads to towns of Bula Atumba and Pango Aluquem and others in the jungle are inaccessible. The people vacated this area three and a half years ago and the roads are completely overgrown. Nobody will attempt to drive down them for the threat of mines, forcing people to stay in the IDP camps for food, security and other support. With funding for clearance in this area, eventually these people will be able to return home. This developed clearance team will then graduate on to clearance of routes from Negage and Uige cities, in Uige Province, to outer communities. Uige has been one on the major recent battle zones in Angola, along with Malanje, Lunda Norte and Moxico. Once route clearance has been carried out in Uige, it can move on to clear the few routes closed by mines in Zaire Province.

Cunene is another province badly needing route clearance. MgM has an extensive maintenance facility developed in Ondjiva, part of which is to support MgM demining operations in the southern provinces but also supports other NGOs in the region. Many communities are isolated from the provincial capital. This restricts support and forces people, especially women, to carry goods to main roads for sale at markets.

Routes eventually have to be opened into Cuando Cubango, which still has many areas closed off due to the threat of mines. Similarly in Moxico, routes also need to be opened in the central and southern areas of the province. MgM had

a priority set by WFP in 1998 for the route clearance from the town of Cazombo. This would have allowed for road transportation of food flown in from Luanda or transported across the border from Zambia. This project would have eventually cleared into Cuando Cubango and on to Cunene linking all areas with aid and development coming from Zambia and Namibia. These three provinces are sparsely populated, but over 200,000 nomads are forced to live outside Angolan borders. Clearance in these areas will allow free movement for these people again.

In 2001, MgM also carried out two major surveys. One survey was carried out at the site of an old ammunition storage site that suffered a major detonation. This site contained aerial deployed weapons and is now surrounded by a residential area. The majority of the serviceable ordnance has been moved, though a substantial amount was left spread over a large area close to the International Airport of Luanda. No check has been done of what was left in the soil, and a simple rake can pull up unexploded munitions where children play daily.

The second survey was carried out on the Benguela railway line in Huambo. It is now obvious that the railway network in Angola is central to the regeneration of the interior of the country and especially the towns and cities that lie along those lines. There appears to be European Union (EU) and possibly Angolan funding

available for the reconstruction of these lines, most of which have to be checked and cleared of landmines prior to engineers starting work on them. Initial contacts have been made to introduce MgM to the possible main contractor for the developments of these lines and MgM's extensive experience clearing the Limpopo rail lines in Mozambique are a valuable reference. The key to the future may be the opening of the rail line to the rich coffee growing area of Nambuangongo. Both these projects are looked upon as high priority, for the safety of the people living in an ammunition dump who with all likelihood will not return to their original homes, and for those who would like to eliminate their dependency on aid in the long term.

Conclusion

The fragile peace in Angola appears to be a reality, and demining is an integral part of sustaining this very delicate process. There have been discussions about large amounts of aid pledged for Angola, but this appears to be far off at the moment. Donors seem to be waiting for more developments and possibly small successes in the short term before committing. The problem is that all NGOs in Angola have been under-funded for years relative to the task at hand, and their equipment needs alone may not permit the kind of progress needed. Donor reluctance may be responsible for hundreds of preventable

Angolan deaths. Mines can be cleared now.

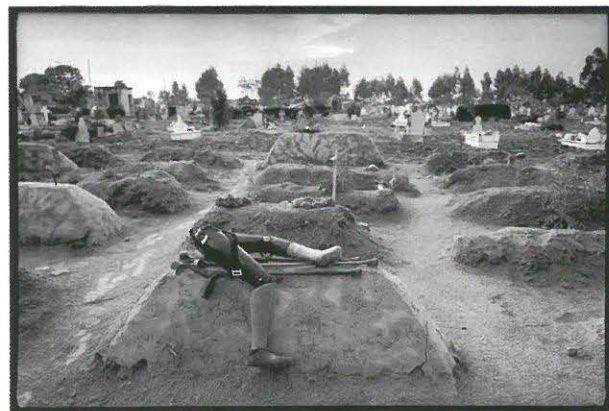
Without increased support at this critical junction, the lack of access by WFP and other aid groups and the lack of simple information will indeed doom thousands of Angolans to starvation as they continue to roam the mine infested roads and fields in search of life itself. MgM is dedicated to resolving this and has pledged itself to continued relief in one of Africa's keys to future economic growth, rich in both resources and culture. MgM remains at the front and welcomes additional assistance and support. We also gratefully acknowledge the tremendous financial contributions of the U.S. State Department's Humanitarian Demining Program Office in recognition of the value of our efforts. Please visit our web site or contact us to learn more. The wonderful people of Angola deserve your thoughts, prayers and consideration. ■

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■ Graves in Angola.
c/o Guy Tillim for
MgM



\$57 million was set aside by Angola from which demining was to have received around a 10 percent share. The NGOs in Angola all report little optimism that this will ever reach them and none believe it will actually get spent.

A Matter of Access

Demining is an important part of the peace process. Particularly, it helps to provide safe access to aid groups, while also allowing them more freedom of movement. Unfortunately, the problem is that the same freedom is afforded to the Angolan population. On a positive note this freedom means that the usual military-organized convoys are a thing of the past. As an example, there are large groups of people who gather to the east of Viana,