Moving Forward:
Recommendations for a Landmine Victim Data Collection and Management System
The Landmine Casualty Database Workshop at James Madison University (JMU), May 13–14, 2002

After discussing ways to develop a systematic and accurate system for the collection of victim data on a global basis, participants developed three sets of recommendations that were presented to the global community.

by Sarah B. Taylor, *MAIC*

Introduction

Participants work together to create recommendations for the future.

The Landmine Casualty Database (LCD) workshop was designed to bring together participants with a variety of experiences in the field of landmine victim data collection that also represented a wide geographical distribution. Sponsored by the U.S. Department of State (DOS), the workshop was part of the culminating phase of a multi-year project that also included a comparative analysis of nine landmine casualty database systems in use in mine-affected countries and a survey of mine action database operators and victim assistance experts. The workshop's goal was to build upon these initial stages (which were combined into the *Managing Landmine Casualty Data* report) and create recommendations for the development of a global landmine casualty data collection and management system. In particular, attendees worked to make recommendations for a common core of data fields; to make recommendations on data collection methodology, design of data collection forms, training and data reliability; and to make recommendations on the implementation and use of a global landmine casualty database system and related ethical issues. Many important issues repeatedly arose throughout the workshop. The participants frequently debated whether or not mine action workers should be responsible for collecting and managing victim assistance data. Creating concrete and universal definitions of terms such as incident and accident also became key. In the end, these discussions facilitated the creation of three sets of recommendations, which were presented to the Standing Committee on Victim Assistance and Socio-Economic Reintegration of the mine ban convention at intercessional meetings from May 27–31, 2002.

The First Day: A Discussion of the Present

JMU Mine Action Information Center (MAIC) Director Dennis Barlow began the workshop by giving the participants a direction. He said,

"Do not go back to square one; move forward." Accordingly, throughout the first day of the LCD workshop participants discussed existing data collection and management methodologies, such as the Information Management System for Mine Action (IMSMA) incident and accident report forms, as IMSMA is becoming the most widely used software for collecting data on landmine victims. (The IMSMA Mine/UXO Incident Report and the IMSMA Incident Victim Report are available online.)

Participants Pat Patierno, Director of the Humanitarian Demining Program at the U.S. Department of State (PM/HDP) and Eric Fillipino, Head of the Socio-Economic Section of the Geneva International Center for Humanitarian Demining (GICHD) continued discussion during a break.

Reto Haeni, the IMSMA Project Coordinator for the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology Zurich (ETH), began the day's presentations with an explanation of the basics of IMSMA's incident victim functionality and its newest developments. IMSMA, he explained, strives to provide for "improved capabilities for decision-making and information policy related to mine action" and thus also offers, "support to the operational and management needs of mine action programs [by providing] standardized data formats." Therefore, IMSMA supplies three types of forms: casualty, incident and accident. Haeni explained that casualty data is recorded during impact surveys, and is "really just a snapshot to determine the socio-economic impact on a community." Incident forms provide information on civilian casualties, while accident forms collect "continuous information on casualties involved in demining accidents." Haeni also noted that IMSMA is in the process of developing data-sharing methods called "WebReports," which incorporate Geographical Information Systems (GIS) and other statistical tools. While they are still in the early stages of development, these reports will one day make the collected data more contextual, allowing the reader to actually visualize the information.

At the conclusion of the presentation, Dr. Will Boyce, Director of the Social Program Evaluation Group at Queen's University, asked an important question: "How does IMSMA's purpose relate to the [Ottawa] Treaty with respect to victim assistance?" This question was to bring up a great deal of debate among mine action workers and health care providers throughout the workshop. Alan Arnold, project manager for IMSMA, responded to this question with another series of questions. He asked, "What is mine action? What is victim assistance, and how are they linked? Should mine action include victim assistance?" Only by answering these questions, the group agreed, could responsibility for data collection truly be determined.

Noah Klemm, Mine Action Extensible Markup Language (maXML) project leader of FGM Inc. and the day's second speaker, initiated further discussion about the future of data management. He presented his company's plan for the development of a new information specification that will allow different mine action database systems to more easily exchange data with one another and with systems in other domains. Called maXML, it is "a set of rules for the mine action community" and will be "[a] free, open standard for sharing information." It will also include an information glossary and will provide a method to encode collected data so that others may use it. Workshop coordinators Dr. Suzanne Fiederlein and Dr. Ken Rutherford asked how this new system would work to clarify the specific definitions of certain mine action terms, such as accident and incident. Participant Dr. Terry Wessel compared maXML's mapping techniques to the Library of Congress's coding system, while Dr. James Cobey, of Physicians for Human Rights (PHR), added that maXML would force everyone to use a common language. Finally, while maXML promises to improve data collection and management, Reto Haeni reminded everyone that "it is not the silver bullet to solve all database problems; if data is mapped incorrectly, XML will not solve these problems."

The purposes and parameters of casualty data collection and management were other important issues discussed during day one. Facilitated by Dr. Ken Rutherford, this portion of the workshop involved attendees discussing numerous issues including the purposes for

collecting landmine casualty data, the design and length of the data collection form, the methodology for data collection, the training of data collectors and data entry personnel, and cultural and ethical issues. Rutherford also asked participants what the best method for encouraging the collection of global data would be and how this data could best be used and shared. Participants were eager to discuss these issues, and this prepared everyone for the second day's sub-groups, when actual recommendations would be made.

Along with again debating whether or not victim assistance should be a part of mine action, Matthew Wood, the Deputy Information Management Officer of the Vietnam Veterans of America Foundation (VVAF) brought up another important concern. He said, "The fundamental issue is getting governments and organizations to share data." Indeed, information access became a central issue of the workshop. Often, information is collected but not made available to other organizations, and without this access, the information becomes useless. The group agreed that this issue needed to be addressed if a new global landmine casualty database system was to be utilized to its fullest extent.

Coordinator Dr. Suzanne Fiederlein of the JMU MAIC facilitated the final discussion of day one. Dr. Fiederlein reviewed the results of the recent survey she conducted concerning landmine casualty data. During this discussion, she compared IMSMA's data fields to her survey results and asked for suggestions for additions and deletions from IMSMA's current data fields. Participants then began a discussion of IMSMA's current data fields. Arnold stated that Cambodia and Afghanistan have adopted IMSMA's form as their own, as did the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). Haeni stated that user feedback is an essential part of creating effective forms and that IMSMA always encourages feedback even though feedback is hard to obtain. This final debate was merely the beginning of day two's larger participant feedback.

Throughout the first day of the LCD, workshop numerous issues concerning existing data collection and management systems were addressed and discussed. While suggestions were made, this first day was designed to initiate discussion. It was during day two that actual recommendations for new and/or improved methods of systems were addressed and discussed. While suggestions were made, this first day was designed to initiate discussion. It was during day two that actual recommendations for new and/or improved methods of systematically and accurately collecting and processing casualty data were drafted.

Participants work together to create recommendations for the future.

Day Two: Recommendations for the Future

The second day of the LCD workshop concentrated on actively creating recommendations both for improving existing and developing new data collection and processing systems. To accomplish these goals participants were separated into three sub-groups and asked to draft recommendations. After serious discussions, all three sub-groups presented positive recommendations for the future.

Group one created recommendations for a common core of data fields. Importantly, the group decided that the IMSMA terms of incident and accident needed to be changed to correspond to the International Mine Action Standards (IMAS) which use mine accident and demining accident. IMAS defines mine accident as "an accident away from the demining workplace and involving a mine or UXO hazard," while demining accident is defined as, "a demining accident at a demining workplace and involving a mine or UXO hazard." The group also decided to retain the use of the term victim throughout the IMSMA forms. Finally, the participants in group one concluded that the relevance of numbers 4.6–4.10 of the IMSMA form need to be reevaluated by people involved in mine risk education. These data fields concern issues such as mine awareness training and personal knowledge of the area where the incident occurred.

Agreeing with group one, group two concluded that IMSMA needed to reevaluate its use of the terms incident and accident. Also, they recommended that numbers 1.3 ("data gathered by") and 1.4 ("reported by") on the incident report be reevaluated. They suggested that either those administering the form need better training in differentiating between the two terms or the wording should be changed altogether. Group two also questioned the utility of numbers 2.1–2.7 of the form. Participants believed this section, titled "Device that caused the incident," was often useless, as most people do not know what type of mine/UXO caused the incident. Like group one, this group concluded that numbers 4.7–4.10 needed to be reevaluated for relevance. Group members stated that victims are often reluctant to answer these types of questions, fearing they might not receive aid if they knew an area was dangerous and were injured there. Also, during group two's discussion, the importance of information access was reemphasized, and this group also discussed the accident report form and found it to be a powerful investigative tool. They also proposed some improvements for training. The group concluded that more women and survivors should be involved in training and more coordination among the various agencies and organizations involved in mine action should be encouraged.

Group three developed recommendations for the implementation and use of a "global casualty database system" and related ethical issues, yet the first recommendation that they constructed was the removal of the term "global" from the system. Members stated that it was already too difficult to get various agencies and organizations to collaborate on a national level. This group then wrote a preamble for their recommendations. They wrote, "The Ministries of Health are responsible for the long-term health care and rehabilitation of all persons with disabilities, including mine victims." Altogether, this group drafted six recommendations. They concluded that victims' confidentiality should always be protected to the fullest extent, and that donors should be responsible for encouraging the collection and reporting of data. Also, the Mine Action Center (MAC)/National Demining Office (NDO) should take the responsibility to advocate the need for data collection internally and within the national mine action authority, while also collaborating with the Ministry of Health to establish a mine victim data collection system. However, they concluded that the Ministry of Health should be responsible for the collection and management of data on mine victims. Finally, group three concluded that the Standing Committee on victim assistance should engage the national Ministry of Health on the need for victim data collection.

Conclusion

By the conclusion of the LCD workshop, the participants made a great deal of progress, particularly in the three sub-groups, and an agreement was made by all attendees to pull together a basic report for feedback and then use that feedback to create a formal report. Indeed, throughout the 10 days following the workshop, members of the working group solidified the suggestions through e-mail. JMU MAIC director Dennis Barlow presented these recommendations to the Standing Committee meeting in Geneva on Tuesday, May 28, 2002, and a more extensive discussion took place in a side meeting on Wednesday, May 29, 2002.

Proceedings for this conference are available online at:
http://www.jmu.edu/cisr/research/conference-proceedings.shtml

All photos courtesy of MAIC.

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