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The Mine Action Programme for Afghanistan (MAPA) was established under the auspices of the United Nations following the Soviet Union’s withdrawal from the country in 1989. Originally tasked with helping the Afghan people clean the landmines that the Red Army had left behind, the Programme has evolved over time to deal with the mines and UXO contamination caused by the successor conflicts to the 1979–1989 Soviet-Afghan war. This includes the period of the pre-Soviet ruling government (1988–1992), during fighting between various factions from 1992–1995, during the Taliban era, in fighting with resistance forces from 1996 to September 2001, and finally, during military operations by and against the American-led Coalition in October–November 2001 and beyond. At present, Afghanistan has over 872 sq km of suspect or mined land and an additional 450 sq km of land thought to be contaminated by UXO, including a large areas of the more mines and UXO-affected counties in the country. Up to five people a day are killed or injured by mines and UXO, nearly 25 years after their original deployment.

Each successive conflict has resulted in a changed operational environment for the MAPA. The October–November 2001 war that led to the ouster of the Taliban regime is no exception. However, unlike most of the conflicts, which simply increased the amount of contaminated land facing MAPA clearance and risk education teams, many of the changes associated with the emergence of an internationally recognized Afghan government led by President Hamid Karzai have had a positive impact on mine action.

An Internationally Recognised Afghan Government

The post-Taliban Afghanistan that emerged from the December 2001 Bonn negotiations following the Coalition military intervention formed an internationally recognized government that indicated that it was ready to join international treaties, including the Ottawa Convention. Afghanistan has indeed joined the Ottawa Convention, becoming a State Party on 1 March 2003. In a tense region, Afghanistan’s decision to unilaterally give up this weapon should be applauded; a number of Afghanistan’s neighbours are not Parties to the Convention, including Pakistan, Iran, China and Uzbekistan.

That Afghanistan has taken this courageous step has provided the MAPA with the opportunity to plan its work around Convention timelines; a 10-year plan to make Afghanistan mine-free free was endorsed by the government in March 2003. Costing models for the 10-year plan have been developed. We estimate that the total cost for making Afghanistan mine-free free in the order of $500 million (U.S.).

This regime change has also provided the United Nations with a base government that is eager to take over the management responsibility for mine action as soon as it is practically possible. To this end, the Afghan Ministry of Foreign Affairs—the lead ministry for mine action within the government-led consultative group process—has been holding meetings to plan the transition of the MAPA from United Nations to national governance, representation from other Afghan government ministries, mine action donors, the United Nations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in Afghanistan. Representatives from other Afghan government ministries, mine action donors, the United Nations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in Afghanistan have been active participants in these discussions.

However, the change in government has not been without its challenges, particularly with regards to security. The post-Taliban government is one that has had difficulty projecting power beyond the capital, Kabul, indeed, even within the capital. This factionalized government has been, to a large extent, protected by a mixture of Coalition forces and their Northern Alliance allies, and also by the UN-sanctioned International Security Assistance Force (ISAF). In the region, factional commanders also often consider “warlords,” quickly filled the security vacuum left by the defeat of the Taliban. The security environment within which the Programme now operates has had a detrimental effect on clearance and risk education activities. In the absence of clearly demarcated front-line areas in the ongoing low-intensity conflict in Afghanistan—a conflict that has claimed the lives of hundreds of civilians and dozens of Afghan and international aid workers since December 2001—the Programme has been forced to make extensive use of armed guards for the first time in its history. The MAPA has recorded over 56 security incidents against deminers during the last two years, culminating in the murder of four Afghan deminers in February 2004. These four employees of the Organization for Mine Clearance and Afghan Rehabilitation were traveling without guards in a part of the country considered to be safe when they were ambushed and shot to death. No arrests have been made in this case. Afghan authorities have suggested that the perpetrators of this crime could be elements loyal to the former Taliban regime.

More Money, Diverse Priorities

The fall of the Taliban has resulted in a large financial boost for the MAPA. Whereas in 2000 and 2001 the United Nations and the MAPA agencies were not able to raise all the money to fund a $280 million programme that employed 4,500 Afghan deminers and risk education workers, the 17 MAPA implementing agencies now employ almost 8,000 people. This budget has jumped to $60 million per year and this budget was fully funded in 2003. Early indications are that donors will continue to provide this level of support in 2004. This boost is largely due to the focus on demining and peace-building in post-Taliban Afghanistan. The MAPA’s traditional work in humanitarian mine clearance and risk education has also increased alongside these new requirements.

However, bringing in $60 million a year has come at a cost. With the increase in money has come an increase in the complexity of the Programme, with the United Nations and the MAPA implementing partners having to deal with a myriad of different funding modalities.

In Afghanistan, absolving a national or international mine action trust fund, the New York-based United Nations Voluntary Trust Fund for Assistance in Mine Action (VTF) remains the largest single conduit for donor support. However, other donors provide grants to national and international NGOs operating in Afghanistan or sign service contracts directly with these NGOs or via other UN entities. In some cases, the donor in question is an Afghan government ministry which has itself received international funding support. For example, the Ministry of Civil Aviation has contracted MAPA implementing partners for the clearance of Kabul International Airport.

The increased mine action funding that is a result of regime change in Afghanistan (NGOs fall into three major categories: humanitarian funding, reconstruction funding and peace-building funding).

Humanitarian Funding

Humanitarian funding is provided for the coordination and execution of mine action, victim assistance, and advocacy and risk awareness activities that are focused on responding to prioritized community needs, based on the current impact (both physical impact, in terms of deaths and injuries, and economic impact, in terms of access to agricultural land, and other productive assets.) Humanitarian mine action, whether in clearance or risk education, yields immediate positive impacts. It is based on the prioritization of contamination influencing vulnerable and impeding the fulfillment of basic human rights, including the right of return for refugees (denimizing returnee villages), the right to work and food security (providing access to agricultural and grazing land), in education (denimizing schools and paths to schools), and to healthcare (denimizing health clinics and paths to health clinics). The MAPA’s prioritization system is currently being critiqued, and a new one is being established by a Retrofit Landmine Impact Survey (LIS). The LIS is designed to identify those communities in most critical need of humanitarian mine action—mine clearance, mine risk education, victim assistance, dangerous areas and/or the destruction of UXO. This is achieved through a questionnaire process that grades (or scores) the impact of mines and UXO on
The Mine Action in Perspective

Communication, Coordination and Consensus

A third effect of the APMBIC is that it has focused much attention and facilitated much action on the activities and functions of what we have come to call "mine action." Without the meetings of the International Workgroups, steering committees, the submission of reports and presentations, many governments, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), donors, and the United Nations would not have been able to define and propose action plans to address the wide scope of mine action challenges. The pure act of having real-time discussions among groups that might ordinarly never see one another, much less engage in dialog, has led to new partnerships, new approaches to mine action activities, and if not always a clear consensus, then at least a greater understanding of the problem and an awareness of others engaged in the effort. The fact that national governmental agencies at risk are routinely coordinating with NGOs, visiting military, the United Nations, regional organizations and donor countries is truly amazing. The meetings of the various venues of the APMBIC provide a good sounding board in which ideas compete for attention and general approval.

Restriction of NPIs by the Convention on Conventional Weapons

On the other hand, the APMBIC is not the only international instrument to restrict the use of anti-personnel landmines, and for some reason, many "Mine Ban Treaty" advocates often fail to add the authority of Protocol II of the Convention on Conven-

by Dennis Barlow, Director

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