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A Pioneer in the Field of Humanitarian Mine Action: Mine Clearance Planning Agency (MCPA)

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The Mine Clearance Planning Agency (MCPA) aims to effectively contribute to humanitarian mine action and advocacy activities in Afghanistan and other landmine-infested countries in order to make the hometowns of refugees and displaced people land-mine free and to implement essential rehabilitation and development activities in mine-affected communities.

by Qadeem Khan Tariq, *MCPA*

Background

The Mine Clearance Planning Agency (MCPA), an Afghanistan based international NGO, was incorporated under the rules and regulations of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Assistance to Afghanistan (UNOCHA) in March 1990 as an implementing partner of the United Nations Mine Action Program for Afghanistan (MAPA). MCPA is also registered as an international NGO in Afghanistan and the Republic of Yemen. MCPA specializes in the field of humanitarian mine action including General (Level One) Survey, Technical (Level Two) Survey, Battle Area Survey, Socio-economic Impact Survey, Mine Detecting Dogs Use and Mine Clearance Training. In addition, MCPA concentrates on the development and maintenance of information management systems for mine action.



An MCPA Team Leader is briefing an internal quality assurance team on the activities of his team.

The mission of MCPA is to effectively contribute to humanitarian mine action and advocacy activities in Afghanistan, in particular, and worldwide, in general. In doing so, MCPA contributes to making the land clear of the landmine threat, thus enabling safe return of refugees and displaced people to their hometowns, resumption of normal life and essential rehabilitation and development activities in the mine-affected communities.

Surveying and Clearance

In Afghanistan, MCPA is responsible for all types of mine surveys across the country. MCPA operates through its head office in Kabul and three regional offices located in Kandahar, Jalalabad and Herat with more than 300 staff members. The current operational capacity of MCPA in Afghanistan consists of 30 five-member technical survey teams, three five-member battle area survey teams and one quick response survey team.



An MCPA Team Leader is briefing his team about operational safety just before the start of field operations.

The survey output of MCPA is used by all mine clearance organizations in Afghanistan with exception to HALO Trust, which conducts survey operations for its own clearance teams. All the technical survey teams

of MCPA are supported by a set of two mine detecting dogs from the Mine Detection and Dog Center (MDC). Each MCPA survey team consists of four surveyors and a team leader, with one surveyor or team leader trained in first aid.

Since its establishment in 1990, the survey teams of MCPA have identified, marked and mapped more than 280 million square meters of mine contaminated area and about 199 million square meters of former battle area contaminated by UXO. While MCPA is primarily engaged in landmine surveys, it also undertakes clearance as part of the two-meter minefield boundary clearance and reduction of suspected mined areas. So far, MCPA has reduced/cleared about 34 million square meter mine-contaminated areas as part of the two-meter minefield boundary clearance and reduction of suspected mined areas and destroyed 4,052 anti-personnel mines, 624 anti-tank mines and 4,200 UXO.



An MCPA survey team during the technical survey of a mine field.

Reduction of suspected mined areas during the survey process is an important element of the technical survey as it saves significant mine clearance resources. The clearance/reduction of the 34 million square meters suspected mined areas by MCPA has resulted in a direct saving of about \$20 million (U.S.) for MAPA, calculated at the rate of \$0.60 per square meter clearance cost in Afghanistan.

Management Information Systems

In addition to conducting survey operations in Afghanistan, MCPA provides data management and planning support to MAPA at its headquarter and regional level. The management information system (MIS) developed and maintained by MCPA comprises of two main parts: a well-developed and practical database and a geographical information system (GIS). The MIS is mainly used to:

- **maintain accurate and reliable records of mine action operations for planning and coordination of action activities and prioritization of mine affected communities at a regional and national level.**
- **ensure appropriate/efficient allocation of mine action teams and other mine action resources.**
- **provide mine action data and GIS information of mined and cleared areas for the use of MAPA and other concerned organizations as required.**
- **evaluate performance of individual mine action teams or organizations.**
- **facilitate research and development of new demining procedures and mine clearance technology.**

The database is capable of recording and analyzing the data for all aspects of the mine action operations in Afghanistan and can produce outputs of a very wide range as required. The GIS can provide geographical information from an individual minefield level to national level. However, in order to be contemporary and compatible with other mine action information management systems in the world, MCPA and MAPA plan to replace the current mine action information management system with the standard Management Information System for Mine

Action (IMSMA) developed by Geneva International Center for Humanitarian Demining (GICHD).

Research

Given MCPA's experience in the field of mine action surveys, in 1994 it entered an agreement with Vietnam Veterans of America Foundation (VVAFA) to assist in the research on the socio-economic impacts of landmines in Afghanistan as part of the global landmine impact survey. Results of the survey published in the form of a report titled "When the Guns Fall Silent, the enduring legacy of landmines."



A camel injured by an anti-personnel landmine is being rescued by members of an MCPA survey team.

MCPA successfully executed the Training and Monitoring Project, quality assurance component, of MAPA from 1993 to 1997. As part of this project, MCPA trained mine clearance personnel, monitored mine action operations and investigated demining accidents in order to find new, safer and cost effective methods for mine action operations. During the execution of this project, MCPA trained more than 1,200 field staff of various mine action organizations operating within MAPA's structure. The training included fresh and re-fresher training on various aspects of the mine action activities.



Socio-economic Impact Study

In 1998, MCPA conducted Socio-economic Impact Study of landmines and mine action operations in Afghanistan. The study measured the socio-economic impact of landmines and mine action operations and registered national indicators on various aspects of the socio-economic impact of landmines as well as mine action operations. Report for this study was published and distributed in late 1999. The findings/results of the study indicated that the mine action operations in Afghanistan have brought a significant improvement in the life situation of people in the communities where mined areas were cleared. In addition, the study indicates that the mine action operations have contributed in several ways to the overall rehabilitation and reconstruction process of the mine-affected communities. This project was carried on in 1999-2001 by UNDP and the World Bank as part of the Afghanistan Watching Brief project to build on the initial findings and results of the study.

A surveyor has just discovered an anti-personnel land-mine.

Outside Programs

As part of its international involvement in mine action, MCPA executed a Landmine Impact Survey in the Republic of Yemen under a sub-agreement from the Survey Action Centre (SAC) and United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS) during July 1999-July 2000. The survey determined the socio economic impact of landmines and the scope and size of the landmine contamination in the Republic of Yemen. The Yemen Landmine Impact survey is the first of its kind implemented to internationally recognized and accepted standards that received the certification of the United Nations Certification Committee in August 2000. In a joint project with SAC and Cranfield Mine Action, MCPA also provided technical support to the government of Yemen in the effective and proper utilization of the survey results and developing a strategic national mine action plan.

Northern Iraq

In 2000, MCPA entered an agreement with UNOPS to develop local mine action capacity in Northern Iraq. The end product of the project was supposed to be two functional local mine action non-governmental mine action organizations. However, the project, expected to be implemented in January-December 2001, was cancelled in July 2001 pursuant to non-issuance of Iraqi visas for the international staff of the project.

Additional Activities

Being an active member of the Survey Working Group (SWG) and chair of the Working Group on Mine Action in the framework of the International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL), MCPA shares its experience and lessons learnt with other mine action organizations through participation in the international meetings, conferences, seminars and workshops and provides policy advice to the ICBL on humanitarian mine action.

In addition to being an active organization in the field of humanitarian mine action, MCPA has been playing a key role in the establishment and goal accomplishment of Afghan Campaign to Ban Landmines (ACBL). Being the founding member and coordinating agency of ACBL, MCPA, in consultation with the ACBL steering committee, implements all the executive functions of the ACBL. The ACBL is a non-political and non-governmental national forum with the membership of more than 40 national and international organizations campaigning for a total ban on anti-personnel landmines at a national and international level. ACBL was officially launched on 5 August 1995 in Kabul, Afghanistan in order to represent Afghanistan, one of the most heavily mine-affected countries, in the international efforts for achieving a total ban on anti-personnel landmines.



Two landmine survivors with double amputations have received wheel chairs from ACBL.

Through the wide range of activities including public meetings/seminars, walks/rallies and publications, undertaken since its launching, ACBL has been able to obtain wide-spread public support for achieving a total ban on anti-personnel landmines and educate the authorities regarding the devastating impacts of landmine use in the country. As result of these efforts, one of the major achievements of ACBL was the issuance of a decree by the Supreme Leader of Taliban authorities imposing a total national ban on the production, stockpiling, use and transfer of landmines at a national level. Recent studies of ACBL could not find any evidence to the violation of the decree by Taliban forces. ACBL is also in the process of persuading the Northern Alliance to stop the reported use of landmines and follow the suite. In addition, ACBL is an active member of the Coordination Committee (CC) of the International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL) and provides all possible support to it in achieving a total ban on anti-personnel landmines at international level.

Conclusion

MCPA has successfully developed practical, accurate and cost effective mine survey techniques and procedures after more than a decade of practical fieldwork. In addition, MCPA is an organization experienced in developing and maintaining information management system for mine action. Both these components are considered essential elements of a successful mine action program. Therefore, MCPA would be pleased to share its experience and expertise with other organizations involved in

humanitarian mine action activities worldwide by providing technical advice and by undertaking mine survey, mine clearance and mine training projects in the mine affected countries.

**All photos courtesy of MCPA.*

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