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Field Notes

Preparing for the Future: How the SDGs Impact Mine Action

by Ursign Hofmann [Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining] and
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Figure 1. The Sustainable Development Goals.
Figure courtesy of the United Nations.

Adopted by all U.N. Member States in September 2015, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2030 Agenda) and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) entered into effect on 1 January 2016 to guide development efforts.¹ The SDGs are in the early stages of implementation and are still being mainstreamed into mine action. This article draws on a timely study from the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining (GICHD) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) that aims to stimulate collective thinking in the sector, provides policy recommendations, and offers implementation tools.²

From Global To National: The Sustainable Development Landscape

The 2030 Agenda envisions development to be sustainable—i.e., balancing economic development, social equity, and environmental protection. Sustainable development is viewed as being participatory, inclusive, and nondiscriminatory so that “no one is left behind,” particularly the most vulnerable and marginalized in society.¹

The 17 SDGs, subdivided into 169 global targets and 230 indicators, serve as the 2030 Agenda’s results and reporting framework. The SDGs (and their targets) are indivisible and linked together in response to the interconnectedness of the challenges of our time.^{3,4,5} They need to be tailored to national contexts, needs, and priorities through a national SDG framework.

National Mine Action Authorities (NMAA) have a major role to play at the intersection between global policy shifts and national/local level realities. Whereas the SDGs are of a global nature, more country-specific areas of work, such as mine action, are not explicitly identified but rather anticipated to be addressed via national SDG frameworks. These nationalization processes are unique opportunities for NMAAs to mainstream mine action and ensure appropriate entry points (e.g., at the level of goals, targets, and indicators).

Several countries affected by landmines and explosive remnants of war (ERW) have taken first steps in that direction. In Afghanistan, the Directorate of Mine Action Coordination (DMAC), with support of the United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS), successfully voiced the importance of mine action with the Ministry of Planning, in charge of designing the national SDG framework, and was tasked to propose mine action indicators. The governments of Cambodia and Lao PDR decided to formulate a national SDG 18 to address the negative development impacts of contamination and to assist victims.

The 2030 Agenda: A Game Changer

National SDG frameworks will form the basis for national development efforts, sectoral plans, and country-specific U.N. development frameworks. The SDGs are also expected to serve as the reference for development policies and financing.⁵ Mine action is guided by treaty implementation, humanitarian imperatives, human rights approaches, and now the SDGs, which overarch, connect, and reinforce these different frameworks. Consequently, many mine action organizations, NMAAs, and donors are trying to adapt to this new policy and programming environment while aligning their strategies with the SDGs.

The 2030 Agenda is seen as a ‘game-changer’ in that it calls for the global community to go beyond business as



Then U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and Prime Minister of Lao PDR, Tongloun Sisoulith, at the launching of SDG 18 (September 2016). Photo courtesy of the United Nations and Eskinder Debebe.

usual in planning, delivery, monitoring, and reporting. Naturally, several **how** questions arise for the mine action sector, for example

- * How can we better articulate the catalytic contribution of mine action to sustainable development and ensure more coherence with broader development priorities?
- * How can we strengthen our outcomes and indicators to report against broader frameworks?
- * How can we improve participation of and inclusiveness for those at risk of being left behind?
- * How can we diversify and innovate our financing?

Mine Action Contributions to Sustainable Development in the SDG Era

As national and sectoral development plans are now expected to be underpinned by the SDG framework, any contribution by mine action interventions to these plans—and sustainable development at large—may only be fully recognized if mine action stakeholders can articulate and document how they contribute to the achievement of SDG targets.

It is therefore pivotal to understand how mine action activities can accelerate progress across the SDGs and how the latter may form part of a mine action Theory of Change. A 2017 study carried out by the GICHD and UNDP revealed that twelve SDGs are, in one way or another, of direct relevance to mine action.² Furthermore, mine action is positioned to contribute to the attainment of four other SDGs indirectly (see Figure 2). Across the SDGs, mine action can contribute to more than 50 SDG targets.

SDG 16 provides the most direct entry point, especially its target 16.1 that seeks to “significantly reduce all forms of violence and related death rates everywhere.” The re-

establishment of safe physical living environments is, however, not only an objective in itself, but also an enabling precondition that makes possible and accelerates many other development activities.

Analyzing links helps to identify expected and unexpected **SDG contributions** of mine action activities. It also widens the perspective on the impact of mine action’s work on sustainable development. For instance, the strong SDG focus on vulnerability and social protection provides a new pathway to address the rights of indirect mine/ERW victims through broader efforts. More importantly, data will be critical to validate or invalidate these links; an area that both the GICHD and UNDP are working on through their support to mine- and ERW-affected countries.

More Coherence Between Mine Action and Sustainable Development

It is a demanding task to operationalize the conceptual connections with sustainable development in mine action planning, implementation, and reporting. Only by further breaking down the remaining silos between sectors will more coherent and integrated policies and programs be achieved. For mine action to obtain greater results in planning and delivery, it will need to strive to be better aligned with broader national SDGs, especially as the implementation of the 2030 Agenda gains traction at the country level.

The SDG framework makes it possible to deliberately plot and record mine action interactions with broader sustainable development sectors such as agriculture, education, natural resource extraction, and tourism. This will help to facilitate mine action mainstreaming into budgets, planning, implementation, and monitoring within these other sectors. Moreover, the framework provides more coherence and coordination that will potentially influence mine action priority setting and decision making.

For this to happen, it is important to communicate with key government and local community stakeholders on the role that mine action can play in contributing to the SDGs, particularly when engaging with practitioners who rely on mine action as an enabling activity for their humanitarian and development work. Their increased awareness can open new doors for cross-sectoral partnerships that are at the core of SDG implementation.

Measuring Mine Action Results Version 2030

Many mine action stakeholders have made significant achievements toward reporting changes in lives and livelihoods.^{6,7,8} However, more evidence is needed to demonstrate



Figure 2: Major direct and indirect links between the SDGs and mine action. Photo courtesy of GICHD and UNDP.

exactly how mine action is **catalytic** at scale. To date, indicator development, monitoring, and reporting have often been comparatively weak links in project management and implementation.

Therefore, standardizing and aligning mine action outcomes with global, national, or sectoral reference targets and indicators will be critical to positioning mine action within broader development planning at many levels.⁹ Furthermore, information management systems can be refitted and better connected to feed into national SDG data collection mechanisms that are at the heart of SDG reporting. Figure 3 provides an example of possible SDG-aligned mine action outcomes and associated indicators related to SDG 4 and SDG 16.

New Impetus for Participatory and Inclusive Mine Action

Mine action often finds itself at the forefront of efforts to help marginalized and shattered communities rebuild their lives. Differences and inequalities between women and men, and amongst social groups can, however, lead to mine action dividends not always benefitting all members of society equally.¹⁰

Precisely, the SDGs put those at risk of being marginalized at the center of interventions. This provides an opening for the mine action sector to place a renewed, deliberate emphasis on participation and inclusiveness. Strategic planning processes, priority setting, definition of success indicators, and data

collection/disaggregation are some areas that lend themselves particularly well to learn who are and are not benefitting, to increase community involvement, and to strengthen accountability to those we serve.

Fresh Pathway for Mine Action Financing and Innovation

Mine action funding decreased each year from 2012 to 2015.¹¹ At the same time, development funding is expected to become increasingly tied to SDG implementation. Positioning itself to benefit from this SDG-earmarked funding will demand that mine action is able to clearly demonstrate the development

Relevant SDG and target	Potential indicative mine action outcome	Potential indicative mine action indicator	Relevant global SDG indicator (abbreviated)
4: Quality education 4.1 By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes	Safe access to education for beneficiaries in previously contaminated area [number] months after handover of released area	Number of beneficiaries who go to school in previously contaminated area, by sex, age and disability (and other relevant criteria)	4.1.1 Proportion of children and young people: (a) in grades 2/3; (b) at the end of primary education [...]
16: Peace, justice and strong institutions 16.1 Significantly reduce all forms of violence and related death rates everywhere	Increased safety perception by population in previously contaminated area [number] months after handover of released area	Proportion of population that feel safe walking around previously contaminated area, by sex, age and disability (and other relevant criteria)	16.1.4 Proportion of population that feel safe walking alone around the area they live

Figure 3: Illustrative SDG-aligned mine action outcomes and indicators. Figure courtesy of GICHD and UNDP.



Previously mine-contaminated land becoming a rice field, Cambodia.
Photo courtesy of UNDP, Cambodia.

outcomes of its work. The SDGs offer an innovative pathway to do so, whereby the sector becomes more relevant to non-traditional public funding streams. What is more, the SDGs also provide a shared narrative to engage with new actors, such as the private sector or philanthropic organizations, which are expected to step up their role in SDG implementation.¹²

Seizing The Opportunity

The 2030 Agenda offers an important opportunity for mine action at this critical juncture in its 20-year history. It is a pathway to heighten mine action's relevance to and mainstreaming into broader sustainable development, while strengthening participation, inclusiveness, and accountability. Demonstrably aligning mine action with the SDGs can help re-energize and boost partnerships with the broader peace and development communities, increasing mine action's overall impact and its contribution to reaching the 2030 Agenda's pledge to "ensuring no one is left behind." ©

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