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Mine Action Development Funding in Bosnia and Herzegovina

Mine action seeks to eliminate the lingering effects of contamination from landmines and explosive remnants of war, but the need for development in these communities often trumps clearance and mine-risk education activities. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, where clearance activities are expected to continue until 2019, the Swiss Development Cooperation and Handicap International are exploring new ways for mine action to integrate development efforts into more traditional mine-action efforts.

by Michael Carrier [Handicap International] and Dr. John Powell [Community and Countryside Research Institute]

The Bosnian War took place from 1992–1995 during the breakup of the former Yugoslavia and principally involved Serbian ethnic groups fighting against Muslim and Croatian groups in Bosnia. During the war, Bosnian and Croatian groups also turned against one another for the small part of Bosnia still in their control. As a result of these bitter conflicts, Bosnia and Herzegovina is one of the most mine-affected countries in the world.

Despite massive humanitarian mine-action funding during the past 15 years, the suspected hazardous area covers 1,620 square kilometers (626 square miles) or 3.1 percent of BiH.¹ The development of a new Mine Action Strategy (2009–19) aiming for a country “free of mines” by 2019 means it is officially recognized that the struggle to remove landmines will continue for at least another decade in BiH. Humanitarian donors will not likely commit funding in the required quantities to achieve the mine-free objective within that timeframe. Mine-action organizations, therefore, will need to use funding that is specified for more general development activities and operate mine-specific development activities in parallel with humanitarian assistance.

This article reflects on a pilot project currently being implemented in BiH. Funded by the Swiss Development Cooperation and Handicap International, the project aims to develop and test innovative ways to improve the links between mine action and development. This endeavor provides an opportunity to explore how the use of development funding can have a beneficial impact on more traditional mine-action efforts.²

Development Approach Complements Mine Action

The term “mine action and development” does not mean “mine action” versus “development.” As a country moves from an humanitarian crisis to a development phase, a transfer takes place from the traditional mine-action humanitarian assistance to a mine-action development approach. This evolution potentially opens the door to new types of cooperation as a development donor may support “development activities” involving mine action, whereas it would not support demining activities alone.³ Such donors would expect any mine-action intervention to be an integral part of, or at least closely linked with, a development project. Funding is unlikely to be earmarked specifically for mine action but more likely to be based on sustainable effects that any type of intervention, including mine action, would have on identified development priorities. Mine-action organizations will have a difficult time applying for this type of funding without stronger cooperation with other development actors. On the other hand, without a mine-action contribution, development actors would not be able to undertake work addressing social exclusion of a mine-affected population. Mine action—often thought to be dominated by military personnel and ways of thinking—and development stakeholders—often viewed by those in mine action as “civilian”—will therefore need to work together if they want to secure development money for mine-contaminated areas.

Cooperation between the mine-action and development worlds can be difficult and raise a number of questions, ranging from the existential “what is a ‘mine-action



Mine-affected inhabitants actively involved in reconstructing the existing road leading to the community of Burmazi, Bosnia and Herzegovina.

PHOTO COURTESY OF HANDICAP INTERNATIONAL

development approach?” to practical issues such as “who is in charge?” Linking mine action and development inevitably creates friction and requires both groups to be aware of their differing needs and requirements in order to achieve synergistic benefits from linked activities. A key finding in the BiH project discussed below is that most of the traditional development and mine-action interventions do not need any major institutional modification, as long as individual organizations focus on their own mandates within a coherent program of activity. Project outcomes suggest the following:

- Development donors will select the most relevant, efficient, impact-oriented and sustainable project, irrespective of whether a mine-action element is included
- A mine-action center can effectively supervise the five official pillars of mine action without the need to control development interventions in mine-contaminated areas.⁴
- All practitioners should maintain leadership of their core activities, while at the same time creating stronger linkages with other stakeholders.

Strong project management is required, with both sides involved from the beginning in a process of project planning that identifies clear goals, actions and evaluation criteria to measure overall effectiveness. An integrated approach requires:

- A risk-benefit approach in which risk assessment incorporates immediate local community social and economic objectives within long-term regional and national goals. The current risk-assessment approach needs modification.

- Demining and other mine-action operations prioritized on the basis of local needs. Prioritization already occurs, but integrating demining more frequently with development priorities is needed.
- Local-level processes to enable identification of social and economic benefits. These practices might need to be created from scratch but can be staged to identify key priorities early on and more complex concerns later.
- Mine action (e.g., fencing, education) delivered alongside development activities (provision of employment and income assistance, enhanced local services, road rehabilitation, etc.) requires a higher level of communication between mine-action and development organizations.
- Institutional processes enabling compromise between differing objectives. Mine action and development must adapt institutional goals and practices to allow for cooperation and coordination.

The emphasis is twofold, on both project planning and management, and on a deeper understanding of community development needs. The approach may result in a slower start to mine-action activities on the ground, but the outcome would be more effective intervention that simultaneously develops a community and releases it from the wider impacts of mines.

When the BiH project started in 2007, local community members from the mine-affected municipalities of Stolac and Berkovici identified road rehabilitation as a key priority. They realized that better accessibility within their community was necessary to obtain benefits from future mine-action intervention. Mine action would release land for agricultural purposes, thereby increasing local production, while the rehabilitated road would ensure that the agricultural products could be taken to regional markets, thus enhancing local income streams.

The Best Way to a Mine-free World?

The concept of mine action needs enlargement in order to encapsulate a country’s evolution from humanitarian needs and immediate survival to development and sustainable livelihood, as well as a concept that enables movement from a risk-focused to an impact-oriented approach. Instead of taking the traditional mine-free approach—where all possible resources focus on removing all mines before development can occur—an intermediary mine-impact-free goal may be needed.



IMAGE COURTESY OF NAVID BULBULIJA

Questions then arise as to what such a term might mean on the ground and how a potential donor might interpret it.

We define *mine-impact-free* as freedom for local communities to attain sustainable livelihoods (i.e., economic, social and environmental benefits) provided through two broad sets of actions: first, by removing fear and uncertainty about what actions can and cannot be undertaken in a specific area, and second, through support for developing alternative livelihoods. Providing concrete examples of links between traditional mine-action outputs—mine-risk education, humanitarian demining, victim assistance, stockpile destruction and advocacy—and human-development goals will ultimately be more convincing to potential donors.

The adoption of an intermediate mine-impact-free target would undoubtedly delay the ideal time when all mines would be fully eradicated, as resources formerly devoted to demining would be diverted to social and economic development activi-

ty. In the long run, however, it may be the best possible way toward a mine-impact-free world, as it could secure longer-term funding and ensure mine action is only undertaken if the community benefits. In addition, to obtain local community support by enabling current generations to engage in rewarding and sustainable employment is more likely to occur than waiting for some future promised land that may never materialize in their lifetime.

Development: An Effective Response

If the concept of mine action is expanded beyond its current narrow focus on simply removing mines to consider a wider set of options for managing and removing the negative impacts of mines first, development intervention could become a very effective mine-risk response.

More than 15 years after the conflict, the majority of new mine/UXO victims in BiH are adults entering into known hazardous areas for economic reasons.⁵ Without sustainable employment alternatives, they face bitter choices between neglect-

ing their families and risking their lives to meet their basic needs. Evidence from a field study implemented through this pilot project in May 2009 in the mine-affected communities of Stolac and Berkovici reveals that 24 percent of households surveyed continue to use marked mine areas. These are people fully aware of the risk, but they see entering the minefields as the only alternative to sustaining their incomes; therefore, no amount of risk education will curtail their actions. Project efforts to integrate mine action and development in these communities have revealed a local capacity to engage in bottom-up development activities that enhance the inhabitants’ social and economic lives, largely through redirecting the focus away from mine removal and instead toward prioritizing development activities in safe areas.

Prioritizing action, based on the limited resources available in a mined area can ensure that the most important local issues are dealt with first. Mine-risk management has a role to play, including the traditional



Despite the request of the Handicap International team, this local mine-affected inhabitant refused to move out of the marked suspected hazardous area.

PHOTO COURTESY OF HANDICAP INTERNATIONAL

mine-action threat-reduction activities (demining, fencing, marking), but in order to ensure behavioral changes, it must also link standard mine-risk education with actions to create development alternatives. In BiH for example, providing an uncontaminated community space for collecting wood, or temporarily exchanging suspected hazardous areas with safe agricultural land until clearance is completed, would alleviate financial pressures on locals who knowingly use mine-affected land. Thus, these activities would be safe, cost-effective and complementary approaches to mine action.

In the municipality of Berkovici, an association of hunters is one of the most high-risk groups in BiH and is currently involved in an innovative mine-risk management approach. After being accredited to conduct mine-risk education and carrying out a participatory, community-needs assessment, the association identified priorities for development, demining and mine-risk education. The priorities are being formalized into the existing mine-action system while a specific development alternative starts. With the support of local institutions, hunters will manage a specific hunting zone in a safe area, mark safe

paths that any type of visitor could use (not just hunters) and promote the area to local inhabitants, as well as foreigners, in order to enhance the area's tourism. Such an approach requires a deeper understanding of local communities and how they function but will potentially enable access to development funding for a more holistic form of mine-risk management intervention.

Conclusion

The traditional humanitarian-mine-action assistance alone cannot fully erase the impact of landmines and the related social exclusion factors evident in post-conflict zones. Traditional technical mine-action inputs, such as mine clearance mine-risk education and survivor assistance activities, are not sufficient. In order to improve quality of life and access development funding, mine action must also become part of a development response. It must include the setting of intermediary mine-impact-free targets and consider a wider set of intervention measures, from the recognized standards of mine action to innovative actions including institutional change, community appraisal, and support for alternative social and economic opportunities. ♦

see endnotes page 80



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