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The United Nations Portfolio of Mine Action Projects

In Xieng Khouang, Lao PDR, an all-female demining team assesses and clears unexploded ordnance-contaminated land. In Bogotá, Colombia, a team of practitioners nationalizes a plan to train local health personnel about the psychosocial needs of explosive-remnants-of-war victims. In Banja Luka, Bosnia and Herzegovina, primary schoolchildren attend educational puppet shows about small-arms-and-light-weapons risks. At the heart of each initiative is a collaborative resource-mobilization system called the *Portfolio of Mine Action Projects*, and in 2010 it gives life to 277 projects in 27 countries.

by Chad McCoull [Center for International Stabilization and Recovery]

The U.N. *Portfolio of Mine Action Projects* allows government agencies and nongovernmental and international organizations in the field to publicize their plans to deal with local mine-action issues and to seek financial assistance for these plans. The annual appeal also serves as a compendium of global mine-action accomplishments and as a catalog for potential donors to browse. In addition, it is a reference and capacity-building tool, providing a snapshot of global funding requirements, the status of countries'/territories' strategies and whose submission process helps appealing agencies hone their skills in proposal writing and strategic planning.

Simply submitting a project to the *Portfolio*, however, rarely gets it funded. In reality, the politics of aligning voluntary donors' interests with those of the manifold field agents often involves complex negotiations. Routine communications between stakeholders are necessary to strategize the yearly process of approving, funding, facilitating and publicizing country projects.

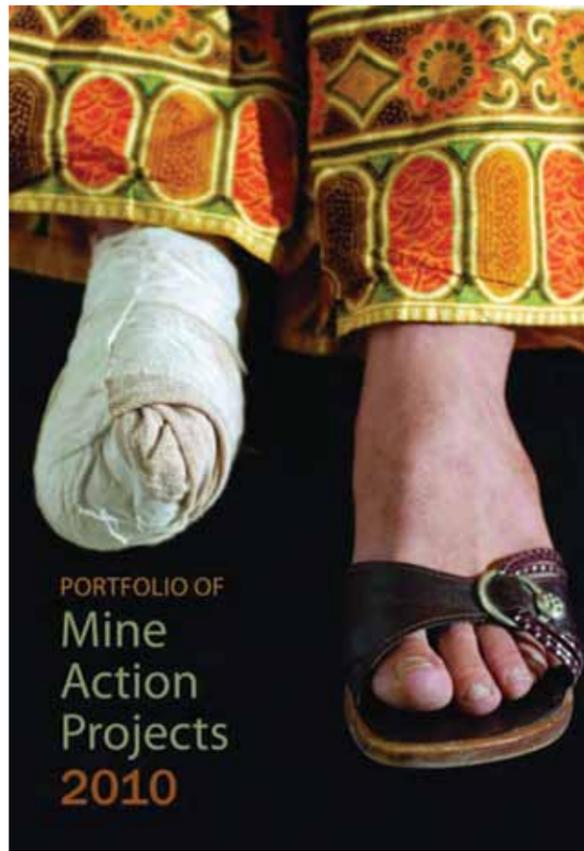
The process begins when an appealing agency identifies an outstanding need for which it requires external funding. For example, DanChurchAid, operating in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, may lack the resour-

es and personnel necessary to clear minefields in the Katanga province. The appealing agency must carefully articulate and submit a request to its respective Country Portfolio Coordinator who then liaises with the Portfolio Team at the U.N. headquarters. Getting indexed in the *Portfolio* requires that an appealing agency work with its implementing partners to formalize a detailed project proposal. In this example, DanChurchAid arranges for one implementing partner to provide mine-detection dogs and mechanical assets while another implementing partner conducts advocacy activities.

The U.N. Headquarters Portfolio Team—an interagency group of staff from United Nations Mine Action Service, United Nations Development Programme and UNICEF—vets the project proposals to ensure consistency and coherence with the stated requirements by the Country Portfolio Team. Finally, donor representatives select projects to fund, specifying budget timelines and accountability measures. Throughout the predetermined duration of project implementation, the applicant (in the above example, DanChurchAid) and its partners report progress to all relevant stakeholders. Once a year, the Portfolio Team publishes a new *Portfolio* online, refreshing the register of new requests and ongoing projects.

Thirteen Editions and Counting

Originally called the *Portfolio of Mine-Related Projects* in 1998, the *Portfolio* first arose from UNMAS' imperative to appraise and monitor the global mine problem's funding requirements. The first edition only acknowledged official U.N. programs, eight integrated mine-action programs and 10 countries' proposed projects lists. During the first five years, increasing numbers of NGOs and national authorities began to participate, some even actively replacing U.N. officials as Country



Cover of the 2010 Portfolio of Mine Action
COURTESY OF THE UNITED NATIONS

Portfolio Coordinators.¹ Since its inception, the proposal process has evolved from a top-down approach to a decentralized approach in which field agencies chiefly assess needs and draft proposals. Today more than ever, the national strategies, priorities and coordinated processes of the 95 appealing agencies currently included in the *Portfolio* guide its content.

More recent in its history has been the 2007 debut of the invaluable Automated Portfolio System, which streamlines data submission and funds tracking and reporting in real time. The web-based AP System has been

instrumental in accommodating *ad hoc* electronic updates and biannual progress reports. According to the Portfolio Team, such efforts promote greater local and national ownership of the *Portfolio* process and support capacity development in terms of outreach efforts, especially to donors.

Linking Mine Action with Development

Following the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention, victim rates have receded, consequently enabling the global mine-action community to pay greater heed to issues of community development. Recent studies have proven the importance of linking mine action with development,² and an increasing number of mine-action entities have begun aligning their efforts with the U.N. Millennium Development Goals³ and Development Assistance Frameworks.⁴

The *Portfolio* is a testament to this trend. According to the Portfolio Team, “The benefits of mine action are seldom singular. A road made passable reduces victims, but also promotes the return of displaced populations and stimulates trade.”⁵ With priorities shifting toward development-conscious mine action, the *Portfolio* has reflected a “more explicit elaboration of development aspects, where they may previously not have been highlighted.” In recent years, appealing agencies have increasingly partnered with development practitioners to attract the interest of progressive donors.

Matching Agencies with Donors

The track records of some appealing agencies show years of experience while others have only recently begun to grapple with mine-action issues. Despite such complexity, the United Nations and donors have been encouraged by the increase in national authorities asserting their right to oversee their own countries' multifarious activities.

Some appealing agencies have held the misconception that simply participating in the *Portfolio* will guarantee them funding from the international community. Programs that have not received funding in a particular year have thereafter withdrawn their proposals. While the *Portfolio* ultimately strives to connect the donor and implementer and serves as a reference tool for many donors, both parties must align regional and topical priorities before plans can be discussed. For this reason, not every project can receive funding. In 2010, for example, most projects did not receive funding. Out of the

US\$589 million requested for the combined projects, only \$24 million was secured at the time of publication, amounting to a record shortfall of \$565 million. In December 2009, UNMAS director Maxwell Kerley announced, “It is unlikely with our best efforts that funding would be attained, but it does not mean that the job won't get done—it will just take longer and more people will die.”⁶

The United Nations hypothesizes that some of the reasons for this shortfall include deficient reporting, the global economic downturn and new directions in donors' earmarking decisions. In addition, while the *Portfolio* has expanded from 10 countries in 1998 to 27 countries in 2010, donor interest in the mine-action field has stagnated. Though global support for mine action has remained constant, forecasts from *The Landmine Monitor Report*⁷ indi-

for its flexibility in expressing the dynamic needs of a particular community. Japan, one of the major donors, annually references the *Portfolio* to inform earmarking decisions. Donors also gain greater awareness of the plights of lesser publicized countries, such as Mauritania.

When stakeholders meet to solve a problem, assess local needs and strategize a plan of action, the *Portfolio* empowers these parties to communicate uniformly and globally. According to the U.N. Portfolio Team, Albania often cites the *Portfolio* as invaluable for coordinating partners and attracting funds. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, all national authorities, international agencies and NGOs found the *Portfolio* to be a useful means to coordinate activities. Amid Sudan's civil war, the call to compile the *Portfolio* brought together stakeholders from

delayed for some months as a result of this review. To learn more about the *Portfolio of Mine Action Projects*, visit <http://tinyurl.com/36gfzuy>. ♦

*Note: Information presented in this article was provided by the UNDP, UNICEF and UNMAS, members of the UN HQ Portfolio Team, interviewed in July and August 2010.*⁵

see endnotes page 81



Chad McCoull worked for *The Journal of ERW and Mine Action* from January 2007 until October 2010 as an Editorial Assistant. While attending James Madison University, he earned a Bachelor of Arts in technical communication and a Masters of Public Administration, specializing in international NGO management. In October 2010, McCoull began serving as a Small Business Development Peace Corps Volunteer in Burkina Faso, Africa.

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“It is unlikely with our best efforts that funding would be attained, but it does not mean that the job won't get done—it will just take longer and more people will die.”

cate that donors may decrease funding in future years.⁸ To gain donor attention, the Portfolio Team recommends that appealing agencies respond by “recognizing the wider funding interests of traditional and non-traditional mine action donors and to partner with wider thematic and geographic funding sources.”⁵

Building upon Assets

Donors praise the *Portfolio* both for its utility as a reference tool and

both the North and South in confidence-building roundtables, long before the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement.⁹

These success stories underscore the prospect that the *Portfolio* will continue to serve the mine-action sector as a permanent fixture. Currently, the Portfolio Team is reviewing inefficiencies and assets, listening to stakeholder feedback and improving objectives for the upcoming years. The 2011 *Portfolio* is expected to be