Regional Cooperation: MDDC for SE Europe

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to the marking of weapons, focuses on collecting and destroying surplus and obsolete SA/LW, as well as improving the physical security of police weapons stores. It also focuses on strengthening the capacity of the

PNB in weapons and ammunition accountability and safe storage. The project is ongoing with completion expected in April 2010. A final example of the aid effectiveness is seen with Danish Demining Group’s active involvement in efforts to reduce armed violence. In Somaliland, DDG is working with local communities and peace-building organizations to reduce the demand for SA/LW and enhance community safety. As previous attempts to forcibly disarm communities have failed, DDG is focusing on training local communities in conflict-management and conflict-resolution techniques, safe storage of SA/LW and ammunition, undertaking mine/ERW clearance and de-mining.

Conclusion

Donors face increasing challenges in delivering aid effectively in countries affected by mines and ERW. Recently, several strategies including the Paris Declaration, the Principles and the AAD have encouraged donors to take a wider look at the unique issues encountered in delivering aid to conflict-affected and insecure areas. In order to maximize the benefits of relief, recovery and stabilization efforts, donors are encouraged to conduct joint assessments, promote flexible funding modalities, work in harmonization with local government entities and communities, and look at the wider agendas of conflict prevention, state-building and peace-building in war-torn areas. In maximizing aid effectiveness, donors can make valuable contributions toward peace-building, strengthening local governance institutions, reducing violence, countering poverty and facilitating the coordination of humanitarian access in communities affected by mines/ERW.

Making aid effective in conflict-affected countries is clearly challenging. However, enhanced donor coordination, harmonization and support for broader peace-building, armed-violence reduction, and institution-building initiatives are all vital, and they can go a long way to improving safety and reducing poverty in communities affected by mines/ERW.

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As the refinement of mine-detection methods becomes more important, the Mine Detection Dog Center for South East Europe is answering the call, training dogs and handlers for effective detection. Working with animals is not easy, but the MDDC has been very successful in its operations. The organization focuses on regional cooperation, and has worked in areas such as Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Iraq, where it has proved to be an effective asset to mine detection and clearance.

by Marija Trlin | Mine Detection Dog Center for South East Europe |

The Global Training Academy, located in San Antonio, Texas, United States, provided initial training to MDDC with the sponsorship of a grant by the Office of Humanitarian Demining Programs in the U.S. Department of State (now the Office of Weapons Removal and Abatement) in 2003. The U.S. State Department also funded the operational costs of the MDDC and facilities construction/improvements through the International Trust Fund for Demining and Mine Victims Assistance in Slovenia until the MDDC became financially self-supporting in 2006. Cooperation with the ITF and the Marshall Legacy Institute in the United States has resulted in many successful projects. It is worth mentioning a few of the most important regional training projects, including those at the American National Agency for Mine Action and the Lebanon Mine Action Center. The MDDC has trained a total of 16 mine-detection dogs and teams from March 2006–June 2009 for ANAMA, along with 10 mine-detection dog teams for the LMAC, the Marshall Legacy Institute provided the majority of the funds for purchasing and training the dogs.
ANAMA training. MDDC trainers faced certain challenges in training and integrating mine-detection dog teams for Azerbaijan. In the first "six-pack" (a set of six mine-detection-dog teams, where a team is comprised of one dog and its handler), an MDDC trainer encountered an acceptable amount of time, trainers should remember that MDDs are not machines, but animals that need to adapt to new surroundings. To ensure proper integration and long-term results, MDDC trainers suggested a longer period of supervision from the ANAMA trainers and handlers during their training. As emphasized by an MDDC trainer, accommodation and care of the mine-detection dogs in Azerbaijan was excellent and similar to the mine-detection dogs in Azerbaijan and Serbia in November 2005. MDDC conducted a similar project in Southeast Albania in July 2005, and another to support demining of the border area between the Republic of Croatia and Serbia in November 2005. Since Bosnia, Albania and Croatia are countries within the same region, the affected areas have very similar climates, soil and vegetation, and the same accreditation's procedures and applicable standards for humanitarian demining.

Regional Projects

One of the first regional demining projects in which MDDC participated provided support to DanChurchAid’s demining teams in northern Albania, from April to November 2005. MDDC conducted a similar project in Southeast Albania in July 2005, and another to support demining of the border area between the Republic of Croatia and Serbia in November 2005. Since Bosnia, Albania and Croatia are countries within the same region, the affected areas have very similar climates, soil and vegetation, and the same accreditation's procedures and applicable standards for humanitarian demining.

Cooperation with DCA continued into 2006 in several regions of Albania, and was followed by support for demining teams of the Explosive Ordnance Demining Management Section Kosovo from 2007 until the present. MDDC transport them to the work sites and required translators with operational language abilities in English, Arabic, and Sorani Kurdish. Logistical support to accommodate handlers and dogs in Iraq was also more demanding than in Southeast Europe.

Conclusion

From MDDC's point of view, it must be emphasized that the challenges of regional and interregional cooperation are more manageable if addressed in the initial planning phase. During this phase, it is essential to estimate timelines accurately and adjust performance and logistics to be in line with local standards and conditions. Each project MDDC has taken on provides a foundation of experience that can be applied to future projects. Cooperation between mine-action centers and MDDC continues to be a successful enterprise as mine-action experts strive to reduce the mine threat in the most efficient and cost-effective manner. Despite cultural differences and conditions, all mine-action organizations share the same desire to free countries from mines and unexploded ordnance, and MDDC strives to build on this common ground.

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