August 2009

Making Land Release in Mozambique Operational

Antonio Belchior
Instituto Nacional de Desminagem

Charles Downs
Downs Consulting

Follow this and additional works at: http://commons.lib.jmu.edu/cisr-journal

Part of the Defense and Security Studies Commons, Emergency and Disaster Management Commons, Other Public Affairs, Public Policy and Public Administration Commons, and the Peace and Conflict Studies Commons

Recommended Citation
Available at: http://commons.lib.jmu.edu/cisr-journal/vol13/iss2/7

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Center for International Stabilization and Recovery at JMU Scholarly Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Journal of Conventional Weapons Destruction by an authorized editor of JMU Scholarly Commons. For more information, please contact dc_admin@jmu.edu.
It is therefore necessary to involve local populations of women and men in the reconstruction process to ensure equal rights and protection as they return to the released land. Mine-action organizations, while implementing the land-release process, should link up with development organizations to ensure fair and equal post-handover rights.

Possibilities for Change

Mine action is currently in a transition process in which the focus is shifting from the number of square meters cleared to the beneficiaries, i.e., all affected stakeholders in mined communities. However, despite positive recognition that gender equality is a precondition for successful mine action, many actors are still reluctant to redefine the sphere from purely technical to one that takes into account local needs, preferences, and priorities. Gender-biased work practices create an unequal and disadvantageous environment for women.

Virginia Ruseva worked as a Programme Officer with the Swiss Campaign to Ban Landmines and Mine Action Programmes in Mozambique, where she conducted field research from July 2008. Previously, Ruseva worked as a Women and Peace Research Assistant at International Committee of the Red Cross where she undertook research on sexual violence in armed conflict. Earlier positions also include researching sexual and gender-based violence for United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and gender history for the Academic Research Center on Gender Studies in Lyon, France.

Possibilities of Change

Land-release approaches offer new possibilities for how mineworkers can go about their job. In Mozambique, land release builds on existing good practices of the national program. The 2000–02 Landmine Impact Survey estimated there were 558 square kilometers (215 square miles) of suspected areas, with 1,374 SHAs affecting 791 communities. While approximately 60 square kilometers (23 square miles) have been cleared over the past eight years, the current best estimate is that 12 square kilometers (5 square miles) of SHAs remain. The workshop resulted in the creation of national land-release draft elements and criteria that will help to develop practical land-release standards in the near future.

Mozambique’s Instituto Nacional de Desminagem is interested in the land-release approach as a practical method to increase the efficiency of mine clearing and to more rapidly eliminate the threats to life and obstacles to development caused by landmines and other explosive remnants of war found in Suspected Hazardous Areas. Land-release emphasizes the continuous collection of information to determine where mine clearance is necessary to eliminate community suspicion and support full use of land.

In Mozambique, land release builds on existing good practices of the national program. The 2000–02 Landmine Impact Survey estimated there were 558 square kilometers (215 square miles) of suspected areas, with 1,374 SHAs affecting 791 communities. While approximately 60 square kilometers (23 square miles) have been cleared over the past eight years, the current best estimate is that 12 square kilometers (5 square miles) of SHAs remain. The workshop resulted in the creation of national land-release draft elements and criteria that will help to develop practical land-release standards in the near future.

The Workshop

Discussion regarding land release in Mozambique began in 2008 when IND management, with the support of the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining, introduced the subject within IND and with other stakeholders. As a second step, IND invited the Survey Action Center to help develop a policy approach and facilitate a workshop for its operations/quality-assurance staff. The purpose of the workshop was to develop operational procedures related to...
land release, particularly through Non-technical and Technical Survey, for quality assurance of the process, and for the documentation of results. These issues are particularly relevant in Mozambique, since land-release activities will most often be carried out by demining operators, with the IND providing quality assurance and acceptance of the results. Thus, IND staff would need to understand the typical operator steps to conduct land release through survey and the appropriate measures for quality assurance of that process.

The workshop effectively combined conceptual discussions, working groups and site visits. The training centered on a few key topics: quality management and quality assurance for mine action, concepts and methods for land release, land release through Non-technical and Technical Survey methods, specific criteria for land release relevant for Mozambique, and practical use of the criteria. This resulted in agreement on draft elements for two important documents: "Elements of National Standards for Land Release" and "Criteria for Release of Suspect Areas Through Survey." These documents are centered on a few key topics: quality management and quality assurance for mine action, concepts and methods for land release, land release through Non-technical and Technical Survey methods, specific criteria for land release relevant for Mozambique, and practical use of the criteria. This resulted in agreement on draft elements for two important documents: "Elements of National Standards for Land Release" and "Criteria for Release of Suspect Areas Through Survey." Additionally, the workshop resulted in the revision of the terms of reference, procedures and forms for quality assurance of demining.

The participants evaluated the workshop in very positive terms. They believed that the combination of theory and practice provided a level of understanding and technical capacity that will enable them to participate in the field with operators and communities to objectively and responsibly evaluate and validate suspect areas proposed to be cancelled, confirmed or cleared. Participants emphasized the need for quality-assurance teams to be directly involved with the reclassification of SHAs, that this should be done in permanent dialogue with the local communities and operators on the ground, and that this will result in greater confidence in the data eventually contained in the official information-management system.

**Implementation**

The next steps for starting to use the land-release approach in Mozambique include:

1. Finish the current internal IND discussion regarding the draft norms and criteria
2. Expand the discussion to include humanitarian and commercial operators active in the country
3. Refine the draft norms and criteria
4. Determine how the operators will apply the norms

This will lead to a pilot application of the interim standard, criteria and procedures for land release, which will be evaluated after a period of six months.

The implementation of the methodological principles of land release through survey is expected to provide greater rigor and objectivity both in the process of reduction/cancellation of suspect mined areas and in the treatment of information regarding newly identified SHAs. The IND leadership looks forward to the improvements this may bring to the national program as well as to the communities, institutions and individuals whose lives and work are still affected by the remaining landmine problem in Mozambique. This experience should also bring useful lessons for other programs.

The IND staff in the workshop concluded that the IND should take the lead in developing national land-release standards and procedures in full discussion with operators and other stakeholders, and that the national database should be promptly updated to reflect land-release decisions.

**Draft Elements and Criteria**

Draft elements for national land release standards include the following:

- Each specific SHA should be identified and investigated; that is, the process is not simply completed by general actions or adjustments to consolidated totals in the database.
- Objective criteria should be established to decide whether a given area will be reclassified or kept as previously defined. The criteria should not be applied mechanically; they may be applied to entire SHAs or to portions thereof.
- Local communities must be involved in the land-release process, both as sources of information and in the acceptance of any decision regarding released land.
- The decision to cancel a SHA should be made in agreement between the IND, the operator and the community. Cancellation should not be forced on any party and should be reflected in the signature of representative parties on the corresponding documentation.
- Areas should be handed over by IND to the community promptly after conclusion of work.
- Draft criteria for release of specific parcels of land through survey developed in the workshop for further discussion included.
- Any specific area that has been used regularly for at least five years without evidence of mines.
Clearing Areas Right; Clearing the Right Areas

by Håvard Bach | GICHD |

Although land release is a widely used term, its definition is not universally understood. There are various approaches to mine clearance with different survey steps taken before conditions of safe land release are met, and some techniques are more efficient than others. This article examines ways of improving land-release methodology to more effectively define and ultimately resolve the landmine problem.

I
teresting efforts to define and ultimately resolve the landmine problem.

A land-release methodology useful? The answer to this question requires insight into what land release is as a concept and how it can be applied in the field. The term land release is not entirely new, and it has gradually found its way into mine action, as well as the lexicon of most governments and organizations. It is now widely used, and while a few criticize the term, most embrace it. Rather than being an indication of a problem with the term itself, this criticism is perhaps related to the differences in understanding what it implies. Misuse of the term to support specific agendas may also have added to the backlash.

In the past, the practice of releasing land was based on a subconscious and subjective decision-making process by demining organizations in the field. There is, in principle, nothing wrong with informal decision-making, but when it causes excessive clearance, and subsequently a waste of resources, there is a need to reflect on whether current practices are efficient and if they should be challenged. A comparison between cleared areas and the numbers of mines and pieces of unexploded ordnance found in 15 countries showed that less than 3 percent of the land cleared contained mines or UXO. While it is not always the case that demining organizations waste resources clearing mine-free land, it unfortunately is a problem that occurs far too often to be ignored.

The Problem

Often in the field of mine action, we know there are mines but do not know their exact locations—or even how many there are, or the actual size of the mined area. In the absence of a more detailed framework for completing the task, it is left to operators and contractors—guided by rigid criteria to leave no mines behind—to assess the task at hand and decide where to use scarce demining resources. The absence of a proper framework for defining and guiding mine clearance has inflated the perceived landmine problem, while allowing inefficient mine-removal practices.

Clearing mines is actually the least difficult aspect of mine action. The real challenge lies in defining the task and determining the location of the mines, but there has been reluctance to find effective solutions. Relevant factors that promote inappropriate and conservative decision-making include:

• Flawed use of success indicators
• Pressure by local authorities

There are various approaches to mine clearance with different survey steps taken before conditions of safe land release are met, and some techniques are more efficient than others. This article examines ways of improving land-release methodology to more effectively define and ultimately resolve the landmine problem.

i

The IND will finalize the standards and detailed criteria in discussion with the demining operators active in Mozambique. This will provide the framework to implement land release and increase the efficiency of mine action in Mozambique. These changes will improve the national program and may provide an interesting paradigm for other national programs and organizations.

Agricultural land that has been plowed for planting by animal or mechanical means for two years without any evidence of mines

Areas where the local population has freely moved for two years without evidence of mines

Areas where surface vegetation has been removed by hoe for planting of cereal or other crops, where seeds are planted about 30 centimeters (12 inches) apart, for five years without evidence of mines

Areas used intensively as pasture (e.g., cattle grazing) for two years without evidence of mines

Forested areas used for gathering forest products

Forested areas cleared by powered logging equipment without evidence of mines should be cleared immediately

Forest areas used for gathering wood for fuel, roots, etc., without evidence of mines should be investigated further

Areas subject to other types of intensive use without evidence of mines for two or more years

Areas sufficiently checked by Technical Survey without finding any evidence of mines

When the local population and a technical team agree that there is no evidence of mines

Areas sufficiently checked by Technical Survey without finding any evidence of mines

The figure illustrates how land can be released by Non-technical Survey (NTS), if it provides sufficient confidence that land is mine-free. An NTS survey provides a risk assessment based on a comparison of possible ordnance with the number of mines found to a depth of 12 inches and meters (12 inches) apart, for five years without evidence of mines should be investigated further

Clearing Areas Right; Clearing the Right Areas

by Håvard Bach | GICHD |

Although land release is a widely used term, its definition is not universally understood. There are various approaches to mine clearance with different survey steps taken before conditions of safe land release are met, and some techniques are more efficient than others. This article examines ways of improving land-release methodology to more effectively define and ultimately resolve the landmine problem.

Clearing Areas Right; Clearing the Right Areas

by Håvard Bach | GICHD |

Although land release is a widely used term, its definition is not universally understood. There are various approaches to mine clearance with different survey steps taken before conditions of safe land release are met, and some techniques are more efficient than others. This article examines ways of improving land-release methodology to more effectively define and ultimately resolve the landmine problem.

Clearing Areas Right; Clearing the Right Areas

by Håvard Bach | GICHD |

Although land release is a widely used term, its definition is not universally understood. There are various approaches to mine clearance with different survey steps taken before conditions of safe land release are met, and some techniques are more efficient than others. This article examines ways of improving land-release methodology to more effectively define and ultimately resolve the landmine problem.

Clearing Areas Right; Clearing the Right Areas

by Håvard Bach | GICHD |

Although land release is a widely used term, its definition is not universally understood. There are various approaches to mine clearance with different survey steps taken before conditions of safe land release are met, and some techniques are more efficient than others. This article examines ways of improving land-release methodology to more effectively define and ultimately resolve the landmine problem.

Clearing Areas Right; Clearing the Right Areas

by Håvard Bach | GICHD |

Although land release is a widely used term, its definition is not universally understood. There are various approaches to mine clearance with different survey steps taken before conditions of safe land release are met, and some techniques are more efficient than others. This article examines ways of improving land-release methodology to more effectively define and ultimately resolve the landmine problem.