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Linking Mine Action and Development: Local-level Benefits and Challenges

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There are few things more discouraging than land that has been painstakingly demined only to remain unused following clearance. Cleared land that goes unused because of a lack of development priority is a waste of money and effort. In addition, the risk of subsequent injury or death for no obvious benefit is frustrating and demoralizing. If land is considered a high priority for community or economic development can also be prioritised for clearance, there can be some valuable results and the benefits can multiply. Linking mine action and development not only helps to eliminate wasteful denoting but also has the ability to optimise the impact of mine action in several other ways. However, linking mine action with development has some serious consequences for the way that mine clearance undertakes both prioritization and clearance at a local level.

Broad interest in linking mine action and development has led to a “contact group,” consisting primarily of representatives attending the States Parties meetings for the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention. The group also includes other invited partners and is coordinated through the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining. In June 2008, the GICHD published extensive draft guidelines for linking MA and development for key actors, non-state affected states, official development agencies and mine action organisations.

What Does “Linking MA and Development” Really Mean?

One current definition of this approach states that linking mine action and development simply means that mine action is aligned with broader development priorities and programs at all levels. This definition is based on the recognition that landmines and explosive remnants of war constrain post-conflict reconstruction and development. Linking the two is not a simple option, however, nor is it a simple yes or no decision. There is an entire spectrum of possible relationships between mine action and development, with no one correct approach suitable for all situations. Here are some of the possibilities:

No relationship, no linkage. In this case, mine action and development work independently, with separate goals, and separate prioritisation and project-identification mechanisms. Development agencies adhering to this approach are likely to regard mine-contaminated areas as infeasible, deciding not to plan development projects in these areas.

Leader-follower relationship. Usually, development staff wait for de-mining to be completed before starting development projects. Sometimes, mine action waits until development funding is available before starting mine-action work. Initial planning of development work in areas intended to be cleared may be undertaken, but there is a likely delay between the end of demining and the start of development activities. Development priorities in this case may not be able to make the best use of completed mine clearance.

Coordination. In this option, mine action and development are informed of each other’s priorities, and work together as far as possible without a major change in approach to either. Coordination can lead to much shorter delays in take-up of cleared land, but it does not significantly change the prioritization of mine action to take development needs into full account. For example, the actions most needed to address the causes of poverty in a region may not be those indicated by mine-action priorities. This approach goes a long way to reducing the humanitarian or socioeconomic impact of mines. No action, no linkage. In this case, mine action is intended to be cleared ahead of medium- or high-priority SHA, as defined by mine-action priorities. This approach goes a long way to reducing the humanitarian impact of mines. A low-priority suspected hazardous area that is a severe blockage to development might be cleared ahead of medium- or high priority SHA, as defined by mine-action priorities. This approach goes a long way to reducing the humanitarian impact of mines.

Integration. In this final possibility, mine action is fully integrated with development, as prioritisation and implementation are based on the overall development impact and not the mine action impact alone. A low-priority suspected hazardous area that is a severe blockage to development might be cleared ahead of medium- or high priority SHA, as defined by mine-action priorities. This approach goes a long way to reducing the humanitarian impact of mines. A low-priority suspected hazardous area that is a severe blockage to development might be cleared ahead of medium- or high priority SHA, as defined by mine-action priorities. This approach goes a long way to reducing the humanitarian impact of mines.

A clear understanding of what linking MA and development is about and an understanding of the potential benefits of this change, the loss of hard-won efficiency and impact is not likely to be welcomed by deminers.

Full linkage of demining and development demands a new paradigm for mine action at a local level, where clearance is seen as an enabling activity or a service in support of development, rather than a separate activity or a precursor to development. When fully linked to development goals, mine action in a “team player,” with a specific role of ensuring that it makes the greatest possible contribution to reducing poverty by enabling development, a significant change from the role of maximising the reduction of the humanitarian or socioeconomic impact of mines.

Examples of Local Linkages

Ample, clearance and verification of roads are key in assisting the return of refugees and internally displaced persons to their villages. In some regions, roads that are mined, or believed to be mined, can rapidly become overgrown and impassable, so there is no way to find out what lies along the former route. In some areas there are rivers that need replacement of substantial bridges that are 5 meters (16 feet) long or more. Unless bridges are rebuilt, roads cannot be used by vehicles, and if they remain unused for several years while money and materials are found to build a bridge, then the vegetation will return and the roads will disappear again. Local memory of what is a mined road and what has been cleared can be fickle, and rumors that the mine-free road is not used because it is still not safe can start and spread. Linking mine clearance to civil works like bridge building has obvious benefits in cases like these.

Bosnia and Herzegovina. Following mine clearance of their house and land, a family returned to their small farm in a former heavily mined area. Life was not easy, but a living could be made. When the young daughter of the family reached school age, however, the family seriously considered moving back to the nearest town, as there was no affordable transport available to take her to and from school. Demining the village could have been in vain if the children did not have access to education. If the farmers left the area again, the funds invested in road repairs and support to agriculture, as well as demining, would be wasted and the local economy would set back. Like many development problems, this issue was unexpected and required community involvement, acting with the municipal authorities, to find a solution based on a bus service. Mine-action prioritisation alone cannot address or resolve problems like these.
Southeast Europe. Finally, there is another case from Southeast Europe, where a large development agency was planning a substantial project in support of rural reconstruction. The funding timetable was set and required tight coordination of the various aspects of the project if the ambitions were to be achieved. Should the whole project be delayed, risking a reduction of the impact, or even a total loss of financial support, to allow preparation of a third of the money for mine clearance of affected areas? Or, should the mine-contaminated areas suffer “double jeopardy” by being excluded from the development funding in order to keep the rest of the project on track and on budget?

Linking mine action and development may offer a potential solution that is outside the usual way of working and prioritizing of demining: gradual clearance, which aims to clear just enough land, just in time, to ensure that key intermediate development goals of the overall large project can be met. One part of the project, for example, building up a goat farm, was planned to take several years, but the necessary land was mined. Immediate de-mining of the first part of the pasture could, if necessary, wait a year. Clearing further building areas would take a little longer, but finally, as the herd of goats gradually increased, the rest of the pasture would be cleared. This all makes for slow, inefficient and hence relatively expensive demining, but the overall gains in development activities could be considerable. In this approach, prioritization and task planning for mine clearance would be dominated by the development project and its time frame and not by demining or LCM plans.

Conclusion
Many approaches exist concerning demining and its connection to development within affected communities. Clearance projects can be successfully completed, but afterward the cleared land remains unusable, as no development program exists to assist the community in rebuilding what was lost through war and violence. Linking mine action and development helps to ensure that clearance projects in mined communities are not in vain by approaching the process in a new, more integrated way.

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An African Perspective on the Cluster Munitions Convention

On 30 May 2008, the international community adopted the Convention on Cluster Munitions. It is this little wonder that those who were against a convention of this sort are still reeling from the shock of it. Africa, on the other hand, can give itself a well-deserved pat on the back for having played a pivotal role in the adoption of a groundbreaking, legally-binding instrument of which posterity will judge the results.

by Sheila Mweemba [Zambia Mine Action Centre]

Africa’s Expectations for the CCM Negotiations
For Africa, the Convention on Cluster Munitions would address the negative humanitarian effects of these weapons. Since the continent is already plagued by crises—including inadequate health care and a lack of social and human-resource capacities—it was imperative that strong language be included, particularly on definitions, victim assistance and international cooperation and assistance (i.e., Articles 2, 3 and 6 respectively of the Convention on Cluster Munitions). Africa, in its deliberations during the Dublin Diplomatic Conference held in Ireland, felt that assistance in whatever form—technical, financial, or human—was vital, especially for poor countries that lack these capacities. In addition, African representatives wanted to avoid the inclusion of a clause permitting a transition period or any tolerance of interoperability language (i.e., joint military operations with countries not adhering to the ban).

After a position was determined, the 38 participating African countries agreed to delete Article 2(c) be deleted from the draft, as its presence provided for an opportunity for exceptions to be included. Article 5 (victim assistance) was also deleted as observers, attending meetings and expressing their own views. Strategy meetings were held every day during lunch breaks and served as an opportunity for informal parallel sessions and report back to the full group meetings. For instance, Malawi was the lead for Article 2 (interoperability). Suara Leone for Article 2, (victim assistance), Ghana for Article 2 (definitions)