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MAG (Mines Advisory Group)

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MAG, also known as the Mines Advisory Group, whose motto is “saves lives, builds futures,” takes a proactive role in meeting the needs of individuals in mine-affected countries through peacebuilding, community liaison and mine-risk education. With operations located in Angola, Cambodia, Cyprus, Democratic Republic of Congo, Iraq, Lao People’s Democratic Republic, Lebanon, Somalia, Sri Lanka, Sudan and Vietnam, MAG has learned to incorporate old and new techniques, resulting in prosperous futures for many.

By Rachel Cantin | Mine Action Information Center

I t is the mine-action language of numbers and statistics, the effects on people’s livelihoods sometimes lost in translation. However, for MAG, the focus never strays from meeting humanitarian needs and aiding the individuals in affected communities. MAG has taken its unique approach to clear 30 countries worldwide in an effort to clear abandoned weapons and landmines.

MAG has been operating since 1989, when Soviet troops withdrew from Afghanistan, leaving the country with a staggering landmine and unexploded ordinance problem. During that early period, MAG filled an advisory role in mine-action, working to inform the international community to respond to the needs of conflict-affected countries.

While many of its efforts age community-focused, MAG has never ignored the need for international recognition and support of efforts to eliminate the landmine/unexploded ordnance problem. In 1992, MAG, along with five other governmental organizations, founded the International Campaign to Ban Landmines. Over the past 15 years, the ICBL has grown to include more than 140 NGOs in over 90 countries.

Balancing local needs and a unified effort against landmines, MAG adopted its long-term approach to concentrate on sustainable development for affected communities. MAG strives to create a “world where people can build peaceful and prosperous futures free from the impact of the remnants of conflict.”

The MAG Approach

The MAG approach focuses on rebuilding communities and countries by providing physical clearance, education, and local know-how and partnerships. The organization concentrates on meeting the most critical needs of a community, such as safe access to water and clear routes between villages.

MAG aims:

• To save lives and build futures globally by implementing its innovative solutions for conflict-affected communities
• To enable governments and institutions to address the needs of conflict-affected communities through funding MAG activities
• To work with partners and others who share its impact-driven approach and further enable people to escape from the poverty and suffering caused by conflict
• To create awareness and secure public contributions so that MAG’s activities can respond effectively to the wider problem caused by the presence of remnants of conflict

This distinctive approach encompasses peacebuilding, community liaison, mine-risk education, Mine Action Teams and mine- and explosive-detection dogs, explosive-ordnance disposal and technology processes.

Peacebuilding

Many MAG efforts are directed at constructing an environment in which sustained economic and social development can take place. Tactics used to create such an environment are disarmament, demobilization and reintegration. Disarmament involves landmine removal and explosive-ordnance disposal. MAG attempts to bring organizations and both sides of conflicts together to work toward lasting peace.

Community liaison

In order to create the most effective plan to help a conflict-affected community, MAG employs Community Liaisons that work with all stakeholders to develop a clear understanding of the unique problems faced. Villages, authorities, hospitals, government and aid agencies are among the partners that assist in this process. Community Liaisons are used to discover how landmines and UXO affect the everyday lives of those in at-risk communities. Through information-gathering and establishing current and potential risk-taking activities, suitable responses can be formulated before, during and after clearance. This allows the ICBL to assess the importance of information-sharing and networking.

Mine-risk education

MAG was the first organization to introduce the concept of MRE. MAG mine-risk education campaigns are tailored to each community and take into consideration the specific impact of landmines/UXO as well as other details, such as economic resources, cultural differences, existing awareness, age, gender, etc.

MRE can cover information on a variety of issues, including:

• The physical appearance of landmines (UXO)
• The environment in which landmines/UXO exist
• Realistic safety precautions and guidelines
• Emergency measures

MRE programs also concentrate on initiating discussions that promote ways to stay safe through behavior change.

Mine Action Teams and mine- and explosives-detection dogs

Typically demining teams consist of army-style platoons that cut increase costs and efforts. MAG Mine Action Teams are compact and efficient, each with 15 people who are all trained in at least two of the following skills: demining, EOD, Technical Survey, medical and first aid, and management capabilities. Individuals from the local population are trained to work on the MATs, which helps strengthen the national workforce.

In projects that utilize mine- and explosives-detection dogs, clearance rates can be maximized as much as 300 percent. MAG prefers to employ these animals for clearing areas prepared by remote-controlled flail or vegetation-culling machines, reducing contamination in low-risk areas and assuring quality control after clearance.

Explosive-ordnance disposal, EOD involves locating, identifying, marking, securing, and safely removing and destroying dangerous remnants of conflict. This work includes the destruction of stockpiles and caches. In an area of conflict, a large amount of EOD. MAG frequently works to develop a local capacity to assist in the disposal of dangerous items, training local laborers in support roles. The EOD teams’ MAG deploys are helped greatly by the response of communities to MRE and Community Liaisons.

Technology

MAG uses a range of multi-faceted technological techniques. These technologies can include metal detectors, large machinery, and new innovations. However, no single clearance method works for every setting and situation. Consequently, MAG developed its “toolbox” of different approaches.

MAG uses some machinery, such as the Tempur-Flail mini-flail. Nuclear, thermal, sifting machines and advanced metal detectors. While new technologies are constantly being developed, MAG still views manual clearance as the most reliable method.

Recent Operations

Currently, MAG has operations in 11 countries. Below is information on their latest operations in Iraq and Lebanon. For additional information on other programs, please visit http://www.mag.org.uk.

In Iraq, MAG has worked in Iraq for over 15 years. During the current conflict in the country, MAG’s efforts have been concentrated in the northeastern province of Kirkuk. Over 1.5 million landmines and pieces of UXO have been cleared, making several million square meters of land available for use. Recently, MAG (with EOD partner) removed and destroyed more than 10,000 explosives.

In Lebanon, MAG’s operations in Lebanon began in 2000 with a team of 80 national staff members. Most current activities focus on clearing the unexploded ordnance in the southern region of the country. The Lebanon program has involved activities such as rapid survey and demonstration of an anti-personnel landmine detection system. MAG now faces many challenges, the ongoing conflict, the need to clear more and working with a new partner organization.

Conclusion

For almost 20 years, MAG has been developing its distinctive approach and disseminating it through operations that span the globe. These operations help realize the social and economic potential of conflict-affected communities. Ultimately, MAG’s work continues to “save lives, build futures.”