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An Operator’s Perspective on Ottawa’s Article 5

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With annual victim figures dropping towards 10,000, it is hard to make the case that landmines continue to be a global ‘scourge’ compared to the impact of other issues such as HIV/AIDS, food security, malaria, etc. The realization should not be taken as a critique of any treaty or policy position, but rather as positive testimony to the power knowledge can have in focusing on national strategic plans—ones that set forth achievable and self-analysis, a rather normal but unpleasant outcome of lesions learnt. A natural cure for these questions could be articulated by recalling the objectives we set for ourselves in the pursuit of mine action in the late 1980s and early 1990s, long before the Ottawa Convention came to be.

Even then we were talking about implementing mine clearance operations in support of the creation and development of sustainable national structures and operations that could be the best to solving the landmine problem. The Convention was pushed through as a groundbreak- framework for the establishment of such setups, and fund-raising was time-consuming but not necessarily very hard.

Around the same time, we made huge efforts to de- velop a methodology for mine action to make it as safe, secure and all-encompassing as possible in the wake of internationally recognized advanced quality management systems such as ISO 9000. Our intentions were good but, alas, with most prescribed medicines, it had side effects and a negative impact on our ability to obtain the overall objective of effectively ridding the world of mines. With the benefit of this hindsight, it is paramount that we now collectively ask ourselves the following:

- Why is mine action still more characterized by the provision of externally managed, too-complex and thus pacifying mechanisms for mine action than by any treaty or policy position?
- Why aren’t the formal demobilization processes that put thousands of former combatants to work in the minefields undertaken in support of national planning and implementation of national efforts? Moreover, why aren’t most regular army units involved in posse clearance as part of a well-structured national-plan?
- Why isn’t there still a growing division between UN and NGO perspectives on mine action? In addition, why aren’t governments of mine-affected countries more aware of the development of better practices on the national level?
- Based on these questions, it would be fair to say that the level of accomplishment compared to the input of resources is not equal. Furthermore, the implementa- tion of mine action activities is now effectively taking place outside of centrally managed bureaucra- cies. The established structures have proven inefficient and inadequate and now need to be challenged in order to render the higher output needed to meet existing Article 5 deadlines.

We are to meet the obligations of Article 5, we will need the support and commitment of the United Nations, NGOs—all of us involved in solving the problem of antipersonnel landmines—need to seriously change our approach.

But the question at Norwegian People’s Aid do not have all the answers on how to achieve a new paradigm for mine action, we think peer pressure, active donor engagement and goal orientation need to be communicated to all mine action operators and mine-affected countries in order to obtain national ownership, effective planning and cooperation to get the job done. To achieve this, a donor should ensure that these optimal conditions are in place prior to granting funds. With the current trend of shifting project and program support to that of budget and sector support, it should also be a fundamental re- Quirement that mine action is elaborated in national plans.

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The Nairobi Action Plan calls upon all of us in the mine action community to ensure that assistance in mine action is based on adequate surveys, needs analysis and cost-effective approaches.1 The purpose of this editorial is to bring an operator’s perspective to this commitment.

By Per Nergaard | Norwegian People’s Aid

1. It is so difficult—even sometimes with good impact and technical data at hand—to establish national mine-action plans aimed at meeting the obligations of Article 5? This means national planning where national authorities’ initiatives lead to the full participation and commitment of the United Nations, non-governmental organizations and donors-in-the-making, for implementation and support of that plan—and the ability to see it through.

Why are international organizations still implementing large-scale mine action operations when we all said we would build national capacity and create national leadership?

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There is still a growing division between UN and NGO perspectives on mine action. In addition, why aren’t governments of mine-affected countries more aware of the development of better practices on the national level?

Based on these questions, it would be fair to say that the level of accomplishment compared to the input of resources is not equal. Furthermore, the implementation of mine action activities is now effectively taking place outside of centrally managed bureaucracies. The established structures have proven inefficient and inadequate and now need to be challenged in order to render the higher output needed to meet existing Article 5 deadlines.

While we at Norwegian People’s Aid do not have all the answers on how to achieve a new paradigm for mine action, we think peer pressure, active donor engagement and goal orientation need to be communicated to all mine action operators and mine-affected countries in order to obtain national ownership, effective planning and cooperation to get the job done. To achieve this, a donor should ensure that these optimal conditions are in place prior to granting funds. With the current trend of shifting project and program support to that of budget and sector support, it should also be a fundamental re-
One major constraint is the development of new skills for local people. Generally speaking, it simply has not been done to the extent that it needs to be. This work plan should include clearing mined areas on paper and much more about what the community’s needs are on the ground.

Unofficial “village demining.” Development of skills for local people is generally seen as a positive step, and undertake other tasks due to the lack of additional training and recruitment costs.

Pre-conditions for Success

It is apparent that the locality model will not replace the MAT model. From programme experience over the last eight months on MAT, MAG recognises the need to complement the locality teams with mobile MATs, Technical Survey Teams and other elements of more traditional clearance activities. It is also clear that management plays an important part in the success of the model, as in most operations. Training must be rigorous and graded to lower levels of education, if appropriate. Indeed, a requirement for recruiting is a minimum standard of education, and this may prove difficult in communities deprived of access to educational facilities over long periods.

Also, unlike MATs, it is harder to break a locality team into smaller units to undertake tasks such as clearing sites for well-drilling. The tasks must be appropriate; the site must be able to accommodate the whole group without splintering it into smaller groups (which may also provide a keen impetus. With this programme, MAG has found that it can train villages in the core skills and, with supervision and good management, undertake demining as effectively as long-serving, multi-skilled and better-paid mobile teams.

 OPPORTUNITIES

One of the main opportunities for expansion is the value of employment for the household.

Conclusions

Many of the vulnerable households are crippled by the lack of independent loan agents lend money to households at extremely high interest rates of 100 percent per annum and above. There is an opportunity to maximise the earnings potential of locality deminers. In many cases, a portion of the deminer’s pay goes off the debt of the household and in turn the household pays back the loan at cost to the agency. In some cases, it should not eliminate deminers’ need so long as that wages paid can be concentrated on encouraging the household in the act of paying off crippling loans. This is an area for further work with development agencies and MAG in the future.

Donors’ needs versus community’s needs. The locality approach presents an opportunity to work with MAG’s overall mission to find solutions that not only put people first but are appropriate. Importantly, MAG has found that it can train villages in the core skills and, with supervision and good management, undertake demining as effectively as long-serving, multi-skilled and better-paid mobile teams.

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Endnotes and References

Mine Free: Not Anytime Soon, Kidd [from page 4]
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1. Nergaard. An Operator’s Perspective on Ottawa’s Article 5

Observations on Recent Changes in Northwest Cambodia’s Mine/UXO Situation, Simmonds, et al. [from page 24]
Endnotes
1. LSI is an abbreviation for Landmine Impact Survey, which is commonly used in Cambodia. This is not to be confused with LSI (Landmine Impact Survey), which is in common use in most other parts of the world.