April 2002

The Mine Action Program for Afghanistan

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Recommended Citation
Available at: http://commons.lib.jmu.edu/cisr-journal/vol6/iss1/8

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did not have to worry about much resistance or interference from local leaders.

Finally, though mines and UXO saturated Kosovo, the province itself is relatively small, leaving less area to occur in than in many other operations. The landmine problem was also fairly recent in Kosovo, so no 50-year-old mines were around to discover in long-forgotten areas. People generally had a good idea of which areas were mined and which were clear, and combatants provided maps to complement people's memories. When all available information was collected and analyzed using the IMSMA system, the MACC found it fairly easy to determine which areas required clearance and which resources to use.

Flanagan argued, the significance of the MACC’s accomplishments cannot be overemphasized. Mr. Flanagan himself declared the MACC to be "the most successful MAP ever implemented by the UN." A bold statement to be sure, but who would argue? As Mr. Flanagan reminded me, "this was the first time that the UN had actually started and completed a mine action program through its stated objectives." The MACC earned laudatory comments for its effective management strategies, early adoption and thorough implementation of the IMSMA system, and the declaration of unambiguous and attainable goals. Remarketing the nearly universal praise garnered by the MACC, he added: "I believe that almost all those who worked under the UN umbrella during the program in Kosovo would agree" that the MACC was an absolute success.

Lessons Learned and the Future of Mine Action

Though the circumstances surrounding the MACC’s implementation were rather unique, some of the lessons learned in Kosovo are applicable to future MAPs. Mr. Flanagan informed me that the overall structure of the Kosovo MACC is being imitated in Lebanon and Ethiopia, since "there are certain principles that should be applied wherever possible." However, he stressed that the most important lesson from Kosovo is "that there is no template solution in mine action." The most effective tactic used by the MACC was the design and implementation of a "Kosovo solution to the Kosovo problem." Integration and effective information management allowed the complete customization of the MACC-led programs, the flexibility of which led in turn to unhesitated speed, efficiency, safety, and success throughout the operation.

Mine action is often presented as an impossible problem. We’ve all heard that there are billions of landmines covering entire continents, completely eliminating populations, and that their removal may very well take till the end of time. Yes, I’m exaggerating, but my hyperbole is only slightly inflated when compared to the numbers frequently reported by advocacy groups, numbers that get frequent exposure in the press, accuracy thereby disdained. Mr. Flanagan chooses to look at the land mine problem from a much different, much more optimistic and practical outlook. "I firmly believe that the problem of mine contamination can be rapidly brought under control in the vast majority of affected countries using existing technologies and techniques if each program is properly managed and implemented. An integrated approach is critical," he declared. Obviously, he bases this statement on the recent success of the Kosovo MACC, but the wisdom to that approach cannot be denied. Mr. Flanagan is not an overly optimistic dreamer when it comes to mine action though, either. He sees a very small window of opportunity open to the demining world right now, a window that may slumber until the HD community can come up with a suite of successes now. If other projects are not wrapped up quickly and successfully, "then there is a strong possibility that donors will become disillusioned and in the topic will wane," he prophesizes.

With world attention currently focused on Afghanistan and the landmine situation there, the stage is set for a flurry of demining activities throughout the world. Flushed with his recent, hard-earned success, Mr. Flanagan manages to see a light at the end of the demining tunnel, much nearer than many others in the field would suspect. "If all the resources that are currently being frustrated away through duplicitous, inefficient or otherwise wasteful projects were brought to bear at a sustained, focused effort, the problem would essentially be solved in a ten-year period," he claims. Here’s hoping that all other MAPs throughout the world can achieve the same success that Mr. Flanagan and the Kosovo MACC have, because only then will the world enjoy the reality of Mr. Flanagan’s inspiring ten-year vision: a world free from the impact of landmines.

References


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The Mine Action Program in Afghanistan

The United Nations Mine Action Program for Afghanistan (UNAMA) combines the efforts of numerous Mine Action Centers (MACs) and local NGOs in order to form one of the most comprehensive mine action programs in the world. Operating under the direction of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Assistance (UNOCHA), MAPA has successfully located and destroyed 1,629,605 landmines/UXO and cleared 230,440,706 square meters of mined area and 339,579,010 square meters of battlefield area.

by Susanna Sprinkel, MAIC

Introduction

Years of controversy have left Afghanistan as the country most severely affected by landmines, with an estimated 150 to 300 landmine/UXO-related fatalities each month. The MACAs add an unnecessary burden to the lives of many who already suffer on a daily basis from numerous other hardships. As a result, Afghanistan has amassed the strongest Mine Action Programs in the world. The Mine Action Program for Afghan- Ghani (MAPA) was developed in 1999 and has been working under supervision of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Assistance (UNOCHA) ever since.

This program combines the efforts of six Mine Action Centers (MACs)—the UN Mine Action Center for Afghan- Ghani (MACA) and five Regional Mine Action Centers (RMACs) designated in the central, southern, eastern, and western regions of Afghanistan—as well as 15 local NGOs in order to provide extensive coverage of all areas of mine action (for more information on partner NGOs, see Table 1 below). UNOCHA, United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS) are responsible for developing the structure of MAPA, and they have designated specific responsibilities to each of the bodies involved.

Coordination of Mine Action Activities

Designated Responsibilities

UNOCHA, UNDP and UNMAS have requested that all mine action activities be planned and coordinated by MACA and the Mine Clearance and Planning Agency (MCRA). Specifically, these bodies are responsible for the following operations:

- Planning all mine action strategies and operations.
- Developing a set of mine action standards and policies.
- Overseeing MAPA activities and assuring quality.
- Implementing necessary programs and support for field operations.
- Securing and distributing required resources for all mine action programs.
- Organizing mine action technology.
- Managing and distributing mine-related information.

Goals for 2002

As outlined in their 2002 Project Plan (available at www.mineaction.org), the United Nations has established the following goals for coordination activities:

- Implementing a work plan for all mine action activities by contributing bodies.
- Developing a plan for future expanding MAPA, in order to meet increased demands that have arisen from the current political situation in the country.
- Formulating a seven-year plan to develop Afghanistan’s land to a moderate level.
- Creating an approach for degrading stockpiles.
- Supplying periodic reports to donors on the funds received by MAPA.
- Forming an administrative contract among contributing NGOs.
- Preparing data on the mine threat to be used both locally and globally.
- Providing necessary support to preserve and expand mine action activities throughout the region.
Survey Operations

Designed Responsibilities

The following responsibilities have been adopted by all survey operations in Afghanistan to support MACA, MCPA, the Mine Dog Center (MDC), Halo Trust and the Danish Demining Group (DDG). These organizations are responsible for identifying, marking and mapping all hazardous areas as well as distributing data regarding these territories. Specifically, these bodies should complete the following objectives:

- Reducing the amount of territory to be surveyed by pinpointing and clearly marking hazardous areas.
- Performing a Post-Conflict Contamination Assessment in conjunction with the Vietnam Veterans of America Foundation (VVA) to determine the extent of the landmine threat resulting from air strikes and recent conflicts.
- Conducting a Landmine Impact Survey (LIS) in conjunction with the Survey Working Group.
- Gathering detailed information on the technical and socio-economic impacts of contamination in contaminated regions in order to set priorities for clearance, explosive ordnance disposal (EOD) and mine awareness operations.
- Evaluating and distributing information gathered through the Information Management System for Mine Action (IMSM) and contributing accurate and up-to-date data on the landmine situation.
- Informing all Afghan civilians of the landmine/UXO threat in their region.
- Allocating improved data with humanitarian assistance and development aid personnel.

Goals for 2002

In 2002, the United Nations anticipated the following accomplishments for Survey Operations in Afghanistan:

- Marking 30 square km of mine fields and 50 square km of battle area as well as surveying and reducing 200 square km of potentially contaminated areas.
- Identifying mine-free land for agricultural development, irrigation, grazing and other productive use by Afghan citizens returning to their native lands.
- Verifying and re-naming hazardous trade routes in order to increase mobility both socially and economically.
- Reducing fatalities and relieving the patient load on the medical and health care system by clearly marking hazardous areas and establishing effective awareness programs in areas as well as encouraging refugees and internally displaced persons (IDP) from returning to hazardous areas.
- Helping other mine action operations concentrate on high priority territories, thus accelerating the capabilities of MACA for planning strategies and activities.
- Making mine-related data easier to access, thus permitting more effective preparations.

Landmine and UXO Clearance Activities

Designed Responsibilities

All landmine and UXO clearance activities have been conducted by the Agency for Rehabilitation and Energy Conservation in Afghanistan (AREA), Afghan Technical Consultants (ATC), the Demining Agency for Afghanistan (DAFA), DDG, HALO Trust, MDC, Handicap International (HI) and the Organization for Mine Clearance and Afghan Rehabilitation (OMAR). In order to eliminate the landmine threat in Afghan territory and return the land to productive use, these NGOs have been designated the following tasks:

- Restoring capabilities of MACA activities that were hindered as a result of the September 11th conflict.
- Clearing all cluster bombs dropped as a result of the September 11th conflict.
- Marking at least 30 km² of mine fields and 50 km² of battlefields.
- Formulating a stockpile destruction strategy and destroying all stockpiles as a result.
- Supplying clearing teams for agiculture, irrigation, grazing and other productive use.
- Clearing major trade routes in order to enhance mobility both socially and economically.
- Performing EOD and emergency clearance operations.
- Retaining all personnel and fully restoring all mine action resources throughout Afghanistan.
- Helping other mine action operations concentrate on high priority territories, thus accelerating the capabilities of MACA for planning strategies and activities.
- Making mine-related data easier to access, thus permitting more effective preparations.

Goals for 2002

The United Nations is asking clear aims to teams for the following objectives:

- Observing all mine action NGOs to be sure they are following all national and International Mine Action Standards (IMAS) in their operations.
- Continuing to research and acquire methods for improving the safest and most effective programs.
- Examining the cause of all demining fatalities, in order to develop improved techniques.
- Training all mine action personnel and developing efficient training programs, including refresher training courses in order to maintain and improve skills for locating and destroying newly laid antitank mines.
- Planning and executing training for basic management and leadership positions on supervising, planning and conducting tasks and organizing senior and middle management courses on overseeing and formulating mine action activities.
- Developing training programs for mine awareness programs geared towards specific regions.
- Designing and distributing supplementary materials for reference, assistance or additional training.
- Forming a national standards guideline based on IMAS.
- Investigating the use of new mine action technologies in Afghan regions.

Goals for 2002

By the end of 2002, the United Nations hopes to improve QA in the following areas:

- Improving the safety and effectiveness of all MACA operations.
- Preparing EOD teams to handle cluster bombs and other newly dropped munitions, by implementing 17 Battle Area Clearance Courses (BAC).
- Performing refresher training in all areas of mine action and creating and distributing specific training manuals to MACA employees.
- Observing 252 mechanical and mine clearance, BAC, EOD, mine dog and survey team operations.
- Completing three Middle Management training courses integrating information on running mine action organizations.
- Forming and implementing a Mine Risk Education (MRE) training and assessment program.

Mine Awareness

Designed Responsibilities

In order to reduce the number of landmine and UXO-related accidents in Afghanistan, the United Nations has assigned the following NGOs the responsibilities of implementing mine awareness initiatives: ARl, Afghan Red Crescent Society (ARS), AREA, British Broadcasting Corporation/Afghan Education Program (BBC/AEP), INTERFEC, HALO Trust, HI, META, OMAR and Save the Children (SC-USA). The MACA Mine Awareness program intends not only to increase awareness throughout the country but also to build relations with institutional and governmental agencies. Specifically, MACA NGOs are implementing the following responsibilities:

- Incorporating a wide range of Mine Awareness activities into mine action and other humanitarian assistance programs both globally and locally.
- Increasing the data collected and evaluated in order to further advance mine awareness programs.
- Examining MRE tactics and expanding the curriculum.
- Developing MRE standards and establishing a set of guidelines for assessing training methods.
- Further building a collection and analysis of information on mine casualties.
- Formulating a plan for targeting specific groups by examining established training and educational materials.
- Designing training kits for teachers.
National Mine Action Programs

Mine Action often does not effectively use the technology available. The author gives several examples of beneficial uses of technology in the field, and offers suggestions to improve the effectiveness of several aspects of Mine Action.

by Vernon Joynt, Technical and Scientific Consultant to the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR), South Africa

Introduction

I recently received an e-mail with real good news on the line so I would like to try to stick my neck in the nose once more. The questions included:

• Will technology ever improve speed and safety in Humanitarian Demining (HD)?
• What is the comparative efficiency among commercial, military and NGO clearance?
• Will dogs be more or less integrated into HD programs?
• When will land use priorities determine clearance priorities?
• Is “donor fatigue” a reality? If so, how do we fix it?

These questions are right in the middle of my current pet struggle to give technology its rightful role and place in mine clearance. I would like to discuss both technology in (HD) and donor fatigue, because technology is linked to funding. Present HD methods are too slow and ineffective at solving the total problem, so the donors do not get value for their money.

I want to present this article simply as a South African who has been involved in HD on one hand and associated with research and development (R&D) on the other. By 1996, as one in the South African government-owned demining group, I was already using a presentation slide that read:

A Technologist’s Nightmare: You build the SILVER BULLET and nobody wants to use it.

Little did I realize then that this nightmare would turn out to be the truth for technology in general and not only for one individual in particular. The fact is that new technologies and products are being blown out of the game before they have been given a fair chance to develop into their full potential. Initially I blamed the people controlling the demining as being responsible. Now I realize that people developing the technologies are at least equally responsible. Too many are simply doing their R&D for R&D’s sake or for financial gains with too little drive to get the product field-ready for deminers to use. This act in turn is upsetting the deminers in the field, justifying their attitude that the research monies should be used directly for demining.

Will Technology Ever Improve Speed and Safety?

The simple answer is YES. In fact, for us as a demining group, it already has. For example, in 1991–92 we cleared 12,000 mines from around 62 pylons on the Maputo-South African border power line in Mozambique. We completed the job in a third of the time it should have taken with various demining accessories: two armoured bulldozers; a detonating fuel-air gas mixture in one-meter diameter plastic-film tubes to work in spots that the machines could not get to, such as amongst the pylons bottom ends and stays.

For more information on the current mine action situation in response to September 11th terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon, Mine Action Situation in Afghanistan can be downloaded from:

http://www.minaction.org

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Conclusion

Through extensive planning and operations, MAPA hopes to ease human suffering through various mine clearance, Mine Awareness and other activities. In addition, they aim to help refugees and IDPs re-establish their lives in Afghanistan, by clearing areas for settlement and making them aware of the mine hazards in each region. They also intend to secure a food supply for civilians, by clearing agricultural and grazing land and making them available for productive use. By clearing land, buildings and major roadways in the country, MAPA can also help other organizations safely implement relief, development and rehabilitation programs for the Afghan people. Finally, MAPA has helped build Afghanistan’s economy, by providing work for more than 4700 Afghan people, and they will continue to provide further employment opportunities in the future.

Since its development in 1987 and up until April 2001, MAPA’s mine action personnel have cleared 230,440,706 sq m of mined area and 339,579,010 sq m of battlefields area. Approximately 728,42 sq km remains to be cleared, with 350.23 sq km marked high priority for more information see Figure 1). Additionally, MAPA’s survey teams have surveyed over 302,960,491 sq m of mined areas and 364,588,980 sq m of battlefields area. Overall, MAPA personnel have successfully located and destroyed 1,629,605 munitions, including 10,127 AT mines, 219,730 AP mines and 1,399,748 pieces of UXO. After the September 11th, 2001 terrorist attacks, all mine action programs were severely hindered as a result of security conditions in Afghanistan, so they were unable to reach their goals for 2001. However, at least 90 percent of mine action personnel have returned to the country, prepared to respond to new conditions and munitions, as of January 2002.

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