April 2002

Mine Awareness: A New Approach

Michael Labon
Independent Consultant

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/vol6/iss1/15

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.
Mine Awareness: A New Approach

The proper integration of mine awareness, Level 1 and 2 surveys, and EOD can produce a synergistic effect that would benefit everyone involved in a mine action program. This concept has been used before but needs to be more widely utilized.

by Michael Labon, Independent Consultant

Introduction

Normally, all aspects of Mine Awareness (MA) are conducted in parallel with, but often separate from, Survey and Clearance. In addition, Level 1 Survey officially precedes Level 2 Survey. And finally, Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) is often done during Level 2 Survey, but may also be conducted by a stand alone team. There are good and historical reasons for these being independent and/or linear functions; however, it does lead to gaps in the overall solution to the mine and UXO threat.

The concept involves marrying often independent and linear components into one operation, to create a cycle of feedback and incentive, producing an operation with synergy that gives greater benefits to beneficiaries with equal donor resources. The end up is the Mine Awareness (MA) Level 1 Survey, Level 2 Survey and EOD are most effectively and efficiently utilized when combined into a unified operation. When properly done, this produces a synergy that will lead to direct benefits for the recipients, donors and practitioners. When the components are combined into an information and activity cycle, they will produce better information and better plans and therefore more safety for the beneficiaries and more precisely directed resources.

Reasons for Changes - Desk Experience

The problem of mines and UXO is multi-faced. The solution is simple: remove all the mines and UXO, sort out the victims and produce no more devices. The problem with that, however, is that the resources available to do this are not equal to the task. They fall far short, in fact.

It is imperative, then, that solutions take into account this shortage of resources when they are developed. Solutions must be crafted and executed in such a way that maximum benefit is given to the people on the receiving end. Any solution that does not take into account the most efficient utilization of resources, any plan that does not take into account the ultimate end use of every penny or the impact of every resource input, is less than a proper solution. To this end, aspects of two of the four pillars—MA and Mine Survey and Clearance—can be combined to give a greater impact for resources spent.

Because there are and will be insufficient resources available, the approach to the problem is moving from a clearance based solution (take them all away) to a management solution (clear the viable stuff and give the community the ability to live/ work alongside the threat). For example, we know that there are mines only in Denmark from WWII, but life and the economy continue. While Zimbabwe may have more mines than Mozambique, the Zimbabwe border mine fields produce fewer casualties in terms of people, animals, livestock, etc. than the scattered and unknown mines and UXO threat in neighboring Mozambique.

Clearly, coping mechanisms exist and can be used with great effect. The important part of the management solution is getting the right information so that the vital locations can be cleared, and producing the right information/abilities to allow the community to get on with life.

Reasons for Changes - Field Experience

How MA got into Survey

Most of this experience comes from conducting mine action operations in central Mozambique, for the German Development and Cooperation Agency (GTZ) from 1994 onwards but especially from 1997 to 1999, for CARE in Kosovo in 1999, and especially Somalia in 2000, where the closest version to this concept was put on the ground and was very successful.

Initially, during emergency refugee repatriation work (GTZ/Mine-Tech) into Mozambique in 1994, it was found that information gathering was enhanced with simple MA lectures. Put most simply, when asked if there was a mine threat in the area, the local people could make no comment. When given a simple mine and UXO recognition lecture, people suddenly recognized the shapes, sizes, colors, etc. and could give Level 1 information. This was continued through the years into village clearance projects (Survey, followed by Clearance), and it was then found that the Level 2 Survey team (which included EOD support) were often given more and better information that had not been given to the Level 1 Survey team.

Incentive

Two factors were involved in the success of the Level 2 Survey team:

• The Level 2 Survey took much more time, during which the team lived near the community, interacted with them and gained their confidence; and

• The incentive provided by removing and destroying things (e.g., UXO), but often just harmless but suspicious items, made the people more interactive. They had not felt motivated to hand in information previously, just for the sake of handing in information. Now, everyone could see a benefit in giving information.

Information

Poor information had two severe consequences. First, the lack of knowledge in communities led to casualties caused by people doing things they should not have done, and going places (or sending their livestock to places) where they should not have gone. The vast majority of casualties I have encountered in every mine/UXO risk area I have knowledge of except Afghanistan, have come from people touching/tampering with UXO. This is clearly followed by people touching or going into mine areas about which they know nothing. Invariably, casualties are caused by ignorance (ignorance being simply a lack of knowledge).

Secondly, "mine fields" that do not exist but are firmly believed to exist retard progress in the same ways known mine fields do. This applies equally to suspicious areas which are actually parts (Mozambique), old stoves (Kosovo) or the grave of a tortoise (Somali-lad) of all of which halted progress in some manner.

In addition, both of these "information failures" hamper the external relief effort. (Hereafter, the term "external" will be used to refer to all actors outside of the benefiting community, be they professional, commercial or NGO, clearance, MA organizations, aid, development and relief agencies, etc.) Suspect areas and mine fields that are not known cannot be dealt with. This is the smaller problem, as invariably, someone in or around the community has information on every suspect area, and eventually this will come out. Reasons why this is not shared with the rest of the community are numerous.

The larger problem for the externalists are the "mine fields" that do not exist. In most cases, it takes as long to clear an area with no mines as it does to clear a heavily-mined area. The major factor slowing clearance is vegetation cover. Therefore, good information gathering during the survey stages can lead to early discarding of suspect areas, which in turn frees resources for other tasks. Good information leads to a greater impact for the beneficiaries.

Another problem encountered in the field was survey/clearance/EOD activities that were not understood by the community. The most common example of this is an external EOD capacity that visits an area that contains both mines and UXO after a report. The team destroys the UXO (often with a loud bang), and the local population then believes the entire threat is eliminated. However, while UXO has been destroyed, a mine field remains. The people have not been told, nor do they understand, the difference between clearance and EOD tasks, and we end up with further casualties, a crisis of confidence in all survey and clearance activities, and previously cleared areas becoming suspect areas again.

How the Concept Works

As is seen in the diagram, all components are interlinked, and ideally, "under one roof", with a common manager who is responsible for the entire concept, rather than any one component of it. The concept may be applied to a specific area, and each component strengthened or weakened depending on the needs for that component. However, every aspect is vital and equally important. MA, TRaining, Mine Risk Edu.
FEATURE

The Future of Mine Action

Citation, etc., is a large pillar of Mine Action and involves passing mine/UXO information, in many specific forms and for many specific reasons. Within this concept, the largest portion of MD referred to is that involved in inform-