Ensuring Effective Coordination: UNMAS and Mine Action Coordination Centres in Africa

by Sarah Campbell, UNMAS

Introduction

Given the range of activities and the number of players involved in mine action, coordination is a prerequisite to the effective implementation of mine action programmes in the field. MACCs are therefore a central component of mine action programmes. Support for their establishment and development has been at the core of UN mine action ever since the first such centre was established for Afghanistan in 1989.

MACCs are normally initiated and developed under the direct auspices of local authorities. The role of the United Nations is to provide them with the assistance they need and to support international cooperation. This assistance is provided through the United Nations Mine Action Programme (UNM), for long-term capacity-building programmes, and through UNMAS for programmes developed in the context of peacekeeping operations or in response to immediate humanitarian needs.

The main principles under which MACCs operate are outlined in the policy document of 1998, "Mine Action and Effective Coordination: The United Nations Policy." This document is further refined with the formulation of guidelines clarifying the role of the military in mine action, and a sectoral policy on information management. These additional guidelines will be circulated defining the roles of MACCs in relation to various assistance.

While the responsibilities of MACCs vary from country to country, they typically include:

- The planning and operational coordination of all mine-related activities, surveys, demining and mine risk reduction activities.
- Quality management, in accordance with the International Mine Action Standards (IMAS) adopted by the United Nations in 2001, which now form the basis for the development of country-specific national standards and Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) across all UN mine action programmes.

Information management for which MACCs collect, analyze and disseminate the mine-related data necessary to operations, most of the time using the Information Management System for Mine Action (IMSMA), developed by the Geneva International Center for Mine Action (GICM). The MACC is a centralized resource for humanitarian demining. In Africa, the United Nations system, through UNMAS, UNDP and the United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund (UNICEF), is involved in mine action in Angola, Burundi, Chad, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Ethiopia, Eritrea, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Mauritania, Mozambique, Sierra Leone, Somalia and Sudan. The source and scope of the landmine and UXO problem in each of these countries is unique, and therefore the mine action activities undertaken vary from country to country.

UNMAS, working with the United Nations, through the United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), developed by the Geneva International Center for Mine Action (GICM) as its executing partner, is currently directly responsible for supporting MACCs in the field. UNMAS is, as its executing partner, currently directly responsible for supporting MACCs in the field.

The Democratic Republic of the Congo

Since 1997, the DR Congo has been engulfed in a conflict involving six neighbouring countries. Since January 2001, the political situation has improved, allowing for the deployment of the United Nations Mission in Congo (MONUC).

Operating since 2000, UNMAS recently established a MACC as part of MONUC. The primary objectives of the MACC are the following:

- Develop a reliable mine and UXO information system based on IMSMA
- Implement emergency mine surveys required
- Implement emergency mine action
- Provide mine action expertise to MONUC and the humanitarian community

As of this date, UNMAS is developing a national mine action coordination strategy.

Sudan

Sudan has been at war for nearly 40 years. While the ongoing civil war does not currently allow for the implementation of a typical Mine Action Programme (MAP), there are a number of immediate actions that can be taken to address some of the emergency needs of the civilian population. Many of these actions have already been identified as a result of the field assessment conducted in November 2000 on behalf of the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD) Partner Forum Working Group. These activities are currently being implemented through Sudan Landmines Information and Response Initiative (SLIRI).

One of the initial responsibilities of the UN MAP in Sudan will be to develop a more comprehensive understanding of the scope of the problem and its impact on the people of Sudan. In addition, the following actions will be taken to begin addressing the landmine and UXO problem:

- Implementing an effective information distribution network
- Assisting with the creation and development of an emergency national mine clearance capacity
- Assuring that all mine action needs in the Nuba Mountains are carried out swiftly and effectively
- Developing a relevant and effective mine awareness/information distribution package
- Establishing a management presence in Khartoum with field offices at the local level

In June 2000, the UN Emergency Mine Action Project in Sudan was in its third month and was making steady progress. The Mine Action Coordination Office in the Nuba Mountains was operational and detailed cooperation between the United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS), the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), and the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) was established, and the Mine Action Coordination Office in the Nuba Mountains was the key, catalytic role in this regard and will continue to be an active advocate of the importance of coordination in the field of mine action.

References

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A young man demonstrating the method used to deactivate a mine by cutting it

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To be successful, MACCs rely primarily on two things: the commitment of national governments to mine action and the strength of the partnerships they build with a variety of partners, including donors, operators—in particular, non-governmental organizations (NGOs)—humanitarian agencies and the local communities themselves. The United Nations aims to play a supportive and catalytic role in this regard and will continue to be an active advocate of the importance of coordination in the field of mine action.