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Community Liaison in Mine Action: Partnerships for Growth

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3. Carstairs: Community Liaison in Mine Action: Partnerships for Growth

Using a Community Liaison (CL) model that emphasizes community participation, Mines Advisory Group (MAG) prioritises minefield clearance to lessen landmines' impact on communities in Angola.

by Tim Carstairs, MAG

A recent intervention at the May International Standing Committee of Experts (ISCE) meeting in Geneva was paraphrased in this way: "The humanitarian impact of landmines must guide the priorities of donor countries." This statement made by the representative of Norway goes directly to the point and presents us all with the real problem of ensuring that our resources are used most wisely and effectively to address these needs. This article seeks to briefly explain how MAG conducts the process of prioritisation as an aspect of integrated mine action response.

What seems clear to us is that mine action is not and should not be allowed to remain a "stand-alone" discipline. Mine action is an integral part of wider rehabilitation and development. As the opening quote says, we have to deal with the impact of mines on people. In this case, the impact of mines and UXO must be considered within a wider context of economic, social, and political recovery from conflict. Prioritisation and appropriate action are therefore to be taken at the same level. Furthermore, individuals and groups in the equation are not passive and helpful but active parts of the process and worthy of respect.

In the mid-1990s, MAG developed the practice of applying a CL model to mine action situations in Angola. We believe in working together with all actors to find the best solutions to pedagogical human subjects—the communities that live in mined areas or that have been driven from mined areas and wish to return—become key players within the prioritisation process. This is good developmental practice that has been encouraged since the late 1980s. The concept of CL is being mentioned more frequently now in relation to mine action, and we hope that this short article will help explain how we understand it.

The Global Impact Survey process enables us to understand the impact of landmines and UXO on basic human needs and on the longer-term developmental process and economy and thus is a fastener in establishing the long-term priorities for humanitarian mine action. That being said, the survey process is not designed to cope with the immediate needs of communities faced with life-threatening mine/UXO contamination. We also need to provide mine action to those that need it now; at the same time, planning that action firmly within the development sphere, working...
The water station, Luena, gent concerns for a beleaguered community and fresh water has been in short supply. Deprived of ration to be carried out, and in April some moved and destroyed from along the perimeter of the pumping station.

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The local community asked MAG to help with this situation. The area was cleared, in all, 17 mines were removed and destroyed from along the perimeter of the pumping station, including several just inches from the path. Clearance has enabled repairs to the pumping station to be carried out, and in April, 2002, the water tanks of Luena ran with fresh water again for the first time in eight years. Just 17 AP mines had impacted on some 300,000 people.

where possible within national and provincial development programmes. In an emergency and emerging situation—Luena in eastern Angola is a good example—CL skills as developed by MAG can be a good way to fulfill this function at reasonable cost. CL enables us to carry out emergency mine and UXO clearance and at the same time build up a community-based picture of the wider development needs within society.

Partnership: Mine Action for Development in Angola

No single agency or person has all the answers. No single agency or NGO can provide all services or help with the post-conflict rehabilitation of every aspect of community development. That is why partnership is so important. Our experience points to partnership as being a very real element in the ability and capacity to appropriately prioritize. We attempt to coordinate the various elements of mine action for development. Partnerships enable us to bring to the bear the most relevant expertise—which may not always be a mine action solution. MAG’s CL teams will regularly provide information about other needs to appropriate partners. If it can’t fit, someone else will be able to.

In Angola, MAG works with a variety of other partners in such fields as:

- Action Against Hunger
- World Food Programme (WFP)
- Refugee/IDP matters
- Ministry for Reconstruction and Social Affairs
- United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR)
- Lutheran World Federation (LWF)
- Medical Care and Protheus; Social Reintegration
- CAPDC
- Vietnamese Veterans of America Foundation (VVA)
- Trauma Care Foundation
- Médico Internacional (MI)

As in many other areas of the globe, relative peace and stability bring with it added dangers. Luena, the capital city of Mozambique province has been home to over 300,000 people. Many of these people were displaced in 1998 when conflict flared again after the elections of that year. Almost under siege for several years, movements were restricted and the population became reliant on WFP food deliveries. Mines ringed the town. Mine action became impossible between 1998 and 1999, and mine clearance was not permitted during that time. Security has improved since 2000, and people are again able to think longer-term.

Today, the Ministry of Defence, Assistance and Reintegration (MINARS)—the government authority charged with social and refugee matters—is gradually licencing internally displaced persons (IDPs) in different and previously unused areas to relieve pressure on space and resources. MINARS consults with MAG before planning new refugee and IDP camps. The Muachicbom camp is just one such example. In 2001, in response to CL interventions, MAG cleared the road of UXO. MAG’s clearing efforts continued even after MINARS began mapping UXO in 1993. LWF started rebuilding basic infrastructure, IDPs began arriving, and a new community is building itself once CL plays a key role in creating the means on the ground to build community and economy.

CL is not enough in itself as the IDPs find their feet and expand their activities from their new base, they begin to find landmines and UXO. MAG's community liaison teams in the IDP

Community Liaison: An Academic View

Development workers also argue for approaches like CL. "A development effort is essentially a humanising process. Participatory development must be consciously based on people, their needs, their analysis of issues and their decisions," writes Peter Ossen. There is a strong body of evidence that argues that participation, the basis for CL, brings the following benefits:

- Enables development practitioners, government officials and local people to work together to plan and implement appropriate programmes (World Bank Sourcebook).
- Ensures greater efficiency of resources.
- Improves cost effectiveness.
- Makes projects more effective as instruments of rural development.
- Helps to break the mentality of dependence that characterises so much of development work.
- Promotes self-awareness and confidence.
- Has a much wider coverage than government participation increases people’s power over the issues which affect their lives; they learn how to plan and implement development projects.
- Ensures sustainability as people maintain a project's dynamism (Paulo Freire).
- Stresses the importance of community participation during data gathering, shared analysis, and transparent negotiation of priorities to the development of national Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (World Bank, IMF).

Agrred to mine action, MAG believes that these approaches make sense. After five years of practice, we can say that they do indeed work.

STOP PRESS: Community Liaison Assists Demobilisation

In the Luena province of southern Angola, MAG was recently requested by the provincial authorities to help with the establishment of resettlement camps for former UNITA soldiers and their families in Luena. The actual quarters area reported free of mines, but the roads and towns in the area are heavily mined. Working with the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA), MAG’s CL team has been gathering data and has conducted initial visits, inspecting eight minefields to date. The soldiers’ families are expected to be located to join them, and as many as 300,000 people may be involved. As of mid-May 2002, 697 soldiers in the camps were accompanied by 633 married women, 540 children (10-16), 441 male children (under 9), 41 female children (10-16), 502 female children (under 9), 56 widows, 47 male orphans and 54 female orphans.

The Community Liaison Process

A MAG office or a MAG team is usually contacted by a village leader and informed of problems relating to mines or UXO or asked to clear a particular area. It is true to say that MAG’s flexible, mobile teams (MATs) facilitate and strengthen the voices of those who are accessible to the local people and are already skilled in CL. The request will be recorded, and a community liaison team will visit the village and assess local needs, discuss village mapping, collect village history, identify the beneficiaries of clearance tasks and prioritise the minefields to be cleared.

MAG will also coordinate with local authorities and NGOs to make sure that the agreed prioritisation meets with national or provincial clearance and development plans. The CL teams will make necessary negotiations and use the land ownership process to ensure agreed development of the land goes smoothly, and that the identified beneficiaries are indeed benefiting.

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Village mapping being conducted by MAG’s CL team in Luena, Mozambique province. Stones represent mines and mangles represent UNOCHA. Anti-Landmine Sticking and the U.S. State Department. We believe that this continued funding has saved many lives and contributed to growing confidence in Angola.

About MAG

MAG has 12 years experience implementing mine action around the world. The agency currently conducts a variety of programmatic, institutional and dog clearance programs, as well as CL, training, and development programs in a number of areas including Angola, Cambodia, Laos, Lebanon, northern Iraq, Somalia, Sudan, Sri Lanka and Vietnam.

All photos courtesy of Peter Sutton/MAG.

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Cultivating land in Luena that was previously a minefield.
July 5, 2002: MAG Opens Main Road from Luena, Moxico Province, Angola
Allowing Aid to be Distributed to Thousands of Starving Families

The Lucusse Road between Luena and Lucusse in Moxico province in eastern Angola has been the scene of heavy fighting for decades. There was fighting many years ago between Cuban and South African forces and over much of the last decade between the government and forces of the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA). The road is littered with the wrecks of trucks and armored vehicles destroyed in anti-tank mine blasts and ambushes. It is said that over 6,000 soldiers died here trying to get convoys of supplies in and out of Luena. The road itself serves thousands of people living in its vicinity. Opening it up can dramatically change the socio-economic situation in the province.

On July 3, 2002, Mines Advisory Group (MAG) staff met with the Angolan Technical Unit for Coordination of Humanitarian Assistance (UTCAH). Lucusse will be used as a quarterming area for 4,000 UNITA soldiers being disarmed and demobilised under the new peace agreement. While the Lucusse Road has been closed, thousands of families have not received aid of any sort. It is reported that 38 percent of the children in the area are severely malnourished. The World Food Program (WFP), the Angolan Ministry of Social Assistance and Reintegration (MINARS) and the United Nations all agreed that the major demining priority in the province was this road.

Due to the grave humanitarian situation, MAG undertook an emergency survey of the road immediately following the request from UTCAH to see how much the situation had changed since 1997/98. Previously, during this brief period of peace, MAG had surveyed and cleared 92 kilometers of the 148-kilometer route. After re-survey on July 3, 2002, it was clear that there had been no new vehicle wrecks since that time; however, using the route still requires extreme care. The survey team was able to travel to Lucusse where they met with the Police Commandant and UNITA officials who explained they were desperate for food and other emergency aid.

MAG teams returned July 4th to clear and destroy several items of UXO seen on the road. Areas where vehicles will have to travel off the edge of the road to get around mine craters or vehicle wrecks will also be checked for mines. MAG has already identified several suspect mined areas on the roadsides that will be marked. Passing areas are being targeted for special clearance efforts to minimize the risk in the immediate future. MAG has made it clear that all drivers intending to use the route must first attend a mine safety briefing conducted by MAG. Although it can be safe to use the road, there is a very good chance that any deviation from tracks of the previous vehicle may lead to a fatal mine accident. It is hoped that funding can be raised to enable complete clearance of the verges and other suspect areas along the route.

On July 6th, MAG escorted Médecins sans Frontières—Doctors Without Borders (MSF) to Lucusse so that medical assistance would be made available to the UNITA quarterming areas. MAG has also facilitated the access of Dom Bosco, a respected Angolan non-governmental organization (NGO) to the quarterming area. Dom Bosco has already begun registration and identification of needs. It is hoped that WFP deliveries will be authorized within the next week. These are all vital elements in the peace and confidence-building, demobilization and normalization process. MAG is proud that mine action can play its role and is grateful to all those parties in Angola and to its donors for enabling such progressive and positive outcomes.

For additional information, visit www.magclearmines.org

Locating Landmines and UXO: A Methodological Lesson from the Ethiopian Landmine Impact Survey

One of the most important parts about implementing effective Landmine Impact Surveys is first identifying which communities have a landmine/UXO problem. The author describes how Expert Opinion Collection (EOC) is used in Ethiopia to overcome the obstacles survey teams face when gathering their information.

by Michael L. Fleisher, Ph.D., Deputy Team Leader/Operations Manager, Ethiopian Landmine Impact Survey

Introduction

In every country where a Landmine Impact Survey is being implemented, those charged with conducting it are faced with the challenge of compiling a reliable list of the communities that need surveying—because before a community can be surveyed to assess the landmine/UXO impact, it must first be accurately identified as a community having a landmine/UXO problem. Owing to its vast size and its ongoing, highly variegated conflict history, Ethiopia presents Landmine Impact surveyors with particularly daunting difficulties. The Italian invasion of the 1980s Ethiopia's protracted, and ultimately successful, war for independence; the 1990s Ogaden war with Somalia; the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front's (EPRDF's) successful revolution to topple the Marxist Dergue regime; the recently concluded trench war with Eritrea; and the still-simmering internal conflicts with the Omoro Liberation Front (OLF) and the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF)—and all of these must be regarded as potential contributors to Ethiopia's landmine/UXO legacy.

To make matters still more complicated, the country's arduous terrain and poor-to-nonexistent roads make travel in the rural areas problematic in the best of times and, in innumerable areas during the long rainy season, all but impossible. Even in sublimely weather, many Ethiopian communities are accessible only by foot or by mule. The task of determining where the landmines/UXO are, so as to be able to formulate a complete, reliable list of landmines/UXO-affected communities for impact surveying, is not an easy one.

The technique developed for surmounting this problem, EOC, entails gathering information from all available sources—civilians, government administrators, military authorities, UN agencies, NGOs and NGOs, in-country scholars and so on—and using this information to compile a gazetteer of the affected communities to be surveyed. However, because time and resources are inevitably limited, survey teams are pressed to devise methodologies that will enable them to separate the landmine/UXO-affected communities from the non-affected communities as quickly and as efficiently as possible. To accomplish this, they must first devise a strategy that will enable them to determine where the most thorough, most reliable information regarding the locations of landmines/UXO may be obtained and how to acquire this intelligence as swiftly, systematically and cost-effectively as possible.

This article aims to facilitate this information-gathering process for all communities undergoing Landmine Impact Surveys by sharing some lessons learned by the Ethiopian Landmine Impact Survey (ELIS), which is currently being carried out by Norwegian Peoples Aid (NPA), under the auspices of the Survey Action Center (SAC), in Washington, D.C., and in close partnership with the Ethiopian Mine Action Office (EMAO) in Addis Ababa.