

# IMSMA: The Future

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Over the last five years, IMSMA has grown from a single prototype installation in Kosovo into a worldwide network of systems supporting field operations in 37 locations. Alongside this expansion in the number of systems in use, the IMSMA team has greatly expanded the system's capabilities. The system has been upgraded to provide regional data entry, automated coordinate data conversion and storage, improved reporting and mine risk education management functions. All of these innovations were based on feedback from the field and were driven by our focus on development geared to the provision of services to field operations.

However, no system is ever perfect, and despite all of these efforts a number of structural issues concerning the system's ease of use and its general complexity still remain open. As the system grew, users reported that it was becoming more difficult to make local modifications without technical assistance and that the new menus and functions were complex and difficult to understand. At the same time, not all programmes saw the need for the provision of new functions, and some were confused by the apparent need for frequent updates to the software. As IMSMA entered its sixth year of field operations, these issues and the increasing difficulty of working within the existing IMSMA database structures made it clear that a new approach would be needed to fully address the requirements of the system's users.

Beginning in the autumn of 2003, a comprehensive list of system requirements began to take shape. In the spring of 2004, these concerns were brought to life in the form of a formal request for proposals (RFP) document that outlined the design requirements for a new and re-engineered IMSMA. The response to the RFP was very positive, and a number of innovative proposals were received. The process of reviewing these submissions is still ongoing, but will culminate with the start of an IMSMA re-engineering project in the near future.

Though the specific design of the re-engineered system is not yet known, the general form of the new IMSMA is. We know that in the future IMSMA will be a modular system that allows local administrators and users to determine its functional configuration based on local needs. We know that the re-engineered IMSMA will be less complex, with a simple user interface and fully integrated mapping functions. We also know that the new system will focus on hazards rather than the processes used to collect data about those hazards.

At the same time, the new IMSMA will retain those things that users tell us they like about the current system. The system will still record, display, analyze and report on data collected in the field. Tasking and status tracking will also be available, along with victim data collection, and demining and mine accident data. In addition, all of the data, gazetteers, locally defined data elements, sketches, photos and ordnance data in the current system will be transferred to the new data structure.

This process will not happen overnight. We have prepared for a two-year development cycle that will make incremental deliveries of the new system. This will give us the time required to complete a full programme of pilot tests in the field and to refine our plans before making a final deployment of the new system. It will also make it possible to prepare the training materials and tools required to support a smooth transition to the re-engineered IMSMA.

While preparing to meet the future, the IMSMA team will continue to support IMSMA Version 3.0 in the field. As always, we will listen to the concerns of our users and strive to incorporate them into the re-engineering project. Our commitment to the future of mine action through ongoing field support and training for information managers has not changed. We remain firmly committed to long-term support for IMSMA, the maXML data-exchange project and information management as important tools in mine action. The IMSMA re-engineering project is one concrete example of this commitment.