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Home | Focus | Features | Notes | Staff | CallforPapers | Journal

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Building National Mine Action Capacity: It is No Myth

After the success of short term mine action interventions in Kuwait and Kosovo, there has been discussion about the value of the United Nations building national mine action capacity in the countries it supports, rather than implementing a more direct, hands-on strategy. While there is obviously no way of dictating a one-size-fits-all policy, this article will show that the concept of building national capacity remains a vital one and one that has a proven successful track record.

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The UNDP

In 16 of the countries that currently receive mine-related UN support, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) provides assistance primarily in building or strengthening national mine action capacity. The main reason for this is that in almost all cases, the mine-affected country will eventually have to deal with the problem itself and so, as a result, a national capacity must be adequately developed. This is consistent with the UN Policy on mine action. It is also consistent with the new International Mine Action Standards. Such a strategy also reflects the reality that in most cases, the large scale of the landmine problem or the lack of adequate funding to deal with it rapidly, will necessitate government "ownership" of the process. Aligned with this is the long-term benefit that comes from establishing a local response capability to deal with the residual threat and maintain accurate records relating to the status of cleared areas.

Capacity Building On A National Level

In mine action, the term "capacity building" can be applied at many levels. To some it means training local deminers, surveyors, mine risk reduction educators, or prosthesitists. However, with its traditional role of supporting national and local governments, the UNDP has focused on developing capacity at the national level. This includes activities like advice on drafting national legislation, assistance with establishing a Mine Action Centre (MAC), training, project support, and resource mobilization. Based on these activities, the attached diagram shows a set of principles that can be applied when preparing advice or assistance to mine affected governments. This is not an organigram or recipe for bureaucracy, but rather reflects the current thinking, based on experience to date, including the UN DHA Four Country study of 1998.

The top layer of the diagram reflects the fact that most mine action activities are donor funded, and that mechanisms are needed to raise funds and then channel them to activities in a transparent manner. In the immediate post conflict period, such as in Afghanistan, government ministries are often weak, banking systems have collapsed and financial controls are inadequate. In situations such as this, the UN can assist with the creation of a trust fund to ensure proper accounting procedures and to provide an avenue for funding by smaller donors who may not have diplomatic representation in-country. It should be noted however, that in most countries the trust funds are "joint," with the UN providing the accounting, but the release of funds remains dependent on government agreement. As programs mature, the amount of bilateral funding tends to increase, and donors expect to see an increase in the government's own contribution. In Cambodia, for example, the government is now the fourth largest contributor to mine action, and

in Croatia over 90 percent of activities are government funded.

Resource mobilization is another "joint" activity where the UN can assist. This may involve existing mechanisms such as the annual "Round Table" events, or the use of special appeals. The UN can help coordinate resource mobilization, but experience has shown that effective presentations by government or local officials are a key element to successful fund raising.

Government Ownership

The next layer of the diagram involves government ownership and policy making authority. In nearly all cases, new legislation is needed to establish a national mine action authority. Experience has shown that this is most successful when one ministry is made responsible for mine action matters, particularly to ensure political oversight and responsibility. The responsible ministry varies from country to country, but it is often Labour and Social Welfare, Interior, or in some cases, Civil Protection. It is important to realize however, that mine action is not a stand alone sector and will require inputs from other ministries including Agriculture, Transport, Health, Education, Foreign Affairs and the like. An inter-ministerial policy making body is required to ensure that all aspects of mine action are considered. This body should also be responsible for approving national mine action strategies and priorities, annual workplans, budgets and drafting relevant legislation. In the past, UNDP has provided this, and other types of assistance in developing mine action legislation to a number of countries, including Bosnia, Cambodia, Laos and northwest Somalia.

The MAC

Developing the capacity of the MAC is another integral part of the process. (Recently, the word "coordination" has been added to the title in some countries to better reflect its activities.) The need for a body to coordinate and regulate day-to-day mine action activities in a country is one that became apparent fairly quickly in the evolution of the sector. The activities that MACs carry out include ensuring that the mine risk reduction messages being used by operators in-country are consistent and coherent; carrying out national impact surveys to assist in the appropriate allocation of scarce resources; ensuring that that priorities for clearance are consistent with national reconstruction priorities; and checking the work of all operators through a quality management system. It has been found that the key to a successful MAC is a national database, and the Information Management System for Mine Action (IMSMA) system developed by United Nation Mine Action Services (UNMAS) and the Geneva International Center for Humanitarian Demining (GICHD), provides an off-the-shelf standard database package to meet this need. Developing a local ability to implement such a system is another example of the importance of building national capacity.

As with other mine sector activities, ownership of the MAC should remain with the government or recognized authority, wherever possible. As the MAC will be a new organization in most countries, the UN can assist with support projects involving technical assistance, training, provision of equipment and resources. This can vary according to the type and amount of work the MAC will be undertaking. For example, in some cases, the MAC will coordinate a large number of operators and control relatively large amounts of money, while in others, it will be quite modest; the MAC in Guinea-Bissau for example, consists of about four people. In other past cases, such as Cambodia and Angola, the MAC controlled its own operational demining teams. (This approach proved to be less successful though, as the MAC became too focused on the work of its own teams and was not able to effectively undertake its national coordination functions. It also led to a conflict of interest, whereby the MAC as the regulatory body, was being both the "umpire" as well as the "player".)

The Projects and the People

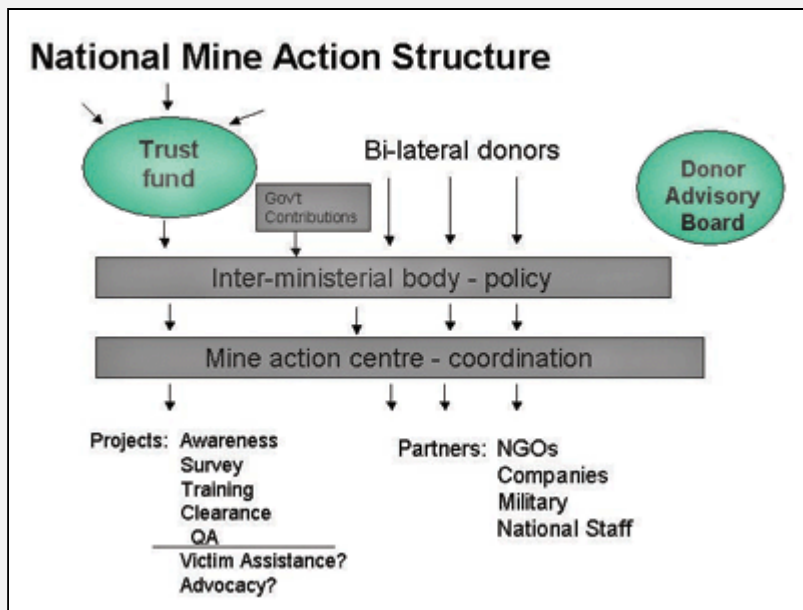
The final (and usually most visible) component of a national mine action program is the wide variety of projects or activities that need to be undertaken, and the range of operators needed to carry them out. Any national mine action program will need to include projects in some or all of the areas of mine action, including mine risk reduction, survey and clearance, stockpile destruction,

victim assistance and advocacy. While the level of involvement of a MAC in the latter two is currently

being examined in more detail by the UN, they will certainly need to be addressed by some segment of a national mine action program. Other related activities and projects, such as training and quality assurance and monitoring will also need to be part of the overall national response.

A unique mix of operators is required to undertake this range of activities in any particular country. In Afghanistan, for example, all activities are undertaken by local or international NGOs, whereas in Bosnia and Croatia, commercial companies conduct a higher proportion of the work. There is also a growing acceptance of the

use of the national military as a clearance "operator", and as mentioned earlier, there are a few countries where the MAC has hired its own deminers. Whatever the situation or activity, there is always a need for the involvement of national staff and in many cases, this capacity will have to be established and then built upon. With UNDP focusing on assisting to develop mine action authorities and setting up the coordinating bodies, all operators have a role to play in capacity building on the local level. This may range from an international NGO helping to develop a local NGO, through to the training of individual counterparts in the service providing organizations.



Conclusion

Due to the long term nature of the landmine problem in some countries, along with increasing competition for scarce resources, it can be seen that building a national mine action capacity has a place across all levels of mine action activity. As such, all parties involved in mine action within a country play a part in its success. With regards to UNDP, the goal is to assist governments to establish and run their own legal, transparent and efficient mine action organisation, eventually leaving behind either a trained local capacity to continue dealing with the problem, or residual capacity to handle a low level threat.

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