
An overview of *A Guide to Mine Action*

A *Guide to Mine Action* is not an operational handbook, rather it is an information resource on mine action that can also assist in decision-making, programme planning and research. Each of the 12 chapters contained in the Guide has been designed to stand alone (although, inevitably, there are a number of cross-references to other chapters). In general, therefore, readers can select the topic or topics most relevant to their particular needs or interest. In addition, each chapter begins with a brief summary of the key points.

Chapter 1 provides an historical introduction to landmines and unexploded ordnance (UXO) and the problems they wreak on affected communities. Landmines were developed before the 20th century but became a weapon of choice for many armed forces and groups from the 1939-1945 war onwards. Widely used in international and internal armed conflicts alike, mines typically continue to be a threat to the civilian population long after hostilities have ceased. Similarly, UXO — bombs, shells, grenades and other ammunition that have been employed but which have failed to detonate as designed — plague post-conflict societies around the world.

Chapter 2 looks at the development of the discipline of mine action since its inception. Its origins can be traced to October 1988, when, for the first time, the UN appealed for funds to carry out civilian demining activities in Afghanistan. There are now national programmes in dozens of countries covering humanitarian demining, battle area clearance and explosive ordnance disposal, mine risk education, international and national legislation against mines, stockpile destruction and victim assistance. Efforts to standardise and professionalise mine action continue and the willingness of operators and institutions to learn from its successes and failures is one of the great strengths of the discipline.

Two instruments of international law apply specifically to landmines (Chapter 3 reviews the historical background to their adoption). The 1997 Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention prohibits the production, stockpiling, transfer and use of all anti-personnel mines. Although it has many of the characteristics of a disarmament treaty, its purpose is humanitarian. The 1980 Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons has two protocols regulating all landmines,

booby-traps and other devices. On 28 November 2003, States Parties to the 1980 Convention adopted a new protocol to address *“the serious post-conflict humanitarian problems caused by explosive remnants of war.”*

Chapter 4 describes the content of the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention, which was adopted on 18 September 1997, entering into force on 1 March 1999. By the end of 2003, more than two-thirds of the world’s States had already become parties to it. The Convention aims to put an end to the suffering and casualties caused by anti-personnel mines. It does so by obliging States Parties never to use, develop, produce, stockpile or transfer anti-personnel mines, and by requiring that they destroy existing stocks of anti-personnel mines, clear mined areas and assist victims. In fulfilling their obligations, States Parties in need may request assistance and States Parties *“in a position to do so”* are required to provide assistance. A variety of mechanisms exist or have been established to ensure that these cooperation and assistance provisions are brought to life.

The 1980 Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW) is an instrument of international humanitarian law that regulates the use, and in certain circumstances also the transfer, of a number of specific conventional weapons. Chapter 5 looks at two of the Protocols attached to the CCW, which govern landmines, booby-traps and what are termed ‘other devices’ (directional fragmentation munitions). CCW Protocol II, adopted in 1980, reflected customary law by limiting the use of mines to military objectives. The 1996 Amended Protocol II strengthened the rules governing anti-personnel mines, in particular, although it did not include the total prohibition that a significant number of States had been seeking. Advocacy to ban anti-personnel mines is one of the five core components of mine action; the others being mine risk education, victim assistance, stockpile destruction and humanitarian demining. Protocol V deals with explosive remnants of war, that is abandoned and unexploded ordnance other than mine, booby-traps and other devices.

Humanitarian demining, described in Chapter 6, covers the range of activities which lead to the removal of mine and UXO hazards. These include technical survey, mapping, clearance, marking, post-clearance documentation, community mine action liaison and the handover of cleared land. Clearance operations are only one part of the humanitarian demining process, but they are the most costly part. Mine action has developed a ‘toolkit’ approach to clearance, using and combining, as appropriate, manual deminers, mine detection dogs and mechanical demining equipment, such as vegetation cutters, tillers and flails. Explosive ordnance disposal and battle area clearance rely primarily on specialist personnel to remove and/or destroy the UXO hazard.

Mine risk education (MRE) is the subject of Chapter 7. MRE, previously known as mine awareness, is *“a process that promotes the adoption of safer behaviours by at-risk groups, and which provides the links between affected communities, other mine action components and other sectors”*. Thus, at the heart of MRE are two elements: public education, using a communication strategy to promote safer behaviour, and community liaison activities to support broader mine action. Under the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention, States Parties in a position to do so are obliged to provide assistance for mine awareness programmes.

Chapter 8 provides an overview of efforts and strategies to assist the victims of landmines and UXO. Individual landmine survivors — not to mention

communities affected by landmines and UXO — require a range of assistance including: emergency and continuing medical care; physical rehabilitation, including prostheses and assistive devices; psychological and social support; economic reintegration; and laws and policies designed to eliminate discrimination and equalise opportunities. While ultimate responsibility for providing this assistance rests with their governments, the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention requires that State Parties in a position to do so provide assistance for the care and rehabilitation, and social and economic reintegration of mine victims.

Chapter 9 considers stockpile destruction, the fifth and final core component of mine action. Destruction programmes may relate to any explosive ordnance contained in stockpiles, as defined in the International Mine Action Standards (IMAS). The IMAS, however, focus on the destruction of anti-personnel mine stockpiles. Each State must destroy all its stockpiled anti-personnel mines within four years of becoming a party to the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention, and those States Parties in a position to do so must assist others to fulfil this obligation. Physical destruction techniques available range from the relatively simple open burning and open detonation techniques to highly sophisticated industrial processes. The decision to opt for any particular technique is likely to be based on cost, safety and environmental considerations.

Effective coordination of actors and actions, which is addressed in Chapter 10, is critical for the success of mine action programmes. At national level, ultimate responsibility for mine action remains with the government. Typically, a national mine action authority, largely an inter-ministerial body, will conduct overall oversight of mine action and the day-to-day coordination of the programme is carried out by a mine action centre. Chapter 10 also looks at the related issue of capacity development in mine action. A broad range of organisations and governments are involved in mine action capacity development, including the UN Development Programme (UNDP), Cranfield Mine Action and the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining (GICHD).

Of increasing significance for mine action programmes is the discipline of socio-economics, as Chapter 11 argues. The objectives of a national mine action programme should support the overall development effort of the country. Socio-economics seek to improve decision-making in mine action, especially priority setting for mine action tasks and evaluation of effectiveness and efficiency. There is increasing recognition in the mine action community that merely reporting on number of mines and items of UXO or square metres cleared is not an adequate assessment of work performed as they do not capture the impact of clearance on affected communities. An approach gaining wider acceptance is the use of economic assessment of the impact of clearance to demonstrate effectiveness.

Effective management of mine action information is also crucial to a successful national programme, as set out in Chapter 12, the last of the book. The Information Management System for Mine Action (IMSMA), developed by the GICHD for the UN, is widely used as the Geographic Information System-based database programme to assist in this process. The IMSMA system or other relevant database are usually managed by the national mine action centre.

Following Chapter 12, there is a select bibliography and a glossary of terms and acronyms. Appendix 1 contains the text of the Anti-Personnel Mine Convention and Appendix 2 details adherence to the Convention at 1 December 2003. Appendix 3 contains the text of the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW), its Amended Protocol II, and the new Protocol V on explosive remnants of war. Appendix 4 lists the States Parties to the CCW, 1980 Protocol II and 1996 Amended Protocol II. Appendix 5 includes selected definitions from the Glossary of the International Mine Action Standards. Finally Appendix 6 sets out the UN policy on mine action, endorsed by the UN General Assembly in 1998.