

CASE STUDY

**ACHIEVING ISO 9001 CERTIFICATION:
A NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATION'S
EXPERIENCE**

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November 2013**

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GLOSSARY OF ABBREVIATIONS

BAC	Battle Area Clearance	PMS	Performance Management System
EOD	Explosive Ordnance Disposal	QA	Quality Assurance
FMS	Financial Management System	QAO	Quality Assurance Officer
GICHD	Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining	QC	Quality Control
HAP	Humanitarian Accountability Partnership	QMR	Quality Management Representative
IMAS	International Mine Action Standards	QMS	Quality Management System
ISO	International Organization for Standardization	SOP	Standard Operating Procedures
KPI	Key Performance Indicators	STA	Senior Technical Adviser
NGO	Non-governmental Organisation	TA	Technical Adviser
NMAS	National Mine Action Standards	TL	Team Leader
PDCA	Plan-Do-Check-Act	UXO	Unexploded Ordnance
PM	Programme Manager		

1. INTRODUCTION

The Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining (GICHD) is involved in a range of projects and activities that relate to the development and implementation of quality management systems (QMS) in demining activities.

ISO 9001:2008 is the current version of the international standard specifying the requirements for a quality management system. It is issued by the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) and is widely used in many industries around the world. The principles and tools contained within it form the basis for the content of the GICHD's workshops on quality management.

When conducting workshops, the GICHD actively seeks feedback from participants. One of the most common requests over the last three years has been for case studies describing actual experiences of non-governmental mine action organisations using a formal ISO 9001 QMS. This publication seeks to provide an initial response to satisfy that demand.

Although it is not mandatory for mine action organisations to achieve formal certification against the requirements of ISO 9001 either in International Mine Action Standards (IMAS) or in any of the various National Mine Action Standards (NMAS), an increasing number of organisations are choosing to make use of the rigorous principles and international credibility that come from doing so.

A good deal of misunderstanding and misapprehension within mine action surrounds what adopting ISO 9001 entails and whether it is appropriate or achievable for different organisations. This case study explains how one non-governmental organisation (NGO)¹ achieved ISO 9001 certification through the commitment and efforts of its staff and local specialist consultants.

The GICHD is particularly grateful to Rickard Hartmann for his assistance in the preparation of this case study; all images in this study are reproduced by his kind permission.

2. BACKGROUND

2.1 ISO 9001 IN MINE ACTION

Quality management has been important in the mine action industry since its earliest days, both within the first United Nations Standards and the subsequent IMAS.

When the first standards within the IMAS system were developed, the mine action industry debated whether or not formal adoption of ISO 9001 should be the recommended standard. Instead, a focus on ISO 9001 and the development of QMSs with the same characteristics as the ISO system was encouraged among operating organisations. Since then, practice at field, organisational, programme and national levels has developed through a combination of habit, adoption of standards and import of knowledge and experience from other industries.

The potential value of the ISO 9001 system of quality management had already been recognised by the mid-1990s, with work carried out against the requirements of the standard by the British

¹ For the purpose of this publication the GICHD has chosen that the NGO used in this case study remains anonymous.

Army and the first formal certification of a mine clearance organisation in 1997.²

A small number of other commercial operating organisations achieved certification during the next ten years, mostly to satisfy bidding requirements for commercial or governmental contracts. In the last five years the standard has been widely adopted (with several NGOs achieving formal certification), mainly due to donor demands for evidence of competence, effectiveness and efficiency.

2.2 INTRODUCING THE NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATION

The non-governmental organisation (NGO) in question was founded in 1990 and, together with its local partners, is involved in sustainable development cooperation projects in Africa, Asia, Latin America and Eastern Europe.

The organisation seeks to support affected communities using an integrated approach, combining humanitarian mine action with development measures. The organisation takes the view that overcoming the consequences of war requires more than simply clearing contaminated land: there must also be support to affected communities – in building infrastructure and helping families develop sustainable livelihoods.

To achieve its aims the NGO focuses on poverty alleviation in the most affected areas, strengthening the self-help capacity of local people. It targets its activities at poor people, victims of unexploded ordnance (UXO) and other contaminants, people with disabilities, ethnic minorities and victims of natural disasters.

The programme considered in this study focuses particularly on two provinces, reflecting both the density of contamination and current population densities.

In 2011, as the NGO began to develop its ISO 9001 system, the organisation employed around 150 staff in mine action, battle area clearance (BAC) and explosive ordnance disposal (EOD) work. In the same year teams shallow-searched 3.4 million m² and deep-searched 522,000 m², clearing 18,966 UXO, landmines and cluster bombs/submunitions.³

2.3 GICHD ASIA REGIONAL QUALITY MANAGEMENT WORKSHOP, CHENNAI

The GICHD ran the first of a series of workshops on quality management in mine action in November 2011. Course participants came from various mine- and UXO-affected Asian countries and included the NGO's Country Programme Manager (PM).

At that stage the organisation did not have a comprehensive and adequate QMS in place, but a need for one was fully recognised within the organisation. The PM felt that the GICHD workshop in Chennai provided a good overview of the different aspects of implementing a QMS, although

² The British company Greenfield Consultants Ltd. Some larger commercial organisations with a mine clearance or EOD arm may have had certification before this date, but no other certification had been awarded at that stage specifically for mine clearance.

³ Shallow search relates to investigation of hazardous areas for 'near surface' contamination items (mortar bombs, cluster submunitions, grenades etc). Deep search generally involves searches to depths significantly greater than one metre for larger, air-dropped bombs.

its focus was more at the national programme level than that of individual operating organisations.

3. SELECTING A QUALITY MANAGEMENT SYSTEM (QMS)

In choosing the type of QMS to adopt, the NGO identified the involvement of an external certification auditor as being of particular importance. The opportunity for outside eyes to review the system, provide feedback and support further improvement was attractive.

The country where the NGO operates offers a widespread and sophisticated quality management support industry. A large number of commercial organisations make use of formal quality certifications, most frequently ISO 9001, and there is government support for state entities in obtaining ISO 9001 certification.

There is some evidence to suggest that not all organisations pursuing ISO 9001 certification maintain their systems once the certificate has been obtained, but nonetheless there is good understanding of the basic principles of quality management among many organisations and individuals. There is also a healthy body of consulting organisations that offer support and advice to organisations seeking to establish and maintain a formal QMS.

In light of the nature of the ISO 9001 system and its widespread use within the country, the NGO took the view that the system would meet the organisation's requirements, be well understood by key stakeholders and so offer a better chance of sustainability over time. The NGO selected a local branch of a well-known international certification body.

4. THE EXISTING QMS

Like most mine action and EOD organisations, the NGO had developed a QMS on the basis of individual managers' experience. This is common practice within the industry. The system comprised three elements:

- 'before' activities and steps, such as personnel training and the availability of suitable Standard Operating Procedures (SOP);
- 'during' elements, such as the conduct of internal quality control (QC) and observation of activities by the Quality Assurance Officer (QAO) and Senior Technical Adviser (STA);⁴ and
- 'after' elements based on the sampling of cleared land.

The quality assurance (QA) functions revolved around six forms, each with the same structure. Each was signed off by the QAO and the on-site Team Leader (TL), and had space for comments by the QAO and TL. The forms were adapted to:

- BAC;
- EOD spot tasks;

⁴ The use of the terms QA and QC in this context reflects common usage in the mine action industry, rather than the more widely understood meanings described and explained in the publication '10 Steps to a National Quality Management System – A Handbook for Mine Action Managers'.

- task completion;
- basic deminer training;
- basic deminer on-job-training; and
- post-clearance assessment.

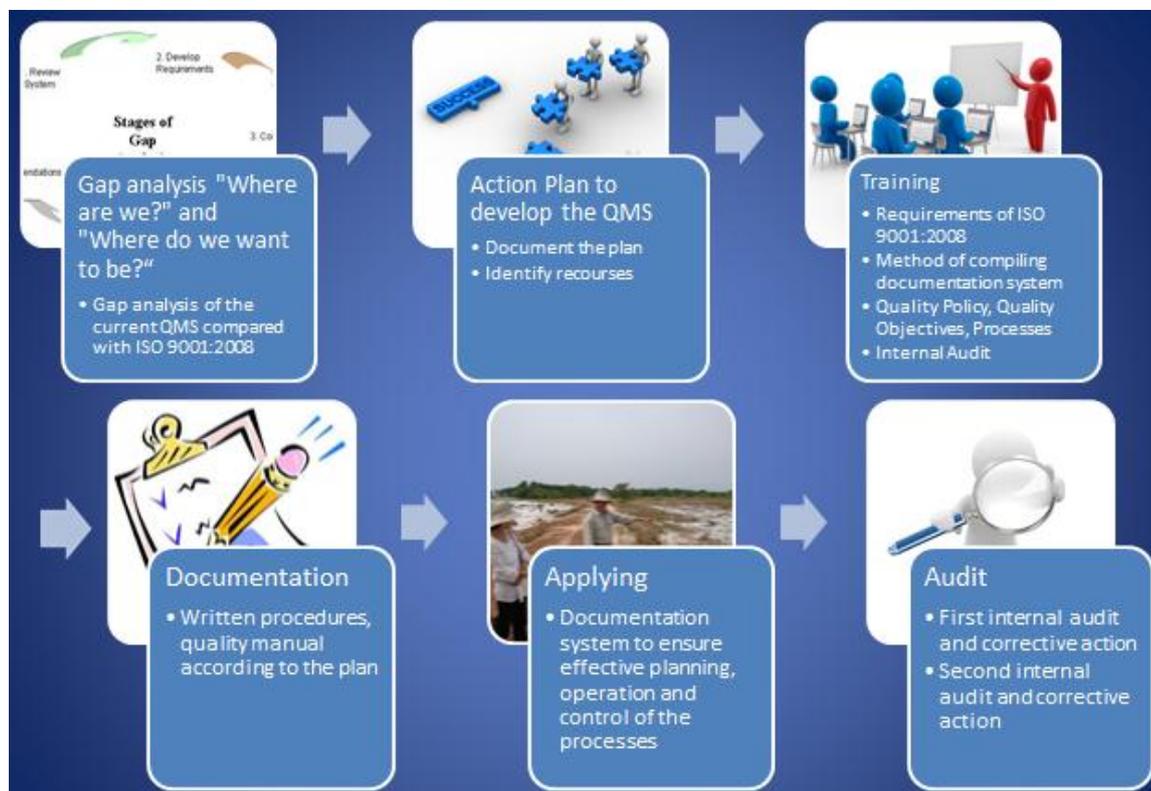
Core documentation, including the Field Operations SOP, EOD Handbook, UXO reference manuals and operating instructions for detection equipment, had all been translated into the local language. Additional documentation was available covering administration, logistics and finance.

5. WORKPLAN AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE SYSTEM

Before implementing the ISO 9001 system, the NGO identified two fundamental challenges; one was that the organisation’s local staff had almost no knowledge of how the ISO system worked. A second was how to change the established working habits of the NGO’s existing team. To address these challenges they engaged in a range of activities to help prepare the ground for the main implementation phase. These activities included team building sessions to introduce the concepts of ISO 9001, as well as general awareness raising and meetings with project partners.

Staff members were obliged for the first time to begin writing SOP. This was a significant task in its own right and presented a challenge, irrespective of the wider implications of developing and adopting a formal QMS.

Figure 1: Overall plan of action for implementation of the QMS



Once the decision to proceed with certification had been taken, it was agreed that the target timeline to complete the process would be six months.

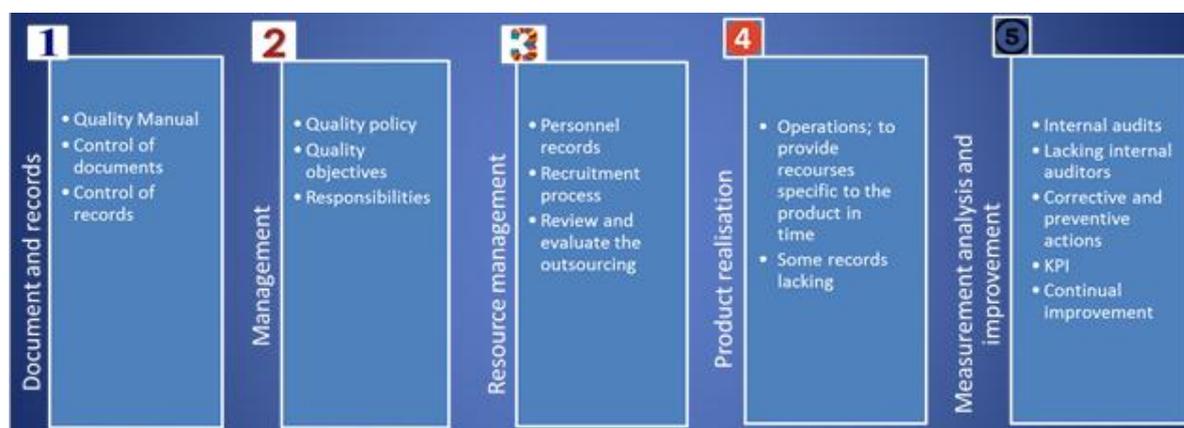
The NGO identified six key stages in the process:

- a gap analysis to compare the existing system with the requirements of ISO 9001:2008;
- development of an action plan to address the identified gaps;
- training to prepare staff with responsibility for development of the QMS;
- furnishing – the development of system documentation by trained staff members;
- applying – putting the documented system into practice; and
- audit – the conduct of internal audits of the functioning system to identify remaining shortcomings or non-conformities and to ensure that appropriate corrective and preventive action would be carried out.

On completion of the process, the organisation would be ready for the external audits necessary to receive formal certification against ISO 9001:2008. The NGO also considered the benefits of using an established and reputable ISO 9001 consultancy to assist in the implementation process. The country has an extensive ISO 9001 support industry, reflecting the widespread adoption of the standard in governmental and commercial organisations. The NGO selected a local branch of a larger global corporation, to act as consultants.

6. INITIAL ASSESSMENT, GAP ANALYSIS AND DEVELOPMENT OF AN ACTION PLAN

Figure 2: Results of the ISO 9001 gap analysis



The gap analysis was conducted with the ISO consultants. It identified as ‘gaps’ needing to be addressed:

- development of a quality manual;
- development of a document control procedure*;
- development of a records control procedure*;
- formalisation of the quality policy;
- establishment of formal quality objectives;

- identification and establishment of key performance indicators (KPI);
- clearer definition of responsibilities;
- description and control of the recruitment process;
- evaluation of outsourcing;
- enhancement of the operational resources provision process;
- establishment of an internal audit process*;
- training of internal auditors;
- development of corrective and preventive action procedures/processes*;
- enhancement of personnel records;
- creation of some additional records; and
- implementation of a comprehensive continual improvement process.

* mandatory procedures within the ISO 9001 requirements

During the gap analysis it became clear that many of the basic elements of an ISO 9001 compliant system already existed within the organisation, but in a number of cases, components needed formalisation to bring them fully in-line with the requirements of the standard.

7. TRAINING AND DOCUMENTATION

The practical elements of the plan (resources, documentation, etc) required:

- the identification of people within the programme and the allocation of responsibility for preparing documentation; and
- a phase of initial training (delivered with the support of the quality consultants) to equip those people with the skills and knowledge necessary to develop documentation that would satisfy ISO 9001 requirements.

Initial development training included:

- an understanding of the requirements of ISO 9001 in general terms and specifically in relation to key documents within the QMS;
- key performance indicators – their purpose, identification, definition and management;
- compiling documents – the document control requirements of ISO 9001, the use of formats and templates;
- policies, objectives and processes – their roles within the QMS, ISO 9001 requirements, and the relationship of objectives and processes to concepts of continual improvement;
- internal audit training – to ensure that auditors would be available to carry out the internal auditing required before certification; and
- developing, reviewing and approving documentation – processes, responsibilities and control of documents within the QMS.

Both the training and the documentation followed typical ISO 9001 methods and reflected standard ISO course content, but were modified to take into account the specific work, processes and products of the NGO's operations.

After the training, the main phase involved:

- drafting the documentation; and
- its internal review, revision and final approval.

Getting the procedures and other documentation right is fundamental to the successful establishment of an ISO 9001 system. The Programme Manager worked to stimulate discussion among team members, and to encourage development of process maps reflecting the reality of the NGO's work.⁵ Reviewing the development of the procedures was one of the most time-consuming stages in the whole process, and went on to present significant challenges during the subsequent application phase.

The quality policy and objectives

Quality policy

'We produce safe land which we hand over to the local community. Our purpose is to provide safe land cleared from UXO for socio-economic development purposes (such as agriculture, resettlement from areas affected by flooding and landslides, construction of social infrastructure facilities etc.). Our long term aim is to reduce the risk to a level where UXO contamination no longer poses an immediate threat to the health and lives of people in their daily activities and do no longer constrain socio-economic development.

We continually improve our services to satisfy the needs of our beneficiaries better. Our quality management system is designed to ensure the maintenance of the product (safe land) quality through evaluation, inspection and verification processes at all stages of the clearance.

We are committed to comply with the International Mine Action Standards (IMAS) as well as national legal requirements, donor finance regulations and also committed to continually improve the effectiveness of our quality management system.

This policy is itself reviewed at management review meetings and is to be communicated to all staff, permanent civilian, military and temporary, upon initial introduction to the NGO and at appropriate intervals thereafter.'⁶

Quality objectives

Objectives are set and reviewed by the top management of the NGO. In the early days of implementation of a QMS it can be hard to set SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, time-bound) objectives, unless baseline data is already available. On that basis the NGO's initial quality objectives are of two types:

1. system-wide objectives such as 'to achieve and maintain certification against the requirements of ISO 9001:2008'; and

⁵ Further explanation of process maps and how to use them can be found in '10 Steps to a National Quality Management System – A Handbook for Mine Action Managers', published by the GICHD, as well as in many other online resources.

⁶ This Quality Policy of the NGO in question is also available on the CD-ROM in the back of the publication '10 Steps to a National Quality Management System – A Handbook for Mine Action Managers'.

2. system definition objectives, such as ‘to collect baseline data in order to establish appropriate levels for future objective and targets’.

Once the baseline data has been collected and analysed, the NGO will set specific objectives for aspects of their operations like ‘time to respond to requests’. Setting objectives, reviewing evidence relating to them and updating them is a central part of the management review and continual improvement processes.

8. APPLICATION

The application phase involved:

- the practical implementation of the system in its initial form;
- the review of processes and procedures;
- the modification of processes and procedures to reflect real experience; and
- the establishment of key performance indicators.

The application phase was more than simply following written procedures. It involved:

- the practical use and testing of the system; and
- the identification of shortcomings and the revision of the system to turn it into a genuinely applicable, useful and successful system.

Once again, the process of reviewing procedures to understand their application and to identify areas requiring improvement proved particularly demanding. On occasion it was the review process that created the hardest to clear bottlenecks in the certification process.

The table below identifies the main documents within the QMS and shows how many changes had been included during the first months of operation. The procedures that show the highest number of changes are those most directly associated with the organisation’s practical work – field activities, survey and warehouse management.

SOP title	No of changes
Quality manual	2
Internal audit procedure	2
Description of projects and staff’s function, responsibility and authorities	3
Recruitment and training procedure	3
Procedure for material, equipment and service procurement	4
Procedure for warehouse management	6
Standard operating procedure for field activities	8
Procedure for receiving and handling the requests of customers/ beneficiaries	3
Procedure for field survey	7
Financial management procedure	3
In-process quality control	2
Management meeting review	1
Total	44

While 44 changes may seem like a lot, in most cases they were relatively small in nature. Despite the challenges the initial application phase presented, team members recognised the value brought by a rigorous approach to thinking through every aspect of the organisation's work.

9. INTERNAL AUDITS AND REVIEWS

Figure 3: Final activities before certification



ISO 9001 requires that all aspects of the QMS be subject to internal audit before an external certification assessment takes place. The Quality Management Representative (QMR) planned an appropriate internal audit schedule for agreement and approval by the PM.

Internal auditors underwent two days of audit training (with the ISO consultants) and received certificates of competence. To comply with the requirement that no auditor may audit their own area of responsibility, auditors from one province audited operations in the other. The quality consultants provided support during the audit process.

Following internal audit training, the PM observed that it could clearly be seen that there had been a positive change in the way that the auditors thought about what they were doing. Subsequent audits were carried out by NGO auditors without consultant support. The NGO's aim was to conduct two complete audits of the QMS before the certification inspection and one other afterwards. The planned audit schedule covers the full period of the first 12 months of QMS application.

The audit process is designed to be open and NGO senior staff reported that:

- people within the programme were generally comfortable with it (although a need for additional training was identified early on); and

- the audit of one province yielded fewer action points than the other, but the positive attitude to concepts of continual improvement meant that any competitive spirit was wholly beneficial.

After the internal audits, Team Leaders were given additional training and became more involved in the QMS, demonstrating how people learned from each other through the audit process. All internal audits were completed by the end of February 2013.

ISO 9001 also requires that a management review meeting takes place before any external certification inspection. A meeting was held in March 2013. The overall PM, individual project managers, the QMR and technical advisers attended. The QMR had prepared the findings from the internal audit process. Attendees went through the findings, with photographic evidence accompanying any reports of non-conformances. Corrective and preventive actions had already been drafted by the QMR, ready for agreement at the review meeting, which took about two hours in total. Feedback from the participants about the process of adopting and implementing the QMS was very positive.

By the end of March 2013, the NGO was ready for its external inspection by the certification body.

10. ASSESSMENT AND CERTIFICATION

The external audit was conducted over a period of three days. The audit covered the whole of the NGO's programme in both provinces. Two auditors visited the PM's office to audit all aspects of the QMS, including management responsibility, document management, procurement management, field activities, formats, reports management and SOP. The auditors then visited teams at their various worksites and camps (including warehouses) to audit implementation and compliance with the SOP.

The result of the thorough assessment was that no non-conformities were identified.⁷ The formal ISO 9001:2008 certificate was received around a month later. As is often the case, the auditors included some additional remarks in their report to assist the NGO in their ongoing continual improvement of the QMS. The certificate is valid for three years, although each year the certification body will visit the NGO to conduct interim audits to confirm continued compliance with the requirements of the standard.

Although the NGO spent several months considering the implications of pursuing formal ISO 9001 certification, once the decision had been taken, a target of six months was set to develop, implement and audit the system. In fact, the main body of work was done in the space of four working months leading up to the successful certification inspection.

11. INTEGRATION WITH FINANCIAL AND PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS

Any effective QMS should be fully integrated into an organisation's wider functions and

⁷ A non-conformity is defined as *non-fulfilment of a requirement*. Non-conformities can be related to the product of a process, the implementation of a process, or to inputs to a process.

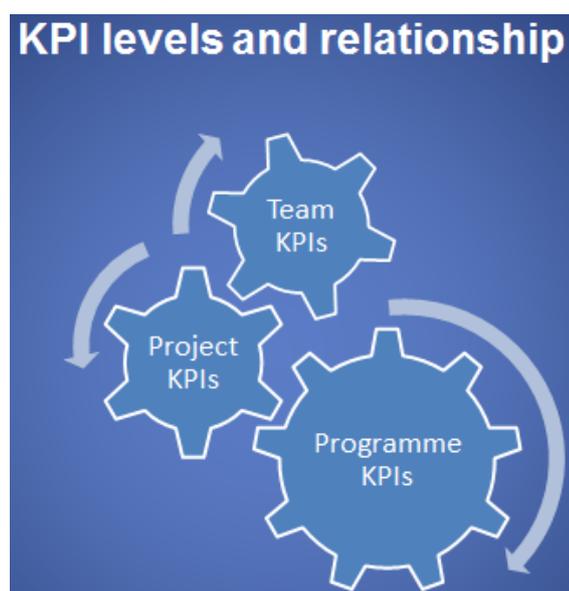
processes. The NGO management recognised the importance of the connections between the proposed QMS and other management functions within the organisation, in particular the financial management system (FMS) and the performance management system (PMS).

While they choose to treat the PMS as a standalone element of the overall integrated management system, it encompasses many fundamental elements of the ISO 9001 system, including the identification and establishment of KPI, the measurement, monitoring and evaluation of those KPI, and action in response to the results of the evaluation.

The NGO recognised the extent to which the establishment of KPI, their measurement, monitoring and evaluation form a continual improvement cycle (typically known as a Plan – Do – Check – Act (PDCA) cycle). PDCA cycles were applied throughout the QMS itself, and as a core feature of the underlying system development process.

The NGO developed a task impact assessment process to extend the reach of the system beyond the most direct form of product/output quality management into the realm of outcomes and results. The further development of an analysis format is intended to help ensure that the information management system is asked the right questions and delivers the right outputs to support decision-makers.

Figure 4: Integration and consistency of KPI



KPI are now established at three levels: team, project and programme. They include indicators for information management, finance and administration. The KPI at each level are consistent with those at higher levels, and help inform results at their own and other levels.

Key Performance Indicators (KPI)

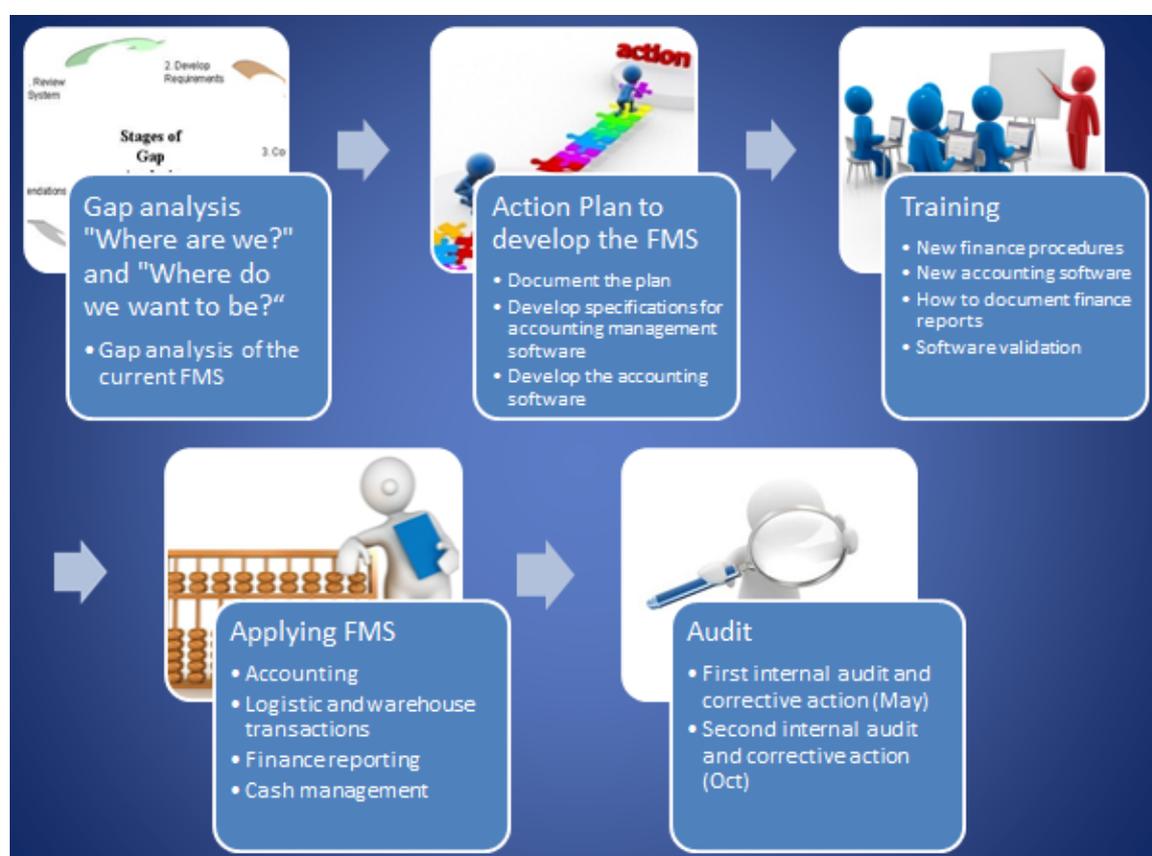
KPI are established to help understand the performance of the organisation, identify areas that require improvement and to find evidence of change once decisions have been taken.

The NGO sets KPI at several levels within the organisation:

1. Personal KPI for every key staff member in logistics, finance and operations.
2. Team KPI for each key unit and element in the organisation.
3. Project KPI, reflecting the specific objectives, constraints and schedules associated with that project. Project managers' KPI are developed to be consistent with those of the project.

Like every other aspect of the organisation's performance management system, KPI are reviewed on the basis of data collected and managed within the NGO's information management system, and are updated to reflect changing circumstances and the effects of continual improvement processes.

Figure 5: Financial management system development process



The development process for the FMS exhibits many of the same features as the ISO 9001 QMS, easing the process of integrating financial, quality and performance management systems.

12. ONGOING APPLICATION

Six months after achieving certification, the QMS continues to be actively maintained. Two internal audits were conducted early in the year, with another due in the last quarter. The second management review meeting is also due to take place during the last quarter.

Internal audits and management review meetings are proving to be very important in relation to the continual improvement of the QMS. These two basic quality management tools allow the NGO to review the implementation and real effectiveness of their quality management and to take action to keep it relevant, applicable and effective.

Based on the result of audits the organisation is aware of and understands:

- non-conformities in the system, as well as the success of corrective and preventive actions and the status of any agreed follow up action;
- the needs and ideas of their people for the continual development and improvement of the QMS and of the organisation itself; and
- the training needs of their staff and any weaknesses in the system, and how they intend to address them with appropriate training or improvement plans.

New SOP, updates to existing SOP and changes to the organisational structure have all been introduced in order to ensure that the organisation works more effectively and efficiently.

The ISO 9001 QMS helps NGO staff to be confident in their work. With clear and well-prepared SOP, they can implement their work independently without direct support or oversight. The system sets a clear road map for everyone involved – staff, management and outside partners: defining requirements, establishing policies and frameworks and empowering those most directly involved with, and responsible for, work.

Staff recognise the personal professional development benefits of the system. Training needs are discussed, identified and agreed, and are subject to formal training management plans. Most importantly, ISO 9001 requires that trainees provide feedback on the training they have received – another example of continual improvement and empowerment in action within the system.

At the organisational level, the NGO sees the system to have brought a greater degree of transparency to its operations, with a clearer understanding of the processes involved in the work. It is also clear that adopting ISO 9001 does not require the scrapping of existing systems: quite the opposite. Existing systems and practices are used to the maximum extent possible, with limited reorientation taking place where necessary to bring systems into line with ISO requirements.

The role of the QMR continues to be important. The QMR liaises with the external consultants and the certification body when required. The QMR also deals with logistic support for QM functions and the deployment of people. There is now a QAO in each project as well as a Technical Adviser (TA). The QAO reports to the Project Manager, the TA reports to the Programme Manager.

ISO 9001 fulfils the NGO's requirements for a QMS, although the PM has already identified areas (such as in relation to the wider participation of stakeholders) that could be better addressed using other systems (such as the Humanitarian Accountability Partnership, HAP).⁸ It is clear that the right tool needs to be selected for the right purpose; ISO 9001 provides a good foundation, making it easier to assess and implement other tools as required.

⁸ <http://www.hapinternational.org/what-we-do/hap-standard.aspx>

13. SUSTAINABILITY

Before implementing the new QMS, many of the NGO's staff felt uncomfortable about the perceived paperwork demands. After implementing the processes of the QMS, all of them say that they feel confident with what is expected of them. It is very clear how each process should work and the roles and responsibilities within those processes. The overall effect is that they feel more confident in their work in all respects.

The QMR reports that national staff members believe that they now have a good, sustainable and well-organised QMS. They feel comfortable with their roles and are familiar with the routines at work. However, feedback also suggests that the NGO may benefit from enhancing HR policies and practice to acknowledge more clearly the performance of team members.

The NGO team recognises that the nine months that the QMS has been running is a short period of time to reach clear conclusions about the sustainability of the system. What can be said is that so far the system has been received positively and is seen as an important enhancement to the NGO's operations. Even so, the question of longer-term sustainability is one that remains important. Staff members have identified a number of points that they see as being particularly important in relation to long-term sustainability of the QMS:

- continual improvement;
- strictly following the principle of PDCA to ensure the implementation of the quality policy and objectives to maintain the effectiveness and efficiencies of the current QMS processes and an effective and efficient NGO's programme;
- updating the SOP to ensure continued compliance with the actual situation of the NGO and the requirement of national and international mine action policies, donor regulations and local laws;
- satisfying the NGO's customers/beneficiaries to ensure high level of effectiveness of the QMS; and
- improving the staff's capacity through training to help them achieve continual improvement of the system.

Senior managers agree with these points. Concepts of continual improvement are at the heart of the system's sustainability, but achieving improvement requires effort on behalf of the staff, and the need for ongoing training for both new and established staff members. Such efforts will be more naturally and easily accepted and applied when the benefits of the system are apparent, highlighting the need for communication with team members and the need for continued management commitment.

The PM sees the implementation of ISO as the very essence of capacity building and empowering staff. As such it provides a powerful tool to help the organisation and its senior staff achieve many of their wider goals of delivering positive outcomes to beneficiaries, and also enhancing the capacity of their own staff to manage successful and efficient programmes into the future. The system will require commitment from the NGO's own staff, as well as the availability of suitable human and financial resources if it is to last into the future. On that basis the NGO's managers see the establishment of a Quality Manager position as part of the senior management team as fundamentally important.

14. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Key conclusions reached by the NGO at the end of the certification process are:

- The ISO 9001 implementation and certification process went well. It has been important to expose team members fully to the process. Doing so ensures that they learn and adapt, although it can mean quite a lot of work to begin with.
- Changing attitudes and working habits can take time and require commitment and effort within the organisation.
- Adoption of ISO 9001 is about quality. Quality does not mean paperwork, but there has been a need to demand a higher quality of paperwork than may have been the case previously (and perhaps than may sometimes be found elsewhere in humanitarian mine action).
- In general ISO consultants are not familiar with the world of humanitarian mine action, or indeed the world of NGOs, but the consultants used in this case are learning quickly. As other NGOs and mine action organisations start to make more use of ISO 9001, it can be expected that quality consulting organisations with knowledge of mine action will become more readily available around the world.
- Organisations choosing to adopt ISO 9001 may draw on assistance from specialist quality consultants, but they should be directly involved in writing their own systems – it should not be a ‘cut and paste’ of someone else’s system.
- Achievement of ISO 9001 certification supports the credibility of the organisation with donors and partners.
- ISO 9001 fulfils the NGO’s requirement for a QMS and provides a solid basis upon which other tools (such as for results-based management) can be developed.
- The NGO has no regrets about choosing to adopt ISO 9001 – it has been a great tool and it was a very good decision.
- Ongoing external input may be more important to a small organisation (as it will have limited opportunity to gain different perspectives on its work), than a big one – which can use a wide variety of internal auditors to bring objective assessment and analysis of what is working well, and what needs improvement.

Recommendations to other organisations considering ISO 9001:

- Every organisation must carefully consider the pros and cons of implementing ISO 9001. Most organisations are likely to see some additional management/administrative burden, but any additional effort will be in areas that require attention and that may not have received the level of management they need.
- Where additional resources are required to satisfy quality requirements it is important that the benefits (in terms of quality of output, reliability and confidence in the work of the organisation) are well understood and communicated. Donor support is essential to ensure that commitment within the organisation is reflected in appropriate budgets and plans.
- The NGO recommends that other humanitarian mine action organisations should consider ISO 9001.
- Organisations aiming for ISO 9001 certification should consider making use of specialist consultancies. The NGO could have done the process on its own, but it would have taken a great deal more time and effort to do so. The external consultant increased confidence

within the NGO and ensured that efforts were well targeted and focused on what needed to be done.

15. SUMMARY

The NGO brings an informed, energetic and rigorous approach to developing its quality management systems. The decision to make use of the ISO 9001 system makes sense, especially in the local national environment, where the standard is recognised and widely applied.

To date adoption of ISO 9001 is seen as an overwhelmingly positive thing. At the same time, achieving certification required considerable effort on the part of the organisation’s senior staff at every level. Senior management drove the process, but a great deal of the work was done by middle managers and field personnel.

Applying that level of effort can be seen as a cost, but the feedback from those involved was that it was well worth it: they came out of the process with a better understanding of what the organisation does, how it does it, and with greatly enhanced confidence in the quality of its work and their roles within it.

It is easy to see ISO 9001 as a system that addresses quality specifically. In fact, through its emphasis on the system approach and its clear recognition of the importance of management commitment, the availability of information, and the monitoring and review of performance throughout the organisation, it actually offers a comprehensive management system, that naturally embraces other important aspects of an organisation’s operations such as safety and the environment.

The experience of the NGO demonstrates that pursuing ISO 9001 certification requires effort and commitment, but is wholly achievable and directly relevant for organisations working in the mine action sector.

As more and more operating organisations adopt ISO 9001, and as more consultancies and certification bodies become familiar with the mine action industry, the availability of knowledgeable, experienced advisors increases. ISO 9001 is now a firm feature of the mine action industry and is likely to become more widely applied over the coming years. This case study suggests that mine action organisations considering using the standard should seek advice from others in the industry who are already familiar with it, and investigate its value for their own work.

ISO 9001 brings costs and benefits, as set out below, but the evidence from those who make use of it is that the benefits significantly outweigh the costs.

Table 1: Comparison of benefits and costs of obtaining ISO 9001 certification

Benefits	Costs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Immediate and easy access to a rigorously tested, developed and proven approach to quality management. • Improved understanding of quality and its management. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Management and staff effort to understand, define and describe the organisation’s purpose, objectives, activities and QMS. • Review and adjust existing documentation to satisfy ISO 9001 requirements.

Benefits	Costs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comprehensive application of quality management throughout an organisation. • Enhanced focus on the needs of the organisation's 'customers'. • Empowerment of national and international staff through confident, defined capacity development. • Increased ownership and buy-in among national staff. • Transfer of knowledge and experience within the organisation during audits, reviews and continual improvement processes. • Improved quality and usability of operational documentation. • Collective confidence in the quality of the organisation's products, outputs and services. • Clearer confidence-building understanding of the organisation's performance through the establishment and monitoring of KPI. • Improved understanding of the links between information management and quality management. • Enhanced profile and confidence among stakeholders and interested parties. • Internationally recognised qualifications for the organisation's auditors (at internal and lead levels). • Access to a global resource of quality consultancy, advice and information. • Independent professional assessment of the organisation's QMS. • Clear credible evidence of the organisation's competence and reliability. • Evidence to donors, partners and authorities of the organisation's continual improvement, standards compliance and management commitment. • Sound basis for the future adoption of similar systems such as ISO 14001 (environmental management) and OHSAS 18001 (Occupational Health and Safety), HAP etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop new documentation to satisfy ISO 9001 requirements. • Financial cost of hiring external consultants (if the organisation chooses to do so). • Audit fees for initial certification and annual interim audits from Certification Body. • Time spent reviewing, improving and updating system documentation, SOP etc. • Management time associated with the role of QMR.

ANNEX: METHODOLOGY

This case study was prepared on the basis of meetings with national, international and head office staff of the NGO, as well as visits to local offices and field sites. Meeting notes and copies of the NGO's presentations, describing the status of the organisation's QMS at different stages in its evolution, provided the primary documentary sources.