Strategic Planning in Mine Action Programmes

Vietnam

Geneva, January 2014
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# Glossary of Abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>APMBC</td>
<td>Anti-personnel Mine Ban Convention</td>
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<td>BOMICEN</td>
<td>Technology Centre for Bomb and Mine Disposal</td>
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<td>CCM</td>
<td>Convention on Cluster Munitions</td>
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<td>CRPD</td>
<td>Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities</td>
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<td>CSO</td>
<td>Civil Society Organisation(s)</td>
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<td>EOD</td>
<td>Explosive Ordnance Disposal</td>
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<td>ERW</td>
<td>Explosive Remnants of War</td>
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<td>GICHD</td>
<td>Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining</td>
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<td>GoVN</td>
<td>Government of Viet Nam</td>
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<td>ICRC</td>
<td>International Committee of the Red Cross</td>
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<td>IMAS</td>
<td>International Mine Action Standards</td>
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<td>IMSMA</td>
<td>Information Management System for Mine Action</td>
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<td>MAPG</td>
<td>Mine Action Partnership Group</td>
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<td>MoD</td>
<td>Ministry of Defence</td>
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<td>MOLISA</td>
<td>Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs</td>
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<td>MRE</td>
<td>Mine Risk Education</td>
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<td>NGO</td>
<td>Non-Government Organisation</td>
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<td>NSC</td>
<td>National Steering Committee</td>
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<td>PAVN</td>
<td>People’s Army of Viet Nam</td>
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<td>UNDP</td>
<td>United Nations Development Programme</td>
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<td>UNICEF</td>
<td>United Nations Children’s Fund</td>
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<td>UNMAS</td>
<td>UN Mine Action Service</td>
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<td>VA</td>
<td>Victim Assistance</td>
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<td>VBMAC</td>
<td>Vietnam Bomb and Mine Action Centre</td>
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<td>VLIS</td>
<td>Vietnam Landmine Impact Survey</td>
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<td>VNMAC</td>
<td>Viet Nam Mine Action Centre</td>
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<td>VUFO</td>
<td>Vietnam Union of Friendship Organizations</td>
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<td>VVAF</td>
<td>Vietnam Veterans of America Foundation</td>
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

It is widely known that Vietnam is one of the countries that is most heavily contaminated by unexploded ordnance (UXO); it is less well known that it has had, for years, one of the world’s largest mine action programmes. The bulk of the contamination stems from United States (US) bombing during the Vietnam War, but there is also contamination from World War II, the First Indochina War against the French, and the Sino-Vietnamese War of 1979. Vietnamese officials have stated estimates that 66,000 km² (20 per cent of Vietnam’s land mass) is suspected of contamination.

Vietnam’s mine action programme has gone through a number of distinct phases. From 1975-78, the army, together with local militia, undertook a huge post-war clearance campaign as part of a broader post-conflict reconstruction programme. Using only basic technology, this cleared built-up areas and other essential livelihood spaces, but also led to thousands of demining casualties. In many cases UXO were simply hauled to shallow pits and dumped rather than destroyed.

The post-war clearance campaign ended in December 1978, when Vietnam invaded Cambodia to topple the Khmer Rouge regime, which led China to invade Vietnam briefly in early 1979. With the military fully engaged, clearance for civilian purposes was undertaken by the military on a responsive basis.

In 1986, the Communist Party instituted a package of economic reforms, which led to a surge in economic growth and a dramatic increase in development investments. Accordingly, the military was instructed to provide demining support to development projects. Rapid economic growth meant that the demand for demining began to outstrip the military’s capacity. Demobilised soldiers began to take private contracts for clearance and, in the absence of regulations, problems multiplied.

Reforms began in 1996 when the Ministry of Defence established the Technology Centre for Bomb and Mine Disposal (BOMICO, now BOMICEN) and began a major expansion in equipment for specialised demining units. However, Vietnam’s rapid economic growth meant that the army’s demining units could not keep-up with demand and private firms continued to demine with little regulation.

MoD demining officials also started to become aware of developments in the international mine action field. Progress was slow however, in part because mine action was viewed to be only demining and the MoD took the lead on the Vietnamese side; it took years before sufficient trust was built to overcome the resistance of defence officials to working with foreign governments and international non-governmental organisations (INGOs). Finally, in 2004 an agreement was signed between MoD and VVAF to launch Phase 1 of the Vietnam Landmine Impact Survey (VLIS), covering the six central provinces.

INGOs were also allowed to conduct demining operations in Central Vietnam, working under agreements with provincial governments. Aware that international support was available, but that few donors would fund the military, in April 2008, the Ministry of Labour, Invalids and
Social Affairs (MOLISA) issued a Decision to establish the Vietnam Bomb and Mine Action Centre (VBMAC) as a civilian demining operator. This attracted only modest donor support, in part because VBMAC was staffed entirely by military personnel and worked from MoD facilities.

The Government took additional series starting in 2010. In April of that year, Prime Ministerial Decision 504 signified the approval of both a National Mine Action Programme (‘Programme 504’) and the National Mine Action Plan: 2010-2025. This represented a strategy rather than an isolated initiative: the first clear plan for a national programme that incorporated including mine risk education (MRE) and victim assistance in addition to demining. Three ministries; MoD, Ministry of Planning and Investment (MPI), and MOLISA; were assigned central roles, and the plan envisaged that most mine action projects would be formulated by provinces for funding by the national government or donors. Planned spending would be in the neighbourhood of USD 150 million/year.

Implementation began well on some components of Programme 504 (e.g. the VLIS, plus increased international engagement) but, in general, progress has been disappointing.

Vietnamese officials commissioned an assessment of the programme in 2012, which led in May 2013 to additional steps outlined in Decision 738. These included:

- Establish a true Mine Action Centre (VNMAC)
- House VNMAC, including the national database centre, outside of MoD premises
- Establish a policy dialogue mechanism between the Government and its development partners.

National mine action officials are now engaged in developing detailed plans for the measures incorporated in Decision 738.

**Strategic Planning for Mine Action**

Vietnam’s mine action programme is distinctly different from those with which the international community is most familiar. Its distinguishing features include:

- Strong national ownership
- A long history of nationally-funded mine action activities (overwhelmingly demining)
- Use of government systems and national approaches to programme governance
- The central role of the MoD in humanitarian demining, but focused on socio-economic priorities set by civilian authorities

Until comparatively recently, strategic planning for demining has simply been part of MoD’s broader planning process (and the GoVN was not engaged in MRE or victim assistance). Therefore, outsiders have little insight into strategic planning processes prior to the GoVN’s decision to seek international support for mine action, or into the motivations of Vietnamese officials to introduce more substantial reforms to mine action. The tipping point appears to have been in March 2009, when senior personnel from Engineering Command and VBMAC/BOMICEN attended a workshop on Priority-Setting for Mine Action in Vientiane. They report that this gave them a better understanding that Vietnam needed a comprehensive strategy for mine action rather than a series of individual initiatives. They began work on what would emerge as Decision 504, issued a year later.
Again, outsiders also have little insight into the processes through which Decision 504 was agreed as these processes took place within the government system, without input from international advisors. Regardless, Decision 504 was clearly a strategy rather than simply a pragmatic step. It set-out a long-term plan for an integrated mine action programme under civilian oversight, complete with an inter-ministerial governance structure. It included a budget and a financing plan. It also marked the beginning of far greater efforts to engage the international mine action community.

Vietnam officials also have adapted the strategy along the way, most notably with Decision 738 in May 2013 when the Prime Minister agreed to establish a true MAC. This decision followed the assessment of Programme 504 commissioned by the Executive Office that focused explicitly on the perceptions of the international community. This suggests recognition that the strategic planning process had not been sufficiently open to donor inputs: ‘national ownership’ could not imply a strategic planning process that only involved government officials if Vietnam was to attract donor support.

National mine action officials are, therefore, learning from international experience – including for strategic planning – but are adapting these to Vietnam’s systems and perceived requirements rather than simply adopting international practices wholesale. It has proved to be a slow process but, down the road, Vietnam should have less difficulty in sustaining its programme than many other countries, where mine action is often a standalone endeavour, dependant on foreign funding and largely distinct from the rest of the government.

**International engagement**

Again, the history of international mine action engagement in Vietnam’s is unique in many ways, including:

- **Light footprint** – UNICEF provided modest support until 2009, and neither UNDP nor UNMAS have had any programme of assistance to mine action in Vietnam. The international community provides only modest funding and operators work with provincial rather than national officials.

- **Pivotal role of an INGO** – in the absence of UN involvement, Vietnam Veterans of America Foundation (VVAF) plays a critical role in supporting national mine action officials (particularly in their involvement in key international meetings and workshops) and brokering-in appropriate assistance from the international mine action community. This is unusual for an INGO, particularly in a socialist country, but has worked because VVAF provided the first support to national mine action officials, it has remained engaged with those officials, is staffed entirely by Vietnamese, and has enjoyed steady (although not lavish) support from the U.S. Department of State.

Vietnam’s experience holds important lessons for the international community and for countries emerging from conflict.
Risks

Building on vast experience and national commitment and enjoying increasing, albeit still modest international support, there appears to be great potential for Vietnam’s national mine action programme. There are, however, risks that this potential will not be realised. First, Vietnam’s window of opportunity may be closing. While there are distinct advantages in using Vietnam’s government systems, planning and implementation of a programme that involves multiple ministries has been a challenge, with a disappointing rate of progress. International mine action funding has been flat for a number of years and may now be decreasing. It may well be that, by the time Programme 504 is truly up-and-running, little international support will be available.

There is also the risk of donor failure – given the strong national ownership exhibited by Vietnam and the use of government systems (including the continuing role of the MoD), mine action donors might largely ignore Vietnam’s request for assistance. The fact that the GoVN has not signed the key international conventions also narrows the list of donors that might be willing and able to provide significant assistance.

Finally, there is the risk of implementation failure: once it is in place, the new national mine action programme may prove unworkable. National officials plan to channel most international funding to provincial budgets: will the provincial governments be up to the task? As well, the sheer amount of demining that is envisaged may overwhelm the ability of national authorities to exercise sufficient oversight of quality and probity.
INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND
Vietnam is a country in Southeast Asia with a population a bit over 90 million, far exceeding that of its neighbours Laos (6.5 million) and Cambodia (almost 15 million). About the size of Germany, much of Vietnam is hilly or mountainous, and densely forested, with level land covering no more than 20 per cent, much of which is in the heavily-populated Red River delta in the north, and the Mekong delta in the south.

Independent from China since 938 AD, Vietnam was colonised by the French in the mid-19th century. Following the occupation by Japan from 1940-45, during which time the Viet Minh insurgency began, France attempted to reassert its control. This led to the First Indochina War and the defeat of the French in 1954. According to the Geneva Accords, Vietnam was divided into North Vietnam (with Ho Chi Minh as Prime Minister) and South Vietnam at the 17th Parallel as a temporary measure until unifying elections could take place in 1956.

Those elections never took place. Instead, there was the Second Indochina War (called the Vietnam War in the US), which ended with a North Vietnamese victory in 1975. Vietnam was unified under the Communist Party, but isolated politically and economically. This isolation intensified after Vietnam invaded Cambodia in 1979 to remove the Khmer Rouge regime, leading to a large-scale but brief invasion by China that same year.

Vietnam remained impoverished until 1986, when a set of sweeping economic reforms (called Doi Moi or 'renovation') led to an acceleration of economic growth. Following the withdrawal of its troops from Cambodia in September 1989, and the collapse of the Soviet Union in late 1991, Vietnam also sought to forge political and economic linkages with the wider global community. From that point until 2010, Vietnam was one of the fastest growing economies in the world. The global financial crisis, coupled with high inflation within Vietnam, then led to efforts by the Government to stabilize the economy, leading to a decline in the rate of growth.

SOURCE AND NATURE OF CONTAMINATION
Although there is significant uncertainty over the tonnage of munitions dropped by the US during the Second Indochina War, there is no doubt that it left Vietnam as one of the countries in the world most heavily affected by explosives contamination. In addition, Vietnam also has contamination from World War II, the First Indochina War against the French, and the Sino-Vietnamese War of 1979. Vietnamese officials have stated estimates that 350,000 to 600,000+ munitions were dropped.

\[2\] Geopolitical realities of the day led to the absurd position by China, the U.S. and most Western countries to recognise the Khmer Rouge as the rightful government of Cambodia.

tons of UXO remain, and 6.6 million hectares (20 per cent of Vietnam’s land mass) is suspected of contamination.\(^3\) Contamination is often present in residential and farming areas,\(^4\) and sub-surface contamination represents a problem for many infrastructure and other construction projects. According to incomplete statistics, there were over 100,000 casualties (including over 40,000 killed) from 1975-2000.

**HISTORY OF MINE ACTION**

As is true in most conflict-affected countries, Vietnam’s response to contamination by landmines and other ERW has gone through a number of distinct stages:

**1975-1978: POST-WAR CLEARANCE CAMPAIGN**

The Army’s Engineering Command, working with provincial and local militia, undertook a huge post-war clearance effort, organised on a ‘campaign model’ as part of a broader post-conflict reconstruction programme. This aimed to clear built-up areas and other essential livelihood spaces and resulted in the destruction of 2.9 million landmines, 7.4 million UXO and over five tons of bombs, as well as the release of 10,000 ha of land as safe.\(^5\) The campaign also led to thousands of demining casualties.

During this period, Engineering Command established the first military units focussed fully on mine and UXO clearance, but even these employed only the most basic technology. Clearance generally was done to only 30 cm in depth, and in many cases bombs and other UXO were simply hauled to shallow pits and dumped rather than destroyed.

**1978-1986: RESPONSIVE CLEARANCE**

In December 1978, Vietnam invaded Cambodia to topple the Khmer Rouge regime. This led China to invade Vietnam briefly in early 1979. With the military fully engaged on two fronts, the domestic demining campaign ended. Subsequently, clearance for civilian purposes was undertaken by the military on a responsive basis only until 1986 and the Party Resolution on *Doi Moi*. *Doi Moi* was a package of sweeping economic reforms, which led to a surge in economic growth and an increase in development investments.\(^6\) The military was instructed to resume the clearance of minefields and to provide demining support to development projects.

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\(^3\) These estimates stem from a ‘preliminary survey’ conducted in 2000 by MoD.

\(^4\) In 2012, Project RENEW reports that it cleared 193 items of UXO, including mortars and rocket propelled grenades, from land located 15 meters from the family home in Quang Tri province. (Landmine & Cluster Munition Monitor, Vietnam Country Report, accessed 24 October 2013.)

\(^5\) These figures are from a presentation by Col. Mai Khanh Do, Deputy Director, Institute for International Defence Relations at the UN and National Programme Directors Annual Meetings in Geneva, April 2013.

\(^6\) The needs were huge. For example, a World Bank assessment in 1990 had this to say of the transportation infrastructure: *Most roads, railways and ports date back many years, were partly destroyed or dismantled during the war, and received inadequate maintenance thereafter. As a consequence, the majority of Viet Nam’s transport infrastructure is in a deplorable condition. Even facilities built as recently as 1965-75 are severely deteriorated, as their construction quality was often poor, reflecting the short-term objectives of the time. Most of the post-1975 repairs were carried out as temporary works, under financial and time constraints, and are themselves in need of upgrading* (Source: Vietnam Stabilization and Structural Reforms: An Economic Report, Report no. 8249-VN, April 1990, p. 69)
1986-1996: GROWTH OF DEMINING SUPPORT FOR DEVELOPMENT

The demand for demining in support of development grew to reach significant proportions by 1989, outstripping the military’s capacity. In part this was due to the disbandment of the specialised demining units as part of a wider demobilisation process following the end of Vietnam’s direct involvement in Cambodia in 1988. This was soon recognised as an error, and two specialised units were re-established in 1989. However, these remained ill-equipped and the continued expansion in construction activity meant demand for demining outstripped supply, and demobilised soldiers began to take contracts for clearance tasks. In the absence of regulations, problems quickly emerged and multiplied.

Figure 1 – Foreign direct investment in construction: 1988-1996

EARLY REFORMS

Efforts to reform Vietnam’s demining sector stem from 1993, when Engineering Command submitted a proposal to establish a specialised centre to assume responsibility for demining policy, standards, equipment testing, training, and international relations. The Ministry of Defence (MoD) initially rejected the proposal, but continuing problems with the regulation of demining, a rise in UXO casualties due to the growth in scrap metal collection, and occasional reports about the Ottawa process and the establishment of large national mine action.

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7 Demining support for construction projects was required by the Decree on the Management of Construction Projects, but at that time no decree was in place that specified who was responsible for the delivery and oversight of demining services.

8 International Monetary Fund, Vietnam: Statistical Appendix, IMF Staff Country Report 99/56, July 1999, Table 31, p. 33. Domestic economic data from this period is patchy and hard to interpret due to the transition from a centrally-planned to a market economy. However, the rise in foreign direct investment would have been accompanied by a similar rise in domestic investment.

9 The ‘Ottawa process’ refers to the campaign and negotiations leading to the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention (the ‘Ottawa Treaty’) and, subsequently, the work of the States Parties.
programmes (e.g. Afghanistan, Cambodia)\(^{10}\) ensured that the internal debates continued within the MoD.

**Initial steps: 1996–2006**

In 1996, the MoD established the Technology Centre for Bomb and Mine Disposal (BOMICO, now BOMICEN) and began a major expansion in equipment for the specialised demining units. These steps enlarged the military’s capacity for demining in support of development, and MoD subsequently issued instructions that only ‘certified’ units could undertake demining for civilian purposes. However, Vietnam’s rapid economic growth (see Figure 2) meant that the accredited units could not keep-up with demand for demining services. ‘Standard’ military units and private firms continued to obtain demining contracts, and operated in a largely unregulated fashion. It was clear that the first round of reforms were inadequate.

**Figure 2 – Growth in fixed investment\(^{11}\)**

External pressure also appeared in the form of complaints from members of the National Assembly that the Decree on Construction created a legal requirement for demining but there was no system in place to ensure the quality or cost-effectiveness of the work. In response, the Minister of Defence stated that the MoD would do the demining at low cost, leading BOMICO to initiate work on cost norms for demining.

Gradually, demining officials in the MoD also became more exposed to developments in the international mine action field. From 1996, international demining NGOs established continuing operations in Quang Tri, under agreements with the provincial government. During his official

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\(^{10}\) In addition, international operators first appeared in Quang Tri province in 1991 – initially to support international NGOs working on community development.

\(^{11}\) Gross fixed capital formation...includes land improvements...; plant, machinery, and equipment purchases; and the construction of roads, railways, and the like...  
visit to Vietnam in November 2000, President Clinton announced that the US would help Vietnam address its landmine/UXO contamination. Six months later, the US Department of State asked Vietnam Veterans of America Foundation (VVAF) to initiate a dialogue with the Government of Vietnam regarding a national landmine impact survey as an initial step in a US humanitarian demining assistance programme.

Progress was very slow however, in part because mine action was viewed to be demining only and the MoD took the lead on the Vietnamese side; it took years before sufficient trust was built to overcome the natural conservatism of defence officials to working with foreign governments and international non-governmental organisations (INGOs). Finally, in February 2004 an agreement was signed between MoD and VVAF to launch Phase 1 of the Vietnam Landmine Impact Survey (VLIS), covering the six central provinces.\footnote{The report on Phase 1 of the VLIS was released in July 2009.}

In a separate initiative, UNICEF and a number of INGOs began an MRE working group, in which the Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs (MOLISA) sometimes participated. With technical support from the GICHD, this led to the translation of a number of Guides and to the development of draft national standards for MRE.

The legal basis for demining also evolved over time, but in a piecemeal fashion. (See Textbox 3) In May 2006, Decision 96 finally provided MoD with a clear legal mandate for the management and implementation of demining throughout the country: “The Ministry of Defence shall be responsible for organizing the implementation of mine and ERW clearance nationwide… and for the safety of the projects and worksites during the construction and utilization related to the mines and ERW contamination.” The Decision specified that demining for resettlement, food security, poverty reduction and public investment projects would be financed by the national budget, while private investors would pay for demining in support of private construction.

Textbox 1 – Evolving legal basis for demining

| Programme 120 (1980-present) | authorisation for military to clear land for resettlement along the border with China (done only by military units). Since 2004 under Programme 120, military engineers have reportedly cleared around 95 km² of contaminated land in the provinces bordering China.\footnote{Landmine and Cluster Munition Monitor, Vietnam Country Profile. Accessed 24 October 2013.} |
| Programme 327 (1993-present) | National Reforestation Programme, incorporating modest amounts for demining (clearance often by firms) |
| Programme 135 (1998-present) | National Programme for Poverty Reduction, incorporating modest amounts for demining (clearance often by firms) |
| Programme 160 (2008-present) | governing clearance for economic development of communes on all borders (clearance often done by firms) |

In addition, the MoD would undertake ‘political-military tasks’ (i.e. tasks for military purposes plus tasks specifically assigned by the Government because they were deemed to be of national
importance, such as major infrastructure projects). The funding for these comes from the MoD budget (for military tasks) or from the State budget, as part of the ‘counterpart funding’ required by the World Bank and other development banks when they provide ‘soft’ loans.

In May 2000, Decree No 12 amended a number of provisions of Decree 52/1999 on the Regulation of Investment and Construction Management, including the following supplementary provision to Article 35: The Ministry of Defence shall assume prime responsibility and coordinate with localities in guiding and clearly defining areas where mine sweeping is required; and coordinate with the relevant ministries and branches in guiding mine sweeping on the construction ground. With Decision 96 in 2006, the MoD responsibility to “coordinate”, “guide” and “define” was strengthened to “organise” to ensure “safety of the projects and worksites during the construction and utilization...”

Decision 96 was followed by Circular 146 (Guidance on Implementing, including cost norms/standards), which also specified that all demining companies had to be accredited periodically by Engineering Command, and by Decision 122 (Allowances for deminers) and Decision 117 (cost norms for various ‘inland clearance tasks).

Responsibility was split between national MoD authorities and the nine regional and 63 provincial military offices; national authorities had to review and approve any proposal for clearance in excess of 30 ha, while provincial military offices handled smaller requests. For the latter, provincial military offices might assign military units; otherwise, they would arrange for a demining company to undertake the task. Most of these demining companies were connected in some manner to MoD.

Moving beyond the Ministry of Defence

In April 2008, MOLISA issued a Decision to establish the Vietnam Bomb and Mine Action Centre (VBMAC). The purpose of this initiative seems to be the creation of a civilian demining agency that would be eligible to receive grants for demining from international donors, which typically would not fund military operations.

The function of VBMAC was to “to mobilise, receive, manage and utilise the aid and assistance from foreign countries and international organisations to implement the clearance operations of remaining bomb and landmine/UXO from the past wars in Viet Nam.” Interestingly, even though it came under MOLISA, VBMAC had no mandate for MRE or victim assistance. Regardless, building on its earlier work with the MRE Working Group, UNICEF requested the GICHD to deliver a three-day workshop to VBMAC and BOMICEN personnel on the role and functions of a national MAC (including MRE and VA). The workshop was delivered in July 2009, after which UNICEF ended its support to mine action in Vietnam.

14 Decision No.598/QD-LDBTXH on the Establishment of the Viet Nam Bomb and Mine Action Centre, issued by the Minister of Labour, War Invalids and Social Affairs on 29 April 2008.
15 The US and Japan had earlier provided demining equipment to MoD (USD 10 million from the U.S. and USD 11.2 million from Japan) but these donations had not come through the development agencies of the donor countries. (Source: presentation by Senior Colonel Phan Duc Tuan, Vice Commander, Engineering Command/Vietnam, March 2010.)
VBMAC did receive USD 1.5 million for demining in Quang Tri from Japan, but has not received a continuing stream of international donations since then. Part of the reason is that, in fact, its managers and demining teams are military personnel who have been ‘double hatted’ to work in VBMAC: for example, the VBMAC Director is also the Director of BOMICEN. As well, VBMAC is housed in MoD facilities. As a result, financing for demining came primarily from the Government, followed by private investors, development projects (e.g. loans from international financial institutions\(^\text{17}\)) and, lastly, international donors.

The Government took a series of further steps starting in 2010. In April of that year, Prime Ministerial Decision 504\(^\text{19}\) signified the approval of both a National Mine Action Programme (often called ‘Programme 504’) and the National Mine Action Plan: 2010-2025.\(^\text{20}\) This represented the first clear plan for a national programme that incorporated including MRE and victim assistance in addition to demining. It also made clear the scope of Vietnam’s ambitions for its mine action programme. Three ministries – MoD, Ministry of Planning and Investment, and MOLISA – were assigned central roles. Lead responsibility was assigned to these ministries for seven tasks or functions, as listed in the following table:

\(^{17}\) Among donor countries, ODA (=Official Development Assistance) includes all grants and soft loans provided by a donor government for humanitarian and development work in what are known as “developing countries”. In Vietnam, however, ODA is understood to be only the grants and soft loans channelled through Vietnamese government agencies, which excludes aid delivered via UN agencies and INGOs.


\(^{19}\) No. 504/QĐ-TTg on the Approval of the National Mine Action Plan Period 2010-2025. The process leading to the formulation and approval of this national plan is discussed in the section on the History of the Strategic Planning Process.

\(^{20}\) This was broken into two periods: 2010-2015 and 2016-2025, with more detail on the objectives and activities planned for the 1\(^{st}\) period.
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<th>Mine Action Plan Tasks</th>
<th>MoD</th>
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<td>Resource mobilisation</td>
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In this regard, Programme 504 represented the type of national mine action programme with which the international community was familiar. But Decision 504 also contained surprises, particularly in terms of the size envisaged for the programme: it would be the largest in the world in terms of funding, and as large as all other programmes in the world combined in terms of areas to be cleared.21

Figure 4 – Annual financing requirements for the National Mine Action Plan

Another surprise was that significant elements of Programme 504 would be decentralised. Funds were to be transferred from the State budget to provinces to finance mine action projects in support of the socio-economic development plans of the local governments (provincial-district-commune). Initially, only the six heavily contaminated provinces in central Vietnam, covered by Phase 1 of the VLIS, were eligible. Once the VLIS is completed nationwide, other provinces will become eligible.

21 At least, all programmes for which clearance figures are reported by Landmine Monitor.
Decision 504 also referred to the need for MoD and MOLISA to develop a proposal on the establishment of the Government Steering Committee, to be submitted to the Prime Minister. This would establish an inter-ministerial national mine action authority, in accordance with both IMAS and standard Vietnamese practice for national programmes (e.g. the national programme on poverty reduction). This task took until late December 2010 when the Prime Minister issued Decision 2338 on the Establishment of the National Steering Committee of the National Mine Action Programme.

Decision 2338 also represented a surprise to much of the international community; the membership of Steering Committee 504 was extremely senior. The Prime Minister would chair, with the Ministers of Defence and of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs as co-Vice Chairs. Members included Vice Ministers from Defence; MOLISA; Planning and Investment (MPI); Finance; Natural Resources and Environment; and Foreign Affairs.22

As it turned out, it was not until eight months later in August 2011 that the members of Steering Committee 504 were officially appointed. This was followed in December by the 1st annual Vietnam Mine Action Forum; a nationally televised event opened by the Prime Minister and attended by a number of Vice Ministers, ambassadors, and the Resident Representative from UNDP. This served as the official launch of Programme 504, and the high profile accorded to it meant that much of the international community expected an acceleration of progress in implementing the national mine action programme.

Implementation of some initiatives did get underway quickly. Engineering Command began the VLIS in a number of provinces (the VLIS is now scheduled to be completed by the end of 2013, although data entry and analysis will take longer). As well, about VND 150 billion (USD 7.5 million) in both 2011 and 2012 were disbursed from the state (i.e. national) budget to provinces in central Vietnam for demining projects proposed by those provinces. MRE messages also started to appear on TV, and national mine action officials held two ‘joint efforts’ seminars in some of the central provinces. As well, in mid-2012 Vietnam sent a high-level delegation, led by

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22 Senior officials from the General Staff and the Political Department of the Vietnam People’s Army and the President of the Vietnam Union of Friendship Organizations (VUFO) were also appointed as members.
a Vice Minister of Defence, to the US to discuss the country’s mine action plans with the U.S. Government and the Department of Peacekeeping Operations at the UN (see Textbox 2).

Textbox 2 – Recent humanitarian demining initiatives beyond Programme 504

In 2011, the National Assembly approved the participation of Vietnamese troops in UN Peacekeeping missions. The UN and Vietnam agreed that military engineering units would be among the contributions. Accordingly, the 2012 high-level mission to the U.S. visited New York to meet UN officials in the Department of Peacekeeping Operations to discuss the requirements for military engineers and to present the necessary documents.

The previous year, Vietnam also proposed that humanitarian demining by militaries be adopted as “an area of practical cooperation” for the ASEAN Defence Ministers’ Meeting Plus (ADMM+) forum.24

However, progress on other fronts did not accelerate markedly. In addition, starting in 2011 there was a slowdown in demining by the military and demining firms due to severe budget cutbacks designed to lower the inflation rate in Vietnam (see Figure 5 and Figure 6).

Figure 5 – Annual expenditures for survey & clearance operations25

![Graph showing annual expenditures for survey & clearance operations from 2005 to 2012.](image)

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23 The ADMM is an organ of ASEAN. The annual ADMM allows ASEAN defence ministers to discuss current defence and security issues facing the region, and aims to promote mutual trust and confidence. ([www.asean.org/communities/asean-political-security-community/category/asean-defence-ministers-meeting-admm](http://www.asean.org/communities/asean-political-security-community/category/asean-defence-ministers-meeting-admm)) The biennial ADMM+ includes military representatives from eight non-ASEAN countries (China, India, Japan, South Korea, Australia, New Zealand, Russia and the USA) which have the capacity to influence and support military cooperation and security in South East Asia.


25 Data provided by Engineering Command. Figures for 2012 are estimates for the full year based on actual data to 25 September.
Concerned with the apparent lack of awareness among international donors of Vietnam’s mine action efforts and plans, in June 2012, members of the ‘Executive Office’ of Programme 504 (see Textbox 3) requested GICHD to conduct an assessment of the national mine action programme, focussing on the perceptions of the international community.

Textbox 3 – Organs of a national programme in Vietnam

When national programmes, such as that for mine action, are established in Vietnam, there are three ‘organs’ created, as follows:

- National Steering Committee (NSC 504) – the national authority; for mine action, it is an inter-ministerial committee of 12 (raised to 15 with Decision 386/2012), chaired by the Prime Minister
- Standing Board – a 21 member inter-ministerial committee of senior officials that prepares recommendations for adoption by the Steering Committee. Standing Board 504 is co-chaired by the Vice-Ministers from MoD and MOLISA who sit on the Steering Committee
- Executive Office – a group of mid-level (up to director-general) personnel seconded from the relevant ministries to serve as the secretariat to the Steering Committee and Standing Board.

In December 2010, Decision 504 outlined the members of NSC 504 and their roles, in terms of positions in the government or ministries. Formal appointments of individuals to the Steering Committee did not occur until August 2011. Similarly, there were delays in appointing individuals to Standing Board 504.

There have been more substantial delays concerning the formal establishment of Executive Office 504; this did not happen until September 2013. As a result, only one individual was working on the EO functions on a “full time basis” (he was also Director of BOMICEN and Director of VBMAC) and the EO had no “seal”, without which it could not stamp documents so
these could be issued directly to another government office (i.e. all documents had to go through the Minister’s Office in MoD to be stamped, creating significant delays).

The GICHID reported its findings, conclusions and recommendations at the 2nd annual Vietnam Mine Action Forum in December 2012. The conclusions of the assessment were:

- The approval of the National Mine Action Programme was widely welcomed but, to date, the pace of implementation has disappointed many stakeholders.
- The division of roles and responsibilities among MoD (BOMICEN and Engineering Command), VBMAC and the proposed Executive Office remains unclear to most stakeholders, and this lack of clarity represents a significant concern to many of them.
- The delay in providing adequate human and financial resources to discharge key functions that typically fall to a mine action centre (operations planning and coordination; information management; quality management) – perhaps because a final decision on roles and responsibilities has not been made – is a core problem, and would contribute to disappointing progress on other measures envisaged in the National Mine Action Plan: 2010-2015.
- Better progress can be expected in 2013 and beyond, assuming that the plans and budgets already prepared are approved on a timely basis.

Recommendations were:

1. Establish a new Viet Nam Mine Action Coordination Centre (VNMACC) to discharge the core MAC functions (quality management; national database management and reporting; operations planning and coordination), and appoint qualified personnel to it, on a full-time basis
2. House VNMACC, including the national database centre, in premises separate from those of BOMICEN and Engineering Command
3. Establish a mechanism to facilitate policy dialogue for mine action between the Government and its development partners.

The report and its recommendations were well-received by Vietnamese officials, and led to Decision 73827 by the Prime Minister on 13 May 2013 with the overall objective to “Mobilize and efficiently use every domestic and international resource in making efforts to minimize and finally overcome mine/ERW consequences in a sustainable manner; ensuring the safety for the people; assisting victims in their community re-integration and for the purpose of socio-economic development; ensuring the compliance with Vietnam law as well as other international treaties and agreements signed by Vietnam.”

Among other things, Decision 738 called for:

- Drafting a Decree to regulate mine action (including MRE and VA) to replace Decision 96, which covered only demining
- The development and submission for approval a proposal for the establishment of the

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27 No. 738/QD-TTg on approval of the National Mine Action Plan for the period up to 2015.
Vietnam Mine Action Centre (VNMAC),\textsuperscript{28} including projects for the construction of:
- VNMAC premises
- a Mine Action Training Centre
- the establishment and running of a national mine/ERW Database Management Centre, plus the development of mechanisms for collecting and sharing information
- the establishment of a Vietnam Mine Action Fund as a “social/charity fund”\textsuperscript{29}
- the establishment of a Vietnam Mine Action Association\textsuperscript{30}
- the establishment of a Government-donor coordination mechanism for mine action\textsuperscript{31}

Decision 738 basically endorsed all the recommendations made by the assessment team (establish a true national MAC; house this separate from MoD facilities; establish a Government-Donor policy coordination mechanism), and added some additional measures (the Fund, the Association, the formulation of a capacity development plan). The decision to draft a mine action Decree to replace Decision 96 on demining is particularly important.

Decision 738 also provided further information on the costing of ‘projects’ (i.e. MRE, VA and demining), and the financing plan for the period 2013-15 (see Figure 7).\textsuperscript{32}

\textbf{Figure 7 – Financing plan for Programme 504 for 2013-2015}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{financing_plan}
\caption{Financing plan for Programme 504 for 2013-2015}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{28} This was intended as a ‘true’ MAC, unlike VBMAC which was an operator. The fate of VBMAC remains unclear, although it will likely continue as a ‘civilian’ operator under MOLISA.
\textsuperscript{29} In Vietnam, “A [social/charity] Fund is a legal entity that has its own seal, bank account, and logo. Its purpose is to develop and support various activities, e.g. cultural, educational, health, athletic, scientific, charitable, and humanitarian activities.” It is not-for-profit and must publish its financial accounts. The establishment and operation of a Fund are regulated by Government Decree 30/2012/ND-CP dated April 12, 2012 on the Organization and Operation of Social Funds and Charity Funds. (Source: Forms of Not-for-Profit Organization Establishment in Vietnam, Russin & Vecchi [international legal counsellors], 11 June 2012)
\textsuperscript{30} In Vietnam “An association is a voluntary organization of Vietnamese citizens or organizations conducting the same business, having the same interests, or that are united by a common goal.” These are regulated by Government Decree 45/2010/ND-CP dated April 21, 2010 and Decree 33/2012/ND-CP dated April 21, 2010 amending Decree 45. (Ibid)
\textsuperscript{31} Other measures included (i) a capacity development programme, and (ii) a resource mobilisation strategy.
\textsuperscript{32} The costs for some activities covered 2012-2015, so there is some imprecision.
Vietnamese officials state that 60 per cent of the financing will come from the State Budget (including loans to the Government from international financial institutions such as the World Bank), and the rest (almost USD 50 million/year) is targeted from international donors.

**CURRENT STATUS & PLANS**

**Mine Action Pillars**

**Demining**

Unsurprisingly, demining dominates Vietnam’s mine action programme, with priorities set by four different sets of entities: the national government; sub-national governments; private investors; and development NGOs. These constituted four ‘market segments’ as depicted in Figure 8 and summarised in the following tables.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Priorities</th>
<th>Who decides</th>
<th>Who demines</th>
<th>Source of funds</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>National</td>
<td>MPI, MoD, etc.</td>
<td>Army, firms</td>
<td>Taxes, bonds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sub-national</td>
<td>Province-district-commune governments</td>
<td>Firms, demining INGOs</td>
<td>Transfers from state budget</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private sector</td>
<td>Private investor</td>
<td>Firms</td>
<td>Private investors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Development NGOs</td>
<td>Development NGO</td>
<td>Demining INGOs</td>
<td>Donors</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organisation</th>
<th>Locations</th>
<th>Demining Personnel</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>People’s Army of Vietnam</td>
<td>National</td>
<td>3,000+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VBMAC</td>
<td>Central provinces</td>
<td>Up to 500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demining firms (52)</td>
<td>National</td>
<td>2,000+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MAG</td>
<td>Quang Tri, Quang Binh, Quang Nam</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NPA</td>
<td>Quang Tri &amp; Thua Thien Hue</td>
<td>400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peace Trees Vietnam</td>
<td>Quang Tri</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SODI</td>
<td>Quang Tri &amp; Thua Thien Hue</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

One clear problem is that most provincial governments – and none in the most heavily contaminated parts of the country – raise sufficient taxes to pay for their demining requirements. International demining NGOs have programmes in a few provinces, which support provincial priorities, but these are far too small to meet requirements. This has meant that there have been few demining resources available to support many of the tasks identified by provincial, district and commune authorities. In large part, Programme 504 is designed to plug this gap by channelling funds to provincials, allowing them to engage demining operators to support the socio-economic development plans of the provinces, districts and communes.

Another problem is that few development NGOs have included the costs for demining in support of their community development investments, so the demining priorities of these NGOs have often received little attention. (These unsupported priorities are depicted as uncoloured

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33 Estimates are from various sources, including Sr Col Tuan, Deputy Commander (Retired), Engineering Command, Sr Col Tung, Deputy Commander, Engineering Command, and from Landmine & Cluster Munition Monitor, Vietnam Country Report.
ovals in Figure 8.) The initial plans for Programme 504 did not address this directly, other than encouraging donors to provide more resources for mine action, which they could choose to channel through demining INGOs.

Demining projects that have recently been proposed reflect the focus on channelling funds to priorities identified by provincial authorities.  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Province/districts</th>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Budget 2014-15 (USD)</th>
<th>Total cost estimate (USD)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Quang Tri</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Trieu Phong</td>
<td>4,074 ha</td>
<td>1.10 million</td>
<td>8.10 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Dakrong</td>
<td>7,288 ha</td>
<td>1.50 million</td>
<td>14.50 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Gio Linh &amp; Hai Lang</td>
<td>92,000 ha</td>
<td>2.00 million</td>
<td>186.00 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quang Binh</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Le Thuy</td>
<td>49,800 ha</td>
<td>1.50 million</td>
<td>70.00 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Quang Ninh</td>
<td>740 ha</td>
<td>1.05 million</td>
<td>1.05 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thua Thien Hue</td>
<td>159,000 ha</td>
<td>2.00 million</td>
<td>249.00 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ha Tinh</td>
<td>38,100 ha</td>
<td>2.00 million</td>
<td>52.00 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nghe An</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Nghi Loc</td>
<td>620 ha</td>
<td>1.03 million</td>
<td>1.03 million</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

MRE
MRE has been carried-out since the mid-1990s by INGOs, mainly in a few of the central provinces, and by Project RENEW (a quasi-government agency in Quang Tri province established with support of some INGOs), which coordinates to some degree with the Quang Tri chapters of the Vietnam Women’s Union, a ‘mass organisation’. Until 2010, UNICEF coordinated a MRE working group, but it no longer works in mine action in Vietnam. Starting in 2012, MOLISA began to put RE messages on national television.

MOLISA aims to attract modest international funding to support MRE but, as of October 2013, has not yet formulated a concrete proposal for international support.

Victim Assistance
There is no national surveillance system for mine/ERW accidents and victims. Emergency medical treatment for victims is provided at local hospitals and clinics. A number of INGOs provide support for mine/UXO victims, mostly as part of each organisation’s work persons with disabilities but in a few cases focussing purely on mine/UXO victims. In addition, Project RENEW has a significant VA programme in Quang Tri, where the Vietnamese Red Cross has also undertaken some VA activities with support from the regional ICRC office in Bangkok.

As part of Programme 504, MOLISA has proposed two projects: one to pilot community re-integration for survivors and the other to construct or upgrade facilities (medical centres;

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34 Data for these and other projects are taken from a briefing book prepared for the high-level Programme 504 delegation to Europe in October 2013.
commune health stations; two regional orthopaedic & rehabilitation centres; social work & social protection centres in 11 provinces).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project name/component</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Budget (USD)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Community re-integration of ERW victims</td>
<td>Quang Binh, Quang Nam, Quang Tri provinces</td>
<td>1.0 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Systems for healthcare, rehabilitation &amp; social services</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Construct/upgrade medical centres &amp; health stations</td>
<td>11 highly impacted provinces</td>
<td>3.3 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Enhance regional orthopaedic &amp; rehabilitation centres</td>
<td></td>
<td>1.0 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Upgrade social work &amp; social protection centres</td>
<td></td>
<td>1.1 million</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**National Authorities**

Members of the Executive Office⁵⁵ have been working since May 2013 on plans for various items from Decision 738, including:

1. A Mine Action Decree (to replace Decision 96) – draft prepared and being circulated prior to finalisation and decision, then submission to the National Assembly
2. Mandate and organisation structure for the VNMAC – draft prepared and being circulated prior to finalisation and submission for decision (see Figure 9 for the organisation chart as of October 2013)
3. Construction of VNMAC premises, including facilities for a Mine Action Training Centre and the national data base centre, plus regional data base centres
4. Mandate, membership and procedures for a Mine Action Partnership Group (MAPG – i.e. a Government-Donor aid coordination body that will serve as a policy forum – this will probably include INGO and Vietnamese CSO representatives)
5. Mandate, governance and policies for a mine action fund to enable pooling of financial contributions from the Government of Vietnam and donors.

Vietnam is seeking international support for the construction of the training centre and for the national and regional database centres.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project</th>
<th>Total budget (USD)</th>
<th>International contribution (USD)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>VNMAC + National Training Centre</td>
<td>15.00 million</td>
<td>6.2 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Data Base Centre</td>
<td>1.06 million</td>
<td>0.2 million</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Progress has been slow, in part because the executive office was not formally established until September 2013. Until its formal establishment, the executive office had no legal presence. Among other things, this meant it could not communicate directly with other government agencies, so all communication had to be sent via the Minister’s Office of the MoD, which could lead to delays of a week or, frequently, more.

⁵⁵ Technically, this was not formally established until late August 2013, but personnel from MoD, MOLISA, and MPI in particular have been functioning as the *de facto* Executive Office.
Regardless, most of the documents to support the next round of decisions are ready and decisions are expected before the end of the year. At that point, the processes of filling posts in VNMAC and beginning construction of buildings for VNMAC, the training centre, and the national data base centre, can begin. From past experience, these processes will also take time.

These delays, plus delays in fielding a UNDP team of international and national consultants to work on a resource mobilisation strategy, meant that the MAPG was not established in 2013. As a result, Vietnam is considering the re-scheduling of the next Vietnam Mine Action Forum from December 2013 to March 2014.

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36 Earlier indications were that the training centre and national data base centre & regional centres, plus the consultancy unit, would report via the Deputy Director, Planning. In addition, VNMAC is to implement demining projects ‘as may be assigned by NSC 504 and the Standing Board’. This may be restricted to emergency response, but remains unclear,
HISTORY OF STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESSES

CONTEXT AND BEGINNINGS

Following the Second Indochina War in 1975, demining was simply a component of the post-conflict reconstruction programme (which is normal for countries following widespread and prolonged conflict). Large-scale demining efforts stopped when the military became involved in wars in Cambodia and with China, and resumed once those wars ended, with a focus on clearance of the Chinese-laid minefields in the North. Demining would also be provided on an ‘as required’ basis to support development. (In addition, war veterans who were familiar with landmines and UXO would undertake ‘informal’ clearance for their own purposes and within their local communities.)

Although undoubtedly there were MRE efforts during the wars and in the immediate post-conflict periods, these were seen as civil defence activities, organised locally. Victim Assistance for at least some mine/UXO victims came in the form of emergency and on-going medical care, but mine/UXO victims were just one category among many of civilian war victims, not as an integral part of something called ‘mine action’.

Therefore, Vietnam did not share the same understanding as has prevailed in the international community for the past two decades on what constitutes mine action: it undertook the demining, MRE and VA activities, but saw these as separate functions. The principal activity by far – demining – was understood as a military affair. As well, the People’s Army of Vietnam still is seen as a nation-building institution and is expected to contribute to domestic socio-economic development. Close connections between the Party/Government and the army made it natural for the Government to assign military units, even for purely civilian tasks.

Initial efforts to adjust the demining programme appear to be pragmatic responses to the decline in capacity (the demobilisation following the end of the conflict in Cambodia in 1988) coupled with the increase in demand for demining services to support development following the Doi Moi economic reforms of 1986. The first proposals were to reconstitute specialised demining units, followed by the recommendation to establish a bomb and mine technology centre (first proposed in 1993 and implemented in 1996).

These steps proved insufficient to keep pace with demand, and cracks began to emerge (demining done by unaccredited units; poor quality and rising costs leading to criticism in the National Assembly; rise in civilian casualties, probably associated with high prices for scrap metal). As well, rapid coastal development (ports, tourist facilities, etc.) created demand for underwater demining; something for which the MoD lacked both equipment and know-how.

At the same time, Vietnam was opening to the world both economically and in terms of its diplomatic engagement. Demining INGOs appeared in Quang Tri and the U.S. was pushing for closer engagement on many fronts, including mine action. The MoD’s natural conservatism meant it was a slow process for members of the international community to build trust; the signing of the MoU between VVAF and MoD in 2004 followed three years of discussions. However, the VLIS was successful in the eyes of MoD, so trust grew.
Growing awareness of the existence of an international mine action community among the relevant MoD and (through the MRE Working Group) MOLISA officials probably led to the decision to create VBMAC in 2008. This can also be seen as another pragmatic step, designed to attract donor funds for demining (VBMAC had no mandate for RE or VA). Formally, VBMAC was under a civil service ministry (MOLISA) which could receive official development assistance but it was staffed almost entirely with MoD personnel and attracted little donor support.

EMERGENCE OF A STRATEGIC APPROACH AND PLAN

Outsiders have rather little insight into the motivations underlying efforts by Vietnamese officials to introduce more substantial reforms to mine action. Perhaps it was the relative lack of success in obtaining funding for VBMAC that led Vietnamese officials to conclude they had to reach beyond the donors based in Vietnam and engage with the mine action diplomats and practitioners at international mine action meetings and workshops.

Regardless of the motivations, the tipping point appears to have been March 2009 when the Deputy Commander of Engineering Command, plus the Director of VBMAC (and BOMICEN), accompanied VVAF to Vientiane to attend a workshop on Priority-Setting for Mine Action organised by the GICHG. They report that this workshop gave them a far better understanding that Vietnam needed a comprehensive strategy for mine action rather than a series of individual initiatives, such as the establishment of VBMAC. This encouraged them to work on what would emerge as Decision 504, issued about a year later in April 2010.

Again, outsiders also have little insight into the processes through which Decision 504 was agreed as these processes took place within the government system, without the direct participation of international advisors. The international mine action community is also used to dealing with ‘standalone’ mine action programmes, largely divorced from the standard government structures and dependent on donor resources and international expertise. In contrast, Vietnam’s programme clearly is a part of the government structure and follows a governance model that is common in Vietnam for ‘national programmes’.

Regardless, Decision 504 was clearly a strategy rather than simply a pragmatic step. It set out a long-term plan for an integrated mine action programme under civilian oversight, complete with an inter-ministerial governance structure. It included a budget and a financing plan. It also called for greater efforts to engage the international mine action community. Significant delegations from Vietnam attended the Annual UN and National Programme Directors Meeting in Geneva (March 2010) and the First Meeting of States Parties of the Convention on Cluster Munitions (CCM) in Lao PDR in November of that year, shortly after which they held a Government-Donor ‘roundtable’ on mine action.

Exchanges during this Government-Donor roundtable were illuminating. A number of donors stressed that they would only provide funding if mine action were aligned with Vietnam’s five-year Socio-Economic Development Plan: 2011-2015 (SEDP, which had just being finalised but not translated and distributed). In the eyes of Vietnamese officials, Programme 504 is clearly aligned with development; indeed, most survey and clearance undertaken in Vietnam had always been conducted in direct support of public and private development investments.
Representatives from MPI pointed out that appropriate reference had been explicitly included in the SEDP.\textsuperscript{37} However, donors appeared unaware of these facts; perhaps they had difficulty reconciling the fact that a mine action programme dominated by the military could be aligned with socio-economic development.

Vietnam officials also have adapted the strategy along the way, most notably with Decision 738 in May 2013, when the Prime Minister agreed to establish a true Vietnam mine action centre (VNMAC).\textsuperscript{38} This decision followed the assessment of Programme 504 commissioned by the Executive Office. For that, the Executive Office requested the GICHD and VVAF focus explicitly on the perceptions of the international community: an unusual step and one seemingly at odds with the how Decision 504 had been developed entirely by government officials. It suggests recognition that the process of developing the national mine action strategy had not been sufficiently open to donor inputs: ‘national ownership’ should not imply a strategic planning process that only involved government officials if Vietnam was to attract donor support.

The overall slow pace of putting Programme 504 on an operational footing continues to frustrate. The pace probably reflects (i) ‘turf battles’ among ministries (common in governments around the world), (ii) delays in securing a broad consensus on key decisions based on realistic understanding among officials (including very senior ones who would have scant time to devote to mine action), and (iii) sequencing issues, two obvious examples of which are:

- the formal establishment of the Executive Office had to await that of the National Steering Committee and then the Standing Board; however, until the Executive Office was established, personnel could not work full time on putting Programme 504 in place, and could not communicate directly with other government agencies, delaying the appointment of individuals to the National Steering Committee and the Standing Board
- VNMAC needs to be established before staff can be appointed, but the shortage of staff means it takes longer to finalise plans for VNMAC

Progress in implementation is likely to remain slow through 2014, but should pick up pace as additional personnel are appointed and the Government increases its engagement with donors.

\textsuperscript{37} It includes a brief reference to “the National Mine Action Program to reduce the effects of bombs, mines and ERW” in the section on Environmental Protection, Disaster Preparedness and Climate Change.

\textsuperscript{38} The other key decisions agreed at that point – the commitment to a Mine Action Partnership Group and a funding mechanism – were more steps towards implementing what had been envisaged in Decision 504 of 2010. Perhaps donors wanted more? However, given the size and economic dynamism of Vietnam, the scope of initiatives covered by the SEDP, and the fact that Vietnam had been undertaking demining for decades as part of its ‘routine business’, a single mention of Programme 504 in the SEDP is probably appropriate.
KEY FINDINGS: GOOD PRACTICES, MAIN CHALLENGES AND LESSONS LEARNT

NATIONAL DIMENSIONS

NATIONAL OWNERSHIP
Clearly, the Government of Vietnam displays a strong sense of ownership over the mine action programme, and particularly demining, which it has long recognised and valued as making an essential contribution to broader development. The Government has always paid most of the costs of demining. Although it is increasing its international engagement, Vietnamese officials formulated the basic strategy and define the specific issues for which they seek international expertise, and how that expertise is provided. Mine action officials have also declined offers of technical assistance when they felt it was badly designed or premature.\(^{39}\)

USE OF GOVERNMENT SYSTEMS
The Vietnamese Government is establishing the institutional architecture for Programme 504 following the model used for other national programmes to achieve inter-ministerial cooperation. These mechanisms and committees are well known to Vietnamese officials; they exist in reality rather than simply on paper.

In addition, Vietnamese officials rely on policies that have been articulated through decrees and decisions at very senior levels, even though there often are significant delays in getting these decrees and decisions approved. These policies are then binding on all relevant government ministries and agencies, achieving ‘whole of government’ adoption rather than being recognised only within the mine action programme.

Another encouraging feature is that Vietnam is decentralising the delivery of mine action services in line with the broader constitutional and legislative framework of the country and the division of authority among national, provincial, district and commune governments. Mechanisms are being put in place to ensure that funds flow to lower levels of government, so these officials have the resources required to discharge their responsibilities vis-à-vis mine action. These mechanisms also incorporate oversight by the national level (although it remains a question whether the oversight measures will prove to be adequate).

ADAPTING NOT ADOPTING INTERNATIONAL PRACTICES
While Vietnamese demining officials are eager to learn from international partners about new survey and clearance approaches, equipment, and so on, they have avoided the wholesale adoption of many standard practices, some of which appear to have hindered progress elsewhere. For example, Vietnamese officials have resisted the exclusion of the military from humanitarian demining, but have also allowed commercial firms (although these are connected with the military) and INGO operators. They have also retained their segmented market structure (military does tasks of national importance; firms do commercial demining and smaller projects; INGO operators support community development INGOs and sub-national

\(^{39}\) For example, they turned down a one-year extension of a technical advisor assigned to the national data base unit because this was premature (i.e. the VLIS was not completed).
governments). This meant, for example, that the army was not burdened by the cost of thousands of ‘surplus’ deminers when both national infrastructure spending and private investment declined markedly in 2011. It also means it should be able to scale up service delivery in a decentralised manner (i.e. commercial firms responding to increased demand in some provinces but not others) rather than via a ‘central planning’ approach.

As well, unlike what has happened in many countries, Vietnamese mine action officials have not lost sight of the fact that, while explosives contamination may be reasonably static, the impact of that contamination is dynamic, changing with the pattern of economic growth and socio-economic development. Following the ‘big push’ to clean surface and shallow contamination in populated or productive areas, and continued, proactive clearance of known minefields after that, they have targeted UXO survey and clearance efforts on areas slated for development (i.e. where there will be a change in land use) instead of targeting contamination.

This seems to be the appropriate approach when faced with the ‘3-D UXO contamination’ that results from aerial bombing. Clearance of all areas to the depth necessary to find buried bombs would be prohibitively expensive and slow. Instead, areas are cleared to a depth that allows safe use of the land for planned purposes. This, of course, means that few if any areas will be released unconditionally as safe; rather, they will be released as safe for planned land use.

This “adapting, not adopting” approach might also be termed “additionality”: build on what is already in place and working, and add new capacities and techniques selectively, rather than adopt wholesale an international model which was developed in the context of failed states.

The high degree of national ownership, the significant financing from government sources, the use of government systems, the continuing role of the military in humanitarian demining and the emergence of a national commercial demining industry mean that transition is unlikely to be a significant issue in the future, as it has in so many countries with donor-dependent mine action programmes.

**INTERNATIONAL DIMENSIONS**

**LIGHT INTERNATIONAL FOOTPRINT**

Given that Vietnamese officials are retaining ownership of the national mine action programme, relying on national systems, and attempting to adapt rather than adopt the international template, the international mine action community has a relatively ‘light footprint’. Features include:

- operators have provincial, not national, connections;
- no UN agency is active in mine action; and
- comparatively little international money has been expended to date.

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40 Landmines and cluster munition remnants generally are on the surface or in the first 30 cm of the ground. Accordingly, clearance techniques that detect devices to 30 cm mean that clearance is ‘two-dimensional’: the length times the width of the area suspected of contamination. Aerial bombs can be buried far deeper, and will not be discovered by standard mine detectors, dogs, etc. Therefore, aerial bombing results in a three-dimensional contamination problem.
PIVOTAL ROLE OF VVAF

The role played by the VVAF\(^{41}\) – an INGO – in supporting Vietnam’s Programme 504 is unique in international mine action. Building on its long engagement with the MoD beginning with the VLIS, and the fact that it is fully localised (i.e. all employees are Vietnamese), VVAF has local knowledge and language skills, and commands trust within MoD and, more recently, other government agencies involved in Programme 504. It also has low costs relative to UN agencies and other INGOs, which typically have expatriate personnel in managerial and ‘skill positions’ (e.g. Mine Action Operations Managers).

VVAF has also adopted what appears to be an appropriate strategy. To keep its costs down, VVAF has not sought to acquire its own technical expertise in demining.\(^{42}\) Instead, it plays a brokerage role; bringing-in appropriate expertise from international partners for short term missions when opportunities present themselves. This allows it to capitalise on its comparative strengths (high trust with officials; local knowledge; language skills; low costs). It also has placed a premium of facilitating the engagement of key mine action officials with the international community; often cooperating with the GICHD, NPA and, most recently, MAG to ensure strong representation from Vietnam at important meetings and workshops.

Textbox 4 – Cooperation among international mine action actors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VVAF’s close relationship with the relevant national officials from MoD and other government agencies, plus the absence of UN mine action involvement in recent years, creates a very different context for cooperation among international mine action organisations. VVAF understands the mine action industry, and clearly it has the capability to plan and act strategically, but it lacks the expertise to provide technical and operational advice to BOMICEN, VBMAC, etc. Accordingly, it sought to broker-in this expertise when required. To date, most of this has been provided by the GICHD, and the Programme 504–VVAF–GICHD partnership has been cemented through tripartite MOUs (originally with MoD and MOLISA, but since March 2013 with National Steering Committee 504.</th>
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<td>But cooperation among international mine action actors has been broader and appears to be strengthening. The level of the GICHD involvement has been made possible by sub-contracts from MAG for the GICHD to take the lead in supporting capacity development for national authorities.(^{43}) As well, NPA has been coordinating more actively with both VVAF (e.g. for ensuring strong delegations from Vietnam to meetings of States Parties to the Convention on Cluster Munitions) and the GICHD (e.g. for piloting, with Engineering Command, new survey and clearance approaches) to accelerate progress on NPA’s priorities in Vietnam.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There are, of course, risks in this approach. Cooperation is not institutionalised; rather, it has based on a mix of personal and broader organisational connections.(^{44}) The departure of key</td>
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\(^{41}\) Technically, VVAF was absorbed by an American NGO called the International Center. Understandably, it continued using the VVAF name in Vietnam, where it is now known as IC/VVAF.

\(^{42}\) VVAF has considerable experience and expertise in disability programming.

\(^{43}\) The original sub-contract was for DFID-funded activities, but another is scheduled concerning an Irish Aid grant to MAG.

\(^{44}\) For example, Vietnam is only one of a number of countries covered by sub-contracts from MAG to GICHD, and represents an organisational connection.
individuals could easily weaken the effectiveness of the cooperation.

**RISKS**

**INSUFFICIENT OVERSIGHT**

Of course, each of the key features listed as strengths of the strategic planning process in Vietnam could also represent a risk; that is the nature of decision-making under uncertainty. For example, Vietnam’s approach to demining has emphasised the survey and clearance of large areas at low cost. This has allowed infrastructure and other development projects, as well as private investments, to proceed with reasonable safety. However, the scope of demining activities exceeds what national authorities can inspect to assure quality.

The same is true with the emergence of a large number of commercial demining firms; national authorities do not have the capacity to re-examine these periodically to renew or revoke accreditation. Even when VNMAC is established and staffed, the capacity of national authorities for Quality Management will be modest given the scale of demining operations and the number of operators. The fact that most commercial firms have roots in the MoD is another concern; will VNMAC be in a position to enforce national standards?

More broadly, like many socialist states, the MoD in Vietnam is allowed – and perhaps even encouraged – to establish commercial enterprises: Vietnam’s MoD has substantial business operations in construction, telecommunications, and other sectors. Originally, this approach seems to have been designed so the military could generate its own funds to cover some MoD costs, reducing the strain on the national budget. There is, however, a risk of malfeasance, particularly if the MoD and, even more so, its affiliated companies are not subject to the same degree of scrutiny as are other government ministries. Mine action officials have planned measures to enhance national oversight of provincial demining programmes, but there remains a question of whether these will prove adequate.

**DONOR FAILURE**

There is also the risk that, given the strong national ownership exhibited by Vietnam and the use of government systems, mine action donors will largely ignore Vietnam’s request for assistance. Development agencies have generally been happy with Vietnam’s performance in accelerating economic growth and reducing poverty, and have been generally supportive by channelling funds through the government budget and pooled funding mechanisms. But most donor officials who work on mine action are not familiar with Vietnam or, more generally, with nationally-owned programmes that are run effectively; they are used to supporting donor-dominated programmes, often in failed states. The fact that the MoD remains in a dominant position within Programme 504 could represent another hurdle for many donors.

As well, international funding for mine action has been stable for some years and may already be falling. Donor support for Programme 504 on anything like the scale that Vietnamese officials

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45 “Poverty fell from 60% over the national poverty line in 1990 to...a likely 10-12 per cent in 2010. This gives donors confidence that their aid will be used effectively, despite significant institutional weaknesses.” Marcus Cox, Tran Thi Hanh, Tran Hung, and Dao Dinh, *Paris Declaration/Hanoi Core Statement Phase 2 Evaluation: Vietnam Country Evaluation*, January 2011, pp i-ii.
hope for could imply significant cuts to many other national mine action programmes. Perhaps this would be warranted given the scale of contamination in Vietnam, but would donors make this type of difficult choice?

Even if donors substantially increase their financial support to mine action in Vietnam, will they support the national mine action programme or, instead, simply provide larger grants to INGOs? Demining INGOs have the potential to make great contributions in Vietnam, but their costs are far higher than military units or demining firms because of their continued dependence on expatriate managers for the country programme and operations. Working with provincial governments and frequently rotated, for the most part these expatriates do not possess sufficient knowledge of the country or the Vietnamese language to dramatically scale-up their programmes. Instead, their comparative advantage would be in piloting innovations (particularly in survey and clearance) and, perhaps, in working with the emerging provincial mine action programmes to strengthen operational planning and coordination at the provincial level.

OPERATIONAL CHALLENGES

Two operational challenges warrant mention because they have such important strategic implications. First, Programme 504 envisages significant increases in the flow of resources to provincial mine action activities. Such decentralisation offers many potential benefits (e.g. better mine action support to ‘bottom-up’ priorities), but provincial governments have far less capacity than the national authorities, and most have little experience in planning and managing mine action operations.

Second, what to do about cluster munitions? The Vietnam Government has not signed the CCM but has repeatedly stated that it is considering this step. Signing would likely result in additional funding, but would also represent a change from Vietnam’s demand-led approach to demining because the Treaty’s obligations would require Vietnam to find and destroy cluster munition remnants within a specific time period. The scale of cluster munition contamination is not well known, but NPA has been working in Vietnam and elsewhere in South East Asia to develop more efficient and rapid approaches to documenting its extent.
ANNEXES

ANNEX I – INDIVIDUALS INTERVIEWED
The information for this case study was obtained during a number of missions from 2011-August 2013 to consult with national and provincial government officials, representatives from donor and UN agencies, and managers of mine action INGOs active in Vietnam on a variety of issues relating to Programme 504. Sr. Colonel Canh, Director of both VBMAC and BOMICEN, and Sr Col Tuan, Deputy Commander of Engineering Command until December 2012, were particularly knowledgeable about the history of mine action in Vietnam, and about the current status and future plans for Programme 504.

More focussed interviews with Sr Col Tuan on the case study itself were held on 22 March 2013, 24 June 2013 and 26 June 2013.