

GICHD Insights

PLANNING FOR COMPLETION

INTRODUCTION

Completion, generally understood as State Parties fulfilling their Article 5 obligations on identifying and clearing mined areas, lies at the heart of the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention (APMBC) and plays a central role in achieving its aim of ending the suffering and casualties caused by anti-personnel mines “for all people, for all time”. This brief stresses the pivotal role of robust information management (IM) systems and processes as enablers for evidence and results-based completion planning processes. It also underlines the centrality of the principle of *all reasonable effort*¹ and the importance of defining it based on the local context. The brief further highlights how planning for completion (including residual contamination² management and staff transition) can leverage connections and strengthen transparent communication, information sharing and coordination between national and international partners, thereby strengthening national ownership. The brief draws on the GICHD’s experience in supporting and implementing inclusive completion planning processes and presents concrete examples from Sri Lanka. The brief concludes by summarizing findings and recommendations and shows how inclusive completion planning processes can facilitate the implementation of the Convention.

NORMATIVE FRAMEWORK

While the Convention itself does not include specific guidance on completion, the Oslo Declaration on a mine-free world committed states to intensifying efforts to complete time-bound obligations “with the urgency that completion requires”. Also, the Oslo Action Plan contained several references to Article 5 completion, including Action 1 and Action 19 on the requirement to develop evidence-based national strategies and workplans “to fulfil and implement convention obligations as soon as possible”. Furthermore, Action 26 urges states to ensure that national strategies and workplans for completion make provisions for a sustainable national capacity to address previously unknown mined areas.

Although the international mine action standards (IMAS) do not explicitly reference completion of Article 5

obligations,³ many chapters and related Technical Notes for Mine Action (TNMAs) provide critical guidance on key areas,⁴ promoting and advancing safe, effective and efficient completion processes. The central land release principle of *all reasonable effort* should be at the heart of any completion planning process and should be defined based on local needs and realities. When planning for completion, States Parties are urged to consult guidance in relevant IMAS and TNMA 07.11/03 on all reasonable effort.

PLANNING FOR COMPLETION: KEY CONSIDERATIONS

Mine action is implemented in conflict and post-conflict contexts by a range of national and international governmental and non-governmental actors. National strategies that are comprehensive, context-specific, and evidence-based allow affected states and their partners to gain greater clarity on the remaining contamination, to communicate consistently and transparently, make informed decisions, mobilize and allocate resources, and prioritize activities. This helps maximize the impact of mine action efforts and minimize the risks to communities affected by explosive ordnance. Strong government engagement in completion planning processes has further shown to strengthen national ownership.

Consultative, timely planning process

Inclusive and participatory planning processes allow States Parties to profit from diverse experience and expertise, identify varied needs and priorities, and strengthen their ownership of the mine action programme. Experience shows that stakeholders who have participated in planning processes and have contributed to identifying strategic priorities often have a greater sense of ownership of the strategy document and its subsequent implementation. The involvement of relevant government ministries is critical as it can further strengthen national ownership and sustainability. The responsibility to manage residual contamination commonly sits with national security forces. Examples from Zimbabwe and Sri Lanka show that involving these actors in planning processes early on will increase their knowledge of mine action while providing

them with opportunities to exchange with mine action partners and benefit from capacity enhancement and training opportunities. Ministries that are responsible for explosive ordnance risk education (EORE) should also be involved, to ensure that EORE structures and processes are appropriate, sustainable, and owned by relevant government actors and partners.⁵

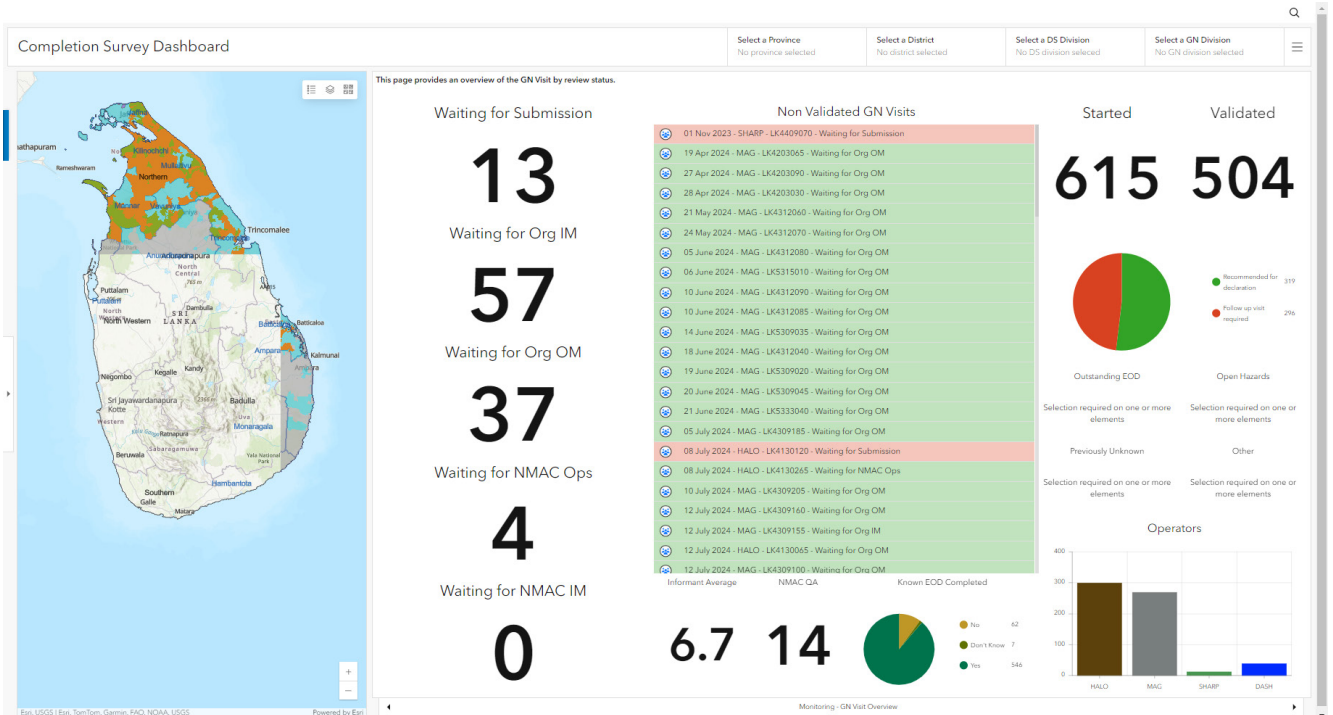
Information management

Examples from a range of national mine action programmes illustrate that robust IM systems are prerequisites for any planning process. In Sri Lanka, a data clean-up exercise accompanied the completion process to ensure that the national database was as accurate, reliable and up to date as possible. Also, the development of a completion survey dashboard, presenting survey results in ‘real time’, including information on the various steps of quality control validation, provided greater accountability (by clearly defining roles and responsibilities) and transparency (by showing progress). Moreover, the use of mobile data collection tools and compatible geographic information system software reduced the risk of human error, allowing for validation, storage, analysis, reporting and dissemination of information. It further allowed for a smooth transfer of data to be displayed on the completion survey dashboard. Sri Lanka’s completion process and the emphasis on quality data also contributed to strengthened collaboration between operations and IM staff, thereby addressing long-standing silos – not unique to Sri Lanka – between these teams. The programme shared dashboard log-in details with donors, allowing them to monitor completion survey progress, facilitating transparent information sharing and coordination.

Holistic approach: the example of Sri Lanka’s national mine action completion strategy

Completion planning processes provide State Parties with precious opportunities to consider broader aspects related to completion – beyond Article 5 – together with a range of national and international partners. When planning for completion, affected states are encouraged to consider interrelated themes, including the development of national capacities to manage residual contamination, and staff transition. The former includes ensuring that states have the required national capacities (human, technical and financial) to manage residual contamination in a sustainable manner, that the supporting national systems, processes, and legislation are appropriate, and that there is a sustainable IM system to support these efforts. The TNMA on residual risk management⁶ emphasises that residual risk management policies/procedures require a review of the established institutional architecture, as well as the development of appropriate evidence-based systems, tools, and processes. Staff transition processes seek to provide deminers with new professional skills through a structured, sequenced and tailored training process, allowing them to seek alternative, sustainable livelihoods once proactive survey and clearance activities have been completed. In Sri Lanka, this process has been guided by staff consultation and assessments, to ensure the training is gender- and diversity-responsive and tailored.

Sri Lanka’s completion planning process, and its National Mine Action Completion Strategy 2023–2027 illustrate how broader aspects can be consolidated under a completion strategy umbrella, strengthening the complementarity



Sri Lanka completion survey dashboard

between different areas. The Strategy includes commitments to defining and implementing a standardized completion survey, based on a clear process map and anchored in a standard operating procedure (SOP). The SOP centres around structured and systematic engagement with local authorities and female and male community members at the smallest administrative level in conflict-affected areas, to verify if there is any suspicion and/or evidence of previously unknown hazardous areas. This process is further framed by national mine action standards, ensuring that non-technical survey operations are consistently implemented to the agreed level of quality, and supported by an IM system that strengthens the programme's ability to collect, analyse and share data more effectively. Programme stakeholders together defined *all reasonable effort* as part of the development of the SOP, ensuring that its application is appropriate for Sri Lanka's contamination context and operational realities. The SOP stipulates the required number of informants that surveyors need to interview; this number is defined based on what is reasonable, given the local context. Sri Lanka's completion process will allow the government of Sri Lanka to declare their administrative areas 'mine free', meaning they are confident that all known mined areas have been identified and cleared and that there is no further evidence and/or suspicion of mines at this time, on their land. The process formalizes the mechanisms around ongoing survey and clearance so that the government can document the 'completion' of administrative areas in a consistent and transparent manner. This will enable it to demonstrate that *all reasonable effort* has been made to identify and clear all mined areas, as per its Article 5 obligations. Sri Lanka's completion survey is supported by a solid quality management system, guided by ongoing monitoring through regular programme meetings. This allows the programme to monitor progress, identify challenges, and address problems on a regular basis, ensuring continual improvement of the process and tools.

This thorough completion survey will, de facto, limit the risk of residual contamination. Sri Lanka's completion strategy also includes commitments to strengthening national capacities to manage residual contamination, and to developing a tailored staff transition process. The strategy development was led by the National Mine Action Centre and the GICHD, through an inclusive, consultative process, including the Sri Lanka Army Humanitarian Demining Unit, the Special Task Force Bomb Disposal Unit, relevant government ministries, national and international operators, and the Sri Lanka Campaign to Ban Landmines. NMAC and GICHD further ensured that international donors were engaged throughout the process. This broad stakeholder engagement facilitated partnerships, coordination, and regular dialogue between different stakeholders.

Completion scenario planning and resource mobilization

Sri Lanka's broader completion planning process has greatly benefited from the results generated by the completion survey since its launch in November 2023. The GICHD supported this process by developing a completion scenario projection tool to determine a realistic completion timeline. The tool considers three interrelated factors: annual land release outputs (released square metres through survey and clearance), the extent of previously unknown mined areas discovered through the completion survey, and secured funding. The quality of the survey data, thanks to database clean-up, clarity on the completion process, survey information requirements and the standardized procedures described above, enabled a thorough analysis of the survey results which, in turn, allowed the national mine action programme to elaborate a realistic completion timeline, based on evidence, with greater confidence. To do so, it was also necessary for the programme to better understand the funding situation, including the trajectory. In Sri Lanka, the completion process includes a commitment to developing a resource mobilization strategy. In preparation for this, the GICHD supported the programme by analysing the funding trajectory over the past years and clarifying the level of funding required for the programme to reach completion by the current deadline. Results of this exercise will allow a resource mobilization strategy to be developed, that will also explore innovative financing opportunities.

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS FOR THE CONTINUED IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CONVENTION

Experiences and lessons learnt from State Parties' implementation of the Oslo Action Plan provide them and their partners with critical opportunities to achieve more sustainable results through inclusive completion planning processes and the application of best practices:

- ▶ **Start planning early and secure broad stakeholder engagement:** start planning for completion as early as possible, involving all relevant stakeholders, including security forces and government ministries. Developing national systems and processes requires time and resources. Broad governmental stakeholder involvement strengthens national ownership and promotes greater sustainability of national systems and processes.

- ▶ **Recognize IM as an enabler:** strengthen national IM systems, processes, and data quality, including through data verification and clean-up processes, striving for a minimal data backlog. This allows programmes to rely on data and plan for completion with greater confidence. Consider capitalizing on innovative solutions, including online dashboards to visualize completion-related information with national and international stakeholders. Sound information management and up-to-date and reliable data facilitate communication and information sharing, critical for continued stakeholder engagement and commitment, including with government ministries and international donors.
- ▶ **Ensure the completion process is contextualized:** context analysis exercises, clarity on information requirements, and thorough analysis of updated, high-quality data allow affected states and their partners to ensure that completion processes address challenges and needs. Contextual challenges can include technical aspects such as the extent and density of contamination, which in

turn should influence how the affected state defines *all reasonable effort* at the national level. Completion survey methodologies and processes should be defined in SOPs.

- ▶ **Adopt a holistic approach to completion:** capitalizing on good practice and lessons learnt from Sri Lanka's completion process, consider completion from a broader perspective – beyond Article 5; include strategic commitments and plans related to developing national capacities to manage residual contamination and implementing a tailored and gender- and diversity-responsive staff transition process.
- ▶ **Connect the dots:** completion planning processes provide great opportunities for States Parties to strengthen the connections between IM, operational planning, resource mobilization, reporting⁷ and communication. All components are critical to ensuring sustainable, positive results and strengthened national ownership.

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Endnotes

- 1 The term 'all reasonable effort' describes what is considered a minimum acceptable level of effort to identify and document contaminated areas or to remove the presence or suspicion of explosive ordnance. 'All reasonable effort' has been applied when the commitment of additional resources is considered to be unreasonable in relation to the results expected. See IMAS 07.11 Land Release, First Edition, Amendment 5, February 2019.
- 2 IMAS 04.10 Glossary of mine action terms, definitions and abbreviations, specifies that residual contamination refers to contamination which gives rise to residual risk, which is the risk remaining following the application of all reasonable effort to identify, define, and remove all presence and suspicion of explosive ordnance through non-technical survey, technical survey and/or clearance. Risk is the combination of the probability of occurrence of harm and the severity of that harm.
- 3 IMAS use the term 'completion' to refer to the conclusion of individual land release tasks.
- 4 IMAS 08.10 Non-technical survey, IMAS 07.11 Land release, TNMA 07.14/01 Residual risk management, IMAS 08.20 Technical survey, IMAS 07.14 Risk management in mine action, IMAS 07.12 Quality management in mine action, and IMAS 05.10 Information management for mine action.
- 5 GICHD, "Explosive Ordnance Risk Education in residual contamination management", December 2023.
- 6 TNMA 07.14/01 Residual risk management.
- 7 Including annual APMB Article 7 reports.

The GICHD works to reduce risks to communities stemming from explosive ordnance, with a focus on landmines, cluster munitions, explosive remnants of war, and unsafely and insecurely managed conventional ammunition. As an internationally recognized centre of expertise and knowledge, the GICHD helps national authorities, international and regional organizations, NGOs and operators in around 40 affected countries and territories to develop and professionalize mine action and ammunition management.

Through its work, the GICHD strives for the fulfilment of international obligations, for national targets to be reached, and communities' protection from and resilience to explosive harm to be enhanced. These efforts support sustainable livelihoods, gender equality and inclusion. They save lives, facilitate the safe return of displaced populations, and promote peace and sustainable development.

