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The Role of Mine Action in Victim Assistance

Of the five pillars of mine action, victim assistance seems to receive the least attention. At the request of the United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS), the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining (GICHD) has recently completed a research project with a view to offering guidance on the future role of mine action in mine and UXO victim assistance.

by Eric Filippino, GICHD

Introduction

The response to the global landmine and UXO problem, generally termed mine action, is defined as including five core components: mine clearance, mine awareness and risk reduction education, victim assistance, advocacy in support of a total ban on anti-personnel landmines, and stockpile destruction. Yet, of the five components, the mine action community has not paid the same level of attention to victim assistance as it has to the others. Though clearly part of the existing definition of mine action, few mine action organisations have much involvement in victim assistance in issues and that is equally true of the coordinating entities, such as the national or UN mine action centres. At the same time, practitioners of mine clearance, survey and awareness have often been unclear as to victim assistance's operational role within mine action.

Indeed, victim assistance has sometimes sat uneasily within the framework of operational mine action. Mine action centres and mine action programmes have often been unclear as to what their operational role should be in this field and in many cases—Kosovo and northern Iraq being notable exceptions—mine action has played little operational role in direct service provision. Although a number of humanitarian organisations involved in providing assistance to those injured by landmines and UXO also carry out humanitarian demining and mine awareness, the skills and knowledge required are typically very different.

Study on The Role of Mine Action in Victim Assistance

At the request of UNMAS, the GICHD has recently completed a research project with a view to offering guidance on the future role of mine action in mine and UXO victim assistance. The Study has found that generally, *operational mine action*¹ has had a limited role in direct-service delivery, but nonetheless, it still makes a significant contribution to the rehabilitation and social reintegration of

mine and UXO victims.

Operations at field level within mine action centres and programmes to implement victim assistance programmes has been relatively limited. The gap between policy and operations is what the study has aimed to examine. Specifically, it has tried to:

- Identify and analyse ways in which mine action agencies/programmes have approached victim assistance.
- Identify lessons learned that will lead to the clarification of the respective roles and responsibilities of agencies involved in mine action in relation to victim assistance.
- Identify good practice in the field of victim assistance for mine action agencies and programmes.

The Study is comprised of five country case studies—Cambodia, Eritrea/

■ Will mine action be able to support all the needs of the victims? c/o AP



Ethiopia, Kosovo and Nicaragua, which were selected for the distinct mine action scenarios and developmental settings they reflect.

Study Findings, Analysis And Recommendations

Study Finding 1

There is a widespread lack of clarity about the operational role of mine action in providing assistance to victims of landmines and UXO. One of the sources of this is a lack of clarity in the use of certain terminology and conceptual frameworks.

Mine Action Definition

It is important to remember that the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention, which is generally considered to be a hybrid arms control and humanitarian law treaty, does not provide a definition of operational mine action. Similarly, international law provides no real definition. To a large extent, this allows the mine action community great freedom to define itself.

Operational assistance to mine and UXO victims clearly falls within the current definition of mine action, but in most cases, mine action professionals take a much narrower definition of their mandate. This has left us in somewhat of a quandary when it comes time to define our profession with any accuracy.

The Definition of "Mine Victim" and "Victim Assistance"

There is also no consensus as to the scope of the term "mine victim." Similarly, there is no universally accepted definition to the term "victim assistance." Without going into the various nuances and definitions it is noteworthy to mention that through the course of the Study we were repeatedly urged not to resurrect a debate that the victim assistance community itself has been unable to resolve. This level of uncertainty in fundamental definitions can only lead to greater confusion when it comes time to implement.

Recommendation 1

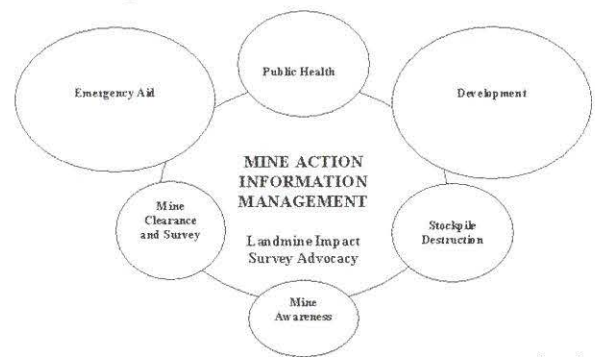
There is still a need to clarify, and if possible, standardise the various definitions attached to the following terminology:

- Mine action
- Mine (UXO) victim
- Victim assistance

In particular, a definition of operational mine action should be elaborated, with due attention paid to the central importance of information management, and the need to integrate mine victim assistance within the wider war-wounded and disability contexts and mine clearance within wider relief and development initiatives. This definition should be distinct from the all-encompassing political definition.

This does not mean that only one definition may be applied to each term, but that the range of definitions commonly used, and, equally importantly, the corresponding implications for programmatic interventions, be clarified and explained in layman's terms.

In this regard, a definition of operational mine action might be conceptualised as shown in the following diagram:



Study Finding 2

Globally, the number of new mine victims is decreasing. Although this may be attributed in part to the availability of better data, it is also an indication of the success of mine action programmes around the world. In the past, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL) have claimed figures as high as 24,000 and 26,000 annual deaths and injuries respectively, though these are probably now overestimates. Though there is still some debate and mine casualty rates do continue to fluctuate, it

does appear that globally mine casualty rates are reducing.

For example, casualty rates actually increased in 1999 in a number of countries and areas of conflict; however, in some other mine-affected countries (e.g. Afghanistan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cambodia, Croatia, Mozambique, Senegal, and Uganda), the casualty rate has been declining substantially. Most recently, the *Landmine Monitor* has estimated "that there were some 15,000 to 20,000 new casualties from landmines and UXO in 2000, an encouraging decrease from the long-standing and commonly cited figure of 26,000 new victims per year."

Recommendation 2

It is important to remember that the process is actually working and to further reduce the number of landmine and UXO victims, there is a need, especially in emergency situations, to reinforce preventive efforts such as effective mine awareness education and mine marking.

Study Finding 3

As mentioned, in most cases, field-based mine action programmes have done relatively little to promote the rehabilitation and reintegration of mine and UXO victims. Indirectly, all mine action actors can have a positive or negative impact on the survival, rehabilitation and reintegration of mine and UXO victims.

Reintegration

The most acute needs of landmine survivors are not medical services, but assistance in helping the survivors become productive community members again. Socio-economic reintegration has not generally enjoyed the attention of national governmental initiatives or by international relief organisation efforts.

In areas where mine clearance teams have been operating, they have often provided "casualty evacuation," and in some cases, their medical teams have treated patients for other ailments. Yet, once the patient has been brought to an appropriate medical facility, this normally marks the end of the role for the mine action professional.

In situations—typically emergency—where the United Nations has a predominant role and the national Ministry of Health is not functioning for whatever reason, mine action may have a role to play in ensuring coordination and funding for victim assistance: such has occurred to differing extents in Kosovo and Northern Iraq, for instance. Mine action fills a gap that might otherwise not be filled. But there is a risk that this will reinforce an ongoing tendency to treat mine victims and exclude amputees from other causes. And a mine action centre will likely lack the skills and experience necessary, and will hire appropriate expertise from the medical or disability fields.

Recommendation 3

There is a need to provide detailed guidance to mine action professionals in general (and the mine action centre in particular) on the following issues:

- The encouragement of mine action programmes to set positive examples (for instance by hiring amputees within their workforce and including positive rather than negative images of persons with disability in their literature).
 - The need to share mine victim data as widely as possible with relevant actors.
 - The role of victim data in prioritising mine marking, mine clearance and mine awareness.
 - The importance of coordination with relevant actors in the health and disability sectors, including the need for referrals.
- In general, mine action centres and mine action professionals should not be required to be directly involved in the implementation of assistance to mine and UXO victims, but should be aware of their place within the wider development framework.

Follow-up Activities

The importance of follow-up activities was emphasised by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and National Demining Institute (IND) alike in their work in Mozambique. Though made specifically for Mozambique, the following recommendations have far-reaching implications for mine action in general:

- Mine action should participate in the systematic collection of mine incidents involving deminers and civilians alike.
- Mine action should regularly participate in advisory, advocacy, and service committees providing support to the disabled community.
- Mine action should actively assist in the development of survivor and victim assistance policies by becoming knowledgeable of the existing laws and statutes pertaining to the disabled.
- Mine action should act as a clearinghouse and distribute sanctioned directories and other survivor and victim information materials as appropriate.
- Mine action should openly and regularly share data acquired on survivors and victims with all ministries and civil society organisations.
- Mine action should provide continuing education for its staff to stay abreast of new programs and developments concerning the disabled by attending seminars and workshops, and by inviting the community serving the disabled to mine action-sponsored meetings, working groups, etc.
- Mine action should examine its existing policy and practices on hiring people with disabilities and recommend changes as necessary.
- Mine action should review its mine risk education materials to ensure its contents include all relevant information

needed by survivors and victims.

- Mine action should strengthen its linkages, communication and participation with civil society organisations concerning mine risk education and sensibility training being conducted throughout their country of operations
- Mine action should contribute to the creation and participation of mechanisms for the coordination and communication between the public, the private sector, and the donor community for the disabled. ■

Endnote

1. The Study has used the phrase "operational mine action" to represent the three core mine-related activities: mine risk education, mine survey and mine clearance. As these three activities reflect the background, training and skills of mine action professionals, the phrase is intended to distinguish these "operational" disciplines from the other components of the mine action definition.

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Copies of the study, *The Role of Mine Action in Victim Assistance*, are available upon request from the GICHD.

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