

Determining disarmament and development priorities— the case of mine action

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Mine action¹ achieves numerous objectives in a country emerging from conflict. Agreement concerning the need for mine action is symbolic of the desire for peace. Mine action can unify former adversaries around a common goal, thereby building confidence in the transition to peace. 'Mine action may be particularly important in relation to peace-building: it depends on the negotiations of access by parties to the conflict; it is addressing an instrument of war; and it is freeing up essential resources, which may also be disputed ones'.² There is, of course, the immediate safety and disarmament aspect of mine action—the physical removal and destruction of weapons from the community. Lastly, mine action enables development (of land, human resources, the economy and peace).

Mine action—a prerequisite for peace and development in mine-affected countries

Mine action is a long-term endeavour, beginning in the immediate post-conflict phase and continuing through the return to normality and peace. It meets different needs in these different phases. The phases marking the transition from conflict to normalcy do not necessarily occur in a linear way, but often simultaneously and at different rates. In this way, the disarmament and development objectives of mine action are mutually reinforcing, each one assisting the objectives of the other.

Mine action requires cooperation at all levels of society, from that of the highest government representatives to that of stakeholders in local communities. The desire for, and confidence in, peace can often be measured by the level of cooperation and willingness to facilitate the fulfilment of the required steps for mine action operations.³

As peace accords are slowly implemented, other aspects of life and livelihood become priorities. Also here, in the more long-term developmental phases of post-conflict regions, mine action can play an important role in the consolidation of peace and development. Ex-combatants are demobilized and reintegrated into society. Civilians confront the potential for normalization of life and, in many cases, the opportunity to return to pre-war activities for income generation.

If an environment conducive to the normalization of life and livelihood and the potential for social and economic development cannot be created in the post-conflict period, frustration levels will increase, distrust will poison any attempts at further reconciliation and peace can easily be undermined.

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Unemployment, inability to support one's family, the absence of needs satisfaction and the psychological distress this entails are fertile grounds for uprisings, which can quickly escalate into hostilities.

Mine action actors and their roles

An understanding and appreciation of the unique roles of mine action actors and stakeholders would probably improve cooperation, national ownership and effectiveness, and hence the ability of mine action to function as a vehicle for peace and development.

OPERATIVE ACTORS

Mine action operators are those who actually undertake demining. In the case of humanitarian mine action, this includes the United Nations and NGOs, as well as some commercial operators working on tenders who are paid through, for example, the International Trust Fund (ITF) or the UN Trust Fund. Mine action operators are tasked (or, in the absence of a mine action authority, task themselves) to clear mines in specific areas. These operators are ideally represented by national mine action centres (MACs)—the national authority designated to coordinate mine action. Depending on the specific situation of the country, MACs can be an entirely national entity, or managed by, or operated in cooperation with, the United Nations, with cooperation partners such as national and international NGOs and commercial companies.⁴

The *United Nations* works bilaterally with governments and national authorities in supporting, co-operating and even managing MACs. Together with national stakeholders they draft strategic national mine action plans, support the authorities in the drafting of national legislation, guidelines and criteria for accreditation, and create national standards for mine action based on the International Mine Action Standards (IMAS). The United Nations also works at the inter-agency and inter-ministerial levels promoting the coordination of national mine action plans with those of other sectors such as health, education, infrastructure, industry and agriculture. The United Nations plays a much greater role at the national and international levels than at the community level.

In mine action, *NGOs* tend to work at the local level, targeting the needs of less vocal and otherwise marginalized groups. NGOs are generally perceived as operating above self-interests and on a non-profit basis. Although often largely funded by governments, it is widely understood as well as accepted that NGOs must remain independent and critical to maintain their credibility and ability to act efficiently and effectively.

NON-OPERATIVE STAKEHOLDERS

The *mine-affected communities* are extremely important stakeholders. Not only do they live under the threat of mines—and hence would be well qualified to set priorities—they often have significant information concerning the scope of the problem.

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They also play an essential role in gauging the success of mine clearance. The local community's confidence in and willingness to use cleared areas differentiates useful from useless mine action.

National authorities have the ultimate responsibility to successfully address the country's mine problem. If the country is a signatory to the Mine Ban Convention, the national authority also has the duty to act in accordance with the international norm set by the convention.⁵ In relation to mine clearance, States Parties are obliged to (amongst other things):

- Undertake to destroy or ensure the destruction of *all* anti-personnel mines in mined areas under its jurisdiction or control, as soon as possible but not later than ten years after the entry into force of the Convention for that State Party, and
- Make every effort to identify *all* areas under its jurisdiction or control in which anti-personnel mines are known or suspected to be emplaced and shall ensure as soon as possible that all anti-personnel mines in mined areas under its jurisdiction or control are perimeter-marked, monitored and protected by fencing or other means, to ensure the effective exclusion of civilians, until all anti-personnel mines contained therein have been destroyed [emphasis by author].⁶

These provisions are significant in that they ultimately leave the authorities with no other option than to address the mine problem in its entirety—at all levels of society.

Donors play a major role in mine action, providing the largest portion of funds necessary to carry out mine action operations. The range of donors involved in mine action is vast—including countries, international funds, NGOs and international humanitarian organizations. Over the last decade over US\$ 1 billion has been given to mine action. Donors would probably (and rightfully so) claim that they should play no operational role in setting mine action priorities. Obviously and indirectly, they do. It cannot be overlooked that donors have their own interests and therefore approach mine action from different perspectives—that of humanitarian aid, shared economic interest, promoting national interests, etc.

Local and national priorities for development

LOCAL NEEDS—LOCAL PRIORITIES

Obvious mine action priorities at the local level include access to water, firewood, local markets, construction material, hunting and grazing grounds, and land for cultivation as well as creating a safe neighbourhood where the fear of stepping on a landmine is absent. By addressing such needs, the initial stability is established that is necessary to build confidence for further peace-building.

Experience has shown that to obtain full confidence in clearance, the local community has to be consulted and involved, with the goal of popular participation in setting clearance priorities, evaluation of land cleared and identifying post-clearance activities. It can also be concluded that an environment conducive to the consolidation of peace and development is more easily established when there is local ownership of the problem, as well as the problem's solution.

In the initial phase of deployment, mine action programmes by NGOs usually employ a number of technically and managerially experienced international staff. This expatriate staff recruits and trains additional national staff to form the bulk of the human resources of the programme. In this way mine clearance programmes can promote the national capacity and capability to deal with the mine problem.

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Norwegian People's Aid (NPA) has, as often as possible and appropriate, made an effort to recruit staff in cooperation and coordination with demobilization programmes. Offering former combatants employment is beneficial to the employer, who capitalizes on the former combatant's knowledge concerning mines, and the employee, who has an opportunity to work and be reintegrated into society. When working to de-mine as opposed to mine, it might even assist former combatants in overcoming trauma and psychological stigma as they gradually come to realize the effects of war and landmines upon themselves, their families and communities as well as former foes.⁷

In the initial post-conflict phases, the link between success in addressing the local needs and the success of the peace process is quite evident. However, as time passes and peace is consolidated, a mine-affected community's needs will change. The more needs that are met, the more a community is able to involve itself in the improvement of its living conditions, community development and activities beyond that of pure survival, such as diversification of income, popular participation in decision-making, democratization and perhaps even nation-building. The further down this road a mine-affected community travels, the easier it is to engage in constructive discussions about local and national development priorities, their interlinkages, and the need for both.

NATIONAL NEEDS—NATIONAL PRIORITIES

Ideally, national mine action priorities would be those of the people of that particular country, but this is a simplification that neither brings much clarity nor does it illustrate reality. As national development often relates directly to the notion of an output or return in conventional and real economic terms, national priorities frequently have a more macro-economic focus. Regrettably, national priorities sometimes reflect the desires of a few well-situated decision-makers rather than the outcome of a transparent procedure in line with set objectives and policies.

National economic priorities serve an extremely important role in the prospects for sustainable development in mine-affected countries. National needs and priorities often target the reconstruction and rehabilitation (and hence demining) of a country's physical and commercial infrastructures, such as power plants, railroads, airports, harbours, road networks, bridges, factories, commercially viable agricultural land, mineral deposits and oil installations.

In practice, this economic focus tends to be the general emphasis of national authorities and hence influences the selection of priorities by national mine action authorities—regardless of politically elaborated criteria and policy statements focusing on other, non-economic, needs (such as the resettlement of internally displaced persons and refugees).

By addressing the need for mine action in the planning and formulation of national development and poverty reduction strategies there are clear prospects for inclusion of both local and national priorities. However, in the end it is also a matter of resources, coordination of post-clearance activities and operational planning that ultimately form the work plans and gives clearance priority to some minefields above others.

Setting priorities—clash of interests or balanced approach?

Although it might help provide food for local communities and certainly decrease the number of new mine victims in the immediate post-conflict period, clearing land exclusively for subsistence farming will probably not develop the national economy. Prioritizing clearance for subsistence farming will

most likely leave primary and secondary road networks disrupted, making it difficult to govern, provide social services and consolidate security throughout the territory. It may even slow down or hinder a diversification of the economy that could otherwise be achieved through mechanizing farming, developing the food processing industry, promoting micro-enterprises, et cetera. The flow of money and goods and access to markets may also be hindered because transportation networks remain mined.

Yet what happens if one prioritizes only national needs and interests? Experience indicates that the famous 'trickle-down effect' often proves to be unbearably slow at improving the lives of the poor—if it does so at all. This is similar to what has been seen in other sectors: in many developing countries, large power plants built decades ago still fail to provide electricity to rural villages within sight of the power lines. Subsistence farmers are unlikely to ever enter the formal economy or receive the benefits of commercially obtained profit, and yet they are the ones who are forced to cultivate fields sown with deadly weapons.

Many argue that priority setting in mine action is particularly difficult and that it inevitably leads to clashes of interest. There are as many opinions as there are stakeholders. Some mine action authorities go so far as to claim that national sovereignty is at stake if supra- or sub-national interests are considered. Some in mine action feel that there is only one correct way of approaching priority setting—that only one stakeholder can lead and that all others must follow. Yet the various operative and non-operative stakeholders in mine action have different roles to play and it may be the full spectrum of mandates that could bring about the desired results. If we acknowledge that there will be more minefields than the combined mine action community's ability to deal with for some time to come, there is no reason why there couldn't be multiple priority lists to be dealt with simultaneously by the various actors that have clearly defined roles.

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To promote development in all of its aspects—human, social, economic—at the local and national levels, a balanced approach to national and local needs (and thus priorities for mine action) is probably the most promising. Only if all parties feel involved and actually participate in the development process will improvements take place at the national level as well as in the mine-affected villages and ultimately promote the consolidation of peace and reconciliation.

A balanced approach to priority setting

In light of the multitude of stakeholders, the various approaches to and opinions about development priorities, and the various levels at which the different actors can play their roles successfully, the priority-setting procedures are perhaps more important than the priorities themselves. Not only do the procedures need to be transparent and follow agreed-upon policies, the objective of or justification for clearance must be clearly identified (i.e. what is the planned post-clearance activity and how does it correspond to national and or local needs and development plans).

This approach to priority setting, however, requires the appreciation and acknowledgement of the various roles of mine action actors. It also entails much more sophisticated priority-setting procedures than currently used, if they are used at all. It necessitates that mine action, as an activity in emergency as well as in development contexts, is fully integrated into the planning and coordination of other humanitarian and development activities.

Humanitarian mine action is a comparatively young discipline within humanitarian emergency and development work. In the 1990s mine action programmes primarily engaged military-trained

personnel possessing the necessary skills and experience to conduct mine clearance and safe disposal of explosive ordnance. Military mine clearance has vastly different methodologies, objectives, standards and priorities than humanitarian mine action. In the past few years, voices within the mine action community have begun to call for a more comprehensive and holistic view of mine action. Humanitarian mine action is not only about the safe disposal of mines and unexploded ordnance (UXO)—what one might consider its disarmament aspect in the strictest sense of the term. In addition to the essential technical knowledge that the military can bring to mine action, other backgrounds and skills among mine action actors can help to focus priority setting, community integration and linkages to other sectors of society, thereby contributing to the long-term success and effectiveness of mine action.

The difficulty in priority setting is determining how you justify in which order you clear the minefields. The fields that have the heaviest impact on lives and livelihood should be cleared first. It is necessary to ensure that beneficiaries of mine action activities correspond to identified target groups and that mine clearance has a positive impact directly or indirectly on society and the economy (whether at the national or local level) and hence, in accordance with set development and poverty

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reduction strategies, improves living conditions for target groups. Additionally, mine action is—by its nature—a very cost-intensive activity. Elaborating the objectives of mine action, tying costs to desired results and development outputs rather than the number of square metres cleared, provides the argument and justification for a balance between efficiency and effectiveness and also gives a more realistic evaluation of mine action activities as a supporting tool for development.

Although NGOs are considered ‘implementing partners’ of MACs and the United Nations, in that they support the development of national MACs and ideally would operate under their coordination, MACs and NGOs often have two different and quite distinct approaches to mine action—perhaps best described as that of a top-down approach versus that of bottom-up. When needs assessments are undertaken by the MAC at the national level, too often national interests predominate and there is no integration of local needs and priorities. At the level of a MAC, often the criteria for priority setting are economic, i.e. prioritizing clearance where the land will provide a substantial economic profit or gain in the national interest, not for the mine-affected communities as such. When undertaken by NGOs, priority setting is often integrated with or, in the best cases, done by the local community. Ideally a MAC should have the coordinating role of ensuring that priorities are made in accordance with agreed standards but not ultimately define what these priorities are. As both national and local priorities must be met when tasking mine clearance, MACs might be better suited to concentrating on national-level priorities, while NGOs could together with local administrations and communities oversee local priorities.

NPA’s focus on community participation and evaluation

NPA’s overall objective is to enhance the ability and opportunity of disadvantaged groups to control their own lives and together develop a society that respects and secures political, economic and social rights for all. In the mine action context, participation of rights-based organizations and partnership with civil society form the basis of sound priority setting and resource allocation. However, alleviating the threat of landmines and promoting the right to security and welfare require active cooperation with national and local authorities.

As the ultimate goal of mine action must be to achieve sustainable stability in politics, the economy, and social life, and the progressive devolution of aid and dependency from donors, outside institutions

and organizations, reinforcing and/or establishing national and local authorities' ownership of the landmine problem is considered crucial. Therefore, NPA's objective is to support the development of national institutional competence capable of addressing the landmine problem. This includes participating in the development of national plans, national priority-setting mechanisms, and a well-functioning national coordinating body. Within this context NPA also operates as an implementing partner directly involved in mine action with the objective to transfer competence and build a sustainable national mine action capacity while improving living conditions for identified target groups in accordance with identified needs.

NPA responds to the immediate post-conflict as well as developmental needs of a community through implementation of sound methodologies on priority setting and socio-economic aspects of mine action, and further enhancement of methods to improve humanitarian mine action along the lines of quality, cost-efficiency and impact. Its longer term objectives focus on the sustainable improvement of socio-economic living conditions for target populations in mine-affected areas and promoting the universalization of the Mine Ban Convention.

To meet these objectives, NPA promotes the implementation and use of transparent procedures and priority-setting methodologies. Using its Task Impact Assessment⁸ tool, local needs are identified in an assessment carried out with community representatives. This tool promotes local community involvement in planning operations and significantly increases two-way communication between NPA and the mine-affected community.

Whether tasked by a national MAC or local authorities, a NPA needs assessment focuses on three aspects. It verifies with the community affected by the mined area that:

- the task is a priority;
- that clearance will have a positive effect on the community's ability to improve its situation; and
- that a post-clearance activity or land use is identified, including who will actually implement the activity and if the necessary resources exist to carry it out.

The last point is an essential element in the disarmament-development relationship. Once the disarmament aspect of mine action is completed, are there individuals, local actors, NGOs or even authorities who will step in and provide other essential resources in order to be able to utilize the cleared area? A classic example is the clearance of fields for cultivation. In many cases in rural farming communities, there are no seeds or tools left after years of fighting. Even if the land is demined, the community will still not be able to cultivate it due to the lack of other essentials.

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An often overlooked part of mine action is evaluation. Clearing land that people are not confident enough to utilize is useless. In conducting its evaluations in Kosovo, NPA found that the confidence among local people in demining increased over time as local participation increased. The first minefields that were cleared in 1999 were more often still laying idle whilst fields cleared later were being cultivated and fully utilized. This could possibly be explained by the fact that in its initial phase, the project was set up in coordination with other external actors as a rapid response to the mine problem as soon as the security situation allowed. As can be expected, the various organizations drew on existing capacities in other programmes; NPA brought in several mine action staff from its programme in Bosnia and Herzegovina. There is no doubt this had implications in terms of distrust and the lack of involvement on the part of the mine-affected population. Perhaps bringing staff from an entirely different region would have been better.

In order to address the issue of cleared land not being utilized in Kosovo, the mine clearance supervisors ploughed the fields together with local farmers to build confidence in the clearance work and prepare the fields for the planting season. The need for such confidence-building measures decreased over time with the introduction of two-way communication procedures with the mine-affected populations. The same trend can be found in programmes elsewhere, for example in Mozambique⁹ and in Angola.

Concluding remarks

‘The total is greater than the sum of its parts’ is a maxim that comes to mind when trying to summarize how mine action integrates with disarmament and development. Mine action will enhance stability and prospects for development if the activities are coordinated with other non-mine action activities in a mutually reinforcing manner. All actors’ roles must be well defined, including their approach to development and in which way they can and will contribute to the mine action effort.

Divorcing the disarmament aspect of mine action from its development aspect has significant implications on the resources available for this activity. For example, the World Bank has traditionally been minimally involved in mine action, considering it a humanitarian activity (i.e. disarmament), and stated recently that it had no plans to alter this policy.¹⁰ Yet planning and financial support to the (re)construction and rehabilitation of a country’s infrastructure are classic World Bank issues. Some countries, such as Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia and others, have attracted World Bank funds for overall reconstruction and rehabilitation, of which a small part has been designated to mine action because it was a prerequisite for a development project (such as building a pipeline or a power plant). Increasing awareness that disarmament and development are two inseparable, interdependent aspects of mine action might encourage a shift in donors’ perspectives.

Experience shows that as mine action transitions from the emergency phase to longer-term development plans, the importance of mine action methodologies increases. Not only is the objective to clear mines, it is to ensure that the right mines are cleared first. Minefields that cause casualties and

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create obstacles for subsistence living and the potential for development must be prioritized. This, however, entails a much more thorough analysis of the local mine-affected environment, community needs and the longer-term plans for meeting these needs.

Notes

1. Disarmament is a component of mine action. Therefore, from this point forward, the article will refer to mine action and not specifically to disarmament .
2. Kristian Berg Harpviken, *Humanitarian Mine Action and Peacebuilding*, presentation at the Standing Committee on Mine Clearance, Mine Awareness and Related Technologies of the Landmine Convention, 14 May 2003, Geneva, Switzerland.
3. Throughout the article, the term 'landmine' as well as the phenomenon 'mine action' will refer to both landmines and UXO and other explosive remnants of war (ERW). Furthermore, the article deals with the issue of mine action as regards to clearance, survey, mapping and marking since its point of discussion is mine action in support of development more than the otherwise equally important objective, that of saving lives.
4. As companies usually follow terms of reference, their role in priority setting is minor as they take on tenders on already prioritized tasks.
5. The Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on their Destruction, which entered into force 1 March 1999. As of 1 July 2003, 134 States had formally agreed to

be bound by the convention, a process that includes domestic measures to 'ratify', 'accept', 'approve' or 'accede to' the convention and the deposit of a declaration with the United Nations Secretary-General indicating adherence to the convention.

6. Based on Article 5 of the convention. For full text, see < <http://www.icbl.org/treaty/text> > .
7. While this form of recruitment clearly has its advantages, it also brings with it a cause for caution. If not carefully conceived, mine action can have detrimental effects on deminers as well as on the communities in which they live or work. Psycho-social debrief and other forms of follow-up may be necessary for former soldiers to be able to 'normalize' fully. Mine action deals with geographically dispersed minefields and suspected areas; mine action operators move from one clearance task to the next in the process of clearing landmines, covering substantial geographical distances. This implies a roaming existence for expatriate staff and national deminers, who often live in the bush and are given little or no chance to settle down. While this might leave expatriates with a feeling of adventure, national deminers might face a feeling of rootlessness caused by never finding a home. The nomadic demining life can also contribute to broken relationships, an endless line of loose encounters and frustration of never belonging to anyone or anywhere. It takes little to imagine the potential consequences this can have on the spread of HIV, a disease that undermines development. In this way, the structure and organization of mine action programmes can have secondary impacts on peace-building, consolidation and development, and should be further examined.
8. NPA's *Task Impact Assessment* is priority-setting procedure developed for mine action and is used to assess the potential impact of mine clearance operations prior to, during and after deployment as basis for decision-making in mine action programmes.
9. For more information, see Ananda S. Millard and Kristian Berg Harpviken, 2000, *Reassessing the Impact of Humanitarian Landmine Action: Illustrations from Mozambique*, PRIO report 1/2000, Oslo, Norway.
10. Statement by the World Bank to the Contact Group on Resource Mobilisation within the framework of the Standing Committee on the General Status and Operation of the Convention, second Session of the Standing Committee, 12–16 May, 2003, Geneva, Switzerland. For more information, see < http://www.gichd.ch/pdf/mbc/SC_may03/SCGS%20Detailed%20Report%2012_16%20May%202003.pdf > .

