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Determining disarmament and development priorities - the case of mine action

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Mine action and disarmament

- **Legal framework** – anti-personnel mines firmly framed within the Ottawa Convention, certain other ordnances more loosely within the CCW, however, and from an operator's point of view,
- **Operational framework** - mine action deals with all explosive remnants of war (ERW) as it addresses any instruments of war and deals with the physical removal and destruction of weapons,
- **Conceptual framework** – humanitarian mine action in its wider operational sense as an integral part of, facilitator for and promoter of peace and development efforts.

This presentation will first and foremost concentrate on the conceptual framework of mine action as an example of disarmament and its links with peacebuilding and development.

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A peacebuilding component and development proponent

- Fewer new mine and UXO victims, it spares lives and limbs.
- Symbolic of the desire for peace, it is a starting point for access negotiations,
- Consolidating measure, in that it unifies former adversaries and builds confidence among and between the various actors,
- Enables socio-economic development in that it frees up essential and perhaps disputed resources,

Mine action decreases the number of new mine victims and hence, saves lives and limbs. This not only reflects an immediate justification for mine action, it is in and of itself also a proponent for development. In a local community heavily affected by landmines, a new

victim, lethal or otherwise, even the death of a cow due to the detonation of a mine, may completely undermine the potential for development of that village. The individual may be the breadwinner, the cow may be the only cow, and not only may this put an end to future incomes, the cost for treatment (if this is at all available) may completely drain what little resources there ever was. But since we now will discuss mine action in support of development in more general terms, we leave the otherwise equally important objective of saving lives aside.

In the outset, it should perhaps also be acknowledged that mine action meets different needs at different phases in a transition from post-war emergency to that of peace and prosperity in a development setting. The phases marking the transition from conflict to normalcy also do not necessarily occur in a linear fashion, rather both simultaneously and at a multitude of different rates. Mine action enhances stability and prospects for development if the activities are coordinated with other non-mine action activities in a mutually reinforcing manner.

Shortly, before speaking more in –depth on each point,

- ❖ Mine action is symbolic for the desire for peace and a point of departure for access negotiations,
- ❖ It is a consolidating measure in that it unifies former foes and builds confidence, both within and between groups but also for individuals involved in mine action,
- ❖ And last but not least, it enables development in all its aspects, human, social and economic, in that it frees up and provides access to essential and maybe previously disputed resources.

Now let us look at each point in more details and a few examples.

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Symbolic of the desire for peace

The desire for, or perhaps more correctly the 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

This would apply to all levels of society, from that of highest peace negotiations by government and leadership representatives to that of operational mine action activities in affected areas. This can be argued in reference to mine action often being the first concrete

measures on the ground after a peace agreement has been settled and steps are taken to implement the provisions of a peace accord. Also top levels must agree to the handing over of mine maps, sensitive information and access to disputed territory.

When authorisation is given and activities are initiated to implement such measures, the level of confidence will normally increase in both camps. Landmines are arguably instruments of war and what can be more symbolic than to disclose information on their locations or agree to stockpile destruction in the attempt to consolidate peace. From top to bottom both parties have to gather around a very concrete item and cooperate in order to reach a breakthrough in a peace process.

Experiences from conducting initial mine surveys of suspected areas for the localisation of demobilisation camps confirm this. Mine surveys require the studying of maps over disputed land, actual and physical visits by all parties to frontlines and to accept the presence of the adversary as well as any negotiator or in this case, mine action operator in 'your' court. At this stage the presence, or absence, of a mutual desire for and belief in a lasting peace often becomes quite evident.

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Consolidating, unifying and confidence building

- Stabilising and reaffirming peace processes by accommodating needs in both camps,
- Building confidence by transparent priority setting and respect for both/all parties, and for the individual – in demobilisation and reintegration into society

Once peace has been negotiated and phases of consolidation and transition approaches, other aspects of life and livelihood become central for further talks. Combatants are demobilised and plans for reintegration into society are drafted. Civilians as well, are facing the potentials for normalisation of life and in many cases, the attempts to return to pre-war sustenance and activities for income generation.

If an environment conducive to normalisation of life and livelihood and potentials for development cannot be created, levels of frustration will again increase, distrust will poison any attempts to further negotiations and peace can easily be undermined. Unemployment, inability to sustain your family, the absence of needs satisfaction and the psychological

distress this may entail are fertile grounds for uprisings, which very quickly can escalate into war hostilities. As argued by the peace researcher Prof. Galtung in his theories of basic human needs as a working hypothesis; security needs, welfare needs, identity needs and needs for freedom all have to be satisfied to avoid violence, misery, alienation and repressionⁱ.

Mine action can have an immediate impact on satisfying needs in creating immediate access to for ex. Security and freedom of movement or facilitating for the potential access to resources needed for welfare - provided mine clearance is done in accordance with needs assessments and coordinated with other post-clearance activities and hence, with the objective to fulfil identified needs.

Strengthening this argument is the evident link between human needs and human rights. Each human rights as found in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights relates to basic human needs for survival. If human rights are denied over time, basic needs will not be met and since they function as a pure need for survival, people will simply pursue them regardless of the damage it will cost, i.e. denying human rights or access to them will only bring back conflict and thus suppress both the prospect of peace and the potential for development.

Now, needs at local level, for individual sustenance or those of the community may vary considerably from those at national level often expressed in more macro economic terms. A balanced approach to these needs and thus, priorities for mine action, is probably the most promising approach if one also wants to promote development in all of its aspects; human, social, economic and national development. So it is not a question of one or the other, it is achieving progress in both. Only then will improvements take place at national level as well as in the mine-affected villages and at the same time promote the consolidation of peace and reconciliation. All parties may feel involved and actually participating in the process of national development.

Efforts to recruit staff in cooperation and coordination with demobilisation programs can support the confidence building and sense of unification also for the individual. Employing ex-combatants can be done for several reasons; some of which will function stabilising for society and thus reinforce a delicate peace process. Furthermore, many ex-combatants inherently possess experience and technical knowledge of landmines and mine laying,

something that, from a pure technical and operational point of view, makes them particularly qualified to conduct mine clearance.

The procedure can also help turn a destructive and hostile activity into something positive and meaningful for the soldiers now trying to reintegrate into society and a normal life. Perhaps it even assists in overcoming trauma and psychological stigma when those coming from active duty gradually come to realise the effects of war and landmines upon themselves, their families and former foes. Experience from mine affected post-conflict countries show that unemployment is one of the critical realities facing demobilised soldiers, often recruited to combat at early age, denying them little or no other training and experience to market in their search for new employment. Furthermore, authorities have seldom had the ability to care for or otherwise compensate demobilised soldiers leaving them with little prospects for a successful reintegration into society.

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Enabling socio-economic development

- At the local, community level, where subsistence cultivation, husbandry and barter still remains vital for life and livelihood,
- For national development, the rehabilitation and reconstruction of major physical infrastructure.

When addressing local needs such as demining for access to water, firewood, local market, construction material, hunting grounds, grazing land, land for cultivation and creating a safe neighbourhood where the fear of stepping on a landmine is absent, you automatically follow quite obvious priorities and promote local development. As mentioned, these features represent basic needs in the attempt to normalise life in a post-war environment. By addressing such needs an initial stability is created necessary to build confidence for further peace building.

However, in society, as the complex and interdependent environment it truly is, the further behind you put war and allow peace to consolidate, the needs among mine affected communities change. They still relate to basic human needs but they may be expressed as well as acted out differently. And the more needs that are met, the more a community is able to involve itself in improvement of their living conditions, development and activities beyond

that of pure survival, i.e. diversification of incomes, popular participation in decision making, democratisation and perhaps even nation building, etc. The further down this road mine affected communities move, the easier it is to engage in constructive discussions about local and national development priorities and the need for both.

National development, on the other side, often relates directly to the notion of an output in conventional economic terms. Putting this into the context of national needs and national priorities this often implies the reconstruction and rehabilitation, and hence, demining of a country's larger physical infrastructure and commercial grounds such as power plants, railroads, airports, harbours, road networks, bridges, factories, etc., commercially viable agricultural land, mineral deposits, oil installations, etc.

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Stakeholders and their respective roles

There are operative as well as non-operative stakeholders and they all have different roles to fulfil and hence should all be actively involved in the mine action process.

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Mine affected communities

- To obtain full confidence in clearance, the local community has to be consulted and involved, aiming for a popular participation in the priority setting and following activities in the area.
- The conducive environment needed for peace consolidation and development is more easily established when a local ownership of the problem, as well as the problem solution, is sought.

Mine affected communities are often the best sources of information when conducting landmine surveys, which usually sets off any mine action program. They are likewise the appropriate authority to address when attempting to establish priorities since they live among the mine fields and as such, in their surroundings, know perfectly well where landmines impact on life and livelihoods. Mine affected communities are often also and unfortunately,

mine action operators themselves, clearing landmines and UXOs from rice paddies and cassava fields as they come across them

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Authorities in mine affected countries

- The clearance of major physical infrastructure is often the general direction provided by national authorities and hence, the priorities set by national mine action institutions. Thus, often regardless of politically elaborated criteria and policy statements focusing on the resettlement of IDPs and refugees and their related priorities.

From a principal point of view this may of course be criticised, however, national economic priorities also serve an extremely important role in the prospects for sustainable development in mine-affected countries. Additionally, an imperative role designated to the authorities of mine-affected countries is the responsibility to solve the mine problem. In two – thirds of the world's countries, this is an obligation in accordance with the provision of the Ottawa Convention, accepted by the State Party when ratifying or acceding to the Treaty.

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Mine action donors

- Donors also play a major role in providing largely all the funds necessary to carry out mine action. During the last 10-12 years over 1,5 billion dollars have been given to mine action.
- Donors will probably argue that operationally, they play no role in setting priorities in mine action. But, indirectly, and they would probably agree, they do.

It cannot be overlooked that representatives from donor countries, whether based at foreign missions abroad or at home at the various ministries concerned, do have many roles in carrying out their profession. Engaged in a discussion similar to this one, an ambassador representing a rather large donor country and based in a heavily mine affected country once said, "Don't forget that I am the ambassador here and not an aid worker. My job is to promote [my countries] interests [here], not to do humanitarian or development work, and I use the resources available to me through my embassy to achieve that goal. To the extent that my goals coincide with those of aid workers (and they do, a lot) I am happy and eager to help."

Although this, and similar statements made by others, ultimately may mean little for the end result of mine action, it does point at the wide range of different roles played by stakeholders to mine action.

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Mine action operators

Operators represent organisations that are either tasked or, in the absence of a coordinating body, task themselves to clear land. They are represented by national mine action centres (*MACs*), often managed by, or operated in cooperation and support of, the *UN*, the national and international *NGOs* and *commercial companies*.

The companies usually follow other terms of reference (ToR) less relevant to this discussion since they take on tenders on already prioritised tasks. In addition, you find several variations of military demining groups, with some examples, in for example Sri Lanka and lately, Angola, moving in the direction of humanitarian mine action, but in general, they follow military priorities and will not be elaborated further here. However, they may very well be worthwhile noted as a considerable asset for humanitarian mine action in the future.

Most NGOs are usually created around issues of common interest and although most often politically neutral they tend to work at the local level targeting the needs of less vocal and otherwise marginalised groups. NGOs are also generally considered operating above self-interests and on non-profit basis. Although often to a high extent funded by governments it is widely understood as well as commonly accepted that they must remain independent and critical to government approaches in general to maintain their credibility as well as ability to act efficiently and effectively.

The UN on the other hand, works bilaterally with governments and national authorities in supporting, co-operating and even managing *MACs*. Together with national stakeholders they embark on drafting strategic national mine action plans, support the authorities in the drafting of national legislation, guidelines and criteria for accreditation and creating national standards for mine action based on the International Mine Action Standards (IMAS). They also move on interagency and inter-ministerial levels advising the coordination of national mine action plans with those of other sectors such as national health, education, infrastructure, industry, agriculture, etc.

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Concluding remarks

The various actors in mine action may have different roles to play and it may be the full spectra of mandates that could bring about the desired results.

Although the NGOs are considered ‘implementing partners’ to the MACs and the UN, in that they support the development of national MACs and ideally would operate under the coordination of the same, two different and quite distinct roles are shaping, that of a top-down approach and that of bottom-up. Operating under the assumption that there will be more minefields than the combined mine action community’s ability to deal with them for a long time to come, there is no reason for why there couldn’t be multiple priority lists to be dealt with by the various actors in mine action and with reference to a clearly defined role and officially stated ToRs.

In light of these arguments, with the multitude of roles played, the various approaches to and opinions about development priorities and the various levels at which the different actors can play out their roles successfully, irrelevant of the objective, the priority setting procedures perhaps more than the priorities per se, becomes of utmost importance if development is to be achieved in all its forms. Not only do the procedures have to be totally transparent and follow agreed upon standard operating procedures (SOPs), the objective, or justification for clearance will have to be clearly stated, i.e. what is the planned post-clearance activity and how does that correspond to needs and development plans. At least when donor funded, the link to long-term multi-sectoral development plans *and* poverty reduction strategies cannot be overemphasised in this regard. Ideally, the two would then balance each other both at national and local level. By allowing this, multiple layers of society could have their needs addressed and mine action becomes a catalyst for an integrated approach to development. It is in this manner that a newly won peace can be allowed to develop and prosper.

Thank You.

ⁱ Galtung, Johan, *Human needs: a contribution to the current debate*, p. 66, table 3-2, ed. Katrin Lederer in cooperation with Johan Galtung and David Antal; Oelgeschlager, Gunn & Hain, c1980. Cambridge, Mass.

