PRACTICE NOTES

Mission creep or responding to wider security needs? The evolving role of mine action organisations in Armed Violence Reduction

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Since the late 1980s, mine action organisations have focused their efforts on reducing the social, economic and environmental impacts of anti-personnel mines and other explosive remnants of war (ERW) through a broad range of activities, including survey, clearance, mine risk education (MRE), victim assistance, stockpile destruction and advocacy. In recent years, an increasing number of mine action organisations are using their mine action technical expertise and their capacities to operate in difficult environments to reduce armed violence and promote public safety. Several organisations now have armed violence reduction (AVR)-related policies, programmes and staff in place. Some may argue that this shift towards AVR is a diversion from the core mandate of mine action organisations. But does this represent a loss of focus and thereby 'mission creep' on the part of these organisations? This practice note examines the factors underlying the evolving role of mine action organisations, discusses how these new programmes are contributing to the wider domain of AVR and explores whether these new programmes have resulted in a loss of organisational focus.

Introduction

Since the late 1980s, mine action organisations have focused their efforts on reducing the social, economic and environmental impacts of anti-personnel mines and other explosive remnants of war (ERW) through a broad range of activities, including survey, clearance, mine risk education (MRE), victim assistance, stockpile destruction and advocacy. In recent years, an increasing number of mine action organisations have expanded the focus of their programming to also include activities that try more broadly to reduce armed violence and promote public safety. But does this represent a loss of focus and thereby 'mission creep' on the part of these organisations? This practice note examines the factors underlying the evolving role of mine action organisations, discusses how these new programmes are contributing to the wider domain of armed violence reduction (AVR) and explores whether these new programmes have resulted in a loss of organisational focus.

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Clarifying key terms

According to the International Mine Action Standards (IMAS), mine action consists of those activities that 'aim to reduce the social, economic and environmental impact of mines and ERW, including unexploded submunitions' (UNMAS 2003). It also includes the following types of complementary activities: MRE, humanitarian demining (mine/ERW survey, mapping, marking and clearance), victim assistance, stockpile destruction and advocacy against the use of mines. The overall purpose of mine action is to reduce the risk posed by mines and ERW to a level where people can live safely, where socio-economic development is not impeded and where victims' needs can be addressed (UNMAS 2003).

Despite the lack of an international consensus on what constitutes armed violence, this practice note uses the definition provided by the Geneva Declaration on Armed Violence and Development, which defines armed violence as the 'intentional use of illegitimate force (actual or threatened) with arms or explosives against a person, group, community, or state, which undermines people-centred security and/or sustainable development' (Geneva Declaration Secretariat 2008). Based on this definition, AVR refers to any action or activity that contributes to a decrease in armed violence, including, for example: certain peace building activities; disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) programmes; community safety programmes; small-arms/light weapons (SALW) and ammunition disposal; physical security and stockpile management (PSSM); and, security sector/system reform (SSR). While some of these activities are strictly dedicated to preventing and reducing armed violence, others, such as SALW control, ammunition disposal and PSSM, also contribute to increased public safety and accident prevention (e.g., by reducing the likelihood of ammunition depot explosions). For the purpose of this article, the terms 'AVR' and 'AVR-related' refer respectively to strict armed violence reduction and wider public safety interventions.

Mine action activities have long been considered part of wider efforts to prevent and reduce armed violence. However, this practice note will concentrate on the relatively recent expanded focus of mine action organisations from mines and ERW to broader AVR issues related to SALW, ammunition, DDR and community safety.

Rationale for the shift

In 2012, the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining (GICHD) conducted a study on the involvement of mine action organisations[1] in AVR. They found that this expansion of traditional mine action organisation roles has been motivated by several factors. Perhaps foremost among these are needs on the ground. An estimated 526,000 people are killed annually as a result of lethal violence (Geneva Declaration Secretariat 2011), as compared to the 1,320 recorded deaths caused by mines and ERW in 2011 (CMC 2012). Mine action organisations have therefore started to respond to a much wider range of security threats. For example, the Danish Demining Group (DDG), has been working in Somaliland since 1999 when it established a mine action programme. However, in 2008, DDG shifted its programming away from mine action and towards the development of a community safety programme. This shift was partly in response to a community survey, which found that mines were not having as serious an impact as previously believed on public safety, whereas small arms and the private ownership of ERW were resulting in far more deaths and injuries (GICHD 2008).

Several mine action organisations have also started to engage in AVR in response to specific requests from national authorities. These requests have often been facilitated by the relationships and trust developed through mine action. For example, the Organization of American States (OAS) implemented a mine action programme in

Guatemala that ended in 2006 once the government met its mine clearance obligations under the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention. However, the Guatemalan military contacted the OAS several years later to request assistance with the disposal of unstable white phosphorous munitions. This initial request led to a wider OAS SALW and munitions destruction programme jointly implemented with the military.

Another factor that has motivated this expansion into AVR is the proven ability of mine action organisations to work in unstable, conflict-affected contexts based on longstanding experience from responding to emergency mine/ERW contamination threats during and immediately after conflict. This type of expertise has enabled them to work in difficult environments where SALW and munitions often pose a threat.

Additionally, there are indications that the generous funding previously made available for mine action by donors may decrease by 2015 and beyond (GICHD 2010). According to a 2010 GICHD-commissioned study on mine action funding trends that surveyed 25 donors: 'in the coming years, funding [for mine action] will become increasingly limited and difficult to secure' (GICHD 2010). In response to this threat of diminished budgetary allowances, some organisations have opted to diversify the range of services that they provide in order to take advantage of other funding opportunities.

Another key factor is the progress that has been made on legal, normative and diplomatic fronts with regards to small arms control and AVR. In recent years, an increasing number of agreements, conventions and standards have been developed at international and regional levels. These have provided mine action organisations, among others, with a useful framework for offering assistance to affected states. Examples include the UN Programme of Action on SALW control and its related regional agreements, such as the Nairobi Protocol and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Convention, the International Small Arms Control Standards, the International Ammunition Technical Guidelines and the Geneva Declaration on Armed Violence and Development. These normative and legal frameworks have served as a useful basis for assessing needs and capacity and for offering support to national authorities. Such support has included the development of national standards.

The instruments of armed violence and beyond

In 2009, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) published a report on 'Armed Violence Reduction: Enabling Development', which prioritised an AVR-based analytical lens (OECD 2009). The AVR lens, as illustrated in **Figure 1**, helped to capture the different elements and levels of armed violence and has become a useful tool for designing and analysing AVR-related programming. The lens draws attention first and foremost to the people affected by armed violence, followed by the agents (or perpetrators) of armed violence, the instruments that are used to carry out the violence and the key institutions in society (both formal and informal) that help to sustain cultures of violence (and which can also be used to prevent and respond to violence). There is a large number of organisations, working at different levels, from community and national to regional and international levels, to prevent and respond to armed violence. Mine action organisations constitute one part of this much wider global effort.

When considering the types of AVR programmes that mine action organisations have started to implement, it is clear that most have focused on implementing 'direct' programmes that try to reduce the supply and availability of the instruments of armed violence, particularly in terms of SALW and ammunition. This is consistent with their traditional role of removing the threat of mines/ERW, and, in many ways, is a natural progres-
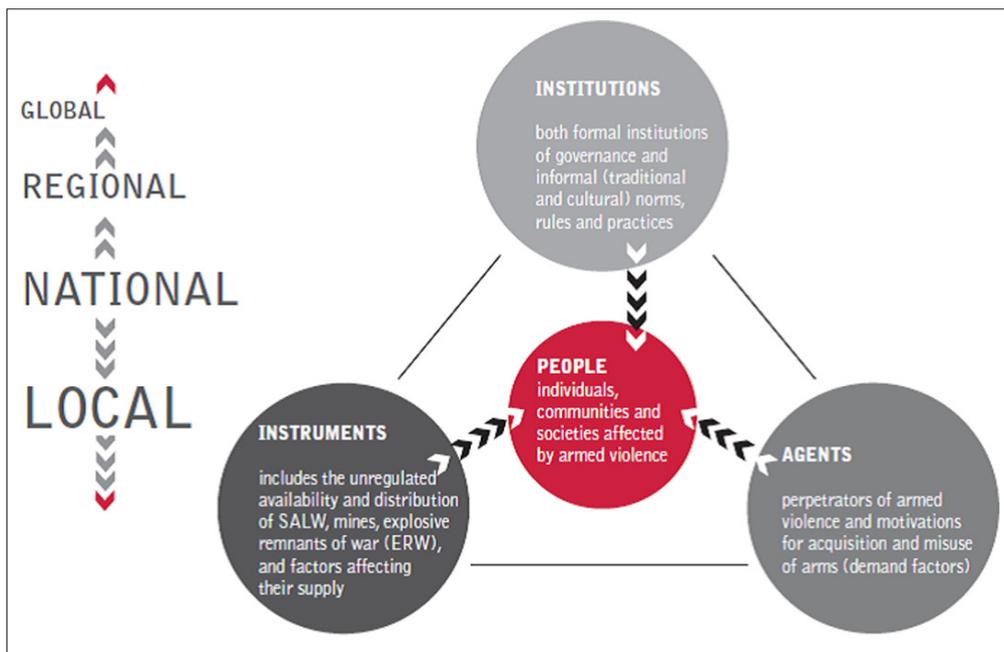
Figure 1: The OECD's AVR Lens. Source: OECD, *Armed Violence Reduction: Enabling Development*, 2009, 50.

sion. A few of these organisations, however, are also implementing programmes that target multiple aspects of the AVR lens. The following sections will examine these different types of programming in greater detail and will ask how they are trying to prevent and address armed violence.

Reducing the availability of instruments of armed violence

Several mine action organisations that have expanded beyond mines/ERW now also address the wider security threats posed by SALW and munitions. These programmes focus on reducing the availability of the instruments of armed violence by collecting, safeguarding and/or destroying SALW and munitions, reducing the threat of unplanned explosions and increasing the capacity of national security actors in these areas. For instance, consider the following examples.

· Although originally established to deal with the problem of landmine contamination, in recent years the Mines Advisory Group (MAG) has established

dedicated programmes to address SALW, conventional weapons and munitions. In Burundi, MAG has been working with the police and the military to survey weapons and munitions stockpiles, promote ammunition safety management, destroy unserviceable and excess SALW, refurbish armouries and train armourers. In 2008 alone, more than 1,500 incidents involving SALW and grenades occurred in Burundi, resulting in 1,000 deaths and more than 1,200 injuries.[2] Armed violence has no doubt been facilitated by the availability of SALW, and theft and leakage of SALW from police and military stockpiles is common, partly due to poor controls and limited capacity to safely manage and store stockpiles of SALW and ammunition. MAG's PSSM operations have therefore focused on working with the police and military to strengthen their capacity to safely and transparently manage their SALW and munitions stockpiles.

· Following the conflict in Côte d'Ivoire in 2010–11, the UN Mine Action Ser-

vice (UNMAS) responded to a request from the DDR division of the UN country mission to assess whether there was any contamination by mines and ERW. Although the UNMAS assessment found no evidence of mine contamination, it did reveal a serious need to assist the military, gendarmerie and the police with securing the numerous munitions storage depots and armouries that had been looted and destroyed during the conflict. UNMAS responded by implementing a PSSM programme that consisted of the following components: rehabilitation and refurbishment of infrastructure; training of national security actors in ammunition safety management; and development of national PSSM standards. UNMAS coordinated and managed the programme and contracted HALO Trust and G4S, which have been involved in mine action for many years, to implement components of the programme.

· UNMAS also played a lead role in coordinating the emergency response to the ammunition depot explosions that took place in March 2012 in Congo-Brazzaville. The explosions resulted in the deaths of approximately 282 people, with an additional 1,500 injured and 20,000 made homeless (UNMAS 2012). Several mine action organisations, including MAG, Handicap International (HI), Demeter and the Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency (MSB), conducted emergency clearance of the rubble and unexploded ordnance, and provided risk education and victim assistance services in an effort to mitigate immediate dangers and enhance the safety of civilians living in and around the site of the explosions. While this programme did not address the use or supply of arms, it focused on increasing public safety by responding to an accident that resulted from unsafe ammunition management practices.

Charting new territory: Holistic efforts to reduce armed violence

Although the majority of mine action organisations that have engaged in AVR-related activities have concentrated on targeting the instruments of armed violence, there are a few that are charting new territory with programmes that target multiple aspects of the AVR lens. DDG for example, is implementing community safety programmes in contexts as diverse Somaliland, South Sudan, Uganda's Karamoja region and Yemen. The community safety approach not only addresses the instruments of violence, but also tries to change the attitudes and behaviour of those involved in perpetrating violence (i.e., the agents) and those affected by violence. It seeks to strengthen the capacity of formal and informal institutions to prevent and respond to violence.

These programmes, while adapted to local needs and contexts, have some common elements. For example, DDG works with affected communities to develop community safety plans and to establish community safety committees in order to build community capacity and to enhance safety. In communities most at risk of outbreaks of violent conflict, residents are trained in conflict management to enable them to peacefully resolve minor conflicts and to minimise the likelihood of armed violence. In Somaliland, to complement community-level efforts, DDG is also implementing district safety programmes which involve building the capacity of district level institutions in development and safety planning. These safety-focused interventions are complimented in some countries by the protection and livelihoods-focused programmes implemented by DDG's parent organisation, the Danish Refugee Council.

HI is another organisation that is implementing AVR programmes that address multiple aspects of the AVR lens. In Libya for example, HI is implementing a SALW risk awareness project which is focused on changing the awareness and behaviour of civilians towards SALW. The availability of

SALW increased following the conflict in 2011, when military depots and armouries were raided, and with the supply of SALW to rebels by Western governments. As a result, an unknown number of SALW are now in the hands of civilians who have no training in the safe storage and use of SALW (Mülli, 2012). HI's project is therefore trying to strengthen national capacity to reduce the risks associated with SALW misuse and ERW, including risks associated with ammunition and explosives. The project is addressing the widespread incidence of SALW-related incidents and accidents in eastern Libya's urban centres. HI is working with civil society, schools and the media to deliver SALW risk education and to promote safe behaviour among at-risk groups with regards to SALW, mines and ERW. HI is also supporting local authorities and others to obtain reliable and impartial data on SALW-related threats, victims and the impact of weapons misuse.

Action on Armed Violence (AOAV), previously known as Landmine Action, is yet another example of a mine action organisation that is charting new territory. In 2006, AOAV established a Weapons and Ammunition Disposal (WAD) programme in Liberia to address the high levels of contamination by small arms ammunition, mortars, grenades and other explosive devices that had been dumped by armed groups alongside roads or near villages (Mülli 2012). Following the success of its WAD programme, AOAV initiated an agricultural training programme for ex-combatants and at-risk youth in 2008, in order to provide them with alternate livelihoods options and dissuade them from re-engaging in conflict and criminal activity, including illicit natural resource extraction. Unlike previous training initiatives offered through the UN's DDRR process in Liberia, AOAV's Tumutu Agricultural Training Programme offered comprehensive agricultural training over an extended period of time.[3]

As further illustration of the interest in applying innovative approaches to prevent and reduce armed violence, all three organisations (DDG, HI and AOAV) are among the founding members of the recently established Global Alliance on Armed Violence, a broad alliance of civil society organisations working on armed violence prevention and reduction.[4]

Mission creep or response to wider security needs?

These programmes illustrate that mine action organisations are using innovative and multi-dimensional approaches to prevent and reduce armed violence. But does this expansion represent a loss of organisational focus? Some argue that mine action organisations should continue to concentrate on removing the threat posed by mine/ERW contamination; that straying into the domain of broader AVR constitutes mission creep and a dilution of global mine clearance efforts when the threat of mines/ERW remains in many countries. However, for many organisations, the choice between mine action and broader AVR is more than just an either-or decision. Funding for mine action typically comes from different funding channels than funding for broader AVR programmes. And most - if not all - of these organisations continue to implement mine action programmes, sometimes alongside their AVR-related activities.

Nonetheless, it is clear that some organisations are grappling with how far beyond traditional mine action they should expand. The OAS for example has long been involved in supporting mine action in Latin America, and, in 2010, its mine action unit established a new programme, the Program of Assistance for Control of Arms and Munitions (PACAM), to respond to requests from states in Central America for assistance with destroying surplus and degraded stocks of ammunition and arms. In response to PACAM activities in Guatemala, the Govern-

ment requested support from the OAS in 2012 with the destruction of 23,000 barrels of precursor chemicals, typically used for the manufacture of synthetic drugs, which had been seized at Guatemala's ports (Naidoo 2012). Although the PACAM team were initially unsure about whether to assist, in part due to issues related to the programme's original mandate, they ultimately responded positively to the request and are developing the capacity of the Guatemalan authorities to not only dispose of the chemicals safely, but to also provide technical support to neighbouring countries with similar problems. Some may say that the shift from dealing with mines/ERW to SALW and ammunition, and then to also addressing precursor chemicals, signals mission creep on the part of the OAS. However, given that Guatemala is struggling with high levels of non-conflict related armed violence and escalating drug trafficking, and that there are no other organisations working in-country that are able to provide this type of support, it makes strategic sense for the OAS to use its expertise to assist the Government in this manner.

Similarly, DDG argues against the notion of mission creep and contends that its community safety programmes directly respond to the needs of conflict affected communities, and that ensuring organisational relevance and impact requires innovation and adaptation.

Ultimately, it is up to each organisation to decide whether and how they should expand their focus beyond mines and ERW. However, in contexts where the threats to safety and security posed by arms and munitions are significantly higher than that of mines and ERW, and where mine action organisations have the skills, expertise and local contacts to respond to these wider threats, this is certainly a welcome development.

Notes
[1] Mine action NGOs such as Danish Demining Group, DanChurchAid, HALO Trust, Handicap International and Mines Advisory Group have been particularly active, as have the UN Mine Action Service (UNMAS) and the Organization of American States (OAS).
[2] Based on 2004–2005 public health data that Small Arms Survey obtained from the Doctors Without Borders-Belgium's Centre des Blessés Legers in Bujumbura.
[3] This expansion in programming focus mirrored a wider shift taking place within AOAV away from mine action towards broader AVR.
[4] See the Global Alliance on Armed Violence, www.allianceonarmedviolence.org.

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