

Mine Action with a Human Face: A Human Security Doctrine for Mine Action

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Human Security and Mine Action Discussion Paper

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Mine action needs to rediscover its ‘human face’,¹ to remember, as UNMAS has said, that “It is not so much about mines as it is about people....”² Empirical research in Afghanistan, Bosnia and Sudan show that mine action is in danger of becoming distracted by commercial and strategic priorities. This is especially true since the advent of the ‘War on Terror’ and the continuing trend of consolidating the commercial mine action sector into the private security sector.

Ten years ago a group of NGOs critical of the donor and commercial interests tried to develop a framework to guide mine action. The resulting document, “Mine Action Programmes from a Development-oriented Point of View”, sometimes referred to as ‘The Bad Honnef Framework’, argued that mine action must be guided by basic principles of participation, co-operation, coherence, sustainability and solidarity.³ Unfortunately, its influence has been relatively limited; in some places mine action is becoming a commodity to buy or an activity in support of counterinsurgency. To counteract these trends, we need a ‘Human Security Doctrine for Mine Action’, guided by the following five principles:

1. Doing no harm
2. Protecting the vulnerable
3. Participation
4. Stewardship
5. Building peace

The following will outline each of these principles in more detail and explain how they relate to mine action.

1. Doing No Harm

Research on mine action, confirming the findings of the political economy of aid in conflict literature, has shown how demining interacts with the politics of the post-war

¹ cf. Giovanni Andrea Cornia, Richard Jolly and Frances Stewart (eds.) (1987) *Adjustment with a Human Face: Protecting the Vulnerable and Promoting Growth*. Oxford, Clarendon Press.

² UNMAS. (2005) “Mine Action and Effective Coordination: The United Nations Policy.” p. 3. <http://www.undp.org/cpr/documents/mine_action/role_undp/UN_Mine_Action_Policy.pdf>.

³ ICBL. (2000) “Mine Action Programmes from a Development-oriented Point of View: ‘The Bad Honnef Framework.’” *Landmine Monitor 2000*. <http://www.icbl.org/lm/2000/appendices/bad_honnef.html>.

context.⁴ Too often, demining agencies have been unaware or unperturbed by way their programs are captured by local vested interests or strengthen networks that are opposed to peace. Demining agencies must become more aware of how their funding, priorities, recruitment, information gathering and management practices can exacerbate conflict or contribute to peace. This will require demining agencies recruiting people from outside its traditional ex-military circles – development professionals, political scientists, anthropologists, sociologists, management specialists and economists – who are able to analyze social and organizational issues from different perspectives.

Particularly important are considerations of whether to accept money from ‘belligerent donor’ (donors that are involved in the conflict), whether to use demining units of the military forces which were responsible for the conflict, how to vet potential deminers who have links to war crimes and atrocities and how to prevent the fragmentation of the public monopoly of force when using private security companies. While this leads to some difficult choices, doing no harm must always be the guiding aspiration.

This also applies to more technical matters. Demining agencies must put safety first in their clearance efforts, ensuring their deminers are well trained, managed and equipped to do their dangerous work. They must also open channels of communication to the local communities surrounding their task to raise awareness of the mine problem and explain what is and what is not being cleared. Donors have a responsibility to ensure that their contracting systems do not incentivize corner-cutting and a ‘race to the bottom.’ Stable and long-term grants to idealistically motivated and professional institutions encourage investment in safety and quality.

2. Protecting the Vulnerable

The Bad Honnef Framework declares that “The needs and aspirations of people affected by mines are the starting point for mine action programmes.”⁵ However, commercialization of clearance can erode this humanitarian principle, allocating demining according to ability to pay, rather than need. Moreover, the integration of demining into the strategic objectives of counterinsurgency campaigns (such as in Afghanistan and Iraq) further corrodes mine action’s ‘humanitarian space.’ Putting military concerns first also allows countries to claim the right to use mines and cluster munitions to devastating effect upon civilians (as seen in Lebanon in 2006).

⁴ Mary B. Anderson. (1999) *Do No Harm: How Aid Can Support Peace – or War*. Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers; Jonathan Goodhand. (2006) *Aiding Peace? The Role of NGOs in Armed Conflict*. Bourton on Dunsmore, Intermediate Technology Publications; David J. Keen. (2008) *Complex Emergencies*. Cambridge, Polity; Fiona Terry. (2002) *Condemned to Repeat?: The Paradox of Humanitarian Action*. Ithaca, NY, Cornell University Press; Alex de Waal. (1998) *Famine Crimes: Politics and the Disaster Relief Industry in Africa*. Bloomington, Indiana, Indiana University Press; Mark Duffield. (2001) *Global Governance and the New Wars: The Merging of Development and Security*. London, Zed Books; Mark Duffield. (2007) *Development, Security and Unending War: Governing the World of Peoples*. Cambridge, Polity Press.

⁵ ICBL. (2000) “Mine Action Programmes from a Development-oriented Point of View: ‘The Bad Honnef Framework.’” *Landmine Monitor 2000*. <http://www.icbl.org/lm/2000/appendices/bad_honnef.html>.

Reconceiving security as the protection of those most vulnerable, rather than those most privileged by nation or class, mine action must focus on securing the lives and livelihoods of those most affected by mine and UXO contamination. At the same time, mine action agencies, the UN and progressive states must continue to strengthen and deepen international norms protecting non-combatants from both the short and long term effects of mines and cluster munitions.

3. Participation

Protecting the vulnerable cannot be an exercise in paternalism, for “As much as any human being, mine affected people and communities have the right to shape their own lives and to participate in political and economic decision making which concerns their interests.”⁶ Therefore, as the Bad Honnef Framework asserted, ‘participation’ must be a guiding principle of mine action programs. This means demining agencies should use community-based mapping and priority setting methods, such as those that have been successfully pioneered in Bosnia, employ local people as deminers and build local capacities to manage the mine and UXO problem.

Moreover, mine action must be inclusive – aiming to incorporate persons from across local social divides of ethnicity, religion or political affiliation. It must attempt to resist gender norms and recruit female deminers where possible. It must involve people from non-military backgrounds, to encourage a diversity of perspectives.

4. Stewardship

This research project has demonstrated how the ‘principal-agent’ model of competitive tendering does not produce the results it promises. Instead of increasing quality, there is a danger that it will encourage a ‘race to the bottom’, incentivizing corner-cutting, poor treatment of labor and unsafe practices.

In its place, mine action donors should be guided by a ‘principal-steward’ model, in which they build long-term partnerships with trusted organizations that show dedication, professionalism and resolve. By granting long-term funding, donors, in effect, create a property right for the implementer, encouraging them to invest in high standards. Thus donors should encourage, and fund, their implementers to avoid cutting costs on training, equipment, oversight, insurance and health care for deminers. Only through investing in people and organizations can one expect them to perform to their full capacity.

5. Building Peace

Ultimately, mine action is about restoring confidence that people are safe from violent threats of harm in their daily lives. It is about removing barriers to safe freedom of movement and exchange. Thus, it is an integral part of a society’s recovery from war. As the Bad Honnef Framework asserted, mine action programs should “support peace-building including reconstruction and development of the community and aim at

⁶ ICBL. (2000) “Mine Action Programmes from a Development-oriented Point of View: ‘The Bad Honnef Framework.’” *Landmine Monitor 2000*. <http://www.icbl.org/lm/2000/appendices/bad_honnef.html>.

enhancing the socio-economic and cultural infrastructure.”⁷ Mine action must thus work to encourage the return of displaced people, kickstart the legitimate economy, restore cultural symbols of integration such as museums, monuments and centers of learning.

Beyond this, however, mine action organizations should embody the peace envisioned. Espousing a multiethnic, law-governed society while supporting mono-ethnic demining agencies with links to organized crime, as some donors did in Bosnia, seems counterproductive. Mine action agencies should be inclusive, incorporating people across social divisions of ethnicity, class or political affiliation. They should also try to resist patriarchal patterns that entrench violence, by employing women deminers where possible and offering alternative constructions of masculinity based on service and saving lives.

Moreover, through campaigning for regulations on the use of mines, cluster munitions and other technologies, mine action organizations should advocate for limits on the politics of violence. They should further embody non-violent politics by limiting links to private military contracting and military forces and, where possible, prevent employees from bearing arms.

⁷ ICBL. (2000) “Mine Action Programmes from a Development-oriented Point of View: ‘The Bad Honnef Framework.’” *Landmine Monitor 2000*. <http://www.icbl.org/lm/2000/appendices/bad_honnef.html>.