



Priority-Setting in Mine Action:

KEY MESSAGES

- > Priority-setting in mine action entails a set of processes and decisions that determine what should receive the most resources. These are known as 'big P' prioritisation, and cover, for example, which geographic areas of a country are most in need, which programme components and which operators. Then, given how resources have been allocated, 'small p' prioritisation is the name given to what should be done first, eg impacted communities, survey and clearance tasks.
- > The main aim of priority-setting is to make sure we are delivering the most value for money.
- > Prioritisation involves
 - (i) deciding what should receive priority
 - (ii) ensuring adequate resources actually get to the selected priorities
- > In decisions involving the allocation of scarce resources, such as prioritisation, everything is interrelated. Priority-setting needs to be understood as a system.
- > In donor-dependant mine action programmes, the government budgeting system is not used to allocate international resources to where these are most needed. This creates huge problems – even if 'small p' priorities are set well, the 'big P' priorities will be wrong and the overall system will not deliver value for money.
- > Good priority-setting normally entails both technical and political issues. Political decisions need to be based on open communication among key stakeholders to identify gaps in the system. In turn, good priority-setting facilitates coordinated action to address those gaps.

If both are not done, the priority-setting system is not complete and will not deliver the most value for money.

Introduction and Basic Concepts

GICHD POLICY BRIEF 1 | NOVEMBER 2011

INTRODUCTION TO THE SERIES

The most important measure of performance for a mine action programme is value for money: the ratio of benefits (however measured¹) to costs. The main determinant of whether a mine action programme delivers good value for money is not the quality of its survey and clearance technology, nor how hard the staff work, how well managers are trained or how complete its database is. It is how well priorities are set at each level.

The aim of prioritisation is to achieve high value for money. We achieve this by selecting actions that deliver more benefits per dollar than an alternative action. If we can do this systematically, the mine action programme will perform well in terms of value for money.



Many mine action managers are familiar with elements of priority-setting, but not so many have experience with the full range of issues that must be considered when designing a national prioritisation system. This is particularly the case for large, complex mine action programmes. These programmes require a number of interlinked processes and decisions that determine:

- > What should receive the most resources – known as “allocation” or ‘big P’ prioritisation. Examples include how to divide resources among geographic areas of a country, programme components, and operators.
- > Taking into consideration how the resources have been allocated, what should be done first? This is known as ‘small p’ prioritisation. Examples include determining which demining tasks should be done first.

Given the range of issues involved in a complete national prioritisation system, the first four Briefs in this series will focus on the basic concept and challenges in priority-setting, as well as the underlying principles in designing the overall system.

Future Briefs will provide advice and will give examples of different approaches in making specific prioritisation decisions. Examples will include various qualitative and quantitative methods for measuring single and multi-criteria decision-making etc and the information management requirements for priority-setting.

OBJECTIVES AND INTENDED AUDIENCE

The basic objective of this series of Briefs is to assist mine action programmes in achieving greater value for money, through designing and implementing sound priority-setting systems. These systems coordinate the many interrelated decisions in a logical manner, and consider both costs and benefits of the value for money equation.

Every country is different in important ways, and mine action programmes often exist in countries in, or emerging from conflict, when changes in politics, economics, and society can be both rapid and dramatic. The Briefs, therefore, cannot provide a blueprint for a national prioritisation system. Rather, they cover the key principles underlying priority-setting. They will enable mine action officials to design and implement prioritisation systems suitable to the place and time, and which will adapt to changing contexts.

The principal audience for these Briefs are national officials and senior managers of large, complex mine action programmes,² and those who provide advice to such programmes. Managers in charge of smaller programmes will find the principles outlined in these Briefs to be relevant, but some of the topics may be more detailed than they require. Managers working in mine action operators (commercial, non-profit, public sector, or security forces) may find that some topics are not relevant to the types of decisions they are required to make.

The Briefs address mine action in general but many of the specific examples relate to demining, which accounts for the bulk of mine action expenditure. The Briefs do not cover the many issues that arise in victim assistance or disability programmes.

The initial Briefs in this series are:

- > Brief 1: Introduction to the series; key terms and basic concepts; common challenges
- > Brief 2: The need for a national priority-setting system; components of national priority-setting systems; what such systems should accomplish and how responsibilities and authorities should be defined
- > Brief 3: Establishing a national priority-setting system and adapting it over time; how to assess the quality of the system
- > Brief 4: A more detailed examination of values, decision criteria and indicators.

Future Briefs are planned to cover, at least:

- > An overview of cost-effective approaches to prioritisation; examples of cost/benefit analysis and multi-criteria analysis in mine action

- > Information management to support prioritisation
- > Participatory approaches to understanding local preferences
- > Prioritisation in survey and clearance operations
- > Quality Management, monitoring, evaluation and prioritisation
- > Putting it all together

This initial Brief reviews some of the basic concepts that need to be understood by those responsible for designing prioritisation systems. But first it discusses why – for national mine action programmes at least – prioritisation is best understood as a system.

A SYSTEMS APPROACH

We need to set priorities because there are never enough resources (people, money, assets, time) to accomplish all that needs to be done. In the case of mine action, for example, we might seek “*a world free of the threat of landmines and explosive remnants of war (ERW), where individuals and communities live in a safe environment conducive to development, and where the needs of mine and ERW victims are met and they are fully integrated into their societies*”.³ However, this will take far more resources than are currently available, and many years. So, we need to determine what should receive the most resources, and what needs to be addressed first.

Because assigning resources to one alternative means they are unavailable for others, prioritisation must be viewed as a system of interconnected decisions. Commonly, the greatest weakness in priority-setting for mine action is not regarding mechanisms already in place but those which are missing. The solution lies mainly in the national capitals of mine/ERW-affected countries and the mine action donors. Decisions made – or left unmade – in the capitals have a huge impact on the quantity and type of resources available for prioritisation later and, therefore, the overall performance of national mine action programmes.

A systems approach is also needed to tie together priorities emerging from strategic planning. These should consist of long term processes, operations planning (annual), and task planning (short term).

MIND THE GAPS

In mine action, key decisions regarding the channelling of sufficient resources towards the right tasks are often not made. This is where the biggest weakness of most national mine action prioritisation systems lies. If we are to improve planning and prioritisation in mine action, we need to identify and address these gaps. These may include:

> Gaps between preferences and resource allocations

Prioritisation is firstly a process in which the preferred alternatives (our preferences) are determined, based on what we believe will deliver the best ratio of benefits to costs. It is secondly the allocation of resources to these preferred alternatives. If the allocation of resources is not closely connected to the 'preference list', the programme will not deliver value for money as resources will be targeting the wrong tasks or areas of the country.

> Gaps between prioritisation processes in different mine action components, areas of the country or organisations

Whenever we allocate resources to one alternative, these become unavailable for others. Resources allocated to one province means they are unavailable for tasks in other areas of the country. Allocating resources to survey and clearance reduces what is available to risk education, for example. An effective prioritisation system is based on the understanding that all decisions relating to mine action resources are interrelated, and a broader perspective is required to ensure each piece fits together. Priority-setting needs to be thought of as a system connecting these interrelated decisions in a logical manner suitable to a specific country at a particular time.

> Gaps in relating benefits to costs

Most advice on prioritisation in mine action addresses:

- (i) the technical and operational challenges in achieving high efficiency and low costs
- (ii) how to obtain the most value in terms of socio-economic benefits

Value for money is a ratio: how much value is delivered per dollar, per team, per day, etc? Technical knowledge needs to be integrated with socio-economic understanding. We cannot set the right priorities without understanding the relative

benefits (determined largely by socio-economic factors) and the costs (determined mainly by technical factors) of alternative courses of action.

> Gaps between the mine action programme and the broader priorities of the country

The costs and (even more so) the benefits of mine action change as the country advances in political, social and economic dimensions. The nature of international involvement in the country changes for the same reason. In parallel, the amount and quality of data available to the mine action programme improves over time due to mine action surveys and the strengthening of survey and statistics services in the country as a whole. If mine action priority-setting systems do not adapt over time to the broader environment as it naturally evolves, gaps will emerge and widen, and value for money will fall.

> Gaps between mine action systems and national systems

Donor-dependent mine action programmes are often obliged to set plans and priorities in ways that no country, organisation or individual would willingly choose to do. Planning and prioritisation processes that deal with explosives contamination in developed countries such as Germany and Belgium do not resemble those established in most donor-funded mine action programmes. Developed countries, plus a number of fast-growing developing nations such as Vietnam, use their established planning and budgeting systems to allocate resources and set priorities for 'mine action' services.

Many mine/ERW-affected countries are emerging from conflict. They are dependent on donor countries to finance the bulk of their mine action services. At the same time, their national planning and budgeting systems are weak. This, combined with a dependence on donor financing, leaves the country susceptible to the insistence by donors on managing the resources provided to mine action via separate systems. These parallel systems create extra complications in the short term and, in the long term, make transition to national responsibility more difficult.

1. BASIC CONCEPTS

Main purposes of prioritisation in mine action

Priority-setting in mine action is the set of decisions and processes involved in determining which tasks or activities to undertake in which sequence. The central purpose of priority-setting is to achieve the most value for money. More formally, we try to maximise the ratio of benefits to costs.⁴ This requires that we are doing the right job (ie it seems likely that high benefits will result) and that we are doing the job right (ie we use the correct assets efficiently).

In addition, priority-setting helps managers by limiting the number of issues upon which they need to focus at any one time. This helps ensure that resources are not spread too thinly – trying to do everything at once often means that nothing important gets done. Identifying priorities also makes it more likely that tasks which are essential to achieve long term goals, but which may take a long time to implement, are not continually delayed because less important, but somehow more ‘urgent’, tasks keep emerging.

Good priority-setting is based on good communication among stakeholders and, in turn, facilitates coordination. There are always hundreds of activities that somebody thinks would be good to do. A list of a few key priorities makes it clear what the decision-makers understand as the need-to-do tasks and which are not the nice-to-do options. As such, an agreed set of priorities is a pre-condition for proper coordination.

Key Terms

Alternatives

Priority-setting entails choosing from a set of alternatives appropriate to the decision being made. For example, if we want to ensure the most heavily impacted parts of a country receive the most mine action services, our set of alternatives might be the provinces in the country. Provinces could then be ranked in priority according to, for example, the total contaminated area in each province, the number of recent casualties or people who have returned to live there etc.

Resources may then be allocated to the most seriously affected communities within the chosen province. The set of alternatives for that priority-setting decision would be all mine-affected communities in that province, with the provincial government aiming to identify which communities the operators should focus upon first.

Operators would then prioritise alternative mine action tasks in the communities most in need. For example, suspected hazardous areas (SHA) for survey and clearance, or high-risk groups for risk education etc.

Preferences, resource allocations and priorities

Preferences, resource allocations and priorities are closely related terms which are often used interchangeably because the payer and the beneficiary are often the same. In such cases, the individuals who control the resources simply allocate them in line with their own preferences, immediately turning them into priorities. When spending other people’s money (which is generally the case in mine action) it is useful to distinguish between these terms, because there is a separation between who is paying and the intended beneficiary.

Preferences are the alternatives to which someone wishes resources to be allocated. ‘Preference ranking’ is the process of determining which alternatives are most important or desirable to the person or organisation doing the ranking – the ‘wish list’.

Resource allocation is the act of dividing resources among purposes – “big P prioritisation”. Because resources are limited, allocating an amount to a particular purpose means there will be less for others.

Priorities can be understood as the combination of preferences and resource allocation – when the necessary resources have been allocated to someone’s preferred alternatives. Priorities need to be set because resources are limited, and it’s a way to try to ensure the most important objectives and activities receive timely attention and are allocated sufficient resources.⁵

An example illustrating the difference between wish lists and priorities is given in the following box.

Box 1 | Wish lists or priority lists in Cambodia⁶

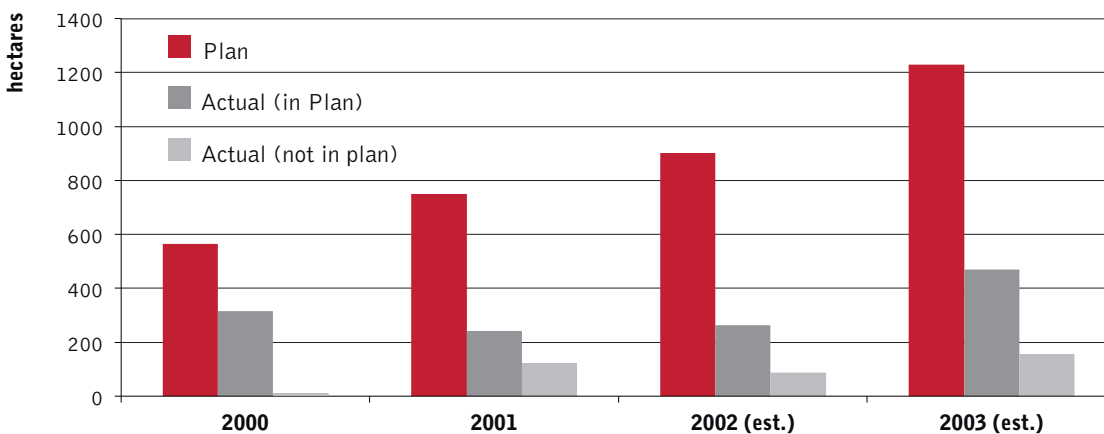
A demining task that is most preferred by a mine-affected community is not a priority until resources have been allocated to it. Lists of preferred alternatives that are not implemented are often termed 'wish lists'. Many preference lists remain simply wish lists because the people who live in mine-affected communities are not in control of the resources. There is a gap between the demand for and the supply of mine action services, and this has not been fully addressed by the priority-setting system.

In Cambodia, Mine Action Planning Units (MAPU) are provincial government units. They have been set up in the most mine-affected provinces to assist in the identification of demining priorities and the formulation of provincial mine action plans. Their main task is to work with villages and communes identifying local demining preferences. But for some years, the actual pattern of clearance has had little relationship to community preferences. There have been a number of interrelated problems, including:

- > not all demining agencies have taken their priorities from the MAPU process
- > often, demining agencies have not adhered closely to their own annual work plans
- > the clearance plans developed via the MAPU mechanism are too ambitious

The scale of these discrepancies can be illustrated with data from Battambang province (by most accounts, the province in which the MAPU mechanism has worked best).

Planned versus actual clearance in Battambang



In 2000, only 56 per cent of the area planned for clearance was actually demined. In percentage terms, this shortfall increased in the following two years: less than a third of the area planned for clearance was actually demined in 2001 and 2002. Performance improved marginally in percentage terms in 2003, but overall, less than 40 per cent of the area planned for clearance was demined.

These substantial shortfalls were in part due to the fact that operators cleared minefields that were not part of the approved provincial demining plan. Often, there are good reasons for deviations from the plan. For example, in 2001, a drought led to an emergency well-digging project and demining agencies were asked to survey and clear areas in support of that project. However, no similar general emergency arose in 2002 or 2003, but clearance outside of plan remained significant, and actually rose in 2003.

Values, criteria and indicators⁷

Values

Prioritisation aims to increase value for money, so logically, we need to base our priorities on values. However, not everything we value can be easily expressed in monetary terms. Simply put, something has value if reasonable people have good reason to value it.

At the most basic level, our fundamental values are expressed in very broad terms; good health, security, prosperity for ourselves, our families and communities, keeping promises and so on. Most people broadly share these values but often differ on the weight that should be given to one value in relation to another.

Criteria

A criterion (plural, criteria) is a principle or standard by which something is judged in terms of its value. As such, criteria are closely related to values, but give more detail of how that general value applies to the specific situation. This table provides examples that are relevant to mine action.

Table 1 | Key values and possible criteria

Value	Possible Criteria for Mine Action Programmes
Sanctity of human life	Reducing risk from mines/ERW Improving emergency medical care for mine victims Facilitating delivery of emergency food supplies
Preventing pain/ alleviating suffering	Reducing the lives and limbs lost to mines/ERW Reducing risk from mines/ERW Improving physical rehabilitation services for victims
Human dignity and alleviating destitution	Facilitating delivery of humanitarian aid Promoting poverty reduction Social & economic reintegration of victims Promoting the rights of people with disabilities
Restoring what people have lost through no fault of their own	Promoting rehabilitation and reconstruction Facilitating refugee/IDP returns
Material prosperity	Raising economic growth Increasing employment Increasing agricultural production
Keeping promises/ fulfilling commitments	Complying with APMBC obligations Complying with CCM obligations

Indicators

Indicators are more specific than criteria. Unlike values and criteria, which are mental concepts, an indicator is something that can be perceived (ie seen, heard, tasted, felt or smelled). A good indicator is tied closely to a criterion but can be assessed (ie measured or at least observed) for each of the alternatives that have to be prioritised. For example, ‘demining safety’ is a criterion, but is too broad to be assessed directly. However, the ‘distance between demining lanes’ is an indicator that can be seen and measured to determine, in part, whether the criterion is met.

Indicators are very specific, to allow measurement or observation. Because of this, one indicator will not give a complete picture of a criterion and, normally, we use two to five indicators for each criterion. Examples are given in Table 2 and a more complete list is provided in the fourth brief of this series.

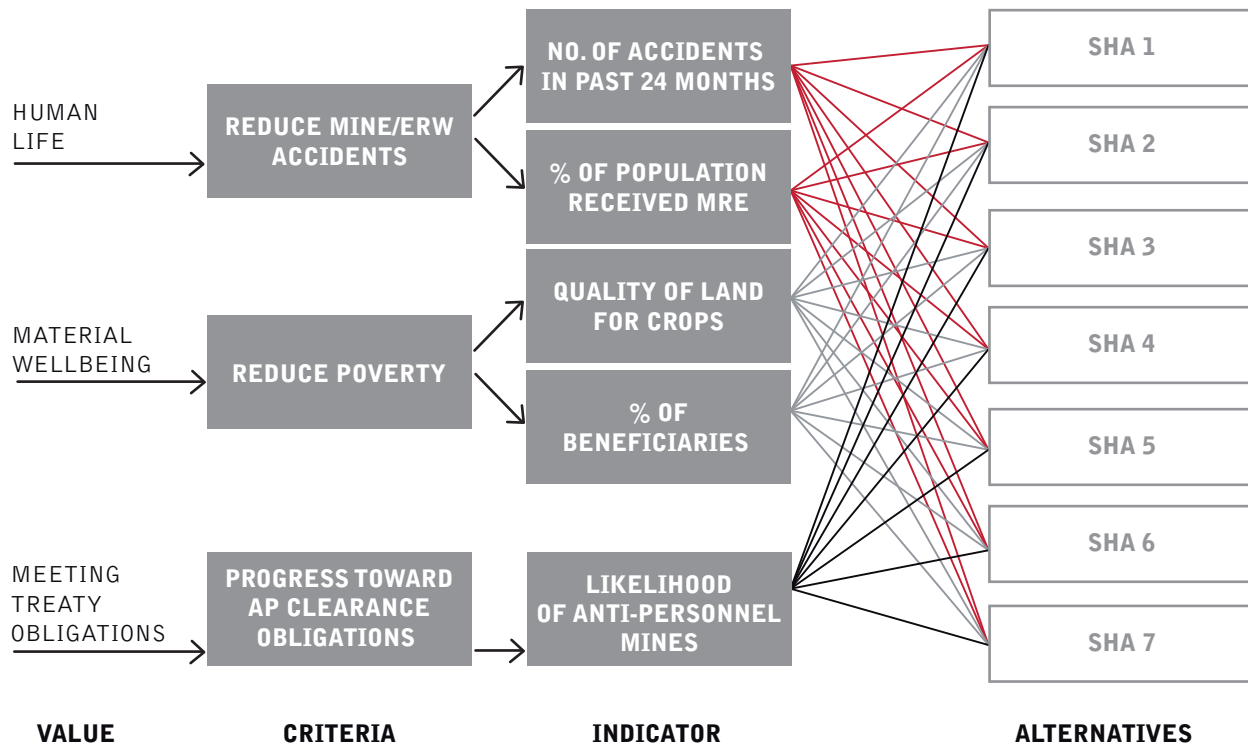
Table 2 | Key values with possible criteria and indicators

Value	Possible Criteria for Mine Action Programmes	Possible Indicators (sex & age disaggregated where possible)
Human life	Risk from mines/ERW	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Number of accidents in past 24 months > Percentage of population that received mine risk education (MRE)
	Quality of emergency medical care for mine victims	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Percentage of victims receiving emergency medical treatment within six hours > Percentage of survivors reaching a clinic within 24 hours
Preventing pain/alleviating human suffering	Risk from mines/ERW	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Number of people receiving risk education > Number of primary schools with risk education in their curriculum
	Quality of physical rehabilitation services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Number of victims receiving rehabilitation services > Percentage of physically disabled people receiving rehabilitation services > Percentage of physically disabled people within one day’s travel of a rehabilitation clinic
Restoring what people have lost through no fault of their own	Facilitating refugee/IDP returns	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Number of home communities for refugees/internally displaced persons (IDPs) surveyed > Number of returnees to communities where demining has taken place
Material prosperity	Increasing agricultural production	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Hectares of irrigated crop land released > Hectares of rain-fed crop land released > Percentage of crop land area on which crops have been planted > Output produced from cleared agricultural land > Value of fodder, firewood and other resources collected from land

PRIORITY-SETTING IN MINE ACTION: INTRODUCTION AND BASIC CONCEPTS
GICHD ISSUE BRIEF 1 | NOVEMBER 2011

Figure 1 depicts the relationships among values, criteria, indicators and alternatives (in this example, in order to rank suspected hazardous areas (SHA) to set demining task priorities).

Figure 1 | Relationship among values, criteria, indicators and alternatives for task prioritisation



Weights

Criteria clarify what we value while indicators clarify which of the alternatives best meet a criterion. Weights then clarify the relative importance that should be placed on the various criteria and indicators, ie what is most valued. For example, the designers of the Landmine Impact Survey (LIS) place great weight on the need to reduce casualties. They use the number of mine/ERW casualties in a community in the preceding 24 months as an indicator (see Table 3).

Table 3 | Landmine Impact Survey Community Impact Scoring System for Sudan⁸

Weight of factors influencing the impact

Number of recent victims	2.00	Fixed pasture blocked	1.00
Number of old victims	0.00	Migratory pasture blocked	1.00
UXO problem present	1.00	Irrigated crop blocked	1.00
Mine problem present	2.00	Rainfed crop blocked	1.00
MRE training conducted	0.00	Non cultivated area blocked	1.00
Housing blocked	1.00	User Defined factor 1	0.00
Roads blocked	1.00	User Defined factor 2	0.00
Other infrastructure blocked	1.00	User Defined factor 3	0.00
Access to drinking water blocked	1.00	User Defined factor 4	0.00
Access to other water blocked	1.00	User Defined factor 5	0.00

KEY CHALLENGES

The need for prioritisation of any kind arises because there are insufficient resources to do everything at once, so choices must be made. These choices should be made through conscious decisions but, even when they are not, choices are being made. Resource constraints mean that, when some things get done, the possibility of doing other things is eliminated. However, mine action programmes also commonly face a number of more specific challenges.

COORDINATION PROBLEMS

People make choices every day; mostly about what a person will do with his or her time, money and energy. Decision-makers in organisations make choices on how to allocate the financial and human resources of the organisation. Typically in mine action however, decision-makers from the National Mine Action Authority (NMAA), Mine Action Centre (MAC) and operators make choices on behalf of others, including donors, beneficiaries, and the government. This is the first challenge – mine action decision-makers decide how to allocate other people's money in the interests of a different group of people – the beneficiaries.

Dependence on other people's money creates additional complications. There are more stakeholders involved – donors, national and local governments, beneficiaries, development non-governmental organisations (NGOs) working in mine/ERW-affected areas, and so on. Each has an opinion about what is most important, and often they differ, causing coordination problems.

MULTIPLE ACCOUNTABILITIES

An account of how funds are used must be given to those who provided the money. Because of this, mine action managers often have to give multiple accounts: to donors of course, but also to the national government, the communities in mine/ERW-affected areas, and so on. How, therefore, can mine action managers demonstrate to all that they behaved accountably in selecting reasonable priorities, particularly when the various stakeholders have different views on priorities?

GAPS AND OVERLAPS IN AUTHORITIES

As different stakeholders have different levels of influence, whose opinions count? Part of the answer to this question lies in the structure of authorities. Someone's opinion counts, in part at least, if they have been given some authority over the decision.⁹ Unfortunately, in many countries the various actors involved in mine action have established different authority structures, leading to gaps (where priorities cannot be addressed) and overlaps (where there may be conflicts over priorities).

The root causes of this problem are interrelated. Firstly, many conflict-affected countries have a government which lacks capacity, or commitment to development, or both. Secondly, when working with fragile and conflict-affected states, members of the international community often establish 'parallel mechanisms' to manage programmes they finance, such as mine action, because they fear government systems will not work. Too often, these parallel mechanisms bear little relationship to the national structures needed to develop local capacities, as a prelude to the transfer of responsibility. In such cases, almost certainly, the following problems will emerge:

- > gaps, where impacts from contamination remain unaddressed because the government units affected are left out of mine action priority-setting processes
- > conflicts, where resources originally allocated for one purpose are diverted to another, often on an emergency basis, to address a problem that should have been identified in the prioritisation process
- > conflicts over which government bodies should have a future role in mine action, leading to multiple, uncoordinated efforts to build local capacities, not all of which can be sustained in the long run.

ARE PLANS COMPLEMENTARY OR IN CONFLICT?

When different actors involved have different views about what the priorities should be (as is often the case), and each bases its planning on achieving its own priorities, how can mine action officials ensure that the separate plans of the individual actors are mutually consistent? Do they 'fit' in a complementary fashion so that the plans of individual actors add up to a sensible overall plan? Very often, poorly coordinated planning by different donors and operators creates an ineffective national plan, even when each of the agencies does a good job at formulating its own individual plan.

Box 2 | Reducing the misalignment of demining assets in Cambodia

This table illustrates what can happen when there is no means for making key decisions in a coordinated fashion. Until recently, there was no mechanism in Cambodia to ensure the allocation of demining assets was in line with the country's needs. Each operator allocated its own assets, with these decisions influenced by its own assessment of needs, the constraints imposed by donors (ie funding operations in only some provinces) and its own definition of 'success' (ie number of beneficiaries or cost per m²). There was no mechanism to ensure these decisions were, collectively consistent with Cambodia's needs.

The result was a significant misalignment.¹⁰ In 2003, compared with the pattern of casualties, only 27 per cent of assets were allocated to provinces that accounted for 75 per cent of all casualties. In 2004, alignment improved significantly, with 42 per cent of assets in the provinces accounting for 75 per cent of the casualties, but there was still much room for improvement.

Province <small>(ranked by numbers of casualties)</small>	Percentage of civilian landmine casualties: 2000-2004	Planned Clearance 2003	Planned Clearance 2004
Battambang	35%	14%	24%
Banteay Mean Chey	27%	10%	14%
Krong Pailin	13%	3%	4%
Otdar Mean Chey	10%	17%	18%
Pursat	3%	6%	10%
Preah Vihear	3%	16%	19%
Kampong Cham	2%	0%	1%
Siem Reap	2%	6%	6%
Correlation: alignment of assets with casualties		38%	58%

In 2009, the operators and CMAA agreed to concentrate demining assets in the 24 most affected districts, which – if implemented – would have ensured a better alignment with casualties and other socio-economic impacts.

DIFFERENT DECISION SCALES AND DURATIONS

In mine action, discussions concerning priority-setting have often focused on task priorities, eg which hazardous areas will be demined first, which communities will receive risk education (RE) this year, etc. However, there is a broader range of prioritisation decisions that mine action managers should make. Some of these involve the commitment of large shares of the total resources available.

For example, decisions on 'big P' prioritisation need to be taken. These involve large-scale decisions about how to allocate resources among different areas of the country and among the different mine action 'pillars' - demining, risk education, victim assistance, stockpile destruction and advocacy.

Priorities differ substantially in terms of the time it takes to achieve them. For example, the decision to make road verification and clearance a priority in a post-conflict period may imply investments in specialised assets that will be occupied on this task for years.

Because of these variations in the scale and duration of decisions, different types of priority-setting decisions are often grouped into broad categories, such as:

- > **Strategic** – large-scale decisions that commit resources over an extended period of time to advance broad objectives (often termed strategic goals or aims)
 - > **Operational** – decisions of varying importance that commit resources, typically for a year or less, to specific projects, areas of the country or pillars etc, in order to implement the strategy
 - > **Task** – decisions to commit specific resources to certain tasks at a specific time, for example, which minefield is to be cleared, which community is to receive risk education, etc.
- > In parallel, the mine action programme collects more data and becomes better informed over time.
 - > Mine action priorities need to change in step with significant changes that take place. Priorities appropriate in the immediate post-conflict period are almost certain to be different to the reconstruction or development phases.
 - > In addition, the mechanisms for setting priorities should evolve, to incorporate the additional information available and, as government capacities grow, to allow greater national ownership.

INFORMATION CHALLENGES

Priority-setting aims to increase the ratio of benefits to costs. Although this will clearly require information on both costs and the likely benefits, information may be difficult and costly to obtain. This will particularly be the case in the early days of a mine action programme – post-conflict or after other emergency situations. Often there is little reliable data about even the most basic of things; such as the extent of mine/ERW contamination, the location and number of refugees and internally displaced persons, when they will return, and to where.

Because of this lack of information, mine action managers are forced to make uninformed decisions, which, often prove incorrect and cost time, money and even lives, despite the very best intentions. During the early days of a mine action programme when good data is scarce, mistakes are unavoidable. The success of a mine action programme over time depends largely on the appropriate decision-makers having more and better information at the right time.

CHANGING CONTEXTS

A further complication can arise when the broader operating environment, or context, of a mine action programme changes; often rapidly and dramatically. This is the subject of a future brief, but, in short:

- > Mines and ERW stem from conflict. Mine/ERW-contaminated countries evolve from conflict to an immediate post-conflict period, then into a phase of reconstruction, and finally, into a more traditional period of development.¹¹
- > These broad changes lead in turn to: population movement, changes in the pattern and intensity of mine/ERW impacts, significant adjustments in the pattern of donor assistance and how such assistance is delivered, and a growth in the government's capacity to implement investments and deliver public services.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ Many of the things that we value most highly cannot easily be expressed in financial terms. How to assess benefits is one of the challenges we must deal with when determining priorities. This will be a recurrent theme in this Guide.
- ² These could be national officials or UN personnel when UNMAS has been given an operational mandate.
- ³ United Nations, Mine Action and Effective Coordination: The United Nations Inter-Agency Policy, 2006, p. 4.
- ⁴ If all the costs and benefits can be expressed in monetary terms, this can be expressed as [€ of benefits] per [€ spent]. Often however, it is unnecessary or too difficult to convert everything into monetary terms (particularly for certain types of benefits such as the reduction in risks to human deaths and injuries). But the concept remains true – we wish to increase the ratio of benefits to cost.
- ⁵ Many priorities do not require significant resources.
- ⁶ Source: Paterson and Vanna (2004) A Study of Capacity Development in Mine Action: Case Study of Cambodia, GICHD.
- ⁷ These are important concepts and are also covered in more detail in Issue Brief 4.
- ⁸ Survey Action Center. Landmine Impact Survey – Sudan. Upper Nile, December 2008-May 2009, http://www.sac-na.org/pdf_text/sudan/UNS_Report_Jul09.pdf
- ⁹ There are other reasons why the opinions of people should count, for example: individuals with special expertise concerning the matter at hand; those who will be most affected by a decision; or people whose rights may be compromised by a decision.
- ¹⁰ The statistic used in the table to measure alignment is correlation, which can vary between -1 and 1. A number close to 1 would indicate close alignment between location of casualties and clearance activities; 0 would indicate no alignment; and a minus number would show a negative relationship, with (in this example) more clearance taking place where there were fewer casualties! The correlation in 2003 (0.38) indicates that clearance was only weakly aligned with the pattern of casualties.
- ¹¹ This evolution may be reversed for periods of time and may progress at different rates in different parts of the country.

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