



Priority-Setting in Mine Action:

KEY MESSAGES

- > There is no such thing as an ideal system for prioritisation. Different mine action programmes need to develop systems that are right for them in a specific country at a particular time.
- > A national mine action programme may have excellent procedures for setting 'small p' task priorities, but to deliver value for money, it must also have a coordinated process that ensures the bulk of assets are allocated to the most heavily impacted parts and sectors of the country ('big P' prioritisation).
- > The components of a national priority-setting system include: actors, resources, information, a structure, processes (ie where, when, by whom and how are what type of decisions made) and policy.
- > A good priority-setting system requires:
 - (i) that the right actors are involved in the right decisions
 - (ii) good quality and complete data
 - (iii) regular analysis of the data to generate useful information that guides decision-making
- > Clarifying which criteria and indicators will be used to set mine action priorities at the various levels is a critical policy decision.
- > Fragile and conflict-affected states require a national priority-setting system that performs many of the functions of a government budget system, because such a system will not be in place, or else donors refuse to provide funding through the budget.
- > For sustainability, the structure and processes of the priority-setting system should fit well with the government's system for setting its budget and for decentralising authority.
- > A good prioritisation system will help mine action managers ensure:
 - (i) overall discipline (ie the cost of dealing with the priorities is affordable in light of the likely overall budget)
 - (ii) efficiency in allocations (ie 'big P' prioritisation channels resources to where they are most needed)
 - (iii) efficient and effective use of the allocated resources (ie 'small p' prioritisation identifies tasks with the largest expected benefits and the right resources are available to perform those tasks).

The Need for National Prioritisation Systems

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INTRODUCTION TO THE SERIES

The most important measure of performance for a mine action programme is value for money: the ratio of benefits 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 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.



Priority-setting in a national mine action programme requires a number of inter linked 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.

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 should coordinate the many inter-related decisions logically, and take into consideration costs and benefits.

The principal audience for this Brief are national officials and senior managers of large, complex mine action programmes,¹ and those who provide advice to such programmes. Managers in charge of smaller programmes will find the principles outlined in the brief to be relevant, but some of the topics may be more detailed than they require.

This Brief, which is the second in the series, discusses:

- > The need for a national priority-setting system
- > Components of national priority-setting systems
- > What such systems should accomplish
- > How responsibilities and authorities should be defined

Other Briefs in the initial release in the series are:

- > Brief 1: An introduction to the series; key terms and basic concepts; common challenges
- > 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.

Additional Briefs are planned for the future to cover:

- > 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

INTRODUCTION

Priority-setting within a national mine action programme should be viewed as an inter-connected system, because any decision to allocate scarce resources to one purpose means there are fewer resources available for other purposes. For example, when resources are allocated to road verification, fewer minefields can be cleared.

In addition, if a decision is made in the national headquarters in regard to the amount of demining assets that are to be allocated to a province, it determines largely how many of its demining priorities that province can pursue. A national mine action programme may have excellent procedures for setting 'small p' task priorities but it will not deliver value for money if it has not also established a coordinated process ensuring that the bulk of the assets are allocated to the most heavily impacted parts of the country ('big P' prioritisation).

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. They do 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.

Most mine action programmes have reasonably good processes in place for certain pieces of the broader prioritisation puzzle. However, few have all the components of a sound national system as regards determining priorities and ensuring resources reach them. The result is that the national programmes will be in some ways unbalanced and will therefore underperform in terms of delivering value for money.

PLANNING, BUDGETING AND PRIORITISATION

Planning and prioritisation are intimately connected. During the planning process, priorities become clearer, and most plans are largely focused on achieving the agreed priorities.² Despite this, planning and prioritisation are not always integrated, particularly when a number of organisations are involved in a programme.

In developed countries such as those in western Europe, prioritisation for mine action public services (eg EOD response teams) takes place within the broader public financial management framework - the government planning and budgeting systems. These departments allocate resources to where they are most needed (parts of the country, economic sectors, government departments etc). The budget system handles 'big P' prioritisation.

In developed countries, priority-setting for mine action is done principally through a combination of:

- > Private financing through the market system (for tasks where individuals or organisations pay because they wish to use the land)
- > Government financing for mine action services delivered by the public sector (eg for response services when citizens report contamination).

The government budget system determines what services are delivered directly with public financing and the level of regulation (ie, Quality Management requirements) over both publicly and privately financed mine action services.

However, budget systems are weak in many mine/ERW-affected countries, so donor countries require separate or 'parallel' systems for managing the funds and other resources in relation to mine action. When the government budgeting system is not used to allocate national and international resources to where these are most needed, the mine action prioritisation system must handle both the 'big P' prioritisation decisions to allocate resources, and the 'small p' prioritisation that assigns resources to specific tasks.

Eventually, however, the government will assume responsibility for the mine action services needed. To prepare for this transition and its sustainability, the mine action prioritisation system must eventually be aligned to the national budget system.

COMPONENTS OF THE SYSTEM

A national prioritisation system is made up of actors (or stakeholders), resources and information. There is also a structure and set of processes, ie where, when, by whom and how are what type of decisions made. These are defined and guided by a policy which stipulates:

- > Who makes the decisions
- > Who covers what resources on the basis of which information
- > How the correct decision is determined.

These building blocks must be assembled in a way appropriate to a specific country at a particular point of time in the evolution of its mine action programme.

For heavily contaminated countries, the national prioritisation system should aim for at least the following capabilities:

- > Integrating the strategic, operational and task planning mechanisms across all mine/ERW-affected parts of the country and all mine action pillars
- > Channelling mine action resources to the parts of the country where they are most needed, and adjusting the resource allocations to mine action pillars in line with changing needs

- > Ensuring the right mix of assets is available to address the current task priorities, and that appropriate investments are being made in new assets to meet anticipated future needs
- > Creating a decision structure that is aligned with how the country divides authorities
- > Creating information flows to support that decision structure
- > Establishing periodic review and evaluation to ensure the system is allocating sufficient resources to the right priorities
- > Increasing value for money, thus bolstering local and international support for mine action.

Actors (Stakeholders)

There are many actors in mine action, and one of the best ways to improve priority-setting is making sure that the right actors are involved in making decisions. For example, use a stakeholder analysis to determine which actors:

- > Should be represented or contribute to decisions being made
- > Have the information needed to adequately inform the various prioritisation decisions
- > Have resources, and what their constraints on the use of those resources are
- > Require policy guidance from national authorities.

Actors should be categorised into different groups to analyse the role they now have, and should play in the future. *The Architecture of Mine Action: Actors, Arenas, and Linkages* diagram at the end of this brief provides one model, with actors grouped into five categories, as following:³

- > Mine Action actors⁴
- > Local community actors
- > Government actors
- > Market actors
- > International actors

It also depicts the key links among these categories.

RESOURCES

Preferences become priorities only when resources are allocated to them. Resources are central to priority-setting, but there are many different types, not all of which are useful or even available. When analysing resources and priorities, a good starting point is the fact that not all resources can be used for all mine action activities: most are restricted in some way.

Assets

We can think of two main categories of resources: financial and “other” assets, such as trained personnel, equipment, buildings etc and information (which is discussed later).

Financial resources can purchase or hire assets which can be used in mine action. Assets deliver mine action services directly, and each is suited to certain tasks more than to others. Some assets are quite flexible. For example, small, mobile survey teams with EOD training can survey and mark hazards and can immediately destroy small amounts of UXO. However, they cannot complete large tasks efficiently. Others, such as mechanical assets are efficient on large tasks, but are less flexible. For example, a large machine may not be able to reach many of the suspect hazardous areas, or operate during the rainy season.

Mine action managers have to strike a balance between specialised assets that enhance productivity but sacrifice flexibility, and more flexible but less productive general purpose assets. For our purposes, such decisions, particularly large investments in specialised assets, place constraints on the priority-setting system. An example is when too few assets can be deployed on small tasks. Often, trying to maximise efficiency will lead to a decline in effectiveness in terms of making a difference in people’s lives. This is illustrated in Box 1, which describes the experiences of the Mine Action Coordination Centre of Afghanistan (MACCA).

Box 1 | Driving by minefields in Afghanistan

In Afghanistan in 2009, detailed data analysis commissioned by MACCA indicated there were hundreds of known minefields close to communities (which MACCA termed ‘low hanging fruit’⁵). Why hadn’t these already been cleared after two decades of mine action in the country?

Further analysis showed that all of these minefields were relatively small. The Area Mine Action Centres had not assigned these tasks to demining units because they were too small for the teams to deploy effectively and achieve their productivity targets. The teams drove by these dangerous minefields because performance was judged on what was easiest to measure (square metres surveyed and cleared) rather than what was more important (making a difference to the wellbeing of people), but harder to measure.

MACCA reacted quickly to these findings. It instructed the operators to establish smaller, more flexible teams, and it established new criteria for setting demining priorities, which specified that ‘low hanging fruit’ should be given priority.

Financial resources

In principle, money is the most flexible resource, as it can be used to purchase or hire any assets required. However, those who provide the finance often place restrictions on its use. Private investors generally place very tight restrictions, with mine action contractors having to provide specified services in specific places and times; and managers of infrastructure projects do the same. Many donors also place restrictions on the use of their funds. Some 'tie' their aid to the purchase of specific assets, such as demining machines. Most place broader restrictions: funds can be used only for risk education (RE), for clearing cluster munitions, or to facilitate the return of refugees etc.

Tight restrictions by a donor simplify priority-setting. For example, in the case of funds being used to facilitate refugee return, it is fairly straightforward to determine which houses and land are owned by returning refugees, making it easy to set precise task priorities.

However, in rapidly changing environments, priorities can quickly become outdated in terms of meeting the emerging needs of the country. Tight donor restrictions on the use of their funds often create more problems than they solve. Local people, however, will usually have a more accurate analysis of mine action needs than a donor representative who may be based at headquarters or newly arrived in a country. More fundamentally, donor restrictions often do not lead to the objectives they believe they are promoting (see Box 2).



Box 2 | Donor domination and donor delusion

While official donor agencies have a mandate to assist developing and post-conflict countries, naturally they have their own objectives as well. Normally there is some alignment between the needs of the recipient country and the objectives of the donor agency, but the donor agency's objectives will not cover all the recipient needs. The donor therefore selects what it will support.

In addition, donor officials are judged on the success or failure of projects they have supported. As a result, decisions can be based on whether a project:

- (i) will 'look good' (ie will do most to promote the agency's own objectives)
- (ii) is likely to be successful.

There are three main problems with this:

1. Collectively, donors tend to support higher profile activities (eg mine clearance or victim assistance) and avoid the less attractive and (especially) high risk activities (eg capacity building of an NMAA), even though these may be more important for success in the long run
2. The activities a donor decides to support may not be the recipient country's priorities
3. In many cases, donors are not really financing what they think they are financing.

'Donor delusion' is a bit more complicated. Consider the following case:

- > A new donor decides to fund five clearance tasks in a mine-affected country, and specifies that it will select the tasks it will fund from the country's priority list
- > The country has a list of 20 priority tasks for the current year, the top ten of which are obvious 'must do' rather than 'nice to do' tasks. The country already has funding in place for 12 of these tasks
- > The new donor hires a mine action consultant who does a good job and identifies five of the 'must do' tasks for the new donor
- > At the end of the year, an evaluation verifies that the donor funded the clearance of five top priority tasks

It appears that the donor has funded the clearance of five top priority tasks, and in fact, the evaluation has confirmed this. But consider what has really happened. The recipient already had funding for the ten 'must do' tasks, plus two others. With the new funds, the recipient now can clear the ten 'must do' tasks, plus seven others. The real effect of the new donor funding is that five more of the lower priority 'nice to do' tasks are cleared, in addition to all of the 'must do' tasks.

The donor thinks it is paying to clear the top priority tasks, but in fact, by enlarging the total pool of resources available, it has financed the five lowest priority tasks that get cleared that year. This is 'donor delusion'.⁶

Donor domination is bad for mine action programmes in the long term. More flexible funding is needed, and one way for recipient countries and programmes to get it is to earn donor confidence. Creating a sound and transparent priority-setting system is one of the main steps on the road to earning such confidence. The national government can also provide the flexible funds required and assume ownership even when much of it is still donor-restricted.

Information

Information can be viewed as another important resource for mine action and one that is particularly scarce at the beginning of most mine action programmes. This scarcity forces managers to make decisions on the basis of limited data and 'best guesses'.

Box 3 | Setting priorities based on limited information: the case of Kosovo

The extent of the mine and UXO threat in Kosovo became relatively well-known after a short period of time. An initial rapid survey of contamination by the HALO Trust led the UN Mine Action Coordination Centre (MACC) to decide that a full Landmine Impact Survey (LIS) was not appropriate. This was because many refugees and displaced persons had not returned to their home communities and would not be able to provide their views on impact. However, future plans had to be based on more than just mine location data, and as a result the Survey Action Center (SAC) proposed a modified LIS.

The basis of the prioritisation methodology used by the SAC and the MACC linked a public safety/hazard analysis and LIS based on geographically defined areas. They reasoned that civilians go about their social and economic activities within a geographic space. When parts of these socio-economic spaces are denied due to mine or UXO contamination, normal activity exposes the population to greater risk of death or injury. By defining areas of "essential livelihood space", they identified the contaminated areas that posed the greatest threat.

A GIS model of the essential livelihood space allowed the calculation of values based on humanitarian and reconstruction priorities. Relief and reconstruction agencies determine project priorities based on sector-specific criteria. Depending on the focus of a programme, the sector's resource allocations were usually assigned by town/village, municipality or geographic region. Compiling the resource allocations sector by sector enabled the identification of the geographic concentration of such resources across Kosovo. The mine action programme then simply assumed that towns and villages in areas with a heavy concentration of relief and reconstruction activities would have a higher demand on mine action services.

In this way, the MACC was able to make good use of the very limited data available to make reasonably informed decisions in a transparent manner.

Accordingly, mine action programmes spend significant time and money on collecting more data. Common features of well-managed programmes are:

- (i) data quality
- (ii) regular analysis of the data

This can be useful information to have when prioritising and making decisions.

An additional complication is that some forms of information, particularly quantitative data, such as numbers of mines or GPS coordinates, are easy to transmit. However, accurate transmission is difficult with other types of information, such as individual beliefs. Data can be transmitted easily, but may be interpreted very differently from one place to another (eg, a picture of a snow-covered mountain will be interpreted as a wasteland to avoid in some countries, but a recreational opportunity in others).

More generally, much of the information that is relevant to a decision about, for example, which minefield in a village should be cleared first, is better understood by the people in that village than by officials in the capital. Ensuring decisions are informed sometimes requires moving the location of the decision to where the information is available, rather than moving the information to the decision-maker.

STRUCTURE AND PROCESSES

The structure of a priority-setting system simply means what types of decisions are made where, when and by whom. In turn, processes determine how information and resources are brought together, and the rules for prioritising when making decisions.

Priorities are divided into three categories; strategic, operational and task. The best location for each decision-making process in relation to these depends on several considerations. For example:

- > **Strategic** priorities should be established at the headquarters of the national mine action programme (often the capital city).
- > **Task** priorities are best determined close to the tasks themselves: suspected hazardous areas (SHA), communities at risk, landmine victims, and so on.
- > **Operational** priorities are made in a multi-step fashion. The heads of major programme components, such as country programme directors of the operators, or heads of provincial mine action programmes, should prepare their priorities first. Then, a process in the national headquarters should ensure the different priorities 'fit' and add up into a sensible national plan.

To be sustainable, the structure and processes of the priority-setting system has to fit with those of the government. The constitution and legislation establish the governmental structures. Responsibilities are allocated by national, provincial and municipal governments, as well as by ministries or departments, such as finance, health, and agriculture. A level of government holding significant land mana-

gement responsibility would have to play a central role in determining priorities, based on expected land use. Similarly, ministries who are responsible for implementing the decisions should be involved in setting priorities. This should also be the case when their work programmes are constrained by explosives contamination.

Many mine action programmes have had difficulty in implementing sustainable systems that determine mine action priorities, for a number of reasons. One is that extensive contamination creates multiple problems for all government departments and levels. Furthermore, mine action programmes are often established in emergency situations in fragile or conflict-affected countries. Governments in these countries often have large gaps in their capacity to act. The international community is obliged to establish 'parallel structures' outside the government to manage the mine action programme and set priorities. The people who set up the initial mine action programme generally do not investigate the legal divisions of responsibility, and often design parallel structures that do not correspond to the government's methods. These structures cannot then be absorbed by the government without extensive adaptation, which takes time and money.

The critical governmental processes for prioritisation are planning and budgeting. Priorities are defined in the planning stage, and are allocated resources by the budgeting system. Therefore, sustainable priority-setting systems for mine action are based on a country's established planning and budgeting systems. However, these systems may not be in place when the mine action programme starts (eg, following a peace agreement). Even if this is the case, the mine action priority-setting system should be aligned with the national budgetary system in the early stages of the transition process to national responsibility. If this is not done, it is unlikely that the essential capabilities of the mine action programme will be sustained.

Aid industry structures

Official donor agencies have different mine action support structures in place. This inevitably causes further problems. For example, some donors will finance mine action through their humanitarian agencies, while others provide support only through development funds. Others focus on assisting the country in fulfilling its treaty obligations with support from the donor's foreign affairs ministry. The result is a lack of coherence, or gaps and conflicts among these different donor structures.

In many situations, none of the donor structures will match the divisions of authority among ministries and between national and subnational governments, as laid out in the constitution and legislation of the country being supported. This makes coordinating donors even more difficult for the government. Each of the donor agencies has its own agenda, and often they try to get the government department it works with most closely to push the mine action programme in different directions. This can overtax the host government's capacities and delay the emergence of national ownership.

To add to all of this, some donors have their mine action officers based in the country, while others cover mine action only from regional offices or headquarters. This further reduces the likelihood of donors coordinating among themselves.

Box 4 | Can't we do better? International support in fragile and conflict-affected states⁷

In 2007, the OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) member countries (ie, all the traditional donor countries) adopted [The Principles for Good International Engagement in Fragile States](#), which outlines ten Fragile States Principles (FSP). In 2011, the DAC reported the findings of its first two monitoring surveys on the Principles. The surveys covered donor engagement in a total of 14 fragile states, a number of which are affected by mines/ERW. The report makes discouraging reading:

- > The application of the FSP is very off-track in six of the 14 countries, generally off-track in another six, and partly on-track in only Sierra Leone and Timor-Leste
- > In terms of the ten FSP, four are off-track, another four are partly off-track, one is partly on-track, and only one is broadly on-track

Among the principles where little progress has been made (ie, off-track) is [Agree on practical coordination mechanisms between international actors](#). The surveys found that, in spite of weak coordination between host governments and donor countries, donors "have made limited efforts to agree on practical coordination mechanisms among themselves". They also found that donor coordination "is almost entirely absent" in a number of countries where it is most needed.

Donors also have difficulty in coordinating themselves because each donor has somewhat different interests and is pursuing different priorities. This is quite natural; every country, organisation and individual has varying interests.

Donor representatives will work to advance their interests if national officials don't clearly state the interests and priorities of the host country. Experience has shown that many donors will set aside their interests once the host government puts forward clear, evidence-based priorities. The way forward depends on national officials (or UN personnel where the UN has been given an operational mandate) coordinating the donors. However, this can only be successful when there is trust, which must be earned over time, based on sound planning and implementation, plus accurate and timely reporting for transparency. Because this takes time, it is best to start today!

POLICY

The final component of an effective prioritisation system is policy. This is perhaps the most important component, but is something that few mine action practitioners fully understand, and so often the policy framework is left incomplete.

We establish policies to set out clearly "who does what" and to enable delegation of authority, which implies a command over resources. Those who provide resources, or who bear responsibility for the proper use of those resources, often must delegate authority for deciding how they will be used. Often it is to people with greater expertise or who are 'closer to the ground' and, therefore, better informed about needs in a particular place and time. National mine action authorities and others responsible for making priority-setting decisions should provide clear guidance, in the form of policies, for those who make decisions on their behalf.

Policies do not have to be complicated to be effective. In Vietnam for example, a very simple policy statement provided the basic guidance needed for the country's mine action programme.⁸

Box 5 | Vietnam's Decision Number 96

On 4 May 2006, the Prime Minister issued Decision No. 96, which clarified that the Ministry of Defence (MoD) had the responsibility to plan and implement ERW operations throughout Vietnam. The MoD's specific responsibilities included:

- > Developing and issuing standards, regulations, etc
- > Implementing survey and clearance projects
- > Reviewing and overseeing NGO demining operators

Decision no. 96 also made it a requirement that every public and private infrastructure or construction project in the country had to discuss its plans with the MoD and, if necessary, obtain demining support from Engineering Command, army demining firms, or (less commonly) international demining NGOs.

Mine action policy documents include:

- > Legislation (eg guidance on who has ultimate responsibility for the delivery of mine action services in a country)⁹
- > Strategies (ie guidance on the strategic objectives that need to be achieved to deliver adequate levels of mine action services)
- > Standards (eg guidance on quality or output targets)
- > General policy statements (eg guidance on what criteria should be used when determining priorities in particular cases)

Specifying the criteria and indicators to be used for setting mine action priorities at the various levels is a critical policy decision.

DESIGNING A NATIONAL PRIORITY-SETTING SYSTEM

What should a sound priority-setting system accomplish?

We know the overarching goal of a prioritisation system is to deliver value for money. To do this, the system must achieve the following¹⁰:

1. Overall discipline – the final list of priorities established by the programme must be reasonable, given the likely financing available. It is damaging to have a set of priorities that clearly exceeds the financing capacity of the overall programme budget. Such a ‘wish list’ leaves every actor the option of pursuing their own priorities, rather than national ones, and will not lead to a sensible overall plan for the national programme. This always leads to lower value for money and often means that none of the true priorities will be accomplished (see Box 6).

Box 6 | Problems with unrealistic mine action strategies and plans

Over the years, many national mine action programmes have issued mine action strategies, multi-year plans, Article 5 extension requests or annual plans, that were unrealistic in terms of the total resources likely to be available.

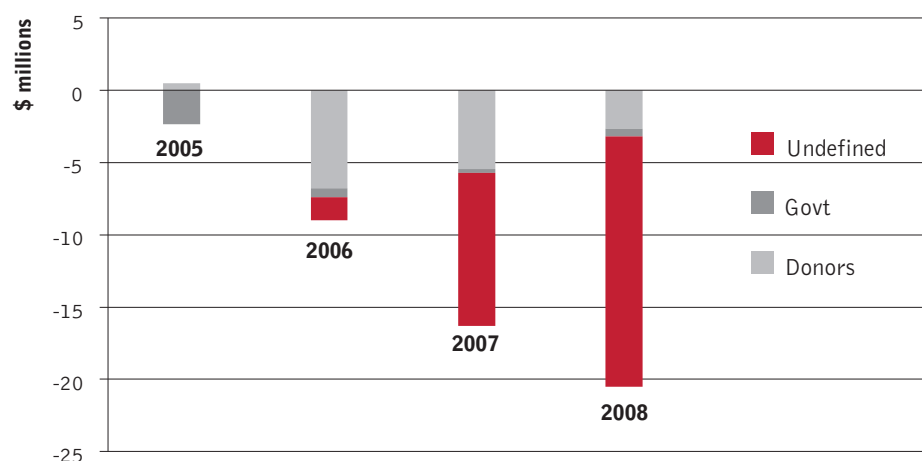
For example, the Sudan Mine Action Programme issued a multi-year plan in 2008 that proposed an average of \$12.5 million per year for ‘pure’ mine risk education (MRE) (ie, not integrated with demining). In comparison, Landmine Monitor 2010 reported only about \$10 million spent for ‘pure’ MRE in 2009 for the entire world. In another case, Thailand issued an extension request, with a budget based on international donations averaging \$17.2 million, and received less than one per cent of that amount in 2009.

Clearly such plans are not presenting true priorities to donors, but rather wish lists. In such cases, donors will indeed finance what they wish to, and generally, they will be items that best reflect the donor’s own priorities, but which may not reflect the country’s true needs. Presenting donors with a wish list rather than a realistic set of priorities means that donors determine the priorities. These decisions by individual donors are unlikely to add up to a sensible plan for a national programme.

The BiH Mine Action Strategy for 2005-2008 provides an interesting case. In many ways, it was an excellent document, clearly based on what today would be termed a land release approach. The financial requirements amounted to about \$158 million for the four years. The planners projected international donations of about \$80 million, plus another \$49 million from the BiH government and other local sources. This left a financial gap of \$29 million, or about 18 per cent of the cost of the strategic plan.

As it turned out, financing from local sources came to over 90 per cent of what had been budgeted, and international donations exceeded 80 per cent of the target. But because the budget started with a large financing gap, what had been planned became increasingly divorced from reality.

BiH | funding shortfalls relative to plan



2. Efficiency in allocation – the priority system must result in sound ‘big P’ prioritisation decisions to ensure that resources are appropriately allocated in accordance with strategic priorities. Even with excellent task (‘small p’) prioritisation mechanisms, the national programme will perform poorly if, for example:
 - i. Resources have not been allocated in line with needs across the various provinces
 - ii. Too much has been invested in clearance relative to survey
 - iii. Too many clearance resources have been invested in machines rather than manual and other assets etc
3. Efficient and effective use of resources in the implementation of strategic priorities. There must be sound ‘small p’ prioritisation mechanisms to ensure mine action assets are assigned to the most urgent and important tasks for the province, sector, mine action pillar, etc.¹¹

CLARIFYING RESPONSIBILITIES AND AUTHORITIES

A priority-setting system should be structured so that the answers to the following questions are clear:

- > Which decision-makers meet to make decisions concerning which resources?
- > When and where do they meet?
- > What information on contamination and socio-economic impacts do they require from which actors?
- > What criteria and indicators should they use to assess alternatives?

Table 1, over the page, gives an example of how some of the essential features of a priority-setting system might be summarised. Note that, the “top-down” information relates to resource allocations and policies (strategy, priorities, policy instructions). The “bottom-up” information is mainly needs assessment, such as the extent of the contamination, number and location of casualties and other socio-economic data including the population affected by contamination, together with local development plans and priorities. As we go to lower levels, the bottom-up information becomes more detailed.

For heavily mine/ERW contaminated countries, the priority-setting system should have at least two levels. At the top, senior officials need to make strategic decisions, such as how many assets will be deployed to support development projects in various sectors. Below that, there must be a mechanism to determine the specific task priorities, using detailed data collected on site.

Table 1 | Summarising the structure of a priority-setting system

Level/Mechanism (Members)	Decisions	Information needed from above	Information needed from below
National/NMAA (NMAA Board Members, Director and Department Heads, Head of MAC and reps from operators as observers)	Allocations among: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Mine action pillars > Sector support versus 'humanitarian' mine action > Provinces > Investment in new capacities > etc 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > National development priorities > Sector development plans > Aid effectiveness policies > Resettlement and reintegration plans > etc 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Relative needs of each province > Provincial development priorities/ plans > Sector priorities/ plans > etc
Provincial/ Provincial MA Committee (Chair and members, district reps, MAC reps & operators present)	Allocations among: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Provincial development projects > Districts (for Humanitarian Mine Action (HMA)) > etc 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Assets allocated to province for the year > National mine action priorities > Policy instructions from NMAA 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Relative needs of each district > District development priorities/ plans
District/ District MA Committee (Chair & members, reps from communes, reps from dev. NGOs in district, reps from MAC & operators present)	Allocations among: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > District development projects > Communes (for HMA) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Assets allocated to district for the year > Provincial mine action priorities > Policy instructions from NMAA 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Relative needs of each commune (needs assessment) > Commune dev. priorities / plans > NGO project plans
Commune/ Commune Council (Chair & members, village chiefs, reps. from dev. NGOs in area, reps from MAC & operators present)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Task priorities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Assets allocated to commune for the year > District mine action priorities > Policy instructions from NMAA 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Relative needs of each village (needs assessment) > Specific problems from each minefield > NGO project plans

In addition, the top level must set policies for those who make tasking decisions. What criteria and indicators should they use? What should they do for tasks that don't fit into the system (ie tasks that clearly should be priorities but, for some reason, do not score highly on the criteria and indicators specified)?¹²

There could well be intermediate levels at which resource allocation and task priority decisions need to be made. In each case, the mechanism needs to be defined: who meets, when and where, to make decisions concerning assets about sets of alternatives, and which criteria and indicators for guidance will be used. This is illustrated schematically in Figure 1.



Figure 1 | A national resource allocation and priority-setting system

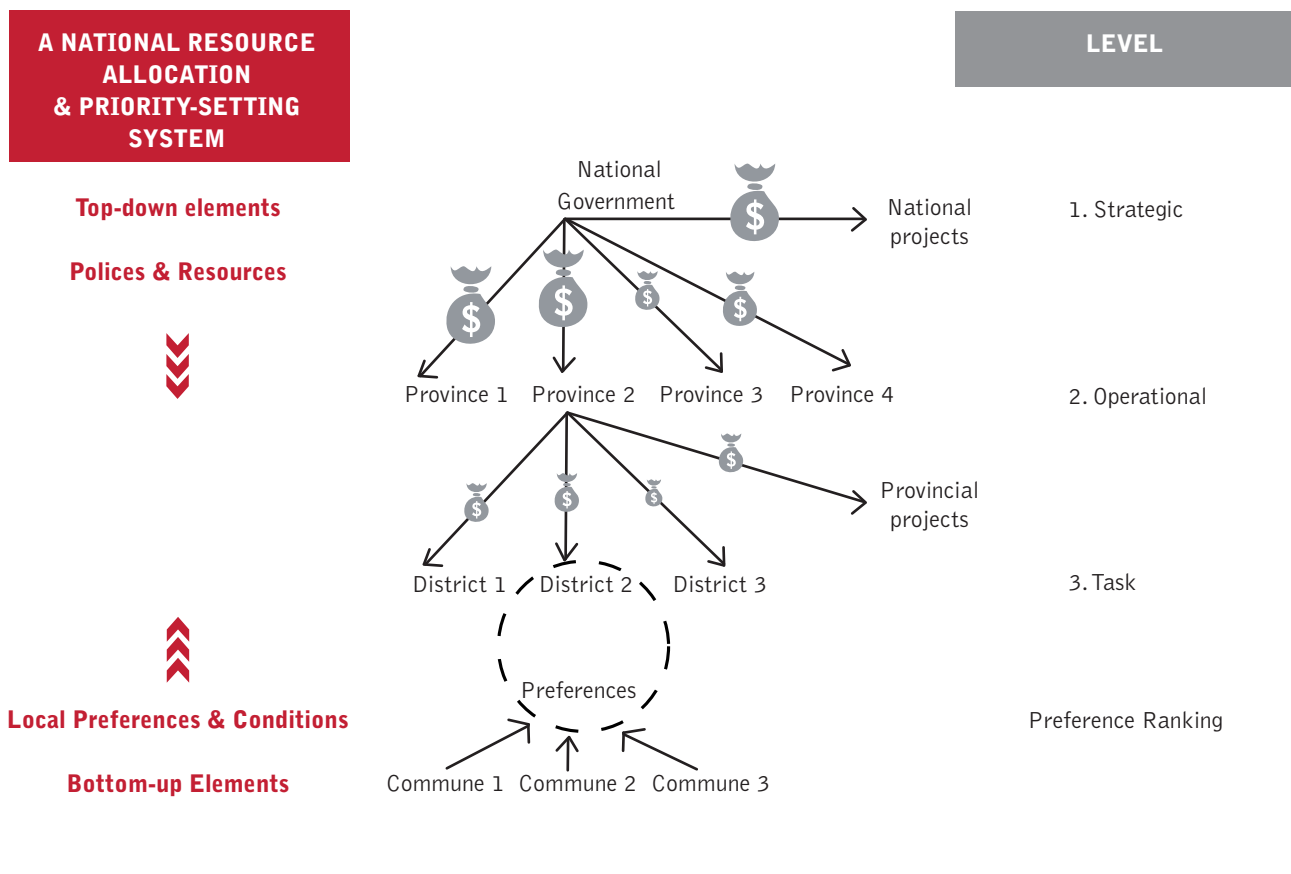
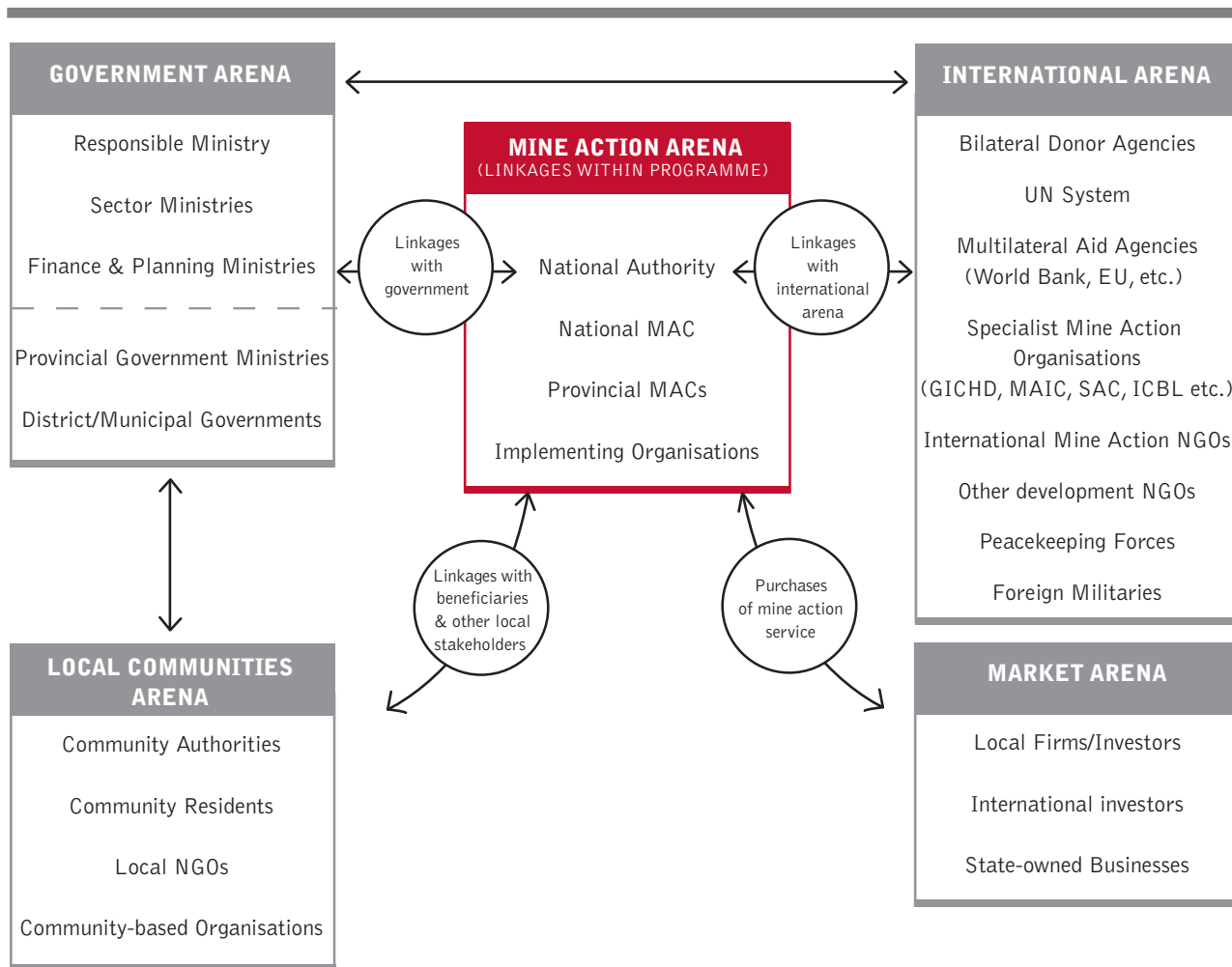


Figure 2 | The Architecture of Mine Action: Actors, Arenas and Linkages



ENDNOTES

- 1 These could be national officials or UN personnel when UNMAS has been given an operational mandate.
- 2 “The prioritization of expenditure is, of course, the key function of planning.” Robinson, Marc (2011), Performance-based Budgeting, CLEAR Training Materials, p. 111. Available at www.clearinitiative.org.
- 3 For an example of how this diagram has been used to analyse a mine action programme, see Paterson, Lardner, Rebelo and Tibana, A Review of Ten Years of Assistance to the Mine Action Programme in Mozambique, GICHD, 2005 pp. xxiii.
- 4 For more discussion on the typical roles and responsibilities of mine action organisations, see Guide for the establishment of a mine action programme, IMAS 02.10, www.mineactionstandards.org.
- 5 ‘Low hanging fruit’ refers to easily reached gains; what can be obtained by readily available means.
- 6 The technical term for donor delusion is ‘aid fungibility’. See Devarajan and Swaroop (1998) The Implications of Foreign Aid Fungibility for Development Assistance, Policy Research Working Paper 2022, World Bank. http://www-wds.worldbank.org/external/default/WDSContentServer/IW3P/IB/2000/02/24/000094946_99031911110844/Rendered/PDF/multi_page.pdf.
- 7 From OECD (2011), International Engagement in Fragile States: Can’t we do better? OECD Publishing.
- 8 This policy is one reason that, since 2006, Vietnam has been able to release about 60,000 ha of land per year, principally through Battle Area Clearance (BAC) operations. This is greater than the 55,700 ha reported by Landmine Monitor for demining and BAC for the rest of the world in 2010.
- 9 See GICHD (2006). Developing Mine Action Legislation – a Guide.
- 10 For more detailed coverage on this important set of issues, see Robinson, Marc (2011) Performance Budgeting, CLEAR Training Materials www.clearinitiative.org or World Bank (1998) Public Expenditure Management Handbook <http://www1.worldbank.org/publicsector/pe/handbook/pem98.pdf>.
- 11 This issue will be examined in greater detail in future briefs on priority-setting.
- 12 Ideally, decentralised decision-makers should be allowed some discretion to allow for cases that were not anticipated by the policy, but where the correct decision is more or less obvious. However, discretion can be abused, which can lead to corruption, unless there is an enforcement capacity (ie, quality assurance and control processes in regard to decisions).

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