



**Republic of Mozambique
Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation
National Demining Institute**

The Land Release situation in Mozambique - background and current situation.

The principle objective of mine action is to remove the explosive hazards (landmines and explosive remnants of war (ERW) from areas where they have been laid or abandoned. Like in any other programme, the Mozambique mine action operations have typically employed demining assets to do this. This has resulted in very large areas of land being released back to communities for productive use. However, some land has been subjected to full clearance unnecessarily.

While some of the operational principles of survey and clearance have been well understood and used by many mine action operators, inadequate or inaccurate survey did exaggerate the mines/ERW problem. This combined situation of information ambiguity and application of a large amount of demining assets that inspired a revival of the land release concept and practice. The revitalization process suggests that it may be acceptable to remove the suspicion based on the evidence obtained, and verified, without the need for any physical intervention into the area. Releasing land therefore could refer to the process of applying all reasonable effort to identify or better define Confirmed Hazardous Area and remove all suspicion of mines/ERW through non technical survey¹, technical survey² and clearance using an evidence based and documented approach.

This paper analyses how the rejuvenated concept of releasing land has created an enabling environment to ensure a more efficient and effective mine action programme in Mozambique.

¹ **Non-technical Survey** describes the survey activity which involves collecting and analysing new and/or existing information about a hazardous area. Its purpose is to confirm whether there is evidence of a hazard or not, to identify the type and extent of hazards within any hazardous area and to define, as far as is possible, the perimeter of the actual hazardous areas. This does not usually involve any physical intervention in the suspect area although there may be some exceptions. The results from a non-technical survey can replace any previous data relating to the survey of an area (MOZNMAS 08.21).

² **Technical Survey** describes a detailed intervention with clearance or verification assets into a CHA, or part of a CHA. It should confirm the presence of mines/ERW leading to the definition of one or more DHA and may indicate the absence of mines/ERW which could allow land to be released when combined with other evidence (MOZNMAS 08.22).



Mine clearance, surveys and data management initiatives in Mozambique allowed a drastic drop from initial vague figures of the mines/UXO situation, during the last 15 years. In this period there were several attempts to estimate the scale of the contamination problem, starting in 1993-4 as limited survey, focused particularly on roads and other facilities important to the relief agencies. This survey identified 981 mined areas. The dataset that resulted, however incomplete, provided the best available picture of the extent of mined areas at the time.

At a later stage in 2001, IND commissioned the “Mozambique Landmine Impact Survey” (LIS). While it has since become recognized that the LIS had major flaws, the LIS became the most comprehensive dataset available after entry into force of the Convention. The LIS confirmed that areas suspected to contain mines were in each of Mozambique’s 10 provinces. In total the LIS recorded 1,374 areas suspected to contain anti-personnel mines totalling 561,689,063 square metres. Subsequent to the LIS and prior to a 2007-8 Baseline Assessment, hundreds of additional areas were identified and subsequently became part of the data set available to Mozambique. In many instances, however, there was duplication between records and there have been a number of cases where Suspected Hazardous Areas (SHA) have undergone full clearance but have subsequently been found to contain few, if any, explosive hazards.

In response to prepare a request to extend the mine clearance deadline under Article 5 of the Mine Ban Convention, the Government of Mozambique commissioned a Baseline Assessment in 2008 aimed at reconciling all available information and providing more accurate data and updated overview of areas known or suspected to contain mines.

As a result of the Baseline Assessment it was possible to report which of the original 2001 LIS identified areas in central and southern Mozambique have been either (a) verified as having been released as a result of clearance or technical survey, or, (b) cancelled as being a duplicate record or as being a record of an area that should never have been considered dangerous.

In summary, the LIS originally identified 1,374 areas. Of these, 470 were clarified as completed, 723 cancelled and 181 (in addition to other areas identified since 2001 and not yet released) remain to be clarified or cancelled. The Baseline Assessment identified a total of 12,164,401 square metres of surveyed confirmed mined area across a total of 541 sites. This includes the 181 LIS-remaining areas. Additionally, infrastructures sites like roads, power-lines, dams and border areas would undergo survey and or clearance.

Although agreed that the Baseline Assessment was a good new starting point, it is important to take into consideration that this is not the final state, as new hazards continued to be reported and known hazards are becoming more precisely defined, cleared and cancelled. For instance, the remaining problem at the end of 2009 was 326 sites estimated at 9.6 million of sqm. This includes 301 sites based on the baseline assessment (8.1 million sqm) and 25 new sites (1.5 million sqm).

As part of the evolving process to further guarantee best use of available resources, the Government of Mozambique (IND), in collaboration with the Survey Action Center (SAC) and in consultation with demining operators, has developed protocols to apply *Quality Management to Mine Action Operations*. These protocols were instrumental to prepare IND QA staff to lead a process of adopting and



implementing Land Release approaches, through broadening the area of quality management functions. At the same time, it was recognized that the interface between mine action database information and ground situation should be tightened. For that reason several measures were undertaken such as introducing IMSMA software to all demining operators and embracing the database unit as an integral part of the IND Operations entity to ensure the consistency and quality of information at all parts of the mine action programme.

As in the International Mine Action Standards (IMAS), the Mozambique Land Release process consists of three main activities, Non-Technical Survey, Technical Survey and Clearance.

- National Standard 08.20 provides guidance on the overall land release process and its sub components.
- National Standard 08.21 Non-technical survey provides guidance on the principles of a non-technical survey, the conduct of a non-technical survey, including how land can be released by non-technical survey;
- National Standard 08.22 Technical survey provides guidance on the principles of a technical survey, the conduct of a technical survey, including how land can be released by technical survey;
- National Standard 08.23 (adjusted from existing national standards) Guide for the management of demining operations in Mozambique

Those standards, which are in the process of being integrated into the existing National Mine Action Standards, pursue the following principles:

- A dynamic process, where no single survey provides a complete picture, hence data needs to be constantly reviewed over time as more information becomes available through the demining process and particularly as communities become more aware of the threat and land use further developed.
- Existing suspect hazardous areas should not automatically be subject to full clearance to remove the suspicion. It is acceptable to remove suspicion based on the evidence obtained, and verified, without the need for any physical intervention into the area.
- Applying all reasonable effort to identify or better define Confirmed Hazardous Areas and remove all suspicion of mines/ERW through using evidence based and documented approach.
- Quality and documentation. All land release process has to be well documented and all documentation provided by operators for insertion into National Database shall be subject to quality management processes.
- Inclusive participation. Local participation of communities and authorities is fundamental for the success of land release process.
- Definition of land release and cancellation
- Basic set of land release criteria. The decision on whether to confirm a hazard or to release it should be based on a practical set of criteria.

Consequently, IND, in partnership with SAC continued to review the Mozambique National Mine Action Standards in relation to the newly drafted standards for Land Release and the policies on Quality assurance. The aim was to seek inconsistencies between existing standards and the new land release drafts. At the operational level, demining agencies, while adjusting their operating procedures, are



applying the Land Release approaches enabling significant amounts of land to be released without being physically demined.

Nevertheless, challenges remain to ensure the consistent demining efficiency among all operators and establish mechanism while contracting commercial assets. Additionally, mine action data needs to be constantly quality checked and reviewed over time as more information becomes available following the District by District approach, supporting mine action decision maker as to define, re-define and clear land that is contaminated by mines/ERW.

In conclusion, to-date more operators applying the land release concept and are in the process of releasing land back to communities without applying demining assets. This is clearly demonstrated by the demining results of 2009, where out of 3.7 million sqm, 1.3 million sqm were based on the baseline data, additionally 1million sqm were released through non technical methods, while 1.4 million sqm were released as new hazard reports. What's more, Mine action operators are evidently more confident in taking better decisions aiming at employing clearance resources only on verified hazardous areas.

Case study:

As part of the District-by-District strategy, Handicap International (HI) was contracted to release 24 suspected hazardous areas (SHAs) in Panda District (Province of Inhambane, Mozambique) registered in the national database, a total area of approximately 250.000m², from landmines and any other explosive hazard.

HI implemented its tasks, releasing about 188,400m² of suspected mined land by the application of non-technical and technical land release approaches. This corresponds to almost 77% of the area initially reported as suspect while only 68,409m² required physical clearance. These results allowed HI to extend its demining activities to other districts at no cost under the funding contract, further contributing to the annual goals set by the IND.

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