

MINE ACTION TRANSITION GUIDELINES: From UNICEF Support to National Ownership

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1. BACKGROUND

UNICEF has been involved in mine action since the early 1990s and is currently implementing its second multi-year strategy covering 2006 through 2009. The first strategy covered 2002 through 2005. Presently, UNICEF supports mine action projects and activities in some 30 countries across the world. Over the years, the motivation for UNICEF to undertake mine action has been the protection of children and communities affected by conflict and its aftermath.

The range of activities that UNICEF has undertaken in different countries was contingent upon the nature and extent of the mine/ERW threat, programme priorities within the Country Office, and the funding available. In less mine-affected countries such as Georgia, Syria and Thailand, where the extent of the problem does not justify large-scale engagement, UNICEF has focused on mass media and information approaches to risk education, sometimes with a corresponding component of survivor assistance incorporated into its child protection programmes. Advocacy in support of the Mine Ban Treaty has also been included at the global level and in countries not Party to the Treaty.

In more severely affected countries, UNICEF has often taken the lead role of MRE focal point and has sought to build national capacities and national programmes. This is consistent with the UN Inter-Agency Mine Action Policy, which is coordinated by the UN Mine Action Service, in the Department of Peace-Keeping Operations. Where this occurs, UNICEF usually has a full-time mine action professional who is well positioned to implement a full and integrated MRE programme. This has been the case in countries such as Afghanistan, Angola, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Cambodia, Laos, Sri Lanka and Sudan. Common features of these programmes include national capacity building, national strategy development in MRE and sometimes survivor assistance, casualty surveillance, support to the Community Liaison function, education and/or training.

In all cases, there is a combination of the national coordination role and support to project implementation. Recently, in some countries such as Colombia and Nepal, UNICEF is scaling-up its support to mine action programming in response to an increased threat posed by explosive munitions¹. In other countries with more established programmes and stronger national capacity, UNICEF is beginning to hand over its support for mine action to national authorities and/or other partners. This has already taken place in Afghanistan and Angola and will continue incrementally in other countries in the coming years.

2. PURPOSE & JUSTIFICATION

The *UNICEF Mine Action Strategy 2006-2009* outlines the circumstances under which UNICEF would evaluate its projects and transfer its support to mine action to a national entity – this is called ‘transition’. The aim of this document is to provide guidelines and criteria for UNICEF Country Offices on *when* and *how* to plan and successfully implement the transition of mine action projects from UNICEF support to national entities.

¹ While the Mine Ban Treaty specifically addresses anti-personnel landmines, Mine Action generally includes Explosive Remnants of War (ERW), including cluster munitions, grenades, Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) and other indiscriminate explosive weapons.

This document complements the *UN Inter-Agency Mine Action Strategy 2006-2010*, which set an objective to “assist the development of national institutions to manage the landmine/ERW threat, and at the same time prepare for residual response capacity in at least 15 countries.”² The main rationale behind this objective was a sense that over the last 17 or so years, the formative stages of mine action programmes had been developed and many of the most difficult elements to tackling the mine problem have largely been addressed. For instance, in most seriously mine/ERW-affected countries there now exist systems to manage and coordinate national mine action activities, mine action legislation has been created, mine action programme methodologies have been built and tested, the Mine Ban Treaty has been signed and is on the way to implementation, and most importantly, in almost every affected country, some local sustainable capacity now exists to address the threat.

In spite of the considerable progress and achievements, important challenges remain and the work is far from done. Seventy-eight nations are still affected to some degree by landmines and as many as 85 by Explosive Remnants of War. While clearance operations and risk education increased exponentially in the 1990s, there remains a vast amount of work to be done, both in terms of the scope and capacity building required to permit transition to take place, and the quality of programme management and implementation. Despite the remaining challenges, and the clear exceptions to progress, it is imperative that UNICEF define clearly identifiable conditions that must exist to transfer management and support.

An ideal situation for a smooth transition may not always exist in every case due to reasons such as funding limitations and/or other competing priorities, for example. In such situations, UNICEF may be forced to make decisions regarding early transition as a result of the prevailing circumstances on the ground. In order to avoid such situations, it is recommended that this document be consulted and used early on as a reference, particularly when Country Programme Documents and/or Annual Work Plans are being developed to ensure that activities supporting a smooth transition are planned ahead of time.

3. DEFINITION OF TRANSITION

In UNICEF, “transition” in Mine Action means the process through which UNICEF works with national authorities and other partners to make sure that they have the necessary capacity to take on the responsibility for managing, coordinating, providing resources (or assuming responsibility for resource mobilization) and implementing all or part of the programme that is currently supported by UNICEF. Identifying the right time and methodologies to do the hand-over is at the centre of a successful transition strategy.

In this regard, among the numerous questions which must be addressed are: How and what do we measure to confirm that we have reached a stage where UNICEF can ensure that national governments and/or partners are able to manage mine action programmes and address any residual and longer term threats, and promote victim assistance? To what extent can victim assistance be integrated into ongoing protection and health programming?³

² United Nations Inter-Agency Mine Action Strategy: 2006 - 2010

³ Most Country Offices are beginning implementation of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disability. Child survivors of ERW incidents should automatically be included in the programming. Consult the UNICEF Guidance Note, “Children with Disabilities: Ending Discrimination and Promoting Participation, Development and Inclusion” for further reference.

In a similar manner, it is also important for other UN agencies involved in mine action to determine: What is the ongoing role of the UN in national programmes? What are the preconditions and indicators for the full transfer of programme activities to affected states or project partners? This document serves to begin addressing these questions and to provide preliminary answers.

4. CONDITIONS FOR TRANSITION

The UNICEF Mine Action Strategy 2006-2009 states that UNICEF will work on projects that 'contribute to reducing risk for high risk groups' and that 'focus on areas with high concentrations of casualties'. Both ideas tell us when and where to act and indicate when and where it is time to limit the nature and duration of UNICEF's programme support: we will work when and where we can verify that there are high concentrations of casualties and high risk groups, and suggest that we ought to cease working when there are not. This may seem overly simplistic, however, there are risk education projects and programmes that continue to be supported by UNICEF in areas where there are either no casualties or very few.

Projects may be focussed on populations who are at less risk than others *not* being targeted in the same country; this is often the case when inappropriate methods are employed in a particular situation. For instance, in some cases mass media approaches are being used to reach people where the mine or UXO problem is actually quite localised and requires a more targeted and systematic approach. In such situations, the obvious course of action would be to re-evaluate the methods and tools being used to communicate risk and adapt the programme accordingly. Or, the re-evaluation might tell us that continued intervention is no longer required from UNICEF.

There are at least two conditions which UNICEF should assess to find out whether or not it should start transitioning its support to mine action. These are the concepts 'residual threat' and the level of 'national capacity'. For purposes of transition, both concepts are closely linked to one another.

4.1 Residual Threat

The definition of 'residual threat' document is closely linked to the level of mine/ERW impact in a given country. A range of survey and assessment activities have been undertaken in majority of the heavily affected countries that defines, to various degrees, the level of threat that is posed by landmines/ERW. Incident/victim surveillance and data collection mechanisms have also been in place in several countries statistics from which are used to define the level of threat in a country. The concept of 'residual threat' is critically important when thinking about transition. If the country is in a situation where the only threats being faced are 'residual', it should be an indicator that UNICEF should begin considering – with its Government counterpart(s) – whether transition of mine action activities is appropriate.

4.2 National Capacity

The level of national capacity to undertake mine action and provide appropriate responses to the mine/ERW contamination is the second key indicator for UNICEF to start thinking about transition. National capacity should be assessed in conjunction with the concept of residual threat so as to determine whether there would be sufficient national capacity to deal with the threat – be it residual or not – in an appropriate manner. A lack of appropriate national capacity should not hinder UNICEF from thinking about transition, as there may be strong potential among national entities which could be further strengthened through a transition plan and which could eventually take over mine action from UNICEF.

4.3 Indicators to Determine Residual Threat and National Capacity

To analyse the above two conditions, there are a number of indicators that UNICEF should consider as part of a 'transition plan'. These indicators are presented in the form of a checklist below, though they are not considered as an exhaustive enumeration. If the answer to many of these questions is yes, UNICEF may be in a position to begin consultations to develop a transition plan, either for discrete activities, a set of activities or the entire project or programme.

Questions	Yes	No
1. Is the level of threat from landmines/ERW considered as residual by the mine action program/community in the country?		
2. Is there a system to undertake casualty surveillance?		
3. Are mine/ERW casualties, especially for children, decreasing?		
4. Are they likely to continue decreasing?		
5. Has there been any significant increase in casualties in the last 2 years?		
6. Are there committed MRE focal points in relevant government institutions (MAC, MOE, civil protection, etc.)?		
7. Is there an effective risk education coordination mechanism in the country?		
8. Has the program developed National MRE standards and is there an accreditation system for MRE established?		
9. Does the national coordinating body have procedures and tools for emergency or rapid response risk education?		
10. Is there a MRE national or regional strategic plan with a set of operational priorities?		
11. Is the MRE plan funded?		
12. Is the government willing to take on the responsibility?		
13. Has the country signed and ratified the Mine Ban Treaty?		
14. If yes, is implementation of the MBT monitored?		
15. Is the country on target for meeting Treaty obligations and deadlines?		
16. Has risk education been integrated into the national or regional school curriculum when appropriate?		
17. Is MRE integrated into teacher training system when appropriate?		
18. If yes, are teachers sufficiently trained on MRE and implement sessions in the classroom?		
19. Are there reliable implementing agencies undertaking risk education in areas experiencing high casualty rates?		
20. Do these agencies have sufficient skills and human and material resources to undertake risk education in areas experiencing high casualty rates?		
21. Do these partners have a source of funding to undertake their activities, other than UNICEF?		
22. Do the partners promote gender mainstreaming in their policies, programmes and human resources practices?		
23. Are affected communities systematically involved with mine action activities?		
24. Has an evaluation of risk education been undertaken for the programme in the last 2-3 years?		
25. Has a KAP study been undertaken in the last 5 years?		

26. Is there national legislation to protect the rights of persons with disability?		
27. Are the rights of child survivors of ERW incidents being addressed adequately through national or other legislation?		
28. Are other UN agencies present in the country and working in mine action?		

If the answer is *no* to any of the questions above, UNICEF may still have important work to do before transition can be completed. This said, it may well be that UNICEF can incorporate these and other questions into a 'transition plan'. Other questions that need to be considered when thinking about transition include:

- 29. Is conflict ongoing in your country?
- 30. Is there a strong likelihood of armed conflict in the coming 2 years?

If you answered *yes* to either of these questions, UNICEF may need to maintain some presence in mine action and at very least, maintain some stand-by capacity along with other partners (i.e. the inter-agency Mine Action Rapid Response mechanism) in case of resurgence in the mine problem.

4.4 Transition at Global Level in UNICEF

At global level, UNICEF's Landmines and Small Arms Team transitioned to the Programme Group's Child Protection Section from EMOPS as of January 2008. This is due in large part to the recognition that landmines and ERW pose important long term challenges to development in addition to being a humanitarian threat.

In developing the 2006-2009 Mine Action Strategy, UNICEF's global team was conscious of the reduced risk to children from landmines and planned to downscale technical resources. Of course, technical capacity must be maintained to adequately support all emergency and ongoing requests from Country Offices and partners, and to conduct advocacy and represent the interests of children in all relevant global fora.

5. TRANSITION STRATEGY

The UNICEF Mine Action Strategy 2006-2009 states that "activities, projects or programmes in this Strategy will be evaluated on the basis of evidence against the extent to which they:

- Contribute to the fulfilment of the Strategic Goal and Results [of the strategy];
- Build on existing programmes, especially related to injury prevention;
- Are likely to be sustained, without direct UN support;
- Focus on areas with high concentrations of casualties;
- Contribute to reducing risk for high risk groups;
- Support the integration of landmine survivors in broader public health and social services programmes."

In the event that programmes meet these criteria and there are national capacities able and willing to take over the activities, UNICEF should begin planning a transition strategy with national authorities. The strategy should document processes and time frames for UNICEF's hand-over to national ownership and outline institutional capacities and structures, technical capabilities, and human and financial resources that should exist to continue the work in the absence of UNICEF's input.

Transition strategies should also be developed in coordination with the UN Country Team, and reflect the achievement of the Goals and Objectives in the *Inter-Agency UN Mine Action Strategy 2006-2010*. A decision to transition will also need to be shared with the Inter-Agency Coordination Group on Mine Action coordinated in New York.

A number of important guiding principles should be kept in mind while developing the transition strategy:

5.1 Capacity Building

National capacity is at the centre of a transition strategy. UNICEF normally works closely with national authorities for implementation of mine action activities, but in the case of transition, UNICEF must make sure that a strong national capacity exists, which can fully take on and manage the projects at the time of transition. This should include both institutional capacity and technical expertise. Undertaking a Training Needs Assessment (TNA) and developing a training plan for implementation as part of the transition strategy could be one way of addressing capacity building needs.

5.2 National Ownership

National governments have a responsibility to protect their population from the negative effects of landmines and ERW and to ensure that mine action projects are undertaken by the state or on its behalf. The UN normally provides technical and financial assistance for implementation of mine action projects in cases where national governments are not capable to do so. In the long term, it is the national authorities who are responsible and who should own, manage and finance their mine action programmes. It is therefore of vital importance for UNICEF to make sure that national partners acknowledge and are willing to receive the responsibility for management of the project and activities as part of the transition.

5.3 Stakeholder Involvement

Ensuring that all stakeholders, including relevant government ministries, national and international NGOs, affected communities, other UN agencies and possibly local donors (also national and international) are involved in the transition process from the beginning is another key principle to a successful and sustainable transition. A stakeholder analysis which highlights roles and responsibilities, interests, and potential impact on the project for different stakeholders could be a useful tool to include as part of the transition strategy. Women and children need to be involved and consulted at all stages of discussions, so attention can be paid to ensuring adequate representation of the needs, concerns, and experiences of women, boys and girls amongst the various stakeholders.

5.4 Sustainability

Sustainability, which means that the project will continue after UNICEF has completed the handover to national entities, is another key and challenging principle. It is linked, primarily, to availability of financial resources and technical capacity. UNICEF, in addition to advocating for allocation of national resources to mine action, should also work with all stakeholders to build national capacity and possibly set up mechanisms through which national entities can conduct resource mobilization and receive funding from international donors. The availability of national technical capacity is an essential requirement for sustainability.

6. INTEGRATION

Integrating mine action into existing national institutions and structures is a fundamental strategy for transition. The UNICEF Mine Action Strategy 2006-2009 describes many results

and activities that are focussed on the integration of Mine Risk Education (MRE) and surveillance activities into existing government structures, such as the education and/or health sectors. The purpose of integrating activities is meant to improve coverage of a project by working with other programme sectors which often more easily reach a larger number of the affected population. It is also, and perhaps more importantly, meant to provide a foundation for sustainability, whereby a project can more easily continue without the direct intervention of an outside actor like UNICEF, and where the government and civil society have the tools and capacity to address any residual threats and needs.

Insofar as UNICEF has integrated its mine action activities into existing programmes it will be easier to transition, and the transition has a greater likelihood of sustainability. This means that UNICEF can transfer programme activities with the confidence that any residual threats will be dealt with.

In mine clearance, it is often envisaged that the military, the civil protection and in some cases the police will take over mine and UXO clearance for residual threats. The military or police will establish effective community reporting procedures and response capacities to deal with threats as they come up, and there will no longer be a need to have dedicated mine action organisations. In a similar way, UNICEF should look for creative ways to engage programme partners in undertaking and integrating risk education and advocacy for survivors into their regular actions, in the absence of dedicated mine action operators.

6.1 Integrating MRE into the School Curriculum

The most common example of integration may be ensuring risk education is built into the school curriculum.

Integrating MRE into a country's primary and secondary school curricula is a strategy primarily developed in countries facing a widespread and protracted mine problem, which successive generations of people are likely to face. It is a method to target a very large number of children and is appropriate in countries where the national government has accepted that the mine problem is a long-term problem, requiring multiple and sustainable solutions. Integrating MRE into the school curriculum is distinct from projects where MRE teams visit schools and make presentations. This type of project is usually more common in the early days of a mine action programme, is typically undertaken by mine action organisations and, as a stand-alone activity, often lacks the coverage or sustainability to be a successful, cost-effective option in the longer term.

A large mine action programme should promote the idea that schools have a responsibility to teach children about the dangers of mines and ERW as part of every day 'life-skills' training. By doing this, we are assisting in protecting children from a problem that poses a threat to their safety and reinforcing peace and reconciliation for post-conflict generations by reminding them of the horrors and impact of armed conflict. We are also providing a framework whereby risk education can continue in the absence of UNICEF.

6.2 Integrating Data Collection and Surveillance into the Health Sector

Another example is integrating casualty data collection activities into the public health sector.

Globally, for the past two decades, when a mine action project was established, it was both instinctive and practical for mine action organisations to establish mechanisms to collect, store, analyse and report information on mine and ERW casualties. Normally this was done as a stand-alone activity or was integrated in the activities of other mine action programme partners, including NGOs. In the short term, this can be efficient in collecting information and informing programming.

Programmes that are likely to be long term, due to lasting residual threats, however, need sustainable solutions to collecting casualty data. The most obvious place for this is the Ministry of Health, which is usually tasked to collect national and localised information on public health issues. While it is a large task to integrate the collection of landmine accident information into their portfolio, the longer term pay-off is essential. Strides toward achieving the integration of landmine information into EPI-Info have been made, and several dozen professionals have been trained in “Field Epidemiology for Mine Action”.

Developing an effective programme to integrate mine action into other interventions rests on having recognised a need for the programme and a willingness and capacity of the national partner or partners to undertake the programme. A key part of success is also the extent to which the programme includes the partners in the development, design, testing and monitoring of the programme, because it is they who will finally be responsible for implementation and will be expected to utilise the guidelines and materials that have been developed. Effective programmes also depend on the identification of the management goals of the project that spell out what resources are required by the partner, such as funding and training.

7. THE TRANSITION PROCESS

In an ideal situation UNICEF should think about and take transition into consideration from the very start of its involvement in mine action and as part of the initial program/project design. The process for transition differs in each case, depending on the specific situation in each country. The process and steps for transition outlined in this document were developed based on experience UNICEF has gained from the implementation of mine action programmes in more than three dozen countries and serve as an example. The three-stage model presented below may be adapted for each country.

Stage One: Identifying a National Partner and Developing a Transition Plan

Identifying the right national entity to take over the mine action project from UNICEF is a crucial stage in the transition process. Selection of the right national partner depends on the level of UNICEF's involvement in mine action and range of activities it supports. In a country where UNICEF only supports mine risk education through schools, the ideal partner for hand-over of the project would be the Ministry of Education. In other cases where UNICEF supports a range of activities, often in more severely affected countries where government has a National Mine Action Centre (NMAC), it is natural and ideal for UNICEF to hand over its programme to the NMAC. In some cases where the NMAC is not willing, UNICEF may consider NGOs or other civil society organizations for a hand-over. It is important that the intended partner for transition be well aware of the responsibilities a transition will entail before any formal agreement is reached.

Once identified, UNICEF and the national partner should work jointly on developing a ‘transition plan’. The plan should be developed within the framework of broader mine action program and involve participation of other stakeholders; this, as noted in Section 5.2 is very important in terms of making sure that the roles and responsibilities of all stakeholders are identified and included in the plan when appropriate. A transition plan should include specific objectives, activities, timeframes, institutional structure, as well as outline financial and human resources that will be required.

Stage Two: Implementation and Joint Management

In the second stage, UNICEF and the national partner begin implementation of the transition plan. This is the core stage in the process of transition and may take much longer than the other two as UNICEF would normally be required to organize and conduct intensive training

and capacity building activities outlined in the transition plan. It is important to mention that this be done within the framework of broader mine action program and in conformity with any overall capacity development strategies and plans within that framework.

Activities in this stage may differ depending on the extent to which the programme has already been established. For example if there is no coordination mechanism for MRE in place, UNICEF and the national partner should establish a coordination mechanism which brings together all MRE stakeholders and should normally be chaired by the national partner. If UNICEF has already established and chairs a coordination mechanism for MRE, one objective should be to make sure the national partner has the capacity to take the lead role in chairing the coordination of MRE work.

It may be better to start with a joint management and coordination in this stage and gradually hand over the lead role to the national partner. For example, coordination meetings can be co-chaired by UNICEF and the national partner in the beginning, but as the national partner gains knowledge and experience, it can begin taking the lead role in tasking MRE operations and managing resources for the program with no or minimal support from UNICEF.

Stage Three: Hand Over and Monitoring

During the third and last stage of the transition process, UNICEF should officially hand-over the project to the national partner. By this stage, UNICEF and partners should have established the structure and mechanisms required for coordination, management and continuation of the project - including funding and resource mobilization mechanisms - as outlined in the transition plan. UNICEF may wish to ensure that arrangements are outlined for periodic monitoring of the project after it has been transitioned, to document progress, provide feedback and advice, and possibly assist in resource mobilization.

You may wish to have an official “handover ceremony” just as UNICEF does with vehicles or education supplies. This may provide some welcome visibility for the government and/or NGOs that are assuming responsibility for MRE.

8. Documenting the Process

UNICEF should make sure that the entire transition process is properly documented, with copies of the plan and final “handover note” sent to the UNICEF Headquarters Landmines and Small Arms Team.