

Speaking notes – CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Speech to ISCE on Mine Clearance and Related Technologies
ILO, Geneva 5 December 2000

Community Liaison Co-ordinating with the community in the context of Humanitarian Mine Action From the experience of MAG

Working for people

I will not try to get you bogged down in technicalities and jargon: I will simply explain the functions and objectives of Community Liaison within the toolbox of Mine Action. I will not speak here about Mine Awareness, which for us is one part of Community Liaison to be used and adapted according to the threat.

Let us remember that just because they are affected by landmines, people are still people, intelligent, articulate about what concerns them: they have emotions, passions, aspirations and ambitions and they want the best for their families.

Their reality is conflict and the aftermath of that conflict. And their wish is for a safe future for themselves and their families.

Co-operation and co-ordination

The challenge for us is to save their lives and to help rebuild effectively after conflict in a fluid and ever-changing funding, political and human environment.: We do not see mine clearance as a precious stand-alone specialism working in isolation... We are working **in partnership** with people before during and after clearance work, **together** with other appropriate actors such as NGOs, international organisations, and with donors to rebuild life and economy after war: co-ordination and co-operation at all levels.

Let us not forget that we are operating in the backyards of people, and under their watchful eyes. We have a responsibility to the beneficiaries of our work just as we have a responsibility to the taxpayer and other donors that enable us to carry out the work.

If we want to make a difference, our work **MUST** be co-ordinated with the wishes and needs of the communities affected, the authorities at different levels, and with other parties. Co-ordination to achieve:

- maximum benefit, maximum impact for the people
- trust and confidence
- continuity and integration
- cost-effectiveness

ISCE Mine Clearance – Community Liaison. Copyright MAG December 2000. May not be reproduced without permission.

Providing a service

The way we see it, Humanitarian Mine Action is a service that we provide. When we treat people right, they will believe in that service: they will ‘buy’ it! And they will ‘buy into’ it, give it their support. It is that ‘*customer relationship*’ that Community Liaison is about. Community Liaison identifies community needs and seeks to achieve the appropriate response.

As you may be aware, most of the trains in Britain at the moment are even later than late. And you all know what is the worst, and most frustrating thing about sitting in trains that are late... no-one ever tells you what is going on!

Managing a process, not an event

If MAG were clearing a minefield at the bottom of your garden, wouldn’t **you** like to know what was going on? And why? And how long is it going to take? And what equipment are we using on **your** land and why? This enable the community to regain trust in the land.

Before we start mine clearance, and while we’re working at mine clearance, communities need to be involved and informed. When we hand over the land at the end of clearance, the land-owner, the villagers, the mayor, the local authorities, all stakeholders will know exactly what we have done, and why, and within what limitations and parameters. And they will accept that... **because it’s transparent**. Because we have worked **together**. Prioritising a site, clearing a piece of land and handing it over – and later evaluating its use - is a process, not an event, and it is part of a much wider process of rebuilding within the community.

Respecting diversity in the rebuilding process

Ladies and Gentleman, we are talking here about discerning ‘customers’, real people. And as we all know so very well, people are all very different, from different cultures, with very different experiences. And with different perceptions and expectations. Thus, we need to be mindful that every minefield is different, every mined village is different, and be flexible and adaptable to that.

Maximising the outcome of mine clearance for people is not possible in isolation. Through partnership, collaboration and discussion, mine action becomes integral to and augments the bigger developmental picture.

It is not the mines that we target, it is the impact of those mines. On communities. If we are going to make a difference, whatever we do we **MUST** work with the affected community.

We want our partners, and future partners to understand that MAG is not about a simply technical ‘addition’, we are very much a part of the social, developmental and economic process of rebuilding communities. This is embodied in the role played by Community Liaison.

ISCE Mine Clearance – Community Liaison. Copyright MAG December 2000. May not be reproduced without permission.

In summary, this is a ‘partnership for change’

It is the achievements that we set out to make, in agreement with the community, that provide even greater confidence in our work, and in the future. And of course they provide a stronger base for information gathering, and for the continuation of mine action.

This is the fundamental place that Community Liaison takes in the tool box of humanitarian mine action. In development terms, it is “a community-focussed approach to project assessment, monitoring and evaluation”. It is still the same thing: gathering and using information appropriately, sharing that information, monitoring and evaluating progress and success, learning from experience to improve future impact. It is this understanding and strong relationship with the community that, in the words of a recent study by PRIO, is ‘capable of triggering change’.

Thank you for listening.

Tim Carstairs
Director of Communications
ISCE Mine Clearance, ILO, Geneva 5 December 2000