



International Peace Research Institute, Oslo

Institutt for fredsforskning

The 'Mine Action for Peace' Programme Afghanistan

Workshop Report Kabul, 29 April 2004

Arne Strand

Bergen, May 2004

Landmines Memo no. 10

Assistance to Mine-Affected Communities (AMAC)

The AMAC project undertakes studies of mine-affected communities with the aim of further exploring opportunities to build on local resources and local competence in humanitarian mine action (HMA). AMAC works in close partnership with HMA practitioners – both in order to learn from existing experience and to engage in a dialogue that can have an immediate impact on field operations. The project is based on the conviction that improved assistance to mine-affected communities must start with a deeper understanding of local responses to landmines. Rather than viewing people in communities affected by landmines as passive victims, AMAC acknowledges their importance as active subjects. It is imperative for the design of interventions that community capacities are properly understood. The challenge is to find ways in which the social dynamics within which mine action agencies operate can be integrated positively into the mine action process.

Landmines Memos is a series of papers initiated by AMAC to foster an ongoing debate about HMA issues without the delays associated with formal publishing processes. The series will contain, among other things, assessment and evaluation reports, workshop and conference reports, and working papers. Landmines Memos can be accessed at our website at <http://www.prio.no/amac>.

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Introduction

This report presents introductory talks and discussions from a workshop entitled 'Mine Action for Peace'. The workshop was arranged by the International Peace Research Institute, Oslo (PRIO), with technical support from the United Nations Mine Action Centre for Afghanistan (UNMACA), and was held at the Monitoring, Evaluation and Training Agency (META) office in Kabul, Afghanistan, on 29 April 2004. The aim of the workshop was twofold. First, to present initial observations from a PRIO case study on the Mine Action for Peace (MAFP) project and to invite comments on those observations. Second, to permit discussion between staff members of organizations working on the implementation side of the MAFP project and staff members of NGOs working on community-based peacebuilding in Afghanistan (see Annex II for a list of workshop participants).

Workshop Programme

09.00	Opening
09.15	Setting the Scene: The Peacebuilding Context - <i>Afghanistan: Conflictual Peacebuilding</i> - <i>The Role of Mine Action in the Peacebuilding Process</i>
09.45	The Mine Action for Peace Programme
10.15	Community-Based Peacebuilding: The Afghan Experience
10.45	Break
11.00	Preliminary Findings from the Mine Action for Peace Programme
11.30	How Can Mine Action Contribute to National Peacebuilding Processes?

The case study in Afghanistan is part of a larger research project on mine action and peacebuilding being carried out at PRIO.² In 2004, this project will conduct case

¹ Dr Arne Strand is a researcher with the Chr. Michelsen Institute, Bergen, with extensive work and research experience from Afghanistan.

² For more on the relationship between peacebuilding and mine action, see Kristian Berg Harpviken, 'Humanitarian Mine Action and Peacebuilding', presentation at the Intersessional Meeting of the Standing

studies on Afghanistan, Sri Lanka and Sudan. The full case-study report on Afghanistan will be made available later as part of the larger study.

The initial findings from the research project are based on a number of different sources. They draw on documents and reports produced by the Afghan Transitional Authority (ATA), the Afghanistan's New Beginnings Programme (ANBP), UNMACA, and other UN agencies and NGOs.³ In Kabul, interviews were conducted with staff involved in the MAFP project, ATA ministers and officials, ANBP, UN and NGO staff, donor representatives and organizations. MAFP projects at Qargha Dam and Parwan were visited; at those projects, interviews were conducted with three demobilized soldiers, and the programme was discussed with demining trainers. In Kunduz, where the programme had been in operation for four months, interviews were conducted with six demobilized soldiers, as well as with the family of one of the soldiers, a community *shura*, local government officials and military commanders, and staff from UNMACA, the ANBP and other NGOs. In Mazar-e Sharif, interviews were conducted with eight demobilized soldiers during the first day of their training, local government officials and military commanders, and staff from NGOs and the ANBP. Semi-structured interviews were used for data collection, supplemented with information gathered from key informers and general discussion in the areas visited.

For a background presentation of the Afghan mine problem and the country's mine action programme, see Annex I.

Peacebuilding and the Afghan Context

This section is based on a presentation by Arne Strand (PRIO).

When discussing practical peacebuilding projects like MAFP, it might be useful to first review the general theory of peacebuilding. 'Peacebuilding' is usually understood as a transitional activity designed to prevent the recurrence of past violent conflict and to lay the foundation for (re)building political, economic and social systems that in the longer run will prevent new wars.

A minimal test for peacebuilding is that past violence does not recur. A more ambitious threshold is that democratic processes are seen to take hold, economic recovery financed by donors gives way to self-sustained growth, divided societies start to deal collectively with memories of the past as well as visions for the future, and a state of law emerges.

Committees Established by the State Parties to the Landmine Convention, Geneva, 14 May 2003 (available at http://www.gichd.ch/pdf/mbc/SC_may03/speeches_mc/PRIO_MC.pdf); Kristian Berg Harpviken & Bernt A. Skåra, 'Humanitarian Mine Action and Peacebuilding: Exploring the Relationship', *Third World Quarterly*, vol. 24, no. 5, 2003, pp 809–822.

³ A selection of these documents is available at <http://www.cmi.no/Afghanistan>.

Often, a distinction is made between the building of peace 'from above' and 'from below'. Peacebuilding 'from above' includes strategies such as peace mediation, negotiations and peacekeeping aimed at getting armed factions to lay down their arms and turn to nonviolent resolution of conflict; strategies to involve the international community and neighbouring or influential states as guarantors of a peace agreement; and strategies to restore public order, encourage relief and reconstruction, and develop peace-sustaining institutions in the judicial, administrative and political sectors. The building of peace 'from below' includes strategies to develop trust and to build confidence among communities at the local level.

What complicates the Afghan peacebuilding process is that the agreement signed in Bonn in November 2001 was not a classic peace agreement. Rather, it was a power-sharing agreement between those Afghans who 'won the war' as a consequence of siding with US coalition forces, and it leaves out such difficult issues as setting up a firm plan and/or timescale for the disarmament and reintegration of former soldiers. It contains neither a vision of nor clear guidance on how to reach a final 'peace agreement', nor does it discuss whether and how the war's 'losers' should be incorporated in such a process. The Bonn agreement is expected to be fulfilled by late 2004, with the election of a president and a parliament, though until now the process has been more focused on meeting deadlines than on evolving into a more representative and participatory process.

As a result, Afghanistan has ended up with what can be termed a 'conflictual peacebuilding' process. A number of issues important for state formation remain unresolved, either lacking a wide consensus or still under negotiation. Peacebuilding then ends up as part of a wider political bargaining process, in which external actors play a significant militarily and political role. Issues seen as possibly damaging to the prospect of completing the Bonn process – such as questions of human rights and justice – are deliberately toned down.

As part of the wider peace process, the Afghanistan's New Beginnings Programme (ANBP) was established by the ATA and the UN to plan and lead the Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration process (DDR) for former combatants. Japan is the lead nation for this process and the major financial contributor. The target set for the three-year DDR process was up to 100,000 soldiers and officers. For reintegration, the former combatants are offered opportunities in different sectors: agriculture, vocational training and job placement, small business opportunities, and demining. A pilot phase was introduced in Kunduz, Gardez, Mazar-e Sharif and Kabul, starting in October 2003, with Kandahar set to follow. Within the DDR framework, the Mine Action for Peace programme aims to provide demining and vocational training, as

well as employment and reintegration into their home communities for a total of 8,334 demobilized soldiers

Thus, the MAFP project aims to assist both in peacebuilding 'from above' – by demobilizing former soldiers – and in peacebuilding 'from below' – through building capacities, confidence and support for the peace process in local communities.

The Mine Action for Peace Programme

This section is based on a presentation on the MAFP programme by Philip Lancaster (UNMACA).

Besides the actual challenge that mines and UXOs pose for both ordinary Afghans and mine action organizations in the country, the MAFP programme is confronted with a range of additional challenges, which include:

- continuing factional disputes;
- a weak central government with limited military and economic power;
- high expectations from external sponsors;
- reintegration opportunities being blocked by social and economic factors;
- competition from opium production; and
- psychosocial problems not being recognized.

However, given these constraints, the basic idea for the MAFP programme is to recruit demobilized fighters for training and employment as community-based deminers. These would then be given:

- mine action training, medical coverage, insurance;
- employment for 13 months;
- vocational training;
- literacy and language training; and
- a reintegration grant.

The project is planned to be community-based and therefore works with both soldiers and their home communities.⁴ While not offering full payment, it provides a stipend for the soldiers plus vocational/literacy training, thus allowing them to reintegrate with dignity into their home communities. However, while community mobilization is key to success, attention must also be paid to psychosocial factors – as many of these

⁴ For a discussion of community-based mine action, see Bernt A. Skåra, 'Risky Business of Constructive Assistance: Community Engagement in Humanitarian Mine Action', *Third World Quarterly*, vol. 24, no. 5, 2003, pp. 839–853. For a brief review of an earlier community-based demining project in Afghanistan, see Kristian Berg Harpviken, 'Towards Community-Based Demining: AREA's Project in Nangrahar Province Afghanistan', Landmine Memo no. 3 (Oslo: PRIO, 2003) (available at http://www.prio.no/page/Project_detail//9244/42378.html).

soldiers have seen decades of war. Important here is also a stable environment and a credible project management that will include constant dialogue with the demobilized soldiers.

A pilot phase has begun in three locations – Kunduz, Parwan, Kabul – and approximately 138 of the 1,000 combatants planned to be reintegrated at each location are to be deminers. The main phase is to take place on a country-wide basis and to include cities such as Mazar, Kandahar, Jalalabad and Herat. Of the 100,000 that are to be demobilized under this plan, as many as 8,000 could be deminers. In this process, the Area Mine Action Centre (AMAC) will select possible clusters of tasks and coordinate implementation on the ground, and the Monitoring, Evaluation and Training Agency (META) will provide training, monitoring and evaluation. There will be one implementing partner per site, and this will include a community mobilization and vocational training team. The plan is to train three mine clearance teams, three permanent marking teams, and one mine risk education team.

The sequencing of the programme will be to start identifying task clusters, to develop proposals and to establish contracts. Here, it is important to coordinate the recruitment with the DDR process, to ensure that communities the soldiers are to be reintegrated into are close to the selected training areas. Community mobilization should then be started, and demining tasks confirmed through interaction with the communities. Training will then be followed by field implementation, quality assurance and evaluation. Finally, the project will be readjusted before implemented at a larger scale.

There are, however, a number of challenges for this process. These might include the need for a proper cluster selection/survey, as well as issues with how the recruitment for the DDR process takes place, and whether it can ensure recruitment of a workforce that matches task and community needs. Community mobilization must also ensure local support for the project, as the selection of skills for the vocational training should ensure the soldiers permanent jobs when the demining operation is completed. And, of course, such an operation requires resource coordination, budget control and timely funding to ensure that the process is not disrupted and trust in the process damaged.

Some statements from demobilized soldiers joining the MAFP programme:

'We were blind. We thought carrying weapon is the only way that we can earn money and feed our family. We realized that there is such a great respect to us if we clear mines and save the life of the people.'

'We realized that the Commanders Saheb [the warlords] were using us like their slaves for their own benefit. We were thinking that there is no other choice for us but to work for these Commanders, and/or otherwise we will not be able to earn money to feed our family.'

'We were scared that if we drop the weapon, what else we could do.'

Community-Based Peacebuilding

This section is based on a presentation of experiences from community-based peacebuilding in Afghanistan by Mohammad Suleman of Cooperation for Peace and Unity (CPAU).

CPAU aims at building peace from below through a community-based process. Although acknowledging the need for a national peacebuilding process, CPAU focuses on communal conflicts as, in its view, such local disputes can easily be scaled up through their possible ethnic and political dimensions. Many political/military groups have mobilized soldiers on local conflicts, and therefore a political peacebuilding process needs to be rooted in local communities. Also, to ensure that peacebuilding processes have sustainable benefit, their value need to be recognized at the local level.

CPAU therefore works with local councils (*shuras*) of 25 to 30 elders, as well as local authorities and other influential persons, to build their capacities and help them develop their own strategies for how to deal with conflicts in their areas and how to mobilize people for peacebuilding processes at the community level.

At the beginning, CPAU imposed itself on communities. Later, communities have requested that the organization come and work with them. Often, *shuras* do not initially see peacebuilding as a priority. They either do not believe that they can have any influence on peacebuilding processes or they have a very optimistic view of peace, believing that the international community is in Afghanistan to secure it indefinitely. However, when the *shuras* and CPAU start to look at types of violence that exist in the community – both structural and physical violence, as well as domestic violence within families – they generally acknowledge that, though some of the violence may be outside their control, there are also types of violence they can do something about.

A five-day training programme aimed at building local capacities for peace includes such themes as human rights, management, etc. This process ends up with the local communities developing their own strategies for a local peacebuilding process. CPAU pays regular visits to the *shuras*, holding reflection sessions and providing them with new input.

The next step is the forming of peace/development *shuras* at the district level. These then receive small grants that they can administer for micro projects, ranging from \$3,000–\$5,000 per year. The experience so far has been that these *shuras* have functioned well. They have managed to solve old conflicts, and even conflicts referred to them by the local court.

Exchange visits are now being planned. The first is to be a week-long visit to Kabul, where the plan is for the *shuras* to meet with government representatives and President Hamid Karzai. Later on, they will pay visits to each other's districts to see how people from other *shuras* live and organize themselves. This to help those taking part in the programme to see that they themselves might not be the poorest and most deprived in Afghanistan, as they frequently claim. Such contacts should also help to establish an understanding of the value of coexistence.

Commanders might be more difficult to bring on board the programme, though one that actually joined the process ended up concluding that 'I don't regret the fighting against the Russians, but I regret the internal fighting that I later on engaged in'.

Commenting on the Mine Action for Peace programme, Suleman emphasized the importance of dealing with soldiers' traumas through the psychosocial component. In the end, such programmes are not only about teaching demobilized soldiers a new skill: they are also about giving them a new vision and assisting them to change their ways of thinking from fighting to peace. This is a long and sensitive process, in which many gaps need to be filled with care. In the end, it is about the soldiers seeing that they have the capacity to make the necessary change for themselves, which then becomes the real empowerment and capacity-building element of the process.

Preliminary Findings and Observations from MAFP

This section is based on the presentation of preliminary findings and observations from the field research on the Mine Action for Peace (MAFP) programme by Arne Strand and Eng. Hakim (PRIO). In addition to issues directly related to the MAFP programme, the relationship between the demobilized soldiers and their commanders and their understanding of the wider peace process were explored.

Group Composition

Ranging from 22 to 48, the average age of the interviewed soldiers was 31. The majority had been *mujahedin*, fighting with different parties and under different commanders. Only three had been enrolled in the Afghan army. The majority had not fought in their home communities (and when that had happened, it had been during the war against the Soviet invasion).

There was a marked difference between those interviewed in Kunduz and Mazar-e Sharif/Parwan. In Kunduz, most of the soldiers came from that particular area, though they had had a range of different commanders. In Mazar-e Sharif/Parwan, a larger number came from other areas, and many had belonged to the same military unit (which posed a major challenge for the community mobilization/demining part of the programme in that area). Of the 17 soldiers interviewed, 11 reported that they had been involved in fighting from the 1980s onward (though not necessarily for the entire period). One had been forcibly recruited, and at least one might not have had any previous military activity but rather joined the DDR process for the job opportunities it represented.

Reasons for Joining MAFP

When asked why they had joined the DDR process, answers given by the soldiers were almost equally divided between those who said that they had been ordered to do so by their commander or by the Ministry of Defence, and those that regarded DDR and the MAFP programme as an opportunity to obtain education and jobs. The majority stated that they had had enough of fighting. One commented that 'every family need an income – every family need peace', and another stated that he 'was too tired of fighting. We fought for the wish of others but now it is time for us to live our own life.'

A majority of the soldiers were very concerned about getting a secure job – as one put it, 'so I can be able to run my life in the future'. There were, though, significant variations with regard to their future job wishes. Some wished to continue with jobs that they knew they could manage well since they had performed similar tasks while in military or *mujahedin* service (for example, as drivers and cooks). Others rather opted for what they believed would be useful for themselves and for Afghanistan in the future (jobs such as journalists, administrators, doctors and teachers).

Asked about whom they would consult if they had to make an important decision about their future, all but one (a former army officer who explained that owing to his training he took decisions by himself) mentioned close family and friends. When

asked, the soldiers all stated that they would not consult their commanders over such decisions, and one commented that 'I don't need his permit any more'.

The Wider Peace Process

When the soldiers were asked to list what for them were two indicators of permanent peace in Afghanistan, the most cited indicators were:

- a job and a secure income;
- education;
- disarmament and demining;
- no more commanders; and
- a continued international presence/involvement.

One soldier explained that 'this is a good time for rehabilitation of Afghanistan as except for a very few persons 100% of the population are willing to give up their arms'.

When asked to list what they regarded as the major threat to a lasting peace, they came up with a range of suggestions:

- the attitude of high-level people, commanders and *everyone who wants to have power*;
- terrorists;
- failed disarmament;
- mines and weapons;
- a government that is not representative;
- soldiers not being paid.

The importance of the last point mentioned was underscored by the following statement: 'if DDR is not done in a proper way, not fulfilling the promises made, other people will not follow in the future, especially not to give away their guns'. However, a former commander did point out that for him the situation had already changed, stating 'before, I did not go anywhere without two bodyguards. Everyone acted the same, as everywhere we saw enemies. Now, I don't have any bodyguards, and I don't have any problems.'

To get them to expand on what longer-term visions they had for peace, the soldiers were asked what wishes they had for their children. With one exception (peace), everyone suggested education, while some added that their children should be educated for jobs that would be useful both for themselves and for Afghanistan.

Asked whether they would consider returning to fighting, the vast majority answered no. Several made statements along the lines of 'there is now nothing worth fighting for'. However, several said that they would make an exception if they were forced to fight or if Afghanistan was invaded again. One soldier that had difficulties disengaging from his former way of life stated that 'if I don't get a good job, of course I will go back to fight.'

The Added Value of Reconciliation

In Kunduz, it became obvious that the group of former soldiers had undergone a major transformation within a short period of time. Several of them pointed out that they had been through what they described as a process of reconciliation. Coming from very different backgrounds – some probably having fought each other in the past – they were now forced to work and study together, and thus they had to find a way to get beyond their past differences as a group. Moreover, the demining training – with the focus on working as a team and the need for complete trust in each other – seemed to be a very important factor here. As one of them stated, 'in the beginning we had a lot of problems on this course; now we sit and work together as friends and brothers'.

Given that former soldiers are to reintegrate into their home communities, one should assume that a form of reconciliation would be necessary there as well, especially if soldiers (or their commanders) had committed atrocities while fighting in those areas. The programme is designed to cope with this type of challenge through the use of community mobilizers and through the active involvement of the village *shuras*. In interviews, the positive effects of the demobilized soldiers regularly returning to their home villages was emphasized, as villagers were kept informed about the progress of the soldiers' education. However, the fact that few of those interviewed had been actively engaged in military activities in their communities might have reduced the need for a more active reconciliation process in this regard.

It should be noted that many of these soldiers were still under the influence of their commanders. It emerged that some had paid parts of their income to their commanders, as they had received their guns from them. Another stated that when the conflict between commanders Dostum and Atta had flared up, a commander had approached him and other demobilized soldiers and put pressure on them to join up with him again. When they refused, the commander had beaten them and confiscated their DDR identity cards and cash. The former soldiers had then sneaked away from the area during the night to join the MAFP training programme. When asked if he could expect further reprisals from the commander, the soldier who reported this interestingly enough answered that 'the next time when I go home I will have a [demining] uniform and then the commander will not hold power over me any more'.

However, as noted elsewhere, some soldiers had been forced to give part of the \$100 they received during demobilization to their commanders, and it was evident from their anger that they had received no proper explanation for the shift in ANBP policy of not paying them the second instalment.⁵ Consequently, their anger was directed against the ANBP, which had not fulfilled the promises that had been made when the soldiers were demobilized (leaving the MAFP programme to deal with the frustration when the soldiers showed up for the reintegration programme), rather than the commanders themselves, from whom they had probably expected such behaviour.

Community Support

In discussions with the father and brothers of a demobilized soldier, a local commander whose soldiers had disarmed and joined the MAFP programme, and a local MAFP *shura*, it emerged that all were very strong supporters of the process. The father strongly emphasized that demining was a very honourable job, and he was very pleased that it was organized in such a way that his son could come home every afternoon to help him on the farm. The fact that the family now also had someone in their household who could read and write caused him to repeatedly state 'I am so happy now'.

Both the soldier and his father described how they met with other villagers in the mosque, where they promoted the MAFP programme and encouraged others to join. Similar events took place in the more remote village visited, although there the soldiers only came home for the weekend and met their friends during the Friday prayer. In this village, according to the community mobilizer, both commanders and ordinary villagers had approached him and asked his advice on where they could hand in their guns.

Interviews and talks with a range of people at the sites visited indicate the existence of a certain momentum for peace among the Afghan population, along with support for disarmament and reducing the influence of the commanders. This is linked to a strong wish for secure jobs and income, as many see economic growth accelerating and fear that a failure to disengage from the war might jeopardize this process.

⁵ According to ANBP Acting Director Peter Babbington, only 44 out of 1,000 in Kunduz had been forced to hand over money to their commanders, though the numbers are probably higher in Mazar and Kabul.

External Challenges to the MAFP Project

On the basis of the above-mentioned indications, there are a number of general observations to be made on the DDR process – and the ANBP's handling of it – that may have an effect on the MAFP project and thus need to be addressed at a political level:

- The DDR process is actually, as explained by the ANBP, primarily about DD – with much less emphasis being placed on the reintegration component.⁶
- Many question whether the removal of guns from just 100,000 men will have much of an impact, as Afghanistan is flooded with arms and the coalition forces continue to arm militia groups excluded from the DDR process.
- Disarmament is seen as a precondition for holding relatively free elections for the presidency and the parliament, with increasing national and international pressure on the ANBP to rush the disarmament process and to go slow on reintegration.
- The DDR process contains some serious flaws that might undermine the entire process and the trust of soldiers (and commanders) in the process.
- The DDR process has become very politicized, and the provincial DDR process has become linked to regional and national struggles for power and influence.

There furthermore appears to be an urgent need to address some practical aspects of the DDR process to try to avoid a future negative effect on the MAFP programme. For example:

- The decision not to pay the second instalment for the soldiers needs to be examined. There is a need either for a revision of this policy or for an active information campaign directed towards the soldiers.
- Though a further 40,000 soldiers are to be demobilized before the election, only a limited number of these are to be reintegrated in the first phase of the process. It is possible that this will generate anger and resentment among the soldiers with regard to the DDR process. How can they be assured that there will be a second reintegration phase?
- The low levels of interest and understanding within the ANBP with regard to the need for longer-term reintegration processes should be addressed.
- The ANBP is overly preoccupied with the issue of cost per demobilized soldier – and thereby does not fully take into account the total quality and additional results that the MAFP programme delivers.

⁶ The ANBP's acting director therefore argued for a second phase of the project that addressed the need for a general disarmament process.

The Advantages of MAFP and Suggested Areas of Improvement

Despite these challenges, the MAFP programme design seems to have a number of features that might help soldiers disengage from war and from their commanders:

- It offers training (first demining and then vocational training) that both is seen as respectable and can offer soldiers a good future income.
- Soldiers' ability to learn to read and write is important for their dignity and their possibility to seek independent information.
- Through having the soldiers work together, the programme helps with reconciliation across political, ethnic and other divides (which in general is expected to a major advantage of the Afghan mine action programme).
- The community focus generates public support for the programme and for the reintegration of former combatants, and it allows people to see for themselves that there are viable alternatives to earning their income through bearing arms.

However, the initial findings and observations lead to a number of suggestions for improvement that UNMACA and their implementing partners might address:

- The implementing partners should be better able to accommodate the wishes of soldiers with regard to the types of vocational training providing. The options of tailoring and carpentry are not enough, and it is furthermore important as part of the process of change that the wishes of the soldiers are honoured.
- Community mobilization seems very important for the continued success of and support for the programme, but the present *shura*-establishment model should be rethought in order to avoid creating expectations with regard to project implementation that might not be fulfilled.
- There is a need for more and longer-term information work, especially directed towards the local communities (though the international community also needs to be informed about the advantages of the MAFP programme).

To conclude, those involved in the MAFP programme have good reason to be proud of the work they have done so far. It should be acknowledged that this is pioneer work in the field of peacebuilding, combining 'from above' and 'from below' strategies in a demining process that in itself assists the Afghan peacebuilding process.

Workshop Discussion

Several important questions about the MAFP programme and the wider DDR process came up as themes during the concluding discussion.

Lack of Trust in the Wider DDR Process

A central theme in the discussion of this topic was the ANBP's decision to withhold the second instalment of the money promised the soldiers for handing in their weapons (at least \$100, depending on the military rank of the participants). As noted in Mazar-e Sharif, this had created a lot of tension among the soldiers, not least since some possessed documents signed by two ANBP officials that promised them such a second instalment. This had generated a lack of trust in the DDR process, as promises had not been kept. The explanation provided by the ANBP was that they feared for the lives of the soldiers, as commanders (who in some instances initially owned the guns) had demanded to receive part of these payments. What is evident is that the decision to withhold the money was taken without any prior discussion with either the soldiers or the agencies undertaking MAFP projects. Moreover, the message about why the decision had been reached had not been clearly conveyed to the soldiers themselves. As of 28 April 2004, the group in Parwan had still not been informed that they would not receive the second instalment, nor was anyone attending the workshop aware of the explanation provided by the ANBP's acting director that the soldiers would receive the full amount through the topping up of other contributions.

A further threat to the trust the soldiers might have in the DDR process is the new ANBP plan to initially offer the reintegration package to only 16,000 of the next batch of 40,000 soldiers. The remaining 28,000 would have to wait for their turn. Given the lack of the second financial instalment in the pilot phase, there are reasons to believe that this latest decision will not be welcomed by the soldiers, as they by now will have severe doubts about their trust in the ANBP. These doubts either might cause the soldiers to oppose the disarmament plan or might mean that they will simply fail to turn up for reintegration training (in Mazar-e Sharif, we have already seen that only about 80 of 250 turned up for the programme).

Two particular issues – questions about whether the soldiers will be guaranteed a job after the training and claims made in Mazar-e Sharif about having been promised \$3 per day for the period between demobilization and the start of the reintegration project – represent a serious threat to the entire DDR process. Here, the whole notion of swaying the loyalty of the soldiers away from their commanders might be undermined by failures to fulfil promises that have been made.

The Role of the Commanders

The commanders are seen as potential spoilers of the wider peace process – and particularly the DDR process. The ANBP has thus devised a strategy to address the concerns of approximately 650 influential commanders, to ensure their support for the process. The MAFP programme emphasizes contact with the commanders at the community level.

The starting point here is that the term 'commander', as it occurs in DDR parlance, is used to describe a very diverse group of people. While some of the commanders came to power through control over affiliations, money and soldiers, other commanders emerged from within their communities owing to their skills in the battlefield or because of expectations within their communities that they should take on such a role owing to social, religious or family backgrounds. While the first group of commanders might resist giving up their powerbase – as they may have grossly misused it and fear being held accountable – the second group is much more inclined to disengage from war and look for ways to be reintegrated into their home communities.

A fear expressed by some workshop participants was that if a distinction was not made in the approach taken towards the different types of commanders, those with a degree of community support might not be offered an honourable exit strategy and might feel forced to maintain arms. The challenge, thus, was to devise a strategy by which these commanders could be offered other sources of income or positions by the ANBP, without feeling like losers in the process.

However, it is a dilemma both for Afghans and for the international community that many commanders have committed severe human rights violations against civilians in the past, and some even continue to carry out such practices. Some commanders are therefore likely to request a general amnesty in return for giving up their guns. Workshop participants, however, cautioned that if an amnesty is considered, any new violations must be reacted to immediately to avoid giving commanders the impression that such practices are still acceptable. There seems to be a general consensus that the use of violence was more acceptable during the period of defence against external aggression, though not in the subsequent civil war.

A strong concern was expressed over what were regarded as 'double standards' in the international community's dealings with the commanders and armed groups. On the one hand, the international community advocated for general disarmament, while on the other hand the Coalition Force continued to arm and train Afghan militia groups. Likewise, while expressing supporting for the ATA, diplomats and envoys continued to meet with the major commanders outside of Kabul, thereby providing them with a

degree of legitimacy both in their home constituencies and in relation to the central government.

If the disarmament or reintegration process is regarded as politicized and biased in favour of particular commanders or groups, other commanders will be less inclined to give up their arms. Such a concern would certainly apply to the Ministry of Defence as well, in terms of whether it becomes a national ministry or one that primarily represents the interest of one specific ethnic group.

During discussions on alternative options for disengaging the commanders from war, there was also a discussion of the current plan, prepared by the ANBP and supported by the Japanese government, under which commanders would be allowed to take on government positions, be awarded diplomatic missions or receive business training abroad. The main issues here were to find ways of separating commanders (and their families/deputies) from the soldiers for longer periods of time – allowing a more permanent disengagement – and to ensure that appropriate sanction mechanisms were in place if commanders opted for both the business solution and maintaining their military power. The media were mentioned as a powerful tool to be used to depict in a positive fashion commanders that had decided to disengage and return to their communities or take up legitimate business activities.

Women and MAFP

Up until now, all of the demobilized soldiers and all deminers have been men. Afghan women have only been involved in mine awareness campaigns at the community level. Therefore, a question emerged as to whether the MAFP programme (and the DDR process) could include women – for example, wives and mothers of the demobilized soldiers – to a larger extent, as supporters of the wider peace process or in mine awareness training. The workshop session indicated that this was a rather new discussion for the mine action community.

However, an example was mentioned of husband-and-wife teams that had undergone related training in the communities in Herat. In relation to this, one opportunity might be to link up with a number of Afghan women's NGOs that already have ongoing projects in areas that have been demobilized and draw on their experiences of working with women's development *shuras*. Certainly, it should be kept in mind that all of the demobilized soldiers interviewed had stated that they would consult their closest family members before making an important decision, such as whether to return to fighting. This would naturally include their mothers and wives.

It was pointed out that such a process needed to be carefully thought through and that different strategies would have to be devised for the different parts of the country, to avoid generating opposition towards the project

Concluding Comment

Although these preliminary findings indicate a range of positive learning experiences and impacts as a result of the MAFP programme, and show that organizations and staff involved are open to discussing and developing the programme further, there is a need for follow-up research and more comprehensive analysis if firmer conclusions are to be presented. As a result of PRIO's project on mine action and peacebuilding, we are able to draw on a large pool of documentation and research, including case studies from Sri Lanka and Sudan. The presentation of study reports from the three AMAC case studies – as well as the wider implication of this research for mine action and peacebuilding alike – will take place by the end of 2004.

Annex I: Background on the Afghan Mine Problem and Mine Action⁷

The Afghan Mine Problem

The bulk of Afghanistan's problem with landmines and unexploded ordnance (UXO) stems from the war of 1979–92 between the Soviet-backed government of the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) and the resistance movement, which to a large degree operated from exile in Pakistan and Iran. The Soviets and the government forces are responsible for the majority of the mines that have been laid. Mines – both anti-personnel and anti-tank – were used extensively to protect armed positions around towns and villages, as well as to block transport routes. There was also widespread use of air-dropped mines – so-called butterfly mines. For its part, the resistance also deployed mines, mainly anti-tank, in order to hinder the transport of soldiers and supplies (Isby, 1989: 238–240).

Mines continued to be used until the PDPA government fell to a coalition of *mujahedin* groups in 1992. The Taliban movement – which emerged in late 1994 and took control of the capital, Kabul, in 1996 – adopted a principled stand against the use of mines as 'unislamic', while the officially recognized government, under the leadership of Burhanuddin Rabbani, continued to use landmines. However, in general, deployment of mines during the 1990s was thought 'not to be substantial' (ICBL, 2001: 499). Mines laid during the latter half of the 1990s, however, have had the most impact in areas that were subject to the most intense fighting, such as the Shamali plains north of Kabul, and the Gormach and Murghab districts in the northwestern province of Badghis.

US forces have used cluster bombs in their campaign against the Taliban. Rae McGrath has estimated that 18,000 unexploded bomblets remain as a result of 600 cluster bombs having been dropped (McGrath, 2002). According to the Mine Action Centre for Afghanistan (MACA), coalition forces have provided extensive information on these cluster bombs, facilitating planning of operations. MACA has no knowledge of mines being used by coalition forces, in spite of reports indicating that the USA has used air-dropped mixed-mine systems.

⁷ This annex is based on excerpts from Kristian Berg Harpviken, 'Breaking New Ground: Afghanistan's Response to Landmines and Unexploded Ordnances', *Third World Quarterly*, vol. 23, no. 5, 2002, pp. 931–943. Statistics

The Impact of HMA

Since its inception in 1988, the Afghan mine action programme has drastically reduced the threat posed by landmines. By 2004, a total of 750km² had been registered as contaminated. Of this, 410km² have been classified as high priority, of which 183km² are agricultural land, 20km² residential/communal land, 5km² land related to irrigation/canals, 39km² roads and 163km² grazing areas.

When it comes to casualties, there is no nationwide registration system for mine victims, hence existing figures are highly inaccurate. MACA has estimated that the reduction in casualty rates has been about 50% since the inception of the programme. Human Rights Watch has suggested an even more dramatic decline (from 600 casualties estimated in 1993 to 130 recorded in 1999), claiming that this 'can largely be attributed to successful mine survey, marking, clearance, and awareness programs' (HRW, 2001: note 5). By early 2004, the estimate was 100–200 victims per month, of which 50% were related to UXOs.

Building National Capacity

When the mine action programme was established (by the late 1980s), landmines were not internationally perceived as a humanitarian problem, and the Afghan programme was the first of its kind, with little experience to draw on. As a result, the challenges were enormous. Building upon Afghan capacity was quickly established as a primary objective, though it was somewhat unclear what this would mean in operational terms. A first attempt was the so-called spontaneous demining initiative, where it was assumed that Afghans trained and equipped as deminers would return to their communities to start clearing mines (Eaton *et al.*, 1997: 10–11). There would be no monitoring and no recording of clearance. Increasingly, however, it was realized that very few of those trained ever carried out demining activities. Furthermore, it was recognized that there would be unacceptable levels of risk, given the absence of supervision and medical backup. Altogether, some 13,500 people had been trained when the programme was discontinued in 1991.

The approach that was soon taken by the United Nations Office of the Coordinator of Humanitarian and Economic Assistance Programmes Relating to Afghanistan

have been updated where appropriate.

(UNOCA), which headed the programme, was to establish Afghan NGOs to implement the mine action programme, with UNOCA only maintaining a coordinating role. Five Afghan NGOs were established between October 1989 and September 1990, of which three were involved in demining, one in mine awareness, and one in planning and quality control. Afghan NGOs still constitute the bulk of the capacity in the Afghan mine action programme, but are complemented by several international organizations. In comparison with other HMA programmes of a comparable size, the Afghan programme has had a remarkably low national-to-expatriate staff ratio. By late 1996, a programme of 3,500 employees had only five expatriate positions in its organizational chart (Eaton *et al.*, 1997: 24).

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