



Guidance Paper on Staff Capacity Development Programme: Lessons from Sri Lanka Mine Action Programme

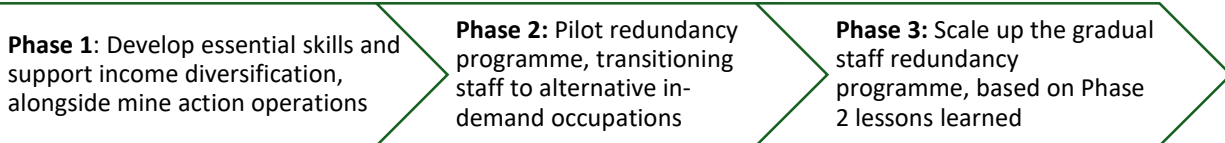
Version 2: July 2024

1. Background & purpose of the guidance paper

As of July 2024, mine action operations in Sri Lanka involve two international NGOs (MAG and HALO Trust), two national NGOs (DASH and SHARP), and the Sri Lankan Army – Humanitarian Demining Unit (SLA-HDU). They operate under the coordination of the National Mine Action Centre (NMAC) within the Ministry of Urban Development and Housing. The combined workforce of the four NGO operators exceeds 2,500 staff, with one-third being women, residing primarily in the Northern and Eastern Provinces.



MAG introduced the “Staff Transition Programme” in 2021, which was expanded across the other NGO operators in 2022, to prepare for the upcoming completion of landmine clearance in the coming years, and anticipated sector closure. The programme consists of the following three phases to facilitate a smooth and successful transition to alternative in-demand occupations.



Phase 1 includes capacity building activities such as financial literacy training, language trainings, soft skills training and orientation to government extension services to support income diversification.

This document offers key insights, steps and recommendations for mine action operators in other countries looking to launch similar programmes for their deminers.

2. Why embed a capacity development programme into your programme?

Reason #1: Fluctuating or Lost Funding

Funding uncertainties can lead to unanticipated staff redundancies. Such scenarios can damage the organization's reputation and undermine the community's trust. Investing in capacity development not only prepares staff with transferable skills but also mitigates the impact of funding fluctuations by ensuring they are equipped to adapt to new roles or employment opportunities, thereby preventing potential social unrest and operations disruptions in the event of unwanted workforce reductions.

Reason #2: Poverty and Socio-Economic Context

In countries where mine action programmes operate, deminers often come from vulnerable backgrounds, including those affected by conflicts, ethnic minority groups, and economically disadvantaged



communities. Mine action programmes can serve as a learning platform to empower these individuals by equipping them with skills and knowledge, enabling them to build more secure futures beyond their current roles in demining operations. Moreover, investing in capacity development can potentially attract further interest from donors, who recognize the dual impact of supporting both humanitarian efforts and sustainable development initiatives in affected regions.

Reason #3: Improved Morale, Motivation, and Productivity

As observed in the Sri Lanka programme, providing capacity development opportunities improves the morale and motivation of the demining workforce. When deminers feel supported and equipped with new skills, they are more engaged in their work, leading to improved productivity and efficiency in mine action operations.

Reason #4: Connecting with Development Branch Expertise

For mine action operators with a development branch within their organization, embedding a capacity development programme provides a valuable opportunity to align with their overall programme goals and leverage internal expertise. This integration allows for strategic implementation along the mine action - development continuum, particularly in areas cleared of mines where deminers both reside and work. By harnessing internal resources, organizations can create synergies between mine action and development initiatives, ensuring that deminers benefit as both beneficiaries and employees in the recovery and development efforts of their communities.

3. How to design & plan a capacity development programme?

Step 1

Conduct staff survey and focus group discussions to understand the socio-economic profile and needs of your demining workforce, covering literacy, education, household details (marital status, disability, landmine victim status, household composition), work history within and outside the mine action sector, acquired skills, land ownership, financial situation and mobility constraints.

Note: Avoid questions about future job preferences due to limited information on alternative livelihood opportunities, as respondents will only report what they know. Ensure that data is collected and stored in a confidential manner, accessible only to those with a mandate for oversight.

Step 2

Gather information on in-demand livelihood opportunities, best practices and lessons learned from a desk review and consultations with livelihood experts and professionals operating in the target areas, including representatives from the UN system, government, NGOs and the private sector.

Step 3

Design tailor-made capacity development interventions by analyzing data from both the demand (labor market) and supply (staff skills, qualifications, and experience) sides, to address specific gaps and opportunities. Depending on the country context, the focus may either be on Phase 1 interventions alone (such as financial literacy, language trainings, and soft skills) or encompass all three phases if the completion of mine action is approaching with a defined end date. These phases include offering market-



driven technical or vocational training opportunities, thereby maximizing the chances of successful transitions.

Note: Only by examining both the demand and supply sides can we ensure that proposed alternative occupations, vocational training opportunities, and business ventures are market-driven and result in actual income generation.

Step 4

Advocate for donor and government support by highlighting the importance of capacity development initiatives in maintaining productivity, safeguarding sector reputation, preventing deminers from falling into poverty post-clearance and reintegrating them into their communities. Integration of capacity development or staff transition into the national mine action strategy ensures official endorsement and commitment.

Step 5

With donor funding, employ a full-time staff or team with a background in livelihood or economic development to oversee the management of the capacity development or staff transition programme. This role serves as a bridge between the mine action operator and external stakeholders, ensuring smooth cooperation and alignment with the organization's interests, needs and requirements.

It is strongly recommended that the design and planning of a capacity development programme with eventual transition in mind is led or supported by a livelihoods expert with knowledge of the local communities.

4. How to implement capacity development activities?

Step 1

Secure buy-in from senior management across Operations, HR, Logistics and Finance Departments, to ensure that demining staff have access to the support and training they need. Regular progress review meetings and ongoing communication will help the capacity development programme integrate smoothly with day-to-day operations.

Note: This step should not be underestimated, as it ensures the smooth implementation of the programme and integrates this new topic into the organizational structure, mission, and HR/procurement/finance procedures.

Step 2

Mobilize expert organizations or individuals through service provision or partnership agreement to deliver the identified interventions. Proper briefing and exposure visits should be conducted to ensure that the content and delivery methodology are customized to the specific literacy levels, skills and needs of the demining staff.

Note: Referral to existing skills development and/or livelihood support programmes may not work due to training schedules that do not align with staff availability, as well as differences in the content that may not address the specific skills and needs of the deminers.



Step 3

Conduct orientation sessions on the capacity development programme for deminers during their recruitment process, demining related refresher training programme, morning parade, maintenance days and regular visits to the minefields. This can be supported by leaflets with contact details and training calendars displayed at control points.

Note: Integrating this orientation into various aspects of their work will help reinforce the importance of the programme and build a trust relationship with the staff members overseeing it.

Step 4

Select demining staff based on their willingness, preference, and interest in the proposed interventions, in close coordination with the Operations Team. This can be done through a registration form, mass SMS invitations and direct phone calls to confirm their participation.

Note: Staff selection and participation may differ depending on the training modality:

- 1. While conducting training on operational days is ideal, it may affect productivity and clearance schedules if too many training days are required. A balance needs to be struck between the number of operational days that can be allocated per year for capacity development interventions, such as financial literacy training, without compromising demining operations.*
- 2. Provide refreshments, meals, transport, or travel allowances when delivering training on stand-down days to offset opportunity costs and boost staff participation.*

Step 5

Invest resources in monitoring and evaluation, including pre- and post-training assessments, 3 or 6-month post-intervention assessments, case studies and interviews, to collect evidence on changes among staff (with an age, gender, position lens) and assess the effectiveness of the implemented activities to guide future interventions, and secure additional funding.