

KEY DEVELOPMENTS

However short-lived, there were positive developments in mine action in Myanmar during 2019 and the first quarter of 2020, including preliminary steps by the government towards establishing a national mine action authority (NMAA) and approval of Myanmar's first national mine action standard on the marking of hazardous areas. Since March 2020, all momentum has been lost as the COVID-19 pandemic severely slowed progress and operators complied with national and local restrictions.

In February 2021, the Myanmar military staged a *coup d'état*, and announced a one-year state of emergency. This has further significantly impeded progress in mine action. Civilian landmine casualties have increased by 240% in 2020 compared to the previous year. Although non-governmental organisations (NGOs) are permitted to conduct non-technical survey, they are still not authorised to conduct technical survey, explosive ordnance disposal (EOD), or mine clearance. These activities remain under the sole remit of the Myanmar army (Tatmadaw).

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

- Myanmar should accede to the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention (APMBC) as a matter of priority.
- Myanmar should clear anti-personnel mines in areas under its jurisdiction or control as soon as possible, consonant with its obligations under international human rights law.
- The Myanmar army (Tatmadaw) and armed groups should stop all use of anti-personnel mines.
- As an entity to lead effective mine action, an NMAA, once established, needs to be civilian led and democratically controlled.
- Despite the political stalemate, donors should continue funding humanitarian mine action in Myanmar. Organisations should prioritise the immediate mitigation of explosive ordnance (EO)-related civilian deaths.
- Mine action NGOs and their implementing partners should continue efforts to establish the baseline of anti-personnel mine contamination, mark hazardous areas, and conduct risk education.
- Myanmar should accelerate non-technical survey, marking of hazardous areas, and permit accredited operators to conduct clearance and EOD.
- Mine action NGOs and their implementing partners should continue to develop and approve National Mine Action Standards (NMAAS), particularly for non-technical survey, technical survey, and clearance.
- A centralised information management database should be established onto which data collected on mined areas should be entered. The information should be managed in keeping with high standards of data protection and taking into account potential security and safety repercussions amid the delicate political context.
- Myanmar should ensure that areas planned for internally displaced people (IDPs) returns are safe or that, at a minimum, mined areas have been clearly delineated, perimeter-marked and fenced, and risk education duly conducted.

UNDERSTANDING OF AP MINE CONTAMINATION

Myanmar is heavily mine-affected as a result of conflicts between the Myanmar army and numerous non-state armed groups (NSAGs) affiliated with ethnic minorities. Violence in Myanmar started after the country's independence in 1948 and is ongoing, with anti-personnel mines continuing to be laid.¹ The Landmine Monitor has documented the use of anti-personnel mines by the Tatmadaw, and by various NSAGs in Myanmar, every year since the publication of its first annual report in 1999.² In 2020–21, both the Myanmar military and many NSAGs continued to lay anti-personnel mines and victim-activated improvised explosive devices (IEDs),³ and in 2020, Myanmar was the only country where new use of anti-personnel mines by the government forces was confirmed.⁴ Mined areas, which are especially in areas close to Myanmar's borders with Bangladesh, China, and Thailand, pose a particular threat in the north and east of the country, and most recently, in the western Rakhine state.

There is no accurate estimate of the extent of mine contamination. The government of Myanmar has said that while it is very difficult to have a complete picture of contamination, data indicate that nine of the fourteen states and regions are contaminated with landmines and explosive remnants of war (ERW).⁵ Although landmine casualty data are not systematically collected in Myanmar, media reports in 2020 indicated high numbers of civilian casualties, further attesting to the scale of

contamination.⁶ The year 2020 saw an increase of 240% of landmine casualties compared to 2019. Of the recorded incidents between January and October, Rakhine state accounted for approximately 50% of the total number of casualties, while Shan and Kachin represented, respectively, 26% and 10% of the total.⁷

The Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on Myanmar, established by the United Nations Human Rights Council, reported in September 2019 that northern Myanmar is “heavily contaminated with landmines” and that the parties to the conflict, including the Tatmadaw, the Kachin Independence Army (KIA), the Restoration Council of Shan State (RCSS, formerly referred to as the Shan State Army South (SSA-S), and the Shan State Progressive Party (SSPP, formerly referred to as the Shan State Army North (SSA-N), all continue to lay landmines and use IEDs.⁸

In September 2018, the Fact-Finding Mission had reported that mines had been laid by the Tatmadaw soldiers along the border with Bangladesh in the lead-up to and following operations targeting fleeing Rohingya civilians and seeking to prevent those who had already left from returning. In April 2017, it was reported that the Myanmar and Bangladesh governments had agreed to remove mines and IEDs from the border area. By August of that year, however, the Tatmadaw was laying mines along the border, not removing them, and in September, Bangladesh formally complained to Myanmar about the latter’s emplacement of mines.⁹

New emplacement of mines has continued despite the signing of the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement in October 2015 between the Government of Myanmar and eight ethnic armed groups (with a further two signing the agreement in 2018). This Agreement had committed all signatories to end the use of landmines and to cooperate on mine-clearance operations.¹⁰

In the absence of a national contamination baseline, non-technical survey conducted by international NGOs and their partner organisations in recent years is starting to provide a better idea of the extent of anti-personnel mine contamination in areas in which they operate. The HALO Trust conducted a non-technical survey in the first quarter of 2020 in Kayah and northern Shan states (in the west and south-west). The survey recorded 0.43km² of anti-personnel mine contamination across five confirmed hazardous areas (CHAs) and four suspected hazardous areas (SHAs).¹¹

Mines Advisory Group (MAG) conducted four non-technical surveys in Kayah and Tanintharyi states, identifying four SHAs covering a total of 9,321m².¹² In 2019, MAG conducted baseline and remote baseline survey in Kachin state, targeting 59 villages identified for IDP return or resettlement. The resultant report, published in 2020, revealed that 90% of the villages surveyed had declared evidence of landmines or unexploded ordnance (UXO), with 70% of the villages reporting direct evidence of contamination. The report highlights the need for the Myanmar government to make humanitarian mine action a prerequisite for any IDP return.¹³

Anti-personnel mines laid by the Tatmadaw are mostly produced in State-owned factories.¹⁴ Ethnic armed groups acknowledge use of anti-personnel mines of an improvised nature as well as of a number of anti-vehicle mines, but unconfirmed reports in 2018 suggested groups in the north have also obtained Chinese Type 72 anti-vehicle mines.¹⁵

In a statement delivered at the Fourth Review Conference of the APMBC in Oslo in November 2019, the Government of Myanmar said that it would “continue to promote the full stop in the use of anti-personnel mines by all parties to the conflict” and stated that it was “working hard to strengthen the knowledge of and the respect towards international humanitarian law among all parties to the conflict.”¹⁶

NATIONAL OWNERSHIP AND PROGRAMME MANAGEMENT

The government set up a Myanmar Mine Action Centre under the Myanmar Peace Centre (MPC) in 2012 with support from Norwegian People’s Aid (NPA), but the centre was never fully staffed. The MPC was dissolved at the end of March 2016 and replaced by a National Reconciliation and Peace Centre, which reported to the then head of government, State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi.¹⁷

In 2019 and early 2020, Myanmar was making welcome progress towards establishing an NMAA, which is needed to strengthen its humanitarian mine action programme. The government told the Fourth APMBC Review Conference in November 2019 that “Myanmar will as soon as feasible establish the needed national legislation to establish a national mine action authority.”¹⁸

An initial workshop on how Myanmar can establish an NMAA to lead and manage a humanitarian mine action programme was hosted by Myanmar in Nay Pyi Taw in October 2019, attended by the Tatmadaw, humanitarian mine action NGOs in Myanmar, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Regional Mine Action Centre (ARMAC), the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining (GICHD), and several ambassadors.¹⁹ Discussions focused on which ministries would form part of a future NMAA and the

mechanisms for establishing the Authority. The Attorney General’s Office reportedly advised that the establishment of an NMAA, including its mandate, terms of reference, and budget would need to follow the national legal process, which could take time, especially in the absence of sufficient political will and pressure to fast-track the process.²⁰ On 3 January 2020, an interministerial meeting took place, attended by 14 different ministries including the Ministry of Defence, during which agreement was reached in principle to establish an NMAA and for a governmental task force/working committee to be created to begin the process.²¹

A second international workshop in January 2020 discussed how Myanmar can establish an NMAA in Myanmar. It was attended by the GICHD and the Norwegian Presidency to the APMBC, but NGO clearance operators were not invited.²²

Following the two workshops, the government created a task force to work towards the establishment of the NMAA.²³ However, momentum in 2020 was lost with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting shift in government priorities.²⁴ The governmental elections in November 2020 further reduced interest in humanitarian mine action. The government had established a new Department of Rehabilitation (DoR) in 2018, which gradually took over the

responsibility to oversee mine action operators and their activities. The DoR, although cooperative and engaged, falls short of addressing mine action challenges at a country level,²⁵ a capacity needed to tackle national-level issues such as creating an NMAA and mine action legislation.

In November 2020, the Director General of the DoR announced during a mine risk working group (MRWG) meeting that the DoR had finalised the vision and terms-of-reference of the working committee that is to be set up prior to the establishment of an NMAA and submitted it to the President office for consideration. As a focal line ministry of implementing the "National Strategy on Resettlement of IDP Return and Closure of IDP Camps", the DoR is said to be committed to acquiring approvals so that humanitarian demining can begin. Nevertheless, as at April 2021, this had yet to be translated into concrete progress.²⁶

In a statement delivered at the Eighteenth Meeting of States Parties to the APMB, held virtually in November 2020, Myanmar said: "Myanmar has formed the Mine Action Working Group on 22 May 2020 in order to craft the National Mine Action Strategy. It is indeed the first step towards formulating a National Strategy and Plan of Action for mine clearance".²⁷

The need to accelerate the establishment of an NMAA is all the more pressing in light of the government's plan to close IDP camps. At the end of 2020, an estimated 370,000 people were internally displaced within Myanmar, and by June 2021, the number had increased by a further 200,000 due to renewed clashes between the Myanmar army and NSAGs in Chin, Kayah, and Kayin states following the coup.²⁸ Myanmar government launched the "National Strategy on Resettlement of IDPs and Closure of IDP Camps" in November 2019.²⁹ The plan identifies the need for landmine clearance to enable IDPs to return to their villages of origin, but does not provide any further details of how and when such clearance will take place.

At the Fourth APMB Review Conference in November 2019, Myanmar acknowledged that mine action "is a precondition for safe return and resettlement of IDPs, and sustainable and durable solutions" and declared that the government was "finding practical ways to move forward to closing the IDP camps using this national strategy" and that it aimed "to start humanitarian demining in non-conflict areas as a part of this camp closure strategy".³⁰ Several senior government officials have similarly expressed support for the need for mine clearance and other mine action activities in areas identified for IDP returns.³¹ However, displaced communities remain afraid of returning to their villages due to the presence of landmines within and around their villages.³² Moreover, the instability since the coup has created an environment that is not conducive to the establishment of the necessary mine action structures or to the conduct of humanitarian demining.

International NGO operators are advocating for camp closures to be conducted in a safe, voluntary, and dignified manner, and for mine action to form an essential part of the planning and activity implementation process of IDP returns. In particular, non-technical survey and hazard marking conducted to international standards are urgently needed in potential resettlement areas, to define and demarcate hazardous areas and to verify safe areas. This is a pre-requisite before IDPs can be allowed to return to areas that may contain mines.³³

Many parts of Myanmar are still in the throes of armed conflict and part of the timeline for the return of IDPs depends on progress in the peace process with ethnic armed groups.³⁴ Since the coup, however, fighting with NSAGs has escalated on multiple fronts.³⁵ According to a briefing by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in March 2020, in western Myanmar the return of IDPs is "hindered by ongoing fighting" and "newly laid anti-personnel mines and improvised explosive devices pose additional risks."³⁶ Kachin is a priority state in the IDP camp closure strategy, but the KIA has not yet signed the ceasefire agreement with the government. However, in negotiation with the government, a mandate has been given to Kachin church leaders to act on behalf of NSAGs with regard to IDP resettlement.³⁷

Discussions continued in early 2020 between humanitarian operators and the national authorities regarding possible survey and clearance in relation to the IDP camp closure strategy,³⁸ but had been suspended as at March 2020, due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.³⁹ Some mine clearance is said to have been undertaken by the military as part of an initiative to facilitate the return of IDPs, but there are serious doubts as to the standard of this clearance.⁴⁰ Similarly, the Independent International Fact Finding Mission expressed concerns "about reports that some demining operations conducted by the Tatmadaw may have failed to meet relevant quality standards and did not include agricultural land surrounding residential areas."⁴¹ The Tatmadaw has historically seen mine clearance as solely its own task.

The Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement (MSWRR) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) co-chair the MRWG which was set up in 2012 and comprises 10 ministries, 41 international and national organisations, and 5 state-level coordination agencies (in Kachin, Kayah, Kayin, Shan states, and, since early 2020, Rakhine state).⁴² Since March 2020, the MWRG continued to convene virtually at state levels.⁴³ At national level, virtual MRWG meetings were only held in the third and fourth quarters of 2020.⁴⁴

In Kachin and Shan states, a notable discussion point of the MRWG was around the need for survey and clearance as part of the camp closure, return, and resettlement process.⁴⁵ The MRWG has also successfully advocated for a government decision to allow the import of detectors in 2020.⁴⁶ The MRWG was said to have active participation from state and union level government representatives, and mine action NGOs.⁴⁷ Along with UNICEF, Humanity and Inclusion (HI) co-chairs the Victim Assistance Technical Group (VATG), a subgroup of the MRWG.⁴⁸

There is also an informal Non-Technical Survey Working Group (NTSWG), which was an ad-hoc group established in late 2018 as an offshoot of the MSWG. The working group was initially held in Yangon and comprised only humanitarian actors, but was subsequently moved to Nay Pyi Taw and expanded to include the Department of Rehabilitation, the Tatmadaw, and additional mine action organisations.⁴⁹ In 2020, the group comprised five members: Danish Refugee Council (DRC), HALO Trust, HI, MAG, and NPA.⁵⁰ The NTSWG continued to convene regularly 2020,⁵¹ and in early 2020, mine action NGOs and their partners were able to successfully advocate for permission to mark and fencing of hazardous areas, and jointly review and approve the national standards on marking.⁵² In 2020, the group established a coordination mechanism of non-technical survey activities and harmonised non-technical survey forms and data

collection tools. As at April 2021, the NTSWG had elaborated national non-technical survey standards but had yet to approve them. Technical survey standards were also being developed.⁵³

Myanmar was also working closely with the ASEAN and the ARMAC, enhancing technical cooperation in mine action in 2019.⁵⁴ In 2020, DanChurchAid (DCA) provided training on explosive ordnance risk education (EORE) to partner NGO and local community-based organisations (CSOs) staff in northern Shan and Kayin states. DCA reported that the COVID-19 pandemic has had a negative impact on maintaining the close cooperation with the national authorities to some extent, as face-to-face meetings or trainings were no longer possible.⁵⁵

The DRC's Humanitarian Disarmament and Peacebuilding Sector, formally known as Danish Demining Group (DDG), helped to develop the capacity of both the national and the regional authorities in 2020 by conducting humanitarian mine action sensitisation workshops and training of trainer

(ToT) of EORE to the DoR, Department of Social Welfare, and Department of Disaster Management.⁵⁶

MAG reported positive developments in trust building with the national authorities in 2020. The DoR had agreed to advance the development of an NMAA and welcomed MAG's support on the development of national standards, establishment of a national database, and planning of a regional conference with ASEAN delegates (which was later cancelled following the 2021 coup). MAG believes that it would have been able to conduct technical surveys and possibly clearance had it not been for the effects of the coup.⁵⁷

NPA, along with the GICHD, assisted a delegation from Myanmar during the attendance of the National Directors Meetings (NDM) in Geneva in February 2020.⁵⁸ NPA paid and facilitated the attendance of Myanmar representatives, and helped to set up bilateral talks during the conference.⁵⁹

GENDER AND DIVERSITY

DCA has a gender and diversity policy and implementation plan. In 2020, women made up 60% of DCA's programme staff and 50% of managerial positions were held by women. In addition, 87% of operational staff in 2020 were women.⁶⁰

DRC reported having a gender and diversity policy and implementation plan. It also disaggregates relevant mine action data by sex and age, and has gender-balanced survey and community liaison teams to help ensure women and children in affected communities are consulted as part of its survey and community liaison activities in Myanmar. There is equal access to employment for women and men at DRC, and in 2020, 58% of DRC's managerial/supervisory positions were held by women.⁶¹

The HALO Trust has a gender and diversity policy and implementation plan specific to its work in Myanmar. HALO consults all gender and age groups, including women and children, during non-technical survey and community liaison, and its survey and community liaison teams are gender-balanced as far as possible. HALO disaggregates relevant mine action data by gender and age.⁶² There is equal access to employment for qualified women and men in HALO survey and community liaison teams in Myanmar. Of HALO Trust's 26 operational staff in Myanmar, 10 are women; and of the 16 managerial/supervisory roles, 5 are women. Until September 2020, HALO worked with two civil society partners in north Shan and Kachin states, which increased its outreach to both ethnic Shan and Kachin communities.⁶³

MAG has a gender and diversity policy and its implementation plan in Myanmar is focused on gender-balanced community liaison teams, equal participation by women in all MAG activities, and gender- and age-disaggregated data.⁶⁴ A total of 43% of personnel in MAG's Community Liaison Field Teams are female (50% of community liaison officers; 67% of community liaison team leaders; and 25% of community liaison supervisors); among senior and mid management staff 11% are women, as are 44% of total staff.⁶⁵ Women are always consulted during baseline survey (BLS) and non-technical survey by MAG, and to help ensure this, the organisation asks village leaders to gather a mixed group of local women and men to avoid the tendency for village leaders to only recommend local men for consultation.⁶⁶ All MAG's community liaison teams are gender balanced and consist of one male and one female community liaison officer.⁶⁷

NPA has a gender and diversity policy and implementation plan, and relevant mine action data are disaggregated by sex and age. NPA consults with women and children during its non-technical survey and EORE operations in Myanmar. All non-technical survey teams are at least 50% female, and teams are fluent in the local languages of the area of operations.⁶⁸ There is equal access to employment for qualified women and men in NPA survey teams in Myanmar, with women making up 50% of the NPA and partner organisation survey staff, and 20% of leadership roles.⁶⁹

INFORMATION MANAGEMENT AND REPORTING

As at May 2021, there was no centralised mine action information management database in Myanmar.⁷⁰ This is so even though data collection and information management was one of the six main priorities of the 2018–19 MRWG strategic work plan.⁷¹ It was hoped that a national database would be set up once an NMAA is established.⁷² Issues of conflict sensitivity, however, pose potential challenges for such a database, which would require input from the joint parties to the ceasefire.

DCA does not conduct direct non-technical survey but trains partner organisations how to do so. DCA partners maintain data in Microsoft (MS) Excel, MS Word, and Google Earth. As at April 2021, DCA had a project with a component related to information management which sought to build partners to capacity to gather, input, manage, and analyse data. The project was delayed due to the coup, but DCA was still planning to introduce Information Management System for Mine Action (IMSMA) Core to its partners, and train them on its use. DCA also intended to better coordinate with the NTSWG in 2021 to achieve this.⁷³

DRC uses the Fulcrum information management system.⁷⁴ HALO Trust's information management system is also Fulcrum, with data recorded in Microsoft Access.⁷⁵ MAG is using Survey123 for data collection and ArcMAP for mapping and GPS services, both provided by ArcGIS. In 2020, MAG upgraded its information management systems by switching to MAG's new global IM system which is on the ESRI platform and is called Operations Management Information Systems (OMIS).⁷⁶

NPA Myanmar and its partner organisations also use Survey123 in the collection of non-technical survey information and all survey data is recorded digitally, including polygon mapping directly via Survey123, with hard copy sketch maps drawn as a back-up. This enabled "live" quality control (QC) checking by NPA Myanmar's information management officer.⁷⁷

PLANNING AND TASKING

Currently there is no national mine action legislation in Myanmar, but prior to the February 2021 coup the government reported plans to elaborate and adopt the required national legislation to establish an NMAA, "as soon as feasible".⁷⁸ No progress has been registered since the coup.

DCA's partner organisations, which primarily work in conflict-affected areas, prioritise their tasks in conjunction with local authorities, often those of NSAGs, based on feedback from communities.⁷⁹

In 2019, HALO Trust followed a systematic work plan for its non-technical survey, while also prioritising credible reports received of local contamination.⁸⁰ During 2020, due to COVID-19 pandemic, access to communities has become more challenging and HALO has taken a more pragmatic and consultative approach.⁸¹

The first stage of MAG's task prioritisation is based on desk research using the "Village Situation Analysis" tool, through which data is gathered on all villages within MAG's operational areas, including information on conflict, accidents, victims, and access. This information is used alongside MAG's operational database to target activities.⁸²

MAG conducts two types of survey in Myanmar: the BLS and non-technical survey. The BLS is a basic preliminary assessment that offers a rapid snapshot of contamination in a particular area, based on focus group discussions and data from community members. On completion of a local BLS, villages are assigned one of three colour categories: red, which represents a high confidence of contamination (direct evidence of contamination is reported); amber, which represents low confidence of contamination (indirect evidence of contamination is reported); and grey, which indicates there was no evidence of contamination at the time of the survey. This categorisation forms the basis for MAG's prioritisation of non-technical survey.⁸³

In 2019, MAG also undertook "remote BLS" within the IDP camps and villages with a large proportion of displaced people, in the states of Kachin and northern Shan.⁸⁴ In 2020, MAG developed and piloted over-the-phone BLS in Kayin and

Chin states. This allows community liaison staff to quickly scan a village tract and identify which villages might need in-person EORE and BLS when evidence of contamination is shared during the phone interviews. MAG reports this methodology has proven effective, low-cost, and allowed rapid survey of a large area. This is particularly important in Myanmar where a desk assessment is challenging considering the lack of accessible military records and accident data.

Similar to regular BLS, the village leader gathered a group of key informants for each over-the-phone BLS session. Information gathered during the interviews help guide the prioritisation of villages for follow-on activities, emergency EORE, and remote EORE when on site access is restricted. Considering the increase in fighting in MAG's operational areas in 2021, MAG and its partners plan to use this tool to gather information rapidly about areas where fighting or aerial strikes have occurred to capture EO contamination and identify communities in need of emergency EORE.⁸⁵

MAG's non-technical survey is a more detailed survey that more accurately identifies the location of SHAs and CHAs, enabling MAG to create polygons, identify EOD spot tasks, and generate hazardous area reports which can be shared with local communities and key stakeholders. Non-technical survey is prioritised in villages categorised as red through the BLS, followed by those classed as amber.⁸⁶

NPA prioritises areas for survey using joint input from local stakeholders and communities along with NPA's local partner organisations. Non-technical survey teams conduct both risk education and village baseline assessments involving members of the communities. Risk education sessions are interactive and facilitate a two-way conversation between local communities and NPA/partner team members. Based on community responses, a conflict, accident, and contamination overview of the village is determined through community mapping, following which CHAs and SHAs are created.⁸⁷

LAND RELEASE SYSTEM

STANDARDS AND LAND RELEASE EFFICIENCY

Historically, Myanmar has not had national standards and therefore operators have followed the International Mine Action Standards (IMAS) and their own SOPs. However, progress was made with Myanmar's first national standard on marking, which was approved by the government in January 2020. A standard for non-technical survey was being elaborated by the NTSWG in 2020, led by the Mine Action Advisor from the New Zealand Embassy,⁸⁸ but as April 2021, these standards had yet to be approved by the group. The NTSWG was also in the process of developing national standards for technical surveys as of writing.⁸⁹

In 2018, operators successfully advocated for the Government of Myanmar to include physical marking (with warning signs) and fencing of SHAs and CHAs as part of the non-technical survey process. The central government approved marking of polygons, though local authorities were also involved in the approval process.⁹⁰ DRC was not able to mark the hazardous areas it identified in 2020 as in the previous year, but many hazardous areas were identified in 2019 along electricity-cable base structures, which were already fenced off to prevent people from entering.⁹¹

OPERATORS AND OPERATIONAL TOOLS

Six international demining organisations (DCA, DRC, The HALO Trust, HI, MAG, and NPA) have offices in Yangon and some provincial locations. None of the humanitarian demining organisations in Myanmar is yet permitted to conduct clearance, EOD, or technical survey; as at May 2021, they were only permitted to conduct non-technical survey, risk education, and community liaison.

Tatmadaw engineers have reportedly conducted some military mine clearance but operations are neither systematic nor have they been formally recorded, and there is concern regarding quality and standard to which clearance is conducted.⁹⁶

DCA's mine action work in Myanmar is exclusively done through local partner organisations. In 2020, DCA had around 15 formal partners and supported a number of small CSOs in implementing EORE and victim assistance activities. Prior to February 2021, DCA also worked closely with the Departments of Social Welfare and Rehabilitation on EORE activities. In 2020, none of DCA's partners conducted any survey activities and DCA could not deploy its technical advisor to support trainings to its partners. As at April 2021, DCA hoped to be able to provide non-technical survey training and implementation support to its partner organisations, though this was contingent on the political situation and the COVID-19-related travel restrictions.⁹⁷

DRC has not been granted permission to carry out technical survey or clearance activities since it conducted non-technical surveys in Kayah state in 2019. As a result, DRC has closed its programme in Kayah state and has instead prioritised non-technical survey activities in Kachin and Shan states. DRC's plans to commence non-technical survey in the said states did not materialise due to the COVID-19 movement restrictions and were postponed to 2021. DRC's community liaison and mapping activities continued throughout 2020

The HALO Trust reported that permission had been granted for marking of hazardous areas by authorities in both north Shan and Kayin states, provided that the village chief agrees. In the first quarter of 2020, HALO marked seven CHAs, one in northern Shan and six in Kayin states, with warning signs in the local languages.⁹² MAG received permission from the government to conduct fencing/marketing operations in early 2020 and has recruited technical field staff to support the activity. MAG, however, did not conduct any fencing or marking in 2020 due to the movement and travel restrictions that persisted throughout the year in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.⁹³ In Mon state, NPA's non-technical surveys did not confirm any hazardous areas, therefore, no marking was conducted by NPA in 2020.⁹⁴

As at April 2021, progress had yet to be made in elaboration of national standards for clearance activities and none of the humanitarian mine action organisations was yet permitted to conduct technical survey or clearance in Myanmar.⁹⁵

as part of its EORE activities in partnership with CSOs. In Rakhine state, DRC rolled out EORE activities in 2020 and provided a TOT to CSO staff. DRC's community liaison and non-technical survey staff were decreased in 2020 due to the closure of its programme in Kayah state. The capacity in Kachin and Shan states remained unchanged while it saw an increase in Rakhine with the rolling out of EORE activities.⁹⁸

HALO conducted non-technical survey in north Shan and Kayin states in the first quarter of 2020, but suspended all mine action activities in March 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In April 2020, HALO reduced the number of teams from seven to five due to a decrease in funding, and in August 2020, on the back of the delivery of COVID-19 hygiene materials, started delivering modified EORE sessions to smaller household groups. HALO's teams are all dual-skilled for non-technical survey and EORE, but the COVID-19 movement restrictions have only enabled the latter since March 2020. As at April 2021, HALO was in the process of establishing a footprint in Kachin state to assist with the safe return of IDPs once the security and political situations allow.⁹⁹

In 2020, MAG's non-technical survey and community liaison capacity consisted of nine teams with a total of 18 staff. This is a decrease from the 12 teams of 26 staff in 2019 as MAG delayed recruitments due to the impact of COVID-19 on operations. MAG worked with six implementing partners in 2020 in Chin Kachin, Kayah, northern Shan, and Tanintharyi states, delivering EORE, BLS, and non-technical surveys. MAG does not expect major changes to its capacity in 2021.¹⁰⁰

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a severe impact on MAG and its partners' ability to operate throughout 2020. Mine action activities were suspended from March 2020 to August 2020, and as MAG was preparing to redeploy, a second wave of COVID-19 spread in October 2020. NSAGs and

local communities also employed their own measures to control the spread of the virus, which together with official restrictions, have created multi-layered challenges to the operations. Movements between townships and communities were tightly controlled, and domestic flights suspended for the majority of the year. International flights have been suspended since March 2020 and remain suspended at the time of writing. Visas have been assessed on a case-by-case basis, making it difficult for international staff to get permission to enter the country.¹⁰¹

In 2020, NPA was focusing on three areas of work: national ownership and capacity development, non-technical survey and risk education with civil society partners, and emergency response by local and national partners.¹⁰² In 2020, NPA conducted non-technical survey with two local civil society

partners in six villages in Mon state (in the south-east), during which NPA provided training and technical support to the partner organisations and experienced NPA team leaders accompanied partner teams during non-technical survey operations.¹⁰³ NPA's number of staff remained unchanged in 2020, albeit consolidated in four non-technical survey teams who also conduct EORE and conflict preparedness and protection (CPP). The COVID-19 pandemic has affected NPA's operations by limiting access to villages and communities in all of NPA areas of operation. It also restricted travels to and from Myanmar, as well as access to visa, domestic movement of staff, and the ability to meet with key stakeholders. Consequently, unlike in the previous year, no mined areas were newly identified by NPA in 2020.¹⁰⁴

LAND RELEASE

As in previous year, no land release took place in 2020 in Myanmar as humanitarian mine action operators are not permitted to conduct clearance or technical survey by either the government or ethnic minority authorities. Since 2018, operators have been authorised to conduct non-technical survey to identify mined areas, in addition to conducting risk education and community liaison activities which they were already undertaking. NGO operators are not permitted to conduct EOD of any explosive ordnance discovered during survey operations.

SURVEY IN 2020

HALO Trust conducted non-technical survey in 2020 in northern Shan and Kayin state. The survey recorded 0.43km² of anti-personnel mine contamination across five CHAs and four SHAs.¹⁰⁵

Table 1: Anti-personnel mined area by state identified by HALO Trust (at end of 2020)¹⁰⁶

State	CHAs	Area (m ²)	SHAs	Area (m ²)	Total SHAs/CHAs	Total area (m ²)
Shan	5	419,009	0	0	5	419,009
Kayin	0	0	4	6,068	4	6,068
Totals	5	419,009	4	6,068	9	425,077

The mined area identified in 2020 is a third of what was identified in 2019 by HALO, which totalled 1.28km².

MAG conducted four non-technical surveys in Kayah and Tanintharyi states. The survey identified four SHA's totalling 9,321m². This is a sharp decrease from the 42 hazardous areas that MAG identified in the previous year. The decrease is caused by the strict COVID-19 measures that severely reduced field deployment.¹⁰⁷

Table 2: Anti-personnel mined area by state identified by MAG (at end of 2020)¹⁰⁸

State	SHAs	Area (m ²)
Kayah	1	209
Tanintharyi	3	9,112
Totals	4	9,321

CLEARANCE IN 2020

No clearance of anti-personnel mines or other ordnance by international NGOs was permitted by the authorities in 2020 as in previous years.¹⁰⁹ The results of ad hoc clearance by the Myanmar army have not been publicly reported.

PROGRESS TOWARDS COMPLETION

The positive progress in anti-personnel mine survey in Myanmar in 2018 and 2019, which was hoped to lead to clearance, has come to a standstill since March 2020 due to the impact of COVID-19 pandemic and is likely to be reversed after the military coup in February 2021.

In March 2021, a Myanmar military airstrike in Kayin State hit an office of a DCA partner organisation causing material damage and loss of equipment. The military coup has profoundly impacted DCA's operations in Myanmar in terms of security, access to funding, government relations, visas, and travel authorisations.¹¹⁰

DRC reported that it was no longer able to provide online EORE due to internet blackouts. Its field deployments have been largely limited due to safety concerns and the ongoing fighting in Kachin state. In Rakhine state, however, travel between the field sites was still possible as Rakhine remained relatively isolated from the insecurity affecting the rest of the country.¹¹¹

The HALO Trust suspended team deployments in February 2021, but resumed operations again in March with four teams, two in each of Shan and Kayin states. HALO continues to review the local security and COVID-19 situation on daily basis, adjust or postpone its deployments accordingly.¹¹²

MAG, together with the majority of its partners, halted activities since February 2021. The coup has rendered field communication difficult, negatively impacted staff safety as well as MAG's relations with local and national authorities.

MAG has engaged with the State Administrative Council (SAC) appointed authorities only on a strictly essential basis. MAG is working on adapting activities to the new context and getting back operational, and is currently conducting a field assessment whose findings will be used to ensure operations respond to the needs of communities.¹¹³

NPA has also put all its operations on hold since March 2021, though as at May 2021, discussions over a potential restart were ongoing.¹¹⁴

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