

DEMINING ALBANIA



INTERNATIONAL TRUST FUND





1.

CHRONOLOGY

1999: Contamination in Albania

During the 1999 Kosovo conflict, mines were laid and sub munitions fired inside Albanian territory. Moreover, cluster strikes were conducted on military positions along the Albanian northeast border region, which added to the contamination of Albanian territory. The contaminated areas covered 120 kilometres along the Albanian border from Montenegro in the north to Macedonia in the south, starting a few metres inside Albania (minefields) and as deep as 10 kilometres into Albanian territory (cluster strikes). After the conflicts ceased, Albania was not able to receive any records or data of minefields, despite repeated requests by donors and the Albanian authorities, which resulted in much slower demining rates.

At the time of the inception of armed clashes in 1999, approximately 25,500 people lived in 39 villages of what would become the contaminated areas of the regions of Kukes, Has and Tropoje in northeast Albania.

Since 1999, there have been 210 mine/UXO accidents, in which 238 persons were injured and 34 killed. However, there have been no mine/UXO accidents since 2006, due to extensive Mine Risk Education programme in this region. A statistical outline of the victims shows that approximately one third of the injured was between the age of 15 and 30. Additionally, approximately half of the victims were affected either during farming, grazing cattle or on their way to school. The contamination along the border has made it difficult for the border police to effectively patrol the area where trafficking and other criminal activities occur on a regular basis.

Start of Mine Action: History of Response

After the conclusion of the Kosovo conflict in 1999, the Albanian Government responded swiftly to the perceived mine and cluster munitions contamination by conducting a rapid surface clearance, which helped drastically reduce civilian casualties. However, as a consequence of clearance not being performed to International Mine Action Standards (IMAS) all the areas had to be re-cleared.

In addition, the Albanian Armed Forces conducted a rapid Level One Survey, which indicated that almost entire border area was contaminated. Initially, 102 contaminated areas were identified in total, representing 15,250,000 square metres stretching along the 120 kilometres of the border and up to 20 kilometres inside Albania.

Towards the end of 1999 the Albanian Government decided to adopt IMAS and established an agency, the Albanian Mine Action Committee (AMAC), to form humanitarian mine action policies as well as to oversee the correct implementation of the standards.

At that time, the Albanian Mine Action Executive (AMAE) was established to implement the mine action programme under the auspices of the AMAC. AMAE responsibilities include coordination and monitoring of all in-country mine action activities. Under this framework, AMAE is responsible for planning, prioritising, developing, support coordinating mine action operations and issues formal accreditations to the mine action implementing agencies. The accreditation process is based on administrative procedures, following an assessment of the agencies' practical performance related to operational procedures and standards.

The Government of Albania ratified the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on their Destruction on February 29, 2000 by undertaking the obligations to destroy all its stockpiles of anti-personnel mines by 2004 and clear all mine contaminated areas by 2010. This also served as the key benchmark for planning the clearance intervention in Albania.

2002 – 2009: Coordination, Survey and Clearance results

A national workshop was held in June 2002 with the aim to formulate a vision, mission, priorities and a mine action plan to support Albania to resolve its mine and unexploded



ordnance problem by 2010. This was a joint effort to ensure responsibility and commitment to the plan by all participants and relevant stakeholders. The workshop included AMAC, AMAE, International Trust Fund for Demining and Mine Victims Assistance (ITF), DanChurchAid (DCA), Swiss Foundation for Mine Action (FSD), local mine affected communities, mine victims and donors. This laid the solid foundations for further cooperation and implementation.

Coordination

In 2002, the Government of Albania reached an agreement with UNDP Albania for the support of mine action through direct financial and technical assistance to AMAE. As a manifestation of this support from 2002 to 2007 several international technical advisors

(including chief technical advisors, operations advisors, quality management advisors and victim assistance advisors) were attached to AMAE to facilitate capacity building of the national staff. Through this effort national staff was equipped with the necessary skills to conduct the main tasks of planning, coordinating and monitoring mine action activities in Albania. In addition, several management and technical trainings were conducted through ITF to further contribute to the upgrade of technical and managerial skills of AMAE staff.

Understanding that quality assurance and control is a necessary component of all clearance activities, a Quality Management (QM) Team was established at the AMAE Regional Office in Kukes already in early 2002. With support initially from the United States Department of State (US DoS) through ITF, the AMAE QM Team was trained and equipped to conduct quality assurance and quality control of ongoing mine clearance activities in northeast Albania. Consequently, by applying relevant procedures and standards throughout the years, the AMAE QM Team

has been able to certify the land cleared, by various demining organisations, as 'mine free' and subsequently hand it over to the particular affected community.

In continuation of its supervisory role the AMAE with support of Geneva Centre for International Demining (GICHD) established in 2003 the Information Management System for Mine Action (IMSMA), through which it provides regular updates on the remaining threat and progress of clearance operations as well as informs the implementing partners of any mine incidents/accidents.

Therefore, AMAE does not act alone. Since 2002 mine/UXO clearance priorities have been set by AMAE in cooperation with the mine clearance operating partners applying a 'bottom-up' consultation process: starting at the local level with the village leaders,

community councils, the border police and military authorities, the regional authorities and with final approval by AMAC. In addition, AMAE has issued accreditation letters to demining operators and allocated operational tasks based on the operational plan.

Over the years, AMAE's role has been instrumental in coordinating with government institutions and agencies involved in mine action and monitoring other mine action activities such as mine risk education and assistance to the mine/UXO victims, mainly funded through ITF. In addition, AMAE has supported the Government of Albania by fulfilling its annual reporting obligations under various international treaties related to landmines and other explosives remnants of war.

Survey and Clearance

RONCO

Ronco, a demining company from United States of America, was involved in Albania primarily to carry out an assessment of the mine contamination. Clearance operations commenced at Qafe Prush (Has District) in June 2000 and finished in October 2001. Approximately 225,978 square meters were cleared and 1,065 anti-personnel mines and 119 UXO found and destroyed.

HELP

The German NGO HELP conducted clearance operations from September 2000 to September 2001. HELP cleared and released 18,594 square metres at the Qafa Morine border crossing in Tropoja district by finding and destroying 198 AP mines and 1 UXO.

Swiss Foundation for Mine Action (FSD)

From 2001 to 2003 the Swiss Foundation for Mine Action was conducting survey and mine/battle area clearance operations. FSD has cleared 484,185 square meters, locating and destroying 1,484 anti-personnel mines, 27 anti-tank mines and 1,011 UXO.

DanChurchAid (DCA)

DanChurchAid started survey and clearance operations in Albania in the beginning of 2002. Since 2004, DCA has been the only active demining operator in the country. Originally DCA clearance assets consisted of



manual deminers, demining machines and mine detection dogs. From 2007, DCA has operated solely with manual demining teams and has had a fully nationalized programme with only one expatriate, the Programme Manager. The advantage of thorough and detailed training of the national staff, thus, came to fruition as all operational planning was conducted by the national Operations Manager and the supervision of the execution of those operations plans was conducted by the national Supervisors. As a result, some of the national staff are now also ready for consideration for deployment to other DCA mine action programmes globally.

Until 20 November 2009 DCA had released 7,186,272 square metres by impact and general survey, 2,877,693 square metres by technical means (technical survey and area reduction process) and 2,060,001 square metres by clearance. In this process 8,767 AP mines, 47 AT mines and 1,898 UXO were located and destroyed and 162 sites completed.

Demining Accidents

RONCO Mine Accident

During the implementation of the clearance project in 2000, a mine accident occurred during operations in Qafa e Prushit, Has district involving a deminer, who was slightly injured. The accident happened as a result of breaching the Standard Operating Procedure (SOP).

HELP Mine Accident

A mine accident happened during HELP clearance operations in Qafa Morina, Tropoja district, involving a demining supervisor. He was injured by a PMA-2 mine, losing his right leg. The accident happened as a result of breaching the SOP.

DCA Mine Accidents

During the implementation of the project two demining accidents occurred in the DCA programme. The first accident took place in 2004 in Dobrunë minefield where a deminer lost his left foot by a PMA-2. In 2005, another accident happened at Letaj minefield where a deminer was also injured by a PMA-2 mine, losing his right foot. Both accidents happened due to the breach of SOP.

Since 2005 however, there have been no demining accidents. This is a reflection of the experience and competence of the demining staff, whose skills and experience developed and progressed together with the maturing of the programme.



HI Mine Accident

An unfortunate accident occurred in Kukes on May 24, 2004 during a training lecture of Handicap International - the organization selected initially to implement the EC funded Technical Survey Project. Out of 36 people present in the classroom, two died immediately and 15 other trainees were injured. A Board of Inquiry was established immediately after the accident to identify the causes and make due recommendations to ensure safety of future operations.

2009: Clearance Completed

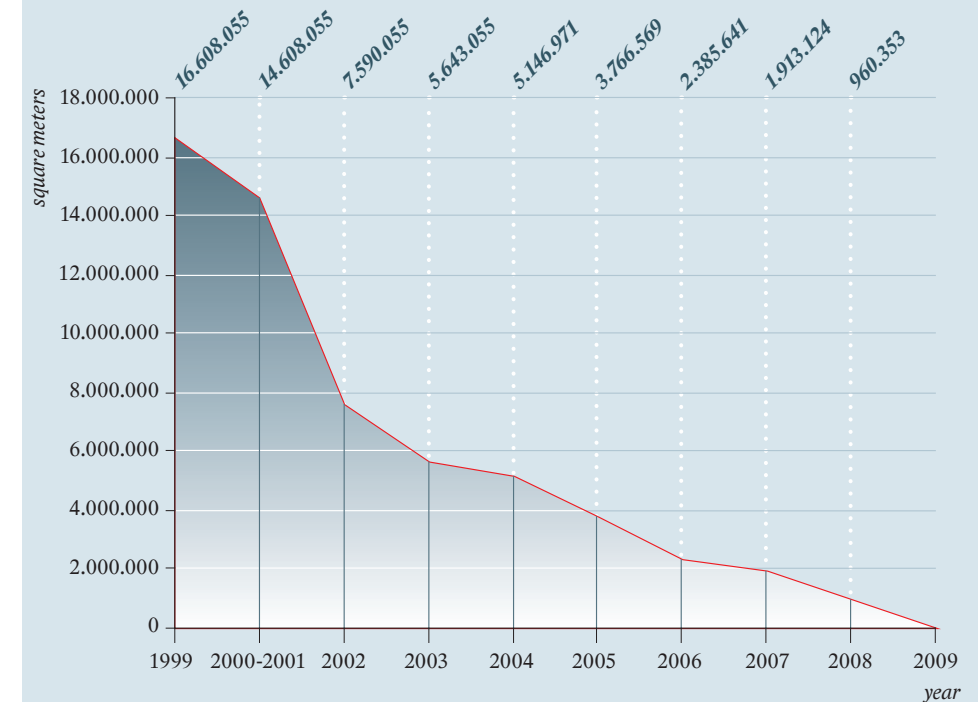
The final year of clearance operations in Albania was, in various ways also the hardest. The plan for completing all mine and cluster contaminated areas by the end of the 2009 demining season has not left any time for delays or slacking. Moreover, the remaining remote highland areas proved to be challenging logistically - some needed to be accessed even by horses in order to carry the demining equipment as the only means of transport available due to steep and harsh remote terrain.

In the concluding year of operations there has also been a need to keep a strong focus on maintaining the deminers' motivation, particularly with concentrating on ensuring constant productivity and safety levels. In the past DCA, with donor support, has offered English and computer classes as added benefit for deminers during the winter period. Already in 2007, DCA started looking for funding for vocational training of the local demining staff, so that alternatives for employment would exist after the ending of mine action operations. In 2009, the ITF and US DoS stepped up to support a project to enable this goal. DCA is also preparing to ensure that some of its well trained and excellent staff could be used in 2010 on securing the old stocks of Albanian ammunition – this project is needed to enhance human security in northern Albania. AMAE and DCA residual capacity can also be utilised when dealing with EOD residual threat and call-outs.

The vocational training as well as the possibility for some deminers to continue on the stockpile destruction project in 2010 have played an important role in maintaining the local deminers' motivation at a high level as well as securing exceptional dedication on their part to contribute to the success story of clearing their own land from the scourge of landmines and cluster munitions.

2 OVERALL CLEARANCE SUMMARY

Land Cleared and Released



Mine/UXO Clearance Results per Year

Year	Mine clearance	Battle area clearance	Released by non-technical means	Released by technical means	Reduced by cancellation and IMSMA data correction	TOTAL in square meters
2009	113,491	280,784	186,272	318,806	61,000	960,353
2008	122,433	94,640	0	471,698	264,000	952,771
2007	61,040	48,714	0	342,763	20,000	472,517
2006	240,532	234,584	326,400	429,412	150,000	1,380,928
2005	214,109	305,828	208,000	652,465	0	1,380,402
2004	140,602	42,190	72,398	240,894	0	496,084
2003	160,428	149,572	117,7000	460,000	0	1,947,000
2002	153,860	76,140	6,113,000	675,000	0	7,018,000
2000-2001	273,288	151,712	938,000	637,000	0	2,000,000
Total	1,479,783	1,384,164	9,021,070	4,228,038	495,000	16,608,055

Mines and UXO Found and Destroyed per Year

Year	2000-2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	Total
AP	2734	2937	1733	2265	1091	881	438	264	109	12,452
AT	104	14	0	1	13	6	8	1	5	152
UXO	2621	353	140	62	241	774	165	276	333	4,965

3. DONOR SUPPORT

Each country’s mine action programme has three important phases. First, the immediate emergency response, which involves establishing the frame work for creating the mine action capacities. For this phase it is crucial that sufficient donor funds are available for – more or less – immediate release. In Albania, this was initially a problem since donors were not aware of the humanitarian problem, which had arisen as a consequence of the mine and cluster munitions contamination.

The International Trust Fund for Demining and Mine Victims Assistance (ITF) presented the problem to its main donor, the United States, thereafter successfully obtaining funds for the first demining project, which was operated by Ronco. Already in 2001, the donation support more than doubled as Switzerland joined the donor pool. Besides Ronco, main field work was also performed by Swiss Foundation for Mine Action (FSD) and DanChurchAid (DCA).

Subsequently, ITF, UNDP and other donors initiated support to establish national mine action structures. The needs in the affected countries can only be addressed properly by creating and developing a well-balanced mine action programme, which enables the mine-affected countries to effectively confront and address the mine problem. Over the years, AMAE has received support from several international donors.

The second phase marks the period where the response is already well established as a framework, in which operations are ongoing. In this, relatively smooth, phase significant efforts are still needed to maintain the interest of current donors as well as to attract new donors.

Since 2004, DCA was the sole mine clearance organisation operating in Albania. The peak of these efforts was the 2006 demining season where over USD 3,3 million was donated by various donors for a single demining season. At the end of the season most of the high impact areas in Albania were cleared.

In the same period (2005), the Government of Albania – through Ministry of Defence – supported and facilitated demining operations by providing (no cost) explosive materials and helicopter transport service for medical evacuations in case of demining accidents. Through this commitment the Government sent a strong signal to donors that it was taking seriously its obligations for clearance of Albania.

The third and final completion phase is the hardest and the most stressful one because it is the time when the results of the previous two phases either confirm or disconfirm the strategic approach set and path originally taken. After the excellent 2006 demining season over two thirds of all affected land was cleared and released. While this would normally be considered an excellent result, the outstanding clearance rate was, however, actually a threat. There was fear that donors would slowly lose interest in providing firm support of the mine action programme in Albania, shifting their attention to other regions and/or spheres of interest.

The situation required immediate reaction by ITF, AMAE and DCA. Jointly the three organisations prepared a strategic plan, setting an end date for a ‘Mine Free Albania.’ Based on the previous seven years of experience and collaboration, the strategic plan was prepared both for keeping strong donor focus as well as for operational planning purposes. The plan succeeded, thus, ensuring continuous donor interest and proving that donors believed in the joint vision for a mine (and cluster munition) free Albania.

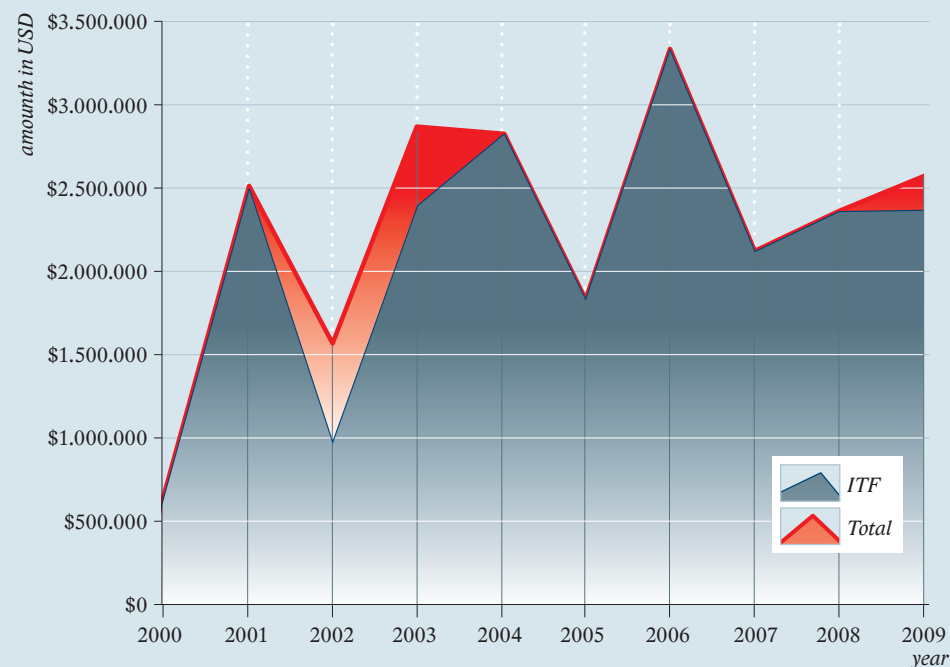
The annual revision of the joint strategic plan further confirmed that the path chosen was realistic, enabling to set forth the 2009 as completion year.

There is no general system or modus operandi, which ensures the successful resolution of any single country’s mine problem. In the Albanian case, though, it was the joint and coordinated efforts of all stakeholders, i.e. ITF, AMAE, DCA, and every single donor contributing to these efforts, which rendered the project successful.

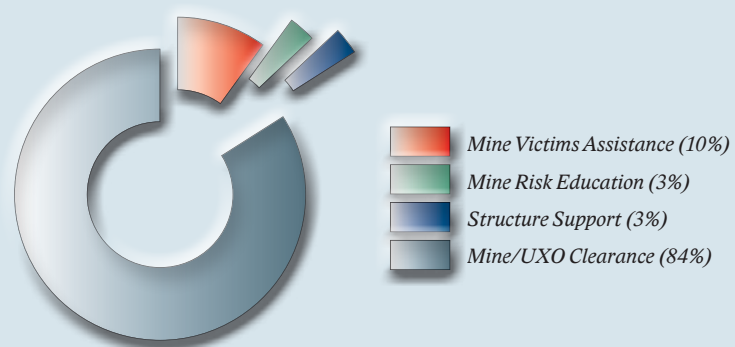


<i>Donor</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Amount in USD</i>	<i>For clearance activities</i>
Albania – in kind	2005-2009	2,700,000	
Canada – via ITF	2004	149,577.59	149,577.59
Czech Republic – via ITF	2003	50,000,00	50,000.00
DanChurchAid – via ITF	2003-2007	926,772.64	926,772.64
European Commission – via ITF	2002-2003	803,294.89	803,294.89
European Commission – via UNDP	2003	470,929.86	470,929.86
European Commission/UNDP Albania – via ITF	2006-2007	2,028,870.00	2,028,870.00
Germany – via ITF	2003-2009	2,559,110.93	2,559,110.93
Germany (HELP)	2002	570,724.49	570,724.49
Handicap International - via ITF	2006, 2008, 2009	302,318.00	
Luxembourg - via ITF	2002	102,209.99	51,207.20
N1KD Albania - via ITF	2005, 2007	25,290.72	
Swiss Foundation for Mine Action - via ITF	2003	138,346.00	138,346.00
Switzerland - via ITF	2001, 2002, 2004	920,308.36	920,308.36
United Kingdom/DFID - via ITF	2005	329,847.92	329,847.92
United Kingdom - via UNDP	2009	198,000.00	198,000.00
United States - via ITF	2000 - 2009	13,620,950.46	10,409,214.98
Total		25,624,451.85	19,606,204.86

Level of Funding through Years



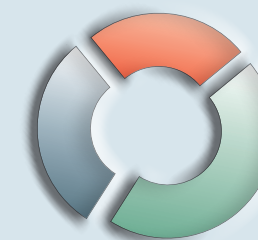
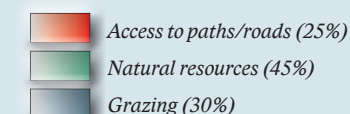
Distribution of ITF Funds by Purpose in Albania 2000-2009



4. IMPACT

A very important part of the whole clearance process is the assessment made once the physical clearance activities have been concluded. The ideal time to conduct these Post Clearance Assessment Surveys is 9 – 18 months after clearance was completed. The value of executing the Post Clearance Assessment Surveys is that the original system for prioritising the clearance of a certain land or area can actually be validated. The clearance organisation, thus, receives the feedback from the local community regarding the confidence of the works performed. Donors as well, are able to acquire information on the impact, which their funding has had, on the mine contaminated areas. Finally, such information and feedback allows the local (and national) authorities to make more focused and detailed decisions on future funding needs for infrastructure development or improvements to a certain formerly mine affected region. It is important to stress that the post-clearance impact survey activities are currently ongoing as the complete assessment with realistic results can only be performed after all the contaminated areas have been cleared. The post-clearance assessments were initiated by DCA in May 2009 across all DCA cleared minefields and BAC strike areas. Until the end of October 2009, 74 sites were visited and 374 interviews have been conducted in total. Preliminary results for the surveyed sites show that the main obstacles caused by land mines have been removed as a result of DCA clearance activities. This today provides access to grazing land, access to natural resources (firewood, fruit, herbs, etc.) and access to paths/roads and bridges. The assessment also shows that there is a very high degree of trust in the cleared land and that the land is being used again.

Use of Cleared Areas



Ujeze • Tropoje Province • North East Albania

The highland area in the mountainous border region of northeast Albania known as Ujeze was heavily mined, so the effect on the local community was considerable. Two people were killed and one seriously injured by mine blasts. In addition, 32 farm animals (sheep and goats) were also killed as they traversed the unmarked mine contaminated area.

Ujeze is an area with very good grazing meadows, which have been used for many years by local farmers during the summer months. Local families are known to migrate from their farms to the mountains each year in early summer to take advantage of the grazing areas and to collect berries and fruit in the meadows that straddle the border. Typically the farmers would remain in Ujeze until the autumn rains in September, approximately 90 days a year.

DCA was tasked with conducting clearance operations in this area in 2006. During the operations, 32,696 square metres were cleared and 90,000 square metres were released using both manual clearance techniques and mine detection dogs. 31 anti-personnel mines, 2 pieces of unexploded ordnance and 11 detonators were located and destroyed.

Since the area at Ujeze was cleared, approximately 38 families have been able to return to the region during the summer months, bringing 150 cattle, 800 sheep and 50 goats. The economic benefit to the 38 families is significant. With the opportunity to graze their animals on fresh pasture through the summer, it allows the grazing areas in their home areas to regenerate over the summer and for the animals to benefit from the high quality fodder at Ujeze. In short, the 38 families enjoy a much greater standard of living than prior to the minefield was cleared by DCA.

Vlahan • Has Province • North East Albania

During the Kosovo conflict in 1999, mines were laid in the area known as Vlahan. This particular area, located high in the mountains and very close to the border-line, was well used during the summer both for grazing of farm animals and as a source of hay (animal fodder). Prior to mines being laid, 30 families benefitted from access to this area each summer. As a result of the threat posed by mines, many of the local population left the



area permanently. Now, less than 15 families use the summer pastures each year. Those who remained suffered the loss of a number of goats (12) and one horse. Equally important, they lost access to a valuable area for the collection of hay and the grazing of domestic animals for eight years. The inability to collect hay had deep effect on the survivability of the families and their flocks during the harsh winter months. It also impeded any surplus income from selling hay.

DCA started clearance operations in May 2007 with one team of deminers. Operations were suspended due to snowfall in early November 2007 and restarted the clearance in May 2008. The task was completed after 179 working days in October 2008 with 43,830 square metres cleared manually, 429 anti-personnel mines, one UXO and one anti-tank mine recovered and destroyed.

Since clearance operations have been completed, the area has been fully re-used in summer 2009.

Gegaj • Tropoje Province • North East Albania

Some 8 kilometres from the northeast Albania border-line lays the small village of Gegaj. In 1998 it was home to approximately 47 families (278 inhabitants). During the conflict some abandoned buildings nearby (used by armed units) were targeted and struck by a rocket in 1999. However, the rocket failed to hit its intended target, hitting an area used by the villagers of Gegaj for grazing and firewood collection instead, thus, spreading cluster munitions. Over the next six years, 22 farm animals were killed as a result of contact with unexploded cluster munitions.

DCA was tasked with conducting clearance operations in this area. Operations commenced in March 2009 and were completed in late May 2009. As a result of clearance operations, 35 KB-1 cluster munitions were located and destroyed by the DCA team and 28,000 square metres of contaminated ground was manually cleared. During an interview conducted with the local population by DCA staff in July 2009, members of the community stated that there was total confidence in the removal of threats posed by cluster munitions by the DCA clearance team.

Grazing of farm animals has resumed and the collection of firewood is again possible.



5. LESSONS LEARNT

The lessons learnt listed below are based on the experience of ‘Mine Action’ stakeholders in Albania. However, these particular lessons could also be accepted and applied in general as all mine action programmes move through the following three phases in a project cycle: emergency, development and completion. A crucial factor as well is that the government – once clearance is completed – demonstrates its continuing and unwavering commitment to the long term problem(s) associated with landmine and cluster munitions survivors through government structures, policies, and laws addressing people with disabilities.

Lessons learnt – Albanian case:

1. It is crucial for all stakeholders, national authorities and mine action centres, operators and donors to have a commonly defined vision and goal. Furthermore, results are to be assessed and discussed jointly as well as presented on regular basis.
2. National ‘ownership’ (of the programme) is very important for successful completion of clearance operations. When planning for national capacity building, the time framework, full commitment, clear benchmarks and sustainable funding need to be clearly defined from the start of the process.
3. Unlike some programmes, which close-down because of lack of funding or poor quality and/or insufficient programme value, the Albanian Mine Action Programme terminated only when the job was completed and Albania could be declared ‘mine free’. Nevertheless, even after this point there is a need for residual capacity dealing with potential EOD-calls, as well as for the structure that would be able coordinate this capacity.
4. The IMSMA database must be finalised before closing of the clearance operations as well as transferred to the most appropriate ministry or entity so that it can be readily available if information from the database is needed. This step should ideally be defined well in advance.

5. All staff should be informed of closure plans from the beginning and in a transparent manner. Staff should also be informed of any plans beyond clearance completion, if applicable.
6. During the last phases, operations must remain tightly controlled and monitored to prevent any breakdown in discipline, productivity or safety practices.
7. Close liaison among the local Mine Action authority, operators and donors should be maintained to ensure a common understanding of the clearance process and progress. Equally (if not more) important is the communication and liaison with local communities. The communities need to be kept informed throughout the clearance operations as well as during the close-down phases. The need for the post clearance impact survey is of immense importance also to ensure that the land cleared and handed-over is indeed used thus proving the local population gained confidence and trusts the clearance efforts and operations executed.
8. Based on realistic planning, the concrete figures substantiated by results must be transparently and constantly presented to donors. This ensures continuous donor interest and re-affirms their belief in the joint vision for the mine (and cluster munitions) free Albania.
9. Advocacy efforts are crucial to ensure that focus is maintained on the remaining problem during the last years of clearance. If focus wavers there is always a threat that donors will slowly loose interest and shift their priority focus to other areas or regions, at a point when the contamination reduction is moving into the final stages.
10. Transparency of the use of donor funds through actual results achieved must be constantly fulfilled at all phases of a mine action programme.

Passion, hard work, determination, direct and frequent communication as well as constant liaising between all involved partners were key variables and values contributing to a successful mine action programme in Albania over the past 10 years, releasing over 16 million square meters of formerly contaminated and unusable land, and thus delivering it back to the local population.

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