



**Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention
Nineteenth Meeting of the States Parties**

**High-Level Panel on Capacity Building
Strengthening localization through capacity building and inclusion:
From Rhetoric to concerted Action**

15-19 November 2021

MAG Talking points

Since the early days of the APMBC, as both advocate and operator, MAG has emphasised the central importance of people-focused and impact-drive mine action. Within the sector, we have added our voice to calls for clearance, risk education and victim assistance activities that respond to the diverse needs of communities affected by landmines. And as an implementing partner, we have always highlighted the importance of national ownership. Of the 50 actions agreed by States Parties at the Review Conference in Oslo, I have highlighted these principles as ones that I believe are central not only to MAG's purpose but to that of the mine action sector. Crucially, they are also principles that can only truly be upheld by acknowledging fundamental power imbalances and taking a proactive approach to addressing them.

For MAG, the localization agenda is an essential opportunity to think honestly about how to tackle inequalities in the mine action sector. This is not only because a fair society is a humanitarian goal in itself – but also because without it, we cannot realistically, as a sector, hope to achieve our goals.

As we approach 2025, with many states unlikely to achieve their current article 5 aspirations, there is a need to reflect on what change is needed. There are many technical and environmental factors that can delay completion. But it is our view that localization must play a central role in accelerating national implementation of the APMBC. Most heavily contaminated states will require long term clearance efforts. A growing number are also finding previously unknown mined areas post-completion. New mine contamination is sadly affecting some states, some of which also have existing long-term legacy contamination. This all points strongly to the need for an increased focus on establishing sustainable national capacities.

Capacity development initiatives in the mine action sector focus most often on imparting technical skills and knowledge to national actors and embedding structures for their retention. The Grand Bargain emphasises the need for increased funding to national and local responders, and has resulted in a welcome push from donors towards increased partnership. While access to training and financial resources is essential, localisation is only effective if it engages and empowers at every phase of humanitarian action. Localisation is not an action that can be taken on behalf of others – it is not something an organisation like MAG can “do”. Instead we must be conscious in how we can facilitate engagement and create space for others – and most importantly, we must be ready to concede long-held advantages. I will briefly summarise some learning and recommendations for localisation at the operational and political level.

MAG's partnerships with national authorities cover a wide range of activities from strategic planning and quality management through to mentoring national demining teams. We also work with a wide range of civil society partners who primarily deliver risk education and community engagement activities. The relatively small number of partners engaged in survey and clearance speaks to the complex risk environment associated with these activities – a key consideration for both donors and operators. Donors should continue to strongly encourage international implementing partners to

work with local actors, while bearing in mind some practical considerations. Local partners should not be expected to bear a higher level of security or safety risk and international operators should extend an equal duty of care to partner staff. Donors must be clear on this expectation, but also be aware of the costs involved in ensuring local partners require adequate support – and be willing to bear those costs. Reliable and consistent funding cycles are essential; local operators are unable to bridge funding gaps or operate at risk if contracts are delayed. Expectations around outputs should be realistic and take into account the need for capacity development, meaning that overly simplistic metrics are unhelpful for measuring success.

Most donors already require implementers to report on the value of funding reaching local actors as part of the Grand Bargain. While this is an important indicator, it is essential to examine partners qualitatively. MAG's experience working with community based organisations in Myanmar during the past decade has shown the value of holistic support that not only transfers technical expertise but also develops institutional capacity. In the current Myanmar context, the expertise of these organisations is more essential than ever, demonstrating the value of localisation in building resilience. Local and international actors must work together as strategic partners, not through transactional subcontract arrangements. Nor should local NGOs be perceived as "beneficiaries" of training and capacity development – rather they are an essential part of an effective and conflict-sensitive mine action response, with essential political and contextual expertise and critical stakeholder relations. These partnerships should be underpinned by shared strategies and clear objectives.

As I have already noted, these operational recommendations, though important, cannot bring about significant or lasting change unless we are willing to change how we work politically. Genuine localisation requires organisations like MAG to be willing to share not only funding, but also influence. We cannot, as a sector, continue to talk of national ownership unless we are willing to create the conditions for national and local empowerment. This includes equal access to stakeholders and political processes – for example, attending meetings jointly with donor embassies. This is standard practice for international organisations working in partnership, but feedback from partners shows that local implementers are often denied access to these key discussions.

Responding to this feedback, MAG has worked to open up funding opportunities for partners such as DASH in Sri Lanka, conducting joint donor meetings in relation to ongoing projects and future funding. It is essential that we continue to reflect on whether our efforts at localisation are conscious and genuine – for example, resource mobilisation training with local partners will often focus on writing proposals and preparing budgets. But if we are to address power imbalances, they should also include advocacy training and, critically, should be accompanied by introductions to key donors and stakeholders. Donors should like to encourage this kind of transparency by proactively requesting the inclusion of local partners in meetings, whether at embassy level or through remote introductions.

These principles apply to empowerment of national authorities as much as to civil society partnerships. National authorities must be empowered to advocate within government for mine action resources, as well as at an international level for international cooperation and assistance. MAG and other international operators in Angola have worked closely with CNIDAH to support their ability to profile mine action within government, as well as with international donors. The fact that mine action is consistently included in Angola's national and local development strategies is a concrete indicator of strengthened national implementation of the APMBC more broadly. This demonstrates the significant of an empowered mine action authority engaging with political processes in country and internationally.

Bearing in mind that localisation involves the engagement of local and national actors at ALL stages of the humanitarian action, it is critical this includes the international policymaking level. This is where perhaps the most honest reflection is needed. Discussions around implementation of the APMBC often centre around the critical issues of funding, and national ownership – with the latter depending particularly on capacity and political will. The Treaty machinery exists in part to hold States Parties to account – but it is also there to provide a framework for support. It is essential that different capacities, needs and contexts are taken into account, including in the preparation of extension requests. The most present reality for mine-affected states is in addressing mine contamination and its local and national impact. An effective and sustainable mine action sector will allow affected states to prioritise practical implementation, but without coming at cost to political inclusion. Regional bodies such as the African Union, ECOWAS, and the ASEAN Regional Mine Action Centre can play an essential role in amplifying and unifying the interests of regions and sub-regions. Creating an enabling environment for broader participation in policy fora and sector coordination is essential, but must also be accompanied by shifts in power dynamics.

Genuine localisation requires us to look at our role in mine action from a different perspective. Operators like MAG are often considered primarily as technical experts, but we must recognise that our work always comes with a political dimension. Empowerment of local and national actors – both in government institutions and civil society – is essential to achieve the step change needed in the mine action sector. To achieve this, we must fully acknowledge inequalities in terms of both resource distribution and political representation and address them. For the localisation agenda to succeed, international actors must take actions that often feel like they're not in "our" best interests. Only by challenging the status quo can we bring about lasting change.