



Guidance Paper on Staff Transition Programme¹: Lessons from Sri Lankan Mine Action Programme

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As of May 2024, mine action operations in Sri Lanka involve two international NGOs (MAG and HALO), 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. The Staff Transition Programme, launched by MAG in 2021 and expanded across the sector in 2022, comprises three phases designed for implementation before and during staff demobilization, continuing until the completion of clearance and phase-out.

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

Design & Planning, led by an external livelihood expert:

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 staff transition interventions by analyzing data from both the demand (labor market) and supply (staff skills, qualifications, and experience) sides, to address specific gaps and opportunities. These interventions will follow a phased approach, first providing readiness skills (such as financial literacy, language training, and soft skills) and then offering market-driven technical or vocational training opportunities, 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.

¹While the Staff Transition Programme aims to start when clearance completion is in sight, some interventions remain relevant in contexts without a defined end date, with the mine action sector serving as a “learning platform” by providing opportunities for deminers who come from vulnerable and marginalized backgrounds to acquire new skills and knowledge.



Step 4

Advocate for donor and government support by highlighting the importance of staff transition initiatives in maintaining productivity, safeguarding sector reputation, preventing deminers from falling into poverty post-clearance and reintegrating them into their communities. Integration of 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 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.

Implementation, overseen by an in-house staff transition team:

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 transition process align with the clearance completion timeline and 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 staff transition 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 staff transition 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 transition programme and build a trust relationship with the staff transition unit.



Step 4

Select staff based on their willingness, preference, and interest in the proposed staff transition 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 staff transition 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.