

The Benefits of Information Transparency in Humanitarian Mine Action

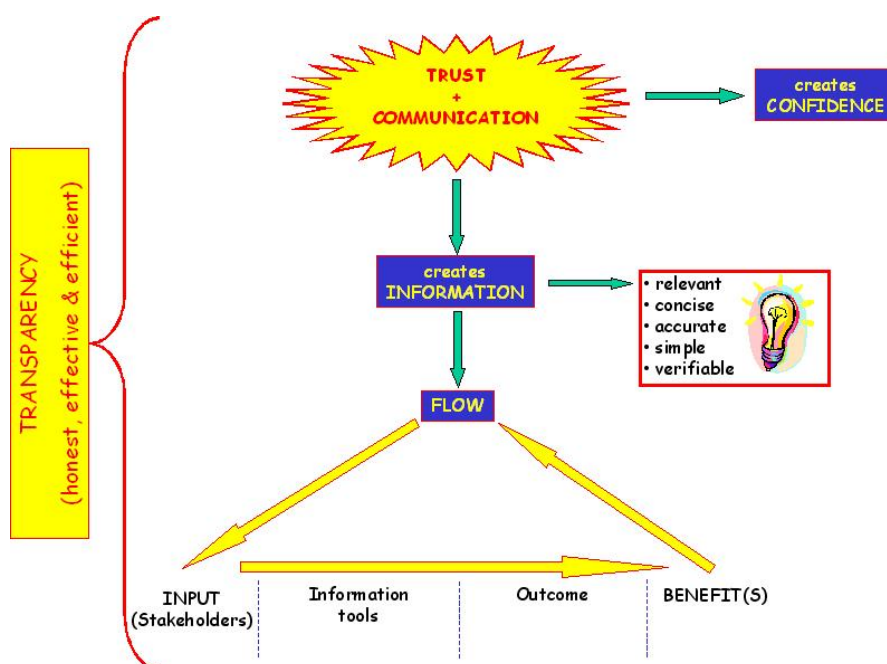
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In my opinion, the term “information transparency” involves a degree of redundancy. In our current information society, information transparency should be the norm, though unfortunately this is not always the case. On the one hand, secrecy, deception and mistrust undermine the desire of some to share valuable information; on the other hand, transparency frenzy and an excess of information scare away those who are looking for plain and simple facts. It is true that today, thanks to information technology, people are able to process huge amounts of information. However, we need to ask whether all these bits and bytes of processed information are really needed. At the end of the day, information is created through communication, but all too often the human side of this factor is neglected. Human communication drives trust, and trust promotes information, both in terms of quantity and in terms of quality.

In order to fit into such a framework, information must be honest and serve the requirements of effectiveness (work quality) and efficiency (the cost–benefit relationship). Hence, information must be relevant, concise, accurate, simple and verifiable. Only when necessary information is well organized will stakeholders involved in humanitarian mine action benefit. This is the *conditio sine qua non!*

What sources provide us with information? We have computers and databases that process information, and tools to help us make decisions on a variety of levels (strategic, operational, technical, logistical, financial, etc.). These may save time, human and financial resources, and in some cases even human lives. But it is human beings who carry the most valuable information – knowledge and experience being the key factors.

Before entering into the details of the different benefits, we must fully understand the importance of the following information-dependency chart:



Once this is understood we can move forward to the following issues:

- from “trust & communication” to the “flow triangle”, and subsequently to the matrix (below);
- through the input actors, their specific information tool(s) and the outcome(s);
- try to establish potential relationships between the different input actors and deduce the benefits from these relationships.

What is perhaps most important is that the term “information transparency” needs to end up redundant if we are to accomplish our goals.

Information matrix

Input (Stakeholders)	Information Tool(s)	Outcome	Benefit(s)
Population at risk (mine-affected community)	Witnesses, victims	Dangerous areas	
Former war factions	Soldiers	Dangerous areas, ordnance used, contamination maps	
Actual political/cultural leaders		Development goals, prioritization	
Donor community	Meetings, reports, field visits	Financial resources	
HMA community (NGO, commercial, military): <i>Training facilities</i> Managing staff: <i>Programme manager</i> <i>Operations officer</i> Field staff: <i>Deminers</i> <i>Team leaders</i> <i>Supervisors</i> <i>QA/QC personnel</i>	Work experience	Ordnance intelligence Improved demining techniques & procedures Improved management procedures Equipment improvement proposals	
Equipment manufacturers	Field experiences	Adequate demining equipment	
GICHD	Knowledge	IMSMA	
Home-based EOD/ demining schools and units	Knowledge	Ordnance databases	
Office of land register and topography	Knowledge	Accurate maps	
UN agencies	Assessment teams	Feasibility study	
General survey agencies	Human resources, knowledge	Impact survey	
Non-HMA NGOs	Field experience		
MRE organizations		Mine & UXO awareness	