

From policies to practice- Environmental Support to Peacekeeping Operations

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Abstract

An area of growing concern for the Swedish Armed Forces is environmental considerations in peace keeping and peace enforcing operations as Sweden, like many other countries increases its involvement in such missions. A need for close cooperation between military and civilian actors has been identified as well as the importance of different types of networks. In a recent cooperation between Sweden, i.e. the Swedish Armed Forces (SwAF) and the Swedish Defence Research Agency (FOI) and United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations (UN DPKO) Environmental Protection issues have been addressed. One project deliverable was to start the implementation of the recently developed UN DPKO Environmental Policy and Guideline by providing training to environmental engineers in UN field missions.

The first trial education took place in Brindisi, Italy in 2006 where the participants among other things shared lessons learned from their current and previous mission experiences. The major environmental problems affecting peacekeeping operations, which are typically deployed in a post conflict and/or developing country, were discussed and a list of suggested actions were developed. Training for key staff and raising general awareness among mission staff was considered paramount and an annual workshop suggested.

Introduction

Countries emerging from conflicts are especially in need of laying the foundation for sustainable development. Since the environment provides an essential basis for living and welfare of people and development of communities and countries, sound management of environment is a key to the post-conflict recovery, reconstruction and sustainable development.

At the United Nations, sustainable development in its economic, social and environmental aspects constitutes a key element of the overarching framework of United Nations activities. As a general policy, United Nations peacekeeping field missions deployed in post-conflict situations, while undertaking their tasks under the respective mandate, need to undertake their activities in a manner that the impact of their activities on the environment is minimized and no harm is caused to human health. All components of the peacekeeping field missions should observe it.

Environmental issues normally arise from day-to-day routine operations, activities and maintenance of peacekeeping field missions (e.g.: handling of waste, hazardous substances, etc, Figure 1-2). In the past, those issues were dealt with on an ad hoc basis by individual missions relying upon their own assessment of environmental problems and voluntary actions of individual members of the respective missions. Although staff members working at field missions were often aware of the need to address such environmental issues, the lack of

standing operating procedures concerning environmental issues made it rather difficult for them to take coherent practical environmental measures at the field missions.

To address such need of peacekeeping field missions, the DPKO has successfully developed - with the technical assistance of UNEP - specific Environmental Policy and Guidelines documents [1,2].



Figure 1 and 2. Common environmental problem in field missions, i.e. waste management. Photo: Birgitta Liljedahl, FOI. ©

1. UN DPKO Environmental guidelines

The guidelines provide environmental policies and practical guidance concerning major environmental issues, typical of a peacekeeping operation. The guidelines are designed to assist the UN staff, both at their military and civilian components, in addressing environmental issues that arise from their operations.

The guidelines consist of two parts. Part one sets out policy guidelines that provide the overall policy framework for addressing environmental issues at peacekeeping field missions. Part two contains technical references that provide practical basis for establishing an environmental plan and operating procedures for addressing major environmental issues.

The guidelines should be considered as a living document of evolving nature. On the basis of experiences gained, the guidelines should be reviewed from time to time and may be updated to make it kept relevant to actual needs and issues in peacekeeping field missions.

2 Environmental training for DPKO field officers

In order to educate the field officers deployed in field missions and to initiate them to the Environmental guidelines, in May 2006 DPKO organised a training session at the UN logistics base (UNLB) located in Brindisi (Italy).

Participants were UN officers working in peacekeeping missions and deployed world-wide, from Africa to Central America. While the coordinator of the course, Dr Gabriele Borla, participated actively in the formulation and drafting of the environmental policy and guidelines documents as well as in the design of the subject training, the other Lecturers were

(a) UN staff experienced in the environmental thematic addressed in the subject Environmental guidelines and (b) environmental experts of the Swedish Armed Forces (SwAF) and Swedish Defence Research Agency (FOI).

The 5 days training addressed: (1) water and environmental management policy, (2) environmental impact assessment during start up, monitoring and liquidations phases, (3) renewable energies and energy conservation. The final part was dedicated to presentation by selected participants on the environmental challenges met at their respective peacekeeping operations. A compact disk with the output and contents of the full training was delivered to each participant who attended the course.

How did start the professional cooperation between DPKO and the Government of Sweden? The Swedish Government through its Permanent Mission to the UN in New York approached the DPKO in order to identify possible areas of technical cooperation. It was noted that the environment was and is still a weak area of growing concern, which both parts agreed to tackle. Furthermore, the opportunity to also integrate health issues with environmental issues, and present such topics in Geographical Information Systems (GIS) was discussed. Eventually this lead to the development of five distinct topics for collaboration, i.e. environmental impact assessments, health threat assessment, environmental monitoring team, environmental education and GIS modelling.

The initial set up for the cooperation was however this first environmental training. Particularly, the Swedish team successfully contributed to a 2 days session, which addressed those typical environmental problems affecting a peacekeeping operation.

Apart from lectures a demonstration of some off the shelf equipment for environmental screening and monitoring of environmental contaminants (Figure 3), a practical session of exercises with recent Swedish mission experiences in the field of environment and health was conducted. Notwithstanding that there are many equally important key issues to address in a UN field mission such as cultural, historical or socio-economic issues, based on the experience and key competences within the Swedish team the focus areas for the lectures and group discussions were waste management, hazardous substances management, environmental emergencies and air, water and soil pollution.



Figure 3. Demonstration of portable field analysis equipment for metals. Photo: Birgitta Liljedahl, FOI. ©

For the purpose of the group discussions, a fictive peacekeeping mission “Anyland” was presented and key environmental protection activities prior to, during and after this mission were discussed. A country study (i.e. a pre deployment environment and health threat assessment), a situation report (Sitrep) and various maps i.e. ortho photos, land use map and maps on soil types in the area of operation (AOR) in was handed out prior to the exercise [3]. The participants were divided in groups in order to discuss and present their conclusions on the cases presented in the scenarios. The aim with the discussion was to factor in the participants own field experience. Examples of topics discussed were ad hoc waste management solutions and preferred camp locations with respect to the surrounding community. No blueprint solutions to the cases were provided at the end since the cases were constructed from real life situations where the outcome depends on many factors. On the contrary, the participant’s appreciation of the various situations that might occur during different phases of a field mission was paramount for the outcome of the discussions, which was very lively and dynamic.

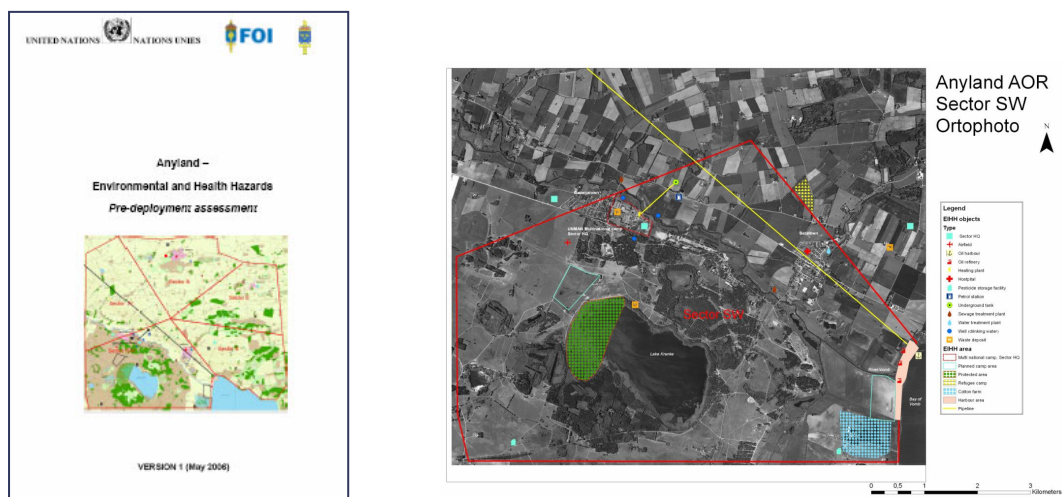


Figure 4 and 5. Training material on “Anyland”.

3. Training findings and challenges ahead.

The outcome of the joint UN-SE team training exercises was a list of suggested actions which in the participant’s opinion would be valuable for future development in the field of environmental protection in UN field missions.

In the participants opinion, among the most crucial actions in order to ultimately succeed with environmental protection activities in field mission would be that environmental provisions should be incorporated in Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA;s) and Memorandum of Understanding (MoU;s) with troop contributing countries (TCC).

The participants did however appreciate the complexity in achieving such results in the shorter term and agreed that parts of it most likely might only be achieved in a longer perspective.

More technically feasible suggested actions was to develop Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for topics such as waste management as well as develop generic checklists for i.e.

Environmental Baseline Studies (EBS), Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA), Environmental log and a lessons learned data base. Such SOPs and templates would not only facilitate the daily work for the field mission Environmental Officer (EO) but also enable for comparisons between mission rotation as well as tracking the improvements in the environmental field within and between different field missions. Furthermore, the development of a DPKO Website (link) with contents covering the Environmental guideline, chat function, templates, links, and a help desk was suggested.

Since the performed training was considered to be very valuable according to the participants, it was concluded that there would ideally be a sequel to the training week. Training for key staff and raising general awareness among mission staff was indeed considered paramount and an annual workshop where field mission Environmental Officer could share there experiences was suggested.



Figure 6. UN Field staff and DPKO-SWE team.

4. Acknowledgments

The following persons are gratefully acknowledged for their contribution to the present work:

1. Dr Russ Doran, Chief Engineer, UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations, Logistics Division, Engineering Section
2. UN Field staff, attending the training.
3. Deputy Research Director Dr Ulf Qvarfort, FOI
4. Principal Administrative Officer, Svante Olsson, SwAF
5. Veterinary Officer, Lt Col Claes Nyström, SwAF

5. References

1. UN DPKO Environmental Policy for UN Field Missions, Draft Version, March 2006.
2. UN DPKO Environmental Guidelines for UN Field Missions, Draft Version, March 2006.
3. FOI/SwAF Anyland training material.