

Military Civic Action in Sub-Saharan Africa

By

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The use of military forces in projects which benefit the local civilian populace is a long-standing role for the military in many countries. U.S. military forces currently engage in civic action activities in many areas of the world. Many African nations have a similar history of involving their militaries in civic action activities, but most currently lack the necessary national funding. In many instances, African militaries have been influential actors in the early stages of national development and are likely to continue to play an important role for some time. The U.S. security assistance-funded Military Civic Action (MCA) program attempts to tap this inexpensive and relatively well trained source of development expertise for the mutual benefit of the nation and the military organization. Although the Department of Defense has no specific military objectives in sub-Saharan Africa, involving African militaries in nation building responds to broad United States regional policy objectives of political stability and economic development.

During the past several year's, authority to conduct humanitarian and civic assistance activities has increased. This has resulted in some confusion, because several of these different activities use the term "civic action." DOD's new authority for humanitarian/civic assistance, Title 10 USC Section 401, *et seq.*, generally referred to as "Title 10 authority," allows the DOD to program and spend annually a limited amount of Operations and Maintenance (O&M) funds for the conduct of humanitarian or civic assistance activities. For example, the DOD may provide humanitarian/civic assistance in conjunction with authorized military operations.[1] This authority allows DOD to pay for materials and supplies consumed during project implementation. Civic action projects conducted under this authority are carried out primarily by U.S. military forces, either as part of authorized exercises or as deployments for training (DFTs). The Military Civic Action (MCA) program discussed in this article, however, differs in two important aspects. First, funding for the MCA program comes from grant aid Military Assistance Program (MAP) monies, which are part of the annual Foreign Assistance Act, Title 22 USC. Second, instead of being planned and implemented by U.S. military forces, MCA projects are conceptualized and implemented by African military establishments using U.S.-funded or provided assistance, principally in the form of materials.

The MCA program developed from interdepartmental consultations beginning in 1983. Representatives from DOD, the State Department, AID, DSAA, the House of Representatives Subcommittee on Africa staff, the JCS, and the U.S. European Command, met at the Naval War College in December 1983, to discuss the potential for military civic action in Africa.[2]

The participants attempted to determine the objectives of a civic action program for sub-Saharan Africa, the assets available to support such a program, and the ability of African militaries to plan and implement civic action projects.[3] While the conference did not produce a mandate, most participants felt the program had merit and program funding began the next year.

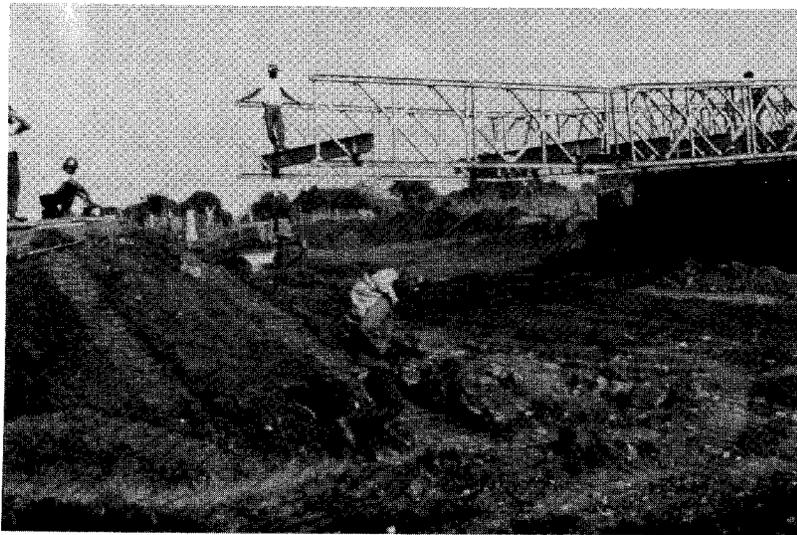
An initial survey team was sent to sub-Saharan Africa in September 1984 to elicit potential MCA project proposals.[4] All of the countries visited (Malawi, Togo, Niger, Sierra Leone and Senegal) proposed projects which were ultimately funded. Today, there are 21 MCA projects either underway or already completed in 16 countries.[5]

Initial funding for the Africa Civic Action program was authorized in 1985. At that time, funding for MCA was combined with funding for a companion program, African Coastal Security

(ACS), as a single MAP program line under the heading Africa Civic Action. The Military Health Affairs (MHA) program element was added to the overall Africa Civic Action program in FY88.

PROGRAM OBJECTIVES

The Military Civic Action program supports U.S. government objectives of internal and regional stability by involving African militaries in nation building activities. Although projects are small because of funding limitations, MCA projects respond to infrastructure and social needs, such as improvements to transportation routes, medical facilities, and schools. We hope that success of the civic action program will lead to long-term commitments in a number of African countries to military civic action with important contributions, albeit on a modest scale, to national development efforts.



U.S. Seabee Mobile Training Team with Mauritanian Army Engineers
installing a Bailey-type bridge at Selibaby, 1986

Some agencies have suggested that in the current climate of decreasing budgets (including the U.S. Security Assistance Program) limited sub-Saharan MAP resources should be focused on a few key countries. This philosophy argues against the MCA pattern of funding small projects in many countries. The U.S., however, has legitimate interests in maintaining ties with many African nations and often the security assistance program is the most efficacious means of demonstrating, U.S. interest and support. Because MCA projects are funded from single fiscal year appropriations, they do not constitute multi-year commitments to recipient countries. This allows the establishment of a U.S./host nation military relationship without a long-term security assistance commitment. Moreover, it is an alternative to providing lethal military equipment to the many African nations which lack a current external threat. Further, the MCA program aims at encouraging African nations to use a portion of their bilateral MAP authorizations and their own national funds in civic action projects which contribute to national development.

The program has produced an unexpected benefit by providing a medium for increasing cooperation and coordination in the region with some of our NATO allies. Contacts established by HQ USEUCOM with the West German Ministry of Defense have led to cooperation in projects in Rwanda and Niger. Discussions have been held with several other NATO allies and the way may be open to more such cooperation in the future.

MCA PROGRAM PRINCIPLES

A few key principles guide the formulation and structure of MCA projects. MCA projects are MAP funded and are implemented using standard FMS procedures. Second, MCA projects must have a direct and positive benefit to the civilian populace. Most desirably they are "dual use," that is, they benefit both the civilian populace and the host nation military. An example of this would be the construction or improvement of a road which is both an important civilian commercial link as well as providing military access to a key region. Other projects may simply provide experience through the construction effort itself.

Further, it is important that projects do not compete with other U.S. programs or with local government or private donor efforts. All proposals are developed in coordination with the country team--in most cases they originate from country team discussions with the host nation--to ensure they meet U.S. and host nation goals and objectives. Finally, host nation military personnel must perform the work. Project subcontracting to civilian or government-associated organizations usually is not permitted.

PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

The procedures for developing an MCA project are discussed in detail in a recently distributed African Civic Action Planning and Implementation Guide. In summary, the country team briefs the host nation on the MCA program and elicits proposals, which then are forwarded to the State Department, the concerned Unified Command, and the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense, International Security Affairs, Africa Region (OASD/ISA/AFR). The Unified Commands present a prioritized list of projects within their regions to ISA/AFR each September. ISA/AFR chairs a broad interagency working group which includes representatives from State, DSAA, ISA/AFR, and other interested agencies (e.g., the JCS, the Services, and AID). The working group reviews proposals and selects projects for funding or further review. For projects which are not fully defined, a technical assessment team normally makes an in-country visit, and extensive information is gathered via message traffic. Assessment team reports are approved by the inter-agency working group. Promising projects which are not funded initially are reviewed periodically throughout the year in the event funds become available, and are automatically considered for inclusion in the budget the following fiscal year.

PROGRAM MANAGEMENT

Because each project is unique, the MCA program requires significant management involvement at all levels. The unified commands (principally USEUCOM which is responsible for most current MCA projects) provide extensive assistance to U.S. embassies and SAOs, and they routinely coordinate LOA and project implementation. Because of the political aspects of project selection and implementation, the State Department Bureaus of African Affairs and Political Military Affairs and OASD/ISA/AFR work together extensively in monitoring program implementation.

When the MCA program began, the host nation was required to develop project plans and to implement the project with only limited technical assistance during the planning phase. Experience has shown, however, that U.S. technical assistance often is essential both in the early stages to ensure adequacy of design and accurate cost estimates and then later to assist in project implementation. Project technical assistance requirements vary according to the capabilities of the host nation militaries and the expertise available within the country team. Because of their extensive experience in Middle East and African construction programs, the Middle East/Africa Projects Office (MEAPO) of the Army Corps of Engineers has become the primary source of MCA engineering technical assistance. They have provided initial technical assessment of construction project proposals, technical assistance to host nation armed forces during planning and implementation, and oversight of construction project implementation, including case funds management. In several instances U.S. military personnel have been on-site during the entire implementation phase. However, program funding constraints makes this possible only for short duration projects.



U.S. Defense Attache to Ghana, Colonel C. J. Grant, with Ghanaian military engineers installing a military hospital water system in Accra, 1988

The Country Team role is also very important since in many cases there will be no U.S. military presence in the country and embassy personnel must manage local procurement and the turn over of project materials to the host nation military, as well as provide limited project oversight.

Perhaps the most frustrating program management aspect, however, has been the extent of management time required for successful project implementation. This has been a burden not only in the field, but for the unified commands and the Washington agencies as well. In April, 1987, DSAA reorganized its Operations Directorate, in part to respond to the increased workload of its African programs. As program management for MCA has become more complex, DSAA has assumed a more active role in case planning and management and ISA/AFR has begun to return to its more traditional policy oversight role.

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PROGRAM CONTENT

Aside from the restrictions discussed above, no constraints have been placed on the type of project proposals. Generally, the MCA program provides only assistance in planning and design plus construction materials needed for project implementation, with the host nation military providing required labor and equipment. In a few instances, due to host nation equipment shortages or operational readiness problems, limited amounts of engineering equipment and spare parts necessary for project implementation have been provided. In some instances it has been necessary to procure construction materials locally, either because of local building code requirements or lower cost; however, CONUS procurement is preferred and is used whenever possible.

To date, African militaries have tended to focus on larger construction projects (\$250-500k) which are generally not affordable through their own (national) funding. For example, medical clinic proposals have been proposed in countries where military medical facilities and care are lacking. In most cases these clinics are planned for remote areas and they will bring much needed medical care to rural civilian populations.

Basic infrastructure projects such as roads and bridges improve basic transportation networks. The bridge project in Mauritania benefited significantly from USAID assistance and linked a USAID-funded road project with the town's major medical facility. Other projects have involved the refurbishment or expansion of existing facilities. To date, the philosophy has been to encourage host nations to develop plans for projects that respond to real and immediate needs rather than to offer an agenda of potential projects to these nations.

PROJECT DURATION

Experience indicates that it will take 2 to 2 1/2 years to plan and implement a medium sized (\$250-500k) MCA construction project. This results from the initial planning responsibility placed on the host nation military, the requirement for Washington inter-agency project approval, and the necessary steps to prepare and implement an FMS case. Smaller projects require less time; however, approximately twelve months should be considered the absolute minimum.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

In its three year existence, the MCA program has experienced growing pains, but also successes, and it seems clear that the time invested in the MCA program has been well spent. The program has been well received by African militaries. From their perspective, the primary program shortcomings are limited funding and U.S. unwillingness to agree to multi-year projects. Our embassies generally find that they obtain much greater access to host nation militaries than would otherwise have been possible. Moreover, MCA projects assist in transferring valuable management and technical skills in development programs to African militaries and they build on the IMET program. For example, a bridge project in the Central African Republic will be managed by an IMET-trained engineer officer.

As a measure of the growing recognition of the potential of military civic action, the upcoming International Exhibition for Security and the Army (SECARM) in Libreville, Gabon--the only African military trade show--has adopted as its conference theme, "Applications of the Peace Time Army for Civic Action." Although this should not be construed as a commitment by African armies to civic action, it does indicate that African intellectuals are aware of the concept and interested in its potential.

On balance, despite its problems, the MCA program has been a success. By the end of FY1988 several more projects will be finished and the MCA program will have expanded to the CENTCOM and PACOM regions. Much has been learned during the first three years and it seems clear that if the U.S. is willing to approach program implementation with the understanding that it will be a learning process for participating African militaries--this implies a willingness to accept their pace--and that useful skills will be transferred with the potential for real contributions to national development.

ENDNOTES

1. The history of this wider authority for DOD to engage in Humanitarian/Civic Assistance activities is contained in a series of legislative changes, amendments and Congressional report language. The Office of Humanitarian Assistance, Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs can provide summaries of these authorities.
2. An unclassified conference summary was published by OASD/ISA in March 1984. Limited copies are available from OASD/ISA, Africa Region.
3. Stanley Schrager, a former *charge d'affairs* in Nouakchott, Mauritania, authored a monograph which was influential in generating interest in the concept of military civic action in Africa (Schrager, Stanley N., *The Third Choice: Military Civic Action in Africa*, Naval War College for Advanced Research, 1983). This publication is available from the Defense Technical Information Center (U.S. government agencies only) and contains an extensive bibliography.
4. The unclassified team visit report is available in limited quantities from OASD/ISA/AFR, but is of interest primarily in the historical context.
5. OASD/ISA/AFR maintains a current summary status report of ongoing and completed projects. The numbers of ongoing projects reflected in this article may have changed slightly after final allocation of FY88 program funding.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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