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Mine Action in North Sudan

North Sudan's National Mine Action Centre is making great strides toward clearing all known mined areas in Sudan's northern regions by April 2014. In this article, the author, a Quality Assurance Officer for NMAC, explores NMAC's work, future plans and how it has linked mine action to development and recovery in North Sudan.

by Khalid Ibrahim Hamed [National Mine Action Centre]

More than 20 years of conflict between North and South Sudan, ending with the Comprehensive Peace Agreement,¹ has left Sudan riddled with landmines and explosive remnants of war. Based on the CPA, the northern region of Sudan consists of 15 states including the Blue Nile, Gadaref, Gezira, Kassala, Khartoum, Northern, North Darfur, North Kordofan, Red Sea, River Nile, Sennar, South Darfur, South Kordofan, West Darfur and the White Nile. Nine of these states in North Sudan reportedly have varying degrees of landmine and ERW-contamination with the Blue Nile, Kassala and Southern Kordofan being the most-affected regions.² Despite several years of intensive mine-action operations, landmines and ERW continue to threaten civilians and impede economic recovery and development. Contaminated land reduces productivity, thereby negatively affecting the sustainable livelihoods of rural communities. Furthermore, landmine and ERW contamination on key logistical supply routes continues to hamper safe and free movement of citizens, trade and humanitarian interventions. It also endangers the lives of local communities, internally displaced persons and refugees, as well as the staff of humanitarian operations. The presence and perceived threat of landmines/ERW prevents and delays IDPs and refugee populations from returning to their hometowns, and

as a result, constrains recovery, reconstruction and development efforts in mine/ERW and war-affected areas.

The National Mine Action Centre

The National Mine Action Centre is the government body mandated to plan, coordinate and oversee all mine-action operations in coordination and collaboration with the Northern Region Office of the United Nations Mine Action Office in North Sudan. NMAC also serves as an implementing arm of the National Mine Action Authority.

As of June 2010, of the total 1,559 recorded dangerous areas identified in Sudan's nine affected northern states, 1,164 were cleared or verified while 395 dangerous areas remain to be addressed. During clearance/verification operations, a total of 2,625 anti-personnel mines, 686 anti-tank mines, 347,472 small-arms ammunition and 35,736 items of unexploded ordnance were identified and destroyed.

As a State Party to the Ottawa Convention, Sudan's northern regions are meeting their envisioned end state for mine action, as well as their obligation to clear all known mined areas by April 2014. Mine-action operations commenced in North Sudan in 2004, and since then, North Sudan has met a number of key milestones in reaching its mine-free end state, including the establishment of the mine-action authority and its substructures, adoption of the North Sudan mine-action law, inclusion of mine action in the state budget and the train-



A victim-assistance project under NMAC VA supervision.
ALL PHOTOS COURTESY OF NMAC MEDIA DEPARTMENT

ing of more than 40 mine-action management staff. Furthermore, North Sudan has developed and resourced national landmine/ERW clearance assets, including 120 deminers and technical staff. They are part of the Joint Integrated Demining Units that are actively engaged in mine/ERW clearance activities in partnership with several international mine-action operators in North Sudan, and that also manages a number of projects independently.

Although North Sudan continues to receive assistance from the United Nations and other donors, mine action has also been included in the state budget. Approximately US\$13.5 million has been allocated to mine action since mid-2006. This has encouraged other donors to continue supporting North Sudan to address its landmine/ERW contamination problem.

With the capacity-development assistance provided by the United Nations Development Pro-

gramme and United Nations Mine Action Service, the national mine-action authorities are actively engaged in the planning, coordination, priority setting, accreditation, quality assurance and oversight of mine-action operations in North Sudan.

Development and Recovery

North Sudan has been very successful in linking mine action to recovery and development activities. The Government of National Unity has secured funds from the state budget, the Multi-Donor Trust Fund and the World Bank for the rehabilitation and reconstruction of 446 kilometers (277 miles) of railway lines, and approximately 200 kilometers (124 miles) of main roads have been cleared and verified to be free of landmines and ERW in the country's central and southern regions.



The Sudan Joint Integrated Demining Units go to a field at Babanusa-Waw for a railway clearance project.

Socioeconomic rehabilitation and reintegration of landmine and ERW victims remains a high national priority. Furthermore, North Sudan has signed and ratified the Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities. Since 2007, 22 community-based projects have been implemented for the socioeconomic rehabilitation and reintegration of the landmine and ERW victims in various parts of the country with generous contributions from Canada, Japan and the state budget.

The North Sudanese authorities, UNDP and the UNMAO have embarked on a broader and more practical partnership in various areas of mine action in support of the implementation of the mine-action transition plan, and look forward to further expanding this cooperation and partnership in the future.

Future of Mine Action in North Sudan

From August 2010 until April 2014, the key challenge for North Sudan will be to clear known-mined or suspected-mined areas under its Article 5 obligations. In the future, North Sudan envisions producing an experienced mine-clearance staff capable of fulfilling its local role of mine clearance while offering support to other countries through sharing experiences and lessons and deploying trained staff.

With the engagement of all relevant stakeholders, a mine-action transition plan was concluded in November 2008. In 2009, based on the provisions of this plan, the national authorities

made significant progress toward transitioning by strengthening and consolidating their institutional and management capacities. As part of its long-term planning process, North Sudan's National Mine Action Authority, together with the UNMAO, UNDP and other stakeholders, has developed a three-year operations plan, covering 2009–11 to implement the Cartagena Action Plan. North Sudan aims to clear 80 percent of all known high- and medium-priority affected areas by the end of 2011 at an estimated cost of US\$120 million.

Conclusion

North Sudan is committed to fully implementing the Cartagena Action Plan. As it reaches the Article 5 mine-clearance deadline, North Sudan will put all necessary measures in place to achieve all the goals and objectives set forth in the action plan. To fulfill its Article 5 obligations, North Sudan's national demining teams, which are the nation's most cost-effective and sustainable assets, need continued and generous support from the donor community. This will enable North Sudan to realize the goal of being mine-free by 2014. ♦

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Khalid Ibrahim Hamed has been involved in mine action since 2007. As Quality Assurance Officer for the National Mine Action Centre, he oversees the accreditation of mine-action organizations, conducts quality assurance within the mine-action operations of United Nations Mine Action Office and reports on these operations to North Sudan's government. In addition to his work in humanitarian mine action, he also serves as a Major in the Sudanese Army Engineering Corps in Khartoum, where he has been an instructor for almost two years.

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SPECIAL REPORT