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Gendered Structures of Mine Action

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Different segments of populations. All advocacy materials should also highlight the impact mines/ERW have on age and gender. Advocacy materials should also provide job training, psychological discussion, separate facilities for men and women, mobile services or free transportation, equal employment to medical staff and gender-specific activities to engage mine victims. Gender experts emphasize that donors must demand mainstreaming from their partners’ victim-assistance programs in order to force positive change. There is a great deal of uncertainty about which criteria on victim-assistance organizations must grade their efforts is whether or not the survivor “feels good about himself or herself. How can that be achieved if the assistance was not tailored to him or her in the first place?”

Advocacy

Mine-action advocacy focuses on creating “a world free from the threat of landmines and encouraging countries to participate in international treaties and conventions designed to end the production, trade, deposit or use of mines and to uphold the rights of persons with disabilities.” Specific advocacy initiatives can involve:

- Raising public awareness
- Mobilizing resources
- Eliminating the mine/ERW threat
- Promoting the rights of affected populations
- Integrating mine action into the work of international and regional organizations
- Ensuring that public information/outreach programs have equal opportunities to participate in mine/ERW-affected communities.

The United Nations’ Gender Guidelines for Mine Action Programmes include the following four objectives for advocacy:

1. Advocacy efforts should be used to empower individuals of both sexes, as appropriate.
2. Ensures that public information/outreach programs have equal opportunities to participate in mine/ERW-affected communities.
3. Ensures that women’s needs are put on the agenda of decision-makers.
4. Ensures that men and women and their children have equal opportunities to participate in advocacy-related initiatives.

A broad view when it comes to policy and advocacy campaigns that target organizations, governments and donors should keep gender at the forefront of advocacy efforts, making sure gender is considered in all mine-action activities.

Conclusion

Advocacy

The potential of advocacy is widely recognized by the Mine Action community as a whole as well as the recipients of mine-action programs and services. See Endnotes, page 10.

Research on Gender and Mine Action

During 2007, the Swiss Campaign undertook extensive research on the significance of gender in relation to the impact of landmines and, more broadly, mine action. A global survey of civil society and grassroots organizations, as well as a report to the government of the Swiss Confederation, which resulted in the 2007 Dead Sea Progress Report, produced valuable information. In addition, five in-depth interview mis- sions were launched in Colombia, Lofoten, Mozambique, Sri Lanka and Jordan, focusing on groups of grassroots organizations and individuals involved in national mine-action campaigns, local governments, U.N. agencies and women’s organizations. A total of 28 communities participated in the study, and more than 80 people were interviewed.

Impact of landmines on men and women

The respondents correctly identify men as more likely to be involved in a landmine accident. Statistics show men are much more exposed to landmine threats than women, with some 85–90 percent of global victims being male. Respon- dents offered a variety of arguments to explain such differences, such as mobility patterns and the daily division of labor whereby men are expected to tend fields of land as farmers, domestics or migrant workers, as opposed to women, who mostly stay at or near home. Others suggested “women are much more receptive to mine-risk education,” and “that women are more involved when going out and know their immediate area better than men.”

If men seem to be more vulnerable to being caught in a landmine accident, women face many more barriers to recovery. Due to inequities in victim assistance, women receive less medical care and rehabilitation, resulting in a higher fatality rate for females (43 percent) than for males (29 percent). Wives of landmine survivors have to take on the role as the main breadwinner for the family, adding more duties, and putting them in an even more vulnerable position. Injured women, furthermore, face greater risks of stigmatization, isolation and poverty.

Gender-equal victim assistance? On questions regarding equal ac- cess to victim-assistance and rehabilitation services after a landmine injury, many of the respondents argued that their approach of treating anyone that comes to the door “would not discriminate against any group in society. Yet not all have equal access to information about these services, and the gender-blind method of assisting land- mine victims is prone to becoming indirectly discriminatory. Women’s restricted mobility, in addition to a lack of transportation, money and time, are some of the obstacles for women to receiving the same treatment as men.

Apart from physical consequences, landmine injuries also have psycho- social implications. The injured are stigmatized and marginalized in society, having little chance of reintegrating into their communities. Those inter- viewed raised some similarities of the project’s impact between men and women. Men, they said, face greater difficulties in their new role as dependents, as opposed to being the main breadwinner. They feel that their masculinity is challenged, leading to insecurity and fear. Women maintain that several organizations found landmine victims are linked to domestic violence and in some cases when landmine-imposed hardship is evident toward their sons or family members. Whether this is widespread or not needs to be further studied before conclusions can be drawn. Women, on the other hand, seem to face problems in getting married if injured, as communities may believe that injured women will “bring bad luck.”

Gendered Structures of Mine Action

To examine the relevance of gender in the mine-action sector, the Swiss Campaign to Ban Landmines conducted a global survey and in-depth interviews. The authors present the findings of this research and its implications.

By Marie Nilsson and Virginia Rozes (Swiss Campaign to Ban Landmines)

Governments and nongovernmental organizations gathered in Geneva in June 2008 for the yearly International Meeting of the Standing Committee to review the progress of States Parties within the Ottawa Convention. The meeting discussed the priorit- ies contained in the Dual Sea Progress Report from the Eighth Meeting of States Parties in Jordan in November 2007, which coincided with the 10th anniversary of the Ottawa Convention, celebrated under the slogan, “A success in progress.” The success relates to the growing number of States Parties that have ratified the treaty, the increased attention brought to mine action and the mine-affected areas that are cleared every day throughout the world.

The discourse of mine action, however, is still a male-dominated arena, and very few of the States Parties or main stakeholders have made a significant effort to put gender on the agenda of action. The fact that the Swiss Campaign was asked to present an update on gender and mine action at the Meeting of the Standing Committee shows, however, that things are changing. Gender is important considering the very different impact landmines have on women and men (psychological effects, economic consequences, stigma, access to victim assistance and rehabilita- tion services, post-accident social roles, etc.). As such, serious thinking and action is needed before success is claimed.
Gendered Future for Mine Action?

The concept of gender, which refers to the different roles that men and women are meant to play in society, is frequently misunderstood. As one interviewee puts it, “[There is] no need to talk about gender.” However, as this research has shown, gender awareness is a prerequisite for effective and nondiscriminatory mine action. A gender perspective should not be considered as an eventual add-on at the end, but should be integrated from the beginning of the planning process, in order to ensure that mine-action policies, operations and programs are tailored for everyone. Governments, both as donors and developers of programs, need to have clear guidelines on how to integrate a gender perspective in the mine-action sector. Donors must have a responsibility to initiate an ongoing dialogue with their implementing mine-action partners on how gender can be successfully mainstreamed, gender is not only about equality but also about quality. The results and the impact of mine-action activities will improve greatly by integrating a gender perspective, which simply consists of taking all people’s needs and concerns into consideration.

See Endnotes, page 111

Marie Nilsson is a Gender Programme Officer for the Swiss Campaign to Ban Landmines. Before joining the Swiss Campaign, she worked as Gender Advisor to the Swedish Rescue Agency and was responsible for the gender sensitization of humanitarian activities with focus ranging from field analyses, through the development of gender toolkits and training events, to organizing seminars and contributing to gender-aware recruitment systems.

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It is worth pointing out here that the term “victim” not only refers to those injured by landmines, but also to the caretaker and family members of an injured person. The interviewees identified differences between men and women in this regard. A man, a husband to an injured wife, could more or less continue life as before, with assistance from female family members for household duties. Women, as wives to injured men, have to take up the role as the family’s main provider, in addition to maintaining household tasks and childcare. “A good woman takes care of her family. It doesn’t work the other way around,” said one respondent. Gender affects, therefore, the economic capacity of the caretaker depending on sex. In terms of reintegration into society, many organizations stated that the type of services provided for landmine victims did not correlate with women’s needs or interests. There are many social activities for male landmine vic- tims—football tournaments, for example—but few attract women in this regard. A man, as husband to an injured wife, could more or less continue life as before, with assistance from female family members for household duties. A man, as husband to an injured wife, could more or less continue life as before, with assistance from female family members for household duties.

Women are crucial as trainers because they have access to other groups of women, whom men cannot approach. Holding separate sessions for men and women is another way of ensuring women’s effective participation. None of those interviewed reported that they use MRE material directly targeted at men or women but said that “the methods are the same for men and women with the same education level.” For illiterate groups—including children—posters, plays, TV shows and other visual media are used to convey the messages. Gender issues.

Women are well-respected in society and act as role models for other women to become involved in mine-action activities in their communities.

Moreover, none of the organizations include information of the gendered dimen- sions of mine action in their MRE activities. For example, they do not discuss the dif- ferent needs of men and women in victim assistance in their MRE, or other relevant gender issues.

Surveying and demeaning—resistance met. The surveying and demining sector (the first pillar of mine action), is the most male-dominated area of mine action, both in terms of employment and in taking the different groups’ needs and interests into consideration. Although a few organizations employ women as surveyors and deminers, the majority still view this sector as a “man’s world.” Regarding surveying, all too often many respondents agree that men and women have different information on where landmines are emplaced or where landmine accidents have taken place in the past, very little has been done in consulting and engaging women in surveying and ass- essment exercises. In cases where an inclusive approach has been adopted, as in Jordan, the result has been more accurate mapping, and hence more thorough clearing.

The risks of demeaning, hardship of camp life, distance from families and “cultural contexts” are used as main arguments for not engaging women in demining. The “cul- tural contexts” argument has been used to an extent where it has become an unam- plishable truth. Women’s lack of involvement in mine action is also sometimes blamed on women themselves. The survey said, “If women stay at home, it is basically their own decision,” or “Women themselves do not want to do those kinds of jobs.” Many of these organizations have never employed, nor do they plan to employ in the near fu- ture, female deminers. One organization goes as far as stating that “involving women and letting them into the camp creates prob- lems between men and women as they start to mix.” For organizations, however, had ac- tually studied this cultural argument more deeply to find out whether it has any basis in reality. In fact when empirical evidence exists, the evidence seems to support the opposite. The few organizations that have hired female deminers—such as Norwegian People’s Aid–Sri Lanka and The HALO Trust in Somaliland, have not faced these problems, neither at the camps nor with the local community. On the contrary, these wom- en are well-respected in society and act as role models for other women to become involved in mine-action activities in their communities.

The female team for NPA in Sri Lanka had 40 manual deminers, four section commanders, a team leader, a deputy team leader, a paramedic, and one driver—all of them women. The organizations see gender merely as an issue. As one interviewee puts it, “[There is] no need to talk about gender.” However, as this research has shown, gen- der awareness is a prerequisite for effective and nondiscriminatory mine action. A gender perspective should not be consid- ered as an eventual add-on at the end, but should be integrated from the beginning of the planning process, in order to ensure that mine-action policies, operations and programs are tailored for everyone. Governments, both as donors and developers of programs, need to have clear guidelines on how to integrate a gender perspective in the mine-action sector. Donors must have a responsibility to initiate an ongoing dialogue with their implementing mine-action partners on how gender can be successfully mainstreamed, gender is not only about equality but also about quality. The results and the impact of mine-action activities will improve greatly by integrating a gender perspective, which simply consists of taking all people’s needs and concerns into consideration.

Endnotes

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2. Gendered Future for Mine Action?

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