Mines Awareness Trust In Eastern Africa

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Mines Awareness Trust

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January 2003, the Anti-Mine Network–Rwenzori asked MAT Operations Director Ben Remfrey to conduct an assessment of the Kasese district in western Uganda. Reports from Uganda stating there was a landmine and unexploded ordinance threat to the local population drove the deployment.

Like many African countries, Uganda has experienced bloodshed as a result of major internal conflicts during the year since independence, and today internal security problems remain with organizations like the Lord’s Resistance Army. The legacy of this fighting is areas of land contaminated by anti-personnel mines and UXO as well as approximately 1.4 million internally displaced people. These problems are exacerbated by a recent influx of Sudanese refugees into northern Uganda.

The Allied Democratic Forces further contaminated the western region, particularly the Rwenzori Mountains, during the infiltration and heavy fighting in the late 1990s. The most heavily contaminated region, however, is still northern Uganda, where it has been the area of some of the fiercest fighting between the LRA and the Ugandan People’s Defence Force.

During his time in Uganda, Remfrey met the Johnson family, who survived the tragedy of the war that raged around them. They returned from their displacement to their devastated village with their five children, among whom was a young child who had suffered severe burns and had lost both hands and livelihood. The children were playing to the rear of their home when there was loud explosion, which incorporated large excerpts as part of its official inter-agency report in July 2004. Comic Relief2 donated £50,000 to MAT in June 2004, which enabled MAT to conduct an eight-month needs assessment in the western districts of Uganda.

Adrian Sahabura, who had been a member of the MAT Kosovo Mine Risk Education Programme in the aftermath of the Kosovo conflict in 1999, was the principal Needs Assessment Coordinator and was assisted by Nora Solomon, who had worked for MAT previously in her home country of Estonia in 2002. The NA team based itself in the Kasese district and, in conjunction with Anti-Mine Network–Rwenzori, the team members interviewed themselves in the local communities. During the two-week build-up phase, MRE Assistants were trained in interview techniques, methods of systematic collection and analysis of data, map reading, radio transmission procedure and first aid, as well as the preparation of reporting and briefing documents. After an initial three-months, the teams undertook a one-week refresher course, primarily concentrating on map reading, ground assessment and data analysis. The main objectives of the assessment were to appraise the level of contamination in the subcounties of Kasese, identify areas at risk and establish an impression of the extent of landmines and UXO contamination in the district. The objectives of the assessment were to appraise the level of contamination in the subcounties of Kasese, identify areas at risk and establish an impression of the extent of landmines and UXO contamination in the district.

Motorbikes proved to be a highly valuable asset to the team, as they were used to access the most remote villages and thereby obtain the information required to satisfy NA objectives. With a determined and creative approach, the project staff managed to gain the respect and trust of the people of the Kasese district and gained valuable information and data that can now be used toward implementing an effective National Mine Action Plan.

This NA is still the only detailed study of any district in Uganda, and it identified 57 suspected dangerous areas. However, the most heavily affected districts in the north are yet to be fully surveyed. Additional donor funding is required to implement future MRE and clearance programmes.

A New Partnership in Kenya

The U.K.–funded International Mine Action Training Centre opened 17 Feb. 2005. In under a year, the Centre has trained and equipped 370 African deminers to International Mine Action Standards of

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Picking the Right Tool for the Right Task: Mine Clearance with the MineWolf Machine in Sudan

Sudan has been embroiled in a civil war for all but 10 years of its post-independence existence, making its internal battles part of Africa’s longest running conflict. The civil war has created a considerable problem with landmines and unexploded ordnance in Sudan. In general, the mines are located along communication and logistical lines and around towns and military facilities. In 2002, the United Nations reported that landmines on key logistical routes were a great impediment to the delivery of humanitarian aid. Consequently, much of the aid has been delivered by air at tremendous cost. The involved parties have specified clearance of the road network as the first priority, the second priority being access to water and the third, food security. Almost four years after setting these priorities, they are still struggling with the first one.

In 2005, Norwegian People’s Aid decided to support its mine-action program in Yei with a mechanical mine-clearance machine called the MineWolf. The MineWolf is a German machine that combines the advantages of both the tiller and flail systems. It is designed as a multi-purpose toolbox to provide maximum flexibility for the user, especially in the challenging environment of Sudan. As a result of a feasibility study in January 2005, it became clear that in order to support and move a 25-ton machine in South Sudan, a well-equipped and perfectly organized team must be formed to deliver cost-effective results. The main challenges would be transportation, hard ground conditions during the dry season, and dense vegetation after the rainy period. Based on its experience in the Balkans, MineWolf Systems GmbH provided NPA with a tailor-made transport and support plan.

Getting There and Moving Around

To achieve operational flexibility and maximum deployment, the system needs its own transport and support assets.

by Christoph Freisene [MineWolf Systems GmbH]