

Effects of Mixed Teams on Land Release

The Gender and Mine Action Programme (GMAP) investigated the impact of mixed gender teams on land release. Based on the opinion of the respondents, as well as gender baseline assessments conducted by GMAP, the organization found that in most cases mixed teams in the land release process are primarily associated with the employment of women and its effect on the teams. Some mine action managers indicated that mixed teams actually enable better access to information while only a few respondents indicated that more accurate and inclusive information will allow mine action organizations to prioritize tasks where the impact is highest. This demonstrates that despite arguments in favor of mixed teams, their importance is still not fully understood in the mine action sector.

by Arianna Calza Bini, Nyske Janssen and Abigail Jones [Gender and Mine Action Programme]

Despite increasing global recognition that mixed gender teams can benefit land release, sufficient documentation does not exist to support this. In 2013 the Gender and Mine Action Programme (GMAP) started to map first-hand experiences by sending a short questionnaire to current and former operations, program and community liaison managers working in the field of mine action. The 10 respondents have worked for different international nongovernmental organizations in North and Central Africa, the Middle East and Southeast Asia. The respondents were invited to share their personal experiences from 2003–2013 as well as opinions on the perceived impact of mixed gender and male teams on non-technical survey, clearance and handover.

In addition, findings were analyzed from seven gender baseline assessments involving more than 400 people. For these assessments, GMAP conducted individual interviews, focus group discussions, staff surveys and direct observation of local staff and expatriates in six different countries during 2012–2013. GMAP observed that impact was most frequently interpreted as effect; hence, the results of this analysis are presented as effects on the individual, effects on the team and effects on younger and older members of impacted communities, both male and female.^{1,2}



HALO non-technical survey training in March 2013 in El Retiro, Colombia.

Photo courtesy of Grant Salisbury.

Mixed Teams in Land Release

Land release in mine action focuses on operational efficiency, the quality of the process and its results. Relative to a gender perspective, the three key steps are

- Hire the most qualified teams for the job
- Obtain information on contamination from affected women, girls, boys and men
- Ensure the entire community is informed that released land is safe to use³

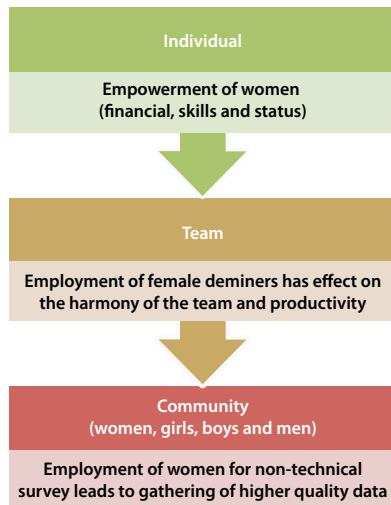


Figure 1. Perceived positive effects of mixed teams at the individual, team and community levels.
Figure courtesy of the authors.

Due to cultural restrictions, access to information is limited in many impacted countries. As a result, teams should be composed of mixed genders. The benefits of mixed gender teams are threefold:

- Equal access to employment opportunities empowers men and women.
- The collection of more complete comprehensive data for mapping hazard areas is better facilitated as a result of increased access to women and children in affected communities. Because of the context-sensitive approach, teams also have more access to men who are not community leaders.
- Including all landowners and possible end users in the handover process better ensures that released land is used productively.

Moreover, frameworks of international guidance for gender mainstreaming in land release exist. The Cartagena Action Plan of the *Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-personnel Mines and on Their Destruction* (Anti-personnel Mine Ban Convention or APMB), the Vientiane Action Plan of the *Convention on Cluster Munitions* and the International Mine Action Standards on land release each reference the need for an integrated gender dimension within land release activities.^{4,5,6}

Effects on the Individual

Earlier GMAP research illustrates that female employment has a positive impact at the individual level.⁷ Employing women in management positions demonstrates to the community that women are physically and psychologically capable of fulfilling high-level positions with equal productivity.

Individually, income often empowers women, and other females within the community see them as positive role models. Relatedly, a woman's status in her family and community rises. However, what happens to the women after mine action activities conclude is not documented. Based on experience with female deminers, one respondent said, "If women did not hold a mid-management position, they most likely fall back into the roles they held before their employment."

The gender baseline assessments and staff survey findings supported arguments for mixed employment in mine action. Respondents stated that financial needs, helping the community and the opportunity to learn new skills were frequently reasons for both men and women to work in mine action. Questionnaire responses from managers suggested that most women become deminers due to financial motivations. The effect of employment on women's lives and their role in the community was seldom referenced, and only one respondent mentioned that employment in mine action could empower women.

Effects on the Team

When asked about their experience regarding mixed-team employment, the surveyed local managers and field staff typically highlighted positive effects on their projects. These testimonies noted

- Men become more competitive due to stigma associated with performing worse than women.
- Women bring more harmony to teams.
- Women increase effectiveness but not efficiency.

A frequent survey answer from expat operations managers (typically from developed countries) with mixed team experience seemed less positive, because in their opinion "its success is country specific" and "should never be forced when it is not in accordance with cultural norms," and therefore the focus should be on "only employing the best candidate."

Effects in Impacted Communities

In examining the effects of mixed teams during non-technical surveys, survey responses suggested that teams employing women had better access to women and children in affected communities. Whether this better access leads to the collection of more complete and accurate information about the locations of potential explosive hazards or other risk factors is undocumented. Although not every participant demonstrated improved effectiveness from mixed teams, certainly better access to information allows them to prioritize the tasks where the impact for all groups is highest. In focus group discussions, participants agreed on the significance of having women conduct surveys and fulfill community liaison

activities in order to access a wider range of stakeholders in a community and collect information on contamination and priorities for clearance from women, girls, boys and men.

Regarding the perceived effect of mixed teams during the handover of cleared land to younger and older men and women, a range of answers included

- The handover is worse because “people do not trust women enough” and will doubt the safety of the land.
- The effect is identical to male-only teams.
- The handover is better “because women reinforce confidence in women in the use of cleared land.”

The unique circumstances the participants in the survey faced likely influenced these varied responses. Negative experiences commonly came from those working in North African countries, whereas positive experiences often came from Central and South African countries. Other regions reported no effect of mixed teams.

Areas of Future Research

Respondents associate mixed teams in the land release process primarily with the employment of women and its effect on the team. Many practitioners seem less aware of the broader positive benefits on males and females of all ages, i.e., better access to information from women, girls,

boys and men in affected communities which allows mine action organizations to prioritize tasks where the impact for all groups is highest.

The findings also point to a number of areas that require further research in order to better understand the long-term developmental impact of mixed teams in land release settings:

- What is the impact of employment in mine action on men’s and women’s lives and gender equality?
- What happens to the status and position of men and women after their employment in mine action ends?
- Do mixed teams have varying effects based upon the type of land released (common land, private fields, roads, etc.), and how do the different types impact the livelihoods of all members of affected communities?
- What is the impact on the survey quality? Does it lead to better planning, more efficient operations, lower costs and more beneficiaries?
- How important of a factor is culture for the use of mixed teams in land release?

GMAP is interested in receiving details about the experience and opinions of any interested party on the effect of mixed (male/female) non-technical survey teams on mine/explosive remnants of war affected communities. To participate in the study, contact info@gmap.ch. ©

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