Providing Safe Drinking Water in Post-Civil War Sri Lanka

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stayed in areas without access to food, water or medicine. The family finally found refuge in an IDP camp where they spent one year and four months. Romarl ended his story with, “Soon it will be like it was before, and we are very happy. 153 families are here now (in their village) only because of MAG. Otherwise, how could we be here? Our lives would be a question mark.”

MAG’s goal in Sri Lanka is to protect conflict affected individuals by facilitating recovery activities. By contributing to the urgent requirement to survey priority areas and clear them of landmines and unexploded ordnance, MAG enables post-conflict reconstruction and development interventions. MAG’s program in Sri Lanka is supported by AusAID, the Canadian International Development Agency, Stichting Vluchtelingshulp van Nederland and the Office of Weapons Removal and Abatement in the U.S. Department of State’s Bureau of Political-Military Affairs (PMWRA).

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### Happy children enjoy a safe playground once again. A new school was built in Sinnapurathiruchchey village, Sri Lanka. Six unexploded projectiles were found at the site and destroyed by MAG teams, 2011.

### Providing Safe Drinking Water in Post-Civil War Sri Lanka

The Sri Lankan Civil War (1983–2009) threw the country into turmoil for nearly three decades, claimed as many as 100,000 lives and resulted in thousands of “silent killers” scattered over northern and eastern Sri Lanka. The conflict left behind large numbers of various types of explosive remnants of war, including mortar bombs, artillery rounds, small arms ammunitions and landmines in unexpected locations such as water wells. Landmines and ERW continue to have significant negative impacts on individuals, communities, agriculture and the wider economy in Sri Lanka’s poorest districts: Mannar, Vavuniya and Mullaitivu. Even after resettlement, subsequent observations from the Ministry of Economic Development conclude that many people in these areas live adjacent to mine/ERW-contaminated land.

Contaminated Wells

After the Sri Lankan government released land for resettlement, thousands of people returned home, it remains to be seen whether the poorest districts will have access to one of the most basic human necessities, clean water. Foundation Suisse de Déminage (Swiss Foundation for Mine Action) hopes to alleviate this situation by clearing contaminated wells.

“…we immediately started our job [clearance].”

— Noel Peacock, FSD Technical Advisor

Well Clearance

A tractor transports the teams and their equipment between tasks. Each FSD mobile team is equipped with all the necessary equipment to carry out well clearance, including a tractor, a front loader and various tools. The clearance site is marked off with bamboo sticks and a team leader and three deminers who are trained and equipped to carry out well clearance. Clearance tasking and prioritizing is carried out in close coordination with local water sanitation teams, the provincial authorities and the regional mine action office. The well clearance activities are conducted parallel to ongoing mine clearance and survey operations. As a result of this close cooperation with partners and stakeholders, the well clearance teams achieved good success. For instance, in 2010 FSD reported clearing 1,168 wells in addition to removing 19 anti-personnel mines, 186 UXO and 33,688 ERW.

“…we suspected explosive remnants of war, small arms and other dangerous items would be in the wells. During the survey it was confirmed that these wells are highly contaminated with explosive remnants of war and other devices. We immediately started our job [clearance].”

— Hartmut Thoms (Foundation Suisse de Déminage)
ing any items of ERW found. In addition, the national water board is informed of clearance completion. The national water board is then responsible for follow-up water purification of the well.

Achievements

Since the project’s commencement, FSD has cleared 2,214 wells, removing and destroying more than 42 AP mines, 556 items of UXO and nearly 57,468 ERW in FSA areas of responsibility in Vavuniya, Mannar and Mullaitivu districts. More than 47,000 IDPs have benefited from FSD’s well clearance initiative.

As the demand for clean water resources increases, some international nongovernmental organizations including Global Water and Hygiene and Sanitation for All (SWA), an international partnership providing sustainable, universal access to clean water, selected “FSD CLEARED” wells as a priority for water purification to improve the quality and quantity of water provision at the community level. Well clearance ensures that multiple families have sufficient safe water for personal and domestic use.

Safety Messages

In addition to clearance activities, a need emerged to educate local communities and NGOs, international NGOs and water sanitation workers in landmine and munitions safety. FSD community liaison teams provide returning IDPs with mine awareness training by educating participants on warning signs, identifying landmines and items of UXO, safe behaviors when encountering suspicious objects, and contact details of national mine action offices and demining agencies.

So far, FSD has reached over 55,000 people. In addition, the national water and drainage board is responsible for follow-up water purification wherever possible. Well clearance is an effective mine action intervention for FSD. Additionally, well clearance is closely linked with national development priorities, helping communities to overcome obstructions to social and economic development.

Well clearance project is strengthened by the generous support of the Swiss Development Cooperation, the Australian Agency for International Development and the Office of Weapons Removal and Abatement in the U.S. Department of State’s Bureau of Political-Military Affairs (PM/WRA).

Humanitarian demining extends beyond ground clearance with a metal detector to eliminating the threats landmines and ERW pose to human lives wherever possible. Well clearance is an effective mine action intervention for FSD. Additionally, well clearance is closely linked with national development priorities, helping communities to overcome obstructions to social and economic development.

Beneficiaries using “FSD CLEARED” wells.

The National Water and Drainage Board staff.

In turn, these agencies provide this material to all other organizations clearing wells in their districts.

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All three sets of cards are available free of charge. Please contact sas@smallarmssurvey.org for more information.

Kathleen Sensabaugh, CSFR staff

Small Arms Survey Creates Playing Cards

In August 2012, Small Arms Survey, in partnership with the Office of Weapons Removal and Abatement in the U.S. Department of State’s Bureau of Political-Military Affairs (PM/WRA), released a third set of small arms informational playing cards, the Marking, Record Keeping and Tracing Implementation Support Cards. The previously released cards focused on small arms identification (available in English and Spanish) and physical security and stockpile management (available in English and Serbo-Croatian).

The new cards are designed to provide general knowledge of the International Tracing Instrument. One of the playing cards describes ITI as “designed to facilitate the successful tracing of small arms and light weapons (SA/LW) used in crime and armed conflict.” Other cards have information regarding marking identification, record-keeping and implementation of ITI in different countries.

According to Martin Field, the communications officer at SAS, the cards are of interest to workers involved in weapons manufacturing, removal, tracing, record-keeping, policy making and law enforcement.

All three sets of cards are available free of charge. Please contact sas@smallarmssurvey.org for more information.

Kathleen Sensabaugh, CSFR staff

The Marking, Record Keeping and Tracing Implementation Support Cards are designed and distributed to provide knowledge of the International Tracing Instrument.

Photo courtesy of Small Arms Survey/CISR.