NPA’s All-female Demining Team in Sudan

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Many advantages exist in facilitating all-female demining teams. First, avoiding mixed-gender teams addresses the practical concerns of spank and socio-cultural considerations of women in demining. In Sri Lanka, all of which were successful. The positive feedback concerning female participation in these projects encouraged NPA to continue training women to take part in demining—even in its most recent project in war-torn southern Sudan.1

Female Demining in Sudan

NPA has been involved in mine clearance in Sudan since April 2004, when it established its first program in the nation, a traditional all-male team. 2

Women of South Sudan. The culture of South Sudan is known for its conservative nature. Initially, this emphasis on tradition was seen as a potential cultural hindrance as the first all-female demining team was formed and women began to take on roles traditionally viewed as masculine.2 This traditional culture, however, has not been a deterrent to the process. The majority of the female deminers say that their involvement has not been discouraged, but rather that their friends and families have been very supportive of their involvement in mine clearance.

NPA’s All-female Demining Team in Sudan

Norwegian People’s Aid has always held the opinion that women should have equal employment rights to all jobs—including those in the risk sector, and supporting gender mainstreaming in mine action needs to reflect this fact in all its strategies.1

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Female deminer of Linda Bilinga task, Lanya, Central Equatoria. Photo courtesy of Jaja Sudi

Mary Sudi, team leader. Photo courtesy of Jaja Sudi

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used both before and after the birth. If necessary, the deminer is pregnant, she is automatically given the same pay she would if she were demining on the field with the rest of the team.

Clearing Mine 38. The team recently participated in the clearance of Mile 38 on the Yei-Juba road—a line of Engagement of some 100 hectares. This Mile 38 battlefield was “on the frontline in a decade’s long conflict.” In the process of mine clearance in this dangerous stretch of land, the women cleared 15,843 square meters (4 acres) and removed nine pieces of unexploded ordnance; 105 anti-personnel mines and 21 anti-tank mines. The Mile 38 clearance project took over a year, spanning from February 2007 to March 2008. The grueling clearance process involved the use of both manual and mechanized demining techniques, which included the use of the MineWolf mechanical demining machine. In June 2008 NPA handed Mine 38 over to the Sudanese government, with farming and agriculture predicted as the use for the land.

Statistics from the U.N. Mine Action Office indicate that of the 100 million landmines laid during and since the recent war. The heavily mined land in this area has caused more than just death and injury to the people of Sudan. It has made trade and travel virtually impossible, destroyed farmers’ livelihoods and harmed communities throughout southern Sudan. For example, Mile 38 was once a part of a major trade route, but due to fear of landmines and conflict, it was virtually useless land until it was cleared. The women of the team are working to restore their nation and bring an end to the fear that keeps communities from making use of the land.

Continued commitment to gender main- streaming. NPA has found that in these war- torn communities it is typically women who are involved in gathering water and wood for their families and in mine victim assistance. Due to their knowledge of these least-known areas, women have the best information in these rural communities regarding which areas are the most dangerous. These women, however, are typically an untapped resource of knowledge, since all-male teams go into these areas and speak mainly to the men from the communities about their knowledge of the mine threat in the area. Perhaps this all-women team will be able to speak to more women, accessing vital information that has not been shared in the past.

NPA’s commitment to incorporating women into the demining process continues to pay off. The first all-female demining team’s success in Sudan is just one example of the positive outcomes. Although it seemed that a traditional culture would get in the way, the team members have been met with support by their friends and families. The potential issues of pregnancy and maternity leave have not hindered the team, but rather have provided an opportunity for NPA to develop a new program for new mothers. Furthermore, the team has recently finished clearing one of the most dangerous battlefields in the nation, Mile 38, providing communities with land for agriculture and trade. The team hopes to continue on this path, restoring the community and helping the country recover from a long war.

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Gender in the Mine-action Community

Comparing the perspectives of multiple gender specialists and detailing real-world examples, this article provides a multi-faceted look at gender mainstreaming in the mine-action community. The authors analyze four of the five mine-action pillars: clearance, mine-risk education, victim assistance and advocacy.

by Rachel Canfield and Chad McCoul (Mine Action Information Center)

M any organizations in the global mine-action community remain unaware of the importance of gender-proactive interven- tions. During the Eighth Meeting of the States Parties to the Ottawa Convention in 2007, non-official events addressed gender and mine action. By failing to investigate the human component of technical operations, mine-action organizations profit clarity and progress. Some sector-specific activities as meaningless burdens imposed upon field professionals. Others disregarded the topic because of perceived cultural or situational constraints. However, simple gender-mainstreaming solutions are valuable and easily achievable for any organization. Participating organizations find that including gender considerations serves a dual purpose of improving human rights conditions and making labor more cost-efficient. By studying gender disparities, we can better understand the unique qualities and inequalities of men and women and boys and girls in order to resolve problems and make pro- cesses more effective.

The United Nations and other organizations have long under- stood the importance of gender. Although the first all-female demining teams in the nation’s gender-sensitive mine action, sharing successful intervention stories, applying the lessons learned to improve the process and obtaining un- marked financial support.

United Nations Mine Action Service Officer-in-Charge Justin Brady believes compassionate collaboration is essential. “Only when gender specialists emphasize how integrating gender concerns will improve programming and the mine-action site looks at the practical side of taking gender into consideration and the two sides surround around a healthy discussion on how to promote changes in the way we do business.”

Mine-action specialists can evaluate gender distinctions in a variety of contexts from employment procedures to program-implementing methods. Gender mainstreaming has implications for each critical situation, including political, social, religious, psychological, economic and cultural concerns. Most important to consider are the personal circumstances of individuals whose lives have been changed by each differential intervention. After all, all of the five pillars of mine action—victim assistance and gender—make the difference in any organization. Solutions are valuable and easily achievable for any organization.

Gender Misconceptions in Mine Action

In the field and in the office, gender specialists commonly discover that mine-action organizations have false impressions about the gen- der norms of local societies. “That would be great, but you just can’t do that in this community,” or “You should just forget it, it doesn’t work with the context, many things that seemed possible can be done,” says Brady. International nongovernmental organizations will tip you around what they perceive to be existing norms, hoping that they have made no official investigations. Two presumptions should be recon-