

Mines Awareness Trust In Eastern Africa

Mines Awareness Trust has been involved in many mine-action programmes that are aiding the mine-clearance process and improving the way of life for the people of eastern Africa. MAT has performed needs assessments in Uganda and has supervised the Ugandan Army. It has also developed a partnership with the International Mine Action Training Centre, which resulted in a state-of-the-art mine-detection dog training facility in Kenya. MAT's collaboration with and assistance to eastern African organisations has put the area on the path to becoming mine safe.¹

by Nigel Howard [Mines Awareness Trust]

In 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 ordnance 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 years since independence, and today internal security problems remain with organisations 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; 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 and set about rebuilding their home and livelihood. The children were playing to the rear of their home when there was loud explosion. They had found what is now believed to be an M79 submunition,² and it detonated, killing three of the children instantly and severely injuring the other two.

Uganda Needs Assessment

The plight of the Johnson family became a catalyst for action, and MAT set out to secure funding to conduct a needs assessment and implemented a mine-risk education programme. The MAT report was sent to the United Nations, which incorporated large excerpts as part of its official inter-agency report in July 2004. Comic Relief³ donated £50,000⁴ to MAT in June 2004, which enabled MAT to conduct an eight-month needs assessment in the western districts of Uganda.

Adrian Sahatciu, 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 Netsa Soloman, who had worked for MAT previously in her home country of Eritrea in 2002. The NA team based itself in the Kasese district and, in conjunction with Anti-Mine Network–Rwenzori, the team members immersed 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 underwent a one-week refresher course, primarily concentrating on map reading, ground appreciation⁵ and data analysis.

The objectives of the needs assessment were to appraise the level of contamination in the subcounties of Kasese, identify and record all known or suspected dangerous sites in the areas assessed, and identify and/or verify all landmine/UXO casualties. The NA also sought to evaluate the existing knowledge of the local population regarding the threat of landmines and UXO, calculate the "at-risk" section of the local community and analyse the socio-economic impact of the landmine/UXO contamination on 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 gleaned 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 Kenya⁶

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 Standards⁷

countries were needed. Consequently, the IMATC sought a suitable organisation to provide the technical ability and discovered MAT working in Uganda.

A new partnership has now evolved whereby IMATC trains the various African armies/police units to conduct particular aspects of humanitarian mine action (whether that be manual mine clearance, battle-area clearance, EOD or Technical Survey), and MAT provides the Technical Advisors to ensure the training occurs and that standards are rigorously maintained.

The IMATC is ideally located in Nairobi, Kenya, on the doorstep of some of the most deeply affected African nations. The IMATC is currently involved in training personnel for demining operations in Eritrea, Uganda, Sudan, Rwanda and Somaliland. With the majority of mine-action nongovernmental organisations that operate in and around eastern Africa having



to conduct demining, battle-area clearance and explosive ordnance disposal operations on U.N. missions or as part of their national programmes in their own countries.

The IMATC offered to train and equip the Ugandan People's Defence Force Army engineers for humanitarian-demining operations. The overall plan is for up to 140 UPDF engineers to be trained and seconded⁸ to the Ugandan Mine Action Centre. The IMATC has trained and equipped 20 UPDF soldiers and 40 Ugandan Police Officers to conduct demining and EOD operations with an aspiration to train an additional 80 soldiers in 2006. It was soon discovered that training alone would not be sufficient for this programme to be fully effective. Supervisors with the necessary experience and expertise to supervise, monitor and mentor the teams in their home

their regional offices in Nairobi, this new partnership between MAT and the IMATC, along with additional assets that MAT is currently developing, will provide other NGOs with a constant source of mine-action assets for use in a plethora of ways.

Both the IMATC and MAT were the subjects of a *Sky News* documentary at the end of 2005, where the MAT operations team accompanied Derek Tedder (*Sky News* correspondent) and Kevin Capon (British Army cameraman) to the Rwenzori Mountains in Uganda to interview Mrs. Johnson and other landmine survivors. They then returned to Kenya to film the Ugandan police officers undergoing EOD training at the IMATC.

Positive Action

The programme to train the UPDF soldiers and Ugandan police officers at



The Sky News film crew interviewing the Johnson family.

the IMATC to become humanitarian deminers and EOD technicians respectively, was funded by the British government's Department for International Development and the U.K. Ministry of Defence. MAT has been contracted through the United Nations Development Programme by the Department for International Development to provide the Technical Advisors to supervise the Ugandans in their new role, ensuring that the International Mine Action Standards are maintained and the teams operate at their maximum capability.

Upon completion of the course and repatriation to Uganda, MAT was essential in helping to shape the strategic policy for the deployment of these newly trained forces. The Office of the Prime Minister and the mine-action Technical Advisor for the UNDP have agreed to acquire the necessary life support⁹ and operational funding for the teams to undergo refresher training and deploy to the field to conduct clearance operations. This has by no means been an easy feat, and with this new approach to national capacity building, there is now a heavy emphasis on the local governmental infrastructure to include mine action within

its national regeneration plan and assign essential funding and personnel.

At present, MAT Chief Technical Advisor in Uganda Danny Danenbergson is assisting in the development of the national mine-clearance programme and will then deploy on operations with the UPDF. It is a very delicate

to build a mine-detection dog training facility on the grounds of the IMATC. A continued partnership with Securatec, a German-owned commercial dog-training company that operates globally, means that the supply of high-calibre and well-trained MDDs will soon be well-established in eastern Africa to move and support a myriad of mine-action programmes/agencies in countries such as Uganda, Rwanda, Somaliland and South Sudan.

Damian Leitch, the MAT Technical Advisor and head of the MDD training facility, the Dirk-Ridge Dog Centre, controls the day-to-day running of the centre and occasionally assists the instructors from the IMATC during the course. Leitch provides specific EOD knowledge from his experiences gained during his career in a British Army EOD team operating in countries such as Iraq, Afghanistan, Sierra Leone and Macedonia. Andreas Steineberg, the MDD TA employed by Securatec, is responsible for the actual dog and

handler training beyond the standard required by the IMAS.

Once the MDD teams are trained, MAT will deploy them to countries that have a need for MDDs, and with the help of NGOs/commercial organisations, will put the MDDs to work, utilising them in area reduction and quality assurance as part of a national mine-action programme.

The Future

MAT has provided programmes in Eritrea and the Democratic Republic of the Congo for many years. It is now implementing mine clearance and needs assessments in Uganda and developing an MDD capability in Kenya. MAT aims to consolidate these activities and to expand its "toolbox" method of clearance.

With the influx of mine-action activity in Sudan and as donors are re-educated to the plight of Africans living with the threat of landmines and UXO, a concerted effort to use every method available to clear land is needed so the people can return to their way of life without fear of death or injury. Without a multifaceted mine-action programme fully implemented at the U.N. or national level, Uganda will be unable to free itself from the threat of landmines and UXO. ♦

For additional references for this article, please visit <http://maic.jmu.edu/journal/10.1/focus/howard/howard.htm/#addlrefs>

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balance¹⁰ that the MAT team has to manage, as there must be some close supervision to ensure standards are maintained while allowing the command element to develop.

The government of Uganda's mine-action aspiration is to free the country from the most severe humanitarian and economic effects of landmines and UXO by 2009. The prioritisation of mine-action tasks will be in accordance with the government's newly published document, "National Policy for IDPs [Internally Displaced Persons],"¹¹ taking into consideration the government's rehabilitation and reconstruction requirements. In order to implement this policy effectively, the staff needs a great deal of cultural sensitivity and empathy to ensure that the right capability is employed to maximum effect.

Concurrently, MAT has secured additional funding from the UNDP to conduct another needs assessment, which will concentrate on the two northern districts of Lira and Soroti. With the desire for this NA to incorporate even more districts, there is a creditable drive by all involved toward securing more funding to make this possible so that valuable and critical information required for a focused and efficient mine-action plan can become a reality.

Mine Detection Dog Programme At IMATC

With the development of Uganda's mine-action capacity, MAT has started



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