

Ethiopia

by Daniele Ressler

[Mine Action Information Center]

Ethiopia's 70-year history of internal and international armed conflict, from the Italian invasion of 1935 to the Ethiopian-Eritrean War (1998–2000), has contributed to significant landmine and unexploded ordnance contamination. Ethiopia is one of the world's 10 most heavily mined countries, with the government estimating it will take decades to clear.¹ The most extensive contamination is in the Tigray, Afar and Somali regions. It is estimated that during the recent Ethiopian-Eritrean conflict, Ethiopian forces laid 150,000–200,000 landmines and Eritrea laid 240,000 mines over the disputed border areas.²

Norwegian People's Aid completed a nationwide Landmine Impact Survey in 2004. The LIS found 1.9 million people were at risk and identified 1,492 landmine-impacted communities.³ Within the past two years, 1,295 victims were recorded (including 588 fatalities), with two-thirds reportedly engaged in herding or farming at the time

of the incident.³ The LIS also calculated 15,321 victims before 2002; however there is “no comprehensive or systemic ongoing data collection mechanism in Ethiopia” for casualties, so actual casualty rates are under-reported and unknown.⁴

Landmine/Explosive Remnants of War Action

After the end of the most recent conflict with Eritrea in 2000, the government of Ethiopia ratified the Ottawa Convention⁵ Dec. 14, 2004, and it entered into force June 1, 2005. In 2004, a national capacity for quality assurance was established to regulate humanitarian mine-action activities based on the International Mine Action Standards.⁴

EMAO. The Ethiopian Mine Action Office was formed in 2001 to implement humanitarian mine action, as well as manage and coordinate clearance and mine-risk education nationally. In late 2005, EMAO had six manual-clearance companies, three mine-detection dogs and three ground-preparation machines.³ With the support of the United Nations Development Programme, EMAO is also working to develop a national mine-action strategy that addresses the socioeconomic impact of mines on communities, as there is no national capacity for dealing with mines in the long term yet.

EMAO reported that in 2004, 10.9 square kilometers (4.2 square miles) of land were cleared and 478 anti-personnel mines, 67 anti-vehicle mines and 8,352 pieces of UXO were destroyed.⁴ EMAO's mine-risk education department (assisted by UNICEF) was established in March 2002 and works in coordination with other partners such as the Rehabilitation and Development Organization, with a particular focus on using community liaisons to provide MRE in areas where mine clearance takes place, and who are attached to demining teams.

UNMEE MACC. The United Nations Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea Mine Action Coordination Center was set up in 2000 to operate within the Temporary Security Zone, a 25-kilometer (16-mile) post-conflict buffer zone between Ethiopia and Eritrea. The MACC coordinates mine-clearance operations to support UNMEE Peacekeeping Forces, ensuring their safety and securing mobility for them while they are monitoring the TSZ. The MACC also provides MRE to peacekeepers and communities living within the TSZ and adjacent areas.

In 2005, the MACC cleared 6,282,083 square meters (two square miles) of land and 1,639 kilometers (1,018 miles) of road and destroyed 348 mines and 11,109 pieces of UXO; that same year, there were 45 casualties and 10 people killed within the TSZ.⁶

RaDO. The Rehabilitation and Development Organization is an indigenous nongovernmental organization that has been implementing MRE in the Tigray and Afar regions with financial and technical assistance from UNICEF. In 2006, the organization has appealed for funding for a victim-assistance project in the Somali region providing physical rehabilitation to landmine/UXO victims.

Challenges and Hopes

Ethiopia has been identified as one of the “24 State Parties with the greatest needs and responsibility to provide adequate survivor assistance.”⁴ In 2004, Teklewold Mengesha, Head of EMAO, estimated that at rates of demining at the time, it would take 20 years to make Ethiopia impact-free of mines/UXO and continued significant funding is required.⁷

By the end of the Ethiopia-Eritrea conflict in 2000 there were an estimated 360,000 internally displaced Ethiopians, most of whom came from the Tigray region as a result of the border dispute.⁸ As of November 2005, 62,000 people still remain displaced while others have returned to their homes and are presently facing both continued insecurity and landmines.⁸ The result is that many are unable to use their land and are left dependent on food aid;

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this is likely to continue until the border is demarcated, land is demined and security is ensured.

In addition, at the time of writing, Ethiopia and Eritrea are still in disagreement over demarcation of their border. In recent months, the UNMEE MACC's demining efforts have slowed in the TSZ, particularly on the Eritrean side, as UNMEE deminers and workers have been banned from flying helicopters since October 2005 (thus blocking demining safety requirements). Western workers were then ejected from the country in December 2005 (though MRE in Eritrea continues).

On the Ethiopian side of the TSZ, demining continues but border tensions are rising, and at least two anti-vehicle mines were found recently as well as newly emplaced anti-personnel landmines, with ongoing UXO casualties being reported.⁹ Additionally, there have been reports of troop movement on both sides of the TSZ. Coupled with this insecurity at the Ethiopian-Eritrean border, in the south and southeast of the country a drought and food crisis have resulted in rising malnutrition. This humanitarian crisis is impacting most of the Horn of Africa and may inadvertently result in a diversion of attention and funding from demining for now.

Gebriel Lager Ezekiel, Head of Operations at EMAO, confirms that in

Ethiopia, mines and UXO are directly contributing to poverty by denying access to already limited resources in communities and hindering development. EMAO is a new organization and faces challenges such as Ethiopia's climatic conditions of mountains, hard-baked rocky ground, forests and high winds that make demining difficult, as well as establishing effective organizational capacity and receiving needed funds. However, he optimistically points out that Ethiopia's mine-action strategy is future-oriented, with strategic plans for 25 mine dogs by the end of 2006 (through Norwegian People's Aid), a training center for demining, and a multi-purpose group for technical survey and rapid response teams.¹⁰

Conclusion

Encouragingly, in April 2005, the European Commission announced it was giving Ethiopia US\$9.6 million to support a large-scale three-year continuation of mine-clearance efforts in the remote Afar, Tigray and Somali regions through EMAO and the UNDP. Negotiation talks for border demarcation in the TSZ continue and so far, conflict has not erupted. For now, demining efforts still progress both in the TSZ and across the country, even in the face of challenging circumstances. ♦

To view endnotes and references for this article, visit <http://maic.jmu.edu/journal/10.1/profiles/ethiopia/ethiopia.htm/#endnotes>.



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