Journal of Conventional Weapons Destruction

Volume 6
Issue 2 The Journal of Mine Action

Article 2

August 2002

U.S. Humanitarian Demining in Africa

Sarah Kindig
Department of State

Follow this and additional works at: https://commons.lib.jmu.edu/cisr-journal

Part of the Defense and Security Studies Commons, Emergency and Disaster Management Commons, Other Public Affairs, Public Policy and Public Administration Commons, and the Peace and Conflict Studies Commons

Recommended Citation

Available at: https://commons.lib.jmu.edu/cisr-journal/vol6/iss2/2

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Center for International Stabilization and Recovery at JMU Scholarly Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Journal of Conventional Weapons Destruction by an authorized editor of JMU Scholarly Commons. For more information, please contact dc_admin@jmu.edu.
U.S. Humanitarian Demining in Africa

Due to the numerous internal conflicts, crises and wars that several of the nations in Africa have faced, this region is one of the places in the world that is significantly affected by landmines. In an attempt to alleviate the suffering from landmine injuries, the United States has set out to provide humanitarian mine action assistance to many of these afflicted nations.

U.S. Humanitarian Demining Initiatives in Africa

Angola

As a result of more than 30 years of internal political struggle, landmines litter Angola’s provinces. The majority of landmines is concentrated in areas necessary for survival, such as agricultural land, roads, bridges, waterways, railways and health care facilities. The actual number of landmines in Angola is unknown, though estimates range up to six million. Aided by the U.S. and other donors, Angolan demining teams have cleared over nine million square meters of land, 841,887 square meters of it in 2001 alone. This cleared land allowed for increased food production and for the resettlement of many internally displaced persons (IDPs). Thanks to contributions from the U.S. Agency for International Aid’s (USAID) Leafy War Victims’ Fund (LWVF), Angola has a fully functioning orthopedic workshop that produces prostheses and orthoses so that landmine survivors are able to re-enter society and participate in economic activities. Since 1995, the United States has contributed a total of $25,810,000 to the campaign to remove landmines in Angola.

Chad

The Libyan occupation of the north region of Chad resulted in large (2-60km long) military minefields around key population centers, while rebellions in other regions of the country contributed a large number of smaller minefields to the landmine problem. There are an estimated 300,000 mines in Chad. Along with other donors, the United States played a pivotal role in establishing Chad’s demining program. Since 1998, U.S. Special Operations Forces (SOF)-trained Chadian deminers have cleared 1,322,330 square meters of land, while destroying 3,800 mines and 148,000 pieces of UXO in the process. The United States has given $5,011,655 in aid since 1998 and continues its commitment to demining with a contribution of $461,000 for FY 2002.

Eritrea

Civil strife and the war with Ethiopia have resulted in a severe landmine problem in Eritrea that is concentrated around strategic military positions and around water sources in the rural provinces. The National Demining Center in Asmara estimates that there are between 1.5 and two million landmines in the country. In order to help combat this problem, the United States has contributed a total of $10,244,000 since 1994. Currently, Eritrean deminers are clearing an average of 1,826 square meters per week. In addition, mine detection dog teams are averaging 6,255 square meters per week of area clearance. According to the UN, these operations have permitted refugees to re-enter safe land and spurred economic growth in the region.

Guinea-Bissau

Guinea-Bissau has an estimated 16,000–20,000 landmines, some laid by Seregal forces, others remaining from the war for independence, but most resulting from the 1998–1999 military mutiny. Since FY 2000, the United States has been a primary source of assistance, providing a total of $388,145, a significant portion of that going to the non-governmental organization (NGO) HUMAID for mine clearance operations.
The remainder of the funds purchased equipment for Guinea-Bissau's Mine Action Centre, which oversees demining operations. Since January 2000, Guinea-Bissau deminers have cleared more than 183,200 square meters of land and destroyed over 2,400 mines and 900 pieces of UXO. In addition, 2,300 mines and 730 pieces of UXO have been cleared.

Mauritania

Mauritanian war in the Western Sahara has left between 50,000 and 100,000 landmines in Mauritania's borderlands. With unilateral support from the U.S., landmine casualties were reduced significantly. There was only one casualty in 2001. Mauritania deminers have cleared 141,000 square meters of land, destroying more than 8,000 landmines and over 7,700 pieces of UXO in the process. In 2001, with support from the U.S., the Mauritanian government was able to clear 90 kilometers of roadway to permit the transport of supplies from the well in Bioulassa to the population of Nouadhibou.

Mozambique

Two decades of war have left Mozambique littered with landmines. Although landmines are found in all of Mozambique's provinces, there is no reliable estimate of their number or the amount of mine-affected land. The U.S. provided $2,124,000 in FY 2002 and since 1993 has provided $28,825,999 to support mine action in Mozambique. Thanks to the combined efforts of demining organizations, the Mozambique National Demining Institute reported that in 2001 8 nearly two million square meters of land were cleared and 2,727 landmines were destroyed, permitting significant economic development and allowing refugees to resettle on safe land. Presently, the U.S. effort in Mozambique is focused on clearing the Sena rail line, which will allow the export of agricultural and mineral products. Through the LWVF, USAID has supported the production and distribution of prosthetic devices for the estimated 9,000 amputees in the country, most of whom are landmine victims.

Namibia

Namibia declared mine-safe status last year when it completed the clearance of its ten known minefields and 410 electric power pylons. Nevertheless, there are reports that rebel forces of the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA) have crossed over from Angola and have planted mines in the Kavango and Caprivi regions. Namibia has received almost $9 million in U.S. demining assistance since 1994, including $864,000 in FY 2002. Namibia's 1,100 deminers, trained by U.S. SOF have cleared over 1,000,000 square meters of land and removed over 5,000 landmines and 1,300 UXO.

Nigeria

Following the explosion of a military ammunition depot in Lagos in January 2002, the U.S. Department of Defense (DOD) responded by providing a team of Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) experts. The U.S. Department of State has committed over $1,500,000 to provide for an additional period of clearance through its commercial contractor, RONCO Consulting Corporation. By the middle of April 2002, 29,800 pieces of UXO had been cleared from the site and subsequently destroyed.

Senegal

An almost two-decades-long conflict in the Casamance region of Senegal, located in the southwest part of the country, sandwiched between Gambia and Guinea Bissau, has left an unknown number of AP and AT mines in the ground. These mines have adversely affected the population, agricultural activities and tourism. In July 2001, USAID's LWVF began providing money to the NGO Handicap International to support its program to assist landmine victims in Senegal and to raise the population's awareness of the risk of landmines through mine awareness education efforts.

Zambia

Zambia has an estimated 2,500,000 landmines buried within its territory. The U.S. has supported the humanitarian demining program in Zambia since 1998 through training and equipment donations. Zambia's demining program has cleared 800,000 square meters of land, allowing large parts of Victoria Falls to be opened for tourists and the Zambezi Valley to become safe for resettlement. Currently, Zambia's demining efforts are in the sustainment phase. Since the beginning of the program in 1998, the United States has funded $6,549,000 in an effort to help Zambia rid itself of mines.

Conclusion

Assistance from the United States and other donors to mine-affected African nations has helped to increase the quality of life in these once war-ravaged countries. That assistance has also helped open countless kilometers of road to humanitarian aid organizations to reconstitute infrastructure necessary to sustain economies and to provide holistic health care to thousands of landmine survivors. Their fear has been replaced by hope.

* All photos courtesy of Office of Humanitarian Demining Program.

Contact Information

Marc Murphy, Program Manager Office of Humanitarian Demining Program

Bureau of Political Military Affairs Department of State

E-mail: murphyh@digp.org