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Landmine Impact Survey in the Republic of Yemen

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For years the government of Yemen has recognized the urgent need to address the landmine contamination issue caused by various conflicts. As a result, the United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS) requested the Mine Clearance Planning Agency (MCPA) to conduct a Landmine Impact Survey in Yemen. The survey provided them with the most comprehensive set of mine related socio-economic impact data for clearing their lands.

by Qadeem Khan Tariq, *Mine Clearance Planning Agency*

Background

The Republic of Yemen is located in the Middle East, bordering Saudi Arabia to the north, Oman to the northeast, the Gulf of Aden to the south and the Red Sea to the west with an area of 550,000 square kilometers and a population of approximately 15 million. The country is divided into 19 administrative units, called governorates.

Landmines in Yemen were laid as a result of several separate conflicts over a period of about 30 years, starting during the 1962–1975 conflicts between the Republicans and Royalists in the north. In addition, landmines were laid during the 1963–1967 war of independence in the south and during the leftist guerrilla war in the central governorates during 1970–1983. A large number of landmines were also laid in six governorates in southern Yemen during the 1994 war of cessation.

Mine Action

The government of Yemen recognizes the urgent need to address the landmine contamination issue and is strongly committed to both national and worldwide efforts to ban the use of landmines. Yemen is the first country in the Middle East to have signed and ratified the "Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-personnel Mines and on their



Anti-tank mines collected by MCPA; security personnel in Al-Mahra governorate, Yemen.

Destruction," known as the Ottawa Treaty on landmines. As a requirement of the Ottawa Treaty, Yemen has destroyed about 10 percent of its stockpiled landmines and is committed to completing their destruction in the coming years. The government has established the National Demining Committee (NDC) to oversee all mine action policies in the country and the National Technical Executive Unit (NTEU) to help implement mine action projects. The government of the United States has provided Yemen with extensive

technical and material support, allowing for the establishment of three demining companies or mine clearance teams involving about 300 personnel.

There have been extensive efforts since 1998 by the government of Yemen with assistance from the government of the United States to address the landmine problem. However, in order to have an overall picture of the landmine problem in Yemen and obtain the necessary information required for an effective national mine action plan, the government of Yemen, the United Nations and the donor community conducted a Landmine Impact Survey in the Republic of Yemen from July 1999 to July 2000.



Two adjacent mined areas on the peak of a mountain blocking access to drinking irrigation water in Ibb governorate, Yemen.

Landmine Impact Survey

The United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS), on behalf of the Yemen NDC, requested the Landmine Impact Survey in Yemen. The Survey Action Center (SAC) implemented the Survey in conjunction with the Afghanistan-based Mine Clearance Planning Agency (MCPA), in accordance with the guidelines and protocols set forth by the Survey Working Group (SWG). Funding for the Survey was provided by the governments of Canada, the United States, Germany and Japan, and included partial matching by the United Nations Foundation. The Survey was made possible through a contracting mechanism and with the support of in-country UN staff provided by the United Nations Office for Project Services. Conducting the Survey in Yemen cost a total of \$1,650,000 (U.S.). Of this amount, \$450,000 consisted of non-expendable equipment such as vehicles transferred to the NDC as part of a plan to expand national mine action capacity.



A Field Supervisor is seen coordinating survey activities with local authorities in Ibb governorate, Yemen.

The Landmine Impact Survey conducted in the Republic of Yemen conclusively identified 592 mine-impacted communities and 1078 contaminated areas, covering at least 95 percent of the suspected mine-impacted communities in the country with a high degree of confidence. While the data collected during this effort affords extensive opportunities for research and analysis, four key points are most salient:

1. Water is critical to the health and well being of Yemeni communities, and when mines block access to water, the negative impacts upon local communities can be profound. Special attention should be given to those communities where water access is blocked.
2. Impacts are clustered in groups of communities, creating broad swaths of contamination and suggesting that well-targeted mine action programs can quickly reach a large number of affected communities.
3. Community size does not matter much in the final scoring analysis, and small communities should not be ignored.

4. Accident profiles indicate that mine awareness education

programs should target persons engaged in livestock grazing (particularly women) and risk-taking behaviors (especially teenage boys and young men).

Survey Results

The 592 impacted communities indicated by the Survey are distributed in 18 governorates, primarily in the southern and central portions of Yemen. There are an estimated 828,000 Yemeni civilians, roughly 6 percent of the total population, living in these communities. This means that at least one in every 16 Yemeni lives by, works near or is otherwise affected by the presence of landmines. 1,078 distinct mined areas were located with a total reported surface area of 923 million square meters.



Proximity Verification of a mined area in Hajja governorate, Yemen.

Results indicated a tendency for the mine-affected communities to be grouped together into "clusters" of contamination. Two large clusters dominate the dispersal pattern of affected communities, concentrating the adverse impacts of landmines in an area straddling six governorates. Additionally, there are several smaller clusters as well as a residual set of communities dispersed across the country.

A scoring mechanism ranks communities in terms of the degree of mine impact. Indicators considered include the number of victims within the last 24 months, blocked access to facilities or livelihood areas and the type of contamination. This system ranked 14 communities as highly impacted, 84 as moderately impacted and 494 as lightly impacted. The most significant difference between a "high impact" and a "moderate impact" community is the reporting of mine incidents within the last two years. There are 36,472 people living in highly impacted communities, 178,763 in moderately impacted communities and 612,559 in lightly impacted communities.

The Survey collected extensive information regarding the types of livelihood activities and institutions that are denied to local population through the presence of landmines and UXO. The most frequently reported impact of mines was blocked grazing land, with 89 percent of all communities reporting this loss. The impact most closely associated with mine accidents and often perceived as the most detrimental to villagers is loss of access to water sources, either for drinking or irrigation.

The Survey shows that there have been at least 178 mine victims in the last two years, 136 males and 42 females. The largest concentration of incidents involved persons of both genders engaged in livestock herding (60 cases), followed by young males who were tampering with mines or UXO (40 cases).

Future Plans

The results of the Survey clearly indicate that the Republic of Yemen suffers many adverse consequences from landmines and UXO contamination. The collected information will allow for the creation of a well-planned and targeted set of mine action initiatives. Given sustained funding support, these initiatives will allow Yemen to free itself from the most adverse consequences of landmines. Economic opportunity and enhanced



A community interview in Al-Nadera district of Ibb governorate, Yemen.

safety can quickly be restored to those communities that are suffering the most, with longer-term efforts aimed at concentrating resources where they will have the greatest benefit.

With the completion of this Survey, Yemen now has the most comprehensive set of mine related socio-economic impact data in the world at its disposal. This data will allow Yemen to develop effective national plans that target areas posing the greatest threat and communities bearing the greatest impact. With focused effort and sustained funding, the impact of landmines in Yemen can be dramatically reduced and controlled.

**All photos courtesy of MCPA.*

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