Providing Safe Drinking Water in Post-Civil War Sri Lanka

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MAG’s goal in Sri Lanka is to protect conflict-affected individuals by facilitating recovery activities. By contributing to the urgent requirement to survey priority areas and clear them of landmines and unexploded ordnance, MAG enables post-conflict reconstruction and development interventions. MAG’s program in Sri Lanka is supported by AusAID, the Canadian International Development Agency, Stichting Vluchteling and the Office of Weapons Removal and Abatement in the U.S. Department of State’s Bureau of Political-Military Affairs (PM/WRA). See endnotes page 66

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The deminer searches for hazardous objects in the well. The deminer uses a submersible electric water pumps, generators, overhead gantry tripods, hose pipes and aluminum foldable ladders. Upon arrival in a village, the teams prioritize tasks based on a risk assessment. In broad terms, any confirmed hazardous area within the task location is a priority, with subsequent well clearance based on the priorities of local communities. Prior to well clearance, the teams clear a 25 m (82 ft) radius around a well to ensure team safety during the operation. Once the surrounding area is secure, the team pumps the well dry using the submersible pump to expose the bottom of the well.

Following the pumping process, one team member wears protective equipment to guard against biohazards, snake bites and debris, and is lowered into the well on a harness suspended from the overhead gantry. The deminer then searches the well bottom to a minimum depth of 15 cm (6 in). Any ERW in the well is placed into a basket and hoisted to the surface. At the surface, the explosive ordnance disposal team assesses the condition of the items. If the team considers recovered items too dangerous to move, they are destroyed in situ. Items safe to move are taken to a central demolition site for later destruction. The EOD team is qualified to deal with all ERW discovered by well clearance teams.

The time taken to clear a well depends on a number of factors, namely, the well size and the amount of contamination including mud, general refuse, leaf litter and any items of ERW found. In addition, the national water board is informed of clearance completion. The national water board is then responsible for follow-up water purification of the well.

Achievements

Since the project’s commencement, FSD has cleared 2,214 wells, removing and destroying more than 42 AP mines, 556 items of UXO and nearly 57,468 ERW in FSA areas of responsibility in Vavuniya, Mannar and Mullaitivu districts. More than 47,000 IDPs have benefited from FSD’s well clearance initiative. As the demand for clean water resources increases, some international nongovernmental organizations including Global Water and Hygiene and Sanitation for All (SWA), an international partnership providing sustainable, universal access to clean water, selected “FSD CLEARED” wells as a priority for water purification to improve the quantity and quality of water provision at the community level. Well clearance ensures that multiple families have sufficient safe water for personal and domestic use.

Safety Messages

In addition to clearance activities, a need emerged to educate local communities and NGOs, international NGOs and water sanitation workers in landmine and munitions safety. FSD community liaison teams provide returning IDPs, with mine awareness training by educating participants on warning signs, identifying landmines and items of UXO, safe behaviors when encountering suspicious objects, and contact details of national mine action offices and demining agencies.

So far, FSD has reached 55,000 people. In addition to risk education and distribution of mine risk awareness materials to communities prior to and during clearance, community liaison teams also distribute mine risk awareness material to the National Water and Drainage Board staff. In turn, these agencies provide this material to all other organizations clearing wells in their districts.

The well clearance project is strengthened by the generous support of the Swiss Development Cooperation, the Australian Agency for International Development and the Office of Weapons Removal and Abatement in the U.S. Department of State’s Bureau of Political-Military Affairs (PM/WRA). Humanitarian demining extends beyond ground clearance with a metal detector eliminating threats landmines and ERW pose to human lives wherever possible. Well clearance is an effective mine action intervention for FSD. Additionally, well clearance is closely linked with national development priorities, helping communities to overcome obstacles to social and economic development. See endnotes page 67.

In August 2012, Small Arms Survey, in partnership with the Office of Weapons Removal and Abatement in the U.S. Department of State’s Bureau of Political-Military Affairs (PM/WRA), released a third set of small arms informational playing cards, the Marking, Record Keeping and Tracing Implementation Support Cards. The previously released cards focused on small arms identification (available in English and Spanish) and physical security and stockpile management (available in English and Serbian).

The new cards are designed to provide general knowledge of the International Tracing Instrument. One of the playing cards describes ITI as “designed to facilitate the successful tracing of small arms and light weapons (SA/LW) used in crime and armed conflict.” Other cards have information regarding marking identification, record-keeping and implementation of ITI in different countries.

According to Martin Field, the communications officer at SAS, the cards are of interest to workers involved in weapons manufacturing, removal, tracing, record-keeping, policy making and law enforcement. All three sets of cards are available free of charge. Please contact sas@smallarmsurvey.org for more information.

~ Kathleen Sensabaugh, CSB Staff