

October 2010

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Recommended Citation

Mathiang, Margaret M. (2010) "Mine-action Program in Southern Sudan," *The Journal of ERW and Mine Action* : Vol. 14 : Iss. 3 , Article 15.

Available at: <http://commons.lib.jmu.edu/cisr-journal/vol14/iss3/15>

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Mine-action Program in Southern Sudan

Following more than two decades of civil war between Northern and Southern Sudan, much of Southern Sudan has been left contaminated with landmines and explosive remnants of war. As a result, the Southern Sudan Demining Authority, along with the United Nations Development Programme, United Nations Mine Action Office and other organizations, have been diligently working toward clearing 80 percent of the mines in Southern Sudan by 2011.

by Margaret Matthew Mathiang [Southern Sudan Demining Authority]

The 21-year north-south civil war in Sudan that killed an estimated two million people, uprooted four million and caused 600,000 to take refuge outside of Sudan¹ has left Southern Sudan littered with landmines and explosive remnants of war. The contamination poses a serious challenge to the Government of Southern Sudan's development plans and is considered a serious threat to the successful implementation of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement signed in 2005 and ending in 2011. In 2011, in accordance with the CPA, a referendum will determine whether Southern Sudan will remain a part of a united Sudan or become its own separate entity. Based on the CPA, in 2005, Southern Sudan gained the right to self-determination in Bahr El Gazel, Eastern Equatoria, Jonglei, the Lakes, Northern Bahr El-Ghazal, Warab, Western Bahr El Ghazal, Western Equatoria, Unity and Upper Nile. All of its 10 states are reported to have varying degrees of landmine/ERW contamination.

As with the rest of the country, the civil war has left Southern Sudan with a large-scale landmine/ERW contamination problem. Despite several years of intensive mine-action operations, landmine/ERW contamination continues to threaten civilians and impede economic recovery and development. Contaminated land reduces productivity and thereby the sustainable livelihoods of affected communities.

Landmine/ERW contamination on key logistical supply routes continues to hamper safe

and free movement, trade and provision of humanitarian assistance. Contamination also endangers the lives of local communities, internally displaced persons, refugees, staff of humanitarian missions and the personnel of the United Nations Mission in Sudan. The presence and perceived threat of landmines/ERW prevents and delays IDPs and refugee populations from returning to their hometowns, and as a result, constrains recovery, reconstruction and development efforts in mine/ERW- and war-affected areas.

Mine-action Assistance

The Southern Sudan Demining Authority is the mandated government body established in 2006 through presidential decree number 45/2006² to plan, coordinate and oversee all mine-action operations in Southern Sudan with assistance from and in coordination and collaboration with the National Mine Action Centre based in Khartoum and the southern regional sub-office of the United Nations Mine Action Office in Sudan.

Other partners in UNMIS who assisted SSDA include the United Nations Development Programme in the area of capacity building, UNICEF in support of mine-risk education initiatives, international nongovernmental organizations (Norwegian People's Aid, Mines Advisory Group, Danish Demining Group) and national organizations (Operations Save Innocent Lives, Sudan Landmine Response, Sudan Integrated Mine Action Service), as well as oth-



A mine was found along a well-traveled path.
ALL PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE AUTHOR.

er national and government institutions.

Achievements

Since 2004, when mine-action operations started in Sudan, Southern Sudan has met a number of milestones, including the establishment of the SSDA and its substructures, drafting of the mine-action bill, inclusion of mine action in the state budget and the training of more than 80 management staff in different technical and specified fields. Additionally, five senior personnel from SSDA completed the James Madison University Senior Managers' Course in Mine Action, thereby contributing to improved managerial performance. Furthermore, Southern Sudan is supporting the Joint Integrated Demining Units (national landmine/ERW clearance support) and has provided 120 deminers and technical staff to the JIDU.

As of June 2010, 4,206 of the 4,733 recorded dangerous areas identified in Southern Sudan have been cleared or verified as mine-safe, while another 527 dangerous areas are waiting to be addressed. During clearance/verification operations, a total of 17,023 anti-personnel mines, 2,290 mines, 779 landmines of unknown origin, 836,355 small arms ammunition and 575,382 pieces of unexploded ordnance have been found and destroyed.²

With the capacity development assistance provided by UNDP and the UNMAO, the SSDA is now actively engaged in the planning, coordination, priority setting, accreditation, quality assurance and oversight of mine-action operations. In addition to assistance provided by the

United Nations and others, 5 million Sudanese pounds (US\$2.11 million)³ has been allocated by the GOSS to mine action since mid-2006. This has encouraged other donors to continue to support mine-action operators in Southern Sudan to address its landmine/ERW contamination.

Mine Action and Development

Sudan has been very successful in linking mine action to recovery and development activities. Northern Sudan's Government of National Unity and the GOSS have secured funds from the state budget, the Multi-Donor Trust Fund and the World Bank for the rehabilitation and reconstruction of 446 kilometers (277 miles) of railway lines and approximately 200 kilometers (124 miles) of main roads have been cleared of landmines/ERW in the central and southern parts of Sudan. The clearance of railway lines has been extremely important in restoring safe passage between Northern and Southern Sudan as the Babanusa-Wau railway line is the only all-season land link between the northern and southern parts of the country. In addition, the clearance and reconstruction of railway lines and roads has enabled the safe return and resettlement of IDPs and refugees.

Socioeconomic rehabilitation and reintegration of the victims of landmines/ERW continues to be a priority on the national agenda. Sudan has signed and ratified the Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities. Over the past three years, 22 community-based projects have been implemented for the socioeconomic rehabilitation and reintegration of the victims of landmines and ERW in various parts of the country with generous contributions from Canada, Japan and the state budget.

Challenges

Southern Sudan is working toward becoming "impact free" as soon as possible, as achieving the status of "landmine free" is very much debatable. One of the key challenges for Southern Sudan is the clearance of known mined/suspected mined areas to provide a safe environment for returning IDPs and refugees. In addition, the SSDA in Southern Sudan faces challenges from the long rainy seasons, logistical complications and lack of enough data to determine the level, type and locations of contamination.

As UNMAO is operating under UNMIS's mandate, a reduction in international support is also expected during the forthcoming referendum period. This loss of funding calls for more financial support to national mine-action capacities, which remains a challenge for the GOSS, as it must confront conflicting development priorities in the post-war rehabilitation period.



A man walks past unexploded ordnance.

Transition Plan and End State

Southern Sudan faces major challenges in pursuit of clearing all known landmines by 2014; however, this might not be realistic due to the aforementioned geographical and logistical challenges.

With the engagement of all relevant stakeholders, a mine-action transition plan was concluded in November 2008. Based on the provisions of the transition plan, the national authorities made significant progress in 2009 by strengthening and consolidating their institutional and management capacities.

The aim of the process is to transition the management and coordination of the Sudan Mine Action Programme to national authorities in a systematic and gradual manner as soon as possible but no later than early 2011. The desired end state therefore is that the national authorities in Sudan manage all aspects of mine action with minimal technical assistance from the United Nations. The national authorities, UNDP and UNMAO have embarked on a broader and more practical partnership in mine action to support the implementation of the mine-action transition plan and would like to further expand this cooperation and partnership in the years to come.

As part of SSDA's long-term planning process and in its implementation of the Cartagena Action Plan, UNMAO, UNDP and all other stakeholders have developed a three-year operations plan covering 2009–11. With the implementation of the plan, Sudan aims to clear 80 percent of all known high- and medium-priority affected areas by the end of 2011 at an estimated cost of US\$120 million.

Southern Sudan Demining Authority has developed a three-year strategic plan that aims to strengthen national capacities in mine-action activities and to meet the vision of freeing the country from the effects and threat of landmines and ERW. Southern Sudan also envisions itself to one day be active regionally and globally supporting other countries with an exchange of lessons learned and deployment of trained and experienced staff. In the meantime, Southern Sudan continues to address its landmine/ERW contamination. It is in need of ongoing generous support from the donor community to all mine-action operators working in the region.†

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After receiving her Master's Degree in development training and education from the U.K.'s University of Wolverhampton, **Margaret Mathew Mathiang** became the Deputy Chairperson of the Southern Sudan Demining Authority in Juba, Southern Sudan in 2006. Today, she is the Undersecretary of the Ministry of Gender, Child and Social Welfare, a position she has held since September 2010.

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