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 Mines Awareness Trust In Eastern Africa

Mines Awareness Trust has been involved in many mine-action programmes that are aiding the mine-clearance process and improving the way of life for the people of eastern Africa. MAT has performed needs assessments in Uganda and has supervised the Ugandan Army. It has also developed a partnership with the International Mine Action Training Centre, which resulted in a state-of-the-art mine-detection dog training facility in Kenya. MAT’s collaboration with and assistance to eastern African organisations has put the area on the path to becoming mine safe.

by Nigel Howard [ Mines Awareness Trust ]

January 2003, the Anti-Mine Network–Rwenzori asked MAT Operations Director Ben Ramføy to conduct a needs assessment of the Kasese district in western Uganda. Reports from Uganda stating there was a landmine and unexploded ordnance threat to the local population drove the deployment. Like many African countries, Uganda has experienced bloodshed as a result of major internal conflicts during the war years since independence, and today internal security problems remain with organisations like the Lord’s Resistance Army. The legacy of this fighting is areas of land contaminated by anti-personnel mines and UXO as well as approximately 1.4 million internally displaced people. These problems are exacerbated by a recent influx of Sudanese refugees into northern Uganda.

The Allied Democratic Forces further contaminated the western region, particularly the Rwenzori Mountains, during the civil war and heavy fighting in the late 1990s. The most heavily contaminated region, however, is still northern Uganda; it has been the area of some of the fiercest fighting between the LRA and the Ugandan People’s Defence Force.

During his time in Uganda, Ramføy met the Johnson family, who survived the tragedy of the war that raged around them. They returned from their displacement to their devasted village with their five children and a three-year-old who had been born under an improvised homemade hemp and livelihood. The children were playing to the rear of their home when there was a loud explosion, which incinerated large areas of what is now believed to be an M79 submunition, and it detonated, killing three of the children in instantaneous death, leaving two.

Uganda Needs Assessment

The plight of the Johnson family became a catalyst for action, and MAT set out to secure funding to conduct a needs assessment and implemented a mine-risk education programme. The MAT report was sent to the United Nations, which incorporated large excerpts as part of its official inter-agency report in July 2004. Comic Relief donated £50,000 to MAT in June 2004, which enabled MAT to conduct an eight-month needs assessment in the western districts of Uganda.

Adrian Saharan, who had been a member of the MAT Kosovo Mine Risk Education Programme in the aftermath of the Kosovo conflict in 1999, was the principal Needs Assessment Coordinator and was assisted by Noreh Solomon, who had worked for MAT previously in her home country of Eritrea in 2002. The NA team based itself in the Kasese district and, in conjunction with Anti-Mine Network–Rwenzori, the team members immersed themselves in the local communities. During the two-week build-up phase, MRE Assistants were trained in interview techniques, methods of systematic collection and analysis of data, map reading, radio transmission procedure and first aid, as well as the preparation of reporting and briefing documents. After an initial three months, the teams underwent a one-week refresher course, primarily concentrating on map reading, ground appreciation and data analysis.

The team spent the first months assessing and were apprised of the level of contamination in the communities of Kasese, identity and risk, and the nature of the suspected dangerous sites in the areas assessed, and identify and verify all landmines/UXO cascadues. The NA also sought to evaluate the existing knowledge of the local populations concerning threats of landmines and UXOs, calculate the “at-risk” section of the local community and analyse the socio-economic impacts of the landmine/UXO contamination on the district.

Motorbikes proved to be a highly valuable asset to the team, as they were used to access the most remote villages and thereby obtain the information required to satisfy NA objectives. With a determined and creative approach, the project staff managed to gain the respect and trust of the population of the Kasese district and gleaned valuable information and data that can now be used toward implementing an effective National Mine Action Plan.

This NA is still the only detailed study of any district in Uganda, and it identified 57 suspected dangerous areas. However, the most heavily affected districts in the north are yet to be fully surveyed. Additional donor funding is required to implement further MRE and clearance programmes.

A New Partnership in Kenya


In January 2006, the IMATC offered to train and equip the Ugandan People’s Defence Force Army engineers for humanitarian-demining operations. The overall plan is for up to 140 UPDF engineers to be trained and seconded to the Ugandan Mine Action Centre. The IMATC has trained and equipped 20 UPDF soldiers and 40 Uganda Police Officers to conduct demining and EOD operations with an aspiration to train an additional 80 soldiers in 2006. It was soon discovered that training alone would not be sufficient for this programme to be fully effective. Supervisors with the necessary experience and expertise to supervise, monitor and mentor the teams in their home countries were needed. Consequently, the IMATC sought a suitable organisation to provide the technical ability and discovered MAT working in Uganda.

A new partnership has now evolved whereby IMATC assists in the local African armies/police units to conduct particular aspects of humanitarian mine action (whether that be manual mine clearance, high- or low-technology clearance, IED or Technical Survey), and MAT provides the Technical Advisors to ensure the training occurs and that standards are rigorously maintained. The IMATC is ideally located in Nairobi, Kenya, on the doorstep of some of the most deeply affected African nations.

The IMATC is currently involved in training personnel for demining operations in Entebba, Uganda, Sudan, Rwanda and Somalia. With the majority of mine-action nongovernmental organisations that operate in and around eastern Africa having

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Picking the Right Tool for the Right Task: Mine Clearance with the MineWolf Machine in Sudan

Sudan has been embroiled in a civil war for all but 10 years of its post-independence existence, making its internal borders part of Africa’s longest running conflict. The civil war has created a considerable problem with landmines and unexploded ordnance in Sudan. In general, the mines are located along communication and logistical lines and around towns and military facilities. In 2002, the United Nations reported that landmines on key logistical routes were a great impediment to the delivery of humanitarian aid. Consequently, much of the aid has been delivered by air at tremendous cost. The involved parties have specified clearance of the road network as the first priority. The second priority being access to water and the third, food security. Almost four years after setting these priorities, there are still ongoing and multi-sectoral operations.

In 2005, Norwegian People’s Aid decided to support its mine-action programme in Yei with a mechanical mine-clearance machine called the MineWolf. The MineWolf is a German machine that combines the advantages of both the tiller and flail systems. It is designed as a multi-purpose tool to provide maximum flexibility for users, especially in the challenging environment of Sudan. As a result of a feasibility study in January 2005, it became clear that in order to support and move a 25-ton machine in South Sudan, a well-equipped and perfectly organized team must be formed to deliver cost-effective results. The main challenges would be transportation, hard ground conditions during the dry season and dense vegetation after the rainy period. Based on its experience in the Balkans, MineWolf Systems provided NPA with a tailor-made transport and support package.

For additional references for this article, please visit http://minewolf.jmu.edu/journal/10.1/

Getting There and Moving Around
To achieve operational flexibility and maximum deployment, the system needs its own transport and support assets. Taking into account the limited transportisation and support assets. Taking into account the limited transportisation and support assets. Taking into account the limited transportisation and support assets. Taking into account the limited transportisation and support assets. Taking into account the limited transportisation and support assets. Taking into account the limited transportisation and support assets. Taking into account the limited transportisation and support assets. Taking into account the limited transportisation and support assets.