

Gender Mainstreaming the Cartagena Summit on a Mine-Free World: Community Liaison and Mine Risk Education

Until recently, mine action was widely perceived as a military and technical field where activities were un-problematically planned and implemented by almost exclusively male staff. A decade after the Mine Ban Convention has become effective and the United Nations Security Council has emphasised “the need for all parties to ensure that mine clearance and mine awareness programmes take into account the special needs of women and girls”, the mine action community has become more and more sensitised about the need to include both a gender perspective and women in mine action. However, in view of the approaching Cartagena Summit on a Mine Free World, there is still a need for a better understanding of what mine affected communities have to gain from including gender perspectives in mine action, and what that could mean concretely for States Parties wishing to implement it. This is the first of three articles presenting a fact based argument in favour of the inclusion of a gender perspective in three mine action pillars: Community Liaison/Mine Risk Education, Victim Assistance and Mine Clearance.

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Community Liaison (CL) and Mine Risk Education (MRE) make up one of the five pillars of mine action. The International Mine Action Standards (IMAS) define MRE as “educational activities which aim to reduce the risk of injury from mine/UXO through raising awareness and promoting behavioural change, and includes public information dissemination, education and training.”² CL, being closely related to MRE is defined as “a process designed to place the needs and priorities of mine affected communities at the centre of the planning, implementation and monitoring of mine action and other sectors.” CL and MRE activities are often closely integrated with other mine action pillars, such as clearance and surveys, and a number of mine action NGOs deploy both clearance and CL/MRE teams, as this has proved to be very effective.³

Clause 3 of Article 6 of the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti/Personnel Mines and on their destruction (also known as the Mine Ban Convention) specifically mentions mine awareness programmes, as it underlines the importance for each State Party “to provide assistance for mine awareness programmes”. Additionally, clause 4 of the same article states that each State Party shall “provide assistance for mine clearance and related activities”. Hence, CL and MRE are integral parts of the Mine Ban Convention, and their significance in mine action need to be recognised.

The aim of this brief paper is to focus on the CL/MRE pillar, and to emphasise why it is necessary to mainstream gender for the activities to be as efficient, non-discriminatory, inclusive and sustainable as possible. A number of examples from the field will be highlighted, illustrating how gender can be mainstreamed, and what benefits it brings.

1. Non-Discriminatory Access to MRE

A fundamental principle underpinning MRE is affected people’s rights to receive accurate and timely information about landmine risks and other hazards in the environment.⁴ To ensure that MRE is non-discriminatory, it is important to make sure that it is accessible to women, girls, boys and men. It is vital to recognise that the time and location of the MRE is instrumental in deciding who is able and willing to participate in it. For instance, in many environments it has been evident that it is difficult to reach females in public settings. The reasons for this might be

that women and girls are busy working in or close to their homes, and/or that it might not be culturally appropriate for women and girls to gather in public settings together with men. One solution to overcome this challenge is for female MRE trainers to conduct house to house visits, thereby reaching females who are confined to the household. The challenge of gendered access to MRE has been identified and solved by the MAG Sudan programme: “...an MRE session presented at a public forum may be presented to an audience with few women in attendance. The trend of low female turnouts at public MRE sessions has been circumvented by the delivery of home-to-home MRE. MAG has also tailored critical risk reduction messages to the area’s gendered division of labour.”⁵

2. Gender Sensitive MRE Communication and Material

It is important to take into consideration the manner in which MRE is communicated, and to critically assess what means are used to convey the safety messages. For example, the literacy rate is highly influenced by sex and age in many countries, and it is important to make sure that the means of communicating and conveying MRE is gender sensitive, in order to avoid discrimination. For instance, songs, role plays and dramas can be very effective means of communicating safety messages, at the same time as they are participatory in nature. It is also common practice for MRE practitioners to organise separate sessions for children and women respectively. The main reason for this is that in many instances it has been evident that these groups participate more actively in separate sessions, while gender sensitive material and means of communication can be tailored to suit the specific needs and realities of women and children.

The design and production of relevant MRE material is essential for effective awareness activities. The material needs to reflect the local culture and traditions, and it is vital that women, girls, boys and men can identify with scenarios portrayed by the material. Age and sex specific activities need to be highlighted, as different types of activities result in distinct exposure to risks. For instance, if boys graze their cattle in fields next to mined areas, it is important to highlight this during the MRE session, with scenarios, paintings and/or pictures. It is common practice amongst MRE practitioners to use local drawings illustrating various scenarios of safe and risky behaviour. This type of material is important not only because it is locally adapted, but it also significant since it stimulates discussions amongst the beneficiaries.

3. Community Liaison

Data gathering is an integral part of community liaison, and it is conducted in relation to mapping, prioritisation of clearance activities, land release, impact assessment and knowledge attitude, practice and behaviour (KAPB) surveys. Inclusive and non-discriminatory data-gathering is essential for operational planning, as the collected data is instrumental for prioritisation processes and the subsequent deployment of mine action resources in areas where the need is the greatest, and where the positive impact is anticipated to be the highest.

It has been proven that gender sensitive data-gathering leads to more accurate data collection. In essence, different information sources mean different information. In some countries it is challenging for male mine action teams to access women and girls, and to obtain information from them in relation to contamination and land use. Not consulting with the female community members can result in valuable information related to various issues not being taken into consideration in the planning process. One straightforward and effective solution to this is to have gender balanced teams, enabling the organisations to liaise with, and collect information from women, girls, boys and men. An example from Jordan clearly illustrates this; The National Committee for Demining and rehabilitation (NCDR) and the Norwegian People’s Aid (NPA) conducted a Landmine Retrofit Survey with a clear gender perspective, and information was gathered from men and women by gender balanced teams. The assessment results clearly showed that women and men identified different areas contaminated by landmines, due to their access to, and interaction with different gender groups within the community.⁶

MAG has highlighted a similar experience in southern Sudan where technical survey and CL/MRE teams worked together in impacted communities. It was often evident that adults sometimes had preconceived bias that prevented them from sharing information, whereas children were mostly very observant and willing to share information related to landmine and unexploded ordnance (UXO) contamination. It was further observed that this specific information only could be obtained when activities were conducted separately with adults and children.⁷

Women, girls, boys and men hold unique and highly diverse information about contamination and land use, because of their varying roles, positions and responsibilities in communities. It is therefore necessary to obtain information from as many sources as possible, making sure both sexes of varying ages are consulted. This is a precondition for gaining a holistic and accurate view of the various realities, needs, impacts and priorities women, girls, boys and men have.

4. Conclusion

Women, girls, boys and men are affected differently by mine contamination, and their distinct needs, priorities and realities therefore have to be recognised and taken into consideration for mine action activities to be not only non-discriminatory and inclusive, but also more efficient, professional and sustainable in nature. Recognising this, the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000) on Women Peace and Security emphasises “*the need for all parties to ensure that mine clearance and mine awareness programmes take into account the special needs of women and girls.*”⁸

Experiences from the field clearly illustrate that mainstreaming gender in CL/MRE brings great benefits to other mine action activities such as clearance and technical surveys.

The Cartagena Summit on a Mine-Free World will be a very important event in the history of the Mine Ban Convention, as it will give State Parties the opportunity to review the status of the treaty and set out future steps that need to be taken to create a mine-free world. More specifically, the Swiss Campaign to Ban Landmines sees the Cartagena Summit as an excellent opportunity for State Parties and other key stakeholders to further mainstream gender in CL/MRE, with the ultimate goal of making mine action more efficient and equitable.

¹ United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security (2000). Available online at <http://www.peacewomen.org/un/sc/res1325.pdf>.

² IMAS 07.11 – Guide for the Management of MRE (www.mineactionstandards.org/IMAS.../IMAS%2007.11%20Guide%20for%20the%20Management%20of%20MRE%20)

³ Mines Advisory Group (MAG) has pioneered this strategy, with CL/MRE teams well integrated into its de-mining programmes. (www.maginternational.org)

⁴ Baaser, S., Laurence, H. and Filippino, E.M., MRE in Mine Action : How is it Effective ? The Journal of ERW and Mine Action, Issue 13.1 Summer 2009

⁵ MAG Sudan programme (www.maginternational.org) e-mail communications with Programme Manager Hannah Bryce, 21.09.09

⁶ Gender and Landmines. From Concept to Practice, Swiss Campaign to Ban Landmines, Geneva 2008, p. 53

⁷ Sudan programme (www.maginternational.org) e-mail communications with Community Liaison Manager – Africa, 21.09.09

⁸ *ibid.* note 1