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UNMAS and Gender Mainstreaming in Mine Action

By Aaron J. Buckley and Akiko Ikeda [United Nations Mine Action Service]

In order to further the development of proper protection from and response to landmines and explosive remnants of war in conflict and post-conflict countries, the United Nations Mine Action Service and the International Mine Action Standards Review Board are taking the necessary steps to ensure gender perspectives become an integral part of national mine-action plans. This article briefly describes the evolution of gender mainstreaming in mine action and how UNMAS has addressed the issue.

Taking into account the U.N. Security Council and General Assembly resolutions,^{1,2} as well as a series of gender workshops conducted from 2006 to 2008,³ the United Nations Mine Action Service understands that “gender mainstreaming” in mine action is important not only because it is the right thing to do but also because it contributes to the overall effectiveness of the entire mine-action program. Defined as the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned activity and then taking appropriate action,^{4,5} gender mainstreaming can improve the quality and effectiveness of mine-action programs by giving staff a fresh lens through which to see the impact of their work. Landmines and explosive remnants of war affect women, girls, boys and men differently in conflict and post-conflict situations. Understanding these differences is an important consideration when improving the overall quality of mine-action programming, and integrating gender issues into all aspects of mine-action programs is a strategy that can strengthen similar programs around the world.

Background

United Nations mine action programs, managed by the United Nations Mine Action Service—now a Division within the Department of Peacekeeping Operations Office of Rule of Law and Security Institutions—are an enabling element for the success of peacekeeping operations around the world. The Secretary-General designated UNMAS as focal point for mine action within the United Nations system in 1997. Clearance of roads and fields, either by civilian or military deminers, is instrumental in the fulfillment of the mandates of peacekeepers, humanitarian and development workers. UNMAS works in collaboration with 13 other U.N. departments, funds, agencies and programs, and seeks to ensure an effective, proactive and coordinated U.N. mine action response. Mine action was previously overseen by a “Demining Unit” under the Department of Peacekeeping Operations. This unit later became the “Mine Action Service” after it merged with the Mine Clearance and Policy Unit of the Department of Humanitarian Affairs in 1998. In its first year, UNMAS was equipped with only a few professional staff, but today it is fully operational with 20 professionals, both men and women, at the U.N. headquarters.

In those U.N. field missions where landmines and explosive remnants of war continue to threaten the physical security, freedom of movement and economic development of the local population, peacekeepers and humanitarian workers, UNMAS has set up robust mine-action programs to fight this scourge. UNMAS has undertaken this challenge in field missions in Chad, Darfur, Democratic Republic of Congo, Lebanon, Nepal, Somalia, Sudan and Western Sahara, as well as in the context of the U.N. Assistance Mission to Afghanistan. The number of female professional staff has increased from 14 percent in 2005 to 22 percent in 2008 in these field missions.⁶ This increase is significant because it demonstrates the role that women in professional positions have in the decision-making process of U.N. peacekeeping efforts and mine-action programs. UNMAS will continue to take an active approach in recruitment by aiming to increase the number of women employed both at its headquarters and in the field.

One of the visions of the United Nations is a world free of the threat of landmines and explosive remnants of war where individuals and communities live in a safe environment conducive to development, conflict victims have their unique needs met, and survivors are fully integrated into their societies. UNMAS follows the five central components or

“pillars” of mine action, which include: mine awareness/mine-risk education; minefield surveying, mapping, marking and clearance; survivor (victim) assistance; stockpile destruction; and advocacy in support of adherence to and compliance with relevant international law. Gender is a cross-cutting issue that should be considered within the context of all the pillars, but it is especially relevant in mine clearance, MRE, victim assistance and advocacy.⁷

Women’s Participation

In 2000, the U.N. Department of Peacekeeping Operations requested that all divisions within the department designate gender focal points to regularly update and report on gender issues to other parts of the Department. UNMAS designated two gender focal points to participate in meetings addressing issues related to violence against women, gender equality in work places and human resources.⁸ In October 2000, a historical development emerged as the Security Council adopted Resolution 1325, entitled “Women, Peace and Security.”¹ Building on the Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action,² the resolution called for stronger participation of women in peacebuilding processes and urged the Secretary-General to ensure that field operations include a gender component.

In addition to Security Council Resolution 1325, which recognizes the important role of women at all levels of peacemaking and peacebuilding processes, the General Assembly resolution “Assistance in Mine Action” of 2000 makes two particular references on gender issues: “to promote awareness of landmines, especially among women and children,” and “to promote gender- and age-appropriate mine awareness programmes, victim assistance and child-centered rehabilitation, thereby reducing the number of child victims and relieving their plight.”⁹

Following the adoption of the Security Council Resolution 1325, and at the request of the Department for Disarmament Affairs,



Four-year-old Iman Kobasi holds up a finger wounded in a landmine accident. Photo courtesy of Kike Arnal

UNMAS prepared a fact sheet on “Gender Perspectives on Landmines” for a publication entitled “Gender Perspectives on Disarmament,”¹⁰ published by DDA and DPKO, in collaboration with the Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Advancement of Women,¹¹ in 2001. The study investigated how gender perspectives are integrated into mine action and guided UNMAS in its efforts to fulfill the responsibility of mainstreaming gender perspectives into all areas of its work.

Guidelines and Workshops on Gender Mainstreaming

In February 2005, “Gender Guidelines for Mine Action Programmes” were adopted by the Inter-Agency Coordination Group on Mine Action.¹² The Guidelines seek to strengthen gender mainstreaming and gender equality in mine-action programs at the field and headquarter levels of the United Nations. The Guidelines are designed to provide practical instructions for mine-action policy makers and field personnel on improving programming across all aspects and components of mine action within the context of gender perspectives, from personnel to mine-risk education initiatives to mine removal.

Since 2006, UNMAS has been conducting a series of workshops on gender mainstreaming in mine action with a view toward enhancing the understanding of gender mainstreaming, assisting mine-affected countries in implementing the Guidelines with mine-action practitioners, and promoting the Gender Learning Cycle. Workshops in Dubai, United Arab Emirates (2006), Nairobi, Kenya (2007), and Brindisi, Italy (2008), brought together gender experts and mine-action practitioners from over 25 countries. These workshops discussed the challenges to gender mainstreaming in mine action and produced country-tailored national gender action plans by referring to the Guidelines. In order to make the Guidelines more effective and user friendly, and to further ensure gender mainstreaming is implemented across the wide spectrum of activities in mine-action programs, UNMAS, in coordination with the U.N. Development Programme and UNICEF, is revising the Guidelines based on comments and feedback received from participants of these workshops.



A female deminer in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Photo courtesy of Arne Hodalic

A workshop entitled "Perspectives from the Asia Field Programmes" was held in Geneva, Switzerland, on 27–28 March 2009, gathering mine-action national directors and U.N. advisers from Afghanistan, Cambodia, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Thailand, as well as knowledge-management and gender specialists. The purpose of this workshop was to support all mine-action programs in preparing, updating, evaluating and monitoring the effectiveness of their tailor-made gender action plans; to exchange knowledge on how best to implement the action plans, share lessons learned and good practices; to provide national programs with access to advisers who are experienced in planning, monitoring and knowledge management in order to ensure practical and realistic inclusion in national planning; to review the draft revised gender guidelines and to provide additional feedback and field-oriented inputs from the Asia region; and to ensure that national authorities increase ownership of the action-plan model and the revised gender guidelines. Participants at the workshop expressed strong support for a holistic and coherent system-wide approach to mainstreaming gender in national mine-action plans with a view to ensuring the effective delivery of gender-sensitive programs on the ground ([see related article](#)).

International Mine Action Standards

In addition to the efforts of UNMAS to promote gender mainstreaming in mine action, and, as a result of discussions, the International Mine Action Standards Review Board suggested that a review of IMAS from a gender perspective would be appropriate. The IMAS had already been reviewed in this respect, but the staff acknowledged that the recommendations from this review were possibly insufficient. Therefore, the IMAS review board decided to commission a more complete review. The Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining contracted the Swiss Campaign

to Ban Landmines to reevaluate the review and

establish a Critical Review Group in late 2008 with the aim of advising the review team. Two IMAS were initially selected, namely "IMAS 10.30: Safety and Occupational Health"¹³ and "IMAS 12.10: Planning for Mine-risk Education Programmes and Projects,"¹⁴ and the initial efforts of the review team were circulated to the Critical Review Group for comment and direction. Following this input, the team reviewed all 45 existing standards and submitted their report to the IMAS Review Board in March 2009. At the IMAS Review Board meeting, the review team was thanked for their very detailed comments and suggestions and it was decided to address the recommendations, as appropriate, as each IMAS comes up for its normal annual review.

Conclusion

Gender is a cross-cutting issue, and there is an increased awareness that gender mainstreaming must be incorporated in all areas of mine action. This inclusive approach considers all mine-action-related programming, planning and decision making. As gender issues are considered in more detail in all areas of mine action, the quality of programs will improve and they will have a greater impact on the ground. UNMAS will continue to implement gender mainstreaming in mine action by working closely with its partners, both at the U.N. headquarters and in the field.

The United Nations draws attention to gender mainstreaming in all programs by calling donors, mine-affected member states, mine-action practitioners and civil society to help advance gender equality. The strong support of UNMAS in gender mainstreaming is thus an important contribution to the United Nations' overall effort in advancing gender equality and achieving a vision of a world free from the threat of landmines and explosive remnants of war. ↴

Biographies

Aaron J. Buckley, Advocacy and Information Officer with the United Nations Mine Action Service, is a lawyer with



Mine Awareness Day in Kabul, Afghanistan. Photo courtesy of Jacob Simkin



experience in the areas of human rights, rule of law, mine action and gender. He has served with the United Nations Department of Peacekeeping in Kosovo and Afghanistan, and with the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in Geneva, Switzerland.



Akiko Ikeda, Programme Officer with the United Nations Mine Action Service, is a sociologist with experience in the areas of urbanization (slum improvement), social inclusion and gender. Ikeda has worked at the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, the United Nations Democracy Fund of the United Nations Office for Partnerships, and the United Nations Development Programme in Nairobi, Kenya. At UNMAS, she assists with the interagency coordination processes and policy issues including gender mainstreaming in mine action, and with advancing the rights of persons with disabilities.

Endnotes

1. "Resolution 1325 (2000)." *United Nations Security Council*. 31 October 2000. <http://unispal.un.org/unispal.nsf/3822b5e39951876a85256b6e0058a478/f88d17eda6fedee85256a230074c84e?OpenDocument>. Accessed 26 October 2009.
2. "The Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action." *United Nations Department of Public Information*. 1996. http://books.google.com/books?id=fJIGGgw3fVEC&dq=Beijing+Declaration+and+Platform+for+Action&printsec=frontcover&source=bl&ots=LYzL3obema&sig=yOjOa0vZZNNXriCGuSUXAY2pvc&hl=en&ei=W3auSvnWAcagIAfXh_m7Bg&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=4#v=onepage&q=&f=true. Accessed 26 October 2009.
3. "Gender Guidelines for Mine Action Programmes." *United Nations Mine Action Service*. 2005. <http://www.mineaction.org/doc.asp?d=370>. Accessed 26 October 2009.
4. "Gender mainstreaming" also ensures that concerns and experiences of individuals of both sexes are taken into consideration in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of programs.
5. "Economic and Social Council Resolution 1997/25." *United Nations Economic and Social Council*. 1997. <http://www.un.org/documents/ecosoc/res/1997/eres1997-25.htm>. Accessed 26 October 2009.
6. Based on data provided by UNOPS, UNMAS examined sex-disaggregated statistics for national and international employees at mine-action centers in Afghanistan, Burundi, Chad, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Eritrea,

- Lebanon, Nepal, Somalia, Sudan and Western Sahara from 2005 to 2008.
7. Stockpile destruction could offer an opportunity to advance gender equality; however, no relevant gender considerations have emerged so far.
 8. Currently, UNMAS is a member of that DPKO Gender Task Force, which consists of gender focal points of all DPKO units and sections. Meetings of DPKO Gender Task Force take place several times a year to disseminate information and updates on gender mainstreaming taking place at DPKO.
 9. "Assistance in Mine Action." *United Nations*. 2000. <http://www.mineaction.org/downloads/A.RES.55.120%20E.pdf>. Accessed 26 October 2009.
 10. "Gender Perspectives on Disarmament." *The Office for Disarmament Affairs*. 2001. <http://disarmament.un.org/gender>. Accessed 26 October 2009.
 11. The Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women is located within the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations. OSAGI's mandate is to monitor and report on the status of women in the United Nations system; to participate in major U.N. conferences and meetings on gender equality; and to advocate for and assist policy implementation relating to the improvement of the status of women. UNMAS provides inputs on gender mainstreaming in mine action to OSAGI to contribute to the Secretary-General's Report on Women, Peace and Security. See OSAGI's activities in detail at <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/osagi/fp.htm>. Accessed 26 October 2009.
 12. The Inter-Agency Coordination Group on Mine Action consists of the following United Nations departments and agencies: the Office of Disarmament Affairs, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, United Nations Office for Project Services, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, UNICEF, United Nations Development Program, World Food Programme, World Health Organization and World Bank.
 13. "IMAS 10.30 Safety & Occupational Health – Personal Protective Equipment." *International Mine Action Standards*. 01 April 2009. [http://www.mineactionstandards.org/IMAS_archive/Final/IMAS%2010.30%20SOH%20PPE%20\(Edition%202\).pdf](http://www.mineactionstandards.org/IMAS_archive/Final/IMAS%2010.30%20SOH%20PPE%20(Edition%202).pdf). Accessed 26 October 2009.
 14. "IMAS 12.10 Planning for Mine Risk Education Programmes and Projects." *International Mine Action Standards*. 23 December 2003. http://www.mineactionstandards.org/IMAS_archive/Amended/Amended3/IMAS%2012.10%20Planning%20for%20MRE%20programmes%20and%20projects%20_Edition%201.pdf. Accessed 26 October 2009.

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