

How and why are gender perspectives relevant to reducing the scourge of landmines?

Despite significant international mobilization around landmines in recent years, landmines and unexploded ordnance (UXO) remain a daily threat in more than 60 countries. They kill or maim thousands of men, women, boys and girls every year. The United Nations, through its Mine Action Service, works in close partnership with Governments, civil society, business and individuals to tackle this crisis. The five pillars of UN mine action are:

- **Mine Awareness** - Populations at risk must be educated and local authorities trained to deal with landmine problems.
- **Demining** - The time-consuming, difficult and expensive work of disposing of the emplaced landmines.
- **Victim Assistance** - Thousands of maimed, blinded and crippled victims of landmine explosions need to be cared for and rehabilitated.
- **Advocacy for a Global Ban** - The United Nations works with civil society and Governments to promote universal adherence to the Convention banning the use, production, stockpiling, sale, transfer or export of anti-personnel landmines (Mine Ban Convention) and its effective implementation.
- **Stockpile Destruction** - The Mine Ban Convention provides for the destruction of stockpiles landmines within four years of entry into force of the Convention for a State Party and for the destruction of emplaced landmines within ten years of entry into force for a State Party.

The International Campaign to Ban Landmines, the organization to which many subscribe the success of the mobilization of the international community on the issue, have reported recently that there is some room for optimism. The use of landmines appears to be declining and production has dropped off. On the other hand, new landmines continue to be placed (for example, in Chechnya) and there are concerns that insufficient resources are being devoted to mine action programmes including mine clearance, mine awareness and victim assistance programmes.¹

What gender perspectives on landmines are important?

To date, the international community has paid very little attention to the gender dimensions of landmines. There are numerous rhetorical statements about women and children as innocent victims of landmines, but little documentation, research and analysis. This note provides initial thoughts on how a gender perspective could be beneficial in looking at landmines.

In assessing the gender dimensions of landmines it should be stressed that each situation should be looked at on its own merits, as generalizations do not always apply across all situations.

Women and men tend to do different work and have different responsibilities. In many parts of the world affected by landmines, women and men tend to spend their days differently. Women tend to hold primary responsibility for household work and for the health care of family members and the care of dependents. Women are often the ones who care for the victims of landmines.

Women and men may be concentrated in different economic sectors or have different roles in the same sector. In particular there is often a marked gender division of labour in agriculture. Women and men often grow different crops and have responsibility for various tasks within the crop cycle (for example, weeding is often a "woman's chore"). This in turn may influence who has worked land that is now mined.

It is often pointed out that different mobility patterns for women and men, related to their roles and responsibilities, may influence their vulnerability to landmines. For example, women may face dangers when gathering fuel or water while men may be in greater danger on public roads, given their greater mobility relative to women.

Women's work is often not valued and can be invisible to outsiders. Without a conscious effort to understand what women and girls do, what they need, the resources they can mobilize and their specific experiences, these dimensions can be forgotten in post-conflict initiatives, such as de-mining activities.

Social attitudes to women and men are different. In every culture there are different perceptions of what is appropriate and valued behaviour for women, men,

¹ Landmine Monitor Report 2000. International Campaign to Ban Landmines. Available at: <http://www.hrw.org/reports/2000/landmines/>

girls and boys. Although these social norms may change during times of conflict, in almost all situations, women face inequalities relative to men: less leisure time, less education, less mobility, less respect for their human rights and fewer economic resources. Thus women and men often have differential access to resources when attempting to support their families. When there are landmine injuries in families, these can have different implications for women and men.

Post-conflict life has different implications for women and men. Women and men participate differently in conflicts and the dynamics of a post-conflict society are also marked by gender differences and inequalities. Most obviously, the demographics have changed with a higher proportion of widows and dependents than before the conflict. The specific experiences and circumstances in post-conflict situations thus vary for women and men. It is important to understand the economic, social and political situation in communities and households along gender lines.

International agreements, conclusions and commitments

The **Beijing Platform for Action** (1995) recognizes that women and children are particularly affected by the indiscriminate use of anti-personnel landmines. It urges the ratification of international conventions that would prohibit landmines. Actions to be taken by Governments include:

- *Undertake to promote assistance in mine clearance, notably by facilitating, in respect of the means of mine-clearing, the exchange of information, the transfer of technology and the promotion of scientific research...*
- *Undertake to encourage further international efforts to seek solutions to the problems caused by anti-personnel landmines, with a view to their eventual elimination, recognizing that States can move most effectively towards this goal as viable and humane alternatives are developed. (Para 143).*

From: the **Commission on the Status of Women: Agreed Conclusions on the Critical Areas of Concern of the Beijing Platform for Action** (UN Sales No. E.00.IV.6) - actions to be taken by Governments include:

- *In order to alleviate the suffering of women and children caused by landmines, work towards the objective of eliminating anti-personnel landmines; and in this regard take due note of the conclusion of the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-personnel Mines and on Their Destruction and its implementation by those States that become parties to it;*
- Provide landmine awareness campaigns or classes in close cooperation with communities and community leaders formally and informally, making them accessible to women in afflicted areas, and provide resources and assistance for landmine clearance and share technology and information so that local populations can engage effectively in the safe clearance of landmines.
- Support programmes for the rehabilitation and social integration of women victims of anti-personnel landmines, and demining and mine awareness activities.

Concrete implications

Taking these general insights into gender differences and inequalities and applying them to all aspects of landmine programmes and initiatives highlights numerous issues:

- **Assessing landmine and monitoring the landmine threat.** The presence, or perceived presence, of landmines and UXO has the potential to disrupt an entire community. Gender perspectives need to be taken into account when determining mine clearance priorities and mine awareness education programmes. Socio-economic impact analysis of landmines must also include gender perspectives in relation to such items as land use and access to water, firewood, housing, services and infrastructure. Simply counting the number of victims says little

about the broader devastating impact of these weapons. Women's mobility may be seriously restricted and they may lose access to essential resources because of the threat of landmines.

- **Tracking landmine injuries.** Given the gender division of labour, women and men (girls and boys) often have different risks of exposure to land-mines. Given that it is often women and girls who are responsible for gathering fuel or fetching water, they may run greater risks in some areas. Men's responsibilities and greater mobility may, however, put them at greater risk in other areas. For example, the United Nations Mine Action Service has reported data from Kosovo for June 1999 to November 2000 indicating that there were 393 injuries from

landmines, of which 28 were women and 103 deaths, including 3 women. A survey carried out in Afghanistan indicated that 3.6% of victims were women (July 1998), and figures from Cambodia indicate that 9% of casualties were female (February 1999). There is also anecdotal evidence that women tend to pay attention to signs indicating that a certain area is not safe, while men do not. The implication is that all information collected on landmine injuries should be broken down by sex and age (as is data produced by the UN Mine Action Service).

- **Designing assistance programmes for victims of landmine injuries.** Programmes to support those injured by landmines (loss of limbs, blindness, deafness and other serious disabilities) could benefit by looking at the following issues:

Who receives immediate assistance? Quick care is important for saving lives and reducing disability. Are there biases in who is treated? Is priority given to military personnel (most often male) while civilian casualties often take longer to reach medical services?

Who cares for victims of landmines? Are they getting adequate support? It is often women and girls who care for the injured immediately following the injury and provide long-term support. In relation to the longer-term care implications: "Evidence from Cambodia illustrates the gender dimension of disability as disabled men relied on their wives for support, while disabled women were abandoned by their partners or had difficulty in finding one." (ILO, 1998)

What are the gender differences regarding the social and economic impact of landmine injuries? The loss of a limb can affect women and men differently. Being an amputee can affect a woman's potential marriage chances. In many cases, married women with disabilities face immediate divorce and are left with the sole responsibility for children and the risk of poverty. While women and men both face enormous obstacles to earning a living, families devastated by landmine injuries must face different challenges depending on whether or not it is a male or female family member who has been injured.

How can women's organizations be involved and strengthened? In some circumstances women's organizations may be the best vehicle to deliver services to women. There have been examples of international organizations duplicating services that could have been provided more effectively through existing local women's organizations. If this option

is chosen, however, it is important to ensure that it does not lead to a further marginalization of women's interests and needs.

- **Targeting and designing local mine awareness campaigns.** In order to reach specific populations it may be more effective explicitly to target women or men (or girls or boys), rather than the general population. Different messages and communications strategies are required to ensure that all people are aware of the dangers of specific areas. Women's organizations may be effective vehicles to communicate such information.

Mine awareness education can also be part of a DDR (disarmament, demobilization and reintegration) campaign for ex-combatants. In such cases it is important to ensure that women and girls have access to these programmes. If the focus is entirely on former male combatants, women and girls may not participate in the mines awareness initiatives. Female instructors may be needed to reach women and girls in some situations where it is difficult for men to interact with women.

- **Designing and implementing humanitarian mine action/community-based programming around landmine removal.** Recent thinking on community-based mine action programming has argued for a shift away from a focus that is primarily technical (how many mines removed) to an approach more clearly grounded in socio-economic analysis and criteria. "This goes back to more basic issues about a general reorientation of mine action, de-mining in particular, from being primarily occupied with mines to being primarily occupied with people." (Millard & Harpviken, 1999)

- **Understanding the broad implications of landmines, including non-arable land.** Landmines leave large tracks of agricultural land unusable. This has implications for farmers - both women and men. It might be especially important for farmers of subsistence crops (often women) given the importance of re-establishing the local food supply. Landmines can also make collection of firewood and gathering wild vegetables difficult and dangerous for women.

- **Public support for international anti-landmine campaigns.** Women have been significant actors in the international campaign against landmines. Are there ways that the anti-landmine messages could strengthen women's participation in this movement (or draw in more men)? Are there links to the international women's movement that could be strengthened to ensure that women's voices are heard in campaigns and international conferences?

- **De-mining initiatives.** There can be gender issues in de-mining programmes. How are priorities set for specific areas to be de-mined? Are these women's priorities or men's? Are there significant differences between women's and men's priorities? Women may place higher priority on de-mining land previously used for subsistence agriculture, for example.

Do de-mining initiatives offer employment and skills development for women as well as men? Are

specific steps taken, if necessary, to encourage and facilitate women's participation in these initiatives?

- **More research and documentation are required.** Much work remains to be done to understand and document the gender dimensions of landmines. It will be important to carry out case studies and context-specific research in order to understand how these issues play out in concrete situations.

Women working in demining: Kosovo

In 1999 a team of ethnic Albanian women began clearing landmines in Kosovo. The women received five weeks of training (where they were allowed to bring their children) and then were paid a monthly salary.

The project manager with Norwegian Peoples Aid was quoted as saying: "In Scandinavia, we believe that it is important to show there are a lot more equalities than differences between women and men. Demining is one area where you can see that clearly. With women, you don't get Rambo types."

Although there was some opposition to the teams, reports indicate that the participants felt their actions were important. "When I told them at home what I am doing my brother shouted at me that I was sick and didn't know the meaning of the word danger. But my husband was killed by the Serbs. I like this job. I help the people of Kosovo and most of all I help the children."

Source: "Housewives Join First All-Woman Mine-Clearing Team In Kosovo." London Daily Telegraph by Julius Strauss, November 17, 1999. Available at: <http://www.minesactioncanada.com/documents/r108.html>

Resources

There are few, if any, specific resources, research or documentation on the gender dimensions of landmines. These resources focus on landmines in general.

- The *International Campaign to Ban Landmines* is a good general resource (with lots of links) on landmines. <http://www.icbl.org/>
- *The United Nations Mine Action Service* provides a starting point for UN-related documents and sites. <http://www.un.org/Depts/dpkos/mine/>
- The *Landmine Survivors Rehabilitation Database* includes a listing of programmes that specifically target and offer services/support to women. <http://www.lsndatabase.org>
- *Mines Action Canada's* website offers a searchable database on news and documents relating to landmines. Keyword: gender issues. http://www.minesactioncanada.com/document_search.cfm

- The *Assistance to Mine-Affected Communities* (AMAC) project undertakes studies of mine-affected communities, with the aim of further exploring the opportunities to build on local resources and local competence in Humanitarian Mine Action (HMA). <http://www.prio.no/amac/>

One useful study is: Millard, A.S. and K.B. Harpviken (1999). *Reassessing the Impact of Humanitarian Mine Action: Illustrations from Mozambique*. Oslo: PRIO. Available at: http://www.prio.no/publications/reports/Reassessing_the_Impact_of_Humanitarian_Mine_Action/default.asp

One resource that looks at gender issues in post-conflict situations that deals briefly with landmines is: ILO (1998). **Gender Guidelines for Employment and Skills Training in Conflict-Affected Countries**. Geneva: Training Policies and Systems Branch, International Labour Office.

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