

Gender Mainstreaming in Mine Action

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Within the international community, gender mainstreaming is steadily becoming the preferred route towards achieving equal treatment and equal opportunities for men and women, and the mine action sector provides no exception to this development. Through the mainstreaming perspective, organizations are able to look beyond the narrow traditional approaches of women's issues to see the relevance of gender roles for both men and women within their sector and to employ a variety of tools to ensure equal treatment and opportunities.

This policy brief is based on a paper outlining experiences and challenges related to gender mainstreaming in mine action, summarizing the results of a short field study among mine action organizations in Phnom Penh, Cambodia. Cambodia was chosen as a case study partly because of the presence of significant mine contamination in that country, and partly because several gender mainstreaming efforts were in the process of being undertaken at the time the study was carried out (2007). In addition, the fact that the Cambodian mine action sector is fairly institutionalized and cemented means made it well suited for a study on the introduction of new strategic efforts such as gender mainstreaming. While in Phnom Penh, the author of this brief visited a number of relevant organizations involved in the mine action sector, including the key national institutions CMAC and CMAA, along with the two authorized clearance operators, MAG and HALO Trust, and organizations providing training and capacity-building, such as Australian Volunteers International and the International Women's Development Agency. The aims of the fieldwork were to secure a broad overview of gender-mainstreaming efforts in Cambodian mine action; to identify problematic

aspects of these efforts; and to illuminate gender-related challenges facing the Cambodian mine action sector.

Introducing Key Aspects of Gender Mainstreaming in Mine Action

Employment Opportunities

Employment opportunities and (to a certain degree) affirmative actions designed to lessen the gender division of the labour market have traditionally been key in gender-equality work. In mine action, this has been particularly significant in discussions on the use of women as deminers – a task traditionally associated with the military and with almost exclusively male workers. Employment in mine clearance has been important as a livelihood option for many rural, unskilled labourers in Cambodia, and reserving it for men has meant cutting off poor women – often lone breadwinners – from a reliable source of income. In addition, having women in key positions, especially where strategies are being shaped or in direct relations with local communities, can help organizations ensure that they have a sufficiently diverse range of inputs informing their work.

Influence

In rural areas where labour is strongly gender divided, there is a growing realization that men and women may have different priorities in terms of which areas need mine clearance most urgently. In humanitarian demining, where the involvement of local communities is seen as essential to the demining work being carried out, it is necessary to ascertain whether these different views and

priorities are represented in final clearance plans. Strategies adopted to ensure that this is the case usually involve efforts to include women in community-consultation processes. The challenge for many clearance operators is to ensure that women are not just present at these consultations, but are also able to express their concerns and have these taken just as seriously as the views of the men in the community.

Gendered Analysis on Direct and Indirect Impacts of Landmines

A challenge to all sectors involved in gender-mainstreaming exercises is to be creative about exactly what gender mainstreaming is and can be. Gender may be both directly and indirectly relevant for the work carried out within the mine action sector. For example, the contamination of an area by landmines will have an impact not just on those physically injured or killed by mines, but also on their families and the local community as a whole. The threat posed by landmines affects the livelihood options of individuals living in their vicinity, and this will have different implications depending on gender. However, this does not necessarily mean that women will bear the heavier burdens of landmine contamination. Gender analyses and gender-based strategies apply just as much to the impact of landmine contamination on men and on finding the right solutions to alleviate the male-specific challenges of landmines.

1: Women in Demining: Experiences and Challenges

Cultural biases against women are often deep-seated and rooted in traditional social hierarchies. Such biases cannot be changed by one sector alone, but the landmine sector does need to be aware of how they might affect its work. In Cambodia, for example, women were kept from utilizing the livelihood option of employment in demining by cultural expectations related to female gender roles. These were manifest in attitudes both among local men in the different villages where mine action was being carried out and among demining staff and management.

Recommendations

1. Mine action organizations can fight notions of women as inferior workers using a range of strategies. Gender-awareness training of their own staff, both local and international, to challenge views of local women as unsuitable

clearance workers is important. Another factor is for organizations that already employ women to use this for awareness-raising by highlighting the skills of these women.

2. Proper local development impact may be achieved through cooperation with development organizations operating in the community. Development efforts that provide employment ensure active and inclusive local participation, and it is important that families and individuals most in need of employment opportunities benefit from such an approach.
3. It is often more problematic for women than for men to take up work away from home, owing to childcare and other home-bound duties. However, creative solutions to accommodate the specific challenges facing women can help address this problem. Such solutions will differ between cultures and contexts, but one efficient tool may be to establish local demining structures whereby deminers work close to their local communities and are able to go home at night, such as the localities clearance teams established by MAG in Cambodia.

2: Hearing the Voices of Women: Experiences and Challenges

Fieldwork carried out in Cambodia revealed that shortages of available resources was one of the main reasons why local men had a disproportionately higher influence over mine action being carried out in their local communities than local women.

Recommendations

1. The question of resources is essential. Donors should communicate with local mine action actors to identify what is needed to adequately implement gender strategies, and especially to see whether there is a need for allocating more resources to facilitate necessary changes. There are many strategies that can only be adequately carried out with increased financial resources. Examples include hiring additional staff to facilitate separate meetings for men and women; initiatives to train local women in skills necessary to participate fully at consultations, such as reading and using maps and similar practical skills; and providing babysitters to facilitate the participation of women at consultation meetings.

2. Where possible, donors and mine action organizations should discuss and cooperate with local women's groups in order to ensure the highest possible level of cultural understanding. Very different measures may be required in different countries and contexts. Cooperation of this kind may be the best way for external mine action operators to obtain the cultural knowledge necessary for identifying appropriate and useful gender-mainstreaming strategies. These women's groups may have the competence needed to ensure that the right initiatives are matched with the right challenges.
3. Mine action operators and other organizations need to establish and maintain targeted efforts to change attitudes both within their own staff and in the local communities about the ability of local women to contribute to all aspects of mine action. Experiences from Cambodia show that biases against the value and competence of local women work as a brake on attempts to include them in all aspects of the mine action sector. It is important to note that this is often not just a bias found among the rural communities, but also one found among senior staff, local as well as international, in mine action organizations.

3: Thinking of 'Gender' in Mine Risk Reduction: Experiences and Challenges

An important principle that was recognized but not fully realized within the Cambodian mine action community was that risk reduction and risk education measures should be based on an analysis of the risk-prone behaviour patterns of men, women, boys and girls. Also, mine risk reduction and education programmes proved to be a sphere where it was comparatively easier for women to seek employment, and thus to benefit from the presence of mine action activities in the local community. This is a positive development, but it is important that local employment in the mine action sector does not become divided along gender lines.

Recommendations

1. Disaggregating casualty data based on age and gender provides insight into the different forms of risk-prone behaviour predominant among men, women, boys and girls. Used correctly, and taking into account the underlying causes of such behaviour (such as available livelihood options), such an approach diversifies risk reduction strategies, increasing the likelihood that adopted measures will be effective. In this

context, taking a sombre look at the often rational choices that underlie the risk-prone behaviour of all groups is essential for developing the cultural understanding necessary to assess what risk reduction measures will be effective.

2. Equal work opportunities should be available for women in risk reduction programmes. Opening up the mine risk education sector for the employment of women is likely to demand less in terms of accommodation than doing the same in mine clearance. As well as providing alternative sources of income to rural women, this can have the added benefit of diversifying the nature of risk reduction messages and discussions to ensure that female-specific risk-prone behaviours are also included.

4: The Bigger Picture – The Relevance of Gender for the Impact of Mine Contamination Within a Community: Experiences and Challenges

Landmine issues are tightly connected with issues related to disability. Here, questions related to non-discrimination against the disabled and access to employment, housing and other rights are significant, posing a challenge for many mine-affected countries. Importantly, there is a gendered aspect to disability, in that a disability may have varying impacts on a person's life depending on his or her gender.

Recommendations

1. The overall recommendation is that donors and national mine action and disability authorities should cooperate in carrying out studies on the broader gendered impact of landmine contamination from the point of view of victims, survivors and their families. Women are often less likely to get married if they have a physical deformity, such as a lost limb – a grave problem in traditional societies where men are the breadwinners and women have limited access to employment.
2. 'Male' is also a gender. It is also extremely important to examine disability issues as they relate to male gender roles. In Cambodia, it has been observed anecdotally that men who have been injured by landmines and are unable to support their families sometimes choose to divorce their wives so as not to be a burden on their families. This creates two parallel problems: family ties are broken, and the

disabled man is often left to a life of begging on the street. This is an important aspect of any gendered take on mine action, and it needs to be addressed through adequate policies.

5. Conclusion and Overall Recommendations

As shown above, gender is not an issue to be treated separately from other aspects of humanitarian demining. Rather, gender needs to be part and parcel of overall strategies in the mine action sector, especially as it relates to development efforts and the inclusion of local communities in decisionmaking.

'Male' is also a gender. Male gender roles are not irrelevant to mine action strategies just because males are usually dominant within the communities in question. The male gender has just as much of an impact as the female gender in determining how landmine contamination, injuries and mine action operations affect individuals.

Insight into the local context is key. To improve the situation of women and to address the aggravating effect that gender roles may have on the impact of mine contamination for local individuals, an understanding of the complexities of local gender roles is essential. Such insight can be obtained through cooperation with local women's groups, where these exist, and generally by building and maintaining awareness of and sensitivity towards the broad and complex implications of gender roles for the work of mine action organizations.



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