

# Developing National Mine Action Capacity in Sudan The Impact of Conflict, Politics, and International Assistance<sup>1</sup>

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## Introduction

One of the stated aims of the United Nations mine action programme in Sudan is capacity development so that the national authorities are capable of planning and implementing the country's mine action programme to support humanitarian and post-war recovery processes, and fulfil their obligations to the Mine Ban Treaty.<sup>i</sup>

Capacity is understood as the ability of individuals and organizations to manage their own affairs successfully. To be able to manage a national mine action programme successfully, the Sudanese authorities need to be able to develop and implement legislation, undertake long- and short-term strategic planning, manage mine action activities and develop technical expertise to execute mine action at the field level.

The development of national capacity has been linked with good governance and it is now widely recognized that without either, states can not achieve sustainable development and will continue to be reliant on outside assistance.<sup>ii</sup> However, despite this recognition, efforts to develop national capacity and good governance have a poor record.<sup>iii</sup> The Organization for Economic Coordination and Development (OECD) argues that interventions often concentrate on technical processes to transfer organizational models from the North to the South without adapting models to a specific context or taking into account broader social and political issues.<sup>iv</sup> The Institute of Development Studies is more critical claiming that the level of capacity required to implement complex processes is underestimated and that expectations of what can be achieved are simply unrealistic.<sup>v</sup>

Efforts are underway to develop national capacity in Sudan. Their success will depend on the commitment and political will of the Sudanese and national authorities, and the effectiveness of international support. To date, capacity development in mine action has made slow progress. This working paper summarizes research findings which highlight the challenges to developing national mine action capacity in Sudan. It focuses on UN mine activities at the national level and identifies three main areas affecting capacity development:

- the impact of protracted civil conflict;
- the complexity of Sudanese political dynamics;
- and the inconsistencies of international assistance.

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<sup>1</sup> This paper is based on field research conducted in Nairobi and Sudan in the first half of 2004, in Nairobi in November 2005, and in Khartoum, Juba, and Nairobi in April and May 2006. Discussions took place with numerous national and international actors involved in mine action and other post-war recovery activities. The author is grateful to all those who participated in the research and her colleagues Mads Frilander and Gary Littlejohn who undertook fieldwork in 2004. The research was funded by the Royal Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, DanChurchAid, the Canadian Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade (DFAIT).

## **The Impact of Conflict**

### *Human Resource Deficit*

- Post-war recovery is impeded by the general lack of capacity in all areas of public life in Sudan including the government, civil service, and local non-governmental organizations (NGOs). As a result, there is little available capacity for mine action at the policy making, managerial or operation levels.
- Many of the most able Sudanese left the country during the civil war and it is unlikely that a significant number of these will return.
- Skilled and educated Sudanese still living in the country are disillusioned because employment opportunities are often dependent on political or tribal affiliations and not merit or commitment.
- The existence of two government structures – the Government of National Unity (GNU) and the Government of South Sudan (GOSS) - spreads the available capacity in the South even more thinly.

### *Poor Working Practices and Organization*

- The protracted conflict has affected attitudes to work. People can find it hard to apply themselves to regular work and others, used to living day to day because of the uncertainty of life during war, struggle to plan long-term.
- Formal employment is rare so there is often little understanding of the responsibilities which come with formal employment. This slows progress and can create tensions between national and international staff.
- There is little understanding of what is required to legislate, manage, plan, coordinate and implement mine action activities.
- Decision making tends to be highly centralized, meaning that the majority of individuals are unused to taking decisions and so are unable to exercise their own initiative when given the opportunity to do so.
- Decision making processes are impeded because so few people are authorized to make decisions. They often have multiple responsibilities and mine action may not be a priority.

### *Lack of information*

- The size of Sudan, poor infrastructure and communications, and difficulty in travelling around exacerbate the challenges facing post-conflict recovery efforts.
- There is a lack of basic information. For example, there are few accurate maps and little knowledge of the population size or distribution.
- It appears that the country is not mined as heavily as first thought but detailed knowledge of the mine threat is still limited making long-term planning difficult.
- To date there has been little planning for capacity building as the situation has been unstable and detailed needs assessments have not been conducted
- In certain parts of the country the security situation is still unclear. This prevents freedom of movement and the ability to undertake mine action in some areas.

## **Complex Political Dynamics**

### *Relations between North and South Sudan*

- It will take many years to rebuild trust between the North and South of Sudan and to develop good working relationships so that recovery and development programmes can be implemented effectively.
- The Sudan Armed Forces and the Sudan People's Liberation Army are not yet willing to share information about all potentially mined areas or withdraw from the transitional areas.
- The GOSS has accused the National Congress Party in the North of failing to share the profits from the oil or provide accurate information about the oil wealth which is preventing them from budgeting and planning, and assuming responsibility for funding their own activities effectively.
- The existence of two governments creates a large bureaucracy and additional coordination problems for all mine action actors.

### *Inequalities between North and South Sudan*

- There is less capacity in the South than the North creating inequality and presenting additional challenges to the international community's efforts to work jointly with both the GNU and GOSS.
- There is a lack of physical resources throughout the country but the situation is more acute in the South. All activities need careful logistical planning to ensure that they can be implemented effectively.
- Despite the inequalities between the North and South, UN mine action operations are directed from Khartoum. This has marginalized the South, although it is believed that following the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) and the improvement in transport and communication, the South is now more actively involved.

### *Uncertainty*

- The implementation of the CPA has been slow. The death of Garang has also disrupted post-conflict recovery processes and changed the nature of politics and the vision for a post-conflict Sudan.
- The National Mine Action structure has yet to be finalized. Currently no national authority or authorities exist which can assume responsibility from the UN for mine action. It could be the end of 2006 before mine action structures are finalized and training is completed. Therefore national institutions are unlikely to be operational until the beginning of 2007.
- The decree on the formation of a national mine action authority was issued only in December 2005 and is potentially problematic as it does not fully accord with the terms of the CPA.
- There has been a significant turnover of senior national mine action staff, who had been specifically trained for their posts, creating a loss of capacity and institutional memory. Since the middle of April 2006, there has been only an

acting director of the Mine Action Centre in the North. It is not clear when there will be a permanent appointment to the post.

- The uncertainty about the mine action structure and policies has made it difficult to secure funding, particularly for capacity building.

## **Inconsistence International Assistance**

### *Conflicting Mine Action Aims*

- The UN mine action programme in Sudan operates under potentially conflicting mandates as it must respond to the immediate needs of the UN Peacekeeping mission and the emergency and humanitarian needs of the population while supporting long-term capacity development of national mine action staff.
- The United Nations Mine Action Service, which coordinates all UN, NGO, commercial, and military mine action activity in Sudan, claims that it is an emergency response operation rather than a specialist in capacity development.
- The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) is mandated to support capacity development in Sudan. However, it has experienced funding shortages, and currently there is only one UNDP advisor in Khartoum, a second advisor starts work with the national authorities in the South in June. The capacity development element of the UN mine action operation is tiny in comparison with the technical mine action operations.

### *Funding*

- There are delays in funding for mine action and capacity development reaching Sudan. Funding procedures within donor countries and the UN can be slow, and funding from or being handled in the United States is delayed because of sanctions.
- A significant proportion of the funding for mine action is spent on international staff and on commercial contracts which are expensive and do not contribute towards sustainable capacity building.
- Donors are conscious that they need to be accountable and are therefore reluctant to fund capacity development programmes because of political instability and uncertainty. They also prefer to fund international NGOs rather than local NGOs. This emphasises the inequality between the international and local NGOs and marginalizes Sudanese nationals from interventions designed to help them. Local NGOs are reliant on the ability of international NGOs to offer supportive partnerships which provide capacity building and allow local NGOs to be actively involved in projects.

### *Working Practices of International Organizations*

- The UN and international NGOs provide good salaries and working conditions so attract the most able nationals, particularly those who speak English. This deprives local NGOs, public services, and government organizations, of educated and skilled staff.

- The widespread use of spoken and written English prevents or discourages many Sudanese nationals, perhaps with the appropriate skills and experience, or ability, from actively participating in mine action.
- Many international staff have a ‘can do’ attitude even when faced with challenging situations. They may find it easier and quicker to do the work themselves rather than assist and train national staff to do the job.

## **Conclusions**

To ensure that there is sustainable peace and development in Sudan, the population needs to see progress in post-conflict recovery and a reduced dependence on outside financial assistance and technical support. Therefore, it is important that national capacity is developed to manage the mine action programme. The current programme is expensive because of the use of large numbers of international staff and commercial contracts. An operation under national control would be more cost effective and could be more easily sustained once outside assistance ceased.

There is a general lack of information about political, social, and economic issues in Sudan. Research is needed to determine the extent of the mine threat, the cost of clearance, and the capacity development needs of the population. Without such knowledge, it is not possible to plan programmes which respond to the needs of the people.

To ensure that national capacity is developed, the Sudanese authorities need to prove their commitment to the programme and support its activities through the timely issuing of legislation. Cooperation between the North and the South, particularly the military on both sides, will have to improve, and appropriate national bodies with a stable workforce will have to be established.

Donors, the UN, and international NGOs need to target capacity development as a priority to tackle the effects of long-term conflict on working practices and ensure that national staff can participate actively and as equal partners in the mine action programme. The international community also needs to examine its own responses to the mine threat and capacity development in Sudan. The mine action programme seems to have incompatible goals to provide emergency needs while undertaking long-term development. Perhaps if the mine threat is not as severe as initially thought, a longer-term approach which concentrates on national capacity development would be more appropriate. At the very least, the international community needs to consider providing more resources for capacity development. It is also necessary to examine funding mechanisms to see whether these can be streamlined so that money can be made available more quickly and can support national government and non-governmental organization capacity building more directly.

Despite the current emphasis within the donor community on the need for good governance and capacity building to ensure that assistance is effective and promotes sustainable development, its response to the potential mine threat in Sudan has become an externally led rapid response. This is not sustainable and has been severely hampered by the complex Sudanese political dynamics and logistical challenges. A less rapid response which focused on capacity development would have actively

involved national authorities and NGOs, and may have helped to overcome some of the political and logistical challenges, and perhaps have achieved the same output as the internationally led programme.

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<sup>i</sup> United Nations and Partners 2006 Work Plan for Sudan

<sup>ii</sup> OECD (2006) *The Challenge of Capacity Development: working towards good practice*

<sup>iii</sup> IDS (2005) *Signposts to More Effective States: responding to governance challenges in developing countries*, Brighton: Institute of Development Studies

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