



INCLUDING GENDER IN NTS IN SOUTH SUDAN – A WASTE OF TIME OR INVALUABLE?

Towards the end of 2013, DCA HMA had a joint project with a commercial mine action company in the northern border states of South Sudan. The commercial company was tasked with a Route Survey of both major and minor roads in the states, while DCA was tasked with providing RE to communities along these routes.

As is still usual practice in many Route Surveys and NTS, the commercial company interviewed local authorities (generally men) in each of the villages they reached, and asked them about contamination in the area. These single interviews were generally quick in nature and the route survey team was able to progress swiftly.

The working methodology of the DCA teams was different. In order to ensure all members of the community had an equal



access to RE and important safety messages, the DCA teams organized separate meetings with local authorities (generally men), women’s representative, and where possible, youth leaders. Priorities of the communities were discussed in these meetings and suitable dates, times and locations were agreed for RE sessions for boys, girls, men and women. Meeting with different focus groups, different age and sex groups and different community representative was time consuming and often meant the DCA teams lagged behind the route survey teams by a few days.

Should the DCA teams speed up by their community liaison activities by only meeting with local authorities?

Events in Guit village make the answer to this question indubitably clear.

The route survey team arrived in Guit, met with local authorities, asked them about any ERW contamination in the area, and were told that there was nothing. The route survey team promptly completed their paperwork and reported that Guit village was free from mines.



The RE team arrived in Guit the following day and met with local authorities to introduce themselves and explain their mandate in the village. Again, the local authorities told them there were no mines or any other ERW in Guit, but they gave their permission for the RE team to meet with women and youth representatives, and to provide RE in the village. The next day was market day, and the women were too busy to attend a meeting with the RE team, so it was postponed to the following day. During the meeting, the women told the team about some suspicious items some other women had seen whilst collecting firewood on the outskirts of the village. They

said they had not reported these items to the local authorities because they were not really sure if they were dangerous and did not want to waste the important men’s time. After an investigation by the RE team, four anti-tank mines were confirmed either side of a dirt track leading to another hamlet. They were less than 300m away from a group of tukuls (mud and grass huts), inhabited by female-headed households who had lost their husbands to sickness. As a result, a technical team was sent to the area to clear the mines.

As the local authorities were not involved in collecting firewood and were deemed by the women ‘too important’ to be bothered by their suspicions, the local authorities had absolutely no knowledge of these mines. If the women had not been interviewed, these mines would not have been recorded and cleared at all. Communities are made up of boys, girls, men and women. Each have their own gender roles in the community and therefore different spheres of knowledge. The only way an accurate picture can be formed about a village is by interviewing representatives of all age and gender groups.

Yes, talking to boys, girls, men and women in the community is more time consuming than just speaking to local authorities in the main village office, but is imperative, if we are to work effectively, efficiently and to put the needs of the community first.

Other similar examples from South Sudan include: only young goat-herding boys in a village in Kapoeta knowing the location of a minefield as they were the only members of the community who moved in that particular part of the bush;



and only male youth in a village outside Bor knowing about the location of ERW following the recent conflict as they were the only members of the community who had actually taken part in the battle there.

Both as a result of these experiences, and as part of the general gender mainstreaming programme in DCA HMA SS, the importance of gender in mine action was addressed in a training for all DCA HMA staff – EOD teams, MTT teams, RE teams, office staff, internationals and nationals. During the training, staff participated in a practical exercise where different groups interviewed boys, girls, men and women in an imaginary village, and found out different information about the area and the community needs. It was only when the information gathered from all four groups were collated, that a detailed and accurate picture was formed.

Similar training will be carried out by the DCA HMA SS Gender Focal Point (GFP) to selected staff from all mine action organizations in South Sudan (NGO and commercial) in August and September 2014.

In addition, the GFP, who also happens to be the SS Mine Action Sub-Cluster Gender Focal Point, has helped UNMAS to mainstream gender in all the SS NTSGs (technical and MRE). The next step is for the GFP to work together with UNMAS and IMSMA to ensure the NTS form completed by all mine action organizations, requires both men and women to be interviewed, as well as youth and children representatives, when appropriate. Recording sex and age disaggregated data of the interviewees will help to track the progress of gender mainstreaming in NTS in SS.

Mainstreaming gender in NTS and all other aspects of mine action can only reap positive rewards: more accurate information gathered, better understanding of community needs and priorities, increased possibility of targeting those most in need and giving all an equal opportunity to access safety information and safe land.