

Mine action, early recovery and peacebuilding needs assessment of South Kordofan and Blue Nile states in Sudan

This study seeks to chart the drivers and dynamics of peace in Sudanese states of Blue Nile and South Kordofan to contextually situate mine action, mitigate risks and maximise the benefits of mine clearance for communities and humanitarian actors. This study was commissioned by the UK Department for International Development through the East Africa Research Fund. The research consortium consisted of SafeLane Global, a commercial demining agency; the Policy Institute at King's College London, a policy research institute; and Mercy Corps Europe, an NGO.

Blue Nile and South Kordofan states in Sudan, also known as the Two Areas, have been affected by conflict for many decades. As a result, communities continue to lack access to basic services, such as latrines, accessible health posts, schools, and protected water sources. The conflict has also changed the socio-economic fabric of the areas, causing vast displacement of people seeking refuge from their areas of origin, altering the face of communities and changing how people try to sustain their livelihoods.



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Anti-personnel and anti-vehicle landmines have been heavily used by belligerent parties in both Sudan's civil war and in hostilities since then. These silent killers, as they are often called, have affected communities and people's livelihoods significantly through injury, death, and forcefully shifted livelihood patterns.

Sudan has since made progress in clearing both anti-personnel and anti-vehicle landmines. However, progress has been slow, particularly in South Kordofan and Blue Nile. In 2018, Sudan was granted an extension to achieve its clearing target by 2023. Conflict made the states inaccessible for years, and as a result mine action has only recently commenced after several decades of inactivity.

The Government of Sudan has committed to clearing Blue Nile and South Kordofan, when security conditions will grant demining agencies full access. This calls for a greater understanding of the many ways in which people and their livelihoods have been

affected by mine contamination, and how the use of landmines might have affected tensions between populations. In this study, we seek to provide an empirical base to underpin our understanding of life in the Two Areas, analyse perceptions of mine action in the regions and of agencies tasked with demining, as well as investigate prospects for demining and any ramifications of mine action.

Fieldwork findings

Based on surveys and interviews with members of the public living in the Two Areas, community leaders, and key stakeholders in Khartoum, we found the following:

Mines are a staple of everyday life in the Two Areas, and people use them for economic benefits – despite the dangers. After years of conflict it would seem people in the Two Areas have adapted their lifestyles according to the presence of mines, and have developed coping mechanisms to the destruction mines can cause to people and animals. Based on the community leader interviews in particular, there appears to be a balance between people being fearful on the one hand, and using mines where they can for their benefit on the other – for example, through scrap metal collection and sales. There is also a generation currently growing up who have only known life with mine contamination.



Women bear the brunt of mine contamination.”

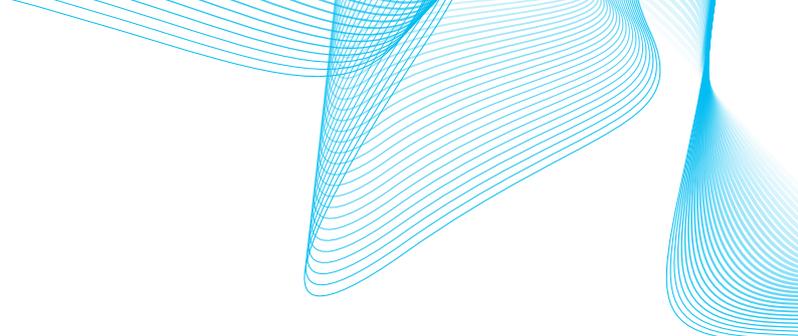
Women bear the brunt of mine contamination, both in terms of stigmatisation as victims and as those responsible for income and care in cases where their husbands are seriously injured or killed by a mine. It was clear that women are affected in different ways to men: our results suggest that, as victims, they would be discriminated against more than men. As a member of a family with a mine victim, they would become (often the sole) caretaker and breadwinner, thereby changing their role in the family and the community.



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Mine contamination can increase intercommunal tensions, but there is limited understanding of the capacity of mine action to act as a catalyst for peacebuilding and reconciliation. Mine contamination caused huge displacement, and has led to competition over land within Blue Nile and South Kordofan, which, in turn, has increased intercommunal tensions. Mine action has helped people living in the Two Areas to rebuild their lives and their livelihoods. However, while demining has been used as a peacebuilding tool in the past, the extent to which mine action has help reduce intercommunal tensions in the Two Areas was not clear.

Peace is crucial for mine action. This was brought up by all three participant groups. In the past, when peace agreements have been broken, or hostilities between armed actors has flared up again, this has impeded or slowed down mine action in the Two Areas. There is also another factor at play, which is the risk to demining agencies themselves. While not targets, demining can be perceived as a political activity, as can the provision of humanitarian assistance. This in turn puts aid workers and demining actors in danger, and has the potential risk of depriving populations in need of humanitarian assistance.



Mine action is generally viewed positively, but its scope and breath is too limited. While demining and mine risk education (MRE) were generally found to be useful, this had not reached all communities or all sections of the population, including those in need. Some remain unaware of the danger of mines. And a few feel there are little to no benefits to having demining agencies operate in the areas.

Relations are fragile between members of the public and demining agencies, which has an impact on whether and to whom people report landmines. While the public is broadly positive about the impacts of mine action, communities are more likely to report mines to security forces than NGOs, which suggests communities have little trust in demining agencies. While community leaders considered demining agencies to be reliable actors who have the necessary expertise for demining, these organisations do not enjoy similar levels of appreciation from the public. Both the security forces in the regions and the demining community have a more complex relationship with members of the public. The public does not appear to fully trust them and has not had sufficient interaction with them to have established close relations.



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Victims need greater support, but this needs to be linked to development activities. In the surveys and community leader interviews in particular, it became clear that people believe victims do not currently receive enough assistance. In particular, there were calls for income-generating activities. However, based on the extent to which victims can suffer trauma, as emerged from the survey, community re-integration activities are equally needed, as well as resources dedicated to supporting the families adapting to new life circumstances. Income generation and economic development are merely one aspect of this, there is an equal need for social and psychological support.

Demining requires more financial resources to ensure scope and breath, but extreme weather conditions will continue to raise challenges. The mine action that has been undertaken in the Two Areas so far is generally viewed positively. However, the pace is too slow and the coverage too meagre. More funding for mine action in the Two Areas, as well as greater stability, would help address this. A further challenge that needs mitigating is the movement of mines due to heavy rainfall.

Comparing the two states, people in South Kordofan appear to have a slightly better grasp of the dangers of mines and of mine action than those in Blue Nile. In South Kordofan, community leaders and members of the public appeared to be slightly more engaged with demining agencies than in Blue Nile. Equally, more respondents in South Kordofan stated they would report a suspicious item, and indeed, more respondents from this area stated they had made a report in the past.



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Policy recommendations

In light of this, we make the following recommendations:

1. The international community, working with relevant stakeholders in Sudan, should **continue to support the peace process in the Two Areas**. This is absolutely crucial to allow actors to begin addressing people’s urgent needs in the region.
2. Where there are clear processes for making reports of suspicious items, these



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need to be communicated more effectively to the community by demining agencies and security forces, in coordination with community leaders. Where such processes do not exist, demining agencies need to work with community leaders and security forces to establish these and communicate this to members of the public. Demining agencies should use the trusted relationships they have with community leaders to do this, and in turn use this to **build greater trust with members of the public.**

3. In parallel, a **quick ERW reporting response unit (RRU) should be established within NMAC** but be based in both regions, to promptly respond to any reports of ERW or otherwise. This will in turn help build confidence in local authorities, and trust between demining agencies and members of the public.
4. **There needs to be better coordination between the community, the security forces, demining agencies and the mandated overarching humanitarian and demining bodies.**
5. **Demining agencies needs to increase their outreach and engagement activities in mine-affected communities**, beyond the community leader, which some of the other recommendations here might be suggestions for. Among other benefits, such as trust building, this would also help create the feeling among communities that they are actively involved in prioritisation of mine clearance areas.
6. **Both mine victims and their families need greater support in living with a mine-related disability.** This should include support on how families might make changes to cope with mine-related injuries and the effect these have on families.
7. **Particular efforts need to be made to help mitigate the impacts of landmines on women**, for example through gender-sensitive rehabilitation and socio-economic reintegration strategies.
8. Children and young people who have been affected by mines, or whose family members have a mine-related injury, **need to receive greater support in developing their skills and finding employment**, as well as **psychological support.**
9. Both Blue Nile and South Kordofan require more mine action, including but not limited to MRE activities. While this is needed in South Kordofan too, **landmine-affected communities in Blue Nile in particular need to increase their understanding of the dangers of mines**, and the support demining agencies can offer.
10. **More MRE activities are needed in mine-affected communities.** Efforts need to be made so that such activities achieve maximum possible participation from members of the public, to ensure they increase their knowledge on the dangers and risks of landmines.
11. **Sudan’s Humanitarian Aid Commission and National Mine Action Centre need to better work together to ensure mine action is linked up with development programming.** This would allow for a holistic approach to mine action and development to help communities transition.