

Mine Action Coordination Centre of Afghanistan
(MACCA)



Afghan Women's Attitudes towards Mine Action:
Results of Pilot Survey



January 2009

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Background to MAPA and MACCA

The Mine Action Programme for Afghanistan (MAPA) was the first mine action programme in the world, and encompasses all pillars of mine action: advocacy, demining (survey, marking and clearance), stockpile destruction, mine risk education (MRE), and victim assistance (VA). Funded both bilaterally and through the UN Voluntary Trust Fund (VTF), over 20 mine action implementing organisations are working in Afghanistan, employing over 8,000 personnel, reaching almost every corner of the country. The MAPA has a twenty year history of successfully delivering mine action in Afghanistan and has cleared over 12,000 hazard areas throughout the country. Over the next 5 years, it will concentrate on removing the remaining hazard in the country. The programme is coordinated by the Mine Action Coordination Centre of Afghanistan (MACCA) in Kabul.

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Executive Summary

The following report presents for the first time the views of Afghan women on mine action. The results highlight the impact of the mine contamination on the everyday lives of women, and garners women's opinions and recommendations for mine action.

Firstly, the results show that the significant mine contamination throughout Afghanistan has a negative impact on a wide range of Afghan women, both those living in high-risk communities where mine action is being specifically focused, but perhaps more striking is the impact felt by women outside these communities. For example, in the areas where there is currently no demining (not the most high-risk areas), more than a third of women had a relative who had been injured or killed in a mine related incident. Women expressed deep emotions of sadness and anger as their emotions in response to such incidents, highlighting the psycho-social impact of mines.

On the other hand, the psychological impact was most severe among those who had minefields close to their community's centre.

In addition to assessing the impact of mines and mine action, this survey also looked to determine whether women can participate in mine action. Due to the cultural issues, it was expected that few women would see a participatory role for themselves; however, 64% of women thought that women could participate in areas where mine action activities are currently taking place.

The report also asked for women's recommendations for mine action in Afghanistan. Although most women felt that the priorities set by the Mine Action Programme of Afghanistan were correct, they felt that more needs to be done in terms of mine clearance and also to increase Mine Risk Education, particularly focusing on women and children.

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1. Introduction

During September of 2008, a team from the Mine Action Coordination Centre of Afghanistan conducted a survey in three provinces of the country. The purpose of the survey was to assess the attitudes of women to mine clearance and mine risk education. The survey interviewed 300 women in 50 villages from 17 districts within the three provinces. The survey was conducted among populations where demining is taking place in their proximity and also in those communities where no demining activity is currently taking place. The results are grouped thematically in this report and differences between the two surveys highlighted throughout.

2. General methodology traits and research process

2.2 Research Team

Interviewers

- 1 ARCS female MRE team
- 1 OMAR female MRE team
- 2 female MRE/VA Assistants, MACCA

Survey Coordinator:

Samim Hashimi
MRE Projects Coordinator/Gender focal point
Mine Action Coordination Centre of Afghanistan (MACCA)

Data entry and analysis

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Final report

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Flora Sutherland, Senior Communications Officer, MACCA

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2.3. Questionnaire

The questionnaire used was developed by the MACCA MRE Projects Coordinator and reviewed and approved by the operations and MACCA management. The questionnaire consisted of 21 simply framed questions which were delivered in the local language. This questionnaire is included as Appendix A.

The focus of quantitative research is the questionnaire. The questionnaire is based on a series of indicators focused on the problem to be investigated. Indicators are a “small set of data ... usually easy or cost-effective to collect highly correlate with other data and from which many useful and trustworthy conclusions can be derived quickly”.

2.4. Sampling

Sampling methods are classified as either probability or non-probability. In probability samples, each member of the population has a known non-zero probability of being selected. Probability methods include random sampling, systematic sampling, and stratified sampling. In non-probability sampling, members are selected from the population in some non-random manner, including convenience sampling, judgment sampling, quota sampling and snowball sampling.

The advantage of probability sampling is that the sampling error can be calculated. Sampling error is the degree to which a sample might differ from the population. When referring to the population, results are reported plus or minus the sampling error. In non-probability sampling, the degree to which the sample differs from the population remains unknown.

In Afghanistan, probability sampling is not possible as there is no list of people to extract interviewees on the basis of the probable theory. As an alternative for the objectives of this study, a selection of interviewees was made based on a “quota method”. Quota sampling

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permits an obtainable cross-section or “cross quotes” analysis and a sufficient representative of the target-population.

Data Survey and Research Ethics

Since this survey focused on women, the research was conducted by the female MRE/VA Assistants and female MRE teams supported and guided by the MACCA MRE Projects Coordinator. The survey teams were trained prior to conducting the survey.

Some measures were established to ensure the followings:

- **Confidentiality:** no names or addresses of interviewees were recorded;
- **Informed consent:** people who participated in the survey gave informed consent.

The interviewers explained the aim of the research and how the information would be used;

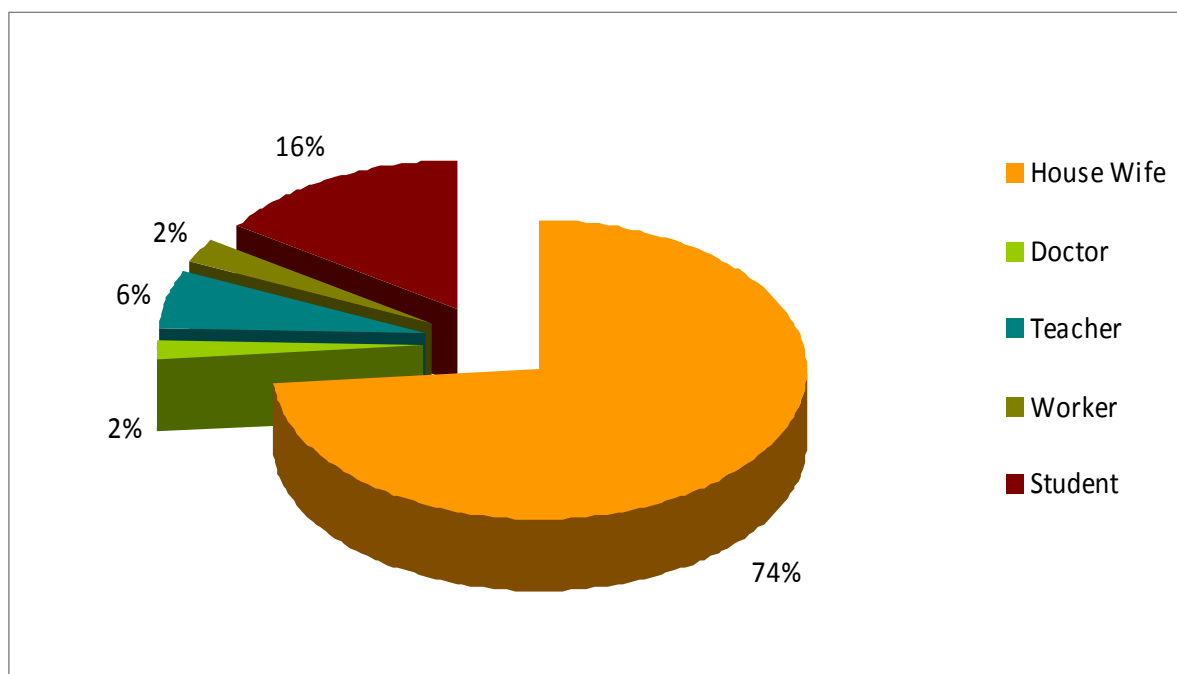
- **Presentation of findings:** quotations used in this report are assigned a general location rather than naming a specific village or area.

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2.5. Occupation profile

The below graph shows the occupation profile of the respondents to the survey which shows that the vast majority of women surveyed were housewives (74%), with students being the next most common (16%). Small proportions were 'professionals', i.e. doctors and teachers, or those more generally described themselves as 'workers'.

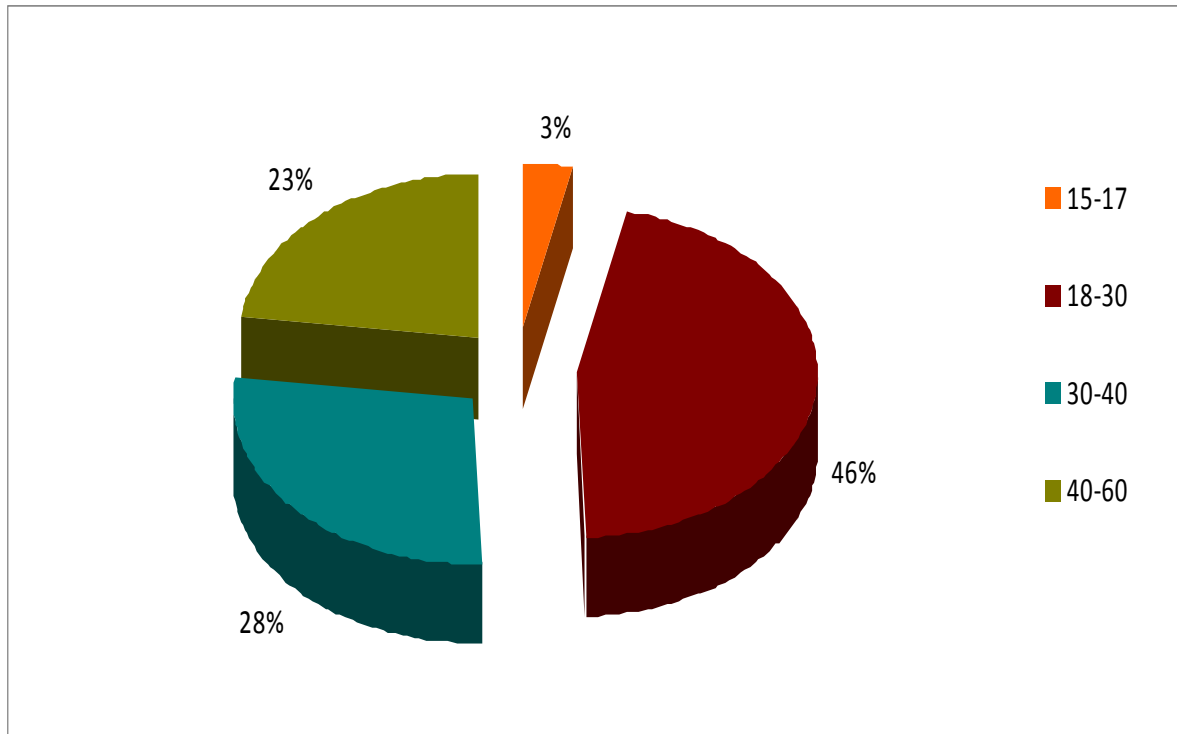


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2.6. Age profile

The following graph outlines the age profile of respondents, showing the single category that most fall into is the 18-30 age category, however, by combining the older categories, overall there is quite an even split between the under 30s and over 30s in this survey.



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3. RESULTS

Part One: Mine Clearance

As the survey looked at two 'types' of communities, those where mine action activities were taking place and those where mine action activities were not at that time taking place, the results compare and contrast the results from both types of communities. Referring to them as the two 'types' of communities in this report is simply for ease of reference.

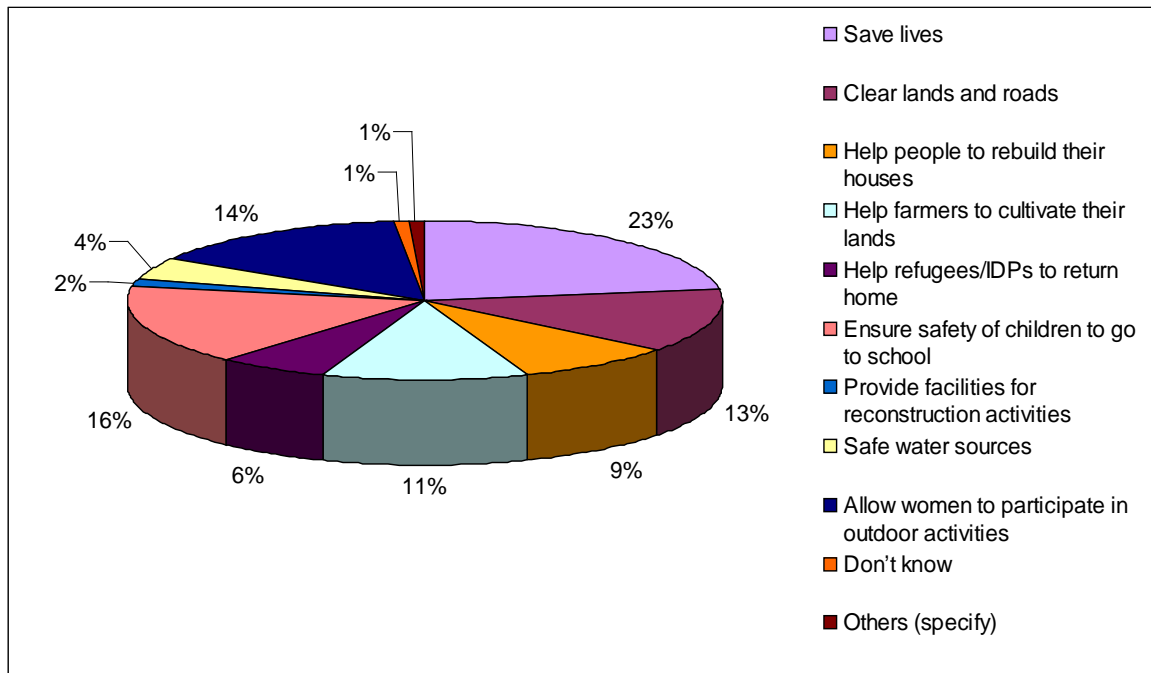
Understanding of demining

Firstly, surveyors aimed to assess the level of understanding of the concept of mine clearance or demining. The results showed that in both types of community, over 90% of people said that they understood the concept, showing that this is well-understood throughout Afghanistan and not just in areas where mine clearance is taking place.

Benefits of Demining

The perceived benefits of mine clearance among both kinds of communities were very similar. The top reason, identified in both kinds of community, was simply to save lives. The other main reasons included clearing land and roads, enabling cultivation of land and ensuring the safety of children travelling to school. The below graph shows the results in more detail.

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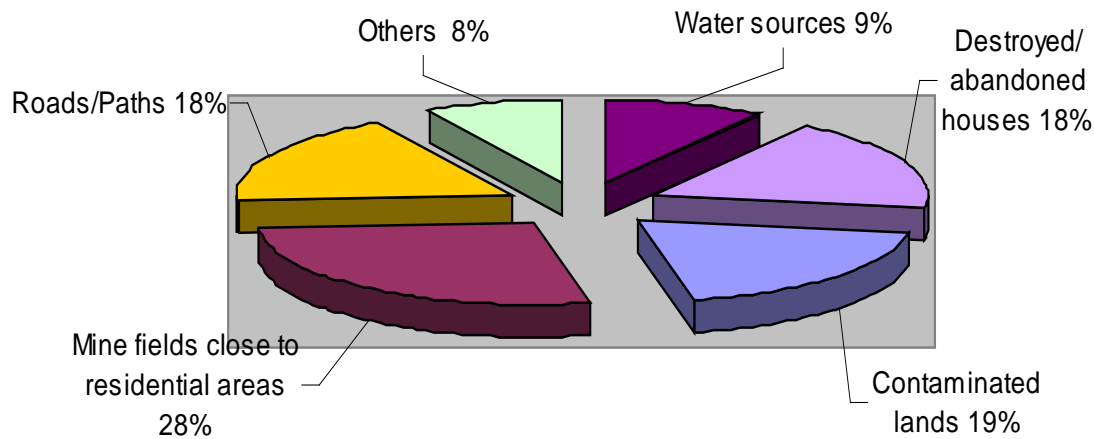
Sufficiency of current mine clearance operations

In areas where mine clearance operations were taking place, 61% of women felt that the efforts were sufficient. In areas where it was not, this was a little lower at 52%. The fact that there is not a major difference suggests that demining efforts are correctly focused in high priority areas, whilst at the same time showing that more needs to be done for all communities to be free from the threat of mines.

Priorities for Mine Clearance

When asked about priorities for mine clearance, the communities also had fairly similar views. The top priorities were for mines to be cleared from areas close to residential areas (28%), roads and paths. The priority of areas close to residential areas is closely echoed in the Mine Action Programme of Afghanistan's strategic plan for 1388, which gives high priority to suspected hazardous areas within 50m of a community. The below chart shows the results from the communities where mine clearance was taking place:

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The most striking figure here is the impact that minefields close to residential areas have on women – almost one third identified this as the most important priority for clearance, and therefore clearly the minefields which have the biggest impact on women.

When asked whether they thought the current priorities for mine clearance were correct, in areas where demining operations were taking place, 86% said yes and this figure rose to 93% in areas where no mine clearance was taking place. This would suggest further that there is a high level of satisfaction among communities with the priorities of the Mine Action Programme of Afghanistan.

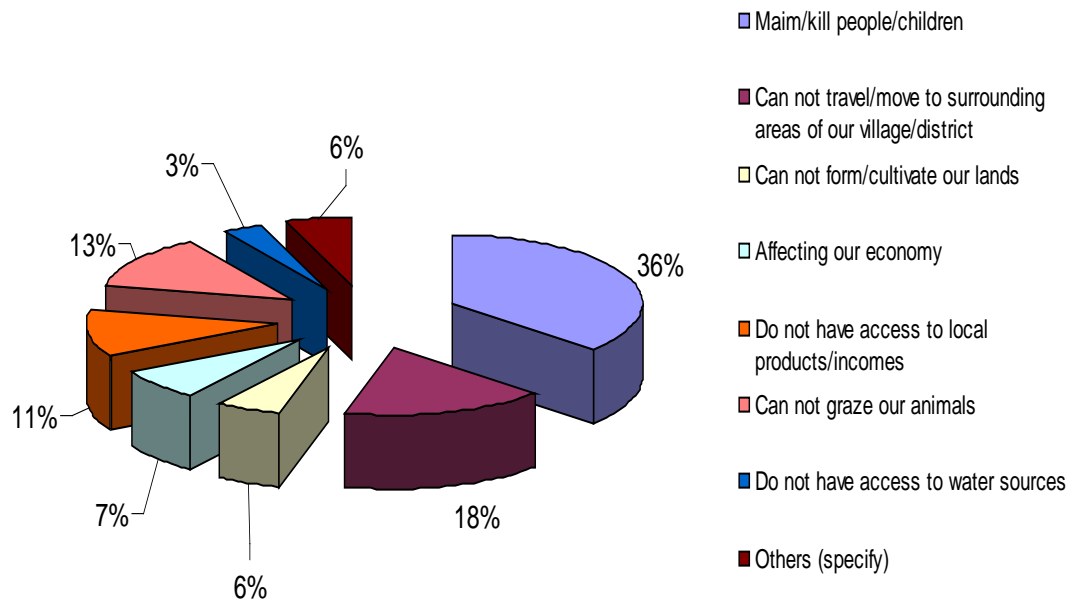
Problems Caused by Mines/ ERW

When questioned on the problems encountered, women in both types of community, answered fairly similarly. The top problem identified (36% in areas with no mine clearance and 32% in areas with current mine clearance) was the risk of injury or death. This was followed by the inability to move freely around their district or province, the ability to graze

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animals and having access to local products/ incomes. The below chart shows the results from the areas with no mine clearance activity:



Family Members Injured or Killed by Mines/ Explosive Remnants of War (ERW)

In areas where demining is currently taking place, 57% of women said that their family members had been injured or killed by mines. In areas where demining was not taking place, this dropped to 39%. In communities where demining was taking place, 6% of women who knew someone who had been maimed or killed by landmines identified their husband as the ones who had been injured or killed by landmines, a striking statistic in a culture where the husband is almost always the sole breadwinner. In areas where demining was taking place, of those who knew someone who had been injured or killed, 4% identified their husband. In total, 30% of women in areas where demining was taking place had an immediate family member who had been injured or killed by landmines or ERW.

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Impact of Mines on Women's Everyday Life

In areas with no mine clearance, 67% of women felt that mines had an impact on their normal lives. This seems fairly high, however in areas where demining is taking place, 73% of respondents said that mines had an impact on their daily lives. This highlights the fact that mines continue to be a serious hindrance to lives and livelihoods throughout Afghanistan.

Proximity of Landmines

In areas where no mine clearance was taking place, 19% of respondents said that they thought there were still landmines and ERW in their village and surrounding areas. In areas where mine clearance is underway, this rose to 37%. This differentiation highlights that mine clearance operations seem to be focused on the areas where people are most concerned about the presence of mines/ ERW.

Participation of Women in Mine Action

Despite the cultural restrictions on women in Afghanistan, this survey shows that women believe that they can participate and assist in mine action activities. This is highest in areas where mine clearance is taking place, with 64% of women saying that they thought they could participate in mine action. This was slightly lower in areas with no demining, where only 55% of women responded positively to this question.

In both cases, however, this is a striking statistic, particularly noting that the majority of respondents are housewives and not professional working women, from whom this may have been a less surprising opinion. It could further be suggested that the higher rate in areas where mine action activities are currently taking place was that women had even more confidence they could participate when they saw it being carried out.

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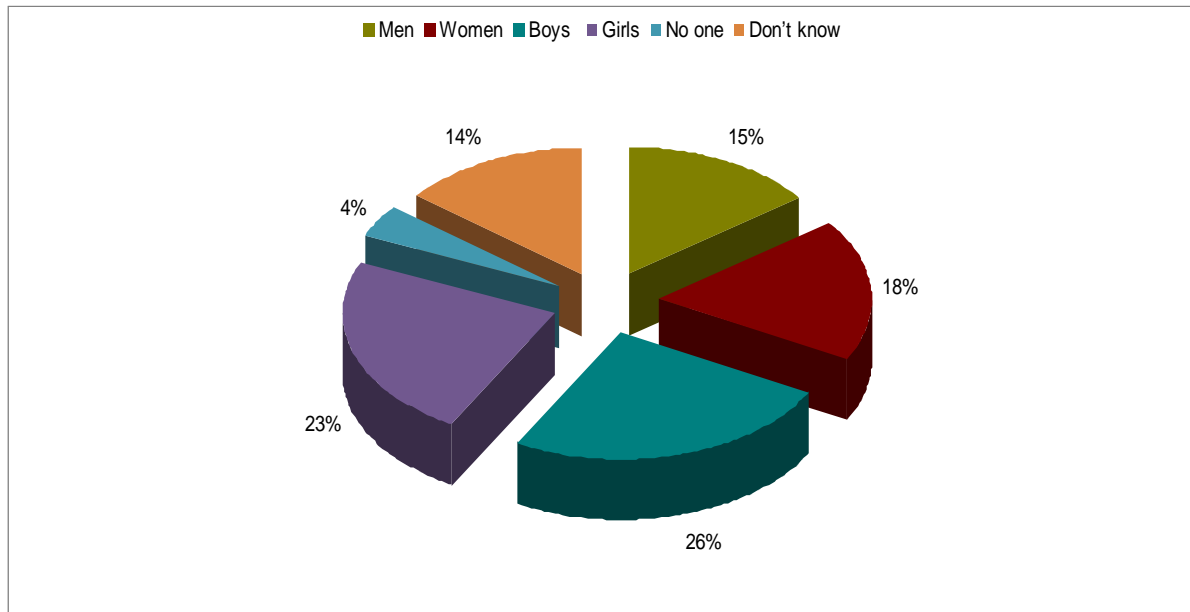


Part Two: MRE

Attendance at MRE Sessions

In areas where no MRE was taking place, 36% of women said that they had attended MRE sessions, this rose to 44% among women living in areas where MRE was taking place. The gender split in MRE sessions was reported as fairly even between men/boys and women/girls in areas where MRE is taking place.

The below chart displays the gender balance in areas where MRE operations were active:



Delivery of MRE

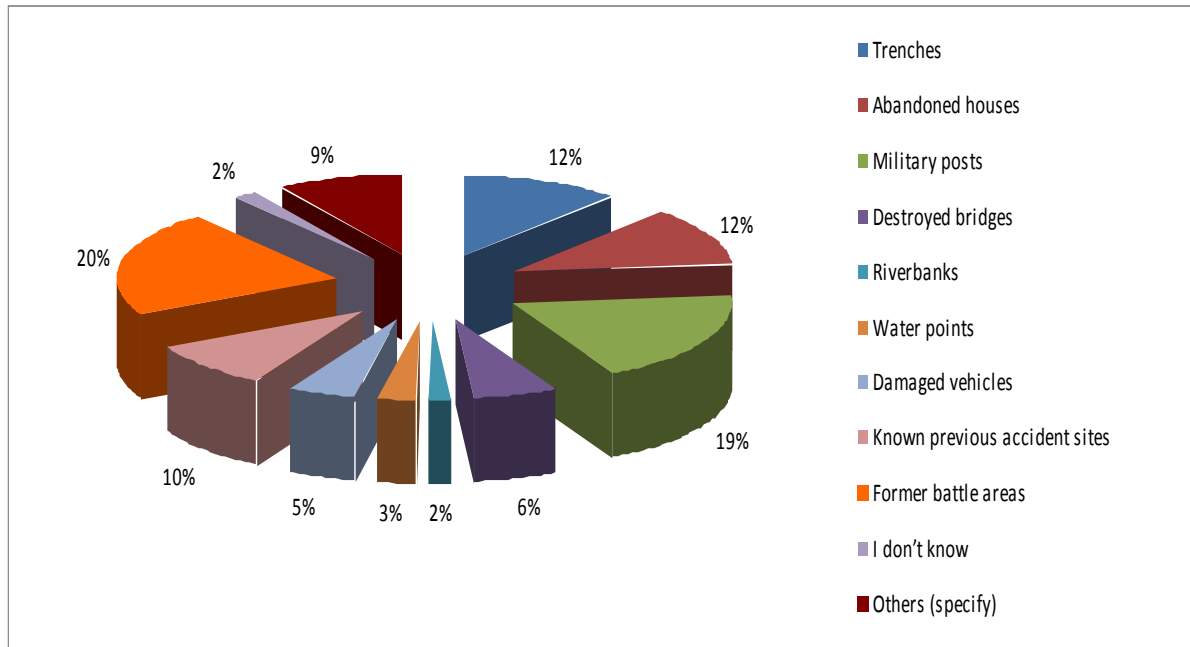
Most women cited schools and NGOs/MRE teams as the ways in which MRE was delivered. In areas where MRE was specifically being carried out, 27% of women identified NGOs and MRE teams as MRE implementers, with 19% naming schools.

Location of mines and ERW

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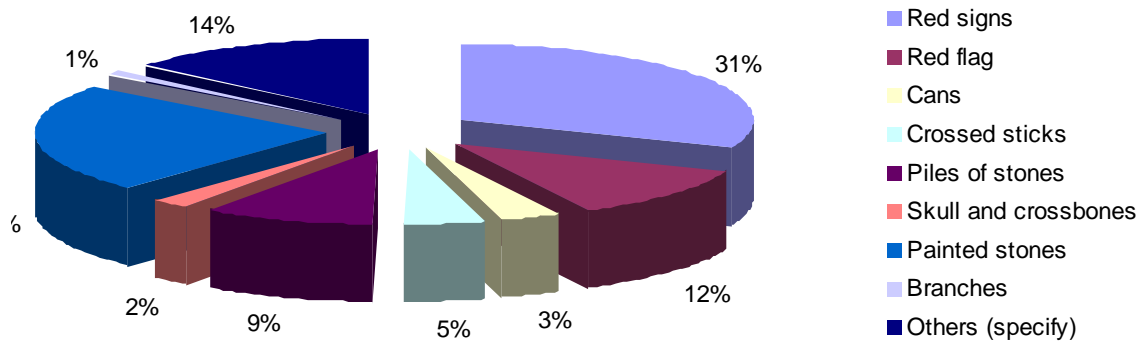
Most women identified military posts or abandoned houses as the most likely location of mines and ERW. In areas with demining activity, these two locations were identified by 18% of women, with the next most common being known accident sites and trenches.



Signs Indicating the Presence of Mines or ERW

The results regarding the indicators of mines or ERW in an area were fairly similar in both kinds of communities, with the most popular response being 'red signs'. The chart below shows the breakdown for areas where there is no demining or MRE currently taking place.

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Mine Related Accidents

In communities with mine clearance activities, 49% of women reported recent accidents in their area, this dropped to 32% in areas where demining is not currently taking place. The overwhelming impact in response to a mine-related accident was that of sadness (43% in areas with demining, 50% of areas without demining). The next most common emotion was that of anger, highlighting that mine-related accidents stir deep emotions of the kind which can easily lead to depression of familial or societal discord.

Response to Seeing Mines/ Mine Related Accidents

If women were to see a mine/ ERW in a safe place, approximately a third in both types of communities reported that they would run away or go back the way they had come. However, in areas where mine action was taking place, one in ten women would continue on their way, highlighting that in these areas many have become so used to the sight of mines that they no longer sense a great level of danger.

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If respondents thought they were in a minefield, similarly, a third would stop and approximately a quarter would shout for help. However, only around one in ten would actually wait for someone to help them.

If respondents were to see someone lying in a minefield, many would run to their assistance; 24% in areas with mine clearance, 31% in areas without. On the other hand, a large percentage would inform the local authorities; 28% in areas with mine action, 29% in others.

Reasons for Risking Travelling into Dangerous Areas

When women were asked why people travel into areas which are risky in terms of mines, the most common answers were related to farming or hunting, highlighting that it is the need to maintain their livelihoods that is the main motivation for people taking risks. This highlights that MRE must be combined with a decisive effort to clear mines as even with mine risk education, as many people will often feel the need to take risks if their livelihoods.

Recommendations from Respondents

- Government should support demining organisations to clear all areas from mines and ERW
- Mine clearance should be continued
- MRE should be implemented and increased throughout Afghanistan, in particular for women and children
- MRE should be increasingly delivered using mass media (e.g. TV and Radio)
- Women should also be involved in mine action and the number of women should be increased within Mine Action Programmes

Conclusion

In conclusion, this survey has highlighted the significant impact that mine and ERW contamination has on women throughout Afghanistan. Mine related accidents lead to feelings of sadness and anger, however, these negative feelings also stir women to action.

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Despite the cultural restrictions, the majority of Afghan women think that they can participate in mine action and want to be involved.

Afghan women are generally satisfied with the priorities for mine clearance in the country at present, but also feel that more needs to be done. This means increased efforts to clear mines and also increased Mine Risk Education, particularly focused on women and children and delivered through mass media as well as through schools and NGOs. Notably, women highlighted the Government's role in mine action. This is the first time in such a survey in Afghanistan when the Government has been noted as responsible for mine action, displaying increased interest in a National authority for mine action.