



MINE ACTION PROGRAMME OF AFGHANISTAN (MAPA) NEWSLETTER: MARCH 2015



“HAPPY NEW YEAR 1394”



Celebrating International Women's Day with Mine Action Family

Each year since 1911, on March 8, organisations around the world celebrate International Women's Day to honour the achievements of women and to call for greater equality. Thousands of events take place every year on International Women's Day (IWD) to mark the academic, economical, political, and social achievements of women.

The official United Nations theme for International Women's Day 2015 is “Empowering Women – Empowering Humanity: Picture It.” According to the UN, the theme “envision[s] a world where each woman and girl can exercise her choices, such as participating in politics, getting an education, having an income, and living in societies free from violence and discrimination.”

This year, International Women's Day was celebrated by the Mine Action Coordination Centre of Afghanistan (MACCA), along with colleagues and partners from the Mine Action Programme of Afghanistan (MAPA) on March 9th, 2015 at MACCA's main office in Kabul, Afghanistan. MACCA convened the event to honour women's contributions to all aspects of the mine action programme and to emphasise the programme's commitment to integrate gender in its activities.



Mr. Rashid while presenting MACCA Honorary Plaque to H.E. Princess India



Mr. Mohammad Sediq Rashid—MACCA Director

MAPA is supported by the following donors to the UN Voluntary Trust Fund for Assistance in Mine Action administrated by UNMAS:

Australia, Austria, Canada, Denmark, Finland, Italy, Japan, South Korea, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Netherlands, and Saudi Arabia.

MAPA is also supported by the following bilateral donors:

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The chief guest speaker of the day was H.E. Princess India, the daughter of King Amanullah Khan (the former king of Afghanistan). She described how her mother, as a young woman in her twenties, began empowering Afghanistan's women to make their voices heard in that era. Her speech demonstrated that women's empowerment is not a new topic in Afghanistan; in fact, the same ideas existed almost over a century ago, but decades of civil war have demolished most of the achievements made by women. In her speech, H.E. Princess India added: "I am delighted to be attending



Mrs. Aziza Zareh, MACCA Gender Associate

today's ceremony with MAPA; I am very familiar with MAPA, as for 14 years I was also working for Afghan mine victims in Rome, Italy. Therefore, I thank MACCA for inviting me today as I feel that I am home now."

Since 2001, after the fall of Taliban regime, GIROA, civil society and the international community revived development processes and women's empowerment in Afghanistan after decades of war had affected women badly and excluded women from the economic social, cultural and political development of the country. Since 2001, women have made great improvements and their achievements are worth recognising.

The event brought together around 80 participants from different

governmental organisations, donors and civil society, including ANDMA, MoE, MoLSAMD, MoPH, the Royal Norwegian Embassy, the Embassy of Indonesia, AABRAR, AAR-Japan, ALSO, ATC, DAFA, DDG, DMC, DAO, HI, HALO, MDC, and UNMAS.

MACCA felt it was particularly important to mark this day to ensure that women continue to be recognised as an equal and important part of our organisation and its activities, because *the inclusion of women in the Mine Action Programme of Afghanistan paves the way towards a mine-free Afghanistan by 2023.*

An interview with an Afghan deminer

The concept of humanitarian mine action was developed in Afghanistan in 1989. Due to the scale of the problem, the Mine Action Programme of Afghanistan (MAPA) became one of the largest mine action programmes in the world. It has a twenty six year history of successfully delivering mine action in Afghanistan. Along the way, MAPA has lost dedicated deminers, but others have lived to tell the tale of the programme's achievements, suffering and hard work.

Over the years, MAPA has suffered from the general insecurity in Afghanistan, with staff and partners of the programme being abducted or caught up in incidents involving unidentified armed groups.. Despite decreasing security in Afghanistan, MAPA has continued to work. The following is the story of Sayed Mohammad, who joined the programme as a deminer back in its early days. He still works in mine action and told us the story of his life as a deminer and of a recent security incident while he was working as a deminer.

"I have been working in mine action since I took mine action training courses as part of 'Operation Salam' in Peshawar, Pakistan, in September 1989. The main reason I joined mine action was to save the lives of my countrymen, women and children. I joined to save our people from the misery of landmines and explosive remnants of war.

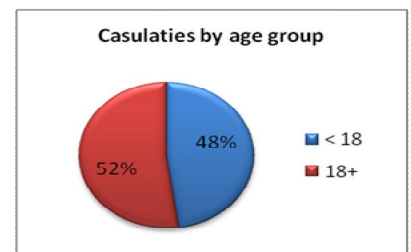
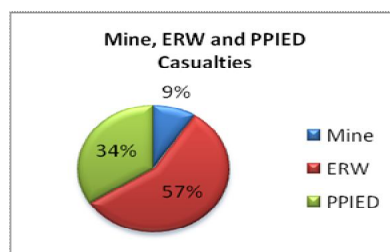
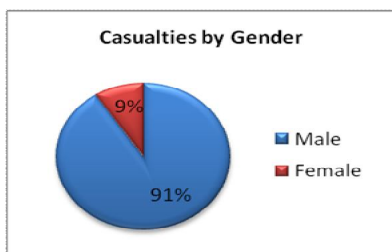
"The situation of Afghanistan was very bad in terms of contamination at that time. When our training finished and we came to Afghanistan and started working, we were very worried, even commonly used paths were not safe. I still remember working in Urgon District of Paktika Province when we were first deployed. We used to work in the deserted fields heavily contaminated by different types of landmines. At that time, my family was very worried for me – they still are. They would wait for my arrival eagerly



Sayed Mohammad, Afghan Deminer

CASUALTIES DURING MARCH 2015

During January, 44 civilian casualties due to mines, Explosive Remnants of War (ERW) and PPIEDs were recorded in Afghanistan.



every day, when I used to come home for my breaks. Luckily, I survived.

"Let me share the story of the recent security incident. It was a normal working day at the Aynak Copper Mine in Logar Province on June 10, 2014. We arrived at our working area around 9 am. We unloaded our equipment from our vehicles and began setting up. The team leader was conducting the morning briefing



when an unknown armed group detonated an explosive device at our parking lot. Our vehicles were damaged and there was chaos. We were scattered everywhere. It was good that the explosive materials were planted at a distance from us. Immediately after the explosion, small arms fire started; everyone was running for their lives. I saw our colleagues being shot in the back. The shooting lasted about two hours and as a result of the incident, eight of our deminers were killed and three others injured.

"Losing colleagues like this is not new. I joined mine action in its early days, when we were losing a friend almost every one or two weeks. The times were very harsh and disappointing. Even now, when we face insecurity or are threatened, sometimes we feel discouraged, but we never think of leaving our duty behind. We as countrymen have dues to pay to our country, Afghanistan. Now that we are trained and experienced in mine action, it is our holy duty to work and clear our homeland from landmines and ERW as soon as possible.

"As a deminer, I think it is possible to clear all the landmines in the next five to six years, as long as our country is not contaminated by any more mines. Certainly, to complete the job, we have to have enough funds for the Mine Action Programme of Afghanistan. Many of our colleagues and friends have been laid off due to the lack of funds. They hope to come back and start their work soon.

"Let me share a good memory of my experience in mine action. We were working in Deh Khudaidad in Kabul after the civil war. The area was heavily contaminated. Suddenly we noticed that a man had crossed our barriers and entered into the minefield. I took a megaphone and called upon him to stand still. I and another deminer by the name of Sayed Faqir, who was killed by an anti personnel mine (AP) during a demining operation, went to save him. We took mine detectors and other equipment and started clearing our

pathway towards the man. We detected and defused ten AP mines in the process and saved him after hours of work. That is one of my most joyful memories from my duty.

"My message to all my fellow deminers is that if they are on the job, they should work hard to clear Afghanistan. They should use their skills and tools with the maximum effort in order to get the job done. I am personally happy about what we do and I think we are doing a fantastic job all over the country. And for those deminers who are not working, they should share their understanding of the risks of mines and ERW with their local communities. They should talk to children and youngsters and educate them about the risks of mines and ERW.

"My humble request to the Government of Afghanistan is to support the MAPA in whatever way possible and provide security so we can achieve our goal of a mine-free Afghanistan by 2023. And my request to our generous donors and other countries is to support us financially. They should not forget that Afghanistan is still one of the most contaminated countries in the world.

"My request to our gallant people is to support us and guide us in our work. People should stay in contact with us and inform us if an area seems contaminated or if an accident occurs. People should also pay serious attention to our awareness activities related to the risks of mines/ERW.

"Finally, I would like to share the point that, in the field, when our mine detectors make a sound, we are alarmed and feel a little scared; even a little piece of metal under the ground could pose a threat to us, but that is just another day on the job. And when we find and destroy a mine, we feel satisfied and happy because we know that we have just saved a life, or prevented a person from being injured or becoming disabled by this hidden enemy.

"I feel that whatever we are doing in mine action, if we are in the field clearing an area, or surveying a suspected hazard, or educating people on the risks of mines and ERW or giving a helping hand to an incident survivor, our job is a holy job and I personally pray that God gives us more power to work for our country and people. One landmark that I see as a result of our clearance operations is Kabul University, which makes me very happy and proud of our work. Now when I see young boys and girls studying in different faculties of the University, I feel so pleased that tears of joy fall from my eyes. I still remember the clearance operations in the University as it was heavily contaminated by landmines and ERW. Our jobs were very difficult at that time, but we cleared it and now it's one of the country's most important institutions.

"Today, I am working on the minefields in Surobi in Kabul Province; I know it is a dangerous job but I do it because I wish to contribute to achieving Afghanistan's goal to be mine-free by 2023."

Another mine and another incident

Afghanistan is contaminated by landmines and explosive remnants of war (ERW) resulting from over 30 years of armed conflict, affecting 33 out of the country's 34 provinces. The contaminated areas cover an area of more than 520 square kilometres. The impact goes beyond statistics, however; the presence of landmines and ERW pose a threat to the everyday lives of Afghan citizens. The following is a story of an Afghan nomad who became the victim of a landmine.

Mohammad Akbar, 35, lives in Welayati, a village in the Bagrami District of Kabul. He is married with six children (two sons and four daughters). Akbar lives in a very small house, made of clay. His only source of income was his flock of 15 goats.

Every day, Akbar used to take his goats to the same grazing field up on a hill; he didn't know that the area was contaminated by landmines. The area is close to an active military base. While the locals were previously warned by mine action implementing partners, many villagers continued to use the area.

Akbar tells his story of the day of the incident:

"It was February 3rd this year. I was taking my goats to the green field on the hill; the area was not new to me. I crossed the area of the incident on the way and nothing happened to me. At 1:30 pm, I decided to go home and started climbing down the hill, crossing the same area on my way back.

"Suddenly, a heavy explosion through me on the ground. I knew that I had stepped on a mine. I could not stand due to heavy pain in my legs. After a few minutes, I moved little by little and I saw that my left foot was severely injured and my right leg was bleeding too. I took my scarf and covered my left foot. While my hands were shaking, I took my cell phone and called my brother who was in the village. I told my brother on the phone that I was hit by a landmine; I might not survive, please come and take me to a doctor.

"Later my brother and my cousin came and they took me to Emergency Hospital in Kabul City. We reached the hospital by 4 pm, and by that time I was mostly unconscious. The doctors operated on my leg and foot. As a result of the incident, I lost my left foot and my right thigh was badly injured. My wounds are healing now but my psychological injuries are still affecting me.

"After the incident, I and my family suffered psychologically and financially. I sold all my goats and spent the money on my medical fees and we bought 3,000 CCs of blood for me. Also I had to pay my debts. Now I don't have a job or any other source of income. I have nine people in my family to support; my eldest son is 10 years old.

"I wish that my government or any other relevant entity would provide me with a job, or pay me a small amount of money to open a small shop or buy a few animals so that I can support my family. Now I am in bed and feel very hopeless."

Representatives of MAPA surveyed the area of the incident and talked to local community members. The Mine Action Coordination Centre of Afghanistan (MACCA) is also planning to prioritize the clearance of the area to be cleared by mine action implementing partners.



Mohammad Akbar, 35, is a landmine incident survivor



Mohammad Akbar's residence in Welayati Village

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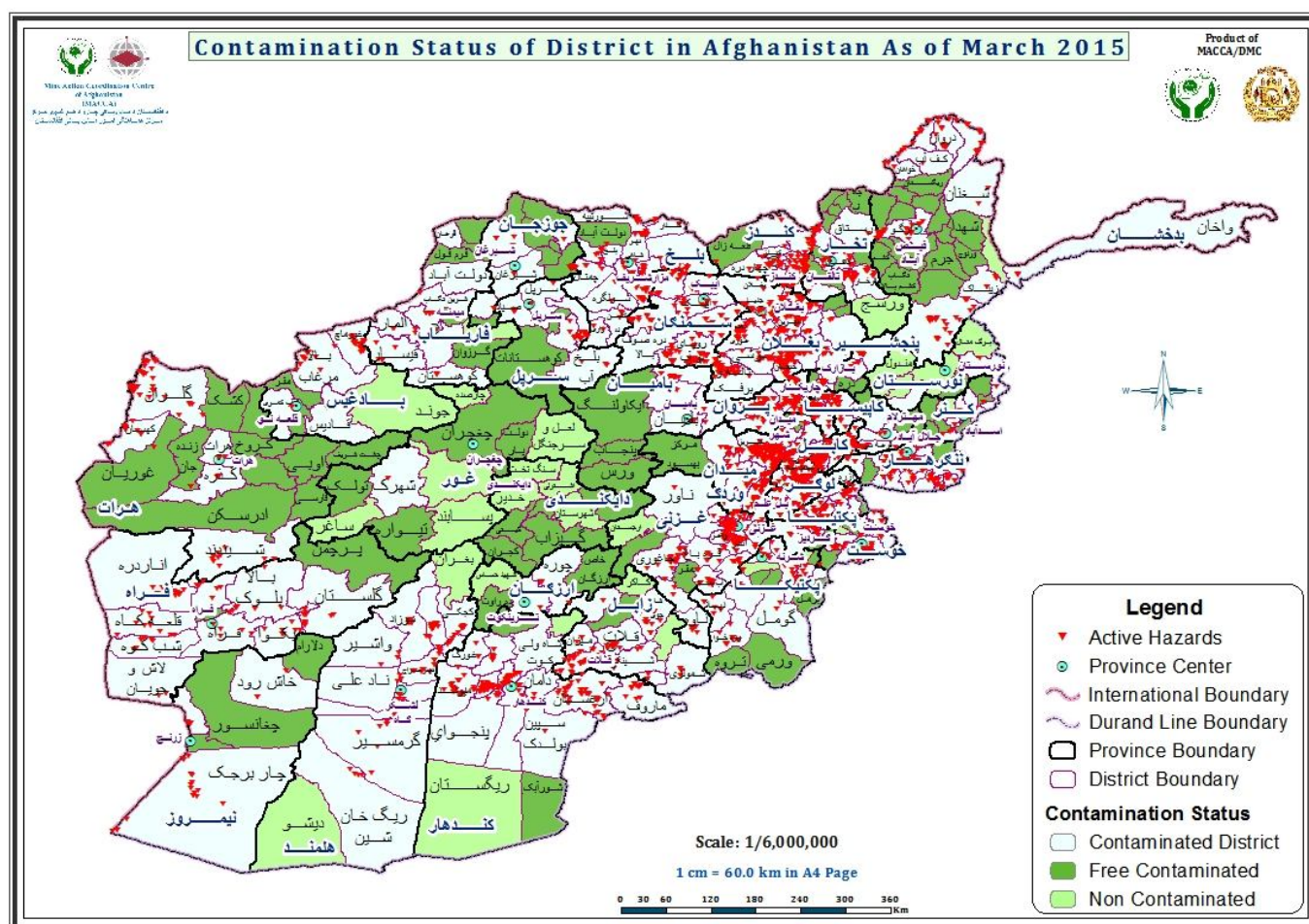


MINE ACTION BENCHMARKS IN AFGHANISTAN

Ottawa Convention:

As part of its obligations under the Ottawa Convention, Afghanistan aimed to clear all emplaced anti-personnel (AP) mines by 2013; destroy all known AP mine stockpiles by 2007; provide mine risk education and assist mine survivors. To note, the Ottawa Convention is about the removal of AP mines, and not of anti-tank (AT) mines or ERW. However it is equally important to ensure that other hazards are not forgotten whilst the focus is on meeting the Ottawa Convention's obligations. In March 2012, the Afghan Government submitted a request for a ten-year extension of the deadline to remove all AP mines by 2023. All AP mine stockpiles have already been destroyed. This request was assessed by 10 members of secretariat at the end of November 2012, where all parties accepted the Afghanistan's request. The current baseline and progress is shown in the benchmark table below. In this table "Hazards" represents number of hazardous areas and "Area" represents the area of hazards in square kilometers.

Hazard type	Baseline April 2013		Previously unreported hazards, up to end of March 2015		Resurvey results up to end of March 2015	Current target as of end of March 2015		Hazards processed from April 2013 to end of March 2015		Remaining hazards at the end of March 2015	
	Hazards	Area	Hazards	Area		Hazards	Area	Hazards	Area	Hazards	Area
	<i>a</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>c</i>	<i>d</i>	<i>e</i>	<i>f (a+c)</i>	<i>g (b+d+e)</i>	<i>h</i>	<i>i</i>	<i>j</i>	<i>k</i>
AP + (AP,AT,ERW mixed)	3,439	266.4	949	52.2	0.9	4,388	319.4	1,565	80.8	2,823	238.7
AT + ERW	1,248	252.1	533	92.4	-13.0	1,781	331.4	587	71.6	1,194	259.8
BF	179	33.5	189	23.7	0.6	368	57.9	118	22.3	250	35.6
Total	4,866	551.9	1,671	168.3	-11.6	6,537	708.7	2,270	174.7	4,267	534.0



MINE ACTION ACHIEVEMENTS IN 1393 SO FAR

- * 11,776 anti-personnel mines, 522 anti-tank mines, and 238,247 ERW destroyed.
- * 157 communities cleared of known mines and ERW.
- * 335,191 women and girls, and 476,825 men and boys received Mine/ERW risk education throughout the country.
- * 23181 people received victim assistance and disability activities including Disability awareness & advocacy, Physical Rehabilitation and socio-economical reintegration . (VA data as per January 2015)

