

# Gender Mainstreaming in Mine Action – a Critical Background Analysis

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## Introduction

How can gender be relevant for something as technical and practical as mine action? In the initial stages of this report the author was on several occasions challenged on the work's *raison d'être*. Land mines don't discriminate on the basis of gender; they will kill or maim anyone unfortunate enough to cross their path, regardless both of gender and of other characteristics. This is of course true in the narrow way in which the argument is presented. Once a land mine is actually stepped on, the victim's gender is irrelevant. However, mines don't exist in such a vacuum. They are a risk factor which will affect one's life disproportionately, and in different ways, based on one's social status, age and, indeed, gender.

Gender mainstreaming efforts have been undertaken in the field of mine action for a fairly short period of time, but it is fast becoming a factor to reckon with in any assessments of mine action efforts. Both for researchers and practitioners, the inclusion of "gender" is perceived as an asset for obtaining funding for new mine action-related projects. This is interesting in itself, and positive to the extent that the value added of gender mainstreaming is being recognised by the powers that be. The purpose of this paper, however, is to critically examine challenges faced by gender mainstreaming in mine action, drawing on experiences made by organisations operating in the mine action sector in Cambodia. The choice of Cambodia as case study is based on the long-standing mine threat here, the extensive literature available and the nature of the domestic mine action sector. While of course being limited by political factors as well as limited resources, the Cambodian mine action sector has a high level of integration between different organisations, both between national bodies and the respective NGOs, and between the different NGOs operating in the country.

The approach chosen for the field study was to conduct semi-structured interviews with key capacities in different mine action organisations operating in Cambodia. Both national organisations and NGOs were represented, and clearance organisations as well as capacity building and training organisations. Not all interviews are reflected in the present paper, as some did not shed any new light on the gender mainstreaming issue at hand. The selection of organisations for interviews was done from a fairly comprehensive overview of mine action organisations operating in Cambodia. Based on this overview, contacts were sought through individuals with an extensive knowledge of the Cambodian mine action sector. Within this limitation, a selection of organisations was chosen partly

to reflect the diversity within the sector, and partly based on access.<sup>1</sup> There are of course shortcomings to this method, and there are organisations that were left out which could have been an asset to the study, such as Handicap International Belgium, who are heavily involved with victim assistance in mine contaminated areas of Cambodia. However, as the selection chosen for interviews includes a wide variety of organisation and the individuals interviewed were invariably either directly involved in gender work or senior staff with responsibilities that include gender mainstreaming strategies, the author believes that the selection is representative enough for the paper to provide a generally representative image of the gender mainstreaming situation in Cambodian mine action.

The essential question of this paper is twofold, though these two aspects are strongly interrelated. Based on lessons learned from Cambodia, which challenges and problems faces gender mainstreaming in the field, and how can this inform the further development of the position of gendered approaches within the mine action sector?

Some restrictions are of course associated with limiting the empirical input to one case study, in this case Cambodia. Firstly, the obvious issues of representativity. This paper cannot make any claims towards universality or a representation of the international mine action sector as a whole. It is merely a case study to underline and challenge parts of the gender mainstreaming discourse. Furthermore, some of the challenges posed by the Cambodian case study were culture specific and may only with great caution be applied to other cases. However, the lessons learned from Cambodia, analysed conceptually, may point towards more general challenges to and inherent difficulties in the gender mainstreaming discourse. This paper will be limited to draw general conclusions at this level, and save the specific lessons for the Cambodian case alone.

## **What Is Gender Mainstreaming?**

In the context of mine action, gender mainstreaming is a process of assessing the implications for women and men of all aspects of the mine action activities, including planning, execution and evaluation. Before looking at the specific ways in which gender mainstreaming is applied to various aspects of mine action, some conceptual clarifications are in order.

The concept of mainstreaming is one frequently used, but infrequently sufficiently understood. It entails the introduction of a concept, such as gender or human rights, into all relevant aspects of the policies, planning and actions of an institution. The scope of aspects considered to be relevant is to be understood in the broadest possible sense for a process of mainstreaming to be considered successful. It is thus insufficient to introduce or increase gender awareness into the aspects usually associated with problems related to gender-based discrimination, such as employment possibilities or level of pay. Mainstreaming of gender entails an understanding that there are gendered issues that need

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<sup>1</sup> The organisations interviewed were AVI (Australian Volunteers International), CMAA (Cambodian Mine Action and Victim Assistance Authority), CMAC (Cambodian Mine Action Centre), MAG (Mine Action Groups), HALO Trust, IWDA (International Women's Development Agency), UNDP Cambodia Gender Section, Cambodia Campaign to Ban Land Mines.

to be addressed across most sectors of an institution or organization, also in aspects of its work not usually associated with such concerns. It demands a deeper understanding of gender issues than what traditional ideas of gender equality and equal opportunities can bring to the table. This is thoroughly addressed by Eveline and Bacchi (2005) as they trace and compare different approaches to gender mainstreaming based on differing understandings of the concept of gender. An important premise for the implementation of gender mainstreaming strategies is, they claim, the acknowledgement that no policy is gender neutral.<sup>2</sup> There are several implications of this. First, it suggests that establishing gender as a field of its own within the structure of an organization initially seems to be a flawed approach. This may not apply if the consequence is that a body is established to oversee the gendered implications of all activities within all fractions of the organization. Still however, such an approach may be insufficient to ensure a true recognition of the gendered implications of the different activities within these fractions, leading to a lack of internalization of the subject which in turn is likely to limit the efficiency of the efforts. Also, the introduction of gender considerations from above may not fully be able to embrace the specificities of the gender issue and the specific challenges associated with it within each fraction of the organization. This is an important insight to keep in mind for the coming discussion.

Processes of gender mainstreaming can be traced back to the mid- seventies and the proliferation of women's advancement instruments in national bureaucracies.<sup>3</sup> At the UN International Women's Year Conference in Mexico City in 1975, it was decided that all states should strive to establish agencies of this kind. As mentioned above, it can be argued that this type of approach to gender mainstreaming is limited in its nature. Still, it constituted a significant watershed in the gender discourse in international politics. The concept of gender mainstreaming appeared in the mid -80's, but only materialised in reports and papers in the early -90's.<sup>4</sup> According to True and Mintrom (2001) the concept has been the subject of contention and debate based on its inherently contradictory qualities. It is construed as a move away from traditional women's issues as the core focal point of feminist policy making. However, it also represents what they describe as a "politisation of traditional male and female roles."

It's important to acknowledge the evolution of the use of the concept since it surfaced in the early nineties. At that point it was primarily associated with the establishment of offices to focus on gender issues within the state machinery. The relative success or strength of the mainstreaming efforts was, crudely put, measured in terms of the strength of the office and how high up in the institutional hierarchy it could be found.<sup>5</sup> These offices were supposed to oversee all aspects of activities within the state bureaucracy, and as such not be tied to a specific field such as mine action. In mine action however, it is

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<sup>2</sup> Eveline, Joan and Bacchi, Carol (2005), *What are we mainstreaming when we mainstream gender?*, International Feminist Journal of Politics, 7:4 2005, p. 502.

<sup>3</sup> True, Jacqui and Mintrom, Michael (2001), *Transnational networks and policy diffusion: The case of gender mainstreaming*, International Studies Quarterly, 45:1 2001, p. 30.

<sup>4</sup> Anderson, Mary (1993), *Focusing on Women. UNIFEM'S Experience in Mainstreaming*, UNIFEM Occasional Paper, New York, p 2.

<sup>5</sup> True and Mintrom (2001), pp 30-31.

difficult to discuss processes of gender mainstreaming in a comprehensive manner within such a framework.

## **A few developments in gender mainstreaming and mine action**

### *UN Guidelines<sup>6</sup>*

As stated in the introduction, the relevance of gender in mine action is primarily related to the gendered impact on a society of being burdened by land mine contamination. This fact has been recognised by a significant proportion of the international mine action community. A cross-section of UN bodies encompassing the Office of the Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women, as well as the Inter-Agency Steering Committee on Gender and Mine Action, have developed guidelines for implementing a gendered approach to mine action, and the implementation on gender strategies is fast becoming a demand upon mine affected countries to secure donor funding for their mine action programmes.

In the UN, the gender mainstreaming efforts in mine action are coordinated by the Inter-Agency Steering Committee on Gender and Mine Action. This is a working group consisting of representatives from 14 different UN bodies involved in development, peacekeeping, mine action and gender issues. The Steering Committee has developed a set of guidelines meant to inform mine action practitioners of the gendered aspects of the different elements of the land mine problem, and to guide strategies towards gender sensitivity.

The UN Gender Guidelines for Mine Action Programmes was published by the UN Mine Action Service in February 2005 and is created to “help United Nations mine action policy makers and field personnel incorporate gender perspectives in all relevant mine action initiatives and operations.” An important starting point is that “men, women, boys and girls are affected, and best assisted, in different ways.” Additionally, the guidelines emphasise the need to strengthen the position of women throughout the organisation.

The guidelines, while meant for UN operations, address many of the issues in which gender comes into play in mine action activities. They are structured in a way which represents the major gender issues related to mine action, while also illustrating some of the challenges and possible pitfalls in the transition from strategic planning to field implementation and are therefore worth taking note of.

The UN guidelines are structured by dividing the paper into sections of guidelines based on the different aspects of mine action, here listed as mine clearance, mine risk education, victim assistance and advocacy. These are then sub-categorised into gender objectives,

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<sup>6</sup> In addition to the guidelines, the UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security (S/RES/1325) is an important development in gender mainstreaming in humanitarian action within the UN, and this resolution can certainly be relevant for mine action. However, including a discussion on resolution 1325 in this paper would require an added dimension which did not fit with the paper as a whole, and it has thus been left out. The author recognises the relevance of resolution 1325 for mine action and the need for further research to be done on this relationship.

gender considerations and gender mainstreaming checklists. The paper is commendable for its hands-on approach, which is an important attempt to bridge the gap between strategists and theorists on the one hand and practitioners on the other. It applies principles of gender mainstreaming, described more theoretically in the introductory chapter, to four out of five key pillars in mine action.<sup>7</sup> However, while such a meeting of the strategic, theoretical field and grass-root practitioners is valuable, these guidelines have significant shortcomings in terms of actually managing to cross this divide. Mainly, the problem lies in trying to generalise something which is not really generalisable. The guidelines for each pillar are sweeping in nature, and with a language stressing the need to “ensure” different objectives such as the needs men, women, boys and girls being taken into consideration in prioritisation work. The approach to this is then somewhat elaborated, but without really addressing the often difficult cultural issues at play in these situations. These issues of course vary between countries and contexts, making generalisation at this level difficult and generating a rather superficial and sweeping approach. However, the guidelines would hugely benefit from addressing how hierarchical and patriarchal structures may affect the attempt at and outcomes of the proposed gender mainstreaming initiatives.

The guidelines are thus primarily interesting as an attempt at quantifying what gender mainstreaming at the ground may entail rather than as a strategic tool to be utilised by practitioners on the ground. Thus, some key lessons and points of reference are certainly addressed in a clear manner in the paper.

First, in all aspects of mine action it is important to maintain a level of communication with the local community to safeguard the quality and appropriateness of the efforts initiated. In carrying out this dialogue, the practitioners need to be sensitive to the needs of all groups in the community in question. This includes consulting women as well as men, but also to look at other groups whose needs may not be adequately represented by community leaders.

Second, that gendered perspectives are necessary to ensure that all individuals have the same opportunity to access the benefits arising from the presence of the mine action organisations in their communities, both in terms of employment and with regards to other benefits.

Third, that to ensure the fulfilment of these objectives it is necessary to maintain a gendered perspective when analysing and disaggregating data and information collected in relation to the mine action involvement in the community.

### *The Swiss Campaign to Ban Land Mines*

The Swiss Campaign to Ban Land Mines has launched its own programme with the objective to support gender mainstreaming in mine action. The programme, initiated in December 2006, is meant to be a comprehensive support effort for the mine action sector, providing both research on and evaluation of such efforts, as well as hands-on practical

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<sup>7</sup> The fifth pillar, stockpile destruction, is not seen as immediately requiring gender guidelines.

guidelines for advocacy groups and mine action actors on the ground. Importantly, these “training kits” were to be produced by a combination of mine action practitioners and gender mainstreaming specialists. Additionally, they intend for the programme to include advocacy work and support of the lobbying efforts of women’s organisations in their respective countries.

This programme will, at the time of writing (October 2007) be running for about another year, and is thus only mid way to completion. An evaluation of its relative success would thus be premature at this point. However, its ambitious and comprehensive nature begs some reflections on its intentions and strategies. By addressing organisations and bodies on all sides of the relevant spectre, this programme has the potential of building bridges between perspectives that are now far apart and holding internally conflicting priorities. The constituencies that it aims to serve are “international civil-society mine action organisations, national civil-society organisations, grass-roots mine action organisations and projects, government ministries as programmers of mine action, government ministries as donors of mine action programmes, and women-based organisations (run by and having their predominant constituency as women) operating in or supporting any aspect of mine action, or seeking to engage in mine action.” This looks, and may also be, overtly ambitious. However, as a tool of mainstreaming it is a very interesting and fruitful approach. By seeking to inform and work with this diverse group of stake holders, the programme takes not just the gender side but also the mainstreaming side of the equation seriously. Successful mainstreaming depends on the involvement of all relevant bodies in the process towards a greater understanding and incorporation of gender issues in their field. Crucially, this requires that the different bodies are able to discuss and share their views on how this should be done and in which ways gendered perspectives are relevant for their everyday work. I would argue that in order for gender mainstreaming efforts to be properly and effectively implemented, they need to be based on a real perception by the practitioners of the relevance, necessity and desirability of the process. If this postulate is accepted, it means that donors wishing to use their influence on the recipient state and state bodies will not be successful in doing so without also ensuring local ownership to the solutions sought. This is unlikely to be achieved without some domestic participation in the development of goals, tools and strategies for gender mainstreaming.

Thus, the interesting angle to this attempt is how it addresses several inherently very different constituencies at once. Given that it is able to create a synergy in which these constituencies are drawn into a common discourse on the interplay between gender issues and mine action, this programme could provide a very interesting starting point for a more effective bridging of the gap between theoretical experts and practitioners, as well as between the mine action community and the women’s organisations.

### *Donor requirement*

A special characteristic of the gender mainstreaming tendency in mine action is the way in which gender considerations tend to be implemented in part as a result of pressure from external donors, both states and IGOs. This is often welcomed as a sign of pro-activity and commitment on the hands of the donor community by gender equality and human rights pressure groups, and for good reasons. The use of funding restrictions as an

enforcement mechanism for engineering change in a dependent state or organisation is of course one of the strongest tools of enforcement available the international community. Gender initiative requirements are thus a clear sign that the donor community is concerned with the impact mine action have in the wider sense on the communities in which they operate. However, there are several problematic aspects associated with the use of this tool for influencing domestic mine action, and these problems are closely related to those identified in the UN Guidelines.

In a conversation I had with Mr. Heng Rattana of CMAC in Cambodia, he gave a clear impression that inclusion of gender elements to CMAC strategies was a result of demands from donors, without saying that the organisation was hostile towards such initiatives. However, it was quite clear that the donor requirements had not been followed up by the necessary training, cooperation and adjustment to the local situation necessary for the gender mainstreaming project to be internalised in the organisational life of CMAC. This will be elaborated later in the report.

### **Cambodia: An illustration**

The Cambodian land mine situation goes back to the Vietnam War, and has constituted a significant challenge to the security and development situation in the country. Cambodia is thus a country well suited for evaluating the introduction of a new aspect of humanitarian mine action.

The Cambodian mine problem is pervasive, challenging and well-known. It is also being addressed at a high level of priority by state bodies and NGOs alike. For gender mainstreaming to be effectively implemented, it is necessary that the mine action sector in the relevant country is fairly well institutionalised and integrated, and that there is a certain level of stability in the country. This is not related to specific characteristics of gender mainstreaming as such, but rather to the challenges associated with implementing holistic, comprehensive strategic changes in any institutional sector. While Cambodia does face several serious political challenges, it is this authors view that the criteria listed above are present in Cambodian mine action efforts. Its mine sector is among the more cemented and institutionalized mine sectors in the world. It consists of two state organs with fairly established division of labour overseeing local public mine action bodies as well as a number of NGOs operating the area. The cooperation between the NGOs and the government bodies is well established and runs relatively smoothly, and the country has been in a period of relative stability since 1998.

At the official government level, mine action efforts are controlled by two government bodies, the Cambodian Mine Action and Victim Assistance Authorities (CMAA) and the Cambodian Mine Action Centre (CMAC). CMAA is the coordinating body which is responsible for suggesting and enforcing strategies, coordinating the different organisations that work within the mine action sector, and manage international co-operations in this field. CMAC is responsible for the state run mine clearance and oversees and manages the local entities involved in the demining work.

*Approaches to Gender Mainstreaming in the Cambodian Non-Governmental Mine Action Sector*

MAG: “The question is not why we do employ women, but why we shouldn’t?”<sup>8</sup>

In terms of gender mainstreaming in mine action in Cambodia, MAG represents perhaps the most comprehensive and sophisticated effort towards realising the potential in this approach. This claim is based not necessarily on the extent to which gender mainstreaming efforts have been carried out within the structure of MAG, though admittedly this has been done extensively. Rather, there seems to be an acknowledgement within the strategies of MAG that gender mainstreaming is not an endeavour to be entered into in isolation, with a view simply to improve the position of women within the work carried out by the organisation. The organisation sees gender mainstreaming as part of a bigger picture in which the goal is to serve the population in the area in which they operate with as little bias as possible. In other words, they approach the rationale of gender mainstreaming from the opposite end of what is the norm, and of what has been criticised above. Instead of approaching gender mainstreaming from the perspective of gender politics, they approach it from a perspective of coherence and an intrinsic principle of equality of treatment. This may seem like an artificial division. However, the core point is whether gender mainstreaming is seen as important because of gender issues alone, or whether it holds relevance in the field of mine action in a broader perspective of acknowledging the need for a multi-dimensional approach to community liaisons.

MAG is present in Cambodia as an authorised mine clearance operator, and has a significant presence in mine-affected areas. MAG states that the goal is to reach a 50-50 gender balance on staff in all sections of the organisation, but that they are still far off that goal, partly because of access to skilled female staff and partly based on cultural prejudice. At present, about 34% of their staff is female. MAG also has a pro-active employment policy on hiring disabled workers, seeing both these policies as a tool for ensuring equal opportunities for the whole community. Additionally, MAG holds that having mixed sex teams is good for the discipline of the teams as it limits the occurrence of drinking, gambling and so on. MAG is eager to communicate to the rest of the mine action community in Cambodia that female deminers can do a very good job and that they will in fact be an asset to the clearance teams. As female headed households tend to be especially poor, the organisation especially targets women from this category when seeking clearance workers. This can be done because MAG has structured significant parts of their demining efforts so that deminers stay and work in their own area. They train local people in their own villages so they’re clearing their own fields and their own forest, and train them to the same standards as their regular deminers. With this arrangement they find that they are able to provide regular wages to whoever we want. It facilitates the employment of women, especially of single-headed household women, because issues of child care are easier to overcome when the women work close to the village. MAG then works with partners such as Australian Volunteers International, CARE and World Vision to identify the families most in need of employment opportunities, a list which is topped by the landless and the female-headed households.

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<sup>8</sup> MAG country manager for Cambodia Rupert Leighton in interview with the author, Phnom Penh 27 April 2007.

MAG then has an approach to their role as employees which integrates development concerns and ties these to gender mainstreaming efforts in an interesting way which should be worth exploring further. The organisation has a policy of working closely with development partners and to not undertake clearance unless there are the villages they work in are supported by regional developing activities.

Australian Volunteers International is present in Cambodia with a team seeking to provide expert advice, skill training and support to local and domestic mine action practitioners. Their mandate is purely related to the development of local skills and expertise; they are not involved as practitioners in any way. They have been present in Cambodia with their capacity building project since 2000, when they started with a few volunteers in the province of Battambang. They don't have any staff with specific gender expertise, and are no longer involved in gender training even though they did have aspects of gender mainstreaming to their project in the initial stages. These however were abandoned in recognition of their own lack of gender expertise and a decision to leave the gender mainstreaming aspect of capacity building to the International Women's Development Agency who were present in Cambodia and possessed the desired specific gender competence. As their mandate was also related to assistance in skills training and advise to domestic and local decision makers and practitioners, The AVI informed the author that they saw no reason why they should attempt to do the same considering their limited gender expertise. Rather, they chose to cooperate with the initiatives of the IWDA, leaving the gender specific capacity building to them. However, representatives from AVI offered some interesting perspectives on gender mainstreaming in Cambodian mine action based on their extended experience with local mine action initiatives.

In their perspectives, gender mainstreaming efforts in domestic Cambodian mine action efforts suffer from a narrow-minded understanding of the term "gender" and the fundamental principles making gender mainstreaming in mine action necessary and desirable. For them, the essential starting point for gender mainstreaming is comprehensiveness. It is only one piece of the puzzle to ensure the involvement and benefit of all aspects of a community in the process and benefits of mine action. The criticism from AVI can broadly be divided into two categories. First, a tendency to over-emphasise the importance of superficial indicators of the success of gender mainstreaming efforts, and second that the goal of gender mainstreaming only to a very limited extent is seen as intertwined with a broader community based humanitarian agenda.

AVI sees it as a problem the way in which the domestic ADMAC project, which funds the MAPUs, demand to see outcome indicators of gender mainstreaming in order to evaluate the relative success of these efforts. Evaluating the results of new strategies is of course a reasonable thing to do in order to be able to adjust for any unexpected outcomes or for the lack of any significant outcomes at all. However, AVI's main contention is that the indicators used are too superficial and do not measure whether the efforts have had any real impact on the communities. Generally, these evaluations are based on head counts, including the presence of women at consultation meetings, the number of female deminers and so on. However, he holds that while an increase of female staff in mine

action organisations and the presence of women at these meetings may be a prerequisite for successful gender initiatives, it is not a guarantee for any real change. For gender mainstreaming to be successful, there needs to be a real empowerment of women in the processes of mine action. This does not necessarily happen just because more women participate in consultancy meetings. If the body attempting to introduce mainstreaming measures does so simply through measures encouraging a quantitative increase in the participation of women, the likelihood of any real impact taking place is small. Rather, it is likely that the community will respond to these measures, be they of the carrot or the stick kind, by simply adapting without internalising why this is important. Thus, there is no reason to expect that the pattern of male domination will change in order for women to speak their minds just because they agree to participate at a meeting.

Keeping this in mind, one can easily see the merits of the second aspect of the criticism raised by the AVI staff. If gender mainstreaming is reduced to head counts, the wider implication and initial intention of these efforts are lost. If we accept that the justification for gender mainstreaming lies in the quest for reducing discrimination and working towards a more equal participation and empowerment of all groups in a given society, it is not enough to introduce measures that are skin deep, amounting to little more than symbol politics.

HALO Trust are markedly different from the other actors on the Cambodian mine action stage. Their approach to mine clearance is strictly technical, and they are known for sticking to the militaristic tradition of mine clearance. They thus do not have any gender mainstreaming policy at all, however some of their arguments for deciding to not enter into this discourse are worth taking note of.

Again, there are two key arguments of interest presented by HALO in Cambodia. First, why HALO do not employ female deminers in Cambodia as a matter of fact and second why HALO do not accept that they play a role in a greater development process in Cambodia and the other countries where they operate. These arguments are intertwined, and in many ways based on the same logic. On the point about female deminers, which reflects the principle of ensuring all members of the local community equal access to the benefits arising from the mine action taking place in their area, HALO does not, as such, have a principle against hiring female deminers. In fact, HALO states that it has employed a number of female deminers in their operations in Eritrea and Kosovo. This, however, was in situations where the deminers didn't live in remote camps but went home in the evening (Kosovo) or where there was a tradition for men and women fighting together in the army (Eritrea).

Rather, their policy is not to be pro-active in seeking to employ women. This is justified in terms of HALO's definition of themselves as a technical entity which is only present to get as many mines as possible out of the ground. Thus, any strategies entailing goals other than this is of no interest to the organisation. A representative from the organization compares HALO's role to that of a plumber who is called to fix a specific problem but who cannot and should not be required to take into account any aspects of the house beyond the pipe system. However, HALO also holds reservations against hiring female

deminers, suggesting that even if women were to seek employment with HALO clearance teams it's rather unlikely they would get the job. With the structure of the clearance work being such that the deminers live in on-site camps, usually far removed from their community and families, mixed teams is seen as a threat to discipline. Interestingly, this is the opposite stand from that taken by MAG in relation to their pro-active stance on the employment of women. HALO settled on this position about 12 years ago (1995) as they moved into larger-scale mine clearance settled away from provincial bases. They regarded it as preferable to keep men and women separate, referring to the traditions of the military structure and fears of disciplinary problems stemming from the intermingling of young, single women with men who are far away from their families. And even though there are actions that can be taken in order to make a policy of hiring women work, this is seen as being an undesirable strain on the organisations economic and management resources which would take time and focus away from the mine clearance tasks.

The same logic is in many ways behind the argument as to why HALO does not consider themselves as tied to any development efforts in their countries of operation. As stressed earlier, gender mainstreaming in mine action is tightly connected to notions of community involvement with processes affecting their lives and livelihoods. As HALO rejects the relevance of this, the rationale for gender mainstreaming does not fit their mandate. As such, they are not particularly interested in different community perspectives on which areas ought to be prioritised for demining. In fact, HALO criticises MAG and the CMAC<sup>9</sup>-run clearance operations for spending significant time and resources on clearing land with very limited land mine contamination rather than focusing on heavily mined ground.

International Women's Development Agency (IWDA) are involved with mine action in Cambodia as an advisory body working closely with both the domestic bodies, the local MAPUs and the mine action organisations operating in the country. Their mandate is to support and encourage processes of gender mainstreaming within the sector. Their involvement is still in the initial stages, and many of their intended activities are still in the planning stages. This sub-chapter will thus focus on some of the perspectives provided by the IWDA on aspects of gender mainstreaming in the mine action sector of Cambodia, drawing on her gender expertise.

After doing an assessment of the understanding of gender mainstreaming among staff in the gender mainstreaming section, the IWDA concluded that this was at a very low level. This, according to IWDA, is problematic because even if the bodies and organisations are encouraged to implement gender elements to their strategies, they lack the necessary depth of understanding to do so in a manner which is efficient and which reflect the intricate issues at play between gender and mine action. Generally, the impression is that gender is seen as an add-on instead of a cross-cutting issue. This is reflected in a tendency to focus on superficial indicators and tools which rather focuses on simple head counts rather than on ensuring the real participation and influence of women in the mine action processes. IWDA, for example, criticises the way in which community consultations for prioritisation of land for clearance is carried out. This is as has been

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<sup>9</sup> Cambodian Mine Action Centre, the domestic clearance body.

described in this paper one of the key areas in which the increased participation and influence of women is desirable. It is not enough to encourage women to participate in these meetings if they don't share their views and concerns. In a mixed meeting, women are unlikely to be comfortable speaking up, and especially to contradict the views of the men. And if they do speak up, they are likely to be overlooked based on an understanding of the views of women as not being as valuable as that of men due to their lack of education and experience. It is important, as IWDA points out, to keep in mind that this view prevails not only among the male villagers attending the meetings, but among many of the staff from MAPU or from the operators heading the meetings. One way of improving this situation is to hold separate meetings with women, a strategy already employed by MAG to a certain extent. However, this will not in and of itself be sufficient to ensure that the women present are able to communicate their views and concerns adequately. First, the issue of prejudice against women on the hands of the mine action staff needs to be addressed through gender training tailored to the domestic and local context. Second, the fact that many of the women in fact lack the skills and experience needed to get their views across needs to be acknowledged and ameliorated. This is often related to very specific skills needed, such as the ability to understand and draw on maps, suggesting a need for creativity in the way consultations are carried out to ensure that women are able to express their views and to share their knowledge and experience without being hindered by their lack of specific skills.

While the IWDA provides many interesting perspectives on the shortcomings of gender mainstreaming in the mine action sector of Cambodia, they suffer from the same shortcoming as many women's organisations do when talking about gender issues, namely to equate gender issues with women's issues. While it is certainly true that the empowerment of women is essential for a more comprehensive and holistic approach to mine action, in Cambodia and elsewhere, the IWDA seems less concerned with the male side of the gender coin. Other organisations: UNDP, Cambodian ICBL

### *The approach of state bodies*

CMAC (Cambodian Mine Action Centre) is the state run Cambodian clearance agency. They have a policy of encouraging women to seek employment with them, both in the administrative sector and as deminers. The director of CMAC describes an organisation which appreciates the specific contributions that women can make, and which seeks their inclusion within the ranks of the organisation on these grounds. He refers to experiences with female deminers as being efficient, disciplined and an asset to the working environment, especially in terms of health and security issues. This is uplifting based on the challenges of the inferior position of women in Cambodian society. However, CMAC seems to lack the necessary integrated understanding of the cross-cutting nature of gender as an issue, leaving employment opportunities as the key gender-based strategy for the organisation. After a long conversation about the employment of women in the organisation, which apparently was seen as the main aspect of gender strategies for CMAC, a high ranking representative was asked about whether he found the UN Guidelines to be helpful for the mainstreaming process which he indicated was ongoing at CMAC. Interestingly, he was not at all familiar with the existence of this document. He then went on to state that he took advice from donors and NGOs working in the mine

sector, but primarily relies on the expertise inherent in the organisation. This is interesting insofar as CMAC does not have any previous experience in gender mainstreaming. In other words, CMAC does not see that gender mainstreaming requires different skills and insight than pure mine action knowledge. Additionally, his comment suggests that the mainstreaming input sought is that of donors and mine action organisations, in other words bodies on which CMAC to a certain degree depend for maintaining the desired level of mine clearance in Cambodia. This is not to say that CMAC are not concerned with for example the level of female employees within their ranks, with women's access to victim assistance and risk reduction efforts, or with female views on the prioritisation of mine action in their communities. However, it does suggest that the process of gender mainstreaming in CMAC is not internalised to the degree necessary for the staff to feel ownership to these concerns. Rather, it suggests that to use gender tools in planning and strategising is a function of external demands which is not sufficiently integrated with the existing strategies and practices of community relations within the organisation.

The perceived discrepancy between the attention paid to gender and the level of integration of the gender concept at CMAC is an example of the problems related to superficial or sweeping demands for gender mainstreaming from donors. For donors to exercise influence over the mine action strategies towards the introduction of gender mainstreaming in a given country in a fruitful manner, these demands cannot stand on their own as an abstract request. Rather, they need to be developed in close contact with the domestic authorities in question and with a culture-specific perspective which allows for local ownership not just of the problems, but of the solutions. Furthermore, concrete strategies, tools and checklist of the kind provided in the UN Guidelines but reflecting local circumstances should be developed as a joint effort between donors, or agents acting on their behalf, and the relevant domestic bodies. With such a model, donors are still able to exercise their influence in a manner consistent with their gender mainstreaming goals and objectives without risking that the outcome is symbol politics rather than effective, fruitful efforts.

CMAA (Cambodian Mine Action and Victim Assistance Authority) was established by the government in 2002 to do coordination and strategizing as separate of what happens on the ground. It is strictly set apart from the CMAC, the government organization which is responsible for the work on the ground. CMAA has the sole responsibility for relations with mine action sections in foreign governments and so on, and for following up on Cambodia's international responsibilities in the mine action sector and other related responsibilities such as rights of disabled person. CMAA is the organisation responsible for the local MAPUs, and are thus responsible for planning strategies for community consultancy work and mine risk reduction measures. In an interview with the author, a representative of the CMAA stated that he found gender perspectives to be especially relevant and helpful in mine risk reduction and mine risk education projects. They aggregate all their casualty data based on age and gender in order to identify patterns of risk. In terms of the employment of specific gender mainstreaming strategies beyond this however, CMAA are rather short on hands-on efforts. This is identified as a result of resource shortage, which manifests itself in limited abilities to seeking broader

community consultations and to diversifying approaches to villagers based on gender or age.

Interviews with CMAA representatives make it clear that gender awareness is certainly present at the CMAA. However, it manifests itself in a fashion which does not reflect the core concerns of mainstreaming – namely the goal of comprehensive, non-discriminatory mine action where the benefits are equally accessible to all groups in the community. Rather, the views presented by CMAA reflect an ad-hoc approach to the gender mainstreaming process which can be said to represent gender without mainstreaming. First of all, “gender” seems to be synonymous with “women”, a mistake which is often, and understandably, made. Second, instead of focusing on ensuring the equal access of women to benefits and influence in the section of mine action, the focus seems to be on finding female-specific aspects in the sector and nurture these. One example is how CMAA want to target women for employment in the mine risk education sector based on their conceived skills in teaching and communication with children. While this may be true based on traditional divisions of labour in the communities, it does not go very far towards the real goals of gender mainstreaming. The approach is too narrow and does not reflect the necessity of ensuring women equal access to benefits and influence. Instead, it takes a traditionalist view on the role of women and seeks to accommodate women into the mine action work within the framework of these roles. Clearly, this acknowledgement of the particular skills and resources of the female side of the community is positive in and of itself, and may certainly be an important part of the gender mainstreaming process. However, if this is what the gender aspects of their mine action strategies amounts to, it does not qualify as mainstreaming in the real meaning of the concept.

### *Some reflections based on the Cambodian experience*

There are two key conceptualisations of the gendered implications of mine action in any affected community. First, there is what can be called the contribution factor. Second, there is the more commonly emphasised benefit factor. Under each of these there are of course a number of different ways in which mine action relates to gender considerations. However, before we get to that these two categories ought to be defined more precisely and contextualised in relation to mine action.

‘The contribution factor’ can be understood as a person’s right to take part in the process in which he or she is a stakeholder. It relates to the right to influence and be heard in processes relevant to a person’s core interests. In the context of mine action this is particularly relevant in the process of prioritisation taking place prior to the onset of a clearance task. These consultations differ structurally between both countries and organisations, but have some general features and goals in common. First, they reflect an acknowledgement of the fact that effective problem solving requires that the people closest to the problem are the ones defining it. In mine action, this relates to which areas should be first priority for clearance, where clearance is less important, and where there is a need for urgent risk-reducing measures to be instated. This is at the core of the community-based participatory approach to mine action discussed by Ruth Bottomley<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Bottomley, Ruth; *Crossing the Divide. Landmines, Villagers and Organisations*, PRIO Report 1/2003, PRIO (International Peace Research Institute, Oslo), Oslo 2003.

in a PRIO report from 2003. This report deals with experiences from the mine sector in Cambodia, which is the same case study chosen for the present paper. Bottomley addresses different challenges met by the mine sector in dealing with the extended impact of land mines and of mine clearance in a context of livelihoods, sustainability and development. One of her key contentions is that there is a tendency for the mine action section to approach the clearance task from a very different perspective than that of the local community. Their technical approach is often based on quantified goals with little regard for the social implications of their presence.

When talking to key individuals in Cambodian mine action, the author was left with a feeling of hollowness whenever gender was brought up. Everyone seemed to agree that “gender” was an important thing for their work. Everyone had “gender” in their strategies. Still, what impact “gender” actually had on their day-to-day activities, and why “gender” deserved a spot in the strategy papers was less than clear. This experience goes to the heart of a significant challenge towards the gender mainstreaming trend, and it begs a very uncomfortable question. Is “gender” merely a buzzword among international policy makers, donors and influential NGOs which meaning has not been trickled down to the practitioners who are expected to act accordingly?

While there is no consensus that humanitarian mine action is an exercise in development efforts, there are certainly grounds for claiming that these two sections meet many of the same challenges and may benefit from drawing lessons from each other. The UNDP has made significant efforts in the field of gender mainstreaming in development, and has come a long way in acknowledging the myriad of intertwined gendered issues arising in the context of development work. They divide their gender equality efforts into three pillars, namely capacity building, policy advice and providing support on ad hoc gender equality interventions in collaboration with UNIFEM. They have developed several approaches to gender mainstreaming in development work which may be useful for looking at the existing efforts and potential improvements of mainstreaming processes in the mine action sector.

One point, stressed in the UNDP practice note on gender mainstreaming, is that in the planning stages of local projects, it is essential to ensure that women and men alike are consulted on what they see as “the most pressing issues”. This is a perspective which to some degree is already recognised in the mine action sector. The UN Guidelines hold that it is key to successful mine clearance that the information gathered for prioritisation purposes is as comprehensive as possible. This point is further elaborated in the recognition that “Men, women, boys and girls often have distinct roles and responsibilities within a mine affected community.” This acknowledgement leads to the conclusion that these roles are likely to inform the individual perspectives on the risks facing the community and on which needs are the most pressing ones in relation to these risks. In order to ensure a comprehensive view of the needs of any given community it will thus be essential that consultations are made not just with adult men and community leaders in the villages, but with women and children as well.

A second point emphasised in the same document is the need for gender disaggregated data on key indicators. In a development context, this may be related for example to illiteracy, HIV/AIDS or poverty measurements, and the logic of this effort can easily be transferred to the mine action sector. By disaggregating data on casualties in a gendered perspective much can be learned regarding how assistance and information can be tailored differently to men, women, boys and girls depending on the type of risk-prone behaviour most commonly associated with casualties within each group. For this to be effective however, it is necessary that the data are disaggregated not just based on gender and age, but also taking into account the context of the casualty. This means for example disaggregating data based on gender, age and activity associated with the accident, or by gender, age and the area of the accident as this relates to the village structure (e.g. whether it took place near the houses, in the fields, in the woods etc).

As has been discussed, some of these tools are being used in Cambodia. CMAA is involved with the disaggregation of data based on gender and age. The acknowledgement that men, women, boys and girls may have different, equally valuable, inputs to the planning and prioritisation processes in their communities is slowly coming about, and attempts to ensure that these voices are being heard have been initiated. The challenge is to tie all this together in a comprehensive strategy in which gender is being recognised for the full scope that it has on the vulnerability of individuals to the direct and indirect impact of land mines, and the influence and access they have to the actions taken to alleviate the problem.

### *Conclusion*

Gender is in the process of being established as a real concern in mine action internationally. In Cambodia, gender mainstreaming is present as a concern, but not necessarily as a strategy in the three key sections of mine action in the country, namely the state run mine action organisations, the authorised operators and advisory and advocacy groups. We have seen how the focus on gender differs substantially between the different organisations, and that these differences illustrate major gaps in the conceptual understanding of exactly what gender mainstreaming is and how it is relevant to mine action. A couple of general issues for acknowledgement and further debate and effort can be identified.

First, there seems to be a disproportionate focus on the employment of women as a measure of gender mainstreaming. Ensuring equal employment opportunities, and effectuate actions to move towards gender balance in the make-up of demining staff as well as administrative staff is of course an essential part of ensuring equal access of women and men to the benefits arising from mine action. These efforts are thus not a problem in and of themselves; rather they ought to be commended, as they duly are. However, there is a tendency to stop short of moving beyond this, leaving the organisation at a point of gender mainstreaming by head count. Needless to say, this is entirely inadequate as it fails to take into account the complex issues at play both when it comes to the gendered division of labour and in terms of other aspects of mine action. Employing women does not necessarily generate any impact beyond that of giving those specific women access to an income, unless it is paired with a real, in-depth focus on

utilising the perspectives and knowledge of these women to challenge the male-dominated outlook of the organisation. Additionally, the employment of women is, simply put, far from the only or even the most important gender mainstreaming tool available to mine action practitioners. Without including strategies to even out the gender imbalance in community influence on the mine action taking place in their areas, gender mainstreaming in mine action will not be realised.

Second, there is a tendency both among the mine action practitioners and especially among the women's organisations seeking to integrate gender and mine action to equate gender issues with women's issues. This falls short of realising how the impact that land mines have on individuals changes based on gender. Men face massive challenges in that they are in a vast majority among the victims of land mines in Cambodia. Also, many men experience significant difficulties related to gender role expectations as they become unable to adequately care for their families in the aftermath of being injured by a land mine. Little research is done on this, but MAG and other practitioners in the mine action sector describe as an example a tendency of injured men to divorce their wives and chose a life of begging in the big cities rather than burdening their families with the chores of caring for them. For the gender mainstreaming efforts to be truly valuable, these perspectives need to be included in the strategies.

How can these problems be overcome? Are they inherent in the intersection of mine action and gender mainstreaming. The answer to the last one is a qualified no. These problems don't need to be inherent in the process of gender mainstreaming in mine action given that they are not the product of insurmountable differences between the discourses. Rather, they are the product of problems inherent in if not the theory then at least the practice of gender mainstreaming in general. By setting gender aside as its own issue instead of closely tying it to principles of equal opportunities, participation and influence, the resulting strategies are likely to be overtly narrow, shallow and simplistic. A suggestion for ameliorating these challenges is to integrate gender mainstreaming in mine action with a rights-based approach to how this work is to be carried out. It has already been pointed out how it can be valuable for mine action operations to draw on lessons from the sphere of development in their planning, prioritisation and community liaisons. By adjusting and applying principles already developed for rights-based approaches to development, gender mainstreaming in mine action is put in a context where the focus is on empowerment, decision making, influence and the inviolable rights of the individual. This lifts these processes out of narrow female-focused context where the tools applied are better suited for ad-hoc solutions and head count measures and into one in which gender concerns can be seen in the broader context of human rights and the empowerment of marginalised groups.

This is not the place to draw out suggestions for how a rights-based approach can improve processes of gender mainstreaming in mine action. The rationale, however, deserves a few lines of clarification as an alternative to the gender mainstreaming implementation seen in the example from Cambodia. First, it's essential to look to Amartya Sen and his influential book "Development as Freedom", which is a key work in the discourse on a rights-based approach to development. Seeing mine action in the same

way as Sen sees development, namely as something which enhances the free agency of individuals, is intuitively meaningful. Mine clearance opens up the possibilities that people have for travelling and for utilising the land. It removes a major risk factor, and thus opens up for a much broader scope of livelihood options in the affected communities. By thinking in terms of rights, perspectives are adjusted from ad-hoc tools applied to the ends of a specific group towards looking at gender mainstreaming as a useful and important way of moving towards the realisation of the rights of mine-affected communities in terms of the development inherent in mine clearance itself as well as participation in and influence over the processes and activities connected to it.

In conclusion, the lessons from Cambodia have illustrated some weaknesses in the implementation of gender mainstreaming in mine action, at the same time as it has pointed out some interesting and useful tools for integrating women's interests in the mine action project. As the weaknesses are not related to failures inherent in the gender mainstreaming project but rather to the angle from which gender issues are perceived, it seems that what is needed is an adjustment, not a reconsideration of the gender mainstreaming project. One potentially fruitful way of making such an adjustment is to develop strategies for gender mainstreaming which is incorporated in a broader rights-based approach to community involvement in mine action. This has the potential of ameliorating the one-eyed focus on traditional women's issues translated into a mine action context, and help gender mainstreaming become a tool towards equal access to benefits and influence in a context of the empowerment of affected communities.