

PREPARING FOR PEACE: MINE ACTION'S INVESTMENT IN THE FUTURE OF SUDAN

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DESPITE THE LONG-RUNNING CIVIL WAR in Sudan, various mine action initiatives have been ongoing in the country since 1996, inspired by national and international actors. And in spite of the numerous challenges faced, which were sometimes underestimated, mine action has both laid foundations for further peacebuilding in Sudan and demonstrated that it is possible for mine action to proceed during conflict. This chapter examines the impacts of some of the mine action activities carried out in Sudan during the last eight years, particularly in the Nuba Mountains. To provide essential context for the analysis that follows, a brief overview of the conflict is first provided, followed by a profile of the Nuba Mountains regions and a history of mine action in Sudan.

Conflict in Sudan

Sudan, the largest country in Africa, has an ethnically diverse population consisting of an estimated 36 million people, which can be roughly divided into 65% African and 35% Arab. Over 70% of Sudanese are Muslim, and a large number of these are of African descent. Between 5% and 10% are Christian, and the rest follow traditional

¹ Fieldwork was conducted in the Nuba Mountains in areas controlled by both the government of Sudan and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A), as well as in Khartoum and Nairobi, in the periods 5–26 January and 22 March–16 May 2004. The authors would like to thank Dr Gary Littlejohn for supporting this project since its inception and contributing to the fieldwork, as well as the numerous organizations and individuals that assisted in the research: DanChurchAid (DCA), the Sudanese Association for Combating Landmines (JASMAR) and Operation Save Innocent Lives (OSIL) for hosting the field visits; the many international and local organizations that provided information; and the translators and communities of the Nuba Mountains, who were always welcoming and gave their time to participate in the research. We are also grateful to Dr Gary Littlejohn, Richard Lloyd (Landmine Action UK) and Steven Olejas (DCA) for comments on earlier versions of this chapter.

theist religions (ICG, 2002).² Since gaining independence in 1956, Sudan has experienced ongoing civil war, with the exception of the 1972–83 period, during which a precarious peace held.

The current civil war broke out in 1983 and has caused large-scale death and displacement. Since the conflict began, it is estimated that 2 million people have been killed, half a million have left the country and 5 million have been internally displaced,³ including up to 2 million originally from the south living in the north (ICG, 2002) and a further 2.2 million living in the transition zone. Sudan's transition zone 'lacks a precise definition or geographical area', but the term is used to refer to those areas of the country where 'Arab and African groups meet and overlap' (Duffield, 2002: 202).

The conflict in Sudan is often described in terms of the Arab Muslim north against the African Christian south (ICG, 2002; Johnson, 2003). However, as is evident from the country's demographic structure, the reality is more complicated. In fact, the conflict involves numerous 'interlocking struggles' (Johnson, 2003: xii), many different warring actors, intergroup fighting and shifting alliances (ICG, 2003). The central parties in the conflict are the government of Sudan in Khartoum and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A), which is based in the south. However, southern politics is plagued by internal divisions and complicated by fighting between factions of the SPLM/A and variously aligned militias. In addition, the Sudanese government has used local militias as proxies in its war with the SPLM/A, and it cannot be assumed that independence in the south would put an end to the violence there (Martin, 2002). Also, there have been rebellions against the government in what has been considered the geographic north of the country – in the regions of Abyei, the Nuba Mountains and the southern Blue Nile. 'Insurgents from these areas have been fighting alongside the SPLM/A throughout most of the civil war' and have become 'integral parts [of the SPLM/A] while preserving their own regional agendas' (ICG, 2003: 2) The Sudan Liberation Army emerged in Darfur at the beginning of 2003, and there is civil unrest among the Beja people in eastern Sudan and increasing tension among the Nubians in the north.⁴

Like the conflict lines, the root causes are also unclear (Johnson, 2003). The most significant issues seem to be religion, control of resources, governance and self-determination (ICG, 2002: 91). The secularist ideology of the SPLM/A has seemed irreconcilable with attempts by the current National Islamic Front (NIF) government

² Johnson (2003: xvii–xviii) argues that Sudanese who are neither Christian nor Muslim are often wrongly described as pagan or animist, when they in fact are theists.

³ See US Committee for Refugees, 2004. 'World Refugee Survey 2004, Country Report: Sudan' (figures from end of 2003); available at <http://www.refugees.org/world/countryindex/sudan.cfm> (accessed 6 September 2004).

⁴ The International Crisis Group (ICG) has criticized the Sudan peace talks for focusing on the conflict between the SPLM/A and the government of Sudan without taking full account of other conflict lines. Instead of relying on the north–south paradigm, the ICG argues that the conflict is better understood as 'the marginalization of peripheral regions and groups by successive governments in Khartoum' (ICG, 2003).



to create an Islamic state. The NIF's Islamist principles are rejected not only by non-Muslims but by many Muslims as well (ICG, 2002). In recent years, as the extent of the oil wealth in southern Sudan has become clearer, the SPLM/A's demands for self-determination in the south have taken on significant economic implications in addition to the political consequences.

Since peace talks began in Kenya in June 2002, six protocols have been agreed. This process led to the signing of a peace deal between the Sudanese government and the

SPLM/A at the end of May 2004. However, at the time of writing in November 2004, there is concern that the conflict in Darfur could jeopardize the peace deal before it is implemented, as the Sudanese government claims it is unable to control the Janjaweed militia it has armed to put down the uprising in Darfur. The international community has been refusing to support the implementation of the peace agreement with financial assistance and resources until the government of Sudan puts an end to the fighting in the Darfur region. Despite the ongoing peace talks, visible signs of conflict remain. The government of Sudan is based in Khartoum and in reality exercises authority only in the northern half of the country. Many senior SPLM/A figures operate from Nairobi. Access to southern Sudan for international actors and aid has to be routed through Kenya, as it is not possible to travel directly to southern Sudan from the north of the country. Freedom of movement is not possible within Sudan at the present time, and international organizations must liaise with both sides separately, which involves time-consuming travel and administrative hurdles.

The Nuba Mountains

‘The ... conflict in the Nuba Mountains is almost exclusively a manifestation of the wider civil war in Sudan’ (Sudan Peace Fund, 2002: 46). The inhabitants of the Nuba Mountains became involved in the conflict between the Sudanese government and the SPLM/A in 1985, following clashes between the SPLM/A and local pastoralist tribes, armed by the government to form militias. The fighting escalated, and although the SPLM/A did not have a permanent presence in the Nuba Mountains, Nuba villages were repeatedly attacked by government troops and militias (Johnson, 2003). In 1986, the SPLM/A began recruiting people from the Nuba region, and in 1989 it established permanent bases in the Nuba Mountains. From 1988, the Sudanese government deliberately targeted the educated elite and traditional leadership of the region, which assisted the SPLM/A in its recruitment drive (Johnson, 2003). Although the SPLM/A did commit human rights abuses during its initial involvement in the Nuba Mountains, the SPLM/A command has since enforced a strict disciplinary code among its troops in order to reduce attacks on civilians. In contrast, it is claimed that the government has actively encouraged its troops to violate human rights (African Rights, 1995). Furthermore, it has been claimed that the SPLM/A has also been developing civil society institutions, while the government has been attempting to control the region by appointing its supporters to influential positions and undermining the traditional tribal governance structures (African Rights, 1995; Johnson, 2003).

Located in the geographical centre of the country, the Nuba Mountains lie in Sudan’s transition zone, between the Arab Muslim north and the Christian African south. Most of the inhabitants of the Nuba Mountains are Muslim, but there are also significant numbers of Christians and theists in the region. The Nuba Mountains is a fertile region, covering an area of 30,000 square miles (African Rights, 1995) and home to an

estimated 1.4 million people (NMPACT, 2002: 7).⁵ The majority of the population are described as Nuba, which comprises around fifty diverse black African ethnic groups that rely on farming as their main means of survival. There are also Sudanese Arab pastoralist groups in the area, whose livelihood is based on herding cattle or camels (African Rights, 1995). Although there have been longstanding tensions between the Nuba and the pastoralists, predominantly over access to resources, some tribes had agreed methods of resources-sharing and other tribal groups had developed close relations with each other (African Rights, 1995: 11). The war, however, has exacerbated tensions between the two groups (Sudan Peace Fund, 2002), and many of the local mechanisms developed to limit tensions have now been abandoned.

The Nuba Mountains is a remote area. Consequently, the infrastructure in the region is undeveloped and access to services has been poor (Johnson, 2003). The majority of people live in mud huts in scattered villages and may walk up to seven hours a day to collect water. The basic schooling and medical services that were available before the war have been destroyed. Communication is slow, because there are no surfaced roads, only tracks, many of which have fallen into disuse and become overgrown. Most people travel on foot, and a few by cart or bicycle. Access to radio or television is poor throughout the region, and many rely on word of mouth for communication. Several of the towns under government control have telephone lines, but the network does not extend to the villages. In comparison with the larger SPLM/A-controlled settlements in the Nuba Mountains, the government settlements are more developed, the standard of living is higher, and the markets are larger and sell a wider range of goods.

Because of the ethnic and religious diversity of the Nuba Mountains and the region's location in the transition zone, questions related to Nuba identity and appropriate political rule for the region have been the subject of some debate (Johnson, 2003). The aggressive Arabization and Islamicization policies pursued by the Sudanese government have made identity and political status a major factor in the Nuba Mountains. It is argued that many Nuba aligned themselves with the SPLM/A as a means of achieving self-determination (Sudan Peace Fund, 2002). Support for the SPLM/A led to the government declaring a jihad against Muslims in the region (Johnson, 2003). Another factor in the conflict is ownership of and access to land. Successive Sudanese governments, ignoring traditional land law, have given large areas of land to their supporters for mechanized farming, which has increased the political power of the Khartoum government in the Nuba Mountains region, deprived the local population of land and disrupted any existing land-access agreements between the pastoralists and the Nuba.

In January 2002, the government and the SPLM/A reached a ceasefire agreement for the region for an initial six-month period. The Nuba Mountains is a geographical region rather than a politically defined area with administrative borders. Therefore, the

⁵ There are no accurate population records for the Nuba Mountains. Johnson (2003: 131) estimates the Nuba population to be between 1.3 million and 1.6 million; Africa Rights (1995: 12) estimated that the Nuba population was greater than 1.3 million in 1989.

ceasefire agreement defined the Nuba Mountains as the whole of the state of South Kordofan and the eastern province of Lagawa in the state of Western Kordofan.⁶ A stalemate had been reached in the fighting, and the agreed ceasefire lines were primarily based on troop location. As a result, the areas under SPLM/A control are in the mountains, while the plains (by far the largest areas) are under government control. The ceasefire lines do not necessarily reflect the sympathies of the population, merely the troop locations at the time the agreement was reached. However, the ceasefire granted jurisdiction over their respective areas to the government and the SPLM/A, and permission has to be obtained from the relevant side in order to enter its territory. Although the Nuba ceasefire agreement was not part of the broader peace process that began later in 2002, the peace talks have helped to maintain the Nuba Mountains ceasefire: the agreement has been extended every six months and is still being maintained.

The Use of Mines in Sudan

Both the government of Sudan and the SPLM/A have used landmines in their offensive and defensive military operations, and rough estimates suggest that around one-third of Sudan is affected by landmines or explosive remnants of war.⁷ However, the full extent of the mine threat and its socio-economic impact are unknown (ICBL, 2003). Even in the Nuba Mountains, where demining has been taking place for the last two years, few detailed surveys of mined areas have been completed. In general, the SPLM/A laid anti-tank mines and the Sudanese government laid anti-personnel mines. An assessment conducted in 2000 concluded that mines had been used for four main purposes: to defend towns and key military installations, to mine roads and tracks, to impede the pursuit of cattle raiders, and to stop military raiding parties and patrols (McGrath, 2000: 6).

Despite claims to the contrary from both sides, there appear to be no accurate records of where mines have been laid. Often, relevant information was not recorded in writing, or individuals entrusted with the information have since been killed, have moved to an unknown destination or are unable to recall the details. Consequently, gathering accurate information about mined areas is difficult and time-consuming. The problem is compounded by uncertainty surrounding the location of villages and towns and the routes of roads. Over the years, inhabited areas have been deserted and reinhabited and houses have been destroyed and rebuilt to such an extent that many settlements no longer occupy their original locations. Similarly, roads (of which many were unsurfaced) have moved as vehicles have abandoned existing paths to avoid

⁶ See 'The Nuba Mountains Cease-Fire Agreement', available at http://www.gurtong.com/downloads/Cease_Fire_Agreement.html (accessed 21 November 2004).

⁷ See 'Sudan Reporting to the Second Session of the Standing Committees to the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention, Geneva, 21–25 June 2004', p. 3; available at http://www.gichd.ch/pdf/mbc/SC_june04/speeches_VA/Sudan_text_23June04.pdf (accessed 21 November 2004).

obstructions or original routes have become overgrown when roads have fallen into disuse. Mines themselves can also move because of flooding, which occurs annually in many parts of Sudan and can wash mines to different locations, making previously mine-free areas hazardous.

As a result of the mine threat, the majority of funding for humanitarian aid to southern Sudan has been consumed by the costs of providing aid by air. Demining would reduce the costs of delivering aid significantly. In addition, many of those who have been displaced by the war will want to return only when they believe it is safe to do so. Displaced groups are considered to be particularly vulnerable to mines, because they do not have local knowledge about the probable location of mines. Generally, the lack of information about the mine threat complicates all aspects of mine action and makes long-term planning difficult.

Mine Action in Sudan

When the international community began to examine options for more active involvement in supporting mine action in Sudan, it was thought that mine action could help to prepare for peace in five areas, all of which are seen as essential to achieving a sustainable peace. The five areas were supporting a peace process, encouraging good governance, strengthening civil society, promoting human rights and initiating official joint activities to benefit the population.⁸ Mine action was identified by the international community as a possible entry point into Sudan to help to prepare for peace, because efforts to combat the threat of mines had already been commenced by both the Sudanese government and the SPLM/A. In fact, both sides had previously sought external help to begin addressing the mine problem. The international community, having recognized the benefits of undertaking mine action in Sudan sooner rather than later, initiated the process of gathering support from donors, developing working relations between the SPLM/A and the government of Sudan in relation to mine action, and undertaking preliminary research to assess the mine threat. This foresight and preparation meant that when a ceasefire was brokered for the Nuba Mountains, more extensive mine action activities could be started in that area.

Unfortunately, the original national efforts to address the mine threat have since been largely overshadowed by outside intervention. In this case study, however, the focus will be on events surrounding the development of indigenous mine action organizations. Mine action activities in the Nuba Mountains are analysed in greater detail and considered in terms of their success in preparing for peace.⁹

⁸ Interview with Xavier Marchal, EU Ambassador to Sudan (February 1999–October 2002), August 2004

⁹ The Mines Advisory Group and Fondation Suisse de Deminage have both had programmes in Sudan. However, these are not discussed in this case study, as they were not operational at the time the field studies were conducted. The Sudan Integrated Mine Action Service (SIMAS) is not discussed in detail, because at the time of the field study it was not one of the prominent national initiatives operating in the Nuba Mountains.

Formal mine action activities in Sudan can be traced back to 1996, when the Sudanese Campaign to Ban Landmines (SCBL) was established in Khartoum and Operation Save Innocent Lives (OSIL) was formed in southern Sudan following the SPLM/A unilateral moratorium on the use of landmines in November that year.¹⁰ Although the government of Sudan and the SPLM/A were concerned about the mine threat, both had difficulty securing outside help to tackle the problem. OSIL began operating in 1997, but since its inception, observers claim that it has struggled to secure enough external funding to function effectively and has lacked effective external expert support. In January 1997, the Sudanese government approached the UN for help. However, although a report assessing the mine problem was produced, it was not recommended that mine action should begin during conflict (UNDHA, 1997).

At the end of 1997, the government of Sudan signed the Mine Ban Treaty, which it ratified in April 2004. In 2001, the SPLM/A signed the Geneva Call Deed of Commitment, the equivalent of the Mine Ban Treaty for non-state actors.¹¹

A further assessment of the mine problem in Sudan formed part of the Inter-Governmental Authority for Development (IGAD) Planning for Peace Initiative in 1999–2000. This initiative identified key areas that would need to be addressed in order for a sustainable peace to be achieved, such as food security, displaced persons, civil society building and land ownership. The report on mine action, published in 2000, concluded that little consideration had been given to ‘the potential impact of landmines on other key sectors such as rural health programmes, refugees and internally displaced populations, agriculture, livestock movement and disease control, food security and aid logistics’. Therefore, it was argued that mine action ‘must be an integral sector of the peace-planning process for Sudan’ (McGrath, 2000: 26).

The IGAD report claimed that, despite international commitments, combatants from each side continued to use landmines. However, it argued that humanitarian priorities had to be put above political issues, and that mine action initiatives should be commenced immediately in advance of peace.¹² It was recommended that both sides start collecting data on mine incidents and meet to discuss technical mine-related issues; that two mine action centres be established; that further assessments of mined areas be conducted; and that first aid training and mine awareness programmes be established. In addition, the report suggested a ‘Brave Option’: ‘a response to landmines [could] play an important part in building peace’, and therefore mine-affected areas should be monitored to identify those that were uncontested and ‘could be targeted for accelerated demining training followed by mine survey, marking and clearing operations’ (McGrath, 2000: 29). It was intended that, if these recommendations were implemented, both sides would actively participate in mine

¹⁰ It should be noted that SCBL and OSIL are not strictly civil society organizations, as both have strong links to their respective regimes.

¹¹ For more on Geneva Call, including its work with non-state actors and the Deed of Commitment, see <http://www.genevacall.org/home.htm> (accessed 6 November 2004).

¹² According to the latest *Landmine Monitor*, the government of Sudan and the SPLM/A continue to accuse each other of using landmines (ICBL, 2003).

action, supported by resources and expertise from UN agencies and international NGOs.

In August 2001, SCBL, representing the government of Sudan, and OSIL and the Sudan Integrated Mine Action Service (SIMAS), on behalf of the SPLM/A, attended a meeting in London hosted by Landmine Action UK (LMA) and the Diana, Princess of Wales Fund to discuss how the Sudanese might begin to tackle their landmine problem. The two sides agreed to form the Sudanese Landmines Information and Response Initiative (SLIRI). This was conceived as an indigenous, grass-roots organization working with both sides of the conflict with a minimal number of international staff. Funding for SLIRI came from the European Commission and would be distributed through Oxfam GB, which would act as a fund-holder. LMA would provide practical support.

Through SLIRI, national capacity to undertake mine action would be developed, with the aim of ensuring that expertise and resources would be sustainable when the international community withdrew or reduced its support. Such a national organization would help to overcome the reduction in international funding that often occurs once an initial emergency phase is over. Another argument for creating SLIRI was that the undeveloped infrastructure and vast distances in Sudan meant that mine action staff had to be more self-contained and able to survive in field camps for longer periods of time than in many other countries. In such conditions, national staff would cope better than personnel from other countries.

In 2001, the Sudanese Association for Combating Landmines (JASMAR) was formed. This has become a significant actor in the Nuba Mountains. Like SCBL, JASMAR is said to be closely associated with the government of Sudan and to maintain political links through the appointment of key staff and board members.

In 2002, a number of factors coincided to make mine action simultaneously practical yet politically more difficult. The signing of the Nuba Mountains ceasefire agreement between the SPLM/A and the Sudanese government in January presented an opportunity for SLIRI to undertake a joint assessment using one team with members drawn from both sides of the conflict. However, the government of Sudan would not agree to such an arrangement, so a compromise was reached: two teams were formed, one from each side. Each team was restricted to gathering data from the areas under its own side's control. The assessment was completed in March 2002 (SLIRI, 2002).

Under the mandate of the Joint Military Commission (JMC), the international monitoring mission established to oversee the ceasefire agreement, it was stipulated that mine action was to be undertaken as part of the ceasefire.¹³ The JMC entrusted the responsibility for coordination to the United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS).

SLIRI provided a briefing on the landmine situation for the JMC and UNMAS when the two organizations began operating in the Nuba Mountains. UNMAS initiated emergency demining, so that the JMC could establish its headquarters. Access to roads

¹³ 'The specific functions of the commission shall include ... supervising the mapping and clearance of mines.' See 'The Nuba Mountains Cease-Fire Agreement', available at http://www.gurtong.com/downloads/Cease_Fire_Agreement.html (accessed 21 November 2004).

was cleared by Ronco, which used demining dog teams from the United States, and DanChurchAid (DCA), using its Kosovar demining teams from Albania. To establish longer-term mine action solutions, UNMAS agreed with JASMAR/SCBL, OSIL and DCA at an Intersessional meeting in Geneva in September 2002 to begin what has become known as crosslines demining in the Nuba Mountains. The Sudanese government was represented by the Humanitarian Aid Commission (HAC), and the SPLM/A by the Sudan Rehabilitation and Relief Commission (SRRC); mine action is conducted in cooperation with both of those bodies.¹⁴ The crosslines programme would involve training deminers from both sides together, in a training camp in a neutral area of the Nuba Mountains, in order to develop national capacity. DCA, JASMAR and OSIL would be equal partners in the project. It was also agreed that UNMAS would establish a National Mine Action Office in Khartoum, a secondary office in Rumbek in the south of Sudan, and a regional office in Kadugli in the Nuba Mountains.

Following an emergency mine assessment in March 2003, JASMAR/SCBL and OSIL withdrew from SLIRI, apparently because of disagreements over resources. A political dispute also developed between SLIRI and the Sudanese government. For several months, SLIRI found it difficult to operate. As a result of travel restrictions imposed by the government, it was unable to liaise effectively between the two sides. In addition, the grass-roots ideology underpinning SLIRI was at odds with the approach taken by UNMAS, which appeared to be advocating an internationally led mine action programme that could be initiated more quickly. It has been alleged by various organizations that UNMAS staff wanted to ‘do a Kosovo’ – that is, a resource-rich mine action programme to achieve rapid clearance. Many Sudanese civil society organizations claim that they were told by UNMAS that the Nuba Mountains would be cleared of mines within two years.

Despite its problems, SLIRI has been able to continue to operate without renewing its working relationship with either OSIL or JASMAR. Relations with the government of Sudan have improved, and a Memorandum of Understanding was signed with UNMAS in November 2003. In 2004, SLIRI and UNMAS developed a partnership in the Nuba Mountains under which SLIRI implemented the first landmine impact survey in Sudan, with mixed teams drawn from government- and SPLM-controlled areas.

The crosslines demining programme in the Nuba Mountains also experienced setbacks. International staff had difficulty in obtaining visas and travel permits, and the delivery of equipment was delayed in Sudanese customs in Khartoum. The SPLM/A claimed that the site chosen for the training camp in the Nuba Mountains, Um Serdiba, was not neutral, and initially the camp had to be moved a few kilometres away from the original site to an area that was less accessible. However, the training camp has now been permanently established in Um Serdiba, which has been accepted

¹⁴ The SRRC was previously known as the Sudanese Relief and Rehabilitation Association (SRRA).

by both sides as a neutral area.¹⁵ In the dry season, Um Serdiba is about an hour's drive from Kadugli, a government-controlled town and an important administrative centre, and three hours from the SPLM/A regional headquarters in the town of Kauda. Driving time can increase dramatically during the rainy season, however. Both JASMAR and OSIL have accused each other of appointing intelligence officers as trainee deminers. The accusations often seem to arise because individuals who have not been living in the Nuba Mountains have been selected for the programme. The original agreement had been that the trainees should be drawn from among the local population living in the Nuba Mountains. The development of local capacity would enable mine action to continue when external organizations shifted their focus to other parts of Sudan.

Challenges and Achievements

Working in any conflict situation is challenging, and it is inevitable that humanitarian and development interventions will encounter difficulties. Perseverance and commitment do not guarantee success. In Sudan, political and logistical problems encountered by individuals and organizations undertaking mine action initiatives have impeded progress. The Sudanese government has been reluctant to issue entry visas and internal travel permits to international staff, who are needed to provide expertise until national capacity has been developed. Organizations have also had difficulty negotiating the release of equipment from customs. The conflict between the government of Sudan and the SPLM/A means that staff and equipment for southern Sudan often have to be routed through Nairobi, as it is not possible to travel directly between the northern and southern parts of the country. The undeveloped infrastructure in the country, particularly in the Nuba Mountains, has impeded communication and the movement of people and equipment. In addition, the rainy season makes the roads in the Nuba Mountains almost impossible to use, so travelling time between locations increases dramatically. The progress of many activities becomes slower, and the heavy rains can stop demining activities altogether.

The lack of previous long-term close-contact engagements in Sudan means that external actors do not have a good working knowledge of how to operate effectively in the country. Most external organizations, including those involved in mine action, are having to learn how to work in a new cultural, political and legal environment that has been shaped by a complicated protracted conflict. Often, even basic information related to normal daily activities is lacking. For example, there are no up-to-date maps, so locating a village or finding a road can be difficult. Even maps of Khartoum are not widely available. Building up an institutional understanding of a new working environment and determining how best to operate takes time.

¹⁵ The camp at UM Serdiba has become widely accepted as neutral territory and has been used by international organizations to hold meetings with people from both sides of the conflict.

As a result of the war, many Sudanese have not completed their education, have had little vocational training, and have limited or no experience of formal employment. Consequently, mine action organizations have to allow time to provide on-the-job training for many of their support staff. The trainee deminers are not used to classroom learning and the strict discipline required to ensure safety in an area suspected of containing mines. Therefore, the training courses have had to progress more slowly than they have done in other countries and, once trained, the teams still require close supervision. National and international staff need time to develop effective working relationships and to understand each others' working practices.

Despite the many challenges, though, progress has been made. Four teams of deminers known as JASMAR I and II and OSIL I and II have been trained through the DCA/JASMAR/OSIL crosslines programme. During their training, deminers from both sides lived together in the camp and were trained together. Currently, however, JASMAR teams can only work in government-controlled areas and OSIL teams in SPLM/A-controlled areas when they are deployed, though this may change after a peace agreement is implemented. Two teams of deminers from each side, trained by LMA, operate under SLIRI in the Nuba Mountains. SLIRI has also established seven offices in government-controlled areas and eight in SPLM/A-controlled areas, to collect information from local communities about mine incidents and suspected mined areas. Unfortunately, SLIRI states it can only share information if permitted to do so by the relevant authorities, so it has not been possible to use all the data collected to plan mine action programmes (SLIRI, 2004). SLIRI's reluctance to share information unless permitted has created some friction within the mine action community.

UNMAS admits that demining has progressed more slowly than would normally be expected. In the Nuba Mountains, 628,233 square metres of land had been cleared and 1,295 mines/UXO destroyed by July 2004.¹⁶ Roads have been a main priority for clearance to improve access, but areas around some villages have also been demined. Unfortunately, though, there have been a number of mine incidents on roads where the mine threat had been considered low, including a road that has come to be known as the 'Humanitarian Highway'. This road passes through both government- and SPLM/A-controlled territory and is an important access route for supplies and assistance. Before the Humanitarian Highway was opened, information was gathered from the Sudanese government and the SPLM/A about where mines were likely to have been laid. It appears that demining activities were concentrated on those areas, and systematic demining of the whole road was not carried out. The mine incidents that have since occurred have led to both sides accusing each other of laying mines after demining, which has posed a serious threat to the Nuba Mountains ceasefire and the peace process. However, it is not widely understood that there have been no mine

¹⁶ See 'Demining' at <http://www.jmc.nu/en/0306.htm> (accessed 24 October 2004).

incidents in areas that were actually demined. Consequently, the confidence of the local population in the ability of mine action to make areas safe has been shaken.¹⁷

The prioritization of areas for demining is dictated by several factors. To fulfil its mandate, the JMC argues that it needs to be visible and to be able to travel within the Nuba Mountains. Although clearance of some roads may not have a direct impact on the humanitarian needs of a community, the JMC claims that demining that allows it to monitor the ceasefire has a longer-term impact for a larger population. The government of Sudan and the SPLM/A military in the Nuba Mountains are aware that the ceasefire might break down and seem reluctant to allow areas to be cleared that may be of strategic importance. In order to reduce the risk of losing the commitment of both sides and to maintain the momentum of mine action, demining sometimes takes place in particular areas simply because it can, rather than because of humanitarian need. In principle, it is desirable in mine action to target areas that pose the greatest threat to the community. However, when working in situations where peace does not exist, it may be necessary for external actors to make compromises and to focus efforts where it is possible to undertake physical activities in order to support the longer-term goals of peacebuilding.

A governance structure for the development of policy and management of mine action has been developed in Sudan. This is known as the National Mine Action Office (NMAO), and it involves actors from both sides of the conflict. A series of counterparts from the government, military and community levels have been established to liaise with each other and to represent the interests of all parties. SCBL, JASMAR, OSIL, SIMAS and SLIRI work through the NMAO, which coordinates mine action tasks in Sudan. To a certain extent, the NMAO is an artificial construct, heavily dependent on UNMAS for material resources and expertise, and reliant on third parties to liaise between counterparts who cannot or will not work directly with each other. Nevertheless, the existence of the NMAO could provide the basis for transparent and accountable mine action programmes. Support from Sudan's indigenous mine action organizations shows that the NMAO has some legitimacy and could facilitate coordination of joint activities. However, the NMAO does have operating problems. For example, in November 2004, it was claimed that there have been no coordination meetings at the national level for demining agencies in Sudan for over twelve months.

Poor communications and dispersed village populations present a challenge to mine risk education programmes, particularly when the extent of the mine threat is largely unknown. Similarly, community liaison to explain the processes involved in mine action is difficult. Mine risk education is in its infancy in the Nuba Mountains and so has not formed part of this study, but it is clear that developing methods of disseminating information that are culturally appropriate and efficient when large numbers of the population are nomadic or semi-nomadic presents a real challenge.

¹⁷ See 'Land Mine Accident Indicates Lurking Dangers in Sudan', UN WIRE, 15 October 2003; available at http://www.mineaction.org/refdocs.cfm?doc_ID+1605&country_ID+829 (accessed 11 November 2004).

Preliminary research suggests that using traditional governance structures to liaise with the local population may have to be supplemented with other methods, as tribal leaders and village chiefs may not always convey information to their communities. Effective methods of communication to inform and gather information from the population need to be developed, without the raising of unrealistic expectations or alarm among the people in the Nuba.

The Impact of Mine Action on Peacebuilding

As the initial motivations behind the international involvement in mine action in Sudan were to prepare for peace and to support peacebuilding, the fact that measurable outputs such as the size of areas cleared and number of deminers trained have been limited is less important if some of the original objectives have been met. The following section highlights the main impacts of mine action on peacebuilding in Sudan, with reference to the original objectives of the international involvement. These were to support a peace process, to encourage good governance, to strengthen civil society, to promote human rights and to initiate official joint activities to benefit the population.

Supporting a Peace Process

There seems to be broad agreement that progress made in mine action has been symbolically important and has highlighted the potential for peace in Sudan. Actors with access to the peace process argue that the international community has been more willing to facilitate negotiations between the government of Sudan and the SPLM/A because of their joint mine action efforts. In addition, because of what was being achieved in mine action, both sides in the conflict felt under pressure to engage in meaningful talks. In political terms, bringing the two sides together to agree a joint approach to the mine threat has been a success that needs to be transformed into tangible results to benefit the population.

There is a fear that the concentration of mine action in the Nuba Mountains could create tensions in other parts of Sudan where, because of the greater challenges faced, comparatively little mine action is taking place. However, mine action in the Nuba Mountains has set a precedent for mine action programmes elsewhere in the country. The establishment of mine action in other areas could be facilitated by the Nuba Mountains experience, as working strategies between the conflict parties and the international community have already been developed, and physical, social and political challenges highlighted.

The system of counterparts established to facilitate mine action has helped to build confidence between those directly involved, but does not seem to extend beyond the mine action community. Professional working relationships have been developed at the national, intermediate and local levels, and in some cases personal friendships

have followed. It is also apparent that friendships have been formed between the deminers trained as part of the crosslines process. Whether there was any resentment between the deminers as a result of the fighting is unclear, but without the programme simple geography or politically imposed travel restrictions would have prevented many of these individuals from meeting. Unfortunately, deminers are usually unable to introduce their new friends to their village communities because of difficulties in crossing ceasefire lines or covering large distances during limited free time. When a peace agreement is eventually reached and demining schedules become more predictable, the deminers' personal friendships may have a broader peacebuilding impact. Meanwhile, some individuals send messages to family members living in areas they are unable to visit personally via others they have met through the crosslines programme who do have access to those areas.

At the grass-roots level, there is a risk that mine action may feed into the conflict rather than support peacebuilding. It seems that the crosslines mine action programme has not responded fully to the contemporary situation in the Nuba Mountains. When the programme was designed, it was believed that the main conflict at the national level, that between the government and the SPLM/A, was also the primary line of division within the Nuba population. The assumption, however, oversimplified the situation. The people in the Nuba Mountains were drawn into the government–SPLM/A conflict, and most found themselves fighting for one side or the other for survival. The ceasefire lines have again imposed an external conflict on the Nuba Mountains, and the agreement can give the impression that those who live in a particular area support the side that controls it. This is not necessarily true: when the ceasefire was declared, most people simply found themselves living in a particular area, under the control of one authority or the other, not necessarily the one they supported.

Many Nuba people reject the suggestion that the crosslines programme reflects the conflict line in the Nuba Mountains. Although government policies did cause some genuine grievances, the Nuba argue that there is no internal conflict in the region and that any fighting that has taken place between them is the result of external forces beyond their control. Undoubtedly, relations among the Nuba have been damaged by the conflict, but some observers argue that, left alone, the Nuba would be able to rebuild their social networks.

A conflict that does threaten peace in the Nuba Mountains is that between the Nuba and the pastoralists. The civil war has exacerbated pre-existing tensions between these two groups, and traditional conflict-resolution mechanisms have been forgotten. However, the crosslines programme has either overlooked or chosen not to take this particular conflict line into account, as the pastoralists have no official representation within the programme. Again, some observers argue that the Nuba and the pastoralists can resolve their own conflicts if given the space to do so and the encouragement to rehabilitate their traditional resource-sharing agreements. Conversely, others argue that the situation has moved on, and that neither the conflicts the Nuba have among

themselves nor the conflicts between the Nuba and the pastoralists can be resolved without outside help.

Mine action has not overlooked the pastoralists altogether. Their migration routes are being examined to determine how they might be affected by mines, and mine risk education initiatives are being planned to specifically target pastoralists. During the fieldwork, it was claimed that some of those training to become deminers had been drawn from pastoralist communities.

Although mine action has brought the two main sides of the conflict in Sudan together, the peacebuilding impact has largely been limited to those directly involved in the programmes. A greater emphasis on community liaison would root projects more solidly within local populations and also contribute to developing confidence in the possibility of a sustainable peace. Some external actors have raised unrealistic expectations about how quickly areas can be cleared and have failed to explain that the capacity to clear all areas immediately does not exist. Disappointment and disillusionment among the population threatens the latter's confidence in the peace process, a dynamic that is strengthened as the expected peace dividend fails to materialize. A more solid form of local contact would help to convey the signal that both sides are working jointly in a way that benefits the local population, and that physical threats that are reminders of war are being removed. Working practices within mine action and the often time-consuming nature of the work could also be discussed. It may be that, in addition to mine risk education, a systematic form of liaison with the local population would need to be developed in an area such as the Nuba Mountains, where infrastructure is poor and traditional leaders cannot always be relied upon to relay detailed information to the community.

One particular issue that should be considered is whether mine action, from its national level to grass-roots structure, has given the Sudanese government legitimate access to civil society. The government is feared by many Nuba, including the pastoralists, whom the government has abandoned since the ceasefire agreement.

Mine incidents posed a serious threat to the ceasefire in the Nuba Mountains and jeopardized the mine action programmes. Both sides have accused the other of laying mines after the ceasefire came into force. At the community level, people's faith in the ability of mine action organizations to clear land has been damaged and, although it appears neither side did break the ceasefire, the commitment of both sides to the ceasefire and to reaching a peace agreement has been placed in doubt.

Encouraging Good Governance

Governance is provided by a set of recognized and accepted institutions that are accountable to civil society and authorized to exercise control within agreed spheres of public and private life. It is argued that sustainable development and stability cannot be achieved without good governance. Consequently, facilitating the creation of accountable governance structures contributes to peacebuilding (Kauffmann, Krayy &

Zoido-Lobatón, 2000; UNDP, 1998; World Bank, 1994). In Sudan, a NMAO has been established, vertical and horizontal information flows have been encouraged, planning and managerial skills have been developed, and policies and working practices have been discussed by the government, the SPLM/A and international mine action actors. To maintain momentum, the NMAO needs to encourage greater active participation, and to facilitate communication and coordination openly between the national and international actors. A one-nation approach to mine action is being supported, and institutions on both sides of the conflict are involved in the process.

However, the NMAO has been established in Khartoum, which immediately credits the government of Sudan as the legitimate authority in the country, and the SPLM/A is marginalized because its staff cannot or will not work in Khartoum.¹⁸ Consequently, the SPLM/A receives information belatedly and second-hand in Nairobi. A similar situation has developed in the Nuba Mountains. The training camp for deminers is based in Um Serdiba, a village located significantly closer to a government administrative centre than to an SPLM/A centre. It is thus more time-consuming and difficult to travel to see SPLM/A and OSIL staff, so meetings do not occur as frequently as with government and JASMAR staff. It could be that the failure of the international community to include both sides equally in the governance structure and process has contributed to the SPLM/A's plans to establish its own national mine action office in south Sudan, a proposal that was announced by the SPLM/A leader, John Garang, at the beginning of May 2004 as the government and the SPLM/A were on the verge of reaching a peace agreement (SPLM/SPLA, 2004).

Strengthening Civil Society

Civil society is the arena between the state and the market that society uses to discuss and manage public affairs. Civil society can include a wide range of institutions at a local, national or international level, ranging from highly organized religious groups, business affiliations and trade unions, though less formal NGOs, cultural organizations and sports clubs, to even looser forms of association, such as social movements and networks. In established civil societies, networks and interdependency become complex, and there is considerable overlap between civil society, the state and the market (Harpviken & Kjellman, 2004).

It is becoming increasingly accepted that one of the prerequisites for an effective and accountable state is the creation of an effective and accountable civil society capable of expressing its needs, approval and dissatisfaction to the state through recognized and legitimate mechanisms. Therefore, the creation of a strong civil society with nonviolent means of expressing itself, one that participates in furthering the interests

¹⁸ It would appear that mine action has been influenced by the international community's desire that the peace process result in a united and not a divided Sudan. The National Mine Action Office was established in Khartoum because there has always been an assumption that Khartoum will remain the capital of Sudan.

of the population and provides a counterbalance to state power, is essential to postwar recovery and peacebuilding.

It could be argued that SLIRI has helped to strengthen civil society in Sudan. It is a grass-roots organization that works closely with the local population to help reduce the threat of mines. Almost all of its staff are Sudanese nationals, and these are usually drawn from the community in which they work. SLIRI staff claim that the organization is trusted and has credibility, despite its slow progress, because it is well integrated at the community level. Although the status of JASMAR, OSIL and SCBL is more ambiguous and it is difficult to ascertain how they are perceived by ordinary Sudanese, those organizations, at the very least, highlight the rights and needs of civil society and provide an entry point for external actors to become involved in mine action. Through JASMAR, OSIL, SCBL and SIMAS, the attention of conflict parties, primarily focused on war, is diverted towards civil society.

Promoting Human Rights

As in many conflict situations, during the last two decades of civil war in Sudan, human rights have been violated. The use of landmines threatens lives and livelihood activities. The signing of the Geneva Call Deed of Commitment and the 1997 Landmine Convention by the SPLM/A and the government of Sudan, respectively, is an acknowledgement of the potentially devastating impact of landmines on human rights. The framework of the Landmine Convention and the Geneva Call provides the international community with an entry point for humanitarian intervention and a set of activities that serve to promote human rights. The mine action activities that have been undertaken in Sudan have helped to draw attention to the issue of human rights, which is often forgotten during conflict. Mine action has contributed to the benefits the population has derived from the ceasefire.

However, there is evidence that upholding human rights is not necessarily the main priority of the two conflicting parties in Sudan. As the war is still ongoing and it is only a ceasefire that is in place in the Nuba Mountains, each side is seeking to maintain its position, which limits mine action and consequently its promotion of human rights.

Official Joint Activities

Mine action has brought the two conflicting sides together in activities that benefit the population in a range of ways. National mine action capacity has been developed, employment has been provided, and work has begun to reduce the mine threat. However, mine action may be a politically charged activity, and because of the potential repercussions and the continued conflict it has sometimes been used as a political tool. This has threatened the goodwill of external actors and damaged the fragile confidence that the conflicting parties have in each other. In a conflict and post-

conflict situation, the use of any intervention for political gain is inevitable, particularly when opposing parties are engaged in joint activities. However, the potential to manipulate mine action for political purposes has not always been taken sufficiently into account by external actors. In some instances, mine action activities have been jeopardized because a particular individual with good connections was not appointed or was dismissed from a particular post. In other cases, agreements central to the continuation of mine action have essentially been made with individuals rather than with organizations. Further problems can be created because, in order to achieve progress, it is necessary to liaise with influential individuals who may have ambiguous roles. The attention of external actors and the potential material benefits this offers can ameliorate the positions of such individuals without advancing mine action.

The government of Sudan and the SPLM/A each claim that the other side has used mine action to gather information about its opponent. Contrary to the terms of the crosslines agreement, it appears that individuals selected for the demining training have not always come from the Nuba Mountains. Both sides accuse the other of selecting intelligence officers for the programme to act as spies. It is also possible that individual Sudanese could become vulnerable if they were put under pressure to use the opportunity presented by mine action to gather sensitive information about the other side.

Although involving both sides in mine action has significant practical benefits, attempts to work with both conflict parties simultaneously have brought political agendas directly and immediately into humanitarian operations. Consequently, it has not been possible to depoliticize mine action, and efforts to promote transparency, accountability and confidence-building have been weakened.

External actors need to develop greater political awareness in order to assess the motivations of actors from both sides for becoming involved in mine action. After twenty years of fighting, it takes time for trust to be established, so even if conflict parties enter into agreements in good faith they will also take advantage of any opportunities to strengthen their position in case such agreements break down. With increased political awareness, external actors would be able to make a greater contribution to peacebuilding.

Conclusion

It appears that the original objectives of mine action interventions in Sudan – namely, to prepare for peace and to support contemporary and future peacebuilding activities – were overlooked or not relayed to field-level staff. Consequently, efforts have tended to focus on mine action activities themselves, rather than on the processes needed to make such mine action activities possible, such as confidence-building and developing effective governance structures. As a result, the impact of mine action on peacebuilding has probably not been as significant as it might have been. However, concrete progress has been made: deminers have been trained, data-collection initiated, and mine risk education is under way; two conflict parties were successfully

brought together to develop strategies for reducing the mine threat in Sudan; professional, and in some cases personal, relationships have developed across the divide; and the importance of good governance, protecting human rights and strengthening civil society has been acknowledged, even if real progress has been limited.

It was a bold decision to begin mine action during conflict, and it has required commitment and a degree of risk-taking from the government of Sudan, the SPLM/A and international actors. Peacebuilding is a slow process that requires long-term commitment and patience from all involved parties. Mine action cannot build peace on its own, but it does have the potential to be an effective component of coordinated peacebuilding efforts. It is too early to fully assess mine action's contribution towards preparing the ground for peace, but the experience in Sudan shows that mine action with conflict parties is possible during conflict and can help sustain belief in a peace process and a future peace.