



Case study of the mine action programme in South Sudan

UNOPS impact for vulnerable people |
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In the restated strategic plan, UNOPS commits to deliver impact for the most vulnerable people. We present this case study to the Executive Board to illustrate the UNOPS contributions.

Executive summary

1. The emergency response to the humanitarian and climate crisis project, carried out in partnership with the United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS) and the National Mine Action Authority (NMAA), provided crucial mine action support to the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS). Together with implementing partners, UNOPS facilitated the survey and release of land equivalent to 1,427 football fields. This effort restored safe access to land and livelihoods for over 588,000 community members while raising mine risk awareness among more than 300,000 people. Overall, the project makes primary contributions to Goal 13 'climate action' and Goal 17 'partnerships for the goals', and secondary contributions to Goal 5 'gender equality' and Goal 16 'peace, justice and strong institutions'.
2. A notable intervention occurred in 2022 when flooding displaced approximately 10,000 people who found themselves with no other option than to reside in a known minefield. This case study highlights the response to this specific situation and its impact on the affected population.

Funded by UN DPO
US\$ 28 million

Main service line
Project Management



Context and project outline

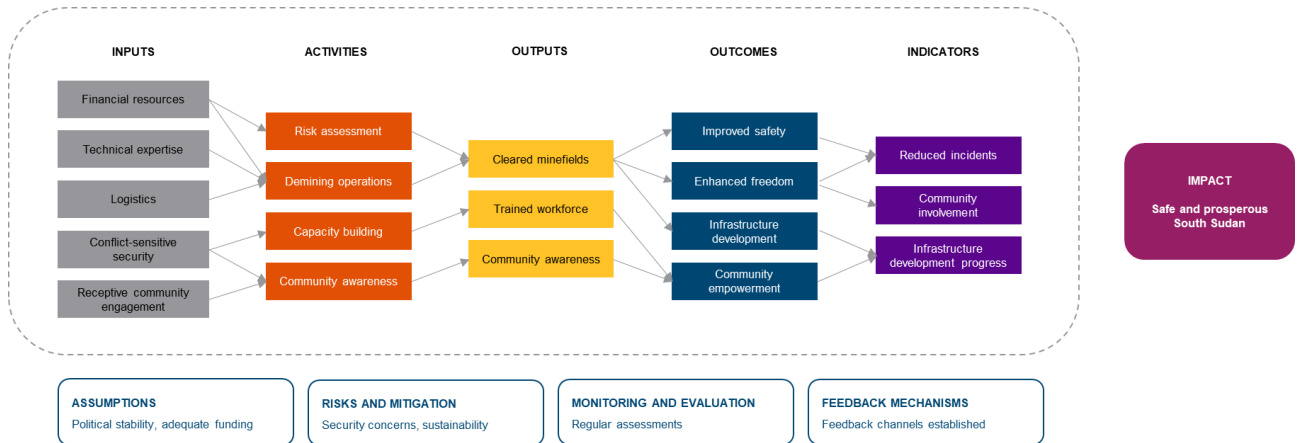
3. In 2021, South Sudan faced unprecedented flooding, particularly impacting the Greater Upper Nile region, with UNICEF labeling it the worst in 60 years. This catastrophe displaced hundreds of thousands of people, devastated crops, and claimed numerous livestock lives. Seeking refuge in less affected areas like Canal-Pigi village, situated at the confluence of River Nile and Sobat, displaced communities faced an unexpected challenge - settling on dry land contaminated with anti-personnel mines. Despite the risks, they had no alternative. UNMAS swiftly responded by deploying mechanical clearance assets, resulting in the discovery and destruction of 25 anti-personnel mines.
4. The project's primary objective is to safeguard civilians, prompting UNOPS to assess the situation, devise a solution, and deploy a mechanical asset via boat for clearance operations before the onset of the rainy season. Moreover, over 1,500 civilians and humanitarian workers received crucial explosive ordnance risk education. Commencing in March 2022, the clearance operation in Canal-Pigi lasted three months, with active community involvement throughout. This collaborative effort facilitated the removal of explosive hazards, provision of vital risk education, and surveyed and cleared land, promoting freedom of movement and secure voluntary resettlement. Such success underscores the strong partnership with humanitarian organisations and the National Mine Action Authority (NMAA).

Theory of change

5. The project Theory of Change was crafted with the overarching vision of contributing to a secure South Sudan, liberated from the menace of landmines. **Figure 1** illustrates how a customized array of activities, aimed at addressing root causes and needs, is anticipated to yield outcomes and impact.
6. The success of the mine action initiative in South Sudan relies on several critical inputs and activities. **Financial resources** from international donors and government support are vital. **Technical expertise**, including mixed-gender demining teams and specialized equipment, ensures efficient mine detection and clearance. **Logistics**, grounded in a deep understanding of the local context, facilitate smooth project implementation, alongside **conflict-sensitive security analysis** to address local dynamics. **Liaison with national and local authorities**, as well as **community leaders**, fosters collaboration and support at all levels. Engaging local communities through partnerships and **awareness initiatives** builds trust and facilitates information gathering.

- Structured activities drive tangible outputs and outcomes. **Risk assessments** guide prioritization of high-risk areas, leading to **cleared minefields** and **enhanced safety**. **Capacity building initiatives** establish a sustainable system for ongoing mine clearance, while community awareness campaigns empower locals to identify and report mine threats. These efforts yield significant **outcomes**, including reduced accidents, enhanced freedom of movement, and safer conditions for infrastructure development. Increased access to resources fosters community development and empowerment. Ultimately, the initiative aims to create a safe and prosperous South Sudan, measured through reduced incidents and increased community involvement. Challenges, such as security concerns and sustainability, are mitigated through collaboration and transition planning. **Monitoring and evaluation** ensure progress, with **feedback mechanisms** enhancing community input for ongoing improvement.

Figure 1.



Contributions

Outputs

- Upon completion of the Canal-Pigi task, **25 anti-personnel mines** were successfully detected and neutralized. Additionally, emergency explosive ordnance risk education and awareness sessions were conducted, reaching thousands of community members. **Over 17,000 square meters of land**, equivalent to 3.5 football pitches, was cleared and released to communities, facilitating freedom of movement and safe resettlement. This effort also involved surveys of neighbouring villages prioritized by UNMISS and humanitarian actors. UNOPS provided tailored awareness-raising training on landmines and explosive remnants of war to humanitarian personnel, enhancing their understanding of threats and safe operating procedures in contaminated environments.
- Overall, the mine action project facilitated the survey and **clearance of more than 1,400 hazardous areas**, resulting in the removal or **destruction of over 18,000 hazardous items** across South Sudan. Emergency explosive ordnance risk education reached **over 300,000 individuals**, and UNMAS released **7,138,813 m² of land** back to communities, surpassing the project's annual target.

“We are facing a lot of challenges in this area. If you come to ask people around, they will tell you that there are a lot of mines in the area, yet we were told to stay in this area and follow the rules and regulations from the government.”

Monyluak Anyalwil, the Sub-Chief from Canal-Pigi, beneficiary

“We didn’t know how the mines were planned in this area. When we were displaced by the water, we came to the higher ground and we discovered that this was the area where mines were laid.”

Sara Nyankiir Dau, Community Member

Contributions to outcomes

10. Upon completion of the task, **over 10,000 individuals** found safe shelter on secure grounds, while more than 1,500 received vital explosive ordnance risk education. This project, vital for saving lives, addresses explosive hazards in South Sudan and swiftly responds to emergencies. UNOPS heads large-scale clearance efforts, representing approximately 75% of the country's mine action capacities. Without UNOPS, civilians would remain at risk of injury and death from explosive hazards, hindering crucial peace, humanitarian, and development initiatives.
11. Explosive hazard clearance not only saves lives but also ensures safe access for humanitarian, peacekeeping, and development operations. Additionally, it facilitates **better living conditions and sustainable livelihoods by enabling access to essential services such as schools and medical facilities**. Agricultural areas are cleared for improved livelihoods, and road and market clearance enhances local commerce, facilitating the safe transport of goods and the sale of produce for farmers.

«*This community here only has 1500 people. Because of the work we have done in mine action, you now have over 10,000 people. This is huge, you can hear children laughing . . . people have complaints about the flooding and about agriculture, but they wouldn't have those complaints if they were not here.*»

Sara Beysolow Nyanti, Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary General / Resident Coordinator/ Humanitarian Coordinator (DSRSG/RC/HC)

«*The question in my head at the time was, why would anyone choose to move into an anti-personnel minefield? And the answer is, no one would. But they didn't feel they had a choice. As we came up on the boat, you can see around there is no place to have a village.*»

Fran O'Grady, Chief of Mine Action Programme (August 2022)

Likely contributions to impact

12. The project significantly advanced several Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs):
 - a. Goal 13 'climate action': The program improved awareness on effects of climate change and early warning systems. For UNMAS South Sudan, the project teams always take into account the foreseeable climatic conditions, such as unprecedented rainfall that often halts activities for half of the year, thus the need to conduct mine action activities during the dry periods.
 - b. Goal 17 'partnership for the goals': UNMAS South Sudan programme successfully built linkages between stakeholders - this was achieved through the fortified partnerships between mine action partners, where UNMAS is a sub-cluster coordinator, and the National Mine Action Authority, that continuously applauded UNMAS work across the country.
13. By clearing landmines, the project enabled approximately 10,000 individuals to safely settle in the Canal-Pigi area, engage in agriculture, and facilitated unimpeded humanitarian access. The task directly contributed to UNMAS and UNMISS strategy of providing conducive conditions of delivery of **humanitarian assistance; protection of civilians; and facilitating the safe, voluntary and dignified returns of displaced populations - supporting over 800,000 individuals**.
14. Goal 16 'peace, justice and strong institutions' and Goal 5 'gender equality': By clearing explosive hazards, UNMAS encouraged the return of displaced people, opening freedom of movement in a post-conflict society, decreasing fear and threat of the 'frozen violence' of landmines and other explosive remnants of war. Mine action often plays the role of a confidence-building measure in post-conflict societies.
15. Inclusive Explosive Ordnance Risk Education played a crucial role in community safety. UNMAS conducted EORE training in the Canal-Pigi area, including Malakal in Upper Nile, enhancing local understanding of hazardous items and promoting reporting of suspicious objects. A follow-up visit in August 2022 showed a

noticeable increase in the community's awareness of safe practices, contributing to Goals related to gender equality and peace-building.

Sustainability considerations

16. **HSSE:** During the initial mobilization phase of UNOPS-contracted projects, implementing partners underwent comprehensive training on health, safety, social, and environmental (HSSE) issues. Post-deployment, refresher training and daily health and safety briefings were conducted, complemented by toolbox meetings led by team leaders.
17. **Environmental:** Given the urgency of addressing climate change, UNOPS prioritized clearing minefields to establish safe zones for civilians. This initiative not only facilitated access for other humanitarian organizations but also supported community rebuilding efforts. Recognising diverse needs, including those of different gender groups, a mixed-gender community liaison was appointed to engage with women, men, girls, and boys.
18. **Gender:** Gender perspectives were seamlessly integrated into the project by forming mixed-gender teams at all levels, with key roles held by female personnel. Ensuring a gender-responsive project plan, all contracted teams comprised both genders, fostering inclusivity and equitable representation. Direct engagement with both men and women in the beneficiary community ensured a holistic understanding and fulfillment of their needs.

Lessons learned

19. The operational success of UNMAS South Sudan's mine action initiatives hinges on strategic asset pre-positioning, operational agility, integration of mine action into humanitarian needs assessments, and effective engagement with women's groups for enhanced data collection and dissemination:
 - a. **Strategic pre-positioning of critical assets:** UNMAS South Sudan strategically deploys critical clearance assets and teams in different regions, considering factors such as accessibility, security, weather patterns and infrastructure availability. This proactive approach enables swift deployment of clearance assets to Canal village just before the onset of the rainy season.
 - b. **Agility in operational context:** To accommodate the heavy equipment and logistical components of the mechanical demining clearance team in the confined space of Canal village, the team and assets were significantly scaled down. This adaptation has led to the development of future mechanical clearance assets designed to be flexible and easily deployable in constrained spaces at short notice.
 - c. **Integrating mine action into emergency humanitarian needs assessment:** In response to the floods displacing people to the Canal, the initial emergency needs assessment conducted by humanitarian partners lacked a mine action component. UNMAS was informed separately about the presence of mines in the camp for internally displaced persons. While UNMAS responded promptly, their involvement in the initial needs assessment could have facilitated a more comprehensive understanding of the mine action context, expediting operational planning and decision-making for deploying appropriate mine clearance assets.
 - d. **Engagement with Women groups:** Cultural nuances in South Sudan could have posed challenges to data collection for the project. However, having a female field coordinator from UNOPS facilitated integration with community groups, enhancing data collection (disaggregated by gender, age and sex) and enabling dissemination of relevant information to other humanitarian partners.

Snapshots



Canal-Pigi community members dance on the safe ground during the DSRSG visit in 2022 © Christina Simons/Photojournalist



UNMISS Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary General and Humanitarian Coordinator, Ms. Sara Beysolow Nyanti and the Chief of Mine Action, Fran O'Grady, visited the communities in Canal/Pigi where they witnessed the unique cohesion between host communities and internally displaced persons who had settled inside a known minefield in 2022 © UNOPS/UNMAS South Sudan