



MAG Sri Lanka Programme Update June 2009



MAG Bozena-4 machine operator working in Pallaikuli village, Mannar District in northern Sri Lanka. This village was abandoned during the conflict in 2008. The MAG team uncovered 94 anti-personnel mines and 19 UXO in the immediate surrounds of the village during June.

Reporting Period: 01 - 30 June 2009

Activities & Outputs Summary:

- **Operations in support of IDP returns and sustainable livelihoods**
- **Ongoing General Mine Action Assessment (GMAA) and technical survey in 8 villages in Mannar District**, in support of the planned return of 136 families displaced by conflict
- **GMAA of 23km stretch of irrigation channel in Mannar District**
- **Technical survey of 9,052m² in Mannar** using mechanical team consisting of Bozena-4 flail machine and deminers
- **94 anti-personnel mines and 19 items of unexploded ordnance (UXO) uncovered in Mannar**
- **Search and clearance of a total of 10,559m² of land** through a combination of manual and mechanical methods in Batticaloa District, with the removal of **2 anti-personnel mines and 3 items of UXO**

Impact Summary:

The programme's work in Mannar District, since the restart of operations in the north in April, led to the return of families displaced by conflict to their home villages during June. In one village, Marathanmadhu, 70 families returned home as part of a wider programme on 9 June. IDPs returned to 4 other villages in Mannar on the same day, following MAG operations. Other activities have been in support of safe livelihood activities – whilst the focus is currently on enabling IDP returns, ensuring livelihood activities can be undertaken in safety by those returning families is also a significant priority.

ACTIVITIES

Northern Sri Lanka

Following the formal end to the conflict in Sri Lanka in late May, approximately 280,000 IDPs from across the north are currently accommodated in camps, primarily in Vavuniya District. The Government of Sri Lanka has stated that it plans to resettle 80% of the IDPs to their home areas by the end of 2009. The Government and UNHCR have stated that mine action survey and clearance is a prerequisite of this returns process.

MAG is currently working in support of this initiative by undertaking survey and clearance in support of return of IDPs to Mannar District. General Mine Action Assessment (GMAA) was completed in 8 villages in Manthai West and Mannar Town Divisions of Mannar District during June in support of the planned return of 136 families displaced by conflict. Clearance is ongoing in Pallaikuli village, and during June 94 mines and 19 items of UXO were uncovered by the MAG teams in close proximity to this village.

MAG received a request from the Irrigation Department to survey the Akathimurippu channel in Mannar District, with a 23km stretch of the irrigation channel suspected of landmine contamination. This channel supplies 36 tanks that water vast areas of land for rice paddy cultivation. It is estimated that the channel irrigated land that produced approximately 6 metric tonnes of rice in two cultivation seasons during 2002/3. These paddy fields are in Musali Division, an area where MAG surveyed 5 villages during April and May 2009 and where the displaced population have now returned. Following MAG's survey work during June, this stretch of channel has been declared as having only a low threat of landmines, which in turn allows access for Irrigation Department staff to continue their activities.

Eastern Sri Lanka

All operational activities in the east continued to be undertaken from the base in Batticaloa. Clearance continued on a large task area in Kajuwatta North, in the north of Batticaloa District. This task is likely to be completed by September. The Japanese Government continued to support the programme by funding the mechanical clearance component. One Bozena-B4 mechanical flail was deployed in Batticaloa throughout June, with the other in Mannar in the north.

In addition to the ongoing clearance task, on 26 June a MAG team began two GMAA tasks in Koralaipathu North division in Batticaloa, following a request from the Government Agent for the district. The first task was to survey Kayankerni village for soil extraction to enable reconstruction of a bridge. The second task was to survey Sethukurai village, where a prawn farm is to be established that will provide jobs to the local population, and is expected to stimulate development in the surrounding area.

Future Plans

MAG's Sri Lanka programme is currently planning significant expansion in the north in support of the IDP returns process. Activities are being coordinated with a range of stakeholders, including the Government of Sri Lanka, UN agencies, and other local and international organisations. **MAG is now actively seeking funding to expand capacity and deployment in the north for emergency mine action survey and clearance**

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