

**Gender mainstreaming in mine action:  
Powerful interlinkages for progress across the SDGs**

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## **Abstract**

Mine action comprises a set of activities aimed at reducing the risks from landmines, cluster munitions and other explosive remnants of war. By returning safe land, housing and infrastructure to people and assisting victims, it restores livelihoods, re-establishes an environment for communities to live, work and thrive in, and accelerates development. Mine action never occurs in a vacuum; it takes place in social and cultural contexts where different gendered power relations exist and therefore does not automatically benefit women, girls, boys and men from different backgrounds to the same degree. This article explores the intersection between mine action and inequality resulting from gender and diversity aspects and argues that the SDG framework can help to better understand and operationalise this nexus. Focusing on good practice in land release, victim assistance and employment, this article scrutinises how gender mainstreaming in mine action contributes to progress across the SDGs and explores pathways to better capitalise on the potential of mine action for women's empowerment.

## **1. Introduction: Mine action, gender, and gender in mine action<sup>1</sup>**

Landmines, cluster munitions and other explosive remnants of war (ERW) represent one direct impact of conflict on people and, once conflicts are settled, persist as a deadly legacy for decades. Despite commendable achievements in past years, more than 60 countries and territories around the globe remain contaminated by such explosive remnants of war. This threat is further exacerbated by newly-deployed explosive devices in current conflicts, many of an improvised nature. As a result, the number of casualties has increased significantly in recent years, from less than 3,500 in 2013 to over 8,500 in 2016.<sup>2</sup>

Beyond posing an immediate threat to people's lives, contamination greatly affects people's livelihoods, in particular by blocking infrastructure required for socio-economic activity and

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<sup>2</sup> International Campaign to Ban Landmines, *Landmine Monitor 2017* (Geneva: ICBL, December 2017), 32, 52, <http://www.the-monitor.org/en-gb/reports/2017/landmine-monitor-2017.aspx>.

mobility and denying or delaying access to basic social services or natural resources.<sup>3</sup> It also seriously hampers the delivery of vital humanitarian assistance, or the return of refugees and internally displaced people to their homes.<sup>4</sup>

In response, mine action<sup>5</sup> is undertaken to reduce the social, economic and environmental impact of these explosive legacies of conflict. In particular, it helps to accelerate socio-economic development by returning land, housing and infrastructure, thereby restoring sustainable livelihoods and re-establishing a safe environment for communities to live, work and thrive.<sup>6</sup> Assistance is also provided to victims, be they survivors of mine/ERW accidents or indirect victims (e.g. family members of survivors or affected communities at large). Mine action is inherently focused on people and driven by their needs; it occurs in contexts structured by social and cultural norms and is shaped by gendered power relations.

It is widely recognised that gender inequality remains a huge issue, despite progress in the past.<sup>7</sup> Gender is a relational concept; achieving gender equality requires understanding and addressing the different challenges that women, girls, boys and men in their diversity face in accessing equal rights and opportunities. Yet, women and girls remain disproportionately represented among the poorest and most excluded. Indeed, women face discrimination in access to work, education, economic assets and participation in private and public decision making.<sup>8</sup> They are also more likely to live in poverty than men.<sup>9</sup> Despite their comprehensive approach, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)—and SDG 5 on gender equality in particular—mainly aim to specifically overcome challenges faced by women and girls.<sup>10,11</sup> While this article focuses more strongly on women and girls, it is understood that the achievement of gender equality requires the full and active inclusion of all, in line with the “leaving no one behind” principle of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

In this spirit, gender inequality has to be understood as intersectional in that it is compounded by other factors such as race, class, religion, income, professional status or access to a job or land.<sup>12</sup> Poverty and marginalisation are also exacerbated when gender and disability intersect.<sup>13</sup> Women and girls facing multiple, intersecting forms of discrimination

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<sup>3</sup> Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining, *A Guide to Mine Action* (Geneva: GICHD, March 2014), 120, <https://www.gichd.org/resources/publications/detail/publication/guide-to-mine-action-2014/#.W1WGqdUzaM8>.

<sup>4</sup> For reference, see Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining, *Humanitarian Impact from Mines other than Anti-Personnel Mines* (Geneva: GICHD, October 2004), [https://www.gichd.org/fileadmin/GICHD-resources/rec-documents/Humanitarian\\_Impact\\_from\\_MOTAPM.pdf](https://www.gichd.org/fileadmin/GICHD-resources/rec-documents/Humanitarian_Impact_from_MOTAPM.pdf).

<sup>5</sup> Mine action comprises five complementary groups of activities or “pillars”: mine risk education; land release/mine clearance; victim assistance; stockpile destruction; and advocacy. For more information on mine action, see Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining, *A Guide to Mine Action*.

<sup>6</sup> UN Security Council, Resolution 2365, S/RES/2365/2017 (June 30, 2017), [https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/ct/%7b65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7d/s\\_res\\_2365.pdf](https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/ct/%7b65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7d/s_res_2365.pdf); Kristian Berg Harpviken and Rebecca Roberts, “Conclusions,” in *Preparing the Ground for Peace: Mine Action in Support of Peacebuilding*, ed. Kristian Berg Harpviken and Rebecca Roberts (Oslo: PRIO, 2004), 55.

<sup>7</sup> Gabriele Koehler, “Tapping the Sustainable Development Goals for progressive gender equity and equality policy?” *Gender & Development* 24, no. 1 (2016): 55, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13552074.2016.1142217>. As an illustration of progress during the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) era, a majority of regions have reached gender parity in primary education, whilst gender disparity narrowed substantially at all levels of education from 2000 to 2015.

<sup>8</sup> International Labour Organization, *World Employment and Social Outlook: Trends for Women 2017* (Geneva: International Labour Office, 2017), <https://www.ilo.org/global/research/global-reports/weso/trends-for-women2017/lang-en/index.htm>.

<sup>9</sup> United Nations, *The Millennium Development Goals Report 2015* (New York: UN, 2015), 8, <http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/publications/mdg-report-2015.html>.

<sup>10</sup> This is exemplified, for instance, by the focus of SDG 5 on gender equality, in particular the formulation of its underpinning targets and indicators. Out of the nine targets under SDG 5, at least seven of them refer uniquely to women and/or girls.

<sup>11</sup> Elizabeth Stuart and Jessica Woodroffe, “Leaving no-one behind: can the Sustainable Development Goals succeed where the Millennium Development Goals lacked?” *Gender & Development* 24, no. 1 (2016): 70, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13552074.2016.1142206>.

<sup>12</sup> The experience of belonging to several disenfranchised social groups is not simply the sum of different discriminations. Rather, their combination intensifies the experience. See, for instance, Naila Kabeer, *Can the MDGs provide a pathway to social justice? The challenge of intersecting inequalities* (New York: UNDP, 2010), 6, [https://www.unnqls.org/IMG/pdf\\_MDGs\\_and\\_Inequalities\\_Final\\_Report.pdf](https://www.unnqls.org/IMG/pdf_MDGs_and_Inequalities_Final_Report.pdf).

<sup>13</sup> UN Women, *Making the SDGs count for women and girls with disabilities* (New York: UN Women, 2017), 1-3, <http://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2017/6/issue-brief-making-the-sdgs-count-for-women-and-girls-with-disabilities#view>.

based on gender and other factors, are therefore those most likely to be left behind in society.<sup>14</sup>

Mine action never occurs in a vacuum. It is itself a male-dominated sector, characterised in many contexts by a strong involvement of security forces and an underlying military mindset. In addition, mine action takes place in gendered environments where women, girls, boys and men have different roles and responsibilities that impact their mobility patterns, exposure to explosive risks, decision-making power, and access to services and resources. Consequently, mine action does not automatically benefit all of them to the same degree. Understanding the interplay between gender and other diversity aspects and mainstreaming the latter into field programmes is therefore key to ensuring that mine action does at least not unintentionally sustain nor exacerbate existing inequalities. Therefore, gender mainstreaming in mine action is the continuous process of assessing the differentiated implications for women, girls, boys and men and taking into account their specific needs in all activities, so that mine action dividends benefit them in the diversity of their circumstances and statuses equally.

This article is based on a qualitative research approach. It relies on both primary sources, including the authors' own work in the field of gender and mine action, and secondary sources. Gathering quantitative data was the main research challenge, partly attributable to the limited research carried out on this topic both by academics and practitioners up to this day. The article starts by assessing the added value of the SDGs to better articulate the effects of mine action and gender work. This is followed by a mapping of good practice on gender mainstreaming in mine action and its contribution to advancing multiple SDGs, which is carried out through a thematic approach. Focus is placed on two mine action pillars, land release and victim assistance, followed by overarching employment practices in mine action.<sup>15</sup> Whereas this article heavily relies on anecdotal evidence, the authors believe that, by scrutinising how gender mainstreaming in mine action can create multiple interlinkages between different SDGs and accelerate their achievement, it provides a timely and initial contribution to filling this knowledge gap and inspiring future research on the topic. By doing so, it seeks to initiate a new, both policy- and operationally-relevant dialogue on the more deliberate pursuit of gender equality-related outcomes in mine action.

## **2. So what? The added value of the SDGs for mine action and gender equality**

Since their adoption in September 2015, the 2030 Agenda and its associated 17 SDGs have faced criticism on many fronts.<sup>16</sup> We, instead, argue that they represent a step forward. As UN Women heralded, “the 2030 Agenda’s focus on sustainability, equality, peace and human progress provides a powerful counter-narrative to current practices of extraction, exclusion and division.”<sup>17</sup>

### 2.1 In the face of complexities: the SDGs as an analytical framework

The SDGs have brought about major and potentially historic changes. Firstly, they have reconceptualised, in part at least, the very notion of development, from a merely economic

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<sup>14</sup> UN Women, *Turning promises into action: Gender equality in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* (New York: UN Women, 2018), 31, <http://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2018/2/gender-equality-in-the-2030-agenda-for-sustainable-development-2018>.

<sup>15</sup> The authors chose to focus on two of the five pillars of mine action given space limitations and availability of data.

<sup>16</sup> The Economist, for instance, labelled the SDGs “worse than useless”. Others again criticised the SDGs especially for their non-actionability, unquantifiability and lack of prioritisation. For some, they have simply remained “warm words with little if any bite”. See for instance “The 169 commandments,” *The Economist*, March 28, 2015, <https://www.economist.com/leaders/2015/03/26/the-169-commandments>; William Easterly, “The SDGs Should Stand for Senseless, Dreamy, Garbled,” *Foreign Policy*, September 28, 2015, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2015/09/28/the-sdgs-are-utopian-and-worthless-mdgs-development-rise-of-the-rest/>; Dhananjayan Sriskandarajah, “Warm and cuddly global goals? The international community must get real,” *The Guardian*, December 5, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/working-in-development/2017/dec/05/warm-and-cuddly-global-goals-sdgs-international-community-has-to-get-real>.

<sup>17</sup> UN Women, *Turning promises into action: Gender equality in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, 15.

process (often narrowly focused on poverty reduction), as reflected in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), to also include social, political and environmental dimensions of inequality and injustice.<sup>18</sup> Secondly, significant advancement is the explicit—and hard-won—recognition that “sustainable development cannot be realized without peace and security; and peace and security will be at risk without sustainable development.”<sup>19</sup> The former is now an intrinsic part of development efforts, primarily encapsulated in SDG 16 on peace, justice and strong institutions. However, safety and security aspects, among other SDG 16 dimensions, can also be found explicitly mentioned in other SDG targets, as posited by the SDG 16+ concept.<sup>20</sup>

Similarly, gender equality is recognised both as a precondition for and result of the realisation of development outcomes: they can reinforce each other in powerful ways. It seems consistent that the 2030 Agenda addresses gender equality twofold: as a stand-alone goal (SDG 5) and mainstreamed across the Agenda in 11 other SDGs with 24 targets relating explicitly to gender aspects.<sup>21,22</sup>

Compared with the MDGs, the SDGs—and SDG 5 in particular—are a major step forward in addressing the structural barriers to gender equality that result from embedded power inequalities and discriminatory social norms across economic, social, and political arenas.<sup>23</sup> This change recognises that a sustainable development pathway with gender equality should improve women’s and girls’ access to new opportunities and possibilities.<sup>24</sup> Beyond ensuring access to resources or justice, it is about increasing women’s and girls’ capabilities (or agency) “to take advantage of opportunities by making decisions and acting upon them.”<sup>25</sup> Gender, environment and development literature has repeatedly demonstrated that the physical burden of accessing daily necessities such as food, fuel and water, among others, reduces women’s capabilities relative to their own potential. Other services (such as education or food security) are usually also found to be critical for gender equality.<sup>26</sup> Much of these basic impediments are particularly prominent in low-income countries and fragile states, making the SDGs, although universal, ever more relevant in these contexts. As will be analysed below, this is precisely where mine action can make a meaningful contribution.

Thirdly, the SDGs are deliberately broader in scope and number than their predecessors. Today’s interwoven challenges and realities, including those of women’s lives, require an integrated response both at the policy and implementation level, based on a nuanced

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<sup>18</sup> Shahra Razavi, “The 2030 Agenda: challenges of implementation to attain gender equality and women’s rights,” *Gender & Development* 24, no. 1 (2016), 29, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13552074.2016.1142229>; Koehler, “Tapping the Sustainable Development Goals for progressive gender equity and equality policy?” 54; Valeria Esquivel and Caroline Sweetman, “Gender and the Sustainable Development Goals,” *Gender & Development* 24, no. 1 (2016): 1, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13552074.2016.1153318>.

<sup>19</sup> UN General Assembly, Resolution 70/1, Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, A/RES/70/1, (September 25, 2015), [http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/70/1](http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/70/1).

<sup>20</sup> This position is strongly advocated by Pathfinders for Peaceful, Just and Inclusive Societies. This initiative is composed of a group of states, international organisations, global partnerships and other partners, convened by the governments of Brazil, Switzerland and Sierra Leone, and supported by New York University’s Center on International Cooperation. The Pathfinders have developed the Roadmap for Peaceful, Just and Inclusive Societies which covers all of the 2030 Agenda targets for peaceful, just and inclusive societies in SDG 16 and beyond (SDG 16+).

<sup>21</sup> Razavi, “The 2030 Agenda: challenges of implementation to attain gender equality and women’s rights,” 30; Koehler, “Tapping the Sustainable Development Goals for progressive gender equity and equality policy?” 56; UN Women, *Driving the Gender-Responsive Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* (New York: UN Women, 2016), 5, <http://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2016/driving-gender-responsive-implementation-2030agenda.pdf?la=en&vs=5353>.

<sup>22</sup> Scholars debate whether mainstreaming is sufficiently broad. Stuart and Woodroffe, for instance, point out that women’s rights groups called for the SDGs to adequately consider cross-cutting gender issues, since women and girls experience specific obstacles to meeting targets, as a result of structural and gender power relations, but that they were largely disappointed. They also argue that “an understanding of the way that gender relations impact on progress is apparent only in a few other targets.” See Stuart and Woodroffe, “Leaving no-one behind: can the Sustainable Development Goals succeed where the Millennium Development Goals lacked?” 70, 72.

<sup>23</sup> Stuart and Woodroffe, 71; Razavi, “The 2030 Agenda: challenges of implementation to attain gender equality and women’s rights,” 29.

<sup>24</sup> Isha Ray, *Investing in Gender-Equal Sustainable Development* (New York: UN Women, 2016), 2, <http://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2016/8/investing-in-gender-equal-sustainable-development>.

<sup>25</sup> Stuart and Woodroffe, “Leaving no-one behind: can the Sustainable Development Goals succeed where the Millennium Development Goals lacked?” 76.

<sup>26</sup> Ray, *Investing in Gender-Equal Sustainable Development*, 2.

scrutiny of interdependencies. As Koehler puts it, “the various areas addressed by the SDGs are not separate entities, but facets of a system.”<sup>27</sup> On the one hand, policies in one area have the potential to multiply the effect of those in other areas synergistically—or threaten any gains achieved. If sectoral policies inadvertently decrease women’s or girls’ capabilities, they are not on a sustainable development pathway.<sup>28</sup> On the other hand, opportunities may simply be lost if interdependencies across sectors are not fully recognised—this at a time of increased demand on stakeholders to “achieve more with less”. By failing to do so, interventions risk being unsustainable.

To take best advantage of interlinkages across interventions and sectors, the SDGs represent a fresh analytical framework allowing for these interlinkages to be understood and acted upon systematically. This “novelty” yields enormous potential for an enabling activity like mine action, underpinning much of the upstream development in mine-affected countries, to change not only the sector’s modus operandi, but more importantly to increase its impact, including on women and girls.

## 2.2 The relevance of “leaving no one behind” for mine action and gender equality

The 2030 Agenda is unequivocal in that development will be sustainable only if it benefits all equally.<sup>29</sup> Yet, as we have seen, inequalities often intersect, whereby women and men experience poverty and marginalisation differently depending on other, individual diversity characteristics. Women facing additional forms of discrimination tend to be at far greater risk of not being heard and being left behind. Thus, a narrow focus on benefits for women as a whole falls short. Furthermore, as Stuart argues, only a few SDG targets appear to be explicitly sensitive to the impact of gender relations on their achievement.<sup>30</sup>

In response to these complexities, the “leaving no one behind” principle enshrined in the 2030 Agenda provides an analytical lens “not just to mainstream a gender analysis across all goals, but also to do the same for groups marginalised” by other diversity dimensions. Fundamentally, from a gender equality perspective, this lens helps consider the intersecting disadvantages that many women and men experience, thus acknowledging the specific barriers that must be addressed for each sex and age group, even where an SDG target remains silent on gender aspects.<sup>31</sup>

## **3. Breaking down silos: gender in mine action, accelerated progress across the SDGs**

A study conducted by the GICHD and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in 2017 revealed that, while SDG 16—and its target 16.1 aimed at reducing violence in particular—provides the most direct entry point, mine action can be directly relevant to targets under 11 other SDGs and indirectly to an additional four.<sup>32</sup> In total, more than 50 targets can come into play, depending on a project’s scope and objectives.<sup>33</sup>

As an initial attempt to discuss the topic in the mine action sector, the study called for further research to back up the identified interlinkages between mine action activities and SDG

<sup>27</sup> Koehler, “Tapping the Sustainable Development Goals for progressive gender equity and equality policy?” 63.

<sup>28</sup> UN Women, *Gender Equality and Sustainable Development. The World Survey on the role of women in development 2014: Gender equality and sustainable development* (New York, United Nations, 2014), 36–37, <http://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2014/world-survey-on-the-role-of-women-in-development-2014-en.pdf?la=en&vs=3045>.

<sup>29</sup> UN Women, *Turning promises into action: Gender equality in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, 14.

<sup>30</sup> Stuart and Woodroffe, “Leaving no-one behind: can the Sustainable Development Goals succeed where the Millennium Development Goals lacked?” 74.

<sup>31</sup> Stuart and Woodroffe, 74.

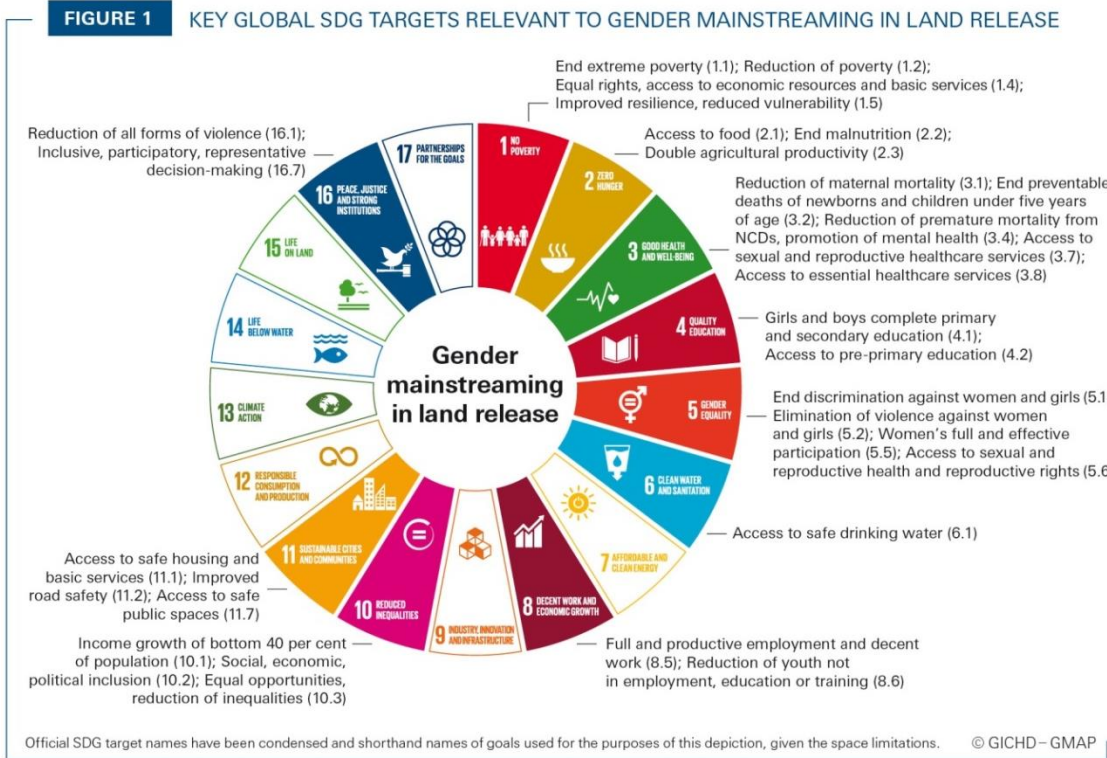
<sup>32</sup> Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining and United Nations Development Programme, *Leaving no one behind: Mine Action and the Sustainable Development Goals* (Geneva: GICHD and UNDP, June 2017), 28, <https://www.gichd.org/resources/publications/detail/publication/leaving-no-one-behind-mine-action-and-the-sustainable-development-goals/#.W1VWVJNUzaM8>.

<sup>33</sup> Ursign Hofmann and Olaf Juergensen, “Preparing for the Future: How the SDGs Impact Mine Action”, *Journal of Conventional Weapons Destruction* 21, no. 3 (November 2017): 43.

attainment—in particular in areas with a smaller evidence base. The following analysis responds to this call from the perspective of gender considerations in land release and victim assistance as well as in relation to the empowering potential of women’s employment in mine action.

### 3.1 Gender mainstreaming in land release

Land release is the process by which all reasonable efforts are applied to remove the presence or suspicion of mines and ERW so that the land, housing and infrastructure can be safely used by a community.<sup>34</sup> As mentioned, all segments of society have different mobility patterns, exposure to contamination, needs and priorities; women and girls may also hold different information on the location of hazards to their male counterparts. In incorporating a gender lens, land release activities have the potential to empower women and girls significantly. Indeed, their main purpose is to increase the safety of communities, preventing casualties and violence (SDG target 16.1; targets are subsequently abbreviated for ease of reading), including that against female members (5.2), and rendering public spaces safe again, including for women and girls (11.7; see Figure 1).



Land release also eases access to previously blocked resources, aiding socio-economic development.<sup>35</sup> Many daily activities typically carried out by women and girls can be hindered or clearly rendered more strenuous by contamination, such as agriculture, collecting wood and water, mobility within and between villages, access to markets, etc. As seen, the physical burden of accessing daily necessities greatly inhibits women’s lived realities and capabilities.<sup>36</sup>

In response, consultations with women and girls, alongside other community groups, are a key principle in land release decision making, for instance when defining which asset is to be

<sup>34</sup> Land release in mine action is a process of survey and clearance aimed at providing effective, efficient and reliable information about which land requires attention, which does not, and how best to deploy precious technical assets. Land release promotes a system of escalating survey activities and only resorts to full clearance as a last option.  
<sup>35</sup> Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining and United Nations Development Programme, *Leaving no one behind: Mine Action and the Sustainable Development Goals*, 30.  
<sup>36</sup> Ray, *Investing in Gender-Equal Sustainable Development*, 2.

released first or when redistributing that asset. Women have to be consulted, in order for their needs and priorities to be heard and for them to influence project planning (5.5). Decision-making processes at the very local level are therefore likely to become more representative, participatory and to the benefit of all (16.7). For example, in focus group discussions with women in Sudan, the British NGO Mines Advisory Group discovered that middle-aged women were collecting palm leaves in contaminated areas, and could subsequently prioritise clearance to allow access to this natural resource.<sup>37</sup> This illustrates how land release can serve as a powerful means towards women's equal access to and ownership over released resources (1.4), addressing certain forms of discrimination against women (5.1), and helping to guarantee equal opportunities for the most marginalised, such as women (10.3).

Access to resources is, in turn, likely to generate employment opportunities (8.5), lower youth unemployment (8.6) and be conducive to income growth (10.1). In doing so, it may lead to reduced poverty and vulnerability (1.1; 1.2; 1.5). These outcomes are particularly important for women in contaminated areas; they often bear the responsibility of sustaining their family economically, as male heads of households are at higher risk of being killed or injured in mine/ERW accidents. In the same vein, increasing access to safe arable land or reducing the time spent accessing water sources (by avoiding lengthy detours due to contamination) also yield significant potential to ensure access for households to sufficient food and safe drinking water (2.1; 2.2; 6.1). The promotion of equal access to released land for both women and men may be identified as a prerequisite for a substantial increase in agricultural productivity and income of small-scale food producers (2.3). Ultimately, this will support women to participate in the economic life of their communities (5.5; 10.2).

In addition to removing life-threatening obstacles to resources, land release also reduces mobility restraints.<sup>38</sup> In consultations with women and youth representatives in South Sudan in 2013, the Danish NGO Danish Church Aid identified four anti-tank mines along a dirt road in very close proximity to the huts of female-headed households, from which the husbands had died due to the war, as a priority—a very specific need, owing to the life situation and mobility of these women.<sup>39</sup> In this example, making this road safe for use (11.2) also had the potential to re-open (or simply shorten) access to housing (11.1). In the prioritisation of land release tasks, a gender lens also affords due attention to access to basic social services, particularly in support of women and girls. Girls (and boys) may be enabled to resume education (4.1; 4.2), and specific access of women to healthcare facilities may be prioritised (3.7; 3.8; 5.6). A lack of access to healthcare remains one of the leading causes of maternal mortality.<sup>40</sup> Re-establishing access can in turn reduce such mortality (3.1), decrease preventable newborn and child deaths (3.2), and improve reproductive health and well-being more generally (3.4).<sup>41</sup>

### 3.2 Gender mainstreaming in victim assistance

Assistance to victims is another aspect of mine action. While men and boys tend to make up a larger proportion of direct victims (i.e. survivors), women and girls are more likely to be

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<sup>37</sup> Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining and Gender and Mine Action Programme, *Gender & Diversity in Mine Action Quality Management* (Geneva: GICHD and GMAP, February 2015), 8, <https://www.gichd.org/resources/publications/detail/publication/gender-diversity-in-mine-action-quality-management/#.W1WXDtUzAM8>.

<sup>38</sup> Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining and United Nations Development Programme, *Leaving no one behind: Mine Action and the Sustainable Development Goals*, 30.

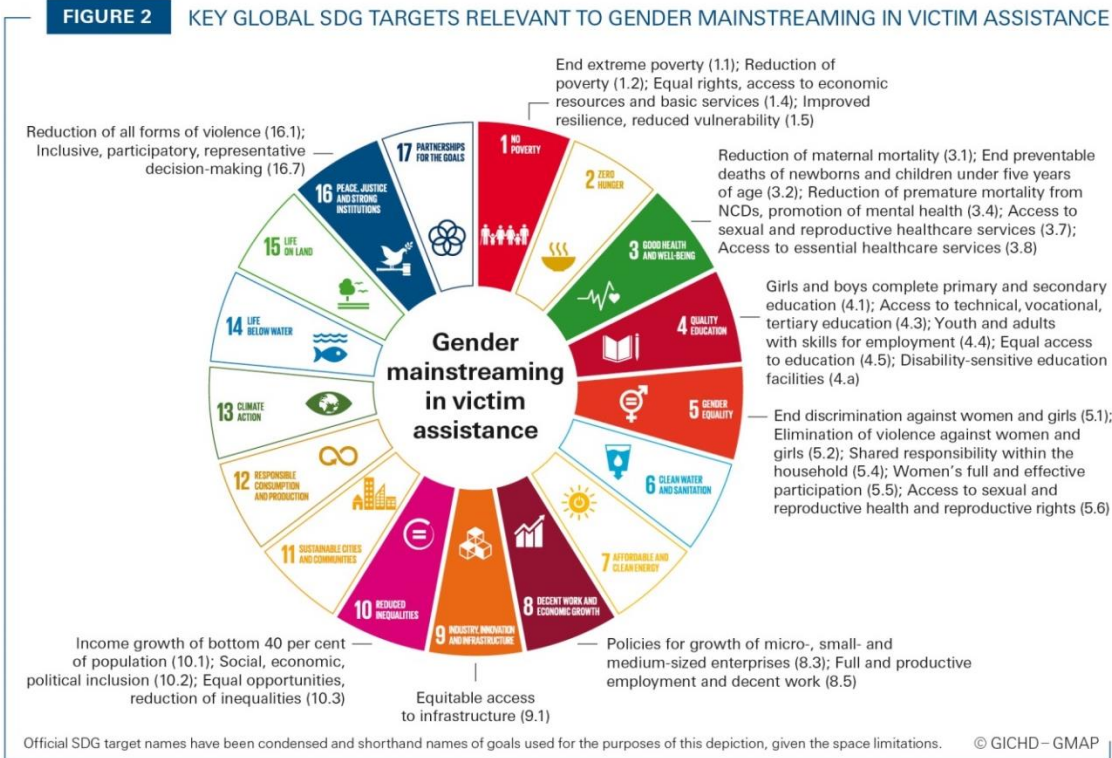
<sup>39</sup> Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining and Gender and Mine Action Programme, *Gender & Diversity in Contracting and Grants Management* (Geneva: GICHD and GMAP, 2014), 7, [https://www.gichd.org/what-we-do/our-news/news-detail/article/1425476587-just-published-by-gichd-and-gmap-gender-diversity-in-contracting-and-grants-management-gender-diversity-in-mine-action-quality-management/#.W1g\\_k9Uza70](https://www.gichd.org/what-we-do/our-news/news-detail/article/1425476587-just-published-by-gichd-and-gmap-gender-diversity-in-contracting-and-grants-management-gender-diversity-in-mine-action-quality-management/#.W1g_k9Uza70).

<sup>40</sup> Razavi, "The 2030 Agenda: challenges of implementation to attain gender equality and women's rights," 31.

<sup>41</sup> This is the case in many countries where a lack of health centres and long distances, made worse in some cases by detours to avoid mined roads, often make it difficult to reach healthcare centres when women go into labour. For an example from Myanmar, see Adam B. Loyer, Mohammed Ali, and Diana Loyer, "New Politics, an Opportunity for Maternal Health Advancement in Eastern Myanmar: An Integrative Review," *Journal of Health, Population and Nutrition* 32, no. 3 (September 2014): 471–85.

indirect victims of mines/ERW, in that they often have to provide care for the survivor and serve as the main breadwinner. While survivors face a long and arduous recovery, not only they, but also their families and communities, are at high risk of social and economic exclusion. Mainstreaming gender is essential in the provision of assistance to victims, in line with the principle of non-discrimination to other persons with disabilities, be this in relation to medical care, psychological and psycho-social support, inclusive education and socio-economic inclusion.

There are different pathways to adapt and improve access to medical and rehabilitation services for women, girl, boy and men victims. In Iraq for example, the French NGO Humanity & Inclusion (HI) employs gender-balanced teams to ensure the constant presence of female health professionals to treat female patients.<sup>42</sup> Similarly, the facilities themselves can be adapted, by offering separate waiting rooms for women and men, or by having the required medical equipment to treat both adults and children. It can be reasonably assumed that the provision of equitable physical access for women and girls to medical infrastructure (9.1) is the precondition for an array of health outcomes: reduced maternal or infant mortality (3.1; 3.2; 3.4), sexual and reproductive healthcare (3.7; 5.6), or access to essential healthcare services for all (3.8, see Figure 2). In addition, mainstreaming gender in medical and rehabilitation care of survivors also has the potential to change family dynamics, by encouraging the training of male family members to assist in the survivor’s physical therapy and in delivering other forms of care at home. This prevents the burden of care falling uniquely on female family members and promotes a more equal share of responsibility for care within the household (5.4).<sup>43</sup>



A gender lens in psychological and psycho-social support ensures that services are adapted to reach all victims and persons with disability, and are tailored to each victim’s specific needs. For instance, HI has created gender-separate support groups to increase the participation of female victims in psycho-social activities in Chad, while it organises activities led by male survivors and aimed at male victims to change norms of masculine behaviour in

<sup>42</sup> Gender and Mine Action Programme, *Victim assistance responsive to gender and other diversity aspects - Operational Guidance* (Geneva: GMAP, 2018), 30, [http://www.gmap.ch/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/gmap\\_guidances\\_EN-web.pdf](http://www.gmap.ch/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/gmap_guidances_EN-web.pdf).  
<sup>43</sup> Gender and Mine Action Programme, 32.



Mozambique.<sup>44</sup> All of these victim assistance interventions are ultimately aimed at promoting the psychological well-being of both women and men and their inclusion in the community (3.4; 10.2).

Inclusive education is another key area for assisting mine/ERW victims effectively. Gender mainstreaming ensures that all victims, regardless of sex or age, enjoy access to school and education services by either adapting the services to their needs, or by providing them with the means to access them. In Iraq, HI works with local partners to build access ramps or, where possible, construct accessible schools adapted to the reality of victims—and people with disabilities at large (4.A). In Eritrea, the United Nations Children’s Fund provided donkeys to 1,000 children with disabilities as a means of transport, giving priority to girls to allow them to continue their education.<sup>45</sup> These are concrete examples in which victim assistance measures have made education more accessible, especially for girls, ensuring that they can complete their education (4.1), thereby preventing their latent discrimination (5.1) and eliminating the gender disparities in access to education for children in vulnerable situations (4.5).

Access for mine/ERW victims to healthcare services, mental support and inclusive education is an important precursor for their socio-economic inclusion. By mainstreaming gender, socio-economic inclusion measures grant women victims equal access to training opportunities in the form of vocational training, financial literacy courses, apprenticeships or other skill development programmes (4.3). As a result, the education of women, including those with disabilities and most at risk, is promoted specifically (4.5), equipping them with skills for employment (4.4). In Iraq for example, UNDP provided financial and economic workshops to empower and educate women who had become the head of a household as a consequence of their husband dying or acquiring a functional limitation.<sup>46</sup> The range of socio-economic activities offered to women can vary widely, from animal husbandry to farming, from managing shops to working in NGOs.<sup>47</sup> Micro-credit and small loans may also be provided to female victims, easing their access to financial services, strongly supporting their financial empowerment (1.4) and leading to a growth in micro-enterprises (8.3).

By doing so, all these measures aim to create employment opportunities for women victims (8.5) who, facing intersecting discrimination, tend to be particularly marginalised and vulnerable. Ultimately, socio-economic empowerment may therefore increase income (10.1), reduce poverty (1.1; 1.2) and strengthen financial resilience of the poorest female victims in particular (1.5), while contributing to promoting their inclusion, participation and equal opportunities, socially and economically (5.5; 10.2; 10.3; 16.7).

Finally, it has become good practice that as part of every victim assistance response, organisations attempt to identify, among beneficiaries, those who may also have experienced or are experiencing gender-based violence. In Colombia, HI has, for example, established partnerships with local organisations that have appropriate care programmes to which it can refer mine/ERW victims suffering from such violence.<sup>48</sup> This way, victim assistance programmes have the potential to help address and reduce violence against women (5.2; 16.1).

### 3.3 Gender mainstreaming and employment in mine action

The importance of mainstreaming gender in recruitment policies and employing women in mine action activities has been largely recognised in the field.<sup>49</sup> Having an inclusive and

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<sup>44</sup> Gender and Mine Action Programme, 43.

<sup>45</sup> Gender and Mine Action Programme, 38.

<sup>46</sup> Gender and Mine Action Programme, 39.

<sup>47</sup> Ban Landmines Campaign Nepal, “Girl Child Education Scholarship Program,” June 2018, <http://nepal.icbl.org/programs/girl-child-education/>.

<sup>48</sup> Gender and Mine Action Programme, *Victim assistance responsive to gender and other diversity aspects - Operational Guidance*, 28.

<sup>49</sup> Gender and Mine Action Programme, *Gender-Sensitive Recruitment and Training in Mine Action - Guidelines* (Geneva: GMAP, 2013), [http://www.gmap.ch/fileadmin/GMAP\\_Articles\\_and\\_Papers/R\\_T\\_Guidelines\\_EN\\_HR.pdf](http://www.gmap.ch/fileadmin/GMAP_Articles_and_Papers/R_T_Guidelines_EN_HR.pdf); Geneva International

balanced operational workforce facilitates both the access to women and girls among beneficiaries, and the understanding and inclusion of their needs and priorities.<sup>50</sup> This is particularly important in societies with rigid gender norms, where women’s interactions with men in the public space are not socially permitted. Mixed gender teams increase the efficiency and effectiveness of mine action operations significantly and still remain a major reason for employing women. Mine action organisations therefore recruit and train women who acquire new operational, technical and managerial skills associated with the responsibilities of their jobs. This eventually renders organisations’ internal decision making more participatory and representative (16.7). In any case, providing women with access to employment and decent work (8.5) is particularly transformative in places where professional opportunities are scarce (8.6, see Figure 3).



Access to a steady income can contribute to gender equality and the empowerment of women in manifold ways.<sup>51</sup> In Angola for example, the British NGO The HALO Trust has developed the “100 Women in Demining” project, an initiative that not only aims to increase female mine clearance personnel for its operations in the country, but importantly, to provide salaries, new skills and career opportunities for women living in mine-affected areas.<sup>52</sup> It was observed that the income earned by these employed women paved the way for them to pay their children’s school fees, with possible consequences on their education outcomes (4.1; 4.2; 4.5). The project also enabled female employees to purchase land and have access to other resources (1.4) and invest in their own education (4.3).<sup>53</sup> This is a constructive initiative to ensuring a sustained income (10.1), reducing socio-economic inequalities (10.2), lifting these female deminers (and possibly their families) out of poverty (1.1; 1.2) and making them financially more resilient (1.5).

Centre for Humanitarian Demining and United Nations Development Programme, *Leaving no one behind: Mine Action and the Sustainable Development Goals*, 40–42.

<sup>50</sup> Gender and Mine Action Programme, *Gender-Sensitive Recruitment and Training in Mine Action - Guidelines*; Arianna Calza Bini, Nyske Janssen, and Abigail Jones, “Effects of Mixed Teams on Land Release,” *The Journal of ERW and Mine Action* 18, no. 1 (2014): 15, <http://commons.lib.jmu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1082&context=cisr-journal>.

<sup>51</sup> Calza Bini, Janssen, and Jones, “Effects of Mixed Teams on Land Release,” 15.

<sup>52</sup> The HALO Trust, “Meet Angolan Deminer Luciana,” December 1, 2017, <https://www.halotrust.org/media-centre/impact-stories/female-empowerment/>; The HALO Trust, “The Project,” <https://www.halotrust.org/100women/the-project/>.

<sup>53</sup> The HALO Trust, “Meet Angolan Deminer Luciana”; The HALO Trust, “HALO Celebrates International Women’s Day,” March 8, 2016, <https://www.halotrust.org/minefreenk/media-centre/impact-stories/halo-celebrates-international-womens-day/>.

Research in Lebanon and Colombia linked female employment with a change in decision-making power in the household. Employed as deminers, and contributing significantly to the household income, women reported participating effectively in decisions regarding money allocation and expenditure in their families and being taken more seriously by their family members (5.5).<sup>54</sup> A positive impact on the division of household chores (5.4) was also observed, although women still retained the main responsibility for domestic work.<sup>55</sup>

Knowledge gained in mine action may be applicable in other contexts, especially after the end of a mine action project.<sup>56</sup> In Sudan, the NGO Norwegian People's Aid (NPA) used to reallocate female employees from field operations, during and after pregnancy, to work in operations centres and radio rooms and provided them with computer training—transferable skills relevant for future job opportunities or even in other aspects of their lives.<sup>57</sup> Similarly, mine action organisations, such as The HALO Trust or HI, train local staff and community members all over the globe as paramedics to deliver emergency trauma care for mine/ERW victims,<sup>58</sup> thereby making a sustainable contribution to developing the national health workforce (3.C) for the benefit of affected communities in the long term. Providing women with transferable skills also helps address the educational barriers faced by women when accessing the labour market after the end of mine action operations and increases their relevant skills for employment (4.4).

Employment has the potential to transform power and gender relations not only amongst individuals and households, but also at the community level.<sup>59</sup> Since demining continues to be perceived as a “man’s job”,<sup>60</sup> the presence of female deminers in a community challenges gender roles and stereotypes and can contribute to reshaping gender norms. Through constant engagement with community leaders and encouraging women to enrol as deminers, NPA witnessed in Jordan how its female deminers “have become more empowered” and that their presence contributed to redefining traditional roles of women in the family and the community. Female deminers are also perceived in many countries as role models for other women.<sup>61</sup> Doing so prepares fertile ground for advancing gender equality and fighting discrimination (5.1). In the case of Colombia, it has been noted that working in demining has made women more aware of the country’s issues—and also more capable of informing their families and communities about these issues—as well as to actively participate in the peacebuilding process, contributing to the promotion of more peaceful and inclusive societies (16) and being an active part of socio-political life (10.2).<sup>62</sup>

Finally, when offering decent work for women and men, proper gender mainstreaming requires mine action organisations to adopt internal policies and practices that promote equal opportunities (5.C; 10.3) and a workplace free from harassment, discrimination and violence, in line with labour rights (5.1; 8.8), taking into account the specific needs of women. By

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<sup>54</sup> Research was conducted in Colombia with the Colombian Army, The HALO Trust and Norwegian People's Aid and in Lebanon with Danish Church Aid, Mines Advisory Group and Norwegian People's Aid. See Franziska Ehler, Zeila Lauletta and Nelly Schläfereit, *Women in Humanitarian Mine Action: Assessing Agency in Families and Communities*, n.d., 30–34.

<sup>55</sup> Ehler, Lauletta, and Schläfereit, *Women in Humanitarian Mine Action: Assessing Agency in Families and Communities*, 30–34.

<sup>56</sup> Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining and United Nations Development Programme, *Leaving no one behind: Mine action and the Sustainable Development Goals*, 30.

<sup>57</sup> United Nations, *Gender Guidelines for Mine Action Programmes* (New York: UN, 2010), 17, <http://www.mineaction.org/sites/default/files/publications/MA-Guidelines-WEB.pdf>.

<sup>58</sup> The HALO Trust, “Medical,” <https://www.halotrust.org/about-us/medical/>; The HALO Trust, “Meet Olga Kislovskaya: Inspiring Women as HALO Ukraine’s First Female Team Leader,” June 28, 2018, <https://www.halotrust.org/media-centre/impact-stories/meet-halo-ukraines-first-female-team-leader/>; The HALO Trust, “Meet Xhezire, Deminer Paramedic for HALO Kosovo,” March 8, 2018, <https://www.halotrust.org/media-centre/impact-stories/xhezire-kosovo/>; The HALO Trust, “HALO Celebrates International Women’s Day”; The HALO Trust, “Meet Elisa, Paramedic Deminer for HALO Angola,” March 8, 2018, <https://www.halotrust.org/media-centre/impact-stories/elisa-angola/>; Gender and Mine Action Programme, *Victim assistance responsive to gender and other diversity aspects - Operational Guidance*, 30.

<sup>59</sup> Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining and United Nations Development Programme, *Leaving no one behind: Mine Action and the Sustainable Development Goals*, 40–42.

<sup>60</sup> Norwegian People's Aid, “Vistahermosa: A Región [sic] of Hope,” <https://www.npaid.org/content/view/full/23301>.

<sup>61</sup> United Nations, *Gender Guidelines for Mine Action Programmes*, 15; Gender and Mine Action Programme, *Gender-Sensitive Recruitment and Training in Mine Action - Guidelines*, 7–8.

<sup>62</sup> Ehler, Lauletta, and Schläfereit, *Women in Humanitarian Mine Action: Assessing Agency in Families and Communities*, 30–34.

upholding high standards for hiring and contracting, these organisations even have the potential to promote more inclusive labour policies (16.B). Indeed, an assessment of a mine action organisation’s programme in South Sudan, conducted by GMAP in 2015, found that the limited maternity leave offered by the organisation—albeit in accordance with the national law—was the main cause for poor retention of female staff. As a result, the organisation extended the leave period and the United Nations Office for Project Services, as the grant agent for mine action projects in the country, has since included longer maternity leave as a requirement in its tenders.<sup>63</sup>

**4. Conclusion**

As a set of activities that not only aims to increase safety and security, but also accelerate broader sustainable development, mine action, like other sectors, is challenged to adapt to the currently prevailing development framework. Mine action stakeholders may be increasingly called to demonstrate how they advance the achievement of SDG targets and “leaving no one behind” in order for their contribution to sustainable development to be fully recognised.

To meet this challenge, the sector requires data to validate (or invalidate) these contributions. Importantly, it is especially at the indicator level that gender mainstreaming most needs to occur.<sup>64</sup> This article capitalises on available evidence to signpost the inherent potential of gender mainstreaming in mine action to contribute, immediately or in the medium to long term, to advancing progress on many gender-related SDG efforts. Yet, this research also considers that further evidence is needed to measure certain claims made in the present paper. Concretely, better anchoring of mine action in national development plans, including national SDG frameworks, or aligning project outcomes and indicators with the SDGs, will allow the sector to become a deliberate part of a broader Theory of Change and be better equipped to pursue and document such results.



<sup>63</sup> Gender and Mine Action Programme, *Annual Report 2016* (Geneva: GMAP, 2017), <http://www.gmap.ch/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/GMAP-Annual-Report-2016-FINAL.pdf>.

<sup>64</sup> Stuart and Woodroffe, “Leaving No-One Behind: can the Sustainable Development Goals succeed where the Millennium Development Goals lacked?” 75.

The shortage of gender-related data might, in part, result from an established focus of perceiving gender mainstreaming primarily as a pathway to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of operations. This article clearly demonstrates that gender mainstreaming in mine action—most prominently land release, victim assistance and employment—can yield important transformative potential to empower women and girls in particular, in all their diversity (see Figure 4 for summary), which is only tapped by mine action organisations to a limited extent. However, various examples presented herein suggest a growing awareness of this potential. There are opportunities to be seized, especially in a context that is conducive to do so, with important mine action donors explicitly pursuing a foreign policy that puts strong emphasis on the empowerment of women and girls.

Partnerships will be essential in such endeavours, primarily to better align mine action projects with broader development initiatives and bringing the sector closer to the “gender community”. They can also prove helpful in gathering data on mine action results. It is hoped that in the future, these results will reflect ever more mine action contributions to gender equality (in all its dimensions) and the empowerment of women and girls. Working *for* and *with* communities, mine action is well placed to demonstrate change. National ownership for further exploring this nexus is key. Doubtless, an increased focus on these potentialities would further strengthen mine action’s role and relevance in humanitarian, peacebuilding and development efforts, and heighten its impact and efficiency. As this article demonstrates, the SDG framework represents a meaningful pathway to that effect.

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