

Women in Humanitarian Mine Action: Assessing Agency in Families and Communities

A Case Study of Lebanon



Photo Credit: Cluster Munition Coalition. Cluster Bombs – South Lebanon. Digital Image. Available from: Flickr, <https://flic.kr/p/a9FZ1J> (2011)

Background

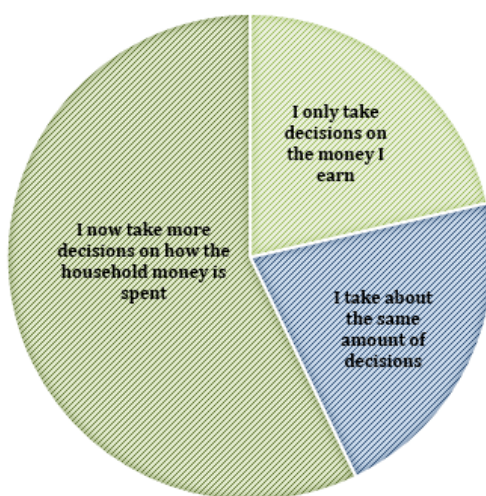
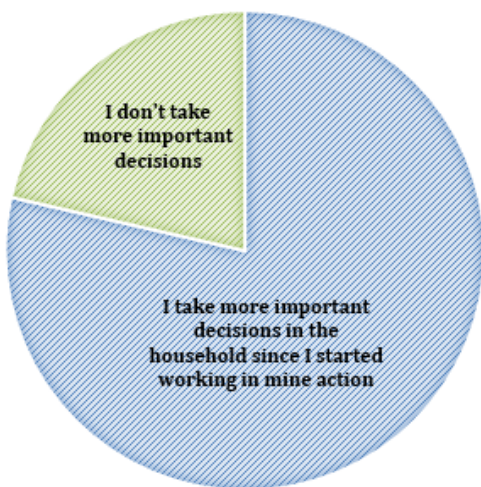
Humanitarian Mine Action (HMA) organizations increasingly employ women, having integrated a gender component into their work. As women participate in a wide range of activities, from demining to management,

How does this influence their agency in their families and communities?

Is such agency potentially transformative by challenging existing social structures?

Lebanon until today is severely contaminated by landmines and other Explosive Remnants of War (ERW). Lebanese HMA organizations employ women at all levels of their organization. At the same time, Lebanese women's overall status in society remains marginalized, and stereotypes over which jobs are appropriate for women prevail.

Agency in the Family



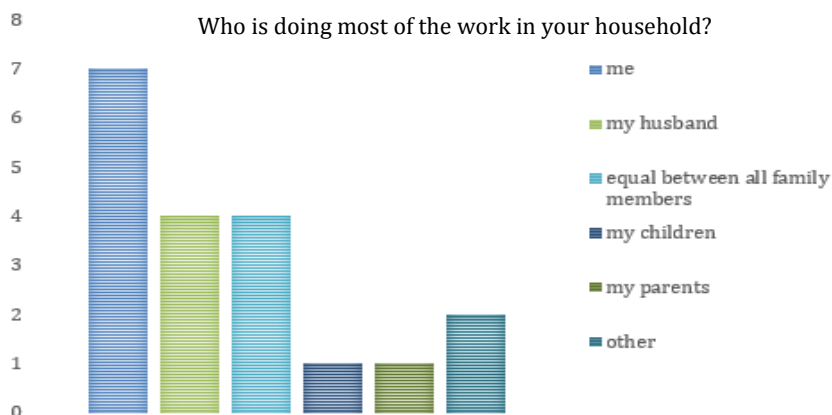
“Now, I have more independence for taking decisions [...] I have more freedom, although I was working for ten years before [working in mine action] and I was independent. But once I was working as a deminer, it was different”

— Female Deminer, Lebanon

A majority of women reported

- having gained **greater influence** over important household decisions.
- receiving **increased help** in the household from their family members.
- still facing a **double burden**, having to juggle a full-time job and the main responsibility for household chores.
- of families now having a **greater awareness** of Lebanon's problems.

Women appear to possess '**knowledge agency**', a less tangible form of agency influencing people's mindsets and perceptions, e.g. regarding gender roles, with a potential transformative long-term impact.

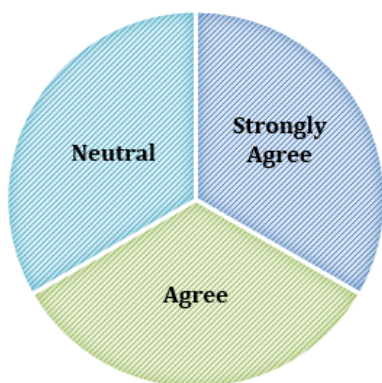
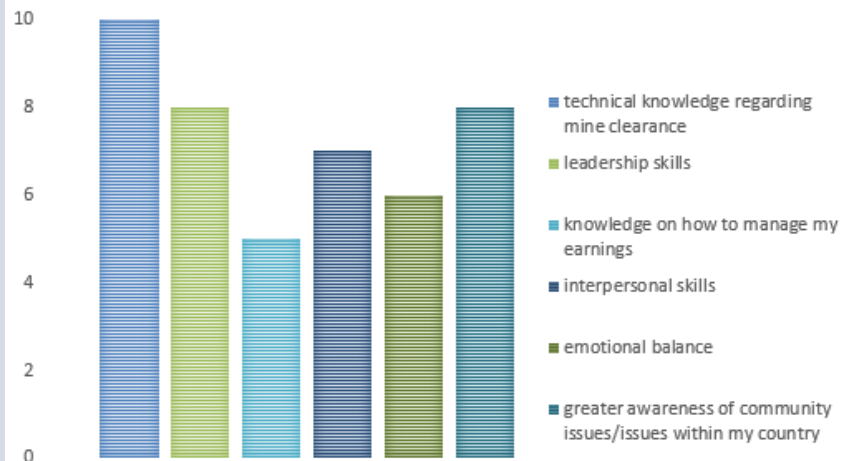


Methodology

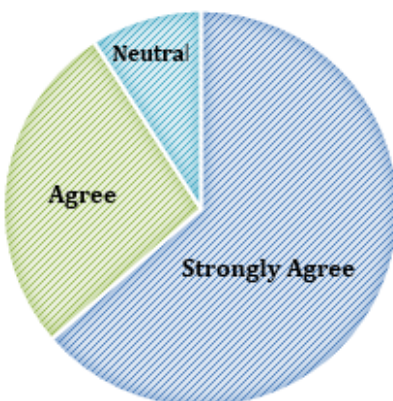
The study was originally conducted in Colombia and Lebanon, focusing on the largest civilian mine action organizations which employ women. Interviews and a survey targeting female staff were used to collect data, whereby the survey was distributed to women in the field with no access to internet or telephone. Women answered a range of questions concerning their experiences in their families and communities. In Lebanon, a total of 14 women responded to the survey, and 7 women were interviewed. Respondents occupied a range of positions in their respective organizations, with educational levels varying from 4 to more than 12 years of formal education. Albeit not set up as a comparative study, similar trends could be seen in Colombia and Lebanon.

Which skills have you acquired through working in HMA?

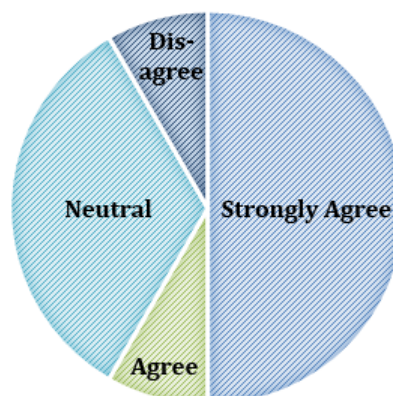
Respondents could indicate several answers



“Since I started working in mine action, I feel that my influence within my community has increased”



“My community perceives me as a more valuable member since I started working in mine action”



“Since I started working in mine action, I feel more strongly about problems I see in my community”

Agency in the Community

Women reported

- observing that **their communities respected them more than before** and that their influence on their communities had grown.
- feeling that their **communities had prejudice** about their work on the grounds of gender.
- seeing that explaining their work often **changed people’s perceptions**, hinting at a potential new collective awareness.
- often having to **‘toughen up’** to be considered equally valuable members of their mine action teams.

Research conducted by Franziska Ehlert, Zeïla Lauletta & Nelly Schlaefereit, *The Graduate Institute for International and Development Studies, Geneva.*



Photo Credit: Norwegian People’s Aid. Disaster Risk Reduction, Lebanon. Digital Image. Available from: Flickr, <https://flic.kr/p/hhTnUb> (2011)

“People show more respect because they realise our job and the results of our jobs are saving lives – we are helping people to rebuild their homes, to live their lives.”

— Female Deminer, Lebanon