

SRI LANKA

Critical Role and Benefits of Staff Capacity-Building & Transition Program Lessons from Sri Lanka Mine Action Programme | October 2024



Goal: To support over 3,000 demining staff in post-conflict affected areas, one-third of whom are women, in developing their employability and vocational skills through a phased approach, enhancing their skills for current roles and facilitating a successful transition to post-demining job opportunities as Sri Lanka moves toward a mine-free status.

KEY MILESTONES IN SRI LANKA'S STAFF TRANSITION JOURNEY

- “Skills Acquisition and Post-Demining Livelihood Transition Strategy” developed by MAG in 2020, the first of its kind, now embedded as Strategic Objective in the 2023-2027 National Mine Action Completion Strategy.
- Memorandum of Understanding signed in 2023 between NMAC and the Northern and Eastern Provincial Councils to support the transition of the demining workforce.

- Staff Transition Unit established at MAG in 2021, and across HALO, DASH and SHARP in 2022 to implement relevant activities.
- A MAG Livelihood Consultant seconded to NMAC to support the implementation of Strategic Objective 4 “Staff Transition” of the National Strategy.
- Interest and buy-in from the international donor community to fund staff transition activities.

With clearance operations running at full capacity, the ongoing interventions focus on improving the employability skills of male and female demining staff and encouraging income diversification while they are still employed. Key interventions include (implemented by all or some operators and delivered by their partners / service providers) :

Financial Literacy Training

Tamil Literacy Classes

Spoken Sinhala Course

English Language Training

ICT Skills Training

General Soft Skills Training

Riding License Facilitation

Orientation on Government Extension Services

Access to Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) System

Mental Health & Psychosocial Support

Empowerment Programme for Female Demining staff

Awareness on GBV, Road Safety and Other Topics

Achievement: Collaborative Ecosystem to Support Deminers' Transition

The cumulative efforts of operators, along with coordination and visibility initiatives at both national and provincial levels, have led to significant partnerships and fruitful collaborations with government stakeholders, universities, UN agencies, civil society organizations and the private sector. This has created a collaborative ecosystem that enhances the impact of demining operations and supports workforce transition in a sector where operators often work independently. Key partnerships and collaborations include:

- Departments of Agriculture, Animal Production & Health, Industries and Motor Traffic | Northern and Eastern Provincial Councils (All)
- Small Enterprises Development (SED) Division, Kilinochchi District | Ministry of Youth and Sports (DASH)
- Vocational Training Authority (HALO)
- University of Vavuniya (MAG)
- Eastern University (MAG)
- NISD | National Institute of Social Development (HALO)
- IOM | International Office for Migration for Sri Lanka (Joint Concept Note drafted to support the sector)
- ICMPD | International Centre for Migration Policy Development, Migration Resource Centre in Batticaloa (MAG)
- SL Chamber of Construction Industry-Chamber of Skilled Crafts of Frankfurt-Rhein-Main | Vocational Training Improvement Project (MAG)
- Yugashakthi (Social Enterprise) – Integrated Farming Initiative (HALO)

Benefits of Staff Capacity-Building at Various Levels

1. At Organizational Level

→ **Ethical Employers** In line with their humanitarian mission, the four in-country mine action operators demonstrate their commitment as ethical employers by preparing their demining workforce for post-demining job prospects as clearance completion approaches. As one of the largest formal employers in the North, mine action operations play a critical role in the local economy, with many communities relying heavily on the income generated from this work. This makes their responsibility to support the workforce even more crucial. This initiative is a continuous process rather than a one-time effort, fostering trust and confidence among staff. By providing ongoing support, it not only supports employees' transitions — making the process of redundancy more manageable—but also helps mitigate the adverse effects of potential workforce reductions due to unexpected funding cuts.

2. At Community and Local Levels

→ **Building a Productive Workforce to Support Local Economies** By investing in employee growth, the mine action operators have seen positive outcomes in workplace productivity and efficiency. Examples include soft skills training to boost efficiency and improve workplace communication, English language training to facilitate better interaction with senior management, and Tamil literacy programs to support internal promotion opportunities. Networking efforts by MAG and HALO also help connect with international and national trainers for key operational roles, such as mechanics and medics, recognizing and building upon their existing skills—an achievement that would have not been possible without the staff capacity-building program. This investment not only benefits the mine action sector but also equips employees with valuable skills that future employers can leverage, particularly in industries facing a shortage of skilled labor.

→ **Collective Efforts and Partnerships** Staff transition efforts have significantly increased visibility for the mine action work and fostered collaboration with international, national expert organizations and local talent to support our workforce. This collective engagement has transformed the landscape of mine action by shifting from sole organizational responsibility to community responsibility, enabling operators to tap into a robust network of partners and service providers for providing the necessary training and resources for staff to thrive in their post-demining livelihoods. For example, at MAG, the use of training facilities and issuances of certificates from the University of Vavuniya and Eastern University represent significant milestones for deminers who have been away from formal education and the academic environment. Exploring strategic partnerships with expert organizations such as IOM allows the sector to diversify funding sources and transfer some staff transition related responsibilities while concentrating on phasing out demining operations as we approach completion. Discussions with the Asian Development Bank have opened avenues to support the government and relevant ministries in accessing funds for mine action and staff transition efforts.

3. At National Level

→ **Contribution to Peacebuilding and Reconciliation** The transition of deminers is not solely an economic matter but a crucial political and social issue intertwined with the reconciliation process. Since 2002, demining work has played a crucial role in the socio-economic reintegration of former LTTE combatants, including female ex-combatants, while also empowering female-headed households, widows, landmine victims and persons with disabilities to move away from poverty and traditional roles.

The central government has become increasingly aware of the ongoing demining efforts in the conflict-affected districts, integrating this critical work into their agenda and recognizing the need to support the dedicated workforce post-completion, thanks to effective coordination with national ministries and associated agencies.

Mine action operators have expanded their in-house training program to include non-demining skills, helping to close the educational gaps that many staff members experienced due to the conflict and reducing the risk of economic instability in these communities. Deminers, primarily from the Tamil ethnic minority, are given the opportunity to learn Sinhala, enabling communication across ethnic groups. By strengthening their proficiency in the national languages—Sinhala and Tamil—as well as English, the workforce gains greater geographical mobility, enabling them to access opportunities beyond the North and East regions, contributing to a more united society.