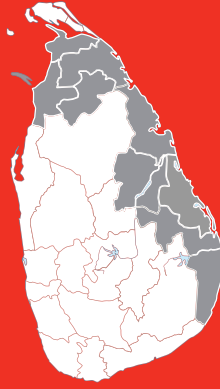
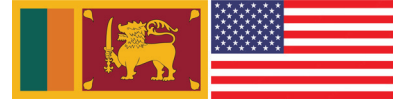




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UNIVERSITY OF VAVUNIYA, SRI LANKA



SRI LANKA

Review of Employability Skills to Support MAG Workforce Transition
University of Vavuniya Study Commissioned by MAG Sri Lanka
Supported by US-WRA | November 2024



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Employability skills are the broad set of skills, attributes, and personal qualities that enable staff to succeed in the workplace and adapt to a variety of professional environments. They are often referred to as “transferable skills” or “soft skills”, as they can be applied across different jobs and industries, regardless of specific technical knowledge. These skills can be developed through experience and training, and are highly valued by employers for their impact on productivity, collaboration, and overall workplace success.

1. Background & Context

Mine action operations in Sri Lanka involve two international NGOs (MAG and HALO Trust), two national NGOs (DASH and SHARP), and the Sri Lankan Army – Humanitarian Demining Unit (SLA-HDU). They operate under the coordination of the National Mine Action Centre (NMAC). The combined workforce of the four NGO operators exceeds 3,000 staff, with one-third being women, residing primarily in the conflict-affected Northern and Eastern Provinces. As of October 2024, MAG employs nearly 1,000 staff members.

In 2021, MAG launched a staff capacity-building program aimed at enhancing the skillset of the demining workforce and supporting their transition to post-demining careers, as we approach clearance completion and the anticipated wind-down of the sector in Sri Lanka.

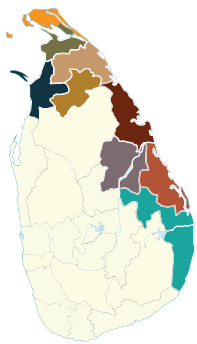
Since November 2023, a 2-day residential soft skills training program, facilitated by the University of Vavuniya, has been introduced for demining staff and drivers, yielding positive outcomes, including increased productivity and reduced conflicts and absenteeism in the workplace. To further strengthen this program, MAG commissioned a study to explore opportunities for further development, which could benefit both MAG and other operators in the sector.



2. Objective of the Study

This study focuses on employability skills gained by MAG demining workforce, identifying gaps and in-demand skills to improve job performance in their current roles and facilitate a smooth transition to alternative occupations in the Northern and Eastern Provinces of Sri Lanka upon clearance completion.

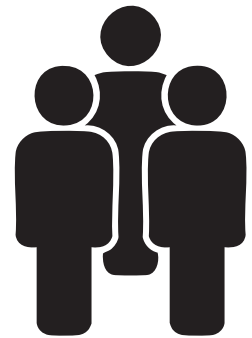
The research covered 12 major industries, such as agriculture (including fishing and livestock), construction, tourism & hospitality, healthcare, IT, and automobile, at the district level within the targeted provinces. To gather insights and recommendations, 120 industry leaders and employers were engaged through key informant interviews (KIIs) and focus group discussions (FGDs).



Northern & Eastern Provinces



12 Industries Identified



KIIs and FGDs with 120 Industry Leaders and Employers

Investing in the development of employability skills benefit both the workforce and the operator during ongoing clearance operations. As the demining workforce enhances their ability to adapt to change, collaborate effectively, and perform their duties efficiently, they position themselves for success both now and in future career opportunities.

3. Employability Skills of MAG Demining Workforce

The following is a list of employability skills identified among the demining staff, derived from an analysis of job descriptions and the Transferable Skill Analysis Report conducted in 2022 by Kiwikaha Learning. These findings provide a basis for the design and implementation of customized skills development initiatives tailored to the needs and skill sets of the workforce.

- ◆ Deminers: Teamwork, Communication, Attention to Detail, Target Conscious, Time Management, Sense of Responsibility, Discipline, Problem-Solving, Adaptability, Patience, Empathy and Situational Awareness.
- ◆ In addition to the skills listed for deminers, managerial positions (deputy team leaders, team leaders, supervisors and field operations managers) involve the following employability skills: Leadership, Team Management, Decision-Making, Accountability, Strategic Thinking & Planning, Coordination, Reporting, and Responsiveness.

While not all staff members may demonstrate the same level of proficiency in these skills, each of them possesses a certain level of each to effectively perform their tasks. Training programs can help harmonize these skill sets across the workforce, ensuring a more cohesive and efficient team.

4. Alternative In-Demand Occupations in the Northern and Eastern Provinces

The identification of alternative semi-skilled and skilled jobs for the demining workforce in the Northern and Eastern Provinces follows key criteria, listed below, to ensure safe and sustainable transitions:

Skills & qualifications required can be attained through vocational training or minimal retraining, by leveraging existing skills gained in the mine action sector

Extensive prior work experience is not required, as the workforce can draw on their previous experience outside the mine action sector and their current skills

Employment opportunities for both men and women, with a focus on offering women roles in both male-dominated and traditional sectors, with flexibility to choose positions

A monthly income above LKR 55,000 to ensure financial stability and security, matching or surpassing the earnings from demining work

Safe working conditions that minimize health risks and ensure the physical well-being of workers

Below is an overview of key in-demand occupations, categorized by wage range, skill level, gender (indicating current access or employer preference), and working conditions, based on a survey of 120 key informant interviews across 12 industries:

Skilled Occupations | Wage Range: LKR 55,000 - Above 95,000

- Plant Operator (55,000 - 64,999) – Secondary Education, Male, Outdoor work
- Technician (75,000 - 84,999) – Professional Certification, Male, Indoor work
- Pharmacist (75,000 - 84,999) – Professional Certification, Both, Exposure to chemicals
- Nurse (75,000 - 84,999) – Professional Certification, Both, Labor-intensive work
- Tour Guide (75,000 - 84,999): Secondary Education, Both, Outdoor Work, Long hours (East only)
- Printer Technician (85,000 - 94,999) – Secondary Education, Male, Indoor, Long hours
- Driver (85,000 - 94,999) – Secondary Education, Male, Outdoor work, Repetitive tasks

Semi-Skilled Occupations | Wage Range: LKR 55,000 - 84,999

- Repair Worker (55,000 - 64,999) – No Formal Education, Male, Outdoor, Repetitive tasks
- Cement Worker (55,000 - 64,999) – No Formal Education, Both, Outdoor, Exposure to dust
- Production Worker (55,000 - 64,999) – Secondary Education, Both, Indoor, Long hours
- Fresh and Dry Fish Processor (55,000 - 64,999) – No Formal Education, Both, Outdoor, Exposure to Heat/Cold
- Farm Worker (55,000 - 64,999) – No Formal Education, Both, Outdoor work
- Compost Producer (55,000 - 64,999) – No Formal Education, Both, Indoor work
- Welder (65,000 - 74,999) – No Formal Education, Male, Indoor, Exposure to Heat/Cold
- Glass Fitter (65,000 - 74,999) – No Formal Education, Male, Outdoor, Labor-intensive work
- Baker (65,000 - 74,999) – Primary Education, Both, Indoor, Labor-intensive work
- Machine Operator (65,000 - 74,999) – Primary Education, Male, Indoor, Exposure to noise
- Aluminum Worker (65,000 - 74,999) – No Formal Education, Male, Outdoor, Exposure to noise
- Mill Operator (65,000 - 74,999) – No Formal Education, Both, Indoor, Exposure to dust

- Boat Builder (65,000 - 74,999): No Formal Education, Male, Indoor, Exposure to dust (East only)
- Crusher Operator (75,000 - 84,999) – No Formal Education, Male, Outdoor, Exposure to dust
- Mason (75,000 - 84,999) – No Formal Education, Male, Outdoor, Labor-intensive work
- Security (75,000 - 84,999) – Secondary Education, Both, Outdoor, Long hours

Customer-Facing and Creative Roles | Wage Range: LKR 65,000 - Above 95,000

- Confectioner (55,000 - 64,999) – No Formal Education, Both, Indoor, Long hours
- Receptionist (65,000 - 74,999) – Secondary Education, Both, Indoor, Long hours
- Jeweler (75,000 - 84,999) – Primary Education, Male, Indoor, Long hours
- Photographer (75,000 - 84,999) – Professional Certification, Both, Indoor, Long hours
- Designer (85,000 - 94,999) – Professional Certification, Both, Indoor, Labor-intensive work
- Chef (Above 95,000) – Professional Certification, Both, Exposure to Heat/Cold
- Makeup Artist (Above 95,000) – Primary Education, Both, Indoor, Repetitive tasks
- Hair Stylist (Above 95,000) – Professional Certification, Male, Indoor/Outdoor work

5. Top 10 Essential Employability Skills

The following outlines the top 10 essential employability skills ranked based on their value as indicated by employers across growing industries. It also highlights the major workplace challenges they encounter, offering insights into both opportunities for skill development and areas requiring attention. This approach ensures that demining staff are equipped with a comprehensive skill set, enabling them to thrive in existing and new employment opportunities.

01 Teamwork and Collaboration

Key teamwork and collaboration skills include being reliable and accountable, communicating well to reach shared goals, creating a supportive environment, and resolving conflicts to keep the team focused and productive.

02 Leadership

Leadership skills include motivating team members to do their best, delegating tasks to improve team performance, and planning long-term goals to guide the team.

03 Communication

Effective communication involves active listening to understand instructions clearly, conveying information with clarity and conciseness, and using non-verbal communication to enhance professionalism and empathy. It is crucial not only within the organization but also in discussions with external parties to ensure clear, efficient, and positive interactions.

04 Time Management

Key time management skills include being on time for work, prioritizing tasks efficiently, setting goals to stay focused on key objectives, and delegating tasks to manage the workload effectively.

05 Problem-Solving

Key problem-solving skills include understanding problems, coming up with creative solutions, and making quick, effective decisions to avoid disruptions in operations.

06 Conflict Management

Conflict management skills involve staying calm to resolve issues, helping people talk through their differences, and finding the main cause of the problem to fix it.

07 Emotional Intelligence

Emotional intelligence involves empathizing with others' feelings, managing emotions in stressful situations, and improving interactions with teams and clients.

08 Customer Service

Good customer service requires patience to handle difficult situations, understanding client needs in advance, and communicating clearly and efficiently.

09 Stress Management

Stress management skills include practicing relaxation techniques like meditation, bouncing back from setbacks, and organizing tasks by prioritizing and delegating.

10 Interpersonal Skills

Interpersonal skills include being flexible in how you communicate, solving conflicts in a positive way to keep good relationships, and creating a supportive and encouraging work environment.

While enhancing the top 10 essential employability skills, particular attention should be given to addressing the following common workplace challenges reported by employers that can significantly impact team dynamics and overall productivity:

1. Poor Listening Skills

Miss Important Details or Misunderstand Instructions

6. Difficulty Bouncing Back

Remain Discouraged, Lose Motivation or Avoid Taking New Challenges

2. Difficulty Expressing Ideas Clearly

Provide Unclear Instructions, Fail to Outline Key Tasks or Struggle to Explain New Ideas

7. Tendency to Delay Tasks

Wait Until the Last Minute to Start or Finish the Work, Postpone Routine Tasks or Put Off Difficult Tasks

3. Failure to Take Responsibility

Deny Responsibility, Shift the Blame to Others or Leave Tasks Incomplete

8. Difficulty Prioritizing Tasks

Focus on Less Important Tasks, Spend Too Much Time on Minor Details or Rush High-Priority Tasks at the Last Minute

4. Lack of Cooperative Skills

Avoid Teamwork, Ignore Others' Inputs, Withhold Important Information or Prioritize Personal Goals over Team Goals

9. Inability to Manage Stress Effectively

Become Overwhelmed, Make Poor Decisions Under Pressure or Create Conflict with Co-Workers

5. Difficulty Accepting Criticism

Take Negative Feedback Personally, React Defensively or Ignore Suggestions for Improvement

10. Resistance to Change

Refuse to Adopt New Tools, Reject New Processes, Avoid New Tasks or Feel Threatened by New Leadership



6. Proposed Actions to Enhance Employability Skills

To strengthen the employability of the demining workforce and ensure their long-term success, a range of targeted actions are necessary to address key skills gaps and promote continuous development. The following key actions can help achieve these objectives:

- **Implement regular leadership training sessions and workshops**
focused on developing the essential employability skills identified above, ensuring that demining staff are equipped to meet both current and future challenges in the workplace.
- **Facilitate regular team-building exercises, including both indoor and outdoor activities,**
to enhance communication, encourage teamwork, and build a stronger sense of camaraderie within teams.
- **Establish open communication channels**
to ensure clarity, smooth information exchange, and minimize misunderstandings.
- **Encourage leadership styles that focus on teamwork, diversity, and creativity,**
moving away from rigid, top-down approaches.
- **Introduce or enhance task management tools**
including low-tech or no-IT options – to help employees stay organized, prioritize tasks, and meet deadlines more efficiently.
- **Equip employees, with targeted actions for both leadership and other roles, with practical tools for stress management, conflict resolution, and mental well-being,**
such as mindfulness exercises, conflict resolution training, counseling services, and wellness programs.
- **Establish mentorship programs that connect employees with experienced colleagues**
to provide insights, guidance, and support for professional growth, skill development, and career advancement.





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