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Mine Action and Development

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Mine Action and Development

The author explains why he thinks the international mine action and broader development communities are moving in the right direction by mainstreaming mine action into development programs where the degree of landmine contamination warrants.

L andmines are victim-triggered weapons that in -jure or kill on contact. They are indiscriminate by nature, making no distinction among enemy combatants, farmers at work, or children at play. Nor do they cease to be a threat when a conflict has ended. The vast majority of mine incidents involve civilians who are killed or injured post-conflict, often many decades after the formal cessation of hostilities.

It is speculated that since 1975, there have been more than a million landmine casualties worldwide. While the number of incidents continues to drop as countries accede to the Ottawa Convention banning anti-personnel mines, the indirect, but equally lethal, impact of landmines as a result of the direct lethality of the weapon.

In addition to threatening life and limb, landmines inhibit rehabilitation and reconstruction, agriculture, water supply, education, and industrial and commercial development. They prevent the safe return of refugees and internally displaced persons, and impose significant and unnecessary costs on health systems already stretched to or beyond capacity. They breed instability and insecurity and terrorize entire populations. For these and a host of other reasons, mine action is very much a development issue, and there is no doubt that in many affected countries, effective mine action can contribute to a great deal to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. With increased awareness of the links between mine action and the achievement of the MDGs, mine-affected communities are moving in the right direction by mainstreaming mine action into their regular programs—both as a sector of development unto itself, and as a means to advance work in more traditional sectors. Notably, in 2004, the World Bank identified mine action as a development imperative.

Positive Changes

It is a tragic fact that in the heat of battle and the fog of war even the most responsible and disciplined areas of diplomacy, defence and development. This is an ambitious undertaking but one that promises to generate real synergy and hard results over time. The former also underlines the importance of the distinction between the so-called “developed” and “developing” worlds. We are all “developing,” albeit in different ways and to different degrees.

“A child who dies of diarrhoeal disease because the only clean water source in an area is mined or of malnutrition because farmers’ fields are mine-contaminated is no less a mine victim than the child struck down directly by a landmine.”

Development: Much More Than a Healthy GDP

The integration of mine action in the broader developmental agenda reflects further evolution in our understanding of “development” and what it takes for it to be achieved. Among the many lessons that almost half a century of international development cooperation has taught is that “development” is an increasingly inclusive notion—much more than a healthy GDP that measures the welfare of a society. It is incumbent upon the international community, therefore, to address the most egregious weapons—weapons of war and the way they are commonly used—are prone to indiscriminate effects and cause high collateral damage.

By any standard, the Ottawa Convention is a remarkable achievement in the annals of international humanitarian law. It is incumbent upon the international community, therefore, to address the most egregious weapons—weapons of war and the way they are commonly used—are prone to indiscriminate effects and cause high collateral damage.

Concluding

The face of war is changing. More often than not, combatants are indistinguishable from and intermingled with civilian populations. Even when they are not, today’s battlefield is tomorrow’s village, roadway or farmer’s field. Fighting such wars in a manner that respects this reality requires weapons that:

1. Render effective force.
2. Are reliable.
3. Can be carefully targeted to minimize the risk to civilians.

It also requires the unwavering determination of those who have these weapons at their disposal to address this challenge.

Earl Turcotte

Earl Turcotte was recently appointed director of the Mine Action and Small Arms Team in the International Security Branch of Foreign Affairs Canada. From May 2004 to June 2005 he was senior development advisor to the UNDP Mine Action Team, based in New York. From 1982 to 2004, he was with the Canadian International Development Agency in various capacities, and he was an occasional television broadcaster focused on international issues.

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The integration of mine action in the broader developmental agenda reflects further evolution in our understanding of “development” and what it takes for it to be achieved. Among the many lessons that almost half a century of international development cooperation has taught is that “development” is an increasingly inclusive notion—much more than a healthy, gross domestic product—and “human-centered development” requires a multi-dimensional and comprehensive approach. It is not enough that people have nutritious food, proper water and shelter from the elements. We also need a clean environment, adequate health care, access to education and the means to provide for ourselves and our loved ones over the long term. We need security, protection, and internally displaced persons, and impose significant and unnecessary costs on health systems already stretched to or beyond capacity. They can also be instability and insecurity and terrorize entire populations. For these and a host of other reasons, mine action is very much a development issue, and there is no doubt that in many affected countries, effective mine action can contribute to a great deal to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals.

With increased awareness of the links between mine action and the achievement of the MDGs, mine-affected countries have begun to integrate or “mainstream” mine action into their regular programs—both as a sector of development unto itself, and as a means to advance work in more traditional sectors. Notably, in 2004, the World Bank identified mine action as a development imperative.8

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by Earl Turcotte [Foreign Affairs Canada]
A Regional Approach: Mine and UXO Risk Reduction in Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia, Wells-Dang [from page 14]

Further Reading
8. USDOS. Annual Report 2004. USDOS, P.O. Box 345, Victoria, Las Palmas. Tel: (852-21-4140) Fax: (852-21-41576). Email: usmosakesland@aol.com.

Destroying the Mother of All Arsenals, Zachacovsky [from page 18]

Endnotes

Hidden Killers in Afghanistan, Sharif [from page 20]

Endnotes
2. One square kilometer is approximately 0.386 square mile.

Observations on Recent Changes in Northwest Cambodia’s Mine/UXO Situation, Simmonds, et al. [from page 24]

Endnotes
1. LIS is an abbreviation for Level One Survey that is commonly used in Cambodia. This is not to be confused with LIS (Landmine Impact Survey), which is in common use in more part of the world.