Integrated Mine Action: A Rights-Based Approach in Cambodia

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Integrated Mine Action: A RIGHTS-BASED APPROACH IN CAMBODIA

The lives of some of the most impoverished Cambodians are beginning to improve as a result of a new governmental programme and nonprofit assistance that award land, provide training and offer other opportunities. Integrating mine action with other development programmes is building a sustainable economic community in Cambodia.

by Sally Campbell | AUSTCARE Mine Action Team |

Integrated mine action has a unique importance for Cambodians. In a country where almost 60,000 registered mine/uncleared ordinance casualties have been reported, 89% of new casualties were reported—it is impossible to ignore the tremendous impact of landmines on human security and national development. Ninety-seven percent of casualties reported in 2004 occurred among civilians, most of whom were pursuing livelihoods to feed their families. Activities such as farming, collecting food or wood, and traveling continue to be among the top sources of mine-related incidents. A reality for Cambodia is that people at risk have also emerged as a vital component to achieving outcomes that enhance the rights and obligations of programme participants, allowing them to sustain the benefits of integrated mine action in a meaningful and progressive way.

AUSTCARE has been conducting integrated mine action in Cambodia since 2001. Its mine action programme was a natural outcome of several years of project support to Cambodian refugees and internally displaced people in the aftermath of conflict. The nation’s Mine Action Programme and Victim Assistance Authority has emphasised the importance of integrated mine action and stated that all mine clearance activities should contribute to sustainable economic growth and the improved management of natural resources. To achieve this goal, each mine clearance activity must be planned in the development context.

Demining activities should work hand-in-hand with development work to achieve social and political change. For example, some sites requiring clearance are not appropriate for agricultural production. Land identified for clearance is inevitably not always suitable for all components of integrated mine action. For example, some sites requiring clearance are not appropriate for agricultural production. Clearing mines is therefore of particular relevance to the most disenfranchised Cambodians. In a country where almost 60,000 registered mine/uncleared ordinance casualties have been reported, 89% of new casualties were reported—it is impossible to ignore the tremendous impact of landmines on human security and national development.

AUSTCARE and Verity Assistance Authority have emphasized the importance of integrated mine action and stated that all mine clearance activities should contribute to sustainable economic growth and the improved management of natural resources. To achieve this goal, each mine clearance activity must be planned in the development context. Demining activities should work hand-in-hand with development work to achieve social and economic growth for the most affected communities. All of these activities need the support and genuine participation of all levels of Cambodian government and society. Indeed, to truly have an impact at the community level, mine action must be holistic and centred on the community's needs and capabilities. As such, empowering the communities is essential as an additional component to ensuring outcomes that enhance the rights and obligations of programme participants, allowing them to sustain the benefits of integrated mine action in a meaningful and progressive way.

One of the most important aspects of ensuring development is securing title to land for the landless poor. AUSTCARE's approach to land allocation is based on strengthening both participation in the land allocation process of the relevant provincial and national authorities to educate those involved with the current land allocation process of the relevant provincial and national authorities to educate those involved with the current land allocation process. This approach has enhanced accountability to the people who have benefited from it, especially the most vulnerable population.

The process of integrating both mine clearance with development is unique and law and land-use planning with capacity building has brought about an evolution in AUSTCARE’s programme from outcomes to a rights-based framework. Through its integrated mine action programme, AUSTCARE ensures safe land is made accessible to the landless poor for resettlement and for family farming. It helps to create permanent land title for demined land and allocate it to landless people by building legal framework awareness and understanding.

As part of the land titling process, AUSTCARE provides a “legal literacy” training workshop with local counterparts to educate those involved with the current land allocation process of the relevant provincial and community leaders and civil society to ensure that the laws are on track to ensure that the laws are implemented.

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