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## Munitions Risk Education in Cambodia

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# Munitions Risk Education in Cambodia

Contamination from landmines and unexploded ordnance in Cambodia poses a serious threat to citizens and impedes economic progress. The Cambodian Mine Action Centre's Mine/UXO Awareness Programme focuses on educating citizens and refugees on landmine and explosive remnants of war safety. CMAC, together with other organizations, also implements the Community Based Mine/UXO Risk Reduction Project, a program that emphasizes community participation with mine action services.

by Sambath Chan [ Cambodia Mine Action Centre ]

After three decades of conflict, Cambodia has among the highest levels of explosive remnants of war and landmine contamination in the world. The vast majority of the mine contamination occurred after Vietnam invaded Cambodia in 1978, helping to overthrow Pol Pot's Khmer Rouge regime. The Khmer Rouge troops were forced to the border of Thailand and Cambodia, and the Cambodian and Vietnamese governments laid mines in an effort to prevent them from re-entering the country. Shortly thereafter, the K5 belt, a heavily mined strip of land ranging from 10 to 150 m (11 to 164 yd) wide and 700 km (435 mi) long was created to seal off the Thai border.<sup>1</sup> After Vietnamese forces withdrew from Cambodia in 1989, guerrilla groups scattered landmines for short-term defensive purposes throughout the country. In addition to the millions of landmines under the ground's surface, from 4 October 1965 to 15 August 1973, the United States dropped more than an estimated 2.8 tons of ordnance on Cambodia.<sup>2</sup>

This mine/ERW contamination continues to maim and kill Cambodians on an almost daily basis and is one of the main factors hindering socioeconomic reconstruction and development in Cambodia. Poverty remains widespread throughout Cambodia, especially among the rural farming communities.<sup>3</sup> Clearance efforts are instrumental to help re-establish infrastructure; assist environmental preservation activities; allow access to resources; free land for productive use and facilitate integration of the many refugees, internally displaced, poor and landless persons.

## Cambodia's Contamination

The National Level One Survey, jointly conducted from late 2000 to April 2002 by the Cambodian Mine Action Centre and Geo-Spatial (an international consulting company)

and funded by the Canadian government, revealed the following statistics:

- 6,416 Cambodian villages were identified as contaminated, or 46.1 percent of total villages in Cambodia.
- 4,544.4 sq km (1,754.60 sq mi) of land area was contaminated, which left 45.2 percent of Cambodians (5.1 million people) at risk.
- 11,429 explosive ordnance disposal tasks were initially identified. However, CMAC has responded to 65,397 EOD calls from 2006 to June 2012.<sup>4,5</sup>

## Cambodia's Mine Incidents

Despite the significant reduction in landmine/ERW incidents over the last decade, the number of casualties in Cambodia remains one of the highest in the world. The overall number of people killed, injured or disabled was 64,121 as of June 2012, according to the Cambodian Mine/ERW Victim Information System.<sup>5</sup> CMVIS further breaks down these statistics, revealing that 19,641 (30.63 percent) people were killed, 35,590 (55.50 percent) injured and 8,890 (13.86 percent) needed amputations after incidents.<sup>5</sup>

Cambodia's rapid population growth, estimated at 1.68 percent, increases the pressure on available safe land for housing and farming.<sup>6</sup> A report provided by CMVIS in June 2012 outlined that 44 percent of landmine casualties occur in villages and farms due to livelihood activities. Roads, agricultural land and community areas, such as schools, pagodas and water sources, are often contaminated, making access dangerous and preventing development. Local populations under economic pressure frequently resettle on contaminated land, increasing the number of victims.

In contrast, nearly half of ERW casualties (45 percent) result from deliberate tampering, when people try to move

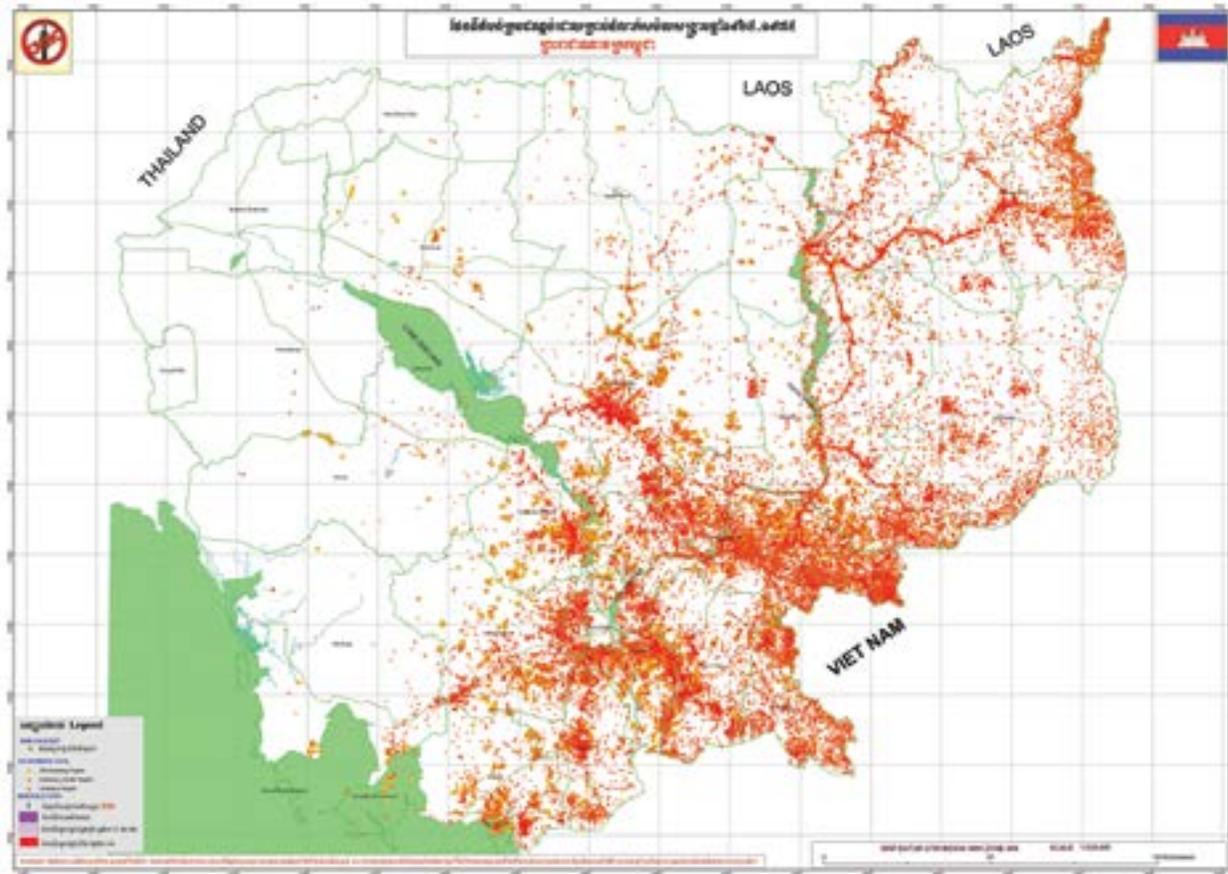


Figure 1. Map showing contamination from U.S. bombing in Cambodia during the Vietnam War.<sup>7</sup>  
 All graphics courtesy of CMAC.

	Landmines	Land Ordnance	Air Ordnance
<b>Western Cambodia</b>	High	Medium	Low
<b>Eastern Cambodia</b>	Low	Medium	High

Table 1. Mine/ERW threat assessment matrix.

unexploded ordnance and it detonates. Despite CMAC and other operators conducting a constant and persuasive ERW awareness campaign, villagers—including those who are not necessarily poor—and ex-soldiers attempt to sell ERW shells after removing explosives and detonators, tempted by the lucrative price of scrap metal.

#### Evolution of MRE in Cambodia

Mine/ERW awareness activities began in Cambodia in 1993. Initial activities focused on returnees and internally displaced persons who often settled in heavily contaminated areas. Roaming educational teams gave presentations in villages on identifying ERW and safe behaviors.

In early 2001, CMAC, Handicap International Belgium, UNICEF and other members of Cambodia’s Mine Awareness Working Group began developing a new approach to mine

awareness in Cambodia. The idea was that the number of mine and ERW casualties would decrease by enabling people to live more safely in contaminated environments through a community-based,

multi-disciplinary approach to mine action. These actors developed a project framework which formed the basis for the CMAC Community Based Mine/UXO Risk Reduction project. The CMBRR project seeks to integrate and link mine and UXO clearance, minefield marking, mine awareness, mine victim assistance and development initiatives with communities living in contaminated areas. CMAC implemented the project in October 2001 with technical assistance from HIB and funding from UNICEF. From the beginning, the CMBRR project has a phase-out strategy. In communities with minimal mine threat, the project has ended, although the volunteers stay trained and vigilant for future threats. Volunteers continue working in towns with a high mine/UXO risk.

The CBMRR project works to develop the willingness of communities to interact with other mine action components and to ensure that these mine action components are

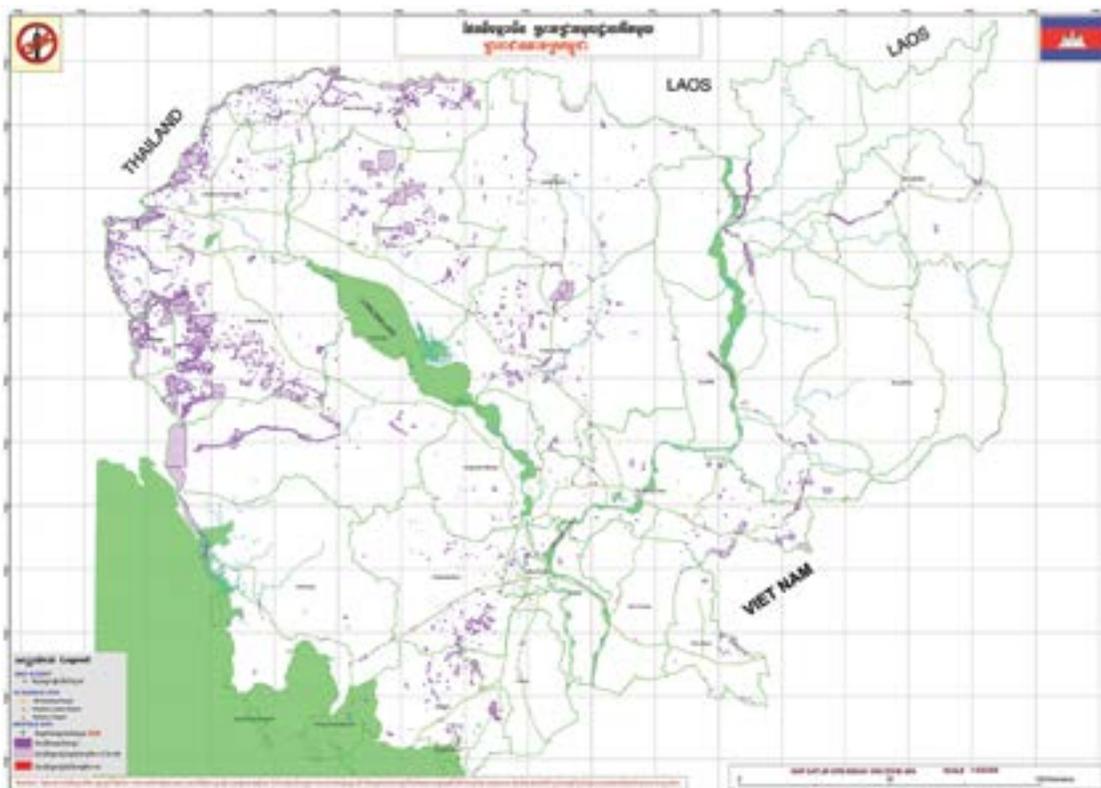


Figure 2. Level 1 Survey.

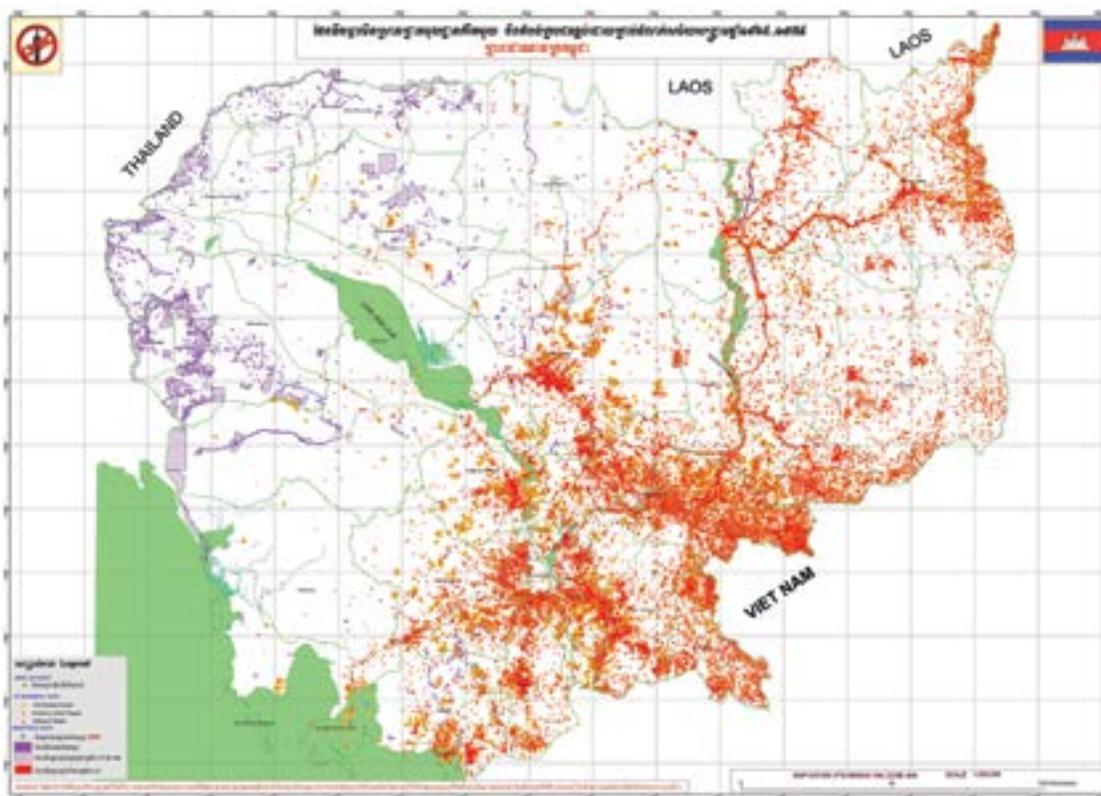


Figure 3. Map showing results of Level 1 Survey and contamination from U.S. bombing during the Vietnam War.



Communities do village mapping to identify and prioritize mine risks and accident areas in the Malay district, Banteay Meanchey province, Cambodia (25 June 2009). Photo courtesy of the author.

responsive to community requests. Local people in target areas are mobilized to become focal points for mine/UXO problems in their communities through the establishment of Mine/UXO Committees at village, commune and district levels. At the same time, the CBMRR project establishes links with community development projects to assist high-risk individuals, groups or communities with victim assistance projects. Mobile Mine Awareness Teams continue disseminating mine awareness messages to a wider audience. Also, an ongoing mass-media campaign primarily focuses on mine risk reduction education.

#### The CBMRR Project

- Is integrated with other activities and institutions involved in victim assistance, mine action and socioeconomic development
- Employs the most appropriate mine awareness and community training and liaison methods for different target groups and target areas, institutions and communities
- Targets the most heavily mine-contaminated areas
- Serves the basic needs of the most vulnerable groups

#### Ongoing Efforts

The CBMRR project was quite successful, with 1,519,950 people receiving MRE during 28,176 village visits from January 2007 to July 2012.<sup>8</sup> Measuring the complete effectiveness of the campaign is difficult due to the risk-avoidant nature of the work and other factors involved, but the number of annual casualties in Cambodia dropped from 826 in 2001 (when the project began) to 211 in 2011.<sup>5,6</sup> In 2011 alone, 460 victims and their families in 354 villages accessed support services from provincial rehabilitation services. Development activities, such as the construction of community infrastructure and agricultural expansion activities, took place in 288 contaminated villages with support from CBMRR networks. These support services focus on victim assistance with regards to physical rehabilitation, medical care and social reintegration. Such services are normally difficult for people living in remote areas to access due to transportation and financial reasons. In 2011, 1,307 persons with disabilities received support services from the government. The develop-

ment activities seek to improve the lives of those in landmine-affected areas. To date, 11,927 m (7.4 mi) of farm roads, 12 primary school buildings, 24 open wells and seven community ponds were built in the 288 contaminated villages. These activities have helped the communities to better utilize the cleared land and to improve their agricultural production and livelihoods.

Over the next five years CMAC will continue refining, strengthening and expanding the CBMRR project. CMAC's five-year strategy (2010–2014) is committed to expanding the CBMRR project to all Cambodian districts, seeking to educate and empower all ERW-affected communities. ©

See endnotes page 66



Sambath Chan, CMAC's MRE coordinator, has worked at CMAC since 2002. In addition to his current position, he has served in many capacities at CMAC in the past decade: as a community specialist, quality-development trainer, organizer of a community-based demining pilot project and project manager.

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