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The Roots of Peace Model: Demine-Replant-Rebuild

Roots of Peace is an organization dedicated to the demining and redevelopment of mine-affected regions. It believes that it is not enough for organizations to just clear land of explosive remnants of war but that the land must be made livable and productive again. ROP suggests that the Demine-Replant-Rebuild model may be a good model for other organizations as well.

by Gary Kühn [Roots of Peace]

Restoring a post-conflict community to productivity is a lengthy and costly venture. The act of mine clearance is a major step and the most costly one in the process. Clearing the land of explosive remnants of war, however, does not automatically create the catalyst for follow-on development or agricultural tasks. In fact, there is no guarantee that clearance will lead directly to such activities and the return to effective use of the land.

Typically, donors expect to see development and agricultural enterprises spontaneously occur following clearance. They are looking to see real impacts from their contributions, such as farmers once again harvesting their fields or children returning to school. However, these activities do not tend to happen naturally in a war-torn or post-conflict environment. In countries ravaged by war, investors are limited and basic survival is often the focus—unlike countries with thriving economies, where investors quickly realize value from their investments.

History and Mission

Roots of Peace, a California-based non-profit, began in 1998 with a vision of clearing minefields following the cessation of war to allow inhabitants to return to their productive pre-conflict livelihoods. Early on, the organization sought private donations to clear ERW in affected countries; Californians were sympathetic to the cause, especially in Napa Val-

ley, where winemakers were the first to answer the call. With these funds, ROP set out to clear minefields in Croatia. The Office of Humanitarian Demining Programs in the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Political-Military



These Afghans are harvesting grapes in a once heavily mined area in Mir Bacha Kot. ROP has been working with the grape farmers in this region since 2004. In 2004, the average annual farm income was US\$500; it is now more than \$4,400.

PHOTO COURTESY OF SHARIF OSMANI

Affairs (now the Office of Weapons Removal and Abatement) supported the program through the International Trust Fund for Demining and Mine Victims Assistance, agreeing to match the private donations dollar for dollar.

ROP-funded mine clearance in Croatia began in 2001 with the clearance of vineyards and orchards in Dragalić. Clearance projects soon encompassed other villages in Croatia, and on a 2002 trip to the region with some ROP donors, Founder Heidi Kühn toured the villages that ROP funds had helped clear. The group came



The ROP soccer coach works with the girls' soccer team at the ROP compound in Kabul during the summer of 2009.

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE AUTHOR

upon overgrown vineyards that were part of the clearance by ROP, but there was no apparent follow-on activity. The vineyards were unused.

“Why were the vines still in a state of disarray? Why was the farmer not in his fields?” Kühn wondered. After speaking with a local farmer, she learned that the farmer could not leave his current job to restart his vineyard; it would take two years to bring the vineyard back into full production and the farmer could not afford the reduced income during the interim. The initial vision ROP had of a productive farmer again working his land following clearance was fading.

The Demine-Replant-Rebuild Model

Cambodia. Chevron became a new donor, allowing ROP to conduct a mine-clearance project in Battambang province in western Cambodia beginning in August 2002. In light of its experience in Croatia, ROP decided to organize the Battambang project differently. The majority of the funds went to mine clearance, but ROP reserved some funds to ensure that farmers returning to their cleared land would be able to farm again. ROP contracted with Mines Advisory Group to clear three villages and engaged Lutheran World Foundation to set up a well, provide initial stock to replant rice, and train

the farmers on how to grow rice. Although it seemed a bit odd to have to train Cambodians to grow rice, ROP learned that after losing a generation of Cambodian farmers to conflicts, no one was able to pass the tradition of farming along to the next generation.

The Battambang project was a success, and with it, ROP launched its Demine-Replant-Rebuild model. This approach includes the integration of mine clearance along with follow-on activities that are essential to rebuilding the lives and livelihoods of internally displaced persons. ROP has developed and continues to improve this model of Demine-Replant-Rebuild to conduct its programs in post-conflict countries. For all projects, its aim is to lock in the positive results of demining by ensuring funding for the replanting and rebuilding efforts.

Afghanistan. With this new model in effect, The HALO Trust asked ROP to apply the Demine-Replant-Rebuild program to its work in Afghanistan. ROP agreed—Afghanistan had an urgent need for assistance and it would be a good test for the model. The country was filled with mines laid not only by the Soviets, but also by the quarreling mujahideen groups and by Ahmad Shah Masood's forces fighting the Taliban, making much of the land uninhabitable.

The challenge in Afghanistan, however, goes far beyond the mines and UXO. Agricultural development was and is in a ruinous state as Afghanistan has been fighting conflicts since 1978.

ROP looked at implementing its program in Afghanistan's Shomali Plains region, an area just north of Kabul, which had been a major grape-producing region until the war between Afghanistan and the Soviet Union, when millions of mines and pieces of UXO prevented cultivation. In the early 2000s, the standard shelter for the rural Afghans in the Shomali was a tent provided by the United Nations High Commission for Refugees. With refugees living in or next to minefields, the mine incident rate was atrocious. Explosives, such as shells and mines, were the cause of approximately 33 percent of refugee deaths,¹ and some years saw as many as 50 incidents a week.²

With private financing led by donations from Diane Disney Miller, ROP funded equipment and mine-clearance teams for HALO from 2003 to 2005. Unlike MAG in Cambodia, HALO had no connections with development organizations, so the task fell to ROP to organize the follow-on activities. ROP submitted a proposal to the United States Agency for International Develop-



Wahidullah (in the wheelchair) is a double amputee. His new ROP-planted vineyard is located on the Bagram battle line where the Taliban fought against Masood's forces for two to three years. Flanked by the ROP team, Wahidullah has his son on his lap. Sultan Hamid is on Wahidullah's immediate left. (June 2009)

PHOTO COURTESY OF ZACH LEA/ROP

ment and other donors to help the grape farmers of the Shomali. USAID awarded a US\$6 million contract to support ROP's development activities in Afghanistan. This project launched ROP's new direct participation efforts. Previously, the organization had always contracted with others to perform fieldwork; it now began to implement its Demine-Replant-Rebuild model directly in Afghanistan.

ROP worked closely with the HALO team to identify the mine-clearance tasks, focusing first on the irrigation canals, then on the village/vineyard com-

binations. Once clearance of the chosen communities was completed, the ROP teams followed with agricultural extension support for the vineyards, partnering with University of California-Davis for extension services. This "one-two punch" was a success, as was ROP's initial foray into the world of agricultural development. ROP followed this first development program in Afghanistan with 17 more programs that now cover 26 of the country's 34 provinces. ROP currently employs 426 people in Afghanistan who perform agribusiness development activities and school

building projects. ROP no longer funds mine clearance in Afghanistan since the major agricultural areas are mostly cleared and the country's mine-clearance focus is now on more remote areas.

ROP's experience in Afghanistan has solidified the organization's commitment to the Demine-Replant-Rebuild approach. ROP has built a school and a fresh-fruit packing facility on land in the Mir Bacha Kot district of Afghanistan that HALO cleared and ROP continues to work closely with the farmers of this former battle area. The farmers ROP has worked with in Mir Bacha Kot district are now earning in excess of \$10,000 per year, much more than the \$1,054 per year per person average for the country.³

Looking Toward the Future

ROP's follow-on projects are diverse and span the globe, but they all continue to have the same focus: improving the economic and social livelihood of the rural population who return to their land following clearance. Examples of ROP's follow-on projects include supporting agricultural activities—which is a primary focus for all the rural areas of countries where the nonprofit works—and furthering the impact of its outreach by extending its work to agricultural processing, export programs, trade policy, irrigation, the building of schools and to support local sporting organizations.

ROP exclusively uses the Demine-Replant-Rebuild approach and is now applying this model to the Vietnam highlands, where the focus will be on UXO removal, followed by the planting of cacao groves. It expects the ef-

fort to lift the highland farmers from poverty and allow them to live in a safe setting. Cambodia and Vietnam remain severely affected by UXO that remains from the American-Vietnam War. For most rural-development efforts in these countries, organizations must precede the development work with clearance projects.

The experiences in Cambodia and Afghanistan, as well as similar work in Croatia, have convinced ROP that this model is the best approach to achieve its initial vision to restore rural farmers on their land and helping re-establish peace and stability in war-torn countries. By not only clearing contaminated land but helping farmers return to their livelihoods, ROP gives hope to the people for a brighter future. In a majority of the countries where ROP works, it is not following the aftermath of a single conflict, but rather a series of conflicts, making this work essential to the community healing process.

With a grant provided by USAID in 2010, ROP embarked on a \$35 million program in the restive southern region of Afghanistan to work with over 20,000 farmers. ROP advocates the integration of both clearance and development work and suggests that others follow its lead. †

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Gary Kühn, Executive Director of Roots of Peace, manages demining and development programs. Kühn worked in the high technology sector for 23 years before joining Roots of Peace full-time in 2001. He worked with IBM, Adobe Systems and Autodesk after studying at the University of California, Berkeley and Harvard.

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