Post-conflict Impact Assessment in Cambodia

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Post-conflict Impact Assessment in Cambodia

This article presents a pilot study that tested the Post-conflict Impact Assessment methodology conducted by MAG Cambodia (Mines Advisory Group Cambodia) in the first quarter of 2009. Funded by the United Kingdom Department for International Development, the pilot was implemented to gauge the suitability and effectiveness of the PCIA methodology to collect impact-assessment data related to MAG’s humani- tarian mine-action activities. This article describes the methodology, outlines the pro cess of the pilot study and concludes by discussing the findings that emerged from the pilot, which are currently helping to inform the development of a MAG impact-assessment tool.

by Ruth Bottomley and Phuong Ponha | MAG Cambodia |

MAG (Mines Advisory Group) de- fines impact assessment as “the sys tematic analysis of the lasting or signifi cant changes—positive or negative, in tended or not—in people’s lives brought about by MAG’s action and/or a series of actions.” MAG believes that mine action is not just about removing landmines and explosive remnants of war, but also enabling positive change in the lives of affected communities, contributing to the alleviation of poverty and promoting socio-economic development. However, effectively measuring the impact of mine-action interven- tions in post-conflict environments presents a considerable challenge. MAG already docu ments changes in the lives of selected benefi ciaries and projects through case studies, and the majority of MAG programs include sim ple post-clearance assessments to ensure that cleared land is being used as anticipated and by the intended beneficiaries. However, the chal lenge still remains to develop a tool that can systematically assess the long-term impact of MAG’s work in local communities and that can be used consistently in a variety of program matic and operational contexts.

Conceptual Frameworks

The PCIA methodology was developed by MAG and draws on two existing models: the Department for International Development Sustainable Livelihoods Framework and the Livelihood Assets Status Tracking System developed by the University of Manchester.4,5 The SLF allows analysis around the five capital livelihood assets (human, natural, physi cal, financial and social), which together form a household’s asset base, demonstrating that the ability or inability to access these assets im- pacts the livelihood outcomes of the poor.7 The more access a household has to a range of assets, the greater its asset base, and the less vulnera ble it is to shocks and disasters, and vice versa. The access that households have to the capi tal on which they base their livelihood strate gies may in turn be restricted or enhanced by societal structures and laws, and the degree to which these are enforced. In her policy briefing, Humanitarian Action in Conflict: Implementing a Political Economy Approach, Sarah Collinson has also noted how, in conflict and post conflict situations, the associated instabil ity and control of resources and assets by political and military factions can increase vulnerabilities. The Livelihood Asset Status Tracking System, which draws on SLF, was developed to assess whether integrated livelihood improve ment projects were having an impact on the live lihoods of beneficiaries. LAST is a monitoring system intended to “track the ongo ing dynamics of the five capital assets essential to household livelihoods as a proxy for impact.”8 The methodol ogy comprises rapid, repeat assess ments of large numbers of beneficiary households to detect emerging chang es in their livelihood platform.

### PCIA Methodology

The main tools used for the PCIA pilot were frameworks called Word Pictures, adapted from tools used in the Livelihood Asset Status Tracking System. One Word Picture represents household assets (see Table 1 below), and another Word Picture represents household risk (see Table 2, next page). The asset Word Pic ture comprises a matrix with the five capital assets listed vertically on the left-hand axis, and four col umns along the horizontal axis, headed poorest to richest, with a nu merical scale along the top. Within the columns of the matrix, various household situations are recorded, describing the worst situation to the best situation, using definitions and information that local people believe are relevant to their livelihoods. For example, under “natural assets,” the worst situation could include a lack of
drought.

### Table 1: An example of a section of the Word Picture matrix for assets.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Asset</th>
<th>Poor</th>
<th>Medium</th>
<th>Richer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Food</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*HH means household.*
of land and no access to clean water or forest resources. The best situation would be the reverse of this one, with ownership of productive agricultural land, the use or ownership of pump wells and easy access to well-managed forest resources.

The risk Word Picture describes risk situations under each of the five capital assets, with the four columns of the horizontal axis headed high risk to no risk. For example, the worst scenarios include households that have no understanding of mine risk and enter mined areas. During discussions with household members regularly conduct livelihood activities in mined areas.

HH can use water sources that are not in mined areas.

HH has safe water sources.

HH has farming land which is not contaminated.

HH has farming land but some of it is contaminated with mines or UXO (suspected).

HH has extended land into mined areas. Has farmed for 1 year already.

HH has extended land into mined areas. Has farmed for 3 years or more.

HH members always conduct livelihood activities in safe areas.

Table 2: An example of a section of the Word Picture matrix for risk.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HIGH RISK</th>
<th>MEDIUM RISK</th>
<th>LOW RISK</th>
<th>NO RISK</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>50 55 60 65</td>
<td>70 75 80</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natural</td>
<td>0 5 10 15</td>
<td>20</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HH has farming land but some of it is contaminated with mines or UXO.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HH has farming land. A small part of the land may have mines or UXO (suspected).</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HH has farming land which is not contaminated.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The risk Word Pictures help to gauge how the situation changes for households. In this way, the Word Pictures have to remain the same for each consecutive assessment, as changes in the descriptions of household situations are relevant within all the areas where the Word Pictures will be used. Once developed, the Word Pictures have to be used for both the current situation and retrospectively, based on the recall of the households.

Word Pictures can only be developed for areas of reasonable homogeneity in terms of social, cultural, agricultural and economic practice, so that the descriptions of household situations are relevant within all the areas where the Word Pictures will be used. Once developed, the Word Pictures have to remain the same for each consecutive assessment, as changes in the descriptions would affect the scores and not accurately reflect the real changes in household capitals or risk taking. For these reasons, the Word Pictures had to be developed carefully for the pilot study, using a two-stage process. The descriptions within each of the Word Pictures were initially developed by the national MAG community liaison teams, based on their knowledge of the target area for the pilot. The draft Word Pictures were then tested over three days in villages in Battambang province to ensure the descriptions were appropriate and reflected the range of possible household situations. The Word Pictures were revised based on the field test and these final versions were used during the pilot.

The Pilot Study

The PCIA pilot project in Cambodia was conducted during the first quarter of 2009. The purpose of the pilot study was not to collect impact-assessment data for analysis, but rather to test the feasibility of the proposed methodology for the MAG mine-action impact assessment. Key study questions included:

- How well will the MAG CI teams cope with the PCIA methodology?
- What does the data look like?
- What skills are required to analyze the data?
- How well does the data capture impact and supply the program with information to improve its operations?
- How practical is the PCIA methodology for adoption within MAG programs in terms of cost, time required to implement the assessment, quality of information collected, and the ease with which the methodology can be adapted to other contexts and operations?

The field work was conducted in the northwestern provinces of Battambang, Banteay Meanchey and Pailin, all of which are relatively homogenous in terms of key characteristics: proximity to the Thai-Cambodia border; heavy landmine contamination; an ethnic Khmer population comprising both long-term residents (often former Khmer Rouge) and newcomers; and economic activities that rely on labor opportunities both in Cambodia and Thailand, paddy rice cultivation, and, increasingly, cash-crop production. MAG has worked in Battambang since 1992, in Pailin since 1995 and in Banteay Meanchey since 2006.

The PCIA pilot study was conducted specifically around MAG activities in Cambodia.
clearance tasks and among those intended to benefit directly from MAG clearance. Twelve villages were included in the pilot and a total of 235 households were interviewed. The villages were selected according to three main criteria: villages awaiting an area to be cleared by MAG, villages where clearance had been completed approximately 12–18 months earlier; and villages where clearance had been completed three to five years earlier. As the time frame for the pilot was short, in all post-clearance sites the pre-clearance data had to be collected retrospectively and then compared with the post-clearance situation. Word Pictures were the main data-collection tool used, in combination with observation of the household and clearance sites, and unstructured interviews with selected households.

Eighteen MAG Cambodia community liaison staff (Cambodian Nationals) worked on the project under the supervision of the CL Manager for Southeast Asia and

development workers tend to be in communities in mine-action processes. This course of action would assume that the changes brought about by the interventions would be more wide-ranging and would be better captured through the PCIA methodology.

The involvement of development partners in conducting impact assessments can also allow for better attribution of the changes in the household status, as community development workers tend to be in villages on a longer basis post-clearance than mine-action or CL teams. Working on impact assessment with development partners also signals a more collaborative approach allowing for joint learning and planning for the improvement of project implementation.

See Endnotes, Page 82