UNMAS/GICHD Technology Workshop

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Recommended Citation
Available at: https://commons.lib.jmu.edu/cisr-journal/vol12/iss2/28
This article highlights the United Nations Mine Action Service/Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining Technology Workshop held in September 2008 in Geneva, Switzerland.

Presentation Highlights

Workshop presentations ranged from an explanation of the International Test and Evaluation Procedure (ITEP) to a presentation on the ITEP trials done with magnets. Most were surprised to learn that obtaining magnets for use in their programs after Scholderman’s preconception asked participants to consider the question, “How can new technology realistically enhance the process of releasing land through standard operating procedures?”

It was recognized that answering this question likely meant making improvements to methods and procedures more than inventing revolutionary new equipment. Suggestions for improving processes included:

- Conducting Technical Survey in tandem with clearance (skipping the step of marking/fencing and coming back to the land later)
- Developing more accurate Impact Survey procedures so as not to make work necessary that is already done
- Gaining more information about the land-release concept generated great interest, as this is obviously an important topic for practitioners to consider as mine action continues to evolve and mature.

N. Mendez, Director of the Humanitarian Demining Section in Colombia, presented a discussion asking participants to consider the question, “How can new technology realistically enhance the process of releasing land through standard operating procedures?”

This question proved quite a bit broader and more difficult to pin down than the one from the first break-out session. Some of the recommended ways forward included:

- Better educating donors on the value of funding new technologies
- Using robots where possible for automating processes and saving time
- Developing more accurate Impact Survey procedures so as not to make work necessary that is already done
- Gaining more information about the land-release concept generated great interest, as this is obviously an important topic for practitioners to consider as mine action continues to evolve and mature.

Another definition of technology has implications for technology development, stressing how technology is not just comprised of new products, but also innovations and improvements. This is supported by the ITC's findings that only a small percentage of the technologies presented at the workshop were considered revolutionary new equipment. Suggestions for improving processes included:

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Improving data management

Land release and Technical Survey were seen as central themes of the workshop, yet definitive conclusions were not made as far as where these areas of mine action are headed, and additional discussions within the humanitarian mine action community on these subjects would likely be beneficial. Any such future workshop would be useful. The Technology Workshop plans to return to the office in April 2009.

Conclusion

Overall, the Technology Workshop was seen by both participants and organizers as a useful gathering, and most expressed an interest in holding additional meetings in the future, perhaps more frequently. UNMAS/GICHD and the CROMAC team plans to continue hosting a similar workshop for 2010, unless popular demand suggests a meeting in 2009 would be beneficial. Any such future workshop would be a minimum of six days in order to accommodate the travel time and cost, with discussion on what question and answer periods, as the participants thought too little time was available for discussion on these important issues. The focus of day one was setting the stage for stimulating discussions on the way ahead in technology development and where do we go from here? This question proved quite a bit broader and more difficult to pin down than the one from the first break-out session. Some of the recommended ways forward included:

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