The GICHD Land Release Project

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The GICHD Land-release Project

In the past, inconsistent and inefficient methods of identifying and clearing mines and unexploded ordnance have wasted precious demining resources and left affected areas contaminated. In 2006, the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining recognized the need for a more effective land-release process in the international mine-action community and subsequently developed the Land-release Project.

by Tim Lardner
[Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining]

P
ot efforts to improve and optimize mine and UXO clearance have revealed that clearance and survey assets are often used too conservatively, commanding significant resources to clear land with little or no actual mine/UXO contamination. There are limited de-mining resources available and, despite an acknowledged need, this is not likely to change. Using these scarce resources in areas that are not, in fact, mined leaves areas that are actually mined uncleared. This usually prolongs human suffering from landmines and prevents many countries from complying with the Ottawa Anti-personnel Mine Ban Convention. The strict timeframes of the Convention obliged victim states and the international community to increase the effectiveness of clearance and develop more efficient ways to use scarce demining resources in the process of releasing land. The international community increasingly understands the mismatch between resources and the need for mine action. Some countries have benefited from major international mine-action efforts over the last decade, yet they still suffer considerably from the impact of landmines.

Projects exploring the use of risk-management principles were developed in the past but were isolated and lacked an agreement on policies or principles that could be applied in order to make the land-release process more effective. On the contrary, in an attempt to make mine action more professional, the international community may have committed the mistake of focusing too much on the quality of mine clearance at the cost of efficient use of resources and increased speed of land release. This prompted the GICHD to implement the Land Release Project in 2006.

The Land-release Project is now widely recognized that the most urgent requirement in mine action is to develop more efficient methods of releasing land by both General and Technical Survey. This will free demining resources for the clearance of genuinely mined areas.

The GICHD has been working on the land-release process since the summer of 2006. This project has faced discussions with the aim of creating political acceptance for challenging traditional methods when clearing suspected hazardous areas. It has been important to understand this process because risk-management terminology and principles are potentially sensitive and could be rejected if misunderstood or put in the wrong context. While it was initially feared that donors would be reluctant to adapt a more proactive approach to releasing land, the contrary has occurred and there is now broad agreement among donors that in many circumstances traditional clearance methods should be replaced in favor of more streamlined and effective land-release methods. These views are shared among most international mine-action organizations, although the discussion has only marginally taken place in most victim states. The process of land release covers the whole spectrum from survey processes through clearance. Please see Figure 1 for more details.

The GICHD has worked in the operational development of several land-release models. Draft models have been developed for land scenarios in Sudan and a traditional area scenario in Angola. A complete model was developed and has been partially implemented in Laos, addressing a UXO problem unique to that country. In addition to developing models, the GICHD has also published the book, Land Release: A Guide for Mine and ERW Affected Countries. The publication documents six program methodologies of land release using nontechnical processes that suit particular environments. The organization is also currently producing a publication focusing on land-release models. Draft models have been developed for land scenarios in Sudan and a traditional area in Afghanistan. The publication documents six program methodologies of land release that suit particular environments. The organization is also currently producing a publication focusing on land-release models. Draft models have been developed for land scenarios in Sudan and a traditional area in Afghanistan. The publication documents six program methodologies of land release that suit particular environments.

Expected Impact of Land Release
The approach of land release is an attempt to formalize structures and procedures that have been undertaken for a number of years. The GICHD has worked on the land-release process since 2006. This project has faced discussions with the aim of creating political acceptance for challenging traditional methods when clearing suspected hazardous areas. It has been important to understand this process because risk-management terminology and principles are potentially sensitive and could be rejected if misunderstood or put in the wrong context. While it was initially feared that donors would be reluctant to adapt a more proactive approach to releasing land, the contrary has occurred and there is now broad agreement among donors that in many circumstances traditional clearance methods should be replaced in favor of more streamlined and effective land-release methods. These views are shared among most international mine-action organizations, although the discussion has only marginally taken place in most victim states. The process of land release covers the whole spectrum from survey processes through clearance. Please see Figure 1 for more details.

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