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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]

A field awaiting clearance before it is returned to locals for use. Photo courtesy of the author.

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 clearance was no guarantee of land by agreement or policies that could be applied in order to make the land-release process more effective. On the contrary, an effort to make mine action more performative, 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

It 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 work has failed 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 adopt 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 methodologies 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 in 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 and assists operators and authorities to define more effective use of their resources. The on-going IMAS updates should allow donors to ensure more effective use of their resources. The ongoing IMAS updates should allow donors to ensure more effective use of their resources.

Expanding Land-release Efforts

The GICHD undertakes work in several areas regarding land release, including research, operational implementation and the development of International Mine Action Standards. Research:
The Land-release Project focuses on three principal research elements:
1. Research the land-release process and subsequently develop concepts.
2. Focus more generic research on asset capabilities (machines, rollers, large loops, etc.), data gathering and analysis.
3. Develop the understanding of how land-release concepts, as identified in preceding steps, can and should be integrated into governmental positions vis-à-vis the AP Mine Ban Convention.

Operational implementation:
Two recent examples indicate the potential of land release methodologies. In Tajikistan, a basic set of procedures drawn from the recent publication on land release has allowed the Tajikistan Mine Action Centre to reduce areas that were previously listed as suspect to a defined, much smaller area that is now manageable in terms of clearance and will allow Ottawa completion to be achieved in the next couple of years. Secondly, in Angola, a model for non-technical survey methods to release land has been developed which allows a more effective way of defining the degree of technical survey input and asset requirements. This has given the ability to release land from suspicion, or clearly defined the further requirements for the work required on that land.

IMAS development: IMAS 8.10 and 8.20 have been developed which allows a more effective use of resources and increased speed of land release.

Effective 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 and assist operators and authorities to define the problem more clearly. The paradigm for policy for the United Nations Mine Action Service is still valid and will allow Ottawa completion to be achieved in the next couple of years. The timeline for development and implementation is tight and draft IMAS versions are currently being reviewed prior to endorsement by the IMAS review board.

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 and assist operators and authorities to define the problem more clearly. It is a critical focus for the United Nations Mine Action Service and should allow donors to ensure more effective use of their resources. The ongoing IMAS updates should allow donors to ensure more effective use of their resources.

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Figure 1: The process of land release as a four-tiered approach to the humanitarian.

General Survey
Technical Survey
Detailed Analysis of Land Use
Analysis of Existing Survey Data

A field awaiting clearance before it is returned to locals for use. Photo courtesy of the author.

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