Global Environmental Demining Issues

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the global landmine problem. It describes "a strong need for a global environmental impact assessment" and calls for multilateral and organizational cooperation in the creation of a Minimum Environmental Standard to be implemented by States Parties to the 1997 Ottawa Convention. Furthermore, members of the international community have engaged in talks for global long-term strategies to address environmental issues, such as the European Parliament's recognition of soil depletion and erosion as being "among the main environmental threats" to sustainable development around the world. Currently, the establishment of a comprehensive policy framework or international standard pertaining to environmental management in mine action has yet to occur.

In recent years, however, the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining has been involved in the creation of a Technical Note for Mine Action concerning with environmental issues and demining. Technical Notes act as unofficial, supplementary documents to the Ottawa Convention comprised of information made public by experts in the field and are used to "provide a forum to share experience and lessons learned by collecting, collating and publishing technical information on important, topical themes." They differ from International Mine Action Standards and International Mine Action Guidelines in that they are not legally binding, although a Technical Note may be later promoted into a full international standard. Recently published on the Mine Action Information Center Web site, TN 10.10 / 01 establishes guidelines on the management of human remains. While important in and of itself, it only represents a small fraction of the environmental issues that mine-action managers face every day. As of today, no TNMAs exist that comprehensively address the topic of environmental management during landmine and UXO clearance operations. While environmental considerations receive mention in some IMAs, these instances are brief and lacking. Creation of a more comprehensive IMA would provide the international legal legitimatization sometimes necessary to facilitate change.

Conclusion
For those within proximity of landmines and UXOs, the hidden threats represent a debilitating force in every respect. Yet the quickest and most effective methods for their elimination can sometimes result in equally deplorable situations. Land once arable can become infertile, unable to provide much-needed agricultural resources. Although motivated by the best of intentions, certain actions may ultimately prove to be more harmful than any number of landmines could be.

News Brief
Solomon Islands Officials Warn Against UXO Tampering

Police forces in the Solomon Islands are increasingly concerned by reports that members of the public are engaging in the illicit sale of unexploded ordnance to scrap-metal dealers. The country, located just east of Papua New Guinea in the Pacific Ocean, consists of nearly 1,000 islands with a land mass of about 28,400 square kilometers (10,965 square miles).

An increase in scrap-metal trafficking on the islands has raised concerns by officials, as most of the UXO being moved remains from the World War II era and may be unstable due to deterioration. Members of the government’s explosive ordnance disposal unit have said that individuals trying to sell a large variety of WWII-era explosives have approached scrap-metal collectors.

Officials also pointed out that, in addition to being extremely dangerous, tampering with or moving UXO is illegal.

Global Environmental Demining Issues

The environmental impact of any human action cannot be underestimated—even humanitarian demining—given the global repercussions in this era of explosive growth. The authors discuss the consequences of thoughtless action and provide valuable context concerning the vast extent to which human beings impact the environment.

by Ian G. McLean (Rotorua District Council) and Rebecca J. Bargisson

early 200 years ago, a population demographer named Thomas Robert Malthus predicted an escalating human population that would rapidly overshoot available resources, resulting in a catastrophic failure of food supplies and infrastructure. Poor nutrition, cramped housing, high population densities and inadequate health services would lead to disease pandemics, social breakdown and population collapse.

Malthus, like so many other doomsayers, was mostly ignored by contemporary and subsequent governments; yet his projections had significant influence in the scientific community. For example, his writings helped Charles Darwin understand that a mismatch between breeding productivity and resources would likely result in some individuals surviving, and others not. Who would survive? Presumably, the strongest or fittest or those best adapted to prevailing conditions—and so the notion of "survival of the fittest" was born, along with the principle that a species is adapted to its environment.

Malthus did not consider environmental issues—the notion of ecology was still in its infancy—and the possibility that humans might adjust global ecology was presumptively inconceivable at the time. Yet Malthus and Darwin established between them a fundamental principle: species and the environment interact.

Environmental Adaptations
Humans are rather poorly adapted to most environments, a fact that in part explains why early humans spread across the globe so successfully. Being poorly adapted forced human beings to manipulate environmental conditions rather than allow environmental conditions to determine human habituation patterns. Our ability to adapt environments to our needs ensured that humanity could avoid the doom-and-gloom predictions of Malthus and could flourish despite exponential growth.

Let us say that humans and their prototypes have been around for about four million years (the prototypes are mostly known to us by names such as Homo erectus, Australopithecus, etc.). One hundred thousand years ago there were a few million of us represented by at least two species. Two thousand years ago, one of those species had prevailed and had built up to perhaps 200 million. The numbers continued to grow very slowly until about 1700, when they began to take off (see Figure 1). Why? The main factors were increasing resistance to disease under conditions of crowding.
In the 20 years since the Brundtland Report, the notion of sustainable development has taken on several levels of meaning. For example, sustainable management is a weak and limited term, which proposes that negative environmental impacts can be traded. An example is the idea that when you fly on a plane, you can manage the carbon footprint (as fuel burned) of that flight by paying an additional amount for trees to be planted somewhere on the planet (because trees take carbon directly from the atmosphere). Carbon trading on the stock market is now feasible and will be implemented in the near future. The possibility that somebody might chop down your tree and use it for firewood (thereby releasing its carbon again) is just one reason why this is a rather weak form of sustainability.

Some notions of sustainability put protection of the environment ahead of the exploitation rights of humans. However, Agenda 21 did not. Principle 1 states, “Human beings are at the center of concern for sustainable development.” On the other hand, Principle 3 goes on to state that “the environment is a public trust, to be held in trust for future generations.” We propose that to be in harmony with nature, one should allow it to function sustainably.

The Future for Humanitarian Demining

Humanitarian demining is now a structured industry, subject to rules, regulations and standards; and run primarily by professionals with extensive experience. It is no longer a single species? The answer for the moment is yes, although with considerable asymmetry in distribution of resources and with a subsidised development of domesticated cattle, which exist primarily to serve the needs of humans.

Since the 1980s, economists have assured us that the solution to increasing human resource use is economic growth, unfortunately, models used by these economists tend to assume the planet supplies infinite resources. The reality is—if you project the resource needs of eight billion people, of which 75 percent are urbanised—you will need several planets the size of one of them to sustain at current efficiencies in food production and resource exploitation. Fortunately, economists have the solution to that problem: new technology. Demand creates innovation, which leads to supply, and the spiral can continue indefinitely as it has done in the past. Perhaps so, but the time has come to consider the possibility that the economies have over-simplified the link between technology development and resource availability. In particular, our food production system depends on a very small number of species (maize, rice, wheat), a nonrenewable resource (fertilizer produced from oil and farming practices using oil-driven machines) and limited capacity for expansion (availability of arable land). Together, these factors suggest that food production is already approaching the limits of sustainability. Urbanised humans produce goods and services, but they do not produce food or provide water. Meeting the needs of another 1.5 billion of them is a daunting prospect indeed.

The notion of sustainability as a rational human objective first hit the international scene with publication of Our Common Future: The World Commission on Environment and Development, commonly referred to as the Brundtland Report of 1987. This U.N.-sponsored analysis focused on environmental impact by establishing the notion of sustainable development, defined as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” Governments of developed countries have subsequently varied the concept with success, but the process of integrating it into national legislation has at least begun. The notion that development should proceed at all costs finally is being questioned. Governments began committing to the notion of sustainability by agreeing to the 7 principles of Agenda 21. Those principles laid out an ambitious framework designed to limit encroachment (read unsustainable) environmental impact and spread environmental resources more equitably.

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Rebecca A. Sargisson was a Researcher in the GECD for three years working on many aspects of the care of animals in death and she moved to studying animal memory at the Otago School of Philosophy before taking a break from research to focus her psychological skills on child rearing.

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