The Human Face of EOD

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Being a specialist insurance broker to explosive-ordnance-disposal organizations around the world has provided Howard Thompson with the opportunity to be on the sidelines of the humanitarian-demining community. But during a 10-day visit to Cambodia, he was able to experience first-hand the significance of humanitarian demining and clearance. He writes about this experience here.

For many years now, my company has specialised in the insurance requirements of minesweepers and explosive-ordnance-disposal organizations operating around the world. During that time, I have learned much about the skills and methods engaged in the field and have become passionate enough to visit many mine-clearance operations, particularly in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo.

In 2006, I joined one of my clients, Mines Advisory Group, for a 10-day visit to their operations in Cambodia and there saw even more beautifully, what the “human” element of humanitarian demining is really all about.

Having seen many specialists working in the field, demining by hand with the aid of machines and dogs, I have nothing but admiration for their work. However, that visit showed me something to which, until then, I had not attached a real human face.

Only when you meet the returning people and see the pride they have in their homes and recovered land does it really hit home how much mine clearance really means to the people of mine-affected communities.

While in Cambodia, I visited many places as a tourist in Phnom Penh and Siem Reap and played operator on a remotely controlled Tempest FLail machine (see photo 1). My efforts to clear

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Increasing the Impact of Mine-action Surveys

While mine-action surveys are an important tool in mine clearance, there are several challenges that must be overcome for survey results to be fully effective. Some of these changes include alterations in priority setting, information management and impact scoring. This article presents some potential obstacles to completing and evaluating mine-action surveys and proposes possible solutions to these challenges to increase their effectiveness and impact.

by Charles Downs [New York University Wagner School of Public Service]

Mine-action Surveys and Priority Setting
Priority setting is the most critical process in mine-action programme management. The approach to priority setting should support the goals of the respective programme. These include direct mine-action goals (rapid reduction of new victims, elimination of all landmines and effects of landmines) and support to local and national development (e.g., support to local economic development, support to regional road or electrical system rehabilitation).

Priority setting based on hazard alone may eventually lead to the elimination of all landmines and may permit more efficient clearance planning and logistics, although it may not provide much immediate relief to the population nor support government development activities. Priority setting based on community impact will respond better to perceived community needs, although it may not fully support national development. It makes a difference which communities are addressed first and which communities are left for later, and proper consideration of these opportunity costs requires appropriate priority setting. This is a management process that requires information, consultation and judgment—including periodic review of results and reassessment of the assumptions and decisions made.

General Approach to Landmine Impact Surveys
Feedback to government and communities. While Landmine Impact Surveys always begin with the agreement of the host government, annual commitment to the survey often is maintained only when the results begin to

The key members of the school staff and local dignitaries were assembled to meet us and, in spite of experiencing a “mini rainy season,” a special invitation was made of our visit and we were all included in a school photograph (see photo 14). I am proud to say that our company has placed the insurance for most of the organisations engaged in the humanitarian-demining world. The work of clearing mines and ordnance will have to continue for many years yet, but seeing the results of successful clearance and its impact on such a small community made me rather proud to be associated with the progress of the humanitarian-seling world is making—even if that involvement has predominantly been from the safety of an office desk in Surrey in the United Kingdom.