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THE HUMAN FACE OF EOD

by Howard M. Thompson | H.M.T. Insurance Brokers Ltd.

Being a specialist insurance broker to explosive ordnance disposal organisations 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 his experience here.

For many years now, my company has specialised in the insurance requirements of mine-clearance and explosive ordnance disposal organisations operating around the world. During that time, I have learned much about the skills and methods engaged in the field and have been fortunate 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 painfully how 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, this visit showed me something to which, until then, I had not attached a real human face. How many times have I heard, read and even said “the purpose of humanitarian demining is to return land to its people”?

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 his experience here.

And of course there were some less familiar sights. For instance, MAG is unusual in engaging female as well as male deminers. One such young woman explained her story. Her husband had been killed by a mine, at she had to provide a living for her two children. Working for MAG made much easier, she was helping her community and providing herself with a good living (see photo 2).

Another deminer (see photo 6) taking a break in the heat, was himself a mine victim. He also had a family to support—and a large one. The “human” element of humanitarian demining, therefore, gave him a bonus above-average living to maintain his large-than-average family. Moving up from where the work was being carried out, we entered the small village of Peakh Pot, which had been cleared of mines but had a stretch of land from the area where clearance work was still being carried out. In this village we saw the full benefit clearance work can achieve. Young families were comfortable and secure, asking for them to do something for them and creating the beginnings of a thriving community.

It was hard not to feel like an intruder in their world. Such thoughts were soon dispelled however; they made me feel at home and were very warm and friendly, which provided such enjoyment all around. I will build their memories with.

First, we met a woman who said in her husband worked across the border in Thailand cutting wood (see photo 7). She was happy to share her story with us, sitting on her veranda. The little boy was not so sure about us, though!

Her story is a sad one, yet I hope her life will improve as it goes on. Her husband had recently died from injuries he sustained while working. She bravely held back tears as she told her story.

Next, we met a woman who said in her husband had recently died from injuries. She lives in a rather fragile house, alone with her children. Her husband had recently died from injuries and one of her children had no fire elsewhere because there was no room for all of them in this new home. She bravely held back tears as he told her story.

She kept her distance from the other villagers, and her children did not join the festivities who attached themselves to us as we wandered through their village. She now has a new home and a new life, and her children are happy.

Her story is a sad one; yet I hope her life and her children’s lives will soon improve at this all can’t seem to find a real part of the new community. In complete contrast, the man in photo 8 is responsible for the community’s original supply, which was created from ground cleared by the MAG team. This poem now helps the growth of his and his neighbours’ crops. He needed very little persuasion to devote his attention and he photographed beside him pride and joy.

Photo 9 is a genuine display of a different sort of pride. A little boy delighted in showing us the fish he recently caught with his pride and joy. Could photo 10 be looked back upon in years to come as the start of the Cambodian neighborhood Wal-Mart? This is one shrewd businesswoman! She moved here to start a “village store” from her box. She says the last is hard and again safe, the women know the community will grow and the area will become valuable as a result of the produce being farmed and the homes and from being harvested. What’s more, the mine victims are now community to clear a large strip of land that is planned for store housing. As families return to move in, she business will grow. It seemed a very good business move to me.

We made an additional stop in the village to see a small mine-risk education school class held by MAG community liaison person (see picture 8 on next page). One little boy proudly displayed the last scrap from at explosion. Luckily she had survived reasonably unscathed, his playmates had not been so fortunate.

Our final visit was to Ta Lon, a school that was inaccessible due to mines, when MAG first arrived in the area in the mid-1990s, but which was now flourishing.
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-mission 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, actual commitment to the survey often is maintained only when the results begin to...