Increasing the Impact of Mine-action Surveys

Charles Downs
New York University Wagner School of Public Service

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The Director of the school, herself a mine victim, was clearly pleased and proud to welcome us to his school. This school operates with full classes; each child avoids for half a day resulting in a complete changeover at midday. This was probably the most emotional occasion in the entire trip.

There is so much enthusiasm for boating in Cambodia, and it provides quite a satisfactory lesson for part of the world. Beautifully dressed and immaculately clean children emerge from their village homes and walk or cycle for miles to get to the school. The comment most often made to us was that education is a vital element in ensuring the dreadful history of Cambodia is not repeated for future generations. Hopefully with schools such as Ta Lou and their dedicated staff and enthusiasm, their aim will be achieved.

Throughout the journey, I was amazed at the number of schoolchildren we saw cycling or walking in what appeared to be the middle of nowhere, shielding themselves from the dust of passing vehicles and conditions sometimes literally dragged in their school uniforms. Their school journeys would make British children gasp with the thought of such long travel and required them British schoolchildren have it much easier!

Here at Ta Lou, we met some of the children in their basic but effective classrooms (see photo 15). Never having been a great schoolboy myself, I did not feel any guilty about interrupting their lesson.

The key members of the school staff and local dignitaries were assembled to meet us, and in spite of the presence of a "mine rainy season," a special occasion 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 effect in not just a few small communities made me rather proud to be associated with the progress the humanitarian-demining world is making—even if that involvement has predominantly been from the safety of an office desk in Survey in the United Kingdom.

Howard Thompson is the founder of HMT Insurance Brokers Ltd, a specialist insurance broker to humanitarian and other organisations throughout the world. He is the author of a best-selling book on insurance for International Mine Action Operations.

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)
Use of Impact-Survey Data

Community impact scoring. Design of the LIS scoring system produced a simple system for ranking community impact as low, medium and high. The ranking system proved very powerful in directing attention to high-impact communities by highlighting them and their limited number, which presented a more “burned” problem and thus an achievable goal. This avoided hyperventilation of high-impact communities proved to be significantly lower than expected by those working in the country, which led to the conclusion that “highly” impacted communities were underestimated and their activities were not being monitored properly. This suggests that it is important to maintain international support to subsidize high- and medium-impact situations.

The relevance of gender issues has been taken into consideration in survey protocols, and LIS teams usually make specific efforts to incorporate gender concerns. Some of the gender bias in the existing data cannot be easily corrected. Gender issues were originally included in the mission-planning and project-implementation steps of the survey. However, this is an ongoing process.

Information Management

IMSSM limitations constrain programme management. The LIS results are recorded in the IMSSM database system. While this system has been developed since the beginning of the 1990s and the rapid appraisal process, it is considered insufficient. The results are not comprehensive enough to be useful. The data collected by the LIS are not validated, and the collection process is not always reliable. The LIS database is not a comprehensive database for monitoring and evaluating the progress of mine action programmes.

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