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Mines Clearance International



History and Objectives
Mines Clearance International (MCI) is an established humanitarian demining agency and a registered charity in the U.K. A fairly new organization, MCI was established, in April 1996, to respond to the problem landmines and unexploded ordnance posed to civilians, particularly in the underdeveloped nations of the Southern Hemisphere. MCI staff, though newly on board, includes well-qualified technical and aid personnel with experience in humanitarian responses to the landmine issue.

MCI's objective is to clear land contaminated by landmines and to return it in a safe condition to the most vulnerable groups within the local community. The approach used to bring MCI to its goal is one that aims to transfer technical and organizational skills to local people, such that a sustainable and indigenous capacity can be developed and clearance work can continue long term with minimal expatriate involvement.

The MCI Approach: MCI has eight major outlined approaches that help it maintain and meet its goal. Those approaches are as follows:

Efficient and Cost-Effective Administration: MCI is committed to lean but efficient administration and project support from the U.K. and in-country program offices. Staffed by experienced humanitarian aid workers, MCI's support offices keep overhead costs to a minimum while ensuring

that the field teams have the necessary level of professional support to operate effectively. The administrators will also ensure that global MCI policy is rigorously enforced throughout the country program down to the remotest operational cell.

Professional Staff Policy: Only the most well qualified Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) and landmines specialists, with demonstrated training abilities and leadership qualities, will be deployed to the field to work alongside local staff. As in any organization, selecting the right personnel is critical to an effective operation.

Provision of the best quality: MCI adopts a total quality approach with regard to demining equipment, especially safety equipment, and provides up-to-date technical and safety equipment to all local mine clearance operatives as a standard.

MCI's Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) and its technical and safety equipment all conform to the highest internationally recognized standards.

A commitment to training and the development of indigenous capacity: MCI will assess the technical aspects of a problem in any location, as well as the caliber and educational standards of the local staff, and design specially tailored training packages that will be available to donors from the beginning of any operation. Such training packages will detail the curriculum areas to be taught and the skills to be transferred as well as the necessary time tables to realize a staged development toward fully indigenous operations. Such training of local staff would not be restricted to purely technical skills but would include the full range of project management, policy and finance/administrative skills necessary to hand over operations across the board.

An integrated approach: MCI is committed to implementing an integrated approach, consisting of Mine Eradication, Mine Awareness & Data Gathering, to the problem, which means that developing local mine clearance and eradication capacity cannot be seen as the limits of program activity. Mine Awareness (working with mine-affected communities and assisting them to live more safely in their contaminated environment) is essential due to the widespread nature of the problem in the affected areas and the inevitable slowness of the clearance response. Data Gathering, primarily through

collecting and analyzing reliable mine victim data, is also important to understanding which communities are under the most stress from landmine contamination. Therefore, MCI can target the limited clearance resources to the worst-off communities first, as such an effective data gathering program has shown to give inhabitants of mine-affected areas a voice in the prioritization process.

Effective Prioritization of the land to be cleared: Prioritizing the tasks that will produce maximum benefits for the most vulnerable groups within any target community is one of the most daunting tasks facing humanitarian demining agencies. MCI will achieve effective prioritization through a variety of strategies.

Effective land titling of demined areas: By working with the local authorities, especially bodies such as the Rural Development Committee in Battambang, Cambodia, MCI will aim to ensure that the land cleared for economic and residential use by those selected as the most vulnerable sector of the population actually remains with these target beneficiaries in the long term. There have been examples where demining agencies have worked for several months on demining projects only to see them taken over by the military.

A flexible, mobile and responsive operational philosophy: In countries such as Cambodia, demining agencies have traditionally operated large teams of 32 deminers. While these teams are ideal for clearing large areas

of land due to the requirement of maintaining 25 meter safety distances between each working pair of deminers, such team sizes waste manpower on smaller tasks. However, experience shows that many of the mine fields and urgent task requests reported to the teams are, in fact, too small to allow full 32 men teams to be gainfully employed. MCI's willingness to be flexible with its personnel and team structure on the ground means that it can be more responsive to the real needs of the community, as well as providing more cost-effective demining services for its donors and target beneficiaries.

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