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Integrated Mine Action: A RIGHTS-BASED APPROACH IN CAMBODIA

The lives of some of the most impoverished Cambodians are beginning to improve as a result of new governmental programmes and nonprofit assistance that award land, provide training and offer other opportunities. Integrating mine action with other development programmes is building a sustainable economic community in Cambodia.

by Sally Campbell | AUSTCARE Mine Action Team |

I ntegrated mine action has a unique importance for Cambodians. In a country where almost 60,000 registered mine/unexploded ordnance casualties have occurred since 1979 and new casualties were reported—it is impossible to ignore the tremendous impact of landmines on human security and national development. Ninety-seven percent of casualties reported in 2004 occurred among civilians, most of whom were pursuing livelihoods to feed their families. Activities such as farming, collecting food or wood, and traveling continue to be among the top sources of mine-related incidents. A reality for Cambodia is that people at risk also emerge as a vital component to achieving outcomes that emphasize the rights and obligations of programme participants, allowing them to sustain the benefits of integrated mine action. For example, some sites requiring clearance are not appropriate for agricultural production. A resulting challenge is to ensure that the development inputs are structured to meet needs identified by communities and not simply imposed by those working closely with them and engaging them in all steps of the process.

One of the most important aspects of ensuring development is the identification of the most vulnerable people as land beneficiaries and the transparent land allocation process.1 Land identification for clearance is inevitable but not always suitable for all components of integrated mine action. For example, some sites requiring clearance are not appropriate for agricultural production. If left to the beneficiaries to allocate cleared lands, the land was covered with brush; no one lived there, as the land could not be used for crops. Now, formerly landless people have been provided with land to farm and the means to re-establish themselves and become self-sufficient.

Through its integrated mine action programme, AUSTCARE ensures safe land is made accessible to the landless poor for resettlement and for family farming. It helps to create permanent land titles for demined land and allocate it to landless people by building legal framework awareness and understanding.

As part of the land titling process, AUSTCARE provides a “legal literacy” training workshop with local counterparts to educate those involved with the current land allocation process of the relevant provisions of the law, with a view to integrating the existing land allocation process with recent amendments to the law. Through the provision of this training, it is hoped that the Mine Action Planning Unit and the District Working Groups will have a good command of the various laws and subchapters that are relevant to the allocation of land in Cambodia. Armed with this knowledge, MAPU and the DWGs will be able to provide accurate information on Cambodia’s land law to the beneficiaries, local authorities at the lowest levels and communities at risk.

The process of integrating both mine clearance with development inputs and land-law training with capacity building has brought about an evolution in AUSTCARE’s programme from outcomes to a rights-based framework work. Through its integrated mine action programme, AUSTCARE helps to save lives, reduce injuries and improve the socio-economic conditions of poor communities affected by landmines. It also empowers communities by focusing on their legal and human rights. In Cambodia, the integration of mine clearance with poverty alleviation is so important because land mine casualties can only be sustainable if land rights and secure land titles are achieved for the landless poor. AUSTCARE’s approach is based on strengthening both partner organisations and civil society to achieve local-level evidence-based sustainable development. This approach has enhanced accountability to the people with whom we work, especially the most vulnerable poor.2

See “References and Endnotes,” page 105

1 The Cambodian Mine Action and Victim Assistance Authority has emphasised the importance of integrated mine action and stated that all mine clearance activities should contribute to sustainable economic growth and the improved management of natural resources. To achieve this goal, each mine clearance activity must be planned in the development context. Demining activities should work hand-in-hand with development work to achieve social, well-being and economic growth for the most affected communities. All of these activities need the support and genuine participation of all levels of Cambodian government and society. Indeed, to truly have an impact at the community level, mine action must be holistic and centered on the community’s needs and capabilities. As such, empowering the communities affected by landmines in Cambodia’s intervention programme is a priority. This involves communities and villages in identifying their needs and capabilities to assist in programme design and implementation. Land identification for clearance is inevitable but not always suitable for all components of integrated mine action. For example, some sites requiring clearance are not appropriate for agricultural production. A resulting challenge is to ensure that the development inputs are structured to meet needs identified by communities and not simply imposed by those working closely with them and engaging them in all steps of the process.

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