

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]

Integrated 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 in 2004, 891 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 are not displaced by landmines, but rather live in minefields as a basic necessity to support their families due to an inequitable system of land allocation. Many people move voluntarily or for economic reasons and end up worse off than they were to begin with. Poverty puts vulnerable people at risk for mine incidents because people endeavouring to support their families will not adjust their routines even if there is a known threat of landmines. Living as squatters, their basic human needs drive them to risk life and limb to achieve day-to-day survival.

The concept of integrated mine action acknowledges the fact that landmines are not the only threat facing communities in Cambodia. Poor water supply and sanitation, diseases, land-grabbing and other poverty-related problems often create a much greater barrier to Cambodia's rehabilitation and development. These factors are particularly relevant to the most disenfranchised members of society who are often landless and living in squalor. For this reason, integrated mine action strives to expand beyond reducing poverty through mine clearance, mine risk education and assistance to survivors. It aims to facilitate community ownership and empowerment, not only by clearing the mines, but by providing

appropriate resources for resettlement on cleared land, including supporting infrastructure, strengthening agriculture, introducing alternative food security, supply of water and sanitation, and providing victim assistance and legal support structures.

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 centred on the community's needs and capabilities. As such, empowering the communities at risk has also emerged as a vital component to achieving outcomes that emphasise the rights and obligations of programme participants, allowing them to sustain the benefits of integrated mine action in a meaningful and progressive way.

AUSTCARE has been conducting integrated mine action in Cambodia since 2001. Its mine action programme was a natural outcome of several years of project support to Cambodian refugees and internally displaced people in the aftermath of conflict. The nation's process of transition from post-conflict reconstruction to rehabilitation and development brought about a parallel transformation in AUSTCARE's programme approach, resulting in an increased focus on the benefits of integrated programming and its critical contribution towards poverty reduction and national development in Cambodia. AUSTCARE's mine action programme is now focused as much on the rehabilitation of communities affected by landmines as it is on making a meaningful contribution to Cambodia's poverty reduction strategy and the Millennium Development Goals.¹

Over the past three years, AUSTCARE's integrated mine action programme has been focused in Otdar Meanchey and Preah Vihear provinces in Cambodia's northwest. The programme combines mine clearance with community development such as water supply and sanitation or agriculture extension activities including farmer field schools, food production and adult-literacy training. AUSTCARE works in partnership with HALO Trust for demining of selected minefields in the target districts. It also provides capacity building to the Mine Action Planning Unit, which is a decentralised provincial government technical support unit responsible for prioritising land to receive mine clearance and for identifying beneficiaries to whom to allocate cleared lands. The District Working Groups assist MAPU in the land clearance and allocation process. AUSTCARE provides technical support at this level to ensure transparency, good communication, and cooperation on the tasks involved in



Integrated training and education programmes have focused on instructing communities about mine risk and prevention.

the mine action process and to strengthen relationships and cooperation among all those involved.

The development inputs involved in AUSTCARE's programme include a pest-management programme that integrates a variety of methods to manage and protect crops. This programme enables farmers to grow healthy crops with high yields, leading to production sustainability. At the same time, the programme safeguards human and animal health and protects the natural environment. A literacy programme provides adults with the skills they need to read instructions on seed packs for planting, to understand mine risk education materials, and to inspire increased education for themselves and their children. AUSTCARE also partners with a local Cambodian non-governmental agency, Teuk Saat, to provide water and sanitation in target communities, and AUSTCARE provides training for sanitary water use for the community along with additional support to improve community health.

A participatory approach is used throughout the process, involving communities and villages in identifying their needs and capabilities to assist in programme design and implementation. Land identified for clearance is inevitably 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 the communities themselves by working closely with them and engaging them in all steps of the process.

One of the most important aspects of ensuring demined land is used for sustainable community development is the identification of the most vulnerable people as land beneficiaries and the transparent land allocation process consistent with Cambodian land law and recently enacted subdecrees. Land is one of the most basic resources available for social and economic development. Securing title to land for the landless poor is therefore of

vital importance to Cambodia's development. The outcomes of this work promote social stability and reduce the vulnerability of Cambodia's poorest communities by assisting the process of land allocation and strengthening land tenure rights to the landless poor in mine-affected areas.

AUSTCARE's project manager for integrated mine action, Chhun Phal An, says the most satisfying and memorable aspect of his job is seeing houses and farm gardens returned to appropriate beneficiaries. He was particularly touched by the return of land to communities of Ph'Av and Village Rumcheck. Before these minefields were cleared for resettlement, 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-reliant.

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 titling 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 working knowledge of the various laws and subdecrees 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. 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 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 ownership and sustainable development. This approach has enhanced accountability to the people with whom we work, especially the most vulnerable poor. ♦

See "References and Endnotes," page 105



AUSTCARE works with communities in agricultural development as part of landmine action projects.



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Integrated Mine Action: A Rights-Based Approach in Cambodia, Campbell [from page 45]

Endnote

1. The Millennium Development Goals are eight goals adopted by the government to eradicate poverty and hunger, achieve universal primary education, promote gender equality, reduce child mortality, improve maternal health, combat HIV/Aids, malaria, and other diseases, ensure environmental stability and develop a global partnership for development, all by 2015. <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/>. Accessed Nov. 1, 2005.