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Data Integrity and Reliability Conference

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Data Integrity and Reliability Conference

During a four-day Data Integrity and Reliability Conference, participants discussed data entry problems and presented suggestions for improvement.

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by Whitney Tolliver, MAIC

Introduction

This summer, the Mine Action Information Center (MAIC) at James Madison University (JMU) organized the Data Integrity and Reliability Workshop and Conference sponsored by the Geneva International Center for Humanitarian Demining (GICHD). The conference was held from July 15th through the 18th and attended by participants from across the globe. The four days were dedicated to discussing issues involving the importance of data collection and dissemination.

Proceedings

The first two days of the conference were reserved for an open discussion about data entry and sharing. Participants shared new ideas and discussed current problems and lessons learned in a non-political manner. The third and fourth days consisted of data-related and country presentations from those in attendance. Some of the participants demonstrated new technologies their organizations had recently developed while others devoted their presentations to the current situations and problems found in their respective countries or their experiences with the Information Management System for Mine Action (IMSMA).

Alan Arnold from GICHD headed the event and commenced the opening presentations with the hope that all participants would walk away from the conference with at least one new idea or point in order to consider their work a success. Therefore, active participation and insightful questions were encouraged. Thanks to the informative presentations and interaction among participants, this goal was accomplished.

Throughout the week, a number of common themes were highlighted during the presentations. Here are some of the general topics covered:

- There is a need to balance quality and efficiency in data gathering and processing.
- With the complexities of mine action information, the time has come for information exchange standards.



Bjorn Liszka and Stephan Kallin introduce a tool recently developed by the Swedish EOD and Demining Center.



Participants engaged in active discussions throughout the conference.

- Regional coordination and cooperation can enhance information management greatly.
- Data can be used to support or prove measures of success in order to plan future operations, to report to donors and government agencies, and to forecast new operations and suggest priorities for mine action activities.
- There is a question as to whether victim assistance should be a part of mine action activities.
- While gathering and processing data has improved in many areas, some areas still need improvement or need to develop a process altogether.

Some of the staffing issues that arose included:

- Organizations must identify and use experts to gather data.
- Staff selection is very important. The staff needs to be trained and retrained in order to maintain constant access to skilled data entry personnel.
- Data entry personnel need to be provided with an environment that affirms the importance and quality of their work in order to reduce laziness and errors.
- A decision must be made as to who may have access to data and who may modify it.



Chuck Conley of Vietnam Veterans of America Foundation (VVAFA) discussed the balance between efficiency and quality in data collection.

Data collection issues included:

- Previously gathered data can have great value but must be carefully evaluated.
- The role of the military in providing data is important but a difficult and sometimes delicate process.
- Primary sources of information are not always valid for various reasons including compensation, glory, fear and laziness.
- Efficient data collection is made more difficult with the existence of many layers of government and overlapping jurisdictions.

Many of the points mentioned during the conference dealt with data processing, including:

- There are problems with inputting data resulting from mix-ups of Geographic Information System (GIS) coordinates and geographical codes, the use of several names for a single location or multiple villages using the same name, various spellings for locations, different mapping standards, language problems and a discrimination of data.
- There is a need for increased quality control and assurance as enhancements and progress in information processing occur.
- Data entry programs need to remain simple, menu driven and conversational.
- Data quality checks must be done as early as possible and in multiple steps throughout data processing.
- Extensible Markup Language (XML) is now more important than ever in data processing.

- IMSMA's recent enhancements are very valuable and value-added.

JMU: Data Integrity and Reliability Conference

- Every component of IMSMA does not need to be used by every organization.
- Mine Action forms may be used to reverse engineer data forms.

At the end of the conference, Alan Arnold concluded, "No matter what stage of the process you're in, there are many sources of data that we have not properly explored in the past. We tend to focus here in this group on the nuts and bolts of day to day operations, which is important, but as time permits or as the situation dictates, it is important to remember that there is more to the universe than day to day existence. You can get information from numerous agencies like newspapers, hospitals, etc.... There are many similarities in all of the programs, whether they are fairly recent or have been established for years. Sometimes it's difficult for government and ministries to provide information. That's common to us all, but the more data we have available and the more we share the better things will work."

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Alan Arnold concluded the conference with some final remarks.



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