

# Development impact

**As recognised in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), poverty is a key challenge facing those interested in addressing development in the world. In putting the MDG objectives into context it has been noted that up to 420 million people (at a conservative estimate) are trapped in chronic absolute poverty. They, and their children, will make up a large part of the 900 million people who will still be \$1-a-day poor in 2015 even if the Millennium Development Goals are met<sup>1</sup>.**

All but two of the 28 countries involved in armed conflict in 2003 were in the bottom half of the states ranked according to the United Nations Development Programme's Human Development Index (HDI)<sup>2</sup>. Conflict exacerbates poverty and contributes to the creation of poverty traps, low growth rates, and an increase in hunger and deprivation. Problems have grown steadily in many former conflict areas, in part resulting from an increased availability and proliferation of weapons and the remnants of conflict and large areas of land, routes and water access points compromised by landmines. Although many international wars and internal conflicts may be relatively short, the legacies of modern conflict have been known to continue on for decades, often with devastating human, social, economic, financial and political cost. Landmine Monitor<sup>3</sup> estimated that there are more than 350,000 landmine survivors in the world today. As the number of non-fatal casualties increase, the long-term effects on poverty and development need to be evaluated and considered. Direct economic repercussions include, for instance, the significant cost of long term medical care. Disability caused by landmine injury can become a burden on public health care systems and premature death of the breadwinner can have a detrimental impact on household resources.

The problems associated with being heavily affected by remnants of conflict are endemic in a number of regions, with many examples in Horn of Africa, sub-Saharan Africa, South East Asia and Middle East. As an example in Laos it is estimated that between nine and 27 million items of unexploded ordnance remain as a legacy of the Indochina wars<sup>4</sup>. Despite the known and horrific dangers, people in affected communities have no option but to continue to live with the threat of explosive remnants of conflict and take risks every day simply to meet their basic needs and in doing tasks such as commuting to work or to school, farming, accessing water or attending markets. Communities, individuals and households in developing countries, confront considerable risk and threats to livelihoods, even without the intervention of violent conflict. Fragile states, fragile environmental conditions, natural and seasonal shocks such as drought and flooding are already a significant challenge in many areas where MAG now works. Yet serious conflict as a 'shock' to the community norms, however difficult and harsh daily life there may be before the fighting, still has a catastrophic effect by killing, injuring and displacing people, through the destruction of infrastructure, through the loss or destruction of assets and this means resources are depleted and markets destroyed or disrupted.

Often the effect of the conflict results in a loss of social cohesion, disruption of the rule of law, with a reduction in employment opportunities and investment. The state of confusion in post-conflict society can also lead to environmental degradation through the illegal exploitation and trade in timber, minerals, gold, diamonds, ivory, animals and other conflict goods. The very poor are likely to be the worst affected due to their inability to cope with the negative effects of conflict. The presence of landmines and other unexploded remnants of conflict have an impact on development because they limit access to a significant proportion of community assets.

Humanitarian Mine Action has become increasingly associated with efforts to reduce poverty and to contribute to the achievement of long term development goals, particularly supporting Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs), and the MDGs. MAG has always acknowledged that the impact of clearance and weapons destruction is greater if socio-economic conditions are taken into account when mine action programmes are designed. MAG's work is not just about removing landmines, weapons and small arms but about making a significant and positive difference to people living with the remnants of conflict. In many of the locations MAG operates in it is not sufficient to be part of restoring livelihoods to their pre-conflict levels, but to support processes that improve livelihoods and restore pride and a feeling of well being to communities. Development activities are a natural extension of MAG's clearance work and forging partnerships with national authorities, local and international development organisations, with donors and supporters is an integral part of our approach.

MAG, mainly through Community Liaison (CL) activities and specifically pre-clearance assessments, can identify what the needs may be post land clearance and contribute to planning joint clearance and development projects. This ensures an integrated approach that creates better assurance that land cleared is better used and developed post-clearance. In many countries MAG has forged strong partnerships with development organisations such as CARE, World Vision, Lutheran World Federation, Catholic Relief Services, World Food Programme and International Relief and Development. MAG will continually improve the way that it conducts its mine action and other activities through forward planning so that activities that are central to MAG's work can be designed or modified to increase the development impact. Mutual partnerships can also lead to a more integrated and holistic approach whereby each step of the clearance and development process is considered in terms of ensuring there is the utmost impact for the communities where we work.

MAG has already achieved a great deal in terms of developing innovative approaches that can help to maximise the development impact of its clearance work. The result of MAG's 20 years of working in partnership and cooperation in many conflict locations has enabled us not only to help create safer communities but also provide a genuine contribution to poverty reduction and empowerment of the vulnerable people with whom we work.

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**Rob White**  
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<sup>1</sup> Brauholtz (2007) <sup>2</sup> Batchelor and Demetriou (2005)

<sup>3</sup> Landmine Monitor (2008) <sup>4</sup> Human Rights Watch (2007)



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Mr Air and his wife Mai harvesting their second rice crop of the year. The area was cleared by a MAG team in 2008, removing more than 300 cluster bombs. Triangle, one of MAG's nine development partners in Lao PDR, then built an irrigation channel to bring water from the river to the rice fields in the dry season.