THE CHANGING RISKS FACING DEMINERS
FIELD EXPERIENCES

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INTRODUCTION

Until 2010, the UN provided demining operations immunity against aggressive interference.

The biggest risks faced by Deminers were operational incidents due to Non Adherence to SOP’s, NTSGs and other safety guidelines.
MECHEM Demining Incidents

Gross Negligence (2)

2007: International Team Leader removed mechanism of Type 72 Mine - loss of fingertip

2014: Local Libyan Deminer entered uncleared area and picked up a detonator - loss of fingertip

Croatia 1998: Dog activated POM-z Tripwire killing MECHEM Dog Handler

Tragic Accident (1)
Immunity / Sense of Safety

The presence of the Blue Helmets provided a sense of safety/immunity against aggressive extremist groups.
Immunity / Sense of Safety

Afghanistan Ring Road Clearance 2003 - 2005:
A team put up camp next to the Police Station, only to find it was attacked during the night by the Taliban….

- Immunity due to UN and SA Flags, as well as the "Mandela Factor"
NEW RISKS: Global Intrastate - and Asymmetrical Warfare

- New Landmines laid on previously cleared roads
- Extremist Group Attacks
- Kidnappings
- Hijackings
- Cash Heists / Raiding Branch Offices
- Road Accidents
- Tropical Diseases
NEW RISK: Laying of New Land Mines

SUDAN/ SOUTH SUDAN [2011]

Intra state conflicts resulting in laying of new landmines at previously cleared roads

Challenges:
- Demining Companies accused and held responsible
- Re-mining of roads

Mitigation:
- Good Record Keeping
- Proper investigation
NEW RISK: Extremist Group Attacks

i) SOMALIA UNDP COMPOUND [19 JUNE 2013]

Al Shabaab Vehicle IED explosion at gate, 6 gunmen entering camp and killing 3 Mechem employees. Worst loss in MECHEM's 56-year history.

In Memoriam
NEW RISK: Extremist Group Attack (continue)

ii) JAZEERA HOTEL BOMBING IN MOGADISHU [26 JULY 2015]

Al Shabaab attack killed 2 MECHEM employees on a motorcycle on their way home.
**NEW RISKS: Kidnappings**

**ii) SUDAN - Bentui [April 2012]**

MECHEM conducted road clearances between Tor, Pariang and Panyang for UNHCR to gain access to the refugee camp in Yida.

During mobilization, the convoy travelled the approved, patrolled route from Bentui to Pariang via Unity Junction and Bui.

On 28 April 2012, the UNMACC Operations Officer and a member from NPA (Norwegian People Aid) returned to Bentui.

They travelled the UN-uncleared route via Tor Junction with the UNMACC Land Cruiser, followed by the mechanic/driver and a deminer in the CASSPIR.

When the members did not arrive back at MECHEM HQ, SPLA Intelligence reported that both vehicles passed the check point at Tor without stopping, heading in the direction of Heglig.

It was later confirmed that the members were kidnapped and taken by plane from Heglig to Khartoum.
NEW RISKS: Kidnappings (continue)

ii) SUDAN - Bentui (continue)
During the 10-day SPLA and SAF clashes, the Sudanese Army took control of Heglig.
The Sudanese Army suspected any expatriate of sabotaging Heglig's oil installations and the captives were accused of spying.
The Sudanese Army later denied having any link with the "arrests".
Thabo Siavhe, a South African and Dongor Makeir, a South Sudanese working for MECHEM, received UN immunity.
After various diplomatic efforts and negotiations, they were released on 20 May 2012.
NEW RISK: Kidnappings (continue)

i) SENEGAL [May 2013]

12 Local Deminers kidnapped by local rebel group (FDC) to force negotiations with the Government.

3 Women released after 1 month

12 Men released after 2 months
iii) **DRC [23 April 2015]**

3 UNMASS contractors kidnapped by unidentified armed group on the Goma-Rutshuru Road, North Kivu Province.

The kidnappers demanded ransom from UN and MECHEM.

The kidnapped contractors were released after a week, badly beaten up, but alive.

**Challenges**
- Paying of ransom can set a president.
- Frail police forces and corrupted judicial systems in African countries.
NEW RISKS: Kidnappings (continue)

WAVE OF KIDNAPPINGS IN DRC KIVU PROVINCE
Latest incident: March 2016 - Kidnapping of 3 Aid Workers in North Kivu Province
www.reuters.com/article/us-congodemocratic-security-idUSKCN0W521H
NEW RISK: Hijacking

LIBYA Vehicle Hijacking

Vehicle (fitted with Tracker Device) and Equipment was hijacked. The vehicle was tracked to a notorious War Lord's Compound, but neither the Police, nor the Army wanted to engage in a confrontation with him.
NEW RISK: Cash Heists and Raids on Offices

i) **MECHEM BRANCH OFFICE IN NAIROBI, KENYA** [Dec 2014]

Loss of large sum of money during a CASH HEIST.

**Challenges**

Unavoidable risk - locals insist on salaries in hard cash.

ii) **DRC HEAD OFFICE** [Dec 2014]

Unsuccessful burglary attempt.
NEW RISK: Road Accidents

ROAD ACCIDENTS

- Extremely bad conditions of the roads, especially in rainy seasons.
- Mines found in areas with little to no infrastructure
- (Flip side of coin) New roads resulting in reckless, high speed driving e.g. incident in Senegal

Challenges:
Any accident involving an expatriate, results in legal claims of enormous sums of money

Mitigation:
Appointment of Local Drivers.
NEW RISK: Tropical Diseases
NEW RISK: Tropical Diseases

MALARIA
Loss of 2 members [2003] to cerebral malaria

Challenges
Member's negligence to take prophylaxes

Mitigations
Registers kept by Medics on project
SUMMARY

THE AIM IS TO

ENCOURAGE SHARING OF EXPERIENCES

BETWEEN

DEMINING AND OTHER HUMANITARIAN ORGANIZATIONS

FINDING MITIGATIONS TO REDUCE THE NEW RISKS

FACED BY DEMINERS AND AID WORKERS

TARGETED BY REBEL GROUPS AND CRIMINALS