

Water and energy:

Wells made inaccessible by the presence of mines are unusable, in effect depriving whole populations of drinking water, so that villages are abandoned, accelerating the rural exodus to the towns and cities where the situation for the people is even worse.

Energy sources (dams, power stations, and so forth) and transmission lines may be mined, by those who want to protect them as well as by others wanting to make them inaccessible: they have become a real headache by now, so dense is the mine-laying, and anarchic beyond imagining. This problem is also a handicap for the power distribution companies, since they find themselves for the moment denied all access to their installations and unable to carry out any repairs.

CULTURAL STRUCTURES

Education: Since schools often serve as «military bases», they are considered legitimate targets for the layers of mines- so that the whole education system has

virtually ceased to exist in many regions (e.g., in Cambodia, in Angola, etc.), depriving whole generations of schooling.

Family Structures:

The community as a whole, often scattered and demoralised after a period of warfare, is weakened even further by this on-going loss of life, both human and of livestock; indeed, its very existence is threatened by it. Herdsmen and farmers living in self-sufficiency, create their own delicately balanced micro-economy, in which family dimensions are in strict relation to the needs of the farm, the cultivable area and the size of the herd.

Over and above the human tragedies, loss of workers because of mines may have devastating conse-

quences, prompting further migration towards the urban centres.

In many regions, mine victims, on their discharge from hospital, return home without having available any of the rehabilitation or psychological support structures they need for their reinsertion. In an agricultural community, the one and only thing a person can provide is his or her labour, which presupposes perfect health and being able to carry out the same tasks as the others. Victims who are unable to provide for their own needs or for those of their family rapidly become a burden for all. Therefore the consequences of the problem go far beyond the individual level and they directly affect the well-being and survival of entire communities.

Migrations: Shortage of unmined farm-land, loss of human or animal life, lack of drinking water, impossibility of gathering fire-wood, feelings of uselessness or of being a burden on the part of amputees: these are all so many factors which push the individual or even whole families to go off and take their chances in the urban centres. Such a rural exodus in developing countries adds to the number of the urban poor while at the same time aggravating the problem of rural depopulation in the abandoned countryside.

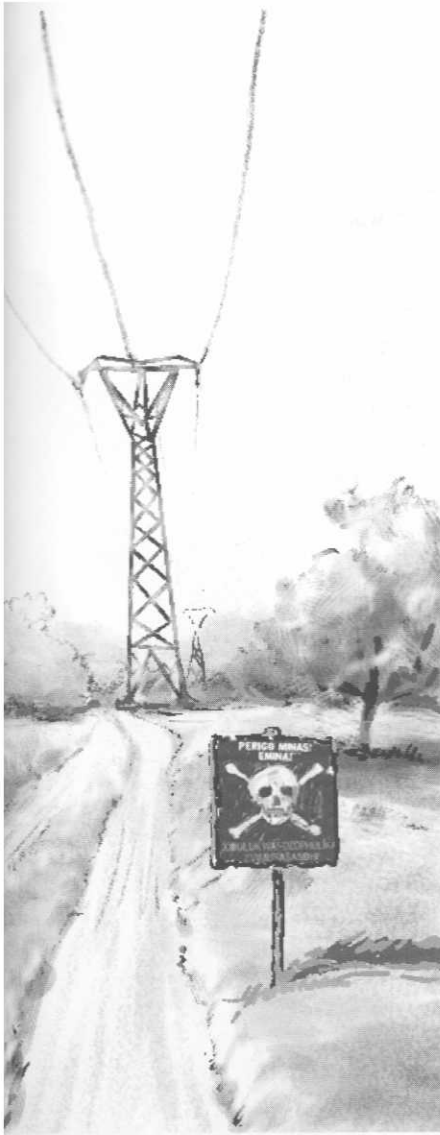
The other side of the story is that the sudden and usually unprepared exodus driving urban populations to flee cities which have become the scene of combats (in Kurdistan and in Afghanistan, for example) into rural districts gives these populations little opportunity to properly understand the real danger of mines. This accounts for the large number of accidents and for the belief, found in certain places, that the ground can be freed of mines by burning off the hillsides, or suchlike attempts.

Cultural weight: Another important factor to be taken into account in certain developing countries is the cultural and/or religious aspect of the problem. A mine victim is no longer «whole»; and if he or she is unmarried, then the chances of being able to take full part in social life as an adult with children are slight. And moreover, if the victim is alone, then the burden of looking after him or her falls on the community.

REFUGEE REPATRIATION

Refugees who return home are one of the categories of people most affected by the land-mine crisis. Mines very often delay their return and hinder their reinsertion by making the land unusable.

Not only to protect the returnees, but also to assure the success of any reinsertion and rehabilitation programme, it needs to be ensured that the road back, the resettlement areas and the land and infrastructure they



are going to be making use of in their day-to-day lives have all been cleared of mines.

Roads mined, wells mined, land made inaccessible: if considerable resources have not been devoted to clearing the area of mines, then the returning refugees will have to be resettled elsewhere. Since refugees only add to populations already confined to areas considered to be free or relatively free of mines, they usually end up with not much choice but to go and take their chances, at the risk of their lives, somewhere else...

Even though they may be under mandate, peace-keeping forces generally lack the capacity to convey humanitarian aid or guarantee the repatriation and reinsertion of populations.

The early 1990's saw the return of Afghan refugees to their homes from Pakistan, as well as the return of Somali refugees from Ethiopia. Both of these population movements were followed by a vertiginous increase in the number of land-mine-accident victims.

In short, it is evident that mines delay or even inhibit the rehabilitation of all social and economical areas of the Economy and the implementation of the most essential social services due to the citizens.

Such a situation increases the risks for failure of the peace-restoration process and the chances of a relapse into war.

