



Humanitarian Engineering Community of Practice

Welcome to our October update

A special welcome to the large group of new members – both Australian and international – who have joined us since our last newsletter. At the time of publication membership stands at 90.

In spite of the restrictions imposed by COVID-19, the community has been very active, participating in various “virtual” events such as the recent HENA gathering, and the IEEE discussion about development of a SIGHT group for Australia.

Our discussion forums and Body of Knowledge (BOK) have also been busy, with numerous additions, views and comments.

Recent activity

Key matters discussed at our July Steering Committee meeting were:

- Our initial WEBINAR on 13/8/20. The subject was “Delivering Humanitarian Engineering in a COVID-19 World”. Guest speakers were from RedR and EWB. The recording of this event is available at eaondemand.engineersaustralia.org.au.
- A range of possibilities for future webinars before the end of 2020. Possible topics include defining the HumEng landscape in Australia, skills and competencies for HumEng, getting involved with HumEng.
- Importance of continuing engagement with HENA and IEEE.
- Work to commence on articulating stage 2 Competencies.

Please Participate

The value of the Community of Practice will be in the active participation of its members.

We encourage you to participate (via the web portal) in the discussion forums, to add to the Body of Knowledge (BOK), and to participate in webinars and other events. You may also contact us at humeng@engineersaustralia.org.au

We hope you will enjoy and benefit from membership of and participation in HECOP, and look forward to your participation in future webinars.

You will be notified separately about any forthcoming webinar content and registration details.

Join our community:



humeng.engineersaustralia.org.au



humeng@engineersaustralia.org.au



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Rob Mitchell
BE FIA(Aust) EngExec

Meet the team

With each issue of the newsletter we will introduce a member of the HECOP team and pose some questions which we hope will help others in their humanitarian endeavours.

In this issue we are featuring the Operations Manager of the Community of Practice, Rob Mitchell BE FIA(Aust) EngExec.

How did you become involved with Humanitarian Engineering?

Having worked for many years on commercial ventures in the Vietnam Electricity Supply Industry, I was approached by an NGO to look at possible electrification for a Muong rural commune of 3000 people in the mountains west of Hanoi. With my experience of the local industry and contractor capability I knew how this could be done, and through my own affiliation with Rotary in Australia I was able to raise the necessary funds to empower the local community and recruit local (Vietnamese) providers to achieve the result which we had worked together to design. It was achieved over an 18 month period, including training of a local committee in necessary asset management.

No other project in a professional life of 36 years to that time (1998) had been so personally and professionally satisfying.

What humanitarian engineering projects are you currently working on?

Following my work in Vietnam I became involved in a variety of infrastructure projects in Malaysia and the Pacific islands, concurrently with taking on the role of founding chair of CELM (now CLM) Sydney, followed by a 5 year engagement with Adelaide University teaching Applied Project Management in Australia and Singapore.

I had become very aware of the special value of engineering insight in HumEng projects, and in 2009 became involved as team leader in a school building/teacher training project in Afghanistan. That involvement led to appointment as General Manager of indigo foundation, the NGO facilitating the work in Afghanistan. I remain actively involved with indigo foundation as a member of its Advisory Panel. And,

of course, I've been heavily involved in advocacy for, and establishment and operation of this Humanitarian Engineering Community of Practice.

What has been your proudest moment as a humanitarian engineer or humanitarian engineering fan?

Definitely my proudest experience in the humanitarian field was seeing the long (hundreds of metres) line of boys and girls queued to attend the first day in their new school at Borjegai, Afghanistan. Knowing that over 20 schools and thousands of students are now part of this ongoing program makes me even more proud.

Why is humanitarian engineering important?

Very simple. If we are genuinely professional engineers, signed on to a code of ethics, we are obliged to work for the benefit of communities.

What is your top tip for engineers and engineering fans who want to apply their skills in humanitarian contexts?

Work WITH communities rather than FOR them. Their ownership of projects is the best assurance of sustainability.

What should people get in touch with you about?

As a committee member of the Sydney branch of the College of Leadership and Management (the parent college of HECOP) I am particularly keen to see the special talents of engineers (see my BOK contribution about this) applied to the leadership and management of humanitarian work of all kinds. I am happy to share my experience on these roles with anyone interested.

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