

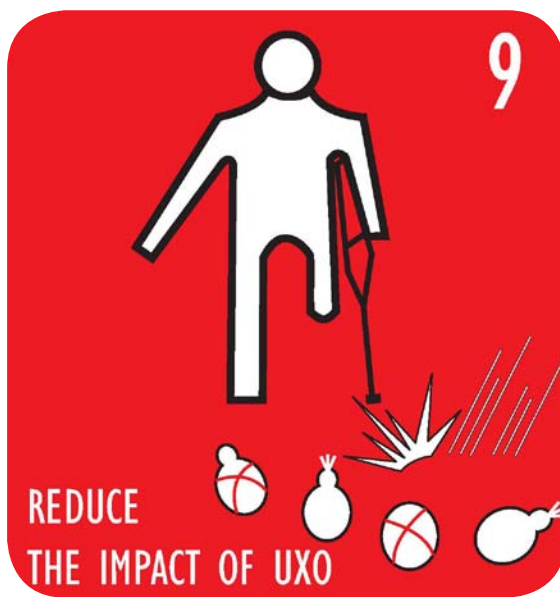


*Empowered lives.
Resilient nations.*



BEYOND THE HORIZON

REDUCING UXO IMPACT
FOR POVERTY REDUCTION IN LAO PDR



The logo for the Lao specific MDG 9

A 'LIVING' DEVELOPMENT ISSUE

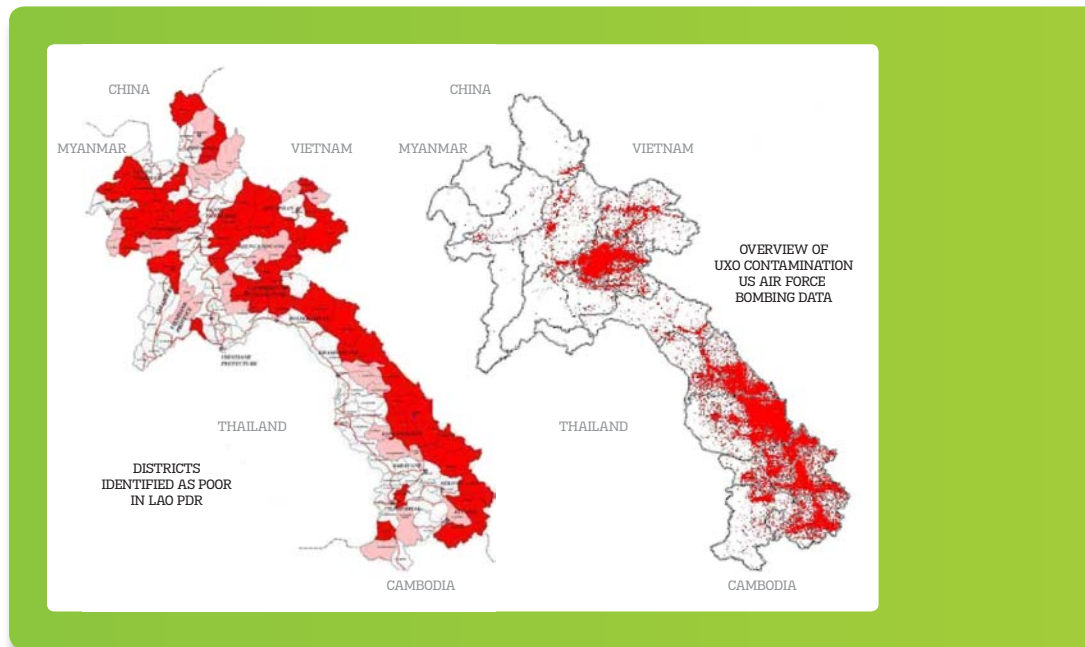
Lao PDR has suffered for decades from the trauma of contamination by unexploded ordnance (UXO) remaining from the Second Indochina War. But the devastating impact of UXO goes far beyond the human toll of death, injury and disability: It also prevents millions of Lao people from living and pursuing their livelihoods as they normally would. In turn, this has consequences for multiple sectors and constrains long-term development of the country as a whole, especially in rural areas.

The presence of UXO hinders a community's ability to safely cultivate land, which affects income generation and food security. It also limits access to education, health care and clean water, and presents an obstacle to building roads, supplying electricity, linking to commercial centres, or developing tourism.

Despite significant development gains in recent years, poverty in Lao PDR remains widespread. Disparities between rural and urban areas are increasing. It is no coincidence that the most heavily UXO-contaminated areas are also among the least developed in the country, comprising 41 out of the 46 poorest districts.

Poverty also plays a role in some UXO accidents by forcing people to risk using contaminated land even before clearance or to "collect" dangerous ordnance to sell for the value of the metal. Widespread anecdotal evidence from villagers indicates that they often find and remove cluster sub-munitions and other items. It is well-known that such activities have resulted in numerous accidents.

Although addressing the UXO issue alone does not directly guarantee increases in income or food security, better accessibility to services, or improved literacy rates, UXO action often is a prerequisite and an important “multiplier” for improvements in overall rural development.



The coming years will be particularly critical for Lao PDR: To fulfill the national aspiration of graduating from Least Developed Country (LDC) status by 2020, it will first be necessary to make significant progress toward the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Urgent action must be taken to improve household incomes, social service delivery, environmental sustainability, and expand partnerships for development. Action in the UXO sector can help in all these important areas.

A DESTRUCTIVE LEGACY

Lao PDR is, per capita, the most heavily bombed country in the world. Between 1964 and 1973, during the Second Indochina War, more than 2 million tonnes of ordnance were dropped. This included 270 million sub-munitions, or “bombies.” Nearly 1 in 3 of these bombs failed to explode, however, and remain partially or fully armed and very dangerous.

An estimated 8,400 square kilometers of land remain potentially contaminated by “bombies,” affecting nearly 25 per cent of villages in 14 out of 17 provinces; the most affected provinces are Savannakhet, Xieng Khouang, Saravan, Khammouane and Sekong. Natural disasters such as floods and landslides also can extend affected areas even farther.

Since the war ended, more than 20,000 people have been killed or injured as a result of UXO accidents, with about two-thirds of these survivors losing limbs. Although casualties have now fallen sharply, from approximately 300 in the early 2000s to 118 in 2010 and 99 in 2011, there are 12,000 survivors who require support. The number will be multiplied when their families are included. Moreover, the proportion of the toll involving children has climbed steadily and for the last decade has comprised about 40 percent of total casualties.

The overall decline in fatal encounters with UXO may be an indication of enhanced coping strategies: learning where, and how, to live with contamination, as a result of Risk Education. At the same time, Lao PDR still appears to account for more than half of all confirmed cluster sub-munitions casualties in the world.

A LIFE CHANGED, FOREVER

“I knew UXOs were around me, but I had no choice and kept farming – we did not have enough to eat. Because of the accident, I lost my leg and cannot move as I used to. I feel isolated from the community, and am stigmatized as a disabled person. Please clear all UXOs in Laos. I do not want other people to experience such an accident like me. I do not want to see any more bombs produced.”

Mrs. Chanthava Potbouly, 53, suffered a UXO accident in August 1993 while ploughing her rice field

TACKLING THE KEY CHALLENGES TO UXO ACTION

Who Is Who

The UXO sector in Lao PDR is led by the National Regulatory Authority for UXO/Mine Action Sector in Lao PDR (NRA) under the guidance of the NRA Board. The NRA, which became fully operational in 2006, is responsible for coordination, regulation, prioritizing and monitoring of all UXO sector activities, and reports directly to the Government's Office. The national strategy for the UXO sector which was approved in 2012, Safe Path Forward II, charts the course for the sector until 2020 and further integrates the UXO sector into the broader poverty reduction and development efforts of the Government.

UXO Lao, the national UXO clearance operator established in 1996, undertakes pre-planned UXO clearance; "roving" tasks, to respond to high-risk contamination situations whenever and wherever they emerge; community-based surveys and research; and risk education. It currently works in nine of the most affected provinces. Given the urgent need for socioeconomic progress in contaminated areas, UXO Lao prioritizes operations on land for agricultural and other development purposes.



Over the years, numerous other organizations have become active in addressing UXO challenges. As of September 2012, 17 accredited operators, which include UXO Lao, international non-Government organizations and private commercial operators, are working in the country. Others are active in providing victim assistance and risk education activities. All these partnerships are crucial for the successful delivery of results.

ACHIEVEMENTS ON THE PATH

Work in the UXO sector entails more than simply removing UXO from the ground. It includes actions ranging from teaching people how to protect themselves from danger in a UXO-affected environment to advocating for a world free from cluster munitions.

Efforts to address UXO contamination in Lao PDR began receiving international assistance in the 1990s. From 1996 through the first half of 2012, Lao PDR has destroyed 1,378,629 items of UXO, including 571,929 “bombies,” and has cleared more than 31,700 hectares of land. Of this, more than 22,800 ha were used for agricultural purposes and nearly 8,900 ha for development purposes.

It remains difficult to keep up with numerous requests for clearance. Says Mr. Kingphet Phimmavong, Provincial Coordinator of UXO Lao in Xieng Khouang Province: “In our province alone, we receive 5,000 hectares of clearance requests a year. On the other hand, the ability of our team is only 500 hectares.”

At the same time, more than 14,800 risk education visits have been conducted to broaden awareness of safety in a contaminated environment. Ensuring that the needs of UXO survivors are met also is a priority. This includes not only medical assistance and rehabilitation services, but also job skills training and employment opportunities so that this extremely vulnerable group can be fully reintegrated in society.

A MAJOR ROLE FOR UNDP

UNDP has been a longtime supporter of the Government of Lao PDR in the UXO sector. Since it helped to establish UXO Lao more than 15 years ago, UNDP has supported the organization's clearance and other activities. UNDP also assisted the Government to establish the NRA and continues to help strengthen national capacities to address humanitarian and long-term development challenges caused by the threat of UXO.

All this reflects UNDP's commitment to helping men and women to participate fully in all aspects of the development process and to share equitably in its gains. UNDP is in a unique position to advocate for change, connect countries to knowledge and resources, and coordinate broader efforts at country level.

This includes key policy and technical support that will promote development effectiveness and resource mobilization in the sector, in turn allowing Lao PDR to meet the national Millennium Development Goal of reducing the impact of UXO, as well as to meet obligations under the Convention on Cluster Munitions. UNDP supports national efforts toward:

- More efficient and effectively planned release of land, coordinated and regulated in accordance with development goals as prioritized in the National Socio-Economic Development Plan and other relevant national planning and policy frameworks
- Effective coordination and regulation of the UXO sector, including through development of sustainable institutional capacity at the outcome level
- Strengthened linkages between UXO and crosscutting issues such as governance and gender mainstreaming
- Improved technology for effective and efficient operations (technological and methodological innovations and sharing of sector best practices)

Additional resources to support these efforts are urgently needed. For the new UNDP UXO support programme period (2013-2016), a funding shortfall of US\$14.7 million (out of total budget of US\$30 million) is expected.



Toward Strengthened Coordination and Integration

All current goals of the UXO sector in Lao PDR – clearance, victim assistance, risk education and advocacy – remain valid. Yet continuing innovation in a number of areas can help to further the shift toward broader integration of activities in the sector with the goal of long-term national development.

With both widespread needs and limited as well as highly dispersed resources in the UXO sector, close coordination, along with improved efficiency of activities, are imperative. The NRA has undertaken several important initiatives to address the need for more integrated planning and priority setting, with a view to developing a fully systematic approach over time.

Integration of UXO clearance into the development planning and budgeting process, especially at provincial and village levels, also will be critical to strengthen the “mainstreaming” of UXO-related concerns. This can be further complemented by stronger coordination with the Round Table Process between Government and development partners. In addition, development of a strong communication strategy for the sector by the Government and international partners can serve to facilitate a sector-wide approach, strengthen collaboration and deepen awareness raising.

All this can help to realize the full potential of UXO action and foster a comprehensive approach toward overall development. It also can help to ensure a gradual transition from international donor funding of the sector to regular national budget support for the UXO sector.

MANAGING QUALITY

The main reference for all UXO-related activities is contained in the Lao National Standards, which regulate each activity, including quality management. Managing quality is important particularly to ensure deminers' safety as well as the quality of land released after clearance. Having strong teamwork further boosts overall quality of services. Observes Vandy Vilavongsa, Senior Explosive Ordnance Disposal Supervisor of UXO Lao: "Atmosphere of the team is another important element of the operation."

At the same time, funding limitations and capacity challenges continue to constrain national abilities to conduct quality control and quality assurance for all operations.

Further Developing Policy and Strategic Planning Skills

National technical skills are fundamentally strong, with the UXO sector displaying good practices and high quality in the execution of clearance techniques. Nonetheless, the Government of Lao PDR seeks to further develop capacity in all areas of the sector, including in management of the sector and in integration of UXO-related activities with broader development initiatives. Undertaking a structured process of capacity development will serve as the foundation on which many other strategic initiatives will rest. A comprehensive capacity development assessment will be initiated by the NRA and a corresponding capacity development strategy will be elaborated.

Formulating Broad Results and a Reliable Baseline

The quantitative results that are communicated from the UXO sector are relevant and impressive, including number of hectares cleared or items destroyed, people receiving risk education, and victims tracked. As the NRA develops its capacity to analyze causal links between UXO sector activities and national socioeconomic development, this can be further strengthened through additional attention to reporting on even broader outcome-oriented results in the sector.



OPENING UP TO SAFE TOURISM

The Plain of Jars is now a popular tourist site in Xieng Khouang Province, but it too had been contaminated by UXO. In the past, a humanitarian UXO clearance operator had cleared the main part of the Plain. However, to further boost tourism development and based on a request from the local government, UXO Lao has cleared another 27 ha. Each year, more than 30,000 tourists now visit to enjoy splendid views of mysterious, ancient stone jars scattered across the vast plain, bringing much-needed revenues to one of Lao PDR's most affected areas.

Although UXO contamination is a longstanding issue in Lao PDR, there remains a critical need for more reliable baseline information about the level and location of contamination in the country. Despite the availability of bombing data from the Second Indochina War, these have not been found accurate enough to pinpoint with certainty the areas of suspected contamination in order to efficiently guide clearance activities at anything other than the strategic level. Meanwhile, Lao PDR has initiated a survivor tracking system to better identify the needs of UXO victims and track their treatment, rehabilitation and reintegration into their communities.



FILLING A 'FOOTPRINT' WITH MUCH-NEEDED DATA

The District Focused Approach (DFA) will provide better baseline data on UXO contamination. This will contribute to a more proactive and coherent planning process in the sector and closer alignment with the goals of the 7th National Socio-Economic Development Plan.

The process is coordinated by the NRA in close partnership with Handicap International, Mines Advisory Group and Norwegian People's Aid. It covers three districts in Kammouane, Savannakhet and Saravan Provinces and is expected to eventually expand to all the contaminated districts in the country.

The DFA involves collecting and analyzing key information from local authorities and individual households to supplement available data, including from general bombing maps from the Second Indochina War, clearance records, and predictable patterns of where cluster munitions may be scattered. A matrix based on these diverse sources of information is then used to create more detailed maps and more clearly delineate the boundaries of the contamination "footprint" of target areas.

These data will be able to provide a baseline for efficient planning and priority setting within the UXO sector. By clearing land within a full "footprint," unnecessary costs will not be incurred as a result of returning to an area several times in response to ad hoc clearance requests. Better recording of the contamination picture also will decrease the targeting of non-contaminated areas.



HARVESTING THE BENEFITS OF CLEARANCE

About a 20-minute ride down a muddy lane off the main road, the residents of Nanou Village earn their living from farming and making rice noodles. Lavong Heungnouxay was looking forward to his first harvest since his land was cleared of UXO earlier in 2012.

During the first planting after the operation, he was happy to discover that there was no need to use fertilizer. "Thanks to the clearance, we could use a buffalo for ploughing instead of hands and a shovel, and this helped to develop better soil," he says. Even a bomb crater has been converted to a paddy field now.

This was a big change from 1975, when Mr. Lavong's family came back to the village after fleeing the war and started to re-establish their lives. Previously, the village was bombed regularly and was an intense battlefield, causing the family to leave everything behind, including house and cattle. When they returned, "we started ploughing with a shovel, removing UXOs by hand very carefully," Mr. Lavong recalls. "We had no other choice."

In addition to cluster sub-munitions, numerous grenades and bullets were found during the 2012 clearance operations. About 400 "bombies" were found on just the 16,783 square metres of Mr. Lavong's land that were cleared.

Many of Mr. Lavong's neighbours in this village have been killed or injured by UXO. Says the 48-year-old farmer: "I felt anger to see so many bombies from my paddy field."



A HEALTH CENTRE BORN ON SAFE GROUND

Naphay Village Health Centre has served a core function for 15 surrounding villages since it started functioning in 1997, the same year that UXO Lao cleared the land around the centre.

The small, four-room community health centre, which has three staff, takes care of the primary health care for about 1,000 households, includes maternity care. Many of the pregnant women in this area of Xieng Khouang Province deliver babies at this centre.

Sonephet Meunbichit, who heads the centre, has worked at the facility for the full 15 years since it was built. "I feel secure thanks to UXO clearance operations," she declares. For example, now when the 45-year-old nurse walks for up to 2 hours to reach villages during immunization campaigns, she can do so on a UXO-free path.

Likewise, her ability to regularly visit each household in the villages under her jurisdiction has led to improvements in villagers' hygiene practices and conditions. In addition, pregnant women from the area, including women from ethnic minorities, are increasingly choosing to safely reach the centre for regular health checks as well as delivery. Mrs. Sonephet herself has delivered about 160 babies.

As a result of risk education, Mrs. Sonephet also has witnessed an improvement in villagers' awareness of UXO risks. "Now people know very well about UXO, thanks to community awareness activities," she says. "Children also understand that they must not touch these objects." She continues to enjoy her job and what it means to the people under her care, adding: "I'm very proud. I'd like to keep working here until retirement."

UXO POLICY: LAO PDR LEADS THE WAY

Lao PDR has been an international leader on UXO policy issues, including moving forward on the Convention on Cluster Munitions (CCM), which prohibits all use, stockpiling, production and transfer of these deadly weapons around the world. Lao PDR, which has adopted an additional national Millennium Development Goal on UXO (MDG9), was the second country in the world to sign the CCM, in December 2008. It also hosted the First Meeting of States Parties in 2010, the same year that the Convention came into force as binding in international law. In turn, this has led to the ratification of the Convention by 76 countries as of September 2012, with a further 35 nations signing up.

... We will strengthen our efforts to raise the necessary national and international resources to overcome the remaining challenges and deliver tangible results and dividends to those individuals and communities that need continued support. ...

As long as people remain at risk, we are compelled to do more to achieve our collective goal – a world with no cluster munitions. ...

"No Cluster Munitions: From Vision to Action," the 2010 Vientiane Declaration



The CCM is thus the “backbone” of the commitment of the Government to not only tackle UXO within the country, but also to advocate for the Convention and its norms internationally. At the First Meeting of States Parties, it guided the formulation of the 2010 Vientiane Declaration, “No Cluster Munitions: From Vision to Action,” with detailed actions set out in a subsequent Vientiane Action Plan. The Government has particularly encouraged neighbouring states that are not yet Parties to join the Convention.

The Convention requires States Parties:

- Never to use, develop, produce, acquire, stockpile, retain, or transfer to anyone, directly or indirectly, cluster munitions (Article 1)
- To destroy or ensure the destruction of all stockpiled cluster munitions within 8 years (Article 3), and to clear or destroy cluster munitions remnants within 10 years after the entry into force of the Convention for a State Party (Article 4)
- To conduct risk education for civilians in contaminated areas to ensure awareness (Article 4)
- To provide adequate and age- and gender-sensitive assistance, including medical care, rehabilitation and psychological support to victims, and to work for their social and economic inclusion (Article 5)

The main national instrument to ensure that Lao PDR fulfills its obligations under the CCM is Safe Path Forward II (SPF II), a national strategy for the UXO sector till the year 2020 that was approved in June 2012. It is aligned with the 7th National Socio-Economic Development Plan and sets clear targets to reduce the impact of UXO.

In particular, SPF II stipulates releasing priority land for clearance in accordance with national standards and treaty obligations; strengthening coordination and implementation of the national programme; and developing relevant national capacities as part of the overall set-up of the Government. It also seeks to bring together humanitarian and national development priorities for the sector to a far greater extent than in the past and to achieve an end state where "people from the most highly impacted communities live free from the impact from UXO."





MDG9: REDUCING THE IMPACT

The Lao-specific MDG9, to reduce the impact of UXO by 2020, highlights the links between UXO presence and poverty. Adopted in 2010 as part of the MDG Compact, a further commitment by Government and development partners to attain the overall MDGs, it sets three targets:

- Ensure the complete clearance of UXO from priority/high-value agricultural land by 2020
- Reduce substantially the number of casualties as a result of UXO incidents
- Ensure that the medical and rehabilitation needs of all survivors are met in line with treaty obligations under the CCM

MDG9 is not only an independent Goal but also a prerequisite to accomplish all eight other Goals, thus creating further synergy toward overall development in Lao PDR.

Thus far, integration of the UXO sector into broader national development planning has been facilitated through the UXO Sector Working Group (SWG) as part of the overall annual Round Table Process for improved aid coordination and effectiveness. The SWG brings together a variety of actors in the field of UXO action, to:

- Facilitate action toward reducing poverty, increasing growth, and building the capacity of national human resources and institutions
- Enhance resource mobilization and donor coordination
- Strengthen information sharing among stakeholders

These actors include the Government, international development partners and UXO clearance operators. The SWG is co-chaired by the NRA, through a representative of the NRA Board, and by UNDP, and the United States. Three sub-sector Technical Working Groups also have been established to advance the work in clearance, risk education and victim assistance.



WOMEN EARN A LIVING IN THE EFFORT TO DESTROY UXO

Mrs. Khamson Chanthavong, a medic in a UXO Lao clearance team, is also a widow of a UXO victim. Like many other women, since nearly 9 in 10 UXO victims are male, she has thus had to become the breadwinner for her household.

It was January 1987 when Mrs. Khamson's husband hit a UXO with a shovel while they were digging land to create an irrigation system for their small paddy field on a collective farm. He died two days later. At the time, their two children were only aged 5 years and 1 year old.

Mrs. Khamson continued to work on the collective farm, but eventually she needed to look outside to make a living that could support her family. She decided to take medic training provided by UXO Lao and joined the organization in 2003. Thus, she became one of 151 female team members who are now benefiting from the non-traditional employment opportunities for women provided by UXO action efforts. These women comprise nearly 1 in 6 of UXO Lao employees.

While her family's life improved after joining the team, Mrs. Khamson, now 50, is still afraid of UXO. "I worry about many families and children, because I know that UXO is everywhere - forests, paddy fields and waterways," she says. Although she never forgets the accident she and her husband experienced, she adds that she is pleased to work in the UXO sector: "I love our teamwork, and when villagers become happy with the completion of UXO clearance, it makes me happy as well."

Mrs. Saisamone Nouanthasing also is gratified by the results of her work as leader of an all-female de-mining team. The 37-year-old mother of two declares: "I feel very proud when our team finds and destroys as many UXOs. Also, I'm very proud that this job allows me to send my children to school."

CONTRIBUTE TO THE UXO SECTOR, CONTRIBUTE TO HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

Only on the surface – literally and metaphorically – is eradicating UXO about the removal of remains of the past. In reality, clearing UXO is about creating opportunities for the future.

The national UXO sector is currently almost wholly supported by international donor funding. However, the Government is planning to increase its domestic resource investment, a very commendable move. Overall, the scale of UXO action in Lao PDR is directly linked to the availability of financial and technical resources. Expenditures in the sector in 2011-2012 were US\$31 million, including about US\$10 million from the private sector.

Operations could be scaled up reasonably quickly if additional resources were available. Lao PDR seeks to mobilize US\$50 million annually for the sector as a whole to support an accelerated programme of survey and clearance, as well as for increased activity in risk education and victim assistance. Increased support from the international community is critically important and most welcome, particularly multi-year and un-“earmarked” commitments for purposes of predictability and more effective planning to address funding gaps.

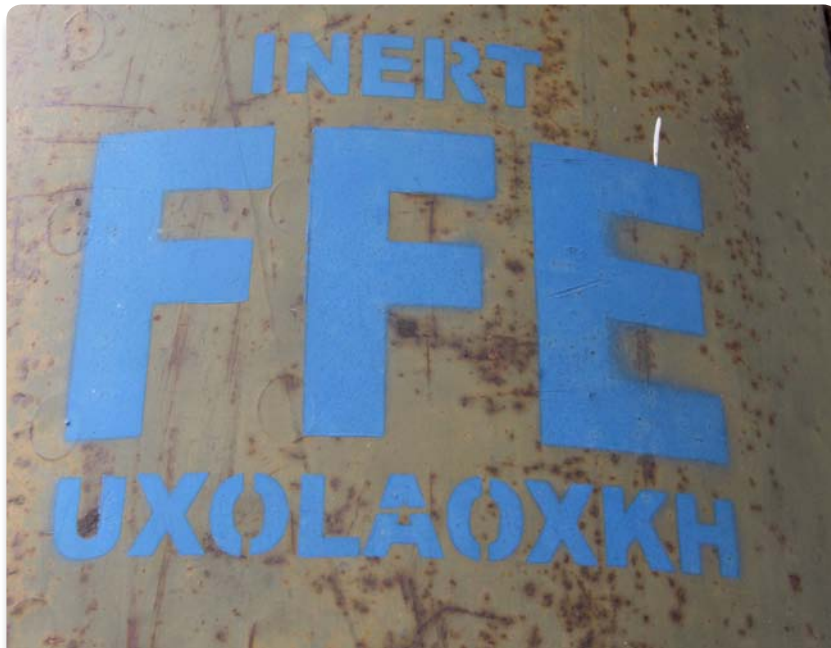
UXO Trust Fund

To help mobilize and manage international assistance, the Trust Fund for Support to the Full Implementation of the Convention on Cluster Munitions in Lao PDR (UXO Trust Fund) was established in 2010, managed by UNDP. The Trust Fund, which currently serves primarily as a mechanism for support to the NRA and UXO Lao, is operated under the framework of the national UXO strategy and UXO policies approved by the NRA Board. Its Steering Committee is chaired by the Government and co-chaired by UNDP, in close consultation with the UXO Sector Working Group.

Financial resources contributed through the Trust Fund allow for an enhanced UXO sector-wide approach and increased Government ownership, leadership and discretion over resource allocation in the sector. The Trust Fund complements other funding options available to donors, including bilateral support and direct funding to UXO operators. A "window" to channel resources to non-Government organizations, whose ranks are growing in relevant areas, may provide added value in the coming years, particularly with regard to efforts within the disability sector and victim assistance initiatives.

Generous Donors Support UNDP's UXO Programme

The table in the next page indicates the continuing generosity of international donors to the UXO sector through UNDP, for which both the Government and UNDP are grateful.



**FINANCIAL CONTRIBUTIONS TO UNDP'S UXO PROGRAMME
AS OF SEPTEMBER 2012 (US\$)***

DONORS	Received during 1996-2012	Receivable & pledged for 2013-2016
AUSTRALIA	8,297,532	5,248,000
AUSTRIA	137,210	
BELGIUM	627,265	71,531
CANADA	2,307,419	
DENMARK	5,512,383	
EU	441,948	1,161,479
FINLAND	1,589,348	
FRANCE	65,531	
GERMANY	3,538,813	
IRELAND	4,770,500	2,451,000
ITALY	161,464	
JAPAN**	9,572,677	
KOREA (REP OF)	153,584	
LUXEMBOURG	3,138,459	551,472
NETHERLANDS	2,901,220	
NEW ZEALAND	4,413,529	
NORWAY	2,874,201	
POLAND	11,000	
SWEDEN	394,176	
SWITZERLAND	5,519,975	1,000,000
UK	2,075,116	124,973
USA	3,198,324	
UNDP	9,109,642	1,290,000
TOTAL [through Trust Fund]	70,811,316 [14,377,496]	11,898,455 [9,250,472]

* Exchange rate at the time of receipt

** Includes JMAS, JAIF, GGP and UNMAS Japan

Donors to the UXO Trust Fund

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- p.9 © UNDP Lao PDR/Paul Wager
- p.11 Clearance operation in Plain of Jars, Xieng Khouang Province
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- p.14 Paddy field which had clearance operation © UNDP Lao PDR
- p.15 Ms. Sonephet Meunbichit (left), a nurse of Napay Village Health Centre, with a villager whom she had delivered a baby © UNDP Lao PDR
- p.17 A scene of First Meeting of States Parties to the Convention on Cluster Munitions in Vientiane, 2010 © UNDP Lao PDR
- p.18 Schoolchildren who attended Community Awareness activity and learned the danger of UXO © UNDP Lao PDR
- p.20 Female deminers in searching UXOs with a metal detector
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- p.22 'Free From Explosives', or FFE, a sign printed on deactivated items
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*Empowered lives.
Resilient nations.*

Beyond the Horizon - Reducing UXO Impact
for Poverty Reduction in Lao PDR
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United Nations Development Programme
Lane Xang Avenue
P.O. Box 345
Vientiane, Lao PDR