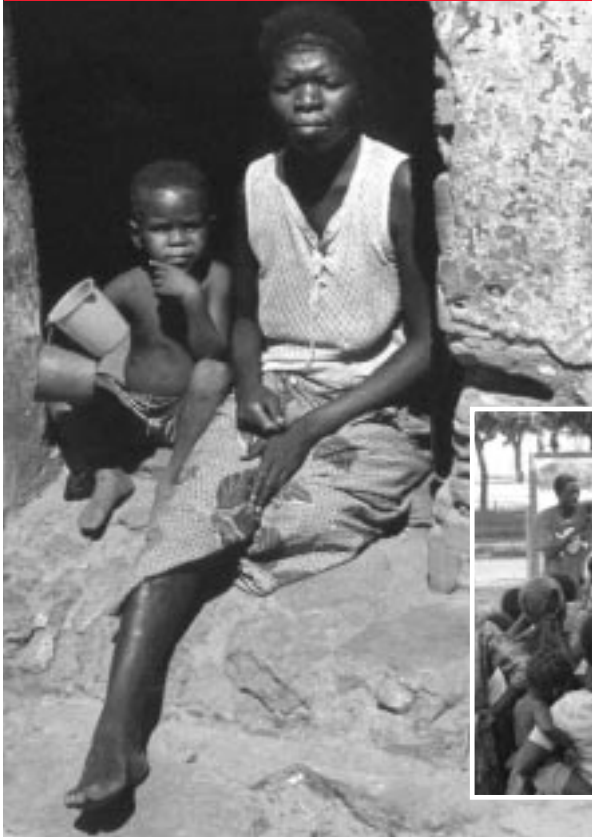


Planning a safe return home for Angolan refugees



Up to 200,000 refugees have been living in Zambia for over 20 years after fleeing the civil war in Angola. Now refugees planning to return home are at serious risk as the country is very heavily mine and UXO affected.

Over sixty percent of refugees did not recognise mines and unexploded bombs as dangerous. They are unaware of mined areas, not familiar with local warning signs, and are likely to be pushed to use dangerous land out



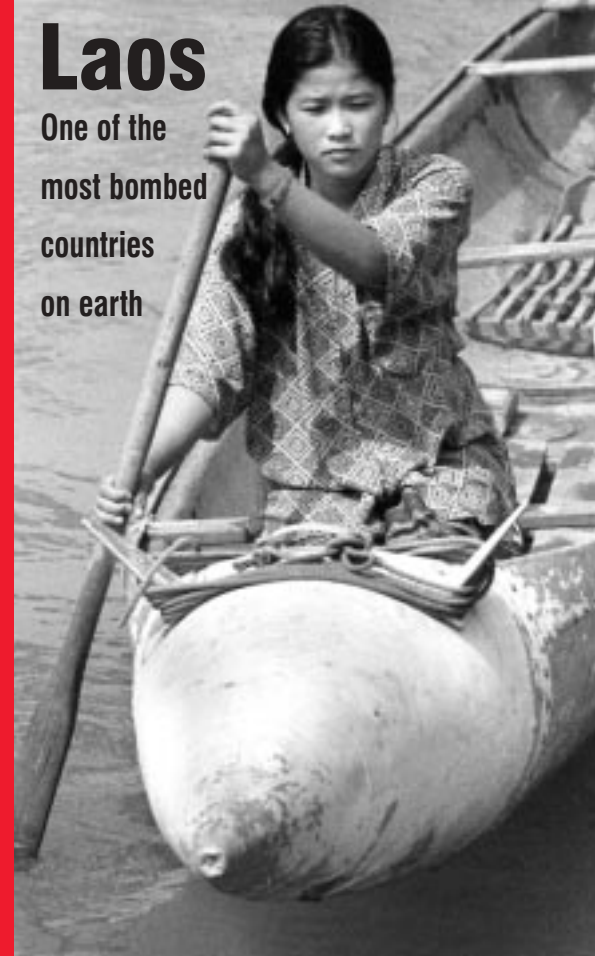
of sheer necessity. **And as we know too well, bomblets and other UXO can look especially tempting to children.** In such circumstances Mine Risk Education can greatly reduce the risk.

MAG and its partner agency, the Japanese NGO Association to Aid Refugees (AAR), have developed an emergency project aimed at giving mine awareness lessons to adults and children planning to return to Angola. The project would train seven four-person Mine Risk Education Teams to work in Meheba Camp, where more than 40,000 refugees are living.

MAG has been approaching donors to support this project, but so far has not secured the support required. AAR have begun limited mine awareness with funds to run only one team. It is vital that MAG secures funds in order to deliver this much-needed education before people begin returning to Angola – largely unaware of the dangers and the basic steps on how to reduce the risk of death and injury.

Laos

One of the most bombed countries on earth



MAG mobilised as war in Iraq draws near

Despite the threat of conflict, MAG's humanitarian work amongst the Kurds of northern Iraq will continue. MAG has been clearing mines and unexploded bombs there every day since 1992 and this will continue, with increased security, through the present threat. MAG employs more than 700 Kurds in northern Iraq and provision has been made for their safety.

MAG's knowledge and expertise within Iraq has earned the trust and respect of those in the field and has been instrumental in clearing access routes and allowing safe passage for tens of thousands of Kurdish returnees following the Gulf War in 1990 and again in 1996. Its activities are also heralded by other humanitarian organisations as others can only carry out their work after MAG has identified mine-free land. More often than not MAG is the 'first in – last out' in the field for humanitarian aid.

Lou McGrath, MAG's executive director, said lessons had been learned during the Gulf War: "MAG's work is absolutely vital for the safety of all those in the field. We were there during the last war in 1990 and again in 1996 and we'll be there again if there's a war in Iraq. It's dangerous but MAG's core activity is to clear up the remnants of war so innocent victims can live in some safety despite the dangers."



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MAG

news

take action clear mines

ISSUE NO. 10 MARCH 2003



Latest moves in

Humanitarian Mine Action

MAG operations save life and limb every day

More than 1,670,000 sq. meters of land cleared
equivalent to 3,342 football pitches.

15,018
other UXO cleared

9,640
mines cleared

Achievements from
July-December 2002

Destroying the remnants of war and helping to build peace

MAG Sri Lanka

MAG experts recently destroyed a stockpile of more than 5,000 items (see photo) that had been gathered by local people and was of massive risk to the community. MAG is also working to establish a second Mine Risk Education capacity in Batticaloa on the east coast, following a request from the LTTE.

The ongoing peace talks in Sri Lanka between the government and the Tamil Tigers have allowed MAG to carry on its landmine and UXO clearance work with the local Humanitarian Demining Unit (HDU).

With valuable support from ECHO, the EU's humanitarian funding arm, a Dutch Trust, Stichting Vluchteling, and the Co-operative Bank, MAG has provided training and supervision for four Survey and Demarcation Teams and two Mine Risk Education Teams.

MAG is now helping the HDU to establish two mobile teams to deal with the unexploded ordnance that litters the north of the country.

Also this month in Sri Lanka, the Japanese Government have agreed to donate US\$ 353,000 to MAG to purchase a specialist mine clearance vehicle, the Bozena Mini-Flail. This machine will speed up manual clearance by **500%** enabling MAG to help even more people survive the peace.



The explosion you helped to set off. Thousands of items of UXO go up in a controlled explosion in Sri Lanka. The cloud reached 150 meters high.



An Innovative Approach To Clearing Land in Laos

“Most villages in Xieng Khouang Province, Lao PDR, have large tracts of unused agricultural land. The villagers are terrified to actually dig in this ground for fear of being injured or killed”

Nearly 30 years on, the people of Lao People’s Democratic Republic (Laos) still suffer death and injury from unexploded ordnance dropped during the Indo-Chinese war. Subjected to intense bombing and ground battles, Lao PDR is possibly the most heavily bombed nation on earth, with more than 580,000 bombing missions dropping 2 million tonnes of ordnance during the nine-year war. An estimated 30 percent did not explode and today a vast amount remains where it dropped.

MAG has been working in Laos since 1994, primarily in the two heavily contaminated provinces of Xieng Khouang and Saravan. Deminers have so far found 13 different types of American bomblet and have encountered more than 100 other types of ordnance from at least seven countries (USA, Russia, China, North Vietnam, France, Japan and the UK). They have destroyed more than **a quarter of a million** items, ranging from bomblets the size of tennis balls to air-delivered bombs weighing up to 3,000lbs and averaging the length of a household bath!

Houidokham village, Xieng Khouang Province

Houidokham is a very poor ethnic minority farming village with a population of around 200. When MAG first visited in 1995 it took over four and a half months of continuous work to clear the village of ordnance that was simply lying on the surface or had been uncovered by the villagers. More than 4,500 items were destroyed. As Houidokham expands and more land is required for agricultural and domestic use, demolition teams are still being requested on a regular basis.

The Approach to Village Assisted Clearance (VAC)

Most villages in Xieng Khouang have large tracts of unused agricultural land; the main crop, rice, is not grown as the UXO contamination is so high that the villagers are terrified to actually dig in the ground for fear of being injured or killed. Over the past eight years Xieng Khouang has had, and continues to have, a UXO-related injury or death, on average, every week of the year.

In July 2002 discussions took place within MAG Laos to determine how best to involve and support the poorer villages of Xieng Khouang and how to increase the rate of UXO removal from agricultural and other land.

Now a new concept has been formulated, agreed and accepted: this is Village Assisted Clearance (VAC). Hired villagers are thoroughly trained as detector operators and scrub cutters and receive instruction in basic first aid, UXO recognition, detector operation and how to operate a handheld mechanical scrub cutter (trimmer). Upon completion of the four to five days training, they are ready to start clearance operations. They detect and mark only, passing the task of clearance to national technically trained staff. At no time are locally employed villagers put at risk.

As the amount of safe agricultural land increases, village income is improved. There is another advantage too; the villagers working on clearance also earn a wage, many for the first time in their lives.

VAC activities commenced in Ban Houidokham in the third week of November after a successful week’s instruction. Agricultural land cleared of UXO by the VAC personnel is being utilised to grow “wet rice” in brand new paddy fields yielding two crops annually. More and more, villagers there can farm their land without fear of being blown up by the aftermath of a long-finished war.

The ‘stilts’ these homes are built on are all bombs. Living with danger every day can desensitise people, and untrained villagers run dreadful risks dealing with UXO that lies around in their hundreds of thousands.

Tempest Mini Flail moves from Cambodia to Angola!



Following the peace accord in Angola last year, MAG is radically expanding its operations to address the need for safe land in this vast and severely mine affected country.

In order to speed up clearance and improve safety MAG has just bought a Tempest Brush Cutter arriving at the end of March to support the manual clearance teams currently operating.

The Tempest is a remote controlled flail, designed to remove vegetation prior to deminers searching the area. The need to clear dense vegetation in countries such as Cambodia or Angola, so that deminers can use metal detectors on the ground, can dramatically slow down the clearance process when done by hand. The tempest machine means it will allow MAG to clear significantly more land in less time – almost 100 percent.

The Tempest was developed and built in Cambodia by the charity Design Technology Workshop (DTW) with advice and support from MAG. The machine has been so successful and efficient that MAG Cambodia is currently using five of the machines in its programme there. This will be the first time the Tempest has been used in Angola.

Tunisia

In December a MAG team visited Tunisia to assess the problem of landmines and UXO in the country. The team were hosted by the Tunisian Ministry of Defence and visited minefields on Tunisia’s border with Libya. These mines were laid during tension between the two countries during the late 1970s and early 1980s.

MAG concluded that whilst there is not a major problem with landmines in the country, there are a number of minefields where civilians have suffered death or injury in the past. In addition, there is also a problem with unexploded bombs from the battles for North Africa during World War II.

MAG’s main recommendations to the Tunisian Government is advice on buying and training in the use of mechanical aids for minefield clearance. Once all the minefields on Tunisian soil are cleared, which should occur within a few years, the machinery can then be used to support infrastructure and engineering projects in Tunisia, all of which require clearance of unexploded bombs before work can begin.

