

MAG and U.S. Government

continue partnership to tackle UXO threat in Lao P.D.R



Mr Phoukhieo Chanthasomboun (left) and Mr David Harrocks shake hands after signing the MoU

“The U.S. Department of State’s Office of Weapons Removal and Abatement provides US\$1.4 million to MAG for UXO clearance”

Some very good news to start: MAG (Mines Advisory Group) Laos and the United States Department of State’s Office of Weapons Removal and Abatement (WRA) will continue their history of successful partnership in Khammouane and Xieng Khouang provinces, with a new 12 month unexploded ordnance (UXO) clearance project worth US\$1.4 million.

A Memorandum of Understanding between the National Regulatory Authority (NRA) and MAG Laos was signed in October at the Mercure Hotel in Vientiane.


Through the work of five UXO clearance teams, significant amounts of contaminated land will be cleared of UXO contamination.

MAG Laos’ partnerships with numerous development organisations, who will work with the communities whose land has been cleared of UXO, will ensure m² clearance outputs become positive development outcomes.

The signing ceremony was chaired by the Director of the NRA, Mr. Phoukhieo Chanthasomboun and was attended by His Excellency, Mr. Bounhueng Duangphachanh, Deputy Chairman of the NRA, and Ambassador Karen Stewart, Ambassador of the United States to the Lao PDR.


Speaking at the ceremony, MAG Laos Country Director, David Harrocks, thanked the WRA for their ongoing support but also emphasised that, “...a lot more work is needed and I would like to urge the international donor community to provide much more funding for the UXO work in Lao PDR. Together we can ensure that all the people of this beautiful country can live safely and in peace.”

Quarterly news roundup:


 A poignant documentary on the impact of UXO on Lao PDR long after the end of the war has been released by MAG America. It is called ‘Surviving the Peace’ and is an insightful and moving film that all should watch. An on-line copy can be found at:

<http://www.maginternational.org/usa/en/news/surviving-the-peace-launch/>

 We have a new Country Director at MAG Laos. David Harrocks has been spending his first few weeks meeting with senior Government representatives and our partner development agencies. Sa baai dee (welcome) David and xook dee (good luck)!

 A farewell party was held for David Hayter, the previous Country Director. The staff took the opportunity to present gifts and offer thanks to David for his dedicated and thoughtful leadership during his time with MAG Laos. Xook dee David!

 Our new Monitoring and Evaluation Officer is Khonesavanh Louanglath. Khone will be leading on ensuring our internal systems continue to run smoothly and effectively. Sa baai dee Khone and xook dee!

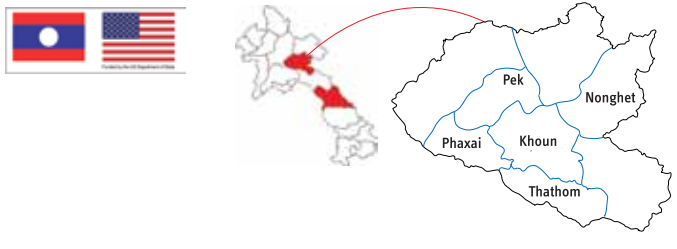
 On Oct 24th, the MAG Laos programme in Xieng Khuang hosted a film crew from ZDF German Television. There have also been various written press visits to MAG Laos project sites and our work has been featured in numerous international publications.



Project highlights:

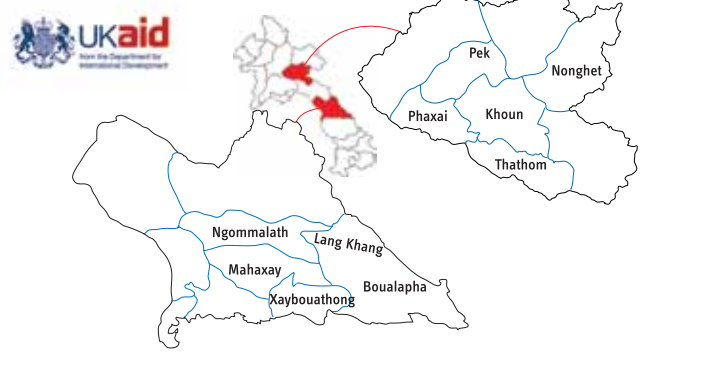
All Women UXO clearance team Xieng Khouang

The all-female clearance team continues to provide an excellent service to target communities within the Province of Xieng Khouang. In the last three months alone they have cleared over 75,000m² of land and have removed 510 items of UXO.



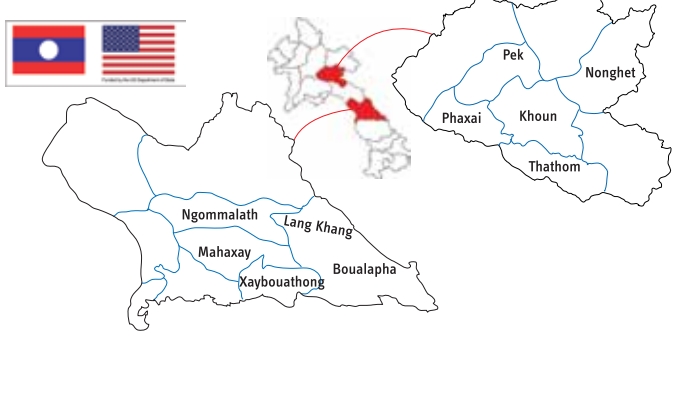
Development led Humanitarian Mine Action Xieng Khouang & Khammouane

This 2.5 year grant is an extensive commitment from UK Aid to the work of MAG Laos. Since the start date in February 2011, five teams have cleared over 2,000,000m² of land and, along with the two roving clearance teams, have overseen the removal of close to 5,500 items of UXO.



Integrated UXO & Development Action Xieng Khouang & Khammouane

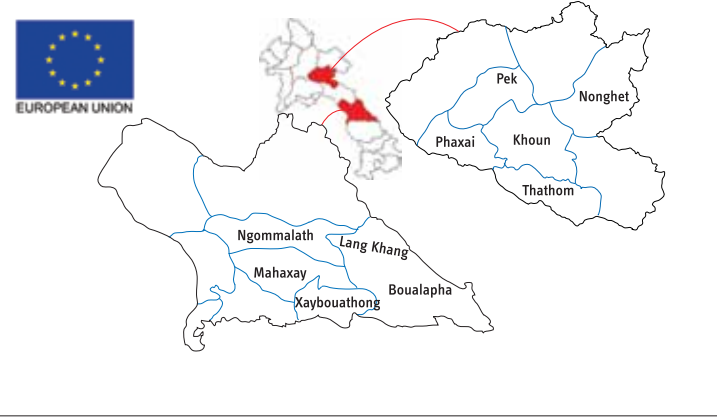
Since the project start on 1 May 2011, just under 800,000m² of land has been cleared of 1,100 items of UXO. These impressive figures will improve even further as the dry season comes into effect and the teams can have unhindered access to the target areas.



UXO clearance for Sustainable Outcomes in Vulnerable Communities and Capacity Building of Local Authorities Khammouane

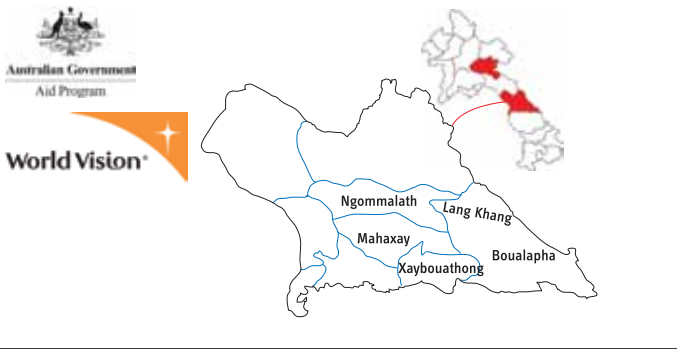
The two clearance teams operating under this grant are based in Khammouane. This province has been experiencing extremely heavy and prolonged rainfall. Despite the many logistical difficulties the two teams have still been able to clear close to 700,000m² of land and remove 210 items of UXO.

The second aspect to this project is the staging of a new and innovative approach to surveying land prior to clearance. The District Focused Approach (DFA) will ensure affected Districts have their UXO threat and its resulting impact accurately defined. Implementation of the DFA has recently commenced and we are very excited about the results which will be announced shortly.



Integrated UXO Action partner World Vision Khammouane

As we go to press this project has come to an end.. Over the course of the project, a strong partnership has developed between MAG Laos and World Vision. Both agencies have played a key role in ensuring target communities have their land cleared of UXO and receive the support they need to turn m² cleared into a positive development outcome.



More news and photos online at:
www.maginternational.org



'It is Like Life's Gift to me!'



Bounma clearing UXO from the ground's of a temple

Photo: MAG Laos

Regardless of gender, being a UXO Clearance Technician is hard work. The role is physically demanding and calls for high levels of concentration. By establishing two all-female clearance teams, MAG Laos is providing an opportunity for Laos women to demonstrate that they are as equally capable as their male counterparts when it comes to freeing the country from UXO contamination.

"Now each month I divide my salary into three portions: school for my children, food for my family and the rest I save as scholarship for when my children graduate from high school. My wish is for a bright future for my children."

Take for example Bouakham, who is a member of the all-female clearance team based in Xieng Khouang. She is 45 years old and comes from Naphia village, Phaxay District. It is MAG policy to work with local District and village authorities to select from the local population the poorest members of the community so as they can be trained and employed as Technicians. From a long list of applicants, Bouakham was selected. Her husband died in 2000, ever-since-when she has had to support her four children on her own through subsistence farming.

"I am enjoy working with my team members, they are very nice and helpful to each other. I will do my best to make land free from UXO" she says

"I was wondering when I saw the chief of village coming on his motorbike, followed by the MAG vehicle, if my dream was going to come true. After talking with the village chief I was finally informed that I was selected to be a Technician. The news was like a dream come true. It is like life's gift to me!" said Boukham.

At this time, 27% of MAG Laos' employees are female and we are always attempting to increase this number, as well as increasing the number of women in leadership/management roles.



Photo: MAG Laos

Bounma's team removed more than 200 items of UXO from this area of 19,537m² of agricultural land

Facts and figures	
Programme stats, July 2011 – September 2011	
Square meters cleared	1,995,347
Villages where clearance took place	21(districts 6, province 2)
UXO destroyed	2,633
Beneficiaries (clearance)	15,207

MAG Lao PDR's work is made possible through the generous support of the following donors:

