

Quarterly news roundup:

Two staff from MAG Sri Lanka helped to introduce HR software and bring our procedures and policies into line with other MAG offices in the region

Training provider Global Medic provided basic first aid training for all staff in May, conducted refresher trauma courses for MAG medics, revised medic bag contents and reviewed our standard operating procedures.

A new project with World Vision is expected to begin in the next quarter - funded by AusAID's LANGOCA programme

Tools are being developed for making gender-specific assessments of the impact of UXO, and of representation in the UXO action process

Community Liaison teams have had further training in facilitation and data gathering and have developed post clearance impact tools which will be tested in the next quarter

DFID has awarded MAG funding for a further three years. It will be used to provide UXO clearance support to marginalised rural communities and to enhance linkages with development partners to maximize post clearance impact

A grant from the US Department of State will be used to fund work at the scrap metal foundry in Phonsavanh later in the year – more on this innovative project in the next issue

If you would like further detail on any of the above please contact us

How digging less can help find more

MAG projects in Khammouane are running ahead of schedule, thanks largely to the use of CEIA MIL D1 Deep Search detectors.

These detectors are specifically designed to detect UXO rather than landmines and are now the primary type of detector MAG Lao is using. Compared to previous equipment, detection distance, soil compensation capability and immunity to external interference are all superior. Crucially, the detector can also 'filter out' metal objects smaller than the minimum clearance target set by the draft National standards for the sector. This reduces the number of detector readings that need to be investigated, thereby increasing clearance rates. To give an example from the US Department of State-financed project in Khammouane, MAG project teams previously averaged around 150m² of cleared land per detector per day. Since introducing the CEIA detector, clearance has increased to 300-400m² per detector per day – a huge improvement in efficiency.



Results of Uni-disc trial

Tests of vegetation cutter come to an end



Initially planned to be tested against another vegetation removal machine, the Uni-disc was instead trialled alongside manual vegetation clearance. 'This equipment shows potential for big clearance sites,' says Pascal Blasutto, who conducted the trial on a site in Khammouane measuring 500m x 800m. 'But on the type of sites that MAG is now working on, manual scrub clearance has proven to be more cost-effective and efficient,' he says. Flexibility is key for MAG, as our clearance teams currently require approximately 1.5 hectares of vegetation cleared per day across seven different sites.

Nonetheless MAG was pleased with the trials. 'We are always keen to explore new ways to increase efficiency, for the benefit of everyone in the sector,' says Jo Durham, Country Programme Manager. 'The results of the trial will be presented to the UXO technical working group soon and will be available to all interested parties. Thanks to the US Department of State and the US Army's Night Vision and Electronic Sensors Directorate for making this trial possible.'

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



Project highlights:

Support to UXO Lao Operations Houaphanh



Two Houaphanh-based UXO Lao staff, Mr. Khamthon and Mr. Sompick, have successfully passed the tests to become Senior Explosive Ordnance Disposal Technicians. This is positive validation of MAG's work to mentor and train staff in the province.

UXO action for sustainable community development (programme-wide funding)



In the first instance, the new DFID funds are being used for one clearance team in Xieng Khouang, continuing work carried out under the previous DFID-funded project. Work in Nong Khieung has now been completed, with 57,060 m² of land cleared. 76 BLU's (bombies) and 29 other items of UXO were found and destroyed, and large parts of the cleared land have already been planted with corn. Clearance at Nong Het Primary School has restarted, following the re-drawing of boundaries at the school. The surrounding area was very heavily bombed and in the first few days of clearance (at the end of June) huge amounts of metal were removed.

Village Assisted Clearance Ban Houay Dok Kham, Kham District, Xieng Khouang



The JOA clearance team has recently received further assistance from the Xieng Khouang all-female clearance team, which works flexibly between the various MAG projects in the province. In addition to the ongoing work clearing the village's agricultural land, the teams have been conducting 'roving' tasks in the surrounding area that were identified by the community liaison teams. In June a total of 18 roving tasks were conducted, destroying 66 items of UXO's in the process.

UXO clearance, pro-poor tourism and sustainable management Plain of Jars, Xieng Khouang



Two of the four jar sites (Ban Pakheo and Ban Nam Hom) have been completed. Clearance activities at the next jar site (Ban Song Hak) were postponed after the deaths of three villagers (from natural causes) caused the village to ask MAG to temporarily suspend clearance work in order that they could appease the spirits. Instead, work commenced in Ban Phai. As of mid-July, a total of 20 food security tasks have been completed in Ban Nam Hom, Ban Song Hak and Ban Phai.

Integrated UXO Clearance for sustainable outcomes in Khammouane Mahaxay district



The total clearance target has been achieved, with 238,688 m² being cleared. In fact, this represents 119 percent of the target. This includes five schools grounds in support of IRD's school programmes. A total of 42 areas have now officially been handed over with more planned in the next quarter – we are just waiting for the necessary signatures. MAG is liaising closely with WFP to provide clearance support to them over the next six months of the project.

Humanitarian UXO clearance Lang Khan Development Zone, Boulapha district



The EC teams have been primarily working in the Lang Khan development zone, focusing on both district government and community priorities. Land cleared by MAG is already being used – for example a hospital is currently under construction, which will provide improved health care access to local communities in the area.

Mine Risk Education Support provided to the National Regulatory Authority MRE team



Highlights from the last quarter included a visit of the NRA's MRE team to Cambodia, to see MRE materials in use there and to learn about the sector in that country. The MRE officer and advisor also attended a workshop on linking mine action with development. Back in Laos, a NRA MRE Materials Review Workshop, facilitated by MAG's MRE Advisor and the NRA MRE officer, made a start in identifying approaches required for the production of new materials.

The Partnership for Safe Educational Opportunities Boulapha, Mahaxay and Ngommalat districts



95 percent of the total clearance target of 600,000 m² has been achieved. MAG has cleared 16 schools to date, and is clearing small plots on (or close to) school sites for the development of vegetable plots and/or food production. With clearance ahead of schedule and completion of target clearance expected in August, the teams will be able to clear further school sites which were identified in December 2006 and provide additional support to WFP.

A word in your ear

Interview with Vilaphan Soukvilay, Team Leader, all-female clearance team, Khammouane

'There is a Lao proverb saying women are always one step behind men. It's not fair or true. Look at how we did today - we cleared more than 3,500 square metres of land and the male team only cleared 2000!

At first I was Team Leader in a mixed team. Sometimes it was hard to tell the men what to do, especially those who were older than me. I am much happier now I am in a female team. There is a good atmosphere and the women listen to me. We work very well together.

We have found UXO in the village school we are clearing, and also in the agricultural land. What's great about this job is that when we find UXO, we destroy it. It feels good to know we are making these villages safer.'

Interview by Alina Paul



MAG's female teams play a crucial role in enabling us to understand the perspectives of women living in UXO contaminated communities. Gender roles may mean that men and women are affected in different ways, and MAG must formulate effective responses for both.

Employing women, and proving their ability to undertake demanding work in difficult conditions, raises their status amongst the communities they come from, and encourages other employers to hire female staff.

Remember these faces

New people /new roles

All photos: MAG Lao



Mayouly Vongphit, Receptionist, previously worked at the Embassy of South Korea



Phetsavart Phangphong-phakdy, Support Services Manager, recently completed an MA in Higher Education Administration in the US



David Ghaznawi, Programme Officer, previously worked in Afghanistan for the Aga Khan Foundation



Vilaysack Paxaxay, Finance Manager, joins MAG after working at the US Embassy



Saveng Phengmany, Logistics Assistant, was previously employed by the French Red Cross



Khamphout Kanthapanya, Admin and Logistics Assistant, was previously MAG's receptionist

MAGazine is produced by:

MAG Lao, Ban Sithanneua, Vientiane, Lao PDR
Tel: +856 (0) 21 251 849 / 252 004
Fax: +856 (0) 21 217 505
Email: maglao@laopdr.com

All photos: Sean Sutton / MAG unless otherwise specified

www.mag.org.uk