

Quarterly news roundup:

In mid-August MAG's US-funded teams celebrated a milestone, having cleared one million square metres of land.

MAG's office on the high street in Phonsavanh has now become a dedicated 'UXO information centre' that provides information about UXO, MAG and its donors to tourists and other visitors. A new office has been established just outside the town centre.

In partnership with Armor Group, a MAG Team Field Manager will be seconded to UXO Lao in Savannakhet and Champasak.

In order to strengthen operations support at field level, new national operations positions have been created

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

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Time to talk

Gender study indicates how UXO prioritisation process can be improved

(photo: Mike Goldwater)

A gender study conducted by MAG Lao shows that while both men and women are satisfied with their community's decisions about which land to clear, there is room for increasing women's involvement in the process.

Single-sex focus groups were held in five villages where MAG had recently worked. All groups reported satisfaction with choices made by their community, except in one case where the MAG methodology had not been used.

However, surveys were also conducted which revealed that women participate less than men in the prioritisation process - 47% of women and 62% of men had attended the relevant community meetings. Even when women do attend such meetings, they often participate less actively than men and are more likely to listen than to contribute. Women often said that they felt 'too shy' to speak or that they 'did not dare to show their opinions' during the community meetings.

"This study has shown us how the prioritisation process can be improved," said Lisa Ognjanovic, MAG's Community Liaison Manager. "We will now introduce various measures that ensure that women's opinions are heard and taken into account."

High levels of participation by women are seen in the clearance process itself - equal numbers of male and female community members are hired as members of Village Assisted Clearance teams, while one third of MAG staff are women.

The study also examined gender in relation to UXO accident victims and their families, and in relation to working in the UXO sector in Laos. When finalised, the findings will be made widely available in order that the entire UXO sector can benefit from them. The next step will then be for MAG to partner with UXO Lao and extend the assessment to five provinces. The study was jointly funded by the US Department of State, Good Gifts and AMR (the Dutch arm of Adopt-a-Minefield), as part of the all-female clearance team project in Xieng Khouang.

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



Project highlights:

Humanitarian UXO clearance Lang Khan Development Zone, Boualapha district



Land in and around the newly created "Integrated Special Economic Zone" (ISEZ) located in Langkhang District is being cleared for food production, housing and district buildings. These buildings include a district health centre which has been under construction during the last quarter, on land cleared by MAG. The health centre is scheduled to be completed at the end of October. Overall progress against project targets remains good, with almost 80,000 m² cleared in September.

Integrated UXO Clearance for sustainable outcomes in Khammouane Mahaxay district



With progress ahead of schedule (and a need to wait for crops to be harvested before further work can be done), clearance activities during the last quarter focused on two roads and a well for WFP, undertaken to improve food security. An additional four school sites were cleared for the 'Partnership for Safe Educational Opportunities' project. Testing of a risk assessment methodology, developed by the NRA and MAG, also began. MAG clearance tasks were evaluated against a risk assessment table designed by the NRA. Following analysis of the results, a re-test will take place in the near future.

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



Work is almost complete on the MRE (Mine Risk Education) message development project. This 10-week project, funded by UNICEF and undertaken in conjunction with the NRA, has developed new MRE messages and materials to be used nationwide. Community workshops were held in Xieng Khouang and Khammouane in order to develop the messages. Radio spots in three languages and posters will be pre-tested before production. Meanwhile, the national strategy for MRE will be approved soon, and a review of the proposed national standards for MRE will be carried out in mid-November.

Support to UXO Lao Operations Houaphanh



The MAG TA team continues to train, mentor and advise staff to effect gradual and sustainable change. A particular focus of current capacity building efforts is compliance with standard operating procedures. As a result there is now greater understanding of SOPs and the reasons why strict compliance is necessary. The TA team are making regular quality control checks. Magnetometer training was conducted in September for both MAG and UXO Lao staff. Two magnetometers will be used by UXO Lao in Houaphanh next year (MAG will also use one in Khammouane).

Female EOD Clearance Team Xieng Khouang Province, Lao PDR (co-funded by Good Gifts and AMR)



All but one of the 15 women in the team were newly recruited and trained for this project. The last quarter has therefore been spent working alongside experienced team members from the JOA team. Average daily output has improved from 176 m² (July) to 604 m² per day (September) – the team is now hitting its stride. The team will now start to work independently, providing UXO clearance for development partners WFP and the Lao Red Cross. The clearance tasks will be mainly related to food security.

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



Clearance has now been completed at Nong Het primary school, where 41 items of UXO were located and destroyed in the last quarter alone (including 13 bombies, a white phosphorus grenade round and a 750 pound bomb). Over 25,000 individual detector readings were investigated. A 4km-long WFP access road to Ban Phavene has also been completed, under difficult working conditions. Clearance is currently underway on another WFP access road that leads to Ban Kha Bor. Land has also been cleared for a Lao Red Cross project that will install toilets, water pipes and water tanks for the Lao Red Cross.

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



After activities were completed in Ban Phai the team moved to Ban Na O (Jar Site 1). The jar site itself was cleared under the previous MAG Plain of Jars project (2004). Under the current project, an additional 20,000 m² of the village's land will be cleared to enhance food security. Following clearance, the land will be used to grow cassava, sweet potatoes and rice.

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



This project has now been completed. A full report will be available early next year, but to give an idea of the scale of contamination at the site, during September alone an average of 3.7 pieces of metal were found for every square metre cleared. All the agricultural land in the village has now been cleared and the community can farm safely.

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



The HDI teams continue to perform very well and have passed the project's initial objectives, clearing a total of 854,311m² (142% of the target). The teams are now operational in all three target districts. September was a productive month, with clearance activities carried out in 22 school sites (with 19 fully completed). Both school grounds and school gardens were cleared, so that schools can plant their own vegetables. Nine identified emergency UXO clearance tasks (roving tasks) were completed.

A word in your ear

Interview with David Hayter, Organisational Development Adviser

David Hayter has worked for MAG in six countries over seven years, and worked for MAG Lao between 2000-2001. His current role, as Organisational Development Adviser, is to 'localise' the MAG Lao programme and reduce reliance on international staff.

"Part of the role of international agencies is to develop human resources. MAG Lao has many staff with good potential and it is the right time for us to encourage them to work at more senior levels.

MAG Cambodia represents an aspirational role model for MAG Lao – the programme is entirely managed on a day-to-day basis by Cambodians. There are 500 Cambodian staff and three international staff. All the Field Managers are Cambodian.

The process of increasing Lao ownership of the programme will begin with involving all staff – including international staff - in identifying the competencies required to do their job.

Then we will devise a simple method of measuring if these are being reached. If they are, confidence will be boosted, and if not, we will identify gaps that can be filled with training or capacity building.

Confidence is what is important in this process. Individuals need to be confident in themselves and in their managers. And the organisation must be confident in the Lao programme so that we can localise it.

"We want to build in success; we don't want to build in failure."



Remember these faces

New people /new roles

All photos: MAG Lao



Soth Phommalin, Provincial Programme Manager, Xieng Khouang. Soth was previously Office Manager in Xieng Khouang



Lin Syphavong, Communications Assistant, Vientiane. Lin was previously field assistant in Houaphanh



Noymani Phialeuxai, driver, Xieng Khouang all-female team. Noymani is MAG Lao's first ever female driver



Bounyot Chantanavong, Office Manager, Xieng Khouang. Bounyot was previously Field Assistant in Xieng Khouang

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