

UXO Sector Progress Report 2021 (as of 3rd of November 2021)

Name of Sector Working Group: Unexploded Ordnance (UXO)

SWG Chair and Co-Chairs:

- Minister of Labour and Social welfare (Chair)
- UNDP Resident Representative (co-Chair) and Ambassador of the United States of America to Lao PDR (co-Chair)

SWG Secretariat Focal Points:

- Government Officials: Chomyaeng Phengthongsawat, Director General of the NRA
- Development Partners: Catherine Phuong (DRR), UNDP; US Embassy

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Overview of Sector Performance in 2021

Sector outputs and activities	Progress	Challenges and opportunities
A. Sectoral thematic (substantive) areas		
1. Actions/activities relating to the RTM key recommendations as per Annex 1 (for most relevant recommendations only)		
There was no RTM conducted in 2020 due to COVID 19	<p>There has been good progress in enhancing the understanding of the UXO sector’s needs in prioritization of the Confirmed Hazardous Areas (CHAs) to be cleared. The actual UXO Sector prioritization CHA methodology is still in progress as the subject matter is problematic as it has to be managed from a centralized regulatory perspective, but still be able to encompass the regional nuances of implementation.</p> <p>The National Implementation Measure in line with the Article 9 of the Convention on Cluster Munitions legislation have moved forward and made good progress through consultative workshops. The Government is currently in the process of drafting Decree on UXO Regulatory and the Decree is expected to be approved in 2022.</p>	<p>Challenge/opportunity: We therefore need to develop a risk management approach in work-planning through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Risk Identification at all levels of implementation. • Risk Prioritization by ranking the risks according to their likelihood of occurring and the potential negative impact on the work-plan. The highest scoring risks should then be clearly

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	<p>Coordination with UNDP to draft the new UXO National Strategic Plan, “Safe Path Forward III” (2021-2030) has taken place since 2020. The strategy will form the basis on which the 5-Year UXO Sector Action Plan is developed and we must ensure that UXO is mainstreamed across all sectors through the nationally endorsed SDG-18, ‘Lives Safe from UXO’. The UXO contamination in Lao PDR is a cross-cutting issue that can delay the achievement of multiple SDGs, impact the poorest communities and hinder development initiatives.</p> <p>The inclusion of the specific UXO Output in the draft structure of the 9th NSEDP is something that the UXO Sector community have been requesting for a number of years. The UXO issue requires the attention of all stakeholders at different levels and needs to be considered from the earliest planning phases onwards. After a detailed consultation with our partners, UXO Sector became a stand-alone ‘UXO Pillar’ in the 9th NSEDP.</p>	<p>identified as either drivers of work-plan objectives, or as threats to initiatives.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Risk Mitigation of the prioritized risks, through a mitigation plan that outlines what will be done to prevent or minimize the likelihood, and/or what would be done in the future to minimize its impact if the risk occurs. ● Risk Monitoring by regularly reviewing the risks and to update the mitigation plans. ● During lockdowns, working from home modalities are feasible for management functions, but UXO survey and clearance operations require presence on the ground. <p>Opportunities: The new UXO national strategy will be a launchpad to make the next 10 years of the sector a success moving into a decade of action to achieve the 9th NSEDP and SDGs. A clear prioritisation strategy is the best tool to make the case for the UXO Sector in the Lao PDR, and to increase the level of funding. The ongoing survey leads to better identified clearance needs, and it greatly improves the possibility of additional funding for clearance operations.</p> <p>With more efficient survey and clearance methodologies, the UXO sector can really make a difference in the next decade with greater prioritisation of clearance efforts. The</p>

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		humanitarian clearance capacity has increased and will increase further in 2022 with the support from the Republic of Korea (KOICA Phase III project).
2. Other substantive actions/activities relating to overall sectoral strategies, if applicable, to support the finalization and implementation of the 9th NSEDP		
<p>2a. Explosive Ordnances Risk Education (EORE)</p>	<p>In 2021, in collaboration with the Ministry of Education and Sports, we have reached an important milestone with the completion of the primary school component, the fact that UXO Risk Education curriculum has been integrated into the Science and Environment textbooks for Grades 1 to 5. It enables the sustainability of these risk education activities but it also allows to reach more girls and boys in the Lao PDR. The UXO Sector will continue the good work with secondary schools, and also trying to reach more young people through non-formal education centers, Village Education Development Committees (VEDCs) and youth volunteers.</p> <p>820 hats were produced and distributed to 5 provincial radio stations (Vientiane Capital, Khammouane, Sekong, Salavan and Champasack) to be distributed during the Q&A games of the UXO radio broadcast.</p> <p>500 sets of 6 different UXO/EORE posters were printed and distributed to NRA provincial offices and village volunteers in Borlikhamxay and Salavan provinces for their MRE activities.</p> <p>In addition, 1,193 MRE visits were carried out in 435 villages, benefiting 123,993 people, of which 61,754 were women.</p>	<p>Challenge: Some provinces no longer conduct full EORE activities (due to lack of funding), e.g. Luang Prabang. COVID19 pandemic has put the restrictions, in particular, on the mass-gathering (limited number of participants), travel bans and social distancing rules and limited in-person RE activities as a result. The number of UXO casualties has been increased this year compared to the previous years (24 in 2019 and 25 in 2020).</p> <p>Opportunities: There are opportunities for further integration of EORE into secondary school curriculums, as well as opportunities for expand radio stations into 2 additional provinces (Xaisomboun and Vientiane) in total of 7 provinces. COVID19 restriction opened up the opportunities for virtual meetings and online campaigns utilizing national TV and various social media channels. EORE teams including radio stations can provide information to communities in case of emergency, in addition to their usual UXO awareness raising, as they did on COVID 19</p>

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		preventive measures, the need for physical distancing, and how to provide home care.
2b. Survey and Clearance	<p>The proactive survey efforts with a systematic village by village approach need to be continued as a key planning for clearance.</p> <p>There should be survey before clearance, but taking into account the growing backlog of Confirmed Hazardous Areas (CHAs) to be cleared in Laos it means that now clearance needs to be prioritized.</p> <p>By October 2021, 747 CHAs, equivalent to 11,664 ha of land, were identified. This is equivalent to 23% of the annual target of 50,000ha and has been entered into the IMSMA UXO National Database. The NRA, coordinating with all UXO operators, oversaw and conducted quality assurance of UXO clearance on 2,595 ha, equivalent to 26% of the annual target of 10,000 ha. 49,819 items of UXO were destroyed through roving tasks and area clearance, 38,737 of which were cluster munitions.</p>	<p>Challenge: The need and annual target for survey and clearance was not met by the current resources, to mitigate this risk the UXO Sector is developing a planning and prioritisation system. COVID 19 restriction has also an impact to the achievement of S&C target.</p> <p>Opportunities: Opportunities include the potential use of a new electronic data collection mechanism and the development of the new UXO prioritisation plan.</p> <p>For the evidence-based survey methodology, national standards should be revised. This would ensure consistency in implementation.</p>
2c. Victim Assistance (VA)	<p>The NRA, with the support from donor countries, provided support to 32 UXO victims and survivors in 2021, including medical care for 25 people, metal rehabilitation 4 and physical rehabilitation 4 people.</p> <p>The sector has continued to develop the draft the new 5-year (2021-2025) UXO VA framework which will aim to provide more comprehensive support to UXO survivors and their families over the next 5 year period and will seek to prioritise the needs of those survivors with the most urgent mental health problems and create community-based peer to peer support groups. The development process has been paused this year. However, once the new UXO National Strategic Plan and CCM decree are finalized, the 5 year UXO VA framework will be finalized too to align with the relevant national strategy and decree.</p>	<p>Challenges: The main challenge in this area is the limited available financial support and human resources. After signing the MoU with KOICA on VA in Xiengkouang and Huaphan provinces, a needs assessment has been conducted.</p> <p>Access to rehabilitative services for UXO survivors is also a great challenge, with limited awareness of available resources and with many survivors living in rural areas that are difficult to access.</p>

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		<p>Opportunities: KOICA’s bilateral cooperation with the NRA on VA will expand the role and strengthen the capacity of NRA on VA. The law to implement the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities is an opportunity, as well as the new policy being drafted to implement this law. The finalisation of the new 5-year VA strategy is also an opportunity.</p>
<p>B. Communication and outreach activities with the sector and across Sector Working Groups</p>		
<p>Communication and outreach activities</p>	<p>The UXO sector is structured and coordinated under the leadership of the NRA. Each year there are: two NRA Board Meetings, two UXO Sector Working Group meetings, two UXO Project Board Meeting (UNDP), regular IP meetings (NRA, donors and operators) and four UXO Technical Working Groups meetings (TWGs) for each of the following working groups: survey and clearance, EORE, VA and information management (IM).</p> <p>By October 2021, the following TWGs were held: three EORE, two survey and clearance, two VA, and two IM.</p> <p>An operational Dashboard is regularly produced, updated and made available on the NRA website www.nra.gov.la.</p> <p>The NRA has developed and published the UXO Sector Annual Report 2020, also available in the NRA website. This reference document is appreciated by many UXO sector stakeholders, including donors.</p> <p>A UXO promotional video was also published both in Lao and English in 2021, and broadcast in Lao language on national TV, in English language on UNDP’s social media channels, and publicised by partners such as the Government of Norway. It has recorded more than 63K views within a month and is expected to raise awareness of UXO issues in Lao PDR.</p>	<p>Challenges: This was a challenging year for the NRA to implement its activities as planned due to the COVID 19 pandemic and in particular, the restrictions on the mass-gathering (limited number of participants), travel bans and social distancing rules. This continues to be a challenge for the sector as opportunities for in-person communication are limited. With many UXO operators and the NRA provincial and district offices being located in rural areas with often times limited internet access, communication efforts remain a challenge.</p> <p>Submission of reports by the UXO operators to the NRA is needed in the sector to better communication between these organisations.</p> <p>Opportunities: The International Cooperation and Treaty Support Unit conducted a meeting in 2021 to discuss the MOU via ZOOM and to ensure better alignment with government regulations. This is an opportunity for greater</p>

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		coordination between the NRA, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the UXO operators in 2021.
C. Cross-sectoral thematic areas applied to all SWGs		
<p>1. Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation (in accordance to VDCAP 2016-2025) (Only narrative on each principles)</p>	<p>UXO sector progress was made on the Vientiane Declaration principles, in particular:</p> <p>I. Ownership- government planning, prioritisation and government-led initiatives (humanitarian teams of the Lao People’s Army). UXO Lao operations were strengthened and enhanced over the past year. The NRA’s capacity was enhanced in 2021, resulting in better overall coordination and management of the UXO sector.</p> <p>II. Alignment- all UXO sector stakeholders continue to align their efforts to the UXO sector priorities. With the drafting of the new UXO long-term strategy commencing in 2021, all stakeholders have worked together to ensure alignment with the new 9th NSEDP, sector work plans, SDG18 and local socio-economic development plans.</p> <p>III. Harmonisation & Simplification- UXO national standards have been strengthened to allow for greater harmonisation and simplification and these standards continued to be disseminated through the NRA website.</p> <p>IV. Inclusive Partnership for Development Results- multiple organisations play complementary roles to achieve UXO sector goals (example: collaboration on MRE activities, survey and clearance and VA activities).</p> <p>V. Transparency, Predictability, and Mutual Accountability- the NRA continues to strengthen monitoring and oversight functions, quality management and enhanced information management collection and validation. The NRA has upgraded its website and more regularly uploads meeting minutes, reports and news events, increasingly the transparency of its work and the progress of the sector.</p>	<p>Challenges: There is currently no funding predictability in the sector.</p> <p>Opportunities: Increasing focus on greater and more inclusive partnerships, bringing private sector parties on board, regional partners, civil society organisations and other related stakeholders.</p> <p>Further opportunities in 2022 include: enhanced transparency and mutual accountability with stakeholders in the sector, strengthen long term sustainability of the sector through for instance establishment of NTC, building national capacity on demining, domestic resource mobilisation, further harmonisation and simplification of processes and systems and south-south triangular cooperation.</p>

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	<p>VI. Domestic Resource Mobilization- the Lao PDR government continues to support the UXO sector.</p> <p>VII. South-South Cooperation, Triangular Cooperation, and Knowledge Sharing- as mentioned above.</p> <p>VIII. Business as a Partner in Development- there are more than 25 UXO commercial companies that conduct clearance activities in Lao PDR, regulated by the NRA. These commercial companies have begun attending clearance TWG meetings, increasing the cooperation between the Government and these companies.</p>	
<p>2. Innovation and technology</p>	<p>One of the most innovative practices in humanitarian and or development is probably the use of innovation and technology e.g. animal (dog) or drones, including in the UXO and humanitarian demining sector. Their applications are numerous, and more are identified all the time.</p> <p>This year, UXO Lao, as the largest operator in Lao PDR, plans to upgrade its detector equipment Vallon VMH4-VS30 to improve operational efficiency. In addition, the use of new technologies e.g dog and drones, have been discussed in the clearance TWGs this year.</p>	<p>Challenges: Innovation is needed within the sector, e.g. electronic data collection, new survey and clearance technologies, animal and drones etc. However, there is limited capacity of staff within the sector (quantity and quality) to adopt and utilize new innovation and technology.</p> <p>Opportunities: There are more technologies available at regional and global level; further experiments can be conducted through regional exchange and information sharing.</p> <p>In the case of Laos, geographical conditions, such as high levels of dense vegetation/plants, have been identified as major obstacles to the use of appropriate technology such as 1) the 'UXO/Mine clearance tool-box' where the vegetation is less dense such as Xiengkhouang and Borlikhamxay provinces, 2) the planned Mine Clearance operations like in Huaphan</p>

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		province, and 3) a useful monitoring and evaluation tool with documentation of land use, before and after clearance.
3. Promoting gender equality and women’s empowerment and accelerating the adoption and implementation of the National Youth Policy	Some UXO operators has hiring gender consultants within their offices in 2021 to train their staff on how to better mainstream gender within their UXO activities and planning.	<p>Challenges: There is limited capacity within the sector of qualified gender experts who could assist the sector in their improvement of gender mainstreaming efforts.</p> <p>Opportunities: Funds could be secured to implement the UXO Gender Mainstreaming Manual, which was developed by UN Women with the support of the Canadian Fund for Local Initiatives in 2018.</p>

Way forward for 2022:

- Conduct MRE in 540 villages.
- Conduct area clearance of 7,500 hectares.
- Conduct Non-Technical Survey in 540 villages to identify UXO evident points.
- Conduct Technical Survey to identify CHA of 37,500 hectares.
- Launching and Dissemination of the new National Strategic Plan for the UXO Sector “Safe Path Forward III” (2021-2030).
- Dissemination of Decree on UXO Regulatory.
- Workshop on UXO sector prioritization work plan for 2023.
- Workshop on the improvement of UXO sector coordination in Laos 2022.
- Improving the UXO National Training Center.
- Develop a funding/resource mobilization strategy for the UXO sector.
- A workshop to review the UXO National Standards.
- A donor field visit is planned for 2022 as a method of garnering greater support to the sector.
- Implementation of the following newly funded projects in 2022.
- Development of Five Years UXO Action Plan 2022-2026.