

NATIONAL CONSULTATIVE MEETING

Lao PDR | 28 February 2023

To Promote the Establishment of Regional Victim Assistance Network

under the project

*Enhance Victim Assistance Programme
in the ASEAN Member States*



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The ASEAN Regional Mine Action Center (ARMAC) extends its sincere gratitude to the Government of the Republic of Korea for its generous financial support through the ASEAN-Korea Cooperation Fund (AKCF), which made this National Consultative Meeting possible. This meeting and the broader “Enhance Victim Assistance Programme in the ASEAN Member States” project are a testament to their commitment to addressing the humanitarian impact of explosive ordnance in the region.

ARMAC also expresses its profound appreciation to the Government of Lao PDR, particularly the Office of National Regulatory Authority for UXO/Mine Action Sector (NRA), for their collaboration in co-hosting and organizing this crucial event. Their active involvement and logistical support were instrumental in bringing together key national stakeholders.

We would like to acknowledge the valuable contributions of the technical partners and stakeholders who participated in the National Consultative Meeting. These include representatives from government ministries and agencies, national mine action authorities and centers, international and national non-governmental organizations, bilateral donors including the Korean Development Partner-AKCF and AKPMT, UN agencies such as UNDP, and research and academic institutions. Their diverse perspectives and active engagement in the discussions were essential for advancing the objectives of establishing a Regional Victim Assistance Network (VAN).

Special thanks are extended to Mr. Chomyaeng Phengthongsawat, Director General of the NRA, and Mr. Byung Seok Yoo, Minister-Counsellor of the Embassy of the Republic of Korea in Lao PDR, for their insightful opening remarks and continued support. We also thank Mr. Prum Suonpraseth, Executive Director of ARMAC, for his leadership and vision for regional cooperation in victim assistance.

Finally, we deeply appreciate the participation of explosive ordnance survivors, Mr. Kamsy Xayaboud and Mr. Joc Xaysombounkham, who bravely shared their personal experiences, highlighting the critical needs and importance of victim assistance efforts. Their voices are a powerful reminder of the human cost of explosive ordnance and the urgency of our work.

ARMAC also acknowledges the support of its dedicated staff members who contributed to the planning and execution of this meeting.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A National Consultative Meeting on Promoting the Establishment of a Regional Victim Assistance Network (VAN) was held in Vientiane Capital, Lao PDR, on 28 February 2023. The meeting was organized by the ASEAN Regional Mine Action Center (ARMAC) in collaboration with the Office of National Regulatory Authority for UXO/Mine Action Sector in Lao PDR (NRA), with financial support from the Government of the Republic of Korea through the ASEAN-Korea Cooperation Fund. This meeting was the fifth and final in a series of national consultations across Explosive Ordnance (EO) affected ASEAN Member States (AMS) aimed at fostering the creation of a regional platform for victim assistance.

The primary purpose of the meeting was to bring together relevant national networks and stakeholders, particularly those directly involved in supporting EO victims, to discuss the implementation of victim assistance services and explore the potential for widening the national network towards the establishment of a Regional VAN. Discussions were guided by International Mine Action Standard (IMAS) 13.10 and an integrated approach to victim assistance. Over 50 participants, including representatives from government ministries, national mine action authorities, NGOs, donors, UN agencies, and academia, as well as EO survivors, attended the meeting in person and online.

Key discussions focused on sharing knowledge, best practices, and challenges in victim assistance implementation in Lao PDR. Participants also engaged in group discussions to map out potential roles, responsibilities, coordination, and communication mechanisms for the Regional VAN. The meeting provided valuable country-level inputs that will be incorporated into an initial draft of the Regional VAN Blueprint, including its Terms of Reference and Communication Mechanism.

Key outcomes:

- **Shared understanding of the necessity for a Regional VAN** to integrate victim assistance at a regional level, share knowledge, raise funds, and address challenges in VA.
- **Identification of existing national mechanisms, strategies, laws, and policies** in Lao PDR that support victim assistance activities, with the NRA serving as a key coordinating body.
- **Recognition of the importance of data collection** on EO victims and persons with disabilities as a crucial element for effective planning and resource allocation.
- **Highlighting the need for capacity building** for national stakeholders in areas such as inclusive education, rehabilitation, and psychosocial support.
- **Emphasis on the importance of coordination and information sharing** among government agencies, local authorities, and victim assistance operators.
- **Acknowledgement of funding constraints** as a significant challenge in implementing victim assistance programs.
- **Expression of commitment from national stakeholders** to contribute to the establishment and functioning of the Regional VAN.
- **Collection of inputs on potential roles, responsibilities, structure, and communication mechanisms** for the Regional VAN.

These outcomes will inform the development of the Regional VAN Blueprint, which will be further refined at a subsequent regional workshop.

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Project Overview and Context



Southeast Asia continues to grapple with the devastating consequences of explosive ordnance (EO) contamination, a lingering legacy of past armed conflicts. This widespread contamination remains a significant threat to millions of people, particularly in the ASEAN region, where five member states — Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand, and Viet Nam — face some of the highest levels of contamination. The persistent presence of mines, unexploded ordnance (UXO), cluster munitions, and other explosive remnants of war (ERW) places communities at constant risk of deadly explosions, resulting in fatalities, injuries, and lasting disabilities.

The impact of EO on individuals extends beyond the immediate physical harm, affecting the victims' psychological, social, and economic well-being. Many survivors are left with permanent physical disabilities, which often prevent them from participating fully in daily life, work, and community activities. Furthermore, the stigma associated with disabilities in certain cultural contexts can lead to social marginalization and economic exclusion. In countries where disability inclusion is insufficient, the situation is even more dire, as victims are often denied the support and opportunities they need to regain autonomy and dignity.

Recognizing these challenges and the critical gaps in victim support across the region, the ASEAN Member States (AMS) have partnered with the ASEAN Regional Mine Action Center (ARMAC) to launch the "Enhance Victim Assistance Program in the ASEAN Member States." This initiative, funded by the Government of the Republic of

Korea through the ASEAN-Korean Cooperation Fund (AKCF), aims to improve victim assistance and promote the inclusion of EO survivors in social, economic, and political life. Since its inception in January 2021, this program has been working to strengthen national and regional frameworks for victim assistance, aligning with international standards and practices. Scheduled for completion in June 2024, the project aims to establish long-term, sustainable mechanisms that will enhance victim support and integrate the needs of survivors across the ASEAN region.

1.2. Objectives of the Report

This report aims to comprehensively capture the proceedings, key discussions, and outcomes of the National Consultative Meeting held in Lao PDR on 28 February 2023. The primary objective is to document the national-level consultations, synthesizing input gathered from a broad spectrum of stakeholders regarding the establishment of a Regional Victim Assistance Network (VAN). By providing an in-depth overview of the meeting's deliberations, this report will serve as a pivotal resource to inform the ongoing development of the Regional VAN Blueprint, its associated documents, and the strategic direction of victim assistance efforts in the ASEAN region.

1.3. Link to Broader Project Timeline

The National Consultative Meeting in Lao PDR represents a key milestone within the broader timeline of the "Enhance Victim Assistance Programme in the ASEAN Member States" project. As the fifth and final national consultation in a series of meetings conducted across the most EO-affected ASEAN Member States, this event plays a critical role in consolidating insights and recommendations from diverse national stakeholders. The valuable inputs collected will directly contribute to the subsequent regional consultation phase, culminating in a regional workshop where the Regional VAN Blueprint will be finalized, setting the foundation for its operationalization and ensuring a coherent, integrated approach to victim assistance across the region.

2. BACKGROUND

2.1. ERW/Mine Context in Lao PDR

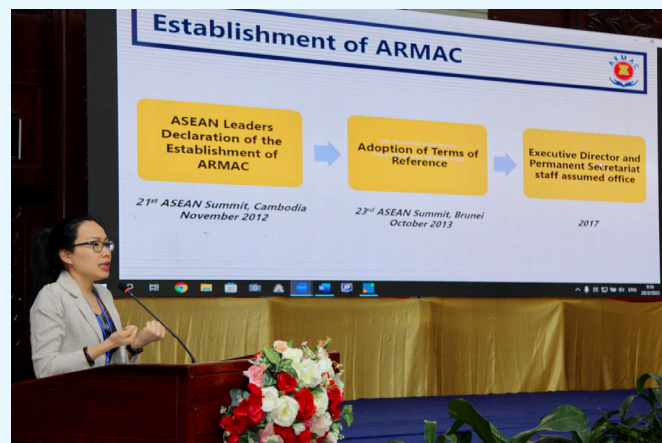
Lao PDR is recognized as one of the countries most heavily contaminated by Explosive Remnants of War (ERW), including unexploded ordnance (UXO), as a result of extensive bombing campaigns between 1964 and 1973. Over two million tons of ordnance were dropped on the country, with a significant percentage failing to detonate. This widespread contamination continues to pose a severe threat to communities, resulting in over 50,000 casualties since 1964. The presence of UXO not only endangers lives but also hinders economic development by restricting land use and creating fear and insecurity.

2.2. Project Inception and Purpose

The “Enhance Victim Assistance Programme in the ASEAN Member States” project was initiated based on the identified needs for support to EO victims highlighted at a regional workshop in November 2018. The project aims to enhance assistance to victims of EO in ASEAN through the achievement of five key objectives:

- Promote the establishment of a victim assistance network as a regional platform for various stakeholders among ASEAN.
- Assist the ASEAN Member States on victim-assistance-related knowledge sharing, needs and resource assessment, and the possibility of its mobilization.
- Assess the needs of the victims of ERW in the affected AMS for further assistance.
- Assist the ASEAN Member States in providing psychosocial support to the victims of ERW.
- Conduct research regarding ERW Victim Assistance Inclusive Services in Cambodia, as well as Community Perspectives of Humanitarian Mine Action in Lao PDR and Viet Nam.

A central focus of the project is promoting the establishment of a Regional Victim Assistance Network (VAN) to strengthen coordination and support for EO victims across the ASEAN region.



2.3. ARMAC's Mandate and Involvement

The Victim Assistance Project aligns directly with ARMAC's second and third mandates and functions:

- **Facilitating appropriate medical and rehabilitation assistance for the victims of ERW, upon request from the affected ASEAN Member States (AMS).**
- **Assisting AMS in research and knowledge sharing on the effects of ERW and efforts to address them, including through writing proposals for technical assistance projects and funding, at their specific and individual request.**

ARMAC is working closely with various stakeholders, including national focal points, government agencies, UN agencies, national and international organizations, and research institutions, to achieve the project's objectives. The National Consultative Meeting in Lao PDR is a key activity in exploring the potential to broaden the VAN both within the country and at the regional level. ARMAC's Executive Director emphasized the importance of multisector efforts for victim assistance in achieving the establishment of the Regional VAN.

3. MEETING OVERVIEW



3.1. Objectives

The National Consultative Meeting in Lao PDR aimed to promote the establishment of a Regional Victim Assistance Network (VAN). Specifically, the objectives were to:

- Share best practices and challenges on services for victim assistance implementation in Lao PDR in areas of data management and collection, intensive and ongoing medical care, physical rehabilitation, psychosocial support, socio-economic integration/education, and laws and policies and enabling environments.
- Further discuss the promotion of the establishment of the Regional Victim Assistance Network (VAN).
- Collect inputs on roles and responsibilities, including coordination mechanisms of related stakeholders participating in the national VA network and its contribution to the regional level, through group discussions and presentations.

3.2. Date, Time, and Venue

The National Consultative Meeting was held on Tuesday, **28 February 2023**, at **Hall B, level 2, Don Chan Palace Hotel & Convention, Vientiane Capital, Lao PDR**. The program commenced in the morning and concluded in the late afternoon.

3.3. Format

The meeting was conducted in a **hybrid format**, with participants attending both in person and online. Simultaneous translation into the national official language was provided for in-person attendees. The agenda included opening remarks, presentations by government and non-government stakeholders, a “Voice of Victims” session, group discussions, and closing remarks.

3.4. Opening Ceremony Summary



The opening ceremony was facilitated by a Master of Ceremony (MC) who welcomed all participants and provided an overview of the meeting's objectives and agenda. Welcoming and opening remarks were delivered by key dignitaries:

- **Mr. Chomyaeng Phengthongsawat, Director General of the NRA**, expressed gratitude to the Embassy of the Republic of Korea and ARMAC, highlighted Lao PDR's status as one of the most UXO-affected countries, and emphasized the importance of clearance and victim assistance for economic development. He noted the existing cooperation mechanisms in Lao PDR and looked forward to the extension of the network of UXO support.



- **Mr. Byung Seok Yoo, Minister-Counsellor of the Embassy of the Republic of Korea in Lao PDR**, congratulated the organizers on holding the meeting, recognized the threat posed by UXO in rural areas, and affirmed the importance of victim assistance for mental and social well-being and regional development. He highlighted Korea's past experience with landmines and KOICA's significant contributions to the UXO sector in Lao PDR



- **Mr. Prum Suonpraseth, Executive Director of ARMAC**, conveyed sincere gratitude to the Government of the Republic of Korea and NRA Lao PDR. He noted ARMAC's operational journey and emphasized the ongoing threat of ERW and the crucial role of multisector efforts in establishing the Regional Victim Assistance Network. He encouraged participants to share experiences and address challenges in victim assistance for the benefit of all ASEAN countries.



Following the opening remarks, a group photo was taken.

4. PARTICIPANTS



4.1 Total Number of Participants

The National Consultative Meeting in Lao PDR brought together a diverse group of **53 participants**, including **18 female attendees**, representing a wide range of sectors and expertise. These participants came from various government ministries, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), international organizations, and local institutions involved in mine action, victim assistance, and disability inclusion. The meeting's inclusive participation reflects the broad interest and commitment from both national and regional stakeholders to address the needs of explosive ordnance (EO) victims and contribute to the establishment of the Regional Victim Assistance Network (VAN). The active engagement of all attendees underscored the collective dedication to finding sustainable solutions for victim assistance within the ASEAN region.

4.2 Stakeholder Groups

Participants represented a diverse range of institutions and organizations actively engaged in victim assistance efforts. The multi-sectoral composition of the meeting reflected the collaborative nature required to effectively address the needs of explosive ordnance (EO) survivors. The key stakeholder groups included:

- **Government Ministries and Agencies**
Representatives from relevant national ministries and departments responsible for social welfare, health, rehabilitation, planning, and coordination of disability-related services.
- **National Mine Action Authority and Center**
The National Regulatory Authority for the UXO/ Mine Action Sector (NRA) of Lao PDR participated as the lead national agency responsible for coordination of mine action activities.



- **International and National Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs)**

Various humanitarian and development organizations contributed their perspectives and shared experiences related to victim assistance, rehabilitation, and community-based support services.

- **United Nations Agencies**

UN agencies such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) were recognized for their technical engagement and long-standing contributions to mine action, inclusive development, and capacity building in the region.

- **Dialogue Partner – Korean Development Partner**

The ASEAN-Korea Cooperation Fund (AKCF), together with the ASEAN-Korea Project Management Team (AKPMT), was acknowledged as a key dialogue partner and donor supporting the “Enhance Victim Assistance Programme in the ASEAN Member States.”

- **Research and Academic Institutes**

Institutions involved in evidence-based research, higher education, and professional training contributed technical expertise and policy-relevant insights to support victim assistance programming.

4.3. Geographic Representation

The National Consultative Meeting was predominantly focused on the national context of Lao PDR, gathering stakeholders who are actively working within the country. This approach ensured that the discussions were directly relevant to Lao PDR’s specific challenges, needs, and opportunities regarding explosive ordnance (EO) victim assistance. At the same time, the meeting was framed within the broader regional context of establishing an ASEAN-wide Victim Assistance Network (VAN), highlighting the critical link between national experiences and the wider regional effort to enhance victim support. The integration of local insights into the larger ASEAN framework was emphasized, ensuring that Lao PDR’s contributions to the development of the Regional VAN were clearly aligned with regional objectives.

4.4 Attendance Mode

To ensure broad participation and inclusion, the meeting was held in a hybrid format, allowing attendees to participate both in person and online. This format proved essential in overcoming potential travel restrictions, enabling stakeholders from across the country and region to engage in the discussions. The flexibility of the hybrid format ensured that those unable to attend in person could still actively contribute to the meeting, thus fostering a more inclusive and comprehensive dialogue on victim assistance.

5. TECHNICAL AND THEMATIC DISCUSSIONS



The technical sessions of the National Consultative Meeting were designed to provide in-depth insights into the national perspectives on victim assistance (VA) in Lao PDR, with a particular focus on an integrated approach. These sessions facilitated robust discussions on the availability of victim assistance services, the challenges faced in providing these services, and the roles and responsibilities of various stakeholders involved in victim support. Presentations from government agencies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and other key partners provided a holistic view of the existing efforts, ensuring that discussions were well-rounded and covered a range of practical, policy, and operational considerations.

5.1. Overview of National VA Programmes and Services

The session was structured to offer a comprehensive overview of the victim assistance programs and services currently available in Lao PDR. Presentations were delivered by both government and non-governmental stakeholders, offering insights into the scope, objectives, and impact of existing programs. Government representatives outlined the roles of ministries

and agencies, detailing their efforts in providing medical, rehabilitation, psychosocial, and socio-economic services to explosive ordnance (EO) victims. Meanwhile, NGOs shared their complementary work, focusing on grassroots-level interventions, awareness-raising activities, and community-based rehabilitation initiatives. The session also provided an opportunity to highlight gaps in service delivery, with discussions exploring how an integrated approach could address these challenges more effectively, ensuring a more coordinated and comprehensive response to the needs of EO victims across the country.





5.1.1. Government Stakeholders

- **Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare (MLSW):**

Mr. Sengaloun Luanglath, Acting Director General of the Department of Devotee, Disability and Elderly, provided an overview of the **Law on Persons with Disabilities (PWDs)**. He highlighted the alignment with the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), the national policy and strategic plan on PWDs, and the key provisions of the law adopted in 2018, which aims to protect and promote the rights of PWDs and eliminate discrimination. The law outlines six categories of disability and emphasizes the state policy to support PWDs through financial contributions, promotion of employment, and awareness-raising. Challenges in education, such as the lack of trained teachers and accessible facilities, were noted. Proposals included financial assistance for data collection on PWDs, including UXO victims, and the establishment of a publicly accessible database.

- **National Regulatory Authority for UXO/ Mine Action Sector (NRA):**

Mr. Bountao Chanthavongsa, Officer of the Victim Assistance Unit, presented the NRA's role in **implementing victim assistance activities**. He highlighted Lao PDR's extensive UXO contamination and the legislative framework guiding their work, including national socio-economic development plans and international conventions. Main activities include data collection, support for medical treatment and rehabilitation, psychosocial support, vocational training, and rights awareness. Achievements include the drafting of a Victim Assistance Implementation Plan for 2022–2026 and the provision of various forms of assistance to thousands of survivors since 2011. Statistics on UXO accidents and victims were presented. Challenges include the limited scope of current support compared to

needs, the need for strengthened information management and coordination, and limited surveys on VA services. Lessons learned emphasize the importance of capacity building, coordination, and monitoring. The drafted work plan for 2022–2026 aims to strengthen data collection and reporting and to provide assistance to 5,750 victims.

- **Ministry of Health (MoH) – Department of Curative and Rehabilitation (DCR):**

Ms. Pomsawath Eounnavong provided an overview of **national medical services for victims**. The DCR supervises hospitals and health centers and refers victims to rehabilitation centers. Services are provided based on the law on treatment and the national strategy for medical rehabilitation. While services are provided as part of regular MoH work, budget constraints from the UXO sector were noted. Achievements include regular first-aid training for service providers and support for referrals. Challenges include a lack of staff capacity, limited resources, and transportation issues. Proposals focused on providing more equipment and ambulances, supporting community-based initiatives, offering regular training, and monitoring implementation. Future plans include reviewing VA implementation to improve service quality and setting priorities for rehabilitation works.

- **Ministry of Health (MoH) – Center for Medical and Rehabilitation (CMR):**

Mr. Sibounheuang Sensathid presented on **medical rehabilitation services for victims**, highlighting that the CMR has been providing these services since 1964. Key services include prosthetic devices in partnership with COPE, with five branches across the country offering free services. Orthopedic mobility services are also implemented with NRA support. Achievements include the provision of over 1,800 assistive devices annually and mobility services in targeted provinces. Challenges include duplicated provisions in some areas and low demand for post-assistance services. Proposals include cooperation on data management and continued donor support for mobility services and technology upgrades. Collaboration with Exceed Worldwide Cambodia on capacity building was noted.

- **Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES) – Inclusive Education Promotion Center (IEPC):** Mr. Houmphanh Keoounkham provided an overview of the IEPC and its role in **inclusive education**. Established in 2008, the IEPC supports inclusive education for PWDs and ethnic students. Responsibilities include disseminating laws, developing legislation, conducting research, providing technical support to educators, and monitoring inclusive education. Successes include the emphasis on children with disabilities in educational laws and the provision of two boarding schools for PWDs. Challenges include insufficient budget, the need for a national sign language, and inaccessible updated data on children with disabilities. Statistics on students with disabilities and UXO child victims were presented. Future plans focus on establishing structures, introducing laws, creating education plans, collecting information, seeking funding, providing teacher training, and monitoring progress.



- **Quality of Life Association (QLA):**

Mr. Thoummy Silamphan, Director, provided an overview of QLA's work since 2011 in Xiengkhuang Province, focusing on assisting landmine and UXO victims, PWDs, and impoverished families through healthcare, education, economic development, social engagement, and accessible services. Challenges include limited funding, the need for ongoing support to victims, and the lack of accessible buildings and schools. Future plans include promoting economic social engagement through animal husbandry, providing referrals for rehabilitation, offering psychosocial support, providing education funds, and promoting employment for survivors. Regional cooperation within ASEAN was also highlighted.

- **World Education (WE):**

Ms. Cheunkhanly Mouanvongsa, War Victims Medical Fund (WVMF) Officer, presented on WE's operations in Laos since 1992 and the WVMF, which has supported UXO survivors since 1996 in partnership with the NRA. The WVMF provides essential support including medical care, transportation, food allowance, assistive devices, and funeral cost contributions. The national policy on WVMF was approved in 2017 and is currently under revision. Achievements include supporting 1,133 UXO survivors with medical costs. Challenges include a lack of awareness of the WVMF system, delays in documentation, and a lack of coordination of financial schemes. Next steps include continuing to provide support through WVMF and conducting follow-up visits to survivors.



5.1.2. Non-Government Stakeholders

- **Lao Disabled People's Association (LDPA):**

Mr. Samnieng Thammavong, Director, presented the LDPA's work in supporting PWDs, including UXO survivors. The LDPA focuses on advocacy, capacity building, and promoting equal rights and opportunities. Organizational strategies aim to create disability-friendly environments and accessible institutions. Challenges include employers' reluctance to hire PWDs due to accessibility concerns and the lack of a standardized national social protection system. Proposals include cooperation on educational campaigns, teacher training on inclusive education, increased community engagement, and advocacy for job creation. General recommendations emphasize improving livelihoods and increasing awareness.

This section highlights the contributions of various stakeholders, both governmental and non-governmental, in providing victim assistance services. Their efforts, as outlined above, showcase the collaborative approach necessary to strengthen victim assistance programs in Lao PDR and further integrate these services into the framework for the Regional Victim Assistance Network.



5.2. Challenges and Gaps

Across the presentations, several key challenges and gaps in victim assistance services in Lao PDR were identified:

- **Limited funding and resources** to meet the extensive needs of UXO victims and PWDs.
- **Lack of comprehensive and updated data** on UXO victims and persons with disabilities, hindering effective planning and resource allocation.
- **Need for strengthened coordination and information sharing** among government ministries, local authorities, and victim assistance operators at all levels.
- **Limited capacity of staff and service providers**, particularly in specialized areas such as rehabilitation, psychosocial support, and inclusive education.
- **Inadequate infrastructure and equipment** in healthcare and educational facilities to meet the needs of PWDs.
- **Lack of awareness** about available victim assistance services and application processes.
- **Gaps in the provision of comprehensive support**, particularly in vocational training, economic reintegration, and psychosocial support compared to medical and physical rehabilitation.
- **Absence of a standardized national social protection scheme** for PWDs and UXO survivors.
- **Challenges in ensuring accessibility of physical environments**, education, and employment for PWDs.
- **Duplication of assistance** in some areas while other needs remain unmet.

5.3. Survivor Testimonies

The “Voice of Victims” session brought forth deeply moving and powerful personal stories from two explosive ordnance (EO) survivors, whose resilience in the face of unimaginable adversity highlighted the ongoing struggles of those affected by the remnants of war.



Mr. Kamsy Xayaboud, a 77-year-old survivor from Khammouane Province, shared his painful experience of being injured in 1966 while herding buffaloes, an event that forever altered his life. His words painted a stark picture of the long-lasting scars — both physical and psychological — that remain with him to this day. He poignantly expressed the importance of not only addressing the physical wounds but also the profound mental and emotional scars that come with surviving such an ordeal. “It is not just the body that needs healing,” he said, his voice thick with emotion, “but the heart and mind as well.” Mr. Xayaboud’s plea for continued support was clear: “We need help to rebuild our lives. We need economic support to stand on our feet again, so we can live with dignity.” His testimony was a powerful reminder of the comprehensive care survivors need — not just in the immediate aftermath, but throughout their long journey to reintegrate into society.

Mr. Joc Xaysombounkham, a young 20-year-old survivor from Houaphan Province, shared his painful recollection of a tragic accident while fishing with his brother. At such a young age, Mr. Xaysombounkham had to face the physical and emotional challenges of losing a limb. Yet, despite the enormity of his loss, his words were filled with gratitude. “I am thankful for the prosthetic limb that has been given to me. It has helped me regain a sense of independence,” he shared.

“But it is not just about the prosthesis; it is about receiving hope, and the belief that my life still has a purpose.” His testimony underscored the importance of providing holistic support for victims — an essential part of the healing process.



These testimonies brought the invisible struggles of EO survivors into sharp focus. They underscored the deep, multifaceted needs of those affected, emphasizing that victim assistance must go beyond physical rehabilitation to include psychosocial care, economic empowerment, and most importantly, hope. The voices of these survivors call us to act with urgency, reminding us of the moral imperative to offer comprehensive, long-term support to all victims of explosive ordnance.



5.4. Regional/Global Technical Guidance

Ms. Alexandra Letcher from Humanity and Inclusion (HI) provided a global perspective on victim assistance and introduced IMAS 13.10 and guidance on an integrated approach to victim assistance.

- **Why Victim Assistance?** Victim assistance is a fundamental responsibility of states, as enshrined in key international treaties such as the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention, the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons,

and the Convention on Cluster Munitions. The 2006 Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) provides an overarching framework for implementation. VA is a core pillar of mine action requiring long-term commitment, yet it receives only a small percentage of overall mine action funding. The ultimate responsibility for victim assistance rests with state entities such as ministries of health, social affairs, education, and labor.

- **IMAS 13.10 Introduction:** IMAS 13.10 provides guidance on the roles and responsibilities of national mine action authorities, centers, mine action operators, the UN, and survivor organizations in support of VA efforts. It emphasizes multisector engagement, information management, specific VA efforts by the mine action sector, referral pathways, advocacy, and strengthening national action plans. The definition of VA in IMAS 13.10 highlights it as a national responsibility towards all injured people and those living with disabilities. A key question is how to operationalize this understanding to develop the VAN.
- **Operationalizing Victim Assistance:** VA should be implemented and coordinated through an integrated approach with dual imperatives:
 - ◊ VA-specific efforts by mine action actors as part of land release and EORE interventions in a non-discriminatory manner.
 - ◊ Broader VA efforts by non-mine action actors. The mine action sector's role includes information management, referral of victims, promotion of multisector engagement, and development of national action plans.
- **Best Practices in Lao PDR:** HI supports best practices in Lao PDR, including training primary healthcare professionals on basic rehabilitation and providing psychological and psychosocial support. Socio-economic inclusion activities focus on vocational training, integrating people with disabilities into employment, and supporting income generation. Data collection and sharing efforts support the establishment of centralized databases on EO victims and disability management.
- **Victim Assistance Network (VAN):** The VAN should integrate the principles of VA, particularly participation, inclusion, accessibility, sustainability, national ownership, and non-discrimination, in coherence with IMAS 13.10 and national standards.

6. REGIONAL VAN DISCUSSION



6.1. Rationale and Proposed Functions

The discussion on promoting the establishment of a Regional Victim Assistance Network (VAN) centered on its necessity and potential contributions. Participants explored the importance of having a regional platform to:

- Integrate victim assistance efforts at a regional level.
- Facilitate knowledge sharing, best practices, and lessons learned among ASEAN Member States.
- Serve as a central point for resource mobilization and fundraising to support national VA programs.
- Provide a forum to discuss and address common challenges in victim assistance.
- Enhance cooperation and coordination among various stakeholders, including affected and non-affected states, donors, and international organizations.
- Ensure the principles of victim assistance, as outlined in IMAS 13.10 and the integrated approach, are upheld across the region.

6.2 Group Discussions Summary

Participants engaged in group discussions to map out the potential roles, responsibilities, coordination, and communication mechanisms for the Regional VAN. Key points raised during these discussions included:

- Leveraging existing national mechanisms and networks to contribute to the regional network.
- The need for clear guidelines, recommendations, and support from ARMAC in developing national action plans that can interface with the Regional VAN.
- Prioritizing data collection and establishing standardized approaches for accurate and updated information on EO victims and their needs.
- Focusing on capacity building initiatives in areas such as inclusive education, rehabilitation, and psychosocial support.
- Exploring opportunities for technical support and expertise sharing among ASEAN Member States and with international partners.

- Addressing the funding constraints and exploring mechanisms for regional resource mobilization.
- Ensuring that the Regional VAN complements and does not duplicate existing national efforts and networks.
- Defining the structure of the Regional VAN, including representative members and modes of communication.
- Identifying potential contributions of different stakeholder groups to the Regional VAN, such as data collection, medical care, rehabilitation, psychosocial support, socio-economic integration, and policy development.
- Considering the principles for joining the network, including criteria for EO-affected and non-affected states and donors.
- Establishing effective communication and coordination systems among the committee and stakeholders of the Regional VAN.
- The importance of learning from the experiences and best practices of other ASEAN countries through study tours or exchange platforms.
- Ensuring inclusivity by considering all types of persons with disabilities, not only those affected by UXO.
- Exploring and considering the integration of relevant ASEAN legal frameworks or strategies, such as the rights of persons with disabilities and social protection mechanisms.

6.3. Stakeholder Roles

Participants discussed the potential roles their institutions could play in the Regional VAN, aligning with IMAS 13.10 and an integrated approach to victim assistance:

- **Government agencies** could contribute to policy development, coordination of national efforts, and data sharing.
- **National Mine Action Authorities** (e.g., NRA) could serve as national focal points, contribute data, and facilitate coordination among national stakeholders.
- **NGOs** could provide direct services in medical care, rehabilitation, psychosocial support, and socio-economic integration, as well as contribute to data collection and community engagement.

- **Donors** could provide financial and technical support for regional and national VA initiatives.
- **UN agencies** could offer technical expertise, support coordination, and facilitate access to international best practices.
- **Research and academic institutions** could contribute to data collection, analysis, and the development of evidence-based practices.
- **EO survivors and their representative organizations** should be central to the network, ensuring their voices and needs are heard and addressed.



6.4. Coordination and Communication Mechanisms

The discussions touched upon the need for effective coordination and communication mechanisms for the Regional VAN. Suggestions included:

- Establishing clear channels of communication among member states, ARMAC, and other stakeholders.
- Regular meetings, both virtual and in-person, to facilitate information sharing and joint planning.
- Developing a platform or database for sharing best practices, resources, and data.
- Identifying national focal points in each member state to streamline communication and coordination.
- Defining clear roles and responsibilities for different members and the overall structure of the VAN committee.

7. MEETING OUTCOMES

7.1. National-Level Commitments

Participants from Lao PDR demonstrated a strong commitment to contribute to the establishment and functioning of the Regional Victim Assistance Network. The NRA indicated its willingness to serve as the national focal point and coordinator for VA efforts in the country, facilitating integration with the regional network. National stakeholders expressed their readiness to share their experiences, data (while addressing the challenges in data collection), and expertise to support the objectives of the Regional VAN.

7.2. Identified Challenges

The meeting reaffirmed several key challenges in victim assistance that need to be addressed both at the national and regional levels:

- **Data Collection and Management:** The lack of accurate, comprehensive, and standardized data on EO victims and PWDs remains a significant obstacle to effective planning, resource allocation, and monitoring of VA programs.
- **Funding Constraints:** Insufficient financial resources limit the scope and sustainability of victim assistance activities, hindering the ability to meet the extensive needs of survivors.
- **Coordination and Collaboration:** While coordination mechanisms exist at the national level, strengthening collaboration among different government agencies, local authorities, NGOs, and other stakeholders is crucial for a more integrated and effective approach.
- **Capacity Building:** Enhancing the skills and expertise of service providers in areas such as specialized rehabilitation, psychosocial support, and inclusive education is essential to improve the quality of services.
- **Accessibility:** Ensuring physical, informational, and social accessibility for PWDs and UXO survivors remains a challenge across various sectors, including education, employment, and community life.



7.3. Action Points

The National Consultative Meeting paved the way for several key action points to advance the establishment of the Regional VAN:

- **Incorporation of National Inputs:** The insights and recommendations gathered from the meeting will be incorporated into an initial draft of the Regional VAN Blueprint, including its Terms of Reference and Communication Mechanism.
- **Circulation of Draft Documents:** These draft documents will be circulated to relevant stakeholders in Lao PDR and other ASEAN Member States for further inputs and feedback.
- **Regional Workshop:** A regional workshop will be organized to finalize the Regional VAN Blueprint based on the feedback received from national consultations.
- **Further Discussion on Collaboration:** Continued dialogue and collaboration between Lao PDR and ARMAC will focus on developing national programs and plans that align with the objectives of the Regional VAN, including exploring opportunities for resource mobilization and technical support.
- **Focus on Data Needs:** Future efforts will likely include a more detailed evaluation of the data gathering needs for ERW victims to inform the development of standardized data collection approaches.

8. GOOD PRACTICES AND SUCCESSES



Despite the challenges, several good practices and successes in victim assistance efforts in Lao PDR were highlighted during the meeting:

8.1 Positive Experiences

Participants shared valuable experiences related to effective inter-agency collaboration, particularly in the context of providing victim assistance:

- **Development and Revision of National Policies:** The development and ongoing revision of the War Victims Medical Fund (WVMF) national policy and the Law on Persons with Disabilities demonstrate a commitment to establishing a legal and policy framework for victim assistance and disability rights.
- **Provision of Medical and Rehabilitation Support:** The WVMF's success in supporting over 1,133 UXO survivors with emergency and ongoing medical costs, along with the NRA's provision of medical and physical rehabilitation support to hundreds of survivors, showcase significant achievements in addressing immediate needs.
- **Accessibility of Prosthetic and Orthotic Services:** The Center for Medical and Rehabilitation (CMR) and its collaboration with COPE to provide free prosthetic and orthotic

devices and mobility services across multiple provinces represents a crucial service for improving the quality of life for many PWDs and UXO survivors.

- **Efforts in Inclusive Education:** The Lao educational law and policies emphasizing the importance of children with disabilities and the establishment of boarding schools for PWDs are positive steps towards inclusive education.
- **Psychosocial Support Initiatives:** The NRA's provision of psychological support to survivors and their families and the planned psychosocial support training acknowledge the importance of mental health in victim assistance.
- **Vocational Training and Economic Empowerment:** The NRA's efforts to provide vocational training and income-generating opportunities, along with initiatives by NGOs like LDPA and QLA to support livelihoods, contribute to the long-term reintegration of survivors.
- **Coordination Mechanisms:** The existing national coordination committees for the UXO sector in Lao PDR, with representation at district, provincial, and national levels, provide a foundation for further strengthening collaboration in victim assistance.

9. LESSONS LEARNED



The meeting provided an opportunity to reflect on lessons learned from victim assistance implementation in Lao PDR:

- **Importance of Coordination Training:**

Providing proper coordination training to stakeholders at all levels (ministries, provinces, districts, and VA operators) is essential for effective program implementation.

- **Need for Concrete Work Plans:**

Having concrete work plans, projects, and activities for UXO/Mine victim assistance available from concerned ministries, local authorities, and VA operators is crucial for focused action.

- **Enhancing Information Sharing:**

Increasing coordination and sharing information among all relevant stakeholders is vital for avoiding duplication and ensuring comprehensive support.

- **Importance of Monitoring and Evaluation:**

Closely following up and monitoring the implementation of VA programs is necessary to ensure transparency, effectiveness, and efficient use of funding.

- **Sustained Fundraising Efforts:**

Continuous efforts to raise funds internally, regionally, and internationally are crucial for the sustainability of UXO/Mine victim assistance programs.

- **Addressing Unmet Needs:**

Current support remains limited compared to the vast needs of UXO victims, particularly in vocational training and economic support.

- **Strengthening Local Coordination:**

There is a need to strengthen information management and coordination, especially in UXO-contaminated districts and villages, to build capacity for community coordination bodies.

- **Need for Comprehensive Needs Assessments:**

More extensive surveys of the assistance needed by UXO/Mine victims are required to better target interventions.

10. RECOMMENDATIONS



Based on the discussions and challenges identified, several recommendations were put forward by participants:

10.1 For National Stakeholders

- **Strengthen data collection and management systems** for PWDs and UXO victims, including the establishment of a centralized, publicly accessible database.
- **Enhance coordination and collaboration** among government ministries, local authorities, and victim assistance operators through regular meetings and information sharing.
- **Prioritize capacity building initiatives** for staff and service providers in specialized areas of victim assistance, such as rehabilitation, psychosocial support, and inclusive education.
- **Increase investment in infrastructure and equipment** to improve the accessibility and quality of healthcare and educational facilities for PWDs.
- **Develop and implement a standardized national social protection scheme** for PWDs and UXO survivors.
- **Conduct comprehensive surveys** to better understand the needs and gaps in victim assistance services.
- **Raise awareness** about available victim assistance services and application processes at the community level.
- **Actively engage communities and survivors** in the planning and implementation of victim assistance programs to ensure their needs are met.
- **Advocate for increased financial and technical support** for victim assistance programs at national, regional, and international levels.



10.2. For ARMAC/Regional Actors:

- Provide clear guidance and support to ASEAN Member States in developing national action plans for victim assistance that align with regional frameworks.
- Facilitate knowledge sharing and exchange of best practices among ASEAN countries through regional workshops, study tours, and online platforms.
- Support the development of standardized data collection tools and systems for victim assistance across the region.
- Explore mechanisms for regional resource mobilization to support national victim assistance programs in EO-affected AMS.
- Facilitate technical assistance and expertise sharing among member states and with international partners.
- Support the establishment and functioning of the Regional Victim Assistance Network as a central platform for coordination, knowledge sharing, and resource mobilization.
- Continue to conduct research to inform evidence-based victim assistance strategies and interventions.



10.3. For Technical and Funding Partners:

- Maintain flexible and sustained financial and technical support for victim assistance programs in EO-affected ASEAN Member States.
- Support capacity building initiatives for national stakeholders in specialized areas of victim assistance.
- Facilitate access to international expertise and best practices in victim assistance and disability inclusion.
- Support data collection and management efforts to improve the evidence base for victim assistance programming.
- Promote coordination and collaboration among different implementing partners to avoid duplication and maximize impact.
- Ensure that funding and program guidelines are aligned with the principles of integrated victim assistance and are sensitive to the diverse needs of survivors and PWDs.

11. WAY FORWARD



The immediate next steps following the National Consultative Meeting include:

11.1 Immediate Next Steps

- ARMAC will incorporate the inputs and recommendations from the meeting into an initial draft of the Regional VAN Blueprint, including its Terms of Reference and Communication Mechanism.
- These draft documents will be circulated to relevant national stakeholders in Lao PDR and other ASEAN Member States for their review and feedback.

11.2. Regional Consultations

The feedback received from national stakeholders will play a pivotal role in refining the draft Regional VAN Blueprint. This collaborative process will culminate in a regional-level consultation, providing a platform for all participating ASEAN Member States to review, discuss, and fine-tune the proposed framework. The aim is to ensure that the Regional VAN's structure and objectives are inclusive, responsive, and reflect the diverse needs of all affected countries within the ASEAN region.

11.3. Timeline for Deliverables

The finalization of the Regional VAN Blueprint, along with its associated documents, is expected to take place at the first Regional Workshop. This workshop is slated for completion between 2023 and June 2024, consistent with the overall project timeline. The successful delivery of these documents will mark a significant milestone in the creation of a sustainable, regional network that will provide essential support to victims across the ASEAN region.

CONCLUSION



The National Consultative Meeting in Lao PDR represented a crucial milestone in advancing the establishment of the Regional Victim Assistance Network (VAN) within ASEAN. The active and committed participation of diverse national stakeholders, including government ministries, non-governmental organizations, donors, and, most importantly, survivors, demonstrated a unified determination to enhance support for explosive ordnance victims across the region.

The discussions were both open and constructive, addressing key challenges and identifying areas of strength in existing victim assistance programs. The sharing of experiences, coupled with the generation of actionable recommendations, will provide the necessary framework for the development of the Regional VAN Blueprint.

Lao PDR's leadership in this process, particularly as the national focal point, underscores the country's unwavering commitment to the success of this regional initiative. Despite the significant challenges that persist—particularly regarding data collection, funding, and coordination—the outcomes of this meeting have established a strong foundation for continued collaboration. These efforts pave the way for a more integrated, effective, and sustainable regional approach to victim assistance, ensuring that services are accessible, comprehensive, and available to all who need them.

We extend our deepest gratitude to AKCF and our co-hosts, whose unwavering support and partnership have been instrumental in making this journey possible. Their dedication to walking alongside us, investing in this crucial cause, and offering both financial and moral support are at the heart of this initiative's success. Their compassion and commitment continue to light the path toward a future where the needs of explosive ordnance victims are met with dignity, compassion, and lasting support. The collaborative momentum generated at this meeting reflects a collective promise to leave no one behind as we work toward a future where no victim is left forgotten.

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ASEAN Regional Mine Action Center (ARMAC)



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