



# RESEARCH REPORT

Community Perspectives of  
Humanitarian Mine (Explosive Ordnance)  
Action in Lao PDR and Vietnam



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## FOREWORD AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The ASEAN<sup>1</sup> Regional Mine Action Centre (ARMAC) was founded following the ASEAN Leaders' Statement on the establishment of an ASEAN Regional Mine Action Centre, adopted on 18 November 2012. ARMAC became operational in 2017 with a mandate to serve as a centre of excellence to encourage efforts to address explosive ordnance (EO) for affected ASEAN Member States and to facilitate cooperation among ASEAN member states (AMS) and relevant institutions to:

- a) Enhance awareness programs on the dangers of EO among affected communities;
- b) Facilitate appropriate medical and rehabilitation assistance for victims of EO, upon request from the affected AMS; and
- c) Assist interested AMS in research and knowledge sharing on the effects of EO and efforts to address them, including through writing proposals for technical assistance projects and funding, at their specific and individual request.

As part of this work, the AMS and ARMAC initiated the "**Enhance Victim Assistance Programs in the ASEAN Member States**". The project is funded by the Government of the Republic of Korea through the ASEAN-Korea Cooperation Fund (AKCF) mechanism. Details in of AKCF are available on its website: [www.aseanrokfund.com](http://www.aseanrokfund.com).

The project aims to

- (i) **Objective 1:** promote the establishment of a victim assistance network as a regional platform for various stakeholders among ASEAN;
- (ii) **Objective 2:** assist the ASEAN Member States on the victim-assistance-related knowledge sharing, need/s and resource/s assessment and possibility of its mobilization;
- (iii) **Objective 3:** assess the needs of the victims of EO in the affected AMS for further assistance;
- (iv) **Objective 4:** assist the ASEAN Member States in providing psychosocial support to the victims of EO; and
- (v) **Objective 5:** conduct research regarding the "Explosive Ordnance Victim Assistance Inclusive Services in Cambodia," as well as "Community Perspectives of Humanitarian Mine Action in Lao PDR and Viet Nam".

To achieve these objectives, the ARMAC project team works closely with various stakeholders including government agencies, national authorities/centres, UN agencies, national and international organizations as well as local and international research/academic institutions.

This report and the associated research sit under Objective 5 of the project and focuses on community perspectives of humanitarian mine action in Lao PDR and Vietnam. For this research, ARMAC sought to partner with researchers and research institutions based in Lao PDR and Vietnam to execute the activities. In Lao PDR, the research was conducted by a team from the Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization (SEAMO) Regional Centre for Community Education Development, led by Mr. Kiengkay Ounmany, and in Vietnam the Hanoi based Asian Management and Development Institute (AMDI) conducted the research, led by Mr. Hoang The Ky.

The research project would not have been possible without the support of the Government of the Republic of Korea which funded the research through the ASEAN-Korea Cooperation Fund.

The project wishes to thank the National Regulatory Authority for the UXO Sector in Lao PDR (NRA) and the Vietnam Mine Action Centre (VNMAC) who endorsed and supported the research projects in their respective countries. Thanks are due to the provincial, district, commune, and village authorities in the provinces of Huaphan and Savannakhet in Lao PDR, and in Quang Binh and Quang Tri in Vietnam, who helped to facilitate the research in their areas and took part in interviews. The research would not have been possible without the international, national and local organizations, the societies and unions, and the many village residents who willingly participated in the research and shared their knowledge and experiences. The participation of these actors is much appreciated and was crucial for gaining the insights presented in this report.

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1. Association of the Southeast Asian Nations – a regional organisation comprised of 10 Member States i.e. Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam.

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<b>AMS</b>	ASEAN Member states
<b>ARMAC</b>	ASEAN Regional Mine Action Centre
<b>ASEAN</b>	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
<b>CAMA</b>	Comprehensive Approach to Mine Action
<b>CCM</b>	Convention on Cluster Munitions
<b>CHA</b>	Confirmed Hazardous Area
<b>CRS</b>	Catholic Relief Services
<b>DBCU</b>	Database Coordination Unit (Vietnam)
<b>EO</b>	Explosive Ordnance
<b>EOD</b>	Explosive Ordnance Disposal
<b>EORE</b>	Explosive Ordnance Risk Education
<b>ERW</b>	Explosive Remnants of War
<b>FGD</b>	Focus Group Discussion
<b>INGO</b>	International Non-Governmental Organization
<b>HI</b>	Humanity and Inclusion
<b>HMA</b>	Humanitarian Mine Action
<b>IMAS</b>	International Mine Action Standards
<b>JMAS</b>	Japan Mine Action Service
<b>KII</b>	Key Informant Interview
<b>KVPV</b>	Korea-Vietnam Peace Village
<b>LAK</b>	Lao Kip (currency)
<b>Lao PDR</b>	Lao People's Democratic Republic
<b>MAG</b>	Mines Advisory Group

<b>MOES</b>	Ministry of Education and Sports (Lao PDR)
<b>MOLISA</b>	Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs (Vietnam)
<b>NGO</b>	Non-governmental organization
<b>NMAS</b>	National Mine Action Standard
<b>NPA</b>	Norwegian People's Aid
<b>NRA</b>	National Regulatory Authority for the UXO Sector, Lao PDR
<b>NTS</b>	Non-Technical Survey
<b>PPC</b>	Provincial People's Committee (Vietnam)
<b>PRA</b>	Provincial Regulatory Authority (Lao PDR)
<b>PTVN</b>	Peace Trees Vietnam
<b>QTMAC</b>	Quang Tri Mine Action Centre (Vietnam)
<b>RCS</b>	Red Cross Society
<b>SDG</b>	Sustainable Development Goal(s)
<b>TS</b>	Technical Survey
<b>UNDP</b>	United Nations Development Programme
<b>UXO</b>	Unexploded Ordnance
<b>UXO Lao</b>	Lao National Unexploded Ordnance Programme
<b>UXO/MRE</b>	UXO/Mine Risk Education
<b>VA</b>	Victim Assistance
<b>VNAH</b>	Vietnam Assistance for the Handicapped
<b>VND</b>	Vietnam Dong (currency)
<b>VNMAC</b>	Vietnam Mine Action Centre

## NOTE ON TERMINOLOGY

### **Survivors and victims:**

The term victim(s) is used in this report to refer collectively to persons who have been injured, killed or otherwise directly or indirectly impacted by UXO and other explosive ordnance. Survivors refer to direct victims who have been injured and/or impaired but not killed as a result of an accident with UXO or other explosive ordnance. (see IMAS 13.10, Victim assistance in mine action, 17 January 2023).

### **Unexploded Ordnance (UXO):**

The report uses UXO to describe the main type of contamination in both Lao PDR and Vietnam. It refers to explosive ordnance that has been primed, fuzed, armed or otherwise prepared for use or used. It may have been fired, dropped, launched or projected, yet remains unexploded either through malfunction or design or for any other reason. (IMAS 04.10, Glossary of mine action terms, definitions and abbreviations, 25 October 2024). The term used in the context of Lao PDR and Vietnam also includes cluster munition remnants.

### **UXO/mine Risk Education:**

Explosive Ordnance Risk Education (EORE) is the internationally accepted term for activities which seek to reduce the risk of injury from EO by raising awareness of women, girls, boys and men in accordance with their different vulnerabilities, roles and needs, and promoting behaviour change (IMAS 12.10, Explosive ordnance risk education, September 2020). However, this report refers to UXO/mine risk education, which is the term more commonly used in Lao PDR and Vietnam.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The research described in this report is part of a larger project implemented by the ASEAN Mine Action Centre and funded by the Government of the Republic of Korea through the ASEAN-Korea Cooperation mechanism, to “Enhance Victim Assistance Programs in the ASEAN Member States.” The research, conducted in Lao PDR and Vietnam during 2023 and 2024, aimed to explore the involvement and perspectives of UXO/mine affected communities regarding the humanitarian mine action activities implemented in their localities. The research was conducted by SEAMO in Lao PDR and by AMDI in Vietnam.

The research used a mixed-methodology approach including a desk review, survey, key informant interviews, and focus group discussions. In Lao PDR the research was undertaken in the provinces of Huaphan and Savannakhet and in Vietnam in the provinces of Quang Tri and Quang Binh. The research locations were selected to target areas with UXO/mine contamination and where different mine action operators were working. The National Regulatory Authority (NRA) in Lao PDR and the Vietnam Mine Action Centre (VNMAC) supported the research by providing advice on study locations, providing the relevant permissions, and participating in interviews.

The research aimed to explore the extent to which local communities have been involved in the planning and implementation of humanitarian mine action in their communities. It was found that individuals from UXO/mine affected communities are involved in providing information on UXO contamination for survey and in reporting UXO finds. However, it appears that local people have less involvement in, and therefore understanding of, clearance activities and task prioritization. This sometimes leads to misunderstandings as to whether land had been cleared, surveyed, or whether a UXO find has been removed. People were unable to explain how tasks were prioritized for clearance. The involvement of local people in risk education activities is often limited to attending a meetings or village-based activity, although in both Lao PDR and Vietnam some individuals are more actively involved as risk education focal points or volunteers.

In line with custom and protocol, village authorities are the first port of call in a village for mine action operators, and the authorities are often actively involved in helping to facilitate the mine action activities and passing on information to other villagers. Communication between local people and the mine action operators usually takes place via the village authorities as the main conduit of information. However, other methods to communicate are used, including approaching teams when they are working in villages, or talking to local people who are employed by the organizations. The use of hotlines for reporting UXO, and phone apps and social media to communicate are used to some extent in both countries and offer great potential for efficient and fast communication in areas with mobile reception. To ensure take-up, information campaigns are needed to raise awareness about these methods.

It was found that women generally have less knowledge and information about mine action activities, and that men are more often involved in meetings. The involvement of other groups, including persons with disabilities and some ethnic groups was also noted to be challenging often due to factors such as accessibility or language or being out of the village during the day. Ensuring that different groups within a community have access to information regarding the UXO threat and mine action activities may require the use of several different methods and channels for communication, including the use of digital channels and through specific interest groups, such as women’s groups, farmer’s groups, self-help groups, and youth groups.

The survey respondents and villagers interviewed in FGD largely reported that they were satisfied with mine clearance activities in their communities. However, in areas where operators were not currently active, the response rate for responding to UXO reports was found to be slower. In a small number of villages there were complaints about damage to the environment and poor waste disposal. Operators also noted some of the challenges of working in ethnic villages and ensuring that no damage or disrespect is caused in relation to sacred areas. This points to the need for guidance to mitigate environmental impacts at local level and to share good practice on working with ethnic communities.

In Lao PDR and Vietnam, local people have lived with UXO contamination for many years. Maintaining the interest and engagement of people in contexts where the threat of UXO contamination has become normalized is often challenging. People feel less inclined to attend risk education sessions or to stop livelihood activities to participate in discussions about survey or clearance. While there is a need for the mine action sector to continue to engage and build trust with communities, operators must also respect that time is often a precious resource in rural communities, and communication activities should be arranged with this in mind.

The research did not look in detail at the provision of victim assistance and the involvement of survivors in defining their needs, but some survivors were interviewed. It was found that while services are provided both by government and NGOs, access to and knowledge about the services is often limited, particularly in rural areas. Survivors felt that much of the assistance they received was a help, but did not meet all of their needs. There was interest expressed in having clubs where people with disabilities could meet and provide support to each other. There is a need for UXO victims to be better connected to support and for them to have more understanding of what support is available. Mine action organizations can play a key role in this by providing information on services and referrals in areas where they work.

Mine action organizations can provide a source of economic support and employment for people in UXO/mine affected areas, contributing to the local economy and building the skills and expertise of individual community members. The presence of teams within a village may provide opportunities for villagers to rent accommodation or sell food. Recruitment of local people into clearance, survey, or risk education teams was found to be a usual practice in both Lao PDR and Vietnam, enabling local people to learn new skills and give back to their communities, in addition to earning a salary, often in areas where paid employment is scarce. The benefits for women may be particularly significant.

The research showed that there have been significant efforts to ensure that UXO/mine affected communities are involved in mine action activities in both Lao PDR and Vietnam, and where these have been successful there are significant benefits for both the communities and the operators. However, the involvement is currently limited to certain areas such as providing information on UXO locations and participating in risk education. There is a need for greater involvement in planning, prioritization, and understanding clearance processes to avoid misunderstandings and to lead to more targeted, effective interventions, building local competencies for managing residual risks.

The recommendations from this study aim to support the national mine action authorities in Lao PDR and Vietnam in considering actions that could be taken to increase the involvement of UXO/mine affected communities in mine action with the aim to enhance the effectiveness of clearance, risk education, and victim assistance activities, and to ensure that local people are informed, proactive and have access to the support they need to live in safety. The recommendations are as follows:

Finding	Recommendation
<p>Villagers often have little understanding of task prioritization, despite often being asked to provide information on contaminated areas during survey.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Ensure that task prioritization processes are understood at provincial, district, and village level by conducting outreach activities.</li> <li>● The basics of task prioritization should be explained to village authorities and villagers during survey processes, or before clearance commences.</li> </ul>
<p>Some villagers expressed concern about environmental damage caused by clearance teams.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Ensure new or updated national standards on environmental management address mitigation measures for environmental damage at local level.</li> <li>● Ensure the inclusion of questions on local-level environmental impacts in post-clearance surveys.</li> </ul>
<p>Villagers reported finding UXO on land that has been “cleared.” It is possible that this is due to misunderstandings about whether land has been fully cleared or surveyed or to a UXO item having been removed as a spot task.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Ensure operators provide a clear explanation on the purpose and outcomes of survey, spot task clearance, and area clearance, so that village authorities and villagers have a better understanding of these different processes and what this means in terms of any remaining contamination.</li> </ul>
<p>Hotline numbers for UXO reporting have been set up in both Lao PDR and Vietnam, although use of the hotline numbers appears limited.</p> <p>Response rates to UXO reports are generally good in areas where operators are working, but less good in areas where there are no operators.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Conduct a campaign to promote awareness of hotline numbers. This can be done via mine action teams, by radio or TV, or by digital means.</li> <li>● Where possible have only one hotline number used by all operators and make it free to call.</li> <li>● Develop a process to ensure that there can be a timely response to calls in areas where operators are not currently working.</li> </ul>
<p>Village authorities have a lot of responsibility to ensure that villagers are aware of mine action activities, that they report UXO, and that they attend relevant meetings.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Ensure village authorities are well equipped to support mine action processes in their communities, particularly in areas with heavy contamination. Consider organizing meetings or training with village authorities to help them better facilitate mine action activities.</li> <li>● Support village leaders to set up localised phone app group chats to share information about hazards, meetings, or mine action activities.</li> </ul>
<p>Most of the communication regarding UXO and mine action is dealt with by male community members. Women and other marginalized groups, including UXO survivors, may have less knowledge about clearance and reporting processes than men.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Consider the best methods to ensure the inclusion of women and other marginalized groups in the dissemination of information about mine action activities. This could include drawing on existing forums and structures with access to women and other groups, for example, the Women’s Union, self-help groups etc.</li> </ul>

<p>Risk education fatigue makes it harder for operators to gather people to in-person risk education sessions and to target high-risk groups such as adolescent boys and men.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure that risk education approaches are adaptable, that messages can be provided through different communication channels, actors, and at different times (evening as well as during the day).</li> <li>• Develop specific programmes with adapted messages and tested communication channels to target high-risk groups such as adolescent boys and men.</li> <li>• Review village volunteer programmes to improve effectiveness and to ensure that they are well supported with training and backing from existing government and societal structures.</li> </ul>
<p>Risk education was seen to be less effectiveness in supporting people to conduct livelihood activities safely.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continue to investigate approaches that integrate risk education with agriculture and livelihood activities to address high-risk activities.</li> </ul>
<p>There appears to be a need for victims to be better connected to support, and for them to have more understanding of what support is available.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop a clear strategy with mine action operators to implement IMAS 13.10 on mine action and victim assistance, ensuring that operators can provide UXO victims with information on services available and provide referrals.</li> </ul>
<p>Recruiting people from UXO affected communities has multiple benefits both for operators and communities, including building trust, facilitating communication, building skills and expertise, and supporting the local economy.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continue to support the recruitment of UXO affected people in mine action. Ensure the promotion of equal opportunities for the employment of women, ethnic groups, and UXO survivors.</li> </ul>

# CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Humanitarian mine action in Southeast Asia began over 30 years ago, initially in Cambodia, but with mine action programmes starting in neighbouring Lao PDR and Vietnam in the mid-1990s. The operations in the early years focused on removing the UXO contamination to reduce injuries and fatalities and to support resettlement and reconstruction. Today, humanitarian mine action is also seen as a key activity facilitating social and economic development.

The United Nations International Mine Action Standards (IMAS) define mine action as:

"Activities which aim to reduce the social, economic and environmental impact of mines, and ERW including unexploded sub-munitions. Mine action is not just about demining; it is also about people and societies, and how they are affected by landmines and ERW contamination. The objective of mine action is to reduce the risk from landmines and ERW to a level where people can live safely; in which economic, social and health development can occur free from the constraints imposed by landmine and ERW contamination, and in which the victims' different needs can be addressed."<sup>2</sup>

Mine action operators have developed approaches to better involve affected people in activities, with the understanding that this can improve mine action outcomes. Engagement with affected communities in clearance and risk education activities is referred to in the International Mine Action Standards (IMAS) as community liaison. IMAS 12.10 on Explosive Ordnance Risk Education states:

"Community liaison in mine action refers to the processes, techniques and information exchange that encourage mine action actors to develop a better understanding of affected communities and their existing assets, needs, and priorities. The process also allows affected communities, local authorities and development organisations to gain a better understanding of mine action services and to participate in defining their requirements for EORE, survey, marking, clearance and VA."<sup>3</sup>

Community liaison can be conducted by specific teams, although all mine action teams, including clearance, EOD, and risk education teams have contact with communities and therefore have a responsibility to liaise and engage with communities.

Similarly, including mine/UXO victims in shaping the provision of services is recognized to be the best way to ensure that victims and their families receive the support they need. This is recognized in

the IMAS 13.10 on Victim Assistance in Mine Action, which states that National Mine Action Authorities are responsible for "promoting community-based planning processes that facilitate the meaningful participation of survivors."<sup>4</sup> The preamble of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disability, also states that "persons with disabilities should have the opportunity to be actively involved in decision-making processes about policies and programmes, including those directly concerning them."<sup>5</sup>

There are many benefits that may result from increased engagement between the mine action sector and affected communities. Communities can provide information to operators regarding areas that are contaminated, they can report UXO that they find, and they can provide information on land use, local priorities and risk-taking behaviour. Better communication with local communities builds trust and prevents misunderstandings and can help organizations navigate local customs and challenges with dialect and language. For local people, increased interactions with mine action organizations can help to build local capacity and skills and strengthen local-level decision making. There may also be opportunities for employment which can provide skills and economic benefits. For survivors, increased involvement should help to shape services and interventions to better meet their needs, building agency and self-esteem.

This report presents a summary of the findings from two research studies conducted in Southeast Asia, one conducted in Lao PDR, and one conducted in Vietnam. In each country, the study was carried out by a local research institution – in Lao PDR the research was conducted by the Southeast Asia Ministers of Education Organization (SEAMO) Regional Centre for Community Education Development, led by Mr. Kiengkay Ounmany, and in Vietnam the research was conducted by the Asian Management and Development Institute (AMDI), led by Mr. Hoang The Ky. The research projects were overseen by the Asean Regional Mine Action Centre (ARMAC).

2. UNMAS, International Mine Action Standards, IMAS 4.10, "Glossary of mine action terms, definitions and abbreviations," 1 January 2003.
3. UNMAS, International Mine Action Standards, IMAS 12.10, "Explosive Ordnance Risk Education," Edition 2, Amendment 3, September 2020.
4. UNMAS, International Mine Action Standards, IMAS 13.10, "Victim Assistance in Mine Action," Edition 1, Amendment 1, January 2023.
5. United Nations, "Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disability," United Nations General Assembly A/Res/61 106, 24 January 2007.

The overall goal of the research studies was to investigate how communities in UXO contaminated areas in Lao PDR and Vietnam have been involved in humanitarian mine action processes and to what extent they have been able to contribute, influence and shape these interventions.

The specific objectives of the studies were to:

1. Explore local community participation in humanitarian mine action in their communities, including survey, clearance, risk education and victim assistance;
2. Examine the perspectives of the local communities on the implementation of humanitarian mine action and its impacts on their livelihoods; and
3. Address the barriers that prevent the local communities from effective participation in the humanitarian mine action activities in their communities.

Under these objectives, the following research questions were considered:

1. To what extent have local communities been involved in planning and implementation of humanitarian mine action in their communities?
2. How have UXO clearance organization and local government facilitated the local communities to participate in the humanitarian mine action activities?
3. What are the local perceptions and experiences from participation in the implementation of humanitarian mine action in their communities?
4. To what extent has humanitarian mine action contributed to improve the livelihoods of the local people?
5. To what extent can humanitarian mine action meet the needs of the local communities, including women, ethnic minorities, people with disability, and other disadvantaged groups?

## CHAPTER 2: BACKGROUND AND METHODOLOGY

### Country Background

Lao PDR and Vietnam remain extensively contaminated by unexploded ordnance (UXO), including cluster munition remnants, resulting from bombing campaigns carried out by the United States during the 1964–1973 Second Indochina war. Many of the bombs dropped failed to detonate, and UXO continue to cause injuries and fatalities and hamper socio-economic development.

Lao PDR has the reputation of being the most heavily bombed country per capita in the world. Bombing data available for Lao PDR indicates that there were around 70,000 individual target locations across the country, and more than two million tons of munitions dropped, including more than 270 million submunitions (referred to locally as bombies).<sup>6</sup> In Vietnam, the United States dropped 413,130 tons of cluster munitions.<sup>7</sup> The failure rate of the submunitions dropped on Lao PDR and Vietnam is believed to have been as high as 30%. Landmine contamination is also found to a lesser extent in both countries.

The full extent of contamination in both countries is unknown. All 18 provinces in Lao PDR are reported to have UXO contamination, and 15 have cluster munition remnants contamination. Nine of these are considered heavily contaminated: Attapeu, Champasak, Huaphanh, Khammouan, Luangprabang, Salavan, Savannakhet, Xekong, and Xiengkhuang. The heaviest contamination is found in Xiengkhuang province and along the former Ho-Chi Minh trail in the east of the country, bordering Vietnam. Ongoing survey in Lao PDR had identified 1,996km<sup>2</sup> of confirmed cluster munition remnants contamination at the end of 2023.<sup>8</sup> In Vietnam, a survey conducted between 2004 to 2014 reported that 61,208km<sup>2</sup> of land was contaminated by UXO, representing 19% of Vietnam's land surface area.<sup>9</sup> In 2023, the total area still contaminated was reported to be 56,000km<sup>2</sup>, or 17% of Vietnam's land surface.<sup>10</sup> Contamination is mainly concentrated in central provinces on either side of the former demilitarized zone, including Quang Tri, Quang Binh, Ha Tinh, Nghe An, and Quang Ngai.

Fifty years since the end of the conflict, landmines and UXO continue to pose a threat to the safety of people living and working in the contaminated provinces. While in both countries the number of accidents has continued to drop, accidents do still occur each year, frequently caused by everyday farming activities such as digging, ploughing, cutting vegetation, or lighting fires. In some cases, accidents have occurred due to people touching, tampering

with, or playing with items. Mine/UXO contamination hinders social and economic development by restricting access to land and resources, delaying infrastructure development, and discouraging investment and employment opportunities.<sup>11</sup>

UXO/mine action in Lao PDR is coordinated by the National Regulatory Authority for the UXO/Mine Action Sector (NRA). The NRA is responsible for overseeing the implementation of the National Strategic Plan for the UXO Sector in Lao PDR, The Safe Path Forward III 2021–2030, adopted in January 2023.<sup>12</sup> Lao PDR is a signatory of the Convention on Cluster Munitions and is bound by Protocol V to the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons.

In Vietnam, the Vietnam National Mine Action Centre (VNMAC) is the national coordinating entity for mine action operations, a mandate formally endorsed through a 2019 decree. VNMAC oversees the implementation of the Prime Minister's Program 504 for mine action and the National Mine Action Plan. The provincial authorities have a high level of autonomy in managing mine action activities in Vietnam. The Quang Tri Department of Foreign Affairs was the focal point for mine action coordination in Quang Tri from 1996, and the first provincial mine action centre, the Quang Tri Mine Action Centre (QTMAC) was set up in 2018.<sup>13</sup> A provincial coordination structure is currently being set up in Quang Binh province.<sup>14</sup> Vietnam is not a signatory to the Mine Ban Treaty or the Convention on Cluster Munitions.

6. "US bombing records in Laos, 1964–73, Congressional Record", 14 May 1975; and Lao PDR, "Article 7 of the Convention on Cluster Munitions: Annual Article 7 Report," April 2024.
7. Mine Action Review, "Clearing Cluster Munition Remnants 2024," Norwegian People's Aid, 1 August 2024.
8. Mine Action Review, "Clearing Cluster Munition Remnants 2024," Norwegian People's Aid, 1 August 2024.
9. VNMAC, "Data and Statistics: Statistics of UXO Contamination in Vietnam," January 2021.
10. Mine Action Review, "Clearing Cluster Munition Remnants 2024," Norwegian People's Aid, 1 August 2024.
11. Kiengkay Ounmany, "Impacts of Unexploded Ordnance Clearance on Wet Rice Farming in Xieng Khouang Province, Northern Laos," Journal of Peacebuilding and Development, 1,5, 2021.
12. Mine Action Review, Clearing Cluster Munition Remnants 2024, Norwegian People's Aid, 1 August 2024.
13. QTMAC, "About us: History of Formation and Establishment" 2021.
14. Quang Binh DBCU, "The database and coordination unit for mine remediation of Quang Binh province comes into operation," 12 April 2021; and Quang Binh DBCU, "Introduction to Quang Binh DBCU," no date.

## Research Locations

The research locations in Lao PDR and Vietnam were selected according to the extent of mine/UXO contamination and to areas where different mine action operators are conducting a variety of activities including survey, clearance, risk education and victim assistance. The selection took into consideration different levels of socio-economic development and, where possible, ethnic diversity. The research teams sought the advice of the NRA in Lao PDR and VNMAC in Vietnam regarding the choice of provinces, districts, and villages for the study.

In Lao PDR the research was conducted in Huaphan province in the northeast of the country, and Savannakhet province in the south. These provinces are among the nine provinces most heavily contaminated by UXO in Lao PDR, particularly in the areas along the former route of the Ho Chi Minh trail which was the site of some of the heaviest bombardments during the war. The international NGO, the HALO Trust, and the national operator, UXO Lao, both work in Savannakhet province. Humanity and Inclusion (HI) worked in Huaphan province over a five-year period from 2018–2023 and implemented a project focused on the integration of mine clearance, risk education, mine action, victim assistance, and livelihood support (the Comprehensive Approach to Mine Action – CAMA).<sup>15</sup> UXO Lao also has operations in Huaphan, although these were suspended between 2021–2022 due to lack of funding. At the time of the study in December 2023, the UXO Lao operations were re-starting.

Two districts were selected in each province – Haumeuang and Viengxay in Huaphan province, and Nong and Sepon in Savannakhet province, and a total of 13 villages were included in the study across these four districts.

## Study Locations Lao PDR

Province	District	Village
Huaphan	Huamuang	Nakeng
		Khangkha
		Ban Phao
		Ban Vek
	Viengxay	Nameuang
		Xiengsue
		Meuang-gna
Savannakhet	Sepon	Phonxay
		Nabo
		Phonhai
	Nong	Dongnasan
		Ban Xuang
		Nongvilay

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## Study Locations Vietnam

Province	District	Village
Quảng Bình	Lệ Thủy	Lộc Thượng
		Lộc Hạ
		Resident group No. 2
		Resident group No. 6
	Quảng Ninh	Tiền
		Hà Thiệp
		Trường An
		Bắc Ngǔ
	Đồng Hới	Đức Thủy
		Đức Hoa
		Trung Nghĩa 5
		Trung Nghĩa 6
Quảng Trị	Cam Lộ	Tam Hiệp
		Lâm Lang
		An Mỹ

15. HI received a Memorandum of Understanding from the Lao government to begin operations in Phongsaly province in 2022. However, HI still maintains some staff in Samnuea in Huaphan province, and intended to re-start work in Huameung district with funding from Germany.

## Timeframe

The research was conducted over a period of eight months, from October 2023 to May 2024. In Lao PDR, the research began in October 2023, with fieldwork conducted from December 2023 to January 2024. The Vietnam team began work in April 2024, with most of their fieldwork conducted in May. Both teams prepared inception reports and desk reviews before the fieldwork and adapted and translated the research tools for use in their specific contexts. Following the fieldwork, each team analysed the survey data, wrote up the transcripts from their interviews, and conducted the analysis. Country research reports were written by the team leaders.

## Research Teams

The local research institutions and senior researchers were responsible for the selection and training of their research teams. In Lao PDR, researchers were selected from the National University of Laos and SEAMO. In Vietnam, AMDI selected enumerators from the Red Cross and Youth Union in Quang Binh and Quang Tri. These researchers had worked with AMDI on a previous mine action study.<sup>16</sup> The research teams included both men and women. The researchers in both countries were briefed on the aims and objectives of the research and received refresher training in interviewing methods, completing survey forms, general ethics and approaches for working in communities. During the field research, daily briefing sessions were held with the enumerators and researchers to discuss the progress, challenges, and any lessons learned. The senior researchers were responsible for undertaking the key informant interviews and focus group discussions and for conducting daily quality control checks on the survey data.

## Methodology

The research study in each country used a mixed-method approach comprising a desk review, a survey, semi-structured interviews, and focus group discussions. The use of different methods was intended to allow triangulation of data during analysis to strengthen the findings presented. It also allowed for the collection of numeric, broad data through the survey, and for in-depth and narrative data through the interviews and focus group discussions.

### Desk Review

The researchers in both countries undertook a thorough desk review of secondary data including publications, project reports, and policy documents. The desk review was written up and presented in inception reports, and it helped to inform the adaptation of the research tools to each country context. The International Mine Action Standards (IMAS) and the Lao PDR National UXO/Mine Action Standards were also reviewed to identify the relevant areas where community participation and involvement is recommended or required.<sup>17</sup>

### Quantitative Data

Quantitative data was collected via a household survey which provided an overview of how impacted communities have been involved in mine action, and how levels of risk and livelihood opportunities have changed following mine action activities. The household surveys were field-tested as part of the research training.

To identify households for the survey, the research leads worked with the local authorities to list households within communities. Households were then randomly selected from the list of households. Interviews took place both in public meeting spaces and in homes and took around 30 minutes. Where a household was not available to interview, the enumerators moved to the next closest household. To reach as many of the selected households as possible, the interviewers visited several times during the day. In most cases, the survey was administered with heads of households. A total of 532 respondents participated in the survey in Lao PDR, and 400 in Vietnam.

In both Lao PDR and Vietnam, the survey data was collected electronically on mobile devices using the Kobo Toolbox data collection platform. The data was analysed in SPSS and Microsoft Excel.

## Qualitative Data

The research teams in Lao PDR and Vietnam collected in-depth qualitative data to explore the opinions and perspectives of the different local stakeholders on the implementation of mine action within their communities, and to gather information from national and international mine action organizations.

A purposive sampling approach was applied to select respondents for qualitative interviews, ensuring that people with relevant knowledge and information were interviewed. When required a snowball approach was taken, asking interviewees for recommendations of other knowledgeable people to interview. Semi-structured interviews were held with authorities at different levels, mine action organizations, army representatives (in Vietnam), and representatives of other relevant organizations and institutions, including national coordination bodies and local level volunteers and networks. Mine/UXO victims and their families were also interviewed. The research teams tried to ensure that the interview sample was inclusive, considering gender, age, disability, and ethnicity.

Focus group discussions (FGD) were held with the residents of mine/UXO affected communities, with deminers and UXO mine risk educators. The mine action organisations supported the research by assigning deminers and risk educators to participate in the FGD, and village authorities supported the research teams to identify village residents to participate, considering the need for broad representation in terms of age, occupation, and ethnicity. In villages, the FGDs were held separately for men and women to try to understand how gender may influence perceptions and understanding. In most cases the FGD comprised five to six participants.

## Ethics and Permissions

The principles of Do No Harm were adhered to during the research, ensuring that the research would not cause unintended harm to the local communities and authorities and the other study recipients. Before any interviews took place, potential participants were asked if they were willing to participate, and interviews and Focus Group Discussions only proceeded if the participants gave their consent. All researchers and interviewers were trained how to approach potential study participants and obtain consent. The consent form provided information about the study, confidentiality, rights, and contact numbers. Participants were able to withdraw their consent at any time during the interviews. No children under 18 were interviewed. Confidentiality of the participants in relation to the data collected and presented in this report has been protected.

## Research Participants

The survey was administered with household heads where possible. As a result, a greater number of men participated in the survey, reflecting the fact that household heads in Lao PDR and Vietnam are frequently male. In Lao PDR, 61% of the total respondents were male, and in Vietnam, 69%.

The education levels of survey respondents in Vietnam were higher than in Lao PDR, with 42% having completed upper secondary school and 17% attended college or university. In Lao PDR, 45% of the respondents had completed primary education, and 27% had completed lower secondary education. Only 11% had completed upper secondary, and 3% had attended college. 17% of respondents had not attended school.

Household income levels differed between the survey respondents in the two countries, with the households in Lao PDR poorer than those in neighbouring Vietnam. In Vietnam, 68% of surveyed households reported an average monthly income of between 1.5 million VND and 5 million VND (approximately USD 60 to USD 198). In Lao PDR, 45% of the survey respondents had an average monthly income of less than 1,000,000 Lao Kip (approximately USD 45 per month), which is lower than the minimum monthly wage of 1,600,000 kip (approximately USD 73).<sup>18</sup>

In Lao PDR, villagers in the study area pursued multiple livelihood options, including upland and lowland rice farming, cash crops, small animal raising and trading. Most survey respondents reported rice farming as their main occupation. In Huameuang district, the studied villages include Khmu and Hmong communities, where people mainly practice upland agriculture, while the villages in Viengxay district are ethnic Lao, where communities practice lowland agriculture and animal breeding. The districts of Nong and Sepon in Savannakhet province are largely dominated by plain where people earn their living from lowland agriculture, animal raising, and small-scale trading. The villages are rural, and agriculture is largely subsistence, with households struggling to meet rice sufficiency due to poor soil quality and a lack of irrigation.

However, some villages were located near to major roads providing better access to public services and markets. In the last two to three years farmers have begun to grow cash crops such as cassava, rubber and sugar cane for export to China, Thailand and Vietnam. In Savannakhet, the village populations included Khmu, Hmong, Phuthai, Mangkong people.

In Vietnam, the districts of Minh Hoa, Quang Ninh and Le Thuy in Quang Binh province largely depend on agriculture, forestry, and fishing as their primary economic activities. These areas are predominantly rural, with most people engaged in subsistence farming and small-scale agriculture. In contrast, Gio Linh, Cam Lo and Dong Ha City in Quang Tri province are more diverse economically. Dong Ha City has a growing service sector and industry. People in Quang Tri work in manufacturing, trade and services in addition to agriculture.

## Research Limitations

The purposive sampling and use of snowballing in the qualitative research is likely to have had an impact on the representativeness of the sample, especially for the individuals from the affected populations. Village leaders often directed the researchers to households for interviews and assisted in collecting participants for the focus group discussions. This potentially led to some bias, with individuals being selected based on their relationship with, or proximity to, the village authorities. This may have excluded people who had different views, or who were marginalised in the community, or who lived further away. The survivors included in the study were identified by the village authorities, which likely also led to some bias.

Despite efforts to ensure representation of interviewees and a gender balance, the research teams sometimes had difficulties in encouraging women to join the FGD, or to speak and share their opinions. This was particularly the case in some of the ethnic villages in Lao PDR. The survey was administered with household heads which meant that a large proportion of the respondents were male.

In Lao PDR the research team found that language was a major challenge in the non-Lao speaking communities, making it difficult to get detailed responses and highlighting the challenge that some of the ethnic groups have in speaking and understanding Lao language. This was particularly noticeable among elderly people and women. In some villages the village authorities assisted with interpretation, which may also have introduced bias into the responses provided.

The research in Lao PDR and Vietnam was originally intended to be conducted at the same time, which would have allowed for more interaction between the two teams and discussion of emerging findings. However the recruitment process was delayed in Vietnam, which resulted in the Vietnam research beginning once the Lao research had been completed.

16. Specifically, a Knowledge, Attitudes and Practices (KAP) survey for UNDP as part of the Korea-Vietnam Mine Action Project (KV-MAP).

17. Vietnam did not have national standards in place at the time of the research, although work is ongoing within VNMAC to develop them.

18. See Laotian Times, "Laos to Increase Minimum Wage for Workers in October," 18 August 2023. Currency exchange in this report is calculated using Xe.com, 23 January 2025.

## CHAPTER 3: FINDINGS

### UXO Clearance Operations

IMAS 08.10 Non-Technical Survey, Edition 1, Amendment 4, February 2019.

Local participation should be fully incorporated into all stages of the land release process, including non-technical survey, in order to obtain agreement from all relevant stakeholders and to ensure that land is used appropriately after it has been released. Community involvement should include men, women and children living or working in or near the suspected area and where appropriate, owners of land.

IMAS 9.10 Clearance Requirements, Edition 2, Amendment 6, January 2020

The beneficiaries of humanitarian demining programmes must be confident that cleared and released land is safe for their use. This requires management systems and clearance procedures which are appropriate, effective, efficient and safe. All relevant parts and members of the local community should be involved in the process and should also receive regular briefings and explanations during the clearance operation as this acts as a very effective confidence building measure.

The IMAS Technical Note on All Reasonable Effort notes that community engagement is often fundamental to the success of the land release process which is dependent on accurate and evidence-based information to dictate where clearance should take place.<sup>19</sup>

Mine action authorities and operators in Lao PDR and Vietnam agree that the involvement of local UXO affected communities in mine action is crucial in their support to identify contaminated locations and to report UXO finds to operators.

*"If the community did not report [UXO], the survey and clearance teams would find it difficult to locate the UXO and clearance would take much longer."* Mine Action representative, Lao PDR.

### Survey And Task Prioritization

Since 2015, UXO operators in Lao PDR have been undertaking a Cluster Munition Remnant Survey (CMRS) to produce an evidence-based assessment of the extent of contamination.<sup>20</sup> The survey has been conducted in six provinces, with limited survey ongoing in five provinces. The survey results inform the clearance operations, with area clearance conducted in Confirmed Hazardous Areas (CHA) where there is evidence of contamination. Since 2021, with the conclusion of proactive survey in six provinces, there has been an increase in clearance outputs as operators focus on the clearance of the CHAs identified during the survey.<sup>21</sup> In Vietnam, operators are undertaking survey in both Quang Tri and Quang Binh province. NPA is conducting a Cluster Munition Remnant Survey (CMRS) in Quang Tri, and in Quang Binh, a CMRS survey approach was approved by MAG, PTVN and the Provincial People's Committee (PPC) in 2020.<sup>22</sup>

The research found that affected communities in both Lao PDR and Vietnam are involved in survey processes by providing information on areas that they know, or believe, are contaminated by UXO.

19. International Mine Action Standards, IMAS 07.11, "All Reasonable Effort," Edition 3, Version 1, March 2021.

20. The NRA can approve exceptions to this where the clearance is being paid for by a client or full clearance of land is required for development projects.

21. Mine Action Review, "Clearing Cluster Munition Remnants 2024," Norwegian People's Aid, 1 August 2024.

22. Mine Action Review, "Clearing Cluster Munition Remnants 2024," Norwegian People's Aid, 1 August 2024.

Village authorities in Lao PDR explained that they were responsible for organizing village residents to attend a meeting when the mine action operators began survey work. At the meeting, the survey team would present the objectives of the survey and the work schedule, and village residents would then be asked to identify UXO and hazardous areas in and around the community. Some of the villagers participating in the FGDs in both Lao PDR and Vietnam confirmed that they had attended such a meeting. A representative of a mine action operator in Vietnam explained that in addition to the village meetings, the team would also talk to people in their homes, fields and other places of work. Village authorities may also provide additional information as part of the survey process, including identifying poor and disadvantaged households and information regarding how land will be used after clearance.

However, once contaminated land, poor households, and land use needs have been identified, the plans for task prioritization in both countries are largely decided without community consultation. In Lao PDR, the national guidance for prioritization of land for clearance beyond evidence of contamination is quite general. Agricultural land is the priority, with development land, including land for infrastructure development, the second priority. Prioritization is decided by national and provincial level authorities in line with socio-economic development plans and district and provincial development plans. Mine action operators working at provincial level use their own systems to further identify their clearance priorities. In Vietnam, there is currently no national prioritization system, and prioritization is largely decided at a provincial level, managed by the provincial Mine Action Centres (MACs) in consultation with the mine action operators and other stakeholders, including the military and police.

Representatives from mine action operators in Lao PDR and Vietnam had mixed views on whether affected villagers should play a greater role in task prioritisation, citing difficulties such as demand for clearance being greater than available resources, and that people would want land cleared regardless of the level of contamination. However, others felt that there should be more participation from the communities, for both farming land and clearance of public land.

At local level there appeared to be little understanding as to why some land is prioritised for clearance and other land remains lower on the priority list. Some villagers interviewed said that they did not know why some agricultural land had been cleared and other areas had not, while others speculated it might be due to a lack of time or budget. Respondents also had little awareness of clearance plans for public land for schools, pagodas, and village halls.

These findings echo other research, including a 2017 study on prioritisation in Lao PDR which found that people at village level could not explain how multiple clearance tasks had been prioritised.<sup>23</sup> A 2023 UNDP report also found that a lack of information and understanding about survey and clearance processes.<sup>24</sup> Some community respondents interviewed in Lao PDR felt that if local people were more involved in the planning and prioritisation of clearance, they may feel more content with how the priorities are established.

*"I think it is very important for the villagers and the UXO project as well, because the more villagers are involved in the mine action activities, the greater the efficiency of the UXO teams implementing these activities in this village."* Village authority, Lao PDR.

In Lao PDR the NRA is working with mine action partners to develop a national process for task prioritisation. As part of this process, the NRA has been conducting some outreach activities to increase understanding among the provincial and district authorities as to how this will work. In Vietnam, operators in Quang Tri reported that they were involving local communities and authorities in the prioritization process through risk mapping activities and local consultation workshops. Such initiatives may help to better involve local authorities and affected communities in prioritization processes and enhance local level understanding.

### **Clearance**

Some of the village authorities interviewed reported that they were involved when clearance was ongoing in the village, to ensure that local people kept away from the clearance sites. Village authorities and landowners are also consulted prior to clearance to gain consent and to agree the timing of clearance activities.

*"The people are also the ones who give permission, because without their consent and support, it is difficult for us to carry out activities because it will affect their land, crops, and farming activities on the ground."*  
Mine action representative, Vietnam

In both Lao PDR and Vietnam, operators take into consideration the cultivation periods so that villagers can harvest their crops before clearance takes place. Clearance of agricultural fields often takes place in the dry season when crops have been harvested, and in the wet season when rice cultivation is taking place, clearance for community infrastructure, grazing land and development and infrastructure projects is prioritized. In Vietnam, some households reported that some crops had been damaged during the clearance process, although the villagers said they felt it was a sacrifice worth making. A mine action operator noted that the military observers in Vietnam often assisted to negotiate the timing of clearance activities with local communities.

During clearance operations, mine action teams may remove and cut vegetation or trees to allow access and to clear a path for detection and clearance, which may compact soil or damage crops. Heavy vehicles may also cause damage on village and farm roads. In two villages in Lao PDR, dissatisfaction was expressed by some villagers about the damage and waste created by clearance teams. In one village, the large, heavy-duty trucks used to transport equipment and personnel were reported to cause damage to paths and rice fields during the rainy season, which villagers had to pay to repair.

*"A few villagers don't want the team to clear their land during the rainy season because the UXO clearance team used large vehicles to go to their field, which destroyed the road to their field and also destroyed their grazing land. But in the dry season, all villagers allow them to conduct mine action activities."* Villager, Lao PDR.

Another concern raised was around waste disposal from clearance teams. With large teams of deminers working in villages, environmental management is important. However, in one village it appears that the waste disposal had not been adequate, with plastic waste disposed of carelessly.

Lao PDR has a national standard on environmental management, which states that "All domestic rubbish is to be removed from the site, buried, or burned on a daily basis. Rubbish from the site is to be disposed of at approved rubbish dumping sites."<sup>25</sup> In Vietnam, one of the mine action operators has started to include questions about the environment and climate change impacts in survey data collected from local areas to understand how mine action might be able to mitigate some of these impacts.<sup>26</sup> Understanding environmental and climate change impacts could also be included in post-clearance activities as well, to ensure that communities are not suffering any undue impacts from operations and that mine action is not exacerbating climate change and reducing community resilience. In addition, measures to mitigate environmental damage at community level should also be reviewed, updated, and included as appropriate within National UXO/Mine Action Standards.<sup>27</sup>

Villagers interviewed were generally very positive about the presence of clearance teams within their communities. The major benefit reported by communities with regards to UXO clearance was that it provided safety and peace of mind. In interviews and discussions with the communities, participants repeatedly said that they felt they had more confidence to work on the land after UXO clearance.

*"The UXO clearance activities helps to reduce the risk of an accident from UXO and makes it more convenient for villagers to practice their agricultural activities, collect the products from the village forest, and extend their agricultural areas, which increases their productivity and household income, and helps them reduce poverty."* Village authority, Lao PDR.

In Vietnam, people also reported feeling more confident to engage in agriculture. Villagers recalled how they were often afraid carrying out basic tasks such as digging before clearance, but since clearance they felt more secure in their daily lives. They said that clearance had helped to extend the amount of land they had available to farm, and enabled them to use machinery, grow vegetables and fruit trees, and to build houses or cattle pens. Respondents also noted that clearance had enabled the building of new schools and resettlement villages.

23. Kathryn Sweet, "Prioritisation Policy, procedures and Practices relating to UXO clearance in Lao PDR," GICHD NRA, Geneva, September 2017.

24. UNDP, "Final Report: Post-Clearance Impact Assessment for UNDP's UXO Clearance Support," January 2023.

25. National Regulatory Authority, "Lao PDR National UXO/Mine Action Standard, Chapter 21: Environmental Management," 15 October 2012.

26. GICHD, "Mine Action and the Resilience of Communities to Climate Change," GICHD, December 2023.

27. The Lao National Standards on Environmental Management are currently being revised, and Vietnam is also preparing to develop national standards, including one on Environmental Management.

*“Once the land is cleared and declared safe by the government and relevant organizations, people feel secure in raising livestock, growing crops, and advancing their economic activities.”* Village authority, Vietnam

In several communities in both Lao PDR and Vietnam, villagers noted that they often expressed their appreciation for the work the clearance teams were doing by providing food for the teams. Such interactions between clearance teams and villagers helps to build trust and good relationships.

### **Vegetation Clearance**

Chapter Five of the Lao National UXO/Mine Action Standards states that casual staff may be employed by clearance organizations for cutting vegetation prior to clearance, if they are supervised by a qualified technical and provided with safety training.<sup>28</sup> In Lao PDR, of the survey respondents who reported contributing to the mine action activities in their community, 48% had been involved in clearing vegetation before clearance.

In both Huaphan and Savannakhet province, UXO Lao has requested local community members to contribute voluntarily to the preparation of land before clearance, with the aim to minimize costs and to encourage local people to be involved in the clearance process.

However, the policy has not always been easy to implement, and operators reported that it was sometimes difficult to request villagers to contribute their labour for free. Participating in vegetation clearance detracts people from their daily livelihood activities. In the dry season, when rice fields are often being cleared by UXO clearance teams, villagers may travel further afield for livelihood activities and have less availability to support the clearance activities. UXO Lao has acknowledged that there is decreasing involvement of villagers in supporting activities such as vegetation clearance and so have now established four salaried teams to undertake this work. In Savannakhet, the HALO Trust also employs its own vegetation clearance teams.

In Vietnam, some villagers interviewed said that they had supported the work of the clearance teams by cutting back crops and removing trees under their guidance and supervision.

The effort to involve local people in UXO/mine action activities by contributing their labour to cut back vegetation prior to clearance is understandable, but perhaps not practical in areas when village livelihoods are largely subsistence and people rely on daily work to ensure household food and income. Providing a daily wage for the labour contribution of local people would help to ensure that sites are prepared on time and that villagers can still earn an income while being involved in the work of the UXO clearance teams.

### **Handover Of Cleared Land**

IMAS 8.30 – Edition 2, Amendment 5, June 2013 – Post Clearance Documentation

The demining organisation should brief the local community and the proposed beneficiary of the cleared land on the task when it is complete and has been formally handed over to the NMAA. Such a briefing should include a subjective confidence demonstration and an explanation of the residual risk for men, women and children.

Ensuring local confidence in land release activities is essential. Following UXO clearance, village leaders are responsible for signing the relevant documents to certify that the work has been done. Landowners who have had land cleared are provided with documentation about the clearance on their land and the ordnance that has been cleared. The NRA in Lao PDR stressed that this is important “because it gives villagers the confidence to know which areas have been cleared and which areas have not been cleared.”

Of the survey respondents in Vietnam who reported having land cleared, 80% said that they had received written information regarding the clearance process and the depth of the cleared areas. Participants in the FGDs also confirmed that they had attended a village meeting where the families who had land cleared were informed about what land had been cleared and the UXO found.

28. National Regulatory Authority, “Lao PDR National UXO/Mine Action Standard, Chapter 5: Worksite Preparation,” 15 October 2012.

Following area clearance, households are provided with a clearance completion document which outlines the task carried out, the coordinates of areas cleared, the depth cleared to, and the UXO found. However, such documentation is quite detailed and dense, and villagers reported that they were not always able to understand or read all the information. This suggests that a simple, one-page summary document, outlining the key information and attached to the more detailed documents, might help villagers to better understand the clearance conducted and how they can then use the land.<sup>29</sup>

Despite the general satisfaction of villagers with regards to clearance activities, there were indications from the survey respondents that some did not feel safer using the land after clearance. Participants of FGDs also noted that in some areas where UXO had been cleared, other UXO items were sometimes found. It is very likely that these reports are due to many of the clearance tasks being spot tasks, whereby UXO items found are removed but land is not fully cleared, or where land has been surveyed but not cleared. It does indicate that more communication is required between clearance teams and landowners to enable villagers to understand more clearly the clearance process on their land. It also points to the need for more participation in post-clearance assessment among community members.

### **Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD)**

The research in both Lao PDR and Vietnam found that one of the main ways local people engage with mine action operators is by reporting UXO that they find during their daily activities. Villagers participating in the focus group discussions in both countries noted that many of them had found and reported UXO to the local authorities or to representatives from mine action organizations. In the FGD, participants in both countries recalled the risk education message to “don’t touch, don’t move it, report it to the village authorities,” indicating that reporting UXO had been learned and reinforced through risk education messaging.

*“The most active participation of the local community is their participation in reporting information related to the bombs and mines that they discover in their area. In localities where people understand and cooperate, these tasks are implemented very quickly.”* Mine action representative, Vietnam.

Village authorities were cited as the main channel through which a community member would report a UXO find. Of the survey respondents in Lao PDR who had reported UXO in the last five years, 73% said that they would request verbally via the village chief. In Vietnam, 88% of survey respondents said they would report UXO via the village authorities. This is very much in line with traditional practices in both Lao PDR and Vietnam, whereby village authorities are the key focal points in local communities for facilitating communication with those outside the village.

*“Most villagers will report the UXO information to the unit head. Then the unit head will forward the details to village chief. The village chief will inform relevant parties. Usually, it takes about a week, the soonest.”*  
Villager, Lao PDR.

*“When explosives and mines are discovered, locals report to the authorities and wait for the mine action organizations and officials to address the issue.”* Villager, Vietnam.

Villagers also report and show UXO finds to mine action operators, although this tends to be on a more ad-hoc basis when operators are working in the village or nearby area. More households in Savannakhet province in Lao PDR and in Quang Tri province in Vietnam said they had reported UXO to a mine action operator, and it is likely that this is due to a stronger mine action presence in these provinces. In Savannakhet province, an operator also reported providing contact cards with the numbers of team leaders and supervisors during risk education sessions or when meeting with the village authorities.

UXO/mine risk education teams were found to play a role in verifying UXO finds and reporting to the clearance teams.

*“A child told us he had found a UXO, but when we went to see it, we found it was not a UXO. However, we are happy that people are watchful and reporting suspicious items which is what we tell them to do.”*  
Risk educator, Lao PDR.

In both Lao PDR and Vietnam hotline numbers have been set up by national or provincial authorities or by operators to help facilitate community reporting of UXO. In Vietnam, the hotline numbers are connected to the provincial mine action centres in Quang Tri and Quang Binh. In Quang Tri, the mine action centre, in cooperation with operators, conducted a campaign to promote awareness of the hotline number and the mine action centre website, which also has a link (accessible by scanning a QR code) to a report form. It appears that the campaign has helped to increase an uptake in reporting via the hotline. Of the survey respondents who had reported UXO, 18% said that they had used the hotline.

In Lao PDR, an emergency hotline has been set up by the NRA for UXO reporting, and some of the mine action operators also distribute phone numbers for people to call. The survey responses suggest that these hotlines are not used directly by villagers, with only 2% of survey respondents saying they would use the phone lines to request clearance. A Knowledge, Attitudes and Practices (KAP) survey conducted in Lao PDR in 2023 also found that the UXO reporting hotline was not widely known in Xieng Khuang province. This suggests that the system for reporting via the hotline in Lao PDR could be assessed to see how it could be improved and increase uptake.

The quick response of a roving or clearance team to clear UXO following a community report is crucial for reducing risk to local populations by removing the immediate hazard and for demonstrating to affected communities the effectiveness of the reporting mechanism. The survey results in Vietnam indicate that villagers are generally satisfied with the response when UXO were reported, with 94% of respondents saying that the UXO they had reported had been dealt with. The FGD participants also confirmed that the response rates to reports was good, particularly in Quang Binh where there is a greater mine action presence.

*"The response time is very fast; they will arrive within 30 minutes to an hour. If there is a need to evacuate people from the area, the destruction may take longer, but the situation is addressed promptly, day or night, without delay from one day to the next."* Villager, Vietnam

In Lao PDR, 63% of survey respondents who had reported UXO said there had been a clearance response, and 8% believing that there was a plan for clearance. However, over a quarter of respondents (28%) said that their request had not been responded to. Evidence suggests that the response to calls for roving clearance depends on the proximity of operators, with a good response rate when operators are working in the neighbourhood, but a lower response rate when operators are outside of the locality. In Huaphan province, for example, villagers reported a lack of response to their requests for clearance, which is likely due to operators not actively working in the province at the time of the research.<sup>31</sup> In Savannakhet the feedback on UXO clearance response was reported to be better. In Vietnam, it was also reported that in areas that were not "hotspots" for UXO clearance organisations, it was more challenging to contact teams to clear UXO.

### **Communication And Inclusion**

In Lao PDR and Vietnam, village authorities play an important role and are often the main point of contact for all new people visiting a village, and the main interface between the local population and the government or other agencies. Mine action operators in both Lao PDR and Vietnam ensure that first contact is made with the village leaders who can help to mobilize local people to join meetings or activities. Village authorities reported using traditional methods such as loudspeaker systems, a bell, or visiting households to contact people. In some cases, village authorities are beginning to use online chat Apps to contact villagers.

As key people in passing on information within villages, village authorities should be equipped with the information they need to be able to inform villagers of survey and clearance activities, and how to report UXO. However, contact solely with local leaders can also impede the spread of information to other people in the community. There were several examples in the study villages where information about demining activities seemed to have remained with the local leadership and had not been passed on to other villagers. Village authorities themselves reported that participation in meetings was often moderate, with some family members passing on information to others. Methods should be found to ensure that information is provided to everyone in the village, particularly regarding land that has been cleared, or reporting UXO. In one of the villages visited during the study, it was reported that some people were reluctant to report items unless they received some form of compensation.

29. See also: UNDP, "Final Report: Post-Clearance Impact Assessment for UNDP's UXO Clearance Support," January 2023. This study had similar findings regarding the handover documentation.

30. Keeley, Robert, "Knowledge, Attitudes, and Practices (KAP) Study: Lao People's Democratic Republic," UNDP Lao PDR and KOICA, August 2024.

This suggests that the local communities are not always well informed about the implementation of the programme and the benefits for them. Operators acknowledged that there is a need to maintain a regular presence in communities to build trust and enable reporting and to ensure an understanding of mine action activities.

***"We rarely participate in village meetings due to our busy work schedules throughout the year."***  
Villager, Vietnam.

Involvement in survey and clearance activities also seems to be influenced by gender, with most of the communication regarding UXO and mine action dealt with by male members of the community. The research found that in many cases women seemed to have less knowledge about clearance and reporting processes than men. The deminers and risk educators interviewed noted that most of the communication regarding UXO clearance tended to be with men in the village. The village leaders that participate in mine action activities are frequently male, and male members of households also take most responsibility for interaction with outside organizations and decision making. As a woman respondent in Vietnam noted, "my husband is very social, so he takes care of this." Women often find it difficult to participate in activities because of their household and child rearing responsibilities, and sometimes a lack of confidence and literacy skills. Even during the research, the research team, particularly in Lao PDR, struggled to encourage women to contribute their ideas and perspectives during the focus group discussions, despite these deliberately being organized with single-sex groups.

There may also be other sectors of the population that are excluded from participating in decision-making and activities within a village, including poorer households and those that lack time or ability to attend meetings due to livelihood activities, illness or disability. When the FGD participants were asked which community members tended not to join meetings, these were the common groups of people identified. Considering how these people can be reached when they are not able to be informed through traditional village meetings requires consideration by the mine action sector. It was also noted by some of the research participants that the use of phone apps or hotlines for reporting may also exclude some community members such as the elderly or those who do not have a phone.

***"I have not participated in any meetings with communication content about mines, because when village meetings are held, farmers usually attend. I cannot farm so I do not participate or learn about these issues."***  
UXO survivor, Vietnam.

31. HI completed operations in Huaphan in 2023, and UXO Lao were just re-starting operations having been stood-down due to lack of funding.

Another potential challenge for mine action operators working in Lao PDR and Vietnam is the number of different ethnic groups, many of whom live in areas which are UXO contaminated. Lao PDR has 49 officially recognised ethnic groups and many more sub-groups.<sup>32</sup> There is a high level of linguistic diversity, with 86 recorded languages and many communities where language skills other than Lao are necessary for effective communication, particularly when communicating with women and older people who are less likely to speak Lao.<sup>33</sup> Vietnam also has 54 officially recognised ethnic groups. The Viet (Kinh) people account for 87% of the population and mainly live in the lowland areas, with the other 53 groups in the more mountainous region.<sup>34</sup>

In both Lao PDR and Vietnam, operators reported that working in ethnic villages was often challenging due to cultural and language differences, and because people were often absent from villages during the day, or shy to interact with outsiders. Working in ethnic villages also requires respect of cultural beliefs and customs. In many ethnic villages there are sacred areas, including cemeteries, spirit forests and areas for storing rice, around which there are often access restrictions. Operators spoken to during the research reported trying to be sensitive to the cultural beliefs of the local people, noting that they would take advice from the village authorities regarding times to visit and ensuring that they avoided days when funerals or ceremonies were taking place. In Lao PDR, there were some reports of compensation being paid by mine action operators for ceremonies to appease the spirits when clearance activities caused damage to crops or sacred areas.

Mine action operators in both Lao and Vietnam reported that working with village leaders and village elders was essential when working in ethnic areas to facilitate communication and activities. Operators also reported having staff members from ethnic communities on their teams who could help with communication when working in villages. However, ensuring that all information is understood, both written and verbal, remains challenging.

## UXO Risk Education

### *Handover Of Cleared Land*

Risk education is an important pillar of mine action, aiming to ensure that individuals and communities are aware of the risks posed by UXO and mines and of the safe behaviours to adopt in order to reduce these risks to a level that allows them to live safely. The survey found that UXO/mine risk education had reached many of the communities participating in the study. Over 75% of the survey respondents in Lao PDR reported they had received UXO/mine risk education messages in the last five years, and in Vietnam, 87% of the surveyed households reported receiving risk education messages. More respondents in Quang Tri province reported receiving risk education (96% compared to 78% in Quang Binh) which could be explained by the greater number of mine action organisations working in Quang Tri and having extensive coverage built up over many years. In Quang Binh, the coverage by mine action operators was still relatively limited and concentrated in the central areas.

The methods for disseminating UXO/risk education messages in Lao PDR and Vietnam remain relatively traditional. The most common method for UXO/MRE delivery is by in-person delivery at village level. This includes presentations to the community, house-to-house delivery, sessions in schools, and the provision of emergency risk education in the case of a UXO accident or in other emergency contexts.<sup>35</sup> In Vietnam, a large majority of survey respondents (87%) reported receiving risk education via radio or television. Receiving risk education through community meetings was also a main method of receiving information (58% of respondents in Vietnam and 64% in Lao PDR reported they had received information through community meetings). To a lesser extent, people had also received messages on posters and leaflets.

*"In our village, a team performs a skit about bomb and mine accidents for the entire community. This approach is highly effective as it combines entertainment with education, making the message more memorable compared to flyers alone." Villagers, Vietnam.*

32. Lao Statistics Bureau, "Lao PDR Population and Housing Census 2015," Ministry of Planning and Investment, Vientiane, 2015.

33. Kalamar, Tina, "Social Inclusion of Marginalised Communities in Mine Action in Laos," Journal of Conventional Weapons Destruction, Vol 21, Issue 2, 2017.

34. Socialist Republic of Vietnam website, "About Vietnam: Ethnic Groups in Vietnam," 8 January 2025.

35. For example, risk education was provided during flooding in the south of Laos when it was feared that UXO may have been moved by the flood waters.

In both Lao PDR and Vietnam, UXO/MRE messages have been integrated into the school curriculum at primary and secondary level, which enables school children to be educated on safe behaviour. Risk education is incorporated into life-skills lessons and taught by trained teachers. The programs are run in each country under the respective Ministries of Education but have been supported by World Education in Lao PDR and by Catholic Relief Services in Vietnam. In Vietnam, it was also reported that school children are involved in art programs and painting competitions around the theme of risk education. Other operators also conducted risk education sessions in schools when working in the area. While children were not interviewed in the survey, the majority of adult survey respondents believed that the best way to disseminate UXO/MRE messages to children is through inclusion within the school curriculum.<sup>36</sup>

Affected communities largely participate in UXO/mine risk education activities as beneficiaries, attending presentations and awareness sessions. In Lao PDR, the NRA noted that more women attended risk education activities than men, often because of the time of day when activities are conducted, and because women traditionally take responsibility for caring for children and can ensure their children receive the messages. A Knowledge, Attitudes and Practices (KAP) survey conducted in Lao PDR in 2023, found that there was a problem with attendance and reach of risk education activities, with the main barrier to access being the provision of risk education during working hours which prevented attendance by working-age males.<sup>37</sup> Another study focusing on risk education in the ASEAN region found that risk education faced challenges working in communities including language and dialect barriers, illiteracy and the difficulty of implementing new digital technologies in remote areas. This was resulting in some priority audiences such as male youth not being included within risk education activities.<sup>38</sup>

As men and boys form the largest casualty groups in Lao PDR,<sup>39</sup> operators have made efforts to reach more men. The HALO Trust in Savannakhet province reported implementing a flexible schedule which allows them to work at night and reach villagers who are out of the village during the day. HI in Huaphanh province reported conducting house-to-house risk education with the intention to reach families and people who are unable to attend village-level events, for example, people with disabilities or mobility problems. In Vietnam, there is no centralized data collection system for casualties, and so it is difficult to know exactly who is most at risk. However, the casualty data that is available suggests a similar risk profile as Lao PDR, with men and children, particularly boys, the highest risk groups. Operators have also attempted to address attendance issues by providing risk education through a number of different communication methods including through online apps or community focal points.

The use of digital media is relatively new in Lao PDR and Vietnam. In Vietnam, campaigns have been run by mine action operators on Facebook, YouTube, and other social media platforms, and an interactive smartphone app was developed by Catholic Relief Services in 2018 that helps children identify landmines and other UXO and report them to the proper authorities.<sup>40</sup> In Vietnam, 37% of survey respondents said that they had received risk education messages through digital media. Operators explain that the use of digital media has helped to provide information to people wherever they may be, without having to call them to a village meeting. As a relatively new media, it is also interesting and exciting for people to use and may particularly attract youth who are often a high-risk group, but less easy to reach through traditional risk education methods. Online methods for the delivery of risk education have not yet been widely adopted in Lao PDR, partly due to the challenge of poor internet infrastructure. UXO Lao has a Facebook page and has uploaded UXO/MRE videos on YouTube, but only 4% of survey respondents said that they had received risk education messages digitally.

36. In Lao PDR, it was found that teachers also run evening classes on literacy, numeracy and life skills for adults in Community Learning Centres, run by village authorities with technical and financial support from INGOs. These could potentially be an opportunity for teachers to play a role in disseminating information on UXO safety to adults in the future.

37. Keeley, Dr. Robert, "Knowledge, Attitude and Practice (KAP) Study Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR) 2023 Final Report," 2 KOICA/UNDP Lao PDR, August 2024.

38. Hal Judge, "Integrated Approaches to EORE in ASEAN Member States," ARMAC, April 2020.

39. In 2023, a total of 47 casualties were recorded, with men and boys comprising 70% of the casualties (16 men and 17 boys). In 2024, 49 casualties were recorded, with men and boys comprising 74% (11 men and 25 boys). See [www.nra.gov.la](http://www.nra.gov.la).

40. Hue, Duong Trong, "Using Communication Theories in Mine Risk Education Campaigns: The Case of Vietnam," Global CWD Repository 179, 2018.

## Risk Education By Community Actors

### IMAS 12.10 EORE

"Efforts to strengthen community capacities for EORE should be an integral part of any EORE programme. This may include the establishment of volunteer networks and strengthening of community risk management efforts."

The training of community actors to provide UXO/mine risk education in their own communities has been tried to some extent in both Lao PDR and Vietnam. In theory, this type of approach is relatively cost effective, can help to ensure good coverage, build competencies at the local level, and create some expectation of sustainability. Shifting responsibility for risk education to community actors can also help to build capacity for dealing with residual risk.<sup>41</sup> It can also provide education in a way that is relevant to the local contamination problem and using local languages.

In Vietnam, the risk education programs involve organizations such as the Red Cross Society, the Women's Union, Youth Union, Fatherland Front, and Veterans' Associations. The involvement of these organizations was seen by some villagers to be important, and some international organisations work with these mass organisations as partners to identify the risk education needs of local communities and the best approaches. Such groups have their own communication activities and organizational structures and members which can support organizations in reaching specific groups within communities. Project Renew, in partnership with the Youth Union and Red Cross, runs a Community Reporting Network to ensure that any items of explosive ordnance found are reported.<sup>42</sup> Over 200 people are members of the network, including Youth Union officers, schoolteachers, and Red Cross workers.<sup>43</sup>

PTVN runs the Danaan Parry Landmine Education Centre in Quang Tri province, which provides risk education for children and serves as a training centre for Vietnamese volunteers, who then return to their own communities to deliver risk education messages.<sup>44</sup>

*"These organizations, often led by individuals with direct war experience, effectively educate the community about the dangers of mines and UXOs. For instance, a retired veteran who is also the chairman of the Red Cross Association actively promotes risk information."* Mine action programme manager, Vietnam.

However, it was reported that some of the volunteers, including the District Red Cross volunteers, lacked funding for their activities, despite being trained to provide risk education and to assist in survey and data collection projects focusing on casualties. The lack of support has impacted on the frequency of community risk education sessions and the number of community volunteers, with some villages having none.

There were mixed views from communities about the risk education activities implemented by the mass organisations. Some said the approach, which included competitions and was often run in collaboration with international organizations was highly effective. However, some villagers also felt that the methods used by some of the volunteer groups were not engaging, perhaps due to the lack of funding for better materials.

*"While veterans provided excellent examples of distinguishing between different types of bombs, they did not use illustrative images. As a result, the outreach was neither engaging nor effective."* Villager, Vietnam.

Qualitative research findings also revealed that many villages did not have volunteers. Some villagers explained that there had been volunteers before, but as the threat from UXO declined, these activities had petered out. In Vietnam, nearly 90% of survey respondents indicated that they either did not have or were unaware of any volunteers providing information on UXO risk education in their villages.

41. See, Katrin Atkins and Céline Cheng, "Explosive Ordnance Risk Education in Residual Contamination Management," GICHD, December 2023.

42. Project Renew, "Risk Education in Support of Explosive Ordnance Removal," no date.

43. ICBL-CMC, Country Profile: Vietnam, 11 February 2021.

44. PTVN, "What we do: Humanitarian Mine Action, Mine Risk Education," undated.

In Vietnam, MAG explained it was setting up a network of focal points at village and commune level who would be able to report on accidents and UXO finds and provide risk education. The focal points are volunteers and selected as they are trusted by other community members. In the first year the volunteers receive 200,000 VND per month (approximately USD 8) as fuel support so that they can organise activities and introduce their position and role in the community. By providing only a low financial incentive, it is hoped that the volunteers will continue to work even after the organization has moved on.

The Lao study found fewer examples of efforts to build community capacity for risk education. The HI programme in Huaphan worked with two or three volunteers per village who could help facilitate communication, report UXO, and identify victims or report accidents. Local people were also engaged to help deliver risk education within schools. However, it was not clear how sustainable the activities were following HI's move to Phongsaly province in 2023. World Education Laos is implementing a risk education project of which a major component is community outreach. However, the project has found it challenging to engage the community as volunteers because they either didn't have the time to join activities or wanted to be paid. A plan to involve youth as outreach workers also faced challenges as younger people did not command as much respect in a community as older people. UXO Lao and the Lao Youth Union are also known to train village volunteers for risk education, although the research team did not find any feedback on the success of these projects.

### ***Perspectives Of Risk Education***

In Lao PDR, villagers who had seen or heard mine/UXO messages generally understood them well. 83% of respondents said that they understood the messages clearly (35%) or very clearly (48%). There was a slight difference in levels of understanding between respondents in Huaphan and those in Savannakhet, which could be due to education levels or the fact that more respondents in Huaphan were Lao speakers.

In Vietnam, most respondents (nearly 82%) reported a clear understanding of the risk education messages and 91% said that they found the information useful in terms of recognizing what UXO/mines might look like (69%) and understanding the dangers (91%). 62% of survey respondents said they knew what to do if they saw a UXO, and 44% said that they know how to report.

While the survey respondents agreed that the messages were useful in terms of recognition and reporting, there was less consensus on the usefulness of risk education in helping people carry out livelihood activities more safely. Only 5% of respondents in Huaphan province and 15% in Savannakhet province said that the risk education helped them to know how to farm more safely (35% of respondents in Vietnam). It is also unclear how successful risk education has been in addressing intentional risk taking such as moving and tampering with UXO. In Vietnam, specific radio and television programmes aimed at scrap metal collectors and young boys have been aired. However, even when aware of UXO/mine risks, many people continue to conduct livelihood activities in areas where UXO may be present. This may be driven by poverty, but also by normalization of living in contaminated areas, which can lead to a level of complacency. There has been a general acknowledgement that risk education needs to become more responsive to risk taking, which is informed by a complex set of factors other than simply lack of knowledge and awareness.

Risk education fatigue is also an issue in Southeast Asia as people have received risk education sessions many times over the years. This was apparent in the responses of some of the participants and risk education operators also reported this as a growing challenge. As people are not turning out for risk education presentations as in the past, it is timely that operators are looking at how messages can be provided through different delivery channels to ensure as much reach and engagement as possible. There may also be options to integrate risk education with other sectors such as health programmes and livelihood activities. As one former risk education professional from Vietnam has suggested, "Applying more than one communication channel particularly interpersonnel efforts engaging opinion leaders and peer groups and (low cost) networks such as the Youth Union, reinforced by mass media messages is more likely to increase receptiveness of the target audience."<sup>45</sup>

## Victim Assistance

### Provision Of Support And Services

IMAS VA in Mine Action, Edition 1, Amendment 1, 17 January 2023

"The National Mine Action Authority is responsible for promoting community-based planning processes that facilitate the meaningful participation of EO survivors."

"Survivor organisations should be consulted, through the appropriate national mechanisms, in all aspects of planning, coordination, implementation, monitoring, evaluation and reporting, in particular of activities that affect their lives."

The provision of assistance to victims of mine/UXO accidents is complicated and requires long-term commitment. Most services that provide support to victims of UXO/mines, including emergency and ongoing medical care, rehabilitation, psychological and social support, and who facilitate access to education and livelihood activities, are managed outside of the mine action sector. However, as outlined in the IMAS 13.10 for Victim assistance in mine action, the mine action sector can provide important assistance by identifying victims, gathering information about their needs and challenges, and referring them to the appropriate authorities and institutions.<sup>46</sup>

The studies in Lao PDR and Vietnam did not conduct an in-depth enquiry into victim assistance and the perceptions of survivors and victims regarding the services and support provided. However, some survivors were interviewed as part of the research, and some information regarding the available services and their experiences is included here.

The provision of assistance to victims is often hindered by a lack of data on casualties and their needs. In Lao PDR, the last country-wide victim survey was conducted in 2007 through to 2008,<sup>47</sup> although the NRA notes that the actual number of UXO victims has never been accurately established, and there is a lack of systematic and ongoing data collection on victims and their situation. Similarly, in Vietnam, there has been no mechanism to systematically collect victim data, although in 2019 a database on persons with disabilities and UXO survivors was set up in the provinces of Quang Binh and Quang Dinh, funded by the Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA) and implemented by VNMAC and UNDP.

In Lao PDR, the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare is primarily responsible for providing assistance to persons with disabilities, including UXO/mine victims. Support provided includes medical care, rehabilitation, psycho-social and livelihood support for UXO victims and their families. Several NGOs work in victim assistance in Lao PDR, including World Education, HI, the Cooperative Orthotic and Prosthetic Enterprise (COPE) and the Quality-of-Life Association (QLA), a local civil society organisation based in Xieng Khuang province. World Education is the largest provider of victim assistance services and has a Memorandum of Understanding to provide services countrywide and to administer the War Victims Medical Fund in cooperation with the NRA. This provides funds for survivors during their stay in hospital and for other costs related to their treatment, including travel. The fund provides support to UXO victims country-wide, and a Victim Assistance Support Team facilitates assessment of needs. World Education also runs the Opportunity for the Future project which integrates livelihood and disability support. HI in Huaphan province also provided support to survivors and other persons with disabilities to identify and plan socio-economic activities, thus involving the persons with disabilities in the decision-making process. In some areas community self-help groups have been set up for persons with disabilities, which was reported to provide personal and social empowerment for beneficiaries within their communities. Victim assistance providers interviewed noted that the provision of prosthetic limbs, psycho-social support, and vocational training is not well covered.<sup>48</sup>

45. Hue, Duong Trong, "Using Communication Theories in Mine Risk Education Campaigns: The Case of Vietnam," Global CWD Repository 179, 2018.

46. International Mine Action Standard, IMAS 13.10, "Victim Assistance in Mine Action," Edition 1, Amendment 1, 13 January 2023.

47. NRA, "National Survey of UXO Victims and Accidents". Vientiane, Lao PDR, 2010.

48. There are only two vocational training centres in Lao PDR, one in Xieng Khuang and one in Huaphan.

The Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs (MoLISA) is responsible for vulnerable people in Vietnam, including persons with disability. VNMAC has a role to support UXO/mine victims, and the 2019 Decree on the Management and Implementation of the Removal of Post-War Mines and Unexploded Ordnance (UXO), also known as the Mine Action Decree, includes victim assistance measures aligned with the work of the Department of Social Protection under MoLISA.<sup>49</sup>

Where UXO/mine victims have registered with the state and have registration cards, they are entitled to assistance from the state, including orthopaedic surgery and physical rehabilitation. Children of UXO victims from poor or near-poor households are also supported with scholarships and financial support for buying school supplies.<sup>50</sup> The District Red Cross Societies provide support for victims, coordinating with donors or NGOs to facilitate access to medical, health care, or livelihood support. Vietnam Assistance for the Handicapped (VNAH) partners with regional rehabilitation centres run by MoLISA to provide rehabilitation services and prosthetic devices. Project Renew provides financial support to UXO survivors and the families of victims to help with livelihoods and any adjustments needed after an accident. The organization also supported the setup of an orthopaedic workshop in Quang Tri General Hospital to bring rehabilitation services closer to survivors.<sup>51</sup> UNDP, through the Korea Vietnam Peace Village project, has provided health screening and prosthetics and rehabilitation services in Quang Binh and Binh Dinh, in addition to supporting victims and their communities in agricultural activities through skills, knowledge and access to credit and markets.<sup>52</sup> CRS supports a Volunteer Network that connects landmine survivors to NGOs and social organizations for support, and links survivor families with the Department of Agriculture in Quang Binh and Quang Tri to provide livelihood training.<sup>53</sup>

While PTVN used to have a victim assistance programme, this closed due to a lack of funds. Mine action operators in Vietnam noted that there has been a decrease in the number of mine victims in the country in recent years, and this appears to have been matched by a decrease in the funding available for victim assistance programmes. UXO/mine victim support is increasingly integrated into larger programmes supporting people with disabilities which makes it difficult to track how well UXO/mine victims are being supported.

In both Lao PDR and Vietnam, most mine action operators conducting survey, clearance and risk education activities do not conduct victim assistance activities, although in line with IMAS 13.10 on victim assistance in mine action, they may provide information to victims and families on how to access services and will provide transport in the event of an accident. Reports on UXO victims are also submitted by operators to the NRA in Lao and to the provincial mine action centres in Vietnam.

### **Perspectives Of Support And Services**

The survivors interviewed as part of this study were all adults, and the majority interviewed had been injured while conducting livelihood activities such as collecting food and non-timber forest products, digging and farming, cutting vegetation, or making a fire for cooking. A few of the survivors interviewed were war veterans who had been injured during military training or fighting. Some of the survivors revealed that their accidents had a severe impact on their health, their mental state, and also on their ability to work. Several reported that the health issues they faced were exacerbated as they got older.

In Lao PDR, in the case of recent accidents, the survivors and relatives interviewed reported that they received medical assistance following the UXO accident. This included transportation, hospitalisation and daily subsistence allowance for victims and their relatives while staying in the hospital. This indicates that the War Victims Medical Fund run by the NRA in cooperation with World Education can respond to the needs of recent casualties. World Education also provides a report on all UXO accidents, which contributes to updating casualty data and outlines the needs of the survivors. However, survivors who received their injuries in the past, often reported that they had not received support, and the costs of travel and treatment had created financial difficulties for their families. War veterans in Lao PDR receive a monthly allowance from the war veterans fund through the provincial department of Labour and Social Welfare. Three war veterans interviewed in Lao PDR all reported that they received the allowance.

49. VNMAC, "Major contents of Decree No.18/2019/ND-CP," 7 January 2020.

50. VNMAC, "Major contents of Decree No.18/2019/ND-CP," 7 January 2020.

51. Project Renew, "Renew Meet Local Partners to Evaluate Disability Support Program In 2019–2020 And Discuss Action Plan For 2021," 21 December 2020

52. UNDP, "Korea-Vietnam Peace Village Project Brief," 2021.

53. CRS (April 2015). Mine Risk Education in Vietnam, Journal of ERW and Mine Action, Volume 19, Issue 1, Article 8.

The Vietnam, the Department of Labor, Invalids and Social Affairs provides monthly financial support to victims, with the amount provided depending on the type of disability. UXO victims are registered to by the commune authorities, and once registered, they are eligible to receive financial support. One survivor reported receiving around 720,000 VND (\$29 a month). Another reported receiving a state subsidy of 540,000 VND (USD22) per month, while another reported that the support had increased from 120,000VND to 540,000 VND (USD5-20) per month over 15 years.

*"I receive monthly financial support as a disability allowance. Many people in this village also receive this disability support. I receive around 720 thousand VND per month (approximately \$29). I still have to work in the fields to make ends meet. There are also some preferential social policies from the state, such as health insurance, or borrowing capital to start small business, but you need to check the conditions to make sure you are eligible."* Survivor, Vietnam.

Two survivors interviewed in Vietnam had received free government health insurance, and two had been visited by local authorities for assessment. As in Lao PDR, it appears that more recent victims had received support, whereas those who had been injured sometime previously had not. However, some survivors still did not know who to contact to get help and were waiting to be notified by the government.

*"A few years ago, I declared my details to the village, but I haven't heard anything for a few years now. I see that people here who have been affected do receive benefits, but I don't know who to ask. I also asked the village chief and he said the declaration has been made, so I have to wait for them to deal with it."* Survivor, Vietnam

The provision of prosthetic limbs appears to be less consistent, and survivors also had mixed opinions on their usefulness. Three survivors interviewed in Lao PDR had received prosthetic limbs from provincial hospitals. However, the prosthetics were not always deemed comfortable or useful. In some cases, this was due to the prosthetics being received some time after the accident, which meant that the survivor had learned to cope without a prosthetic or found it difficult to adjust. One or two of the survivors who had been injured during the war refused assistance as they felt that they were too old to need it.

*"I haven't got used to using it. Since getting the prosthetic arm I hardly ever use it. It is difficult to ride a motorbike when wearing it."* Survivor, Lao PDR

In Vietnam some of the victims reported that they have been provided with prosthetic limbs, and that some of the programmes provided re-fitting or replacement prosthetics every few years, including support for accommodation and travel expenses.

In Huaphan province in Lao PDR, the Quality of Life Association (QLA) implements victim assistance activities funded by the Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA). The project includes training and livelihood support. However, the provision of livelihood support to victims was less visible in the provinces and villages visited as part of this study. No respondents reported livelihood projects for victims in Savannakhet. In Huaphan, a small number of victims had received assistance in the form of skill training and animals (cows and goats), although the results were mixed. Some beneficiaries were still raising the animals and had reared young. However, in some cases, it seems that the support did not match the needs of the victims. One woman survivor had been given a cow to raise, but due to her disability she found it too difficult to look after the cow and so gave it to a relative. However, the women is able to weave and said she could earn about 100,000 Lao Kip per month (approximately USD10) from weaving. This illustrates the importance of involving survivors in the conversation around appropriate support and assistance.

In Vietnam, children of some UXO victims were reported to receive tuition subsidies. These subsidies were reported to be provided by the state, and by Project Renew. One survivor reported that her child received 3.5 million VND (USD140) per semester, which had been provided since 10th grade and into university.

While the survivors interviewed in both Lao PDR and Vietnam noted that the support received was welcome, many felt that the support was insufficient and said that more financial support was needed as was access to rehabilitation services and psychosocial and livelihood support.

*"The support serves more as encouragement than a reliable source of income. Although it motivates me to strive and stay positive, it is not sufficient." Survivor, Vietnam.*

In Vietnam, survivors also expressed the desire to establish a club or mechanisms for people with disabilities to facilitate communication and mutual support.

*"We need a club where people with disabilities can meet quarterly or annually to share experiences and provide support to each other. Currently, we are reluctant to attend village meetings and need a more dedicated space for open discussions." Survivor, Vietnam.*

There appears to be a need for victims to be better connected to support, and for them to have more understanding of what support is available. Mine action organizations, even when not working directly to support victims, should ensure that they are able to provide referrals for victims in the areas where they work. One representative from a mine action organization in Vietnam noted that more needed to be done to document the services available for victims, so that they know who they can contact for prosthetics or vocational training.

## **Economic Support And Employment In The Mine Action Sector**

Mine action organizations have provided a source of economic support and employment for people in mine/UXO affected areas, contributing to the local economy and to building the skills and expertise of individual community members.

The presence of clearance teams within a village can provide opportunities for villagers to earn additional income. In Lao PDR, 32% of respondents said that they supported the clearance teams by providing food. The HALO Trust noted that having teams present in villages meant that people could sell their produce to the clearance teams. While some operators camped near villages, some rented property for storage or accommodation and hired villagers as security guards during their work in the communities. Staff of some organizations are paid a food allowance so that they can purchase food in the communities where they are working.

In Vietnam, the Quang Tri Mine Action Centre reported that there are more than 1,000 individuals engaged in mine action activities in the province, and several of the mine action organizations hired local people in both Quang Tri and Quang Binh. In Lao PDR, the HALO Trust reported that it had employed 1,400 people in 2023, of which around 90% were from the local communities. Local people were recruited to work as deminers, risk educators and drivers, earning between 5 to 7 million kip per month (around USD530 to USD740 per month). According to the HALO Trust, this allowed the employees and their families to invest in farm equipment and agricultural activities, significantly contributing to their families' wellbeing. HI in Huaphan also reported recruiting staff members from the villages where they worked, including women and ethnic minority people.

The local staff involved in mine action activities interviewed during the research expressed pride at supporting the work to clear UXO from their local communities.

*"I have helped my local villagers clear and clean up dozens of hectares of UXO-contaminated land over the past 10 years. This work is very meaningful and brings me great happiness."*  
UXO clearance staff, Vietnam

*"Being able to connect and communicate with people in my local villages makes my work very meaningful because it helps people understand and prevent the risks that lead to UXO/mine accidents."*  
Risk educator, Vietnam.

Villagers who are recruited to work as deminers or UXO/MRE educators, often function as a bridge between the local communities and the UXO clearance operators. They were reported to be a good source of advice on UXO clearance, risk education, and even victim assistance for the local communities. In some of the FGDs, participants said that they were able to easily talk to the villagers who worked for the demining organizations when they had questions on UXO clearance and other issues. The local people recruited as deminers and risk educators are also considered to be good role models for young people in the village.

The recruitment of individuals from different ethnic groups in Lao PDR has the added benefit of helping teams to communicate effectively within ethnic villages, particularly with women or elderly people who were less likely to speak Lao language, and to understand the culture and customs.

*"Many of the women in [the districts of] Nong and Sepon [in Savannakhet province] cannot speak Lao language, and so we are able to work with them in their own language so they can understand the messages."* Risk educator, Lao PDR.

The recruitment of women from local communities is equally important. A gender case study in Lao PDR found that the benefits of employment may be particularly significant for women as while they benefit economically from mine action employment on a similar scale to men, it is in a context where formal employment opportunities for women are fewer. In addition, "women-led single income households, such as those led by widows, show particularly strong improvements across a range of indicators, indicating that employment of women who are the sole breadwinners for their families can be particularly beneficial.<sup>54</sup>

In both Lao PDR and Vietnam, it was found that mine/UXO survivors had also been employed to a limited extent, particularly for risk education activities. This should be encouraged as it can help to contribute to financial independence, self-esteem, and confidence, and the fulfilment of basic rights and freedoms. Many people living with disabilities, particularly women, often have considerable challenges and restrictions in finding salaried work. This is even more pronounced in rural areas.

Employment opportunities in the mine action sector can be important for all people living in contaminated areas, but particularly for women, survivors, and people from ethnic minority groups. Salaried employment can significantly support these individuals and their households, in addition to providing mine action operators with valuable local knowledge and insights and helping to change attitudes towards the employment of these traditionally marginalised groups.

54. Dominic Wolsey and Laura Biscaglia, "Monitoring and Evaluation of Gender Equality and Inclusion in EORE," ARMAC 2023.

## CONCLUSION

The research studies demonstrate the efforts that have been made to involve local communities in mine action activities in Lao PDR and Vietnam. Where the involvement has been successful, there are significant benefits for both the communities and the operators. The engagement with communities helps to facilitate effective communication, builds trust, and enhances the overall efficiency of clearance operations. Local people provide valuable information on contamination as part of survey processes and are key to reporting processes. The recruitment of mine action staff from local communities have shown multiple benefits: mine action operators gain staff with local knowledge and language, and the employees are able to contribute to improving the safety within their communities while earning a good salary. Recruiting individuals from different ethnic groups and women ensures that diverse perspectives and knowledge are incorporated, which is particularly important in ethnic villages and rural areas.

However, the studies indicate that community involvement is often limited to certain areas such as providing information on UXO locations and participating in risk education. There is a need for greater involvement in planning, prioritization, and understanding clearance processes to avoid misunderstandings. Enhanced community participation could lead to more targeted, effective interventions, and build local competencies for managing residual risks. While good policies are in place in both Lao PDR and Vietnam concerning victim assistance, implementation is not always consistent, and information about how to access services is often lacking, particularly in remote, rural areas. It will be important for the mine action sector to consider how best to implement the guidance within IMAS 13.10 on Victim Assistance, to help to address these gaps.

Maintaining the interest and engagement of people in contexts where the threat of UXO contamination has become normalized is often challenging. People feel less inclined to attend risk education sessions or to stop livelihood activities to participate in discussions about survey or clearance. While there is a need for the mine action sector to continue to engage and build trust with communities, operators must also respect that time is often a precious resource in rural communities, and communication activities should be arranged with this in mind. Village volunteer activities show varying degrees of success, which suggests that more information is needed from affected people to consider what works in which context. Communicating solely through village authorities, while necessary and helpful, can also exclude people, in particular women, people with disabilities, and other marginalized groups. Considering how information can be shared more widely within villages is still a challenge to be addressed.

The recommendations from this study aim to support the national mine action authorities in Lao PDR and Vietnam in considering actions that could be taken to increase the involvement of UXO/mine affected communities in mine action with the aim to enhance the effectiveness of clearance, risk education, and victim assistance activities, and to ensure that local people are informed, proactive and have access to the support they need to live in safety. The recommendations are as follows:

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Finding	Recommendation
Villagers often have little understanding of task prioritization, despite often being asked to provide information on contaminated areas during survey.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure that task prioritization processes are understood at provincial, district, and village level by conducting outreach activities.</li> <li>• The basics of task prioritization should be explained to village authorities and villagers during survey processes, or before clearance commences.</li> </ul>
Some villagers expressed concern about environmental damage caused by clearance teams.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure new or updated national standards on environmental management address mitigation measures for environmental damage at local level.</li> <li>• Ensure the inclusion of questions on local-level environmental impacts in post-clearance surveys.</li> </ul>
Villagers reported finding UXO on land that has been “cleared.” It is possible that this is due to misunderstandings about whether land has been fully cleared or surveyed or to a UXO item having been removed as a spot task.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure operators provide a clear explanation on the purpose and outcomes of survey, spot task clearance, and area clearance, so that village authorities and villagers have a better understanding of these different processes and what this means in terms of any remaining contamination.</li> </ul>
Hotline numbers for UXO reporting have been set up in both Lao PDR and Vietnam, although use of the hotline numbers appears limited.  Response rates to UXO reports are generally good in areas where operators are working, but less good in areas where there are no operators.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conduct a campaign to promote awareness of hotline numbers. This can be done via mine action teams, by radio or TV, or by digital means.</li> <li>• Where possible have only one hotline number used by all operators and make it free to call.</li> <li>• Develop a process to ensure that there can be a timely response to calls in areas where operators are not currently working.</li> </ul>
Village authorities have a lot of responsibility to ensure that villagers are aware of mine action activities, that they report UXO, and that they attend relevant meetings.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure village authorities are well equipped to support mine action processes in their communities, particularly in areas with heavy contamination. Consider organizing meetings or training with village authorities to help them better facilitate mine action activities.</li> <li>• Support village leaders to set up localised phone app group chats to share information about hazards, meetings, or mine action activities.</li> </ul>

<p>Most of the communication regarding UXO and mine action is dealt with by male community members. Women and other marginalized groups, including UXO survivors, may have less knowledge about clearance and reporting processes than men.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Consider the best methods to ensure the inclusion of women and other marginalized groups in the dissemination of information about mine action activities. This could include drawing on existing forums and structures with access to women and other groups, for example, the Women's Union, self-help groups etc.</li> </ul>
<p>Risk education fatigue makes it harder for operators to gather people to in-person risk education sessions and to target high-risk groups such as adolescent boys and men.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ensure that risk education approaches are adaptable, that messages can be provided through different communication channels, actors, and at different times (evening as well as during the day).</li> <li>Develop specific programmes with adapted messages and tested communication channels to target high-risk groups such as adolescent boys and men.</li> <li>Review village volunteer programmes to improve effectiveness and to ensure that they are well supported with training and backing from existing government and societal structures.</li> </ul>
<p>Risk education was seen to be less effectiveness in supporting people to conduct livelihood activities safely.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continue to investigate approaches that integrate risk education with agriculture and livelihood activities to address high-risk activities.</li> </ul>
<p>There appears to be a need for victims to be better connected to support, and for them to have more understanding of what support is available.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop a clear strategy with mine action operators to implement IMAS 13.10 on mine action and victim assistance, ensuring that operators can provide UXO victims with information on services available and provide referrals.</li> </ul>
<p>Recruiting people from UXO affected communities has multiple benefits both for operators and communities, including building trust, facilitating communication, building skills and expertise, and supporting the local economy.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continue to support the recruitment of UXO affected people in mine action. Ensure the promotion of equal opportunities for the employment of women, ethnic groups, and UXO survivors.</li> </ul>

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