

## **ChildFund Laos Australia**

### **Development Effectiveness Case Study**

#### **Bomb Clearance at Hindeng Village**

#### **Theme: Protection**

**Outcome Indicator: OI17: % of women of child bearing age, children and youth who feel safe in their daily life.**

**Country:** Laos

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**Program Area:** Nonghet

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**Informed consent secured -Yes**

**Recommended for external publication - Yes**

During the Second Indochina War, more than half a million bombing missions were carried out over the Lao PDR, resulting in over two million tons of explosive ordnance being dropped. Some 30 per cent of all ordnance delivered failed to detonate. Research indicates that 98 per cent of all casualties from cluster bomb munitions are civilians and “more than half of the casualties caused by UXO in the Lao PDR in recent years have been children, most often young boys”<sup>1</sup>. On September 7, 2016, UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon inaugurated the Lao PDR’s own national Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) on unexploded ordnance during the ongoing Asean Summits. Goal No. 18, which related specifically to Laos, is “Lives safe from UXO; remove the UXO obstacle to national development”. Having UXO clearance as a national SDG is a powerful tool to make sure efforts are coordinated for full impact by 2030, with the support of national institutions, development partners and civil society organisations. At the same time, US President announced that America would double its assistance to Laos for UXO clearance, from USD 15 million last year to USD 30 million in the coming year and which totals USD 90 millions over the next three years. Other countries like New Zealand have also announced contribution to the UXO sector through UNDP.

ChildFund Laos has funded three large clearance operations on farmlands and several smaller clearance works on school and water and sanitation facility construction sites in Nonghet District since 2011. In 2015, ChildFund Laos had received enough funding from the Gift for Goods program to conduct clearance activities on farmlands again. The process of selecting the partner villages for UXO clearance is based on where the majority of UXO is known in the area or where there still remains exposed UXO to be cleared. The ChildFund Laos Livelihood Officer, the village authorities, and village community members met to draw a village map. Using this map, they marked where they believe that there still exists UXO, and listed the names of the families on whose land this UXO is to be found. After bidding, ChildFund Laos selected the service of a private company to clear the agricultural land of the three communities. A total of 23.5 hectares was cleared by the end of November 2015.

One of these communities, Hindeng Village, is located only a few kilometres from Nonghet municipality, along a main road. Farming corn is the main livelihood activity. Only a few rice fields are cultivated as the land quality is poor; planting corn is seen as more economically advantageous than rice as it grows better in poorer soils. In the beginning of 2015, this village received support from ChildFund Laos<sup>2</sup> to clear an area of 6.8 hectares belonging to eight families.

The Head of Hindeng Village explained:

*“People have been living in Hindeng for a very long time, long before the war. During the war there were so many bombs dropped on our village that it became a serious issue for the community. Later, MAG, an organization working in Nonghet, started to clear the land, so some areas were made safe but others remained contaminated because the communities do not have enough money to clear it all. In consequence, people cannot make use of all of the land, and cannot reach their expectations in terms of agricultural production”.*

*“In the past, the people found a lot of UXO in their farms and gardens, and informed the technicians from MAG who are based in Nonghet so that they could remove the bombs. Sometimes the community destroyed a bomb by themselves by setting fire around it to make it explode. No one was injured because everybody was careful.”*

*“I observed first that the company that came last was clearing the area without using any rope to mark and divide the land into squares, so I reported what I saw to ChildFund Laos. The ChildFund Laos Livelihoods Officer advised them to use ropes to divide the land and to make sure that all the land was cleared and safe. Since then, the company has changed its technique*

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<sup>1</sup> Discourse of UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon on Sept 7 2016 in Vientiane for the launch of SDG 18.

<sup>2</sup> Funded by Gift for Goods program.

*in accordance with ChildFund Laos Officer's advise. Thanks to ChildFund Laos, eight families in our village were supported. I would like to receive more support from ChildFund Laos because there is a lot of land still contaminated by UXO".*

His wife commented:

*"One thing that we feel happy about is that we now do not have to worry too much about our kids when they are in the field. Also, agriculture production has been increased compared to before. This is mostly due to the fact that, since the land was cleared, we are no longer afraid to plant crops; we can dig wherever we want, and deeper than before."*

Mr. Touha is 71-years-old. He lives in the Hindeng Village and has about 0.8 hectares of land. He stated:

*"We started cultivating this land two years ago, but as we were afraid of bombs we just grew corn and some grass for the animals. We could not expand our area. While cutting trees, we did not find any bombs as we were very careful. I also suggested that we not cut trees below 30 cm, and that the children shouldn't go into this area so as to avoid any risks with unexploded ordnance. When we burned the land, two bombs exploded, but nobody was injured because we went to a safe place beforehand. We started growing corn and some grass for the cattle. We used herbicide instead of cutting the weeds by ourselves, and we were careful while planting corn as we could not dig too deep into the ground."*

Mr. Touha explained:

*"In the past, when I found UXO, I marked the sector to make sure that nobody went there, and I warned MAG<sup>3</sup> so that they would come and destroy it. Our communities are poor; they don't have enough money to get the land cleared even when they want to build a house. As the risk is very high, we tell the children to not dig in the ground".*



*"After the area was cleared by ChildFund Laos, I feel comfortable and safe. I can make use of the whole area, and it is safe when we plant corn and grass for the cattle. The area was cleared, but I suggested to the family to remain careful because there might be some bombs still hidden in the ground that the machine could not find, because they were too deep in the ground or hidden behind some rocks; so we need to remain careful at all times."*

*"The technician said that he found one unexploded bomb and one piece of metal in the land. He destroyed the bomb and took away the piece of metal. In my opinion, there was not a lot of UXO in my land because it is an uphill area and when the bombs were dropped they fell down in the lowland. A few years ago, a lowland area close to my area was cleared by MAG and they found a lot of UXO. That is the reason why, since then and until ChildFund Laos came, I was afraid and could not make full use of all my land."*

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<sup>3</sup> Mining Advisory Group

These people's experiences reveal that communities have had to be extremely careful to protect their lives. Even in some areas that were not cleared, they managed to cultivate crops while not allowing people to dig too deeply or carelessly. In cases when UXO was detected, both the village authorities and MAG technician based in Nonghet were informed. Communities are aware that UXO is a serious issue. They know not to touch it because there is no way to know if it is still active or not. The support from ChildFund Laos to clear the land of UXO is very valuable to the communities. It reduces the risk of explosions and therefore of injuries, but it also undoubtedly improves living conditions. The total area cleared this time is 24.0279 hectares, which was 0.5279 hectares more than planned. There were 27 bombs found in the three villages. The bombs have been destroyed by the company. In one of the villages, one of the bombs found along the main road was a large 500-pound bomb.

One continuing challenge relates to the timing of UXO clearance. The company worked from June to October 2015 but stopped during two months because of the rainy season (from the end of July to the end of September). During that period the corn is growing and it makes UXO clearance difficult. This year, the activity started late and ChildFund Laos took almost one month to analyse the



companies' bids and select one. Time management is a significant factor that ChildFund Laos has to take into account regarding the planning and implementation of an activity. For instance, usually planting takes place from April to June, and the harvest from October to December, so during January-March, when it is the dry season, the lands are available and it is more convenient to conduct UXO clearance activities at that time of the year.

The selection of the clearance company is another concern. To ensure the best quality of service, security of the workers and population, adequacy of reporting to ChildFund Laos and to the national database on cleared land, ChildFund needs to level up the criteria for the selection of clearance companies to be contracted. Although only a small issue about the investigation technic was reported by the villagers, it is crucial that the land owners feel confident using their land and this can only happen if a trustful company is contracted. In Laos, the National Regulatory Authority (NRA) is a public institution of the Government of the Lao PDR. It is responsible for the regulation and coordination of all operators in the country working on the impact of unexploded bombs, artillery shells, grenades, landmines and like ordnance. NRA has made available a list of companies that are accredited to undertake clearing operations. Through them, national and international companies have gain different reputation and offer different range of services. It is proposed that ChildFund Laos systematically send bidding documents to all the listed companies to make sure they all have the opportunity to compete in the bidding process instead of advertising on newspaper only. Then, ChildFund would consider the offer of each company based on qualitative criteria and not only cost.