

UXO Lao Post Clearance Impact Assessment Readiness Assessment Summary of key findings



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An Australian Aid project managed by Adam Smith International

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Introduction

The Government of Lao PDR (GoL) has identified UXO contamination as an ongoing barrier to economic development and improved rural livelihoods. GoL has linked Millennium Development Goal 1 on poverty reduction with a ninth Millennium Development Goal on reducing the impact of UXO on communities. The National Unexploded Ordnance Programme (UXO Lao) is the national clearance operator, working in the nine most heavily affected provinces. UXO Lao clears land for agriculture, community development (e.g. schools, hospitals, temples, and water supply) and other development activities. UXO Lao also conducts risk-reduction education activities and is working to further increase its contribution to meeting GoL's rural development and poverty eradication targets.

A recent participatory capacity assessment facilitated by UNDP, prioritised improvement of UXO Lao's capacity for monitoring and evaluation (M&E), including its post-clearance procedures. Post-clearance monitoring currently consists of Post-Clearance Assessment (PCA), used mainly to determine 1) whether cleared land is being used, and if so, 2) whether it is being used for the purpose intended. UXO Lao's goal is to make monitoring and evaluation more consistent, reliable and comprehensive, using currently available resources.

An important step towards these goals is an assessment of how post-clearance monitoring and evaluation can be improved and extended. In February 2015, The Laos Australia Development Learning Facility supported UXO Lao to carry out a Post-Clearance M&E Readiness Assessment. The assessment identified critical improvements to the PCA process and assessed the potential for extending the PCA to include evaluation of the impact of clearance on households and communities using a sustainable livelihoods approach. This report describes the methods and findings of the readiness assessment and presents an outline of UXO Lao's follow-up plan.

Methods

UXO Lao established a post-clearance evaluation team (PCET) with responsibility for progressively improving existing M&E processes. Dr. Jo Durham¹, a developer of post-clearance impact assessment methodology in the Lao PDR context, supported the team to carry out a case study in Salavan District². In Salavan the PCET reviewed available documentation related to clearance sites including UXO survey and clearance completion reports, and post-clearance assessment forms. Relevant information from completion reports was manually extracted to an Excel file:

- ◆ Purpose of clearance (coded as humanitarian or agricultural in the completion reports);
- ◆ Area of land cleared;
- ◆ Pre and proposed post-clearance land use
- ◆ Depth of clearance;
- ◆ Items found;
- ◆ Number of beneficiaries;
- ◆ Name of land user (where available).

The team then located hard copies of completed PCA forms in the Salavan Provincial UXO Lao office³ and tried to link them to the completion reports. The team also checked whether any changes in household poverty levels could be demonstrated by attempting to source pre- (2011) and post-clearance (2015) poverty data from the district government office and linking this to the completion reports.

Several tools⁴ were piloted with District officials and beneficiaries of clearance:

- ◆ A semi-structured questionnaire with staff of two District Offices (Rural Development and Poverty Reduction, and Planning and Investment);
- ◆ Post-clearance semi-structured interviews and a structured questionnaire with program beneficiaries.

1 Formerly Country Director, Mines Advisory Group, in Lao PDR, Currently Lecturer at the University of Queensland, School of Public Health, Faculty of Medicine and Biomedical Sciences.

2 Salavan was chosen because it is one of the focal districts for DFAT's investments in Rural Development.

3 Electronic copies of PCA forms or entries into UXO Lao's Information Management System for Mine Action were not available.

4 Similar to those used by: Durham, J & Nanthavong, V, 2010 Post-clearance Impact Assessment Final Report, NRA: Vientiane



Dr. Durham supported the UXO PCET to use these tools in interviews. She gave feedback to the team on their performance as interviewers and collected feedback on how well the questions worked and their relevance to UXO Lao. Based on this the team developed a checklist for revising the tools.

After the field visit, Dr. Durham worked with the team to develop a draft program theory. Program theory demonstrates how an intervention is understood to contribute to intended changes. PCET's draft program theory clarifies how UXO clearance is intended to support rural development. The team also identified lessons learned through the field experience and explored the possibility of including five basic questions in each of the monitoring tools used by UXO Lao: the pre-clearance survey forms, clearance and clearance completion reports and PCA forms.

Five key questions

1. How much of the land is under cultivation?
2. How is the land currently used?
3. For how many months does the household have sufficient rice?
3 months B) 6 months C) all year
4. How safe do you feel using the land?
A) Very safe B) Quite safe c) Not safe at all
5. Do you have access to basic facilities? (school, clinic, all-weather access road)

The same five questions could be used in any future outcome or impact assessment process. This would allow the tracking of five key indicators over time and contribute to an evidence base for any outcome or impact claims.

Findings

Survey and completion reports are available in UXO Lao HQ and Salavan office and are entered into UXO Lao's Information Management System for Mine Action (IMSMA). Post-clearance assessments are available in hard copies in the Salavan office but are not systematically completed or used. Post-Clearance Assessments are not entered into IMSMA or used for planning purposes. Poverty data at the

village level is available in the district but is difficult to match to the UXO Lao clearance data. Data on injuries caused by UXO are available and can be linked to clearance data, but is not consistently entered into the IMSMA.

Opportunities exist for strengthening the consistent use of monitoring data for planning, including prioritisation of clearance tasks. Benefits of better monitoring include improved program performance and enhanced outcomes for beneficiaries. Most importantly, the readiness assessment revealed an opportunity for collecting data on the same key indicators at each key point in the UXO Lao's workflow: survey, clearance and post-clearance assessment. The PCET identified five possible indicators. With further training and support, this approach has potential to provide UXO Lao with information related to post-clearance land use and benefits without significant additional resource and capacity requirements. The data collected would be quantitative and provide information on 'what' questions. Qualitative data collection is more suitable for 'why' and 'how' questions, but these can be sensitive and require a higher level of interviewing skill. It may be more appropriate to contract external expertise for qualitative studies undertaken on a less regular basis.

Next steps

Short term:

- ◆ Hold an internal workshop in UXO Lao to finalise the program theory and finalise five questions/indicators that can be collected at different points in time from the same households. Develop Terms of Reference for the PCET team to ensure continuity;
- ◆ Pilot the five questions and work with the UXO Lao IMSMA team and PCET on data entry and data use using Salavan as a case study. This should include collection of baseline data for any sites identified for clearance in 2015 and entry of this data into IMSMA;
- ◆ Collect and enter any PCA data into the IMSMA at UXO Lao and the National Regulatory Authority.



Medium term:

- ♦ Undertake an in-depth analysis of the data management cycle and design and evaluate interventions to improve performance, using one district as a case study;
- ♦ Develop a mechanism for ensuring that information from the provincial offices is fed back to headquarters and used for planning and improving outcomes and impact;
- ♦ Consider following households from baseline (Technical Survey/Confirmed Hazardous Area Surveys) to outcome (or impact) collecting data (using the proposed five questions) at Technical/Confirmed Hazardous Area survey, clearance, PCA and possibly outcome and impact levels (for more details see discussion) once this process is bedded down;

- ♦ Review the documentation of the clearance prioritisation process and ensure there is a transparent audit trail of decisions-made so that post-clearance impact can plausibly be linked back to UXO clearance.

Longer term/other recommendations:

- ♦ Once the improved baseline and PCA systems are bedded in, identify options for carrying out Post Clearance Impact Assessment (PCIA). Discussion around options should include engagement with and scoping of the sector and development partners to determine the most logical place for PCIA to be placed.



Photos: UXO Lao teams at work by UXO Laos.

Disclaimer: The view expressed in this study are those of the author/s and do not represent the views of Australia or the Government of Lao PDR.

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