

Victim Assistance in Laos: then and now

Laos	1	2	3	4	5	6
According to original study				•		
According to LM 2002						
According to LM 2003						

Key Developments (LM 2002): In 2001, 8.74 million square meters of land were cleared in nine provinces. Mine risk education was provided to an estimated 182,000 people in 766 villages. According to UXO LAO records, 35 people were killed and 87 injured by UXO or mines in 2001.

Indicator 1: The extent to which information on mine victims' demographics and needs is available.

According to original study:

Handicap International completed a socio-economic impact study which collected data on mine victims in 15 of 18 provinces in Laos entitled: Living with UXO: National Survey on the Socio-Economic Impact of UXO in Lao PDR 1997. The HI survey found that from 1973-1996, 1,171 people suffered landmine accidents, and another 9,473 suffered from UXO accidents. For 1999, UXO Lao reported 63 UXO/mine accidents resulting in 102 victims (26 deaths and 76 injuries). Among the victims, 60 were children and 84 were male. For the first five months of 2000, there were 39 reported accidents causing 68 victims (26 deaths and 42 injuries).

The GICDH is currently completing a Study of the Use of Socio-Economic Impact Analysis in Mine Action for the UNDP which will include analysis of the impacts on mine victims and incorporates a country case-study of Laos. A draft report of the Study is expected to be available at the SMSP. There are plans to establish a WHO/ICRC Strategic Framework for Planning Integrated Mine Victim Assistance Programmes in Laos, which would include the development of a system for the monitoring and surveillance of mine injuries.

According to LM 2002:

In 2001, 122 new UXO/mine casualties were reported in Laos; 35 people were killed and 87 injured. Of these, 92 were males and 30 were females. Children make up 42 percent of the reported casualties. Precise information is not available on whether the casualties were caused by UXO or landmines, though most if not all were caused by UXO.⁴⁷ Data collection on mine/UXO casualties could be improved and it is very possible that the number of incidents is under-reported.⁴⁸ Reported casualties increased in 2001; in 2000, 39 people were killed and 63 injured by UXO.⁴⁹

UXO/Landmine Casualties 2001

Province	Number of Casualties	Killed	Injured	Child	Adult	Female	Male
Xieng Khouang	13	4	9	6	7	2	11
Savannakhet	32	9	23	12	20	9	23
Champassak	24	11	13	7	17	6	18
Attapeu	15	5	10	1	14	4	11
Sekong	1	0	1	1	0	0	1
Houaphan	1	0	1	0	1	0	1
Saravane	6	1	5	2	4	2	4
Khammouane	9	3	6	3	6	1	8
Luang Prabang	21	2	19	19	2	6	15
Total	122	35	87	51	71	30	92

Casualties continue to be reported in 2002. In the period 1 January to 19 March 2002, ten people were killed and twelve injured in reported UXO/mine incidents. In one incident, three people were killed and five injured.⁵⁰ On 15 March 2002, two members of a UXO LAO clearance team were killed in a UXO explosion in Xieng Khouang province.⁵¹

Indicator 2: The extent to which a national disability coordination mechanism exists and recognizes mine victims.

According to original study: The National Committee for Handicapped Persons was established in 1995 and serves principally as a coordination mechanism between the Ministries of Public Health and of Labour and Social Welfare. The WHO plans to begin working with the government during 2000 to establish a Strategic Framework for Planning Integrated Mine Victim Assistance Programmes in Laos.

According to LM 2002:

A National Workshop on Mine/UXO Victim Assistance took place in Vientiane on 11-12 October 2001, organized by the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare and supported by Handicap International. Phetdouangechanh Ekbanland, Director of the International Cooperation division of the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare, opened the National Workshop. In his opening speech he stated, "It is the first time and therefore a very important moment for Lao PDR to organize a workshop on Mine/UXO Victims Assistance.... It is quite evident that victims should receive medical treatment. However it is also important to provide physical and mental rehabilitation as well as to assist the victims and their families in socio-economic development. Finally the country needs to develop a better policy and protection to ensure the rights of the People With Disability (PWD) to have a normal life. The Lao government is considering with great attention any proposition to strengthen the policy of the party and the government to assist people who are affected by mine/UXO."⁶⁷

The work of COPE is governed by a National Plan of Action. COPE's services are delivered through the NRC in Vientiane, and four provincial centers in Luang Prabang, Xieng Khouang, Savannakhet and Champassak provinces.⁵⁴ The National Plan of Action includes: advancing prosthetic services; introducing or upgrading other medical rehabilitation services such as physiotherapy, occupational therapy, orthopedic surgery, and wheelchairs; the promotion of social and economic reintegration services by developing athletics and improving access to vocational training; and developing the capacity of the Lao Disabled People's Association.⁵⁵

Sixteen persons representing Lao PDR attended the Regional Victim Assistance Conference in Bangkok, 6-8 November 2001, including the Director of UXO LAO, and the Director of Social Welfare Department, Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare.

Indicator 3: The extent to which programs and services for the medical care and rehabilitation of mine victims are available.

According to original study:

LM 2000 reports that prostheses, orthoses, wheelchairs, and other assistive devices are provided by the Cooperative Orthotic and Prosthetic Enterprise (COPE) which is a partnership between the Ministry of Public Health, POWER, the International Limb Project, World Vision, the Cambodian School for Prosthetics and Orthotics and the Association (CSPO) for Aid and Relief (AAR). As a result of the COPE Program, five orthoprosthetic centers are being renovated and upgraded (Vientiane, Luang Phrabang, Phonsavane, Savannakhet and Pakse) and new equipment has been installed throughout. The COPE program refunds all travel and accommodation costs for all persons attending any of its five centers, and all devices are provided free of any charge. The World Rehabilitation Fund works to establish an integrated approach to physical and psychological rehabilitation, and to provide alternative livelihoods for mine victims.

According to LM 2002:

UXO incidents frequently produce upper body injuries, including blindness, loss of upper limbs, and lacerations. In Lao PDR, medical and surgical facilities with the capacity to adequately assist mine/UXO casualties are limited. UXO incidents frequently produce upper body injuries, including blindness, loss of upper limbs, and lacerations. Health care is unavailable to persons who cannot afford to pay for it, and some services are only available in the capital, to which few of the rural poor have access.⁵² The cost of treatment is often beyond the means of the victims. In Khammouane Province, World Vision Australia assists mine/UXO casualties by paying for transportation to a medical facility.

The War Victims Assistance Project, supported by the US Leahy War Victims Fund and administered by Consortium Laos, was started in September 1995 to upgrade the medical, surgical, and emergency services of

district and provincial Lao medical personnel and institutions in Xieng Khouang Province. As of May 2002, one provincial and five district hospital have received medical equipment, supplies, and assistance in emergency ward rehabilitation/renovation, and more than 300 medical staff received training in emergency rehabilitation or laboratory services. Under the War Victims Medical Assistance Fund, 79 UXO casualties had access to free medical treatment.⁵³

The Ministry of Public Health's National Rehabilitation Centre (NRC) and the Cooperative Orthotic and Prosthetic Enterprise (COPE) continues to provide prostheses, orthoses, and other assistive devices, to persons with disabilities, including mine/UXO survivors. COPE provides travel expenses for patients who need to come to the Vientiane center. The Provincial branches outside of Vientiane still suffer from a lack of equipment, and under skilled staff.⁵⁶ The Provincial branches cannot produce prostheses. At the NRC in Vientiane, with the assistance of COPE, activities are run at inpatient clinics, and a school for the deaf and blind. The center provides accommodation for patients and their family. COPE activities are funded by World Vision Australia/Laos and a small grant from a Japanese charity; new sources of funding are being sought.⁵⁷

In December 2000, AAR commenced a three-year wheelchair production project at the NCR. Following training in wheelchair production by AAR there are now six technicians and six disabled persons working on the project. In December 2001, the construction of a new wheelchair production workshop at the NCR was completed. The project is fully funded by the Japanese International Cooperation Agency.⁵⁸

A Canadian NGO, Garneau International, collaborates with Laotian partners in the sector of landmine/UXO survivor rehabilitation and socio-economic reintegration.⁵⁹ The Canadian funded project works closely with survivors, their families and communities, and the Xieng Khouang Province Rehabilitation Center and includes analysis of the survivors situation, assistance in the area of socio-economic reintegration, and assistance to Lao government institutions in developing viable community-based rehabilitation programs.⁶⁰

The Lao army has its own hospital and rehabilitation center but many military veterans are treated at the NRC as the army hospital often lacks supplies and equipment.⁶²

UXO LAO is not involved in mine/UXO survivor assistance programs, and it has been reported that there is a lack of communication between UXO LAO and COPE, which is compounded by the fact that two different ministries are involved. Although the Trust Fund founding document makes provision for the support of survivor assistance programs, currently COPE and the NRC do not have any access to Trust Fund support.⁶³

Indicator 4: The extent to which programs and services for the social and economic reintegration of mine victims are available

According to original study:

LM 2000 reports that civilian victims of mines and UXO do not receive socio-economic assistance from the government, although military victims receive some assistance. The UNDP is currently supporting a project by the World Rehabilitation Fund to develop guidelines for the socio-economic reintegration of landmine survivors based on pilot projects in four mine-affected countries including Laos.

According to LM 2002:

In January 2001, a Vocational School for the Disabled opened in Ban Sikeud in Vientiane Prefecture, built and operated by the St Paul Foundation. It enrolled 102 students with a variety of mobility disabilities in a three-year vocational training program.⁶¹

Indicator 5: The extent to which mine victims are protected and supported by effective laws and policies.

According to original study:

According to LM 1999, the Lao Disabled Peoples Association has requested that the Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare draft a national law in support of the rights of disabled people.

According to LM 2002:

There are currently no disability laws in Laos.⁶⁴ There is a move to develop national plans on comprehensive rehabilitation and prevention of disabilities, including protection of legal rights of disabled persons at the national level.⁶⁵

Indicator 6: The extent to which there is a disability community advocacy network.

According to original study:

LM 1999 reports that the Lao Disabled Peoples Association was formed in 1997 and is an adjunct to the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare.

According to LM 2002:

In July 2001, the constitution of the Lao Disabled People's Association (LPDA) was formally approved by the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare, having first submitted its proposal in 1996. Activities of the LPDA include organizing vocational training courses for disabled people and workshops and conferences on disability issues. In 2001, the LPDA was supported by the Diana, Princess of Wales Memorial Fund.⁶⁶

Endnotes:

⁴⁷ UXO LAO Summary Report of UXO Accidents 1 January – 31 December 2001, issued by OPS, UXO LAO-Vientiane.

⁴⁸ Interview with Amanda Bissex, Child Protection Officer, UNICEF, Vientiane, 7 February 2002. See also *Landmine Monitor Report 2001*, p. 555.

⁴⁹ See *Landmine Monitor Report 2001*, p. 554.

⁵⁰ "Rising death toll claims UXO Lao officials in Xieng Khuang province," *Vientiane Times*, 22 March 2002.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² See *Landmine Monitor Report 2001*, p. 555.

⁵³ War Victims Assistance Project, Lao PDR, Project Fact Sheet, http://www.usaid.gov/pop_health/dcofwvf/wv/laosdet.html; See also *Landmine Monitor Report 2001*, p. 555.

⁵⁴ COPE is a partnership between the Ministry of Public Health, Prosthetic and Orthotic Worldwide Education and Relief (POWER), World Vision, the Cambodian School for Prosthetics and Orthotics (CSPO), and the Association for Aid and Relief (AAR). See *Landmine Monitor Report 2001*, p. 555.

⁵⁵ *Portfolio of Landmine Victim Assistance Programs*, September 2001, p. 74.

⁵⁶ Interview with Azadi Saryev, Administrator and Finance Officer, COPE, NRC, Vientiane, 5 February 2002.

⁵⁷ Email from Azadi Saryev, Administrator and Finance Officer, COPE, NRC, Vientiane, 11 April 2002.

⁵⁸ Portfolio of Landmine Victim Assistance Program, accessed at www.landminevap.org.

⁵⁹ Email to Landmine Monitor (MAC) from Mavis Mains, CIDA Mine Action Unit, 23 July 2002.

⁶⁰ The project is funded by the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA). Email to Landmine Monitor (MAC) from Mavis Mains, CIDA Mine Action Unit, 23 July 2002.

⁶¹ See *Landmine Monitor Report 2001*, p. 557.

⁶² Interview with Wendy Moss, Australian Volunteer International, NRC, Vientiane, 5 February 2002.

⁶³ See *Landmine Monitor Report 2001*, p. 556.

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 557.

⁶⁵ Interview with Luc Delneville, Program Director, Handicap International Belgium, Vientiane, 8 February 2002.

⁶⁶ Portfolio of Landmine Victim Assistance Program, accessed at www.landminevap.org; see also *Landmine Monitor Report 2001*, p. 557.

⁶⁷ Opening Address by Somphan Phangkhammy, Minister of Labour and Social Welfare, Chairperson of UXO Lao, and President of National Committee for Disabled People, to the National Workshop on Mine/UXO Victims Assistance, Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare, Vientiane, 11 October 2001.