

**Moving Towards Achieving SDG 18:
Removing the UXO obstacle to
Development in Lao PDR**

Final Report

13 September 2021

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Project/outcome Information		
Project/outcome title	Moving towards achieving SDG 18 – Removing the UXO obstacle to development in Lao PDR	
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	7 July 2017	31 December 2021
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¹ This is the total projected budget at the time of the project conception. It includes funds distributed through UNDP, bi-lateral funding and funds mobilized by international operators.

² It is the entity that has overall responsibility for implementation of the project (award), effective use of resources and delivery of outputs in the signed project document and workplan.

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Acronyms

AAR Japan	Association for Aid and Relief Japan
AC	Area Clearance
APMBT	Anti-Personal Mine Ban Treaty
ARMAC	ASEAN Regional Mine Action Centre
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
CCM	Convention on Cluster Munitions
CCW	Convention on Conventional Weapons
CHA	Confirmed hazardous area
CMRS	Cluster Munition Remnant Survey
CRC	Conventions on the Rights of the Child
CRPD	Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
CTA	Chief Technical Advisor
EORE	Explosive Ordnance Risk Education
EORE-AG	Explosive Ordnance Risk Education Advisory Group
ERW	Explosive remnants of war
EU	European Union
EVI	Economic Vulnerability Index
GDI	Gender development index
GICHD	Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining
GoL	Government of Lao PDR
HDI	Human development index
HI	Humanity & Inclusion
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
IMSMA	Information management system for mine action
KOICA	Korea International Cooperation Agency
Lao PDR	Lao People's Democratic Republic
LDC	least developed country
MAG	Mines Advisory Group
MDG	Millennium Development Goal
MoES	Ministry of Education and Sports
MoFA	Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry
MoLSW	Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
NIM	National Implementation Modality
NPA	Norwegian People's Aid
NRA	National Regulatory Authority for UXO/Mine Action Sector in Lao PDR
NTS	Non-technical survey
PCA	Post clearance assessment
PM/WRA	Office of Weapons Removal and Abatement in the US State Department's Bureau of Political-Military Affairs
PRF	Project Results Framework
RT	Roving Task
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SPF II	The Safe Path Forward II
ToC	Theory of Change
ToR	Terms of Reference
TS	Technical Survey
UNCT	United Nations Country Team
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme

UNICEF	United Nations Fund for Children
UNMAS	United Nations Mine Action Service
UNIT 58	Humanitarian Teams of the Lao People's Army
UNSDCF	United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework/Cooperation Framework
UXO	Unexploded Ordnance
UXO Lao	National Unexploded Ordnance Programme
WFP	World Food Programme

Executive Summary

UXO Project Description

This is the final evaluation of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Government of Lao People's Democratic Republic (GoL) (PDR) UXO project, *'Moving Towards Achieving SDG 18 – Removing the UXO Obstacle to Development in Lao PDR'* implemented between July 2017 and December 2021. The GoL implementing partners are the National Regulatory Authority for UXO/Mine Action Sector in Lao PDR (NRA) and the largest humanitarian operator, UXO Lao.

UNDP manages the project funds using a National Implementation Modality (NIM) to channel funding to the NRA and UXO Lao. Donors include Canada, Ireland, Republic of Korea (International Cooperation Agency - KOICA), Luxembourg, New Zealand and Turkey. During the project period, the European Union (EU) and the Government of Australia funding cycles ended and were not renewed.

In implementing the UXO project, UNDP planned to provide leadership, programmatic and technical support, to mobilize resources, and to support gender mainstreaming and human rights within the UXO sector. The UXO project was designed:

- to support Lao PDR to fulfil its obligations to the Convention on Cluster Munitions (CCM) and the Convention on Conventional Weapons (CCW) Protocol V on Explosive Remnants of War (ERW);
- to align with the objectives of Safe Path Forward II (SPF II), the UXO sector strategy, and the UXO Sector Multi-Year work plan;
- to contribute to progress towards the 8th National Socioeconomic Development Plan (8th NSEDP) and Lao PDR's Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 18 *'Lives Safe from UXO'* as well as progress towards achieving the SDGs.

The key outcomes of the UXO project are:

- to develop the institutional capacity of the NRA and UXO Lao
- to support human development and livelihoods among populations in contaminated areas.

Evaluation

The evaluation, undertaken by an international consultant working remotely and a national consultant based in Vientiane, was conducted between 21 June and 13 September 2021. It gathered information through document review and discussions with over 70 key stakeholders using open-ended questions.

Findings for the UXO Sector

Anecdotal evidence from respondents to the evaluation suggests that national capacity has been strengthened during the project period but the lack of baseline data and systematic documentation from UNDP, and the presence of multiple stakeholders supporting the NRA and UXO Lao, it is unknown how much progress has been made and what UNDP contributed to that progress.

It seems reasonable to assume that UXO Action has contributed towards human development and livelihoods but a lack of detailed analysis about the impact of the UXO contamination and UXO Action means that the quality and nature of the contribution is unknown. There is no satisfactory system in place to monitor and evaluate development outcomes.

The extent of the UXO and other explosive ordnance contamination in Lao PDR is unknown so the time and resources needed to complete clearance is also unknown. There is no agreed task prioritization criteria for the UXO sector. Prioritization criteria could be developed based on GoL strategic priorities but not based on the impact of the contamination because it is unknown.

UXO sector approaches have been shaped by obligations to the CCM with a focus on survey and clearance of as large an area as possible of contaminated land as quickly as possible. Yet UXO Action in Laos also aspires to promote development and the achievement of the SDGs and, the UXO project being evaluated, aims to benefit marginalized group in line with the ‘no one left behind’ agenda. UXO Action based on pragmatic logistical decisions will fulfil CCM commitments efficiently but not necessarily be the most effective approach to promote development. Marginalized groups tend to live in more remote and less accessible areas that are harder to clear than more densely populated and developed areas. A ‘no one left behind’ approach to UXO Action is likely reduce clearance rates because the geographical areas are technically more difficult to clear and may not support the country’s macro-economic development and progress towards the SDGs as effectively on focusing interventions in the more accessible populated areas.

Strategies to fulfil commitments to the CCM, achieve the SDGs or pursue a ‘no one left behind’ policy are not mutually exclusive, but neither are they directly aligned. The strategy the sector chooses to pursue will influence the design of research intended to understand the extent and/or impact of the contamination which in turn will shape the task prioritization criteria.

The Covid-19 pandemic has prevented travel for in-person meetings and field visits which affects exchange of information, planning and training. It particularly impacts on complex processes such as strategic planning and the provision of mentoring and support for financial management etc. Survey and clearance operations have been shut down for brief periods and there has been some minor productivity losses. Risk education has been disseminated via village radio as teams were unable to provide awareness raising sessions in person.

Findings for UNDP

It is not possible to measure UNDP’s contributions to the UXO sector and to the capacity development of national counterparts because there is no methodological means within UNDP’s project design and implementation to assess the results of its interventions and UNDP was only one of the stakeholders supporting the NRA and UXO Lao. The project lacks a baseline, appropriate indicators that link inputs, outputs and outcomes, consistent monitoring tracking specific project interventions and analysis of impact. There is no single document that focuses on UNDP’s implementation of or contribution to this project.

Land for agriculture and development has been released and the numbers of UXO victims is low. However, a lack of analysis and impact assessments means that it is assumed that progress has been made towards development goals but it is not possible to quantify or describe in detail that progress.

The absence of a Chief Technical Advisor (CTA), other staff vacancies and staff turnover have severely undermined UNDP’s ability to implement the UXO project. Remaining staff have been overstretched, lacked technical support and lacked time to raise sufficient funding.

UNDP has not provided the leadership or contributed to the sector as planned during the project period. Without a CTA, its visibility as a credible UXO stakeholder has declined. UXO operators and UN entities had little knowledge of UNDP’s role in the UXO sector. Some donors, senior NRA, UXO Lao and

ministerial staff were aware of UNDP's activities and some respondents identified specific UNDP contributions. However, respondents noted that UNDP's UXO strategy is unclear and shifts with staff changes.

UNDP is a trusted partner for donors because it provides oversight and reports on progress. This is especially important for donors without a presence in the country. Donors partner with UNDP because it enables them to fund national partners and to fund a range of UXO activities that would be difficult to do bi-laterally. International donors, such as UNDP, are important to small local organizations because they help to channel funding from large donors that do not fund small organizations directly.

The NRA, in particular, notes that UNDP advocates for the UXO sector to be integrated into national development plans such as the National Socioeconomic Development Plans.

UNDP has provided support for programme management which the NRA and UXO Lao report has been valuable. Its ability to provide support for UXO operations has been limited and its technical contributions are unclear. Respondents specifically noted the following UXO Action interventions:

- When a CTA has been present, UNDP advocated for a clearer GoL policy and sector procedures for addressing the threats from landmines. Currently there are no national standards or operating procedures for dealing with landmines and there is lack of technical capacity among the deminers who are trained primarily to clear submunitions. UNDP is planning to pursue this initiative but cannot do so without a CTA and additional funding.
- UNDP has played a positive role in and advocated for victim assistance within the UXO sector and stakeholders outside the sector. UNDP has also supported gender mainstreaming and intended to pursue this issue further with new project funding.

The National Implementation Modality (NIM) appears to lack flexibility to adjust staff salaries and currency exchange rates. Other donors have increased salaries so those funded by UNDP receive lower pay for the same job. The situation is not easily resolved: UNDP is concerned that raising salaries poses challenges for sustainability while differential pay creates tensions and potentially staff turnover.

UNDP operates on a project basis with no core funding for UXO Action in Lao PDR. Difficulties in securing funding have impeded project implementation and recruitment. UNDP has had mixed success in securing funding during the project period. Covid-19 and the challenges it has created meant that some donors have opted to channel funds through UNDP for the time being. They may have chosen other partners had due diligence and oversight been easier.

UNDP's global commitment to Mine/UXO Action has been ambiguous in recent years and there has been no funding and little technical support from headquarters and none from the regional hub in Southeast Asia. Consequently, UNDP country offices with Mine Action/UXO Projects have had little institutional support and a limited profile at the regional and global levels.

Findings for the NRA and UXO Lao

National Capacity

There is a consensus by all respondents, including those from NRA and UXO Lao, that national capacity has increased during the last four years. However, the existence and increasing number of international technical advisors, which donors state provide value for money by increasing efficiency and improving oversight, demonstrates that further national capacity development is needed. Both

NRA and UXO Lao recognize their need for ongoing support. Operators also provide planned and ad hoc support. UNDP is one of the organizations providing support for capacity development.

Operations: Day-to-day operations are generally considered to be good. There are limited staff to conduct quality management so capacity needs to be increased. Survey is now evidenced-based which has resulted in more munitions being cleared per hectare. This has improved efficiency of output but does not necessarily translate directly into efficiency of impact.

The creation and expansion of Unit 58, humanitarian demining teams drawn from the military, has increased national operational capacity.

Operational support: with support from UNDP, financial management and procurement have improved over the project period. Delays in disbursement of funding from the NRA have delayed operations. UNDP rules and the numbers of transfers of funding from one stakeholder to another require planning and efficiency to maintain regular cashflow. This area requires further support from UNDP to ensure the smooth running of operations.

With support from JICA, assets, human resources and workflow management systems are being introduced at UXO Lao. It has reported improvements.

Reporting and communication: with support from UNDP, donor reporting has improved, and information is now shared regularly on NRA and UXO Lao websites, although some information on the websites is out-of-date. Reporting is not always timely, and respondents noted that information about an UXO accident and misuse of funds has been inadequate, and that lack of transparency can have a negative impact on the working relationships among stakeholders and with donors.

Respondents stated that the NRA and UXO Lao should highlight their work more effectively, expand the use of social media and publish in English to raise their profile internationally and potentially attract more funding.

Information management and analysis: with support from NPA, information management has improved at the national level and further support is planned. Information management at the subnational level requires improvement. Improved data analysis would inform policy and planning.

Many operators collect data, particularly post-clearance data, that is not analysed and used to inform sector plans effectively.

There should be greater sharing of IMSMA data so that all stakeholders can contribute to analysis and also draw on the information to inform their own programmes.

Strategic planning and coordination: strategic and long-term planning requires improvement. Realistic strategic planning is challenging, particularly when the level of the contamination and availability of funds are unknown. The UXO sector is large so internal planning is challenging but the UXO sector also needs to cooperate with other ministries which are sometimes unwilling to engage.

Overall coordination in the sector has improved but further improvements are possible by holding 'active' meetings which focus on meaningful outputs rather than passive reporting of activities. The NRA is more active in engaging with donors and other stakeholders than in the past. The effectiveness of coordination varies depending on personalities and the combination of stakeholders involved. However, opportunities identified through coordination to improve the work of the sector should be translated into concrete action.

Challenges for the NRA and UXO Lao

The NRA and UXO Lao work within GoL structures and procedures which tend to be slow and bureaucratic. The MoU process causes delays although it is noted that the sector is more efficient than others in finalizing MoUs and that the MoU timeframe has been reduced in recent years.

Despite its authority to manage and coordinate the UXO sector, the NRA is a GoL project and part of the MoLSW. Therefore, the NRA is dependent on the willingness of ministries to liaise with the UXO sector to share information and coordinate on policy development and operations.

The NRA and UXO Lao experience staff turnover which reduces capacity and affects continuity. Staff turnover is blamed on uncompetitive salaries within the UXO sector. Recruiting and retaining staff at the subnational level is difficult because few individuals are qualified and, those that are, move to the national level relatively quickly.

There is a lack of effective coordination between national and subnational levels related to lower levels of capacity outside the capital and lower levels of funding for offices, equipment and operations.

Inadequate funding and funding gaps. Limited funding and in-kind support from the GoL can be interpreted as a lack of commitment from the GoL and discourage donors.

Key Recommendations

For the UXO Sector led by the NRA

- Determine the impact of the contamination and UXO Action through research and analysis and use findings as an advocacy and fundraising tool. Examine methods to extrapolate from existing survey and bombing data to determine the extent of the contamination.
- Agree the strategic priorities for the UXO sector based on analysis of the impact of the contamination and UXO Action and develop SPFIII accordingly in collaboration with other UXO sector stakeholders.
- To fulfil the SPFIII, agree criteria for task prioritization informed by the impact of contamination and clearance. Agreed prioritization criteria should facilitate MoU procedures.
- Based on the strategic priorities, identify capacity development needs. There is a huge amount of capacity and expertise in the UXO sector in Lao PDR. Resources should be pooled, capacity mapped and comparative advantage identified to develop a comprehensive capacity development programme to build sustainable national capacity. The process should be led by the NRA with support from UNDP if it has a full-time CTA in place. If UNDP does not have a CTA, an alternative long-term solution should be found to ensure continuity.
- Identify issues to be addressed to ensure sustainable national UXO Action capacity and develop a plan to achieve sustainability.

For UNDP

- Identify what UNDP's role in the sector is and communicate this clearly to other stakeholders.
- Act as a neutral arbiter within the UXO sector and ensure that the interests of all stakeholders including the people of Laos, UXO sector actors, GoL and donors are represented.

- Provide leadership for/or support for coordination and information exchange and joint initiatives that facilitate the work of the sector.
- Support the capacity needs assessment for NRA (and another for UXO Lao) and identify where UNDP can contribute.
- UNDP has a comparative advantage for advocacy across multiple sectors, for example, to improve support for victim assistance and persons with disabilities, and to promote gender mainstreaming and the meaningful participation of women in the UXO sector.
- Improve project design, develop a baseline and monitoring and evaluation mechanisms that can assess progress and help to differentiate UNDP's contribution to the UXO sector from that of other stakeholders.
- Ensure that appropriate staff and funding are available. Lobby headquarters for support and work with UNDP regionally to share experiences, lessons learned and to pool resources.

For the NRA

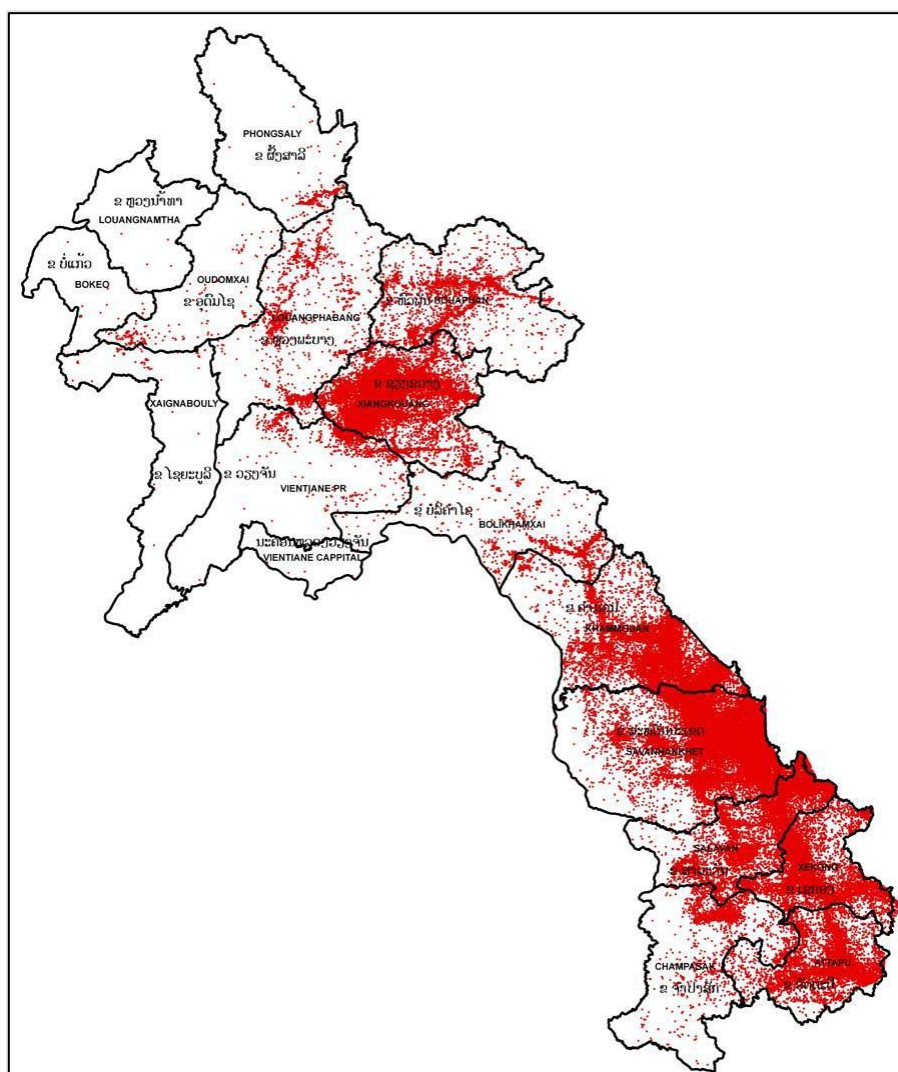
- Improve coordination for action within the UXO sector through more effective sector and technical working group meetings and sharing of IMSMA data and other relevant information.
- Continue advocacy with ministries for UXO Action and mainstream the sector's activities.
- Continue to work towards expediting the MoU process.
- Collate and make public information on all the GoL's financial and in-kind contributions to the UXO sector. Work with the GoL to identify ways of increasing its contributions.
- Continue to develop existing relationships with donors and to build trust by ensuring timely communication, transparency and accountability.
- Improve information management, monitoring and evaluation of sector activities and analysis of data which should inform strategic decision making in the sector.
- Strengthen quality management capacity.

For the NRA and UXO Lao

- Continue to work with UNDP and other stakeholders to strengthen programmatic and technical UXO Action capacity.
- Ensure that responses to and engagement in investigations are timely. Ensure that engagement in processes such as strategic planning and evaluations are timely.
- Identify ways to strengthen subnational capacity and coordination between the national and subnational levels
- Use risk education teams to improve community liaison. Examine more innovative ways to deliver risk education. Explore the possibilities of using international NGOs to provide support.

1. Introduction

The National Regulatory Authority for the UXO/Mine Action Sector in Lao PDR (NRA) states that Lao is among the most heavily bombed country in the world per capita. Over two million tons of munitions were dropped during the Indochina War (1964-1973), including cluster munitions, of which an estimated 30 percent of the submunitions, commonly referred to as ‘bombies’, failed to detonate. Over 186 types of munitions have been found in Lao including bombs, artillery shells, grenades and landmines.³ An estimated 25 percent of villages throughout all 18 of the country’s provinces are contaminated with some form of explosive ordnance.⁴ The nine provinces with the most explosive ordnance contamination are Attapeu, Champasack, Huaphan, Khammuanm Luangprabang, Salavan, Savannaket, Sekong and Xiengkhouang. The provinces that were along the Ho Chi Minh Trail - Xiengkhouang, Khammuan, Savannakhet, Saravan, and Sekong - are considered to be the most highly contaminated with cluster munitions.



United States Airforce bombing data 1964-73 showing contamination in Lao PDR.⁵

³ Lao PDR CCM Article 4 Extension Request, 26 February 2019, p.1, cited in The Land Mine and Cluster Munition Monitor, Laos PDR, last updated 2 December 2020

⁴ NRA, <http://www.nra.gov.la> (accessed 30 June 2021)

⁵ NRA, <http://www.nra.gov.la> (accessed 30 June 2021)

The map above shows the UXO contamination from US aerial bombing data and does not show the extent of contamination from all landmines and other ERW in the country. By the end of June 2020, there were 1,177,55km² of conformed hazardous areas (CHAs).⁶ However, as non-technical survey (NTS) and technical survey (TS) are ongoing, the full extent of the contamination from cluster munitions, landmines and other explosive remnants of war (ERW) is unknown.⁷

1.1 Evaluation Objectives

UNDP has provided technical and programmatic support, including financial management, GoL and UXO sector to tackle the explosive ordnance contamination since the mid-1990s through a series of projects. This is the final evaluation of the UNDP-GoL UXO project, *‘Moving Towards Achieving SDG 18 – Removing the UXO Obstacle to Development in Lao PDR’* implemented from July 2017 until the end of 2021. The GoL implementing partners are the National Regulatory Authority for UXO/Mine Action Sector in Lao PDR (NRA) and UXO Lao, the largest national operator.

The evaluation was conducted between 21 June and 13 September 2021 by an international consultant, working remotely because of Covid-19 travel restrictions, and a national consultant, based in the capital Vientiane, who conducted meetings in-person and remotely. The evaluation aims to identify what UNDP contributed to the Lao PDR UXO sector and the strengths and weaknesses of the current project design and implementation modality. The evaluation addresses three key questions:

1. What did the project intend to achieve during the period under review?
2. To what extent has the project achieved its intended objectives?
3. What factors have contributed to or hindered the project’s performance and therefore the sustainability of results?

The evaluation considers how UNDP has responded to recommendations from previous evaluations and identifies recommendations to improve future UNDP-GoL UXO project designs and to help to align the project with national strategies, in particular, the forthcoming National Strategic Plan for the UXO sector in Lao PDR (2021-2030), Safe Path Forward III (SFP III), the 9th National Socio-Economic Development Plan (9NSED) (2021-2025) and Lao PDR’s Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 18 ‘Lives Safe from UXO’. The evaluation terms of reference (ToR) asks the evaluators to consider the context and UXO sector as a whole, including donors and bilateral donors and other implementing agencies – international non-government organizations, (NGOs), the private sector, and the Lao Humanitarian People’s Army, to assess the scope of UNDP’s future interventions.

1.2 Evaluation Methodology

The evaluation adopts the OECD-DAC criteria of relevance, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability and is guided by the questions in the ToR (see Annex 3). In addition, the evaluation considers the project’s contribution to human rights and gender equality.

Information is drawn from multiple sources to enable it to be triangulated. Sources include:

- document review to identify:
 - existing quantitative data collected as part of ongoing monitoring and evaluation processes for the UXO project and UXO sector in general;

⁶ Response to Monitor questions by Chomyaeng Phengthogsawat, Director General, NRA, 22 June 2020, The Land Mine and Cluster Munition Monitor, Laos PDR, last updated 2 December 2020

⁷ The Land Mine and Cluster Munition Monitor, Laos PDR, last updated 2 December 2020; Respondents for the evaluation confirmed that NTS and TS are incomplete.

- UNDP and UXO sector reports, policies and strategies;
- existing qualitative research on the impact of the contamination and UXO Action on the population and development of Lao PDR;
- relevant GoL, UNDP and other development policies and strategies;
- other relevant documents and articles from academia and UN entities etc.
- qualitative research conducted specifically for the evaluation which include a semi-structured individual and group discussions. Field visits were planned but could not be undertaken because of travel restrictions and delays in confirming visits with the NRA.
- Online and telephone interviews were conducted with village chiefs or deputy chief to learn about impacts of UXO Actions at the community level. These include Khangkhai in Peak District (Phonsavan), Ladkhai in Phaxay District, Xiengkhuang Province and Thongsene and Thaveng in Khamkeut District, Bolikhamsai Province.

The methodology, which was originally shared with UNDP in the inception report, was developed jointly by the international and national consultant to ensure that it was appropriate to the local context and that questions translated unambiguously into Lao. Questions were open-ended and free-flowing to enable stakeholders participating in the evaluation to discuss the issues that were important to them and to ensure that the preconceived ideas did not limit the scope of the research and inadvertently bias the results. A question guide, organized thematically to cover key aspects of the UXO project’s intended interventions and outputs, was designed to use with respondents. Each thematic area has a primary question and sub-questions. The sub-questions were used to prompt the respondent and elicit more detailed information after the respondent has replied to the primary question. This approach is intended to facilitate an open discussion allowing stakeholders to express their own views. The consultants memorized the primary questions so that thematic areas could be addressed in the order that seem most appropriate to the progress of each discussion. The consultants’ experience has shown that respondents asked open-ended questions often move the discussion on themselves to new thematic areas. This facilitates a conversational approach but means that the questioner must be able to memorize which issues have been covered and which have not.

The question guide to use with UNDP, national counterparts and the UXO sector was produced for the inception report and is shown in the table below. Relevant parts of the guide were used with stakeholders outside the sector providing support for risk education and victim assistance, donors and those with insights into inclusivity, human rights and progress towards national development goals.

The question guide is based on the UXO project outcomes and key areas where UNDP states it intended to provide leadership and programmatic and technical support. The question guide is designed to enable the consultants to draw conclusions about the project’s relevance, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability and the cross-cutting issues of gender mainstreaming and human rights. It is also intended to provide insights into UNDP’s strategic positioning and how it can most usefully support the UXO sector in Laos.

Primary Questions	Sub Questions
1. Introduction	
1.1 Purpose of evaluation Respondent’s consent	Describe of the purpose of the evaluation Obtain oral consent and check that the respondent’s name can be included in the report.
1.2 Establish respondent’s position and expertise	What is your role/interest in the UXO sector?
2. Capacity development	
2.1 In your opinion, what is UNDP’s contribution to the UXO sector?	Leadership and strategic direction Development of legislation/policies

2.2 In your opinion, what contributions have other international stakeholders made to the UXO sector?	Public relations Management of the sector/coordination Land release (NTS/TS/clearance/support to Unit 58) Operations planning, coordination and prioritization Risk education Victim assistance Quality management Information management (IMSMA & analysis) Monitoring and evaluation and learning. Analysis of information for planning.
3. National Priorities	
3.1 What progress has been made towards achieving obligations to the CCM	What has been the role of UNDP? What has been the role of other stakeholders?
3.2 What progress has been made towards achieving SDG 18 and other national development strategies	
4. Inclusivity	
4.1 How is gender mainstreamed and the needs of women addressed?	Participation in decision making processes Policies to promote inclusion Training to promote inclusion
4.2 How are the needs of marginalized groups addressed by the UXO sector? (include persons with disabilities if not included in VA discussion)	Evidence of impact of inclusion Project design and implementation tailored to the needs of particular groups to promote inclusivity and tackle inequalities
5. Resource mobilization	
5.1. What contribution has UNDP made to resource mobilization and financial management?	Success in securing new donor relations Effective management of funds Assistance in budgeting
6. UNDP's contribution	
6.1. What is your opinion of UNDP's contribution to the UXO sector?	Strengths weaknesses How could UNDP improve its support to the sector in the future?
7. Conclusion	
7.1 Is there anything else you would like to add?	
7.2 Is there anything that you would like to ask me?	

The inception report listed stakeholders identified as potential respondents. These included:

- individuals directed involved in the UXO project from the NRA, UXO Lao and UNDP
- NRA Board members
- GoL Ministries
- UXO sector operators
- Other organizations providing complementary interventions
- UN entities operating in Lao PDR
- Donors

Over 70 respondents were consulted for this evaluation (see annex 2)

A kick-off meeting was held on 21 July 2021 to discuss the inception report. The meeting was organized by UNDP which invited Government counterparts and donors. There was little substantive discussion about the evaluation or feedback on the list of respondents or the proposed methodology.

The evaluation took place at the same time as consultancies to support the development of SPFIII and to assess the NRA's capacity development needs. With permission from respondents, notes from discussions and written responses to questions were shared among the three consultancies. This expanded the scope and depth of the information available for each consultancy and, in some instances, reduced the time burden for respondents as notes from one meeting satisfied the needs of the other consultancies.

Analysis

The use of multiple sources enabled findings to be triangulated to identify themes, commonalities and differences. Analysis is organized according to main UXO sector interventions and areas of intervention identified in the UNDP Prodoc. The analysis also responds to the questions and the DAC criteria included in the ToR. Analysis was ongoing and the question guide was adapted to introduce new issues for clarification as necessary.

The national and international consultants for this evaluation discussed their findings and took the opportunity to reflect on these with the consultants undertaking the NRA capacity needs assessment and supporting the development of SPFIII. A draft of the final report was presented at a validation workshop to key UXO sector stakeholders and feedback from the workshop was incorporated into the analysis of the final report.

Challenges and Constraints

The evaluation faced a number of constraints:

- International travel restrictions aimed at controlling the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic prevented the international consultant from travelling to Lao PDR so she worked remotely. The national consultant's travel within the country was also restricted and planned field visits were substituted by telephone calls;
- Given the time and remote working it was not possible to include a range of respondents from different demographic and socioeconomic groups;
- Practical support from UNDP to contact respondents and arrange meetings with stakeholders at the early stages of the evaluation was limited and staff from the NRA were slow to engage in the evaluations. As a result, the evaluation process was inefficient and the submission of the final evaluation report delayed;
- The purpose of the kick-off meeting was not clearly explained to the consultants. It appeared that the invitation to donors to participate in the kick-off meeting was sent at short-notice and that no operators or stakeholders outside UNDP, the GoL entities and donors were invited. Lack of clarity about the purpose of the meeting and the lack of timely and inclusive involvement of a range of stakeholders resulted in a meeting that was of limited utility to the evaluators;
- The broad scope of the evaluation and challenging working conditions prevented all aspects of the project and ToR being addressed in the same level of detail;
- Access to former CTAs would have helped the evaluators to understand the scope of UNDPs support for technical aspects of UXO Action operations.

More forward planning by UNDP and the NRA would have significantly improved the efficiency of the evaluation process. The late participation of the NRA and UXO Lao in the evaluation meant that evaluators had information just a few days before the draft report was due. The schedule for the evaluation was extended by two weeks but evaluators' prior commitments prevented further extensions. The time to discuss findings with the evaluators, UNDP and GoL partners was reduced.

Following feedback on the draft final report, it became apparent that the evaluators and UNDP had differences of opinion about some of the issues to be covered by the evaluation and the aims of the UXO project. More detailed discussions at the beginning of the evaluation, including discussions about the inception report in which the evaluators had laid out the scope of the evaluation as they understood it, and provided a question guide of the topics to be addressed by respondents, would have avoided these problems. The evaluators were also asked to identify challenges and recommendations for future UXO projects, these issues may take the evaluation beyond the scope of the current UXO project. The evaluators included issues related to the UXO sector they felt were important although UNDP has stated they are outside the scope of the prodoc, If the information is not included here, then where? This is perhaps something for UNDP to consider in the development of the next prodoc – does it capture UNDP’s role in the sector or is it just about implementing a specific project. If the latter, then how does UNDP define, implement and fund its UXO sector role?

UNDP also seemed to feel that important aspects of its work in the UXO sector were overlooked or undervalued. For future evaluations, UNDP should be more explicit about what it does and provide information in a timely and clear manner. It should also be prepared that the perception of other respondents may differ from their own.

2. UNDP-GoL Project Design

The UXO Project, *Moving Towards Achieving SDG 18 - Removing the UXO Obstacle to Development in Lao PDR*, runs from July 2017 until December 2021. It is a UNDP-GoL project implemented nationally by the NRA and UXO Lao. According to the Prodoc, ‘*capacity development is the key expected result...for both implementing partners*’. The UXO project has been designed to align with the objectives of SPF II and the UXO Sector Multi-Year Work plan, to contribute to progress towards the 8th NSEDP and SDG 18, and to support Lao PDR to fulfil its obligations to the CCM and CCW Protocol V.

The Prodoc states that its development and implementation were informed by the final evaluation of UNDP’s support to the UXO sector in Lao PDR from 2013 to 2016 and UNDP’s 2015 global evaluation of its contribution to mine action which included Lao PDR as a case study.⁸ Later documents related to the UXO project state that the recommendations of the Mid-Term Review, conducted in 2019,⁹ have been taken into account and that a capacity development strategy conducted in 2014 has informed interventions.¹⁰

According to the Prodoc and ToR, through this project, UNDP aimed:

- to provide leadership, programmatic and technical support to the national institutions including on UXO clearance, prioritization, coordination, information management, quality management, programme management, sector monitoring and quality management, operational planning, financial management and resource mobilization;
- to draft legislation in line with the Convention on Cluster Munition;
- to develop a task prioritisation system for development outcomes integrated into National Standards;
- to improved efficiency of clearance operations by only working on CHAs;
- to support progress in the effort to establish a national baseline of UXO contamination;

⁸ UNDP IEO, 2016

⁹ Raaymakers, & Phakdisoth, 2019

¹⁰ Jones, 2015

- to improve coordination of sector activities through, updated National Standards and appropriate policy frameworks;
- to promote and support gender mainstreaming and human rights, directly and through national capacity development, within the policies and practices of the UXO sector;
- to develop the capacity of the NRA and UXO Lao to formulate and implement plans, strategies and policies;
- to provide programmatic and technical support including for survey and clearance, risk education and victim assistance activities;
- to improved NRA Information Management at the sector level;
- to reduce annual casualty rates to 40 or fewer;
- to improve coordination among different national institutions involved in the implementation of the SDGs;
- to improve the availability of safe-to-use land increased for agriculture, livelihoods and development;
- to improve transparency in results and financial reporting;
- to progress towards the articulation of a sustainability strategy for the sector (the evaluators assume this is national sustainability);
- to improve national capacity for monitoring and evaluating the sector's development outcomes;
- to enhanced Quality Management of UXO operations at the sector level;
- to improved communication of sector progress to public and donors through data availability.

Initially, the UXO project was aligned with UNDP's Strategic Plan 2014-2017.

- Outcome 1: Growth and development are inclusive and sustainable, incorporating productive capacities that create employment and livelihoods for the poor and excluded
- Area of work 1: sustainable development pathways
- Proposed new and emerging areas of citizen security and risk management for resilience

Later the UXO project was aligned with the current UNDP Country Programme Document (CPD) 2017 to 2021, in particular:

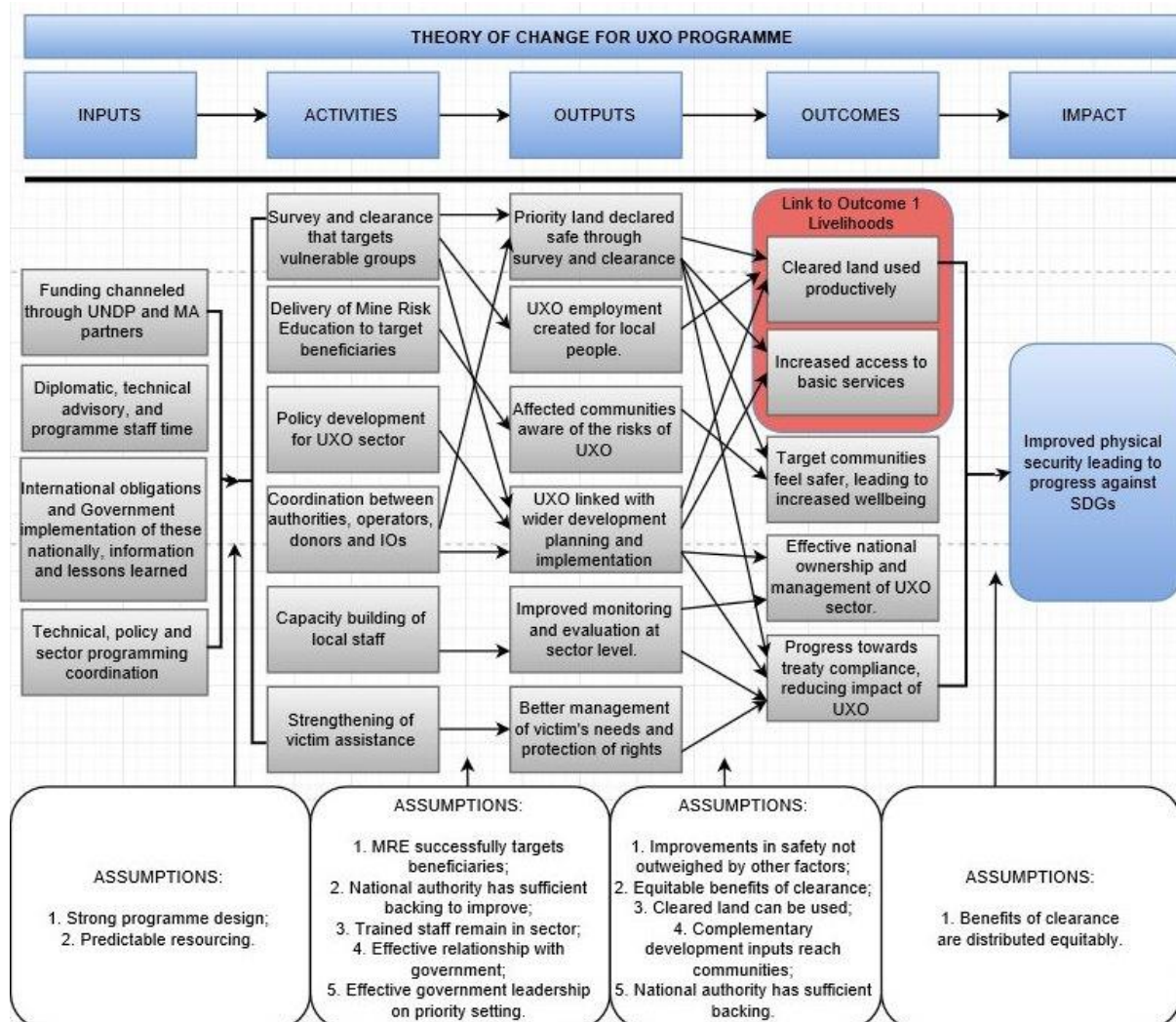
- Outcome 1: all women and men have increased opportunities for decent livelihoods and jobs
- Outcome 3: institutions and policies at the national and local level, support the delivery of quality services that better respond to people's needs

The expected outputs from the UXO Project are:

- Output 1: Institutional capacities are strengthened to further improve the contribution of the UXO sector to the human development in contaminated areas.
- Output2: UXO interventions are delivered in contaminated communities in support of human development and livelihoods.

The narrative of the project strongly aligns with GoL obligations to the CCM and the CCW Protocol V, the 8th NSEDP and SDG18, and to the UXO sector strategy SPFII. The ToC developed for the Prodoc captures the project logic. Some current UNDP staff feel that the ToC is too ambitious arguing that it should be closely linked to the specific project interventions. The evaluators sympathize with this perspective; however, a ToC can also be aspirational, and the development of a ToC can help to create a shared vision and to understand the potential routes to achieving particular outcomes. A ToC can show the complexity of causal pathways and interaction of different elements of interventions more effectively than a log frame. This UXO project ToC aims to capture the logic of the contribution of the UXO sector as a whole to the objectives of the SPFII, rather than just UNDP's contribution or the scope of this particular project within the UXO sector. As such the ToC is a useful illustration of UNDP's

understanding of the UXO sector and how its different components complement each other and are intended to contribute to development outcomes. However, it does not define the specific interventions that have been planned under the UXO project.



Confusingly, the UXO project has two stated high-level 'outputs', which would be more appropriately termed 'outcomes'. These are aligned with GoL, UN and SDG strategies – 1. *institutional capacity building*; and 2. *support to the development and livelihoods of populations living in contaminated areas*. The high-level outcomes and the various objectives from the ToC and different strategies are not linked in the programme logic or the results framework. The results framework consists of countable output indicators. Many indicators are based on data routinely collected by the UXO/Mine Action sector. These are generally low-level output indicators and are not linked to higher level outcomes, nor do they effectively capture the range of interventions and results included in the prodoc narrative. Other issues with the output indicators include:

- *Milestones versus indicators*: one-off milestones rather than indicators that can help to identify positive trends or consistency over the project period;
- *Indicators have different levels of difficulty*: some one-off milestones are difficult to achieve such as 1.4: the development of approved task prioritization criteria and 1.10: UXO sustainability strategy drafted. Yet these are ranked as equal with other indicators such as 1.6: quarterly sector level progress shared publicly and approved by the NRA which is relatively easy to achieve and has, in fact, been achieved;

- *Unclear rationale for indicators: 1.8:* disability policy discussed at the UXO Sector Working Group (SWG). According to UNDP's Transparency Portal, the policy has been discussed at each SWG but it is unclear what this has achieved.

A multiplicity of documentation and reports emanate from the UXO project including the separate annual project reviews for the NRA and UXO Lao, the annual UXO sector reports and donor reports from UNDP to donors that provide earmarked funds. There are also annual and quarterly plans for the NRA and the UXO sector. It is difficult to reconcile all these and to understand UNDP's role in the implementation of the plans and its contribution to the outputs/outcomes. UNDP is reviewing its reporting with the intention of streamlining it. It should also examine how it can highlight UNDP's contribution to the UXO sector more clearly.

Progress against the indicators for the UXO project in Laos are reported on the UNDP Transparency Portal.¹¹ The evaluators used the information on this website to complete the results framework. There is inconsistent reporting for some indicators and none in the case of others. For some the baseline needed to measure the indicators against was not conducted. Some have not been achieved at all (see annex 4).

Despite capacity development being a stated as a key aim of the document there has been no baseline capacity assessment or comprehensive capacity development plan. Annual UXO sector, NRA, UXO Lao and donor reports state that UNDP has contributed to capacity development yet statements are general and refer to technical support, or support for reporting and preparing for meetings, or to attend specific training. There is little difference in reports from one year to another so it is unclear whether levels of capacity have improved, remained the same or deteriorated. In 2014 a short mission took place to produce a report on the *'Capacity Development Strategies of UXO Sector Institutions in Lao PDR: NRA and UXO Lao.'*¹² Although the report highlights important issues for the sector to tackle, it does not provide a baseline or identify functional areas requiring improvement that fall under the NRA's or UXO Lao's areas of responsibility.

Without a baseline assessment or detailed reporting that records changes in capacity development, there are limited conclusions that can be drawn about levels of capacity development in the UXO sector and, in particular, among UXO Lao and the NRA and about how and if UNDP has contributed to capacity development. The similar lack of baseline data and subsequent difficulties in attributing contributions to UNDP was noted in the final evaluation of the previous UNDP-GoL UXO Sector project and the Mid-term Evaluation of this project.¹³

2.1 UNDP Staff Capacity

The project was designed based on the assumption that UNDP had a Chief Technical Advisor (CTA) in place for its duration to implement and oversee programmatic and technical interventions, to provide leadership and help to coordinate the UXO sector and UXO Action. Insufficient funding and difficulties in employing and retaining a CTA have resulted in staff turnover, multiple CTAs and periods when the position has been vacant including from November 2020 to date (September 2021). The position is being advertised for the third time as previous recruitment processes have failed.

Staff turnover within UNDP has undermined UNDP's own capacity. Without a CTA, the UNDP UXO Unit lacks access to technical expertise to inform its UXO sector activities. Staff turnover has resulted in a

¹¹ UNDP Transparency Portal, Lao PDR <https://open.undp.org/projects/00104101>

¹² Jones, 2015

¹³ Durham, 2016; Raaymakers & Phakdisoth, 2019

loss of institutional memory affecting continuity and leaving current staff with project designs that they do not fully understand. Existing UNDP staff are overstretched and trying to cover the responsibilities of vacant positions. It is also apparent that non-technical staff in UNDP's UXO Unit lack an understanding of some of the basics of mine action and UNDP's global mine action roles and responsibilities. This is an institutional failing and is not a reflection on the individuals involved. The situation could easily be rectified by UNDP offering places to staff on short mine action courses, facilitating field visits with operators and some targeted reading. It is important for staff to understand UNDP's global UXO/Mine Action role as a member of the UN Inter-Agency Coordination Group for Mine Action (see annex 5).

At the time of the evaluation UNDP has two reporting and planning officers to support the NRA and UXO Lao, it had just appointed a new finance officer to replace a staff member who was leaving and a new junior project officer. In the past UNDP has had a team leader for the UXO project which provided project management and a decision is pending about whether it should be filled. The UNDP Deputy Resident Representative is acting as the UXO Action portfolio manager. There has also been a dedicated monitoring and evaluation specialist in the past but this position is also vacant and funding is being pursued to fill the position.

UNDP has had staff in place throughout the project period to provide programmatic support but not operational support to the UXO sector. There has also not been any technical UXO Action input from current UNDP staff for this evaluation making it difficult for the evaluators to understand how and if UNDP has supported technical UXO operations.

3. Lao PDR UXO Sector Legal and Policy Framework

The UNDP UXO project is clearly aligned with the GoL's legal and policy framework which states its commitments to the UXO Action and the protection and promotion of human rights. The UXO project development aims also reflect national UXO sector GoL development objectives. These national frameworks provide the structure within which to implement UXO Action and also the tools for UNDP to mainstream UXO Action into development objectives and SDGs and to promote respect for gender, the rights of women, marginalized groups and persons with disabilities.

3.1 Legal Framework

Lao PDR is a state party of and a prominent advocate for the Convention on Cluster Munitions (CCM). In February 2019, under Article 4 of the CCM, it submitted a five-year extension request until July 2025 to clear all cluster munitions remnants. Lao PDR joined the Convention on Conventional Weapons (CCW) in 1983 and signed Additional Protocols I, II, III and V but has not signed the Anti-Personal Mine Ban Treaty (APMBT) despite expressing support for it and participating in international meetings related to its implementation. As landmines have been found in Laos, the benefits of joining the APMBT and developing national capacity to address the landmine threat should be discussed.

The CCM requires State Parties to address the needs of vulnerable groups and to ensure that UXO sector interventions are gender sensitive. The country's 1991 Constitution guarantees equal rights for women and men and the National Commission for the Advancement of Women (NCAW), created in 2003, is responsible for promoting gender equality and empowering women. Lao PDR ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 1981 and promulgated the Law on the Development and Protection of Women in 2004. Lao PDR has also signed

the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women in the ASEAN Region.

Lao PDR ratified the Convention on the Rights of Person with Disabilities (CRPD) in September 2009. The Convention advocates a rights-based approach which complements the social model promoted by the CCM. The social model focuses on removing the barriers preventing persons with disabilities from participating fully in socioeconomic life. Article 5 of the CCM is consistent with the social model of disability as it requires state parties to support UXO survivors through medical care, rehabilitation, psychological support and socioeconomic inclusion.

Lao PDR is a party to the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) which advocates for inclusive approaches that protect of the rights of children with disabilities and children from marginalized groups such as those from ethnic minorities.

3.2 National UXO Policy

National Mine Actions Standards

The National UXO/Mine Actions Standards (NMAS) based on the International Mine Action Standards (IMAS) were developed and issued by the NRA in 2012. All operators must follow these standards and the standard operating procedures (SOPs). Reviewing and updating the NMAS was part of the UXO project plan but did not happen. Now, New Zealand plans to fund a consultancy to update the NMAS. HI is also planning to support the development of a national mine action standard on victim assistance.

The Safe Path Forward II

'The Safe Path Forward II' (SPF II) is the National Strategic Plan for the Lao UXO Sector 2011-2020 and has the following strategic objectives:

- Reduce the number of UXO casualties from 300 to fewer than 75 a year (Later reduced to fewer than 40 casualties a year in the 8th NSEDP and the Multi-year Work Plan 2016-2020)
- Ensure that medical and rehabilitation needs of UXO survivors are met in line with Treaty obligations
- Release priority land and clear UXO in accordance with national standards and Treaty obligations
- Ensure effective leadership, coordination and effective leadership of the National Programme
- Establish sustainable national capacity integrated into the regular set-up of the Government
- Meet international treaty obligations

The UXO Sector Multi-Year Work Plan (2016-2020) identified four key pillars to fulfil the SPF II

- UXO/Mine Risk Education
- Victim Assistance
- UXO Survey and Clearance
- Management
 - Information management
 - Quality management and training
 - Programme and public relations
 - International cooperation and funding mobilization
 - NRA institutional and coordination

Currently the UXO sector is in the process of developing SPF III and the next multi-year plan. UNDP plans to align its future support to the UXO sector to these new plans.

SFP II claimed to be people-centred and development orientated but respondents noted that much of SFP II has focused on quantitative outputs intended to contribute towards commitments to the CCM.

SDG 18: Lives Safe from UXO

In 2016, the GoL launched Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 18: Lives Safe from UXO. The table below shows indicators and progress although no final targets are shown.¹⁴

SDG 18: Lives Safe From UXO				
Selected SDG18 targets, summarized	Localized SDG indicators	Year	Available value	Source
18.1. By 2030, ensure that annual casualties from UXO accidents are eliminated to the extent possible.	18.1.1. Number of reported UXO casualties (disaggregated by age group and sex): Total/ Male (boy)/ Female (girl)	2018	T 24 M 15 (boy 9) F 9 (girl 5)	Lao People's Democratic Republic – Voluntary National Review on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable for Development 2021 (July, 2021, Government of Lao PDR)
		2019	T 25 M 29 (boy 12) F 4 (girl 2)	
		2020	T 33 M 18 (boy 5) F 7 (girl 5)	
	18.1.2. Percentage of population in contaminated villages where the population has received information on UXO Confirmed Hazardous Areas (CHAs) (%)	2018	21.2	
		2019	18.2	
		2020	18.2	
18.2. UXO contamination cleared from high priority areas and villages defined as 'poor'	18.2.1. Percentage of high priority Confirmed Hazardous Areas in remaining to be cleared (%)	2018	99.33	Lao People's Democratic Republic – Voluntary National Review on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable for Development 2021 (July, 2021, Government of Lao PDR)
		2019	99.25	
		2020	99.1	
	18.2.2. Number of villages defined as 'poor' with Confirmed Hazardous Areas remaining to be cleared	2018	1,983	
		2019	1,526	
		2020	-	
18.3. Identified UXO survivors' health and livelihoods needs met	18.3.1. Percentage of registered active age UXO survivors unable to earn sufficient income with access to basic income security (%)	2018	94.51	Lao People's Democratic Republic – Voluntary National Review on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable for Development 2021 (July, 2021, Government of Lao PDR)
		2019	94.52	
		2020	94.2	
	18.3.2. Percentage of registered UXO survivors mainstreamed into health, education and employment services (%)	2018	19.61	
		2019	20.61	
		2020	20.9	

¹⁴ SDG 18 Table from NRA, 2021b

Based on the four key pillars of SFP II, the NRA has articulated areas of capacity development to strengthen the sector to fulfil SDG 18:

- Promote the GoL organization and national and international private sector to conduct UXO/mine risk education. Teach the UXO curriculum in primary schools and conduct UXO/Mine risk education in UXO contaminated villages;
- Promote the GoL organizations and national and international private sector to provide assistance for UXO survivors which will focus on medical care, physical rehabilitation, psycho-social rehabilitation support, vocational training and economic inclusion;
- Conduct NTS to identify UXO evidence points and then followed by TS to identify CHAs across the country. At the same time, conduct CHAs clearance in the focal development areas project and also agricultural land;
- Improve UXO management organization, capacity building for staff, improve coordination and fund mobilization systems for both national and international effectiveness fund management.

National Socio-Economic Development Plan

The SPF II and the UXO Sector Multi-Year Plan are designed to contribute to the following outcomes of the 8th National Socio-Economic Development Plan (8th NSEDP) (2016-2020) although the NRA believes that the expectations of the UXO sector were unrealistic.

- Outcome 1: sustained, inclusive economic growth with economic vulnerability (EVI) reduced to levels required for least developed country (LDC) graduation and consolidated financial, legal and human resources to support growth;
- Outcome 2: human resources development achieved to LDC graduation criteria level and achievement of off-track Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) through the provision and use of services which are balanced geographically and distributed equitably between social groups
- Outcome 3: reduce effects of natural shocks as required for LDC graduation and sustainable management of natural resources exploitation.

The 9th NSEDP notes that, although the UXO sector has made significant progress, further UXO Action is needed to support ‘poverty alleviation, land use for agricultural production, habitation, tourism or land use to access natural resources.’ The latest national plan sets targets for land release, victim assistance and risk education. The final version of the 9th NSEDP has been approved by the GoL but is yet to be released as some targets are not yet agreed. The targets suggested for the UXO sector seem ambitious.

Despite the inclusion of UXO Action into development policies and Lao PDR’s own specific SDG to address the impact of UXO contamination, The GoL notes the limited integration of UXO Action into other sectors for development.¹⁵ As with the UXO project intended development outcomes, it is unclear how the UXO sectors contribution to the SDGs and national development plans can be measured as the identified indicators tend to be countable outputs.

¹⁵ GoL, 2018

4. National UXO Sector Capacity

The UXO Project aims to support the development of national capacity. This section provides an overview of the key national organizations and assets and GoL support.

4.1 National Regulatory Authority for UXO/Mine Action Sector in Lao PDR

The UXO Sector is led by the National Regulatory Authority for UXO/Mine Action Sector in Lao PDR (NRA) and falls under the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare (MoLSW) It was established by Decree in 2004 with the support of UNDP and has a board comprising 18 ministries chaired by the Deputy Prime Minister of Lao PDR.

The ministries include: Labour and Social Welfare (Chair), National Defense (Vice Chair), Foreign Affairs (Vice Chair), Planning and Investment (Vice-Chair), Provinces, Public Health, Information, Culture and Tourism, Agriculture and Forestry, Finance, Post and Telecommunication, National Resources and Environment, Public Work and Transportation, Public Security, and Education and Sport.

The Lao Front for National Construction, the Lao People's Revolutionary Youth Union and the Lao Women's Union are also board members.

The composition of the board is intended to facilitate the integration of UXO Action into the work of other sectors, although the NRA acknowledges that there is still work to be done to improve integration. The NRA adopted a gender equality strategy in 2011 and, since 2014, by decree, the Lao Women's Union (LWU) has been a NRA board member.

The NRA has a national level office and provincial offices and is responsible for regulation, planning and coordination of the sector including the national UXO/Mine Action Standards. It has units for clearance, risk education (RE) victim assistance, information management, quality management, public relations and international cooperation and treaty support. It maintains the national database using the Information Management System for Mine Action - New Generation (IMSMA NG).

The strategic goal of the NRA, the GoL and development partners is to reduce the humanitarian and socioeconomic threats posed by UXO and to build sustainable national capacity to address UXO issues. The NRA's vision is:

A Lao PDR free from the threat of UXO, where individuals and communities live in a safe environment contributing to development and where UXO victims are fully integrated into their societies and their needs are met.

The NRA is a GoL project and most of its staff are project staff and not civil servants. NRA staff receive higher salaries than civil servants although staff turnover has been attributed by some respondents to staff finding better paid positions with international organizations. The legal status of the NRA should be assessed to ensure that it is adequate to protect its position in the long-term.

4.2 UXO Lao

UXO Lao was established in 1996, by the GoL with support from UNDP and UNICEF, and initially functioned as a service provider and the national authority for the UXO sector. This was deemed a

conflict of interests in a 2002 evaluation which led to the creation of the NRA to manage the UXO/mine action sector and to refocusing UXO Lao on service provision. UXO Lao operations include survey and clearance and RE. It does not provide victim assistance. UXO Lao has an office in Vientiane and an office in each of the nine most UXO affected provinces where it has operations. UXO Lao is the largest operator and, until the creation of humanitarian demining teams drawn from the Lao Army, it was the only not-for-profit national operator.

4.3 Unit 58

Between 2013 to date, the Lao People's Armed Forces have established, trained and equipped seven humanitarian demining teams, known as Unit 58. Each team comprises 13 staff, two of whom are female medics. The personnel costs are covered by the GoL. KOICA, through UNDP, funds equipment and operational costs. The funding is channelled through the NRA and transferred to Unit 58 every quarter. Unit 58 operates in areas where other operators are not present -Vientiane Capital, Vientiane Province and Borlikhamxay Province - and provides survey and clearance, RE and emergency response.

The aim in creating Unit 58 is to develop sustainable national UXO Action capacity. Unit 58 plans to add a further 13 teams over the next three years to make a total of 20 teams and also to have a dedicated office and to build a training centre. Unit 58 states that its equipment is old and should be replaced and that the quality of their operations needs to improve.

Unit 58 operates according to the National Mine Action Standards and SoPs and the NRA conducts quality management of Unit 58 operations. Unlike UXO Lao, Unit 58 does not have offices at the provincial level so coordinates its work at the sub-national level through the NRA.

4.4 National UXO Training Centre

The National Training Centre for the UXO sector, located north of Vientiane, was built over 15 years ago but had not been used regularly and had fallen into disrepair. The Government of Japan funded the rebuilding and handed over the renovated Centre to UXO Lao in 2017.¹⁶ In 2020, the Centre was transferred to the NRA which, with funding from the Governments of Japan and New Zealand, and support from the QSI technical advisor is planning to update the training course, strengthen the capacity of the management team and improve facilities to provide a high quality, permanent training centre for the UXO sector offering training facilities and accommodation for around 50 trainees at a time. Urban sprawl means that the Centre is now too close to inhabited areas to be used for demolition training so the GoL is in the process of purchasing land for training away from populated areas. Once fully updated, it is believed that the centre would reduce current unit training costs, provide advanced training courses, help to maintain a sustainable national capacity, and mitigate the capacity lost by turnover of national staff particularly at the provincial and district levels.

Transferring the Centre to the NRA from UXO Lao makes it a national asset to help it attract donor funding. As the training is provided by the NRA, it can be used by other operators the national UXO Action authority, rather than UXO Lao which, as an operator, has no authority over other operators. It is intended that the Centre will be run on a cost recovery basis.

¹⁶ <https://www.uxolao.org/79-japan-handed-over-training-center-s-buildings-to-uxo-lao-to-support-uxo-lao-operation/> (accessed 24 August 2021)

4.5 GoL UXO Sector Contributions

According to the UXO Sector Annual Report, in 2020, the GoL contributed almost 13,000 USD to the UXO sector and contributions in-kind to the value of 22,000 USD. As a result of Covid-19, there was a significant underspend on these contributions. However, it seems that additional funding from the GoL goes to the UXO sector, for example to Unit 58. in which is not being captured in the UXO budget reports. For example, Unit 58 reports that between 2019 and 2021, the GoL gave 100,000 USD to the MoD for Unit 58 operations. Donors want to see more financial commitment for the GoL to the UXO sector. Some respondents believe that greater financial and in-kind support from the GoL would attract more international funding. It is important that the true value of GoL support to UXO Action is captured and reported to donors and other stakeholders.

4.6 UXO Lao and NRA Staff Capacity

The GoL acknowledges that national actors need to improve their capacity for strategic planning, coordination, quality management and information management to improve UXO Action operations and that it should continue to develop the capacity of Unit 58 and improve resource mobilization to secure more funding for the sector.¹⁷

During the project period, several TAs note that the NRA has a higher profile within the UXO sector, is more engaged and has improved communication. Some respondents also noted that the NRA is engaging more often, and taking the initiative to engage with donors present in Vientiane.

Poor coordination, partly because of lack of resources and human resource capacity, between the national and subnational levels of the NRA and UXO Lao management structures were cited as impeding efficiency.

Several general challenges in maintaining national UXO capacity were noted by respondents to the evaluation. These include expected staff turnover as a result of retirement and the need to introduce effective human resources management to ensure sustainable staff capacity by appointing and developing junior staff to their superiors when they retire. For example, NRA's EOD experts are approaching retirement and there is a lack of trained staff to take their place. JICA is currently supporting the development of human resource management systems for UXO Lao.

Another challenge is recruiting suitably educated and skilled staff at the subnational level where access to education in rural areas is poorer than in urban areas. There is also staff turnover in the NRA and UXO Lao at the subnational level as expectations of promotion mean that it is unlikely staff can be retained for sustained periods of time. It is intended that the National Training Centre should help to increase the capacity of staff at the subnational level and to address subnational staff turnover by providing training to new recruits.

The lower pay for staff at national institutions than those employed by international organizations is another issue contributing to staff turnover. The situation is exacerbated by the fact that long-term employees of GoL partners who are funded through UNDP have not received pay increases for 10, 15 or 20 years. A UNDP finance expert explained that this is partly because the NIM modality does not allow annual pay increases, only pay increases at the end of each project cycle - although some UNDP staff think that this explanation is incorrect. However, there have been several new project cycles in the last two decades, so it is unclear why this issue has not been addressed. Tetra Tech has increased the salaries for UXO Lao staff at the Provincial offices where it works with the result that staff in the

¹⁷ GoL, 2018

same positions in Xiangkhouang Provincial office, supported by UNDP, receive lower wages. Obviously, this issue has to be resolved and has implications for sustainability. The higher national salaries are now, the more expensive it will be for the GoL to assume responsibility for covering the salaries and the more difficult it will be to align salaries in the UXO sector with other parts of the civil service.

5. Support for the UXO Sector

During the project period, the UNDP UXO unit has had significant staff turnover, staff vacancies - most notably that of the Chief Technical Advisor (CTA) - and lacked funding for critical staff positions. There are other major UXO sector stakeholders, including large international NGOs and significant bi-lateral funders that have contracted commercial organizations to manage their contributions to the sector and to provide technical support which have more visible roles than UNDP. The NRA, UXO Lao and donors channelling funding to the sector through UNDP are aware of UNDP's role and have an overview of its support. However, other UN entities that participated in the evaluation were vague about UNDP's role and other UXO Action stakeholders often said they had no idea about what UNDP was doing except that it was present at Sector Working Group meetings. One respondent thought that UNDP could withdraw from the sector without being missed.

While the evaluators disagree with the view that UNDP's withdrawal from the sector would not be missed, it is clearly not as fundamental to the sector as it once was – a conclusion also drawn in the most recent UNDP Country Programme Evaluation (2017-2021). Nevertheless, assessing UNDP's role and evaluating its contribution over the last four years is difficult because of the project design, which lacks a baseline and an effective monitoring mechanism, the lack of documentation that specifically identifies UNDP inputs and traces their impact, the lack of institutional memory and the absence of a CTA or staff involved in UXO operations to help to guide the evaluation and explain how UNDP implemented its current UXO project.

The following sections (5,6 and 7) consider support to the sector from various stakeholders, including from UNDP, for capacity development, funding and financial management, leadership, coordination, programmatic support and technical support for UXO Operations.

5.1 Sector Support for Capacity Development

Several large donors to the UXO sector provide technical advisors (TAs) and the number of TAs has increased during the project period. The willingness of donors to fund these relatively expensive positions, indicate that the national capacity is believed insufficient to manage the sector effectively. Donors report increased value for money, improved oversight, reporting and accountability when international TA are in place. The NRA and UXO Lao are also positive about the presence of international TAs believing that staff benefit from ongoing mentoring and have increased confidence in their work because they can consult international TAs for advice.

Tetra Tech, funded by the United States, provides technical support to UXO Lao. It currently has eight full-time staff which will increased to 10 following GoL approval for two additional staff. The 10 staff have the following roles: one task order manager based in Vientiane; four advisors working at the provincial level; five technical advisors for Survey and Clearance, Quality Management, Information Management, Logistics and Procurement, and Finance. Tetra Tech also has a monitoring and evaluation role for the six provinces where UXO Lao operations are funded by the US.

Tetra Tech also provides support to the NRA with a focus on prioritization, EOD 3 plus training and information management/information technology. Tetra Tech is working with UXO Lao to develop team-based management, introduce new detectors and the necessary training, develop capacity and use computerized systems that enable real-time reporting and therefore a better oversight and management of operations.

JICA funds two technical experts to support UXO Lao who, in particular, prioritization, information management and support services such as computerized asset management, human resources and pay roll. JICA is supporting a work-flow survey to improve coordination between the national level and the provinces.

In addition to its funding to the UXO sector through UNDP, since 2017, the New Zealand Embassy in Thailand has contracted QSI to appoint a technical advisor to UXO Lao in Xiengkhouang to oversee all activities in the province and, from 2021, to support the redevelopment of national training courses.

International operators also report providing support to national counterparts on an ad hoc basis, particularly at the operations level for various activities including RE and VA. NPA has provided formal support for informational management.

5.2 South-South and Triangular Cooperation

South-South and Triangular Cooperation is another approach to capacity development although, inevitably, such international cooperation has been hit by the Global Pandemic.

South-South cooperation to exchange experiences on specific issues including operations, quality management and human resources has been promoted by JICA between UXO Lao and the Cambodian mine Action Centre (CMAC). UXO Lao has reported to JICA that it has implemented aspects of what it learned from CMAC. In 2020, JICA appointed a TA to CMAC for the first time in about a decade which could facilitate closer cooperation between CMAC and UXO Lao in the future.

As part of its GMAP II funded support to strengthen capacity for information management, NPA organized exchanges between Cambodia, Lao PDR and Vietnam.

UNDP includes South-South and Triangular Cooperation as an aim in the Prodoc but the evaluation did not identify examples during project period, despite UNDP supporting mine action operations in neighbouring Cambodia and Vietnam. The last final evaluation notes that UNDP has not implemented the recommendation from the 2012 evaluation to promote South-South cooperation.¹⁸ Some respondents were positive about the role of UNDP in UXO/Mine Action in Vietnam and the mine action sector there and thought that interaction between the two countries could be useful.

The level of engagement with the ASEAN Regional Mine Action Centre (ARMAC) is also unclear.¹⁹

5.3 Capacity Needs Assessment

Through consultants, UNDP is conducting a capacity needs assessment of the NRA with the aim of developing a capacity development plan. The assessment, following guidelines developed in 2021 for capacity development in the mine action, is adopting a participatory approach to identify functional

¹⁸ Durham, 2016

¹⁹ ARMAC, <https://aseanmineaction.org/armac/what-is-armac/> (accessed 24 August 2021)

areas that require improvement.²⁰ The implementation of the capacity needs assessment has been delayed because of Covid-19. Some UN respondents suggested that, rather than use consultants, the assessment should be conducted by UNDP's CTA who would have knowledge of the sector and could ensure continuity of design and implementation of the capacity development plan. UNDP argues that an external consultant, who would be perceived as neutral is more appropriate to lead the capacity needs assessment than a UNDP CTA.

Many sector actors are providing planned and ad hoc support for NRA and UXO Lao capacity development. Greater coordination of this support is necessary to avoid duplication and fill gaps.

Respondents who reported using a participatory self-assessment methodology to determine the capacity of NRA and UXO Lao staff said that the approach was positively received and could be implemented effectively.

The capacity needs assessment should provide a strategy and prioritization for capacity development support as well as baseline against which to measure progress. There appears to be more TAs supported by a wider range of donors and covering a wider range of issues than there were when the UNDP and the GoL developed the current UXO project. The changed situation affects where and how UNDP focuses its future support for capacity development.

5.4 UNDP Managed Funding

There are numerous bi-lateral and multi-lateral donors to the UXO sector in Lao PDR including governments, the European Union and charitable foundations. Details can be found in the UXO sector annual reports. Although UNDP manages a fraction of the funds supporting a well-funded sector, UNDP has an important role.

UNDP manages over 3 million USD for the UXO sector annually. The largest donors are the Republic of Korea and New Zealand, which provide earmarked funds, and Ireland and Luxemburg that provide unearmarked funds. All these donors have longstanding commitments to the Lao UXO sector. Around 95 percent of the funding for NRA comes through UNDP. On a smaller scale, Canada is also a long-standing donor and Turkey began contributing to the sector through UNDP in 2020. Australia and the European Union have funded the UXO sector in the past through UNDP but stopped during this project cycle. UNDP is currently (September 2021) in advanced talks with the Republic of Korea to extend its multi-year funding for a third stage of their project.

Donors channel funds through UNDP because it is a trusted partner, provides oversight and reports on progress. This is especially important for donors without a presence in the country. Many UNDP donors for Laos fund UXO/Mine Action projects elsewhere through UNDP so it is a familiar arrangement for those involved. Donors partner with UNDP because it enables them to fund national partners and to fund a range of UXO activities that would be difficult to do bi-laterally.

Some donors report that UNDP is responsive and replies rapidly to queries, others that there are delays in communication. Of particular concern is an accident involving UXO Lao staff that some respondents believe was not properly reported. Other issues noted by donors and other respondents is late responses from the NRA and UXO Lao which cause delays and tensions. For example, the development of SPF III is behind schedule and several consultants have already been involved in the process. Respondents believe that lack of engagement from the NRA with consultants working on SPF III has led to delays. Respondents also noted that during the project period there had been some

²⁰ Grayson, 2021

falsification of data in Huaphan province and some fraudulent activity in which funding went missing which were not resolved to the satisfaction of some international stakeholders. It is argued that these issues precipitated the withdrawal some donor funding. Although it is recognized that the responsibility for resolving these issues lies with national partners, some donors (and other respondents) believe that UNDP should be doing more to improve the level of engagement and the accountability and transparency of the NRA and UXO Lao.

Other donors want to understand the impact of their funding in more depth and to be able to link their funding with development projects. KOICA's forthcoming project in Bolikhamxai will do that. In the past New Zealand has been able to link UXO Action with promoting tourism.

Although UNDP's role in managing funding to the sector is important, given some of the issues raised, a donor suggested that, for their next funding cycle, it would consider other potential partners rather than automatically continue to partner with UNDP.

5.5 Bi-lateral Donors

The Office of Weapons Removal and Abatement in the US State Department's Bureau of Political-Military Affairs (PM/WRA) is by far the largest donor to the UXO sector contributing 30 million USD annually. Tetra Tech has been contracted to manage and be accountable for the PM/WRA funding for UXO Lao and the NRA. In 2021, there is 5.5 million USD for UXO Lao and 120,000 USD for the NRA. PM/WRA also funds international NGOs. Funding to the UXO sector in Laos is agreed by Congress on an annual basis. It is not expected that this level of funding will continue indefinitely but respondents believed that funding levels would remain high for the next few years.

The UK is the second largest bi-lateral donor to the UXO sector and funds MAG, the HALO Trust and, until about 18 months ago, Norwegian People's Aid. The funding, provided through the UK's Global Mine Action Programme, has a three- or four-year funding cycle. The current funding cycle has been extended by 12 months until March 2022 because of an underspend and plans for the next funding cycle under GMAP III, which is expected to begin in April 2022, are already underway.

Other large donors include the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs which channels its funds through Norwegian People's Aid and UXO Lao for operations and some capacity building support, and Japan which provides funding through the Japan Mine Action Service (JMAS) and the Japan International Cooperation System (JICA) for operational support including the provision of mechanical assets and technical advisors.

5.6 Leadership

UNDP also seems to be unclear about role. The prodoc aspires to provide programmatic and technical support, to mobilize resources and strengthen the link between UXO Action and development. The UXO project design implies that UNDP should have a high profile in the UXO sector and among other sectors. The evaluation ToR state that UNDP is committed to providing 'leadership', although current staff explain that their aim should be to support the NRA to provide leadership so that UNDP's role in the sector can be phased out leaving a sustainable and effective national UXO sector. The evaluators respect this aim and understand that the current staff may have a different approach from previous staff, but it is important for UNDP to communicate its position and aims to other stakeholders

Advocacy and Strategic Support

Respondents noted that UNDP is seen as non-political but has political access among the GoL and other officials at a high level. UXO sector stakeholders would like their profile to be promoted by UNDP to facilitate their work by linking. Some respondents mentioned that UXO Action should be more closely linked to development interventions.

The NRA acknowledges UNDP's role as a facilitator in bringing together different stakeholders and an important advocate for the UXO sector. UNDP supported the development of SPF II and is supporting the development of SPF III. It has advocated for the inclusion of the UXO sector into national development plans and succeed in increasing the profile of the UXO sector and issues of UXO contamination from the 8th NSEDP to the 9th NSEDP. Although the NRA reports that the 8th NSEDP targets for the UXO sector were ambitious and the targets for the sector in the 9th NSEDP also seem ambitious.

Ministries note UNDP's role in convening meetings to promote joint planning. However structural challenges in the GoL and staff turnover in UNDP and the NRA have limited the progress.

Although provision of services to UXO victims and persons with disabilities is limited in Lao PDR, UNDP's role as an advocate for victim assistance persons with disabilities is seen as important.

Following the submission of the draft final report, UNDP reported that it has advocated for a realistic assessment of SPFI and is highlight its views about what SPF III should include, for example, ensuring national sustainability of UXO capacity, further development of the national training centre, prioritization and more innovative risk education

Resource Mobilization

UNDP has succeeded in mobilizing resources during the project period but they were insufficient to cover needs such as the salary of a CTA. The lack of core funding and reliance on project funding is a major challenge for UNDP in the planning and execution of programmes. UNDP globally should examine its funding strategy. It may be that core funding is not made available for existing projects, but UNDP should recognize the damage to its reputation and performance by lacking funds for a CTA.

UNDP's GoL partners want UNDP to raise more funds for the sector whereas UNDP argues that its role is to support the NRA and UXO Lao. However, UNDP and partners balance their responsibilities, resource mobilization will be challenging as the major sector donors are already committing funding to Laos, funding for UXO/Mine Action is general is declining, contamination from conflict in the Middle East is attracting funds and the Pandemic has led to the reduction in the aid budgets of Western countries. UNDP should develop a resource mobilization plan and examine the potential of funding from non-traditional donors, the commercial sector and advocating for the systematic inclusion of budget lines into development projects. Simultaneously, the GoL should report all its funding to the UXO sector and consider committing more. Donors state that the legal and policy framework of the GoL shows its commitment to the sector but that this should be reinforced with more funding and in-kind support.

UN Country Team

UNDP is the UN focal point for UXO Action in Lao PDR. The UXO project has a key aim of contributing to the achievement of the SDGs promoting sustainable development and supporting livelihoods. Therefore, the evaluators assume that one of the ways UNDP can do this is through meaningful engagement with the UN Country Team. However, other UN entities lacked detailed knowledge of UNDP's role in the sector, and some were frustrated by the lack of coordination over UXO

contamination which they state affects their programming. However, other UN entities reported that the UXO contamination had no impact on their activities.

The latest UN Cooperation Framework for Lao PDR 2022-2026 brings together UXO Action and rural development under its Strategic Priority: Inclusive Prosperity. The Cooperation Framework is aligned with the 9NSEDP and the outputs on Rural Development and UXO support the livelihoods pillar of the 9NSEDP in particular. Under the leadership of UNDP, IFAD, FAO and UNICEF, the Rural Development and UXO output aims to enhance the capacity of the Government at the national and subnational level to: *'facilitate new and inclusive opportunities in rural areas through integrated rural development planning and prioritization, identification, survey and clearance of UXO-affected areas for productive use, conduct mine risk education, especially for children, and address the consequences for UXO victims and survivors.'*²¹

It will be interesting to see what synergies the UN Country Team identify for development and UXO Action.

UNDP Globally

Despite being involved in UXO/Mine Action since the 1990s, being a member of the United Nations Inter-Agency Coordination Group – Mine Action (IACG-MA)²² and supporting national UXO/Mine Action programmes in numerous countries, UNDP's role in the sector has lacked clarity. UNDP headquarters and UNDP regional offices provide only limited technical, policy and financial support to its country office UXO/Mine Action programmes. In 2015, UNDP headquarters announced that it would cease being active in mine action globally: at the time, UNDP's largest portfolio in Lao PDR was its UXO project.

UNDP reversed its decision the following year but, by this time, had already downsized its technical expertise and created the impression that it was not fully committed to the UXO/Mine Action. For several years there were no formal channels for UNDP country offices to seek technical support and UNDP staff were reliant on personal networks. For example, Lao PDR sought advice from the UNDP hub in Istanbul. Recently, UNDP seems to be reasserting its UXO/Mine Action profile and, in September 2020, appointed a Global Mine Action and Development Advisor to work alongside the pre-existing Global Programme and Policy Advisor – both of whom are paid from core UNDP funds. UNDP staff involved in mine action in the Southeast Asia Region report that they feel better supported by headquarters and have been able to seek advice from the global mine action staff. Monthly online meetings have been convened by UNDP with UN partners to exchange experience and lessons learned on different aspects of UXO. Mine Action. These meetings are open for all UNDP staff involved in UXO/Mine Action to attend.

However, two core-funded staff to support UNDP global UXO/mine action portfolio does not seem commensurate with the scale of UNDP country offices work in the sector. Regional UNDP hubs do not have sector expertise, for example, there is no Southeast Asia regional advisor despite UNDP supporting national UXO/mine action programmes in Cambodia and Vietnam as well as Lao PDR.

UNDP should consider how it can provide funding and technical support for its country officers active in UXO/Mine Action. UNDP is developing a new mine action strategy which will be launched next year and mine action will appear as a coper UNDP intervention.

²¹ UN: Lao PDR, 2021

²² More information on the UN IACG-MA and its strategy and publications are in annex 5

5.7 Coordination

Sector Working Group and Technical Working Group

The MoLSW is UNDP's official GoL partner and the NRA and UXO Lao are the official implementing partners. According to UNDP, the UXO Sector Working Group currently meets twice a year, although some respondents reported that meetings are held annually. It is led by the chair of the NRA board and is co-chaired by the UNDP and the United States Ambassador in Vientiane. There are four technical working groups (TWG) - clearance, information management, risk education and victim assistance – which meet quarterly and for which the NRA has overall responsibility.

During the project period, the Sector Working Group and the quarterly Technical Working Group meetings have been held according to the original project plans. Meetings have been held online when in-person meetings have been prevented because of the pandemic. The NRA's flexibility to move meetings online was noted positively by several respondents who thought it important that the regular meetings continued despite the difficulties.

Most respondents felt that, although over the last four years, the meetings have generally improved, all of them could be more useful. Currently, there is a focus on reporting at the meetings which is unnecessary as members of the UXO sector regularly report to the NRA and provide information for IMSMA. Respondents would like the meetings to be used to share lessons learned and discuss issues that pose challenges or areas that could be improved. For example, criteria for prioritization require further development. This could be discussed in one of the TWGs or a separate working group could be established to focus on the issue.

Some operators reported that they attend the meetings as a means to ensure they maintain their profile in the sector and insights into what is going on. However, one respondent was clear that the meetings were not useful and preferred to access information through informal meetings or by contacting one of the TAs.

Some of the TAs reported that they are not invited to the TWGs. This could just be an oversight, or it could be because the individuals concerned are not based in Vientiane. However, the Pandemic has forced meetings online so location is no longer an issue. In the future hybrid meetings could be held with those unable to attend in person connecting online.

Respondents also noted that invitations to the meetings regular sector meetings and ad hoc meetings to engage with consultants or discuss a specific issue are often sent at short notice. This makes it difficult for stakeholders to plan their time and to ensure that they are prepared for meetings. More notice of meetings would improve their efficiency and effectiveness and ensure that staff who are best placed to represent an organization are present at the meeting.

Donor Meetings

There are informal donor meetings but some respondents suggested that a regular donor meeting or meetings would be useful to ensure complementary interventions, a common approach to the UXO sector and avoid contradictory policies and duplicated efforts. This meeting should involve bi-lateral and multi-lateral donors channelling funding through UNDP.

Informal Stakeholder Meetings

Many respondents noted a range of informal meetings that occur several times a year. For example, the US Embassy convenes meetings with all major international operators and its own implementing partner Tetra Tech. The British Ambassador meets with MAG, HALO and the NRA. International

commercial organizations also report meeting with other sector stakeholders informally and with Embassies to highlight any problems they are facing.

6. Programmatic Support

UNDP's programmatic support to the UXO sector has included support for the annual and quarterly workplans, developing agenda for meetings, coordination meetings, reporting, procurement, financial management and recruitment. This support ensures that the NRA and UXO Lao can continue to operate. It happens 'behind the scenes' so few UXO stakeholders are aware of it so UNDP should consider whether it is appropriate to raise awareness about its role and, if so, how it can do that effectively. UNDP should also highlight this support in more detail in reports which tend to be vague and do not demonstrate how intensive and time-consuming programmatic support can be, or how it supports UXO operations. Unfortunately, without a baseline, it is unknown how effectively UNDP has developed programmatic capacity in the NRA and UXO Lao.

6.1 Reporting and Planning

The NRA and UXO Lao note support from UNDP for annual and quarterly planning and support to prepare for international meetings and produce reports related to treaty obligations and for donors. However, both GoL implementing partners report they would like to improve their report writing and data analysis skills so that they can advocate more effectively with donors.

Sector reports, summaries of IMSMA data and minutes from SWG and TWGs are published on the NRA and UXO Lao websites. However, some information on the websites is out of date, although UNDP has been working with both GoL partners to improve their websites and report that changes will appear online soon. One donor suggested that both the NRA and UXO Lao could use social media more effectively and produce more information in English to raise the profile of the UXO sector and its work internationally.

Discussions with some donors and the UNDP Programme Officers/Programme Analysts supporting the NRA and UXO Lao elicited anecdotal evidence that the quality of reporting has improved. Annual reports from the sector, the NRA and UXO Lao, lists the documents and presentations and preparations for meetings that UNDP has supported although the information is descriptive and does not provide analysis of the levels of capacity development. UXO Lao believes that their reporting has improved during the project period but require further support to be able to write concept notes, engage with donors and produce reports to a high standard independently.

6.2 Financial management and Procurement

The UNDP finance officer was in post for 5.5 years and conducted a capacity needs assessment at the beginning of her deployment and agreed priorities for capacity development with NRA and UXO staff for budget management, accounting, financial reporting and procurement. The aim was to develop the capacity of individuals and to institutionalize appropriate systems, policies and guidelines. No formal assessment was conducted after the initial baseline analysis but ongoing monitoring reportedly maintained progress and enabled capacity development support to be responsive to changing needs. Annual NRA, UXO Lao and UXO sector reports contain more detailed information about support for finance and procurement than the other areas of capacity development suggesting a rigorous planning process and effective execution.

After 20 years, UXO Lao's Chief of Finance resigned in December 2020. The systems for financial procedures had been developed and institutionalized and so facilitated the transition to a new staff member. The UNDP finance officer left her post in June 2021 but was able to complete a proper handover and agree an action plan with her successor. She seems confident that the capacity developed over the last 5.5 years will be retained and that the new finance officer for UNDP, can build upon what has already been achieved. If this is the case, it will demonstrate the importance of conducting a capacity needs assessment, agreeing a joint action plan with partners to develop individual and institutional capacity.

Financial management is critical as delays in disbursement of funds delays operations. For example, Unit 58 reports that funding delays can result in a loss of two weeks' a month. The delays occur because funds can only be requested from UNDP when 80 percent of the previous tranche of funding has been spent and the funds are transferred several times before reaching the operations level. Therefore, good financial oversight and forward planning are imperative.

The NRA noted that GoL processes are slow and can impede NRA and UXO Lao timely reporting to donors.

Feedback on the processes and speed of procurement are mixed. UXO Lao and the NRA have received training from UNDP and have agreed procedures for procurements. Many issues with procurement are outside the control of the UXO sector. Unit 58 criticise slow importation of equipment by UNDP but some operators report that UNDP has helped to facilitate their procurement processes. Other operators report that the Tetra Tech TA for procurement has helped to expedite procurement processes for the whole sector.

6.3 Memorandum of Understanding

Each new project must have a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) agreed with the GoL before it can officially start, staff can be recruited and procurement process initiated. Delays in agreeing MoUs have delayed project implementation and, in some cases, led to a loss of funding. Respondents from the UXO sector noted that, in recent years, the NRA has been able to facilitate the MoU process so it has been completed more smoothly and quickly and that the UXO sector delays in agreeing MoUs are shorter than those often faced by other sectors.

Nevertheless, the MoU process is time consuming for all involved wasting human resources, diverting staff from their planned tasks and, ultimately, delaying the implementation of interventions intended to support the people of Laos. The NRA has already been successful in improving the system and should look at additional methods to ameliorate the process. The NRA believes that agreeing criteria for task prioritization would expedite the MoU process. UNDP has high level access to GoL authorities and should work with the NRA to identify way of improving and simplifying the process.

7. UXO Operations

Support for financial management, recruitment and other programmatic support for the NRA and UXO Lao obviously underpins UXO operations. However, details about UNDP support for and participation in UXO operations during the project period are limited. The evaluators had no access to a recent CTA and respondents from the UXO sector noted that UNDP's role in operations had been confined to highlighting the need for a national GoL response to landmine contamination and advocacy for victim assistance. The UXO prodoc stated that UNDP would support the development for more efficient land

release processes, better information management and analysis, improved quality management, and more effective risk education. It is unclear whether UNDP has been involved in these areas. The prodoc also stated that task prioritization criteria would be developed to be used consistently throughout the sector. It is known that a system of prioritization has not been agreed. UNDP has managed funding for Unit 58 which has increased national capacity.

7.1 Land Release

Land release includes non-technical survey, technical survey and clearance. Operators follow the NMAS and SOPs but have different team structures. The climate and topology of Laos varies from one region to another so operators must be adapted accordingly. Operators need to plan activities for the wet and dry seasons and avoid activities at times when the local population need access to their land for livelihood activities. Working in and around villages is slower than clearing large tracts of land. These difference means that it is not possible to compare cost efficiencies of operators direct without controlling for the different variables. If donors require such a comparison, operators must agree on criteria that enable comparisons of similar tasks.

To date there has been no complete national survey so the extent of the contamination is unknown. Areas that have been surveyed or cleared can change as flooding is a regular occurrence and can move munitions. For example, in 2020, river waters rose 25 meters above their normal level in Sepon District, Savannakhet Province. In 2018 a dam burst in Attapeu Province dislodging munitions. Therefore, areas must be resurveyed and then cleared.

Efforts in Lao PDR have been focused on clearing submunitions although other types of explosive ordnance (EO), including landmines, are found in the country. Operators are tasked to clear areas contaminated with submunitions but clear other EO if found in those areas. There are no national standards or operating procedures for clearing landmines and different raining is required for clearing landmines from submunitions. The last UNDP CTA was working with the UXO sector to address the issues of landmines and it is possible that some minefields will be cleared. However, there is a need to ensure that the necessary legal and operational frameworks and national capacity are developed to deal with this threat.

Clearance

UXO Lao clearance capacity is considered to be good, but some respondents stated that the presence of TAs is necessary to maintain the quality of operations.

Unit 58 reported that its clearance capacity is not as good as that of UXO Lao and other operators.

Quality Management

The NRA and UXO Lao lack capacity in quality assurance (QA) and quality control (QC) because they have few staff to cover a large number of operators. The Quality Management (QM) teams reported that they had received more training in past than now but the reasons for this are unclear.

QA/QC is conducted on all operators – humanitarian, commercial and Unit 58 – using the national standards and checklists. KOICA has funded equipment and GIS/GPS training in 2020 and 2021. The priority for QA/QC is land that is being cleared for GoL priorities.

Obviously effective quality management is necessary to maintain national standards so quality management capacity should be increased.

Survey

One of the main challenges the sector faces is not knowing the full extent of the contamination. Without this information it is not possible to quantify the problem, the time and resources need for clearance and to prioritize clearance. The area remaining to be cleared regularly increases as more CHAs are confirmed.

The introduction of the Cluster Munition Remnant Survey (CMRS) was designed to determine the extent of the contamination and to inform a shift from request-based to evidence-based clearance.²³ The CMRS has succeeded in improving efficiency of output as UXO Lao operates mainly in CHAs. However, it is unknown whether this translates to efficiency of impact.

Views about the CMRS differ which may be influenced by the density of contamination and the terrain where different operators have been working. The US funded HALO, MAG and NPA to undertake CMRS which has been their focus since 2018. NPA completed its survey in 2020, HALO anticipates completion by June 2020 and MAG will take longer because of the high density of contamination.

Critics say that the focus on survey has led to a reduction in clearance and frustrated populations that see survey and then no clearance. UXO Lao has used a different survey method and followed up with clearance soon afterwards. It suggests that populations prefer this approach. HALO reports that it has cleared many munitions during the survey although full clearance would have to be undertaken at a later date. There is a shift in focus now for the international NGOs as they complete the US-funded CMRS and the number of survey teams is reduced and the number of clearance teams increased.

This is not a nationwide survey and some estimates suggest that using the CMRS methodology would take 20 teams decades to complete the survey. Another estimate suggests that according to the bombing data, the INGOs will have surveyed 77 percent of the bombing sorties so there is only 23 percent remaining. Therefore most of what needs to be surveyed had already been done.

The NRA and operators should discuss how to proceed. It is unclear what GoL and CCM requirements for survey are and whether bombing data and physical survey data can be combined to calculate contamination and inform long-term planning and prioritization, or whether a physical survey must be conducted throughout the country. National standards are designed for evidence-based clearance so would have to be changed if the methods for identifying contaminated land change.

Prioritization

Developing a 'clear and transparent policy for task prioritization' was an explicit aim of the UXO project. The CMRS surveys were intended to inform prioritization although without a better understanding of the impact of the contamination and clearance, it is difficult to prioritize according to socioeconomic issues.

The current system is supposed to involve a series of consultations at village, district and provincial levels and to follow some very broad criteria. Respondents acknowledge that there is currently no agreed system for prioritization used consistently across the UXO Sector to determine the order in which contaminated areas should be cleared. Research conducted in 2017 concluded that national level criteria for prioritizing clearance are general so can be interpreted differently and decisions made at the operational level are influenced by local priorities from the Provincial and District authorities and by the operators themselves based on technical considerations.

UXO Lao and JICA have developed a computerized prioritization system which is being piloted in three provinces. The system criteria are used to identify priority areas for the annual workplan and include:

²³ Creighton et al., 2013; HALO, MAG & NPA, 2019

- CHA
- GoL or Provincial focal development area,
- Socioeconomic status of village
- Number of poor families

Changing from request-based to evidenced-based clearance using NTS and TS have facilitated prioritization although a universal system to be used by the UXO Sector should be developed. The 2017 report on prioritization should be consulted to inform future discussions on agreeing prioritization criteria.

Despite the ongoing challenges, some TAs report that the NRA has been more active in the prioritization process than in the past.

Land Conflicts

Several respondents raised concerns about the potential for land grabbing and land conflicts following land release. For example, land concessions for agriculture are managed by the GoL and one respondent suggested that national and international investors are allocated land that has been cleared or is believed to be free from EO contamination which is then not available to members of the local population. This is because the GoL fears that if offered contaminated land on the condition that it must be cleared as part of the concession agreement, investors will refuse the land and withdraw their investment. A 2019 report by the Human Rights Commission noted that people had been turned off their land to make way for large-scale infrastructure projects, resource extraction and industrial plantations without considering the complex and long-term negative impacts on the displaced population. Since 2017, the GoL has revised its policy and is reviewing land rights.²⁴ However, this process is yet to be completed and the UXO sector should ensure that it does not violate the land rights of vulnerable populations groups.

The evaluation was unable to pursue the issue in any detail, but it should be explored.

7.2 Information Management

IMSMA

The NRA is responsible for managing the Information Management System for Mine Action (IMSMA). IMSMA – New generation is used in Laos but there are discussions about introducing IMSMA Core.

Support from UNDP for information management has included provision of computer equipment and training in GIS and GPS, but not the technical support. In 2018, NPA led a participatory assessment of NRA capacity with the NRA and other operators. The range of needs and constraints on time led to a focus on information management. Baseline and endline assessments were conducted and improvements were achieved in some areas.²⁵ There has been a funding gap for support to information management but discussions are underway between NPA and the US to fund further knowledge management capacity development in 2022.

NRA agrees that further capacity development is needed, particularly at the Provincial level as some staff are not confident to use computers and record data in writing leading to mistakes and inefficiencies as handwritten notes are entered into the database. Not all data is collected in a timely manner and there remain longstanding issues with historical data which are not yet resolved.

²⁴ Human Rights Commission, 2019

²⁵ NPA, 2018; 2020

Monitoring and Evaluation and Analysis

There does not seem to be any comprehensive monitoring and evaluation systems in place for the UXO sector or its contribution to development. Pre- and post-clearance information is collected but there is no evidence of it being analysed to identify development outcomes. INGOs report on impact assessments based on donor requirements. Developing a M&E system for the sector was one of the aims of the UXO project.

Data is included in reports for donors and ministries and published on the NRA website. However, some operators reported that the NRA does not share data in full meaning that they do not have an overview of the situation. There is some data analyse but more complex analysis would inform sector strategies more effectively and is necessary to develop prioritization criteria.

7.3 Risk Education

Risk Education has been integrated into the primary school curriculum by the Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES) and into the courses at all eight teacher training colleges in the country. RE is provided by village volunteers and most of the humanitarian clearance operators. The UXO RE is partly supported by the INGO World Education Lao (WEL). RE messages are disseminated through village radio, mass media, posters and leaflets, presentations, drama and activities. Plans are under development to integrate RE into the secondary school curriculum.

The NRA believes that a strategy is needed to strengthen the planning and implementation of RE and to raise more funding. The NRA and UXO Lao state a lack of refresher training, inability to train newly recruited staff, a lack of funding and new material are undermining their impact. Some funding for RE activities has been channelled through UNDP. The Covid-19 Pandemic has limited RE activities but awareness raising has continued through village radio.

Coordination with Provincial and District Authorities to conduct RE activities can also be difficult. Respondents believe that this is because the subnational authorities are more interested in survey and clearance.

External respondents observed that some of the materials in use with children were not age appropriate and that methods of raising awareness lacked innovation. RE materials are not tailored to specific socio-economic and demographic groups, translated into minority languages or adapted for those who are illiterate. Teenagers are considered most at risk especially in rural areas because of livelihood activities. HI is piloting a new methodology which involves working with young people to develop RE for their peers.

No respondents mentioned the importance of RE as an aid to community entry and establishing trust with local populations so effective NTS and other UXO Action can take place. As the NRA and UXO Lao acknowledge that they should strengthen the planning and implementation of RE, that RE will be successfully integrated into the national curriculum and RE messages continued during the pandemic via village radio, this next project period would be a good time to introduce more innovative approaches to RE, use mass media and social media more effectively and to focus more on the community liaison role of RE teams. During this evaluation, there were positive reports about how the international NGOs work with local communities and perhaps they could be involved in supporting the redevelopment of the national approach to RE and community liaison.

7.4 Victim Assistance

Between 1964 and 2019 there have been 50,803 recorded casualties (29,566 killed and 21,237 injured).²⁶ There is limited support of any kind - medical, rehabilitation, psychosocial and socioeconomic - for victims of explosive ordnance and their families or persons with disabilities in Laos.

Victim Assistance is integrated into the disability sector through the MoLSW and the National Committee for Disabled and Elderly. Non-governmental organizations provide services and support and advocate for an inclusive approach to persons with disabilities. HI is active in the holistic provision of victim assistance. The other INGOs in the UXO Sector focus on provision of transport for victims, accident reports and referral pathways. WEL, Cooperative Orthotic and Prosthetic Enterprise (COPE) Quality of Life Association (QLA) and Lao Disabled People's Association are among organizations supporting persons with disabilities in Laos including victims of explosive ordnance. Persons with disabilities are employed in the UXO sector.

Processes are ongoing within the GoL to advance the rights of persons with disabilities. The National Commission for Disabled People is responsible for leading the development of national legislation to integrate the commitments to the CRPD.²⁷ The 2014-2020 UXO/Mine Victim Assistance Strategy aims to facilitate the integration of victim assistance into the broader provision for assistance for persons with disabilities. A new victim assistance strategy for 2021-2025 is being drafted.

Respondents active in victim assistance note that developing and implementing strategies and policies is challenging because the practical support that exists for UXO survivors is outside the UXO sector and involves different line ministries. Stakeholders believe that collaboration on victim assistance between the NRA, MoLSW, MoPH and other Ministries could be improved. Currently there is no comprehensive mapping of the sector that identifies the range of services available and victims do not know how to access support.

Government and non-governmental respondents report that there is no comprehensive accurate database, including IMSMA, for victims which disaggregates gender, age, location, ethnic groups and activity at the time of the accident which would allow analysis that might inform strategies to reduce accident rates. Different organizations manage their own databases. While ensuring data protection, ways of sharing information and developing a comprehensive database for persons with disabilities should be explored. Without credible comprehensive data on the numbers of victims, it is difficult to mobilize funds as there is no accurate information about the number of people affected or their needs.

There is limited understanding of mental health in Laos and a lack of psychosocial support. There is some psychotherapy in Vientiane and HI is exploring ways to provide training to medical professions and volunteers to provide some psychosocial support and to be able to identify individuals in need of advanced support which could be provided in more specialized centres.

Women with disabilities faces more difficulties than men with disabilities so some organizations, such as Lao Disabled People's Association, focus on women. The UXO sector employs persons with disabilities. For example, HALO has eight employees with disabilities.

There is limited funding for victim assistance as it tends to be seen as an emergency response which fails to recognize the life-long needs of those who have sustained injury and psychological trauma and the needs for their families. QLA and LDPA rely on international funding. Some CSO lack the capacity

²⁶ The Land Mine and Cluster Munition Monitor, Laos PDR, last updated 2 December 2020

²⁷ NRA, 2020, Draft

to develop project proposals. International donors such as UNDP and HI are important because they help to channel funding from large donors that do not fund small organizations directly.

UNDP has been an important advocate for victim assistance and persons with disabilities and has funded technical support to lead the development of a National Action Plan for Victim Assistance and victim assistance strategies. Apart from HI, it is the only other significant organizations working in the UXO sector and on victim assistance and support to persons with disabilities. Unlike HI, UNDP has access to the relevant high level stakeholders providing services or developing policies to support persons with disabilities and their families.

7.5 Gender Mainstreaming

The gender development index (GDI) was 0.927 in 2019 which places Lao PDR in group 3: medium equality between women and men in human development achievements.²⁸ There for it is appropriate that gender mainstreaming and the promotion of women's rights are stated aims of the prodoc but there is no baseline against which to measure progress of gender mainstreaming and the indicators developed for the project results framework have not been used. Responses to questions about gender tend to highlight the inclusion of women in the UXO sector and as beneficiaries of UXO Action rather than consider how the different needs of men and women, boys and girls are taken into account.

Around one third of employees in UXO Action are women, some of whom occupy management positions. Operators have mixed and women only demining teams. HALO, as the newest operator in Laos (from 2013), has been able to achieve gender parity and six of its top nine management positions are held by women and 54 of its 118 operational management positions are occupied by women. With time and natural staff turnover, it is possible that other operators that were established in the country before there was such a strong emphasis on employing women in the sector, will also increase the ratio of their female employees. Respondents state that having women on the staff helps to ensure that the needs of women are considered by the sector.

The Lao Women's Union has a dedicated place on the NRA Board and women are in other senior positions in the sector or related sectors, but it has not been possible to assess the impact of the presence of women in senior positions.

The NRA worked with the LWU, UN Women and UNDP to promote gender mainstreaming. UN Women led the development of the 'Manual for Trainers on Gender Mainstreaming in the UXO Sector Lao PDR' which was published in 2019.

National and international respondents from a range of different stakeholders recognize that women often do not participate in public life, particularly in rural areas, so their voices are not heard. The UXO sector has been working with UN Women to develop a manual for gender mainstreaming in Lao PDR. The manual was developed using a participatory process and has been positively received. However, UN Women closed its office in Vientiane and, although UNDP has tried to promote the manual and gender mainstreaming, and its attempts were noted by several respondents, it failed in initial attempt to secure more funding. UNDP has included a budget for training of trainers for gender mainstreaming for a proposal which, if successful, will start in 2022. g. MAG is planning to use the manual for internal training with the community liaison teams and has suggested that it could share lessons learned with the sector.

²⁸ The Human Development Reports, Laos PDR, 2020, United Nation Development Programme, <http://hdr.undp.org/en/countries/profiles/LAO#> (accessed 30 June 2021); World Bank Group, 2019

It is also unclear whether women in contaminated areas are systematically consulted about operations. However, it is unclear how effective local level consultations are for anybody. In 2020 RE was given to 127,908 men and 129,167 women.²⁹ Respondents stated that data about support to persons with disabilities including victim assistance was not detailed enough to determine how well the different demographic and socioeconomic need have been considered.

The evaluation did not identify any NRA policy concerning Sexual Harassment and Sexual Exploitation and Abuse or any formal and trusted complaint mechanism in place. However, UNDP has shared advocacy posters with the NRA and UXO Lao which are in display in headquarter and provincial offices.

Gender mainstreaming is an important element of national policies, the SDGs, specifically SDG 5, and the UN global mine action sector which has mainstreamed gender through its 2019-2023 strategy and updated the UN gender guidelines in 2019.

From the available information it is not possible to know how effective gender mainstreaming is in the UXO sector in Laos. Statistically women are included but this does not necessarily translate into gender sensitive responses by the sector and achieving an impact that benefits all genders.

7.6 Human Rights

Lao PDR is one of the most ethnically diverse countries in the region and has 49 officially recognized ethnic groups including Lao-Tai (53.2%), Khmu (11 %), Hmong (9.2%), Phouthay (3.4%), and Tai (3.1%).³⁰ The ethnic Lao tend to live on the plains to practice wet rice cultivation, whereas non-Lao ethnic groups, such as Khmu and Hmong, live in remote mountainous areas and rely on shifting cultivation.³¹ Poverty rates are higher and educational attainment and access to services are lower among ethnic minority groups than the majority Lao-Tai.³² For example, there is a large proportion of children out of school and numbers are higher among children from ethnic minority groups and in remote rural areas.³³ The 2019 report by the Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights stated that inequalities in Lao PDR are increasing and structural barriers prevent those in poverty, in particular, rural populations, ethnic minority groups and women from realizing their human rights.³⁴ In 2019, the Human Development Index (HDI) ranked Lao PDR 137 out of 189 countries and territories but noted an increase of HDI from 0.506 to 0.613 between 1990 and 2019.³⁵ However, when the HDI is adjusted for inequality, it falls by 24.8 percent to 0.461 because of the country's inequalities in human development achievements.³⁶

No evidence was found of systematic efforts by the UXO sector to ensure that marginalized groups are specifically consulted and their needs considered when planning UXO Action. Respondents report that UXO Action tends to be focused in flat agricultural areas that are more likely to be farmed than upland forested areas where there are higher concentrations of ethnic minority groups. This is possibly the unintended consequence of the flatter lands being more accessible and easier to survey and clear than mountainous wooded areas and that by focusing on the plains a larger proportion of the

²⁹ NRA, 2021b

³⁰ Results of Population and Housing Census 2015, Lao Statistics Bureau, p.38

³¹ World Bank Group, 2017

³² World Bank Group, 2017

³³ Respondents for this evaluation

³⁴ Human Rights Council, 2019

³⁵ The Human Development Reports, 2020, Laos PDR, United Nation Development Programme, <http://hdr.undp.org/en/countries/profiles/LAO#> (accessed 30 June 2021)

³⁶ The Human Development Reports, Laos PDR, 2020, United Nation Development Programme, <http://hdr.undp.org/en/countries/profiles/LAO#> (accessed 30 June 2021)

population benefits from interventions than from programmes implemented in more remote areas. In addition, UXO Action relies on local knowledge to determine the extent of contamination but if a remote area is suspected to be contaminated, sometimes no one from the local population is willing to act as a guide to lead operators to the SHA.

Not everybody speaks Laotian, not all languages used in the country can be written and there are high levels of illiteracy, particularly among the rural poor and ethnic minority groups. Therefore disseminating information in writing has limited use and verbal communication may need to be aided by an interpreter. To facilitate communication HALO has employees from 10 different ethnic groups. These employees act as interpreters but also as informal cultural advisors to ensure that interventions are conducted sensitively. For example, some ethnic groups do not allow 'an outsider' into their cemeteries or do not allow anyone to enter the village during a period of mourning. UXO Lao includes ethnic minorities in its RE teams to facilitate communication and access and reports that RE presented for children presented by women seems to be more effective than using men.

HALO has also employed people who are illiterate because they would not usually have the opportunity to enter formal employment and illiteracy rates in parts of Savannekhet are among the highest in the country. The NGO has been successful in developing training suitable for people who cannot read and write.

Although some groups are more disadvantaged than others, rural populations in general can be marginalized. Some report that they are not always consulted or even informed of what UXO Action is happening in the area. One village chief stated that he had received a report about clearance but, although he was educated and able to read, the document contained technical language that he did not understand.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that the INGOs are better at liaising with and supporting the local populations than the NRA, UXO Lao and Unit 58. Differences in budget allocation or use of funding partly explain some of the differences. For example, the INGOs have budgets for community entry activities and to pay local populations or their own staff to cut vegetation. UXO Lao and Unit 58 ask local populations to contribute their own time for free to clear vegetation. Unit 58 does not live among the local populations and pay for accommodation and tends to set up its own camps near areas of operation. This means that the local population does not benefit from hosting deminers in the way it does from other operators and that there are fewer opportunities for social interaction and establishing trust.

Provincial and District NRA and authority staff are supposed to liaise with local populations but this does not seem to happen consistently. One local official reported that he does not receive the budget to cover the costs of holding local consultation meetings – therefore, the meetings are not held. Another issue, reported by UXO Lao is that rural populations do not always understand the change from request-based to evidence based-clearance. There are also reports of populations not understanding why some areas are prioritized over others for clearance. Such misunderstandings have the potential to create tensions between communities and the UXO sector so community liaison is important.

Some respondents observed that in Laos, importance is not always attached to working with local populations through consultations and ensuring the inclusion of vulnerable groups.

8. The Socioeconomic Impact of UXO Contamination and UXO Action

The Lao People's Democratic Republic is a landlocked country in mainland Southeast Asia is one of the least developed countries (LDC) in the region. According to the World Bank in 2020, Laos is a lower middle-income country with a gross domestic product (GDP) per capita of 2,630 USD.³⁷ In recent years, the Laos government has focused on ensuring that Laos graduates from its LDC status although many people still live in poverty and public services are inadequate. Graduation from being a LCD is expected to be achieved in 2026, after which, Laos will be unable to access 'certain aid and trade privileges' which could leave it in a worse position than it was as a LDC³⁸ and reduce its ability to support its national UXO Action programme.

Laos is the most rural country in Southeast Asia. Over 60 percent of the population lives in rural areas and depends on subsistence agriculture.³⁹ It is evident from the US bombing data, the partially completed national technical survey and the ongoing work of the UXO sector, which recovers tens of thousands of items of explosive ordnance every year, that Laos is heavily contaminated with UXO, landmines and other ERW.⁴⁰ Despite the heavy contamination and reliance on agriculture, respondents from the UXO sector are divided about the level of impact of the contamination on daily life and on the overall development of country. This evaluation failed to identify good quality detailed analysis that examines the socioeconomic impact of the contamination and of UXO Action, yet, documentation generated by the UXO sector, including the Prodoc under evaluation here, regularly justifies interventions to remove the UXO because they are an obstacle to development. One the key aims of the UXO project is to contribute to development. Some respondents from the UXO sector note that the most contaminated areas are the poorest areas, others that before the conflict the areas now contaminated were already the poorest so without analysis, it is not possible to confirm the link between UXO contamination and poverty. The 2016 evaluation of the UXO project concluded that the causal links between poverty and UXO contamination have not been empirically demonstrated⁴¹

According to the Population and Housing Census, Laos had a total population of 6.5 million inhabitants in 2015. Some respondents from the UXO sector commented that the small population means that the impact of UXO interventions benefit a smaller number of people than in more populated countries which can make donors reluctant to fund UXO Action in Laos.

Outside the UXO sector, one UN entity reports that the UXO contamination is below the root zone so does not affect its programming or impact on agriculture. It argues that Laos faces more significant development problems than UXO contamination. Conversely, another UN entity reports that UXO contamination impedes its work and the country's development. Lack of timely and clear information from the UXO sector had forced it to modify its planned programme resulting in the potential long-term impact of a livelihoods interventions being compromised. Different UN entities also had differing views on the safety of schools with one reporting confidently that schools had been cleared and were safe for children and another that it been unable to obtain satisfactory official confirmation in writing that schools it had identified for inclusion in its programme were free from UXO contamination.

Populations living in UXO contaminated areas continue to farm their land. They have developed coping mechanisms which include not digging too deeply, working around contamination, marking suspected explosive ordnance with a stick or moving it to somewhere considered safe.⁴² A Lao Census for

³⁷ The World Bank, Lao PDR <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.PCAP.CD?locations=LA> (accessed 30 June 2021)

³⁸ Human Rights Council, 2019

³⁹ Results of Population and Housing Census 2015, Lao Statistics Bureau, p.12

⁴⁰ According to the NRA's annual UXO Sector Report for 2019, over 55,000 items of explosive ordnance were recovered that year, and in its 2020 annual report, the NRA records that over 92,000 of explosive ordnance were recovered.

⁴¹ Durham, 2016

⁴² UNDP IEO, 2016

Agriculture 2010/2011 conducted in over 1,100 villages, of which, one in six had reported UXO contamination of agricultural land, found that UXO contamination was not among the top nine factors reported as limiting agricultural production. A longitudinal study by the UNDP Independent Evaluation Office (IEO) published in 2016 conducted fieldwork in contaminated rural areas and found that contamination was rarely given as a reason for not cultivating land. Instead, poverty was the main factor which limited access to productive assets including labour, irrigation, seeds and equipment.⁴³ The same fieldwork concluded that land use rarely changes pre-and post-clearance: a conclusion consistent with previous research reviews for the IEO study and a view confirmed by participants in this evaluation. However, expectations that land use should change post-clearance are likely to be driven by experiences from the clearance of landmines. Known mined areas are avoided by people because the risk of a landmine being activated is greater than that of a cluster munition. Therefore, it is not necessary to see a change in land use after UXO clearance but to see what changes occur among local populations.

Determining whether UXO contamination has an impact on agriculture is important because, although the World Food Programme (WFP) not a reduction in poverty from 25 percent to 18 percent between 2013 to 2019, it still found moderate to severe food insecurity among 20 percent of the population before the Covid-19 Pandemic. Food insecurity leads to malnutrition and long-term health problems. For example, stunting, which on average affects 33 percent of children aged 6-59 months and more than 40 percent of children in areas with higher poverty rates, ethnic minority groups and upland areas, has long-term consequences including poor cognition and educational performance resulting in lower wage earning capacity and productivity among affected adults who, in turn, are less able to provide for their children meaning that the impact of food insecurity has the potential to be generational.⁴⁴

Populations post-clearance report reduced fears of death and disability and improved harvest because of being able to dig more efficiently. This in turn freed up more time to open more land for cultivation or to pursue other livelihood activities. Therefore, to understand the impact of UXO Action, it is necessary to conduct further research to determine the impact of a better harvest or of having more time to focus on other livelihood activities. Is the health and wellbeing of a household improved because there is more food and the nutritional levels are better and there is less concern that a child will be malnourished? Is household income increased because of the better harvest and additional livelihoods activities and, if so, how is that additional income invested and what impact does that investment have on the household? MAG is initiating impact assessments in locations where it worked several years ago. A 2018 study it commissioned concluded that impact assessments should be delayed after clearance to allow the impacts to emerge.⁴⁵ The findings from this forthcoming MAG study could help to shed more light on the impact of UXO Action and inform sector plans.

Environmental factors in relation to UXO contamination and clearance are rarely raised despite the fact that Lao is highly dependent on natural resources and has an agriculturally dependent population - it is adversely affected by natural disasters and climate change.⁴⁶ It is unclear whether UXO contamination is leading to unsustainable environmental practices and whether clearance is creating environmental problems. The MAG 2013 study found that in some areas, access to previously contaminated land was leading to deforestation and over-use of the land.⁴⁷

⁴³ ibid

⁴⁴ WFP, 2020; WFP: Stunting in a Nutshell, <https://www.who.int/news/item/19-11-2015-stunting-in-a-nutshell> (Accessed 25 August 2021)

⁴⁵ MAG, 2016

⁴⁶ IFAD, 2017

⁴⁷ MAG 2013

Some of the commercial operators have conducted survey and clearance on behalf of the Lao government ministries for infrastructure projects such as rural road development and renewable energy. Presumably feasibility studies were conducted before such projects were initiated to assess the economic benefits to the country. Therefore these studies could provide an indication of the macro-economic obstacles created by suspected and actual UXO contamination and a projection of the benefits for the economy once the projects are completed.

In 2019, individuals were expected to receive 11 years of schooling by the age of 18, although the quality of education is low, so quality-adjusted education equates to only 6.4 years of schooling⁴⁸ An academic article published in 2020, argues that ongoing explosive ordnance contamination has negatively affected educational attainment for children living in these areas. This is because households farming contaminated land have to do so slowly and carefully to avoid causing explosions. The time-consuming process means that children must contribute their labour to ensure that households produce enough food. This has been calculated to reduce the time children attend school by 1.7 years.⁴⁹ In Lao PDR there is a strong correlation between level of educational attainment and poverty rates as those with 'the least education... have the lowest chance of transitioning out of poverty and the highest likelihood of falling below the poverty line.'⁵⁰

Although there is no comprehensive database of UXO victims and a lack of detailed analysis of the impact of UXO accidents on the individuals who sustain lifelong injuries and the families who lose family members or have to take care of a UXO survivor, the World Bank found that in Laos, among those in or near poverty, 13 percent were in that situation because of a health shock.⁵¹ Global analysis shows that a disproportionate number of persons with disabilities tend to have other vulnerabilities including additional health problems, low educational attainment, higher rates of poverty and lower rates of participation in socioeconomic life than those without a disability.⁵² In addition to the psychological and emotional loss of losing a loved one or becoming disabled, there are economic consequences. With the exception of 2018, in the last 10 years, the highest number of casualties from UXO has been among men. As these are likely to be the main income earners, their loss affects household income and, if they or any other family needs medical or other types of support, this increases financial pressures on the household.

The reduction in the number of explosive ordnance accidents and casualties annually is often attributed by the UXO sector to the effectiveness of RE (and also to clearance but this attribution is made less often than the attribution to RE). Without detailed research it is difficult to know if and how RE is responsible for the decline in the number of accidents and casualties. Other factors such as natural disasters, population movement and changes in livelihood activities can affect the number of accidents and casualties. For example, research published by the UNDP Independent Evaluation Office in 2016 suggested that the global market for scrap metal was likely to have had a significant impact on the number of casualties from explosive ordnance. It argues that there is a correlation in the rise in the number of accidents between 2004-2008 with the increase in scrap metal prices and a decline in the number of accidents from 2008 at the start of the global financial crisis and the reduced demand for scrap metal.⁵³

As the data for the number of accidents and casualties from explosive ordnance in the last 10 years is relatively small, qualitative rather than quantitative analysis is more appropriate. There is a strong

⁴⁸ 48 The Human Development Reports, Laos PDR, 2020, United Nation Development Programme, <http://hdr.undp.org/en/countries/profiles/LAO#> (accessed 30 June 2021); World Bank Group, 2019

⁴⁹ Guo, 2020

⁵⁰ World Bank Group, 2019

⁵¹ World Bank Group, 2017

⁵² WHO & WB, 2011: UNGA, 2018

⁵³ UNDP IEO, 2016

correlation between the number of accidents and number of casualties and the trend is a reduction in the number of accidents and casualties. Stakeholders with knowledge of Lao should look at annual changes in the number of accidents and discuss whether specific events occurred in those years to explain differences. For example, there was a significant drop in the number of accidents from 2011 to 2012 and from 2016 to 2017 – why? What happened in Laos that might explain the change or did the UXO sector start to work differently? Conversely, it is already known, unfortunately, that the number of accidents in 2021 will be greater than in 2020 – why? Is it because the Covid Pandemic has forced people to change livelihood activities or farm contaminated areas more intensively than previous years or is it because migrant labourers returning from Thailand have travelled through unfamiliar territory unaware of the threat from UXO? The evaluators do not believe that the rise in the number of accidents during the Pandemic is because RE activities have been reduced which has been a conclusion drawn by a number of respondents. However, analysis of the rise in the number of accidents in 2021 could help to identify at risk groups and inform UXO sector responses.

Such qualitative analysis that considers the contemporary situation in the country is important to inform the design and prioritization of UXO interventions. Similarly, it is also important to analyse the causes of accidents more closely. The NRA database disaggregates data to a greater extent than those presented in the UXO sector annual reports which, for some reason are combined. For example, the accidents caused by lighting fires for cooking and clearing land are combined yet the reasons for the activities, where they take place and who is responsible for lighting the fires are different. Analysis is also important because, if the sector claims that its interventions have been responsible for the decline in the number of casualties then it could be argued that the sectors shortcomings are responsible for any increase in the number of casualties. As casualty numbers in Laos are low, it is likely that in the future there will be annual increases which may be unconnected with the work of the UXO sector. Therefore, the sector needs a more sophisticated understanding of what contributes to accident and casualty rates so that explanations for positive and negative changes in the numbers can be provided for donors.

KOICA is in the process of initiating a new five-year project in Bolikhamxai Province which explicitly links rural development and UXO Action. The project will be implemented in cooperation with the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry (MAF) and the NRA and UXO sector. A new centre for training in rural development will be established and the survey and clearance operations will be undertaken by Unit 58. Funding has been set aside to conduct a baseline and endline study to assess the impact of the project including the impact of adopting an integrated approach to UXO and livelihood activities. This is an exciting opportunity to try to understand, in a holistic manner, the impact of contamination and UXO Action on development. Presumable monitoring and evaluation will be conducted throughout the project cycle but it would be interesting to add a mid-term evaluation and to consider conducting a further impact assessment two or three years following the completion of the project. The findings could provide important insights for the development and UXO sectors as well as to donors about the potential impacts of their funding.

Some development stakeholders expressed the desire to link UXO Action and development programmes more directly, particularly in the case of the UN which should be able to offer a package of related and mutually reinforcing interventions which would have a greater impact than the sum of their parts. Research from 2015 noted that poor households lack the finances to invest in productive assets which may help them to increase their agricultural production post-clearance.⁵⁴ Such a conclusion suggests there are opportunities to increase impact by linking interventions.

⁵⁴ UNDP IEO, 2016

Some donors also want to understand the development impact of their funding in more detail. One donor stated that it had change its mind about some of the funding it planned to allocate to the UXO sector because there was no analysis of how clearance impacted on agricultural development.

The UXO sector employs a lot of nationals, builds capacity and puts money into the local economy. To understand the impact of UXO Action, it is important to look at the impact of the provision of employment, training and salaries as well as the impact of the sector's activities. This information would help the GoL and other stakeholders to understand the potential repercussions of large numbers of people becoming unemployed which would when funding to the sector is reduced.

Mini Case Studies

The evaluators had aimed to conduct mini-case studies of contaminated villages where UXO Action has taken place to compare the findings with the aims and stated outcomes of UXO Action interventions. As travel was not possible, the information collected online or by telephone is not as detailed as originally intended but it helps to illustrates some of the findings in this report.

Khangkhai, Peak District Xiengkhouang Province

The village is about 7 km from Phonsavan, the provincial capital of Xiengkhouang Province. It has around 600 inhabitants; of whom about 70 percent are working as government employees and 30 percent are farmers and traders. The village was considered highly contaminated because of its strategic location during the war. It is on the Road No. 7 to the Lao-Vietnamese border and hosted a number of military bases. The village chief reported that UXO clearance could meet the needs of the residents. At the time of evaluation, three UXO Lao demining teams were working there. The local people participated in demining activities by reporting evidence, attending NTS, RE sessions, and weeding the areas before the survey and clearance. UXO clearance has significant impacts on the farmers. They feel more confidence to work on the land and allow them to expand the production areas.

Ladkhai, Phaxay District, XiengKhouang

Ladkhai is located in the centre of Phaxay District, about 25 km from Phonsavan. It has a population of 4,000 inhabitants including Tai Dam, Khmu and Hmong, who work in subsistence farming, animal breeding, trading and in formal sectors. MAG was working in this village. Similar to other villages, villagers have been involved in UXO Action activities by reporting evidence, attending NTS and MRE sessions. The Deputy chief of village reported that little evidence of UXO was found near the community, however; there was a lot in remote parts of the village. In addition to demining, MAG contributed some fund to construct running water system for the village. The inhabitants feel safer after the UXO clearance. MAG tried engage with village authority by sharing the clearance reports; although they have difficulty in understanding them.

Thongsene, Khamkeut District, Bolikhamsai Province

Thongsene is among nine villages in the Ban Yai-Thongsene village cluster having over 4,000 inhabitants. The inhabitants include Lao, Hmong, Khmu, and Meui ethnic groups, who subsist on wet rice farming, animal breeding, and cash crop plantation (e.g. corn, cassava, sugar cane etc.). The village chief stated that Unit 58 frequently come to the village. The village benefited also from a cooperation project between Lao People's Army and Russian Armed Force to decontaminate 100 ha of land in the areas in 2018. They worked in the school yards and other areas surrounding the village, where UXO evidence was reported. However, the village authority had limited participation in mine action activities. The contribution of the village includes reporting the evidence and attending RE sessions. The respondent stated that the population is increasing and will require more land for cultivation.

Thaveng, Khamkeut District, Bolikhamsai Province

Thaveng is located in Khamkeut District. It has a population of 1,472 inhabitants consisting of three ethnic groups - Lao, Khmu and Hmong. The population earn their living by rice farming and animal breeding. The UXO contamination is found in clusters in different areas of the village. The village chief stated that little evidence of UXO contamination was found in the inhabited areas, but there are still a lot them in agricultural land. As in Thongsene, the villagers benefited from the work of Unit 58 and Russian troops. The village chief reported that Unit 58 could not do much clearance because their operational time in the village was limited. An interview with the Head of Unit 58 reveals that a limited budget and delays in the transfer of the budget reduces the operational capacity of Unit 58. The villagers participated in the activities by attending the meeting in the village; report evidence point and attending RE session. The local farmers feel safer to work on the land after the clearance.

9. Conclusions

With a lack of documentation, methodology to assess progress and limited institutional memory, the evaluation can respond to the questions of the ToR in only a limited way. Previous evaluations have noted similar difficulties in assessing UNDP's contribution to the UXO sector.

UNDP's main challenges during the project have been the absence of a CTA, staff turnover and staff vacancies, and the lack of technical knowledge of the remaining staff. The remaining staff were aware of many of these issues but lacked time and expertise to address them effectively. The original Prodoc did not provide adequate guidance for staff or an effective monitoring and evaluation mechanism. UNDP has had a lack of funding but also a lack of staff capacity to pursue more funding.

Within the UNDP structure, at headquarters and at the regional hub, support for UNDP in Laos for UXO Action has been inadequate. This may be in the process of changing but it is important that senior UNDP representatives recognize the need to provide resources and expertise to its country offices if it wants to retain a position in the UN UXO/Mine Action sector.

UNDP has managed funding for the sector, provided programmatic support and facilitated coordination. It has also advocated for the sector within GoL ministries. It has played an important role in advocating and developing strategies for victim assistance and persons with disabilities. It is currently contributing to strategic planning and a capacity needs assessment. Its contribution to UXO operations is unclear.

UNDP's role in the UXO sector is unclear and should be defined and communicated to key stakeholders inside and outside the UXO sector.

Relevance

- The stated aims of the Prodoc are relevant to GoL international commitments and national developments. However, without a better understanding of the impact of the contamination on the socioeconomic development of the country it not possible to know if interventions are aligned to support the achievements of GoL policies. Better context analysis would inform more targeted UXO Sector responses.

- The needs of the most vulnerable are mentioned in the project design but there are no obvious specific provisions for addressing their needs beyond policies and collecting disaggregated data.
- Obviously, the Pandemic has had an impact on the work of the UXO sector and the people of Laos. It may be a few years before the impact is fully understood. However, discussions within the sector and with the UN more broadly should help to identify issues caused by Covid-19 that UNDP and partners should consider in their plans for the coming 12 -24 months.

Effectiveness

- The completed results framework in Annex 10.4 collates some information about the UXO projects intended outputs drawing on data published on UNDP's Transparency Portal.
- The impact on human development from the UXO project is unknown. Land for agriculture and development has been cleared but the UXO sector does not have a means of linking their activities with development impact. Research and analysis are necessary to understand the impact of the UXO contamination and UXO Action
- UNDP has channelled funding to civil society organizations for victim assistance, support to persons with disabilities and risk education. It liaises with various government partners to advocate for the UXO sector and has been successful in ensuring that UXO Action has been integrated into national development plans. UNDP has not been successful in forming partnerships with other UN entities or development partners. Other UN entities have very little knowledge of UNDP's involvement in the UXO sector. Some expressed a desire to collaborate on complementary or joint interventions for UXO Action and development
- UNDP's NIM financial procedures should be reviewed to ensure that they facilitate the smooth running of the project, allow appropriate salary and exchange levels to be set. Partners need more support to ensure efficient transfer of funds among all partners. The idea of establishing a trust fund was briefly discussed with UNDP at the beginning of the evaluation. It did not seem that this would be a viable option.
- The prodoc is broad and there is no effective measurement of UNDP interventions. However, it is believed that support to UXO operations is where the fewest achievements have been made. This is because the CTA position has been filled by several different people and has been vacant since November 2020. Unfortunately, UNDP has had difficulty in recruiting a new CTA. Had the same CTA been in position throughout the implementation of the project providing continuity and a clear and consistent vision for the role of UNDP, the project would have had a greater impact.
- Programmatic support appears to have been effective, however, the project aimed to support institutional capacity development. To improve programmatic support, UNDP must have a baseline and a capacity development plan so it can measure the transfer of skills.
- Lack of information about the extent of the contamination, the impact of the contamination and impact of UXO Action, and lack of a baseline capacity assessment means that progress towards sustainability and improving operations is unknown.
- As implementing partners, the NRA and UXO Lao are beneficiaries of the UXO project. The project aimed to develop their capacity. Both organizations were satisfied with the programmatic support and both wanted more support to mobilize resources. As noted above,

lack of analysis means that the socioeconomic benefits of the UXO project are unknown. Gender is considered in terms of employment in the UXO sector and ensuring that men and women benefit from UXO Action. UNDP has also helped to support training for gender mainstreaming into the UXO sector. However, it is unclear how meaningful progress on gender equality and mainstreaming has been, and how effectively women participate in decision making. More research is needed to understand gender equality in the sector and gender equality among beneficiaries.

Efficiency

- UNDP has not implemented the project efficiently because it has not had adequate or appropriate staff capacity. Without a CTA it has had little impact on UXO operations. Funds have not been efficiently mobilized and UNDP has been unable to staff in its own UXO Unit. It has also lacked staff capacity to raise funds because remaining staff have been overstretched and attempted to cover the roles of vacant staff.
- Had a CTA been in place, the timeframe for the project should have been adequate to achieve the outputs. It would also have been realistic to expect progress towards the outcomes of institutional capacity development and improved human development. It is reasonable to assume that progress has been made but there is no mechanism in place to assess the progress. Other stakeholders have also contributed to the sector, so their contribution must be considered alongside that of UNDP.
- It is beyond the scope of this evaluation to compare the cost efficiency of different operators. It requires the operators to agree criteria for comparison of areas cleared based on climate, topology and population density etc.

Sustainability

- It is unclear to what extent UNDP has passed on knowledge and expertise to individuals and institutions. A baseline assessment and a mechanism to assess progress are needed for future projects.
- Currently there is no transition plan and no progress was made during the project period to develop one.
- National legislation for the CCM will strengthen the UXO sector's legitimacy when it is passed. The legal status of the NRA should be examined and reinforced if necessary to ensure its future.
- National capacity for UXO operations and operational support has been developed but, to be sustainable, there needs to be human resource management to ensure that recruitment and ongoing training maintains national capacity. The redevelopment of the National Training Centre is an important part of ensuring sustainable national capacity.
- The UXO sector has focused on clearing submunitions so this is where the national legislation, national standards and capacity lie. Laos does not have a sustainable national capacity unless there are provisions for it to be able to clear all types of explosive ordnance and landmines.
- High levels of funding from the international community are unsustainable. The GoL should conduct a detailed audit of the funding and in-kind support it provides to the UXO sector to capture all its contributions and review how it can provide more support to the sector. A resource mobilization strategy should be developed to identify potential funding sources

including through commercial investors in Lao PDR. A better understanding of the development benefits of UXO clearance would potentially provide access to a wider range of funding opportunities.

- UXO Action to clear land of contamination is sustainable although natural disasters are known to have re-contaminated cleared land. Accurate records of clearance must be maintained and guarantees of clearance provided when requested.⁵⁵ Maintaining national capacity for information management is important.
- The provision of ongoing support to UXO victims and persons with disabilities is limited. This sector needs to be strengthened and a comprehensive database of individuals and the support they receive established. Policy and legal frameworks have been initiated and are being strengthened. UNDP support here has been important.
- The integration of RE into the primary school education system and into teacher training programmes is an effective means of ensuring that awareness of the UXO risk is raised. A new initiative to integrate RE into secondary schools is underway. Village radio systems have been used to continue disseminating RE messages during the pandemic as the work of RE teams has been restricted.
- Without a full understanding of the extent of the contamination and the ability to quantify the impact of the contamination the length of time and resources needed for clearance operations cannot be projected so how long UXO Action should be sustained and the level of national capacity that will be needed is unknown. No progress was made during the project period in planning for a transition to national ownership of the UXO sector.

Human Rights

- There is no evidence that UNDP's support to the UXO sector has contributed to the needs of ethnic minorities.
- UNDP has effectively advocated for UXO victims and the rights of persons with disabilities provided support to develop national strategies.
- UNDP has advocated for gender mainstreaming in the UXO sector and is in the process of securing funding to support training for gender mainstreaming.

Gender equality

- Women are employed in the UXO sector, including in senior positions. Data is disaggregated by sex and age. Risk education is given to men and women, girls and boys but UXO Lao does not seem to tailor risk education to specific groups. Victim assistance responses are being supported by UNDP and mainstreamed into support for persons with disabilities. However, there is limited capacity in the country to support victims and persons with disabilities and it is reported that women with disabilities are more vulnerable than men with disabilities. Work in these areas is ongoing but it is unclear whether meaningful progress has been made. Future projects should include a means of measuring and assessing the impact of progress.

⁵⁵ There will be residual contamination. This is the term used in the UXO/Mine Action sector for contamination that is found after all known contamination has been cleared. In Lao PDR some documentation has confused the terms 'residual' and 'sustainable'. It will be many years before Laos reaches a stage when all known contamination has been cleared. When it does, it will require sustainable national capacity to deal with residual contamination.

Summary of Findings

Agency	Findings
UXO Sector	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ National capacity strengthened, but unknown how much progress has been made and what UNDP contributed to that progress, as no baseline data/systemic documentation. ▪ UXO action has contributed towards human development and livelihoods, but no satisfactory system in place to monitor/evaluate development outcomes ▪ Extent of UXO contamination is unknown, so no agreed task prioritization criteria for the sector ▪ UXO Action based on pragmatic logistical decisions will fulfil CCM commitments efficiently but not necessarily be the most effective approach to promote development, particularly for marginalised groups ▪ Strategies to fulfil commitments to the CCM, achieve the SDGs or pursue a ‘no one left behind’ policy are not mutually exclusive, but neither are they directly aligned. ▪ The Covid-19 pandemic has prevented travel for in-person meetings and field visits which affects exchange of information, planning and training.

<p>UNDP</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Not possible to measure UNDP’s contributions to the UXO sector and to the capacity development of national counterparts, as no methodological means within UNDP’s project design/implementation to assess the results of its interventions ▪ Land for agriculture and development has been released and the numbers of UXO victims is low. However, a lack of analysis and impact assessments means that it is assumed that progress has been made towards development goals but it is not possible to quantify/describe in detail ▪ Absence of a Chief Technical Advisor (CTA) and staff turnover have severely undermined UNDP’s ability to implement the UXO project. Remaining staff have been overstretched, lacked technical support and lacked time to raise sufficient funding ▪ Without a CTA, UNDP’s visibility as a credible UXO stakeholder has declined. UXO operators and UN entities had little knowledge of UNDP’s role in the UXO sector. ▪ UNDP is a trusted partner for donors because it provides oversight and reports on progress. This is especially important for donors without a presence in the country. ▪ UNDP has provided support for programme management which the NRA and UXO Lao report has been valuable. Its ability to provide support for UXO operations has been limited and its technical contributions are unclear. ▪ The National Implementation Modality (NIM) appears to lack flexibility to adjust staff salaries and currency exchange rates. ▪ UNDP operates on a project basis with no core funding for UXO in Lao PDR. Difficulties in securing funding have impeded project implementation and recruitment. ▪ UNDP’s global commitment to Mine/UXO Action has been ambiguous in recent years and there has been no funding and little technical support from headquarters and none from the regional hub in Southeast Asia.
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<p>NRA/UXO Lao</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ National capacity has increased during the last four years. However, the existence and increasing number of international technical advisors demonstrates that further national capacity development is needed ▪ Operations: Day-to-day operations are generally considered to be good. There are limited staff to conduct quality management so capacity needs to be increased. The creation and expansion of Unit 58, humanitarian demining teams drawn from the military, has increased national operational capacity. ▪ Operational support: with support from UNDP, financial management and procurement have improved over the project period. Delays in disbursement of funding from the NRA have delayed operations. With support from JICA, assets, human resources and workflow management systems are being introduced at UXO Lao. ▪ Reporting and communication: with support from UNDP, donor reporting has improved, and information is now shared regularly on NRA and UXO Lao websites. However, reporting is not always timely, and respondents noted that information about an UXO accident and misuse of funds has been inadequate. Respondents stated that the NRA and UXO Lao should highlight their work more effectively, expand the use of social media and publish in English to attract more funding. ▪ Information management and analysis: with support from NPA, information management has improved at the national level and further support is planned. Information management at the subnational level requires improvement. Many operators collect data, particularly post-clearance data, that is not analysed and used to inform sector plans effectively. ▪ Strategic planning and coordination: strategic and long-term planning requires improvement. Overall coordination in the sector has improved but further improvements are possible by holding ‘active’ meetings which focus on meaningful outputs rather than passive reporting of activities. The NRA is more active in engaging with donors and other stakeholders than in the past. ▪ The NRA and UXO Lao work within GoL structures and procedures which tend to be slow and bureaucratic. The MoU process causes delays although it is noted that the sector is more efficient than others ▪ The NRA and UXO Lao experience staff turnover which reduces capacity and affects continuity. Staff turnover is blamed on uncompetitive salaries within the UXO sector. Recruiting and retaining staff at the subnational level is difficult because few individuals are qualified and, those that are, move to the national level relatively quickly. ▪ There is a lack of effective coordination between national and subnational levels related to lower levels of capacity outside the capital and lower levels of funding for offices, equipment and operations. ▪ Inadequate funding and funding gaps. Limited funding and in-kind support from the GoL can be interpreted as a lack of commitment from the GoL and discourage donors.
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Summary of Recommendations

Agency	Recommendations
UXO Sector	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Determine the impact of the contamination and UXO Action through research and analysis and use findings as an advocacy and fundraising tool. Examine methods to extrapolate from existing survey and bombing data to determine the extent of the contamination. ▪ Agree the strategic priorities for the UXO sector based on analysis of the impact of the contamination and UXO Action and develop SPFIIL accordingly in collaboration with other UXO sector stakeholders. ▪ To fulfil SPFIIL, agree criteria for task prioritization informed by the impact of contamination and clearance. Agreed prioritization criteria should facilitate MoU procedures. ▪ Based on the strategic priorities, identify capacity development needs. There is a huge amount of capacity and expertise in the UXO sector in Lao PDR. Resources should be pooled, capacity mapped and comparative advantage identified to develop a comprehensive capacity development programme to build sustainable national capacity. The process should be led by the NRA with support from UNDP if it has a full-time CTA in place. If UNDP does not have a CTA, an alternative long-term solution should be found to ensure continuity. ▪ Identify issues to be addressed to ensure sustainable national UXO Action capacity and develop a plan to achieve sustainability.

<p>UNDP</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Identify what UNDP’s role in the sector is and communicate this clearly to other stakeholders. ▪ Act as a neutral arbiter within the UXO sector and ensure that the interests of all stakeholders including the people of Laos, UXO sector actors, GoL and donors are represented. ▪ Provide leadership for/or support for coordination and information exchange and joint initiatives that facilitate the work of the sector. ▪ Support the capacity needs assessment for NRA (and another for UXO Lao) and identify where UNDP can contribute. ▪ UNDP has a comparative advantage for advocacy across multiple sectors, for example, to improve support for victim assistance and persons with disabilities, and to promote gender mainstreaming and the meaningful participation of women in the UXO sector. ▪ Improve project design, develop a baseline and monitoring and evaluation mechanisms that can assess progress and help to differentiate UNDP’s contribution to the UXO sector from that of other stakeholders. ▪ Ensure that appropriate staff and funding are available. Lobby headquarters for support and work with UNDP regionally to share experiences, lessons learned and to pool resources.
<p>NRA</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Improve coordination for action within the UXO sector through more effective sector and technical working group meetings and sharing of IMSMA data and other relevant information. ▪ Continue advocacy with ministries for UXO Action and mainstream the sector’s activities. ▪ Continue to work towards expediting the MoU process. ▪ Collate and make public information on all the GoL’s financial and in-kind contributions to the UXO sector. Work with the GoL to identify ways of increasing its contributions. ▪ Continue to develop existing relationships with donors and to build trust by ensuring timely communication, transparency and accountability. ▪ Improve information management, monitoring and evaluation of sector activities and analysis of data which should inform strategic decision making in the sector. ▪ Strengthen quality management capacity.

NRA and UXO Lao	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Continue to work with UNDP and other stakeholders to strengthen programmatic and technical UXO Action capacity.▪ Ensure that responses to and engagement in investigations are timely. Ensure that engagement in processes such as strategic planning and evaluations are timely.▪ Identify ways to strengthen subnational capacity and coordination between the national and subnational levels▪ Use risk education teams to improve community liaison. Examine more innovative ways to deliver risk education. Explore the possibilities of using international NGOs to provide support.
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9. Annexes

9.1: Documents Reviewed

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10.2: Respondents

Date	Respondent	Position	Organization
13 Jul	Phetsamone Southalack	Programme Officer/ Analyst	UNDP, Lao PDR
13 Jul	Nicholas Tan	Junior Project Officer	UNDP, Lao PDR
14 Jul	Minyoung Kim	Programme Officer/ Analyst	UNDP, Lao PDR
16 Jul	Sara Sekkenes	Resident Coordinator	UN, Lao PDR
19 Jul	Ricarda Rieger	Resident Representative	UNDP, Lao PDR
19 Jul	Souphalack Bounpadith	Project Support Officer	UNDP, Lao PDR
20 Jul	Steinar Essen	Global Mine Action and Development Advisor	UNDP
26 Jul	Nasar Hayat	FAO Representative	FAO, Lao PDR
26 Jul	Nils Christensen	Former CTA, Laos PDR. Current CTA Vietnam	UNDP, Vietnam
27 Jul	Dale Wilson	Climate Change & Resilience Specialist	WFP, South Africa
27 Jul	Outhai Sihalath	Deputy Head	WFP, Lao PDR
27 Jul	Olivier Bauduin	UXO Program Advisor	US Embassy, Lao PDR
28 Jul	Avi Sarkar	UN-Habitat Representative	UN-Habitat, Lao PDR
28 Jul	Cameron Imber	Programme Manager	The HALO Trust, Lao PDR
30 Jul	Abdulman Karimov	Capacity Development Advisor	NPA, Lao PDR
2 Aug	Nicolas Tasch	Attaché for Development Cooperation	Embassy of the Grand Duchy of Luxemburg, Lao PDR
3 Aug	Simon Rea	Lao PDR Task Order Leader	Tetra Tech
4 Aug	Soulivanh Pattivong	Country Programme Officer	IFAD, Lao PDR
5 Aug	Sangjun Kim	Deputy Resident Representative	KOICA
5 Aug	Minla Nanthavong	Rights & Inclusion Coordinator	HI

5 Aug	Thoummy Silamphan	Executive Director	QAL
6 Aug	Akira Nagata	JICA Expert	JICA
6 Aug	Sarah Goring	Grants & Public Information Manager	MAG
10 Aug	Catherine Phuong	Deputy Resident Representative	UNDP, Lao PDR
11 Aug	Elliot Kirton	First Secretary	New Zealand Embassy
11 Aug	Natthanun Patchara	Development Programme Coordinator	New Zealand Embassy
11 Aug	Minyoung Kim & Phetsamone Southalack	Programme Officers/ Analysts	UNDP, Lao PDR
12 Aug	Åsa Massleberg	Programme Manager, Senior Advisor/Strategic Planning	GICHD
13 Aug	Charlie McFarlane	Technical Advisor	QSI
13 Aug	Chanthaboune Keobounkhoune	Managing Director	AusLao Group
13 Aug	Palivath Inthavong	Head of UXO Section	Lane Xang Mineral Limited (LXML)
16 Aug	Khamsay Iemsouthi	Child Protection Specialist	UNICEF
16 Aug	Alan McKeown	Regional Manager General Manager	Milsearch Pty LTD Milsearch, Lao PDR
17 Aug	Phan Cuong		Embassy of Ireland, Vietnam
17 Aug	Kolakan Chanthavongsa	Acting Head of Coordination Unit	UXO Lao, Xieng Khuang
17 Aug	Maikham	Village chief	Khangkhay Village, Peak District
18 Aug	Vilayvan Thongmanivong	Deputy Head, Planning and Public Relations Unit	UXO Lao, Vientiane
18 Aug	Nouphin Phimmasy	Deputy Head, Planning and Public Relation Unit,	UXO Lao, Vientiane
18 Aug	Sompheang Thonsavan	Deputy village chief	Ladkhay Village
18 Aug	Lattanaphasouk Kedtavong	Provincial Coordinator	Bolikhamxay Province
19 Aug	Julien Kempeneers		HI
19 Aug	Khamsouk Bounkeomanixay	Head	Labour and Social Welfare Office
19 Aug	Houmpheng Phomsy	District Coordinator	Khamkeud District
20 Aug	Khamphan Saliangkham	District Coordinator	Phaxay District
23 Aug	John Pearson	British Ambassador	British Embassy, Vientiane
	Khensy Vilatid	Village Chief	Thayegang Vilage
23 Aug	Chomyaeng Phengthongsavath	Director General	NRA
23 Aug	Vilayphong Sisomvang	Director General	International Cooperation Division, Department of Planning and international Cooperation, MoLSW
23 Aug	Thavisak Phengthay	Deputy Director	
23 Aug	Soulikone Samounty	Deputy Director	Division of UN Political and Security Affairs. Department of International Organizations, MoFA
24 Aug	Venephet Philathong	Officer	
24 Aug	Phathaly Vongsidthy	Officer	
24 Aug	Phetsamay Kommasith	Unit 58 Coordinator	Ministry of National Defense
24 Aug	Phonekeo Orladom	Head of Unit 58	Ministry of National Defense
24 Aug	Bounchanh Sihavong	Deputy Permanent Secretary	Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry
25 Aug	Thongchan Duangmalalay	Chairperson	Lao Disabled People's Association
25 Aug	Samnieng Thammavong	Director	

25 Aug	Soukthavisone Khounsipaseuth	Office Manager	
26 Aug	Meena Sivilay	Deputy Director General	Department of Youth Activity, Lao Youth's Union
26 Aug	Somyot Sengthavy	Director	Youth Activity Division, Department of Youth Activity, Lao Youth's Union
27 Aug	Phonesay Bannavong	Acting director	Division of Foreign Language, Department of General Education, MOES
27 Aug	Vilay Nanthasone	Deputy Permanent Secretary	Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare
27 Aug	Manivanh Kittilad	Director	Division of Advancement of Women and Children Promotion, MLSW
27 Aug	Oudsa Phetsisanavong	Director	Division of Administration, MLSW
30 Aug	Bounphamith Somvichith	National Project Director	UXO Lao
31 Aug	Kongkeo Sengoudomxay	Deputy Chief of Operation Unit	UXO Lao
31 Aug	Vatchana Xongvilay	Deputy Chief of QM Unit	UXO Lao
31 Aug	Bounleng Boudala	Officer, MRE Unit	UXO Lao
31 Aug	Sorboulaphanh Indalavong	Chief of Logistics and Procurement Unit	UXO Lao
31 Aug	Phatsany Sivilay	Deputy Chief of IM Unit	UXO Lao
31 Aug	Bounsack Phonniyom	Chief of Finance Unit	UXO Lao
31 Aug	Xone Monevilay	Chief of Human Resource and Administration Unit	UXO Lao
31 Aug	Thongsouk Sayavanh	Deputy Chief of Human Resource and Administration Unit	UXO Lao
1 Sept	Bountao Chanthavongsa	Chief of VA Unit	NRA
2 Sept	Aubery Miles Sutherland, Main Karimov, Katie Harrison, Ulric Erikson	Senior Management team	NPA [responses in writing]
2 Sept	Vilaisack Vongsayachan	Chief of QM Unit	NRA
2 Sept	Chanmy Keodala	Chief of International Cooperation and Treaties	NRA
2 Sept	Khammoungkhoun Southivong	Chief of IM Unit	NRA
2 Sept	Vilavong Sisavath	Chief of Planning Unit	NRA
3 Sept	Sisavanh Khammoungkhoun	Chief of MRE Unit	NRA

Date	Meeting/Workshop	Consultant Status
2 Jul	Kick-Off Meeting: Capacity Needs Assessment	Observer
21 Jul	Kick-Off Meeting: Evaluation of UNDP Support to UXO Sector	Presenter
23 Jul	Consultative Workshop: SPF III	Observer
9 Sept	Validation briefing	Presenter

10.3: ToR: Evaluation Criteria and Key Guiding Questions

Key questions

1. The evaluation will address 3 fundamental questions: What did the project intend to achieve during the period under review?
2. To what extent has the project achieved its intended objectives?
3. What factors have contributed to or hindered the project's performance and eventually the sustainability of the results?

Relevance

- To what extent is the support to the UXO sector by the UNDP based on clearly identifiable development needs as outlined in the government's strategies, international obligations and others?
- To what extent is the project aligned with the national development needs and priorities and should adjustment in project implementation be considered to better align with the SDGs, including SDG18?
- How well does the design of the project address the needs of the most vulnerable groups including women in the country?
- During the evaluation period, what economic, social or political changes have taken place that affected UNDP-supported UXO initiatives? How do these relate to the relevance of the UXO sector to poverty eradication and economic development in Lao PDR?
- What opportunities are there to better align the support to the changed context and the needs of the beneficiaries?

Effectiveness

- To what extent are the Outputs and Outcomes of the UXO sector, and the indicators used, successful in guiding the support to have maximum positive impact in human development terms? How might this be improved in future?
- What factors are contributing to achieving or not achieving intended outcomes? To what extent are UNDP outputs and assistance contributing to outcomes?
- To what extent has UNDP's UXO work been able to form and maintain partnerships with other development actors, including other UN agencies, Development Partners, Civil Society Organisations, or government agencies?
- How is the current UNDP funding mechanism, its objective, set-up and rules and procedures, effective in fulfilling the intended objectives and needs of the users? How is its effectiveness compared with that of other funding modalities? Including the use of a Trust Fund.
- In which areas did the project have the least number of achievements? What have been constraining factors and why? How can they or could they be overcome?
- In which areas did the project have the greatest achievements? Why and what have been the supporting factors? How can the project build on or expand these achievements?
- To what extent is the planning undertaken for support to the sector adequate to sustain and improve operations?
- To what extent are the intended beneficiaries satisfied with the results? How well are gender considerations been taken into account?

Efficiency

- How cost-effective and time-efficient is the implementation by UNDP of their UXO sector activities and outputs in the evaluation period? What measures are being taken to ensure competitiveness?

- How efficient have the various modalities of UNDP support proved to be in the period?
- To what extent are the planned funding and timeframe enough to achieve the intended outcomes?
- What is the cost efficiency of UXO Lao and the Lao humanitarian army clearance operations versus that of INGOs based on the cost of clearance per hectare?
- How well did the project mobilise resources to fill the funding gaps? What lessons can be learned from this element? And how can the project do better?

Sustainability

- How does the current support (UNDP and outside of UNDP) to the UXO sector reflect and balance national institutional capacity development and sustainability on national systems and structures?
- To what extent has the project passed over the knowledge and expertise to individual and government institutions? What lessons can be learned from this element and in what ways can the project do better?
- To what extent is the Government of Lao PDR increasing its capacity and ownership of the UXO issue during the period in question? What impact has this had on external support?
- What is the transition plan for the Lao Government to take over the sector? (is there a plan?)

Human Rights

- To what extent does the support to the UXO sector by the UNDP contribute to the marginalised people's basic needs?
- How well does the design of the project address the needs of the most vulnerable groups including women, people with disability and ethnic minorities in the country?
- To what extent does the support to the UXO sector by the UNDP engage in advocacy to raise awareness of the rights of peoples with disabilities?

Gender Equality

- To what extent does the support to the UXO sector by the UNDP contribute to gender equality?
- How well did the project ensure that women, girls, boys and men have equal access to UXO/Mine Risk Education and gender-sensitive emergency and continuing medical care? What lessons can be learned from this element? And how can the project do better?
- How well did the project ensure that women's meaningful participation in the decision-making process? What is the percentage of senior management positions in the NRA and UXO Lao held by women?

Annex 10.4: UXO Project Completed Results Framework

Expected Outputs	Output Indicators	Data Source	Baseline		Results					Data Collection methods & risk	Evaluation Comments ⁵⁶
			Value	Year	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021		
Output 1: Institutional capacities are strengthened to further improve the contribution of the UXO sector to the human development in contaminated areas (CPD output 1.3)	1.1 % population in UXO-contaminated communities who perceive that UXO interventions have supported improvements in safety and better lives (CPD indicator 1.3.1)	NRA	TBD	2015	-	-	-	-	-	Annual collection: relies on provision of qualitative response from NRA	Not Achieved No impact survey has been conducted.
	1.2 Timely annual submission of Art. 7 report under CCM	CCM Website	✓	2015	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Annual collection: relies on timely upload	Achieved UNDP supports this activity. It is unclear whether NRA reporting capacity has been strengthened
	1.3 Legislation drafted in line with Art 7. Of CCM & presented to NRA Board	Meeting minutes	x	2015	-	-	-	-	-	One-off; relies on timely upload by NRA	Not Achieved The drafting process has been initiated
	1.4 Task prioritization criteria approved by NRA	NRA website	x	2015	x	x	x	x	x	One-off; relies on timely upload by NRA	Not Achieved Discussions initiated; criteria not finalized
	1.5 Annual sector reports produced with IMSMA used as sole source of quantitative data for clearance & survey progress by NRA, including gender-/age- disaggregated data on VA & RE beneficiaries	NRA website	x	2015	✓	✓	✓	✓		Annual: relies on timely upload by NRA	Achieved UNDP and other stakeholders support this activity. It is unclear whether the NRA reporting capacity has been strengthened.
	1.6 Quarterly sector-level progress data made	NRA website	x	2015	x	x	✓	✓	✓	Annual: relies on timely upload by NRA	Achieved & Exceeded Until 2018, quarterly reports were shared with UNDP, they were not publicly available until 2019. Since 2019, NRA

⁵⁶ information has been compiled from the UNDP Transparency Portal

	available in open format by NRA ⁵⁷										publishes the data on its website every month
	1.7 Sector M&E plan adopted by NRA including monitoring of community participation, evaluation of survey effectiveness, gender indicators and pro-poor prioritization	Annual sector report	x	2015						One-off	Not Achieved From the Transparency Portal it is unclear what progress. From information gathered during the evaluation it is apparent that M&E is unsatisfactory
	1.8 Disability policy discussed at the UXO Sector Working Group	Meeting minutes	x	2015	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		? The objective of this indicator is unclear.
	1.9 Victim Assistance Action Plan developed by NRA in-line with UN Gender Guidelines	NRA website	x	2015	x	✓	-	-	-	One-off; relies on timely upload by NRA	Achieved A VA action plan developed. The implementation of the plan and its impact to be accessed. The ProDoc incorrectly references the UNMAS gender guidelines. The Guidelines are developed by the UN IACG, of which UNDP is a member. The updated Guidelines from 2019, should inform the policy and practice of UXO/mine action in Lao PDR. https://www.mineaction.org/en/united-nations-gender-guidelines-mine-action-programmes-1
	1.10 Sustainability strategy for the UXO sector drafted & raised at UXO working group	Meeting minutes	x	2015	x	x	x	x	x	Annual, relies on approval of minutes	Not Achieved The issue of a sustainability strategy has been discussed but no progress has been made.

⁵⁷ See the Open Data Handbook for definition

1.11 cash contribution to UXO sector by GoL reported annually by NRA	Annual sector report	x	2014	x	✓	✓	✓		Annual, relies on production of report	<p>Partially Achieved</p> <p>GoL made contributions in-kind through salaries for Unit 58 and provision of office space.</p> <p>However, the indicator is vague. It should clarify expectations about the levels of GoL contribution – a specific amount or % of UXO sector costs.</p> <p>It is unclear whether the NRA is reporting GoL contributions in full.</p>
1.12 availability of monthly financial management reports by NRA & UXO Lao	UXO Portfolio manager	x	2015	x	x	✓	✓	✓	Monthly, relies on availability to UXO portfolio manager	<p>Achieved</p> <p>From 2019, reports have been provided on a monthly basis and have been made readily available to UNDP. Until 2019, these reports were provided quarterly</p>
1.13 number of UXO casualties/year	IMSMA	42	2015	41	24	25	33		Annual, relies on data management by NRA	<p>Achieved</p> <p>In 2015, the UXO sector agreed to aim for below 40 casualties a year</p> <p>The figures for 1.13 are unclear on the UNDP Transparency Portal https://open.undp.org/projects/00104101</p>
1.14 number of humanitarian clearance teams of the Lao People's Army trained and equipped by UNDP (Unit 58)	NRA Annual Report	2	2016	?	5	7	7	7	Annual, no target set	<p>Achieved?</p> <p>Unit 58 has increased from 2 to 7 teams. However, without a set target it is unknown whether this indicator has been achieved.</p>
1.15 number of annual QM assessments of nationally-owned training facilities	NRA Annual Report								Annual, depends on production of NRA report	<p>Not Achieved</p> <p>UXO Lao conducts annual internal QM</p>
1.16 Progress towards SDG 18	NRA Annual Report								Annual, depends on production of NRA report	<p>Unknown</p> <p>This indicator should be broken down into several indicators or information Without</p>

											more detailed analysis of the impact of contamination and land release ,as well as clear criteria for prioritization, measuring progress towards achieving SDG 18 cannot be done effectively
Output 2: UXO interventions are delivered in contaminated communities in support of human development, dignity & livelihoods	2.1 % of UXO land clearance with 'High Priority' areas according to NRA sector work plans	IMSMA		2015		✓	✓	✓		Annual, relies on access to coordinates for all tasks	Achieved Annual reports state that all land released by UXO Lao considered to be 'High Priority'. However, there is no clear prioritization criteria used consistently across the UXO sector
	2.2 Sector annual work plan produced by NRA including prioritization	NRA website	x	2015	x	x	x	✓		Annual, relies on timely upload	Achieved in 2020 In 2020, the NRA prepared an annual sector workplan (2021-2025). Until 2020, sector plans were discussed and NRA prepared an internal annual workplan
	2.3 % of UXO Lao clearance within CHAs (target 90%)	Reports	38	2015		92%	77% (Nov)	80% (TBC)		Annual	Almost achieved Progress made towards 90% target of UXO Lao clearance within CHAs. This is a result in changing from request-based to evidence-based clearance.
	2.4 % of survey & clearance tasks subject to NRA quality management	IMSMA	0	2015						Annual, relies on access to IMSMA data	Not Achieved Quality Management is done by area size and targets vary by donor. However, it is widely agreed that NRA lacks the human resources to conduct QM regularly. The indicator should suggest a target for the % of tasks to undergo QM.
	2.5 % of PCA which indicate compliance with pre-clearance plans	IMSMA	0	2015						Annual, relies on access to IMSMA data	Unknown Information not consistently reported
	2.6 % of RE activities in UXO Lao annual workplan delivered (target 90%)	Annual reports		2015		88%	80% (Nov)	100 %		Annual, relies on Project Board agreeing targets	Achieved in 2020

	2.7 % of annual provision of VA verified by monitoring	Monitoring report		2015						Annual, relies on production of report	Unknown No consistent reporting identified. The details of VA provision are not well articulated in reporting.
Gender Component	A. % of senior management positions in UXO Lao & NRA held by women B. % of female victims who report increased income after receiving training	UN Women Report								A. Annual, reported by NRA & UXO Laos B. Timelines for monitoring depend on training date	Unknown No reference to the gender indicators are made on the UNDP Transparency Portal

Annex 10.5 United Nations Inter-Agency Coordination Group – Mine Action (IACG-MA)⁵⁸

The IACG-MA comprises 12 UN entities⁵⁹ and was established in 1998 to ‘support the overall inter-agency coordination of UN mine action initiatives and activities.’⁶⁰ The *Inter-Agency Coordination Group on Mine Action terms of Reference* (ToR) was agreed in 2002 and roles and responsibilities of the members of the coordination group are described in the 2005 document, *Mine Action and Effective Coordination: the United Nations Inter-Agency Policy*.

The IACG-MA is co-chaired by the United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS), which is also the UN mine action lead, and the Department of Peace Operations. Other notable members of the IACG-MA include: the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS) currently provides programme/project implementation services for UNMAS and in the past has done so for other mine-action partners; the United Nations Fund for Children (UNICEF) is the global lead for Risk Education and co-chairs the Explosive Ordnance Risk Education Advisory Group (EORE-AG);⁶¹ and UNDP as a partner of national UXO/Mine Action programmes. Other members of the IACG-MA coordinate with mine action programmes to facilitate the delivery of their own services, protect human rights and oversee adherence to treaty obligations and international humanitarian law.

UNDP Global technical and policy advisors participate in and contribute to the work of the IACG which has initiated the development of the United Nations Policy on Victim Assistance in Mine Action (2016) and the United Nations Gender Guidelines for Mine Action which were most recently updated in 2019.⁶² Both these documents are referenced by the UXO sector in Laos, including UNDP, but are incorrectly attributed to UNMAS.

The IACG-MA leads the development of the United Nations Mine Action Strategy which acts as ‘an accountability framework for the UN system’... Individual UN entities contribute to mine action objectives and results in accordance with their respective mandates’⁶³ The strategy has the following outcomes:

1. Protection of individuals and communities from the risks and socio-economic impacts of explosive ordnance strengthened;
2. Victims of explosive ordnance have equal access to comprehensive health assistance and education and participate fully in social and economic life;
3. National institutions effectively lead and manage mine action functions and responsibilities;
4. Momentum and profile of mine action efforts, including through mainstreaming in humanitarian assistance, human rights, peacebuilding, stabilization, and sustainable development, maintained and enhanced (cross-cutting);

⁵⁸ United Nations Inter-Agency Coordination Group on Mine Action <https://www.mineaction.org/en/un-inter-agency-coordination-group-mine-action-iacg-ma> (accessed 12 August 2021)

⁵⁹ The 12 departments and offices of the Secretariat, specialized agencies, funds and programmes are: the United Nations Mine Action Service of the Department of Peace Operations, the Office for Disarmament Affairs, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN -Women), the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS), the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the World Food Programme (WFP) and the World Health Organization (WHO). The United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR) and the World Bank are observers.

⁶⁰ United Nations, 2002: 1

⁶¹ Explosive Ordnance Risk Education Advisory Group <https://www.gichd.org/en/our-response/risk-education/advisory-group/> (accessed 12 August 2021)

⁶² United Nations Inter-Agency Coordination Group on Mine Action: Policies and Position Papers <https://www.mineaction.org/en/policies-and-position-papers> (accessed 12 August 2021)

⁶³ UN, 2018: 1

5. Mine action programmes address the specific needs of women, girls, men and boys from diverse groups, while facilitating empowerment, inclusion and greater gender parity in employment (crosscutting);

Each outcome has a theory of change which could be used to inform the development of national strategies, including those supported by UNDP. A baseline report was produced in 2018 and the implementation of the strategy is monitored and evaluated annually. The M&E mechanism is time-consuming, although the latest is more streamlined than earlier versions. UNDP has argued it cannot respond to the survey without the cooperation of the national mine action authorities but, this latest version of the survey includes specific questions about UN funding and the nature of its support to the sector. The M&E survey was completed by UNDP and the NRA in 2018 and 2019. No data were submitted in 2020.⁶⁴

UNDP participates in the development of the UN Mine Action Strategy so it should submit data for monitoring and evaluation. If it believes that the M&E survey is too burdensome or that the questions are not clearly or appropriately directed to either UNDP or the national authorities, it should use its membership of the IACG-MA to recommend changes. Lack of response from countries or territories where UNDP is engaged in UXO/Mine Action, creates the impression that UNDP is inactive or uninterested.

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⁶⁴ Email correspondence with Maria Salem and Dejan Loncar IACG-MA M&E Specialists, 27 July 2021