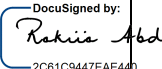
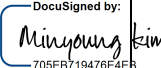




Management response template

UNDP management response template

Mid-term evaluation of Moving towards achieving SDG 18 - Removing the UXO obstacle to development in Lao PDR project.

Date: 31 March 2022

Prepared by: Rakiia Abdurasulova, Minyoung Kim	Position: Monitoring & Evaluation, Reporting Specialist UXO Portfolio Manager Unit/Bureau: UXO Unit, UNDP Lao PDR	Signature: 30-Mar-2022 30-Mar-2022	DocuSigned by:  2C61C947EAE44D... DocuSigned by:  705EB719476E4E3...
Cleared by: Catherine Phuong	Position: Deputy Resident Representative Unit/Bureau: UNDP Lao PDR	Signature: 31-Mar-2022	DocuSigned by:  8B46E7FC81674ED...
Input into and update in ERC: Vipapone Aphayvanh	Position: Head of PSU/M&E Focal Point Unit/Bureau: PSU, UNDP Lao PDR	Signature: 31-Mar-2022	DocuSigned by:  832E18493808482...

Evaluation recommendation 1.

Evaluation Arrangements:

It is recommended that the CO could improve the efficiency and effectiveness of future evaluations by:

- Ensuring that all relevant UNDP and GoL staff members are fully briefed in advance on evaluation purpose, process and standards, as outlined in the UNDP Evaluation Guidelines 2019 and relevant UNEG Guidelines, and that these are followed during the evaluation.
- Responding rapidly and fully to evaluation information requests.
- Providing the Evaluation Team with a full and complete stakeholder contacts list well in advance of the evaluation country mission.
- Allowing and facilitating the Evaluation Team to contact stakeholders directly to arrange meetings.
- Making greater effort well in advance to ensure coordination of key related activities.
- Improving the efficiency of evaluation contracting and payment processes.

Management response: Agreed

The Government of Lao PDR (GoL) and UNDP acknowledge the highest importance of ensuring the full compliance with UNDP Evaluation Guidelines and other UNEG Guidelines. UNDP will strive to ensure smooth implementation of all current and future evaluations.

Stakeholders contact list was provided to the evaluation team, however, as during the evaluation, additional stakeholders were identified.

UNDP facilitated the meetings given the local protocol; evaluators were never prevented from arranging their own appointments.

Key action(s)	Completion date	Responsible unit(s)	Tracking*	
			Comments	Status (initiated, completed or no due date)
1.1 UNDP will provide training to all CO staff on UNDP Evaluation	1 October 2021	UNDP Programme Support Unit/M&E Focal Point	UNDP organised an internal learning session on UNDP Evaluation Guidelines for UNDP Lao CO Staff on 1 October 2021	Completed

Guidelines by 31 October 2021.		and BRH M&E Specialist		
1.2 NRA and UNDP will organise a briefing session on evaluations for relevant government staff by 31 August 2021, ahead of the final project evaluation.	August 2021	UNDP Programme Support Unit/M&E Focal Point and UXO programme unit	UNDP organized a briefing session with relevant government staff on the final project evaluation on 21 July 2021.	Completed

Evaluation recommendation 2.

Program relevance

- Within the current UNDP Program to end 2021 UNDP could, in close consultation with GoL, focus on those activities that are most directly relevant to SDG 18, and especially:
- Supporting GoL to mainstream UXO into all relevant line ministries and sectors.
- Continuing to strengthen capacity at NRA, especially on IM, QM and in the Provinces.
- Continuing to strengthen capacity at UXO-Lao, especially in relation to internal management procedures and MEL.
- For the period post 2021, UNDP could, in close consultation with GoL, develop a program that is more clearly relevant and coherently linked to the Lao PDR SDG 18 and the objectives and targets of Lao PDR's broader strategies and action plans on UXO (i.e. it is recommended that the targets and indicators from SDG 18 and from Lao PDR's own UXO strategies and action plans be adopted directly by UNDP, rather than developing a UNDP ProDoc with separate and different targets and indicators – as the current situation).

Management response: Agreed

The GoL and UNDP recognise the need to ensure programme relevance as it has already been providing substantial support to mainstream UXO into all relevant development sectors in Lao PDR, which is part of ongoing process of the implementation of 8th NSEDP and also the formulation of the 9th NSEDP; UXO is included in one of the outcomes of the 9th NSEDP.

Key action(s)	Completion date	Responsible unit(s)	Tracking	
			Comments	Status (initiated, completed or no due date)
2.1 The GoL (MPI, MoFA) and UNDP will continue to focus on the implementation of activities and producing outputs and outcomes aiming at achieving SDG 18 targets and progress will be monitored through RTIM process every year.	December 2021	UNDP, MLSW, MPI, MOFA, NRA & UXO Lao.	Clearance, risk education and victim assistance activities being implemented will contribute to achieving SDG 18 targets. The progress achievements of SDG 18 are monitored and evaluated annually by NRA. The recent achievement of SDG 18 has been captured at the second Voluntary National Review (VNR) of the SDGs available at 279472021_VNR_Report_Lao.pdf (un.org) The implementation of the activities and the extent to which outputs and outcomes have been achieved were monitored through RTIM process in November 2021.	Completed
2.2 The GoL (MPI, MoLSW) and UNDP will continue providing support to strengthen	April 2022	UNDP, MLSW, MPI, MOFA, NRA & UXO Lao.	A final draft of the Capacity Needs Assessment (CNA) of NRA was reviewed by NRA and other relevant experts in Q4 2021. The	Completed

capacity of NRA through a capacity needs assessment for NRA to be completed and discussed with NRA by 31 March 2022			comments are being addressed to finalize the report. While the CNA report is being finalized, the findings and recommendations of this assessment have been incorporated into the new UXO project document for the next five years (2022-2026), which is currently under approval process. The new project will start from 1 April 2022, and UNDP will continue to provide support to NRA to enhance its capacity for the whole institution.	
2.3 UNDP, in close consultation with GoL, will develop and design the next phase of UNDP UXO project considering next UXO sector strategies and plans being formulated and targets and indicators set out in SDG 18 by 31 March 2022	April 2022	UNDP, MLSW, NRA, and UXO Lao	Final evaluation of the UXO project was completed in September 2021. The results, together with directions set out in the 9 th NSEDP, SPFIIL, SDG 18 targets and indicators and the next CPD have been used to design the new UXO Project which is scheduled to start from April 2022.	Completed

Evaluation recommendation 3.**Program concept & design**

In addition to Recommendation 2, which also applies to program concept and design, it is also recommended that for the period post 2021, any new UNDP program concept and design should:

be based on a properly formulated Results and Resources Framework derived from a coherent Logical Framework Analysis, and incorporating all of the essential elements of program concept and design, that are missing or poorly developed in the current ProDoc; and include a realistic budget that reflects the resources actually committed, plus any additional that can be reasonably expected to be secured by UNDP during the life of the program, but not more.

Management response: Partially agreed

The GoL and UNDP recognise an importance of ensuring full compliance with UNDP Programme and Project management guidelines.

The Government of Lao PDR/ UNDP ProDoc clearly explains the concept / reasoning for the ProDoc budget being set at US\$ 84M which includes the funds to be mobilised from donors aside from UNDP.

It is noted that funds outside of those managed by UNDP to the UXO sector during the first half of this project are estimated at in excess of USD 60 million.

This was in response to GoL's request to have a comprehensive UXO sector document rather than just a UNDP ProDoc. UNDP took this as a positive signal of trust placed by GoL on UNDP.

Key action(s)	Completion date	Responsible unit(s)	Tracking	
			Comments	Status (initiated, completed or no due date)
3.1 UNDP will, in close	April 2022	UNDP, MLSW,	Same as 2.3, Part of CPD	Completed

consultation with GoL, initiate the process of developing the concept and design of the next phase of the UXO project based on a comprehensive LogFrame Analysis and realistic budget by 31 March 2022		NRA & UXO Lao	formulation and final evaluation process, concept and design of the next phase of UXO project design began with detailed LogFrame Analysis and realistic budget. UNDP is using the new established Project Development Building platform to ensure the quality of the project design.	
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3.2 By March 2022, the GoL(MoLSW/ NRA and UXO Lao) and UNDP will develop a new Results Framework (RF) together to ensure they are relevant and SMART. UNDP will also ensure that the new RF is fully compliant with UNDP POPP.	April 2022	UNDP, MLSW, NRA & UXO Lao	The current RF was reviewed during the final evaluation process, and lessons learnt are being used to formulate the next UNDP UXO project. UNDP UXO unit has been engaged CO M&E focal point and where relevant M&E regional specialist on drafting new project PRF. In addition, UNDP also recruited an M&E specialist to ensure a relevant and SMART result framework to the new UXO project document.	Completed
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Evaluation recommendation 4.**Program management, coordination & partnerships**

It is recommended that the UNDP Lao CO improve UXO program management, coordination & partnerships through:

- *greater efforts to build broader, longer-term, more sustainable partnerships, especially for resource mobilisation, and seeking greater coordination and synergies of work effort with partners,*
- *engaging more strongly with private sector,*
- *more “mainstreaming” of UXO across ALL sectors,*
- *enhancing program management, coordination and partnerships at Provincial level,*
- *improving internal UNDP program management including a major shift from what currently appears to be mainly reactive approach to a much more proactive approach, with much clearer staff workplans, deliverables, targets and key performance indicators (KPIs) that are more clearly linked to each other and to the overall Program workplan, and other measures outlined in this section (4.4); and*
- *reviewing IP pay scales under NIM against other employers in UXO sector and updating if necessary*

Management response: Partially Agreed

The GoL and UNDP recognise the importance of building long-term and more sustainable partnerships for resource mobilisation to secure the funding. Thus, Resource Mobilization Plan is prepared every year by each unit of UNDP CO. Consideration is also given to diversify funding sources.

Key action(s)	Completion date	Responsible unit(s)	Tracking	
			Comments	Status (initiated, completed or no due date)
4.1 The GoL (MoLSW/ NRA and UXO Lao) and UNDP will develop a UXO specific resource mobilisation strategy by 31 December 2022.	December 2022	UNDP, MLSW, MPI, MOFA, NRA & UXO Lao.	A zero draft of the National Strategic Plan for the UXO sector 2021-2030 (SPFIII) was shared and discussed with relevant stakeholders. Since the final draft of SPFIII has been approved by the Lao PDR government during the Government meeting in March, a resource mobilization/funding strategy will be discussed in the coming months accordingly to support the Government's effort to achieve the SPFIII.	Initiated

Evaluation recommendation 5.**Monitoring, evaluation & risk management**

It is recommended that both the UNDP Lao CO and relevant GoL agencies improve monitoring, evaluation & risk management by:

- *monitoring and reporting more on outcomes and impacts rather than just activities and outputs,*
- *monitoring and reporting more on UNDP's Program itself, against specific UNDP donor requirements, rather than on the UXO sector as a whole, which is mostly funded by bilaterals*
- *being more proactive and responsive to major problems, including immediate reporting to donors and broadening investigations and follow-up monitoring,*
- *following up initial "stop-gap" responses with more sustainable, long term solutions,*
- *in the case of GoL, ensuring that all perpetrators of wrongdoing are subject to appropriate and effective punitive actions, in accordance with law, including to deter future transgressions by others;*
- *replicating the NZ approach to MEL in Xieng Kouang across all provinces.*

Management response: Partially Agreed

Enhanced monitoring and evaluation capacity within the UXO sector are critical. In 2019, a UNDP Monitoring & Evaluation Specialist was hired and based in the NRA to provide M&E capacity strengthening support based on result-based management (RBM) framework. The RBM framework will allow for a shift from focusing on the inputs and activities to focusing on the outputs, outcomes, impact and the need for sustainable benefits.

The major problem referred to in the report related to the data issue in Huaphan. Upon being notified, the GoL and UNDP took proactive steps to bring it to the attention of the IPs as well as donors. While the IP took various measures including three separate investigations, UNDP in consultation with the government of Lao constituted an external investigation which was jointly conducted by the GoL, UNDP, EU, and Luxembourg in 2018. Corrective measures were also taken with the decision of the investigation committee and recommendations and follow up actions were included in the 2018 EU report.

Key action(s)	Completion date	Responsible unit(s)	Tracking	
			Comments	Status (initiated, completed or no due date)
5.1 The GoL (MoLSW/ NRA and UXO Lao) and UNDP will formulate a new results framework for the ProDoc by 31 March 2022.	April 2022	UNDP, MLSW, NRA & UXO Lao.	The current RF was reviewed during the final evaluation process and lessons learnt are being used to formulate the next UNDP UXO project, including the new RF.	Completed
5.2 The GoL (MoLSW/ NRA) and UNDP will formulate UXO sector level M&E framework by June 2022.	June 2022	UNDP, MLSW, NRA & UXO Lao.	The final draft of Strategic Plan for the UXO sector 2021-2030 (SPFIII) has been approved by the Lao PDR government during the Government meeting in March. However, sector level M&E framework was not included into the SPF III. The Government proposed to add the sector level M&E framework as part of the five year National UXO Sector Action Plan. Therefore, sector level M&E framework will be developed during the Sector Action Plan formulation process.	Initiated

Evaluation recommendation 6.

Effectiveness (including progress towards results):

In order to improve the effectiveness of the UXO sector as a whole, it is recommended that UNDP work to assist GoL with the following:

- ***Victim Assistance (VA):*** *Develop, resource and implement a new (post 2020) comprehensive, programmatic, well-resourced national Victim Assistance Strategy and Action Plan, which integrates and coordinates all VA-related initiatives in Lao PDR, which is centrally coordinated by the National Commission for Disabled People (rather than by NRA), which is integrated with broader national, non-UXO disability programs, consistent with the Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities and relevant provisions of the Convention on Cluster Munitions, and as already required by SPF 2.*
- ***Clearance for Livelihood Development:*** *Promote post-clearance socioeconomic development, by integrating post-clearance impact assessment and development planning into UXO survey and clearance prioritisation, planning and implementation, as already required by SPF 2.*

In order to improve the effectiveness of the UNDP program itself, it is recommended that UNDP:

- *Place greater emphasis on measuring outcomes and impacts rather than just activities and outputs.*
 - *Improve program management arrangements as outlined in Recommendation 4.*
- Address financial management issues as outlined in Recommendation 10.*

Management response: Partially Agreed

Improving the effectiveness of the UXO sector is an enormous challenge as there are many parties and stakeholders involved. This is an effort that has to be led by the Government. UNDP, as always, will extend support. UNDP will continue support to NRA as a regulatory authority to improve its mandates, roles and responsibilities, especially to develop comprehensive five-year national Victim Assistance Strategy and Action Plan 2021-2026 to align with the next UXO sector strategy and five-year sector plan.

The reference to extreme overspending is incorrect. Budget is based on available funds at the beginning of the year while actual expenditure reflects available funds plus additional funds provided throughout the year. As such, variations occur between budget and actual expenditure.

Some of the expenditure is a result of the advance provided to UXO Lao to temporarily cover costs as donor funds were awaited. Otherwise, dozens of trained teams would have been lost permanently resulting in a severe setback to the entire UXO sector. These funds have been fully refunded by the Govt of Lao & Japan.

Key action(s)	Completion date	Responsible unit(s)	Tracking	
			Comments	Status (initiated, completed or no due date)
6.1 The GoL(MLSW/ NRA) and UNDP will develop a national Victim Assistance framework (Strategy and Action Plan) 2021-2025 by June 2022.	June 2022	UNDP, MLSW, NRA and UXO Lao	NRA conducted consultations with all stakeholders concerned on VA strategy 2014-2021 during the last quarter of 2020. Based on the feedback from the stakeholders, the VA database is being updated by the NRA IM team. Also, the VA Framework 2021-2025 is being developed by NRA with support from UNDP, and the primary substance will be incorporated in the new strategy as a part of SPFIII. A consultant may be hired to help NRA finish the VA framework, in the event that further delays occur.	Initiated

Evaluation recommendation 7.

Efficiency

In terms of efficiency within the UNDP Lao CO, it is recommended that the CO:

- *Monitor and manage workload demands on the TL to avoid overload and reduction in UXO efficiency (and effectiveness) due to the demands of broader, non-UXO responsibilities (noting lessons from the previous combining of the TL and CTA roles).*
- *Lobby at UNDP corporate level to move beyond insecure one-year contracts for program staff, to tenure that is better aligned with program duration.*
- *Implementing the last point of Recommendation 5.*

In terms of efficiency of technical activities, it is recommended that the CO work with donors and GoL to:

- Discourage ad-hoc donor support for small scale, isolated VA activities like purchase of livestock for individual families, and a shift to programs with broader, more equitable reach and greater multiplier effect like establishing breeding centres in each province (as part of VA strategy in Recommendation 6).
- Revise and refresh MRE activities to achieve much greater coverage and multiplier effect such as:
 - “Teach the teacher to teach”
 - Roll out UXO in ALL schools through National curriculum (building on World Education & BEQUAL education support programs).

Embracing mass communication tools including TV and social media

Management response: **Partially Agreed**

The GoL and UNDP recognise that the turnover of staffing has been high within UNDP UXO unit during this specific period and it can negatively impact office culture and staff engagement. Traditionally, UNV posts have historically been fully funded by donors for 12 months without imposing any cost to the project.

Previous CTAs and Unit heads stayed on average 3 to 4 years; the Finance Advisor is also now in her fifth year. The combined CTA and Unit head was adopted on a trial basis in 2018 and the CTA resigned for other reasons after a year. For funding reasons, it is not always possible to a full time CTA and a separate Unit head.

As per UNDP policies regulations project position are dependent on the project funds and as such do not have longer term tenures.

Key action(s)	Completion date	Responsible unit(s)	Tracking	
			Comments	Status (initiated, completed or no due date)
7.1 The GoL (NRA and UXO Lao) and UNDP will review the effectiveness in the Victim Assistance (VA) and Mine Risk Education (MRE) activities and adjust accordingly by 30 June 2021	June 2021	UNDP, MLSW, NRA & UXO Lao.	The Effectiveness of the Victim Assistance (VA) and Mine Risk Education (MRE) activities are assessed as part of the VA framework 2021-2025 development and UXO Effectiveness Assessment Survey. The findings will be incorporated into SPF III and adjusted for the next five years UXO Programme.	Completed

Evaluation recommendation 8.

Gender mainstreaming:

It is recommended that the UNDP Lao CO and relevant GoL agencies work together to:

- Assist UXO Lao to significantly increase % of females in senior management above the current 3%.
- Revise and update the 1st gender indicator in the ProDoc to 30% females within next five years and 50% within next 10 years, applicable to all IP staff, not just senior management.
- Reorganise UXO Lao field teams that are currently 100% female to an equitable gender balance of 50/50.
- Revise and update the 2nd gender indicator in the ProDoc to something that meets SMART criteria.
- Develop and implement an operational plan to achieve these indicators on the ground.
- Seek donor support to run an ongoing program to implement the Gender Training Manual supported by Canada and monitor its impact in the field.
- Assist UXO Lao to develop and implement a gender policy and procedures on responsibilities of the employer towards pregnant women, especially those working on dangerous and physically demanding survey and clearance activities in the field.

Management response: **Agreed**

With the support from UN Women, ‘Manual for trainers on gender mainstreaming in the UXO Sector Lao PDR’ is in place and available on the NRA website. UNDP will continue to promote gender equality and facilitate the

analysis at project design, implementation, and monitoring stages of a project will be made as suggested in this recommendation.

Key action(s)	Completion date	Responsible unit(s)	Tracking	
			Comments	Status (initiated, completed or no due date)
8.1 The GoL (MPI and NRA) and UNDP will strongly encourage UXO Lao to employ more women in senior management and reforming the field teams with a balanced gender mix by 31 December 2021.	December 2021	UNDP, MLSW, NRA & UXO Lao.	UNDP has strongly encouraged UXO Lao to employ more women in senior management at UXO Lao Head Quarter and ensuring a balanced gender mix field operations teams. It is noted that, however, no women applied for the recent senior management vacancies.	Completed
8.2 The GoL (MPI and NRA) and UNDP will update the gender indicators in the new results framework of the ProDoc by 31 March 2022	April 2022	UNDP, MLSW, NRA & UXO Lao.	UNDP Lao CO welcomed a regional gender specialist. The regional gender specialist reviewed the new UXO ProDoc and provided her comments. With close cooperation with gender specialist, gender indicators have been updated in the new results Framework of the new ProDoc, which is being finalized.	Completed

Evaluation recommendation 9.

Technical & tactical issues:

It is recommended that the UNDP Lao CO work with NRA and all UXO operators in Lao to address the following key technical and tactical issues:

- *Updating NRA-administered National Standards to comply with IMAS (noting and building on relevant initiatives such as Regional CMRS Best Practices Guidelines by USA, MAG, Halo & NPA).*
- *Standardising TS / CHA colour-coding across operators and NRA / IMSMA (in accordance with the Regional CMRS Best Practices Guidelines).*
- *Ensuring compliance by major operators (UXO Lao, MAG, Halo, NPA etc) with National Standards.*
- *More attention to compliance with National Standards and QM by smaller private commercial operators.*
- *Significantly improving veracity, integrity, availability and effective use of data at NRA (IM / IMSMA).*
- *Making all UXO data and maps automatically available, in electronic format suitable for GIS land-use and development planning, to national planning agencies, including Lao National Geographic Department, Ministry of Agriculture & Forestry and Lao Statistics Bureau.*
- *Modernising procedures for data recording by operators and transmission to NRA to improve efficiency and reduce scope for errors (e.g. use of GPS-enabled tablets in field).*
- *Implementing a QM "force multiplier" at NRA by shifting from direct QM by NRA to assessing, certifying and checking QM by operators.*
- *Improving clearance productivity rates (target of national average of 1ha / team / day).*
- *Expanding technical training of SEOD operators to include team leadership and management.*
- *Improving facilities and equipment of NRA Provincial Offices – including computers, communications and vehicles.*
- *Improving facilities and equipment of UXO Lao and Lao Army Unit 58 – especially field basics like adequate re-issue of uniforms, hats, boots, cold weather jackets etc.*
- *Targeting remote areas of the country that have heavy UXO contamination but that have not received any attention (for various reasons) (e.g. Mai and Khoua Districts in Phongsaly Province) – by establishing a special Remote Area Strike Team (RAST) from Unit 58.*

- *Initiating a biennial UXOlympic games meet where all operators in Lao PDR compete to hone skills, demonstrate and share new skills and techniques and foster a greater sense of professional community.*
- *Developing National Standards and capability to deal with land mines – in accordance with IMAS.*

Management response: Partially Agreed

The GoL and UNDP recognise that many technical & tactical issues are to be addressed and improved for promoting effectiveness, efficiency, and transparency within the UXO sector. However, the addressed issues require a great deal of funds, technical supports, and discussion among major stakeholders led by the NRA (not by UNDP).

Regarding the National Standards, the GoL (NRA) and UNDP have already secured funds to hire an international expert assisting in the review, development and update of NRA National Technical Standards & Guidelines (NTSG) in 2020 complying with IMAS. Additional resource mobilisation plans for the issues raised in this recommendation has been developed and currently implemented.

Key action(s)	Completion date	Responsible unit(s)	Tracking	
			Comments	Status (initiated, completed or no due date)
9.1 The GoL (MPI) and UNDP will support and provide guidance on development of NTSG to the NRA by 31 December 2021.	December 2021	MLSW, NRA, UXO Lao & UNDP.	An international consultant was hired through New Zealand support in March 2021 to provide technical guidance on the development of NTSG to the NRA. The consultant and NRA had a kick-off meeting and embarked on the task. The GoL and UNDP supported the process and provided guidance on development of NTSG to the NRA. NRA continues to collect opinions/comments from the operators to finalize the revision of NTSG. The UNDP will continue to support and provide guidance with a new CTA on the finalization of the revision of NTSG.	Completed
9.2 The GoL (MoLSW/ NRA and UXO Lao) and UNDP will implement resource mobilisation plans for the technical issues raised including additional Humanitarian UXO Teams of Lao people's Army and medical and communication equipment for the existing 7 teams, establishment of communications/IT equipment for 'Zoom' communication conferencing platform for the NRA	December 2021	UNDP, MLSW, NRA & UXO Lao.	The NRA and UNDP succeeded to reallocate current funds for emergency communication and control room (ECCR) establishment for the NRA HQ and 9 Provincial offices. Tele communication facilities were purchased in late 2020 and delivered and installed to the 9 provincial offices in early 2021. With the aid of the new teleconference facilities, 9 provincial officers were able to join the virtually-held Project Board Meeting (PBM) and Sector Working Group (SWG) meeting in June 2021. This support was particularly crucial during the COVID-19 lockdown in Lao PDR. Some of the medical packs for Humanitarian UXO Teams of Lao people's Army were purchased last	Completed

HQ and Provincial communications, and development of internal M&E system by 31 December 2021.			year and delivered to the army team early this year.	
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Evaluation recommendation 10.

Financial management:

Because the financial management issues identified by the evaluation are internal management issues it is considered that an internal response by the CO is not appropriate and these should be assessed further by an independent external party.

It is therefore recommended that the UXO program finances should be assessed in greater detail during the next routine audit of the CO by the UNDP Office of Audit & Inspection, considering and following-up on the indicative findings of this evaluation, including looking into:

- *Compliance with overall UNDP financial management, monitoring and reporting standards and procedures.*
- *Proper use of the ATLAS system including aligning monitoring and reporting of budget and expenditure in ATLAS with the ProDoc PRF.*
- *Compliance of the CO's financial monitoring and reporting with the activity-based budgets and workplans in several of the major donor agreements, that need to be reported against.*
- *The role and effectiveness of the UNDP financial support function based within the IPs.*
- *Forensic audit of all UXO program expenditure trails through to end points between June 2017 and December 2019.*

It is recommended that the report of this assessment be made available to both GoL and donors.

With regard to UNDP Lao CO's assumption of procurement functions from UXO Lao, it is recommended that this be seen as a temporary stop-gap measure only, and that more sustainable, long-term development of transparent and accountable procurement and financial management systems be implemented at both NRA and UXO Lao, as part of UNDP's overall capacity building support to these organisations (it is understood that this is UNDP's intention).

Management response: Disagreed

Management response in all such evaluations will always be provided by the CO.

The GoL (MPI, MoFA, MoLSW, NRA and UXO Lao) and UNDP acknowledge the challenge this recommendation intends to address but does not accept the recommendation.

UNDP has been audited internally by the Office of Audit and Investigation in 2018, the scope of which covered the UXO programme finances also. The audit result was satisfactory, and no issues of concern were raised. There have been no serious issues also raised by the donors with regards to the financial management and reporting of the UXO programme. The IPs and UNDP continued to submit regular Financial and Budget Monitoring Reports to respective donors and publish annual Financial Reports to demonstrate transparency and accountability to various project stakeholders. As such, the MTE recommendation is redundant.

In addition, the GoL(MPI) and UNDP conduct annual NIM audits (financial and management) of its projects to check and ensure the UXO implementing partners' (IPs') compliance with NIM standard operating policies (NIM SOPs) and to enable the independent International Auditors to attest to the veracity of the project expenditures recorded and reported (reference EU independent auditors in conjunction with 2019 NIM audit). UNDP also accommodates financial audits commissioned by donors, as may be required in respective contribution agreements.

From the annual NIM/HACT audits of the IPs for the years 2018, 2019 and 2020, the audit firm found the financial management of the NRA and UXO Lao to be over-all satisfactory and partially satisfactory, respectively. All Finance-related recommendations in 2018 and 2019 audits have been confirmed to be implemented by both IPs. Unqualified audit opinion was also expressed by the Auditor on the IPs' Statement of Expenditures, Statement of Cash Position and Statement of Assets and Equipment during the three years of audit.

Also, the HACT Micro-assessment of UXO Lao, which was conducted by an independent audit firm on 31 March-1 April 2021, covered over-all review and evaluation of UXO Lao's existing internal control and financial management system,

among others. The initial result revealed over-all “low” risk rating of UXO Lao, as well as “low” risk rating specifically pertaining to its financial management and accounting.

The implementation of the above-mentioned measures over-all indicated that the UXO programme’s financial management and internal control systems are in place at the IP and CO level. The UNDP and UXO IPs however will consider any specific recommendations that may be received from donors and/or from other stakeholders during the course of the UXO programme implementation, particularly with regards to the strengthening of its financial management system, and will implement such, as may be deemed valuable and practicable.

With regard to the procurement, it has never been intention of UNDP to indefinitely take over the procurement; current actions are a stop gap measure in response to audit findings and UXO Lao procurement capacity. In 2021, low-value procurement operations are undertaken by UXO Lao.

Evaluation recommendation 11.

Visibility:

It is recommended that the UNDP Lao CO develop, secure resourcing for and implement an overall UXO Program Communication Strategy & Action Plan which:

- *targets national, regional and global audiences (adopting different formats for each target audience if necessary),*
- *communicates the UXO issue and sells UNDP and promotes its donors more effectively,*
- *ensures that the requirements of donor agreements on promotion and visibility and complied with,*
- *highlights UNDP’s comparative advantages in the UXO sector as identified in section 4.12; and embraces mass media formats including TV and social media*

Management response: Agreed

While we accept this rating and acknowledge more needs to be done in this area, we also note efforts that have already been made including RTM visits in 2017 & 2019 to UXO sites, two UXO in Laos advocacy events in Geneva in 2017 and in New York in 2018, celebration of Mine Awareness Day every year, Legacy of War event in Washington DC, USA in 2019, Annual reports circulated at the highest levels in Laos, NY & Geneva – all these carried prominent acknowledgement of all donors.

Partnerships and Communications Strategy and Action Plan (PCSA) for UNDP CO has been initiated for this year with support from the Bangkok Regional Hub. In line with this, UNDP will provide guidance and support to the NRA formulating and implementing ‘Communication Strategy & Action plan (CSAP) for the UXO Program’. To ensure better implementation, UNDP have provided UN communications trainings to the NRA and UXO Lao communications staffs.

Additionally, a UXO sector documentary film was planned in 2020 NRA Annual Work Plan and will be made in 2021 enabling greater visibility and enhanced awareness about the UXO issues.

Key action(s)	Completion date	Responsible unit(s)	Tracking	
			Comments	Status (initiated, completed or no due date)
11.1 The GoL (MPI) and UNDP will support the development of the NRA and UXO Lao communication and awareness strategy by 31 December 2021.	December 2021	UNDP, MLSW, NRA & UXO Lao.	UNDP UXO Unit and Communication unit started to work on ‘UXO portfolio visibility plan’ from February 2021. The draft strategy has been shared with the NRA and UXO Lao. UNDP will incorporate the main principle of such strategy as a part of a new ProDoc for the next five years.	Completed
11.2 The GoL (MPI) and UNDP will continue to support capacity strengthening of the NRA and UXO Lao	December 2021	UNDP, MLSW, NRA & UXO Lao.	UNDP UXO Unit started communication with UNDP Communication unit in terms of providing guidance, training and technical support to the NRA and	Completed

communications staffs by providing guidance, training, and technical support from UNDP Communication unit by 31 December 2021.			UXO Lao along with 'UXO portfolio visibility plan' from February 2021. UNDP Communication Analyst arranged a session for the NRA and UXO Lao communications staff on 23 July 2021.	
11.3 The GoL(MPI) and UNDP will continue to support and encourage the NRA and UXO Lao ensuring and enhancing the promotion and visibility of the donor.	December 2021	UNDP, MLSW, NRA & UXO Lao.	The NRA and UNDP arranged UXO donor and media field visit from 31 March to 2 April 2021 to acknowledge the contribution of the donors. The NRA, UXO Lao and UNDP is being finalised a UXO promotional video to enhance the promotion and visibility of the UXO issue in Lao PDR.	Completed

Evaluation recommendation 12.**UNDP role, culture & comparative advantage:**

It is recommended that the UNDP Lao CO:

- *Seek to strengthen its role as a coordinator, facilitator, capacity builder, resource mobiliser and "service provider" to both GoL and donors.*
- *Work to address the negative perceptions of some donors regarding UNDPs program management capabilities, by becoming more proactive, effective, efficient, accountable and transparent.*
- *Promote its comparative advantages in the UXO sector*

Management response: Agreed

The GoL (MoLSW) and UNDP recognise the needs to play its role more effectively and efficiently as a co-coordinator, facilitator, capacity builder, resource mobiliser and a service provider in the sector. These are all areas that need to be enhanced including UNDP management support of the GoL UXO program.

Key action(s)	Completion date	Responsible unit(s)	Tracking	
			Comments	Status (initiated, completed or no due date)
12.1 The GoL (MoLSW, NRA, and UXO Lao) and UNDP will organise donors meetings, as well as a donor field visit, as part of their coordinating role in the UXO sector by 31 December 2021.	December 2021	UNDP, MLSW, NRA & UXO Lao.	A donor meeting was organised on 3 March and a donor field visit took place in Xiang Khouang from 31 March to 2 April 2021.	Completed

Evaluation recommendation 13.**Sustainability & continuity:**

Within the period of the current program (June 2017 - Dec 2021) it is recommended that the UNDP CO become much more proactive in seeking and securing seamless continuity of funding at the end of funding cycles that are known years / months in advance.

With regard to the future sustainability and continuity of UNDP UXO activities post 2021, it is recommended that the UNDP Lao CO:

- *Develop a more comprehensive Donor Database, which identifies all donor priorities aligned against UXO resourcing needs.*
- *Approach additional ODA donors who have not supported UXO in Lao to date but which do have relevant interests.*
- *Develop a coherent, pro-active, long-term donor engagement and Resource Mobilization Strategy, which seeks to identify and secure the necessary resources to fully implement the Safe Path Forward (including its next iteration) and associated workplans, and which includes new and innovative resourcing mechanisms such as:*
 - *International visitor arrivals - UXO contribution.*
 - *UXO awareness and cloud funding web site and app.*
 - *Philanthropic organisations.*

Private sector – including arms industry (potentially contributing to a Lao Foundation rather than via UNDP - as UNDP itself has barriers to accepting funds from the arms industry).

Management response: Agreed

With acknowledgement of the importance of being more proactive in seeking and securing the funding, UNDP prepares CO Resource Mobilization Plan each year. Considering the urgency of this year, UNDP Lao CO has already started working on “Partnerships and Communications Strategy and Action Plan (PCAP)” with the support from Bangkok regional hub.

We do note that KOICA's funding agreement continues until early 2022 and a proposal for new long-term phase (2022-2026) has been submitted to KOICA. A detailed Activity Design Document (ADD) has been signed with New Zealand for new long-term phase (2021-2024) to support beyond 2020; preliminary discussion has also taken place with Luxemburg, Ireland and Japan regarding ongoing and new future support.

As part of the long-term sustainability plan for the UXO sector, UNDP recognises and supports the contribution of the Government of Lao (GoL) in the UXO programme through the deployment of the Humanitarian UXO Clearance Teams of Lao People's Army. These teams were established in 2013, with initially two teams, and now seven with the support of the Republic of Korea through UNDP. The Ministry of National Defense pays for their salaries as part of the GoL contribution.

Given the extent of the UXO contamination problem, the size of the country and limited clearance assets, it was preliminary agreed in the Cabinet to include UXOs as a cross cutting theme impacting all aspects of development in the 9th NSEDP. So far non-inclusion meant no budget for the UXO sector.

Key action(s)	Completion date	Responsible unit(s)	Tracking	
			Comments	Status (initiated, completed or no due date)
13.1 The GoL (NRA, and UXO Lao) and UNDP will finalise the Partnerships and Communications Strategy and Action Plan by 30 June 2022.	June 2022	UNDP, MLSW, MPI, MoFA, NRA & UXO Lao.	UNDP Lao CO has already started working on “Partnerships and Communications Strategy and Action Plan (PCAP)” with the support from Bangkok regional hub. In addition, a specific communications plan for the UXO sector was developed by UNDP and shared with NRA and UXO Lao in November 2021. Once NRA and UXO Lao agree on it, three parties will ensure its implementation.	Initiated

13.2. The GoL (NRA, and UXO Lao) and UNDP will develop a specific UXO resource mobilisation for UXO programme by 31 June 2022.	June 2022	UNDP, MLSW, NRA & UXO Lao.	UNDP conducted a Final Evaluation for the current UXO Programme in Q3 2021 and a new UXO Programme Document for the next five years (2022-2026) is being finalized. A specific UXO resource mobilisation plan for the GoL and UNDP UXO project has been added in the new ProDoc.	Completed
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Evaluation recommendation 14.

It is recommended that the UNDP Lao CO thrive to achieve an overall Terminal Evaluation rating of at least "satisfactory" by the last year of the current program (2021), by proactively and aggressively implementing all of the Recommendations of this Mid Term Evaluation

Management response: Partially Agreed

The GoL (NRA, and UXO Lao) and UNDP will very much strive to achieve an overall Terminal Evaluation of at least satisfactory for this project.

The mid-term evaluation was closely reviewed by the GoL (MPI, MoFA, MoLSW, NRA and UXO Lao) and UNDP and some clarification and justification with supportive facts and data were needed about the evaluation ratings.

Some of these clarifications and justifications have not been incorporated into the final report and the GoL (MPI, MoFA, MoLSW, NRA and UXO Lao) and UNDP is partially agreed with the evaluation ratings and recommendations.

Key action(s)	Completion date	Responsible unit(s)	Tracking	
			Comments	Status (initiated, completed or no due date)
14.1 For the agreed recommendations for improvement, all will be implemented during the project period to achieve an overall Final Evaluation of at least satisfactory for this project.	December 2021	UNDP, MLSW, NRA & UXO Lao.	<p>The GoL and UNDP already implemented most of the agreed recommendations for improvement to achieve an overall Final Evaluation of at least satisfactory for this project.</p> <p>The Final Evaluation was conducted in Q3 2021, and it confirmed that the national capacity had been strengthened during the project period, and satisfaction from multiple stakeholders was captured.</p>	Completed

Evaluation recommendation 15.**Lessons from EU Contribution:**

In order to rebuild donor confidence and trust and prevent any further erosion in donor confidence and trust, it is recommended that UNDP, the IPs and GoL overall take the findings and lessons from the EU contribution very seriously and respond to these in a positive, proactive, meaningful and timely manner, including for the other donor contributions during the current program and for future programs, by:

- *Complying fully with the requirements of the donor agreements, especially but not only in relation to ensuring that all required outputs and products are delivered and that all monitoring, reporting and risk management requirements are strictly complied with.*
- *Undertaking follow up verification that the CHA reporting issue has been fully addressed in Huaphan and extending the investigation to all provinces supported through UNDP and ensuring ongoing follow-up verification and broader investigations should such issues arise in future.*

Encouraging GoL to ensure that all alleged perpetrators of wrong-doing are subject to appropriate and effective investigative and if necessary punitive actions in accordance with law, including to deter future transgressions by others.

Management response: Disagreed

The conclusion that highlighted extremely serious issue with regards to the management of the EU project by UNDP is a very strong statement, which is not fully valid.

The GoL (MoFA, MoLSW, NRA and UXO Lao) and UNDP undertook an investigation of this serious issue (data issue) with 2 donors (EU and Lux) and Government investigation was done at three levels – NRA, MoLSW and a third one constituted by the Governor of Huaphan.

The disbursement of one installment of funding was withheld until the report of the findings was released. After the report – both from Government and independent external investigation in which EU and UNDP participated - was released, the EU accepted the report and released all further funding.

UXO Lao accepted that 110 hectares of land covering 4 villages in Hiem District, Huaphan Province in 2017 were falsely classified as a Confirmed Hazardous Area (CHA) through the TS activity. UNDP worked closely with UXO Lao and the NRA to ensure that measures were taken to address this issue and ensure the necessary safeguards are in place to prevent a similar incident from occurring in the future.

Evaluation recommendation 16.***Uptake of evaluation findings:***

It is recommended that both the UNDP Lao CO and relevant GoL agencies take more concerted action to learn the lessons and implement the recommendations identified in program evaluations, including this MTE.

Management response: Partially Agreed

From the evaluation findings, the GoL and UNDP acknowledge that there is a need for improvements in both UNDP and relevant GoL agencies (MPI, MoFA, MoLSW, NRA and UXO Lao).

One broader reservation is that some findings of this MTE are not based on supportive facts and data as mentioned in other comments and some areas of the report go beyond the objectives of the project / programme.

Key action(s)	Completion date	Responsible unit(s)	Tracking	
			Comments	Status (initiated, completed or no due date)
16.1 As for the findings UNDP and relevant GoL agencies (MPI, MoFA, MoLSW, NRA and UXO Lao) which are agreed upon, the GoL and UNDP will continue to take concerted actions to have better results during the remaining period of the project.	December 2021	UNDP, MoLSW, NRA & UXO Lao.	<p>The GoL agencies (NRA and UXO Lao) and UNDP have regular meetings not only to monitor project implementations but also to have better results by taking concerted actions during the remaining period of the project.</p> <p>Moreover, an international M&E specialist were recruited by UNDP to engage in this work area.</p>	Completed

Evaluation recommendation 17.***Main reforms required to national UXO arrangements:***

- *Revise and update the National Standards in accordance with IMAS.*
- *Revise and update the national decrees relating to the establishment and operation of NRA, in order to clarify and strengthen the legal mandate and regulatory powers of NRA, including at the provincial level.*
- *Develop, resource and implement a comprehensive Capacity Building Plan for NRA, as per the core pillars of International Mine Action Standard (IMAS), and building on:*
 - *the capacity assessment undertaken by NPA for NRA with DFID funding in 2019; and*
 - *the Capacity Development Strategy developed for both NRA and UXO-Lao by UNDP in 2014, using the UNDP Rapid Capacity Assessment methodology, much of which is still valid and un-implemented (Durham Dec 2014).*
- *Develop, resource and implement a new (post 2020) comprehensive, programmatic, well-resourced national Victim Assistance Strategy and Action Plan, which integrates and coordinates all VA-related initiatives in Lao PDR, which is centrally coordinated by the National Commission for Disabled People (rather than by NRA), which is integrated with broader national, non-UXO disability programs, consistent with the Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities and relevant provisions of the CCM, and as already required by Safety Path Forward II.*
- *Implement the technical and tactical actions identified in Recommendation 9.*

Management response: Agreed

All comments detailed in Recommendation 17 are being actioned.

We note the role of UNDP is to primarily support, advise and collaborate as requested by the Government, The final decision on such matters rests with the Govt. of Lao PDR.

Key action(s)	Completion date	Responsible unit(s)	Tracking	
			Comments	Status (initiated, completed or no due date)
17.1 TORs have been drafted for a consultant to be recruited for a 4 months period to review and revise both the National Technical Standards Guidelines (NTSG) Operational Framework and Standards, funding is being mobilised	March 2021	UNDP, MLSW, NRA & UXO Lao.	An international consultant was hired through New Zealand support in March to provide technical guidance on development of NTSG to the NRA.	Completed
17.2 TORs have been drafted in January 2021 and funding has been secured for a Capacity Needs Assessment (CNA) to be conducted by July 2021. The overall objective of the NRA CNA will be to identify areas for organisational improvement and Capacity Development within the NRA (both at the HQ and provincial level); this will enable the NRA to better achieve its mandated deliverables and to better achieve sustainable regulation,	July 2021	UNDP, MLSW, NRA & UXO Lao.	TORs for a CNA were revised in January 2021. Consultants were hired in May 2021 to conduct a CNA scheduled to be completed by August 2021. The implementation of CNA will enable the NRA to better achieve its strategic deliverables and long-term sustainability of the UXO Sector in Lao PDR.	Completed

coordination and facilitation of the UXO Sector in Lao PDR				
17.3 Regarding the national Victim Assistance Strategy and Action Plan, inter-Ministerial discussions will have to take place concerning the exacting coordination and facilitation roles of both the NRA and the National Committee for Disabled Persons (NCDP) by December 2021. Currently the role lies with the NRA as in accordance with the Prime Minister's Decree no 67/PM, dated 12th February 2018.	December 2021	UNDP, MLSW, NRA & UXO Lao.	The NRA organised an inter-Ministerial consultation meeting in December 2020, in preparing the next five year Victim Assistance Framework (2021-2025). This new VA framework will be instrumental in the way we as a sector provide assistance to UXO victims and survivors in this country, with a new push towards a more inclusive-based support approach, focusing on the larger community of persons with disability and increasing our focus on mental health issues and providing peer to peer support to those communities who have been affected by UXO.	Completed

Evaluation recommendation 18.**Key time horizons moving forward:**

It is recommended that UNDP work with GoL to:

- *Recognise that there are two key time horizons moving forward:*
 - *Next 10 years to 2030 SDG targets (also end of SPF 3) – during which time major donor support for UXO in Lao PDR may well continue (but is not guaranteed).*
 - *Post 2030 whereafter, irrespective of moral arguments, donor support may drop-off and Lao PDR may need to consider strengthening national sustainability arrangements in place for UXO action (also affected by LDC graduation 2024).*
- *Move forward from the current rhetoric about the need for ongoing donor support for “hundreds of years” (to which development partners “close off”), and start establishing and articulating – in SPF 3 - clear, evidence-based national priorities and target dates for UXO action, based on socioeconomic development objectives.*
- *Start laying the foundations – in SPF 3 - for national self-reliance and sustainability on UXO issues, in terms of resourcing, governance and institutional and technical capacity, and including mainstreaming the UXO issue into all sectors.*
- *Towards this end the next SPF (no. 3) could be re-titled something along the lines of:*

Meeting the UXO Challenge to 2030:**A Safe – Self-reliant – Sustainable Path Forward**

(the “3S Path to 2030” or “3S Roadmap to 2030”)

Management response: Agreed

The GoL (MPI, MoFA, MoLSW, NRA and UXO Lao) and UNDP recognise that the year 2020 is a critical year in that Lao PDR will be revising and updating three key national strategies and plans. We also acknowledge that this is an effort that has to be led by the Government of Lao PDR and UNDP, as always, will extend our support, advise and collaborate if asked.

Key action(s)			Tracking
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	Completion date	Responsible unit(s)	Comments	Status (initiated, completed or no due date)
18.1 As a neutral facilitator and partner of the government and program, UNDP will continue to offer technical support to the development and articulation of the next 10-year strategy and plans to achieve the national SDG 18.	September 2021	UNDP	UNDP secured funding and hired an international consultant and a national coordination officer to assess SPF II and develop SPF III. As a result, NRA and UNDP completed the SPF II assessment and are waiting for line ministries inputs before finalising the assessment report. In addition, UNDP and NRA jointly arranged consultative workshops with UXO operators and development partners in July and August 2021 as part of the development process of SPF III. UNDP continues to provide technical support to the development and implementation of the next 10-year national UXO strategy.	Completed

Evaluation recommendation 19.**Revision & update of key national strategies & plans:**

For the post-2020 forward planning period, it is recommended that UNDP work with GoL to:

- *Use the existing indicators and targets under SDG 18 and SPF as the basis for a supporting results and resources framework, rather than developing a new and different framework.*
- *Put more effort and resources into actually implementing and achieving what is already in the existing strategies and plans, with minor refinements and updates for the forthcoming period, and avoid expending too much effort and resources on writing whole new plans.*
- *Put more effort into developing a Resource Mobilization Strategy to implement the strategies and plans, as outlined in Recommendation 14, than into writing more strategies and plans.*

Management response: Partially Agreed

The GoL (MPI, MoFA, MoLSW, NRA and UXO Lao) and UNDP acknowledge that much effort and resources will be required in 2020 to review and update SPF, 9th NSEDP and 5 Year Strategic Plan. We note the role of UNDP is to primarily support, advise and collaborate as requested by the Government, The final decision on such matters rests with the Govt. of Lao PDR.

Key action(s)	Completion date	Responsible unit(s)	Tracking	
			Comments	Status (initiated, completed or no due date)
19.1 It is planned to conduct a full and detailed review of SPF II along with SDG18 (and its targets and indicators), by the GOL with technical support from UNDP by 31 July 2021.	July 2021	UNDP, MLSW, NRA & UXO Lao.	As mentioned above, the NRA and UNDP completed the assessment of SPF II along with SDG18 in June 2021. NRA shared the draft report with relevant ministries and expected to have comments and inputs from them before finalisation.	Completed