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UXO CLEARANCE COMPONENT – EARLY RECOVERY CLUSTER IN DISASTER RESPONSE PLAN FOR SANAMXAY DISTRICT IN ATTAPEU PROVINCE

Background

During the Second Indochina War (1964-1975), more than two million tons of explosive ordnance were dropped on Lao PDR making it, per capita, the most heavily-bombed country in the world. Today, much of the country is still contaminated with cluster sub-munitions and other Unexploded Ordnance (UXO). These kill, maim and injure dozens of people a year with 41 casualties in 2017. Their presence also negatively affects socio-economic development, by preventing safe access to land – for agriculture & other uses and increasing the costs, of all development projects due to the necessity of expensive and time consuming survey and clearance of UXO from the land. In September 2016, Lao PDR launched its own national Sustainable Development Goal, *SDG18: Lives Safe from UXO*, on the sidelines of ASEAN Summit in the presence of the Prime



Project Summary

- Status: Start September 2018
- Duration: 4-6 months
- Geographic Coverage: Attapeu province
- Focus Area: Early Recovery for Sanamxay district and other districts in Attapeu province
- Implementing Partner(s): UXO Lao
- Website: www.uxolao.org
- Amount: 200,000 AUD

Minister of Lao PDR and the UN Secretary General during the ASEAN Summit held in Vientiane.

The Government of Lao PDR established the *Lao National Unexploded Ordnance Programme* (UXO Lao) in 1996. The organisation undertakes surveys to identify UXO contamination; clearance of land; roving tasks to respond to UXO discovery by the public; and risk education activities in affected areas. UXO Lao functions are under the UXO sector lead for the Government – the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare.

Disaster & response in Attapeu province

In addition to seasonal flooding, an unprecedented flash flood occurred on 23 July in Attapeu Province due to water discharge as a result of the breaching of a saddle dam of the the Xepien-Xenamnoy Dam. Over five billion cubic meters of water, equal to two million Olympic swimming pools, inundated an estimated 55,000 hectares of land covering it with mud and sludge. Initial air and ground assessment results led the Prime Minister of Lao PDR to declare the affected areas as a National Emergency Disaster Zone.

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Attapeu is one of the most backward areas of Lao PDR. Flash floods have submerged many kilometres of road and damaged 14 bridges, crippled basic infrastructure, schools, hospitals, and irrigation systems. Rugged terrain and deposits of sticky mud hamper vehicles and boats from accessing some of the worst affected areas and slow down the delivery of much needed assistance. Access is further restricted by the fact that most of the villages are contaminated by Unexploded Ordnance (UXO). Attapeu Province is one of the most affected, caution is therefore needed in access to areas and activities such as search and rescue, clearance, and debris removal.

The Early Recovery cluster is an important part of the disaster response plan as the humanitarian efforts can be hindered by some key issues related to the national context of Lao PDR, and cross-cutting issues such as gender and disaster risk reduction.

UXO Situation in Attapeu province

At the request of the Attapeu Governor immediately after the flash floods, the Lao National Unexploded Ordnance Programme (UXO Lao) has deployed an Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) team on standby for Sanamxay district.

The eight villages most affected by the flood are all contaminated with Unexploded Ordnance (UXO), including cluster munitions. **Overall, at least 94 per cent of the villages in Attapeu province are contaminated by UXO.** We cannot exclude the fact that the flood, with this volume of water and mud, could move large quantities of explosive items in terms of location.

Once there is access to the flooded area, the National Regulatory Authority for UXO/Mine Action Sector in Lao PDR (NRA) will re-assess UXO contamination within the affected areas. In the past, Lao PDR had a similar experience in Sekong and Salavan provinces when Typhoon Ketsana (2009) severely affected both provinces.

Currently UXO Lao has teams on the ground in Attapeu, including 11 Area Clearance teams working in five districts of Attapeu province. UXO Risk Education also takes place in this province, however, additional community awareness activities may be necessary in the flooded areas for locals and rescue operators. There is an evident need for immediate survey and further clearance and for teams to be ready to clear UXOs that have been washed into areas to mitigate the risks of people that are returning to their homes and those being resettled at their request.

An extensive survey focused on cluster munitions has taken place in Attapeu province over the years prior to this flooding disaster and so far the UXO Sector has identified 12,225 hectares of Confirmed Hazardous Areas (CHA) waiting to be

cleared in the province, including 319 hectares in Sanamxay district itself.

Confirmed Hazardous Areas in Attapeu province, breakdown per district:

Phouvong	3,818 ha
Samakxixay	567 ha
Sanamxay	319 ha
Sanxai	1,791 ha
Xaysettha	5,730 ha

It is important to highlight that the actual clearance needs are higher as technical survey is still ongoing. Historical operational data are analyzed and new evidences found are investigated by the technical survey teams, leading to the establishment of additional Confirmed Hazardous Areas.

Main Objectives

The existing clearance capacity has its own 2018 work plan in the contaminated villages in Attapeu province especially in the eastern parts of the province which suffer from the higher level of contamination., However, to address the most flooded and affected villages in Sanamxay district and to respond better to the new identified needs, additional resources are necessary.

Due to the fact that establishing new clearance teams would require time and as the need for response is urgent, the UXO Sector is exploring other options including the temporary relocation of existing teams in neighbouring provinces. This proposal is to deploy up to five existing clearance teams (10 people per team) from the provinces of Champasack, Salavane and Savannakhet who could conduct roving tasks in Attapeu province and undertake required area clearance rapidly. It is pertinent to point out that these teams were funded by the Australian grant to the UXO sector until Dec 2017 and are still referred to as 'Australian teams'. Focus will be on Sanamxay district, but action in other districts within the province may be needed as well. The coordination of this activity will be led by the National Regulatory Authority for UXO/Mine Action Sector in Lao PDR to ensure that the needs of the community are met on a timely manner.

Suggested usage of contribution from the Australian Government

It is suggested that the funds will be used for the following activities. The exact allocation of the funds will be finalized in consultation with the national counterparts.

- UXO Lao Roving Tasks in the flood affected areas of Attapeu province
- UXO Lao Area Clearance in the flood affected areas in Attapeu province

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