

ຄະນະກຳມະການຄຸ້ມຄອງແຫ່ງຊາດເພື່ອແກ້ໄຂ  
ບັນຫາລະເບີດບໍ່ທັນແຕກທີ່ຕົກຄ້າງຢູ່ ສປປລາວ



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

## MINUTES OF THE MRE TECHNICAL WORKING GROUP

### WORKSHOP ON MRE MESSAGES AND MATERIALS

HELD AT THE MINISTRY OF LABOUR AND SOCIAL WELFARE CONFERENCE ROOM

6 JUNE 2007

#### 1. Attendance

See attached list of participants.

#### 2. Opening

The workshop was opened at 09.00 hrs by Mr. Somnuk Vorasarn, the Deputy Director of the NRA. Mr. Somnuk welcomed everyone to the workshop and gave a briefing on the UXO situation in Lao PDR, the links to poverty and vulnerability and the importance of Mine Risk Education.

Mr. Bounpheng Sisawath, NRA MRE Officer and workshop facilitator, outlined the agenda for the day and the participants introduced themselves.

#### 3. Presentations

The morning session comprised the following presentations:

- Mr. Bounpheng Sisawath gave a presentation outlining the workshop objectives and some key issues to take in to consideration when reviewing and designing materials, for example, the MRE national strategy, accident data, core messages, the need to integrate with development and clearance initiatives, and targeting of geographic areas (related to high contamination and accidents) and targeting of the audience.
- Ms. Jo Durham gave a presentation outlining key points from the UNICEF commissioned MRE Risk Assessment. The presentation outlined the assessment findings in terms of who is at risk and why they are at risk and how the risk may vary according to levels of exposure, the reasons behind the exposure and the risks taken when exposed. The assessment classified two main types of exposure to UXO: voluntary and deliberate (the most common form), and involuntary and unintentional. In terms of addressing risk exposure, the assessment suggested two approaches, risk avoidance (traditional MRE approach that is suitable for children or people with low/medium risk behaviours and those able to act on risk avoidance messages) or risk minimization (building on existing coping strategies this is useful for high risk groups and those people unable to act on risk avoidance messages).
- Mr. Khamphan of UXO Lao gave a presentation on UXO Lao Community Awareness activities and the village volunteer programme, which are designed to help people living in contaminated areas avoid risk. The methods of the CA team were outlined, including songs, drama, puppetry and games. In addition to the CA teams, UXO Lao has introduced a village

volunteer programme whereby village volunteers are based in areas that are not readily accessible to the CA teams and provide ongoing community awareness work. There are currently 106 village volunteers. The presentation outlined current accident data collected by UXO Lao and gave examples of some of the posters that have recently been developed.

- Mr. Kongtong Insimany of the Ministry of Education gave an introduction to the MRE in-school programme supported by Consortium. Mr. Vouthisavanh Sithipanhya elaborated on Mr. Kongtong's introduction and gave a presentation on the programme coverage and the materials, messages and methodology implemented in the programme. The in-school programme aims to reduce and prevent accidents and uses an activity-based, student-centred approach that draws on teacher questions, visual materials, activities, songs and group work, relating the teaching and learning to everyday life.

#### **4. Questions**

A question was raised that the accident data shown in the NRA presentation gave a high percentage of accidents caused by tampering, but 0% was recorded against the activity of the scrap metal trade. It was explained that the accident data is incomplete in that it has mainly been collected by UXO Lao in the provinces/district where they are working and there has been no consistency in the use of the case definitions to classify the data. The example of tampering and scrap metal is a good case in point – tampering should be the overall case definition with sub-classifications explaining why the victim was tampering (e.g. for scrap metal, for explosives to sell, for explosives to fish, etc). Playing is another category that is problematic as it seems that tampering activities have sometimes been classified as playing.

#### **5. Group Work**

In the afternoon the participants split in to two groups (a Lao speaking group and an English speaking group to discuss the following set of questions:

- 1a. What messages are currently being used in Lao PDR?
  - 1b. Who are the main target audience for these messages?
  - 1c. What are the main forms of communication (mass media, small media, traditional media, person to person?)
  - 1d. What are the strengths and weaknesses?
2. What ideas do we have to improve existing messages and communication methods?
  3. How can we better address the behaviour of High Risk Groups – people who tamper, people who work in the scrap metal trade – through MRE?

#### **6. Group Work Feedback**

##### **Main messages**

Group 1:

- Dangerous to touch UXO / do not touch UXO
- Safe practices for cooking, digging, cutting etc
- Mark the UXO, report to the authorities/UXO Lao
- Do not use metal detectors

Group 2:

- It is forbidden to touch, to grab, to tamper, to move
- When you see a UXO inform adults or responsible people
- Safe practices for lighting fires in contaminated areas
- How to cut grass, farm etc safely

- Forbidden to sell scrap metal from UXO

### **Main target audience**

Both Groups:

- Children
- Adults
- Cannot specify – should be the entire community and those collecting non-timber forest products

### **Main forms of communication**

Both Groups:

- Posters, pamphlets
- Written materials
- Puppet shows
- Songs, music, drama
- Radio, TV
- Video
- Games
- Visual demonstration boxes (as used by PCL)
- Regulations

### **Strengths and Weaknesses**

Group 1:

- No specific targeting except for school children
- Same message for everybody
- No specific message for scrap metal collectors, traders
- No specific message for authorities
- No specific message about provincial decrees (explosives)
- Language is still an issue, especially when trying to reach ethnic groups
- Lao visuals and landscapes versus ethnic visuals and landscapes are also important considerations

Group 2:

- Puppet shows generate a lot of interest
- Language is a problem
- There is no incentive for villagers who report and identify UXO

### **How to improve existing messages and materials**

Group 1:

- Reinforce existing legislation
- Think about how we deal with UXO in countries with a long history of UXO contamination (e.g. in Europe)
- Educate about identification of safe and unsafe items
- Quick response to clear reported UXO
  - Maybe use national outreach (police, army, other)
- Get rid of all visible UXO
- Balance battle area clearance with roving
- Don't deal with UXO's with children/people around (safer practice)

- Communicate on the legislation
- Focus efforts on specific areas
- Target the “souvenir” UXO market (e.g. tourists and guesthouses)
- Show real/graphic pictures of injuries sustained
- Give more information to local authorities, how to report etc.
- Consider use of models like PCL display boxes to supplement posters

#### Group 2:

- Posters, pamphlets etc must be used in combination with development activities
- Improve coordination with other players – NGOs and other agencies
- Whenever there is a village meeting the village chief should inform the general public about danger and risk
- Improve the speed of response to clear reported UXO
- Idea to establish village clearance teams – for example, giving ex-soldiers training on how to clear UXO
- Introduce Lao traditional folk songs for different areas to inform about UXO
- Selecting village volunteers to work on CA – they must be from the village and speak Lao and the ethnic languages

### **Addressing High Risk groups**

#### Group 1:

- Avoidance is not working for some groups, how can we minimise?
- The reality: Scrap metal trade exists – should we educate on how to deal with UXO safely?
- Marking and fencing
- Identify people who tamper and handle UXO and communicate safer practices
- Revise the national strategic plan (oriented towards hectares) towards a quality rather than quantity approach

#### Group 2:

- Identify secondary income generation sources for high risk people
- Target them with vocational training and find a market for the produce
- Introduce the message, buying scrap metal made of UXO is a crime
- Introduce the message, buying and selling scrap metal from UXO is dangerous to your life

## **7. Discussion**

The discussion began around the question of setting up local teams of villagers to deal with UXO as it was acknowledged that roving teams cannot meet the demand. It was noted that it is an impossible task for official deminers to provide a service to all the people in contaminated areas and so maybe the ex-soldiers should be trained. They would receive special training in clearance and this would be done at village level in a sustainable way.

It was mentioned that there it is often complex to train people in EOD. We can't train villagers to be EOD technicians, but we should be able to develop a better response mechanism and develop a sense of ownership for local people – for example, training the police and soldiers to be responsible to deal with UXO. The training could be managed in a structured way through their line ministry. It was suggested that the NRA could discuss these ideas with the police and military to see what their response is.

It was noted that people at local level have often been handling UXO for 30 years or more despite the fact it is illegal, and so we should try and explore if there are ways to make it safer. When this is referred to we are not talking about expecting people to demolish UXO, but to be able to handle and move UXO safely; how to minimise the immediate risk and danger; being aware of other accidents and the need for safety distances etc.

It was pointed out that there are standards in the country that forbid anyone to move UXO or to use fuzes, explosives etc. Would the NRA be able to train local people and what would be the limitations on the size of ordnance they would be able to handle?

One participant mentioned that there is no reason not to train villagers or ex-soldiers, but the problem will be that the government will not allow the UXO or explosives to be stored once removed. It was suggested that stores could be set up in military camps.

The issue of tampering and involvement in the scrap metal trade needs to be linked to development. An example was given of a village in Bulapha where only 10 households out of 88 were not engaged in the scrap metal trade – this was because these households had different economic alternatives. People may stop collecting scrap metal if they are given alternative activities for income generation. People in Bulapha also mentioned that the amount of scrap metal was depleting and it was becoming more difficult to find. If we have some developmental activities in contaminated communities we could help to minimise the risk that they would otherwise take. This may be a better option than asking people to collect and destroy UXO.

The example of the eradication of opium cultivation in Lao PDR was given – by implementing law enforcement and providing alternative occupations opium cultivation decreased from 35 thousand hectares to zero in a space of 4 to 5 years. An examination of the successes and constraints of the opium eradication programme could also help to inform us about how to deal with the scrap metal trade.

## **8. Workshop Conclusion and Close**

The workshop closed at 1630 hrs.

## **9. Summary of Key Points for Follow Up**

There was not time at the workshop to summarise key recommendations although the workshop was a good first step in the process of reviewing MRE methods, materials and messages. The process will be ongoing and below are some key points that can be taken forward in future discussions:

- Case definitions for accident data needs to be improved and used consistently by all organizations collecting data. This will give a clearer picture of the activities putting people at risk.
- Messages/information can be developed for new specific target groups, for example:
  - Scrap metal dealers/traders
  - Authorities with responsibility for reporting and UXO related coordination
  - Tourists/guest houses
- Existing legislation on the use of explosives and the scrap metal trade need to be disseminated and implemented (perhaps through collaboration between the Ministry of Commerce, ILO, NRA, Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare)
- Language and visuals need to be better addressed in MRE to ensure Lao Theung groups are not excluded
- Lao traditional folk songs could be introduced more widely as an MRE tool

- Materials showing graphic injuries could be tested as part of a pilot
- Materials and methods introducing risk minimization messages could be tested as part of a pilot to specific high-risk target groups
- MRE for specific high-risk target groups / authorities should be targeted in areas/districts where there are known high-risk activities
- Village processes for reducing risk can be strengthened – for example through village volunteer schemes and/or better support and information for local authorities on action to take
- Continued efforts should be made to ensure better coordination between MRE and roving response teams
- The role of development activities in reducing high risk behaviour should continue to be explored/advanced
- Further discussions should take place at national level (NRA) on the possible involvement of local actors (ex-soldiers, military, police) in UXO response

#### **10. UNICEF Project**

Amy Delneuve informed the workshop participants that UNICEF is providing financial support for a project to develop new MRE materials with the cooperation of the NRA. The work will involve hiring a team comprising an international consultant and national staff for a period of approximately 10 weeks to review existing materials, meet relevant organizations and to prepare and test 20 messages for different target groups. There will be ongoing consultation with the MRE TWG and the finished materials will be available for use by all operators. More information on this project will be shared with the TWG in due course.

#### **Distribution:**

AGNA  
 AusAID  
 Consortium  
 DEFC  
 FSD  
 HIB  
 JMAS  
 Lao Women's Union  
 Lao Youth Union  
 Ministry of Education  
 NPA  
 NRA  
 Oxfam Australia  
 PCL  
 UNICEF  
 UXO Lao  
 UNDP  
 World Vision

#### **Enclosures:**

- List of workshop participants

**Prepared by NRA MRE Unit  
 8<sup>th</sup> June 2006**