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Sustainability in World Education's UXO Education and Awareness Program in Lao PDR

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by Barbara Lewis and Sarah Bruinooge | World Education |

The Lao People’s Democratic Republic has been described as the most bombed country in the world per capita. An estimated 450,000 cluster bombs, delivering 200 million submunitions, were dropped on the country between 1965 and 1975 during the height of the American-Vietnam War. In addition, various other forms of ordnance, such as mortar shells, artillery shells, hand grenades and landmines, were used during the war, adding up to nearly an estimated two million U.S. tons of ordnance dropped on Laos. Up to 30 percent of this material did not explode at the time. Now, 40 years later, it remains potentially active, continuing to affect the lives of farmers and inquisitive children.

Children are frequently injured by unexploded ordnance they find because the hula-shaped cluster bomb looks like toys, and their natural curiosity leads them to explore out-of-the-way places. A typical UXO accident occurs when children are digging for crickets or worms, poking in the mud for crabs, pulling up bamboo shoots and burning small backyards fires. To combat the prevalence of UXO to children from UXO, World Education, in conjunction with the Lao Ministry of Education, has designed and implemented a school-based curriculum. The curriculum provides information on the dangers of UXO and clear instructions for children in the event that they discover UXO. The UXO Education and Awareness Program has been implemented since 1996 through funding from United States Agency for International Development, UNICEF, the Lao National Regulatory Authority and the U.S. Department of State’s Office of Weapons Removal and Abatement in the Bureau of Political-Military Affairs.

World Education strives to ensure that effective UXO-awareness programs will continue in Laos, focusing efforts on sustainability and long-term implementation. Although UXO clearance is a high priority for development and poverty-reduction strategies, it is a bottom-up process that will continue for many years. With this in mind, World Education has pursued several strategies to achieve sustainability.

A description of Program

World Education’s UXO Education and Awareness Program in Lao PDR

World Education’s work in Laos, one of the most heavily bombed countries in the world, offers an example of effective implementation of unexploded-ordeance-risk awareness at all levels. This article explores World Education’s work with the government of Laos in achieving higher levels of UXO-risk awareness.

Sustainability in World Education’s UXO Education and Awareness Program in Lao PDR

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A description of Program

World Education’s UXO Education and Awareness Program targets primary schools in districts with high UXO ordnance confrontation, as identified in the “Living with UXO” survey published by UXO Lao and Handicap International in 1997. World Education partners with the Ministry of Education at both national and provincial levels to provide teacher training and technical support. The program is designed to build host-country capacity by training teachers, school administrative and government staff; working at multiple levels within communities; and enhancing the Ministry of Education’s UXO education program by integrating UXO-awareness programming into the national curriculum, particularly in the provinces most heavily affected.

Children glue together sentences about the dangers of UXO. PHOTO CREDIT: BAN PHIAVAT

Interview

SARAH BRUINOEGE, Project Officer, Support the War Victims Project, World Education Lao

What inspired you to work in Laos?

I have a master’s degree in intercultural relations and taught at an international school in Thailand for four years. She is also a certified medical interpreter. Throughout my career, I have been involved in projects for both World Education and the Lao government. I was previously a Project Officer for Thai Lao and the Lao Ministry of Education. I have also worked with the Lao government.

What is the most important lesson you have learned in Laos?

The most important lesson I have learned in Laos is that UXO awareness and education are necessary for the future of the country. It is crucial to educate children about UXO and to ensure that they understand the dangers of UXO. It is also important to work with the government and local communities to ensure that UXO education is sustainable.

What are the biggest challenges you face in your work in Laos?

The biggest challenge I face in my work in Laos is the need to ensure that UXO education is sustainable in the long term. This requires continuous funding and partnership with the government and local communities.

What is the most rewarding part of your work in Laos?

The most rewarding part of my work in Laos is seeing the positive impact that UXO education has on the lives of children and communities. It is rewarding to see children and communities understand the dangers of UXO and take action to protect themselves and others.

What advice would you give to others who are interested in working in Laos?

My advice to others who are interested in working in Laos is to be persistent and patient. UXO education is a long-term project that requires ongoing effort and commitment. It is also important to work closely with the government and local communities to ensure that UXO education is sustainable.

Interview

BARBARA LEWIS, Team Leader of the Supporting War Victims Project, World Education Lao

What inspired you to work in Laos?

I have a degree in intercultural relations and have been working in Laos since 1996. I have previously worked at the University of Arizona and the Lao National Regulatory Authority. I have also worked with the Lao Ministry of Education and UNICEF. I have been involved in projects for both World Education and the Lao government.

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What are your goals for the future of UXO education in Laos?

My goals for the future of UXO education in Laos are to see continued funding and partnership with the government and local communities. I hope to see UXO education become an integral part of the national curriculum and to seeUXO education become more sustainable over time.

How do you envision UXO education changing in the future?

I envision UXO education to become more integrated into the national curriculum, with greater emphasis on sustainability. I also envision more partnerships with the government and local communities to ensure that UXO education is sustainable and accessible for all.

What advice would you give to others who are interested in working in Laos?

My advice to others who are interested in working in Laos is to be persistent and patient. UXO education is a long-term project that requires ongoing effort and commitment. It is also important to work closely with the government and local communities to ensure that UXO education is sustainable.

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