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## MAG: Paving a Mine-free Path to Prosperity in Angola

by Kate Wiggins [ [MAG](#) ]

*In Angola's eastern Moxico province, MAG (Mines Advisory Group), through its humanitarian mine-action program, is making substantial inroads into improving the residents' socioeconomic situation. The almost immediate improvement to people's lives is so visible that from one week to the next, MAG's teams working on the outskirts of Luau, the regional urban center, can actually see families building homes on the land they have only recently cleared.*



40-year-old Augustinho Chinguelexi begins to rebuild a home for his family on land cleared by MAG.

*All photos courtesy of JB RUSSELL/MAG*

It is estimated that 2.4 million Angolans remain at risk from landmines or other explosive remnants of conflict—the legacy of decades of clashes between the Angolan government and rebel forces, the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola.<sup>1</sup>

MAG's (Mines Advisory Group) work, funded by the Office of Weapons Removal and Abatement (PM/WRA) in the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Political-Military Affairs, the United Kingdom's Department for International Development and the Dutch government, among others, is enabling conflict-affected communities to begin the long road to economic, as well as emotional recovery after war.

In 2009, MAG:

- Cleared 1,006,728 square meters (249 acres) of land and 269 kilometers (167 miles) of road in Angola
- Conducted 352 mine-risk-education sessions, reaching 18,300

people

- Identified and removed 32 anti-tank mines, 188 anti-personnel mines and 1,659 items of unexploded ordnance
- Destroyed 2,550 items of UXO that MAG or partner agencies removed
- Allowed 17,487 people to benefit from clearance activities
- Completed 766 explosive-ordnance-disposal spot tasks, benefitting 59,282 people

### Local Perspective

"I am glad to see the deminers working nearby, removing the threat, because I am worried that my children will wander into the areas that are still mined," said 40-year-old Augustinho Chinguelexi. He was allocated a plot of land on which to build a home, but there was a problem: The land was mined. Only after MAG had cleared the land could Chinguelexi begin building his home and focusing on a better future for his family. Chinguelexi recently returned with his family to a small but growing settlement just outside Luena in eastern Angola, having spent much of the civil war as a refugee.

Almost 290,000 square meters (72 acres) of land was cleared



Jermias Matuca, Deputy Chief of Luangrico village in Angola's Moxico province, stands by with his community as a MAG excavator finishes an irrigation canal, having cleared the land of mines.

around the settlement between April and June 2009 and released to the community for uses including housing, agriculture and infrastructure development. Elsewhere in Moxico, large machinery operated by MAG's teams has been preparing land for clearance in the town of Luangrico. As the machines turned the ground over looking for mines and explosive ordnance, local people followed behind trying to finish a long-awaited irrigation canal to bring water into the town.

Upon completing the clearance operations, MAG used its excavators to finish the canal for them, completing it in one day. "If the machines had not been used to finish the canal, it would have taken us another two or three months to dig it by hand," said Jermias Matuca, Deputy Chief of Luangrico. "This will not only benefit me and the village, but all the descendents who will come after us. The people who fled will come back and even people traveling on the road will see that the village is developing. They will build a hospital and the returning people can build homes and expand the village without fear. The future for us and our children will be much better," he explained.

In the community of Musseringinge in February 2009, an anti-tank mine and five other pieces of UXO were found 60 meters from a well-attended local school. MAG was immediately called to define the area for clearance and deliver mine-risk education to the children. "They told us not to play in that area because there are mines," said 10-year-old pupil Nora Benita. "I was really worried," she added.



MAG's Community Liaison Officer conducts an MRE session to villagers in Angola's eastern Moxico province, which was heavily mined during the civil war.

In addition to the threat posed to the children and people of Musseringinge, the discovery of the mines called into question the safety of UNICEF staff supporting education projects in the community.

MAG's Mine Action Team used mechanical and manual clearance techniques to clear the land, eventually destroying two anti-tank mines and six other dangerous explosive items. MRE sessions were given to everyone affected, including the UNICEF staff and all 270 schoolchildren. These activities reduced the risk of accidents and created a safer environment for the community.

Nine-year-old Adao Zachia summed up the inhabitants' feelings quite nicely: "I'm not afraid any more. We can play football there now." ↴

## Biography



After taking a post-graduate course in journalism, **Kate Wiggans** worked on several newspapers in London before moving into public relations. Since starting at MAG in April 2009, Wiggans has focused on increasing public awareness for the company.

## Endnotes

1. "Why Does MAG Work in Angola?" Mines Advisory Group. <http://www.maginternational.org/angola>. Accessed 7 April 2010.

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