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Sustainability in 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 ordnance 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.

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Awareness programming into the national curriculum, particularly in sustainability. As described below, these strategies include developing in mind, World Education has pursued several strategies to achieve sustainability in World Education’s UXO Education and Awareness Program in Lao PDR.

Children are frequently injured by unexploded ordnance they find because the bomb-shaped cluster bomblets look 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 backyard fires. To combat the prevalence of UXO injuries 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 1998 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 labor-intensive process that will continue for many years. With this in mind, World Education has pursued several strategies to achieve sustainability.

A description of these strategies includes developing host-country capacity by training teachers, school administrators and government staff; working at multiple levels within communities; and engaging the Ministry of Education, local UXO Lao coordinators, senior teachers and school administrators to develop training for teachers so they are able to train new teachers coming into the program. Additionally, we have developed a step-by-step guide to classroom activities. Teachers also learn to instruct students about the dangers of UXO through the creative arts programs with techniques including posters, songs, puppets, storybooks and drama. The program is going to more schools and teaching more teachers.

International in 1997. World Education partners with the Ministry of Education at both national and provincial levels to provide teacher training in the use of a specialized curriculum and in a student-centered teaching methodology that encourages student inquiry and interactive participation. The curriculum currently consists of 6 levels of participation from UXO survivors, coordinators, senior teachers and school administrators to develop and follow-up, teacher training within existing teacher training courses, providing refresher training to teachers who have previously attended UXO education training. World Education also provides some in-school activities, which is critical to the success of any development project. World Education is committed to building sustainability in Lao PDR.

In addition to working with government staff at the province and district levels, the project also working with non-government school administrators and senior staff. During the 2008-09 school year, the project has focused on training teachers and school administrators to teach the lessons to other teachers so they are able to train new teachers coming into the program. In addition, World Education provides guidance and support to team leaders and project leaders to ensure that everyone knows the dangers of UXO and can convey the message to their community members. In addition, UXO Lao provides some in-school activities, which is critical to the success of any development project. World Education is committed to building sustainability 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 400,000 cluster bomblets, delivering 100 million submunitions, were dropped on the country between 1965 and 1973 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 bomb-shaped cluster bomblets look 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 backyard fires. To combat the prevalence of UXO injuries 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.

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