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Unsung Hero: NOIMANY PIALEUXAY

Noimany Pialeuxay, the first woman driver to be hired by MAG Lao PDR (People’s Democratic Republic), has worked with her all-female unexploded ordnance clearance team to clear landmines in remote areas of Lao PDR. Her story has been an inspiration to many other women who wish to join the demining effort.

A woman driver is a very rare thing to find in the Lao PDR (People’s Democratic Republic), as are any female unexploded ordnance clearance teams. Working with an all-female UXO clearance team since September 2007, Noimany Pialeuxay, the first woman driver for Mines Advisory Group (MAG) Lao PDR, is broadening the scope forever in Laos of what women can do. “Everyone was talking about MAG because they were the first organization in Lao PDR to recruit a female driver,” says Pialeuxay. “I applied because I really love driving.”

The daughter of a driving instructor, Pialeuxay grew up driving and as the age of 13 became one of a handful of women from the Xong Khoun province in Laos to receive a driver’s license. When she responded to a MAG advertisement for a driver, her interviewer Willi Kubirske quickly discovered that she indeed could drive a vehicle. She then began training for the process of testing and training for the field, and soon became the first woman driver to be employed by MAG Lao PDR, joining an all-female UXO clearance team. Pialeuxay was thrilled and very happy about this accomplishment.

Pialeuxay now is a member of one of MAG’s two all-female UXO clearance teams in Lao PDR, a team equipped with an eight-wheel drive truck to transport UXO clearance teams. Pialeuxay says she is very happy about this accomplishment.

He feels that she is an “excellent team player and right from the start … fits into her role as a driver.” Pialeuxay stresses to keep a positive perspective about life and it is always smiling.

Pialeuxay and her female UXO clearance team are contributing to the future of Laos PDR through their work. Their team’s mission objective is to go into rural areas and clear the remaining unexploded ordnance left from conflicts that occurred over 30 years ago. This UXO clearance is a significant cause of injury and death in rural municipalities in Laos PDR.

Collecting scrap metal is a key form of income for many residents of remote, poor regions of Laos, and it is one of the main causes of UXO-related deaths and injuries. Many farmers sell scrap metal in a marginal business and are not being compensated for the damage they cause. Through the clearance of this land, the team opens up many economic opportunities for impoverished communities and provides safety from the threat of UXO而又。“Pialeuxay adds, “I feel proud because I am one of a team (that is) helping people to be safe from UXO contamination. I am also proud because we are undertaking dangerous work that directly benefits communities.”

She observes that her female UXO clearance team shows success across rural areas of Laos PDR that they also have the ability to continue. “Many women ask if they still need a driver,” Pialeuxay says. She encourages women who are interested to get involved in more action and clearance projects. “If you see a job advertisement, just apply! Don’t be afraid of men who say women can’t do this job.”

Pialeuxay agrees, saying Pialeuxay exemplifies the success that is possible for women through UXO clearance. She says that outstanding and encouraging stories of women involved in UXO and mine clearance in Laos PDR. “She says, ‘also be the inspiration for other women in Laos PDR,’ promoting that women can make a difference in the world.”

Leah Young

Leah Young has been working with MAG since January 2008. She is from Virginia Beach, Virginia, and holds a degree in international studies with a minor in Spanish. Leah Young is currently in Laos as the Communications Officer southeast Asia for MAG Lao PDR. Leah is pursuing a master’s degree in communications from James Madison university where she is working toward her bachelor’s degree in international studies with a minor in Spanish. Leah Young can be reached at Leah.Young@maginternational.org.

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