

Case study: replacing bombs with crops

Village Assisted Clearance in Houay Dok Kham

“The UXO exploded sending a fragment of metal straight through his arm.” Khonsavan is describing an incident that happened when he was at school. A boy was playing with an item he’d found. He didn’t know what it was and he didn’t realise the danger he was in. The boy was just eight years old. Khonsavan was sixteen. “When I heard the explosion I rushed over and tied some cloth around the wound to stop the bleeding. The boy was lucky, he survived and even his arm was OK in the end.” From an early age, Khonsavan witnessed a lot of accidents caused by UXO, mainly involving children in his school and town because they didn’t realise how dangerous the object they were playing with actually was. Where he could he would help the victims by giving them first aid. Now, working for MAG, he feels that the community is safer as a result of what he does.

Khonsavan is the supervisor of a Village Assisted Clearance (VAC) team in the village of Houay Dok Kham in Xieng Khouang province. There are twenty five people in the team working to clear a massive 210 hectare site, which will eventually be used as agricultural land by the villagers. Mainly they will cultivate rice crops and in good weather, they’ll be able to harvest two crops per year. This will be of massive economic benefit to the community. The project is funded by Jersey Overseas Aid.

Soua is a member of the VAC team. She’s twenty years old. “I wanted to be involved in UXO clearance. I want to be able to provide safety for my village and my community.” VAC is a MAG innovation, allowing community participation in setting priorities on the type of land to be cleared. Members of the team receive extra income while they are carrying out clearance and the personnel in the team are changed in each year of the three year project to allow a fair distribution of opportunity throughout the village. Soua runs a deep search detector on the site and her job involves pinpointing and marking the spot where a signal sounds. “When the site is clear the whole village will have a better life. They’ll have land on which to grow and earn more money,” she says.

The project is now in its second year and so far 199 items of UXO have been located and destroyed.



UXO items found in Houay Dok Kham. Photo: Tom Greenwood / MAG