



Evaluation of PM/WRA funded mine risk education programs in Lao PDR

Evaluation Summary

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Dexis Consulting Group

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Washington, DC 20004

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EVALUATION PURPOSE

The US Department of State's Bureau of Political-Military Affairs (PM/WRA) commissioned Dexis Consulting Group to conduct an external evaluation of its Mine Risk Education funded programs in Lao PDR. The primary objectives of the evaluation are (a) to provide inputs for PM/WRA to determine if the benefits of risk education interventions justify the funds invested in the programs; and (b) to inform PM/WRA on the efficiency and tangible benefits of some targeted Risk Education (RE) activities.

EVALUATION QUESTIONS

The scope of work for this evaluation highlights three overarching questions:

- **Overarching Question #1.** To what extent do the benefits of mine risk education programs justify the resources invested in them?
- **Overarching Question #2.** Among the many implementation mechanisms of RE, are there particular methods that work better for particular audiences?
- **Overarching Question #3.** Should RE funding be transferred to another aspect of mine action clearance? Does RE affect the community such that it justifies dedicated funding?

These questions were further detailed into four specific evaluation questions.

- **Evaluation Question #1.** To what extent does Risk Education result in a tangible effect among beneficiaries?
- **Evaluation Question #2.** What are the advantages and disadvantages of each communication strategy and RE model used by each of the Implementing Partner (IP) in relation to the social and economic context of Lao PDR? Conversely, are the benefits from one style of model/strategy superior to the others that implementers should adopt commonly?
- **Evaluation Question #3.** To what extent do RE sessions and implementers have the effect among beneficiaries that the quarterly reports convey?
- **Evaluation Question #4.** What is the effectiveness of the various RE strategies and models used by the IPs?

EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

The Dexis evaluation team used a mixed-methods approach that emphasized evidence-based findings through qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis. Data was systematically collected via electronic surveys (E-Survey with IPs), predesigned "evidence reports" filled by the IPs, field observations, key informant interviews, 19 focus group discussions (including 6 control groups) with farmers, school going and out-of-school children, and small quantitative surveys targeting beneficiaries. In addition, the Dexis evaluation team pioneered an analysis of the 2008-2015 casualty data gathered from the National Regulatory Authority Information Management System for Mine Action (IMSMA/NRA) database.

EVALUATION FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

OVERARCHING QUESTION #1. TO WHAT EXTENT DO THE BENEFITS OF MINE RISK EDUCATION PROGRAMS JUSTIFY THE RESOURCES INVESTED IN THEM?

Analysis of data gathered from both primary and secondary resources indicate that RE interventions have been effective in producing *tangible* effects among beneficiaries. RE activities have provided concrete life skills to beneficiaries based in unexploded ordnance (UXO) affected communities. This increase in RE knowledge has directly contributed to a decrease in risk taking behaviors among the general population of Lao PDR through acquisition and dissemination of improved Knowledge Attitude and Practices (KAP). The information spillover effect from direct RE beneficiaries has contributed to further strengthening the "common knowledge" of the communities who have been living in UXO afflicted areas for the last 40 years. RE interventions have also encouraged individuals to report UXOs to the appropriate authorities. This is exemplified by the finding that UXO reporting rates increases significantly (from 2-3 to an average of 5-10 reports per month) when the mine action

operators remain active and directly accessible in their targeted villages. Furthermore, RE interventions have aided in the dissemination of the national and provincial regulations on the scrap metal trade, which has been instrumental in reducing the number of casualties over the last few years.

Findings from the evaluation show that several other factors have contributed to the decline in UXO casualties. The combination of risk mitigation/aversion strategies and risk education, the increase of less risky activities associated with the development of the overall economy in Lao PDR, the drop in price of scrap metal¹ (dampening the profitability of the scrap metal trade in Lao PDR)², as well as the reduction in the amount of readily available scrap due to UXO clearance work, have all served as reinforcing factors contributing to the decline in the amount of UXO casualties in Lao PDR.

Overarching Question 1: Recommendations

- The NRA should regularly produce more group-oriented statistics based on the casualty data.
- Analysis of the KAPs surveys should highlight the trend in changes for particular specific at-risk groups rather than focusing too heavily on a general population trend.³
- Improve UXO reporting system and support effective explosive ordinance disposal (EOD) roving teams to complement RE interventions.

OVERARCHING QUESTION #2. AMONG THE MANY IMPLEMENTATION MECHANISMS OF RE, ARE THERE PARTICULAR METHODS THAT WORK BETTER FOR PARTICULAR AUDIENCES?

The KAP surveys conducted in 2011 and 2012 indicate that IPs have reached more than 80% of all communities in Lao PDR. As stated previously, the evaluation findings indicate that although the RE activities have been effective, IPs have not yet been able to demonstrate that particular segments of the population who are most-at-risk have been effectively reached through operational, evidence based and documented RE strategies. Examples of most-at-risk groups include boys aged 6 to 14 years and farmers (as a result of engaging in slash and burn farming activities during the dry and cold season), as well as out-of-school children due to their lack of knowledge and practice in RE.

The IPs have developed and used an array of communication tools (including edutainment activities) that have certainly encouraged the participation of the beneficiaries in the RE sessions. However, some of the tools developed would need to be revised to accurately relay RE information (avoid confusing or conflicting messages on how to safely build a fire). The target population would also benefit from a harmonization of approaches, especially in the school setting where some IPs work through the formal school system while others use their own staff to pass RE messages to the children.

The Dexis evaluation team believes that there are pros and cons to standalone and integrated approaches. RE standalone approaches have used a broader variety of communications tools than integrated RE sessions, and integrated approaches are more effective for a quick EOD responses following a UXO request. What is more important is that an RE standalone or integrated approach has clear RE outcome-oriented objectives, are aligned with the National Strategic Plan for the UXO sector in Lao PDR for 2011-20204, clearly spell out which at risk group

¹ The price of scrap was 1,700 kip (17 US cents) per kilo in 2004 according to the study of Scrap Metal Collection in Lao PDR, GICHD, Geneva, September 2005., had reached a pick in 2009-2010 of 2,000 kip/kilo and is now estimated to be between 800 to 1,200 kip/kilo according to the findings from the focus group discussions (FGDs) conducted by Dexis in Sepon district.

² The last few years there has been a general downtrend in steel scrap prices globally and a number of experts anticipate a prolonged period at around current levels. According to recycling international steelmakers in many countries are continuing to blame cheap Chinese exports as the anchor dragging down their sales ambitions. The slowdown of the global economic crisis has also hit China's exports in addition to the effects of a slowing domestic economy. (<http://www.recyclinginternational.com/>). Respondents of the FGDs conducted by DEXIS in Savannakhet reported a decreasing trend of the price of scrap the last few years. The scrap metal dealer met during the evaluation mentioned that the price per kilo was 4,000 kips in 2010 and is now only 500 kips/kg.

³ A good practice was the World Education Laos KAP survey focusing on Out of School Children.

⁴ National Strategic Plan for the UXO Sector, in the Lao People's Democratic Republic 2011 – 2020. "The Safe Path Forward II"

and activities are concerned by the intended intervention, and specify how the action will contribute to the intended outcome and how it will address the underlining factors of risks.

Overarching Question 2: Recommendations

- Prioritize Risk Education for the most-at-risk and most vulnerable groups of the population.
- At risk practices should be actively identified and risk groups should be effectively identified and reached.
- Community volunteer systems would need to be further piloted.
- Continue supporting the school based program but through a more sustainable approach.
- Use advocacy as an avenue for change and for widening impact of activities.
- Focus on interpersonal communication means and improved consistency of materials used.

OVERARCHING QUESTION #3. SHOULD RE FUNDING BE TRANSFERRED TO ANOTHER ASPECT OF MINE ACTION CLEARANCE? DOES RE AFFECT THE COMMUNITY SUCH THAT IT JUSTIFIES DEDICATED FUNDING?

At the current rate of demining,⁵ there is no guarantee that in the next few years, mine clearance activities alone will be able to significantly reduce the current “plateau” in casualties⁶. The most effective way forward should therefore be to continue using a mixed approach of funding, with RE remaining a pillar of the mine action “tool box”. RE has proven to be effective in addressing risk taking behaviors, as well as in increasing UXO reports from villagers to mine action operators. If well targeted to the most at risk activities and groups, RE funding will continue to have a significant impact on the reduction of casualties.

To address the residual risk caused by the remaining surface contamination, the funding for RE could be leveraged, if also complemented by support from a well-coordinated EOD roving capacity that can continue to respond quickly to adhoc requests from villagers even when a humanitarian mine action (HMA) expert is not working in a village anymore. Dedicated funding for RE remains relevant to continue building up the school-based program with the Ministry of Education through enhanced advocacy initiatives as well as to support the development of a wider network of community volunteers to scale up the RE program, increase ownership and better sustain the RE interventions.

Overarching Question 3: Recommendations

- PM/WRA and IPs should work together to develop outcomes oriented RE project documents.
- With the goal to strengthen outcome and impact-level reporting, quantitative data analysis should be complemented by qualitative methods.⁷

⁵ If funding is available, the most optimistic estimated figure considered by some IPs is that at least 20 years are still needed to clear the remaining high impact areas.

⁶ That emerged over the last four years with an average of 43 casualties per year.

⁷ IP might be able to demonstrate RE effectiveness better by documenting cases of behavior change through the following example of monitoring questions such as “what are you doing differently as a result of the RE training you’ve received?” What will make you change your behavior? What did you learn from the RE activities that you did not know before? In what aspect did you change your behavior after having followed up a RE session? Another useful indicator suggested in one of the CRS evaluation was the percentage of villages that demonstrated cases of improved behavior around UXO after a given period of time.