



South-South Efforts to Reduce the Landmine and Unexploded Ordnance Threat

Landmines and unexploded ordnance (UXO) remain in the ground long after a conflict has come to a close, threatening the lives and wellbeing of people and impeding agricultural and economic development. JICA has provided aid in Cambodia for many years to remove landmines and is now drawing on this experience in developing similar programs in neighboring Laos.

REMOVING CAMBODIA'S LANDMINES

It has been over 20 years since the 1991 Paris Peace Agreement brought an end to Cambodia's long civil war. As a result of the conflict, nearly half of the country's agricultural settlements remain plagued by landmines and UXO. The removal of these threats and care for victims, along with other programs, falls to the Cambodian Mine Action Center (CMAC), a government agency established in 1992.

Since 1998, JICA has provided assistance to strengthen the capacity of CMAC. This has involved sending experts to provide technical assistance, helping procure metal detectors and heavy machinery to remove vegetation and ordnance from minefields, and facilitating procurement of materials like tents, communication equipment, and vehicles to strengthen logistical support systems.

For JICA, supporting demining and UXO removal, which require military knowledge, was a new challenge in an unfamiliar field. To ensure that landmines were removed safely and efficiently it was essential for CMAC to function properly. This meant providing assistance toward creating a stronger organization and workforce—two areas where JICA does have deep expertise.

The strong motivation of CMAC staff to improve the wellbeing of fellow Cambodians has been shared by Japanese experts involved in the project, who have provided instruction and other types of



UXO Lao members visit a minefield in Cambodia.



UXO Lao staff exchange opinions during a clearance operation (left). A Japanese brush-cutting machine in Cambodia. Clearing vegetation used to consume 70% of resources in UXO operations, but the introduction of brush removal equipment has greatly improved efficiency.

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Experts estimate that around 80 million pieces of UXO remain in Laos. The lack of data on the location and quantity of these potentially deadly explosives has made it difficult for authorities to establish which areas deserve priority, hampering clearance efforts. This has impeded both regional development and efforts to improve the quality of life of residents.

To address this issue, JICA has provided project assistance in Laos for joint training workshops with UXO Lao and CMAC participation. Under the program, six workshops lasting up to two weeks each are to be held over a three-year period. Workshops are run under a broad range of themes, such as human resource development, information management, victim support, and organization management, with both organizations having the opportunity to share results of their efforts as well as to visit sites in each country.

The five workshops that have been held to date have already begun to yield results. As Hayashi notes, "I've begun to hear the name CMAC crop up during UXO Lao meetings. Members are thinking about how best to apply the information they've gained to the situation in Laos. This shows the strong trust that has developed between the two organizations." The need for trust is emphasized by Phmuro, who says, "By working together, we can build peace and stability in the region."

With JICA's assistance, Laos will soon receive four heavy-duty brush-cutting machines. Landmines and UXO are often buried deep below vegetation and the introduction of equipment to clear sites is expected to improve efficiency of removal efforts. Training for operators, development of a SOP (standard operation procedure), and other practical instruction is taking place in Cambodia. Looking ahead, an issue to be tackled from here on out is how best to utilize land once it has been cleared of landmines and UXO.

JICA will continue working to help residents eradicate the terror of landmines and unexploded ordnance by assisting the South-South cooperation between Cambodia and Laos.

support to staff in such fields as information system technology and resource management. Thanks to the steady progress made by CMAC, Cambodia has seen a significant decrease in landmine victims.

Building on this success, CMAC has taken on the new challenge of providing assistance in other developing countries. CMAC's initial South-South cooperation effort, which JICA facilitated, took place in Colombia in 2010–11.

"The progress we made at home gave us confidence working in Colombia, which is economically better off than Cambodia," says Oum Phmuro, deputy director general of CMAC. "There is nothing that gives us more pleasure than to be able to use our experience to help save lives in other countries."

SUPPORT FOR UXO REMOVAL IN LAOS

New cooperation efforts have also begun in neighboring Laos. An estimated 2 million tons of ord-



A CMAC mine risk education workshop. Cooperation and understanding by local residents is essential to UXO removal efforts. CMAC has also extended its South-South efforts to Angola.