

**REPORT ON OPPORTUNITIES FOR MiVAC  
TO PARTICIPATE IN NGO ACTIVITIES IN LAOS**

**INCLUDING OBSERVATIONS OF A VISIT TO SVA LAOS**

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## **ABSTRACT**

SVA and MiVAC are two strong organizations with the shared goal of improving the lives of people in conflict affected area. SVA is well established as an NGO in Laos and could provide opportunities for MiVAC to support and conduct projects in UXO/landmine contaminated areas. MiVAC has solid resources available for construction, mine clearance and project management. A recommendation is made that MiVAC work with SVA to actively participate in the construction of schools in Saravan province, Laos. A further recommendation is made for MiVAC to investigate ways to participate in UXO/landmine clearance activities in Laos.

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **BACKGROUND OF SVA**

#### **History/Key Milestones**

Shanti Volunteer Association was originally established in 1980 as Japan Sotoshu Relief Committee (JSRC) to provide relief to Southeast Asian refugees. In its first year JSRC opened an office in Bangkok, Thailand and began mobile and permanent library services for Cambodian refugee camps. In 1981 volunteers of JSRC established Sotoshu Volunteer Association (SVA).

In subsequent years SVA added printing and library services throughout Thailand. A vocational training center was opened in Bangkok's Klong Toey slum in 1989. The Phnom Penh, Cambodia office was opened in 1991 and the Vientiane, Laos office in 1992. The name was changed to Sotoshu International Volunteer Association in 1992. In 2000 a library was opened in Thailand for refugees from

Myanmar (Burma). The office in Jalalabad, Afghanistan was opened in 2003.

Over the years SVA has provided relief activities for victims of natural disasters in Japan, Taiwan, Turkey, Democratic People's Republic of Korea, India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Sumatra.

## **SVA Organization**

Shanti Volunteer Association is registered with the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs as a public association. Offices are maintained in Tokyo, Japan; Vientiane, Laos; Bangkok, Thailand (including subsidiary organization named Sikkha Asia Foundation); Phnom Penh, Cambodia; Jalalabad, Afghanistan; and the Myanmar Refugee Project Office in Mae Sod, Thailand.

SVA has over 2,300 members and an annual budget in excess of US \$5 million. Over sixty per cent of funds are for budgeted programs outside Japan, eight per cent for emergency relief assistance, nineteen per cent for Japanese domestic programs, and twelve per cent for administrative costs.

SVA lists four categories of income: membership fees and general donations (57%); donations for emergency relief assistance (8%); support from general programs (7%); and support from government and UN agencies (27%).

## **SVA in Laos**

SVA has been operating in Laos since 1992. Working with the Ministry of Education and Ministry of Information and Culture, SVA has concentrated its efforts in four functional areas:

- Primary School Building Construction and School Cluster Support
- Reading Promotion Activity
- Children's Home for Culture and Education Activity
- International Relations and Training

The following is a list of some of the projects undertaken:

- Mobile Book Boxes
- Picture Book Publication
- Mimeograph Printing Factories
- School Construction
- Teacher Workshops
- Student Essay Writing Workshop
- Mobile Library Van

SVA is active in the following provinces: Luang-Prabang, Xienghouang, Borikhamxay, Savannaket, Saravene, and Champassak as well as Vientiane city, the capitol of Laos. For 2005 SVA expenditures in Laos were about US\$400,000.00

### **Recent On Site Visit/Schools**

While in Laos we were able to visit several sites and see first-hand the work being done by SVA. The first site was a school for grades 1 through 3 in Saysawan village. There are about 30 total students all taught by one teacher. The school was built by the people in the village who are former hill people who moved to the lowlands for better opportunities, including education. The government provides salary for the teacher and SVA provides teacher training and school supplies.



School for Lao children begins at age six and is designed as five grades of primary school, three years of middle school, and three years of high school. Some schools such as this one provide the first three years with the students needing to move to another school in what is referred to as a school cluster for further education. The cluster concept is similar to an education district in which students graduating from primary schools will move on to a middle school in the cluster while children graduating from middle schools will likewise move on to a high school. Although school is mandatory through grade 5, this goal is often limited by lack of government funds. Furthermore, funding limitations mean that schools such as this, serving only 30 students, will not be allocated any money for a more substantial building either by the government or NGO's.

The next site visited was a six room primary school in the village of Phapong. This village of 919 people has 91



students in grades 1 through 5 with separate rooms and teachers for each class (plus a school director) and one room that serves as a library and teachers meeting room. SVA built the school using volunteers, village people, and sub-contractors. (Typically SVA sub-contracts school construction with overseas volunteers and local people providing labor and skills when available.) The cost to build a school such as this is US\$34,000.00.



The director has been at this school since 1969 and over 80% of his students go on to middle school, a much higher percentage than the norm throughout the country. He attributes this high rate to an active Parent/School Association and active participation by the villagers in all aspects of the children's' education including site selection for the school. It is also worth noting that most of the

villagers, including the headman, were at some time or other students of the director.

It should also be mentioned that SVA trains teachers to be student-centric, focusing on active participation of the students in the learning process rather than the rote memorization of facts. Part of the teaching challenge is textbooks: the government uses textbooks for ten years. It is not uncommon for parents and other members of the villages to supplement teachers' salaries and the purchase of school supplies. Despite the efforts of the government and NGO's, overcrowding in schools is still not uncommon, with one school familiar to SVA having 114 students and one teacher. There are over 12,000 villages in Laos but only about 8,000 primary schools.

### **Recent On Site Visit/Reading and Culture**

Reading and literacy improvement are major program points for SVA. Related activities include mobile book boxes, mobile libraries, permanent libraries, and most recently support for the national library in Vientiane.





Book Boxes are moved from village to village and school to school with people able to borrow books and return them on next visit.

The mobile van library provides library services in the Vientiane city area to parts of the population that lack such services.



Permanent libraries have also been established in Vientiane for both children's and adults' libraries. The children's is maintained at the location of the SVA office while the adult library recently moved to a new facility.





In 2005 the library services provided by SBA had over 140,000 users with over 100,000 books borrowed.

The cultural center in Vientiane has the dual goals of preserving and teaching Lao culture to children. The center teaches traditional Lao culture and puts on performances throughout the year.



## **BACKGROUND OF MiVAC**

### **History/Key Milestones**

Mine Victims And Clearance Trust (MiVAC) was founded in 2002. The following information was provided by Rob Woolley, co-founder and trustee of MiVAC, describing the beginnings of MiVAC.

“In the late 1990’s I was asked to speak to an International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL) meeting in Hobart about my experiences with landmines in Viet Nam.

This lead to requests to visit schools and speak to students about the effects of landmines on behalf of the federal government’s “Destroy a Minefield Campaign” and the ICBL. These talks were well received and from the talks several schools decided to raise money for “Destroy a Minefield”.

I also helped to organize (along with Alison Wild, the ICBL co-ordinator in Tasmania) a concert at one of our well known Hobart pubs to raise awareness of the landmine issue and more importantly – some money to help fund a project.

I then contacted an Australian landmine clearer, Carl Chergwin, and asked him to speak to several hundred students and give them a demonstration in mine clearing techniques.

Carl was happy to oblige. We covered his airfare by asking Rotary International to contribute, and we finished this talk by presenting a few large cheques (several thousand dollars from our own fundraising, plus the students’ efforts)

to a representative of a well known NGO who said, “Thanks”, and that was the last we heard of all our donations.

I tried on several occasions to find out where that money had been used. We had specified that we wanted the money to fund a specific project, one that Carl Chergwin was working on, and this had been agreed to. But try as I might, and others tried as well, we were politely told to mind our own business and butt out.

After this letdown, I decided there had to be a better way to support work in landmine affected areas and to give accountability to donors. I contacted a lot of de-miners and a lot of relief organisations actually working with landmine affected communities – found out as much information as I could about the needs of these people and where small donations could be used most effectively.

I learned that some of our Australian de-miners were just as frustrated as I was with some NGO’s. In some cases only about 20 – 30 per cent of donations made it to projects. That leaves an awful lot of money wasted on expenses.

So out of frustration and disappointment – MiVAC was born.

One of the main aims of MiVAC is to make sure that over 80 – 90 per cent of funds raised go directly to the projects – on the ground. That is a minimum amount – sometimes we have been able to put 100% in.

Another important objective is that, wherever possible, we work with and promote Australian de-mining organizations, aid workers, medical teams, etc. Many Australians are working overseas and receive very little recognition or funding.

Another important aspect of MiVAC is that we are apolitical and non-sectarian. We have politicians of every persuasion as members of MiVAC – at both federal and state levels – often they contact us to ask if they can help – rather than our members having to contact them.”

## **Organization**

MiVAC has over 200 members worldwide including a representative in the USA. MiVAC is registered as a trust and NGO in Australia.

Its aim is primarily to be a fundraising body and to inform the community of the dangers of landmines.

Money raised will be allocated to projects identified to the Trustees by Australian de-miners, other NGO's or Federal Government Agencies.

Projects may include:

- Medical / hygiene assistance
- Farming equipment
- Assistance to an Australian mine clearance operation.
- Provision of artificial limbs
- Support to school children.



## **MiVAC PROJECTS**

Projects have been undertaken and completed in Cambodia and Sri Lanka.

### **Tum Nub, Cambodia**

The MiVAC Trust conducted a rural development project in a remote land-mine affected settlement in North West Cambodia. MiVAC donated US\$5,000.00 to provide water pump wells, water storage jars for household storage, and sufficient building materials for the villagers to construct a school/community centre building.

The project was conducted in the village of Tum Nub. Tum Nub is in Stung Treng Commune, Sala Krau District, Pailin, and is approximately 25 Km to the north of Pailin. It is home to 150 families and is typical of many newly settled and impoverished communities within the Pailin region. Sala Krau District is acknowledged as one of the most densely land mined areas in Cambodia. Tum Nub is pretty well in the middle of a bloody great minefield- the Khmer Rouge were still planting them in 1998, the minefields include all types of mines including anti-tank and the one many of us know so well, the US M16. It will take many years to clear the area. The area is still controlled mainly by the Khmer Rouge hierarchy.

The village of Tum Nub was selected because the village was very remote, the nearest water point was 7 km away and the population includes a higher than usual number of widowed and single parent families. This is due to the high casualties suffered by the men

in the fighting of 1998, and more recently landmine detonations and desertions by many of the men who had been soldiers on both sides. The population numbers and size of area made Tum Nub the ideal village to benefit most from the available funding. The village also met the MiVAC funding criteria in that it is a landmine and conflict affected community.

The refugees, known in UN speak as Internally Displaced People (IDP's), began squatting in the area in 2000, many of them displaced during the last fighting in 1998. There are also many returnees from the last of the refugee camps on the Thai-Cambodian Border.

The basic and urgent needs in these places is water (plenty of it about 15-30 meters below them), water storage jars to catch rain, mosquito nets (malaria is killing many each year-mostly kids and the elderly) and hand cultivating tools.



They take water from where they can: turbid road pools, creeks, soak and ponds, often these contain high arsenic and other toxic levels. In the dry season many of these dry up so the kids and women must walk up to 12 km to get water from the only available water points. They only have small 10-20 liter plastic drums which they must lug back and forth (small underfed kids are doing it all day without complaint) as it takes several trips a day to meet the basic family needs. They have no bulk water storage at the homes to catch any rainfall. Most don't have a decent roof to catch the rain with anyway. Basically these small settlements have absolutely nothing but very basic shelter and utensils with a few hand tools to scratch out a bit of a cash crop which they sell to buy enough food and medicine to continue another day.

A MiVAC Trust member coordinated the project. Mike Roberts had previously been in the area as adviser to a local Cambodian NGO. With the advantage of local knowledge and the help an extremely competent Cambodian organization called the Cambodian Rural Development Team (CRDT), a very successful project was the outcome.

(As a matter of interest, CRDT was set-up and run by another ex-digger and MiVAC member, Brendan Boucher. Under Brendan's very competent leadership they have been doing some great rural development projects, in many cases with funding from AusAid. See: [www.crdt.org](http://www.crdt.org).)

After consultation with the village members to determine what they saw as the priorities it was decided to provide some water wells, some bulk water storage jars and with any leftover funds purchase as much building material as possible for the community to construct a small building that could be used as a School and a Community Centre-the nearest is 11 km away. The people preferred that the funds be directed to the construction of the school before the many other basics they need-such is their strong desire to get their kids some basic education at least.



Ultimately the MiVAC Funds provided this small community with three pump wells, 80 300 liter household water storage jars and sufficient building materials(cement, bricks and roofing) for the construction of a 8 x 15 meter building. Before MiVAC left the area the women had established a community vegetable plot at the rear of each well to take advantage of the run off. The produce will be sold and proceeds put into the Well Maintenance Fund that MiVAC established.





## **Kampi Village Project**

The MiVAC Trust, in conjunction with AusAID, undertook a Village Development Project in Cambodia. Kampi Village is a subsistence fishing and rice farming village comprised of a total of 124 families located in Sombok Commune, Kratie District, Kratie. It is situated along the Mekong River approximately 230 km north from Phnom Penh.





Kratie was the scene of some of the heaviest fighting throughout the various foreign incursions and civil wars fought in Cambodia. The area was heavily bombed by US during that bombing campaign. In addition to the UXOs the surrounding areas were heavily landmined. Over the past few years there has been a major de-mining/UXO effort in the zone, but the number of limbless land mine victims to be seen in the area is testimony to the incident of landmine detonations that have occurred.

For this project funding was provided by AusAID Phnom Penh under the Community Development Program (CDF). MiVAC's contribution included the project coordination and supervision by self funded volunteers, along with funding to construct 9 Wells.

The Project was conducted by The Cambodian Rural Development Team (CRDT): a group of young Cambodians formed by Brendan Boucher. Brendan is a former member of Commando Regt. and a MiVAC member. CDRT was implemented and coordinated

initially by Brendan, and Alex Diment (CRDT); later, Mike Roberts assisted.

The project achievements included the following:

### **Agricultural Training and Supply**

- 26 fish ponds dug and stocked with fingerlings
- Pigs for 41 families (9 breeding pigs)
- Ducks for 75 families
- Chickens for 29 families
- Vegetable seed distribution for all 135 families
- Mushroom production for 15 families
- 5 Plots of System Rice Intensification(SRI).

### **Water and Sanitation**

- 9 ring wells
- 60 toilets
- 15 Rain Water collectors
- 5 Biodigesters

### **Training**

- 92 hours of varied agricultural training provided for all 135 Villagers (and others from neighboring villages) including separate courses on:
  - Pig, chicken, and duck raising
  - Fish raising and pond maintenance
  - Vegetable production
  - Mushroom Production
  - System of Rice Intensification
  - Water and Sanitation
  - Biodigester technology

- Training Village Development Committee(VDC) on their roles, responsibility, simple management tools and accounting skills
- Study tour to other villages at which CRDT have conducted similar program for 15 VDC and villagers

Results and benefits to target population - the direct beneficiaries - the 135 families in Kampi Village:



- Reduced risk of UXO and mine injury through reduced need for hunting and foraging.
- Year round public access to clean water
- Reduced incidence of sickness and disease through the provision of clean water and the supply and use of toilets.
- Improved social conditions within Kampi village, due to equal distribution of benefits from community development
- Increased supply of protein, due to ability to raise fish and livestock and grow vegetables for family consumption

- Improve long-term food security through agricultural, aquaculture and small livestock supply and village training
- Reduced village malnutrition as a result of increased quality and quantity of food
- Increase villagers' skill through building toilets, wells, water collectors and full participation with other activities
- Improve agricultural skills and increase household incomes through sale of excess mushrooms, fish, livestock and vegetables

## **Sri Lanka Orphanage**

Batticaloa (pronounced Batty ka low) is located on the central east coast of Sri Lanka approximately 270 Km (eight hours drive) from Colombo. After the civil riots of 1983 many Tamils (the ethnic minority) from Colombo sought refuge and resettled among the predominantly Tamil population of Batticaloa.

Later, heavy fighting between the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE or Tamil Tigers) and Sri Lankan military caused the deaths of over 17,000 LTTE and more than 60,000 civilians on the east coast alone. (Numbers of Sri Lankan military dead in this area are unknown.) A ceasefire agreement in 2002 enabled the LTTE to move about freely unarmed. Today Batticaloa is heavily patrolled by the Sri Lankan Army and Police Force. Although shootings are frequent, fighting has stopped.

Landmines around the area have been cleared by MAG (Mine Action Group) and no longer present such a serious threat. By mutual agreement the LTTE and Government have ceased the indiscriminate sowing of

mines and now only lay well marked mine fields around military bases. The local population is aware of these areas and keeps well away.



On 26th December 2004, the Asian Tsunami devastated the coastal region of Batticaloa district. Between 6000-8000 people were killed. The inaccuracy of the casualty statistics provides some insight into the scale of the tragedy. Many villages were completely washed away with no survivors to provide accurate figures. The Dutch Bar, a large sand bar that juts into the sea and forms a beautiful salt water lagoon between the town centre and coast, was particularly affected. Many of those not killed by outright debris were washed into the lagoon and drowned.

After learning of the devastation to the communities in this war affected area, the MiVAC Trust sent Sri

Lankan Australian members, Brendan Boucher and David Mariadason to meet with local government, community leaders and NGOs to conduct a feasibility study and plan a re-construction project.

The Batticaloa orphanage was established in the Dutch Bar in 1983 by local organization, Servants of Jesus, and received funding by the Jesuits. The orphanage was completely destroyed by the tsunami. It was approximately 400 meters from the sea; the force of the surge tore the foundations, breaking the walls and collapsing the roof. The market garden, aquaculture ponds and two sea going fishing boats used for income generation were swept away. Fortunately, most of the children were away from the orphanage for the Christmas holidays. However the manager of the and his wife were killed while pushing the few remaining children to safety in a large tree.

Reconstruction of the orphanage fits with the criteria set by both MiVAC and the donor. The building to be constructed is community infrastructure that will be used in the education and development of the war affected children within the community. The Batticaloa area was subject to landmines, but this threat has been removed. Furthermore the area has been devastated by the Boxing Day Tsunami. The orphanage is not in receipt of relief funding from the Government or major NGOs.





The rebuilding of the orphanage was completed in March 2007 and the formal dedication and opening will be held in April. This was a joint effort between Ayubowan, a Dutch organization, and MiVAC. Ayubowan raised AU\$40,000.00 towards the project and MiVAC raised over AU\$64,000.00.



# BACKGROUND OF LAOS

## Brief History

Laos traces its history to the kingdom of Lan Xang, founded in the fourteenth century, which lasted until the eighteenth century, when Siam invaded and assumed control of the separate principalities that remained. To avoid a costly war with the French, the Siamese king ceded lands now known as Laos to them, and these were incorporated into French Indochina in 1893. The French saw Laos as a useful buffer state between the two expanding empires of France and Britain. Under the French, the capital (Vieng Chan) was changed to Vientiane. Following a brief Japanese occupation during World War II, the country declared its independence in 1945, but the French re-asserted their control and only in 1950 was Laos granted semi-autonomy as an "associated state" within the French Union. Moreover, the French remained in *de facto* control until 1954, when Laos gained full independence as a constitutional monarchy. Under a special exemption to the Geneva Convention, a French military training mission continued to support the Royal Laos Army. In 1955, the U.S. Department of Defense created a special Programs Evaluation Office to replace French support of the Royal Laos Army against the communist Pathet Lao as part of the U.S. containment policy.

Political unrest in neighboring Vietnam dragged Laos into the Second Indochina War, a destabilizing factor that contributed to civil war and several coups d'état. The North Vietnamese Army invaded and occupied portions of eastern Laos. The North Vietnamese army, with its heavy weapons including heavy artillery and tanks was the real power behind the Pathet Lao insurgency. Significant aerial bombardment by the United States occurred because of

that country's attempt to eliminate North Vietnamese bases in Laos in order to disrupt supply lines on the Trường Sơn Trail (known to Americans as the Hồ Chí Minh Trail).

In 1968, the North Vietnamese Army launched a multi-division attack against the Royal Lao Army. The attack resulted in the army largely demobilizing and leaving the conflict to irregular forces raised by the United States and Thailand. In 1975, the communist Pathet Lao, backed by the Soviet Union and the North Vietnamese Army (justified by the communist ideology of "proletarian internationalism"), overthrew the royalist government, forcing King Savang Vatthana to abdicate on December 2, 1975. He later died in captivity.

After taking control of the country, Pathet Lao's government renamed the country as the "Lao People's Democratic Republic" and signed agreements giving Vietnam the right to station military forces and to appoint advisors to assist in overseeing the country. Laos was ordered in the late 1970s by Vietnam to end relations with the People's Republic of China which cut the country off from trade with any country but Vietnam. Control by Vietnam and socialization were slowly replaced by a relaxation of economic restrictions in the 1980s and admission into ASEAN in 1997. Nonetheless, Vietnam still wields political and economic influence in Laos.

In 1995, after a twenty-year embargo, the United States established Normal Trade Relations with Laos.

## **Government**

The only legal political party is the Lao People's Revolutionary Party (LPRP). The head of state is the President, elected by parliament for a five-year term. The head of government is the Prime Minister, appointed by the president with parliamentary approval. Government policies are determined by the Party through the all-powerful eleven-

member Politburo and the 55-member Central Committee. Important government decisions are vetted by the Council of Ministers.

Laos adopted a new constitution in 1991. The following year, elections were held for a new 85-seat National Assembly with members elected by secret ballot to five-year terms. This unicameral parliament, expanded in the 1997 elections to 99 members, approves all new laws, although the executive branch retains authority to issue binding decrees. The most recent elections took place on 30 April 2006 when 175 candidates in sixteen electoral areas competed for 115 seats.

Remnants of a Hmong group allied with the United States during the Vietnam War have been in armed conflict with the communist regime since 1975. With surrenders reported in the international media, this conflict appears to be on the wane. Most Hmong are integrated into or at least at peace with the existing government, with some Hmong occupying high-ranking positions in the state system.

## **UXO and Landmines in Laos**

Note: This is a very brief discussion of the UXO (UneXploded Ordnance) and landmine situation in Laos. Much more information can be found at <http://www.nra.gov.la/>

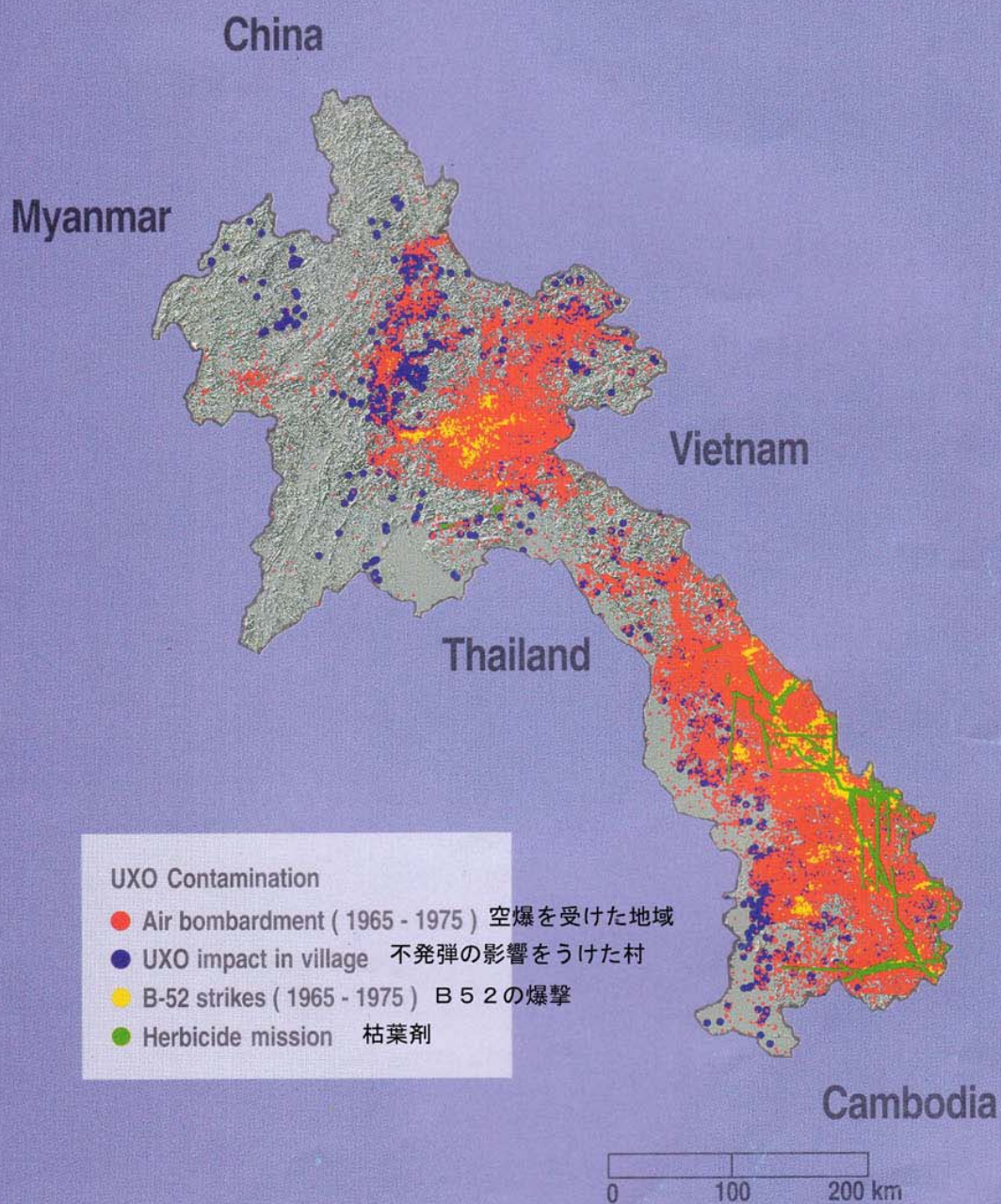
Lao PDR is easily the world's most heavily UXO-contaminated nation. During the war of 1963-1975, extensive aerial bombing and ground battles led to more than 2 million tons of ordnance being dropped on the country, with up to 30 percent not detonating on impact. Bombing records and results from the Socio-Economic Impact Survey carried out by Handicap International Belgium (HIB) in 1996 indicate that over 87,000 square

kilometers of land could be contaminated. Linkages between the UXO/mine action programme and the government's National Growth and Poverty Eradication Strategy (NGPES) are formally established in priority setting and in the tasking of resources. The NGPES has determined that 72 of the total 142 districts in the country are considered as "very poor" (47) or "poor" (25). The map of the UXO contaminated areas shows an extremely high level of coincidence with those poor districts and it is indisputable that the presence of UXO had a detrimental impact on the poverty reduction efforts implemented by development agencies as well as on local initiatives to improve villagers' livelihood.

Beside the direct implications for the victims, the presence of UXO prevents access to agriculture land, disturbs traditional land use pattern and causes an increased pressure on natural environment. Any kind of development programme taking place in the UXO affected areas (road building, school construction or development of tourism) will definitely be exposed to risks from UXO. The lack of safe access to agricultural land is causing chronic food insecurity to many people living in UXO contaminated districts. This is complicated by the difficulty in reaching remote areas due to the absence of communication infrastructure and the mountainous terrain.



# MAP OF UXO IMPACT IN LAO PDR





## **POTENTIAL FOR JOINT PROJECTS/PROGRAMS**

SVA is well established in Laos as a provider of educational and reading resources. Over the years SVA has built schools, established the school cluster concept, provided teacher training, provided school supplies, built permanent children and adult libraries as well as a library in wheels and traveling book boxes.

Now in its 15<sup>th</sup> year in Laos, SVA has secured vital links with the Lao Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Information and Culture, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Laos is one of the most difficult countries in which to establish an NGO. Perhaps due to its history as a colony, there is a certain xenophobia that prevails within the government. Whatever the reason(s), Laos tends to be very restrictive when dealing with NGO's. For that reason, it would be very beneficial for MiVAC to work in Laos with and through an established entity such as SVA. Likewise it would be beneficial for SVA to partner with a group such as MiVAC which can provide skills in project management, construction, fundraising, and UXO and landmine clearance.

SVA submits three year plans to the Lao government and reviews and renews these plans every three years. Given SVA's successful history of meetings the goals of its plans, its three year plans are renewed and approved with little difficulty.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Let it be clearly stated that rather than establish itself as a separate NGO in Laos, I firmly believe it would be much more practical for MiVAC to partner with SVA. The path to gaining NGO status in Laos is long, arduous, and uncertain. SVA is in-country, established, and working on programs/projects and in locations that meet MiVAC's criteria of being landmine and conflict affected communities. Further, funds can be specified for specific projects such that virtually all funds raised go directly to the project, not to administrative costs. It is also possible to fund all or part of a project and to provide opportunities for volunteer workers.

### **EDUCATION FIRST**

With SVA firmly established and recognized as an NGO in Laos supporting education, there are various types of projects and programs to support.

#### **Schools**

School building projects are undertaken annually by SVA Laos. One of the areas where schools are currently under construction is Saravan province. Located in the southern part of Laos bordering Viet Nam and Thailand, Saravan is the third most UXO contaminated province in Laos. All eight districts in Saravan have some UXO contamination, with five districts being considered as severely affected. All prospective school locations must go through the process of being cleared for UXO/Landmines prior to construction. As noted previously, the cost to build a primary school with five grades is US\$34,000.00. Educational clusters are being developed in multiple districts in Saravan province. School construction would also provide volunteer opportunities.

#### **Training**

Training is an ongoing process:

- School cluster administration
- Primary school teachers
- Pupils' Parents Associations

Funds could be raised for specific training in targeted areas

## **Supplies**

Funds are always needed for picture books, story books, text books, and general school supplies.

## **READING PROMOTION ACTIVITIES**

SVA provides support for a wide range of reading programs which could be the recipient of specifically targeted funds.

- Reading Rooms
- Book Boxes
- Mobile Library Van
- Printing of Books
- Purchasing Books

## **UXO AND LANDMINE CLEARANCE**

This situation is a rather foggy picture that may be clearing up. For a number of years clearance activities were largely managed and controlled by UXA Lao. Much of the work regarding the extent and mapping of the UXO situation, as well as administrative structure and funding activities, was carried out by UXO Lao.

The organizational structure changed in 2004 – 2005. The Government of Lao officially created the National Regulatory Authority (NRA) for the UXO sector in Lao PDR by the Prime Minister's Decree on 17 March 2004. The NRA is a public civilian institution of the Government of Lao PDR with representatives of all line ministries concerned and/or affected by UXO. The NRA is

responsible for the coordination, regulation and overseeing of all UXO/Mine Action activities in Lao PDR. The Government of Lao PDR also developed and adopted a National Strategic Plan for the UXO Sector, “The Safe Path Forward”, for the period 2003-2013. All clearance activities are now coordinated by the Lao government through the NRA. The following organizations work with and through the NRA:

- UXO Lao
- Fondation Suisse de Déminage (FSD)
- Mine Advisory Group (MAG)
- Handicap International
- Phoenix Clearance Limited (PCL)
- Minesearch
- Minetech

My recommendation for MiVAC involvement in UXO and Landmine clearance activities in Laos is as follows:

1. Determine the type of involvement MiVAC can and would like to offer in support of clearance activities.
2. Assemble a detailed list of resources that MiVAC can provide or call on for these activities. This would include names of people and organizations that can work in clearance activities including experience, background, capabilities, etc.
3. Establish a relationship with one of the NRA’s UXO partner organizations listed above. Work with and through the partner(s) while determining if MiVAC could and should be a partner on its own.

If the MiVAC board chooses to select this path and needs a volunteer to work on this path, I would be happy to volunteer.

## **SUMMARY/CONCLUSION**

Shanti Volunteer Association of Japan and Mine Victims and Clearance Trust of Australia differ in size, age, origin, home country and in numerous other ways. The two organizations and their people are similar in one very important way: a shared desire to help others in conflict affected areas improve their lives. SVA has been working in Laos for fifteen years with a focus on providing educational opportunities for children and reading opportunities for people of all ages. MiVAC has successfully completed projects in Cambodia and Laos and has a wealth of resources available for projects in Laos as well as elsewhere.

The Lao People's Democratic Republic has the distinction of being the most heavily and comprehensively bombed country in the world, per head of population. Laos' experience as an independent country is fairly short, having been a European colony for much of its existence. Most of the population is agrarian. UXO and landmines make an already difficult life even more so. Although there are many NGO's registered in Laos, becoming and remaining an NGO operating in Laos is not easy.

With shared goals and complementary resources, SVA and MiVAC could form a mutually beneficial alliance in Laos, one that would serve the people of Laos well. Ongoing projects in school construction, training, and reading opportunities are prospective opportunities for joint activities. It has been recommended in this report that MiVAC join with SVA in support of school construction and education in Saravan province.

It is also recommended that MiVAC investigate working with organizations currently established in Laos providing UXO and mine clearance operations. Eventually MiVAC could look to become a partner of the Lao National Regulatory Authority, the agency coordinating UXO and landmine clearance operations in Laos.