

SUPPORT FOR COMMUNITIES THAT BECAME VICTIMS OF BOMBINGS IN LAOS PHASE 1 (2001-2003) AND PHASE 2 (2004-2007)

Since 2001, François-Xavier-Garneau College has offered support to communities in Xieng Khouang province of northern Laos that became victims of bombings. The first project was completed in 2003 and the second lasted until the end of 2007.

Why were these projects needed?

Between 1963 and 1973, Laos, officially a neutral state during the Vietnam conflict, was in fact the scene of what has been called the “Secret War”. Two million tonnes of bombs were dropped on the country over a period of nine years. In 2006, the people of Laos were still suffering from the after-effects of the war and the country’s development was in serious jeopardy because of the alarmingly high number of landmines and bombs littering the country. A survey carried out in 42 districts found that more than 35% of the population had been victims of the devastating effects of mines and all kinds of unexploded bombs.

The war in Vietnam ended over 30 years ago. Yet still today in Xieng Khouang province, fifty people a year on average are killed or injured by unexploded bombs. Feelings of insecurity are rampant; landmines are causing untold damage among the civilian population and preventing people’s active participation in the social and economic life of their towns and villages.

Two projects offering support to communities that became victims of bombs and landmines

The projects corresponded to the *Canadian Landmine Fund* goal of contributing to an overall improvement in the situation of victims and their communities. The



first project helped improve the health and community integration of victims in 17 villages in Xieng Khouang province. The purpose of the second project, extended into a further 22 Xieng Khouang villages, was to increase the critical mass of people able to actively control their own development, and to develop the synergy needed for this to happen.

The project was designed to achieve three kinds of results:

- 1) an assessment of the circumstances of new recipients of assistance to ensure that actions carried out met their needs;
- 2) the provision of physical, social and economic rehabilitation to handicapped citizens – regardless of whether or not they were landmine/UXO (*unexploded ordnance*) victims – and their communities;
- 3) the consolidation of the CBR (Community-based rehabilitation) program set up in Xieng Khouang province and the development of an increased awareness of the program at the national level.



Results obtained during the first phase (2001-2003)

- We worked in three of the 45 districts in Xieng Khouang province, some of the poorest districts in Laos.
- We developed a participatory approach that enabled us, after a survey of 212 handicapped citizens, to jointly assess physical, social and economic rehabilitation needs with these people and their families.
- We used the survey to create a data base on landmine victims and people with handicaps that can now be used for multidisciplinary follow-up on care services to be provided to them.
- We have provided medical care and physiotherapy services to 298 people with handicaps.
- Men and women have been able to benefit equally from the services.
- We have contributed to the development of local expertise among community health and development agents, village chiefs, people with handicaps and the general population, at local and national levels.
- People were trained in project management for Community-based rehabilitation (CBR), in physiotherapy, in the use of local materials to make prostheses, in the administration of micro-credit, etc.
- A micro-credit fund helped 688 families (with or without handicapped members) to develop an economically productive activity and improve their economic situation.
- The participation of handicapped people in the social and economic life of their communities has increased noticeably, and they have now become full members of those communities.



The second phase of the project began in April 2004, with financial support from the Canadian International Development Agency's *Landmines Action Fund*. In addition to the seventeen villages covered in the initial phase, twenty-two more villages have now benefitted from the community rehabilitation services provided under the project. Furthermore, 1 300 people with handicaps have become economically and socially active members of their communities and over 20 000 people in all have been able to get assistance through the micro-credit fund. As we look back on the project, we are also proud to be able to say that provincial authorities in Xieng Khouang province today have the skills they need to manage community-based rehabilitation programmes and introduce them to new villages.



Sabaydi !