



# WORLD WITHOUT MINES

PROJECT: LAOS



Photo: UXO Lao

UXO Lao, the partner organisation of World Without Mines, holding a risk awareness event in a Laotian village.

## 12 YEARS IN LAOS: WHAT ARE THE RESULTS?

**No other country in the world has been hit by as many cluster bombs as Laos. Since 2008, we have been supporting the country through clearance work and risk education. Katrin Stauffer examined the impact of this long-term engagement for us on site.**

*Ms Stauffer, ten years ago, you worked in Laos as an explosive ordnance disposal specialist. You have just returned there again. How was it?*

Wonderful! It was as if I was meeting old friends again. Many amazing memories of my first stay in Laos came flooding back.

*How has Laos changed?*

The capital city Vientiane certainly has money now and it shows too. In the countryside, however, it's as if time has

stopped still. The only difference is in the rice fields, where the oxen are gradually being replaced by small tractors. I was also happy not to see any more malnourished children in the province of Khammouane. New schools have also been built in many places.

*As an explosive ordnance disposal specialist, you also work for large organisations such as the UN. In comparison, can small organisations like World Without Mines*



Photo: Tuan Phan Duc

The independent mine expert Katrin Stauffer examined the long-term impact of the work of World Without Mines in Laos.



Katrin Stauffer in discussion with an employee of UXO Lao.

### About Katrin Stauffer

Katrin Stauffer managed her own advertising agency before deciding, just before her 30<sup>th</sup> birthday, to train as an explosive ordnance disposal specialist with the Swiss army. After ten years in the field, she founded the company RISKey GmbH and has since worked as an independent advisor in the area of humanitarian mine clearance.

In 2019, she carried out a 10-year evaluation for World Without Mines in Laos. The aim was both to review the progress of clearance work through quality controls, and to examine the impact of World Without Mines' support and to highlight future needs.

*even have any sort of an impact in mine-afflicted regions?*

Absolutely. Smaller organisations are less complicated and more flexible and, as such, are often able to provide aid more quickly. They also fill the gaps where large organisations don't want to invest any more. For example, World Without Mines is currently the only organisation which carries out risk awareness work in Khammouane. World Without Mines is also the only organisation in Laos which regularly conducts evaluations and critically analyses its own work and the developments in the country. This generates a lot of respect for World Without Mines.

*What has changed for the people in Khammouane as a result of mine clearance?*

The people there go to work on their fields every day in fear, and the fear for their children is even worse. By clearing the mines, we are able to take this horrible underlying feeling away. To be able to live without fear is a basic human right.

*Have accidents also become rarer?*

Yes, but they have not been able to be avoided completely. Accidents often lead to financial ruin for the victim's entire family. That's why risk education is so important.

*Has the approach to clearance in Laos changed?*

In the past, clearance of cluster munition was carried out where people or authorities requested it, but today it is performed in places where there is the most contamination. This increases efficiency in terms of the number of objects detected. Another positive development is that national authorities are becoming increasingly influential. This means that the work can be better coordinated across the entire country. A separate development goal has been created for clearance, as it has been recognised as a tool for sustainable development. This recognition will hopefully help to generate further funding – especially for the extremely important risk-awareness campaigns and for victim support.

Risk education: school children and village communities are informed about the proper way of dealing with explosive objects.



Mine clearance: non-exploded cluster munition is excavated and professionally detonated.



Photos: UXO Lao

### What work does World Without Mines do in Laos

World Without Mines has been working to clear cluster munitions and raise awareness among the population in the severely afflicted province of Khammouane since 2008. Our partner organisation is UXO Lao, the largest national organisation for humanitarian mine action. Thanks to World Without Mines, over 710 hectares of land and almost 12,000 munition objects have been cleared, and 140,000 people have been made aware of the risks.



Photo: UXO Lao

Mae Thep has overcome more than one stroke of fate in her long life.

## „OTHERWISE, I’LL HAVE TO THINK OF SOMETHING ELSE”

After cluster munitions from the Vietnam War have been cleared, fields can be cultivated once again. But success also requires ingenuity – as the example of a Laotian farmer shows.

1.9 hectares – that’s the amount of land that Mae Thep (74) owns in the village of Thakachan. For years, she feared using her land because she had repeatedly seen unexploded ordnances when working in the field. In 2015, deminers funded by World Without Mines dug up a total of 89 objects from her field – much more than Mae Thep had expected.

Today, she owns a small herd of cows and uses the land as a grazing area. By selling the calves, she is able to earn a living for herself and her family.

But the clearance alone wasn’t enough to guarantee her economic success. Ensuring that the land could provide for her family also required Mae Thep to develop a lot of creativity and entrepreneurship.

At first, Mae Thep started growing rice, but the land proved to be unsuitable for this. She therefore decided to plant pineapples. This led to good yields – until one

night, when her pigs destroyed the plantation and devoured all the plants.

Mae Thep couldn’t afford a fence. So, what to do now? For a short while, she considered cultivating cassava, a root vegetable which pigs aren’t interested in. But then, all the pigs died of a virus. This led Mae Thep to take a courageous step and she decided to invest her money into buying her first two cows.

Today she is very happy about this decision. The cows are easy to tend and their calves generate a good amount of money. Mae Thep is delighted that she made the right decision and that her family is cared for. But what would happen if something went wrong with the cows? „Then I would have to think of something else!”



Photo: UXO Lao

Cows can now graze on Mae Thep’s land thanks to the work of our demining experts.

**Please help people like Mae Thep by making a donation.**

**Thank you!**

### Legacy of War

Giles Duley is the founder and CEO of the NGO Legacy of War Foundation and fights for the rights of refugees and people left with disabilities as a result of conflicts. In 2019, he won the international media prize from Amnesty International for photojournalism. [www.legacyofwar.com](http://www.legacyofwar.com)



Photo: Stella Pictures

## „EACH OF US CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE”

**Photographer Giles Duley lost both legs and his left arm in a landmine explosion. A year later, he returned to visit war-torn people in order to tell their stories.**

Giles Duley worked as a successful fashion and music photographer for renowned luxury magazines. After ten years, he had grown tired of this industry and began to take photos in conflict regions. „I wanted to use my camera to be an advocate for people who otherwise might not be heard.”

While Giles was accompanying a US patrol in Afghanistan in 2011, he stepped on an improvised explosive device and lost both legs and his left arm. He only just survived. As he came to terms with his situation, he said to himself: „I still have one hand, I still have my eyesight – no matter what happens, I can stay a photographer.” Giles fought to get back out there and live his life and returned to continue his work just one year after the accident.

In 2015, he started the „Legacy of War”

project, which documents the long-term impacts of conflicts on individuals and communities. „Can we say that wars are over when people are still dying and life is still affected decades after peace treaties have been signed?” Giles asks.

When Giles meets people, he treats them with a great deal of empathy and respect. The things he has experienced and overcome bring him closer to the people he meets and this is reflected in his photos.

Today, Giles is happy with his life and his work and he would like to encourage others to get involved in the same way: „Each and every one of us creates effects and ripples with our actions that we may never see. If I can inspire just one person to commit to change as well, I’ve done my job.”

### IMPRESSUM

Circulation 20,000, published twice a year  
Text Gabriela Fuchs, Thurid Gjedrem  
Concept Oliver Gemperle GmbH, Zurich  
Printer: Druckerei Albisrieden, Zurich  
Paper Claro Silk, FSC

Foundation World Without Mines  
Badenerstrasse 16 | 8004 Zurich  
+41 44 241 72 30  
info@wom.ch | www.wom.ch  
Account for donations 87-415116-3



WELT OHNE MINEN  
WORLD WITHOUT MINES  
MONDE SANS MINES