Bounchoy could not forget the day when he and his brother was digging for insects in the field and his brother’s shovel hit a “bombie”. The brother got the brunt of the explosion which killed him instantly and Bounchoy was seriously injured in the throat and lost his left foot.

Bounchoy was immediately taken to provincial hospital of Phonsavan and got the first emergency treatment. Due to serious injuries, he was brought to several hospitals and finally he received adequate treatment in the Thai town of Khon Khaen, 150 kilometers away from Vientiane, Laos.

However, back home in Phonsavan, he had difficulties to breathe, complications came up and he had to return to Khon Khaen several times.

Though Bounchoy can now sustain his life, his voice will never be the same again. And for him and the whole family, the loss of his brother will always remain a dark shadow in their life.

Bounchoy is not an isolated case. Still today, 120 Laotians become victim of a UXO (Unexploded Ordnance) accident every year and 35 die from their injuries. For tens of thousands of the rural population in the affected provinces, the UXO threat remains an ever present fear during their daily work in the rice fields.

Over four million bombs with a total weight of over 2 million tons have been dropped over Laos from 1964 to 1973. Among these four million bombs were 610,300 cluster bombs, containing 260 million “bombies”. Over 30 percent failed to explode and 25 percent of all villages in Laos are still affected by UXO’s.
Since 2006, Switzerland has contributed 4.9 Million Swiss Francs to the Lao National UXO Programme in a partnership with the National Regulatory Authority (NRA) and the UXO National Clearance Operator (UXO Lao). The contribution, lasting till end of 2009, is in line with the overall development goal of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), targeting poverty reduction through better governance and natural resources management.

In Laos, agriculture remains of high importance and over 600,000 households depend on agriculture for a living, including 500,000 for whom it is the sole source of subsistence. More safe agricultural surface will be needed in the future especially when the population is growing.

The first clearance priority is to make more land available for agricultural development and this is why SDC decided in 2006 to contribute to land clearing operations of the UXO. Thanks to this support, particularly the purchase of better performing equipment, the UXO Lao was able to render its operations more efficiently. In the year 2006 and 2007, 4,500 hectares of land have been cleared, compared to the 7,000 hectares in the ten previous years. This figure shows the considerable increase of efficiency of the clearing operations.

SDC’s funding is part of the efforts to clear all high priority agricultural land by 2013. With the progress achieved over the past two years, this task now appears possible already by 2011.

While it was important to increase the pace of clearing agricultural land from the UXO contamination, SDC saw the urgency to have a well-organised and structured sector that is coordinated by a government institution. SDC therefore helped to create in 2006 the National Regulatory Authority.

The role of the NRA is to coordinate and regulate the whole UXO sector. It also provides the UXO sector leadership and to develop a UXO sector strategy that fits into wider government strategies.

The NRA is now developing Lao ownership of the programme, which is of paramount importance to make the programme sustainable over time. Now, all clearing agencies operating in the country report to the NRA who keeps the overview, sets priorities and assures that the UXO clearing operations are in line with the national development strategy.

With its contribution to the NRA, the SDC has played a pioneer role. Two years ago, there was little donors’ interest for the NRA and the donors’ focus was on clearance. Now more and more donors are realising the importance of the NRA and are providing funds.

SDC, after providing a strong support in establishing the NRA, is looking forward with strong interest to see results of the mid-term evaluation. Before deciding on a support going beyond 2009, the SDC would like to see a stronger financial participation from Lao government in the NRA and also from the private clearing sector that profits from the NRA activities.
Livestock raising takes poor farmers out of poverty

“My family has one sao [360 square meters] of rice field and it is not enough for us to earn our living,” said Ms. Nguyen Thi Xoan, a farmer from Yen Lap District, Phu Tho Province. “In the past, we raised cows but it was not successful because the grassland in our commune is limited.”

“For a long time, we wanted to raise pigs as they are suitable for our local economic conditions and the initial investments in terms of capital and labour are not so high,” Xoan recalled. “However, we couldn’t afford to buy the breeding pigs since we didn’t know where to buy and how to select the good ones.”

“As the Poverty Alleviation through Livestock Development (PALD) project came to our district in early 2007, I registered to buy a breeding pig and last year it gave births to 11 gilts,” Xoan smiled. “We sold these gilts after several months and got almost VND8million. The net income generated from pig raising was almost VND6million.”

Xoan’s family is one of some 1,400 households who have benefited from PALD, a project funded by SDC which aims to reduce poverty and to improve the rural economy through livestock development in northern uplands of Vietnam. The project has been implementing by a French Non Governmental Organisation, Agronomes and Veterinaires Sans Frontieres (AVSF).

“Farmers have been provided with small loans to buy pigs and given with knowledge to raise pigs properly. In the past, the demand for livestock raising was low due to the lack of quality breeding animals. But the situation has now changed thanks to the project’s support,” said Mr. Nguyen Van Hoi, Chairman of Ngoc Dong Commune.

According to Hoi, the project has directly touched the farmers and has brought about positive economic impacts on the local communities by creating employment and increasing farmers’ incomes. It has also contributed to strengthening the community spirit through joint gatherings.

The PALD project has taken place in nine communes in four upland districts of three Northern provinces of Phu Tho, Yen Bai and Lao Cai where are the home of some ethnic minorities. In these areas, since farmers have little cultivated land, livestock becomes the main source of income generation.

With the goal of poverty reduction, PALD targets to increase farmer’s incomes through the adoption of improved pig and poultry production methods and technologies, and to improve better access to livestock-related services.

The project has introduced a highly productive breeding pig, Mong Cai sow, to farmers and provided technical training on building piggeries, feeding, artificial insemination, and caring for pregnant pigs. The commune paravet systems were also set up to support farmers in pig raising activities.

To facilitate the sharing and learning among farmers, 57 -
Farmers’ Interest Groups (FIG) were setup in the last two years. Farmers, who participate in these groups, can participate in the training and coaching sessions and share experiences on pig and chicken raising activities. It is planned that there will be some 87 FIGs by end of 2008.

The project has drew a high participation rate by local people, especially women. Most of FIG participants are women, of which 66% are ethnic minorities. The joint meetings have brought a lot benefits to women in terms of enriching their knowledge and giving them an economic power.

According to a project’s survey, farmers’ income from livestock raising increases to VND600,000 on the average as compared to VND200,000 before the project started.

In addition to increasing farmer’s incomes through the adoption of improved production methods and technologies, the project has improved the quality and efficiency of livestock planning and service provision at district and commune levels.

The District Livestock Development Planning documents for all four districts were approved and are implementing. Over 100 paravets, who were trained by the project, have been involved in the district vaccination programmes and their contributions are recognised by local communities. Public veterinarians have also been engaged in supporting FIGs' members.

Most importantly, the project has contributed to improved policy formulation through the dissemination of practical field-based methods, learning and experiences at district, province and national level. Son La Provincial Department of Agriculture and Rural Development and District Department of Animal Health have planned to replicate the project’s ways of doing in Thuan Chau District. A development project focusing on agriculture has also considered to learn PALD’s methodology and to apply it in their project’s areas.

“The project has taken the right approaches when supporting farmers to raise pigs and chicken raising with small credits,” Hoang My Lan, SDC Senior Programme Officer said while being asked about the difference approaches which the project has adopted. “Adaptation to the local context, especially from low land to upland and from importing breed to locally produced breed, has shown notable effects.”

“The project clearly addresses the needs of poor farmers with high potential for poverty alleviation and it can create a positive spiral lifting effect that helps many families out of poverty,” Lan added.

Lan, however, pointed out a challenge for the project, which is the lack of initial involvement of the local Banks for Social Policies (BSP) and their willingness to support poor farmers with small credits.

“BSP are more interested in providing large credits to better-off farmers to reduce their transaction costs and possible risks,” Lan said.

“The project itself cannot afford to reach many poor people without BSP’s support because of financial limitations,” revealed Lan. “We have been in touch with them to discuss on credit modalities and if everything goes on well, the impact of the project will be multiplied and a lot of poor people will benefit from it.”
Milestones in the last six months

**JANUARY**

- The **Consultation Workshop on Domestic Violence Prevention**, which was supported by Switzerland, was held in mid-January 2008 by Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism in Do Son Town, Hai Phong City, Vietnam. This is the first time such an event has been organised to establish coordination mechanisms among government bodies, mass organisations and non governmental organisations in the battle against domestic violence.

- The **Mid-term Review of the “Support to the National Legal Aid System in Vietnam”** project took place in six provinces and one of the main findings of the review is Provincial Legal Aid Centres are operational, providing services for the disadvantaged including the poor, ethnic minorities, women, juveniles, HIV carriers. Services more accessible to the target groups through increasingly decentralised service delivery in district branches, mobile clinics, legal aid clubs, specialised legal aid centre.

**FEBRUARY**

- The agreement on the **Alignment Phase of the Laos Extension for Agriculture Project** (LEAP) was signed in Vientiane on 13 February 2008. LEAP approach has so far reached over 200,000 farmers across the country and helped increase livelihoods of poor households and communities.

- An **inception workshop to disseminate the work of the Support for Better Service Delivery (SBSD) programme** held in Vientiane. Building up on successes and lessons from the previous governance reform initiative created by Governance and Public Administration Reform projects, SBSD programme assisted by SDC revealed to have a good start.

- A **Bank Restructuring Workshop** was held in Hanoi and replicated in Ho Chi Minh City at the end of February to discuss about equitization, a central issue for Vietnam’s financial sector reform. The workshop was the 4th in a series of events jointly organised by the State Secretariat for Economic Affairs (SECO) and SBV, providing a forum for the SBV as a market regulator to have a policy discussion with bank executives, government officials and academics on topics relevant for the development of Vietnamese banking sector.

**MARCH**

- The agreement on the **second phase of the Poverty Alleviation in Rural Upland Area (PARUA) project**, which aims to sustainably increase livelihood security among poor ethnic groups in remote upland areas, was signed between SDC and Care International in Lao PDR in early March 2008. Some 12,000 ethnic minority in Sayabouli province are expected to enjoy better quality of lives thanks to this four-year project.

- The Department of Forest and WWF Greater Mekong signed on for a three-year joint undertaking of truly responsible forestry on 12 March 2008. A major component of the project, which is to offer timber related companies in the region opportunities for certification from the Forest Stewardship Council, is funded by Switzerland through SECO. This signing marked the beginning of the “**Linking Trade Demand and Sustainable Forest Management**” project, as a follow-up of the Sustainable Forest Management project.

- Switzerland, through SECO, financed the **Train-the-Trainers of Banking Universities project** to improve the technical skills subjects of two universities owned and operated by the State Bank of Vietnam: the Banking Academy in Hanoi and the Banking University in Ho Chi Minh City. The project responds to the requirements for training designed at instructors, based on practical concepts and tools currently used by global banks.
**APRIL**

- **Final workshop of the Capacity Building for Environmental Science and Technology in Northern Vietnam (ESTNV) project** was conducted in Hanoi, Vietnam. After 10 years of implementation, ESTNV project funded by SDC has yielded remarkable achievements in contributing to environmentally sustainable development in Vietnam.

- **Empowerment workshop** organised in Hanoi. Five possible line actions were defined to ensure that empowerment, as a transversal theme of the Mekong Region Cooperation Strategy, will be dealt with appropriately. These actions include making empowerment explicit and developing it in the Mekong regional programme, strengthening empowerment at project level, and monitoring and reporting on empowerment as process and outcome.

**MAY**

- **Mid-term Review of the Poverty Alleviation Through Livestock Development in the Northern Uplands of Vietnam project** took place in two Northern provinces of Phu Tho and Yen Bai. One of the main findings is the project clearly addresses the needs of poor farmers with high potential for poverty alleviation and it can create a positive spiral lifting effect that helps many families out of poverty. Strong women participation and empowerment is also accredited.

- As part of the preparation for the Annual Conference on Development and Cooperation 2008 in Switzerland, a group of 10 journalists visited Swiss-funded projects implemented in Vietnam and Laos, talked to beneficiaries to get a better understanding of how their lives have changed positively with support from Switzerland. The Conference is considered an opportunity to improve the understanding and perception of the Swiss public about development and cooperation between Switzerland and countries in the South.

**JUNE**

- **Annual Programme Mid-term Review** was held in Vientiane, Laos with participation of SDC’s partners. Requirements for steering of the cooperation strategy and how to link project monitoring with the strategy were discussed during the review. Financial monitoring and programme development were also high on the agenda. Participants discussed on changes in the context that could influence Annual Programme 2008 implementation as well.

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