IMSMA and Its Use in Nicaragua, country profile

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About the Organization

The Organization of American States (OAS) is the oldest regional organization in the world, whose principle idea of creating an association of states in the Western Hemisphere dates to the 19th Century. The Charter of the Organization, adopted in Bogotá, Colombia in 1948, declares that the promotion and consolidation of representative democracy is one of its main principles. The actions that the OAS has undertaken to promote democracy in the Hemisphere have varied since its foundation, but the main thrust of those actions has remained focused on democratic ideals. Through the years, the OAS has become more actively involved in its support for democratic governance in the Americas.

In 1999, the Unit for the Promotion of Democracy was established within the OAS General Secretariat to provide guidance and support to member states to strengthen their democratic institutions and processes. The Unit’s mandate is to provide effective and immediate response to OAS member states requesting advice or assistance in modernizing or strengthening their political institutions and democratic processes. One of the priority program areas of the Unit is Comprehensive Action against Anti-personnel Mines. Since 1995, the Unit has been responsible for the general coordination and supervision of OAS mine action efforts, with the technical support of the Inter-American Defense Board.

AICMA is constantly seeking new technologies to increase the speed, efficiency and safety of clearance operations. With the financial support of the United States, a mine detection dog component has been used within the program since 1999 to enhance area reduction and quality control systems. AICMA has been operating in Nicaragua since 1997 to assist with the physical and psychological rehabilitation of mine victims. More than 500 people have been helped to return to their communities with the help of the country’s rehabilitation centers, as well as lodging, nourishment, prosthesis, therapy and medications.

As the scope of mine action activities expands, partnerships with other international and nongovernmental organizations are taken on greater importance. Significant cooperation with the United Nations has been maintained on several projects, including the establishment of a mine action database, which was funded by a grant from the U.N. Mine Action Service. AICMA is also developing a joint mine risk education and landmine accident prevention project with UNICEF that will target children in Nicaragua. Important efforts are also being made to coordinate AICMA’s victim assistance component with other international programs in conjunction with the Pan American Health Organization, the Center for International Rehabilitation, the Central American Bank for Economic Integration and the Inter-American Council for Integral Development. Other significant collaboration continues with important mine action nongovernmental organizations, including the Canadian Landmine Foundation, International Campaign to Ban Landmines, Landmine Monitor, Landmine Survivors’ Network, Mine Action Group, Survey Action Center and Las Damas de las Americas.

The countries that benefit from this program have made a significant commitment to sustain their national efforts to eliminate the mine problem, but their efforts require continued international support to succeed. With sustained and enthusiastic assistance from the donor community, the goal of making the Western Hemisphere a mine-free zone as soon as possible is both tangible and achievable. Demining in Central America should be completed by the end of 2001 in Honduras, 2002 in Costa Rica, 2004 in Nicaragua and 2005 in Guatemala.

IMSMA in Nicaragua

IMSMA and Its Use in Nicaragua

The Information Management System for Mine Action (IMSMA) was created to coordinate and manage information pertaining to land mine activity. The system was designed to be the source for establishing international standards on mine-related information in order to assist humanitarian demining efforts worldwide.

IMSMA Information Management System for Mine Action

by Nicole Kreger, MAIC

Background

Recognizing the need for a centralized system for Mine-related Information, the Geneva International Center for Humanitarian Demining (GICHED) created the Information Management System for Mine Action (IMSMA) in April 1998, assisted by the Center for Security Studies and Conflict Research (PfIK) at Zurich’s Institute of Technology (ETH). The United Nations (UN) approved the IMSMA Field Module in January 1999, adopting it as the standard for gathering demining information on an international level.

The primary objective of the GICHED is the promotion of international cooperation in the field of mine action, something it hopes to improve by implementing the IMSMA. The system strengthens the UN’s role—and in particular the role of the UN Mine Action Service (UNMAS)—as the primary international reference for the collection and dissemination of information and decision making related to landmines. It is used as a reference by mine action organizations and individuals as a method for setting the standards for their projects.

The system offers its users a number of benefits, including:

-Expediting a mine action center startup with the Field Module "Starter Kit"
-Collecting and evaluating information from many sources
-Improving worldwide resource allocation
-Simplifying the exchange and expansion of knowledge

*Creating international standards for demining activity
*Providing general information as well as technical support
*Enhancing overviews and management of projects
*Aiding proper monitoring, planning and implementation of programs
*Increasing options for personnel distribution
*Improving the safety of deminers and the general public
*Reducing costs for Mine Action Centers (the GICHED provides the international mine action community with the Field Module for free.)

The System

The system is constructed as a network through which organizations can provide input and assess mine-related data. It was developed based on previously existing mine action programs and the necessary support tools. The IMSMA consists of two autonomous but integrated information management systems, namely the Field Module and the Headquarter Module. The two modules process information on different levels.

The Field Module is based on standard software such as Microsoft Access and AccessView and combines a relational database with a geographical information system (GIS). Organizations enter data into their Field
Module, which manages the information locally. The Field Module can produce a number of reports useful to those on the mine action front. Such reports include:

- Mines/UXO located and destroyed
- Areas cleared
- Hours spent per clearance and in total
- Accident and incident statistics
- Digital picture displays and printouts of mine-infected areas
- Printed mine and UXO hazard maps

Additionally, the data is transmitted to the Headquarter Module, where it is compiled with other information and analyzed by the system. The Headquarter Module functions as a decision support system, managing information from all the Field Modules and creating a database for Field Module users. The Headquarter Module itself is comprised of two modules, an information processing module and an information dissemination module, as well as other tools, such as the Database of Mine Action Investments. Through this system, results from the Headquarter Module can be accessed by individuals in the field, organizations, government agencies and others to aid in future mine activity.

The system is multilingual and can be customized to suit the user. It handles four basic kinds of information: technical, operational, strategic and political. Topics processed by the system include dangerous areas, three levels of information-gathering surveys, minefields, clearances, incidents/accidents required—user level and administrative level. The user-level training teaches users the basic operation of the system. Administrative-level training involves learning about the structure and design of the system as well as how to create reports, install applications, back up information and program language access. IMSMA users are also trained in using the ArcView software, which includes learning how to manage the system's digitalized maps.

IMSMA aids Nicaragua in carrying out regional efforts and reporting information to the government. PADCA National Coordinator Carlos Orozco explains that it is also beneficial in helping to "keep a flow of information with the National Commission of Demining."

Currently, efforts in Nicaragua are focused on completing the database. PADCA has run into a few glitches with the system, particularly in using the maps, but these should be ironed out very soon. Even in the short time since the module was installed, users have been able to accomplish a number of tasks, including:

- Working with the army to complete Level 3 surveys
- Monitoring the progress of ongoing demining tasks
- Keeping track of accidents/incidents

used to identify victims and provide assistance
- Mapping out locations of victims and minefields using the ArcView-GIS software
- Using stored data to create new reports on specific mine action needs

Also, the system has already been deemed the official source for mine action information in Nicaragua. In addition to the internal functions of IMSMA, this system also aids in focusing other mine-related projects for its users. In Nicaragua, it will help mine action organizations to plan a campaign before implementing it. Also, PADCA is currently working on a national guide to mine awareness, and plans to use IMSMA to provide assistance in making and using this guide.

**Conclusion**

What does the future hold for Nicaragua now that the IMSMA has been implemented? Orozco hopes the system will help in "implement[ing] more efficient strategies and policies for the affected population" and "prioritiz[ing] objectives to The National Commission for Demining." More specifically, he hopes to use IMSMA to:

- Give demining organizations a better idea of the scope of the problem
- Keep updated records on mine victims
- Improve rehabilitation processes
- Monitor demining activities in order to develop more efficient strategies and policies to assist the affected population
- Help prioritize the objectives of The National Plan of Demining
- Measure the socio-economic impact of mines on the country as accurately as possible

With these objectives in mind, PADCA hopes IMSMA will help in getting a better handle on the mine situation in Nicaragua and bring peace—and peace of mind—to the country's people.

**Contact Information**

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