MRE and Community Leader Involvement in Risk-prone Colombia

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OAS–AICMA and Mine-risk Education In Nicaragua

From 1979 to 1990, a violent internal conflict ravaged Nicaragua, leaving the country contaminated with landmines and unexploded ordnance. To help minimize the number of victims within the country, the Organization of American States’ mine-action program, Acción Integral contra las Minas Antipersonal, has been working with mine-risk-education campaigns to help educate and inform communities about landmines and UXO.

The Organization of American States’ Acción Integral contra las Minas Antipersonal program implements mine-risk-education campaigns as an immediate response to the large number of mine-related accidents happening in high-risk communities in Nicaragua, particularly in the northern region of the country. The program focuses on farmers that work near minefields. The campaign’s main objectives are promoting safe behavior and providing education on how to handle the landmine problem before and after demining activities have taken place.

Special graphic displays urging people to walk safely have been created with the assistance of the National Denominating Commission. Additional educational tools, such as posters, notebooks, rulers, backpacks and bags, are printed and distributed among students, community leaders, and the at-risk population. It is important to notice that these tools are printed with images and language adapted for the targeted community, using input from the local leaders before producing large quantities. The ongoing MRE campaigns focus on communities living within a five-kilometer radius of minefields identified by the Nicaraguan Army and local farmers.

Since this topic is so important for the affected communities, OAS–AICMA designed the campaign’s goal for educators to visit each school and interact with the population, provide information to children in their classrooms and, in coordination with local leaders, provide the information to communities around schools. These new volunteer educators help sustain awareness after program educators have visited the communities.

Following the conflict in Nicaragua during the 1980s, there were many unmarked landmine fields in the country, as well as areas littered with unexploded ordnance. The MRE campaigns have played an important role in compiling information about the location of landmines and UXO. MRE managers tell the locals to report landmines and UXO to the authorities so the Nicaraguan Army can remove and destroy the threat. Identification and registration of landmines require medical attention and/or prosthetic replacements, so it is also very important. These services are financed by AICMA under its landmine-victim-assistance program.

The mine-awareness campaigns have been deemed successful, thanks to the involvement of the program educators, community leaders and students who continue to participate in the “For a Nicaragua Free of Landmines” campaign.

MRE and Community Leader Involvement In Risk-prone Colombia

The presence of unexploded ordnance and anti-personnel mines in regions of Colombia has displaced families and stirred up fear throughout the population. The Organization of American States’ Acción Integral contra las Minas Antipersonal program is bringing hope to these suffering communities by providing mine-risk education to its leaders and through creative awareness programs in its school systems.

The beginning of clearance operations gives hope to displaced families of safely returning to their homes and recovering their way of life. MRE advocates tell families what to do when finding explosive artifacts on countryside footpaths, near their homes or around their plots or schools.

In each municipality with ongoing MRE programs, the student population is meaningfully included. AICMA advocates bring their campaign messages to schools through playful activities that increase interest and awareness among children and adolescents, resulting in improvements that are incorporated into future programs throughout the different communities. The campaign also uses games,
Mine-risk Education in Ecuador: A Person-to-person Approach

“Explosive Mines Kill” is the message that the Organization of American States’ Acción Integral contra las Minas Antipersonal program wants to get across to communities living in mined areas in Ecuador. By taking an interpersonal approach to mine-risk education, the AICMA campaign advocates hope to raise awareness about the risks associated with anti-personnel mines and unexploded ordnance.

Methods

With the objective of reaching segmented populations exposed to the dangers of anti-personnel mines and unexploded ordnance, the OAS MRE campaigns in Ecuador employ a variety of dissemination methods. People are key transmitters in the remote region where mountains give way to the Amazon. The campaigns cover populations living near suspected mined areas or where the Ecuadorian Army conducts humanitarian clearance operations. The AICMA campaign in Ecuador takes a very personal approach in reaching communities at the local level.

The AICMA campaign advocates hope to raise awareness about the risks associated with anti-personnel mines and unexploded ordnance. The Organization of American States’ Acción Integral contra las Minas Antipersonal program conducts annual workshops and training sessions for natural leaders from the affected communities. These leaders then become message carriers and advocates who promote safe landmine handling behaviors within their societies.

The OAS–AICMA program facilitators establish face-to-face contact at the community level. People are key transmitters in the remote region where mountains give way to the Amazon. AICMA staff in Ecuador, along with trained message advocates, spread their campaign community by community and house to house. Women have become essential to message communication because children are usually not doing house visits. In this region of Ecuador, 55.2 percent are women. Where appropriate, safety messages are communicated between children, by children to adults and by women to all affected by the landmine risk—but they are always person to person.

School supplies facilitate message communication among children. AICMA personnel distribute pencils, pens, notebooks, rulers, backpacks, chalkboards, maps and flags. Preventive education is conducted in each school in the region involving the students and their teachers. When educating adults, using T-shirts, caps, water bottles and water dispensers to convey the message is very helpful. Additionally, educational sessions are supplemented by audio-visual materials, and stickers, pamphlets and posters are distributed. All this material carries the message that “Explosive Mines Kill” in both Spanish and Shuar, the native language. Educational sessions for adults take place in community settings with most adults and village elders attending.

The AICMA program also has two telephone lines dedicated to MREs, so the local population has direct communication with program staff from the nearest town. The locals are able to provide information about possible mined areas and can communicate the need to conduct preventive education. They can also report the occurrence of landmine incidents.

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