July 2009

Impact Study on the Effects of Demining Operations in Nicaragua

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Organization of American States

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The study shows both the negative effects of anti-personnel mines and the consequences they had on the community, and the positive effects that demining had in terms of security, trust and economic benefits. The study showed that the benefits derived from demining activities, emphasizing the contribution toward poverty reduction by:

- Describing the human and social benefits resulting from demining
- Detailing the utilization of cleared areas, using the perceptions of affected communities as the main source of information
- Identifying the results and benefits from mine-risk education campaigns
- Reporting women’s perceptions of the benefits from demining operations
- Supporting ways to utilize and optimize cleared areas

Methodology

The report shows the demining results and measures the impact caused by landmines, as well as the effects among inhabitants of affected communities. The main source of information used in the report was the OAS survey among mine-affected communities, the questionnaire developed for institutions and the EMISSA database. INEC was in charge of survey implementation and data processing. The target population of the survey was comprised of all existing homes in the communities where demining operations were implemented with the support of the OAS demining program. The survey took place in rural areas, among 10,101 dwellings in 157 communities with 44,849 inhabitants. Sampling was based on the communities located within one kilometer of mined areas where demining operations took place. Two sampling units were defined: Primary sampling units were defined as communities selected by random sampling; secondary sampling units were defined as dwellings also selected randomly.

To reach the dwellings in the selected communities and carry out the surveys of the target population, community maps from the INEC were used. The calculated sample size was 420 dwellings, where an equal number of persons 16 years old or older would be interviewed using the survey questionnaire. In all, the sample covered 21 communities among nine municipal districts in Nueva Segovia, Chontales, and both northern and southern autonomous Atlantic regions, known as RAAN and RIAAS. Three types of questionnaires were prepared for data collection related to the demining effects on the population:

- Home questionnaire
- Community leaders questionnaire
- Affected institutions questionnaire

The government of Sweden asked the OAS to perform an impact study in 2006. In June of that year, the planning phase of the study, which focused on communities cleared of landmines, began with the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, a relevant actor due to its financial and technical assistance provided by the international community to Nicaragua, and as a key to evaluating the results of their investment. The study also allows us to understand, from the perspective of affected communities, the perception of demining operations and related activities carried out in dangerous areas close to surveyed homes, and to gain insights into the communities’ thinking about the potential for development in the areas.

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Published by JMU Scholarly Commons, 2009

Orozco: Impact Study on the Effects of Demining Operations in Nicaragua

Cover of the ‘Study on the Impact of Demining in Nicaragua’.

Home page of the OAS project ‘Study on the Impact of Demining in Nicaragua’.
The national level, where the demining impact resulted in the improvement of education, the health system and transportation. Affected communities noted a sense of safety and confidence in their immediate environment as the most positive aspects of the demining. After demining operations, people living in the affected communities felt themselves safe from the threat of mines and as a consequence could move about their community with confidence that they would not step on a mine. Given that the main goal of humanitarian demining is to return cleared areas to productive use, the goal was reached.

There is a need to direct initiatives toward land rehabilitation since once land has been released. Likewise, it is necessary to develop financing and technical cooperation proposals to assist formerly affected communities improve the use of released land. National and local authorities must monitor cleared land in order to optimize its use. The population highly values demining operations. Community leaders, utility companies and government entities involved in infrastructure development also share this assessment. The population also found the main economic benefit resulting from demining operations in the agricultural sector.

Mine-risk education campaigns have considerable coverage since the surveyed population knows about the dangers posed by landmines and ongoing demining operations to reduce those dangers. Campaign results were decidedly positive since they reduced dangerous behaviors. The study clearly shows that landmine-affected communities were seriously affected at several levels both physically and psychologically and reclassified as impact free, but it also shows the benefits from the humanitarian-demining efforts pursued by the population and their leaders.

The study also provides important information for national authorities to develop policies that would benefit population living near dangerous areas, and to pursue full socioeconomic reintegration of these areas. See Endnotes, Page 112

Research on Mine-detecting Bees in Croatia

Over the last two years, Zagreb University Agronomy Professor Nikola Kadić and his team have been training bees to detect landmines. Under Kadić’s direction, the bees are being trained for landmine detection in Croatia, which is still plagued with landmines from its civil war in the early 1990s. While mines are costly and time-consuming to find and remove, the bees can provide a quick and inexpensive approach to landmine removal. Known for their keen sense of smell, the bees are trained to associate the smell of explosives with food, and search for civilian areas where the smell is released.

Carlos José Orozco serves as the Regional Coordinator of the U.S. Department of State’s Humanitarian Mine-action program in Central America. PM/WRA is actively involved in mine action since 1994, when it assumed the post of National Mine action Coordinator in Nicaragua. He has expanded the mine-action program to include a holistic victim-assistance vision that enables survivors to reignite their communities in an economically sustainable way.

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PM/WRA has also partnered with Colombian nongovernmental organizations, including the Centro Integral de la Rehabilitación de Colombia, to target assistance to rural civilian victims through medical and support centers. PM/WRA’s association with CBREC through its “Leads of Hope” rural outreach program has helped hundreds of victims receive prostheses, wheelchairs and other assistive devices. Additionally, PM/WRA recently added to its mine-risk education portfolio by providing the maintenance support for this newest team.

Plan Colombia, 6 which targets drug trafficking, has left a firm imprint on Colombia, the militant group FARC is largely considered to be on the run. The remnants of the 40-year-old insurgent stronghold are currently subverting through loosely segregated cells without an existing political agenda. FARC survivors by using an economic lifestyle of drug and hostage enterprises with a limited life span.

The Bureau of Political-Military Affairs’ Office of Weapons Removal and Abatement in the U.S. Department of State initiated a humanitarian mine-action program in Colombia in September 2005. Since that time, PM/WRA has successfully assisted Colombia’s HMA program by providing the equipment, training and maintenance for two emergency response teams—in partnership with the Organization of American States’ Action Integral center las Minas Antipersonal program—for operational humanitarian clearance. In January 2009, the government of Colombia launched a third ERT. The United States expects to provide the maintenance support for this newest team.

PM/WRA has also partnered with Colombian nongovernmental organizations, including the Centro Integral de la Rehabilitación de Colombia, to target assistance to rural civilian victims through medical and support centers. PM/WRA’s association with CBREC through its “Leads of Hope” rural outreach program has helped hundreds of victims receive prostheses, wheelchairs and other assistive devices. Additionally, PM/WRA recently added to its mine-risk education portfolio by providing the maintenance support for this newest team.

More must be done, however, by international donors to prevent injuries and illicit traffic and support communities. The current stands at a significant political and social turning point in its history; in recent years has been ranked No. 1 globally for new landmine casualties and No. 2 for internally displaced persons, stemming from the terrorist actions of Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia. Various reports indicate that are between three and four million displaced individuals within Colombia’s borders. Landmine relief is just one small piece of international support needed to combat terrorism in Colombia.

Insurgency Diminishing

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Since President Álvaro Uribe took office, his new government is making strong and steady progress in the battle against terrorism. For instance: 1. Armed FARC forces have been cut in half. 2. Attrition of FARC forces now surpasses losses attributed to military action. 3. International condemnation from former FARC allies is rising. 4. The recent removal (voluntarily and involuntarily) of key FARC leaders indicates a dissolution of centralized control, evident by the successful rescue of American hostages in July 2008. All these factors increasingly point to the conclusion that the policy begun at the turn of the millennium of suppressing the overall base and stronghold of terrorist operations is paying dividends.

Recently, there have been large-scale public demonstrations protesting FARC, including rallies and street demonstrations against FARC policies. FARC is no longer viewed as a political entity trying to liberate