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José Ramón Zepeda
Organization of American States

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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 minesfields. The campaign’s main objectives are promoting safe behavior and providing education on how to handle the landmine problem before and after dismantling activities have taken place.

Special graphic displays urging people to walk safely have been created with the assistance of the National Demining 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 campaigns for educators to visit each house and interact with the population, provide information about the location of landmines and unexploded ordnance. The MRE campaign implements mine-risk-education campaigns to help educate and inform communities about landmines and UXO.

The immediate results of these MRE campaigns were the reduction of landmine accidents among the at-risk population and the continued involvement of the at-risk population as volunteer educators themselves after undergoing training in local workshops. 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 unexploded landmine fields in the country, as well as areas littered with unexploded ordnance. The MRE campaign has played an important role in compiling information about the location of landmines and UXO. MRE messages 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 and UXO are 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. AICMA team interview conducts house-to-house mine-risk education in Jaibarque, Nuevo Segundo, department, Nicaragua. Photo of the organization of American States.

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.

In July 2008, the Organization of American States’ Acción Integral contra las Minas Antipersonal program began a mine-risk education campaign in Colombia. Activities and campaigns are coordinated with Colombia’s Programa Presidencial de Acción Integral contra las Minas Antipersonal (PPAICMA, Presidential Program for Mine Action). The first OAS-AICMA campaigns were designed to complement emergency clearance operations covering the population in the municipality of San Francisco in Antioquia and displaced families around the locality of Bajo Granada, Bolivar department.

An important step in beginning MRE activities was selecting community leaders in each of the target zones who could carry out prevention activities and promote the AICMA campaigns. Respected leaders from these communities, who are familiar with their community’s needs and environment, can better educate at-risk families. After completing the required OAS–AICMA training, these leaders become mine-risk-education advocates.

These AICMA advocates visit the country-side around mined areas under emergency clearance to educate the population on prevention measures while learning from the people’s experiences. The inhabitants tell of their past, hopelessness and anxiety caused by armed conflict in their region, which has forced them to abandon their plots, homes, and in certain cases, their entire communities.

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 houses or around their plots or schools.

In each municipality with ongoing MRE programs, the student population is significantly increased. AICMA advocates bring their campaign messages to schools using playful activities that increase interest and creativity among children and adolescents, resulting in improvements that are incorporated into future programs throughout the different communities. The campaign also uses games, exercises, and other activities aimed at promoting greater awareness among students.