



## Lessons Learned<sup>1</sup> from the Project

### “Strengthening of Mine/ERW Action and Risk Reduction for Indigenous Populations in the South West of Colombia”

#### Executive Summary

Mine Risk Education (MRE) activities are processes that aim at generating a change in knowledge, attitudes, and behaviour among participating populations. In the same spirit, this document gathers together the principal lessons learned from an MRE project that was conducted within a particular cultural context.

Implemented by Geneva Call in collaboration with six indigenous organizations in three departments of Colombia (Cauca, Nariño, and Putumayo), the project sought to adopt a differential ethnic approach.

The indigenous organizations that participated in the project are: the Association of Traditional Indigenous Authorities of North Cauca (*Asociación de Cabildos Indígenas del Norte del Cauca – ACIN*), *La Escuela Laureano Inampué Cuatin de derecho propio de los Pastos* (School of Native Law of the Pastos People); Indigenous Unity of the Awa People (*Unidad Indígena del Pueblo Awa – UNIPA*); Traditional Indigenous Authorities of Ricaurte (*Cabildos Awa de Ricaurte – CAMAWARI*); Association of Traditional Indigenous Authorities of the Siona people (*Asociación de Cabildos indígenas del pueblo Siona*) and the Traditional Authorities of the Yunguillo Reserve of the Inga people (*Cabildo Mayor del Resguardo Inga de Yunguillo*). Consequently, the present document reflects above all – but not exclusively – the perspectives of the persons from the indigenous organizations who contributed to the project.

This document proposes to share project lessons that may be useful for regionally and nationally based Colombian and international organizations conducting mine action or other activities for the benefit of the self-protection of the indigenous peoples. It is hoped that these lessons may help in the planning and implementation of such processes both for such organizations, and for the indigenous organizations themselves. The document will be shared within fora such as the National Coordination Committee on MRE and the Departmental Mine Action Committees.

Highlights of the document’s main conclusions include:

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<sup>1</sup> Translated and summarized from the original Spanish document: Carlos Alberto Rincón O. in Spanish: *Lecciones Aprendidas: Implementación de un enfoque diferencial en la educación en el riesgo de minas antipersonal con población indígena en el sur occidente colombiano. Pueblos Siona, Inga, Awa, Pasto y Nasa*. Llamamiento de Ginebra y Agencia Suiza para el Desarrollo y la Cooperación, Ginebra/Popayán: 2011.

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### **1. *'Ethnic Approach'***

The value of applying an ethnic approach in a multicultural setting is undeniable. Yet, what emerges from the work described with the six indigenous organizations is that there is no single one-size-fits-all 'ethnic approach,' since every people has its own mental, spiritual and organizational structure. The project was firmly designed around the requirement that special efforts would be needed to respond appropriately to the specific (ethnic) needs of the participants and partner organizations in the work of risk reduction. As a result, participants reported that the project was indeed able to respond to real problems within the indigenous territories. Adopting a differential approach that suited the particularities of each indigenous people, the project dealt with these problems in a way that was relevant in each case.

### **2. *Collective Protection***

Within the indigenous organizations themselves, the project was managed in the context of 'collective protection' and 'collective responsibility' in relation to threats from the armed conflict. The project made every effort to respect the world view, autonomy, and above all the perception of reality held by the participating communities. It also considered the concept of mine and explosive remnants of war (ERW) contamination of the land as something that upsets or disturbs the balance, harmony and culture of the land and hinders Mother Earth from fully exercising her vital functions. This particular perception of landmine and ERW contamination led to the need for the participation of the spiritual authorities of a number of the peoples. They in turn carried out their traditional roles and found the necessary space to accompany the project activities in different ways, according to the logic of 'collective self-protection'.

### **3. *Integration of the Theme into the Life Plans of the Organizations***

MRE is a key topic for many of the indigenous peoples in Colombia, who are affected by the serious consequences of the armed conflict, including mine and ERW contamination. In this case the MRE issue is so important to the participating organizations that they chose to integrate it into the framework of the 'life plans' of the respective indigenous peoples.

### **4. *Dialogue with the Indigenous Authorities and Organizations***

A key aspect of the project was the dialogue with the indigenous authorities and organizations. Indeed the project was designed collectively based on a need expressed by the indigenous organizations themselves. On the one hand, the dialogue contributed to strengthening the organizations and their structures, and generated a feeling of responsibility through inclusion in 'life plans.' On the other, it created trust and confidence in the populations, who saw the project in terms of possible benefit. It should be noted, however, that the time required for communication and consultations within the different structures of the indigenous peoples sometimes slowed down the project implementation process. Some participants noted that still more effort may be needed to achieve greater support from the indigenous authorities.

### ***5. Adapting the Language Used***

In the process of designing the project and defining its central ideas there was much discussion about how to harmonize the conventional MRE language and definitions so that they would be compatible with the worldview of some of the peoples. For example, for some it was important that the land itself should be considered as a victim of mine and ERW contamination.

### ***6. Adapting the Forms of Communications***

The communicative experiences of the indigenous peoples, such as the use of role-plays and the adaptation of traditional games, worked in favour of the methodology of the project. As a result, the input from the indigenous MRE trainers was a key factor in redesign of the pedagogical approach. On a different note, the use of native languages was also a part of the pedagogical process, during needs assessment, in the design of materials, and in the actual MRE delivery.

### ***7. Adapting the Materials***

The initial thought that it was not necessary to design specific materials was re-evaluated as it became clear that there was indeed a need for materials that would follow the logic and thought patterns of the communities, and which would be recognisable in both the protection messages and the images used. The material that resulted came from a collective effort by MRE facilitators, training participants, indigenous authorities and organizations, and with contributions from external experts. Initially, the MRE facilitators saw this as extra effort that they did not want to engage with, but the process ended up as an excellent learning experience both for the facilitators personally and for the project.

### ***8. The Role of the Indigenous Focal Points***

In the implementation phase of the project the role of the focal points within the indigenous organizations comes out as especially important. Acting from within the communities, these individuals coordinated the MRE dissemination activities in the field, and played the role of communication channel between Geneva Call (through the facilitators) and the indigenous organizations, and between these two and the MRE trainers. Future projects should be more attentive to the key role to be played by these focal points.

### ***9. The Role of the Indigenous Organizations in Security Management***

The dynamics of the armed conflict mean that the affected communities are forced to adopt a variety of approaches to collective work according to the circumstances. It was therefore crucial that the specific intervention strategy of the project in a given area would be decided by the indigenous organizations themselves. So at times it was deemed best to conduct the MRE dissemination activities in public spaces, for example within the context of an assembly or a community meeting. At other times, the decision was to use a low-visibility strategy of house visits, in order not to put the community at risk. In a similar manner, to avoid creating the impression of an 'external' intervention, the indigenous organizations decided that during the dissemination the MRE trainers would wear t-shirts with the logos only of their own organizations.

### ***10. Looking ahead***

In conclusion, participants insist on the need to continue and follow up this initiative. The process achieved is expected outcomes, but the armed conflict in Colombia continues to affect the civilian population with differentiated effects according to culture and ethnicity. An additional point that argues for a continuation of the exercise is that during armed conflict the strengthening of the communities helps them to defend their territory and to resist negative dynamics. Therefore, this document is also a testimony to some of the efforts being made to strengthen affected communities, efforts that unfortunately remain necessary.

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