



IMPROVING OPERATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS IN COLOMBIA THROUGH COMMUNITY-INFORMED APPROACHES

Colombia, GICHD workshop: Youth Peace and Security in Mine Action, 10-14 November 2025 © Campaña Colombiana Contra Minas (CCCM)

A COMMUNITY-CENTRED OPERATIONAL MODEL

In Colombia, mine action is closely linked to broader recovery and peacebuilding efforts following decades of conflict. Operations are designed to support the most affected territories, including areas where insecurity and limited access continue to pose operational challenges, in a timely and effective manner, reflecting both humanitarian and development priorities.¹

Mine action activities—including land release, explosive ordnance risk education (EORE), and victim assistance—are implemented through community-informed approaches that emphasize community engagement, partnerships with territorial entities and local authorities, and the inclusion of diverse groups, including survivor associations and community organizations.² These approaches contribute not only to safety, but also to wider outcomes such as social cohesion, local ownership, and recovery.³

This reflects a growing recognition that different groups experience explosive ordnance (EO) contamination and risk in distinct ways, requiring differentiated and context-specific approaches.⁴ This is particularly critical in Colombia, where contamination continues to affect hundreds of thousands of people in rural areas, and where civilians face heightened vulnerability due to everyday exposure and limited access to services.⁵

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IN INDIGENOUS AND AFRO-COLOMBIAN TERRITORIES

Many EO-contaminated areas are located within indigenous and Afro-Colombian territories, where land holds cultural and spiritual significance and is governed through collective systems tied to territorial autonomy and community protection.⁶ As a result, mine action operations must engage with traditional authorities and follow established consultation processes.⁷

While community liaison is a standard component of mine action, operations in Colombia often require additional engagement with collective governance structures, ethnic authorities, and culturally specific consultation processes that go beyond conventional approaches.⁸ Notably, Colombia has also adapted national mine action standards for areas affected by insecurity, establishing rapid-response approaches to risk reduction and prioritizing support to ethnic minority communities.⁹

In some indigenous communities, operational access is preceded by traditional or spiritual ceremonies intended to promote protection, trust, and acceptance of demining teams.¹⁰ Engagement is often conducted through community councils, elders, or representative authorities rather than individual landowners, which influences how survey, prioritization, and land release activities are carried out.¹¹

Collective land rights in indigenous and Afro-Colombian territories are formally recognized under Colombian legal and constitutional frameworks.¹² As a result, consultation and validation processes are often conducted through recognized representative structures—such as community councils, *cabildos*, or traditional authorities—rather than through individual landowners alone.¹³

At the same time, inclusive engagement still requires additional outreach to groups whose perspectives may be less visible in formal community governance structures, including women, youth, displaced persons, and persons with disabilities.¹⁴ This is critical to ensure that their experiences of mobility, land access, displacement, and exposure to EO risks are reflected.

Because operational access and confidence in land release are closely linked to community trust and collective governance systems, failure to account for these dimensions can restrict access, reduce the completeness or reliability of data, and introduce operational delays.¹⁵

In Colombia, interaction with local authorities, ethnic leaders, and affected communities is essential to complement official records and improve understanding of contamination and humanitarian access in insecure or hard-to-reach areas.¹⁶

COMMUNITY-INFORMED PLANNING AND PRIORITIZATION

Operators in Colombia rely on sustained engagement with affected communities and local authorities to inform planning and prioritization. This includes:

- The use of community liaisons—trusted local leaders who facilitate communication, access, and confidence.
- Pre-intervention assessments that analyse community needs, vulnerabilities, and capacities.
- Collection of disaggregated data, including the perspectives of women, youth, indigenous and Afro-Colombian populations.
- Participatory prioritization processes through which communities contribute to decisions on resource allocation and sequencing of activities.

Together, these mechanisms ensure that mine action planning reflects local knowledge, patterns of land use, and how different people experience risk, leading to better mine action outcomes.¹⁷

Understanding how EO risk is experienced in practice is particularly important in rural and conflict-affected areas, where patterns of exposure, mobility, and reporting may be shaped by insecurity, limited state presence, and historical mistrust of formal institutions.¹⁸



GICHD's visit to Colombia, 2018 © GICHD

Engagement methods are adapted to ensure inclusion. For example, where women may not participate in public meetings, door-to-door outreach is used to capture their knowledge of contamination, movement patterns, and risk exposure. EORE and communication tools are also adapted to the context, including translation into indigenous languages and tailoring of materials to local cultural norms.¹⁹

OPERATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS OUTCOMES

By integrating community knowledge into planning and decision-making, operators in Colombia are better able to identify hazardous areas, prioritize tasks, and align mine action activities with local recovery priorities. Community-informed approaches also strengthen trust and cooperation between operators, local authorities, and affected communities,²⁰ particularly in areas where collective governance plays a central role in community decision-making.²¹

In indigenous and Afro-Colombian territories, sustained engagement with representative authorities and community structures can also facilitate operational access and improve confidence in land release processes.²² Significantly, in some areas, land release activities have also supported the safe return of displaced communities, restoration of ancestral lands, and broader reintegration and territorial recovery processes.²³

Similarly, peer-to-peer EORE—particularly involving survivors—has been shown to increase engagement and behavioural impact, in particular among young people.²⁴ By addressing how exposure to EO risk occurs in everyday life, these approaches strengthen awareness in schools, families, and communities and contribute to accident prevention.²⁵

These findings are consistent with broader evidence that inclusive and participatory practices improve the responsiveness, targeting, and overall effectiveness of mine action programmes.²⁶

KEY INSIGHTS & IMPLICATIONS

In Colombia, operational effectiveness in mine action depends on the ability to engage affected communities, navigate collective governance systems, and build confidence in mine action processes. This is not only a participatory approach, it is a core operational function that improves how risks are identified, prioritized, and addressed.

This has several important implications:

- ▶ Community-informed approaches improve the completeness and reliability of data, enabling more effective targeting and prioritization of land release and EORE activities.
- ▶ Inclusive engagement—across gender, age, and socio-cultural groups—strengthens operational access, builds trust, acceptance, and local ownership, expands information channels, and ensures that interventions reflect diverse patterns of risk exposure.
- ▶ Adapting tools and approaches (e.g. language, outreach methods, peer-to-peer engagement) enhances both the reach and impact of mine action activities.
- ▶ Embedding mine action within local systems—including through local partnerships and procurement—strengthens trust, facilitates access, and supports sustainability of operations.

ENDNOTES

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- 15 Mine Action Review (2022), "Clearing the Mines 2022 – Colombia," [Colombia Clearing the Mines 2022](#).
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