

COLOMBIA



ARTICLE 5 DEADLINE: 1 MARCH 2021
(NOT ON TRACK TO MEET DEADLINE)

PROGRAMME PERFORMANCE	2017	2016
Problem understood	3	5
Target date for completion of mine clearance	4	5
Targeted clearance	6	6
Efficient clearance	5	5
National funding of programme	7	7
Timely clearance	4	5
Land-release system in place	6	5
National mine action standards	8	7
Reporting on progress	5	6
Improving performance	7	7
PERFORMANCE SCORE: AVERAGE	5.5	5.8

PERFORMANCE COMMENTARY

Colombia's clearance output increased in 2017 as did demining capacity within the country, with Norwegian People's Aid (NPA), Humanity and Inclusion (HI) and the Campaña Colombiana Contra Minas (CCCM) all commencing humanitarian demining during the year. However, Colombia's mine action programme is still beset by bureaucratic obstacles, such as poor coordination and tasking, which are impeding efficient mine survey and clearance, and putting in jeopardy the peace dividend for mine action. Colombia introduced a number of new national mine action standards in 2017,

including for clearance, mechanical demining, mine detection dogs (MDDs) and technical survey, which should improve operational efficiency if implemented effectively. A number of operators experienced difficulties with the processes around monitoring and accreditation, which impeded their work. There are inconsistencies in the survey and clearance data that was being reported by the Dirección para la Acción Integral contra Minas Antipersonal - Descontamina Colombia and the operators in 2017, a reflection of ongoing problems in data management.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

- Colombia should conduct a baseline survey to elaborate a meaningful understanding of contamination and to accelerate significantly clearance of remaining mined areas in accordance with its obligations under Article 5 of the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention (APMBC).
- Colombia should ensure that data is recorded on the Information Management System for Mine Action (IMSMA) database according to International Mine Action Standards (IMAS) terminology rather than the "events" which are currently reported. The newly introduced "Glossary of Terms" should help with this. The authorities should also review the entries currently recorded as "events" in the database so that, as far as possible, they match actual anti-personnel mine contamination.
- Colombia should undertake a comprehensive review of mine action data to ensure that the systematic collection of data from operators as well as the information on new "events" is used to prioritise demining tasks and allocation of resources efficiently.
- Colombia needs to streamline procedures for quality management and apply them consistently to all operators to prevent unnecessary delays to demining operations.
- Colombia should support operators to fully use both non-technical and technical survey to more accurately identify and delineate areas of confirmed contamination, and cancel or reduce areas where evidence of mines is lacking.
- Colombia should report more accurately and consistently on land released through survey and clearance.
- Colombia should conduct a mid-term impact evaluation to assess whether the outcomes set in its strategic plan for 2016–21 are being met or whether the outcomes need revision.

CONTAMINATION

Colombia's mine problem is the result of decades of conflict with non-state armed groups (NSAGs). The precise extent of contamination remains highly uncertain, but as at October 2018 at least 28 of Colombia's 32 departments were suspected to have a mine threat.¹ As at August 2018, Colombia still lacked an accurate understanding of total contamination, which according to its strategic plan for 2016–21 was 51km².² This estimate is unreliable. It is based on a calculation that takes 15% of the number of IMSMA events from 1990 to 2009 and adds them to 24% of the number IMSMA events from 2010 to 2015, with a further 20% added for both periods. These percentages were calculated based on information from historic humanitarian demining operations. The figure it generates is then multiplied by

an estimated average confirmed hazardous area (CHA) of 5,000m², which generated the baseline contamination figure for the country.³ In its Article 7 report for 2017, Colombia reduced this estimate of contamination to 46km² based on the demining work that has been conducted.⁴

Colombia continues to report on "events" included in its database. From 1990 to 2001, the information about accidents and incidents due to anti-personnel mines, unexploded ordnance (UXO), and improvised explosive devices (IEDs) came from both governmental sources, specifically the Department of Administrative Security, and non-governmental sources, including unconfirmed media reports. Since 2002, a more systematic

registration of the effects of landmines, UXO and IEDs began. It was mandated by Article 13 of Law 759/02 that the Ministry of Defence must submit monthly reports of all the events related to anti-personnel mines that were known by their troops. Similarly, local authorities are duty-bound by Law 759/02 to report on any mine accidents or incidents. In addition, information was provided by relevant government departments and health services at a local level and at a national level by the Ministry of the Environment and Sustainable Development and the Ministry of Health among others.⁵ As at December 2017, 25,767 of these “events” had been registered in IMSMA across 530 municipalities.⁶ When an operator is assigned a task they are given a map of the area and information about the “events” that have been recorded in that area which they must then investigate.⁷ However, according to information provided during interviews with some of the operators these IMSMA events are notoriously unreliable, with operators reporting that often they do not correspond to the presence of either landmines or UXO.⁸ In Vista Hermosa in the Meta department, for example, of the 15 IMSMA events contained in the task allocation, 12 were cancelled by NPA but after conducting non-technical survey in the area, they also found contamination in areas where no IMSMA events had been reported.⁹ Sometimes the events are duplications (when a mine is reported and then cleared by the army, these “events” are duplicated rather than cancelling each other out), or incorrect coordinates are given, or the report of a mine or UXO is actually a hand grenade that has been confiscated by the army. According to Descontamina Colombia, the national mine action centre, IMSMA-recorded events of the military confiscating weapons were ended in 2017.¹⁰

Descontamina Colombia reported that, by the end of 2017, it had recorded 644 CHAs covering 2,045,425m² and a further 691 suspected hazardous areas (SHAs) covering 2,920,525m² across 79 municipalities.¹¹ Of these, 546 were in Antioquia, the department with the largest number of landmine victims.¹² In its Article 7 transparency report for 2017 Colombia reported that 606 suspected mined areas had been recorded between 1990 and 2017, a reduction from 647 at the end of the previous year, and 671 at the end of 2015.¹³

As at July 2018, Descontamina Colombia reported that anti-personnel mines had claimed 11,615 victims between 1990 and 31 July 2018.¹⁴ Of these, the department of Antioquia had the highest number (2,542), followed by Meta (1,136). Vista Hermosa municipality in the department of Meta is the municipality with the largest number of victims, at 368.¹⁵ Colombia reported 56 mine victims in 2017, of which 40 were civilians, a reduction from the 89 victims reported in 2016. As at June 2018, 73 victims had been reported, of which 47 were civilians, suggesting the number of victims is rising significantly.¹⁶

In January 2017, the United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS) had reported that incidents involving mines and UXO have been reported in 673 of Colombia's 1,122 municipalities since 1990.¹⁷ Based on the Descontamina Colombia analysis of incident trends, of those 673, 199 municipalities are considered to be highly impacted (type I), 291 moderately impacted (type II), and 183 suffer from low impact (type III).¹⁸

All of the landmines remaining in Colombia are said to have been laid by NSAGs and are essentially victim or command-operated, artisanal explosive devices. According to The HALO Trust, mined areas in Colombia are low-density, nuisance minefields that average 4,000m² in size.¹⁹ Although contamination levels are relatively low, each mined area can significantly impact rural communities across the country. As there was little, if any, mapping of mined areas by NSAGs and the intended victims were the military or para-military, local communities were often informed that certain areas were mined, though no specifics were given. This has led to a widespread attitude that mines are everywhere and local people are afraid to use vast areas of land for the fear of mines, despite there being little real evidence of their presence.²⁰

Mines of an improvised nature were planted in isolated rural areas by NSAG factions to protect strategic positions; often coca cultivations whose crops were used to fund operations. When the groups moved on, the mines were left behind, blocking access to roads, paths, schools, and other civilian infrastructure, preventing productive use of land.²¹ The impact of mine contamination is social, economic, and humanitarian, as the presence of mines divides and isolates rural communities, prevents agricultural land that is suspected of contamination being used, and reduces access to services such as schools and rural development projects.²²

As at September 2017, Colombia had more than 7 million internally displaced persons (IDPs), which amounts to almost 15% of the country's total population who have been displaced by the more than 50-year-long conflict.²³ There is a clear link between mine contamination and displacement, as displaced people cannot return to areas where there is a risk of landmines. The presence of mines acts as an obstacle to land restitution as well as to the return of IDPs because Colombian law states that victims of the conflict cannot knowingly be endangered. Demining and survey are therefore essential to allow the safe return of Colombia's vast displaced population, as well as to enable rural communities to recover from years of persecution and ensure the safety of local residents in the long term.²⁴

On 7 March 2015, negotiators for the Government of Colombia and the FARC announced that agreement had been reached by the two parties on demining.²⁵ According to a joint statement, the government and the FARC would select a number of pilot zones with the highest level of threat from anti-personnel mines, improvised explosive devices (IEDs), UXO, or other explosive remnants of war (ERW). Following signature in August 2015 of an agreement with the European Union for support to the Pilot Project on Humanitarian Demining, NPA was overseeing non-technical survey of SHAs and technical survey and clearance of CHAs.²⁶ This led to the clearance of two areas: the villages of El Orejón (municipality of Briceño, Department of Antioquia) and Santa Helena (municipality of Mesetas, Department of Meta). By December 2016, a total of 40,723m² had been cleared, eight contaminated areas had been identified, and 67 mines were destroyed.²⁷

On 7 August 2018, Iván Duque Márquez, winner of Colombia's presidential election, assumed office. President Duque, and his political mentor former president Uribe, have refused to recognize key pillars of the peace deal and have promised to "modify" it once in power. This fosters further uncertainty in a country whose transition to peace is under threat from groups struggling for power in the vacuum left behind by a demobilised FARC. This includes FARC dissidents, the National Liberation Army (ELN), and drug-trafficking groups, especially the largest among them, the Gaitán Self-Defence Forces. Most of the fight for control is concentrated in about one-quarter of the country's municipalities, just 5% of which are under state control. For humanitarian demining groups this impacts their ability to conduct survey and clearance.²⁸

Mine action operations will only be undertaken with the local community's agreement and in areas where mistrust of the state is high community members are often sceptical of the operator's intentions. In 2017–18, in the Vista Hermosa municipality, The HALO Trust and NPA have had their vehicles seized and burned while CCCM had their vehicle seized for a month as a warning that they were not welcome to conduct demining in certain areas.²⁹ Unfortunately, these are often areas with the highest suspected contamination. Humanitarian demining operators will not conduct demining in areas where they have not received agreement from the local community. In ELN strongholds, such as the coastal department of Chocó, it has been reported that actors are emplacing mines in order to protect their territory.³⁰

PROGRAMME MANAGEMENT

Established on 30 July 2002 under Law No. 759/2002, the National Interministerial Commission on Anti-personnel Mine Action (Comisión Intersectorial Nacional para la Acción contra Minas Antipersonal, CINAMAP) was the national mine action authority responsible for implementing the APMBBC, including developing a national plan and policy, and coordinating international assistance.³¹

The Presidential Programme for Comprehensive Mine Action (Programa Presidencial para la Acción Integral contra Minas Antipersonal, PAICMA) previously served as the technical secretary for CINAMAP, responsible for coordinating implementation of the 2009–2019 Integrated Mine Action Plan.³² In September 2014, however, Decree 1649 modified the structure of the Presidency's Administrative Department, creating the Directorate for Comprehensive Mine Action (Dirección para la Acción Integral contra minas Antipersonal, DAICMA) to replace PAICMA. DAICMA retained the same mandate and functions as PAICMA; the only change being that DAICMA was now supporting the Minister-Advisor for Post-Conflict, Human Rights, and Security as well as the Minister-Advisor's office in the strategic management of the national mine action programme. In April 2017, following the adoption of a Presidential Decree, DAICMA became Dirección para la Acción Integral contra Minas Antipersonal – Descontamina Colombia, and was ostensibly made Colombia's national mine action authority, with responsibility for formulating the strategic direction of mine action, coordinating and monitoring mine action at national and local level, applying technical guidance and regulating state and non-state operators, and elaborating and implementing national standards, though in practice it also serves as the national mine action centre.³³

In 2011, Decree 3750 created the Instancia Interinstitucional de Desminado Humanitario (IIDH – Interinstitutional Court of Humanitarian Demining) which is composed of a representative from the Ministry of National Defense, the General Inspectorate of the Military Forces, and Descontamina Colombia. It is responsible for recommending or suspending the certification of humanitarian demining organisations to the Ministry of National Defense and, determining and assigning demining tasks.³⁴

Descontamina Colombia's ability to coordinate has come under scrutiny, as it has been locking in operators to tasks before the extent of the challenge is known and without a clear appreciation of operators' future capacities. In the view of UNMAS, in Descontamina Colombia's push to assign tasks demonstrating the peace accord's new opportunities, operators often deployed into new areas which were disconnected from their existing areas of operation, without prior consideration of their capacity and efficient resource deployment.³⁵ Descontamina Colombia are willing to permit international demining operators to swap tasks between themselves but see this as an internal organisational decision rather than something that should happen at a national level, and in reality very few tasks have been swapped.³⁶ Under Article 6(8) of the APMBBC, states parties receiving international assistance are obligated to cooperate with a view to ensuring the full and prompt implementation of agreed assistance programmes.

Strategic Planning

Colombia's APMBBC Article 5 deadline extension request projected, improbably, that all mined areas would be released by 2020.³⁷ This will not occur. Colombia's 2011–13 operational plan was to address 6,000 dangerous and mined areas in 14 of 660 municipalities where the presence of mines is suspected, covering an estimated 15km².³⁸ Colombia did not attain that target either.

Colombia was due to submit an operational plan for 2014–20 at the Thirteenth Meeting of States Parties in December 2013, but did not do so. Colombia did present a demining “action plan” for 2014–16 at the Third APMB Review Conference in Maputo in July 2014.³⁹ The plan foresaw a first phase of mine action in 91 municipalities and steadily increasing national army demining capacity to 54 units, as well as the number of non-technical survey teams to 15 by 2016.⁴⁰ By 2016, two new national standards had been adopted, seven non-state operators and two state operators had been accredited, and 1,342 people had been accredited by the OAS to conduct humanitarian demining.⁴¹

Colombia developed a five-year strategic plan for 2016–21. The aim of which is to address anti-personnel mine contamination in 199 high-impact municipalities, 291 medium-impact municipalities, and 183 low-impact municipalities, covering a total estimated area of 51km².⁴² As at August 2018, the suspicion of mines has been removed in 270 municipalities,⁴³ though in only 99 of these was this achieved through actual survey or clearance. Moreover, anti-personnel mines were found in only 17 of the 99 municipalities. In around 160 of the contaminated municipalities, access for humanitarian demining organisations is constrained by the prevailing security situation and therefore they have yet to be assigned for demining.⁴⁴

Colombia prioritises its task allocation according to the IIDH and the Strategic Plan for Comprehensive Action against Antipersonnel Mines 2016–2021. The IIDH takes into account information provided by local bodies, the Early Warning System of the Ombudsman’s Office, and the General Command of the Military Forces, and Descontamina Colombia. In the strategic plan, municipalities have been categorised according to three typologies: type I comprise incidents involving anti-personnel mines or UXO registered on IMSMA since 2010; type II are incidents involving anti-personnel mines and UXO registered on IMSMA before 2010; and type III are IMSMA “events” without human impact.⁴⁵ Operators can only bid for tasks in type I areas while the armed forces have been assigned all type II and III areas, many of which it has been able to cancel and release through discussion with the local community and local security councils.⁴⁶

As at December 2017, Descontamina Colombia reported that 27km² had been allocated for humanitarian demining operations: half of the total contamination estimated in the strategic plan.⁴⁷ It further reported that, by July 2018, two departments and two hundred and sixty-four municipalities had been liberated of the suspicion of mines, while 192 municipalities currently have mine action operations. As a result, it claims that 6.94km² of area has been “liberated” and 6,007 items destroyed since operations began. In terms of capacity, 5,692 personnel and 24 MDDs have been accredited for demining; and there are 12 mine action operators, including both national and civil society capacity.⁴⁸

Legislation and Standards

Colombia has legislation mandating the establishment of the CINAMAP, PAICMA, DAICMA, and most recently Descontamina Colombia, as well as the IIDH which acts as a decision-making body. Decree 3750 of 2011 also called for the elaboration of National Standards for Humanitarian Demining and regulates the external monitoring of demining operations. Decree 3750 defines humanitarian demining activities as non-technical survey, technical survey, and clearance.⁴⁹ In July 2017, Decree 1195 was promulgated with a view to reducing the impact of demining on the environment. The main objective of the decree is to outline the mitigation and correction measures that must be applied by operators when undertaking demining in National Parks and other areas of ecological value. This is intended to reassure the environmental authorities that mine clearance can take place in these areas without causing unnecessary ecological damage.⁵⁰

Colombia now has 15 national mine action standards in place, including a glossary of mine action terms, up from just three when the 2016–21 strategic plan was launched.⁵¹ In 2017, nine new national mine action standards were adopted, which include standards on clearance, mechanical demining, MDDs, and explosive ordnance disposal (EOD).⁵² The national standard on technical survey was approved by Descontamina Colombia in December 2017.⁵³ The Swiss Foundation for Mine Action (FSD) and UNMAS have both been supporting Descontamina Colombia with the development and implementation of national standards.⁵⁴

In 2017, ten existing national standards were modified, some more than once. According to Descontamina Colombia, most of the amendments were at the request of the operators.⁵⁵ In the case of task assignment and clearance, the national standards were modified three times during the year. This has caused difficulties for both the operators and the Organization of American States (OAS), as each modification of the standard means that operators’ standing operating procedures (SOPs) must also be changed, which then need to be approved by OAS. The national standard on non-technical survey has had seven modifications.⁵⁶ Operators have raised this with Descontamina Colombia, who have agreed to suspend modifications to standards to allow operators to develop more efficient operations using the standards that have been elaborated.⁵⁷

Quality Management

The OAS serves as the body for accreditation and monitoring of humanitarian demining in Colombia. They have received some criticism for being too focused on compliance rather than on supporting the operators to run effective demining operations. This has manifested itself in non-critical conformities being determined by rigid application of national standards and/or SOPs, leading to delays in operations.⁵⁸

At the request of Descontamina Colombia, FSD has been seeking to build capacity in the OAS, including through revision of the non-conformity checklists and corresponding monitoring reports with the aim of improving processes in place by refocusing monitoring on quality assurance (QA), and quality control (QC), rather than on minor administrative non-conformities. As at August 2018, the new and simplified non-conformity checklist had been approved by Descontamina Colombia and the OAS but had not yet been implemented.⁵⁹ There have also been long waiting times after paperwork has been submitted, which has delayed operations. The HALO Trust reported that once a non-technical survey report has been submitted to the OAS there can be a significant delay before the report gets approved.⁶⁰ NPA waited 127 days for approval to use its mechanical assets, with MDD assets standing idle as a result, despite the dog teams having already been accredited.⁶¹

The OAS have also been accused of being too rigid in their processes which has hindered operators. For example, NPA reduced 5,278m² by technical survey in Loma Linda, Vista Hermosa, and although this was completed in February 2018, OAS have refused to approve the land release because the technical survey was not in the clearance plan, even though the clearance plan was written before the technical survey standard was approved.⁶² According to Descontamina Colombia, the technical survey standard was valid before the clearance plan was approved.⁶³ The OAS is also responsible for the accreditation and re-accreditation of MDDs. Re-accreditation takes place annually at a centre in Guatavita, which is an hour outside of Bogota in an area with a very cold climate. MDDs must travel from their operation base to the OAS centre and with time for acclimatisation the MDDs are away from operations for a month, although this is dependent on how long the MDDs take to be accredited.⁶⁴

As at August 2018, a new national standard in quality management was in the process of being implemented. This standard includes the implementation of confidence levels which will be ascribed to an operator and should improve efficiency. An operator with good confidence levels will be subject to less frequent visits from OAS, allowing them to focus on operators that need more support.⁶⁵

Each operator carries out their own internal quality control in accordance with the provisions in the Quality Management national standard and their organisational SOPs. From June 2016 to June 2018, Descontamina Colombia had a team of Quality Managers that provided technical assistance to the operators on issues such as accreditation of personnel and demining techniques, interpretation of and compliance with national standards, and conflicts between the OAS and the operators.⁶⁶

Information Management

Poor information management has been a feature of Colombia's mine action programme since its inception. While lack of access has undoubtedly played a role in this, efforts to verify and consolidate meaningful mine action data have proved inadequate. Government Decree 1649 of 2014 assigned Descontamina Colombia responsibility for maintaining the IMSMA database and to "compile, systematise, centralise, and update relevant information" to serve as a basis for programme planning.⁶⁷ This remains a central challenge for the programme.

In July 2016, NPA began supporting Descontamina Colombia on information management with the purpose of developing and improving their information management capacities. The specific objective of the project was to ensure Descontamina had the capacity to manage IMSMA and all related tools and the flow of information from stakeholders, in order to plan and prioritise mine action activities without relying on external support.⁶⁸ This programme came to an end in 2018 and, in March, FSD took over information management support from NPA. Descontamina Colombia in conjunction with FSD has been training the OAS to use IMSMA and states that the quality of the database is improving. In Colombia, IMSMA is now available online.⁶⁹

The "events" on the IMSMA database that form part of the prioritisation of demining are beset with errors, including duplications and inaccuracies. It has been suggested that Descontamina is not interested in cleaning up and improving the dataset, as the calculation for national baseline contamination is reliant on these figures. However, inaccurate data leads to inefficiencies at an operational level as operators waste time and resources investigating IMSMA events that do not correspond with actual contamination.⁷⁰

Operators

The Armed Forces former Humanitarian Demining Battalion (BIDES), now the Humanitarian Demining Brigade (Brigada de Desminado Humanitario (BRDH)), has been conducting humanitarian demining since 2005, when it began clearance of 35 military bases. It completed the clearance in 2010.⁷¹ As at June 2018, it had been assigned tasks in 214 municipalities across the departments of Antioquia, Boyacá, Caldas, Caquetá, Casanare, Cauca, Cesar, Chocó, Córdoba, Cundimarca, Guaviare, Huila, Magdalena, Meta, Nariño, Putumayo, Quindío, Risaralda, Santander, Tolima, and Valle del Cauca.⁷² As at October 2018, 4,450 personnel had been accredited as well as 18 MDDs and three mechanical assets.⁷³ As at September 2018, the OAS was investigated two incidents of an explosive item being found after clearance in Planadas and Pennsylvania had been conducted by MDDs.⁷⁴

The Marine Corps Explosives and Demining Association (AEDIM) was created and activated through CARMA Decree 41 of 30 December 2014. It has a Humanitarian Demining company, made up of three platoons, and which conducts clearance and destruction of anti-personnel mines and ERW in areas under the jurisdiction of the National Navy.⁷⁵ As at June 2018, it had been assigned tasks in twelve municipalities across the departments of Bolivar and Sucre.⁷⁶ As at April 2018, 240 personnel had been accredited.⁷⁷

In 2013, The HALO Trust became the first non-governmental organisation (NGO) to conduct demining in Colombia when it began clearance operations at the El Morro minefield, Nariño municipality, in Antioquia department.⁷⁸ In 2015–16, HALO Trust Colombia was conducting survey, mine clearance, risk education, and some victim assistance. Its main office was in Bogotá and operations were taking place in eight municipalities across three departments: Antioquia, Meta, and Tolima. Based on the peace agreement, Descontamina Colombia assigned HALO Trust 14 “rapid-response” municipalities for immediate post-conflict intervention. As at June 2018, HALO Trust had been assigned tasks in 23 municipalities across Antioquia, Cauca, Meta, Nariño, Putumayo, Tolima, and Valle del Cauca.⁷⁹

In 2017, HALO Trust employed 347 operational personnel (split between non-technical survey and manual demining).⁸⁰ The HALO Trust employs a number of ex-combatants from various NSAGs when the respective donor’s policy allows it.⁸¹ In 2018, HALO Trust was looking to develop its capacity and has acquired a mechanical asset for vegetation clearance. As at August 2018, it was in the process of developing its SOPs with the support of FSD and will begin using the mechanical asset once the SOPs have been approved. The HALO Trust is also conducting field trials of four MDDs in the department of Meta. As at September 2018, results suggest that weather conditions in Meta, with its high soil humidity and frequent heavy rainfall, impede the MDDs’ ability to consistently locate simulated explosive items. As such, The HALO Trust is considering relocating the MDDs to another location within Colombia to trial the dogs in a different climate. The HALO Trust conducts EOD using thermite or a disruptor, and in 2018 it purchased a drone. On a number of occasions, this was used together with thermite to identify if its use could be improved.⁸²

NPA formally initiated a mine action programme in April 2015, having taken part in the peace talks between the government and the FARC that concerned demining. The first step in the process of implementing the agreement on demining was to conduct non-technical survey of suspected contamination in the departments of Meta and Antioquia. The parties chose two pilot projects, one in the village of El Orejón (Antioquia) and a second in the village of Santa Helena (Meta). NPA’s role has been to lead and supervise a mine clearance project as a trust-building exercise between the Government of Colombia and the FARC. The Colombian army has been conducting the mine clearance, with NPA providing verification with two MDD teams, while the FARC has given information on contaminated areas.⁸³

In 2017, NPA was supporting the Demining Brigade with its MDD and dog handler training, including by sourcing funds for a project to support their puppy and breeding project.⁸⁴ NPA began conducting clearance operations with manual deminers in March 2017. In October 2017, MDD and mechanical assets were deployed with an immediate increase in productivity of 224%. NPA deployed almost 170 personnel in 2017 with five survey and seven clearance teams, including three teams of MDDs and three mechanical teams.⁸⁵ Since November 2017, NPA has employed FARC ex-combatants as “local guides” which has improved the safety and efficiency of clearance operations. As at June 2018, NPA had been assigned tasks in ten municipalities in the departments of Antioquia, Caquetá, Choco and Meta. As at August 2018, NPA were using a disruptor for EOD but were planning to acquire thermite.⁸⁶

In 2018 NPA had two incidents where NPA manual capacity found mines after clearance had been conducted by MDD teams, one in April in Vista Hermosa and one in August in Briceno. NPA has conducted internal investigations as well as thorough MDD review from the Global Training Centre to assess the use of MDDs in Colombia and why incidents occurred. The incident in Briceno was also subject of formal Descontamina Board of Inquiry. All reports conclude that it was the way in which MDD assets were used and not the effectiveness of the assets as such that were the issue. NPA has developed detailed corrective action plans to address identified issues in the reports and is confident that MDDs are an effective asset for Colombian scenario when used correctly.⁸⁷

CCCM began humanitarian demining work in Colombia in 2017. UNMAS have supported CCCM to go from an advocacy organisation to a demining operator, assisting in the development and review of operational plans and providing initial funding to CCCM for this transition.⁸⁸ CCCM conducts clearance using manual techniques only, though in December 2017 it presented a proposal for clearance using MDDs that was classified by the OAS as non-compliant in March 2018 and was under internal review as at October 2018.⁸⁹ In 2017, CCCM had five clearance teams with a total of twenty deminers, nine demining leaders/supervisors, and four paramedics.⁹⁰ CCCM also employs FARC ex-combatants as part of its survey and clearance teams. As at June 2018, CCCM had been assigned tasks in three municipalities across Antioquia, Cauca, and Huila.⁹¹

HI began humanitarian demining in Colombia in 2017. In 2017, HI employed a total of 62 personnel for non-technical survey and clearance.⁹² HI currently conducts clearance using only manual demining but was hoping to start machine-assisted clearance in the course of 2018. HI plans to rent a tiller for vegetation clearance for three months in 2018. Once they have the mechanical asset in place, HI will consider the cost-benefit of MDDs.⁹³ As at September 2018, HI had begun operations in five municipalities across the departments of Caquetá, Cauca and Meta.⁹⁴ As at August 2018, HI had approval to use thermite and a disruptor for EOD and were planning to expand their capacity with a team undergoing EOD training.⁹⁵

The Danish Demining Group (DDG) is in the process of setting up its mine action programme in Colombia and is currently providing mine risk education to affected communities in the departments of Meta and Cundinamarca. In March 2017, DDG received Phase 1 accreditation to conduct demining in Colombia.⁹⁶

Humanicemos DH, the FARC demining organisation, was accredited in August 2017.⁹⁷ In 2017, NPA trained 28 ex-combatants in clearance and non-technical survey, ten of whom were also trained as section leaders and five as team leaders.⁹⁸ Between CCCM and Humanicemos DH, with UNMAS support, an additional 100 ex-combatants are trained in the same technical areas.⁹⁹ As at August 2018, 124 ex-combatants were awaiting accreditation.¹⁰⁰ Due to funding limitations of their main donors, the OAS is unable to QA/QC ex-combatant deminers. The Government of Colombia has therefore decided to mandate UNMAS to assume this role, though the formal mandate to do so was still unsigned as at September 2018. This has led to delays in Humanicemos being able to start clearance operations with personnel sitting idle while they wait for their accreditation.¹⁰¹ The United States (US) still recognises the FARC as a terrorist organisation, which means that ex-combatants cannot be associated with any US-funded projects.¹⁰²

Since 2010, UNMAS has been advising Descontamina Colombia (and its predecessor). UNMAS provides technical assistance to the national authority and provides training and capacity building with a focus on national operators. In 2016-17, as noted above, UNMAS worked closely with CCCM supporting them in the transition from advocacy to demining organisation. In 2018-19, UNMAS plans to work closely with Humanicemos DH to support capacity development with the ultimate aim of it becoming a fully self-sufficient operator. Depending on the progress of the peace process, UNMAS is ready to support possible peace-building pilot projects where (ex-)combatants could be working with the military to clear mines.¹⁰³

FSD has been providing technical assistance to Descontamina Colombia since early 2016. In 2017, it provided capacity building with four specialists: one each for, MDDs, mechanical assets, environmental protection and EOD, supporting the development of its national mine action standards in these areas. FSD also supported the elaboration of Decree 1195 of 2017, which regulates the impact of demining on the environment. At the request of Descontamina Colombia, FSD has also been providing support to the OAS to improve processes and simplify the forms around SOPs and accreditation. In 2018, FSD planned to support implementation of the national mine action standards.¹⁰⁴

LAND RELEASE

In 2017, just under 1km² was released by clearance and survey, with under 0.4km² cleared and the remainder cancelled or reduced by survey. In 2016, Colombia cleared less than 0.3km² of mined area. Just under 1.2km² was “released” through data clean-up in 2017.¹⁰⁵ This occurs in low impact areas after discussions between the armed forces and the local security councils.¹⁰⁶ A further 1.2km² of land was confirmed as contaminated with anti-personnel mines.

Survey in 2017

Colombia reported that in 2017, 110 SHAs were cancelled through non-technical survey covering 239,068m², while 346,301m² was reduced by technical survey. A total of 192 areas were confirmed as contaminated with anti-personnel mines, covering 1,165,237m².¹⁰⁷

Table 1: Survey in 2017¹⁰⁸

Department	Operator	SHAs cancelled	Area cancelled (m ²)	Areas confirmed	Areas confirmed (m ²)	Areas reduced by TS
Antioquia	BRDEH	5	24,947	23	97,766	69,200
Antioquia	HALO	13	26,082	32	105,330	5,500
Bolivar	AEDIM	3	29,742	4	37,565	29,742
Caldas	BRDEH	4	17,562	10	40,174	73,325
Caqueta	BRDEH	12	50,616	11	47,090	78,614
Cauca	HI	0	0	8	21,701	0
Huila	BRDEH	0	0	2	9,768	0
Huila	CCCM	0	0	9	16,435	0
Meta	NPA	0	0	8	70,055	0
Meta	BRDEH	4	4,346	17	366,424	1,600
Meta	CCCM	0	0	2	5,001	0
Meta	HI	1	400	10	34,284	0
Meta	HALO	40	28,274	14	86,039	0
Putumayo	BRDEH	0	0	1	2,382	0
Santander	BRDEH	4	9,442	0	0	36,165
Sucre	AEDIM	0	0	1	9,673	0
Tolima	BRDEH	16	44,800	15	85,368	50,467
Tolima	HALO	8	2,857	18	76,497	1,688
Valle Del Cauca	BRDEH	0	0	4	31,434	0
Valle Del Cauca	HALO	0	0	3	22,251	0
Totals		110	239,068	192	1,165,237	346,301

Operators are often conducting survey in communities that have been inaccessible in previous years due to the security situation and are sceptical of governmental initiatives. All the operators stressed the importance of community liaison and of working with local people when conducting non-technical survey as a way of both building relationships with the community and as a source of accurate information about the existence of contamination.¹⁰⁹ The HALO Trust, for example, spent four months on community liaison in Cauca to gain the trust of the local community before beginning non-technical survey.¹¹⁰ NPA, The HALO Trust, and CCCM have been employing “local guides” who have either direct or indirect links with the FARC.¹¹¹ At one of their sites in Vista Hermosa, NPA’s information came from an ex FARC explosives expert who gave them exact information on how many mines had been planted and where.¹¹²

Clearance in 2017

Colombia reported clearance of 383,951m² in 2017 across nine departments: Antioquia, Bolivar, Caldas, Caquetá, Cauca, Huila, Meta, Santander and Tolima, destroying 104 anti-personnel mines.¹¹³

Table 2: Mine clearance in 2017¹¹⁴

Department	Operator	Areas cleared	Area cleared (m ²)	AP mines destroyed	UXO destroyed
Antioquia	BRDEH	21	62,325	31	3
Antioquia	HALO	12	60,200	21	0
Bolivar	AEDIM	8	30,390	0	1
Caldas	BRDEH	6	33,798	35	1
Caqueta	BRDEH	10	29,515	2	0
Cauca	HI	1	408	0	0
Huila	CCCM	1	3,591	0	0
Meta	BRDEH	5	31,090	3	1
Meta	CCCM	1	1,426	0	0
Meta	HALO	14	81,904	6	0
Santander	BRDEH	1	150	2	0
Tolima	BRDEH	4	8,298	4	6
Tolima	HALO	9	40,856	0	0
Totals		93	383,951	104	12

In 2017, a further 140 anti-personnel mines and 47 items of UXO were destroyed during EOD spot tasks.¹¹⁵

Deminer Safety

In June 2017, an NPA vehicle was set on fire in Santa Helena, Mesetas municipality of the department of Meta by dissidents of the FARC-EP. NPA evacuated its personnel and has not been able to return to the area.¹¹⁶

In September 2017, while conducting a non-technical survey a deminer from the Humanitarian Demining Brigade was injured by a UXO.¹¹⁷

In April 2018, FARC dissidents in La Reforma, San Martin municipality in the department of Meta seized a CCCM vehicle and held it for just over a month before returning it to CCCM. When non-technical survey had been conducted in the area, the FARC dissidents had felt ignored but after consultation CCCM were allowed to conduct operations.¹¹⁸

In July 2018, The HALO Trust had a vehicle seized and set on fire in the village of Santander, Uribe municipality, in the department of Meta. An armed group of 15 FARC dissidents detained a team of four people conducting non-technical survey, forcing them to leave the vehicle before setting it on fire. The group threatened the non-technical survey team and informed them that they did not want The HALO Trust operating in the Uribe or Mesetas municipalities.¹¹⁹

Progress in 2018

In 2018, Descontamina Colombia was aiming to increase the operational capacity and improve the efficiency of demining. It planned to establish a second Humanitarian Demining Brigade and increase the number of accredited deminers. It expects the operators to establish agreements with Humanicemos DH to improve and increase the mechanisms for receiving information from FARC ex-combatants.¹²⁰

The HALO Trust has funding to sustain projects in all operational locations until the end of 2018 and beyond. In 2018, HALO Trust opened a fifth location serving the departments of Putumayo and Nariño, in the south of the country. HALO Trust's operations expanded considerably in 2017 with a similar level of expansion anticipated in 2018. HALO Trust is in the process of introducing a mechanical asset for vegetation clearance which should increase efficiency of its clearance programmes.¹²¹

NPA planned to improve productivity in 2018 with the introduction of a full demining toolbox. NPA will continue to collaborate with Humanicemos/FARC to ensure the inclusion of local guides into its operations. NPA has begun to use technical survey in its operations since the national standard was introduced in December 2017.¹²²

In 2018, HI was seeking funding to acquire a mechanical demining asset and to increase its capacity by two non-technical survey teams and two clearance teams. HI has also been considering the possibility of transforming part of its teams into Multi-Task Teams (MTTs) in municipalities where EOD spot tasks are more needed than mine clearance.¹²³

In 2018, CCCM aimed to improve its processes around information management and secure funding to begin demining operations in the remaining areas it has been allocated. CCCM is planning to introduce MDDs to its operations in 2019.¹²⁴

ARTICLE 5 COMPLIANCE

Under Article 5 of the APMB (and in accordance with the ten-year extension granted by states parties in 2010), Colombia is required to destroy all anti-personnel mines in mined areas under its jurisdiction or control as soon as possible, but not later than 1 March 2021. It is not on target to meet the deadline, though the current national strategic plan still envisions that Colombia will fulfil its demining obligations by 2021.

Colombia does not have a meaningful understanding of baseline contamination and its estimation of contamination at 51km² is based on IMSMA data that operators have found to be consistently unreliable. The report from Descontamina Colombia that 27km² of the contaminated area has been allocated for humanitarian demining operations may seem impressive but operators have found that tasks have been allocated in a way that does not allow them to work efficiently. Tasks may be spread across the country forcing operators to set up multiple location bases with all the resources that entails.

The areas that have so far been declared free of mines have had very low or even no contamination. The majority of the high-impact areas are not yet assigned due to the difficult security situation in those areas. The ongoing issues with security, with the rise of FARC dissidents, the ELN and drug traffickers, means that it is unlikely humanitarian demining organisations will be able to access these areas until the security situation changes.

Non-technical and technical survey are vital to efficient demining operations and are particularly important in Colombia when the initial information given at the task allocation stage has been found to be so unreliable. Non-technical survey, and the associated community liaison, is also vital to building trust with communities to enable access to these areas.

The national standard for technical survey was approved in 2017 and it is hoped that the greater use of non-technical and technical survey will more accurately determine the location and extent of actual contamination, and cancel areas not contaminated. Costs of demining are high in Colombia, on average between US\$8 and US\$20 dollars per square metre, and the amount of clearance varies widely depending on the demining techniques used and the terrain. In Briceño, NPA have been conducting manual excavation which per deminer is as little as only one to five square metres a day.¹²⁵ Descontamina Colombia reports that across all the operators productivity per deminer ranges from 5 to 20m² per day.¹²⁶

There was a substantial increase in capacity in 2017 following the signature of the peace deal between the Colombian Government and the FARC-EP in 2016, with humanitarian demining playing an important part in the implementation of the peace process. Funding from the international community rose in 2018 and it is anticipated that funding will continue to rise as Colombia is still high on the agenda for many whilst the peace deal is implemented. It is difficult to predict whether funding will continue to rise year on year, and Colombia is at risk of donor fatigue if the demining programme does not begin to operate efficiently in the near term.

Table 3: Mine clearance in 2013–17

Year	Area cleared (km ²)
2017	0.38
2016	0.29
2015	0.36
2014	0.54
2013	0.47
Total	2.04

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