

## EORE on the Colombian-Venezuelan border: a case of consolidation of binational alliances for Comprehensive Action Against Landmines

*I feel that we have to understand that the culture of us as a people unites us, it does not separate us. To understand that, beyond a border line that divides us, we must do what is done from the border, which is to find each other. (Sanín Colmenares, Border Coordinator of the project "Technical Assistance in Disarmament and Peacebuilding on the Colombian-Venezuelan Border", Fundalatin)*

Between December 2023 and June 2024, with the support of the Kingdom of Norway, the project “Technical Assistance in Disarmament and Peace Building in the Colombian-Venezuelan Border” was implemented with the objective of contributing to the mitigation of the consequences in the communities of armed violence and possible contamination by explosive devices in 8 municipalities located in four Venezuelan states: Catatumbo and Machiques de Perijá, located in Zulia State; Bolívar, Córdoba, Libertad and Junín, in Táchira State; Páez, in Apure State and Atures, in Amazonas State<sup>1</sup>. It was a coordinated effort between two local NGOs, each with national coverage and impact in its respective country: the Colombian Campaign to Ban Landmines (CCBL) in Colombia and the Latin American Foundation for Human Rights and Social Development (Fundalatin) in Venezuela.



This project made it possible to specify ideas that had been developing through a dialogue, initiated years ago between the two organizations, which understood that the consequences of armed violence and the threat posed by contamination by explosive devices affect the binational communities living on both sides of this border.<sup>2</sup>.

At the beginning of the project, there were two major challenges identified: the first was that in Venezuelan territory the threat of contamination by explosive devices was not recognized as a problem by the actors involved in humanitarian action, health or territorial security; and the second, that the project to be developed was very short (6 months). A tight time to achieve the transfer and strengthening of capacities necessary to face the problem, meet the objectives of comprehensively training the team of local facilitators, meet the territorial and population coverage goals of the EORE<sup>3</sup> workshops and, in addition, transfer organizational capacities of an administrative nature

that would allow the process to be effectively implemented by Fundalatin, based on the accompaniment of the CCBL.<sup>4</sup>

Although saying that these challenges were completely overcome during this period would be far from reality, we can affirm that significant achievements were made in this process. The possibility of attaining them was closely tied to the joint efforts of both organizations, which, rather than developing a unilateral capacity-building process, undertook the task of working through dialogue and mutual recognition. This document addresses the main methodological elements involved in the process and the lessons learned that pave the way for further work.

### General components of the project

The activities carried out by CCCM and Fundalatin aimed at helping binational communities on both sides of the Colombia-Venezuela border mitigate the consequences of armed violence and explosive contamination were structured into four components: two externals, focused on working with the communities, and two internal, related to administrative matters and process monitoring.:

- 1) **Explosive Ordnance Risk Education - EORE:** Support from CCCM's Directorate of Development and Community Liaison in the preparation of pedagogical materials and the training of a team of 15 local facilitators equipped with the skills and abilities to implement 300 workshops on Explosive Device Risk Education across eight municipalities along the Venezuelan border.
- 2) **Awareness in Disarmament and Peacebuilding:** Conducting a workshop for 50 participants on disarmament and peacebuilding strategies, drawing from the experience of the CCBL.
- 3) **Administrative accompaniment:** Presentation and explanation of guidelines, guidance, ongoing monitoring, and feedback from CCCM's Global Programs Directorate, as well as the Human Resources, Accounting, and Administrative Directorates, to facilitate the transfer of organizational capacities in activity planning (Gantt), budget planning and execution, personnel selection, and the logistical and administrative processes necessary to ensure the proper development of the project.
- 4) **Monitoring and Knowledge Gathering:** accompaniment in the design and methodological development from the Directorates of Projects and Communications, Information and Knowledge Management of the CCCM, in the processes of Monitoring, Impact Evaluation and Knowledge Management of the CCCM, with a view to follow-up for timely decision-making, the identification of impacts and the compilation of learning.

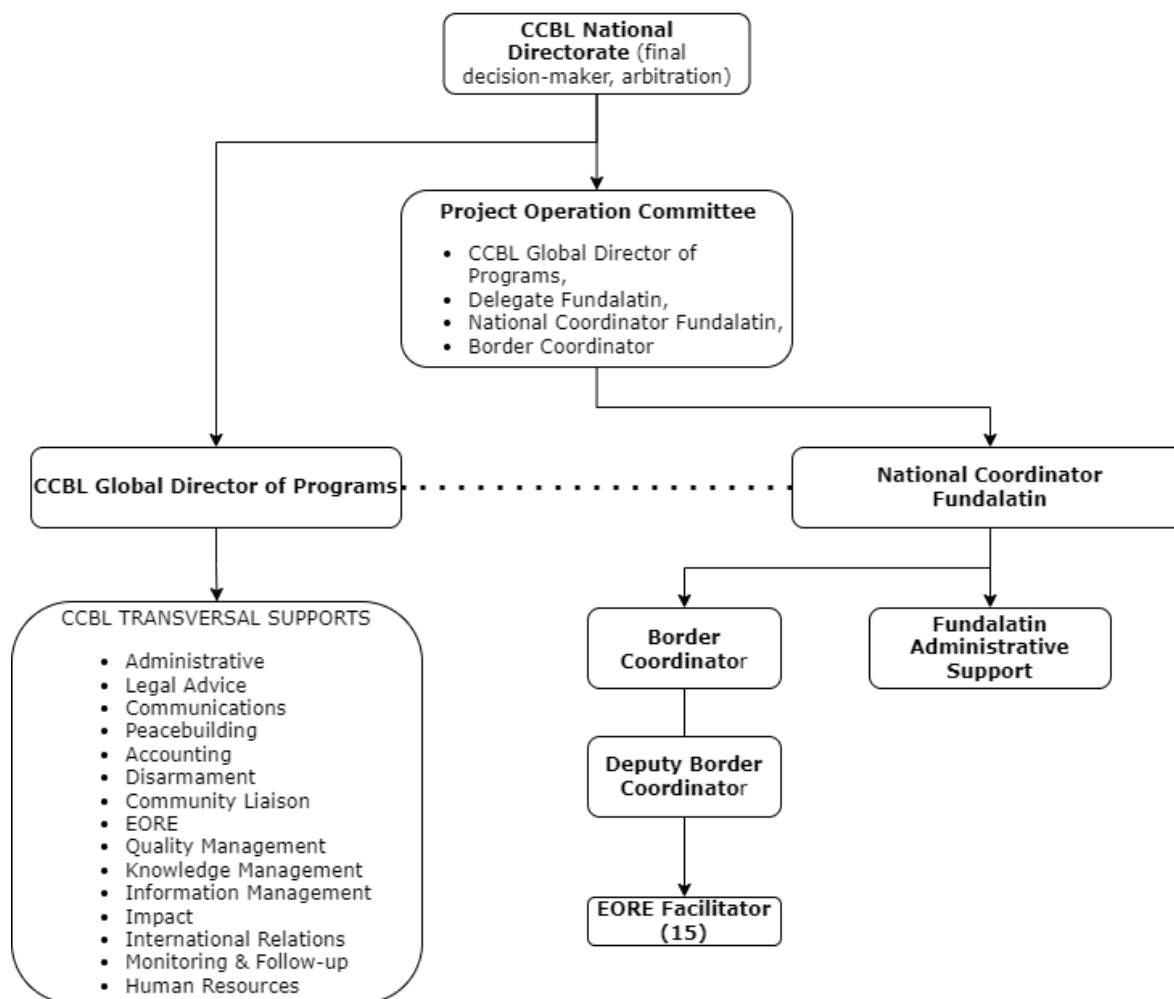
### Methodological development

The success of this process developed in 6 months of work was largely supported by the ability of the two NGOs involved to consolidate a horizontal relationship, from which they worked in an articulated manner and from the recognition of bilateral experience, both technical and experiential. This exchange is transversal to the stages of the process.

- **Alignment of work teams:**

Since December 2023, extensive conversations began between the members of the team that would be in charge of the process, made up of personnel from both organizations. In these, the main topics, both administrative and technical, that were required for the implementation of the project were

socialized with the Fundalatin team: from the regulatory framework of the Comprehensive Mine action, including generalities of the EORE or the community liaison, to the formats and tools of follow-up and monitoring that would have to be appropriated by the Venezuelan team. From this moment on, the operational structure of the work team, made up of both organizations, was established.



Within this structure, the Project Operation Committee was established, with the following responsibilities:

- Make decisions at the strategic level in development of the guidelines established in the project.
- Monitor and evaluate progress on project goals and impact.
- Coordinate the project's efforts with other international bodies and organizations present in the areas of influence.
- Review the terms of reference (profiles) of the EORE Facilitators.

In January 2024, members of the coordinating team of both organizations met in the city of Cúcuta (Norte de Santander - Colombia), to learn about the experience of one of the municipalities in which

the CCCM had implemented ERAE workshops on the Colombian side of the border. This experience allowed the Fundalatin coordinating team to begin to understand more deeply the AICMA process.

- **Selection of the team of EORE facilitators:**

Following this visit and the initial conversations with CCCM experts, the Fundalatin coordination team proceeded to hire local facilitators with the ideal profile for implementing the process. Although most of them had never heard of the issue of contamination by explosive devices (AE) before—and many initially believed this was a risk faced only by communities on the Colombian side of the border—this group, consisting of seven women and eight men, possessed other essential qualities for the process.:

Knowledge of municipal contexts	Integrity of knowledge related to the ERAE	Experience in community work	Interest in new learning
A team made up of inhabitants of the 4 prioritized States, which facilitated the establishment of relationships of trust in the territories.	Among its members, there were teachers specialized in various knowledge, community leaders, personnel in the area of health and risk prevention.	Most of them showed prior knowledge of the challenges of community work and the relationship with community leaders, local authorities and ethnic communities.	An open, participatory team, willing to collect and deliver knowledge, not only in training spaces, but in the territories.

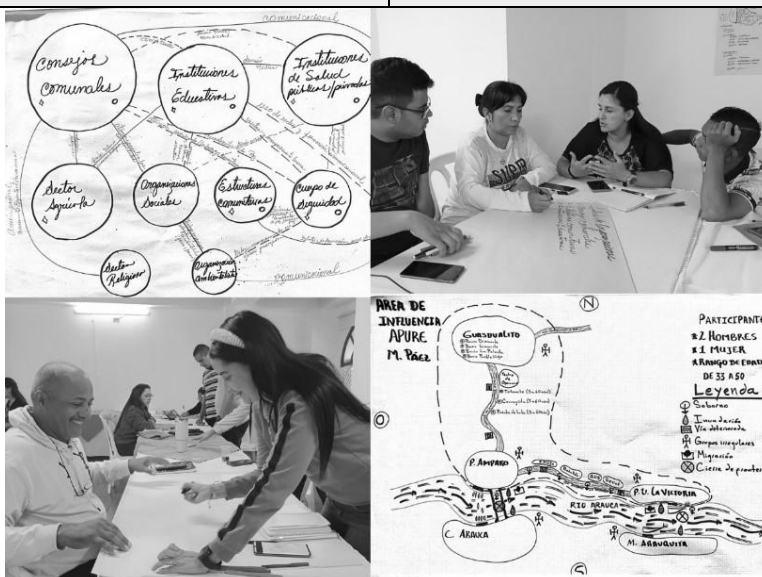
- **Training of trainers:**

Contrary to the initial logic of the project that said "we are going against time", the training strategy for the territorial team took the necessary time and, considering the need to adapt or connect the recommendations of the ERAE to the Venezuelan border context, it was decided to divide the training program into two moments, separated by a period of two weeks. This division of the sessions, although it required considering the costs of bringing the entire team together twice in the Colombian city of Cúcuta<sup>5</sup>, was essential to allowing the EORE trainees to conduct research and contextual analysis between the two sessions. This process laid the foundation for the second session and ultimately made the team's work more effective and appropriate when they began implementing the strategy.

Preparation of the EORE facilitators team: the first meeting lasted 4 days and allowed an important progress in the strengthening of the team, understanding of the problem and its connection with the territories to be intervened.

<b>Consolidation of a network:</b> The first meeting fostered bonds of friendship and mutual recognition among the EORE facilitators, as well as between the teams from Venezuela and Colombia. This network enabled	<b>Conversations based on territorial knowledge:</b> Social mapping exercises were conducted to promote the engagement and recognition of the team's territorial knowledge, highlighting
---	---

<p>them to work with greater confidence and solve problems collaboratively.</p>	<p>its importance for the process. This included mapping social actors and risks in the prioritized areas.</p>
<p><b>EORE put into practice:</b></p> <p>The team was trained in the principles and approaches of humanitarian action and an EORE workshop was conducted with them through which they began to understand the problem of explosive ordnance, identifying safe behaviors and risks that are connected to their experiences in the context.</p>	<p><b>Preparation of the entry strategy<sup>6</sup>:</b></p> <p>Practical exercises were carried out, such as role plays, which allow dialogue and sharing of recommendations on ways to reach the communities to raise the need for the EORE, without putting themselves or the inhabitants of the territory at risk.</p>



*Social mapping exercises, Cúcuta, February 2024.*

#### Entry strategy and information gathering:

The two weeks between the meetings served to begin visiting the communities in order to socialize the objectives of the project, build a schedule for the implementation of EORE workshops and collect preliminary information related to the presence of explosive devices in the territories<sup>7</sup>.

The conversations with communities, community leaders and local authorities carried out at this point in the project allowed the team to realize that explosive devices contamination is a problem that affects the municipalities located on the Venezuelan side of the border, even if it is in smaller proportions than in the Colombian case<sup>8</sup>. Most of the communities visited in this period were open to receiving the project. Local leaders and authorities were ready to facilitate its implementation.





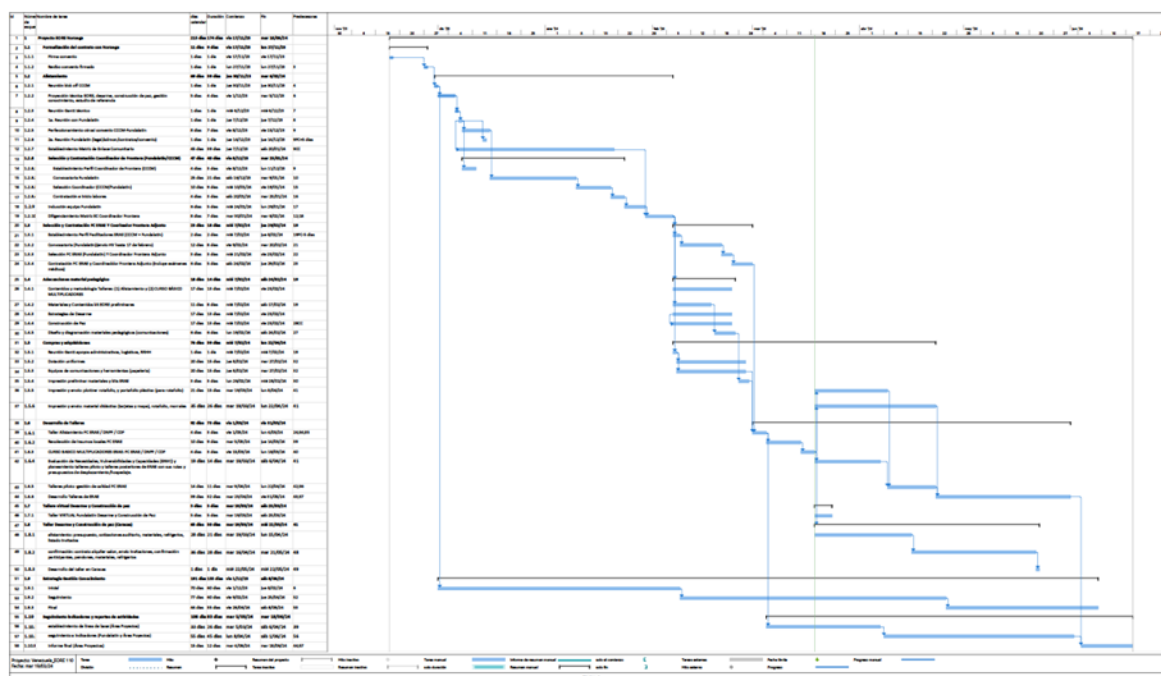
*Visit for the socialization of the process, Átures, Amazonas (February 2024)*

#### EORE Training:

For the second meeting, the team returned to Cúcuta for three days, during which "EORE in Emergencies" training was carried out, following the guidelines defined by the International Mine Action Standard (IMAS). In this session, the facilitators were able to explore the teaching materials, get to know in depth the messages to be delivered, test themselves and resolve concerns. This meeting was also attended by experts in the implementation of the EORE in Colombia, who combined the transfer of the elements included in the standard with the permanent socialization of their experiences in the territory to facilitate meaningful learning. Thus, the training of the team of 8 male and 7 female EORE facilitators was completed, providing them with the necessary knowledge and skills to work in the field.

#### **Project Follow-up and Monitoring**

One of the key elements was the creation of a rigorous Gantt chart, which was reviewed weekly to make necessary adjustments, allowing the goals to be met within the planned timeframe.



## Implementation of the EORE workshops:

Between the months of April and May 2024, the team of facilitators carried out a total of 318 EORE workshops, exceeding the goal of 300 estimated workshops, in which a total of 7149 people participated, 3976 women, 1927 of them minors, and 3173 men, including 1860 minors.

Once the process began in the Venezuelan municipalities, each of the trained people received direct accompaniment from a CCBL expert in EORE, who carried out knowledge assessment, made suggestions to the Facilitators and helped them to finish strengthening the skills acquired during the training.

### • The main challenges encountered along the way

During the implementation period, great challenges arose that threatened the development of the workshops, to which the team was able to establish timely responses that allowed the message of the EORE to be left in the Venezuelan territory. These responses arose from the combination of the previous experience of the Fundalatin team, with the alerts, recommendations and specific experiences shared by the CCCBL team. One of the testimonies collected at the end of the process accounts for the importance of the comprehensive training process for the team that was in the field:

*When each of the trainers who were with us teaching us there, in that first stage, told us about what could happen, I thought that it could not be or that it was somewhat far from reality. But every time what you told us happened, I remembered each one of you, it was completely in line with the reality that we found on the ground. (Doris Méndez, ERAE Facilitator, Táchira, Venezuela)*

The existence of armed conflict and the threat of explosive devices are a reality in the territory: The existence of armed conflict on the border, and the impact it could have on the development of the project and directly on the mobility and security of the territorial team was a risk that was foreseen. The open conversations that were held on this issue and the recommendations on how to deal with the situations that could arise, which were based on maintaining transparency about the process at all times, dialoguing with the local authorities and always showing respect for the community, made it possible to successfully overcome the situations presented.

Election period in Venezuela: The time during which the project was carried out was complex, as it coincided with the election period in the country. Because of this, some people abstained from attending the workshops out of fear or because they were participating in political and citizen mobilization events. Faced with the issues of polarization that are exacerbated by this scenario, the team highlighted the importance of learning and applying humanitarian principles, particularly neutrality, which allowed them to keep their personal political leanings outside the scope of the project, and impartiality, which promoted the participation of a wide range of people, regardless of their beliefs or political affiliation, among other characteristics:

*We have applied humanitarian principles, especially on the issue of neutrality, understanding that in Venezuela we are currently going through an electoral process. So, as the EORE is totally neutral, this rather unifies the people and makes them ask for these workshops to be taken to other territories that are not contemplated in this phase of the project. (Katherine, Deputy Coordinator of the project).*

Difficulties due to the intermittency of public services, telecommunication s and the poor state of access roads to the prioritized areas: the resourcefulness and commitment of the team on the ground allowed us to continue despite everything.



*ERAE workshop in Táchira (June 2024). The workshop takes place after 6 pm, and one of the facilitators shines a flashlight on the activity, due to the lack of electricity.*

The transfer in terms of organizational capacities: due to the timeframe of the project, in terms of administrative capacities, a direct and permanent accompaniment by the CCCM team was chosen. The operational structure of the project proved to be one of the strengths in the transfer of



organizational capacities, not only in terms of the EORE, but also in terms of operations and administration. This allowed the transfer to Fundalatin of the capacity for planning, follow-up and execution of activities, especially considering the time pressure of project execution. There is still knowledge and mechanisms to be strengthened in this regard. However, the Fundalatin team emphasized that, for many of its members, the process helped them to learn about working with international cooperation and that today they feel more capable of assuming this type of relationship with donors.

- **A closing in terms of achievements and learning**

The different conversation scenarios created with the team members during and at the end of the process allowed for the joint identification of some of the main achievements of this exercise.

The process as an opportunity for learning, training and capacity building: The training of the team provided tools to perform in the field and for the development of the EORE workshops, a topic in which the facilitators today show mastery and security. The importance it had for comprehensive education is highlighted. The training spaces also extended beyond the initial training and were transferred to the moments of accompaniment, follow-up and dialogue from different areas, by both the CCBL and Fundalatin, which allowed a greater appropriation of the procedures. The monitoring was done jointly, which made it possible to collect different views on the process, in which technical knowledge was combined with experience in the territories. As a training experience for facilitators, the process does not stop at the thematic knowledge of the EORE, but also transcends the fact of working on a project with international cooperation.

The importance of knowing and understanding border contexts from a central perspective: the Fundalatin team highlighted the importance of this type of process in terms of the recognition of territorial reality. The border between Venezuela and Colombia has particularities that are sometimes unknown from the centralities of both countries and, therefore, we still lack programs designed to address the problems that can be seen in these territories. The process was important because it provided vital information to the communities, but also because there was feedback and exchange of knowledge with the inhabitants of the territory and this served to understand that on the Venezuelan side of the border it is necessary to continue developing this type of projects and that for this it is possible to count on the great progress that Colombia has in terms of EORE.

*That for me is a very important enrichment, to be able to understand that it is applicable, it is feasible, it is viable to have Explosive Ordnance Risk Education in Venezuela (Sanín Colmenares, Border Coordinator of the project).*

*Through the characterization and the visit to the communities, you may have heard that people have died due to the handling of an explosive device and that many times that information is not transmitted, but when you go and alert people, those problems that have been there come to light... Then you go, you say, that's it, but what was happening here? In other words, if this is so delicate, how is it that nothing was being done? (Víctor Montenegro, ERAE Facilitator, Amazonas)*

Characteristics of the EORE workshop: When inquiring about what facilitated the development of the project, the most repeated elements are related to the characteristics of the workshop. The novelty of the subject is highlighted, which arouses the interest of some of the communities, which

were eager for knowledge and information. Emphasis is also placed on the clarity and precision of the information provided, on the didactic strategies that are already in place in the organizations dedicated to the EORE in Colombia, and the ease that this entails for the transmission of messages to very diverse audiences. *A clear, concise and precise method that easily reaches people.*

These assessments also have a lot to do with the fact that the group had teachers from different areas. This allowed them, in addition to easily appropriating the pedagogical component of the process, to propose new strategies and even address populations that, in the Colombian case, have been little covered in this regard and that represent a challenge, as is the case of the population with cognitive disabilities.

*We know that special education is scary. But we understand that they are ordinary citizens who have rights, including the right to information (Nellymar Varela, EORE Facilitator, Táchira).*

**Working with Indigenous Peoples:** This was another challenge that arose for the implementation of the project, especially in terms of the adequacy of EORE's methodologies and pedagogical tools. However, several of the facilitators, especially in the states of Amazonas and Zulia, managed to make a broad coverage, based on the establishment of bonds of trust and communication of the issues with these communities.

Some of these links existed previously, due to the work or life experiences of the facilitators in these territories. In other cases, the rapprochement took place during the EORE process, which allowed the facilitators to learn more about their territories.

*Getting to live there has allowed me to get to know the worldview of the indigenous peoples. In the Amazon there are approximately 22 indigenous peoples, each with their own beliefs and autonomy, which allows one to respect each other in their differences, maintain contact and feel confident and vice versa. It's like a safe-conduct when you go into an indigenous population: you have to have the tact, the ability and the empathy with them.*

**Peacebuilding:** The awareness-raising component on peacebuilding, which ended with the closing event of the project, was also present during the implementation of the workshops, as the territorial team understood that the EORE is a component of peacebuilding.

*I think that educating people in the prevention of these explosive devices is going to help and is going to be directly related to what peace is, because theoretically we talk about peace and everyone talks about peace, but we have to build it precisely from training, from education, from knowledge*



*CCCM and Fundalatin team at the closing event of the project, San Cristóbal, Táchira. May 2024.*