



PAHO Director meet with Health Authorities in the Haiti-Dominican Republic border, Jimani

BINATIONAL COOPERATION BETWEEN HAITI AND THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC



Haiti and the Dominican Republic share the island of Hispaniola, with a 360 km borderline between them. Both countries have distinct cultures and languages, but that does not limit commercial exchange or health cooperation between the two. The economies of both countries and their populations are inextricably linked.

Due to the intense exchange of business and people between the two countries and the fact that both share the same vulnerabilities to natural disasters such as hurricanes, similar health challenges are seen on both sides of the border. In fact, this exchange has created opportunities for coordination and joint health plans between the countries in recent years. Any efforts at disease prevention and control, particularly for communicable diseases should be approached through binational coordination. In this regard, joint activities in the health sector have always encouraged and fostered a collaborative political relationship between the two countries.

Dr. Mirta Roses Periago, PAHO Director and Regional Director of the AMRO WHO Region has always promoted binational coordination and has emphasized, in high level meetings, the need to strengthen coordinated actions between the two countries to tackle common health related issues. Some examples of joint collaboration are:

- High level visits led by the PAHO Director, and joint missions (comprised of members of the Organization of American States, United Nations, among other partners and stakeholders)
- Joint vaccination activities in the border areas
- Rabies control through binational canine vaccination campaigns
- Advocacy for joint activities related to the elimination of priority communicable diseases such as: lymphatic filariasis, TB, Malaria and HIV/AIDS, which has led to increasingly coordinated approaches among both countries

After the January 2010 earthquake, Dr. Roses travelled to the Dominican Republic and Haiti to hold high level meetings with the Interamerican and the UN Systems' teams, including National health Authorities from both countries, in an effort to promote a coordinated response and meet the specific needs of the affected Haitian population in the short term.

The Dominican Republic responded immediately out of solidarity with the Haitian people, offering health services in Dominican health institutions for displaced or affected Haitians; with additional support from the Cuban Medical Brigade, immediate medical care was provided. The Dominican Republic also permitted free movement of materials, equipment, medicines, and people across the border and into Haiti to help with disaster response. They also provided fuel for electricity in health facilities.

In May of 2010, Dr. Roses returned to Fond Parisien in Haiti and Jimani in the Dominican Republic to launch binational vaccination campaigns in support of the Vaccination Week of the Americas.

On November 12 of 2010, the first case of cholera was reported in the Dominican Republic, which had already developed planned interventions to face the epidemic since it was first confirmed in Haiti in October. Efforts were made to strengthen the health institutions and service networks along the border with Haiti. Guidelines, strategies and treatment protocols from Haiti and the Haitian Ministry of Public Health and Population (MSPP per its acronym in French) proved to be essential inputs in the Dominican Republic's preparation. This information was easily accessible and shared through the Health Cluster, led by the PAHO/WHO.

Activities carried out:

In the aftermath of the earthquake:

Coordination and logistics

- Binational meetings were held between PAHO/WHO teams of both countries to define an action plan to implement activities for: health services (hospital care, improved response capacity of health centers at the border), risk communication, rehabilitation, mental health, biosecurity, water and sanitation, disease prevention and control.
- Coordination with the Dominican Republic's Ministry of Health, different partners (United Nations, health authorities, NGOs, volunteers, church leaders) in both the DR and Haiti as well as with the PAHO/WHO Country Offices and Regional Office in Washington DC was key in terms of data gathering, logistics and information management.
- PAHO/WHO Country Office in Dominican Republic activated its Response Team and a Crisis team to support administrative, logistics and technical activities. Emergency kits and fuel were bought in Dominican Republic and sent to Haiti so that PAHO/WHO Country Office and PROMESS (National Center for the Supply of Essential Medicines) in Port-au-Prince could remain operational.



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Activities carried out: (continued)

- Shadow Clusters were established in the Dominican Republic to support the main Health Cluster operations in Haiti and coordinate the relief effort across the border – PAHO/WHO DOR actively participated in the logistics, rehabilitation, mental health, intensive care and research/investigation sub-clusters.
- The rehabilitation sub-cluster recruited and organized volunteer rehabilitation teams from Ecuador, Panamá, Nicaragua, Argentina and Costa Rica, who worked in hospitals in Jimaní and a recovery center in Fond Parisien. Basic rehabilitation training was provided to Haitian nurses and together with the the NGO Progressio the sub-cluster helped to create the first community rehabilitation center in Jimaní.
- As part of the research and investigation sub-cluster, PAHO/WHO jointly with World Vision (“Visión Mundial”) and the General Directorate of Epidemiology of the Dominican Republic Ministry of Health (Dirección General de Epidemiología- DIGEPI) carried out a survey in more than 3,000 houses in the Independencia, Barahona and Bahoruco provinces along the border to identify health demands.
- Medical services were provided for more than 3,000 Haitians (mostly surgeries) in Dominican health facilities. The General Hospital Melenciano in Jimaní and the Hospital Buen Samaritano were provided with additional medical equipment and supplies to handle the increased demand for services.
- The intensive care sub-cluster provided intensive care training for doctors and nurses in hospitals in Jimaní, Barahona and Azua. PAHO/WHO also provided key equipment and materials for intensive care units, ensuring appropriate care for gravely injured patients along the border.
- PAHO/WHO also supported and equipped post-surgical recovery centers in Jimaní (2) and Fond Parisien (1).
- Between January 23 and March 15 2010, Dominican Republic received more than 300,000 Kg. in humanitarian relief supplies, including: medical supplies, water and sanitation products, logistics equipment and cadaver management supplies. PAHO/WHO mobilized experts to support the National Health Authorities in both countries in the management and distribution of these supplies. Supplies were brought into Haiti through Jimaní along the border and PROMESS played a key role in the acquisition, management, administration and distribution of medical supplies in Haiti.

Rehabilitation and psychological support to victims

- PAHO/WHO in coordination with the Dominican Republic’s Ministry of Health mobilized equipment from Argentina, Nicaragua, Panama and Costa Rica to provide rehabilitation services.
- A mental health team from the Dominican Republic was deployed to the General Hospital of Jimaní, along the Haiti/DR border, consisting of a psychiatrist, 4 psychologists and 3 specialized nurses. A plan was developed to provide psychosocial and mental health support to patients in 5 other institutions in the border region.
- PAHO/WHO mobilized experts to provide support to victims and internally displaced populations, especially at border areas on both countries. Three initiatives were implemented:
 - seminars for health personnel were organized;
 - seminars for community members were organized in camps and in health institutions;
 - a basic mental health care protocol was produced.

Health surveillance, disease prevention and control

- PAHO/WHO supports the DIGEPI in the Dominican Republic with epidemiological surveillance (identification of outbreaks, decision making processes and response). An alert system was put in place and situation rooms were established at the national level as well as in Independencia, San Juan, Azua, Barahona, Bahoruco y Elías Piña provinces. The DIGEPI also organized Rapid Response Teams (which were deployed in Jimaní and Port-au-Prince immediately following the earthquake).
- Binational meetings were held with the teams for disease prevention and control and a special focus was given to high endemic risk syndromes, such as conjunctivitis, diarrhea, foodborne diseases, acute respiratory infections, immune preventable diseases, malaria, leptospirosis and rabies.
- Through the Expanded Immunizations Program (EPI), 12,544 DT doses (diphtheria and tetanus) and 200 DPT doses (diphtheria, pertussis and tetanus) were applied to populations living in Jimaní and in other border areas. In addition, 960 measles and rubella doses were given to Haitians over one year old and to foreign and national volunteers.

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Activities carried out: (continued)

- The Expanded Program on Vaccination (EPI) was implemented in seven of nine provinces along the border, including home visits, providing coverage to 95% of the border population. EPI consultants were trained on the use of new indicators for monitoring immunization activities.
- Water quality improvements were made in health institutions along the border, including complete replacement of tubing in some institutions, installing sinks and semi-permanent latrines in temporary settlements and health institutions, the establishment of a chlorine distribution route to 29 hospitals along the border from a chlorine generator provided by PAHO/WHO, and the implementation of a water quality surveillance system.
- Canine vaccination campaigns were done in all border provinces in the Dominican Republic.

Information and communication

- PAHO/WHO jointly with the Dominican Republic's Ministry of Health, the General Direction of Health Promotion and Educations (DIGPRESS), and the National Commission for Risk Communication prepared health promotion material (guides, posters, graphic material, audio messages, etc) in both Spanish and Creole for internally displaced populations at the border areas.

In response to the cholera epidemic:

- PAHO/WHO mobilized epidemiology experts for the exchange of information and experiences regarding the cholera epidemic.
- 150 people working in nine hospitals in five border provinces were trained regarding the organization of hospital food and nutrition services, including the completion of a survey of the nutritional status of newborns.
- PAHO/WHO has been working to improve water, sanitation and bio-safety conditions in 20 hospitals along the border. 13 have already received:
 - Improved water supply and 24-hour nonstop provision of water through the installation of water tanks, water pumps, changes in tubing, etc.
 - Improved water quality through water chlorination and the implementation of a regular water quality surveillance system.
 - Survey conducted which provided each hospital with recommendations to improve onsite sewage treatment and disposal.
 - Improved waste management, including segregation of infectious and common waste as well as improved internal waste transportation routes and outside waste storage.
- Cholera prevention activities were carried out in the main border cities of the Dominican Republic covering 5 provinces across the country and more than 15 municipalities. This initiative was supported by PAHO/WHO in coordination with "Promoción de Ecoclubes Asociación Social (OPEAS)". The main purpose was to educate students, teachers, school administrators, and community organizations, on cholera prevention measures.
- On February 15, 2011 the Dominican Republic's Minister of Health, Dr. Bautista Rojas Gomez, visited the Cholera Treatment Center (CTC) in the municipalities of Neyba and Galvan in the Bahoruco province and the municipality of Matas de Farfán the province of San Juan. Dr. Rojas was accompanied by the Director of Environmental Health of the Ministry of Health and PAHO/WHO Country Office staff in the Dominican Republic. These field visits are part of the weekly activities of the Minister of Health since the beginning of the cholera epidemic in Haiti, which are intended to monitor and assess the quality of care being delivered as well as ensuring appropriate cholera prevention measures.
- PAHO / WHO has facilitated the local production of chlorine, which is being distributed in the provinces in dropper bottles to disinfect drinking water.
- For further information on binational activities carried out by PAHO/WHO in Dominican Republic: <http://new.paho.org/dor/>

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Challenges and next steps:

- Continue, promote and encourage opportunities and spaces for binational coordination with the new MSPP authorities.
- Advocate for and foster binational cooperation and the implementation of joint health approaches in different global platforms
- Support and follow up on projects and financial resources, such as the Global Fund, to maintain coordinated disease control activities and efforts in both countries.
- Strengthen health information analysis, as well as research, to better understand the factors and health determinants of the migrant and mobile populations as well as the border regions.
- Revitalize binational malaria and tuberculosis activities between the two countries.
- Foster cooperation between the two countries to provide appropriate care for confirmed cholera cases and to take joint preventative measures, in addition to maintaining careful surveillance among both populations, especially among the migrant population.