

Team



Empowering People
Inspiring Change

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Talk

Haiti: Cholera Outbreak Response

“Cholera is not endemic to Haiti, so people are getting very sick, very fast after contracting it,” explains Patrica Munday, AMURTEL’s program coordinator in Haiti. She is part of an AMURTEL medical team that travelled recently to remote areas hit by the cholera epidemic, which has claimed thousands of lives and could affect another 400,000 according to the US CDC. “The most important thing is to act fast”, says Munday, recollecting her experience. “When we arrived at night, the local doctor didn’t tell us he had cases already. Unfortunately, some were dead next morning.”

The clinics are headed by a volunteer medical practitioner from Boston, Dr. Marc Luis. Dr. Luis will tell you people die not from cholera itself, but from associated dehydration. Oral rehydration salts are the key to treatment. He says stocks are running short and the price has sky-rocketed. Small outposts are desperate for supplies. “When they saw us they wanted to take everything we had”, Ornelia, a volunteer from Spain, recalls of the drive through one village, “so we had to go very fast. It was a moment of tension.”

The outbreak was confirmed on October 21, amidst confusion. “We train villagers but also local medical staff”, says Munday. “At one hospital they were receiving people just to die - they didn’t know what to do. The first cases were in Artibonite”, referring to the river valley that had 35,000 infections in the first month. The river’s source in forests of the Dominican Republic means it’s one of the few in Haiti that flows consistently, so it’s also the primary food-producing region. That raises further concerns: the UN says “initial assessments suggest food security and agricultural planning have been affected.” Also, distribution of contaminated food could trigger new outbreaks.

The cholera bacteria spread when faeces from an infected person contaminates the water people drink or the food people eat. Prevention is straightforward if hygiene is good and water available. But only 25% have running water, and many have no health facilities. Simple interventions are effective. “One woman was reported so sick she could not walk”, recalls



AMURTEL’s mobile medical team diagnose an elderly cholera victim.

Indranath, an AMURTEL driver. “I went to pick her up. She was 28, with children. The family were crying. They were sure she would die. She was given rehydration and an antibiotic pill. Three hours later, she spoke: ‘I’m so hungry!’”

AMURTEL’s mobile medical team has seen 12,000 patients since the earthquake in January 2010, and continues to serve the most needy. In addition, AMURTEL community organisers work in the tent settlements to promote disease prevention there.

For more information on AMURTEL’s work in Haiti please visit www.amurtelhaiti.org

Cash for Work and a Green Future in Haiti



Last tree's stand. The only tree for miles still clings to life, despite wood-cutting and the top-soil turning to dust. 98% of Haiti's original forest has been felled.

AMURT has helped mobilize an army of 10,000 people in northwestern Haiti to reforest their dying watershed. They live in poor communities overwhelmed by the population influx following the 2010 earthquake. "Many people ran away from the Port au Prince disaster to live in the province", recalls Jacques Vilgar, "A community already in a very bad socio-economic situation became twice as bad."

Vilgar, affectionately dubbed 'Tonga' or uncle by his admirers, is a veteran *animateur*, mobilizing his community since 1973. "My role is to supervise the animation team. We collected all people's requests and suggestions. We recruited the leaders of the project and Paul Ziade came to coordinate."



Jacques 'Tonga' Vilgar is a veteran community organizer from Anse-Rouge.

Paul Ziade is AMURT's Rural Programs Coordinator, and runs the Cash-for-Work (CFW) program. Initiated by AMURT and joint-funded by the UN's Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), it is primarily a response to economic desperation

exacerbated by the influx of displaced persons into two of Haiti's most impoverished communes.

"As short-term relief you want to provide cash quickly - but you will try to have a long-term impact", says Ziade, "so what did we do here? Watershed protection, soil conservation and reforestation."

Most Haitians depend upon small-scale subsistence farming. Only two-percent of forests survive. Flooding and mudslides devastate crops and take lives. Once-fertile soils erode to desert and unsafe water transmits infectious diseases, such as cholera.

After consulting local communities in the Anse Rouge and Terre-Neuve communes, AMURT found that people recognised common threats to their existence related to the severe degradation of their watershed.

"Many villages have no water", observes Ziade. "But telling 'I have something to give you' is very different from 'what do you need?'"

An AMURT-sponsored *animateurs'* association called AEPA joined the program and the area was divided into fourteen sites, with one animator at each site. However, coordinating sites in rugged

ged terrain was difficult: "If it rains you cannot move; extreme mud, dangerous roads", says Ziade. "The people I am working with usually can't be reached by cell phone. So we have to decide everything in our weekly meeting."

The animators activated village committees, who met with agronomists to collectively determine priority ravines and hillsides. "We want to build a community that takes its destiny in its own hands," says Vilgar. "Without the animation team we could never succeed in this project"

The on-site watershed regeneration work has four key elements, according to Jacques Raquise, one of AMURT's technical coordinators: slope contours, ravine barrages, living walls and tree-planting. On gentle slopes sugar cane, elephant grass, Guinea grass or moringa trees are planted along the contour lines as living walls. On steeper slopes, deep contour ditches and forest trees are employed. Both techniques stop sheet water erosion and harvest precious rainwater.

Thelford Melisien, works in one of the ten AMURT nurseries, where seedlings are prepared. Melisien already sees results: "When the rain falls, the water flows into the trenches and is retained."

Ziade considers outcomes: "We planted more than 2.5 million seedlings and seeds. I give all the credit to our technical team."



Ravine barrages prevent floods from swamping the village below. Topsoil and water are retained.

Raquise is positive. "Now people are asking us to work near their gardens, to build retention walls and dams, because they know it helps their harvest and keeps the rainwater longer."

He then reveals a community shift almost unthinkable six months earlier: "Now they have formed their own association and a cooperative that works on certain gardens together. If all the country adopts this kind of project we will become self-sufficient in food."

For project slideshow and more information on AMURT's work in Haiti please visit www.amurthaiti.org



Digging hillside contours. The program receives enthusiastic support from the community and has exceeded its targets.

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2,500 seedlings being aerated in one of the beds at the nursery in Sources Chaudes village. AMURT has now built-up ten community nurseries like this one.

Indonesia 'Better World' Program: A Festive Celebration



One of the 24 early childhood development centres, complete with playground equipment, built by AMURT in Pariaman, West Sumatra, Indonesia

AMURT & AMURTEL Padang's Better World program celebrated a week of festivities recently. The climax came on 15 November 2010 with the inauguration and handover of the 21 early childhood development (ECD) centres built and renovated by AMURT & AMURTEL. This event was jointly held with the graduation ceremony of 56 teachers from 41 ECD centres who had participated in our Teachers for a Better World teacher-training program.

Prior to that, we had three consecutive days of festivities featuring children's and teachers' competitions, a children's parade and a 3-day exhibition of craftwork and educational materials created by teachers and children. About 800 children and 150 teachers participated in the events which were co-organized with the Pariaman Town Council, while hundreds more visited the exhibition and joined in the festivities. Since the inception of our Better World program, AMURT & AMURTEL has worked in cooperation and coordination with the wife of the mayor of Kota Pariaman, various Town Council departments,

local authorities at the District of Padang Pariaman, and local chapters of the Association of Playschools. We hope to strengthen these cooperative relationships to further develop and promote early childhood development in West Sumatra.

Earlier in October, a small team of four selected teachers and AMURT & AMURTEL staff visited Malaysia for a 7-day study tour as the final segment of AMURT & AMURTEL's Teachers-for-a-Better-World teacher-training program. The group visited five kindergartens and also managed to put in some sightseeing as well! The selected kindergartens spanned a range of teaching styles, so the Padang teachers got the chance to gain broad experience. Upon their return home, these teachers shared what they learned with their other colleagues.

For more information on AMURT & AMURTEL's work in Indonesia please visit www.amurt.asia



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