



PRESS RELEASE

Project manages to cut malaria 63 %

Mexico, 2 July 2008--A program to demonstrate sustainable alternatives to control mosquitoes that transmit malaria in eight countries managed to reduce by 63% the number of patients from 2004 to 2007, according to a new report.

The “Regional Program of Action and Demonstration of Sustainable Alternatives for Vector Control of Malaria without the Use of DDT” aimed to show the effectiveness of alternate methods to the use of DDT for mosquito control in Belize, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua and Panama.

The project was implemented in 201 demonstration localities, benefiting directly a population of 159,018, and indirectly a population at risk of 6, 845,000 people, or 29 percent of the population in endemic areas of Central America. This project of the Pan American Health Organization had the support of the United Nations Environment Program, its Global Environment Facility (UNEP-GEF), the participating countries, and the Commission of Environmental Cooperation for the Free Trade Agreement for North America (CAC).

Malaria affects approximately 89 million people, for the most part indigenous populations, in Mexico and Central America. Disease is caused by three species of *Plasmodium* parasites and transmitted by the *anopheles* mosquito.

In the last 40 years, approximately 85,000 tons of DDT have been sprayed in this region as part of the efforts to control malaria. DDT is a very stable toxic compound that accumulates in live organisms, persists for decades in the soil, and it is transported by the water cycle to remote areas where it has never been used, contributing to environmental pollution. This project included implementation of demonstration and dissemination projects for vector control without the use of DDT in malarial localities. It integrated voluntary community work, strengthening of national and local capacity, and elimination of DDT reserves in the participating countries. The eight countries adopted a comprehensive malaria control model, in demonstration areas with alternative

techniques that do not use DDT or other persistent insecticides, demonstrating that the alternate methods are replicable, cost-effective, and sustainable, and discouraging the reintroduction of DDT into the region to control Malaria.

Main community interventions including: cleaning of aquatic weeds and algae, drainages, sanitary landfills, channeling of wastewater; biological control with larvivorous fish, seeding of mosquito-repelling trees such as NIM, use of biological larvicides, and other environmentally-friendly control measures. The project worked with the communities to identify breeding sites and resting places of the vector, to establish its seasonal patterns and carry out different measures of physical and biological control to eliminate the mosquito habitats and breeding sites. They also used practical measures to eliminate resting places attractive to mosquitoes. Ideas such as “clean house, clean patio, clean lot, clean street, clean district”, dwellings painted with calcium hydroxide, proper management of wastewater and other domestic actions were essential for family self-care. They could also have impact on diseases as Chagas’ disease, Leishmaniasis, parasites, and others.

A community volunteer program motivated and organized volunteers for comprehensive actions in surveillance, prevention, and control of malaria, in addition to collecting blood samples and administered treatment to sick people. The number of community agents increased from 838 in 2004 to 1,369 in 2007, training local residents in measures that the community can carry out without inputs or external resources, contributing to the sustainability of the long-term actions.

There was also progress in the adequate final disposal of 200 tons of pollutants found poorly stored and with high human and environmental risk, including 136.7 tons of DDT and 64.5 of others toxaphene, chlordane, HCB, aldrin, Dieldrin and mirex, since 2004. The countries will conclude the adequate disposal of these substances in December 2008. For the development of the project the national and municipal governments of the countries, the Pan American Health Organization, the CAC, and the private sector, to date have made co-financing contributions with a value of US\$ 7.6 million dollars as counterpart to financing by UNEP/GEF of US\$ 7.16 million.