

## **An assessment of child health and herbal home remedies in 16 batey communities of Sanchez Ramirez and Monte Plata, Dominican Republic**

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More than 4,400 Peace Corps Volunteers (PCVs) have served in the Dominican Republic since its inauguration in 1962 (1). Volunteers have contributed to technical skills transfer and institutional capacity-building in a wide range of fields, including agriculture, urban and rural community development, forestry, conservation, environmental education, community health and child survival, nursing, small business development, fisheries, water and sanitation, teacher education, university education, youth development, and information technology. Currently, there are approximately 150 volunteers working in 29 provinces of the country in five main technical sectors: Environment; Education; Community Economic Development; Health; and Youth, Family, and Community Development (2). Within the Health technical sector, the Healthy Communities project targets low income, at-risk infant/maternal and youth populations living in small rural villages of the Dominican Republic in order to increase health education opportunities and access to resources that will result in healthier lives. The project has three broad goals:

1. Capacitate youth and young adults (18-24 years) as peer educators in the prevention of sexually transmitted infections and adolescent pregnancy
2. Capacitate mothers as child health promoters in the identification and prevention of dehydration, acute respiratory infections, and malnutrition in children
3. Capacitate mothers as reproductive health promoters in the identification and prevention of reproductive diseases and the importance of periodic papanicolau and self-breast exams

I was assigned to work directly in the three communities of El Jabonico, Las Arenas, and Doña María, three poor, rural communities with populations between 200 and 400 people in the Sanchez Ramirez region in the Southern Cibao Valley. I was also partnered with the national NGO Fundación de Salud y Bienstar (FUSABI) and its community health promoters in 22 communities throughout the neighboring region of Monte Plata. In order to establish baseline knowledge of the general health condition of the communities as well as an understanding of the local beliefs and habits regarding current health practices so as to gain a foundation from which to design projects, I undertook a diagnostic study. Although the diagnostic household interview was designed to cover the large scope of health themes that are addressed in the Healthy Community project of Peace Corps Dominican Republic (PCDR), I took special interest in the issues related to child health as the infant mortality rate in the Dominican Republic is still one of the highest in Latin American and the Caribbean. It is this special interest that is the focus of this paper. Therefore, the following paper specifically addresses Goal 2 of the Healthy Communities project of Peace Corps Dominican Republic and focuses on the key contributors to high infant mortality: malnutrition, diarrhea, and respiratory infections.

Additionally, as herbal remedies are very frequently used to treat common childhood respiratory illness and gastrointestinal disturbances, it is essential to address their role in order to fully assess the status of child health.