

Peace Corps Dominican Republic Special Initiatives

In addition to Peace Corps DR Volunteer's work in their specific project sector, many PCVs have incorporated one or more of the following activities related to cross-cutting priorities on youth, gender, environment, and HIV/AIDS prevention

Sirve Quisqueya

Sirve Quisqueya is an alliance of NGOs, Government agencies and international agencies founded in 2002 with the assistance of PCDR, to make volunteer service the common experience of every young Dominican. The member agencies of Sirve Quisqueya work to create community service opportunities for youth and build the capacity of youth leaders, teachers and adult allies to promote effective service-learning, strengthen the quality of education and enhance youth leadership skills. Peace Corps DR has played an instrumental role in the formation of this movement through supporting national and local workshops, co-developing effective materials and guides, and developing the following three pilot initiatives that link youth service to health, sports, and the environment.

- *Escojo*: Helping Empower Youth to Choose a Healthy Lifestyle and Serve Others

The *Escojo* Initiative was begun in 2004 to help train Volunteers and their community youth partners in using a more holistic lifeskills approach to the problem of HIV/AIDS infection and teen pregnancy that have reached alarming rates in the DR. The *Escojo* Initiative focuses on promoting healthy life choices, self-esteem, communication, machismo, goal setting, service, decision making, and other positive development activities by youth health promoters and the groups they form to educate other youth.

A growing concern of the Peace Corps Healthy Families program has been the sustainability of the youth groups after the PCV leaves. In order to address this concern, the *Escojo* Initiative in 2005 will be focused on the strengthening and formation of *Escojo* youth networks. This will be achieved by partnering with the Dominican Secretaries of Youth and Health, as well as *Alianza ONG and Sirve Quisqueya*. Additionally, this year a local adult leader from each community who works with youth will be invited to the workshops, in addition to two local youth from communities that have a PCV, as well as those who participated in the *Escojo* conferences last year, but no longer have a PCV. Within Peace Corps Dominican Republic the *Escojo* conferences are examples of effective cross-sectoral collaboration, as participants represent the Youth, Business, and Environmental sectors, as well as Health. Ultimately, the aim of the *Escojo* 2005 regional and national conferences is to provide local youth and adults the tools necessary to form and sustain and connect their youth groups, providing accurate information about adolescent sexuality, STI/HIV/AIDS, the "A-B-C" approach to prevention, and teenage pregnancy, as well as providing opportunities for skill-building. Youth groups within specific regions and sub-regions will motivate one another by

sharing ideas, successful practices, and lessons learned, both through regional and sub-regional events and meetings, as well as through the national *Escojo* newsletter and conference, and the establishment of Regional Hub Centers that convene the various Escojo groups for follow up support. The expansion and strengthening of Escojo is the central component of the PCDR PEPFAR grant.

- Brigada Verde

“Brigada Verde” was founded by Peace Corps DR staff and Volunteers and local partners in 2003 in coordination with Sirve Quisqueya to engage youth in environmental action. The goal of Brigada Verde is to create a national youth conservation corps that act as environmental educators in their communities. With the assistance of Peace Corps volunteers, youth get trained from a curriculum that is designed to provide members with the necessary skills to become Brigada Verde environmental education trainers. The curriculum consists of three graduated levels. Youth have to successfully complete each level to become a certified Brigada Verde trainer. Upon completion of each level, participating youth receive increased responsibilities, such as assisting with future conference planning and facilitation. In addition, Brigada Verde trainers are provided opportunities for interaction and support from other Sirve Quisqueya member agencies. This has led to technical and financial support, and inclusion in activities sponsored by Sirve Quisqueya, such as Global Youth Service Day and Earth Day activities.

In 2004, Peace Corps environmental education volunteers and local youth leaders organized the Brigada Verde conference with 50 youth, and learned project planning skills, participated in hands on conservation exercises, and received training on environmental conservation techniques. The participating youth, subsequently, returned to their communities and replicated the sessions with other members of their Brigada Verdes.

- Servir y Jugar: aims to engage youth in community development projects while also providing healthy recreational activities to youth in underprivileged communities. After the Volunteers teach the youth effective methods to plan and execute community development projects, the youth carry out projects and can apply the service hours towards receiving sports equipment available through Servir y Jugar as recognition for their efforts. The new and used baseball, soccer, basketball and volleyball equipment, is donated from different organizations and individuals including Major League Baseball, Esperanza International, Rotary Club, and family and friends of volunteers and its distribution is managed from the Peace Corps Office. Since 2004, over 700 youth in 70 communities have done over 15,000 hours of community service. Projects have included community clean-ups, painting murals, community gardens, reforestation activities, and HIV/AIDS presentations. Through these activities, youth not only receive the sports materials, but also valuable lessons in self-esteem, teamwork, and leadership skills. Though piloted by Peace Corps and its partner communities, SyJ now forms part of Sirve Quisqueya and is looking to share its methodology with the Secretary of Sports and Recreation.

The Anacaona Cross-Border Collaboration Initiative

The 172-mile long border between Haiti and the Dominican Republic has a particular set of economic and social challenges that require development interventions aimed to restore and preserve natural resources, promote economic growth and cultural understanding, and stem infectious diseases such as HIV/AIDS.

Since 2000, PCDR and PC/Haiti have worked to strengthen cross-border collaboration by Peace Corps Staff and Volunteers to maximize the use of limited resources in meeting the development needs of the border region. PC/Haiti and PC/DR established the Anacaona Initiative in order to work towards the day when there is respect and collaboration between community groups, government agencies, citizens, and PCVs working along the border to improve the quality of life of this region.

In 2000 and 2001, the PCDR and PC/Haiti program teams met once on each side of the border for planning meetings and visited PCV sites. Follow up program dialogues took place in the areas of agroforestry and water/sanitation. Due to changes in Country Directors, the Anacaona project experienced some delays and momentum was not re-established until 2002. Furthermore, security concerns on the Haitian side limited PCV project site assignments on the Haitian side of the border.

Binational border meetings among Volunteers and partners have been held in 2003, 2004, and 2005. As a response, USAID established a special Cross-border SPA fund allotment for Volunteers and their communities in 2004. In February, 2005, 34 technicians from Peace Corps Volunteers Dominican Republic, Pan American Development Foundation, FUDECO and other local and regional agencies in the border zone, gathered for the 4th Anacaona Meeting for Border Development. During the event sponsored by PADF, the participants had the opportunity to: a) Discuss strategies of border development; b) Exchange ideas on the activities that they conduct or are planning to conduct the next year; c) Identify strategies to improve the effectiveness of the projects; and d) Identify opportunities of interinstitutional collaboration (FUDECO, PADF, PNUD). As concrete follow-up aspects Peace Corps and other agencies agreed to explore the continuation of exchanges for regional planning; the extension of the USAID SPA Funds for Border Development, and an increase in the number of Peace Corps volunteers assignments in the border zone on the Dominican side in order to support local and regional initiatives of development.

Cross-Sectoral Clustering:

Since 2001, Peace Corps Dominican Republic has been working towards the increased use of cross-sectoral clustering and collaboration among volunteers as a means of improving the effectiveness of programming in certain micro regions. This approach has required Program Managers to carry out joint site development visits, engage PCVs and partner agencies in identifying new follow up opportunities in different sectors in their region, and creating opportunities through the Mini-Vacs and other cluster meetings to have the Volunteers and their partners discuss programmatic cross-collaboration.

Volunteers in these clusters are typically within 30 minutes of two other Volunteers and PCDR works to cultivate program planning by them and their partners. While the actual number of formal clusters have been somewhat limited, PCDR has set a goal of 5 new formal clusters of 3-4 Volunteers each year starting in 2005 as part of its IPBS. It has also created a simple toolkit for promoting cross-sectoral collaboration.

Gender Awareness and Development – Effective Parenting Initiative

Since 2002, the Volunteer-led GAD Committee and Peace Corps staff have focused on how to help reduce family violence in the communities where the Volunteers live and work. Over the past three years, the GAD Committee has organized an annual national training workshop on Effective Parenting as a means of preventing or addressing this issue. Each year, approximately 15 Volunteers bring 30 local partners for this training of trainers and exchange of ideas on how to promote effective parenting and family communication. When the community teams return to their towns, they are expected to replicate the session plans with their local parents groups.

Peace Corps Feria Artesanal:

Since 1990, Peace Corps DR has promoted access to new markets by artisans from Volunteer's communities through the Peace Corps Feria Artesanal. Over the past 15, years, the one to two day fair has grown from 10 artisans to over 110 artisans from across the country and drew thousands of visitors in 2005. In 2003, PCDR partnered with the Secretary of Culture to ensure the local control and sustainability of the initiative. The Feria Artesanal is the largest artisan fair in the country each year.

Other PCDR initiatives include:

- The **Information and Technology for Development Resource Group** which has produced manuals and training for local partners on using ICT in their education and development projects
- The **Coffee Resource Group** which has linked Volunteers and partners to share resources on effective production, processing, marketing and certification of organic coffee.
- The **Medical Missions Committee** links PCVs with 4 key medical teams that each visit once a year to carry out needed health interventions and surgery on people from Volunteers communities. Volunteers assist with identifying needy patients, accompanying them to the missions and translating for the doctors.