

NEWSLETTER

Project Contingency Plan for Health Protection of Highly Vulnerable  
Indigenous Peoples and in Initial Contact

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Technical  
mission to  
the Madidi  
Region and  
San  
Buenaventura  
- Bolivia

## **Project Contingency Plan for Health Protection of Highly Vulnerable Indigenous Peoples and in Initial Contact**

This initiative consolidates the cooperation actions conducted in border territories in the Amazon Basin creating a favorable context to mitigate the impacts of Covid-19 and the threats of emerging and endemic tropical diseases in the highly vulnerable Indigenous Peoples that inhabit those areas, with special emphasis on the Indigenous Peoples in Isolation and Initial Contact (PIACI) and on the neighboring populations to these Peoples.

This project is being coordinated by the Amazon Cooperation Treaty Organization (ACTO) jointly with the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) and is financed by the Inter-American

  
Development Bank (IDB).

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Project Contingency Plan for Health Protection of Highly Vulnerable  
Indigenous Peoples and in Initial Contact

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Cover: Medical attention in the Torewa Community, Madidi  
Photographs / Map: Technical Mission of ACTO.

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# Technical mission to the Madidi Region and San Buenaventura – Bolivia

During the period December 12-16, 2022, the technical team of the Amazon Cooperation Treaty Organization conducted a technical mission to San Buenaventura and Madidi region, in Bolivia, as part of the ACTO Project "Contingency Plan for the Protection of Health in Highly Vulnerable Indigenous Peoples and in Initial Contact". The project is being implemented jointly with the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) and with the support of the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB).

This was the fourth mission to the Amazon region under the project's actions, involving the participation of consultants Rodrigo Tarquino, Fritz Villasante, with the collaboration of Marcos Uzquiano and led by the project coordinator, Carlos Macedo.

The main purpose of activities carried out in the Madidi National Park region, in Bolivia on the border with Peru, included learning about the practices of the health services of the Ministry of Health and the San Buenaventura Hospital, in coordination with the Park. In addition, the mission visited the Indigenous communities of Eyiyoquibo, Torewa and Villa Fatima, of the Tacana Indigenous people.

As scheduled, dialogue was held with indigenous leaders and health service personnel. Furthermore, the San Buenaventura Hospital's technical team of doctors, nurses, dentists, and technicians provided comprehensive health, dental and immunization care in the community of Torewa, inhabited by the Mosekene, T'simane, Lecos, Quechua and Aymara peoples.

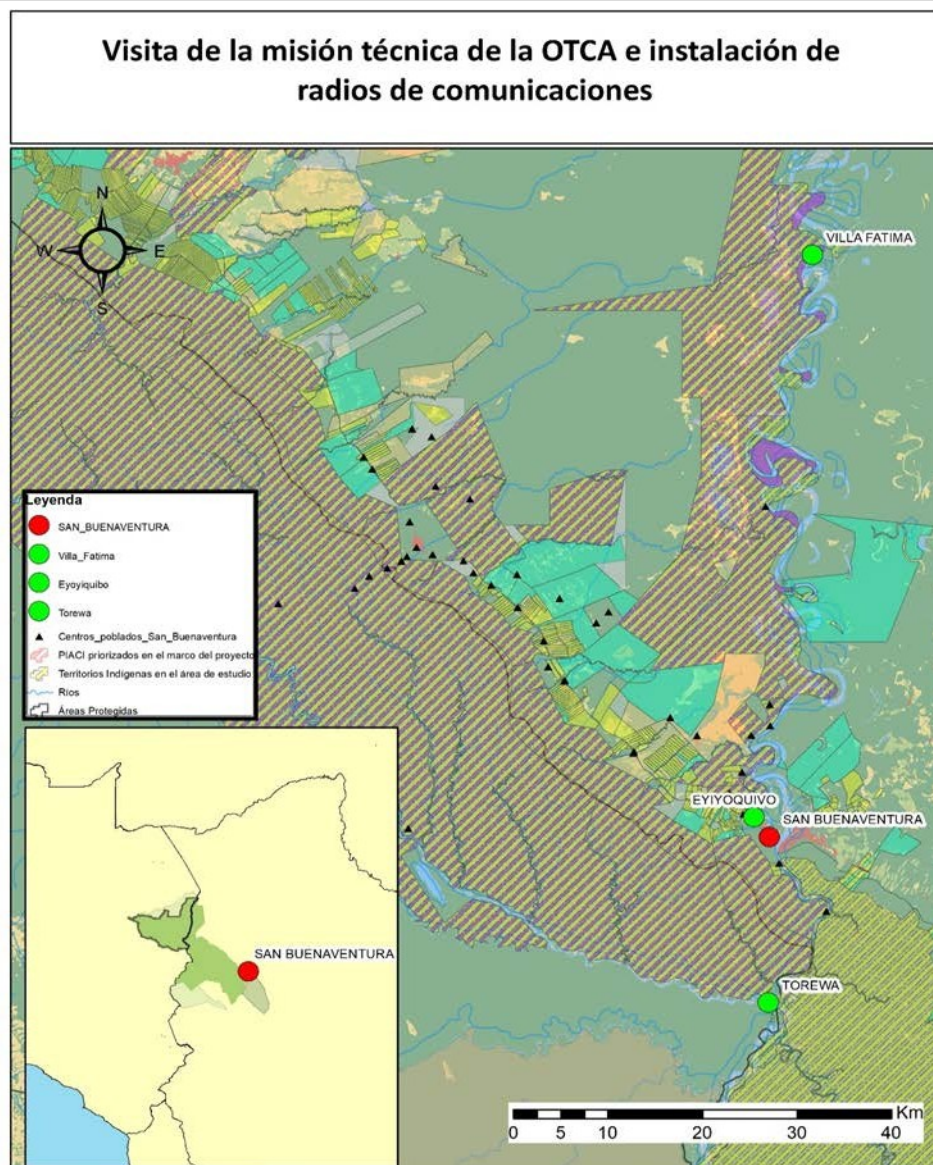
Finally, the ACTO donated three sets of communication radios to the San Buenaventura Hospital and to the Indigenous communities of Torewa and Villa Fatima, in order to strengthen and improve communication for emergency health care.



**THE MADIDI  
NATIONAL PARK  
REGION AND  
MADIDI  
INTEGRATED  
MANAGEMENT  
NATURAL AREA  
(MADIDI NP)**

The region is adjacent to and overlaps with the municipalities of Pelechuco, Guanay, Apolo, Ixiamas and San Buenaventura, all of which belong to the department of La Paz. This region is inhabited by peasant and Indigenous communities with diverse cultural origins. Coexistence is ancestral and development and relationship strategies have been promoted that are very characteristic of Amazonian regions. Currently, the uses and pressures on the processes of nature conservation and territorial organization have been affected by different interests and by the incorporation of development models and territorial actions causing adaptation of the organizational processes and, in many cases, a change in the productive matrix.

**Map N° 01:** The route of the Technical Mission in the middle basin of the Beni River



● Source: Prepared by Rodrigo Tarquino, December 2022

Map of the ACTO technical mission area. The San Buenaventura hospital (red) is the operating site in case of contingency or health emergency; the communities of Torewa and Villa Fatima are accessible by river and have communications equipment in case of contingency; and the community of Eyyoiquibo is adjacent to the hospital, but its health and sanitation conditions are critical.



# COORDINATING MEETINGS

## ACTO and representatives of health and of the municipality of San Buenaventura define the key points of the mission.

Coordinating meetings were held to review the agenda of activities and the objectives established for the technical mission with representatives of health and the municipality of San Buenaventura.

### HEALTH AND ENVIRONMENTAL CONSERVATION COORDINATING MEETING



Initial inter-institutional coordinating meeting. In the background the Director of San Buenaventura Hospital, on the right the Director of Madidi IMNA NP, and on the left the ACTO team

Following the meeting with the health representatives in San Buenaventura, the planned activities were reviewed, and a comprehensive communication process was followed to achieve the objectives established for the technical mission. Visits to the communities of Eyiyoquibo, Torewa and Villa Fatima and vaccination campaigns were coordinated with the representatives of the Buenaventura

integrated health care. To this end, the hospital arranged for the participation of a team of six staff members: physicians, nurses, and a dentist.

The meeting was attended by the director of the San Buenaventura Hospital, Santos Gutiérrez; the director of the Madidi National Park and Integrated Management Natural Area (PN-ANMI), José Luis Howard; and from the ACTO, Carlos Macedo, Fritz Villasante and Rodrigo Tarquino.

## HEALTH MEETING WITH LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND THE ACTO

Several meetings were held with officials of the municipality of San Buenaventura, chaired by the mayor, Luis Alberto Alipaz Azcui.

The first was an extraordinary meeting to inform the route, schedule, and activities of the ACTO mission in the region.

An important aspect was that the municipality joined the mission voluntarily and suggested to install the radios in the communities of Torewa and Villa Fatima.

Subsequently, the radios were handed over to the mayor of San Buenaventura, supporting the activities of ACTO's technical mission and the objectives of the San Buenaventura hospital.



Meeting between the mayor, Luis Alberto Alipaz Azcui (left); the secretary of health, Ivar Gongora Copre Director of the hospital; Dr. Santos Gutiérrez; and the ACTO team

## MEETING WITH REPRESENTATIVES OF MADIDI NATIONAL PARK



Explanation of the characteristics of Madidi National Park in the context of conservation

and a visit to the

medical staff with ACTO's technical team.

The mission members also held a meeting with the director of Maddi National Park, José Luis Howard, who explained how the bilateral agreement with Bahuaja Sonene National Park is being implemented operationally, including joint activities for control and surveillance.

Mr. Howard expressed his concern about the complex situation of the development processes in the region, as they have

a strong impact on the protected area's nature conservation. He also said that, in the next management term, more resources will be allocated for control and surveillance actions, in addition to strengthening coordination with the communities to improve governance, which is one of the weakest aspects in the region.

Finally, the Madidi National Park Directorate has assigned two park rangers to support the mission

in logistics.



# VISIT TO THE TOREWA COMMUNITY

Doctors and nurses provided comprehensive health care in the Torewa community.



Technical staff from ACTO and the team of health personnel who visited Madidi NP, on their way to the Torewa community.

The technical mission to the Madidi Region in Bolivia, together with the team of doctors from the San Buenaventura Hospital, met on December 14 at the El Bala surveillance and control post to plan the visit to the Torewa community, home to families of the Tacana, Mositene, T'simane peoples and settlers.

Participants learned about the natural characteristics of the protected area and the governance system, as well as the importance of the work carried out in the area of conservation and the relevance of the participation of other entities, such as entities in the field of health, due to the innumerable needs of the populations.

To get to the Torewa community, the mission and the medical team traveled for more than three hours by boat along the Beni River and more than an hour's walk through the forest to the community in the Madidi National Park (PNM), department of La Paz.

During this field visit, the medical team carried out



a comprehensive and complete health journey aimed at the adult and child population, including a Covid-19 vaccination campaign. The activities focused on the immunization of children with the vaccines that are part of the Bolivian Unified Health System (SUS).

The comprehensive health care, dental and vaccination activities were coordinated by the director of the San Buenaventura Hospital, Dr. Santos Gutiérrez.

For the first time, a team of doctors from various specialties has been able to reach this community, thanks to the Contingency Plan for the Protection of Health in Highly Vulnerable Indigenous Peoples and in Initial Contact Project.

During the visit to this community, parents of the Mosekene, T'simane, Lecos, Quechua and Aymara peoples were fully attended, and about 50 people were also attended to in general medicine.

During the consultations, the doctors proceeded with the verification of the main diseases reported by the patients, in particular by the children who came

in great majority. All the consultations were carried out in the community school, where the health personnel set up a comprehensive consultation room.

The health team found that the population has chronic malnutrition, observed mainly in mothers and children.

It was also verified that 99% of the children attended have tooth decay and in many cases it is severe. In this sense, a preventive oral health and care campaign was deemed essential since they affect the children's health and their learning process. During the consultations, vitamins were applied, especially to children.

On the other hand, general aspects of the gestation of mothers were observed, the growth of children who are below the lower percentile, so it is necessary to promote a more balanced and protein-rich diet.

Finally, in order to attend and improve the population health conditions, they were vaccinated and dewormed.



# INSTALLATION OF RADIO EQUIPMENT

## Indigenous communities and Buenaventura hospital benefit from the installation of radio communication equipment.



Radio installed in the emergency room of the San Buenaventura Hospital. It is expected that this radio will be able to attend health emergencies in the indigenous communities of Torewa and Villa Fatima, all adjacent to the Madidi region.

As part of the Contingency Plan project, ACTO donated three sets of communication radios that were installed at the San Buenaventura Hospital and in the community of Torewa.

The third radio will be installed in the community of Villa Fatima, of the Tacana people, in early 2023.

The radio installed in the community of Torewa will contribute to integrate the indigenous communities of Madidi National Park into the early warning network to combat Covid-19 and to deal with outbreaks of new infectious diseases and epidemics.

It will also serve to communicate health emergencies to Buenaventura Hospital.

Since the area has no access to electricity, a solar panel was installed, and the community was trained to communicate with the hospital on a regular basis.

In the case of the community of Villa Fatima, the radio equipment was delivered and will be installed by the management of Buenaventura Hospital.

Installation of the radio in the community of Torewa. In the photo, the president, Mr. Cesar, tests the radio while waiting for a response from the San Buenaventura Hospital.



# MISSION ASSESSMENT

Evaluation meeting of the ACTO team prioritizes the need for joint and intersectoral actions



The medical team conducted a comprehensive health journey aimed at the adult and infant population

The technical mission concluded its activities within the established schedule and in compliance with the determined objectives.

The data presented in the diagnosis prepared by the ACTO consultants was validated. The interaction between health processes and the environment is becoming increasingly important, since any disturbance in nature leads to health problems and, in many cases, to zoonotic diseases that must be prevented.

In any case, the role of traditional medicine is fundamental in the health of the local population due to the local knowledge of the context and the

scarce access to health services in the region. For this reason, an integral process of territorial planning and actions for the benefit of indigenous communities is essential.



Local stakeholders welcomed the ACTO team and acknowledged with appreciation the diagnostic activities which have generated useful information for planning and decision making.

In this process the general guidelines should be established by national and central entities, but with the possibility of implementing and making decisions at the local level, and, in this way, local capacities and experience can be used to achieve participatory, joint, and comprehensive work.

The information obtained during the diagnosis, despite being based on secondary sources and systematized interviews, it has a high interaction with the reality of the diagnosed area.

## HEALTH IN SITU

According to the health situation, it was confirmed *in situ* that malnutrition of infants and mothers is exacerbated by the seasonal migration of parents to work to support their families.

These activities do not contribute to the quality of health, nor do they provide better education.

In addition, it was observed that there is a watershed relationship, upstream with extractive activities with negative effects, leaving environmental liabilities to the population living in this lower part of the Beni River. It is important that the regulations be applied directly and as soon as possible.

Likewise, a process of excessive contamination of the waters of the Beni River was observed, with a dragging of soil particles. One of the indicators is the difference in the color of the water, which hinders the fishing activity of the families in the communities, and, since fish is one of the main



Malnutrition in infants is exacerbated by the seasonal migration of parents.

sources of protein for the local communities, the lack of this food leads to malnutrition of mothers and children.

## ORAL HEALTH

The study and its findings not only provided relevant information for local decision making, but also had a positive influence.

The data collected showed that, in some ACTO Member Countries, cavities represent one of the main health problems in children; in Bolivia, this information was not available.

It was recorded that, in some regions among the 21 children attended, 20 of them had tooth decay.

A reflection should be made, since oral hygiene and treatment is part of the preventive process of dental cavities, and if it were carried out adequately and periodically, such discouraging pictures would not exist.

In this sense, it is appropriate



Oral care by the mission's medical team

to note that comprehensive care should also include a dentist to support prevention.

## TRADITIONAL MEDICINE

The on-site visit to the communities confirmed the importance of traditional Indigenous medicine for the communities, which is one of the local alternatives to the absence of conventional medicine. In this sense, preserving this knowledge is fundamental along with the rescue of local wisdom as there is a high migration of the younger

population, who are leaving their communities to move to cities due to the lack of opportunities, such as the lack of access to health services, education and work.



Families waiting for medical attention



### ZOONOTIC DISEASES

Zoonotic diseases are becoming more frequent due to the communities' coexistence with poultry, farm animals, and other animals, which are reservoirs of high-risk tropical diseases. According to interviews with community members, the cases of conjunctivitis, or evil eye, are due to the presence of poultry that transmit infections to children and the general population. Similarly, there are indications that domestic dogs are reservoirs of white leprosy or leishmaniasis. In a quick survey, this was observed in dogs in San Buenaventura and Tumopasa.



Zoonotic diseases are becoming more frequent in the communities.

### ZIKA VIRUS

A case of zika virus was reported in pregnant women in Ixiamas that caused congenital defects in the fetus. Finally, attention should be drawn to the diseases caused by rodents that have been reported in Caranavi. It is important to be aware of the serious risks if these outbreaks get out of control. These processes are even more aggravated in vulnerable populations with acute malnutrition as observed in the region.



Zika virus was found to have affected pregnant women causing birth defects in the fetus.

Consequently, understanding all these conditions of possible epidemic outbreaks, the San Buenaventura Hospital, where all the capabilities already exist, should be a specialized health facility and a reference in tropical medicine so that the infection and disease patterns can be systematized, analyzed, and reported.

The participation of institutions such as the Municipality of San Buenaventura, the Ministry of Health through the San Buenaventura Hospital, and the Ministry of Environment, through the National Protected Areas Service of Bolivia and its Madidi protected area, is an example showing

the need to articulate intersectoral actions, as well as the importance of establishing a health prevention process linked to the environment and nature.

The protected area should coordinate frequent joint work with the hospital, given the relationship between health and nature.

These cases should be reinforced so that joint actions to visit communities can be carried out comprehensively. This is further strengthened by coordination between the Peruvian and Bolivian governments in this region.





OBS

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Brazil



Colombia



Ecuador



GUYANA



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