On 23 February, The Director General of the World Health Organization (WHO), Dr. Margaret Chan has arrived in Brazil for high-level meetings with President Dilma Rousseff, accompanied by the Director of the Pan American Health Organization and Regional Director of the WHO in the Americas, Dr. Carissa Etienne.

The Brazilian government has released an online training program to improve the capacity of health personnel in treating ZIKAV-related diseases. In only 3 days, over 8,000 people have submitted their inscriptions. The course load is 45h and it is designed for doctors, nurses, physiotherapists and other primary healthcare personnel.
Situation Overview

According to the Brazilian Ministry of Health, there has been a sharp increase in the number of cases of microcephaly, related to the ZIKV among newborns in Brazil starting in October 2015 mainly in the northeast region. The Federal Government of Brazil has identified this issue as a priority, and President Dilma Rousseff launched a national plan of action to combat this virus in December 2015. Various ministries and governmental organizations including the police, army, firefighters and others, have been mobilized under the leadership of the Ministry of Health to support various activities related to prevention, communication, monitoring, capacity building, among others. The national plan is currently in its fourth phase until 04 March. UNICEF Brazil (BCO), in an effort to provide support and in response to a request for assistance, has developed a proposal to support governmental efforts to address the epidemic. The action plan is based mainly on vector control using the existing network with the Brazilian municipalities.

Brazilian government response

Accordingly to the MoH, 27.4 million properties (41% of the total goal of 67 million) were visited by health and/or military personnel. Over 80% of all target municipalities have already started local cleaning initiatives. From 19 February to 04 March, government is implementing the fourth phase of the plan whereby military and/or health personnel will also visit education facilities instructing students with prevention messages. On 23 February, The Director General of the World Health Organization (WHO), Dr. Margaret Chan arrived in Brazil for high-level meetings with President Dilma Rousseff, accompanied by the Director of the Pan American Health Organization and Regional Director of the WHO in the Americas, Dr. Carissa Etienne. The invitation was sent by the Brazilian government in order to present in depth the policies of the response to the health emergency and the results of researches carried out by Brazil. It is also an opportunity to deepen the dialogue on global efforts, coordinated by the WHO, of surveillance, response and research to deal with the emergency.

BCO’s Programme Response

Coordination

A key focus of UNICEF’s action in Brazil is on vector control, by joining forces with communities across the country to eliminate breeding grounds of the Aedes aegypti. UNICEF is conducting activities in close collaboration with the Ministries of Health (MoH) and of Education (MoE) as well as with PAHO, state and municipal governments to reach affected communities with the knowledge on how to reduce mosquito infection. UNICEF Brazil and World Bank are in contact to explore possibilities for collaboration as the World Bank develops its plans for supporting the government-led response against the mosquito. UNICEF is also in continuous liaison with LACRO and HQ in coordinating efforts to enhance regional efforts and impacts. The recent visit of the Director General of the WHO, Dr. Margaret Chan, demonstrates possibilities for deepening international cooperation efforts, including the production of rapid tests and vaccines. BCO is also in contact with Japanese and American embassies to dialogue about collaboration possibilities.

Strategy

BCO strategy is based on supporting government-led national plans and inter-agency priorities on reducing the number of breeding grounds. BCO is using three main strategies in the ZIKV response plan: Advocacy, Communications for Development and Monitoring. BCO’s priorities are to reach the most vulnerable communities and strengthen prevention and protection initiatives. BCO’s unique capillarity in Brazilian municipalities is a key component for our strategy. UNICEF is present in 84% of the municipalities classified at high-risk of mosquito infection so far. Therefore, BCO’s role is centered in articulating among different government levels and engaging Brazilian civil society towards the reduction of breeding grounds.

Advocacy and Mobilization

Mobilization of municipalities and states of Amazon region is moving forward. BCO is engaging with local and state authorities in a daily basis, providing key information on fighting breeding grounds and sensitizing communities in prevention and protection measures. BCO is in direct contact with approximately 8,000 key people (secretaries, technical
staff, mayors, articulators, counselors and others) in all Amazonian region. BCO is part of all urgency committees created so far to 1) support families with microcephaly cases and/or; 2) reducing breeding grounds of Aedis aegypti. UNICEF Brazil is also part of upcoming 13° Meeting of Governors and Secretariats (Health, Education and Social Assistance) of all Amazon region states planned for March 2016. Training sessions for 464 municipalities under UNICEF’s Seal of Approval are being prepared and adapted to include most recent information on eliminating breeding grounds.

**Communications and C4D**

BCO is advancing on structuring focus groups in order to design specific messages for target audiences. BCO is also in contact with social media companies – in coordination with NY HQ and UNICEF USA – aiming to boost social media platforms in the fight against the mosquito infection. To date, UNICEF spokespeople were interviewed by more than 10 media channels, including outlets of national and international reach (such as Reuters). UNICEF produced and is currently distributing three radio spots with the National Ambassador Renato Aragão aiming to disseminate messages on Aedes aegypti prevention. These materials are being broadcast by more than 30 radio stations countrywide, some of them of national reach. The distribution strategy is also targeting radio stations which broadcast to the most ZIKV and Dengue affected municipalities. BCO is preparing TV ads with key partners to increase the reach for the most disadvantaged communities and families. Since 12 January, BCO has posted 27 contents in social media networks (Facebook, Twitter and Instagram). This material has reached 2.8 million people and engaged directly 122,000 people.

**Monitoring**

The BCO response strategy includes an M&E pillar, which focuses on four areas: situation monitoring (evolving and potentially shifting trends in the epidemic, and in the spread of Aedes aegypti in the country); response monitoring (progress on Brazil’s response to the crisis, including UNICEF’s activities and added value); research (innovative research to generate data and evidence to support prevention and response efforts); and knowledge management (documentation and systematization of real-time information and data, as well as progress and results achieved by the response strategy). So far, this component has produced a series of bi-weekly SitReps, several maps for data visualization, methodological technical notes and sampling strategy proposals for research that will start in March.

**Next SitRep: 02/03/2016**

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