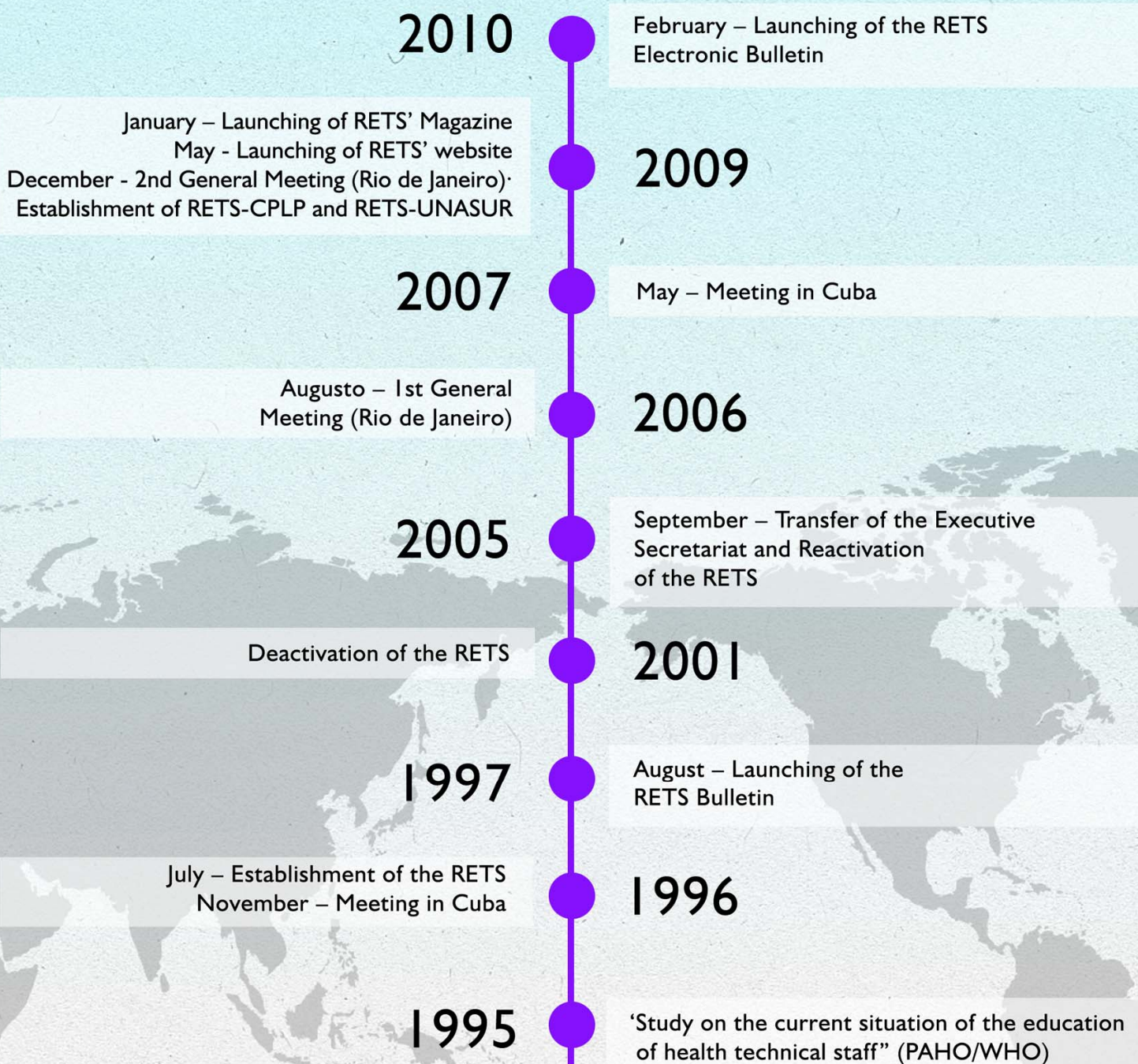


RETS

International Network of Health Technicians Education



***RETS-CPLP and RETS-UNASUR:
two stories gathering in one network***

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editorial

In December 2009, the 2nd General Meeting of RETS was held in Rio de Janeiro after its reactivation in 2005. During the meeting, more than 50 representatives from institutions members of the Network developed a Work Plan and a Communication Plan for 2010-2012 and two sub-networks – RETS-CPLP and RETS-UNASUR – were established. The Joaquim Venâncio Health Polytechnic School (EPSJV/FIOCRUZ), chosen by the participants of the meeting as the Network's Executive Secretariat for three more years, resumed the commitment to keep the network active and fight for its strengthening.

Since then, two years have passed. It is time to stop and assess what has been done and, if necessary, to redesign paths in order to meet commitments made, as well as to prepare new proposals to be discussed at the next general meeting of the Network, which will be held in 2013. This was the main reason that inspired

the development of this issue of the RETS. But that is not all.

The magazine also aims to give a brief resume of the history of this initiative, which somehow begins in 1995, when the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO/WHO) turns its attention to the training of health technicians and through a comprehensive study, ends up bringing to light a rather problematic scenario. Certainly much has changed since then, but it is always good to remember that there are still many issues to be discussed and problems to be solved. Worldwide, there is still much to do to give visibility to the technical health workers to improve their training and working conditions so that they can contribute more effectively to National Health Systems meeting all the people's needs.

Memories are also justified by the need to give new members of the Network some important references about it and the need to strengthen the participation of older members and give permanence to the project which has managed to drive several successful experiences in spite of so many difficulties.

As for sub-networks, after two years of work, we also believe that it is time to show what has been done and make changes that allow networks to meet more effectively the important role they have been delegated with by the Community of Portuguese Language Countries (CPLP) and the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR).

Finally, and in a complementary way, this issue of the magazine also records an important change in the Executive Secretariat of the RETS, which operates under the Coordination of International Cooperation of the EPSJV/FIOCRUZ. After seven years at the forefront, accumulating the coordination of the sector and the Executive Secretariat, Anamaria Corbo transfers her position of Head of the Coordination to Grácia Maria de Miranda Gondim. Her duties in the Executive Secretariat of RETS will be performed by Ana Beatriz de Noronha, who was already responsible for the communication sector of the Network.

Happy reading!
RETS Executive Secretariat

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RETS:

history as the basis for current action



The International Network of Health Technicians Education (RETS) can be defined as a link between institutions and organizations involved with the training and qualification of health technical staff in the Americas and the Caribbean, the African Countries of Portuguese Official Language (PALOP) and Portugal. Its mission is to strengthen national health systems, under the assumption that the training of workers has been considered a key dimension to the implementation of public policies that meet the health needs of populations.

Founded in 1996, the network first ran until 2001, when it was deactivated. In September 2005, with the transfer of the Executive Secretariat previously based at the School of Public Health of Costa Rica to the Joaquim Venâncio Health Polytechnic School (EPSJV/FIOCRUZ), the Network was reactivated and now boasts more than 100 institutions from 22 countries, besides hosting two major sub-networks: the Network of Technical Schools of the Community of Portuguese Language Countries (RETS-CPLP) and the Network of Technical Schools of the Union of South American Nations (RETS-UNASUR). (see articles on pages 7 and 15).

In 1996, common problems ensued the establishment of the Network

In the 1950s, the training of health technicians and assistants suffered a major boost and many educational centers offering diverse technical career were created. In the 1970s and early 1980s, the Human Resource Development Program of the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO/WHO) started a

line of work focused on health technicians training. In this context, some meetings were held in strategic places such as Venezuela, Mexico and Cuba in order to identify common problems related to the training and work of these workers.

At the end of 1995, in a scenario of health sector reforms, the Program resumed this line of work at the express request of countries, with the completion of an extensive study on the situation of training of health technical staff that gathered 70 centers in 16 countries in the Americas. The research identified countless problems, among which serious deficiencies in the planning of human resources, lack of systematized information on education and work of these professionals and outdated curricula.

The construction of an international network of health technicians training was defined as a priority and considered as an important way of enhancing the knowledge and accumulated experience and fostering the growth of different groups, whether teaching, research or health service providers. The formal establishment of the RETS occurred in July 1996 in Mexico City, during a meeting convened by PAHO/WHO. On that occasion, representatives from Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba and Mexico also established the School of Public Health of Costa Rica as the headquarters of the Network's Executive Secretariat, whose objectives were:

- enabling technical cooperation and collaboration among members in the training and development of health technical staff;
- disseminating information resulting from research on workers at this level in order to strengthen their development and that of health services in which they are inserted;
- enhancing the accumulation of knowledge, fostering integration and growth of groups of teachers, researchers, planners, managers and service providers;

- promoting the growth and strengthening of its organizational bodies and stimulating fundraising to ensure its sustainability;
- identifying the educational and training needs and other basic requirements of the various existing technical specialties.

In November of that same year, the group reconvened in Cuba to discuss the proposed organization of the Network presented by Costa Rica and Mexico.

In its first five years of existence, the RETS, which comprised only Latin American institutions, accounted for more than 50 members from 21 countries.

In 2005, reactivation establishes a new beginning

After four years deactivation, the RETS resumed operations on September 8th, 2005, when the Executive Secretariat was transferred to the Joaquim Venâncio Health Polytechnic School (EPSJV/FIOCRUZ) which had been designated as a WHO Collaborating Centre for Health Technicians Training in July 2004.

During her visit to the School at the time of the transfer, PAHO/WHO Regional Advisor for the Development of Human Resources in Nursing and Health Technicians, Silvina Malvárez recalled the important role played by RETS by fostering the development of technicians training in member countries, and celebrated the reactivation of the Network. "The benefit will be the resumption of this movement, this mobilization", she said.

"It is strategic to be at the forefront of this coordination process due to the possibility of stimulating the production of knowledge on this area of training, supporting the formulation of policies on education, work and health of Latin America and Portuguese-speaking African countries", said the then International Cooperation coordinator of the School, Anamaria Corbo, already assuming the purpose of the Network expanding its scope of operation under the new phase. Today, the RETS gathers members of the Americas, the Caribbean, Africa and Europe.

In the last two years, six new institutions were confirmed as members of the RETS. In November 2010, the Portuguese Red Cross Health School (ESP-CVP) and the Institute of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine (IHMT), also from Portugal. In May 2011, the Public Health School of the Chaco Province, from Argentina, and Medised, from Colombia; in July, the Jackson State University's Global Community Health Training Center and, in November, the Pan American Association of Medical Technologists (APTM).

When the Network's knots meet

Following the reactivation meeting, which occurred in 2005 at EPSJV/FIOCRUZ, some other presential meetings were held, serving to not only their specific objectives, but also strengthening the integration of network's links.

The 1st General Meeting of the RETS occurred in August 2006 in Rio de Janeiro (Brazil), during the International Forum on the Education of Health Technicians, held under the 11th World Congress on Public Health. The rules, the reference document "Basis for a Development Plan for Technicians in Health" (available on RETS' website, in 'Presentations') and the work plan of the network for the biennium 2007-2008 were presented, discussed and approved in the event.

On May 22nd and 23rd of the following year, some members of the Network met in Havana (Cuba) during the 1st Congress on Health Technology in order to validate an instrument that would contribute to the achievement of a possible unity in the categorization of different careers and ar-

eas of technical training in order to address the educational reality of countries members of the RETS. The meeting was attended by about 20 people representing 14 institutions from seven countries: Angola, Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Mexico and Uruguay.

In 2009, the 2nd General Meeting of RETS was held. The Work Plans of the RETS for the triennium 2010-2012 and those of its two sub-networks for the period 2010-2013 were defined at the meeting, which occurred on December 9th, 10th and 11th at EPSJV/FIOCRUZ. In addition to

Regions	Countries	Academical Institutions	Government Organs	WHO Representations	Other Institutions	Total
Americas (16 countries)	Argentina Bolivia Brazil Chile Colombia Costa Rica Cuba El Salvador Ecuador Honduras Mexico Panama Paraguay Peru United States Uruguay	60	13	13 (PAHO/WHO)	05	91
Africa (5 countries)	Angola Cape Verde Guinea Bissau Mozambique São Tome & Príncipe	07	04	02 (AFRO/WHO)	0	13
Europe (1 country)	Portugal	03	01	01 (WHO)	01	06
Total		70	18	16	06	110

Who can become a member of the RETS?

According to Article 4 of the Regulation, the following may become members of the Network by invitation or inclusion request: (I) Governing bodies responsible for formulating policies for the education of health technicians; (II) Representative offices of the World Health Organization (WHO); (III) Education institutions that run training programs for health technical workers; and (IV) Corporate institutions involved with the area of health technicians education. In the case of government agencies, WHO country offices and corporate institutions, the request for inclusion shall be made through a letter addressed to the Executive Secretariat. As for educational institutions, there are two hypotheses for their entry into the Network: (1) to be directly indicated by the government agency responsible for formulating policies for the education of health technicians at the national level or (2) have its request for inclusion validated by the same body. In this case, the Executive Secretariat will forward to the Ministry of Health the application for inclusion and notify the institution of the Ministry's response.

specific meetings for members of the network, the event's program included some activities open to the public: the lecture "Technical cooperation in health in the framework of UNASUR and the CPLP", addressed by the director of the Center for International Relations in Health (CRIS) at FIOCRUZ and Brazilian representative in the Coordinating Committee of UNASUR-HEALTH, Paulo Buss and CPLP's Cooperation Director Manuel Lapão; and round tables "Training experiences from Primary Health Care (PHC)", "The issue of culture in the training of health workers" and "The production of knowledge on health technicians: the importance of observatories of human resources for health". The completion of the 3rd Meeting of the RETS is scheduled for the first half of 2013.

A challenge to be overcome

Working in collaboration networks has been an important strategy in finding solutions to countless problems facing the health sector, including those related to training their workforce, considered fundamental to the development and consolidation of national health systems. On the other hand, networks can also play an important role in the interaction between institutions and countries, favoring the construction of a more comprehensive knowledge and boosting integration processes at the regional and global levels, so necessary to cope with the difficulties experienced by the sector. However, the strength and even the survival of these networks are not easy.

This process takes time and financial, technological and staff resources that are not always available. The biggest risk, however, occurs on account of the organizational model itself, when Network members fail to act actively, reducing their participation and contribution to the exchange of information and knowledge and the collective construction of knowledge. Unlike traditional structures, networks do not exist alone, they exist only in the relations established between their knots and in the processes undertaken to achieve the common goals that unite them and guide actions within the network.

In a major effort to reconnect with all those who, for whatever reason, are more distant, the Executive Secretariat of the RETS is starting a work that involves both updating information records of older members of the Network and the resumption of the search for new partners (see box). ■

Communication and the RETS: from the first bulletins to the new website

In his reflections, physician, philosopher and Public Health activist, **Edmundo Granda Ugalde** often reaffirmed the importance of networking. He said the contributions of the then new theory of organization and thinking about networked knots maintaining their autonomy but who must necessarily relate to each other could not be ignored by the Health sector.

While advocating for networks, he made an important caveat to its smooth operation – “a structure that is differentiated through teamwork, decentralized and autonomous is in great danger of lack of actions coordination” –, pointing then the solution to the problem: building a dynamic communication system. According to him, every network should become a major information processing system to be quickly used and criticized, in that it cannot survive without it. “The network depends on and is integrated through information”, Granda said.

In the case of RETS, concern with the issue of communication has already been explained in its initial design, as shown in the document “Proyecto Red de Formación de Técnicos en Salud”, published by PAHO/WHO in October 1997. According to the document, two of the Network’s objectives were directly related to communications: “developing mechanisms of integration among countries to establish the network through the use of modern communication technologies”, and “defining and implementing mechanisms for the production and dissemination of information relevant to the interests of RETS, through regular publications, books and educational materials and results of discussion forums to collaborate with

decision making and formulation of policies for the training of technical staff and its management in health services”. Moreover, among the driving projects of the network originally planned were the dissemination of the initiative through a bulletin, whose publication was the responsibility of the Department of Health Technology at the University of Costa Rica. By May 2001, seven editions of the newsletter had been published.

Deemed strategic since the establishment of the network, the current starting point of communication actions undertaken by the Executive Secretariat of the RETS is the RETS Work Plan and Communication Plan for 2010-2012. These documents, discussed and approved during the 2nd General Meeting of the Network in December 2009, define as the main objective in communication the creation and improvement of mechanisms and strategies that facilitate communication among RETS members and between the Network and the general public, strengthening the production and exchange of information and knowledge.

RETS magazine: topics to reflect on

The RETS Magazine launched in January 2009 is published quarterly, with 16 or 20 pages in 3 languages: Spanish, Portuguese and English. It aims at stimulating reflection on major issues that, to some extent, may affect the area of health technicians training.

The printed magazine has total circulation of 5,000 copies distributed free to individual and institutional subscribers in countries around the world, especially those that are part of the Network. In addition to the printed version, the reader can access the online version of the magazine (in PDF) through RETS website (<http://www.rets.epsjv.fiocruz.br>). Since December 2009, interested parties can subscribe to the magazine through the website.

Also in December 2009, at the suggestion of the Executive Secretariat and by decision of Network members, an Editorial Board was established for the magazine. The Board acts as an advisory body and collaborates with the editor in the consolidation and maintenance of the magazine, working for its dissemination and issuing opinions, when necessary, as well as counseling, ad-



Edmundo Granda Ugalde was born on June 27th, 1946 in Ecuador and died in April 2008. During his lifetime he fought tirelessly for the right to health of Latin Americans, with a concern about the internationalization of health and public health challenges in a globalized world. Granda’s ideas were gathered recently in the collection “La Salud y la Vida -Edmundo Granda Ugalde”, whose three volumes seek to recover part of the story of public health in Ecuador and Latin America. The collection is available on RETS website at: (<http://www.rets.epsjv.fiocruz.br>), in ‘Library’> ‘Books’)

Illustration: Liliana Gutiérrez (Volume 1, from the Collection).

visiting or making proposals on RETS editorial policy.

Since its launch, the magazine has addressed important health and health education issues, such as professional migration, interculturality, distance education, international cooperation in health, social determinants of health and educational materials, among many others. Moreover, it has been an open channel for the publication of successful experiences carried out by its member institutions.

RETS in the WEB: swifter information

Launched on May 22nd, 2009, RETS website, which also presents its contents in the three official languages of the Network – Portuguese, Spanish and English – has undergone since then a continuous process of technical improvement and editorial adaptation which aims to facilitate access and improve the quality of information provided to its users. As a complement to the magazine, the website focuses on the speed of information and the possibility of replicating important information for those who are interested in the topics covered.

Despite technical limitations imposed by the current tool and the specificity of the topic, an analysis performed by Google Analytics shows a great advance for RETS site since its launch. The comparison of the total number of one-time visitors in 2010 and 2011 shows an increase of 90%. In turn, the number of visits has increased by 58%. Today, people from over 60 countries regularly visit

The term WEB 2.0 has been used to designate a second generation of World Wide Web marked by the concept of the WEB as a platform and a trend that strengthens the idea of permanent exchange of information and collaboration of internet users with websites and online services. In the so-called WEB 2.0, the online environment works more dynamically and users become collaborators in the organization of contents.



The original bulletins

RETS site. Since its launch, the site has published nearly 150 articles and around 180 reports. Over 220 titles are already available in the site's library.

For those who are unable to visit the site regularly or do not receive news via RSS, RETS Electronic Bulletin was created in February 2010 to alert users about new contents published on the website and announce the launch of the magazine's editions, among other things. Anyone interested in receiving the publication may register directly on the Network's site and select the desired language. In two years of existence, 28 bulletin issues have been forwarded.

Another novelty adopted in September 2010 was Twitter (@RETS_EP-SJV), which has been used to enhance RETS communication's potential, making it faster and more replicable. Since then, over 340 messages have been transmitted. A year later, RETS created its Facebook profile and finally assumed the importance of social networks and the various environments created by **WEB 2.0** in the strengthening and working capacity of the Network.

An increased interactivity for the future

However, the idea of providing better services has been a constant issue and, because of that, the conceptual design for a new page is ready, which especially focuses on interactivity with the users, functionality and updated information.

Among other things, the project, whose architecture is focused on participation, involves the construction of specific environments for the two sub-networks operating within the RETS – the RETS-UNASUR and RETS-CPLP –, the possibility of discussion forums and the use of applications that act as enhancers of collective intelligence, such as Google Fusion, for example. Contents feeding can also be made directly by representatives of member institutions through different access levels.

More than just being a producer of information, RETS new site also aims to be a reference of access to other sources of information which, by their nature, will always be able to provide the most complete and current information on several issues that can facilitate or support technical cooperation activities. Thus, RETS site user will be quickly directed to other sites, such as "IBGE@países", which presents, in English, Portuguese and Spanish, the main demographic, social, economic and environmental markers worldwide, and the "Time and Date", with useful information for those who need to contact or travel to other countries, such as exact time, temperature, holidays, telephone codes, etc. ■

RETS-CPLP:

two years investing in technical education to strengthen national health systems

In May 2009, the CPLP Strategic Plan in Health Cooperation (PECS-CPLP 2009-2012) was approved at a meeting in Estoril, Portugal, whose goal is to strengthen the health systems of Member States of the Community – Brazil, East Timor and Portugal and the five African countries of Portuguese official language (PALOP): Angola, Cape Verde, Guinea Bissau, Mozambique and São Tomé and Príncipe, in order to universalize access and improve the quality of care provided to their populations.

Seven strategic axes of action (see article published in issue No. 3 of the RETS Magazine) were established in the PECS-CPLP, within which nine priority projects have been included. The creation of the CPLP Health Technical Schools Network (RETS-CPLP), one of RETS' sub-networks, was considered a priority project under Axis 1 – “Training and development of the health workforce”.

In December of that year, the 1st Meeting of the RETS-CPLP, which approved the current Work Plan (2010-2012), was held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, during the 2nd General Meeting of the RETS (see article published in issue No. 5 of the RETS Magazine). At the meeting, it was also agreed that the Joaquim Venâncio Health Polytechnic School (EPSJV) would be in charge of the coordination of the Network.

The RETS-CPLP work plan is divided into four main objectives aimed at: strengthening the physical and equipment infrastructure of the Health Technical Schools of the ministries of health of CPLP countries, in order to improve students' access to technical and scientific information in digital and physical formats and increase the performance of prac-

tice laboratory activities; increasing the number and diversity of the teaching staff of health technical schools (ETS) and qualifying teachers in technical and teaching aspects; developing skills in academic management and pedagogy, improving the construction and organization of the political-pedagogical projects, teaching programs and course plans; and facilitating the sharing of information, experience and expertise among CPLP technical schools, through the implementation of the RETS Communication Plan, which was also discussed and approved at the 2nd General Meeting of the Network.

Understand the RETS-CPLP and learn a little about the work done in its first two years of existence.

Prospects for cooperation in the training of nursing technicians

Considering the issue of technical and teacher training in priority areas, a workshop about specialized technical training in maternal and child health nursing and obstetrics, community nursing, palliative care and mental health was held in São Paulo, Brazil, on July 26th and 27th, 2010. Thus, with the participation of representatives of Angola, Guinea Bissau, Mozambique, São Tomé and Príncipe and East Timor, aspects related to the profile of these professionals, course plans and teacher training itself were discussed. Also participating in the discussions were representatives from the Ministry of Health of Brazil, the Pan American Health Organization in Brazil (PAHO/WHO), the EPSJV and Technical Schools from the States of Bahia and Ceará.

CPLP: political consultation and cultural, social and economic cooperation

The CPLP's story begins in São Luis do Maranhão, Brazil, in November 1989, during the first meeting of Heads of State and Government of the Portuguese-speaking countries. Its creation, however, only occurred on July 17th, 1996, in Lisbon, at the Summit of Heads of State and Government representatives from Angola, Brazil, Cape Verde, Guinea Bissau, Mozambique, Portugal and São Tomé and Príncipe. Only six years later, on May 20th, 2002, with the achievement of its independence, East Timor became a member of the Community. The CPLP is a new political project, based on the Portuguese language, a historical link and common heritage to the eight countries, a unity factor that has fostered a joint action that is increasingly significant and influential on the world scenario.

With the overall objectives of political consultation and social, cultural and economic cooperation, the CPLP operates primarily in activities aimed at strengthening countries' priority sectors such as Health and Education, using resources supplied by the governments of member countries as well as means made available through partnerships with other international organizations, non-governmental organizations, corporations and private entities interested in supporting the social and economic development of Portuguese-speaking countries.

The meeting was organized by the Secretariat of Health Education and Labour Management of the Ministry of Health of Brazil, through the General Coordinator of Health Education Technical Actions, and also served to promote the exchange between PALOP and Brazilian Schools. Furthermore, it allowed the exchange with the institutions present at the VIII Conference of the Global Network of WHO Collaborating Centers for Nursing and Midwifery, which occurred in the same city, in three days that followed the workshop (July 28th, 29th and 30th).

In the workshop, each country presented the context of nursing technical training, addressing, among other things, the provision of technical education in this area, the profile of these workers, the professional categories and the levels of education and professional qualification, as well as training needs, from the organization's national health system.

The discussion pointed out similarities and differences between countries and enabled the expression of concerns about specific difficulties and expectations regarding cooperation.

Teaching materials: an important discussion

The advice on the development and adaptation of teaching materials for courses offered by the ETS, one of the actions foreseen in the RETS-CPLP Work Plan gained materiality in a seminar for sharing experiences of producing educational materials.

The meeting held at the ESTeSL from May 10th to 12th, 2011, was funded by the Project Supporting the Development of Human Resources for Health in PALOP (PADRHS-PALOP) and coordinated by EPSJV/FIOCRUZ.

During the seminar, 15 representatives from Technical Schools and human resources area of the Ministries of Health of Angola, Cape Verde, Mozambique, Portugal and São Tomé and Príncipe had the opportunity to present a diagnosis on the production and use of teaching

materials for training technicians in their country; to discuss the function, the production and use of teaching materials, based on some theories and concepts underlying the different ways of using these materials; and to perform the analysis of a didactic material used by their institution with regards to the text's structure, contents and the proposed activities.

On the last day of the meeting, participants prepared a work plan, whose goal was

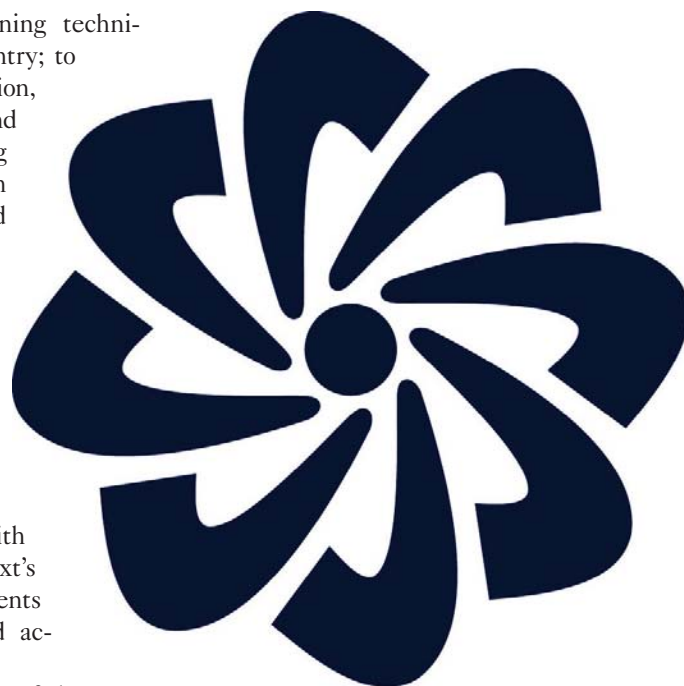
to continue the process of cooperation in this area. The Plan includes actions aimed at: expanding the collection of institutional libraries, through donation and purchase of new materials; sharing curricula, course plans, materials and teaching resources through the tools available on the RETS website; and preparing a textbook for teachers in education and health that can be used in various technician training courses. (See article published in issue No. 12 of the RETS Magazine)

Priority for teacher training

Although all actions undertaken have met their goals, one of them exceeded expectations: the achievement of the Health Professional Education Specialization Course (CEEPS) for African Countries of Portuguese Official Language (PALOP), whose proposal is beginning to be discussed right at the meeting which established the RETS-CPLP in December 2009, and is adopted at a meeting held at the Higher School of Health Technology of Lisbon (ESTeSL), in April 2010.

At the time, during the three-day meeting (21st, 22nd and 23rd), representatives from all countries involved discussed a course project presented by the EPSJV, which was built collectively by the School's postgraduate and international cooperation professionals in more than one year of work.

At the end of the meeting, the project is approved with some major adjustments and another phase of the work begins that culminates with the official release of the course announcement in July. The selection process was completed in October 2010. The course started on February 23rd in Guinea Bissau and ended in Rio de Janeiro on December 9th, with the graduation of 27 students. (See article on page 9). ■



CPLP

Course strengthens cooperation within the CPLP

The Health Professional Education Specialization Course (CEEPS) for the African Countries of Portuguese Official Language (PALOP) which started in Guinea Bissau on February 23rd, 2011 was finalized on December 9th, in Brazil, with a warm ceremony graduation (see box page 10) and a relaxed feast which gathered almost everyone which in some way has been involved with the initiative.

The course aimed at specializing teachers and leaders in the field of Health Professional Education through the deepening of the theoretical and methodological bases underpinning education policies and their relationship with health and health work. Its hosting was one of the actions scheduled in the Work Plan of the Network of Technical Schools of the Community of Portuguese Language Countries (RETS-CPLP), one of RETS' subnets, and which was designed as one of the structuring projects of the CPLP Strategic Plan in Health Cooperation (PECS-CPLP).

Funded by the Multiannual Action Program of the European Union's Project Supporting the Development of Human Resources for Health in PALOP and East Timor (PADRHS-PALOP and TL), the course was conducted with support from World Bank and the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO/WHO), through the TC41 (An International Cooperation Program which includes PAHO/WHO, the Brazilian Ministry of Health and FIOCRUZ).

Course was deemed essential for PALOP

The first meeting of the RETS-CPLP occurred simultaneously with its creation in December 2009, at the 2nd General Meeting of the RETS. At the meeting, attended by CPLP's



Director of Cooperation, Manuel Lapão, and representatives of the Ministry of Health of countries from the Community, possibilities for cooperation in the training of health technicians were discussed and agreed and a Work Plan for the triennium 2010-2012 prepared based on the established in the PECS-CPLP.

Proposed by the ESPJV/Fiocruz team, conducting a *lato sensu* health professional education specialization course was a priority for the structuring and consolidation of public technician training institutions in the PALOP. "At the time, everyone agreed that such a course would boost the possibility of PALOP setting staff operating actively in the process of improving the training and reducing the numeric deficit of health technicians, one of the obstacles to the construction of universal and quality public health systems", says Marcela Pronko, one of the coor-

A celebration full of excitement

December 9, 2011 was not an ordinary day for those who were present at the Polytechnic Health School Joaquim Venâncio (EPSJV/FIOCRUZ) in Rio de Janeiro. That day, something that was considered by many only a dream became a reality. The excitement and sense of accomplishment took over the school auditorium which hosted the graduation of 27 students* from the first class of the Health Professional Education Specialization Course (CEEPS) for the African Countries of Portuguese Official Language (PALOP).

In front of the table composed by the coordinators of the course, Anamaria Corbo and Marcela Pronko; by Cristina Araripe and Marise Ramos, who at the time held respectively, the posts of EPSJV Director and Coordinator of the Postgraduate Program of the School; Nisia Trindade, Vice President for Education, Information and Communication at FIOCRUZ; Roberta Santos and Claudia Marques, representing the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO/WHO) and the Ministry of Health, Angolan student Thomas Chianga Dembe opened the ceremony by talking about the battle that has been won. "Our look translates the joy that invades us for the success achieved. Today, the moment symbolizes the fulfillment of a mission", he said.

Visibly moved, the class representative expressed appreciation for the work performed by teachers who, he said, contributed wisely to build, deepen and diversify the methodological theoretical knowledge underpinning Education policies and its relationship with Health and Work in Health. At the end of his speech, the speaker thanked everyone involved in the project.

Marcela Pronko was next. The coordinator spoke of the creation and development and the difficulties of the course. She reminded that the team of teachers developed during nearly a



year and a half an intense process of collective preparation through weekly meetings for study and reflection in order to support planning activities and study and better understand the African reality. To highlight the spirit in which students participated in the initiative, Marcela ended her speech with words from Amílcar Cabral: "I can have my opinion on many topics, on how to organize the struggle; to organize a party; an opinion that was formed in me, for example, in Europe, Asia or in other African countries, from books, documents and meetings that have influenced me. However, I cannot pretend to organize a party, organize the struggle from my ideas. I must do it from the concrete reality of the country".

"In the seven years that I have been leading International Cooperation, this has been one of the most enriching works I have ever experienced". With the sense of accomplishment, Anamaria Corbo outlined some issues that have been important in the process of creating the course and thanked the people, countries and organizations involved. She was emphatic while addressing the students: "I hope that you will less and less need to ask for help from foreign countries in the context of cooperation to structure your institutions. I hope that you will be increasingly requesting that cooperation, not to help revise the curriculum and structure your schools, but to publish, in the RETS or any other space provided by the EPSJV, the result of the production of knowledge about the reality that you experience".

"I am proud to be African; all my ancestors were born here. A legitimate child of the world. Queen; my Africa, oiê". To celebrate the moment, a student started to sing a song that was used to integrate students during the first phase in Guinea Bissau and which eventually became the 'anthem of course' which was sung at the end of all blocks.

At the end of the ceremony, with many tears and smiles, trainees received their certificates as a reward for the effort and dedication.

* From Angola: Abel Sunda, Castro Chinhundo Chiumbo, Guedes Candundo, Luzia Leonilde de Jesus Fernandes de Almeida, Manuel Lica Nunes, Odília Iva Simbaluka Valente and Tomás Dembe Chianga. From Cape Verde: António Carlos Semedo Varela, Fernanda Jesus Monteiro; Jose Manuel Ledo Pontes da Rosa, Marlinda dos Santos Fortes Rocha and Natalina dos Reis da Cruz Spencer. From Guinea Bissau: Basílio Adriano Conduto, Euclides Victor dos Santos, Francisco José Pinto de Pina, Maram Mane and Quintino Nhaga. From Mozambique: Agostinho Américo Junior, Antonio Macucha Américo, Boaventura Pedro Abasse, Maria Helena Victor Luís Jordão Manuel, Maria Olga Matavel, Melo Maielane Eugenio and Orlando Alberto Prato. From San Tome & Príncipe: Cesaltino da Cruz Cunha, Eurídice Helga da Cruz R. Aguiar and Pascoal Fonseca D'Apresentação.

dinators of the course. At the meeting, it was decided that the EPSJV would draw up a project to be discussed later.

“In fact, the conformation of this course began some years ago, when the EPSJV was called in by the President of FIOCRUZ to collaborate in the strengthening of International Cooperation with African countries, especially with PALOP, through a less welfare-like or an advisory model”, recalls former School director André Malhão.

At that time, he says, based on EPSJV’s own experience with the health professional education postgraduate course for workers trained in the field of health, a project that would serve for the training of leaders and teachers in these countries, but also to strengthen cooperation between the PALOP began to be conceived. “Our goal was to establish a course format that would include students from various countries and of itinerant nature and that, therefore, would go beyond training and also favor a link between professionals and leaders of different countries”, he says.

A must: understanding the reality and needs of each country

A specific working group was set up in EPSJV to prepare a course plan to be discussed later on at another meeting, whose first task was to conduct a preliminary study of the historical and contemporary aspects of the African continent, particularly of the PALOP. The study which included general markers and the organization of health and education systems in these countries served for the building of a project that is more suited to the needs and demands of these countries, based on an already existing postgraduate course of the School.

The proposed course plan developed by the group was presented and discussed with CPLP and country representatives in a meeting held from April 21st to 23rd, 2010 at the Higher School of Health Technology of Lisbon (ESTeSL). It was established that the Course would be modular and of itinerant nature, lasting 34 weeks and with a workload of 606 hours, divided into five classroom steps which includ-

ed classes themselves, workshops and an Integration Seminar. In addition, there would be weeks of dispersion for the performance of non-classroom tasks and activities between each block. Overall and teaching coordination and certification would fall on the EPSJV, who would also assume the executive coordination jointly with the national coordinators.

With the approved proposal, a team of teachers was assembled and worked on the preparation of the course for 10 months, a process that led to a deeper study of the reality of countries with which interaction would occur and resulted in the creation and development of certain disciplines which were important for the PALOP course, although not included in the curriculum of the already established EPSJV postgraduate program.

Marcela says that this long preparatory process was built into a unique space of learning and collective construction, based on the joint listening and learning skill, the respect for differences and the coping with contradictions. “It was a fundamental process, whose wealth is reflected in the thinking developed in other areas and projects, in the maturation of the principles and guidelines that are this political and pedagogical action of the EPSJV and the improvement of theoretical and methodological tools underpinning the performance of each one of us both inside and outside the scope of the course”, she emphasizes.

The specialization course plan was developed by a working group composed by professors and researchers mainly linked to the Coordinator of the Postgraduate Program and the International Cooperation Coordinator of the EPSJV. In all, 16 EPSJV professionals participated in the course, ten of which directly in the classroom.

Selection of students: focus on the dissemination of knowledge

With the project ready and approved, the next step was the selection process, which began on July 9th, 2010 with the publication of the Notice and the Rules of the course. According to the documents, teachers

and heads of health workers training institutions in their respective countries, with a higher education degree and a preferably permanent link with the national health or education public system could participate in the selection process.

Candidates should be appointed by the Ministry of Health or Education or even training institutions, and present a letter of intent and a commented curriculum vitae. The idea has always been to select candidates that could use at the end of the course the acquired knowledge in order to collaborate effectively to structure the training of health technicians in their own countries.

Form and contents: innovation and respect for health technical work

The first three steps of the course were carried out in Guinea Bissau (February 23rd to March 4th), Mozambique (April 25th to May 6th) and Cape Verde (August 16th to 26th). Due to budgetary issues, the last two modules, which would be held in Angola and São Tomé and Príncipe, were eventually held in Brazil, where the students stayed from November 14th to December 9th.

In the first stage, four courses were started. In the second stage, some of these were completed and others initiated. The same thing occurred in the third stage. In all of them, Saturdays were filled with activity in preparation for the seminar. In Brazil,

Maria José Cardoso (Angola), Marilena Cabral (Cape Verde), Maria Aramata Injai (Guinea Bissau), Francisco Langa (Mozambique) and Pascoal Fonseca D’Apresentação (São Tomé and Príncipe).

Angélica Fonseca; Anakeila Stauffer; Anamaria Corbo; Ana Margarida Campello; Arlinda Moreno; Carla Martins; Carlos Bastistella; Cristina Morel; Francisco Lobo; Francini Guizardi; Gustavo Matta; Júlio Lima; Luiz Antonio Saléh; Márcia Lopes; Marcela Pronko; Neise Deluiz.

subjects were completed during the first week. In the second week, the seminar was held with the presentation of the work that students had developed throughout the course. Also, in these last two weeks, workshops aimed at the analysis and drafting of a Pedagogic Political Project (PPP), curricula and the analysis of learning materials were held. (see box)

According to Marcela, the fact that students come from different countries and the itinerant format of the course represent a breakthrough in international technical cooperation and could mean gains for all. “The meeting of students from various countries and the roaming of meetings represent an excellent opportunity to strengthen horizontal cooperation ties and exchange not only between Brazil and African countries, but also among the PALOP”, says Marcela. “The holding of classes in different countries allows greater proximity to the concrete reality of each country. This, in turn, enables students and teachers to more deeply understand the national realities and to be aware of and analyze common problems, exchanging proposals and prospects for resolution”, he explains.

As for contents, **seven courses** of a more general theoretical and methodological nature were structured, with an individual workload of 40 hours/class. According to Marcela, the courses were designed to give students a theoretical foundation about the different fields of knowledge related to the training of health technicians. For example, the “Knowledge, science and politics” course aimed to analyze the historical relationship be-

‘Knowledge, science and politics’, ‘Education economics and health workers’ training concepts’, ‘Foundations of education and health social policies’, ‘Learning and teaching theories and pedagogical approaches’, ‘Historical foundations of health professional education’, ‘Transformation of the world of work and health work’ and ‘Curriculum and teaching in health professional

TESTIMONY

Didactic material in the training of PALOP’s workers: discoveries and changes.

Caio Eduardo Cabral Cidrini*

Curicica neighborhood, Rio de Janeiro, around 14 hours, December 7th, 2011. It is the end of the didactic material workshop of the Health Professional Education Specialization Course for the African Countries of Portuguese Official Language (PALOP) and, after lunch, teacher Carla Martins and I were already leaving when one of the Angolan students approached us and commented on his willingness to take everything he learned back to the health technicians training institution in which he works. The fact was commonplace, but it served to complete my impression on the experience I had just lived during these days, complementing the knowledge for the research project* in which I am a scholar.

In the first activity of the didactic material workshop, students divided into groups according to their countries were instructed to identify and characterize existing and instructional materials used in their institutions. Results were then presented to the rest of the class. My participation in this workshop made possible something that I could never have grasped only through internet searches and reading: what is considered, known and understood as teaching material.

Surely I cannot consider myself a connoisseur of the reality of these African countries, after all, there have been only four rounds listening to some professionals in the field. However, the activity showed me several issues that I could not learn through other means, such as the differentiation of materials’ terminology between countries, the diversity of origin of materials, the concept of didactic material that each one carries and the assessment of each group on the material.

Groups pointed out many positive aspects, but also negative aspects were mentioned, among which are difficulty of access and, especially, the difficulty of adapting the material to the reality of different countries. The complaint confirmed something I consider very important in my study of teaching materials used in the training of PALOP’s health technicians: the fact that many materials of foreign origin and culture are being used.

After characterizing and discussing the materials existing in their countries, groups began a discussion on the design of these materials and proposed actions that could change or improve the abovementioned negative aspects. In addition to enabling everyone to use the knowledge gained, this discussion was very interesting because it enabled students to make suggestions for the existing conditions, according to the needs of each country, based on the issues raised.

At the end of the workshop, which until then was regarded as just another project activity, my perception was quite different. At that moment, I realized that there are many people interested in learning and working to do something for others, changing the health situation in their countries through improvements in the training and work of health technicians. I realized then the desire for change that moves people and the willingness to fight for what they believe.

* Caio is 18, a student of Social Communication of the Pontifical Catholic University (PUC/RJ) and is under the orientation of professor Anakeila de Barros Stauffer in the project “Discursivity and public policies in health: setting up a linguistic and discursive corpus on the training of PALOP’s health technicians”.

tween the production of knowledge, conceptions of human being and the corresponding society projects. In addition, it attempted to discuss the fragmented and autonomized ways of contemporarily producing science and the possibilities of building a scientific knowledge that can contribute to human emancipation in education and health.

For the researcher Marise Ramos, then coordinator of the EPSJV Postgraduate Program, the selection of course contents was fairly representative. “This choice demonstrates a concept of technical education that recognizes these employees as strategic for the production of life, going in the opposite direction of those who see them only by their ability to perform tasks and not to formulate processes and seek solutions to problems”, she said, during the graduation ceremony.

Also included in the curriculum was the Courses Integration Seminar, lasting 56 hours, whose goal was to lead students divided into groups by countries to review and discuss the national public education and health policies and thus bring elements to the discussions proposed in the workshops, which represented an opportunity for reflection and construction of educational tools.

At the seminar, besides presenting an analytical diagnosis of health professional education in each country, students were able to discuss education and health public policies and promote the coordination between the content worked in the courses and the concrete reality of each country, taking into account the need for structuring and strengthening of health technicians training institutions. “The knowledge gained from seminars is the starting point for a discussion network. It was a huge,



new and creative work”, said teacher Carla Martins, responsible for the “Knowledge, Science and Politics” course.

Assessment: a unique learning opportunity

As educator, philosopher and doctor of Education from the University of São Paulo (USP) Celso dos Santos Vasconcellos says assessment is a comprehensive process of human existence involving reflection on practice, in order to diagnose its progress and difficulties and, from the results, plan future decision making. With regard to the educational process, he also points out that if we conceive education as a “transformative praxis”, assessment should be considered as a “commitment to learning for all”.

Therefore, it is no wonder that assessment processes assumed a great importance in the Health Professional Education Specialization Course for the PALOP being held at various times on different aspects and with different goals.

On the process of preparing and developing the course, the then RETS coordinator and also course coordinator Anamaria Corbo believes

that the greatest difficulties were due to the concrete feasibility of the proposal, since this depended on resources from various sources and various bureaucratic processes. “It is not easy to reconcile time and functioning dynamics of multiple agencies involved – funding agencies; the EPSJV, as executing institution; and institutions from African countries participating in the cooperation –, but challenges have been overcome and resulted in a great learning experience”, she explained.

On the part of teachers, both during the preparation of the course and the training process itself, successive assessments were made in order to verify the appropriateness, relevance and capacity of the training that was being conducted.

The course assessment by students was also considered important and was made both orally and in writing at a specific meeting with the participation of students, coordinators and teachers on the morning of December 9th.

Generally, the assessment of students on the course was very positive, highlighting the quality of the faculty, which showed “organizational responsibility and a lot of knowledge”, as

In, ‘A avaliação da aprendizagem como um ato amoroso: o que o professor pratica?’ (Educ. rev. vol.25 no.2 Belo Horizonte Aug. 2009). Available at: http://www.scielo.br/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S0102-46982009000200010



Odilia Simbaluka, from Angola, says, and the classes, which were always “very interactive and participatory”, said Pascoal Fonseca, from São Tomé and Príncipe. “We come from different countries and have different cultures, religions and habits. I think we can take with us not only the course contents, but the example of the teachers’ union. I think the way that teachers socialize with each other will be a mirror for us in our own institutions”, added Cape Verdean José Manuel Ledo.

The answer to such praise could not be otherwise: “From our relationship of teachers and students, we now became friends. We are partners in the contemporary challenge of building a more just world”, said Professor Carlos Bastistella, responsible for the “Curriculum and teaching in health professional education” course.

Regarding the curriculum, some students mentioned the initial strangeness caused by the presence of theoretical subjects in a course aimed at training technicians traditionally identified only with the “know-how” and not the “know how to think”. However, they said, it gradually became clear and understandable, as exemplified by Mozambican Boaventura Abasse. “At first, I did not understand why to study, for example, epistemology. However, the answer to this came during and at the end of the course, with the workshops and the seminar. Everything made sense then”, he said, adding: In the first session, in which a movie and some photos were displayed, it was a total question mark. I could not make a connection. In the end, however, all was well interconnected and we could see the relevance of contents. Today, I have the clarity that I am able to assess a curriculum and a teaching material and I believe we all have a strong foundation for doing relevance work in our institutions”.

The biggest complaints from students were about the workload, regarded low by almost everyone. The major concern, in turn, was about the possibility of continuing the project in their countries of origin. “It is important to involve the Health and Education authorities in these processes so that they are more sensitive to the discussions proposed, more likely to listen to us and cooperate among themselves”, he said Maran Mane, from Guinea Bissau.

In order to try to reduce some apprehension of the group about the possibility of applying the acquired knowledge in their countries, Anamaria Corbo noted that the course was set out in the work plan of the RETS-CPLP and that is perfectly in line with the provisions of the Strategic Plan in Health Co-

operation (PECS-CPLP): “There is a commitment of national governments with the implementation of the Plan, under which the network which we are all part of was created. The aim of this network is to increase the possibility of exchanging experiences before the practical difficulties we face in the daily work routine. The idea is to be able to use some of the other’s work to rethink our own and thus strengthen the area of training health technicians in the countries”, she said. “However, a network is not built only from one place”, she warned, adding: “Actually, the network concept is a “non-place” where everyone works together on the same level, where there is no hierarchy. Therefore, for this network to be indeed established, all must use it as a space for sharing knowledge and practices”.

According to Marcela, the results enabled a reflection on the validity and relevance of the course as a whole, the wealth that was provided and the possibility of staging new editions, although there is no provision to host another course like this. “We are trying to set a record that can show concrete results and the potential of this experience and serve as a starting point for other similar initiatives”, she said.

In her final analysis, Marcela noted three relevant aspects: the experience of preparing with the teaching staff, which allowed the collective construction of knowledge to be conveyed to students; the contact with other realities, which allowed to realize that some problems which, in principle, seemed characteristic of a particular institution, are common to all; and the possibility of exchanging experiences and knowledge.”We’ve always been very keen in making a horizontal cooperation, where we have knowledge and different assessments, but we put everything on the table to build knowledge together. Thus, both students and teachers learned”, she added, concluding: “Somehow, the approach to new realities opened new possibilities of looking at the world. I think my view of the world will never be the same”. ■

RETS-UNASUR:

Technical training and regional integration in South America

The Network of Health Technical Schools of the Union of South American Nations (RETS-UNASUR) was established in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in December 2009 during the 2nd General Meeting of RETS. Its origin, however, is intrinsically related to the history of the South American Health Council (UNASUR-HEALTH) and the South American Health Agenda established in December 2008. (See box)

In April 2009, Technical Groups (TGs) were created during the 1st Ordinary Meeting of the South American Health Council (UNASUR-HEALTH), held in Santiago, Chile, to be responsible for the viability of the five major objectives of the Agenda: (1) establishing the South American epidemiological shield; (2) developing universal and equitable health systems; (3) providing universal access to medicines and other health supplies; (4) promoting health and jointly tackling its social determinants; and (5) strengthening the training and management of human resources for health.

The creation of networks of institutions structuring national health systems was considered one of the priorities within the WG for the Development and Management of Human Resources for Health and is expressed in Resolution N° 07/09 of the 3rd Extraordinary Meeting of the Council held in November 2009 in Guayaquil, Ecuador.

A month later, during the 2nd Meeting of the RETS, representatives from the Ministries of Health and health technicians training institutions from Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Paraguay, Peru, Suriname and Uruguay, as well as the area of Human Resources of some national PAHO/WHO offices, signed the charter of the Network of Health Technical Schools of UNASUR (RETS-UNASUR). At the time, during the

first meeting of the new Network, the Work Plan for the period 2010 to 2013 was approved and the Joaquim Venâncio Polytechnic Health School (EPSJV/FIOCRUZ) was chosen as the manager institution and the host of the Network's Executive Secretariat for that same period. The creation of RETS-UNASUR was formalized at the 2nd Ordinary Meeting of UNASUR-HEALTH, held in Cuenca, Ecuador, on April 29th and 30th, 2010.

Technical-scientific cooperation and sharing of experiences

Designed as a sub-network of the RETS, RETS-UNASUR is composed of government agencies responsible for the formulation of health technicians training policies and education institutions conducting training programs for the training of health technical workers indicated by the Ministries of Health of the Member States of UNASUR. Their general purpose is "to strengthen the field of health technicians training in countries members of UNASUR through the exchange of experiences and development of technical cooperation, in order to increase and improve teaching, research and technological development activities, leading to the improvement of national health systems and their adaptation to the needs of their populations and regional integration".

The RETS-UNASUR Work Plan was developed based on four specific objectives – (1) to monitor and systematize the information related to the area of health technicians training and its interface with the organization of health work so as to identify educational trends and needs in order to support the definition of public policies for the field; (2) to promote technical and scientific cooperation among member institutions for the development of educational proposals, curricula, courses, teaching materials, methods and faculty training in priority areas, seeking alternatives and experiences that can be shared; (3) to develop mechanisms to facilitate production, dissemination and systematization of information and communication on the field of health

This decision sought to ensure a greater organicity in the actions of cooperation between countries, since major initiatives have already been carried out under the RETS, such as the two Technical Cooperation

Projects between Countries (CTP) performed between the years 2006 and 2009 and which gathered Bolivia, Brazil and Paraguay: "Interinstitutional Cooperation for the Strengthening of the Training of Technicians and Assistants as Essential Health Care Stakeholders" and "Deepening and consolidation of interinstitutional technical cooperation for the strengthening of health technicians training".

The general objective of both projects was to contribute to the improvement of care of health systems of Bolivia, Brazil and Paraguay through the exchange of experiences and lessons learned in the training of health technicians and assistants. The purpose was to improve the availability, quality and quantity of these workers for health services, as well as to strengthen the RETS within MERCOSUR.

Participants of the projects were: EPSJV/FIOCRUZ, Brazil; PAHO-Bolivia; PAHO-Paraguay; PAHO-Brazil; the National Institute of Health and the Ministry of Health of Paraguay; the Japanese-Bolivian Health Technical School for Andean Cooperation, the Bolivian Chaco Health Technical School Tekove Katu and the National Health School in La Paz, Bolivia.

technicians training among members of the sub-network; and (4) foster the development of research among the institutions included in the interface areas of Health, Education and Labor, in order to increase and strengthen their teaching and technical cooperation activities –, and the third one is related directly to the RETS communications department.

Now get to know some of the work that has been developed by RETS-UNASUR.

Funded by the Ministries of Health and Science and Technology, by EPSJV/Fiocruz and the TC-41 and developed between March 2007 and May 2009, the research gathered important quantitative data on the training of health technicians in Brazil and identified national educational policies for these professionals in other countries, serving as the basis for the current study and providing subsidies for the discussion of training health technicians in the MERCOSUR. The results contributed significantly to the inclusion of this matter on the agenda of the Working Subgroup 11 (SGT-11) responsible for Health matters in the bloc.

Another important result of the initial research was the launch of two books: (1) “The silhouette of the invisible: the training of health technicians in the MERCOSUR”, which gathers the presentations made during the 1st International Seminar on the Training of Technical Health Workers in Brazil and MERCOSUR, held in November 2008, at the EPSJV, and the full text of the “Manguinhos Document” adopted at the end of the seminar; and (2) “Health technicians training in Brazil and MERCOSUR”, with the study’s final report.

Both publications are available on RETS’ website (<http://www.rets.epsjv.fiocruz.br>), in ‘Library’ > ‘Books’. The presentations of the seminar can also be accessed at ‘Library’ > ‘Events’.

UNASUR-HEALTH: A strategic Council

Expressed initially in the Cuzco Declaration signed in December 2004, during the Third Meeting of South American Presidents, the idea of creating the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR) was only implemented in May 2008, in Brasília, Brazil during a meeting of Heads of State and Government. According to its constituent treaty, UNASUR’s objective is to “build in a participatory and consensual manner a cultural, social, economic and political space of integration and union among their peoples, prioritizing political dialogue, social policies, education, energy, infrastructure, financing and environment, among others, with a view to eliminating socioeconomic inequality, achieving social inclusion and citizen participation, strengthening democracy and reducing asymmetries within the framework of strengthening the sovereignty and independence of States”.

Besides economic integration, the UNASUR project, which gathers 12 independent nations of South America – Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Guyana, Paraguay, Peru, Suriname, Uruguay and Venezuela – provides for the adoption of joint measures for different sectors, among which are defense and health.

Accordingly, in December 2008, the South American Defense Council and the South American Health Council (UNASUR-HEALTH) were created and composed by the 12 ministers from each field. At the same time, members of the Heads of State and Government Council set the South American Health Agenda, to be detailed at the first meeting of UNASUR-HEALTH and implemented over the next three years.

MERCOSUR Project: experience which may extend to other UNASUR countries

To identify and analyze the supply of health technicians training in Argentina, Paraguay and Uruguay, in a convergent way with the data and analyses already produced for Brazil in order to subsidize policies for the organization and strengthening of health, education and international cooperation systems among MERCOSUR countries, ensuring comparability of national studies and respecting the specificities of each country. This is the goal of a project being conducted by EPSJV/FIOCRUZ, in partnership with the National Directorate of Human Capital and Occupational Health of the Ministry of Health of Argentina, the Public Health Research Institute of the University of Buenos Aires, the National Health Institute of Paraguay and the University of the Republic of Uruguay.

The project, which is being developed based on the methodology used by EPSJV in the coordination of the research “Health Professional Education in Brazil and MERCOSUR countries: prospects and limits for the comprehensive training of workers before the challenges of health policies”, encompasses two dimensions: quantitative and qualitative.

In its quantitative dimension, the research aims to identify the number of courses, professional qualifications and institutions carrying out the training of health technicians. The qualitative dimension focuses on the theoretical and methodological guidelines and the material bases of curriculum development and organization of professional education in MERCOSUR countries. The ultimate goal of the study is to map a regional diagnosis of health technical workers training that can contribute to international cooperation actions among countries of the bloc, as well as strengthen the research capacity of institutions participating in the training of health technicians.

The starting point for the development of this project was the realization, in Argentina, Paraguay and Uruguay, of a meeting of EPSJV professionals with researchers of each country, in order to consolidate the groups and to start work. Then, in order to have in depth discussions about issues related to the quantitati-

ve research, a workshop was held in Rio de Janeiro, from August 1st to August 3rd, 2011 gathering members from each national teams and EPSJV's team.

During the workshop, each team presented the historical and legal background of health technicians training in its own country and the first results obtained. They also discussed the difficulties faced in performing the work, as well as possible solutions to the challenges that must be overcome.

Two workshops for the analysis of quantitative data and the definition of instruments for the collection and analysis of qualitative data of the research will be held in May 2012. The II International Seminar on the Training of Health Technicians in MERCOSUR is already planned for November, where the final outcomes of the work will be presented and widely discussed.

By gathering education and health research institutions and governing bodies of the countries involved in order to collect the information needed to achieve its goal, this multicentric project has been encouraging in each country a reflection on the structuring needs of health technical training at the national level, as well as on the strengthening of regional integration processes of the sector. Therefore, the team's expectation is to extend the initiative to other countries of UNASUR with support from the GT-DGRHS and the PPT of UNASUR-HEALTH.

A partnership with Argentina in the 'Plan de Mejora'

While holding one of the highest education rates in Latin America, Argentina has a large disparity in educational supply and faces serious difficulties in guaranteeing the quality of education, including in relation to technical and professional health education.

In the early 90's, the Argentine education system was mixed, involving institutions managed by the National State and provincial institutions. Between 1991 and 1993, the State transferred to the provinces and the Autonomous City of Buenos Aires the total management of educational services, including those related to Technical and Professional Training (FTP). Decentralization, strongly influenced

by the globalization process, eventually resulted in a great diversity of supply and decrease in the quality of training. Market economy and neoliberal ideas are predominant in the context and are responsible for reducing the State's role and an unemployment situation worsened by the new productive forces, the incorporation of unskilled labor, outsourcing and the strengthening of the informal market, associated with the deregulation of labor relations.

At the time, despite the shortage of some professional categories, a leap is noted in the growth of technicians training, due to the need to incorporate these workers in the provincial health systems. Quantity is gained and quality is lost, which ends up, in the medium term, resulting in a movement for the improvement of health technical education in the country.

The "Plan for the improvement of the quality of health technicians training institutions (Plan de Mejora)" which aims to modernize the structural conditions of institutions and teaching and learning processes, facilitating the continued education and training of faculty and leaders, exchange and cooperation between educational jurisdictions and national and international institutions begins to come true after the enactment of the **Technical and Professional Education Law** in 2005, whose text creates tools and mechanisms for its implementation through eleven lines of action. The development plan was divided into seven steps: (1st) Selection of beneficiary institutions; (2nd) Technical assistance for the assessment processes; (3rd) Institutions' own self-assessment; (4th) Selection of improvement plans; (5th) Development of the request report; (6th) Management of the improvement plan; (7th) Final Assessment.

In the context of this plan, a cooperation project between the Ministries of Health and Education of Argentina and the EPSJV is established, whose first workshop is held in September 2011 in Buenos Aires. The meeting attended by EPSJV professionals, leaders and faculty for the training of health technicians from various provinces of Argentina and representatives from the Ministry of Health of the Nation and the National Institute of Technological Education of the Ministry of Education aimed at strengthening the organizational management of institutions selected through the debate on the creation of the Institutional Educational Project (PEI). Timely discussions on pedagogic concepts and curriculum development were also held at the meeting.

In Argentina, technical and vocational education is defined as a form of secondary education and higher education, responsible for the training of mid-level and high-level technicians and professional training and can be implemented in public or private administration institutions. In case of health technical education, besides there being only high-level courses, there are some peculiarities that result in the convergence of interests and Health and Education policies. Firstly, it is a field working with people's health and, for this reason, professional activities and practices have a higher workload than the other technical courses. Secondly, professional development occurs in health institutions, whose regulation is the responsibility of the Ministries of Health of the Nation and the Provinces.

The logo of UNASUR (Union of South American Nations) features a stylized graphic of three curved lines above the word "UNASUR" in a bold, blue, sans-serif font.

To continue discussions and exchange of experiences between institutions that do not occupy the same geographical space, it was necessary to establish an ongoing communication process that would allow a greater flexibility in the exchange of documents and meetings between those involved in the project. The solution was to use the 'Virtual Classroom', a collaboration tool based on the **Virtual Campus of Public Health (CVSP)**.

Within RETS-UNASUR, this cooperation project gains importance with the work methodology that was built by the group, which has enabled all institutions involved can reflect together on the problems they have in common and the diversity of realities in which they live and that, on several measures, affect the ways and times to solve these problems.

"Despite being a Brazil-Argentina bilateral project, it gathers six institutions members of the RETS-UNASUR, which, despite a common goal, work in very different realities. It has been a huge learning experience for us. The methodology that has been used for a nationwide work in a setting of great regional diversity can serve as a basis for work at the continental level, in a setting of great national diversity", says former coordinator of the Executive Secretariat of the RETS, Anamaria Corbo.

The RETS-UNASUR and ISAGS

Since November 2010, the coordination of RETS has participated in activities related to the structuring of the South American Institute of Health Governance (ISAGS), which was officially launched on July 25th, 2011 and whose headquarters are located in Rio de Janeiro.

The ISAGS is an intergovernmental entity of public nature, part of the South American Health Council of

A PAHO/WHO initiative, the classroom of the Virtual Campus of Public Health (<http://www.campusvirtualsp.org/?q=es/aula-virtual>) provides an environment with many features for the exchange and network collaborative learning supporting professionals in the region, aimed at promoting changes in public health.

the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR). Its goal is to contribute to the development of leadership of systems, services, organizations and programs in health, as well as to provide technical support to government health institutions. Its proposal is that its three basic functions – management and production of knowledge, leadership development and technical assistance – are developed in a participatory manner, both in identifying problems and in forwarding and sharing solutions.

ISAGS' organizational structure consists of two Boards – Directors and Advisory – and the Executive Director's Office, which is responsible for the management of the Institute. The Board of Directors consists of delegates appointed by Health Ministers from member countries and guides the Institute's activities. In turn, recommendations about the planning, management, implementation and assessment of programs developed by the Institute are made by the Advisory Board, which is composed of Coordinators of the Technical Groups of UNASUR-HEALTH and Coordinators of the Network of UNASUR's Structuring Institutions: the Network of Health Technical Schools (RETS); the Network of National Health Institutes (RINS); the Network of Public Health Schools (RESP); the Network of Offices for International Relations in Health (ORIS); and the Network of National Cancer Institutes (RINC).

As a member of the Advisory Board of the Institute, the Network has already attended two meetings. In the first one, held on July 29th, 2011, a proposal for the Internal Rules of the Executive Council was presented and discussed and some general guidelines for the work plan of the Institute were outlined.

In the second one, held on March 7th and 8th this year, ISAGS' progress in its first semester of operation was presented and the proposed 2012-2015 Work Plan submitted by the Institute's Director was discussed. Discussions on the Internal Rules of the Advisory Board also continued.

Also on March 28th and 29th, RETS representatives attended the 3rd Meeting of the Technical Group

on Development and Management of Human Resources in Health of the UNASUR, held in Lima, Peru. During the meeting, where discussions occurred on the ways of contributing to the strengthening of the conduction, design, implementation and management of HRH in general and, especially in technical areas of UNASUR's Health Agenda, the coordination of the Technical Group was transferred to Brazil.

Participation in events

RETS-UNASUR's coordination Executive Secretariat was represented by two major events held in Rio de Janeiro in 2012: the workshop "Health Systems in South America: challenges to universality, comprehensiveness and equity", organized by ISAGS, and the I South American Forum on International Cooperation in Health, coordinated by REDESSUL-ORIS of the Advisory Office for International Affairs of the Ministry of Health of Brazil.

In the workshop held from July 26th to 29th, South American countries' representatives outlined an overview of national health systems, focusing on aspects related to legal frameworks, financing, coverage, and workforce, among others. RETS presence was essential to raise discussions on the training and work of health technicians, a professional segment that does not always get from the authorities and the managers of the sector the attention corresponding to their importance to health systems.

Participation in the Forum held from November 23rd to 25th aimed to expand the inclusion of the Network in discussions on different issues present in the universe of international cooperation in the South American context. (See article on page 19)

The then coordinator of the Executive Secretariat of RETS-UNASUR, Anamaria Corbo, was also invited to participate in a panel on the international scenario of health science and technology during the VI National Meeting of Health Science and Technology conducted by the Higher School of Health Technology of Lisbon (ESTeSL), held from October 20th to 22nd. ■

Forum reaffirms the importance of international cooperation in health



“If you were convinced of the value and potential of the experiences of each one of us, for the common good. If you were convinced UNASUR’s one-bloc action is important. Then I think that this conference has achieved its objective, which is the strengthening of regional integration in health for the benefit of our peoples”. With these words, ambassador and special advisor for International Health Affairs of the Ministry of Health of Brazil, Eduardo Barbosa, ended on 25 November the I South American Forum for International Cooperation in Health held in Rio de Janeiro.

The event organized by the Network of International Advisory Offices and International Cooperation in Health of UNASUR (REDESUR-ORIS) gathered about 300 people, including: Health Ministers and other decision makers within their respective Ministries of Health of UNASUR; health managers; and representatives from international advisory offices; health-related technical areas and institutions, international organizations and cooperation agencies, embassies and diplomatic bodies, political and technical areas of the Ministries of Foreign Affairs of the region, regional integration mechanisms, development agencies, universities, NGOs and other institutions related to the subject.

During three days, roundtables and panels, organized from four thematic axes – International Cooperation, Humanitarian Assistance and Partnerships; Global Health Issues; Regional Integration; and Intersectorality and Interculturality – enabled the discussion of countless issues, creating a privileged space for the ex-

change of experiences and the qualification of international cooperation actions in South America.

At the end of the Forum, the International Advisory Offices of the Ministries of Health released a document – the Charter of Rio – covering topics such as sustainable development, the Five-Year Plan guidelines of UNASUR, technical cooperation, strengthening cooperation activities in border areas, support in disasters, strengthening triangular cooperation and consolidating international partnerships from the priorities of each country. The document was handed to the Ministers of Health of the countries at the V Meeting of the South American Health Council (UNASUR-HEALTH) held in Montevideo (Uruguay) on December 7th, 2011.

Opening the event reflects confidence in the current model of cooperation

Representative of the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO/WHO) in Brazil Diego Victoria opened the event, making clear his expectations. “Discussions that are made here will serve as a basis for future discussions”, he said.

Uruguayan Minister of Health and then pro tempore president of the South American Health Council Jorge Venegas sought to emphasize the respect for people’s heterogeneity as one of the milestones of UNASUR’s work. He said governments should be self-critical, seeking to apply their efforts on issues that really matter for each nation. “People are stronger when they unite, but it is necessary that experiences be adapted to national realities”, he insisted.

The Minister of Public Health and Social Welfare of Paraguay, Esperanza Martinez, who in December replaced Venegas in the pro tempore presidency of UNASUR-HEALTH and who was representing the pro tempore presidency of UNASUR in the event, stressed the importance of the Council as an ideal venue for discussion, action and political intervention in health in the countries and highlighted the collaborative effort existing in UNASUR. “We are all looking at the integration and this leads me to believe that UNASUR is a unique political setting”, she emphasized.

In his speech, Ambassador Eduardo Barbosa said he believed that the Forum would be an excellent opportunity to strengthen the capacity of countries acting together in seeking solutions to regional problems. He also highlighted the importance of horizontal cooperation based on mutual respect and said that good

REDESUR-ORIS was established in 2009, through Resolution N° 10/2009 of UNASUR’s Health Ministers Council, in Guayaquil, Ecuador, and in 2011, worked under the coordination of the Advisory Office of International Affairs of the Brazilian Ministry of Health (AISA).

Among the actions foreseen in the Biannual Operational Plan of REDESUR-ORIS (2010-2011) worth highlighting are initiatives aimed at training and improving professionals working in the area of international cooperation in health; actions to disseminate experiences and lessons learned within the region, including the holding of a Workshop for the Diagnosis of Cooperation Offers and Demands; and, as the most expressive initiative for 2011, the completion of the I South American Forum on International Cooperation in Health, under the coordination of the Network.

cooperation is one that gives power to the beneficiary so that he can pursue his own paths.

The first day focused on global health

The Forum's opening table – "International Cooperation: political milestones, current situation and future prospects" –, the Head of Knowledge Management and Operations Department of the UN Special Unit for South-South Cooperation, Francisco Simplício, extensively explained the origins of this cooperation model, the current scenario and trends that are already noted and the role of various stakeholders interacting in cooperative processes. "The main response of the debate about international cooperation is that the only way out, no matter the way, is that recipient countries have more leadership over their development process", he said.

Also on the first day, three roundtables completed the program: "Horizontal Technical Cooperation: a view from the South"; "Current issues of the global health agenda: Health Diplomacy and WHO reform"; and "Humanitarian cooperation in health: towards a coordinated action for emergencies".

In the case of WHO reform, the consensus among the members of the table – Diego Victoria; Director of the Center for International Relations in Health at FIOCRUZ, Paulo Buss; and the Coordinator of the Center for Research, Policy and Information on Social Determinants of Health (CEPI-DSS/ENSP/FIOCRUZ), Alberto Pellegrini Filho – is that the Organization, with over 60 years of age must change to cope with an ever modifying global scenario.

Buss says that we must consider all the political transformation occurring in the world to define what should be changed, but unfortunately the political issue has been ignored in this reform process that has been discussed and should be realized as from the next World Health Assembly in May. According to him, some dramatic global health issues, such as addictions, unhealthy lifestyle, hunger and malnutrition, environmental impact and high rates of maternal and infant mortality are not

being taken into account in discussions on the reform. "We do not have neglected diseases, we have neglected people with diseases, who are hungry and have other problems. These are human groups that are excluded and not neglected diseases", he said.

Humanitarian assistance and health care at the border

The program began on the 24th with the conference "Humanitarian assistance in health and disaster risk reduction" addressed by the Director of PAHO/WDC Emergency Preparedness and Disaster Relief Department, Jean Luc Poncelet. "Humanitarian aid requires more than an emotional response, it requires knowledge", he said, pointing to the huge differences in coping with an earthquake, volcanic eruption or a tsunami, for example.

Among many other things, he also stressed that the way to approach the problem is fundamental and that it includes both combating the causes through risk reduction and be aware that disasters will continue to occur and that it is necessary to improve the response in order to save lives.

On the same day, roundtables "Health and Cooperation at UNASUR's borders"; "Community Health and Interculturality"; and "Triangular cooperation: the role of partnerships in the South-South cooperation"; four panels and the discussion "South-south, north-south and triangular cooperation: convergences and dissonances" were held.

As one of the panelists, the advisor on International Cooperation affairs of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, International Trade and Worship of Argentina, Javier Surasky, advocated for triangular cooperation as the one that allows you make the most of what other cooperation has to offer, provided that it is a solidary partnership and brings benefits to all parties involved. "International cooperation is always necessary and, in times of world crisis we live in, we cannot waste any opportunity. South-south, north-south, north-north, south-north and triangular. It's all the same, if its objective is to build a lesser unfair world", he argued.

Discussion on regional integration marks the end of the event

On the last day, with the participation of representatives of the main regional integration mechanisms, the Southern Common Market (MERCOSUR), the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR), the Amazon Cooperation Treaty Organization (ACTO), the Latin American and Caribbean Economic System (SELA) and the Andean Health Organization – Hipólito Unánue Agreement (ORAS-CONHU) presented the work developed by each one individually and discussed ways to promote more coordinated actions among them.

In his speech, the responsible for health affairs of UNASUR's General Secretariat, Fausto Lopez Crozet, said that UNASUR was established so that all build together a cultural, social, economic and political interaction environment in a participatory and consensual way and highlighted a fact that he considers essential to strengthen the capacity to perform of countries in the region: the establishment of common positions at international meetings on health.

At the closing ceremony of the Forum, Minister Esperanza Martínez spared no praise for the event, whose purpose would have been fully achieved for several reasons. "First, because it allowed us to update our work agenda. Then, it showed the political drive of our countries to build areas of cooperation, alliance and solidarity supported by concepts and values that are common to us, such as human rights and health, building universal health systems and the reduction of inequities. Finally, for allowing us to pursue our vocation to learn, listen and get to know one another", she said. "We all have a voice, we all have experience, we all have skills and abilities. We should take advantage of and use this experience to build a fairer and more solidary society", added Esperanza.

With regard to the Charter of Rio, coordinator of the ORIS-REDESUR in 2011, Mauro Teixeira Figueiredo, said: "The document reflected in summarized way all the discussions held at the Forum". ■

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The International Network for Health Technicians Education (RETS) is a liaison effort between different institutions and organizations involved in training and capacity building for health technical staff in Americas and the Caribbean, the African countries whose official language is Portuguese (PALOP) and Portugal that strives for the strengthening of public health systems. It is based on the premise that the capacity building of the workers is a fundamental dimension for the implementation of public health policies that serves the population health needs of each country member of the RETS.