

## HELPING CREATE A WELL-INFORMED AND ACTIVE CITIZEN NETWORK

Educating people on active civic engagement is one of the tools available to us for raising their awareness about the enormous challenges that lie ahead and fostering a sense of respect and responsibility toward the planet. CUAMM is especially committed to developing the public's understanding of global health issues and training people to become driving forces for change.

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The end of a year involves many things – last but not least, balance sheets and accounts. So it is only appropriate that we take a look at what we managed to achieve with our “*Educating for civic engagement and global health*” project, part of an *Agenzia Italiana per la cooperazione allo sviluppo (AICS)* [Italian Agency for Cooperation Development] program, which we carried out for nearly two years throughout Italy, from Trento in the north to Sicily in the south, raising community awareness about, and taking action on, major global health issues. But first a brief preamble, although it may seem superfluous to some of our readers: why does an organization like CUAMM, whose heart and activities are centered on Africa, spend time and effort on Italy-based activities as well? The answer can be found in the very concept of global health, or, if you prefer, in the visual metaphor known as “the butterfly effect”, i.e. the notion that the flapping of a butterfly’s wings on one side of the world can generate a tornado on the other. For that is how we see things through a global health lens: if we fail to foster critical awareness about the weightiest challenges facing our shared planet, there will be negative consequences for all, with the heaviest burden falling on communities in the world’s most vulnerable nations. Take the example of cyclones and floods, where the first to be hit are those who already live in the most precarious conditions, mainly in developing countries, in homes located in the riskiest areas and not built to withstand such events. Our reasoning becomes even more clear when one considers that it is those of us in the global North who are responsible for the largest quantity of greenhouse gas emissions in the atmosphere, yet those in the global South who will be hardest hit by their impact. This is precisely the reason that we brought the “*Educating for civic engagement and global health*” project to communities throughout Italy, with a special focus on youth and the implementation of an array of activities so as to reach out even to those who might feel detached from such issues. Our priority objective: to create cultural linkages between seemingly distant parts of the world, offering people a notion of their own small, yet immensely important, piece of responsibility in terms of their actions. One of our main areas of activity involved partnering with universities, something that CUAMM has been doing for nearly a decade. Twenty-eight courses pertaining to global health were held in 22 Italian universities, often

following direct requests by students keen to bridge the “training gap” that is unfortunately still widespread when it comes to these issues. Among the main topics dealt with were the relationship between health and climate, health and the environment, and the ever-more important role played by international health cooperation actors; at times students took part in specific follow-up initiatives. For example, urban regeneration activities were undertaken in Palermo, where art and culture were used to help heal wounds and create new spaces for dialogue in critical areas of the city. The “Heroic Imagination Project”, a peer-to-peer laboratory program coordinated by the Pedro Arrupe Institute, was also carried out in Palermo; here, a kind of “territorial solidarity” was cultivated to create a form of mutual support through use of the limited resources and skills available – no small thing nowadays. In Trento, young people prepared and staged a “participatory” play, with the help of university students and months of work in a theatrical workshop to ponder the notion of global health and then give a performance based on their own vision of it. It was an inspiring and unorthodox approach that saw one group of young people crafting the theatrical contents and another offering them support and feedback. But that’s not all. Three publications focusing on the environment and health and edited by *ISDE Italia – Medici per l’Ambiente* [Doctors for the Environment] were issued. The Italian Climate Network carried out awareness-raising activities to teach people about the impact of climate change on human health. And Trento’s *Centro di Cooperazione Internazionale (CCI)* [Center for International Development Cooperation] worked to promote global health and cooperation. Finally, there was the flagship part of the project, a radio series curated by CUAMM in cooperation with Radio24 and entitled “*Terra in vista. L’Africa spiegata a mio figlio*” [Land in sight: Explaining Africa to my child]. In five episodes hosted by Federico Taddia (now also available as podcasts), the program looked at Africa through macro-themes including climate change, distances – not just physical, but also cultural, social, and economic – and the differences between urban and rural settings, alternating firsthand accounts by experts and those on the ground every day, including doctors from CUAMM, with reports by Radio24 journalists, to build a panoramic vision of Africa through a global health lens<sup>1</sup>.

### NOTE

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.radio24.ilsole24ore.com/programmi/terra-africa>