



DIALOGUE

OUR MOST IMPORTANT RESOURCE: PEOPLE

How does Doctors with Africa CUAMM respond to a scenario of increasingly protracted and structural emergency crises? By integrating our approach to the latter into our very *modus operandi*: deep knowledge of local contexts, trust in people, and investment in communities. By thinking and acting beyond the immediate crisis, we help build a capacity for resilience.

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As 2021 draws to a close, it is striking to review the numerous challenges CUAMM was called on to tackle this year. An onslaught of emergencies – drought in Angola, flooding in South Sudan that only intensified the plight of the malnourished, armed conflicts in Ethiopia, Mozambique and the Central African Republic that left in their wake streams of displaced persons and refugees in desperate need of safe haven – battered areas in already highly precarious conditions, particularly the remote ones where we operate, all alongside a relentless pandemic that continues to underscore the full weight of inequality on a continent where only 6% of the population has been vaccinated despite accounting for 17% of the world's population. As I reflect on what we experienced both this year and in prior ones, aware of the fatigue felt by many, I am also confident that our organization's ability to respond is stronger than ever, guided by our vision of providing healthcare to those most in need. Even as emergencies continue to strike, our objectives remain unaltered: to strengthen primary health systems and care, "grafting" a capacity for extraordinary interventions into our ordinary programs.

Emergency crises seem, in fact, to be increasingly of a structural and protracted nature, triggered by multiple factors – at times climate- or environment-related, at others economic, political and/or social, often a mixture of all the above – and heavily impacting areas everywhere.

Despite, or perhaps precisely because, CUAMM has been called on to respond to all of this, we were fortunate this year as always to be able to count on our greatest strength, what is often described as "human capital" but what we prefer to call people. People whose skills, first and foremost, but also fervent commitment enable us to tackle such challenges day after day, steadfastly "building" development cooperation for seventy years and counting.

This was where CUAMM's visionary yet concrete founding fathers – Francesco Canova, Anacleto Dal Lago and don Luigi Mazzucato – began when they set out to create an organization skilled in doing cooperation "on the ground" while keeping a constant focus on training, especially that guided by universities, to ensure that healthcare for the poor would not be poor healthcare.

And that's who we still are today, a group that views relationships as a key strength: bonds of understanding, respect and engagement with African communities as well as investment in those who choose to put their expertise at the service of the neediest in the farthest corners of the world. CUAMM fosters such bonds with territories and their institutions too, whether they be Italian, African or international, to develop solid networks and opportunities.

This is the job of synthesis we do, the very heart of our *modus operandi*: finding ways to "stitch" and integrate all these components and skills together into increasingly resilient systems.

It's what we've continued to do in recent years as we tackled emergencies of every sort, starting with Ebola in 2014 and moving onto cyclones and COVID-19. *People* make the difference. It's they who support and care for individuals and communities, study the causes of problems and assess possible solutions and communicate with communities and agencies. They're the key element when it comes to ensuring continuity between emergency, rehabilitation and development, which is why building up relationships and skills is the core of our upcoming five-year strategy.

The current issue of *Health and Development* derives from our cognizance of the growing intensification of crises in the areas where we operate in Africa and our desire to share how we intend to tackle such events: by "doing" cooperation as we have from day one, trusting in the people and know-how that have brought us to where we are today and integrating our response to emergencies into our ongoing dialogue around development with local institutions.

Here we share both our experiences from the field – from drought in Angola to the conflicts in Mozambique – and our reflections on the worldwide emergency scenario and the role that organizations like ours can play; for example, by developing preparedness processes, i.e. helping communities ready themselves to the greatest degree possible to deal with crises (one example is Fabio Manenti's piece on how African hospitals are equipping themselves to be strong and resilient in the face of emergency situations).

We start 2022 in a spirit of trust – trust in the people who work with CUAMM and with Africa, heads held high as they move towards the future to meet its challenges.