BOLIVIA

IN THE HEART OF THE AMAZON

In the Amazon, many health risks threaten its inhabitants as well as animals, flora, and fauna. A newly started surveillance system aims to overcome this risk by empowering the community.

In Bolivia, the Rurrenabaque and San Buenaventura communities live far away from urban settings and infrastructure. The two – a village and a small city – are located next to the Beni River in the Amazon, 450 kilometres from the country's capital La Paz. Facing an increase in fatal diseases, local Indigenous community leader Gladys Ybaguari has been alarmed for some time. 'In the Amazon riverbanks, we mainly feed on fish, but lately, with gold exploration, the river has been contaminated with mercury, and the fish are getting sick, which affects our health when we consume them,' she says.

The communities like hers of Rurrenabaque face increasing cases of Dengue, Leishmaniasis, Leptospirosis, and more recently also Hantavirus.

To address the situation, Gladys plays a key role in preventing epidemics for her indigenous community. As a focal point of the new Community-Based Surveillance network, the Tacana woman functions as an important link in San Buenaventura when it comes to handling disease outbreaks.
By reporting health cases to a network of interconnected information units, Gladys contributes to preventing wider outbreaks. The pilot model – implemented by the Global Programme Pandemic Prevention and Response, One Health – already bears the first promising fruits: cases of fish, parrots, and poultry mortality events were reported

to higher authorities and successfully tracked. By following up on these diseases and getting back to their causes, the Community-Based Surveillance network enables the communities to develop local mechanisms for early detection and rapid response autonomously.
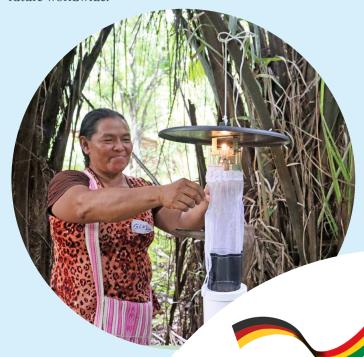

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How One Health protects the Amazon

'Working under the One Health approach helps to prevent diseases that can affect us humans and our animals,' Gladys is convinced. 'The GIZ workshops taught us how to detect and fight these diseases. Today, through the new Community Surveillance System, we inform each other about any health or disease case and transmit the information to doctors, health centres, laboratories, and other relevant institutions,' she says.

In a region where veterinary services are rare, the network could serve as a role model for similar regions in the future worldwide.

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