

GUSTAVO A AVILA MONTES: professional development as a leader in public health in Honduras

1. How have you grown from your experience in TDR as a researcher, student or mentor?

Having obtained two research grants with the TDR opened the doors for my professional development. Just after returning to the country from my Master's degree in Health Sciences from Johns Hopkins University, I applied my first grant to test new tools for Chagas control in Honduras (1991)¹⁻². Sharing these results at the national and international level projected me as a young researcher in the Central American region under the mentorship of Dr. Carlos Ponce (Senior TDR Researcher).

Later, having obtained a second TDR grant for dengue control (2002) allowed me to share my experience with researchers and experts in Latin America. This experience developed my research skills and professional career, which has contributed to the body of knowledge in the country in the areas of epidemiology and vector disease control, outbreak investigation, community participation for dengue control, and environmental health. This trajectory has been widely recognized at the national level having received the highest recognition from the country:

National Science Prize 2007, and

National Environment Prize 2007

At the international level, the Pan American Health Organization recognized my work in dengue prevention through school programs through two international awards:

The Iberoamerican Prize for Good Health Promotion Practices in School Settings in 2007 and 2009³.

Later, thanks to these experiences, I have managed to obtain the following professional positions:

International Temporary Advisor on Health Surveillance, Disease Prevention and Control of PAHO in El Salvador.

Head of the USAID Health, Population and Nutrition Office leading the Zika response in Honduras.

¹ **Avila Montes GA**, Ponce C, Ponce E, Martínez M, Flores M. Insecticidal paint and fumigant canisters for Chagas' disease control: community acceptance in Honduras. Pan American Journal of Public Health 1999; 6(5):311-320.

² **Avila Montes GA**, Martínez M, Ponce C, Ponce E, Soto RJ. Chagas disease in Central Honduras: Knowledge and practices. [In Spanish] Pan American Journal of Public Health 1998; 3(3):158-163.

³ Honduras gana premio iberoamericano de buenas prácticas en promoción de la salud [Access May 1, 2020]. Available in https://www.paho.org/hon/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=208:honduras-gana-premio-iberoamericano-buenas-practicas-promocion-salud&Itemid=228

And currently, Regional Coordinator of the Central American HIV Program from the Universidad del Valle de Guatemala in association with the CDC in Guatemala

2. How does your community, country and humanity at large have benefited from his work with the TDR program?

Through the implementation of the Domestic Hygiene and Environmental Health Module, the heads of families of the beneficiary communities were empowered in their role as agents of change, co-responsible for the control of *Aedes aegypti* in their homes and recognizing the importance of their active participation in the control and elimination of Aedes breeding sites. The schoolchildren involved developed a broad awareness of the severity of the disease⁴.

The feasibility of the strategy of training school multipliers was demonstrated, in which children (environmental vigilantes) act as agents of change in the community, and they were shown to be very persuasive in modifying attitudes and practices within the family in a sustainable way.

The National Dengue Program and the Ministry of Health of Honduras recognized the usefulness of the Module as a valuable complementary tool to vector control measures and incorporated it into the National Dengue Plan as a fundamental strategy for achieving community participation⁵.

The Latin American scientific community in the field of dengue control through school programs values the experiences published and my works are reference documents, which have positioned Honduras at the forefront of school programs for dengue control in the Americas. I recently collaborated with the National Institute of Public Health of Mexico for the development of the first school curriculum in Latin America that includes the three main arboviruses⁶.

⁴Avila Montes GA, Martinez M, Sherman C, Fernández EA. Evaluation of an educational module on dengue and *Aedes aegypti* for schoolchildren in Honduras. [In Spanish] Pan American Journal of Public Health 2004; 16(2):84-94.

⁵Avila Montes GA, Araujo R, Leontsini E, Orellana Herrera G, Fernandez Cerna E. A school program for dengue control in Honduras: from knowledge to action. Pan American Journal of Public Health [In Spanish] 2012; 31(6):518-522.

⁶Betanzos-Reyes AF, González-Chacón DA, Rodríguez-López MH, Rangel-Flores H. Participación escolar en la prevención y control de las enfermedades transmitidas por Aedes spp. Dengue, Zika, Chikungunya. Cuernavaca: Instituto Nacional de Salud Pública, 2018.

IMAGES PROFFESIONAL CAREER GUSTAVO AVILA



National Science Prize Ceremony 2007: "Dr Jose Cecilio del Valle". Dr Gustavo Adolfo Avila Montes (Fourth from left to right) receiving this award from the President of Honduras Manuel Zelaya Rosales.



National Environment Prize Ceremony 2007. Dr Gustavo Adolfo Avila Montes (Seventh from left to right) receiving this award from the President of Honduras Manuel Zelaya Rosales.



Environmental keepers conducting home visits supervised by their teacher in Comayaguela, Honduras.

Home visits



Environmental keepers conducting home visits supervised by their teacher to eliminate *Aedes* breeding sites in Pena Blanca, Honduras 2019.



Screenshot of the publication of the result of the Second Iberoamerican Contest of Good Practices in Health Promotion: “Categoría Medio Ambiente, Programa Escolar para el Control del Dengue.



Publication on the PAHO Website of the recognition of the Iberoamerican Award 2009 for Good Practices at the School Settings.