



## Peru's Systemic Approach to Better Health

For the Quechua indigenous groups living in Sunec, a village in Peru's central highlands, getting medical attention is a challenge. Extreme weather changes make influenza viruses prevalent during the winter months. Children with breathing problems are especially vulnerable to exposure to extreme cold, altitude, and rain. Millions of Peruvians live in remote villages like Sunec, hard to access due to poor road conditions. When they get sick, their families must travel hours, sometimes days, by foot or boat to reach the closest health center, if they can endure the trek and have the means to get there. The inaccessibility of care explains why Peru's infant mortality rate remains exceptionally high in rural areas — 50 deaths annually per 1,000 live births — while its national rate has plunged from 43 to 19 over the last 15 years.



*A Peruvian child is taught how to brush her teeth as part of the personal hygiene training offered by MCC-funded mobile health brigades.*

In response, the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) is financing a threshold country program in Peru that is being implemented by USAID, and allocates approximately \$10.5 million to increase immunization rates across the country. The program focuses on rural areas, and is designed to increase immunization rates by strengthening the vaccine supply chain and improving immunization information management. These critical interventions to streamline public health services are allowing the government to allocate public resources more efficiently, and free up funds for other social spending or investments aimed at promoting economic development and reducing poverty.

At the heart of this program are innovative, mobile health brigades, five-person teams comprising of a doctor, nurse, dentist, obstetrician, and a health technician. These mobile units trek across Peru's rugged terrain to reach rural communities and deliver basic health services, including immunizations. MCC's threshold program has



*Community residents participate in water use trainings.*

trained and equipped 163 trainers, who, in turn, are responsible for training 786 mobile brigade members. These health brigades, which are serving over 660,000 indigenous residents of Peru's highlands and jungle, also work to promote better sanitation (latrines, solid waste disposal) and to ensure that children and mothers are registered with proper identification.

The threshold program has also delivered 1,246 computers to health centers across Peru. These computers will improve the information systems that health officials rely on to plan for, procure, and distribute vaccines and to coordinate the activities of primary health facilities and

the mobile brigades. Before the program completes, the immunization management system will be used by 11,000 preventive health professionals across Peru. The use of this system will help Peru's health officials deliver better quality services and budget for resources necessary to vaccinate children in rural areas.

## **Sustainability of the Threshold Program**

The immunization systems supported by the threshold program are also benefiting the broader health sector. The Government of Peru allocated \$8 million to finance immunizations and the activities of the mobile health brigades. Immunization coverage is increasing in the regions targeted by the threshold program. A recent USAID survey among health posts in the eight targeted regions show that vaccination rates increased by 13 percent for measles and 8.8 percent for DPT<sub>3</sub> (three doses of diphtheria-pertussis-tetanus) from 2008 to 2009.

Peru's Health Ministry has already adopted lessons learned from the program to develop national standards for medical equipment. Regional health directorates are using the training modules developed for the mobile brigades for their regular staff. Peru's largest public medical school now includes the training module as part of their curriculum. Improvements in the immunization information system have also been incorporated into Peru's national health insurance system. Peru's Minister of Health, Oscar Ugarte, recently announced that "the joint effort between the Ministry of Health and the MCC Threshold Program is expanding [to include] protection against pneumonia and diarrheal diseases....During 2010 we are strengthening and providing more resources to this strategic priority."

After 18 months of implementation, Peru's immunization delivery system has expanded its reach to children in the country's poorest, most remote areas. The Peruvian government's recent actions make it more likely that this system will continue after the threshold program ends.