

## **CBIO: Curamericas Global's Unique Approach to Saving Lives**

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**16 April 2007**

In the early days of Curamericas 25 years ago, when we were starting our first program in Bolivia, we had the great benefit of technical advice from Dr. John Wyon who, at the time, was still teaching at the School of Public Health of Harvard University. John was in his mid-60s and had a lifetime of experience in community health programming around the world, and he helped us establish in the rural highlands of Bolivia a program in which our staff members worked with local community residents to create a map of their community showing every household by number and a census of everyone who lived in every household. Then, we began a program of visiting every house to make sure that mothers knew how to care for their children and when to seek medical care when sickness arose. We even vaccinated children and measured their weight during home visits. At the same time, the health worker who was visiting the home also recorded any pregnancies, births, deaths and migrations into or out of the house that had occurred since the previous visit.

As time went by, our field staffs became deeply committed to this approach because it gave them the "tools" to know who was actually present in their service population, who needed services, who was dying from what, and what the health priorities of the population were. This was an empowering tool for our field staff. They got to know the people they were serving in a new way – by visiting their homes, getting to know them, and, surprisingly to them, encountering people with health problems that our staff had no idea were out there. These people in need of attention included seriously ill children and people with long-term chronic disabilities who were being kept essentially hidden in their homes.

As we further refined this approach and became convinced of its applicability on a broader scale, we eventually gave this approach a name – and the most descriptive name we could think of was the census-based, impact-oriented (CBIO) approach. "The census-based" part of the approach means that the program serves a "defined" population – defined in terms of geographic boundaries and who resides within those boundaries. The "impact-oriented" part of the approach means that, through visiting everyone home, it becomes possible to measure actual mortality rates and causes of death, to focus program efforts on the leading causes of death and those most at risk of death, and to measure changes in mortality rates and changes in other health indicators over time.

Over the past 25 years, this approach has gained Curamericas (and its partners in Bolivia, Haiti, Guatemala and Mexico) considerable recognition because the approach makes it possible to achieve high-quality programs with high levels of service coverage and documented declines in rates of child mortality. Gradually, organizations around the world are moving in this direction because of the greater impact of this approach. Curamericas has been and continues to be a true pioneer in CBIO!