



AFRICA/NIGER - New health centers help fight malnutrition of 200,000 children

Niamey (Agenzia Fides) – Most government health centers in Niger are not ready to meet the needs of the number of malnourished children calculated by the Ministry of Health. An estimated at least 200,000 children need assistance for acute malnutrition due to crop failures that have put 2 million people at risk for starvation. Since the last farm crisis, which hit the country in 2004, international NGOs have been working to protect children from hunger. In emergency response, in 2006 the government developed programs for health care, but the lack of qualified staff, drugs, and therapeutic food supplements has blocked everything. Over half the population (7.8 million people) has already consumed nearly all the food reserve of the most recent harvest, and the next is still 6 months away.

To date, of the 812 health facilities that deal with child malnutrition, 382 are supported by international NGOs and local authorities. In 2008, there were 7,376 for a population health staff of about 14 million. 90% were in cities, 885 in rural areas. 40% of all health workers were engaged in the capital, Niamey, and in Zinder, 900 km to the west. Approximately 15% of children monitored in the region of Zinder, in June 2009, were underweight, while in Diffa, in the westernmost region of Niger, more than 17.4% suffer from acute malnutrition. Since the beginning of this year, up until March 19, at least 55 children have died from malnutrition, including 45,525 under age five and recorded carefully. The centers for the treatment of malnutrition have seen a 50% increase, in part due to changes in international rules, and partly because of poor harvests. (AP) (Agenzia Fides 26/3/2010)