



## **AFRICA/NIGER - Every child has a right to food and medical attention**

Niamey (Agenzia Fides) – A lack of transport, rural lifestyles, and pressure on women to prepare fields for harvest mean severely malnourished children are being taken out of therapeutic feeding programs before their treatment is complete. In some remote rural areas, health centers, where treatment takes place, are too far away for families to reach at all. One in five severely malnourished children in feeding programs in Zinder and Maradi provinces in the south drop out because they are traveling from Nigeria. Treating severe malnourishment takes up to eight weeks of intensive feeding, on average. Despite drop-outs, week-on-week the number of severely malnourished children being registered in therapeutic feeding programs is on the rise, with a jump of 8,000 cases just last week.

Aid agencies have admitted 84,000 severely malnourished children into care since the beginning of the year. In the southeastern province of Diffa, where the NGO Save the Children is working, the situation is getting worse. The organization is planning to extend aid to all the health centers of the district of Diffa. In Zinder and Maradi: “It takes the children and their mothers too long to go back and forth to the center. Husbands don’t want their wives and children to stay there in the centres unaccompanied for long periods of time; and it’s the start of the harvesting season - women prepare the fields - so they are being called home,” sources explain. Many families find it hard to access health centers at all. In some areas, 70 percent of villages are more than 15km from health centers, with some villages 50km away. “It can take three days to walk there [to the center] and three days to walk back, so by that time they have to leave again,” sources say.

Global acute malnutrition rates in Diffa province were the highest in the country, at 17.4 percent. Many rural families in northern Diffa do not stay put, so cannot be reached. One may return to a site one month later and find the village has disappeared. Children undergoing intensive feeding ideally need to be monitored weekly to ensure they are gaining weight, have no other health complications, and that the high-calorie food they are given is not being diverted to other family members. Children under five and pregnant women ostensibly receive free healthcare in Niger. However, even if it is free, you still need enough medicines to be able to provide it. (AP) (Agenzia Fides 8/6/2010)