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AFRICA/NIGER - Child malnutrition rate increases 42%

Niamey (Agenzia Fides) - Nearly 17 percent of Niger's children younger than five suffer acute malnutrition, a 42 percent increase over the same period last year, according to a national survey released by the government. More than 15 percent acute malnutrition is classified as a critical emergency by the UN World Health Organization (WHO). The report links this increase to the poor 2008-2009 harvests. The government, with UN agency and NGO support, surveyed 8,000 under-fives nationwide from late-May to mid-June. In Agadez region, only urban centers were surveyed due to insecurity. Without immediate intervention, the situation is likely to further deteriorate before the September harvests, according to the government. Nearly half a million children are acutely malnourished, including some 87,000 severely malnourished. The most affected regions are Diffa, Maradi, Zinder, and Tahoua. Acute severe malnutrition has increased to 3.2 percent from 2.1 percent a year ago. Throughout the country, with the exception of the Diffa region, children younger than three are twice as affected by acute malnutrition than older children (21.7 percent compared with 9.5 percent). More boys than girls are malnourished. The rate is higher than one death per 10,000 children a day but remains below the humanitarian community's emergency threshold of two deaths per 10,000 children a day, except in the Zinder region. Similar to 2009, nearly half of Niger's children are chronically undernourished and lacking life-sustaining nutrients. In Zinder region, six children in 10 do not eat enough on a daily basis to maintain natural physical activity. In Niamey, 17 percent of children suffer from under-nutrition. A fifth of the surveyed children nationwide are severely chronically undernourished. (AP) (Agenzia Fides 07/12/2010)

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