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ASIA/BANGLADESH-Serious sanitary problems in the remote Chittagong Hill Tracts

Bandarban (Agenzia Fides) - The remote area of Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT), in Bangladesh, registers the poorer levels of health care. The rate of infant and maternal mortality is among the worst ever achieved by the national average. The 1.3 million inhabitants of the area, mainly Buddhist, are distributed in three districts - Bandarban, Rangamati and Khagrachari - and 90% are located in rural areas where it is extremely difficult to access health services. According to the Civil Surgeon's Office, which manages the government hospitals at the regional level, 50% of jobs in government health facilities in CHT are vacant. There are few ambulances and lacks in experienced staff who is willing to work in such remote and dangerous areas because of the continuing challenges in the region, comprising 11 indigenous groups known as Jumma.
According to the national average, which registers around a quarter of births attended by health care experts in the district of Bandarban only 7.6%, take advantage of this service, as well as in the districts of Rangamati and Khagrachari that record an average of 11 .5%, and 9.1%. In the district of Bandarban the highest infant mortality rate in the country is recorded, with 63 deaths per 1,000 live births, compared to the national average of 49 deaths per 1,000 births. The average number of children who die under five years of age is 85 per 1,000, compared to 64 per 1,000 in the country. Another constant threat in the region is malaria, which is the main cause of child deaths. In 2009, in the three districts of CHT, the highest number of infections and deaths due to this disease were recorded compared to the entire country. This year, at the end of June, the number of cases was four times higher than last year. The problem is aggravated by the fact that in such remote areas it is not possible to reach any type of health facility and the cost of transport is very high. The food factor continues to be very problematic because of several crises attributed to infestations of mice, restrictions on cultivation, rising prices and shortage of seeds. (PA) (Agenzia Fides 07/15/2011)

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