



AMERICA/GUATEMALA - Malnutrition against the health of the poor: 17% of Guatemalans are poor

Guatemala (Agenzia Fides) - Thousands of families in Guatemala survive on a very precarious diet of flour and cereals, they cannot economically afford protein foods like meat and dairy products which are essential for growth and mental development of people. This phenomenon is repeated across the country, particularly in the rural area and among the indigenous population. Physicians often see cases of chronic malnutrition, which marks the health of people affected for the rest of their life. 14 million people live in Guatemala and the highest rate of chronic malnutrition concerning children is registered in Latin America, 49.3% boys and girls who are under five years of age, one of the highest in the world. The food insecurity families in the south part of the country live is the same as thousands of Guatemalans living in absolute poverty. According to the nutritionists of the National Hospital in the northwestern department of Totonicapán, the department registers the highest rate of chronic malnutrition in the country that affects 77% of the population and usually eats a tamal made of corn paste, barley water and soup without meat or vegetables, accompanied by herbs. This protracted nutrition leads to chronic malnutrition. The data reported by the United Nations Program for Development (UNDP) are alarming, chronic malnutrition reduces the intellectual coefficient between 10 and 15 points and vitamin A deficiency affects 40% for the immunological system of children under five years of age. Unfortunately, according to experts, chronic malnutrition is evident during the first 1000 days of life and causes irreversible damage in humans. According to the report, between 2002 and 2008, anemia in children under 5 years increased from 42 to 48%, while overweight and obesity increased by 87% over the past 43 years. Malnutrition is a problem that is eliminated with the supply of a meal but improved with the reduction of poverty, improving education, health and access to employment of women. (AP) (Agenzia Fides 25/10/2011)