



ASIA/INDONESIA - Small steps to reduce child malnutrition, but the problem remains very serious

Jakarta (Agenzia Fides) - In Indonesia 1 child under 5 years of age out of three suffer from malnutrition, both in the acute and chronic form, stunting and impairment. Although, according to the latest statistics carried out in 2010, from 1990 to 2010, the rate of chronic malnutrition was reduced by 2%, this phenomenon contributes to half of all deaths of young Indonesians before having completed their fifth birthday. However, in the last twenty years, the total number of malnourished children under 5 years of age has increased, also due to the increase of the population, from 179 million to 237 million. Those who manage to survive may suffer alterations in brain development and delays in the ability to learn, have poor immune system and be at increased risk of diabetes, obesity, heart disease and stroke.

The government is taking steps to encourage the promotion of breastfeeding and hygiene, as well as the timely complementary feeding in young children, administering vitamin A, iron and zinc supplements. National statistics for an archipelago made up of 17 000 islands, about 900 of which are permanently inhabited, hide severe regional disparities. In the eastern province of Nusatenggara, about 2,000 kilometers east of the capital Jakarta, 34% of children are underweight, a rate similar to that of the Western Province of Nusatenggara that is 30%, compared to the national average of 18%. These areas are subject to the scarcity of food and, especially in times of drought, malnutrition remains a matter of great concern. Another serious problem in the country that contributes to the deaths of children is the lack of knowledge of basic sanitation. Precarious nutrition and lack of clean water are key factors. In 2010, the main causes of children's death under 5 years of age were pneumonia, with 14% of deaths, premature births 21%, 6% due to injury, and 5% for measles and diarrhea. According to experts, 48% of these deaths occur in the first 28 days of life. According to Indonesia Health Profile in 2010, 80% of the country's population has access to safe drinking water, but only 52% use "safe" health services (AP) (Agenzia Fides 06/09/2012)