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ASIA/NEPAL - Dramatic situation of malnourished children and mothers without medical assistance

Kathmandu (Agenzia Fides) - The number of children suffering from acute malnutrition in Nepal has reached emergency levels, and the situation has remained unchanged despite 15 years of commitment, effort and investment. According to World Food Programme (WFP) experts, the prevalence rate in 1996 was the same, and now the situation is even worse due to the increase of the population. In Nepal malnutrition affects 60% of all deaths among children. While most of the young emaciated children are between the remote hills of the Midwestern and Western regions, considered the poorest areas at national level, the situation is worse in the southern fertile plains bordering India, known as the Western Terai. Here more than 15% of children suffer from acute malnutrition because of the precarious health services, water pollution and outbreaks of water borne diseases during the monsoon season. Moreover, the rate of rickets, also known as chronic malnutrition in Nepal is among the highest in the world, according to UNICEF this year the country is the sixth among all those who provided data. Among the main reasons, because of the high rates of malnutrition, some experts have indicated acute respiratory infections and diarrhea, the leading cause of death among Nepalese children under five years of age. Diarrheamakes children more vulnerable to infections, which in turn aggravate the condition of food.
With regard to respiratory infections, in 2011 the government registered 2 million and 700 thousand cases. Out of 1 million and 700 thousand cases of diarrhea, only 38% of children were assisted by a health facility. In Nepal, more than 3 million of the 30 million and 400 thousand inhabitants, do not have access to drinking water, although the country has abundant freshwater resources. About 19 million people lack access to adequate sanitation such as public fountains, wells or safe springs, nor household connections. There are also many mothers of malnourished children who do not have proper health care, before and after birth. According to the Demographic Health Service, 88% of mothers who live in the city receives prenatal care from experienced professionals, while only 55% of those living in rural areas. About 23% of mothers across the country give birth before 18 years of age. There are also no investment in agriculture in a country where a quarter of the population lives below the national poverty level, and about 3 and a half million people have problems taking nutritious foods. (AP) (Agenzia Fides 17/12/2012)

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