

## Brazil's Human Milk Banks for Latin America and Africa

Contributed by Nasi Brum  
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Brazil is once again exporting technology for the creation of human milk banks. In the next few weeks two technicians from the Ministry of Health will travel to the Ecuadoran capital, Quito, where they will train professionals at the Isidro Ayora maternity hospital.

The Ecuadoran government has already acquired the equipment to set up the milk bank. 10 thousand expectant mothers give birth annually in Quito, the largest city in the country.

The agreement to export the technology was signed during President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva's visit to Ecuador on August 25. The milk bank will permit treatment of babies who are premature, sick, or underweight.

The first country to receive this Brazilian technology, developed by the Oswaldo Cruz Foundation, was Venezuela, in 1997. Eight milk banks are already functioning there.

Due to the success of the program, recognized by the World Health Organization as one of the best in the world, the Ministry of Health decided to make the experience available to all interested Latin American countries.

According to the Coordinator responsible for the Ministry's Policy of Maternal Nursing, Sonia Salviano, a milk bank is relatively cheap.

The most expensive apparatus, the pasteurizer, costs US\$ 1,500 (4,500 reais), and along with other pieces of equipment, such as a household freezer, the bank can be assembled for US\$ 5,200 (15,000 reais).

"Here in Brazil, milk banks are a priority in public hospital maternity wards. The pasteurization process is monitored every five minutes. That is why we can be certain we are offering the babies a product that is extremely safe, free of possible bacteria or viruses," the Coordinator explained.

In the milk pasteurization process there is a minimal loss of antibodies, which protect infants against diseases and infections.

Next year, the Brazilian government plans to organize an International Congress on Human Milk Banks, with the idea of establishing a network covering the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean.

The government will provide the technical know-how, while the cost of implanting the banks will be assumed by the interested parties.

"We are also expecting participants from African countries, where there is a heavy incidence of Aids, especially in children who are infected while nursing," the physician explained.

She said that in many African countries, for reasons of custom and tradition, mothers are obliged to nurse, even if they are HIV-carriers.

The pasteurization of milk would eliminate the virus, which has low resistance to heat.

Last month the South African Federal Council of Medicine sent a representative to Brazil to become familiar with the process used here.

Brazil's technology in this area has stirred interest for being highly efficient and cheap.

The system used in France, the first country in the world to implant a milk bank, is more expensive and complicated.

173 milk banks exist in Brazil, and nine more are scheduled to be inaugurated in the near future.

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Translator: David Silberstein