

Anemia Afflicts Half of All Brazilian Children

Contributed by Aline Beckstein
Monday, 20 March 2006

Brazil's Pastoral Commission for Children estimates that around 50% of poor Brazilian children suffer from anemia. Zilda Arns, a physician who is the coordinator of the commission, regards the problem as much more serious than child malnutrition, which is around 4%. Brazil has nearly 20 million children under the age of six, and 48.6% are considered poor.

"According to the World Health Organization (WHO), this 4% indicates that we have already been able to control malnutrition. What the pastoral does each year is to keep 150,000 children from being malnourished. Anemia, however, is a much more complicated problem that we have still not been able to control," she said. The Pastoral Commission takes care of 1.88 million children.

Arns also informed that she is negotiating with the Ministry of Health for iron sulfate to be provided at government health posts for more serious anemia cases.

"When the social conditions are unfavorable, children can take a lot of time to recover. Anemia in very small children can weaken their intellectual capacity and their resistance to disease, and this worries us a lot," she said.

According to Arns, one of the causes of the large number of anemic children is the change in the eating habits of the Brazilian population.

"What we are trying to do is to get anemic children to eat more food like chicken gizzards and livers and egg yolks, which are rich in iron and very good in preventing disease."

Agência Brasil