

## PRESS RELEASE

### Ethiopian and Danish scientists join forces to fight child malnutrition

ADDIS ABABA, 09 February - Ethiopian and Danish scientists are to join forces to find new ways of fighting the scourge of child malnutrition.

The health experts from Ethiopia's Jimma University and Denmark's Royal Veterinary and Agricultural University were brought together during a series of meetings and visits organised by UNICEF Ethiopia.

They are currently looking into a range of joint projects in combating child malnutrition, which contributes to the death of more than 269,000 young Ethiopian children every year. It is estimated that 472,000 Ethiopian children under five years of age are dying every year (DHS 2000). Formulas developed by Pelletier et al show that global malnutrition contributes up to 57% of those deaths every year.

Joint schemes currently under consideration range from cutting-edge research into some of the most extreme forms of malnutrition to training exchanges between the two institutions.

"One of the most exciting developments for us is the possibility of opening up training opportunities," said Sylvie Chamois, UNICEF Ethiopia's Nutrition Project Officer.

"Ethiopia desperately needs more home-grown experts in nutrition. This new relationship, and the resulting exchange in expertise, could go a long way towards a centre of excellence for the study of this deadly condition.

"This could more well beyond just the treatment of malnutrition – although that is of course crucial. This could open the doors to more research, a much greater technical capacity in Ethiopia and further links with international institutions."

Prof Kim F Michaelsen and Dr Christian Molgaard, from the Danish university's Paediatric Nutrition Group, last visited Dr Tsinuel Girma, director of Jimma University Hospital, in late January to discuss plans.

Future joint research could take place in Jimma University's brand new Epidemiology Laboratory, which is still under construction at Gibe.

Areas of possible cooperation include new studies into ways of treating children with moderate and severe malnutrition in the community and supplementing pregnant women with vitamins and minerals to reduce low birth weight among babies. There is also a need for ground-breaking research into the causes of kwashiorkor – a severe form of malnutrition that leaves children with swollen legs, among other symptoms, and has a mortality rate as high as 60 per cent.

The health experts also discussed setting up a possible teaching exchange that would allow Jimma students to participate in the Royal Veterinary and Agricultural University's course on Food and Nutrition Security in Developing Countries. Another option would be the Bachelor course in Food and Health in an International Perspective at Denmark's Suhrs University College.

Jimma University hospital with UNICEF support started to run a Therapeutic Feeding Unit eighteen months ago. This unit treats severe malnutrition cases and serves as a "practical teaching field" for the medical student. The NGO Concern also assisted the University to start an Outreach Therapeutic Programme 3 months ago in order to address the malnutrition problem in the community.

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