

CONGO: Vitamin A campaign targets deficient children

At least 8,000 children between the ages of six months and five years have received vitamin A supplements in a health campaign aimed at eradicating vitamin deficiency in southwestern Congo.

"Since June 2005 we have administered the vitamin in the form of capsules as part of our intervention programme," said Charles Ngoussa, the head of local health NGO Dynamisation des Initiatives Locales, which is based in Sibiti, the main town in Lékoumou.

Vitamin A boosts the body's immunity, increasing children's resistance to infections. It stimulates mental and physical growth through the synthesis of proteins. The vitamin is also important in improving vision, preventing eye infections and in the production of red blood cells. Vitamin A supplements contribute to the reduction of mortality from diseases such as diarrhoea and measles.

Vitamin A deficiency leads to an increase in infectious and parasitic diseases, stunted mental and physical development, declining vision [night blindness] and ultimately blindness, as well as increasing the likelihood of developing anaemia due a reduction in red blood cells.

Among the children who received the vitamin supplements in the ongoing campaign were 2,000 children from indigenous communities ('Pygmies'), Ngoussa said.

He said these children were the most vulnerable, adding: "If in general the situation of the Congolese children is of concern to us, then that of the pygmy children is even of greater concern as can be seen in the precarious way in which the indigenous communities live."

Read the full article here <http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=77607>