

IDRC



FEATURE

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SCIENCE WORLD

(a collection of development-oriented science news briefs that may be used as a column, or as separate items)

BLIND CHILDREN

(approx. 120 words)

Ophthalmia neonatorum is a serious eye disease that can strike newborns, usually within the first 28 days of life. The disease is fairly common in developing countries: studies have shown that in Africa 15 to 34 percent of newborns had contracted it.

Ophthalmia neonatorum is caused by infection from a type of gonorrhoea in the mother. It can be diagnosed by simple examination under a microscope. However, more than a hundred years ago, it was shown that the infection could be prevented by putting silver nitrate drops into the eyes of newborns at birth. The technique is carried out in developed countries but not, so far, in developing countries.

But silver nitrate can sometimes cause conjunctivitis, a potentially serious eye infection. Some doctors then, prefer to use tetracycline, an antibiotic that also helps prevent other diseases.

A research project at the University of Nairobi, Kenya, funded by Canada's International Development Research Centre (IDRC), aims to evaluate the incidence of this disease. Researchers will compare silver nitrate and tetracycline and look for more efficient therapies.

ANAEMIC WOMEN

(approx. 100 words)

About half the women in developing countries are estimated to be suffering from iron-deficiency anaemia, making it "one of the most frequently observed diseases in the world today," according to a recent report of the World Health Organization (WHO).

Some 230 million out of 464 million women in developing countries are deficient in one or more essential nutrients - chiefly iron - and, less frequently, folic acid (part of the vitamin 'B' group essential to red blood cell production).

Pregnant women are more often anaemic, says the report. In Africa, 63 percent of pregnant and 40 percent of non-pregnant women are anaemic; in Asia, the proportions are 65 and 57 percent; in Latin America, 30 and 15 percent.

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A DIRECTORY OF AFRICAN EXPERTISE

(approx. 130 words)

The Panafrican Information and Documentation Centre (PADIS) is setting up a regional information system that will include an inventory of African scientific expertise and technical capability. The data base will include current research and development projects, consultants' services, institutions promoting technical cooperation between developing countries and any other available resources.

The immediate objective is to publish a directory of African experts and to access this information to a computer file. The directory will eventually cover a range of disciplines and specializations: industry, food and agriculture, health, tourism, commerce, transportation and communications, planning and administration, education, rural development, urban planning, the environment, etc.

Canada's International Development Research Centre (IDRC) has supported the PADIS information network from the beginning and is trying to involve as many countries and national and international organizations as possible.

It is hoped that the service will supply legislators and researchers with information essential to decision-making and contribute to the development of a scientific capability adapted to the needs of the African nations.