

14th May 2010, Lima - The "Glass of Milk" Programme, created in 1985 in Peru to provide a nutritional supplement for the most vulnerable population, specifically children up to six years old and pregnant and nursing women, is undermined by poor oversight, according to an audit by the Comptroller General's Office.

The programme has a budget of 136 million dollars a year, and a target population of 4.2 million people, including 2.8 million children under six. However, some of the potential beneficiaries are not getting their glass of milk, because of discrimination in the allocation of resources.

For instance, in urban districts where five percent of the population are poor, the programme spends 52 cents of a dollar per person, but in rural districts where the poverty rate is 90 percent, only 7 cents are allocated per head, according to the Comptroller's Office report, which was seen by IPS.

The official audit also found that the milk delivered by the programme is sometimes diverted so that it does not all go to the children who are the priority population.

In the capital and in Callao, the main port, the programme reaches 50 and 59 percent, respectively, of the target population.

In regions like Apurimac and Pasco, which have poverty rates of 69 and 63 percent, respectively, the milk rations reach 65 and 67 percent of those enrolled as beneficiaries.

Professor Enrique Vásquez at the private Pacific University Research Centre has published several studies warning that poor management was undermining the goals of the programme.

"The Comptroller's Office report has confirmed our own research," Vásquez told IPS.

"One of the main problems we see is that the programme's beneficiaries have not been fully identified (by age group and poverty level), which implies that the supplements do not reach the entire needy population. The siphoning away of the rations is a waste of resources, because the glass of milk is not reaching those who need it most," he said.

The programme and its budget are administered by 1,639 municipal governments and 195 provincial governments.

The official audit investigated 1,263 municipalities, handling a total budget of 96.3 million dollars in 2008. The sample was large enough to detect an anomaly: nearly half the budget (42 percent) was spent on milk purchases from only six companies, five of which are located in Lima.

In other words, districts far from the country's capital are buying the more expensive products supplied by companies in Lima.

For example, impoverished districts located far from Lima in the Peruvian regions of Huánuco, Huancavelica and Apurímac in the central and southern Andes, and in Puno in the southeastern Altiplano, purchased evaporated milk from the Niisa Corporation in Lima, when it would have been cheaper to buy supplies closer to home.

Irregular procurement procedures by municipal governments, favouring certain suppliers in Lima, may be responsible for this, according to the audit report.

The national head of the Glass of Milk Committees, Pilar Brito Álvarez, had a different view. "If most of the purchases are made from six suppliers, it is because they win the tendering processes, which are open to participation by any company," she told IPS.

However, the Comptroller's Office found evidence of price manipulation for the benefit of supplier companies.

"The major suppliers do not necessarily offer the best prices," the report says.

"Poor monitoring is another failing of the Glass of Milk Programme. Since oversight is inadequate, nobody takes responsibility for the inefficiency," Vásquez said.

The official audit also found that the milk rations distributed did not always have the prescribed nutritional value.

"Out of the 1,263 municipalities analysed, only 523 (41 percent) delivered a milk ration with the specified minimum nutritional value, at least once a year," the report says. "The other 740 municipalities did not provide a single milk ration in 2008 that fulfilled the nutritional requirements."

The Comptroller's Office does not have enough branches in the country to supervise the programme.

Each municipality ought to have an institutional oversight office reporting to the Comptroller General's Office, but only 122 of the 195 provincial governments and 106 (six percent) of the 1,639 municipalities have such an office.

"The Ministry of Women and Social Development should oversee the performance of the Glass of Milk Programme," José Vega, the chairman of the parliamentary oversight commission, told IPS. "We should supervise it too, but unfortunately we are snowed under with other investigations," he said.

However, the Ministry of Women and Social Development told IPS that it does not exercise oversight of the programme.

Source: [IPS](#)

