

6. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1. Assessment of needs in the food sector

The transition from communism to new economic structures appears to be a slow process. In the short term, for the majority of the population, it has led to much hardship and suffering. However, **it is a promising sign that the increases in agricultural and economic activities were clearly visible and were indicated by many resource persons met during this evaluation mission.** The substantial food imports and food aid flows into Tajikistan of the past years more or less filled the cereal gap in local production. As a result, **wheat flour has been available on the main markets of Tajikistan in sufficient amounts.**

A range of nutrition surveys has shown that malnutrition rates of children under five years of age have stabilized at relatively high levels. Chronic malnutrition (stunting) is a problem for 30% to 50% of the children under five years. Acute malnutrition (wasting) is a problem for children up to two years, especially in remote plains in the RRS and in Khatlon. The last type of malnutrition mainly appears to be related to inappropriate child feeding and hygiene practices. **It calls for health and nutrition education interventions and improvement of water and sanitation systems in Khatlon.** For the poorest households, food insecurity is related to insufficient access to inputs for production of food by themselves and low purchasing power to buy food on the market. This especially applies to single elderly who have to survive on very low pensions, and families without breadwinner and little or no access to lands for cultivation. As the Tajikistan government in the years to come presumably will not provide social benefits of any substance, **a continuation of free food assistance to the poorest and most needy households in Tajikistan is justified. However, definitely there should be a substantial reduction in free food aid flows. In the coming two years, food security programmes including food-for-work should be quickly expanded to promote self-reliance of most households which up to now have received free food aid.**

6.2. Free food distribution programmes

It is suggested that WFP will gradually take over from ECHO the 'core caseload' of most needy households. This could be combined with WFP Tajikistan's workplan 2000 to start to work through implementing partners.

Geographically differentiated food aid programmes should remain the approach in the coming years, as the causes and extent of nutrition problems vary substantially between the various regions in Tajikistan. Based on various dialogues with the ECHO food partners, the evaluation mission advises to provide free food aid to about 12% of the population in Khatlon, 5% in Dushanbe town, 5% - 10% in the RRS, and 2% - 5% of the population of urban areas only in Leninabad province.

More restricted criteria for free food assistance are necessary. It is suggested to focus on single pensioners, families without breadwinners in urban areas, and families without breadwinners and no access to kitchen gardens (at least 0.1 ha) in rural areas. Also, there should be some room left to include households who are evidently in need, but who don't fall in these specific categories. For instance, families with severely malnourished children (identified through the local health care structures) should be eligible for food aid. Monitors should visit the additional cases for pre-distribution verification purposes. Thus, the

number of beneficiaries would go down considerably. Some **indicative figures** for the number of households thus to be included are given below¹.

Organization	No. Households	No. People	Oblast (Districts)
Mission East	5,500	37,000	Khatlon (Kulyab, Khovaling, Muminibad)
IFRC/RCST	9,000	45,000	Dushanbe and RRS (Sakhrinov, Varzob, Kofarnihon, Tursunzade, Leninsky)
GAA	7,000	50,000	RRS (Karategin Valley)
GAA	4,000	15,000	Leninabad (urban areas only)
Total	25,5000	147,000	

Targeting procedures should be kept as simple as possible. They should ensure a focus on the poorest and most needy households. **Community-based beneficiary selection at ‘kishlak’ (village) or ‘makhala’ (neighbourhood) level has proved to work rather well, and should be considered by other ECHO partners as well.**

Up to now nutrition surveys were executed regularly but not in a co-ordinated and systematic way. **It is recommended to establish a nutrition monitoring system to assess the impact of the reduction in food aid flows.** ECHO should consider inviting Action Against Hunger to execute a yearly round of nutrition surveys in collaboration with the ECHO food partners for the various regions.

With a close eye on the costs per beneficiary and the nutritional contents of the basket, **it is advised to compose a food ration of 25 kg of wheat flour, 5 litres of vegetable oil and 1 kg of iodized salt. To make the programmes more efficient, there should be two distribution cycles per year. These are preferably held at times when household food supplies are most limited, e.g. at pre-harvest and in winter time. With two cycles and the mentioned ration composition, 707 kCal and 15 g of protein are provided per person per day for the whole year round, at an estimated cost of EURO 25 to EURO 30 per person per year².** This ration will cover 34% of the energy needs and 30% of the protein needs of adults leading a sedentary life. It should be kept in mind here that the food ration is a supplement to other sources of food and/or income. It thus can never be expected to cover more than around one-third of the nutritional needs. Also, in this way a strong long-term dependency on external food aid is being avoided.

The number of rations per household should depend on the level of needs in the family. As a rule of thumb, **one ration should be provided to single-person households, and a maximum of two (exceptionally three) to larger households.** This means that project proposals to ECHO in future should state the number of households planned to be covered and the number of rations planned to be distributed. The current practice of calculations based on a mix of numbers of households and of beneficiaries is confusing and should be abandoned.

Especially with the smaller quantities needed for the 2000/2001 food sector programmes, possibilities for **local purchase or regional purchase in Kazakhstan** could be explored. It would substantially reduce transport costs, and has the added advantage of less distortion of the food preferences (the high-quality imported wheat flour is not appropriate for the local 'libjoska' flat bread). However, there are possible flaws in terms of delays and delivery of inferior quality food items.

¹ For GBAO, no recommendation can be given, as the local circumstances there were not assessed during this mission.

² This budget per person includes international purchase of the food items and transport to Tajikistan. Comparison with retailer prices at Dushanbe markets shows that this estimated cost would also suffice for local purchase within the country.

6.3. Food-for-work and food security programmes

The mission concludes that ECHO could have shown more leadership and guidance to assist the implementing partners in a coherent realization of a shift away from free food aid. Up to spring 2000 the proportionality of food security programmes has been very small in comparison with the amounts of free food aid. In the past two years, ECHO has left most of the initiative in this field to the partner organizations. However, several partners have functioned with relatively inexperienced expat staff, leading to less strategic vision and operational capacity. In the near future, ECHO should intend to provoke a clear shift to food security, e.g. through the organization of a series of technical and strategy workshops for the food sector partners. Another suggestion would be for ECHO to contract a short-term consultant to assist in the elaboration of household food security interventions together with the partners and relevant agencies in Tajikistan.

The ECHO partners so far have little experience with income generating activities in urban areas. Some NGO's from the USA already execute small-scale credit schemes and vocational training in the larger cities of the country. As this type of projects is rather complicated and ECHO anyway in the coming years will phase out from Tajikistan, **it is felt that ECHO should continue to focus on programmes for rural areas only.**

For planning purposes, it is needed that ECHO sets the number of households to participate in household food security projects. ECHO should also provide a general framework for these projects. As the various ECHO-partners each have their own expertise and their own niche in the Tajikistan context, **autonomy for selection of specific food security activities should be left to the organizations themselves.** Definitely, both food-for-work programmes and provision of agricultural inputs will have a positive impact on household food security. The effects of the executed programmes in the short term and longer run should be closely monitored. To avoid that the programmes become unbalanced, the amounts of benefits/inputs per household should be kept to a small size.

The mission feels that ECHO's co-ordination in the food sector should be stronger. The ECHO-funded food sector programmes (both free food aid and food security programmes) so far have not been completely coherent with each other. This is seen as part of the explanation for the slow shift away from free food aid. Sometimes, two food distribution programmes are executed independently in the same area. This applies especially to food aid for institutions (like in Leninabad where various donors provide food to medical facilities), but also happened in Kulyab with free food aid distributions by Mission East and WFP. In some areas, free food is distributed by an ECHO-programme without any link to a food security programme of another organization. E.g., this happens in Leninsky district in the RRS where the IFRC/RCST provide free food aid and agricultural inputs without any coordination with the CARE agricultural programme in the same area.

7. LESSONS LEARNED

- Free food aid programmes are expensive but appropriate to alleviate the suffering of highly needy households without any perspective on sufficient access to the staple food.
- In Tajikistan, community-based targeting functions rather well, but only when this is done at the lowest level (village or neighbourhood).

Although the definition of end terms and the provision of a general project framework lies within ECHO's mandate, partner organizations within limits can be free to 'customize' their operations to their own perceptions and capacities.