



DONORS PRINCIPALS IN TAJIKISTAN

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PRESS RELEASE

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The Ambassadors or Representatives of donor Embassies and Organisations in Tajikistan¹ wish to express their concern at both the situations of malnutrition, and of declining food production in the country, call for accelerated reforms to address these problems, and offer to work further together with the Government to overcome them.

Malnutrition did not decline in Tajikistan in 2004, and for children less than 5 years old acute malnutrition worsened compared to 2003. Chronic malnutrition was an estimated 31.4% of total children aged 6 to 59 months in 2004, compared to 30% in 2002. Global Acute malnutrition of children under 5 years old jumped in many parts of the country, to an average of 7.6% (and as high as 11% in some parts of the country), compared to an average of 4.7% in 2003. These are some of the findings of the first of three major surveys conducted in Tajikistan in 2004, on malnourishment of children under five years of age (Action Against Hunger, in cooperation with the Ministry of Health).

Malnutrition has many dimensions to be addressed, such as household food insecurity, socio-cultural behaviour, dietary behaviour, consumer preferences, and access to safe drinking water and health facilities. Chronic malnutrition rates are associated with micro-nutrient deficiency, namely iron deficiency, iodine deficiency and vitamin A deficiency, which also contribute to high mortality and morbidity of young children.²

A second survey has found that 27% of rural households (equal to about one million people), are either chronically food insecure (10%) or very vulnerable to food insecurity (17%). For the 10% of households in the chronic category, the only foodstuff guaranteed on a daily basis is bread -- with only potatoes and fruits and vegetables eaten on an 'often' basis. Other foodstuffs were consumed either rarely, or never in these poorest of households. The problem is lack of access to adequate food, caused by insufficient household land for food production and insufficient purchasing power to buy food. These are some of the results of a survey of 5,000 households on food security (WFP).

It has been noted that even salaried workers (and even salaried agricultural workers) sometimes lack sufficient purchasing power to obtain basic foodstuffs. Sadly, child malnutrition — and household food insecurity in general — are frequently worse in the major agricultural areas of the country. The problem is also found in urban areas.

A third important survey discovered that there was a 17% drop in 'aggregated' (cereal) foods production in 2004 compared to 2003. Significantly, the drop was largely *not* due to climate variation or international factors such as price. Rather, the decline appears to reflect a systemic

¹ This press release is issued by the Ambassadors or Representatives of donor Embassies and Organisations which participate in regular donor coordination meetings called '*Principals Meetings*', with a rotating chairperson. Those represented by this joint press release include AKDN, ADB, EBRD, France, Germany, Japan, OSCE, Russia, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, UK, UN and USA. The current chairman is Amb. Graeme Loten, UK.

² The recent increase of acute malnutrition could be also related to child rearing practice, improper infant feeding practices and a low rate of exclusive breast-feeding. For instance, 42 percent of women of child-bearing age, and 38% of children suffer from anaemia. To give another example, over 60% of women, and children under five years old, suffer from iodine deficiency (Ministry of Health, in cooperation with ADB and UNICEF).

deterioration of cereals production in the country, particularly in the quantity and quality of most inputs. While commercial imports can be difficult to estimate, there is little doubt that there was a sizeable shortfall, of not less than 50,000 tonnes in Tajikistan in 2004, even after international food assistance (Ministry of Agriculture, in cooperation with FAO). Tajikistan does have considerable potential for food production, and thus for decreasing food imports.

It is important to recognise that the Ministry of Health conducted a nation-wide survey in 2003 — with the support of international technical expertise — in the results of which the Government fully recognizes the serious situation of malnutrition (available from Ministry of Health or UNICEF). The Ministry of Health has also been urgently conducting a number of strategic discussions with internationally prominent nutritionists in this regard.

In the view of donor embassies and organisations, despite much good work done to date, there remains an urgent need to:

- 1) Accelerate agricultural reform, including speeding up the processes of land reform, revising laws, establishing a well-functioning land registry, pushing forward with a debt resolution strategy that favours farmers and agricultural workers, and better-informing them;
Pursue policies that allow better trade-offs between food security and cotton production, such as removing de facto controls on the choice of crop to be grown, or allowing competitive ginning. More agricultural land needs to be dedicated to food production;
- 2) Make further efforts to address malnutrition in overall health care reform, especially primary health care, revitalisation of mother and child health care systems, the building of a national child growth monitoring system (to gradually replace annual surveys), rationalisation of hospital care and health sector financing;
- 3) Build further on the Government's food fortification strategy, which is a vital part of the long-term solution. Universal salt iodisation and flour fortification with iron are the most critical and urgent matters. Micronutrient supplementation, the intermediate strategy — particular for iron deficiency and vitamin A deficiency — should be further promoted; and
- 4) Better inform Tajik citizens, through the mass media, on the facts of malnutrition, the Government's efforts in tackling this problem, and how to prevent it.

International food assistance continues to be provided, to help fill the gap in food requirements, but Tajikistan has fundamentally the potential to become food self-sufficient and should work energetically to attain that goal.