EXECUTIVE BRIEF - MARCH 2016

ARMENIA
COMPREHENSIVE FOOD SECURITY, VULNERABILITY AND NUTRITION ANALYSIS (CFSVNA)

The Armenia Comprehensive Food Security, Vulnerability and Nutrition Analysis (CFSVNA) presents the current food security and nutrition situation combined with trend analysis since 2008. It explores the distribution of food insecurity and malnutrition and proposes related areas where measures could be taken by the Government of Armenia and partners to address them.

In 2014, the Armenian Gross Domestic Product (GDP) grew by 3.5%[1]. After several years of strong economic growth, the Armenian economy contracted by 14.1%[2] in 2009, in the aftermath of the global economic crisis. Although the economy has expanded every year since then, the growth in GDP has not returned to the pre-crisis level and has not been inclusive.

Almost one in three were living below the poverty line in 2014 in Armenia. Poverty increased sharply in the aftermath of the economic crisis, and despite some improvements, it remained 30%[3] in 2014. At the same time, the officially registered unemployment rate was 18%[4]. This had been increasing since 2012 - especially among women and youth whose unemployment rates were 20% and 37% respectively, the latter over twice the national average.

The combination of high poverty and high unemployment rates has led many Armenians to pursue work opportunities abroad. Remittances are an important income source for many households and their contribution to the economy is significant. In spite of a decrease in remittances from 2015[5], their share of Armenia's GDP remains important (18% in 2014).

Methodology

The report's findings are mainly based on the Integrated Living Conditions Surveys (ILCS) for the period 2008 – 2014. The ILCS is carried out each year by the National Statistical Service of the Republic of Armenia (NSS RA). In addition, an extensive literature review and secondary data sources were used to describe the country's recent socioeconomic trends and risks. The nutrition analysis is based on the ILCS 2014 anthropometric data and the Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS) for the period 2000 – 2010.

A food security framework and corresponding pillars (availability, access, utilization, and stability) were used to create food security and nutrition indicators. Using ILCS data, food security profiles were created using household's current consumption (diet quality and quantity), wealth, and the sustainability of their income sources.

[1] WB 2015
[2] WB 2015
[3] ILCS 2014
[4] ILCS 2014
[5] IMF Armenia: News Report for March 2, 2016

FOOD INSECURITY

DESPITE THE ECONOMIC GROWTH OVER THE LAST DECADE, THE LEVEL OF FOOD INSECURITY HAS BEEN STAGNANT OVER THE PAST 5 YEARS, AND THERE IS GROWING DISPARITY BETWEEN THE FOOD INSECURE AND FOOD SECURE

The global economic crisis caused food insecurity in Armenia to increase sharply. Despite economic growth, the level of food insecure households remained high at 15%, almost double the level in 2008. By contrast, the level of food secure households has been steadily increasing. These trends indicate that although the situation is improving for a large share of the population, those worst off are left behind. This increasing disparity is also seen in other socioeconomic indicators in Armenia: income inequality, for example, increased from 0.339 in 2008 to 0.373 in 2014[6].
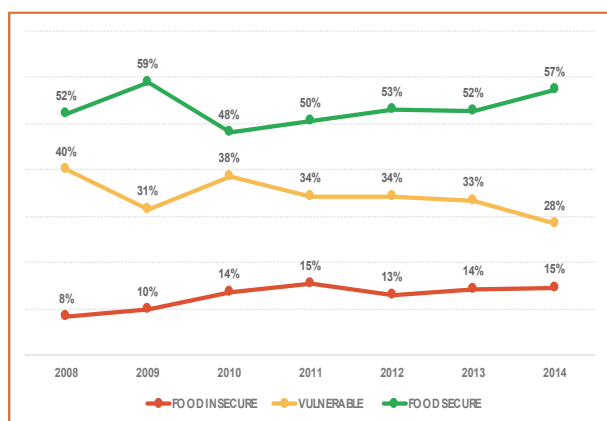

Figure 1: Food security trends (2008-2014)

Food insecure households had a significantly higher share of unemployed adults (19%) compared with food secure households (11%). Food insecure households were also poorer, had less reliable and less diversified income sources, and had accumulated more debt.

Education is critical for improved food security. Food insecure households invested less in education than food secure and vulnerable households, and they were educated to a lower level. They also had larger households and a higher proportion of dependent members. These differences

were statistically significant over several years.

The prevalence of food insecurity was higher in the north of the country. Four marzes had a percentage of food insecurity above the national average: Shirak (17%), Lori (17%), Tavush (16%) and Yerevan (18%).

Photo credit: WFP/Liana Kharatian
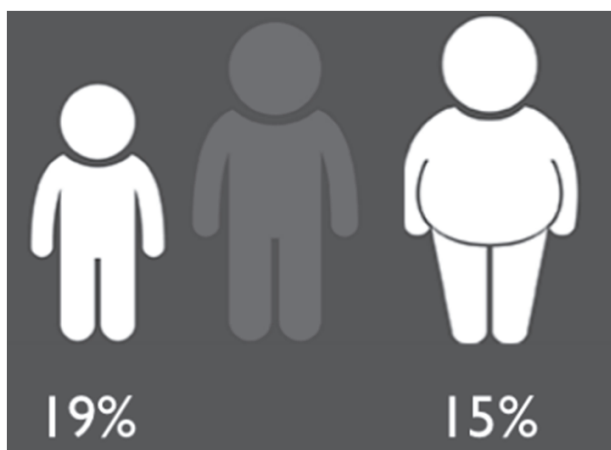
MALNUTRITION

A DUAL BURDEN OF MALNUTRITION EXISTS ACROSS THE COUNTRY AMONG CHILDREN UNDER 5, WITH LARGE NUMBERS OF BOTH STUNTED AND OVERWEIGHT CHILDREN

In 2014 among children under 5 years old, 19% were stunted and 15% were overweight. While both stunting and overweight were falling among children in rural areas, both were rising in urban areas. In urban areas outside Yerevan 22% of children were stunted, and 17% were overweight.

Child stunting was significantly linked with household poverty, poor consumption, poor

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[6] ILCS 2008-14

care and feeding practices, and lower education of mothers. The prevalence of overweight was the same across poor and rich households, indicating the need for greater awareness on healthy eating and lifestyle across the entire population.

19%   15%

Overweight children are more likely to become overweight as adults, which poses serious public health concerns. To support development of effective policies, national data collection need to be improved to better understand the prevalence and causes of overweight.

Deficiencies in micronutrients affect malnutrition and food insecurity, and research to understand their prevalence is underway in Armenia[7]. Data from recent years[8] showed that food insecure households consumed a significantly lower level of iron rich foods, supporting the importance of a nutritionally diverse diet.

SHOCKS AND STRESSES

VOLATILITY IN GLOBAL AND REGIONAL ECONOMIES IMPEDES ARMENIA'S ECONOMIC GROWTH, AND THE MAJORITY OF THE COUNTRY 'S POPULATION IS AT RISK OF ONE OR MORE NATURAL HAZARDS

Recent global and regional economic crises considerably reversed Armenia's achievements in poverty reduction, pushing many vulnerable households below the poverty line. The impacts underline Armenia's dependence on external economies, and its overall vulnerability to shocks in the global economy. The recession in Russia and the volatility in the global economy are impeding economic growth in Armenia, and putting food security at risk.

Armenia is a shock-prone country where the majority of the population is at risk of one or more type of natural disasters. In terms of economic impact, earthquakes are the most significant. Less severe, but more frequent shocks include hailstorms, frost, flooding, land- or mudslides and drought. In addition, Armenia is exposed to man-made disasters, including industrial accidents and escalation in existing political tensions within the region.

THE NORTH-WEST OF THE COUNTRY IS MORE PRONE TO NATURAL DISASTERS AND HAS A HIGHER PREVALENCE OF BOTH FOOD INSECURITY AND MALNUTRITION

The map shows the combination of natural disaster risks and population density (purple shading), overlaid by food insecurity (red outline), and child malnutrition (shown as cross-hatching). Lori and Shirak have higher levels of food insecurity and malnutrition (both stunting and overweight) and also face a higher risk of natural disasters. In addition, these marzes have high poverty rates.
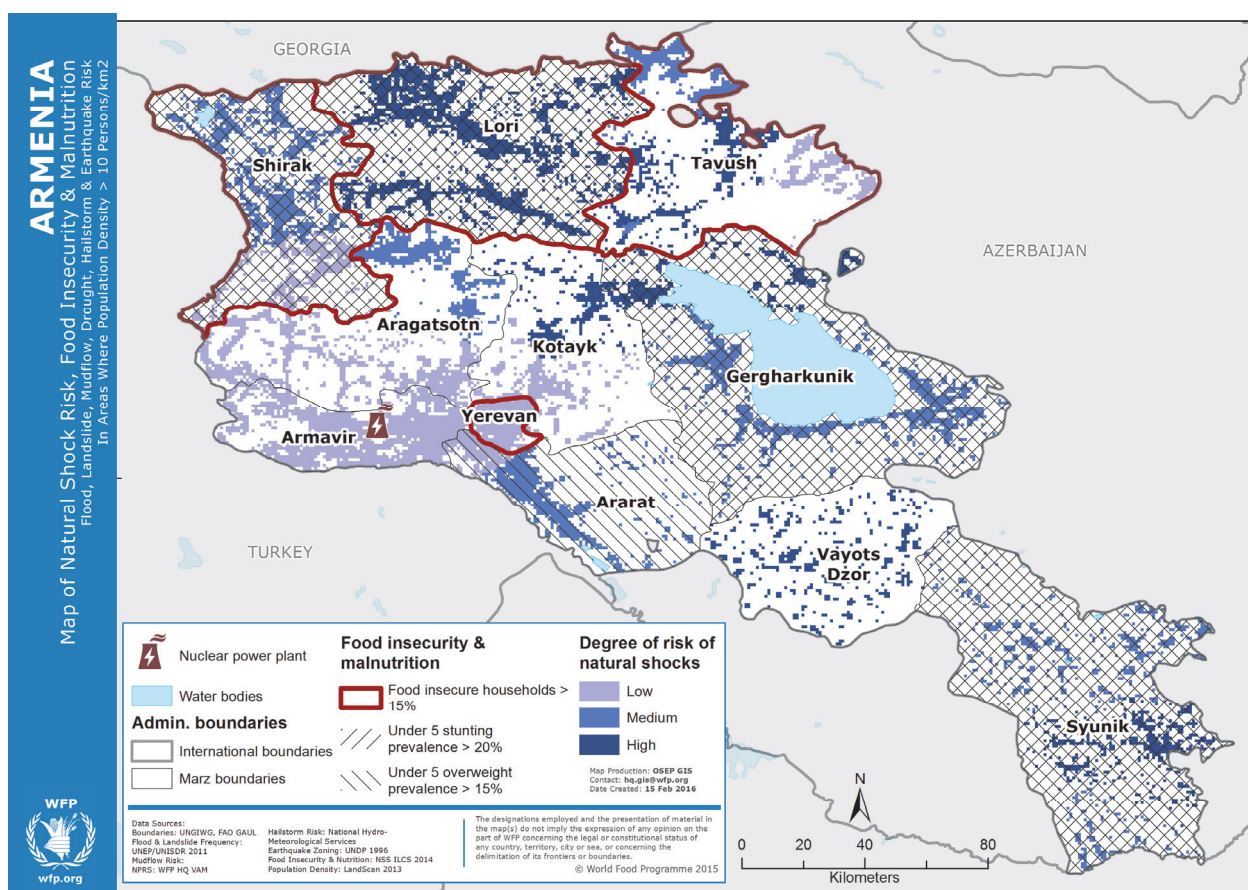
CONCLUSIONS

Many policies and programmes are in place to improve food and nutrition security status in Armenia, aligned to critical strategic frameworks, including the Armenia Development Strategy for 2014-25 and the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) 2016-2020.

Further investment to improve food and nutrition security, and to strengthen resilience to the risks households are facing, should aim to:

- Develop and implement comprehensive national food security (in its three dimensions- availability, access, and utilization) and nutrition policy along a life cycle approach;
- Reduce urban vulnerability and disparity;
- Strengthen food security through investments in youth employment, education and agricultural productivity;
- Reduce the risk of stunting through early identification, and tackle overweight through increased awareness;
- Reinforce emergency preparedness and disaster risk reduction;
- Strengthen the evidence base and coordination for food security and nutrition.

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