Vulnerable Group Feeding in Tajikistan

- Vulnerable Group Feeding is a food lifeline that WFP gives twice a year to tens of thousands of the poorest and most food-insecure people in rural Tajikistan. VGF provides these beneficiary families with a two-month ration of fortified wheat flour, enriched vegetable oil, iodized salt and dried peas at the times of year when they need it most.

- In 2011, the VGF programme distributed food to nearly 36,349 people in the areas of Tajikistan with the highest food insecurity. The families received a two-month ration during the lean season before the harvest (the months of May and June) and at the beginning of the winter (during the months of November and December).

- WFP uses the Food Security Monitoring System (FSMS), to identify the districts of Tajikistan where households are the most vulnerable. Data collectors interview households about their resources, such as monthly income, access to arable land, ownership of livestock and other productive assets (vehicles, sewing machine, mill, etc.). The FSMS reports twice a year on all the findings about food insecurity, including income, nutrition and education.

- Then WFP and local government partners work together to compile the lists of families qualifying for the Vulnerable Group Feeding programme. First, the government authorities supply a list of the poorest families in the district. Then WFP monitors households chosen randomly from the list, applying the FSMS criteria to them to hone the lists to those who truly need help the most.

- WFP and the local partners jointly announce the location of the food distribution sites and the day the food will be available for collection. One week before the distribution, WFP provides ration cards to the heads of the villages who then personally deliver them to the recipient families. The ration cards set out the entitlement and the time and place of the distribution. The card also has awareness-raising information about HIV/AIDS. When the day comes, recipients provide identification documents of each household members sign the beneficiary sheet and take possession of the food. WFP selects the distribution points as close as possible to people’s homes to keep transportation costs to a minimum.
• After the food has been given out, WFP follows up with post-distribution monitoring. This is a random checking of the beneficiary households to ensure that the families got the right amount of food, that they encountered no obstacles at the distribution site that the food was in good condition when they used it.

• WFP takes the opportunity of post-distribution to gather more information on the people we help – how many family members they have, how important the food is to them, what other forms of income they have. This gives WFP a greater understanding of how best to use its resources during the critical times of the year.

• Vulnerable Group Feeding can be effective in alleviating hunger in the short-run and can provide a valuable safety net. But with a local market value of U.S. $16 for the two-month ration, the resulting income transfer to highly food insecure families (all of them living below the poverty line of U.S. $22 a month) can help make other household expenditures, such as education, health or small investments, available to those who could otherwise scarcely afford them.

• WFP has successfully transferred more and more vulnerable families on the VGF beneficiary lists to participation in Food for Assets projects. The aim is to provide families like these temporary employment on a community project that will help them achieve greater self-reliance and a sustainable livelihood.

• WFP’s tree-planting project, designed to enhance the food security of poor families as well as to protect the environment, draws its participants from VGF lists in several districts of Tajikistan. More than 1,862 families have “graduated” from unconditional food distributions to managing their own micro-plantations of fruit, nut, pine and poplar trees, whose produce they can eat, preserve and sell.

• The VGF ration can be used in a variety of ways that give a poor family welcome and nutritious alternatives to their standard daily diet of bread and tea during the lean seasons. Impoverished women can use the oil, flour and salt to make soup (often supplemented with a few root vegetables) or pasta. These dishes can be prepared for lunch and stretched into dinner over the course of a day.