

**EVALUATION OF THE USAID/NIS
VULNERABLE GROUP FOOD PROGRAM IN
ARMENIA, AZERBAIJAN, GEORGIA,
AND TAJIKISTAN**

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The observations, conclusions, and recommendations set forth in this document are those of the authors alone and do not represent the views or opinions of the USAID/ENI/HR Technical Assistance Project, BHM International, Inc., or the staffs of these organizations.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>Page</u>
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS	ii
I. AZERBAIJAN	1
A. INTRODUCTION, BACKGROUND, AND DEFINITIONS	1
B. METHODOLOGY	3
C. DISCUSSION	3
D. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	8
II. GEORGIA	11
A. INTRODUCTION	11
B. METHODOLOGY	12
C. DISCUSSION	13
D. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	21
III. ARMENIA	25
A. INTRODUCTION, BACKGROUND, AND DEFINITIONS	25
B. METHODOLOGY	26
C. DISCUSSION	27
D. RECOMMENDATIONS	34
IV. TAJIKISTAN	36
A. INTRODUCTION	36
B. METHODOLOGY	37
C. DISCUSSION	38
D. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	43
ANNEXES	
ANNEX A: SCOPE OF WORK	
ANNEX B: BIBLIOGRAPHY	
ANNEX C: CONTACTS	

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The three Caucasus nations visited by the BHM Evaluation Team in March and early April 1996 continue to recover from the consequences of actions both within and beyond their control. But the pace is slow. The unresolved six-year conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh and the resulting flight of ethnic refugees between and within the two countries belies the cease-fire, in place since May 1994. Georgia's loss of agriculturally rich breakaway Abkhazia and of South Ossetia, also under cease-fire since May 1994, has displaced over 250,000 persons in the wake of nationalist uprisings. The 1988 earthquake in central Armenia required both emergency housing and infrastructure repair as well as longer-term economic rehabilitation. Traditionally vulnerable populations (invalids, elderly pensioners, single female-headed households, veterans, and even Chernobyl victims and families of those killed in armed conflict) have seen their numbers soar as refugees and fellow citizens fled their homes when war threatened their lives. In Armenia, the earthquake-displaced further swelled the ranks of the vulnerable. All added to the strain on the three economies and furthered their decline. The Western development agencies have not been unresponsive to these humanitarian and development needs.

The overall collapse of the Soviet Union and, with it, the directed economy that had supplied more or less assured markets for the region's exports and a reliable supply of imports and energy (including gasoline, electricity, and natural gas) has left the region reeling. A visit to any of these three nations reveals ghostly factory complexes with cold smoke stacks, empty office buildings, silent railways, rusting construction cranes and steel girders, and paved streets decaying to mud. Poorly built, mass-produced worker apartment buildings now house the un- or underemployed; walls and windows show crude chimney vents for the ubiquitous woodstove that has replaced natural gas as the fuel of convenience, if not preference. In all three countries, natural gas supplies have been shut off when the countries fell too far behind in payments to the suppliers. Tree stumps dot the rural and urban landscape as testament to the search for fuel wood.

All three Caucasus nations have embarked on structural adjustment programs. These programs have many objectives but are generally targeted to help nations reach economic stability and sustainable growth with equity. Privatization seems to march in step with structural adjustment. And perhaps nothing is more critical to the vulnerable populations than what is happening to the State Bread Corporations in all three nations. As these parastatals lose their subsidies, through which bread rations were provided to eligible vulnerable populations and bread prices were controlled, the cost of living for a staple of the region's diet rises sharply. Some advocates of targeted feeding programs track the rising cost of bread against the average wage or pension as a proxy for the continuing vulnerability of those, it is claimed, who survive on fixed pensions or inelastic wages in the public sector.

By the team's own crude measure, a fixed-income pensioner in Azerbaijan could afford perhaps two and a half pounds of cheese per month—and nothing else. Similar stark situations face those on fixed incomes throughout the Caucasus, we were told. Why such situations had not yet resulted in mass starvation or at least grave indications of malnutrition was "a mystery." Others stated that sale of assets had allowed the vulnerable to survive so far but that such assets must certainly be exhausted after three or four years. Yet our own observations did not reflect such signs. In shared box cars on railway sidings in Azerbaijan; in former shipping containers housing the earthquake-displaced in Armenia; in an incomplete hotel in Azerbaijan whose empty elevator shafts and exposed electrical wiring made walking a daily throw of the dice with death; in a former Georgian spa where families clustered around the ubiquitous wood-burning stove in rooms never designed to house long-term tenants (while, nearby, Stalin's smiling face, adored by workers and youths sculpted in the building's frieze, shined down on the abandoned bath house); in condemned apartment buildings where Russian-speaking Armenians, refugees from Baku, lived because they had no other choice even though part of their six-story building had already collapsed; in not one of these and many other housing sites could we detect signs of malnourishment. Women and men appeared healthy and did not complain about illnesses; children were out playing in the mud or dirt or attending school; infants, chubby and blanketed, slept contentedly in cribs, all in reasonably clean, sometimes overheated rooms. Television sets more common than not sat in corners; in some cases, a vehicle or truck was parked outside. Fine china and crystal was visible in lacquered cabinets in some containers and former troop barracks now housing refugees from Abkhazia in Kutaisi, Georgia.

The reader should not interpret this description as satisfaction by the team or by the refugees/displaced with their living conditions. Indeed, better housing, not more food, was the demand the team heard most often during its visits. The presence of foreigners such as the team members drew out local representatives; they knew and appreciated the source of their donated food (many read English). But survival in cramped quarters—sometimes with fear that the roof might literally fall down or that a child might be electrocuted by faulty wiring or that a misstep would send a resident (literally) through the floor—is not a prescription for social content.

The team believes that the refugees/internally displaced in the three countries, joined by the "traditional" vulnerable populations (infirm, elderly pensioners, female-headed multichild families) are in fact "making do." In the absence of baseline nutritional data and with only a few reports indicating some signs of stunting but not the more serious wasting, many relief organizations are increasingly turning their attention to "development" and "job creation" from "emergency" or "direct" relief.¹ The team endorses this move, especially as direct relief resources appear to be on the decline. At the same time, the team sees a continued and important role for targeted USAID food

See, for example, the Summary of Tbilisi 000809 of March 8, "March 5-6 Meeting On Joint UN/Donor Humanitarian Needs Assessment for the Caucasus."

aid in all three countries (as well as in Tajikistan), notwithstanding any overall decline in resources.

Based on documents prepared for the March 4-5 Tbilisi donor meeting for the UN Consolidated Appeal for the Caucasus, USAID reported² without comment highly questionable justifications for continuing targeted feeding. The USAID report posits that many vulnerable persons live on fixed incomes; therefore, the rising price of staple foods puts them seriously at risk.³ (The report also makes a questionable statement based on projected additional unemployment resulting from structural adjustment.) The real situation is clearly far more complex. For example, one major PVO is discontinuing its feeding operations. Its leadership believes that because refugees and the displaced have already survived for three or four years on supplementary feeding programs that provide only 30 percent of their diet (they themselves provide 70 percent of their needs), these same families will not suffer if forced to provide all their needs. Food is available on local markets at prices allegedly too high for most. Yet markets, wherever we saw them in rural or urban areas were crowded. Someone is buying, notwithstanding mass un- or underemployment and unsettled refugee/internally displaced/earthquake victim populations.

How to solve this puzzle? First, new analyses of family income or expenditure patterns are revealing higher disposable incomes⁴ (by a factor of over ten) than had been recognized. Second, families and extended families, including neighbors, are a strong supplement to emergency welfare and survival. The team saw dramatic evidence in Armenia of neighbors, themselves food recipients, who had kept alive a deaf/mute family somehow ignored by the national PAROS registry. Remittances appear to be significant too, especially in Armenia and to lesser degrees in Georgia and Azerbaijan. Assets may still be appearing on the market, although individuals interviewed by the team noted a decline in the sale of such goods in, for example, the Vernisage, the popular Sunday outdoor market in Yerevan.

The team was unable to detect any advantage to specially targeted feeding programs such as the one examined in this report: the VGFP (also known as the Georgia-Armenia Nutrition Supplement Program or GANSP). No baseline data were collected when this emergency supplementary feeding program began; when the program terminated in Azerbaijan, donors increased other program rations to compensate. While farina (cream of wheat) was generally regarded as

Ibid.

Ibid, para. 5. Also see para. 16 for Azerbaijan, comparing a \$15 average monthly salary with the minimum consumer basket of \$72 per person per month, and para. 25 for Georgia, comparing the purchasing power of those on fixed income (\$5 equivalent) with a market basket for a family of three (\$100 equivalent).

See discussion in the PAROS section of the Armenia chapter.

children's food and boxes were seen in many homes the team visited, interviews revealed that the other commodities provided under the program, especially vegoil, dried whole milk, and enriched flour, were consumed by the entire family. Local nationals of the various cooperating agencies resisted this conclusion on the theory that no one would take food from children. But bread in the home and cooked rice or beans and the like are not seen as children's food, and families strapped for resources eat what is available instead of spending scarce resources to purchase other commodities. In this manner, the nutritious supplementary foods provided by the VGFP enrich family diets and offset the cost to beneficiaries of purchasing commodities on the market. Consequently, the team believes that targeted supplemental food USAID probably played a part in preventing acute malnutrition from taking hold in the Caucasus. The team also considers the continuation of well-targeted supplemental feeding programs for entire families or isolated vulnerable population segments to be the best solution to providing effective food USAID as resources decline.

The team's basic recommendations (which follow this introduction) are that the total amount of targeted food USAID from all donors can and should be reduced through improved targeting of such USAID to the most vulnerable; that donors should take every advantage of the income and expenditure studies now underway in Armenia and Georgia and that similar studies be undertaken in Azerbaijan and Tajikistan; and that special care be taken by all those concerned not to allow such vulnerable populations as the hospitalized, elderly pensioners, and the like to slip through the targeted feeding network. The team endorses such self-targeting feeding programs run by the Salvation Army and the French PVO AICF (Action Internationale Contre La Faim) as soup kitchens. In this regard, the team supports the planned focus of the PVO and development community on development programs but cautions that such initiatives should be introduced only with the assurance of the PVOs and their sponsors that they will have sufficient resources to see such initiatives through to termination. The team considers the sale of USDA commodities under Title I or other agreements to be a natural source of local currencies to support such development initiatives. Although USDA/Washington managers show longstanding reticence in becoming involved in traditional development programs, the team recommends that the foreign and domestic development representatives consider approaching the local government authorities for access to such funds. While excuses not to provide such monies are easy to come by (e.g., IMF Standby Agreements, competing requirements, etc.), the fact is that it was common and longstanding practice for USAID to have local currency generations used in this manner in Latin America.

In conducting this evaluation, the team has been careful not to compare requirements in the Caucasus (and Tajikistan) with the (too) familiar scenes well-known to African disaster observers. The decline of the Caucasus economies will not create European "stick people," but the impact of economic decline is nonetheless real. The problem for the future is how to ameliorate the effects of this decline and resolve its root causes.

Tajikistan

In addition to the three Caucasus nations, one team member conducted an evaluation of USAID-supported targeted feeding in Tajikistan in early April 1996. In general terms, Tajikistan is experiencing the same economic problems facing the three Caucasus nations, i.e., economic decline brought about by a collapse of external markets and internal civil conflict. While the situation with regard to energy supplies is better than that encountered in the Caucasus, Tajikistan was less industrialized to begin with and is generally thought to have been either the least developed of the former Soviet Republics or nearly so.

The USAID-Vulnerable Group Feeding Program in Tajikistan was limited to two commodities—vegoil and wheat flour—that arrived at the end of 1995. Because these commodities were combined with other commodities into a family supplementary ration distributed by WFP and its implementing partners, the VGFP-Tajikistan program did not have its own identity and cannot be evaluated as a separate program. However, USAID food still plays an important role. Most of it is targeted to vulnerable populations and not the internally displaced who, in large measure, have returned to their original villages from where they had fled. With regard to the vulnerable, no serious malnutrition was observed during the evaluation or was reported. Various coping strategies appear at play; contemporary analyses of both nutritional status and the vulnerable populations are needed because present targeting is based on government lists which do not necessarily reflect vulnerability.

Conclusions and Recommendations

General Conclusions

- C A common deficiency in the analyses of all four countries discussed in this report is a lack of reliable baseline or current nutritional, family income, or expenditure data related to vulnerable group food needs. Studies designed to fill the gap are now underway or in the planning stages in many cases. **The team believes that any major future changes in targeted feeding should be based upon a better understanding of food vulnerability among the target populations.** The results of studies and analyses now underway, under consideration, or recommended in the Caucasus and in Tajikistan will be central to achieving the goal of more precise USAID food targeting. Although overall USAID food resources may be declining, **the team advises caution in initiating major retargeting absent the results of these analyses.**

- C **The team believes the recommendation that local governments should increasingly take responsibility for adequate care of their most vulnerable citizens, for example, from local currency proceeds of the still-significant donations of USAID program food (wheat shipments). This recommendation for Armenia is equally applicable to Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Tajikistan, allowing for variations in USAID program food levels.**

Country-Specific Conclusions

With regard to Azerbaijan, the team

C **concludes that a continuing need for humanitarian food assistance exists, that donor agencies need to continue to exert careful effort in scrubbing their lists of eligibles, and that, based on the results of the nutrition and CDC/WHO studies, particular attention should be given to inclusion of pensioners, elderly, and families of those killed in armed conflict, among others, in the humanitarian assistance program.**

C due to a lack of baseline or other quantitative data and the receipt by the VGFP beneficiaries of commodities from other USAID food programs, **the team was unable to assess any visible benefit from the VGFP in Azerbaijan.**

C **believes that of the three Caucasus republics, Azerbaijan deserves the greatest attention regarding continuation of USAID targeted food. The team considers the plight of the Internally Displaced Person (IDP) population and doubtless other such vulnerable groups as the families of those killed in armed conflict, orphans, lonely pensioners, etc., as meriting continued supplementary food assistance.** The team recognizes that based on the brief time available to it and the general absence of baseline and current nutritional and income data, this conclusion is necessarily subjective. In this regard, the team does **not** recommend that targeted feeding be discontinued elsewhere in the Caucasus.

C believes that, **based on WFP management's analysis, self-implementation will result in cost savings, even after the additional costs of vehicles and equipment are absorbed. We concur with WFP's decision to begin self-implementation in Mingechevir after World Vision phases out.**

C **strongly believes that WFP should consider assigning more than one senior manager to Mingechevir, especially if, as we have learned, it is WFP's intent to add to his responsibilities USAID food oversight in nearby IDP camps.**

With regard to Georgia, the team

C recommends **that Georgia be ranked somewhat lower than Azerbaijan and Armenia in the allocation of USAID targeted food.** Notwithstanding higher government-to-government and remittance flows to Armenia than to Georgia, the team saw more self-help, better housing, and better access to energy by target

populations in Georgia than in Armenia, with living conditions the worst in Azerbaijan.

C recommends that the international food donors consider in future allocations of food both within Georgia and among the three Caucasus nations the results of forthcoming studies of vulnerability in Georgia and that implementing PVOs/NGOs use these results for better USAID targeting.

C recommends that care be taken not to expand beneficiary groups unless consensus between the donor and implementer is previously reached.

C recommends that the food donor community either in unison or with Georgian support hire a consultant to review the studies and recommend criteria to be used for future USAID targeted food allocations, allowing donors sufficient flexibility to reflect any future changes in USAID food supplies.

C recommends that in the future another commodity is substituted for beans.

C concludes that CARE's decision to include the entire VGFP list of potentially eligible pregnant/lactating women and children between six and 59 months was unnecessary.

C was unable to find any data supporting the impact of VGFP commodities due to the absence of baseline data and the receipt by VGFP beneficiaries of commodities from other programs. Notwithstanding this, the team concludes that commodities were generally consumed by the intended populations thus enhancing their diets with nutritious components. We believe that infants under five years generally consumed farina and dry whole milk. Families at large consumed flour and beans.

C does not believe that exclusively targeting women and children under five years in the manner of the VGFP has been particularly effective since the program provides supplemental food to all family members who, if stressed, will and should benefit from these commodities as well.

With regard to Armenia, the team recommends that

C PVO and government authorities assure that PAROS include all marginal populations, particularly those most easily forgotten among the most vulnerable, such as the physically challenged, "lonely pensioners," and that segment of the refugee population without recourse to extended family support.

- C **the PAROS system be continued and further developed/improved.**
- C **a strong manager/coordinator be added to the Fund for Armenia Relief (FAR) team to improve FAR's external coordination role. Further, FAR should institute periodic meetings with its "clients" to get in-progress feedback on the system.**
- C **other types of assistance be increasingly phased in and that food assistance is limited to those groups that most probably cannot be reached in other ways. Local governments should take increasing responsibility for adequate care for their most vulnerable citizens, for example, from the local currency proceeds of the still-significant donations of USAID program food (wheat shipments).**

With regard to Tajikistan, the team

- C **cautions against scaling down the food programs too quickly, at least until a better quantitative understanding of vulnerability in Tajikistan is gained.**
- C **recommends conduct of a study along the lines of the SCF/ECHO/DHA study in Georgia to develop a better understanding of the number of vulnerable people in Tajikistan and their degree of vulnerability.**
- C **recommends that nutritional data be consistently gathered and analyzed and that CARE's Rapid Nutrition Assessment of August 1994 be repeated to detect a downward trend, if any.**

I. AZERBAIJAN

A. INTRODUCTION

Azerbaijan was the first of four countries visited as part of this USAID-financed Evaluation of the USAID/NIS Vulnerable Group Food Program (VGFP). Azerbaijan's program ended in June 1995 due to reduced overall resources for the program. Termination of the VGFP did not affect other targeted feeding programs run by CARE, which used USDA-supplied commodities, or by the World Food Program (WFP) feeding programs, which were supported by numerous donors. Indeed, including the VGFP, "...38.9 thousand metric tons of food was distributed by 16 international organizations and NGOs/PVOs to IDPs (internally displaced persons) and vulnerable groups..."⁵ in 1995. Among others, USAID, USDA, the European Union, the European Commission Humanitarian Office (ECHO), the Netherlands, and Finland⁶ made donations.

In 1988, war broke out between Armenia and Azerbaijan over the Nagorno-Karabakh region, an enclave surrounded by Azerbaijan and located in the southwestern corner of the country. Azerbaijan declared independence from the USSR in 1989 and gained independence in October 1991. In 1992, Armenia occupied the land between Nagorno-Karabakh and its border and has since advanced to occupy one-fifth of Azerbaijan's total land mass. Estimates of the number of people displaced by the war vary. The World Bank⁷ estimates about 650,000; WFP presently reports that it is reaching some 547,000 displaced.⁴ In addition, one-third of arable land is now unproductive; at least 46 hospitals, 600 schools and kindergartens, hundreds of health posts, and many thousands of homes have been destroyed.⁵ According to a November 1994 Food and Nutrition Security Rapid

Save the Children/Azerbaijan Field Office, "Humanitarian Assistance in the Republic of Azerbaijan, Annual Report 1995." Baku, Azerbaijan, March 1996, p. V.

Ibid, p. 37.

Trends in Developing Economies, 1995, The World Bank.

In an annex to a paper prepared for submission to a coordinating meeting held in Tbilisi in March of this year, the WFP estimates that a total of 985,601 "beneficiaries [are] currently receiving food aid from 11 NGOs, the group including 547,264 IDPs and 438,337 'vulnerables.'" Other NGOs have challenged the total as too high.

The Year in Disasters 1993, World Disaster Report, Section Two, Part XII. "Caucasus: poverty, conflict and disaster."

Assessment,⁶ "the majority of displaced people...have lost their means of securing adequate livelihoods.... War efforts have diverted limited national resources away from economic development;...Azerbaijan has not been able to exploit its oil reserves as it should have. Both agricultural and nonagricultural production has been declining over the last several years. The cumulative effect is that purchasing power for IDPs, and for the entire population, has declined dramatically...."

At this writing, a cease-fire is in effect and the United States is (reportedly) trying to speed resolution of the conflict through a multinational group called "The Minsk Group." Until the present cease-fire results in an enduring peace, the refugee situation will remain unresolved and the Clinton Administration is unlikely to exercise its waiver authority under Section 907⁷ of the Freedom Support Act, which supports the VGFP. The effect of Section 907 on the VGFP was that, unlike Georgia and Armenia, CARE staff directly implemented VGFP/Azerbaijan. Similarly, WFP implemented the humanitarian assistance program for IDPs directly through PVOs without government participation by, for example providing either public sector health personnel or distribution facilities such as ration shops used for distribution in Armenia. (USAID's decision to terminate the VGFP did not, however, affect USDA's provision of commodities to CARE/Azerbaijan.)

The Vulnerable Group Feeding Program began in FY 1992 in the Newly Independent States (NIS). The primary beneficiaries were pregnant and lactating women and small children aged six months to five years. The program was designed as a short-term safety net for vulnerable mothers and children and, since 1992, has at different times been active in the republics of Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Russia, and Tajikistan. The program's aim was to affect the nutritional condition of the target beneficiaries positively through regular bimonthly distributions of appropriate commodities. PVOs, primarily CARE, distributed VGFP commodities. In response to WFP emergency appeals, U.S. commodities continue to be distributed for IDPs as supplementary feeding on a bimonthly basis. Humanitarian food for the IDPs and refugees contributed to the WFP is distributed by WFP's implementing partners. The CARE mothers and children component of the VGFP/Azerbaijan program terminated in June 1995; USAID donations to WFP through the VGFP continue. CARE and WFP continue supplemental food assistance to IDP families and other vulnerables to this date by using commodities donated by USDA and other donors, principally the European Commission Humanitarian Office (ECHO), Italy, and the Netherlands. Targeted feeding

CARE/USA: "Azerbaijan: A Food and Nutrition Security Rapid Assessment." October 19—November 18, 1994, CARE-CIS in Azerbaijan, p. 1.

Section 907 states in part that "...United States assistance under this or any other part Act ... may not be provided to the Government of Azerbaijan until the President determines, and so reports to Congress, that the Government of Azerbaijan is taking demonstrable steps to cease all blockades and other offensive uses of force against Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh."

programs for pregnant and lactating women or to children under five years do not exist at present in Azerbaijan; however, affected groups receive food as members of eligible IDP or vulnerable families.

To prevent overlap, the government of Azerbaijan divided the country into geographic areas assigned to NGOs; CARE was assigned the area around Imishli, near the Iranian border. CARE reports⁸ that the number of VGFP beneficiaries in the FY 94 program was 9,359 pregnant women, 4,558 lactating mothers, and 41,975 children under five years, all from displaced families registered with their local authorities no later than July 1992 or families not previously receiving assistance from other sources. (This situation stands in contrast with Kutaisi, Georgia, where *all* pregnant and lactating women and children six months to five years received CARE supplemental assistance, and with Tajikistan, where only 20 percent of pregnant and lactating women and 8 percent of targeted children received assistance from CARE on the basis of need.)⁹

B. METHODOLOGY

The evaluators reviewed an extensive array of documents regarding emergency feeding programs in Azerbaijan, including reports and analyses prepared by CARE and the WFP and, to a lesser extent, by Save the Children (SCF) and the World Bank (see bibliography, Annex B). In addition, the team visited distributions in progress in and around Imishli and Mingechevir as well as IDPs living in boxcars, an incomplete hotel, and a former hostel. The team conducted formal and informal interviews with major PVO representatives and their national staff who gave generously of their time, with the U.S. Ambassador, and with IDPs themselves. The team is grateful to them all.

The evaluators are aware of the limits inherent in a report based on the brief time spent in each country and the lack of "hard" nutritional baseline or current data. The team has been careful to qualify recommendations given the considerable uncertainty or disagreement among NGO staff regarding the effectiveness and need for the continuation of supplemental feeding, at least as presently targeted (see Conclusions and Recommendations). The conclusions reached and recommendations made, of course, are the authors' responsibility.

C. DISCUSSION

1. An assessment of the food security status of the beneficiary groups of the FY 95 VGFP to include observable coping mechanisms and alternative income potential of these groups. (Italicized portions are taken from the evaluation's scope of work.)

CARE Nutritional Supplement Program Final Report, August 23, 1995.

Ibid, p. 3.

Azerbaijan's 1995 GNP was only approximately 45 percent of its 1989 GNP, even after a 40 percent upward adjustment to the conventional estimated GNP, which had put the 1995 level at 32 percent of the 1989 level. This decline may be the most severe experienced by any republic of the Former Soviet Union.¹⁰ On the other hand, Azerbaijan can point to prospects for significant oil revenues in the near to medium term. It is unlikely, however, that the expected oil revenues will benefit the most vulnerable groups in Azerbaijan in the medium term as "...petroleum sector expansion will not create productive employment opportunities outside the petroleum and related service sectors. Exactly the opposite may be the case. Other countries have found that increased oil income has led to the stagnation, and even to declines, in the industrial and agricultural sectors. And it has led to increasing disparities between regions and individuals, and consequently to considerable social and political tension." Output in nonoil activities will stagnate and may even decline.¹¹ Venezuela and Mexico are cited as nations with ill-considered "oil-boom" policies.

Although "high levels (26 percent) of chronic malnutrition (stunting) were found in the children of the displaced population measured,...very low to 'normal' levels (1.7 percent) of acute malnutrition (wasting) were found."¹² A more recent ECHO study,¹³ however, found "no evidence of a high or increasing level of acute malnutrition; the prevalence of chronic malnutrition (if any) is not known either." Whatever the case, many people interviewed by the team perceive a steadily worsening economic situation in Azerbaijan. Yet, to date, there seems to be no significant emergence of widespread or severe negative effects on the nutritional status of the socially most vulnerable groups as targeted by the major food distributing agencies. World Visions's program in Mingechevir is a case in point. The closing of ten of the 12 major factories in Mingechevir has had no visible impact on the nutritional status of the most vulnerable groups in the city despite no alternative employment opportunities.

Given that access to food commodities over and beyond the supplementary food rations as distributed must exist, two explanations are possible. Either people have found work in other areas in or outside Azerbaijan, or they have been coping by selling assets to keep their families fed. The team saw no evidence of the former in documents it reviewed or discussions it conducted. That leaves the latter. If that were true, malnutrition could eventually become an issue as a result of the inevitable depletion of sellable assets. The prospect of malnutrition favors the continuation

"Poverty Alleviation and Macro Economic Prospects," text of a World Bank presentation at Tbilisi, March 1996, p. 1.

Ibid.

Ibid, p. 28.

Albertien van der Veen: Mission Report, "Southern Caucasus: November 14— December 9, 1995. Brussels, December 1995.

of some type of food assistance, with no immediate end in sight and until such time that employment opportunities can be created or the IDPs return home (which would create another kind of resettlement emergency). Whose role it is to provide such assistance is beyond the scope of this evaluation.

At a minimum, it is important to remain vigilant as to changes in nutritional status. Perhaps more urgent is rapid initiation of income and/or expenditure studies of the vulnerable groups to develop a better understanding of their disposable incomes and expenditure patterns. Such studies are well underway in Georgia; the PAROS system, now undergoing implementation in Armenia for improved targeting of vulnerable group feeding, offers a different approach to targeting. The Georgia and Armenia approaches are discussed in their respective country chapters.

Some signs indicate that the situation is worsening. According to the SCF representative in Baku, the general population is increasingly preoccupied with food issues. In addition, the number of people asking for food and/or money (beggars) is growing. Further, leakage from the food aid programs has been negligible. Finally, IDPs at various sites pressed the team for increased rations although improved housing was their major concern.

The total number of IDPs in Azerbaijan is 684,000, according to government of Azerbaijan (GOA) lists of early 1996. Despite some significant differences various organizations reported number of people fed in 1995, WFP reports for fourth-quarter 1995 that the food distributing agencies targeted 547,000 IDPs, or approximately 80 percent of the GOA list and approximately 450,000 other vulnerable people. The 20 percent reduction in the number of IDPs compared with the GOA list is the result of screening efforts based largely on recipients' status as true IDPs from the area of Nagorno-Karabakh during the time of the latest war. Further screening could be achieved only on the basis of socioeconomic indicators at the level of individual households. Given the reluctance among GOA officials and beneficiaries alike to undertake such targeting, additional screening would be politically and technically difficult, although, as stated above, such vulnerable group analyses are underway in both Georgia and Armenia.

2. An assessment of the food security status of the main vulnerable groups of the general population outside the VGFP beneficiary pool.

The total number of other vulnerable people (groups) is difficult to determine and is mostly an exercise in determining which social groups should or should not be considered "most vulnerable." In 1995, the food distributing agencies targeted approximately 450,000 vulnerable non-IDPs (WFP's report for fourth-quarter 1995) such as pensioners, widows, female-headed households, etc. Indications suggest that the situation of some of the non-IDP vulnerable population is gradually

worsening; some non-IDPs might already be economically worse off than the IDPs.¹⁴ Some additional attention for non-IDPs, particularly pensioners, among others, seems justified.

3. Evaluation of the objectives, organization and design, and implementation of the activities of CARE and WFP under the FY 95 VGFP, including such issues as accountable handling of program commodities, effective coordination with program country counterparts, and whether program commodities are reaching/have reached targeted beneficiaries.

The CARE VGFP in Azerbaijan concluded in June 1995. An evaluation as defined under C is therefore inappropriate at this time. If the current food program as implemented by CARE and WFP (through World Vision and others) is considered a proxy for the way the earlier VGFP program operated, the team has developed a favorable impression. Mechanisms to account for the handling of the food commodities seem to be fully in place (especially in the case of World Vision, which has established an elaborate, computerized, commodity accounting system). SCF and WFP have assumed coordination responsibilities on a regular and continuing basis. In addition, the commodities seem to be reaching the targeted groups, reportedly with little leakage.

4. An evaluation of the appropriateness of beneficiary targeting in the CARE FY 95 VGFP and of the impact of the program on the food security status of the beneficiaries.

There is no FY 95 CARE VGFP program. Currently, CARE is implementing a FY 95/FY 96 USDA feeding program exclusively among IDPs. Our research reveals neither any deterioration among the previous VGFP target population nor any complaints over the program's termination. That this is the case became less surprising than initially expected when the team learned that the entire VGFP population was selected from among IDP families (whose ration was adjusted downward to accommodate the introduction of the VGFP commodities to the family ration). Upon termination of the VGFP, family rations for families participating in the program underwent an upward adjustment to accommodate the reintroduction of the women and children back into the "regular supplementary feeding ration program."

Although the team learned that the status of women and children within the typical IDP family tended to be lower than that of males and that VGFP commodities tended to give special status to VGFP recipients within IDP families, neither the team nor any counterparts could point to any deterioration among women and children after the termination of the VGFP. Hence the team can only conclude that the effect, if any, of the VGFP on the target populations cannot be detected.

With regard to the general issue of better targeting, a refined targeting of IDPs is generally seen as necessary. CARE (joined by WFP and other NGOs) is acutely aware of this issue.

United Nations, World Food Program. "WFP/Azerbaijan." Briefing paper for the Inter-Agency Assessment Mission. Tbilisi; March 1996.

Ways need to be found to implement such refined targeting, probably by using socio-economic criteria. Lessons learned from the PAROS system in Armenia or the analyses of income and expenditure patterns underway in Georgia may be germane in this regard. It is, however, recognized that such efforts might encounter resistance from the GOA and/or IDPs themselves. The team recommends that CARE also study ways to include some of the most vulnerable non-IDPs in its program.

5. Recommendations as to the most appropriate food assistance interventions, if any, for responding to needs of the observed vulnerable groups, taking into account the planned interventions of the program country governments, international organizations, or other NGOs.

The most appropriate solution to the IDP problem is to foster IDP integration into the local economies where they reside. Perhaps more pressing even than food supplies is the distressing conditions under which some of the IDP population resides. Families living for the long term in boxcars or abandoned/incomplete buildings without heat and only rudimentary sanitation create a breeding ground not only for disease but also for social unrest. Many within the NGO community advised the team that it is GOA policy **not** to provide better housing or other opportunities for integration of the IDP populations into the communities where they reside because the government (and it appears the majority of the IDPs themselves) still considers return to their former homes within the realm of reality.

CARE and WFP as well as others consider their principal justification for their involvement in Azerbaijan to be that of providers of emergency relief. Hence, a turn to longer-term income-generating programs targeted at the IDP population, while desirable, implies reconsideration of the basic terms of reference and length of permanency for the NGOs in Azerbaijan. The issue becomes even more complicated when the likely increase in government resources over the next few years as a result of foreign petroleum investments begins to ripple through the economy. This "bonanza" could argue against continuation of emergency programs as well as against initiation of longer-term development assistance.

It is for the NGOs themselves to settle the question of their permanency; the team notes with approval the efforts of CARE in initiating shelter improvement activities and other efforts to initiate home enterprises such as rug weaving and the like.

The team supports continuation of food aid even in the absence of visible malnutrition among the IDPs. The cost of food has increased over the last four years while the standard ration has remained modest; donated food likely plays a role in preventing acute malnutrition for many vulnerable persons and families, although its precise contribution to the balance is difficult to determine. One major NGO, which is discontinuing food distributions, has argued forcefully that the IDPs must have some "informal" access to food beyond that coming from donations or through the sale of assets or other means. Others argue just as forcefully that

discontinuation of supplemental feeding would create a political time bomb and would lead to riots among IDPs. The absence of donated commodities in the local markets also suggests that these foods still are needed and are consumed by IDPs.

The team is persuaded that the argument supporting continuation of food aid is the more convincing. As per the above, a refined targeting of IDPs and some attention to the inclusion of some of the more vulnerable non-IDPs still remains to be accomplished. And progress in improved identification of the most vulnerable in Georgia and Armenia is hard to ignore.

D. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. *An assessment of the food security status of the beneficiary groups of the FY 95 VGFP to include observable coping mechanisms and alternative income potential of these groups.*
2. *An assessment of the food security status of the main vulnerable groups of the general population outside the VGFP beneficiary pool, primarily socially vulnerable, including pensioners lacking family support and institutional residents.*

The team found consensus among the major humanitarian food aid providers that Azerbaijan accounts for a significant and growing number of *vulnerable persons*. Nonetheless, their number remains unclear. WFP sees a target group of 547,264 IDPs who are the most needy and who experience difficulty in meeting their basic needs. WFP counts an *additional* vulnerable group population of 438,337 consisting of elderly living alone, pensioners, invalids, orphans, preschool children, female-headed households, inmates of social welfare institutions, pregnant and lactating mothers, families of those killed in armed conflict, and victims of Chernobyl. SCF, however, lists only 435,755 as current beneficiaries among both IDPs and vulnerables, thus leaving a large group unserved. SCF attributes the discrepancy in part to data limitations associated with distributions in December 1995, which might have excluded those not reached on a bimonthly feeding schedule. The team was not able to resolve this anomaly and sensed considerable shared frustration among NGO personnel regarding the overall size of the vulnerable and IDP target populations as well as the absence of an agreed-upon definition for both groups. Accordingly, data collection/analysis becomes more difficult.

As humanitarian emergency food assistance enters its fourth year, all officials contacted by the team expressed dissatisfaction with the lack of hard nutritional or household food security assessments that could allow for better targeting. Thus, the team stresses that the results of both the ECHO-funded nutrition assessment (due shortly) and the Center for Disease Control/WHO nation-wide nutritional survey scheduled for spring 1996 should receive particular attention by future programmers. The PAROS system, now operational in Armenia, and the ACTS (“A Call to Service”) expenditure system, now underway in Kutaisi, Georgia, also deserve consideration as means both to achieve a better understanding of disposable incomes among the vulnerable groups and to improve the targeting of declining food resources.

Based on the above and the discussion in Part III, **the team concludes that a continuing need for humanitarian food assistance exists, that the donor agencies need to continue to exert careful effort in scrubbing their lists of eligibles, and that based on the results of the nutritional and CDC/WHO studies, particular attention be directed to the inclusion of pensioners, elderly, and families of those killed in armed conflict, among others in the humanitarian assistance program.**

3. An evaluation of the objectives, organization and design, and implementation of the activities of CARE and WFP under the FY 95 VGFP, including such issues as accountable handling of program commodities, effective coordination with program country counterparts, and whether program commodities are reaching/have reached targeted beneficiaries.

Given that currently no VGFP program is ongoing in Azerbaijan and that CARE's former VGFP program concluded about a year ago, this question is not applicable.

4. An evaluation of the appropriateness of the beneficiary targeting in the CARE FY 95 VGFP and of the impact of the program on the food security status of the beneficiaries.

Due to a lack of baseline or other quantitative data and the VGFP beneficiaries' receipt of commodities from other food aid programs, **the team was unable to assess any visible benefit from the VGFP in Azerbaijan.** First, the program has not been active in Azerbaijan for about a year; second, past beneficiaries were selected from and remain counted as members of IDP families for calculation of supplemental ration size. Consequently, the VGFP-targeted population still has access to supplemental foods through its families. Third, no nutritional baseline data exist to confirm any enduring benefit from the program. In the IDP residences visited, the team neither saw nor learned of mal- or undernutrition.

The team was also unable to ascertain any reaction among the humanitarian assistance NGOs that beneficiaries missed the program after it ended or that the target group was excluded from rations provided to the IDP families of which they were members. None of the mothers, infants, and children observed by the team living in freight cars or incomplete buildings showed any sign of mal- or undernutrition. CARE told the team that no more than two or three women had requested program continuation after termination a year ago.

5. Recommendations as to the most appropriate food assistance interventions, if any, for responding to needs of the observed vulnerable groups, taking into account the planned interventions of the program country governments, international organizations, or other nongovernment organizations.

The team believes that of the three Caucasus Republics, Azerbaijan deserves the greatest attention regarding continuation of targeted food aid. The team considers the plight of the IDP population and doubtless such other vulnerable groups as families of those killed in armed conflict, orphans, lonely pensioners, etc., as meriting continued supplementary food assistance. The team considers Georgia and Armenia to be ahead of Azerbaijan in improving vulnerable targeting of food aid. Nonetheless and subject to the limitations imposed on the team by time and the absence of hard nutritional or income data and based on team observations, the team believes that the condition of the most vulnerable in Georgia and Armenia is not as desperate as that of the vulnerable in Azerbaijan. The team recognizes that a race to find "the worst off" among the Caucasus's vulnerable is counterproductive. Nor does the team recommend termination of targeted

feeding anywhere in the Caucasus. The point is that, as of March 1996, the worst IDP/refugee conditions were observed in Azerbaijan.

Additional Issues per Culkin FAX of March 8

6. Assess WFP self-implementation capacity.

WFP will replace and directly manage the World Vision food aid program later this year as the latter implements its decision to phase out of food aid in Azerbaijan. WFP will realize cost savings as a result of its move to "self-implementation." It will pay generally the same local professional staff that World Vision paid but *without* financing home office overhead/benefits.

WFP has chosen its experienced emergency director now in Baku, to manage its food aid operation. He had hired much of the present World Vision personnel when he was employed by CARE/Canada, the predecessor to World Vision in Mingechevir. **Based on WFP management's analysis that self-implementation will result in cost savings, even after additional costs of vehicles and equipment are absorbed, the team concurs with WFP's decision to begin self-implementation in Mingechevir after World Vision phases out.** WFP, however, needs to avoid overconfidence as it makes this move. The team **strongly believes that WFP should consider assigning more than one senior manager to Mingechevir, especially if, as the team has learned, it is WFP's intent to add to the emergency director's responsibilities food aid oversight in nearby IDP camps.** Our observation of workload level reveals more responsibility than one person can handle (the present World Vision leader has a staff of two senior aides) as well as a continuing need to scrub beneficiary lists and adjust targeting in accord with the results of the two aforementioned assessments. Statements made to the team that "once established, (food aid monitoring) systems can function on their own" run strongly counter to the team's experience.

7. Assess levels of accountability and adequacy of monitoring.

World Vision has trained a corps of local hires and contracted for the development of a Lotus 1-2-3 commodity tracking system to permit daily monitoring—to the gram (a greater degree of detail than the allowed weight variance of bagged U.S. commodities)—of food distribution from warehouse to beneficiary family. Commodity storage at CARE and WFP warehouses follows standard practice. The team found that inventory control and stacking appeared to be adequate at all sites visited. The team observed the transfer of stored commodities from a leased warehouse located at a railhead where a combination of water leaking through a concrete roof and rat infestation led to contamination.

II. GEORGIA

A. INTRODUCTION

Without doubt, Georgia has suffered a dramatic economic and social decline brought about by the demise of the Soviet Union and its command economic structure. The loss of former Soviet markets, destruction of infrastructure and communications systems, problems of security caused by armed conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, the loss to the economy of agricultural productivity, particularly in Abkhazia, and the continuing conflict in Chechnya in Russia itself have in varying degrees brought about an internally displaced population generally agreed to total about 280,000 as well as an additional vulnerable population suffering from a combination of unemployment and a near collapse of the former internal safety net. Consequently, the government is unable to provide the population with certain basic services, especially imported energy, as reflected in an intermittent electricity supply and the total loss of imported natural gas, the prime cooking fuel, which was often provided at no charge to retail users. It is the loss of natural gas throughout the three Caucasus republics that is the principal cause of the widespread tree cutting so visible in the region.

Although "great uncertainty persists as to what and how many people/households are affected by food insecurity within the IDP and traditional vulnerable group categories, and if so, at what scale,"¹⁵ the World Bank estimates that as much as 25 percent of Georgia's population, or 1.1 million people, make up the aggregate target population. (Georgia's population is officially reported at 5.1 million, excluding residents of Abkhazia, but significant outmigration could have reduced the resident population to 4.5 million.¹⁶) In addition to the IDPs cited above, host families, pregnant and lactating women, children under five years, pensioners, orphans, single-headed and multichildren (four children and above) families, invalids, and the disabled and institutionalized have been included among the vulnerable. In general, "the number of the most food-insecure persons in need of food aid might range from between 600,000 to 700,000 persons,"¹⁷ although not all received food aid, the possibility of double counting is acknowledged, and not all those within a category are necessarily in need of food aid.

Again according to the World Bank but supported by observations of many interviewees and informal conversations with frequent visitors, hotel staff, etc., the economic

"Assessment of Humanitarian Relief Food Aid Needs in Georgia," Undated World Bank paper prepared for Regional Meeting held in Tbilisi, February 1996, p. 2.

"Agriculture in Georgia," World Bank paper prepared for the coordinating meeting in Tbilisi, March 1996, p. 1.

(same as footnote 1), also "1996 Statistics for the Caucasus as of March 1996," Tbilisi, The World Food Program, Caucasus Regional Office, p. 17.

situation seems to have bottomed out and in many ways (e.g., agricultural production, control of inflation) may be improving. "Georgia no longer is going through an acute emergency situation. The country now seems to enjoy a degree of socio-political stability, unwitnessed since independence was achieved in 1991.... A fairly large variety of food commodities (both local and foreign produce) is available on local markets."¹⁸ Indeed, were simple food market availability the sole criterion, our observations of retail food availability would argue strongly against continuation of targeted food aid in Georgia. However, the situation in Georgia is not that simple, or, if it is, reliable information is not yet available for us to say so with confidence. Further, food availability does not necessarily mean that food is affordable for all people. The single most important issue in Georgia seems to be adequate purchasing power for a significant proportion of the population.

In cleared language appearing in the scope of work for the Vulnerability Assessment (underway at this writing in March 1996), UN Department of Humanitarian Assistance (DHA), ECHO, Save the Children/US (SCF) and the Georgian government's Coordinating Bureau for International Humanitarian Assistance (CBIHA) stated, "There is no doubt that humanitarian assistance will still be required for the Republic of Georgia. However, the aid community also believes that the level of support should be decreased and be based on actual, rather than perceived need. Given as well the indication that the donor community is moving away from the provision of humanitarian assistance to Georgia, it is critical that all partners have the tools in place in which to better assess vulnerability and rationalize the delivery and targeting of aid."¹⁹

B. METHODOLOGY

The team received and reviewed numerous documents, all prepared within the last three years by CARE, the World Bank, and independent consultants, that deal with the economy, the agriculture sector, and target group analysis. A complete list of sources appears at the end of this report. The team also conducted extensive interviews arranged by the USAID Mission in Tbilisi with NGO representatives. An overnight field trip to Kutaisi permitted the team to observe CARE, WFP, and targeted families and individuals. The team wishes to make particular note of its many conversations with Larry Dersham, the enthusiastic Vulnerability Study Team Leader, whose observations were particularly clarifying.

As stated in the Azerbaijan section of this report, the team is keenly aware of the inherent danger of the "one week expert" syndrome and has been careful to qualify recommendations that may stray from conventional wisdom. The team's knowledge base and time was limited, and it is always possible in analyses of this type to have overlooked the essential fact

United Nations, World Food Program. "Assessment of Humanitarian Relief Food Aid Needs in Georgia," Tbilisi, Georgia, March 9, 1996.

Vulnerability Assessment: Scope of Work. November 16, 1995.

or person who could have significantly altered the team's thinking. That said, the team is in debt to all those with whom it spoke, acknowledged or not. Their views and attitudes helped form the team's; what appear in this report nevertheless are the team's own.

C. DISCUSSION

1. An assessment of the food security status of the beneficiary groups of the FY 95 VGFP to include observable coping mechanisms and alternative income potential of these groups.

The food security status of CARE's FY 95 VGFP (in Georgia, more commonly called the Georgia Nutrition Supplement Program or GNSP) beneficiary groups is similar to what the team observed in Azerbaijan. While the official income for a significant part of Georgia's population is 6 Lari per month (approximately 5 U.S. dollars), which is barely enough for 1.2 kg of cheese or 15 loaves of bread, the team noted no significant malnutrition, not even among some of the IDPs living in poor housing. As in Azerbaijan, the solution to this riddle lies in a variety of coping mechanisms that range from extended family and neighbor support to the sale of assets and remittances from labor in other countries such as Russia. Initial results of a SCF/ECHO/DHA household vulnerability study indicate that household incomes are indeed typically a multiple of the officially assumed levels. Without surveying each individual household, however, it is impossible to ascertain who is truly vulnerable or the various degrees of vulnerability.

Even more than in Azerbaijan, the official categories of "vulnerable" people are not necessarily useful in identifying individuals most in need in Georgia. While pregnant and lactating women and young children are probably an easy target group to identify, only those from vulnerable households require food aid. What needs to be established and what is being attempted through various initiatives, is appropriate mechanisms to identify vulnerable households.

The CARE VGFP target group comprises pregnant and lactating women and children six to 59 months (under five years). The team observed CARE VGFP distributions in Tbilisi and saw commodities in beneficiaries' homes. (The American "cream of wheat" farina box, printed in English, is unique to this project and easily identifiable.) Beneficiaries under the VGFP appeared to the team to be no better or worse off than beneficiaries of other CARE or WFP feeding programs. In some cases, a few women noted in direct response to the team's inquiry that their husbands were working in Russia and remitting funds, although no one encountered by the team had any idea whether remittances were significant to either the vulnerable populations or the population at large. As noted below, some families were benefiting from gardening; however, the team was unable to develop any correlation between gardening families and VGFP beneficiaries. To the degree women are housebound to care for infants, their income-earning potential is necessarily limited beyond home-based labor such as sewing or simple crafts production. Whether housebound women have the requisite skills or patience to devote to such activities and whether sponsors exist for such activities is not known.

With regard to commodity appropriateness, the team saw no evidence of entire families consuming the full VGFP ration; the team did, however, note some widely held views that farina is specifically designed for infants and not for adults. The team also noted particular appreciation for dried whole milk provided under the program and a wide preference that the program include a sugar ration. On the other hand, U.S.-supplied red beans were uniformly unpopular with beneficiaries. Beans are nutritious, but are both time- and energy-intensive to people who must depend on expensive wood or unreliable electricity for cooking.

2. An assessment of the food security status of the main vulnerable groups of the general population outside the VGFP beneficiary pool, primarily the socially vulnerable, including pensioners lacking family support and institutional residents.

During its brief stay in Georgia, the team visited populations designated as vulnerable (including IDPs) at distribution sites operated by CARE and ACTS (“A Call to Service”) in Tbilisi and in and around Kutaisi. In addition, the team visited target populations in Tbilisi, some of whom were residing in wood and paperboard shacks, and in Kutaisi in former Russian airforce barracks, in former resort spa sanatoria, and in public hospitals for the aged infirm. The team saw perhaps 200 beneficiaries lining up to receive food at distribution points in both Tbilisi and Kutaisi as well as perhaps another 100 receiving hot meals at soup kitchens run by the Salvation Army and AICF. With the sole exception of the institutionalized elderly infirm whom the team visited in one Georgian hospital (which lacked power, clean linens, warm food, and insulation from the weather), the team saw no housing as poor as that observed in Azerbaijan.

As in Azerbaijan, the team saw no vulnerables or IDPs who appeared in danger of starvation or acute illness; children and infants all appeared healthy. One child whose mother said it was suffering from measles was diagnosed by the ACTS director (a physician) as "well recovering." While team observations are anecdotal, they are no more or less so than team observations in Azerbaijan. Since the team stressed its wish to see "the worst of the vulnerables/IDPs," it assumes that our interlocutors felt it in their interest to visit such populations. Based on team observations and conversations with PVO/NGO resident personnel, the team concludes that the general target populations in Georgia are better off than those in Azerbaijan.

That Georgian vulnerable persons and IDPs may be better off than those in Azerbaijan is not to say that their health status is acceptable. ACTS doctors reported an increased incidence of heart attack, possibly due to stress. (Contrariwise, the reduced incidence of asthma was thought to be a result of generally lower air pollution, a side effect of the near total industrial shutdown.) Alarming reports such as the February Ministry of Health notice that tuberculosis "...is nearly out of control" and that a national TB program is being initiated, which, if not successful, will make

"...the risk of a massive TB epidemic...greatly magnified"²⁰ may be indicative of increased susceptibility to disease caused by general malnutrition. At this moment, the team believes on balance that conditions among Georgia's vulnerable and IDP populations are visibly better than in Azerbaijan and that, other things being equal, food aid allocations between these two nations should so reflect this distinction.

One caveat to these conclusions is in order. In interviews with the Georgian official in charge of PVO coordination, we were learned that the foreign PVO community in Georgia needs to pay more attention to building quality counterparts. Three Georgian PVOs were cited as meeting this standard: ACTS, the Georgian Red Cross and LAZARUS, the PVO arm of the Georgian Orthodox Church. Although the team is least acquainted with the Georgian Red Cross, it knows the other two PVOs and is favorably impressed. Indeed, **should donors consider attempts for improved management of food aid as a criterion for allocation between countries, the team believes that Georgia ranks ahead of Azerbaijan. Armenia, now applying the PAROS criteria to food allocation (see next chapter), leads in this regard among the three Caucasus nations.**

With regard to coping mechanisms, the team's observations revealed that many IDPs as well as other vulnerable populations (again with the exception of the interned and invalids) still commanded resources, which, even after over three years of living under difficult conditions, they had not sold. Television sets were a familiar sight in even the most humble of homes or apartments; some IDPs owned trucks that were parked in front of their buildings and were seemingly in good repair (although owners claimed they could not be used for lack of demand, resistance among local drivers, or lack of spares). Others owned cars (one IDP claimed that his current humble car reflected his present status and had in the past owned two Mercedeses). The team observed many IDP families growing vegetables in gardens they had cultivated on plots between buildings. These plots represented the collective efforts of some but not all nearby resident IDPs, with food grown for consumption rather than for sale. Such frequent observations as these, which the team but rarely saw in Azerbaijan or Armenia, again reenforced our conclusion regarding the relative status of Georgian, Azerbaijani, and Armenian IDPs.

In Georgia, all the PVO officials interviewed by the team agreed in the general direction of future assistance. One PVO director referred to the move from humanitarian to development assistance as the "hot issue" within the PVO community. He noted that those PVOs that viewed themselves solely as emergency response organizations were planning to leave while others were looking closely at both better targeting and the initiation of income-generating activities. However, PVO representatives also noted that the government might not favor income-generating

"Brief Review of the Tuberculosis Situation in Georgia," *Epidemiology Bulletin*, Vol. 1, No. 2, Ministry of Health, Republic of Georgia, February 1996.

activities for the IDPs. Such schemes would have the effect of making the IDPs too permanent in the face of the government's desire to return them to Abkhazia at some unknown future date.

Without exception, all PVOs stressed that beneficiary lists had to be closely examined and, without doubt, reduced. The beneficiary lists, a relic from the period of Soviet domination, segment the population into various categories, including those now widely used as the basis for food distribution. The lists served an important facilitating function during the earliest period of food distribution as the *only* readily available means of reaching vulnerable populations. The lists include such diverse categories used by the welfare net of the previous communist regime as "pensioners, orphans, single-headed and multi-children families, as well as invalids/disabled persons"²¹ and account for more than 1 million additional people over and above the present estimated 288,000 IDPs.²²

With an expected reduction in program (i.e., nontargeted government-to-government) food aid as well as a simultaneous decline in the level of targeted or "project" food aid, streamlining of the old lists is mandatory. Various studies underway in Georgia should yield current analyses of the status of the vulnerable (and nonvulnerable) populations. The International Federation of the Red Cross (IFRC), CARE, IOCC, AICF, and ACTS have been implementing needs and vulnerability assessments/studies/surveys (predominantly on a limited scale) to develop a better understanding of their various target groups. In addition, two major, more comprehensive studies are currently underway.

The scope of work for the now in-progress three-month Vulnerability Assessment,²³ funded by DHA, ECHO, and SCF (the last under a USAID grant), notes that existing categories of vulnerable populations, i.e., IDPs, pregnant/lactating mothers, children, single-headed households, host families of IDPs, elderly pensioners living alone, invalids and the institutionalized, and multichild families, evidenced several problems. In particular, "not all people falling within these categories were ...vulnerable, overlap among categories clearly exists *but the aid community, to date, has not had the tools in place with which to determine the nature or size of the overlap* (emphasis added)..." This nationwide study will establish country-specific vulnerability criteria for identification of humanitarian aid beneficiaries; it is being carried out with professional enumerators and local and foreign nutritionists and statisticians; results are expected in April 1996. (The second study is a nutrition survey by CDC, UNICEF, and WHO.)

John Murray, Inge Breuer, and Dennis Culkin. "Assessment of Humanitarian Relief Food Aid Needs in Georgia," The World Food Program, Caucasus Regional Office, March 2, 1996.

ibid.

Scope of Work: Vulnerability Assessment, November 16, 1995.

In Kutaisi, the Georgian NGO ACTS supported by the Kutaisi Department of Social Maintenance (DSM) and the Centre for Public Health and Social Security (CPHSS) and based on Irish technical assistance,²⁴ plans to conduct an expenditure-based analysis of Kutaisi and the surrounding region. The goal of the analysis is to stratify the population socially to identify the most unprotected households. This voluntary enrollment system will result in creation of a family-based Social Passport system, access to which will be protected from unauthorized institutions and maintained on CPHSS computers. The passport will be renewed twice yearly after resurvey of participating families to reflect family status changes and consequent changes in food and other welfare assistance eligibility. ACTS considers an expenditure-based system more likely to reveal real income/welfare status than income-based studies such as the UN/ECHO/Save study mentioned above and the PAROS system used in Armenia, with which, ACTS notes, its Passport system will be compatible. Initial work on the Passport system is underway, although full funding is still being sought.

IOCC has taken a different approach to refining target lists. It visits 10 percent of beneficiary households. If it discovers that more than 10 percent of the visited households (1 percent of total beneficiaries) are clearly not in need of food aid, IOCC returns the list to the appropriate government department with the request to refine it. From a cost perspective, the system might offer advantages over systems like PAROS or ACTS, but its weakness lies in the lack of transparent criteria used to determine who is in need of food aid. Once the criteria are established and standardized, it will be a workable system. It is not as far-reaching as PAROS and ACTS in that it is based on sampling, although it provides for refining the lists but not for a thorough scrubbing.

IFRC has approached better targeting by concentrating on small villages and letting village councils or elders decide who is vulnerable. Since people in small villages presumably know each other, we have no doubt that this system works well despite some drawbacks. For example, given that villages make the determinations independently of one another, the bottom 30 percent of one village might be better off than the top 10 percent of another. Further, while the IFRC system might help targeting in small, rural villages, the most needy typically tend to live in urban rather than rural areas.

Improved targeting of vulnerable populations is urgently needed. The current WFP pipeline will extend through June 1996. The remainder of 1996 and winter months (through March 1997) require an additional 19,800 MT of food for targeted feeding (2,200 MT per month) for 300,000 beneficiaries (the average number of beneficiaries WFP has fed from November 1995

James Gilan and Brian Kirn. "Estimation Foreseen by the 'Tasis' program, Excerpts of Ireland's firm 'NI-IO.' Also see "General Principles to Stratify the Population into Social Strata," "Regulation of a Social Passport System of Kutaisi Population," "The Estimates of a Social Passport System of Kutaisi Population," and "Family Declaration Questionnaire," papers supplied to the BHM consultants by ACTS.

through March 1996). The 300,000 beneficiaries represent approximately half of the estimated number of vulnerable people in Georgia (600,000 to 700,000), many of whom are served by others such as CARE. CARE's current pipeline extends through September 1996. The team has not obtained a detailed pipeline for the other NGOs working in Georgia but estimates that most organizations will have depleted their stocks by fall 1996. Various appeals are outstanding but no pledges have yet been forthcoming.

The overall food aid levels for 1996 as far as known at this time indicate that only a third (35 percent) of targeted food aid might be available compared with 1995. While this figure might still increase, a significant cut over 1995 levels is almost a certainty. A commonly accepted set of targeting criteria should be in place as soon as possible to preserve current food stocks and to convince donors that better targeting is now a fact. The SCF/ECHO/DHA and CDC/UNICEF/WHO studies will help determine realistic levels of targeted food aid for Georgia as a whole and the entire region. Initiatives such as IFRC and ACTS will help in better targeting individual households.

The results should also go a long way to solving the riddle of how people relying on state allowances and minimum salaries of 6 Lari (approximately 5 U.S. dollars) survive on bread that now costs 0.42 Lari for 400 g/day and that is expected to rise to 1 Lari as the State Bread Corporation privatizes and loses its state subsidy.

The team recommends that **the food donor community either by itself or together with local authorities hire a consultant to review the studies and recommend criteria to be used for future targeted food aid allocations, allowing donors sufficient flexibility to reflect any future changes in food aid supplies.**

3. An evaluation of the objectives, organization and design, and implementation of the activities of CARE and WFP under the FY 95 VGFP, including such issues as accountable handling of program commodities, effective coordination with program country counterparts, and whether program commodities are reaching/have reached targeted beneficiaries.

Based on evidence observed at VGFP distributions and on the number of boxes of cream of wheat (farina) seen in target family homes, the team believes that VGFP commodities are reaching target families. The team observed adequate control forms employed by CARE in Tbilisi and ACTS (distributing WFP food) in Kutaisi. The team was surprised, however, to learn that CARE/Kutaisi is including *all* pregnant and lactating women and children under five years for the receipt of commodities whether or not they fall into any of the vulnerable categories. In nine other districts managed by the CARE/Kutaisi office, CARE distributed project food only to special categories, including "pregnant, lactating women and children under five in IDP households,

multichildren households, single-headed households, invalid husband households and to invalid children under five."²⁵

Subsequent to the team's visit, USAID/Washington informed the team that CARE's distribution to all pregnant/lactating women and children under five years in Kutaisi was included in the VGFP distribution plan and approved by USAID. CARE based its categorical targeting (which was the distribution approach used in two previous rounds of the VGFP in Georgia and Armenia during FY 93 and 94) not only on Kutaisi's acute economic crisis and the logistical advantages of such an approach but also on other grounds. First, Kutaisi has a higher concentration of IDPs than almost any other area in Georgia and its urban environment limits available coping strategies relative to rural areas. Second, Kutaisi had introduced such reforms as a user fee basis for health and educational services. Third, the VGFP category in Kutaisi was not specifically targeted by other food aid programs. Notwithstanding this explanation, the team also understands that senior Georgian political officials at the local level may have influenced the broader distribution decision. Finally, during team discussions about the VGFP, one CARE professional expressed the conclusion that the list on which the VGFP was based in Kutaisi contained mainly *nonvulnerables* and a minority of vulnerable pregnant and lactating women and that ECHO (which funds a different activity through CARE) had been so advised.

Under these circumstances, the team believes that CARE needs to exercise more caution before considering any future VGFP expansion. During precheck, the CARE monitor visits a random minimum 2 percent of those on the list to see if they are truly vulnerable and reside where claimed. The monitor uses food security data during these visits but necessarily reaches subjective conclusions. The monitor returns lists with noneligibles to the government for reissue. Postchecks involve visits to beneficiaries to learn whether commodities were used as intended and how they fit into local diets.

The food aid organizations working in Georgia seem to be engaging in extensive coordination under the leadership of IFRC, WFP, and CBIHA (Coordination Bureau for International Humanitarian Assistance, which is a government of Georgia department). With the regionalization of Georgia each NGO is responsible for certain geographic areas as is the case in Azerbaijan. In the past, PVOs often worked in the same areas such that beneficiaries sometimes received rations from more than one organization. The coordination also extends to the various ongoing vulnerability studies, with regular meetings to keep the various organizations informed of progress and results. Although the team considers regionalization a positive decision, it recognizes that it will be most effective once targeting criteria have been standardized and an agreement is reached as to which groups should receive food aid. At present, the danger exists that some groups might be reached in one area but not in another.

"CARE/Kutaisi, Georgia. Georgia Nutritional Supplement Project (GNSP)," March 3, 1996.

By and large, the commodities distributed in the CARE VGFP are reaching the intended beneficiaries. If any leakage is occurring, it is minor and mostly limited to beans, which are not typically consumed in certain areas because of their high fuel requirements for difficult-to-obtain kerosene or wood. *The team recommends that another commodity is substituted for beans in the future.* It takes only a brief look at Georgia's countryside to see that trees are being cut at astonishing rates to provide heating and cooking fuel. Eliminating beans may, albeit in a small way, reduce the demand for fuel wood.

The team has made only a limited number of visits to distribution sites and warehouses, but it has noted that all programs are following generally accepted standards. The visit to CARE's warehouse in Kutaisi was somewhat of a surprise, however. One of CARE's hallmarks is meticulously stacked food. In Kutaisi, the warehouse is palletized, with pallets stacked in a somewhat disorderly fashion. It also seemed difficult to reach the deep ends of warehouse rooms. At one of the distribution sites, a woman complained about the poor quality of wheat flour, which was probably due to wet and/or old commodities that might or might not have anything to do with the warehouse. The team observed that a strict first in/first out policy would be difficult to implement in the Kutaisi warehouse. CARE explained that the warehouse space (provided by the local government) is inadequate for the amount of food to be stored. The team does not want to draw undue attention to its observation but thought that conditions should be mentioned.

4. An evaluation of the appropriateness of the beneficiary targeting in the CARE FY 95 VGFP and of the impact of the program on the food security status of the beneficiaries.

The team tried to develop a feeling for the degree to which the official government of Georgia (GOG) categories of vulnerable people are "off"; in other words: how many people on the lists are not vulnerable? The informal estimates of people questioned by the team ranged from 3 percent to 30 percent. An interesting question raised in the course of the team's interviews was whether more precise targeting would be cost-effective. The question is difficult to answer. Some categories for example, pensioners, are probably "more correct" than others such as IDPs, but given that the cost of commodities and ocean freight for CARE's program exceeds \$11 million, a 30 percent savings would most probably outweigh the extra cost of refined targeting. Whether such is also true for "only" a 3 percent savings depends on the actual, additional cost of the refined targeting and cannot be determined in the scope of this evaluation.

The specific impact of CARE's VGFP (GNSP) project also cannot be determined. The GNSP is fully integrated with CARE feeding supported by USDA commodities. Family members ineligible for GNSP commodities receive USDA commodities. Further, GNSP commodities such as wheat flour and vegoil are shared among all family members as are the USDA commodities. Farina (cream of wheat) and dry whole milk (DWM) are in all likelihood shared with older children (older than five years). Even more, no nutritional baseline data were gathered. Therefore, measuring impact at this late date may not only be difficult, it may also be impossible.

This does not mean that the program was without impact. The commodities were consumed (leakage onto local markets was small to nonexistent). Therefore, there must have been a beneficial effect. The impact, however, can only be deduced and not precisely and directly measured. In particular, the DWM and farina, which are nutritionally rich commodities, must have significantly helped the women and children for whom they were intended. Further, the availability of donated food meant that people could use money they would have spent on food for other essential purposes.

Under these circumstances, the team concludes that the intended populations generally consumed the commodities, which added nutritious components to their diet. The team believes that infants under five years generally consumed farina and dry whole milk and families at large consumed flour and beans.

5. Recommendation as to the most appropriate food assistance interventions, if any, for responding to the needs of the observed vulnerable groups, taking into account the planned interventions of the program country governments, international organizations, or other nongovernment organizations.

Before addressing the question of "the most appropriate food assistance interventions," the Georgian foreign and domestic PVO community must satisfy itself as to how it will address current reductions in both targeted and program-level food aid as the Bread Corporation almost doubles its prices. The team believes that the results of the various soon-to-be-completed studies will offer decision makers considerable help in this process. **The team does not believe that exclusively targeting women and children under five years in the manner of the VGFP has been particularly effective. The program provides supplemental food to all family members who, if stressed, will and should benefit from these commodities as well.**

Some PVOs will or have begun to conduct income-generation projects. The team heard that none of the projects will graduate to independence from close PVO supervision any time soon and would caution that, before expanding income-generation activities, prospective sponsors consider how much longer they plan to remain active in Georgia as well as the wisdom of using food in monetization instead of in direct feeding.

D. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. An assessment of the food security status of the beneficiary groups of the FY 95 VGFP to include observable coping mechanisms and alternative income potential of these groups.

Since shortly after the initiation of humanitarian assistance, the government of Georgia, along with the international donor/NGO community, has spent significant time and effort to improve identification of the vulnerable population. These efforts include a) the DHA-sponsored Strategy Workshop of September 1994; b) the SCF strategy meeting of September 1994; c) the preparation phase for the 1995/96 UN Consolidated Appeal, d) CARE/USA's Rapid Food Security

and Nutrition Assessment of November 1994, d) the vulnerability profile document produced by SCF in June 1995, and e) several papers prepared by and for the World Bank for presentation to the March 1996 Caucasus Coordinating Meeting in Tbilisi. As stated elsewhere, redefining or more precisely defining the vulnerable population is *the* topic of conversation in the food aid donor community in Georgia. Somewhat less well articulated is the other question related to improved identification of the vulnerable population: whether the donor community should address a target group merely because it exists. (One Georgian official noted that he supported better targeting because it offered an enhanced opportunity to add new categories of beneficiaries to receive food aid. He named two categories: slightly over 400 retired World War II Georgian generals and the intelligentsia (professors, authors, scientists, etc.).

Clearly, every needy group does not have an automatic claim on donor resources. This issue and the subsidiary question of where to allocate resources from what is generally acknowledged to be a shrinking resource base may be outside the scope of this paper or even the direct purview of the Georgian offices of international donors. Yet it strikes the team as somewhat unusual that, but for one PVO in Azerbaijan, PVOs simply assume that food aid will continue for a few more years. As a result, donors need to exercise caution before food aid is allocated to long-term "development" activities in Georgia or anywhere else in the region unless supported by local currency generation from continued flows of program food aid, which recent estimates put at 20 percent of the Georgian national budget.

Consequently and with regard to the discussion in the previous section of this report, the team recommends

C that Georgia be ranked relatively lower than Azerbaijan and Armenia in the allocation of targeted food aid, subject to one important caveat. The international food aid donors should consider in future allocations of food aid both within Georgia and among the three Caucasus nations the efforts of the Georgian NGO ACTS and SCF/ECHO/DHA to sponsor studies for developing a better means of identifying vulnerable populations, thereby enabling donors and the Georgian authorities to improve the targeting of food aid to the most vulnerable and to determine overall food aid levels; and

C that care be taken not to expand beneficiary groups unless the donor and implementer previously reach agreement on such expansion.

2. An assessment of the food security status of the main vulnerable groups of the general population outside the VGFP beneficiary pool, primarily the socially vulnerable, including pensioners lacking family support and institutional residents.

The team recommends that **the food donor community either in unison or with Georgian support hire a consultant to review the studies and recommend criteria to be used for future targeted food aid allocations, thereby allowing donors sufficient flexibility to reflect any future changes in food aid supplies.**

3. An evaluation of the objectives, organization, and design and implementation of the activities of CARE and WFP under the FY 95 VGFP, including such issues as accountable handling of program commodities, effective coordination with program country counterparts, and whether program commodities are reaching/have reached targeted beneficiaries.

C The team recommends **the future substitution of another commodity for beans.**

4. An evaluation of the appropriateness of the beneficiary targeting in the CARE FY 95 VGFP and of the impact of the program on the food security status of the beneficiaries.

The team concludes that **CARE's decision to include the entire VGFP list of potentially eligible pregnant/lactating women and children in Kutaisi between six and 59 months of age was unnecessary.**

The team was unable to find any quantitative or anthropometric data with which to assess the impact of VGFP commodities. The team cannot ascertain the degree to which otherwise ineligible family members benefited from the ration intended for pregnant/lactating women and children six to 59 months of age. This does not by any means indicate that commodities were wasted, especially since reported leakage of commodities onto local markets was remarkably low.

The team concludes that the intended populations generally consumed the intended commodities, thereby adding nutritious components to their diet. The team believes that infants under five years generally consumed farina and dry whole milk as intended but that families at large consumed flour and beans.

5. Recommendations as to the most appropriate food assistance interventions, if any, for responding to the needs of the observed vulnerable groups, taking into account the planned interventions of the program country governments, international organizations, or other nongovernment organizations.

The team does not believe that exclusively targeting women and children under five years in the manner of the VGFP has been particularly effective. The program provides supplemental food to all family members who, if stressed, will and should benefit from these commodities as well.

Additional Issues per Culkin FAX of March 8

6. Visit IDPs in collective centers and IDPs with host families.

The team visited both categories of vulnerable Georgians in Kutaisi. The team believes that their housing status, while by no means adequate, is better than that in Azerbaijan. In general, electricity is provided through internal wiring. Room sizes in the former barracks and sanatoria were more generous than in Azerbaijan, although large families still squeezed into fewer rooms than normal standards would require and many families depended on expensive fuel wood for cooking. Some buildings had internal sanitation facilities, which the team never saw among Azeri IDPs.

7. Visit lonely pensioner food aid beneficiaries (in and out of institutions), special institutions (orphanages, handicapped hospitals), and "social vulnerable" beneficiaries to assess conditions and food aid needs.

The team saw a number of soup kitchens operating where single elderly, many of whom were lonely pensioners, received a nutritious hot meal. At one site, the sponsor had provided a modest game and reading room where daily papers were available; the room was heated, an important consideration in the winter. The team visited one representative hospital where the handicapped and mentally ill were housed. Conditions were poor; supplies (including linens, hot water and electricity to run washing machines, and medicines) were in short supply, if available at all. Staff were hardly paid; the facility lacked most of its windows, and the patients visited by the team were in pathetic condition. Conditions had deteriorated since the economic collapse, with no family support of the institutionalized. Hospital residents, dependent on the government before the economic crisis, only rarely received food aid. The team believes that some humanitarian response is called for in their case; how this can be accomplished under declining food aid resources will depend how pensioners rank among the most vulnerable as determined in the results of the aforementioned studies.

8. Consult with IFRC about its survey of current beneficiaries and with Save the Children/ECHO about its ongoing vulnerability study of the general population in Georgia.

The IFRC survey results are not yet available; however, IFRC strongly believes that the standard government categories are no longer suitable as a basis for vulnerability judgments. IFRC notes that the Georgian authorities will not support income-generating or development projects that help the IDPs, apparently out of fear that projects would encourage the IDPs to become too settled and hence not wish to return home. Finally and with reference to the institutionalized, IFRC feels that the Georgian authorities should look to the donor community to support the people affected by the recent economic change. Support for the institutionalized who exist as they did under the old Soviet system is harder to justify. A discussion of the SCF/ECHO/DHA study appears above.

9. Visit WFP distribution sites and operations to assess levels of accountability and adequacy of monitoring. As a priority, assess capacity of ACTS as a food aid distribution agency. (WFP is considering a form of self-implementation relying heavily on ACTS national staff for 1996.)

The team's discussions with ACTS leaders revealed that ACTS had implemented an adequate food aid control system; its warehousing of commodities at distribution sites appeared appropriate. Distributions were well organized and reflected good publicity as to date and time of distributions. WFP advised the team that ACTS was preparing to discontinue its food aid operations in order to concentrate on medical services. WFP saw ACTS's plan as an opportunity for self-implementation *if* sufficient food aid supplies continue to justify the present level of coverage (128,000 beneficiaries). The team believes that WFP can successfully take over the ACTS operation without any disruption in service or quality of delivery. Given that WFP is presently not involved in self-implementation in Georgia, the team did not visit any WFP distribution sites.

9. Assess effectiveness of NGO methods for narrowing beneficiary base as used by IOCC/LAZARUS and CARE. The system involves submission of names of the most needy within eligible categories by local social welfare authorities with sample check and ultimate approval by NGOs to derive a reduced list for distribution.

IOCC/LAZARUS conducts a 10 percent random precheck of beneficiaries. If more than 10 percent of the precheck sample is considered invalid, IOCC/LAZARUS returns the list to the government with a request for revision and resubmission. Included in the precheck is a LAZARUS determination of the need of visited households for donated food. CARE's precheck includes a 1 percent random review to determine whether the person exists and belongs to the given category; in other words, the need for food is not investigated. The team believes that IOCC/LAZARUS's system is more effective than the CARE prechecking because it takes into account the need for food. Nonetheless, since the check extends to only a relatively small percentage of beneficiaries, it is not as effective as the planned ACTS or PAROS systems.

III. ARMENIA

A. INTRODUCTION, BACKGROUND, AND DEFINITIONS

Armenia is the smallest of the three Caucasus republics in terms of physical size (11,500 square miles versus 33,400 for Azerbaijan and 26,900 for Georgia), population (3.7 million versus 7.3 million and 5.4 million for Azerbaijan and Georgia respectively),²⁶ and economy (\$7.23 billion GNP versus \$12 billion and \$9 billion for Azerbaijan and Georgia respectively, in 1991).²⁷ Armenia enjoyed the highest standard of living in the Caucasus before the fall of the Soviet Union. It is the only one of the three Caucasus republics to show recent positive economic growth (1 percent increase in GDP in 1994).²⁸ More Armenians live outside Armenia than within it, and Armenia has the highest outmigration rate in the region: - 6.68 migrants per thousand.²⁹ In the period 1992-1994, the government reports an outmigration of half a million people, mainly to Russia and the CIS republics, owing to Armenia's prevailing severe economic conditions.³⁰ With these data in mind, Armenia's population is generally assumed to be between 3 and 3.2 million rather than the official 3.7 million cited above.

Armenia was the first of the former Soviet "republics" to declare its independence as well as the first national group in the world to accept Christianity as a state religion (301 AD). It is the headquarters of the Gregorian Apostolic Church whose leader, the Catholicos, resides in Yerevan.

Armenia's independence was preceded by the major March 1988 earthquake, which destroyed "...up to one-third of the buildings in an area between major cities of Gjumri and Vanadzor."³¹ The team's visit to these two cities revealed many empty shells of housing and office

1996 Information Please Almanac. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company.

"Caucases: poverty, conflict and disaster," The Year in Disasters 1993. World Disaster Report. pp. 131-132.

Situation Report Number 5, Commonwealth of Independent States, p. 26. Rome: The World Food Program, September 1995.

According to U.S. State Department notes for 1995, the comparable rates for Azerbaijan were -2.32 per thousand and 0.66 migrants per thousand population for Georgia. All estimates are for 1995.

Ibid, p. 10.

"Country Strategy Document" (third draft). The World Food Program, Armenia. p. 3.

buildings, mute testimony to both the quake's force and the failure of the authorities to gather the resources to initiate reconstruction, notwithstanding the assistance efforts of the Soviet Union before its fall, and of the international assistance community after the USSR's dissolution. The former residents of these destroyed buildings now live in shipping containers, modestly improved over the years with electrical connections and whatever personal possessions could be retrieved after the earthquake.

The Armenian situation is further complicated by the presence of a significant refugee population estimated at 300,000³² (an additional 10 percent of the population). They are largely emigres from Baku, Azerbaijan, who fled as a result of the violence following the armed conflict over the territory of Nagorno-Karabakh (NK). An additional 77,000 Armenians who resided near the border were internally displaced by the NK conflict.³³

Of the total population, the PAROS system, which is based on a computerized calculation of those who declare themselves "vulnerable" (described at length below) "...identifies 96,000 families or 400,000 persons who should be the ones targeted for humanitarian assistance."³⁴ This total, however, appears to exclude all or most of the refugee population that, until recent passage of legislation making them Armenian citizens, were excluded from consideration under PAROS.

The collapse of the Soviet Union led to the same severe economic hardships experienced in Azerbaijan and Georgia. "The eclipse of the country's industrial sector through economic blockade, energy shortage and decay in traditional market activities has resulted in dramatic cuts in income levels and increased food insecurity for the majority of the population."³⁵ As market mechanisms broke down and subsidies of cheap energy came to an end, industrial production fell precipitously, and factories closed and were abandoned. As in Azerbaijan and Georgia, broken windows and looted industrial machinery dot the landscape, signifying continued economic breakdown. Interrupted energy supplies were perhaps the worst in the Caucasus, with many Yerevan residents still receiving electricity for only two hours daily, and that on an erratic schedule. The energy situation is now gradually improving.

B. METHODOLOGY

Joint UN/Donor Humanitarian Needs Assessment, Armenia—1996. Yerevan: United Nations Department of Humanitarian Affairs, Armenia Field Unit, p. 2.

Ibid, p. 2.

"March 5-6 Meeting on Joint UN/Donor Humanitarian Needs Assessment for the Caucasus." Unclassified Tbilisi 000809 of March 8, 1996, para. 6.

Ibid, p. 2.

As has been the case for Azerbaijan and Georgia, the team received several documents dealing with the current situation in Armenia. The documents were prepared by the World Food Program and CARE and included the *JointUN/Donor Humanitarian Needs Assessment—Armenia 1996*, which was presented to a UN Department of Humanitarian Assistance (DHA) meeting held in Tbilisi on March 5 and 6, 1996. The team held numerous interviews with PVO, UN, and USAID personnel and with Rafael Bagoyan, chairman of Armenia's Humanitarian Assistance Commission and Minister for Social Protection, Employment, Migration, and Refugees. Bagoyan is the Armenian minister most closely associated with relief and humanitarian assistance.

The team made two field trips: one to Vanadzor and Spitak and the other to Gjumri. The team is thankful for the hospitality of residents living in containers. The courage and fortitude of these people, some in their eighth year of living in containers, deserve our respect.

The same caveat regarding “one-week” experts applies as much to the team's stay in Armenia as it does to its stays in Azerbaijan and Georgia. Finally, the team is deeply indebted to Mamo Desta, WFP country director, for his own and his staff's strong effort in making effective use of our time.

C. DISCUSSION

1. An assessment of the food security situation of the beneficiary groups of the FY 95 VGFP to include observable coping mechanisms and alternative income potential of the groups.

The 1995 VGFP program, known in Armenia as the Nutritional Supplement Project-II (NSP-II), follows NSP-I which concluded its activities on June 30, 1995. NSP-I, implemented by CARE, distributed 5,427 MT of commodities to 389,474 pregnant and lactating women and children ages six to 59 months. Commodities included dry whole milk, milled rice, vegetable oil, beans (red, pinto, kidney, and/or pea), and farina. NSP-II, now implemented by CARE, is distributing 3,335 MT of commodities, including dry whole milk, wheat flour, vegetable oil, and farina. Reflecting the reduction in commodities, CARE cut the number of beneficiaries to 72,000. NSP-II targeting relied on lists supplied by PAROS; CARE reported satisfaction with the lists.

As with the Georgia project, the team was not able to detect any appreciable difference among NSP and non-NSP food aid beneficiaries except that a cream of wheat (farina) box was usually visible somewhere in the kitchens of the former. Families and professional staff of CARE and WFP assured the team that strong cultural practice mitigated against family members' consumption of food destined for infants. However, beneficiaries reported that project-donated flour and milk were used to produce bread consumed by the whole family. The team considers such consumption normal and expected. Accordingly, project commodities provided beneficiary families with a significant income offset, allowing limited resources to cover other urgent purchases. With regard to commodity choice, the beneficiaries demonstrated a general disdain for beans because they

took too long to prepare and used too much fuel. Beneficiaries frequently requested sugar as an additional project commodity.

NSP-II will distribute commodities over a ten-month period. Upon NSP-II's termination in the fall, other projects underway will not automatically pick up NSP-II's beneficiaries. The reason is that ongoing operations will use PAROS lists, which remain "fixed" for the project distribution period. CARE notes that beneficiaries are aware of the limited duration of NSP-II. In fact, the team observed signs at distribution centers (selected Armenian ration shops) noting the source of the commodities (USAID markings), CARE's participation, and the distribution number.

In terms of coping mechanisms, team visits to containers that served as beneficiaries' homes revealed veneered cabinets and the inevitable television. In one case, a widow had wrapped up some items in preparation for their sale. The Vernisage, the sprawling Sunday outdoor market in Yerevan, has become a major site for sale of anything from new and old paintings, to bric-a-brac designed to catch the tourist's eye, to used linens and pots and pans, to old Soviet-era medals and red flags that might attract the wealthier buyer. Local residents reported that the number of items apparently cast off from refugee homes (pots and pans, linens, etc.) has declined from a year or two ago. Unknown but believed of major significance are cash remittances from the Armenian diaspora, principally in the United States, and from employed family members outside the country, principally in Russia.

Life in a container, while difficult, did not appear to place occupants at imminent health risk. Internal water supply was rare; as part of an earlier PVO program of about a year ago, electricity had been wired into the containers visited by the team and was the norm but remained as unreliable as it is for the general population. Indoor sanitation was nonexistent. While the team observed some improvements made by a number of PVOs to the rudimentary container homes, including, in addition to improved electrical connections, weatherproof roofing and better insulation, some people were now in their eighth year of residence in their containers. Characteristic of both NSP and non-NSP beneficiaries, they expressed no hope for either better housing or a major improvement in their living conditions.

Employment opportunities for the NSP beneficiary population remain limited. Added to the environment of extreme employment shortages due to the economic decline is the traditional responsibility of the mother to remain home to care for her children. For female single-headed households, the situation of dependency on assistance from outside sources is critical. Female single-headed households were a vulnerable category on the old soviet-era lists, and properly so. PAROS, while not creating a separate vulnerable numerical weight for female single-headed households, would rank such households high because they are among the most likely to be lowest in income rank.

2. *An assessment of the food security status of the main vulnerable groups of the general population outside the VGFP beneficiary pool.*

The team believes that the overall food security situation for most Armenians is tolerable and not critical or on the margin of serious malnutrition. According to the consensus of the March 3-5 Joint UN/Donor meeting in Tbilisi, "At present there was found to be no acute malnutrition in the country by the assessment teams."³⁶ To be sure, the meeting did target the lowest 20 percent of the population registered in the PAROS system as vulnerable, particularly given that bread prices are steadily increasing.³⁷

However, a strong consensus is emerging among the PVOs that the long-term need for targeted feeding is diminishing. CARE notes, "During the current fiscal year, CARE Armenia will be emphasizing to make a move from relief to rehabilitation and recovery type of project interventions. It is one of the priorities of CARE International in the CIS to move towards recovery phase."³⁸ A March 21 unclassified cable reports that the European Union "...expressed the view that the Armenian diaspora contributions to that country are not properly reflected in the food aid appeals." They see further "...assessments need to be made before further food aid is provided in the Caucasus, and that they hope to markedly decrease Caucasus food aid."³⁹ Finally WFP's draft country strategy notes that the "...future focus [of its food aid activities] should be more on rehabilitation and mid-term programmes [that] could use food to encourage reforestation and rural development."⁴⁰

The team recommends that **any future targeted food aid in Armenia be limited to the most vulnerable as calculated by PAROS and with assurance that such vulnerable groups as "lonely pensioners," orphans, the medically disabled, and others lacking access to remittances or family support be considered in such programs. Simultaneously, coverage of these groups by government programs should begin to be discussed by USAID with the appropriate authorities. P.L. 480 Title I local currencies should be considered by USAID a source of such support,** notwithstanding the expected opposition by USDA (to avoid assuming

Tbilisi 000809, op. cit., para 8.

Ibid.

"CARE-Armenia Projects at a Glance," Yerevan: CARE, 1996, p. 1.

"EU and ECHO Food Aid," USAID Unclassified cable (number not available), March 21, 1996, para 4.

"Country Strategy Document" (third draft) Yerevan: World Food Program, December 1995, p. 2.

responsibility for monitoring local currency use) and perhaps the IMF. Such programs as CARE's Support to Isolated Pensioners in Armenia, which reached 10,000 isolated pensioners over three months through door-to-door distribution to those physically unable to collect commodities, may deserve consideration for renewal.

3. Evaluation of the objectives, organization and design, and implementation of the activities of CARE and WFP under the FY 95 VGFP, including such issues as accountable handling of program commodities, effective coordination with program country counterparts, and whether program commodities are reaching/have reached targeted beneficiaries.

Team observation of food storage in CARE's ultramodern government warehouse in Gumri and WFP's warehouse in Vanadzor showed that both facilities are following normal and proper food storage and accounting practices. Commodities donated by the United States, the Netherlands, and Italy were properly segregated, with inventory cards in place. The team observed unloading from the CARE warehouse onto a truck in accordance with proper procedure. Distribution in government ration shops appeared to be well managed. Armenia provided ration shop employees at no cost to the PVOs. Beneficiary families appeared well informed of the site and timing of distributions. Notices posted at ration shops, a previously announced schedule, and an occasional notice in a paper or on the radio publicize distributions. The team encountered no evidence of misdistribution; the beneficiaries all appeared well informed regarding the relationship between their inclusion in the program and the PAROS system. As already noted, based on personal observations of tracking systems put in place by CARE and WFP, the team believes that program commodities are reaching the intended populations as defined by the PAROS lists. The quality of these lists is discussed below.

4. An evaluation of the appropriateness of beneficiary targeting in the CARE FY 95 VGFP and of the impact of the program on the food security status of the beneficiaries.

PAROS

One of the biggest problems facing targeted food aid in Azerbaijan and Georgia is the targeting itself. The standard method of identifying the most vulnerable households calls for locating names on lists of people in vulnerable social categories. In the sections on Azerbaijan and Georgia, the team discussed in detail the drawbacks of using these lists and the various efforts underway to improve targeting, especially in Georgia.

In Armenia, the widely accepted PAROS system ranks households in order of vulnerability. At least in theory, if an NGO has food available for 20,000 families, PAROS computers can print out a list of the bottom 20,000 most vulnerable households, with names, addresses, and telephone numbers; the NGO can then distribute the food to the affected households.

From the outset of this discussion, the team wants to state that, given the general acceptance of the system and the efforts (such as significant USAID support) that have gone into its development, it recommends continued support of PAROS. In what is a controversial view, however, the team believes that the quality of the information from the PAROS system is probably about the same as that of the old lists. In any case, the system shows the potential to improve over time.

PAROS is based on *voluntary* registration of all people who consider themselves vulnerable. To date, about 700,000 households have registered (approximately 85 percent of all 825,000 households in Armenia). The information provided by registered households must be confirmed by official documentation. People provide their names and addresses, category of housing (temporary/permanent—located in earthquake areas or not), income, and number of household members. The system calculates an individual's vulnerability on a scale of 0 to 76 (76 is most vulnerable) based on the aggregate of a numeric value assigned to each family member's social category and weighted by average income of the household (income of each household member divided by number of people in the household), the value of the humanitarian aid received (added to income), the number of household members, and the type of housing.

The system embodies two main weaknesses. First, it measures only official income; second, it classifies housing in only four categories—from “temporary in earthquake zones” (worst) to “permanent in nonearthquake zones” (best).

In this report's sections on Georgia and Azerbaijan, the team discussed the apparent contradictions between people's income and people's ability to survive. The team, along with most other people concluded that the population must have drawn on a significant array of coping mechanisms to pull it through an incredibly difficult period. Preliminary results of the SCF/ECHO/DHA study in Georgia showed that the total income of some families might well be of a magnitude ten times higher than the official of 5 to 7 Lari per month. Coping mechanisms such as income from "informal" jobs, extended family support, sales of assets, remittances, and others account for the difference. The team can safely assume that official income is only a small part of total income for a significant part of the population.

PAROS, therefore, fails to capture any of the important coping mechanisms that are part of a huge informal economy. PAROS adds humanitarian aid to the low, official income for the period over which the assistance is provided. The result is that PAROS gives heavy weight to supplementary rations when compared with the total, real income of many households. PAROS also weighs housing heavily. While it differentiates between temporary and permanent housing, it does not weight the quality of the housing. A permanent "hovel" in a nonearthquake area receives the same weight as a permanent "castle" in a nonearthquake area. To be sure, PAROS officials interviewed by the team claimed such extreme cases would be caught as other income data sources

(e.g., four years of automobile registration data is about to be added to the database) are incorporated into the information data bank.

It is important to realize that the old system (lists of social categories) has the same type of problems. While it is impossible to determine which system is better, it is probably safe to say that *the quality* of the information between the two differs significantly today. An illustrative example of the problems arising from the characteristics of PAROS variables is that the vulnerability differentiation must take place at the level of three decimals. This is a direct result of the way housing is "measured" but also of the relative small differences among official incomes and allowances. But PAROS has the potential to improve and is in fact undergoing improvement, although it might take time before the information is substantially better. Among the recent results is the elimination of some 30,000 duplicate listings crosschecked by PAROS computers before a kerosene distribution, thereby allowing greater program outreach. PAROS's potential and the fact that the system is operating and by now is *the* institutionalized targeting method (almost all beneficiaries interviewed by the team were registered; the largest group outside PAROS are refugees, who are about to be registered) make PAROS the recommended approach at this time.

In Kutaisi Georgia, a group of doctors operating a local NGO called ACTS is developing a system that the team believes is far superior to PAROS as far as its ability to rank vulnerability. On the basis of an elaborate questionnaire and home visits, information about people's expenses and housing conditions is gathered. The aggregate is then used as a proxy for income. The team believes that the reliability of ACTS's information is significantly greater than that of PAROS. However, the system is much more time-intensive and therefore far more costly. Further, the questionnaire must be adjusted for regional differences, making countrywide standardization of the system more complicated. It is unclear at this time whether PAROS can avoid becoming a system that also heavily depends on house-to-house visits. The cost advantage of PAROS over ACTS would then largely be lost such that ACTS's system might become more competitive. However, taking everything into consideration, the team's recommendation stands as stated above.

PAROS operates on computers at the Yerevan Institute of Computer Research and Development (YICRD) under the auspices of the Humanitarian Aid Central Commission (HACC) of the government of Armenia. The head of HACC is also the Minister of Social Security, Employment, Migration, and Refugee Affairs (Ministry). YICRD is responsible for all the data entry and computer logistics of the system. HACC is responsible for the approval of humanitarian aid activities that require PAROS lists (all humanitarian aid must be distributed by using PAROS.) The Fund for Armenian Relief (FAR) manages the system on a day-to-day basis under a grant from USAID.

This somewhat complicated organization is further confounded by the newly instituted procedures for obtaining access to PAROS data: 1.) HACC must approve the humanitarian activity for which the PAROS list is requested; 2.) HACC orders YICRD, through the

Ministry, to produce the requested PAROS list; 3.) a copy of the order to YICRD is presented to FAR, which gives its consent to YICRD to proceed; and 4.) YICRD gives three copies of the requested list to FAR, one to the organization (NGO) that requested the list and two to the Ministry.

Even though NGOs have lodged serious complaints about the time it has taken between the request for a list and its receipt (up to six months in one instance), the team believes that the delays must largely be considered as teething problems of what is still a new system. (Recent requests for lists have been turned around within two or three days.) As PAROS manager, FAR comprises a group of motivated professionals who are aware of most of the problems; USAID/Yerevan is aware of FAR's weaknesses. Along with USAID/Yerevan, the team recommends the addition of **a strong manager/coordinator to the FAR team to improve FAR's external coordination role. Further, FAR (with YICRD staff, if appropriate) should institute periodic meetings with its "clients" to obtain in-progress feedback on the system.** These meetings would be in addition to FAR's attendance at WFP's monthly food aid coordinating meetings, to which FAR has just been invited.

As in Azerbaijan and Georgia, the impact of the VGFP is difficult to determine. There is no extensive baseline data, and even if that existed, the information would probably show no signs of acute malnutrition or chronic malnutrition. (Some indications of chronic malnutrition in the Caucasus might be a result of weaning practices and less a result of dietary deficiencies.) As the team noted in other sections of this report, impact might not be provable, but it can be deduced. Given little commodity leakage, the beneficiaries appear to have consumed the VGFP commodities. These commodities are highly nutritious in calories and proteins, especially farina and DWM, and must have contributed to the nutritional well-being of the target population, thereby freeing up money for the purchase of other essential items such as medicines.

5. Recommendations as to the most appropriate food assistance interventions, if any, for responding to needs of observed vulnerable groups, taking into account the planned interventions of the program country governments, international organizations, or other NGOs.

Traveling from Azerbaijan through Georgia to Armenia, as the team has done, raises a question: Is food assistance the most appropriate intervention for the target groups? The answer is not easy to give. It is obvious that vulnerable groups need assistance in each of the three countries. But not once did the team come across either a document or a person pointing to an acute nutritional crisis for any group of persons, however defined. The team does not know what the situation would be without the targeted food aid that is now provided. Given the relatively small rations (about a third of the minimum caloric requirements and about 40 percent of the minimum protein requirements) and the large quantities of program aid (mostly wheat), targeted food aid plays a modest role in maintaining some semblance of a social safety net. However, the team stresses the importance of exercising caution in the face of a delicate and poorly understood balance. Upsetting this balance would be at par with gambling with human lives. In some cases, other types of

assistance could probably replace food aid, but food aid seems essential for the most destitute groups in the three countries. **The team recommends that other types of assistance be increasingly phased in and food assistance limited to those groups that most probably cannot be reached in other ways. In addition, the local governments should increasingly take responsibility for adequate care for their most vulnerable citizens, for example, from the local currency proceeds of the still-significant donations of program food aid (wheat shipments).**

Additional Issues per Culkin FAX of March 8:

6. *Assess suitability of PAROS social welfare registry system for targeting of food assistance.*

See number 4 above.

7. *Visit "lonely pensioners" (those without family support) to assess conditions and food aid.*

It did not prove possible to visit any lonely pensioners in Armenia, and the team narrowly missed visiting a "wet" feeding site (soup kitchen) targeted to pensioners. It is clear, as noted earlier, that notwithstanding the widespread acceptance of PAROS some vulnerable/refugees may fall through the cracks, especially those too infirm to register under PAROS or those for unknown reasons, unaware of its existence. Social Services had ignored a deaf/mute couple visited in Gjumri that had survived on the charity of neighbors and special food allowances provided *ex officio* by

CARE. The team recommends that the government and PVO community take special care not to allow such vulnerable populations to be ignored as the PAROS system develops.

D. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. An assessment of the food security situation of the beneficiary groups of the FY 95 VGFP to include observable coping mechanisms and alternative income potential of the groups.

Consensus holds that acute malnutrition does not exist in Armenia. It also appears that coping mechanisms are working. More than in Azerbaijan and Georgia, remittances go a long way to ensuring survival under the present conditions prevailing in Armenia. Hence we recommend that **the PVO and government authorities ensure that PAROS includes all marginal populations, including those most easily forgotten, who are the most vulnerable, including the physically challenged, the "lonely pensioners," and that segment of the refugee population without recourse to extended family support.**

2. An assessment of the food security status of the main vulnerable groups of the general population outside the VGFP beneficiary pool.

See number 1 above.

3. Evaluation of the objectives, organization and design, and implementation of the activities of CARE and WFP under the FY 95 VGFP, including such issues as accountable handling of program commodities, effective coordination with program country counterparts, and whether program commodities are reaching/have reached targeted beneficiaries.

None; see section C, Discussion.

4. An evaluation of the appropriateness of beneficiary targeting in the CARE FY 95 VGFP and of the impact of the program on the food security status of the beneficiaries.

C Despite questions about the quality of the information now in the system, the team recommends **continuation and further development of the PAROS system.** The PAROS system shows potential to improve over time. It is **the** institutionalized targeting method (almost all beneficiaries interviewed by the team were registered; refugees, the largest group outside PAROS, are about to register); further, it is unlikely to be supplanted by an alternative method.

C The team recommends **the addition of a strong manager/coordinator to the FAR team to improve FAR's external coordination role. Further, FAR should institute periodic meetings with its "clients" to obtain in-progress feedback on**

the system. These meetings would be in addition to FAR's attendance at WFP's monthly food aid coordinating meetings, to which FAR has just been invited.

5. Recommendations as to the most appropriate food assistance interventions, if any, for responding to needs of observed vulnerable groups, taking into account the planned interventions of the program country governments, international organizations or other NGOs.

The team recommends that **other types of assistance be increasingly phased in and food assistance limited to those groups that most probably cannot be reached in other ways. Further, the local governments should increasingly take responsibility for adequate care for their most vulnerable citizens, for example, from the proceeds of the still-significant donations of program food aid (wheat shipments).**

IV. TAJIKISTAN

A. INTRODUCTION

Tajikistan is located in Central Asia north of Afghanistan. It is also bordered by Uzbekistan, the Kyrgyz Republic, and China. Its surface area is 143,000 square kilometers, with a population of 5.6 million.⁴¹ Most of Tajikistan is mountainous, with only 7 percent arable land and 3 percent flat land. Ethnically, the population of Tajikistan is 62 percent Tajik, 23 percent Uzbek, 8 percent Russian, 1.4 percent Tatar, 1.3 percent Kyrgyz,⁴² and 3.3 percent other (Korean, Turkmen, Bashkir, and German).⁴³

Tajikistan has always been the poorest and least developed country of the former Soviet Union. After independence in September 1991 and the resulting devastating disruption of the economy, the disparity between other CIS countries and Tajikistan increased dramatically.⁴⁴ The situation worsened even further as a result of the civil war that broke out in 1992. During the war and the following period of political turmoil, 50,000 people were killed and 500,000 displaced, of whom 150,000 fled to neighboring countries.⁴⁵ The security situation has been fragile ever since, with the latest security incident occurring as recently as February 1996. In March 1996, a three-month extension of the cease-fire was negotiated between the government and the United Tajik Opposition, but the situation remains tense. The security situation is monitored by a 25,000-strong CIS peacekeeping force and an 80-person UN observer force.

Tajikistan's GDP fell by 29 percent in 1992, 11 percent in 1993, and an additional 21 percent in 1994. Industrial production declined by 25 percent from 1994 to 1995.⁴⁶ Measured overall, industrial and agricultural output is estimated to be less than half its 1990 level. The Tajik ruble was introduced in May 1995 and has since undergone a devaluation (as measured by the exchange rate with the U.S. dollar) of approximately 600 percent (50/U.S. dollar to 290/U.S. dollar). However, since early 1996, the currency has remained stable. Indications suggest that more elements

United Nations, World Food Program. "WFP Appeal for Tajikistan 1996/97," p. 1.

Ibid.

Birkenes, Robert M. "Tajikistan: Survey of the Household and Bazaar Economies." United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and Save the Children/US, p. 12.

Ibid, p. 7.

United Nations, World Food Program, op. cit., p. 7.

United Nations, World Food Program, op. cit., p. 7.

within the government now see the need for economic reform; indeed, the government of Tajikistan (GOT) is trying to follow IMF recommendations.⁴⁷

As was the case in the three countries of the Caucasus, the impact of the continuing political and economic turmoil on the population of Tajikistan has been disastrous. Income levels fell to extreme lows. The country is experiencing severe food shortages, especially of wheat flour, and energy shortages have reduced heating, electricity, and transportation to a luxury.

At the time of the evaluator's visit, however, the supply of some of these essentials seemed to have improved, at least for the moment, even to above levels observed in Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Armenia. Dushanbe, at least the central part, seems to have a steady supply of electricity; there is a fair volume of traffic and bread seems to be available, although at high prices. In part of the city, cooking gas is available for four to five hours a day. The extent of the environmental damage caused by the cutting of trees, as seen in the Caucasus, is significantly less in Tajikistan, although various people stated that environmental problems are beginning to surface.

The purpose of the evaluator's visit was to assess the Vulnerable Group Feeding Program (VGFP) financed under the Freedom Support Act and implemented by WFP and CARE. In Tajikistan, however, CARE received commodities through the VGFP only for FY 94, while WFP received a relatively small amount of food commodities in late 1995 : 2,778 MT of wheat flour and 695 MT of vegoil.⁴⁸

Tajikistan has not moved as far away from the political culture of the former Soviet Union as Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Armenia. While the name and statues of Lenin have almost completely disappeared in the latter three countries, Lenin is still very much present in the parks, squares, and streets of Dushanbe.

B. METHODOLOGY

The methodology for this evaluation is comparable to that used for Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Armenia, although only one person (Peter Goossens) performed the field work. We believe it is important to clarify the methodological limitations of this evaluation and to explain how the limitations led to the evaluator's conclusions and recommendations. First, the limited time available to the evaluator precluded an investigation based on original data collection and analysis. The evaluation was necessarily based on secondary sources and a limited number of field visits to distribution centers as well as on interviews with selected officials. The time available to the

United Nations, World Food Program, op. cit., p. 3.

United Nations, World Food Program. "Summary Update of Food Arrivals as at (sic) 4-Apr-96." Dushanbe: WFP/Tajikistan.

evaluator was taken up by such visits and meetings. Second, there was no baseline data concerning nutritional studies as was acknowledged in the scope of work for the evaluation. Accordingly, it was not possible to derive consistent, meaningful data on the comparative nutritional status or vulnerability of population segments at risk. Third, the analysis of vulnerability in Tajikistan, as in the case of the Caucasus republics, is complicated by the operation of the informal economy through which most persons survive. Only a weak relationship exists between nominal, putative salary and pension payments and actual price levels and living costs. Finally, the Tajikistan evaluation was performed with an awareness of the findings concerning the VGFP in the Caucasus, which, in particular, had addressed the role of various host government distribution lists and mechanisms regarding vulnerable populations, e.g., PAROS in Armenia. In making judgments about the situation in Tajikistan, the evaluator drew on a set of impressions garnered from similar (but obviously not identical) situations in the Caucasus.

The evaluator read the documents made available; talked at length with representatives and other personnel of the main subjects of this evaluation, WFP and CARE; and met with the U.S. Ambassador to Tajikistan, the USAID Representative in Dushanbe, and a visitor in Dushanbe from the regional Central Asian office of USAID in Kazakhstan. Furthermore, he met with the UNDP Representative and Resident Representative of the UN for Tajikistan; with the Representative of SCF; and with the Representative of the International Federation of the Red Cross (IFRC). The evaluator visited WFP's operations in the Dushanbe and Kurgan-Tjube areas; WFP's offices, almost empty warehouses, and two distribution points; and two CARE warehouses in Dushanbe and four distribution points. The evaluator also visited a local market in Kurgan-Tjube and, on a Saturday morning, three markets in Dushanbe, where much of Dushanbe's population had seemingly gathered. As in any visit of this type, informal contacts, talks, and discussions with drivers, translators, personnel of NGOs and other organizations, and other people are a valuable source of information. They all contributed to a balanced and fair impression of the country and its problems.

The caveat to the reports on the three Caucasus countries also applies here. A week is not a lot of time to become integrally acquainted with a country. Despite efforts to the contrary, it is always possible that the evaluator missed the place or person who could have changed his thinking.

The evaluator is indebted to the many people who did their best to make the visit as successful as possible. He thanks the personnel of WFP, especially WFP's acting representative during the time of the visit, Mr. A. S. M. Saifuzzaman; CARE; and USAID for their support.

C. DISCUSSION

1. An assessment of the food security status of the beneficiary groups of FY 95 VGFP to include observable coping mechanisms and the alternative income potential of these groups.

2. *An assessment of the food security status of the main vulnerable groups of the general population outside the VGFP beneficiary pool.*

The foremost characteristic that catches the visitor's attention when in Tajikistan (as was the case in the Caucasus) is the prominent contradiction between the official data about the economic conditions of large parts of the population and the visible condition of the citizenry. If official data were accurate, the population should be large-scale starvation. No family can survive when the typical wage, pension, and/or other allowance is insufficient to purchase bread, let alone other necessary items.

The answer is, of course, that people have access to other forms of income (coping mechanisms) that have pulled them through an extremely difficult period. Additional sources of income include extended family and neighborhood support, remittances from other countries and/or areas in Tajikistan, sales of assets, trade activities, miscellaneous labor, and relief aid commodities.

The principal problem was determining the importance of coping mechanisms relative to "official" household incomes, which directly influence households' food security status. Three studies have looked into this issue, at least to some extent. The most important was an SCF investigation funded by UNHCR;⁴⁹ the second was CARE's NSP Food Security Survey (August 1994);⁵⁰ the third was CARE's Rapid Food Security and Nutrition Assessment.⁵¹

SCF's study looks into the issue of total household income, including those informal activities that permit people to survive in Tajikistan (coping mechanisms). Although SCF warns that its study should not be considered representative of Tajikistan as a whole, it does provide some interesting insights. The average family income is approximately 12,334 tajik roubles (TR) (\$42.53 against an exchange rate of 290 TR/1 U.S. dollar). Salaries, which is the figure most often used when describing a population's economic condition, make up only 21 percent of this amount. It is safe to assume that people generally answered the questions about income conservatively; in other words, real income might be higher, although it is not possible to indicate how much higher. In any case, the finding of a higher real family income than indicated by official data might well explain the absence of signs of obvious malnutrition among the population as observed.

Birkenes, op. cit.

CARE CIS: "NSP-NIS Food Security Survey Report." CARE/Atlanta: November 17, 1995.

Bern, Caryn and Anne Golaz et al. "Rapid Food Security and Nutrition Assessment—Tajikistan". CARE International and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, August 1994.

CARE's August 1994 study signals the possible deterioration of the food security situation.⁵² However, if the situation indeed has deteriorated and continues to do so to this date, the dramatic consequences have not (yet) been manifested. Many observers are of the opinion that the situation is still worsening and that a catastrophe might be in the making.

There is an almost complete lack of information about actual vulnerability levels in Tajikistan. Obviously, though, some categories, such as pensioners without support networks and access to other income and female headed households with many children in urban areas, are at particular risk. What is unknown is the number of people in those categories who are truly vulnerable. As in the Caucasus, government lists identify the vulnerable groups, but opinions differ about the lists' validity. Typically, both CARE and WFP refine the lists through information obtained from neighborhood or village people. CARE reports that, on average, it eliminates approximately 5 to 6 percent of the names on the lists. WFP reported one case where it removed 350 names from a total of 17,000. Neither of the refinement efforts seems to lead to enormous reductions. Either the information on the lists in Tajikistan is of a significantly higher quality than is generally assumed to be the case in the Caucasus, or the issue of targeting in Tajikistan has not yet reached the level of attention that generally characterize the Caucasus. CARE seems to be reasonably confident about the quality of its targeting, but WFP seems to be much less so.

Given the general lack of information and the fact that little hard data exist (although many people working in Tajikistan believe that conditions in Tajikistan are the worst of all the CIS countries), **the evaluator recommends a study in Tajikistan along the lines of the SCF/ECHO/DHA study in Georgia.** The SCF/Tajikistan study might be helpful in this regard, but, in its current form, it does not answer the question, How many vulnerable people are there? If such information were available, it could be compared with the number of people currently on the various lists (by region) and permit some judgment about the lists' validity.

One comment heard in Tajikistan in response to mention of a vulnerability study raised a question about the need for another study. This is a valid question, the possibility always exists that we study a problem too much and act too little. In the final analysis, the donor and implementing agencies working in Tajikistan must answer this question. However, the amount of information available about vulnerability in Tajikistan is extremely limited. Further, the implementing organizations are probably interested in understanding the problems they are trying to address. A better understanding might also point to those activities that best address the identified problems.

The evaluator further recommends that, **in light of the persistent notions that the Tajikistan situation is worsening, at least the CARE Rapid Nutrition Assessment completed in 1994 should be repeated to detect a worsening trend, if any.** As a general matter, it might be

Ibid, p. 3.

important to gather and digest nutritional information on a regular basis. If people are running out of options to cope with the situation, such information should eventually reveal itself in nutritional data. (The evaluator learned that ECHO is currently considering support of a dedicated individual to carry out this task.)

3. Evaluation of the objectives, organization and design, and implementation of the activities of CARE and WFP under the FY 95 VGFP, including such issues as accountable handling of program commodities, effective coordination with program country counterparts, and whether program commodities are reaching/have reached targeted beneficiaries.

As mentioned above, only WFP received some VGFP (under the Freedom Support Act) commodities in FY 95. The objectives, design, and implementation of the WFP program with the VGFP commodities are an integral part of WFP's overall program. WFP did not single out the VGFP commodities for a distinct project or specific group of beneficiaries.

Food aid in Tajikistan is well coordinated under the leadership of WFP. Organizations working in the same area are reaching different target groups while attending to an adequate geographic spread of the programs. Typically, WFP and other organizations target those categories considered most at risk such as pensioners, female-headed households with more than four children under the age of 16 (in contrast to an age limit of 59 months applied in the Caucasus), invalids, orphans, pregnant and lactating women suffering from second and third degree anemia (in contrast to all pregnant and lactating women from vulnerable/IDP households in the Caucasus), and others. A later section discusses targeting; but within the currently accepted targeting criteria in Tajikistan, commodities are reaching the intended beneficiaries. The only information on leakage found by the evaluator is in CARE's NSP-NIS Food Security Survey Report of November 17, 1995.⁵³ According to the report, leakage is typically under 1 percent, with some regional differences.

The tracking of and accounting for commodities seems to meet generally accepted standards. The information made available by WFP permits tracking of the VGFP commodities all the way to the various regions where it was distributed.⁵⁴ Since WFP is not targeting the VGFP commodities to specific beneficiaries (they are used as an integral part of their total available food), the commodities could not be tracked to any specific group. WFP's warehouses appear to be in reasonable shape. The GOT made these facilities available.

WFP distribution procedures also appear to follow standard practice. The local governments pick up the commodities for each distribution in their area from the WFP warehouse. WFP monitors accompany the truck to the distribution site and supervise the entire distribution

CARE-CIS. "NSP-NIS Food Security Survey Report." op. cit., Summary Tables.

United Nations, World Food Program. "Summary Update of Food Arrivals." op. cit.

process. At the site, beneficiaries identify themselves with an ID document, typically their internal passport; if their name appears on the agreed-upon list they receive their ration. Personnel of the local government and volunteers well acquainted with the specific area staff the sites. At any time during a distribution, the quantity of commodities still at hand can be compared with the commodities delivered and the number of beneficiaries receiving food. Due to the fact that the local authorities pay for the distribution costs, WFP's distribution cycle is three months. This cycle is long compared to other countries. Although a shorter cycle is normally preferred, cost is an issue. For example, two-month cycles would place an additional burden on the authorities. (The evaluator was not able to ascertain whether the additional burden would be unreasonable.) CARE also uses three-month cycles and, in at least one case, a four-month cycle. Coordination among the various food aid implementing organizations appears well organized and frequent. WFP conducts weekly food aid coordination meetings while weekly UN InterAgency meeting also dedicates time to food matters.

4. An evaluation of the appropriateness of beneficiary targeting in the CARE FY 95 VGFP and of the impact of the program on the food security status of the beneficiaries.

As in the Caucasus, government lists identify the vulnerable groups. However, opinions vary about the validity of the lists. Typically, both CARE and WFP refine the lists with information obtained from neighborhood or village people. CARE reports that, on average, approximately 5 to 6 percent of the names on the lists are eliminated. WFP reported one case where 350 names were eliminated from a total of 17,000. Neither of the refinement efforts seems to lead to enormous reductions. Either the information on the lists in Tajikistan is of a significantly higher quality than is generally assumed to be the case in the Caucasus, or the issue of targeting has not yet reached the level of attention that generally characterizes the Caucasus. The logical assumption is that the government of Tajikistan's lists are not significantly better than the lists used in the Caucasus. If we accept this assumption, then still unanswered is whether more refined targeting is worth the additional cost.

As discussed in the reports on the Caucasus countries, the added cost of more thorough targeting is likely to be great. The development of the PAROS system in Armenia was expensive, and any other system would either need to be more elaborate or probably involve visits to individual households (it is even unclear whether visits to each household can be avoided in efforts to improve PAROS within a time frame useful for the food aid community). Individual household visits are time-consuming and therefore likely to be expensive, even if the manpower were to be supplied by the GOT. Again, if we assume therefore that better targeting is expensive regardless of method used, the determining factor would be the qualitative advantages of improved targeting. The critical issue is food availability. The more that food becomes a scarce commodity, the more that the food assistance organizations will have to cut into the lists or, alternatively, provide less food to each household. Given that assistance organizations distribute only supplementary rations, which typically provide 30 to 40 percent of minimal caloric requirements, any further

reduction of ration size would be questionable. If rations were to be cut to 20 percent or less of daily caloric needs, it is appropriate to ask whether food should be distributed at all (at least if we expect any impact), leaving a reduction in the number of beneficiaries as the only option.

Reportedly, the majority of the Tajik population has a strong sense of entitlement; in other words, it is widely felt that if one pensioner receives food, all pensioners should receive food. Therefore, if any reductions are to be made, the level of vulnerability of a household is probably the only criterion that has a chance to be perceived as fair by those who are better off and thus would be excluded from further assistance.

Analogous to conclusions about the Caucasus countries, the impact of the VGFP food commodities can only be deduced, not measured. Clearly, there has been a positive impact. At minimum, the food freed up other resources for other equally necessary needs. Further, VGFP commodities had a positive nutritional impact. It is, however, impossible to document this impact in view of the lack of baseline data.

5. Recommendations as to the most appropriate food assistance interventions, if any, for responding to the needs of the observed vulnerable groups, taking into account the planned interventions of the program country governments, international organizations, or other NGOs.

The feeding of the most vulnerable groups and those in areas still or again disrupted by fighting or insecurity will probably dominate the food aid efforts in Tajikistan for some years to come. However, the needs of the poorer segments of the Tajik population will inevitably move from food to other types of assistance in the medium term. In some instances, it is appropriate to ask whether food aid is the appropriate response. In fact, various NGOs are looking into ways to expand their interventions toward development. Countries such as Tajikistan lend themselves ideally for the creative use of food resources, and some experimentation, on a small scale, should be encouraged. One noteworthy idea uncovered by the evaluator is the use of wheat flour as an input for a project to promote the establishment of small-scale, labor-intensive bread bakeries.

D. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The predominant opinion of the many people interviewed in Tajikistan is that the country is in the worst shape of all the former Soviet republics. This is reflected in the SCF/UNHCR study and in WFP's 1996 appeal. In addition, most believe that the situation is worsening. The 1994 SCF/UNHCR study signaled continuing deterioration as a possibility while CARE's Food Security Survey found declining food security among the surveyed households between September 1994 and June 1995.

Targeting in Tajikistan suffers from the same weaknesses the evaluator found in Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Armenia. Beneficiaries receive food because their names appear on

government lists of vulnerable categories. However, not every member of a vulnerable category is necessarily vulnerable. Ways to improve targeting (reaching *only* the most vulnerable) should be studied, but the final decision about the implementation of the improvements must depend on weighing the considerable costs versus the perceived advantages of more precise targeting.

Alternative ways to assist the beneficiary groups should be studied. The reality is that food aid programs are being reduced. **But food programs should not be scaled back too quickly, at least until a better quantitative understanding of vulnerability in Tajikistan is gained.** A better understanding of vulnerability will also help determine with greater precision adequate levels of food aid. For the time being, food aid is definitely playing an important role, and prudent policy might dictate the continuation of food aid, although somewhat lower levels from 1995 will not likely result in undue hardship. An important food programming aspect is that WFP's pipeline is currently running through May 1996 while most NGOs will be out of food toward the end of the summer.

In the sections of this report on the three Caucasus countries, the team made the case for somewhat greater justification for targeted food aid in Azerbaijan than in Georgia and Armenia. Based on the general view that Tajikistan is worse off and deteriorating, Tajikistan should be able to make a similar or maybe even greater claim to food aid resources than Azerbaijan. However, no nutritional emergency is evident or reported. Besides the two aforementioned studies (which are two-years-old and one-year-old, respectively), little hard data are available to substantiate conditions. Consequently, **the evaluator recommends conduct of a study along the lines of the SCF/ECHO/DHA study in Georgia to develop a better understanding of the number of vulnerable people in Tajikistan and their degree of vulnerability.**

In light of the prevailing perception that the situation is (still) worsening, **the evaluator also recommends the regular collection and analysis of nutritional data and a repeat of CARE's Rapid Nutrition Assessment of August 1994 to detect a downward trend, if any.**

In Tajikistan, the VGFP program is currently implemented only by WFP, and then only with wheat flour and vegoil as commodities. WFP does not have a specific project or target group singled out for the VGFP commodities; as such a specific impact could not be detected. However, as part of the total food that is available to WFP, it is logical to assume that the VGFP commodities did have a positive effect on the target groups.

The WFP program, of which the VGFP commodities form a part, is generally well implemented. WFP plays a leading role in the various coordination efforts among the implementing agencies. Commodities are accounted for and can actually be traced by paperwork to the areas where they were distributed. The procedures at the distribution sites appear to ensure that food is reaching the intended beneficiaries as identified through the various GOT lists.

ANNEX A

SCOPE OF WORK

ANNEX B

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