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Ministry of Economy

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Government of Afghanistan Releases Latest Data on Poverty and Food Security

Poor nutrition and food insecurity affects a sizeable proportion of the Afghan population, particularly during the lean spring months and when food prices rise

KABUL, March 4, 2012- The Ministry of Economy of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and the World Bank today released a joint report titled "**Poverty and Food Security in Afghanistan: Analysis based on the National Risk and Vulnerability Assessment of 2007/08**".

The study focuses on connections between poverty and food security in Afghanistan. It investigates the status of food insecurity in Afghanistan with a focus on mapping provincial differences and understanding the impact of rising food prices on key measures of food security.

The report finds that Afghanistan faces an acute problem of malnutrition and food insecurity. It states that Afghan children suffer from one of the highest levels of chronic malnutrition in the world. More than half (54 percent) of Afghan children under five are chronically malnourished and over a third (34 percent) are underweight. Almost three quarters of them - around 72 percent - suffer from key micro-nutrient deficiencies, such as of iron and iodine.

These poor nutritional outcomes are closely linked to the state of food security in the country. More than a quarter (29 percent) of the Afghan population cannot meet their minimum calorie requirements, that is, they consume less than 2100 calories per day. Twenty percent of the population consumes a diet that lacks adequate dietary diversity, thus affecting their intake of micro-nutrients. The problem of food insecurity is compounded in the lean season - during spring, for example - when 33 percent of the population suffers from calorie deficiencies and 24 percent from a poor diet.

"It is shocking to learn that children are amongst the most vulnerable segment of the Afghan population, and their lives that could be saved are at risk," **said HE Abdul Hadi Arghandiwal, Minister of Economy, Islamic Republic of Afghanistan.** "There is, therefore, a dire need to scale up the ongoing interventions that provide a safety net to the people, so that we can reduce the high mortality rates, particularly among children under five. The Government is committed to continuing its efforts in this regard, with financial and technical support from the international community."

Overall, the report documents much variation in food security across geographic and economic groups, reflecting the diversity of economic and social conditions across the country. Food insecurity appears to be more pronounced in the rural areas where about 80 percent of the country's population resides. For example, calorie deficiency affects 30 percent of the rural population compared to 24 percent in the urban areas.

The findings have several implications for policy makers:

1. Given that poor nutrition and food insecurity affect a sizeable proportion of the Afghan population throughout the year, but more so during lean times (e.g. the spring months or when food prices rise), there is a genuine need to scale-up the safety net program in Afghanistan.



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2. Given the large differences in food security across the country, particularly between provinces, better targeting is crucial to increase the effectiveness of ongoing food security programs.
3. The empirical evidence points out that if policy makers focus exclusively on improving caloric intake when food prices rise, they may miss an important part of the big picture. While poorer households do cut back somewhat on calories, they absorb much more of the shock by reducing dietary quality, for example, by reducing the consumption of meat.

“Because of the ongoing conflict, foreign assistance has disproportionately gone to the provinces where concentration of troops and fighting has been heaviest such as Kandahar and Helmand,” **said Josephine Bassinette, Acting World Bank Country Director for Afghanistan.** “But the analysis in this report shows that poverty and food insecurity rates are actually higher in the more peaceful provinces. This suggests that aid must become better targeted at reaching the most poor. In order to have a greater impact on reducing rates of food insecurity and poverty, improving the efficiency and equity of service delivery and social protection across all provinces of Afghanistan is essential.”

The report is the fourth in a series of studies that form part of the World Bank's programmatic approach to poverty assessment. It has been prepared jointly by the Directorate General of Policy and ANDS Monitoring and Evaluation, Ministry of Economy, and the World Bank.

For the purposes of the empirical analysis, the report uses three measures of household food security: per capita daily caloric intake; protein intake; and, household dietary diversity. The report is available on: www.moec.gov.af

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