

BOSNIA Vulnerability Survey 1996

The 1996 Bosnia Vulnerability Survey revisited communities involved in the 1994 and 1995 UNHCR/WFP studies of food security. It followed trends in food aid in Bosnia to provide information for a transition and exit strategy. Vulnerable groups, targeting strategies, changing eligibility criteria for food aid, and implications for the time frame of aid were identified.

The Vulnerability Survey covered 29,530 people in 8,484 households in 66 communities. Local community and relief agency views of vulnerability were obtained through systematic discussion of household data with the communities surveyed in Sarajevo, Tuzla, Zenica, Medugorje, Bihac, Eastern Bosnia and Banja Luka. In each of the ethnic and programme areas, analysis workshops were held to discuss the quantitative and qualitative community-level data and to propose area-specific strategies.

In each area, NGOs and other relief agencies were drawn into the analysis workshop. Area-level data and opinions were then aggregated for analysis in the final programme workshop held in Sarajevo on 18-19 March 1996.

Results

Over half (57%) the survey households received food aid in the previous month, a reduction from about 70% in prior years. Coverage of each vulnerable group (unemployed, displaced, female-headed households, pregnant women, elderly living alone, disabled and households with young children) was consistently similar to that of the rest of the population. This finding raised questions about the targeting of food aid to vulnerable groups.

An impressive 81% of all households reported having “sufficient food”, this proportion being the same for those who received food as for those who did not. Hence, the rate of undersupply (those who received food aid but did not have sufficient food) dropped dramatically across almost all regions between 1995 and

1996. This picture of increased food availability coincided with increasing participation in the commercial food markets, more widespread availability of cash and more affordable prices.

One notable outcome is the increase in reports of sufficient food across ethnic minorities in almost all regions. Explanations for this may include NGO complementation of food aid, the non-discriminatory policies of food aid agencies, and/or positive discrimination in favour of ethnic minorities.

Food Aid in the Transition

Focus group participants were concerned about the misappropriation of food in all regions and there was a call for continued involvement of the UN in control and monitoring of food aid. A strongly-voiced demand came from all parts of Bosnia to establish economic viability, with concomitant employment opportunities, before phasing out food aid.

Asked “What should UNHCR/WFP know about your community to improve food aid in the transition?” authorities in Banja Luka, where there is a large refugee population, said that they need agricultural inputs such as seeds and fertilisers. In Eastern Bosnia, insufficient quantity of food aid and problems with sanitation and unemployment were discussed.

Tuzla authorities requested improved communication and organisation of food aid. Local authorities in Medugorje said food aid was not distributed regularly. In Bihac, the authorities requested “accurate data on population and quantities of food aid for each; vehicles, fuel, and regular delivery”. In Sarajevo, too, authorities requested demographic information, particularly relating to the large elderly population among whom, they feel, distribution is poor.

Asked what they would leave out of the food aid basket and what they would add, compared with 1995, an increased proportion said “nothing”. These answers may indicate either increasing satisfaction with the food aid basket or else a situation

where it is no longer needed.