

Facts



OXFAM:
"Food prices will have more than doubled by 2030"

Today, every seventh inhabitant of the Earth is starving; in 20 years' time, it will be every fifth inhabitant of the Earth. These figures are taken from the report "Growing a Better Future" of International British charity organization OXFAM.

According to the organization, the prices of the basic food products will have increased by 120-180% by 2030, the population of the Earth will have increased by one third, reaching more than 9 billion by 2050, and the demand for food will have increased even more, by 70%. According to the organization, "the lives of millions of people are in danger," whereas in developing countries "the poor spend 50-80% of their income on food."

The report mentions abrupt climate changes as the main factor influencing the increase in food prices. Among other factors, the organization mentions the increase in oil prices, the increasing demand for biofuels, financial manipulations, etc.

WB:
"Food prices worldwide increased by 36% during last year,"

– states the World Bank April 2011 report. In particular, maize price increased by 74%, wheat price – by 69%, and only the rice price remained unchanged. According to the WB experts, the rise in the prices of food and energy products creates an additional source of vulnerability for purely importing countries, especially for Armenia, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova and Tajikistan, where the level of poverty can rise significantly.

FAO:
"The prices of cereal grains remain at an unprecedented high level"

According to the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the UN, the prices have gone up 69% as compared to last year. FAO experts claim it is very much probable that we will have the same picture in 2012. "For those who spend 80% of their income on food, this perspective means one thing: for an indefinite period of time, these people will have to eat not 'enough' but 'as much as they can find'," the FAO statement says.

Woman & politics

June 2011

The disasters caused by climate change inflict around USD 100 billion of economic losses annually.



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Photo by Abbie Traylor-Smith

The scene is beautiful on this bright morning in the Armenian mountains, the palest hint of apricot orange glowing through the whiteness. But for the farmers it is a nightmare. "Our new-born child is under the frost. It's terrible. We are losing our harvest again," says Angela Babayan who, desperate like the other inhabitants of the village, is beating the branches of the apricot trees, trying to get the snow off the delicate new blossoms. The last frosts usually come at the end of March. It was supposed to be warm in April, but it's the same as last year all over again. Even the buds

on the apple trees, though hardly formed yet, show black frost burn at their edges....

Angela and Arthur Babayans live in village Yeghegis, Vayots Dzor province. They have three children, 11, 16 and 18. For this family living on the brink of poverty, unfavorable weather conditions imply serious problems...

The story about the Babayans is but one of the materials collected by British journalist Alex Renton in Armenia in April of this year...

Continued on pages 3-4

GROW
FOOD. LIFE. PLANET.

OXFAM launches the global GROW campaign for the hunger-free world



GROW
is a vision for a brighter future. It starts here, and it starts with all of us. So be part of it.

The broken food security system and the environmental crisis around the world drive millions of people into hunger. One billion people around the world every day are hungry when going to bed, whereas the world can feed everyone.

This is a turning point. The harmonic and normal development of our society is endangered, since today development is anchored on inequality, unfair distribution of resources, and the inefficient utilization of such natural resources as fertile land, sustainable climate and potable water.

OXFAM launches the new global GROW campaign, which aims to promote positive changes in the processes of production, consumption, distribution and management of food and other resources. It is a campaign both for us and millions of other people under the "A hunger-free world – Let us grow more and feed the Earth".

OXFAM's GROW campaign aims to reform those failed policies of governments, which encourage

the inequality and unfair distribution of resources enrooted in the society, promote the rapid increase in food prices, as well as to expose the clique of 300-500 powerful companies who benefit from and lobby hard to maintain their dominant positions.

OXFAM has been responding to food crisis for 70 years. Now it is calling on governments to lead the transformation to a fairer, more sustainable food system by investing in agriculture, efficiently utilizing world's natural resources, managing the food system better and delivering equality for women who produce much of the world's food. OXFAM is calling on the private sector to shift to a business model where profit does not come at the expense of producers, consumers and the environment.

OXFAM GB Armenia has undertaken a comprehensive study which aims to reveal the impact of price increases of basic food products on the living standards of people and on the increasing level of poverty in Armenia.

OXFAM GB Armenia and the Civil Society Partnership Network on behalf of 27 non-governmental organizations, taking into account the food crisis threatening both the world and our country, call on the authorities of the Republic of Armenia to:

- > Restrain the threatening increase of food prices in the local market,
- > Make investments in small farms and agricultural cooperatives,
- > Control the prices of imported food products and promote the local production of agricultural food products,
- > Boost investments to mitigate the negative impact of climate change on agriculture.

We believe that change is possible and it starts with each of us.
"A hunger-free world – Let us grow more and feed the Earth".

High-risk zone

The face of poverty in Armenia

Poverty level in Armenia - 34,1%
 Poverty level of the families with one child - 37,9%
 Poverty level of the families with two children - 44,1%
 Poverty level of the families with three children - 51,8%
 Poverty level of the families with children and led by women - 48,5%
 Poverty level of the families with disabled children - 70%



Photo by Anahit Hayrapetyan
 "Youth At Risk" multimedia project,
 UNFPA EE and CA regional office

Poverty level is 34,9% in the rural areas in Armenia; furthermore, it rises more rapidly in rural areas than in urban communities. The highest level of poverty is seen in Shirak province (47,2%), followed by Kotayk (43%), Lori (41,7%), Gegharkunik (40,4%), and Tavush (34,9%).

"Social Snapshot and Poverty in Armenia, 2010",
 RoA National Statistics Service

What can we do?

How much will it cost to overcome poverty?

In order to overcome poverty, Armenia is going to need AMD 93,5 billion or 3% of the GDP, and in order to overcome extreme poverty, it is going to need around AMD 2,5 billion or 0,1 % of the GDP, and that – in addition to the funds already allocated for social welfare, assuming of course that the latter targets mostly the poor. However, international practice comes to prove that flawless target use is highly improbable; hence, factual funds required for overcoming poverty are going to be much more than that.

RoA National Statistics Service

"Uncontrolled rising food prices is a problem which pushes forward the main challenge, poverty. I have had a chance to say from the National Assembly chair that according to the recent research by the UN Population Fund, poverty is widespread in Armenia. Even official data is more than vivid: today, one million and 100 thousand people are poor in the Republic.

That is why I think that the Government ought to carry out indexing especially in relation to the poor, in order for the state to protect the citizens of that group in case of, for example, rise in prices, which according to some predictions threatens the whole world today.

Apart from this, irrespective of the external impulses which of course cannot fail to influence the socioeconomic situation in such a country as Armenia, I believe that other steps are needed, among those the most important being perhaps real combat against monopolies."

By Victor Dallakyan, RoA NA deputy

It's time to worry

Rising Prices Are Hitting Consumers

According to the official data from the RoA NSS, as of May 2011, as compared to May 2010, consumer prices have gone up by 9% in Armenia, with the increase in the prices of food products being 16,2%, that in the prices of non-food products being 2,4%, and that in the prices of different services rendered to the population being 2,5%.



In this time period rise in prices hit bread and similar products hardest (16,9%), followed by dairy products (22,4%), vegetables, potato (35,4%), fruits (19,9%), eggs (20,5%), and meat products (9%). The price of sugar actually went down by 0,4%.

According to the price monitoring of "Protection of Consumers Rights" NGO, during the past year a significant increase has been recorded in the prices of cheese (52%), butter (28%) and vegetable oil (38%). Coffee price went up 14%, whereas are rice and pasta – 5% and 4% respectively.

Mission is possible

"To establish a new, fairer and more effective food system"

Our interview with the Country Director of OXFAM-GB - Armenia Margarita Hakobyan is about the objectives of the global GROW campaign in Armenia



Ms. Margarita Hakobyan and UN Resident Coordinator Ms. Dafina Gercheva signed a cooperation memorandum

- The worldwide GROW campaign of OXFAM is aimed at inviting the attention of humanity to several factors, especially the scarcity of the basic food products brought about by climate changes and the issue of increase in the number of hungry people. The aim of the campaign is to introduce positive practical changes in the process of production, consumption, sharing and management of food and other resources.

Taking into account the increase in food prices (according to the predictions of OXFAM, they will have doubled by 2030), this issue is more than urgent for Armenia too. Agriculture is a field which provides the population with the basic food products, and in Armenia rains and hail and unusual changes in the climate have been plaguing agriculture for the past few years. We have had harvest losses for four years in a row. I think that the Government and the people can draw conclusions themselves.

- Under the circumstances what does OXFAM propose?

- If climate changes adversely affect agriculture, we have to be able to introduce the cultivation of non-traditional, resistant crops. Ten cooperatives have already been established in Vayots Dzor and Tavush provinces with the assistance of OXFAM. We must encourage the villagers, the small-scale farmers, to produce more, to provide both food for the consumers and income for their families. We have also established refrigerator households where foodstuffs will be kept until sale or contact with processing plants. We have introduced production of non-traditional crops: Brussels sprout, broccoli, cherry tomato, etc. All this is done with the involvement of the specialists of the Darakert scientific-research center. Our aim is to give the people the opportunity of alternative sources of income, help small-scale farmers establish efficient models, approaches and propose them to the Government.

This is the issue with which the organization addresses the Government of the country, and on the global level, the G8, which is faced with the task of working more efficiently towards assisting the developing countries in view of the rise in food product prices and the increase in the number of hungry people. It is also important to understand which cases of price increase are artificial and which of them are justified, i.e. the objective and subjective reasons behind the increase. The reasons are objective if there are climate changes globally, influencing the prices, whereas arbitrarily increased prices are subjective. We will soon publish our study carried out in Armenia which will reveal the influence of rising prices on the living standards of the people in the country and the rising level of poverty. We have studied the degree of justification of the prices of imported foodstuffs, as well as their pricing. And if the products imported into Armenia are sold at a high price and affect local production, a question arises: why import if we can produce locally? Maybe we need to promote local production and control the price rise mechanism?

- What is your progress in Armenia?

- We have been working in more than 165 rural remote and border-line communities in 6 provinces of Armenia for 16 years now. We are implementing different programs in cooperation with local NGOs, local authorities and regional authorities. We follow the slogan "Efficient work with few resources." Nevertheless, resources are required, and we try to involve other donor organizations too which are able to make contributions. For example, we have had long-term cooperation with the UN, and since our missions are the same, we have recently signed a cooperation memorandum aimed at bringing our efforts and resources together to improve the living standards of the population and to reduce poverty.

ty in village Aknaghbyur in Tavush province. We already have a refrigerator complex there which yielded results last year: the producer, bypassing the intermediary, had 30-40% more income. Now, together with the UN, we provide greenhouses for the 17 farmers who are members of the cooperative. This is not such a big contribution, but we provide everything: training, crops, drip irrigation system, as well as driers, to produce organic dried fruits and vegetables.

- How long are you going to support the Armenian farmer?

- Our program has a strategy of about 5 years. We started last year and plan to help about 4000 farmers increase their income in the coming 4 years.

- Going back to the global objective of GROW, do you think it is possible to have a "hunger-free world?"

- The world does possess resources; what we need is to share them equally. If everyone in the world contributes to the improvement of the current food system, I think as a result we will have a chance at sustainable future for all the inhabitants of the Earth. But we need to take steps towards mitigating and reducing poverty and establishing a new and fair food system, and we need to do it now.

I think that all the well-off people realise that in order to be really well-off, they need to feed their hungry neighbors. Otherwise, if you are enjoying your life while the food you need is not being produced in the village, tomorrow it is going to affect you too...

Interview by
 Susanna Hovhannisyanyan



Nune Abrahamyan, A Beneficiary Oxfam's Livelihoods Programme in Herher village

A Practical Plan to End Poverty

"If we turn our backs on the poorest people and leave them to die, we destroy our own soul. It is also dangerous, since it is the same as, for example, leaving people alone in an epidemic... In order to reduce poverty by half, the developed countries simply have to double the aid given to poor countries, making it 0,5% of their GDP. We are talking about the rich giving 50 cents out of each 100 dollars of their income to help the poor people in the world, in order to give them a supporting point on the development ladder."

Jeffrey Sachs,
 Special Advisor to the UN Secretary-General on the Millennium Development Goals,
 Author of the book "The End of Poverty"

Women's voice

Irina and Emma Avanesyan: The climate change means we can't grow things any more



Irina Avanesyan, 48, came to village Hermon in Vayots Dzor province, Armenia, as a refugee from Azerbaijan, after the start of inter-ethnic conflict that saw her husband's death. In her tidy house in the centre of the village she works hard to keep her sons and her daughter-in-law and family warm and fed. They're dependent on inadequate social security and the little money her son Araik manages to send home from Russia..

My son Araik, who is 26, left for Moscow one month ago. It's better for him to go, there's nothing to do here to earn money. But around the village we miss him, in a lot of the work we have to do, in the field and with the animals.

The youngest people, the refugees' children, are all leaving, though families with cows and honeybees might keep their children here.

We have a little land and we have a cow. It produces enough milk and we make some cheese. Everything in the village has to be paid for- the only thing that's free is the services of the bull!

On our land that's useable we grow potatoes and lobi (kidney beans). And we have a nut tree that's famous in the village - everyone says it gives the best walnuts. We sell them. That's how we get money, mainly. And we exchange them with other families for food. Sometimes my other son Arasz, who's 31, herds animals for 2000 drams (:3.25) a day.

We don't know what we're going to do this year: because of the weather the potato crop was very bad. We had very dry weather. No rain in the spring. It is not usual for this region. We didn't produce any seed potatoes and we have no money to buy them.

Oxfam is going to help us by setting up a cooperative so we can sell our products at better prices. It's true, you could get 10% more for our walnuts if you sold them in Yerevan, and even more if they're sold green.

Emma Avanesyan, 23, married Araik, Irina's son (who has gone to work in Russia). Their children are Eric, 4, and Milena, 2. She lives in one room with her mother-in-law, brother-in-law and the children. We sat down to eat a midday meal with the family - the children had cold pasta with yoghurt and cheese from the family cow. The adults ate nothing. Eric said "I want some onion." There had been none in three months...

Irina Avanesyan: Today we'll eat macaroni with our cheese and yoghurt mixed in. There's no fresh vegetables now, but in the morning we had some of our tomatoes that we'd bottled. We eat meat maybe twice a month: I suppose the last time we had a good meal was when my son left. We had a good dinner, chicken baked in the oven with potatoes. At Easter usually we'd have fish, but we can't afford it. So we'll go into the fields and collect greens to eat with eggs.

Emma Avanesyan: I think prices are

rising so much in Armenia because the climate change means we can't grow things any more. Last year there was no potato crop, and the price of potatoes is very high. This year we need to plant 200 kg of seed potatoes, at 400 drams (65p) a kilo - we have no idea how to get this money. If we don't have seed potatoes we don't know what we'll do. It's time to plant them now, or we'll be hungry in winter..."

Assia Temanyan: Try the cheese, it's made from Oxfam's kindness.

Refugees from the Armenia-Azerbaijan strife of the late 80s and early 90s, the Temanyans live high in the mountains of Vayots Dzor, in village Artavan. Poorly built on the bare shoulder of a mountain, the snow is still on the fields in mid-April. Temperatures in winter go as low as minus 25 degrees centigrade.

The Temanyans' five children are aged between 14 and 34 - two of them, both mentally disabled, live with them. Such disability is quite common in the Armenian mountains, according to Oxfam staff, and may be linked to malnutrition in infancy.

When we arrived, Assia and Zhorab were waiting to see if the unseasonal frost had affected the buds on their apple trees, whose crop is crucial to their finances. They'd burnt fires of straw all night between the trees to try and ward off the frost.

But - on the good side - the sun was out and soon there would be new grass for the cow that Oxfam gave them two years ago, and which has provided milk, butter, cheese and some crucial income for the Temanyans ever since. And, on the hillside, Zhorab had managed to pick the first mushrooms of the year. Assia set about frying them with eggs, so we could all eat them together for lunch.

"Try the cheese," said Assia when she served the meal. "It's made from Oxfam's kindness."

Zhorab: "Last year we had no apples at all because of the frost. It was really bad for most of the village - only two families had any apples, and they really benefited from the high prices. The price went up to 150 or 200 dram (30p) a kilo.

Assia needed two operations - if we had not sold the calf and two sheep she would not have survived.

There's no question we're all more healthy since we got the cow. Before that we'd very rarely eat milk or yoghurt.



The weather has really changed. When I came here in 1988 it was wetter - we'd get 40 or 50 cm of snow. Now there's only 10cm and it's much colder. There's not enough water now for potatoes to survive. Tomorrow, who knows, maybe we'll have a heavy frost and then no rain. That ruins the trees - you get no leaves at all. It's getting hotter in summer- up to 40 degrees. The trees are disappearing, the forest is gone because of the hot weather.

When we came here as refugees in 1988 we were given a small house and we worked on the kolkhoz, the collective

farm. I was a driver and Assia milked the cow. It was very good, we had a job. There was a plan to build 40 houses and a kindergarten.

For us things are better than they were a few years back. The support we get from Oxfam and the 25000 (about :40) drams a month social security support for our children helps. We can't buy flour as we need it though, and we're in debt.

Oxfam's idea of a cooperative is a good one - if we could share fuel costs and cut out the middle man we'd do better - we'd get twice as much selling our apples in the city.

Assia (she): Last year, we had no apples. But we had cheese and yoghurt to exchange for potatoes; without that we would have seen real hardship. Oxfam gave us a cow and sheep two years ago. Then a cow cost 200,000 drams, now it's worth 350,000. And it has had two calves. They gave us two sheep, 20,000 drams each. We sold them for 80,000 drams each, because I had to have an operation. Without Oxfam we could not have done that. Without Oxfam I would be dead...

Nina Yeganian: Now we get the latest prices by SMS



Nina Yeganian (35) teaches at the school in the village Aknagbjur, Tavush region. Her husband Garik Sardanian (37) is a part time forestry worker. They have two sons and a daughter aged between 10 and 15. Nina is a member of the farmers' cooperative set up with Oxfam's help and training. She has planted 30 Oxfam donated trees, persimmons, apple and cherry in addition to the family's existing orchards. Oxfam and the co-op have now built a shed with a cooling system to store the villager's fruit crop until conditions and prices are at their best. SMS messages tell them when prices are at their best.

"We underwent marketing training and lessons in how to manage the cooperative. We learnt how to tend the trees when they are saplings, and what to do if they get diseases. Last year we sold the crop for 230 to 350 drams a kilo, after it was stored at the new warehouse. Normally we'd get 200 drams. Now we get the latest prices from the supermarket sent to our mobile phones by SMS."

"There are 32 families in the coop and we all have the same rights. We elect the management, and we pay a membership fee of 500 drams (80p) a month."

"It has become much warmer here since I was a child. And it rains for several days at a time. It snows more heavily: this year our roof was damaged by the weight of the snow. Two years ago it snowed in April and all the trees in blossom were spoiled. We had no harvest at all. Just now [mid-April] the apricot and cherry has blossomed: if it snows or there is a frost it will be a disaster..."

By Alex Renton's case studies

Climate change

Trouble Comes in Threes



The year had started quite well for agriculture. The Government declared agriculture a priority field. The villagers took loans; some of them even planned how to spend the income. And then, at the beginning of June, the hail and wind in almost the whole territory of Armenia yet again destroyed the apricot, peach, plum, apple and grape orchards and the harvest of the agricultural crops.

The Armavir, Vayots Dzor, Kotayk and Lori provinces took the hardest blow. The damages have not been quantified yet, but it is clear even now that the expected harvest of fruits and crops has been damaged greatly, and that the consequences will affect the whole population of the Republic, bringing about new increases in prices and depriving many villagers even of their daily bread.

"The hail came down all at once, it came down on our heads. We could not even leave the cars. It destroyed the whole vegetation in 15 minutes. Potatoes, beans, cabbages, greens - all these were completely destroyed" - enumerates resident of Stepanavan Zhora Magtaghyan.

"I was growing cucumbers but it levelled everything to earth" - says 60-year-old grandma Rima and shows the destruction caused by the hail, crying.

"We had all gone to the banks and taken out loans in order to cultivate the lands, gather harvest and feed our families, but today the hail destroyed all that we had. How are we going to repay the loans now? What can the poor villagers do?" - said the residents of the communities affected by the hail.

"We had taken loans and we were managing somehow, but you saw what happened this year; last year was the same, and before that there was a lot of harvest and no buyers. This is not a life we are living," - despairs Arthur, resident of Aragatsotn province village Dasht, who has been cultivating an apricot orchard for about 30 years now.

"I sympathise with the villagers: rodents on the one hand and hail on the other. I do not think that the Ministry of Agriculture will be able to fully compensate for the loss," - says President of the "Armenian Agrarian Peasants Union" NGO Hrach Berberyan.

Hail is recognised as the most disastrous of all the calamities for agriculture. According to the assessment of the experts, the annual loss inflicted on the agriculture in Armenia by the hail is about USD 30 million. In 2009, the hail had caused loss amounting to AMD 1,9 billion, and in 2010 the loss amounted to AMD 4,2 billion.

The Government has installed 118 anti-hail stations in the Republic at the expense of the budget, but in order to ensure protection for the whole agricultural territory the number has to be doubled at least. Besides, the stations are not always effective. Thus, the only thing the villages can really do to avoid more natural disasters is to pray...

Outside eye

...“Hasmik, and Artur and Angela, are inspiring, hard-working people, who could make good livings for their families if only the things they cannot control worked in their favour. But corruption in Armenia and the cartels that prevent farmers' access to markets, rising global prices, an

inadequate social welfare system and the cruel tricks of climate change all work against them”, -

- this is the conclusion reached by British journalist Alex RENTON in his stories about Armenian rural remote communities.

Angela: Our new-born child is under the frost. It's terrible...

Angela Babayan and her mother-in-law were busy beating the branches of their apricot trees, trying to get the snow off the delicate new blossoms. The scene is beautiful on this bright morning in the Armenian mountains, the palest hint of apricot orange glowing through the whiteness. But for these farmers it is a nightmare. Even the buds on the apple trees, though hardly formed yet, show black frost burn at their edges when we go with Artur, Angela's husband, to inspect them.

He shakes his head – how many more disasters can there be? Last year they lost the apple crop because of a frost in mid-April, just like this one, and the summer weather wiped out much of the village's potatoes. “The weather has changed so much. The seasons are confused – usually by now we have tomatoes growing. It's colder for longer, and it's very wet, much wetter in the autumn. That makes it hard to collect forage for the animals and the fields can't be harvested.”

For Artur and Angela and their

sons, living just on the edge of poverty in a country whose finances have been badly hurt by the international recession, an upset in the weather means real problems. “There's a small hope for the apples, but imagine what it'll be like if they don't survive. Last year we had no earnings from apples or peaches. This year it will mean we will only be able to eat what we grow – and there will be no money for clothes for the children, for soap, for petrol, all the necessary things.”

“We've got three children, 11, 16 and 18. The eldest is at university, studying mathematics, all our spare income goes to pay for his tuition and his living costs. I don't know if we'll be able to send the younger ones.” Some hope is offered through a scheme Oxfam is setting up, which will help the farmers of Yeghegis start a co-operative, and store and market their fruit more profitably.

It's clear that this land can provide a good living. But the blows to the farmers of rural Armenia just keep coming – so much so that a recent



Photo by Abbie Trayler-Smith

agriculture minister told them his only advice was that they go into their fields and pray. It is not just the cruel tricks the weather has been playing, but also the rises in prices.

Fertiliser and fuel are 30% more expensive than they were a year ago – and incomes go much less far because of frightening rises in the prices of the food staples, many of which, like wheat flour (up 25%) and rice (up 7%), Armenia has largely to import.

“There is no future here,” we were told, again and again. One woman said that if it wasn't for her young chil-

dren, she would kill herself. Most of the young in the villages have left and gone abroad to look for work: the money expatriate Armenians send back is now the country's biggest source of foreign earnings. But, because of the global downturn, income from the remittances from Russia, where most Armenians go to work, is down 70%. Meanwhile, political changes and international negotiations that would allow Armenian to access western markets with its produce remain stuck in a muddle of ancient ill-will and enmity.

Hasmik: None of my children has ever seen a doctor... Only one has ever eaten a banana.



Photo by Abbie Trayler-Smith

The Yeghegis valley is the site of great monasteries and castles, glories of Armenia's rich history – now there is little here but ruins and shocking poverty. Without land, or the knowledge of how to farm it, it's hard to see how some of the people can be helped. Hasmik Josephyan has never been able to farm – she and her husband came here, like so many people in Vayots Dzor province, as refugees from war or economic collapse.

The Josephyan's collapsing two-

room house on the steep hill above the valley has no good land, no water for drinking or irrigation, and the couple has little knowledge of how to farm these hard hills. Before he became ill, Vigan Josephyan worked in a shoe factory in the city of Abovyan.

So 29-year-old Hasmik looks after herself, her five young children and disabled Vigan on social security benefit of 40,000 Armenian drams (:65/US\$80) a month. It isn't adequate, especially with food

paid for. You had a job, you got a salary at the end of the month. You didn't have to worry about your children. Now you don't know anything for sure – you don't even know if you can get any flour.

“But I wouldn't go back. In the

prices rising to the sort of levels seen in Western Europe.

“The money is enough to buy a little bit of flour and pay for electricity. I've never bought shoes or clothes for my children. I don't have money to take them to the doctor or the hospital. All I can do is ask neighbours to give the medicines.

“One of our children died when he was two months. We didn't have money to make a proper grave for him. I don't know why he died. His ear hurt, he went to sleep and in the morning he was dead.”

Resourceful and generous, like so many Armenians, Hasmik and other villagers have taken to old skills to try and bridge the gaping holes in their income. We went off into the hills foraging with Yasmik Josephyan. High, just below the snow line, we came to the grounds of an ancient and ruined monastery.

Yasmik knelt on the turf and dug up white shoots like miniature sticks of celery. This was mandak. Raw it tasted a little lemony, a little of fennel. In Armenia it is a rare delicacy, said to be good for the heart: Yasmik and the other needy villagers can sell it to

traders for 200 drams (30p) a kilo. What were her shopping priorities? “Potatoes, flour, schoolbooks and medicine,” she said.

With typical generosity, Yasmik cooked the mandak up for us to try. She boiled it for a full thirty minutes, fried a little and then stirred an egg into it – “an omelette”. The cooked mandak tasted much less good than it had raw. I delivered a rather pompous lecture on how much she and the children would benefit from the nutrients in the vegetable, which were surely lost with so much boiling. Yasmik politely put me right: “I know. And of course, we drink the water the vegetable is boiled in.”

As Yasmik cooked, the electricity, always unreliable in the mountains, came on. An ancient TV came crackled to life. On it was a Russian cookery programme. I groaned at the irony of that. But Yasmik said “I love these programmes. They do make me feel hungry, but I can dream of having those ingredients to cook with. Josepha (her eldest, 9 years old) saw a pizza being made on the television and she wants one. I would love to make her a pizza, one day.”

“We're very excited that Oxfam and “Work and Motherland” (local NGO) is helping set up the co-op. We can market our products and get a better price for them – that will help a great deal.”

On the edge of survival

As of March 2011, the cost of the minimum consumption basket in Armenia is AMD 62.600 per month (about USD 170).

The monthly cost of the minimum food basket is 35.400 AMD (about USD 96).

It includes the following daily rations: 250g bread, 100g meat, 200g milk, 25g cheese, 250g potato, 200g fruit, 5g sugar, half an egg, etc.

The families where average monthly consumption per person is lower than the poverty threshold (AMD 30.920) are considered poor.

The families where average monthly expenses per adult are lower than the food threshold (AMD 17.483) are considered extremely poor.

RoA National Statistics Service

- Minimum salary in Armenia which is AMD 32.500 amounts to 56,4% of the cost of the minimum consumption basket for one person.

- Average old-age pension in Armenia which is AMD 28.396 amounts to 49,3% of the cost of the minimum consumption basket.

- As of January 2011, average nominal salary was AMD 104.051. Therefore, the monthly income of a 4-member family (including two employed members getting the RA average salary) which is AMD 208.102, adjusted for one person, is AMD 52.026 or 90,3% of the minimum consumption basket.

- An “average family” in Armenia (consisting of 4 members two of which are getting the RA average salary) is poor.

According to the conclusions of “Analysis of monitoring of the prices of basic food products” March 2010 - March 2011

By the way

As of February 2011 the cost of the minimum consumption basket in Yerevan has increased by AMD 16.735 as compared to February 2010 or by AMD 66.940 for a 4-member family.

By “Protection of Consumers Rights” NGO

What do you think?

How does rise in prices affect your daily living?

Asked this question, many of the residents of Yerevan said that their family budget has recently ceased to suffice for enough nutritious food, which is especially perceptible since the beginning of this year.



“Both my husband and I do the same work as before, but now we and our children are deprived of many things, - says 37-year-old **Varsine Grigoryan**. - I used to spend AMD 25.000 a week on food but now it is just not enough, upon my word! I used to make dishes with meat during the week, but now we eat meat on Sundays only. Fruits are in season but they are so expensive that I can-

not buy them for my children, and the growing organisms need vitamins.”

51-year-old **Anahit Sargsyan** hasn't been able to make the favourite dish of her husband, borsch, for about two months. “I need cabbage for borsch, but it has risen in price, potato is expensive, carrots, onions, greens are expensive. How can I afford them? My salary is AMD 120 thousand, it seems like good money but when you go to the market, you realise that against today's price it is the salary of the poor” - says the mother of two. Anahit has decided to reduce the amount of

money spent on skin care products so that, in her own words, “they can afford enough nutritious food.”

“Cheese has risen in price; so have butter and bread. Fancy that, you need at least a thousand drams in order to have common bread and cheese. Formerly, bread and cheese used to be the food for the poor, - **Mrs. Lida** says angrily. - Nowadays people eat eggs, pasta, lentils. Fresh vegetables, fruits and meat are a luxury. Not everyone can afford them.”

“It is difficult to find a product in this country which hasn't risen in

price. I am not talking about this year or this month only. Try to recall the prices 5 years ago and compare them to present-day prices. Have our salaries increased as much as the prices? Of course not” - says **Jeanna** who is a pedagogue by profession.

Interviews by Arman Gharibyan

The special issue is prepared by ProMedia-Gender NGO with the support of Oxfam GB Armenia

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