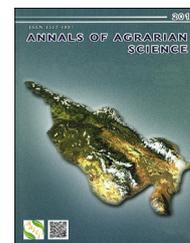


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Food security problems in post Soviet Georgia



I.E. Meskhia

Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University, 2, University St., Tbilisi, 0177, Georgia

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ABSTRACT

The paper introduces new insights into category content of national food security within the context of other components included into the unified system of the economic security of the country. Basic (Pilot) indicators of food security have been studied and there have been made a conclusion that these indicators showed a great deterioration in post-Soviet Georgia. In response to ineffective agricultural policy, food self-sufficiency ratio is low and import ratio in a consumer basket is high. Due to low income bracket and rise in food prices, majority of the population can't get necessary amount of calories determined by physical standards. There have been revealed strengths and weaknesses of endogenous and exogenous factors influencing food security of the country. There has been researched how increase in local food production influences the macroeconomic security, especially momentary security of the country. Proposals and recommendations are drafted on strengthening food security of the country.

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A problem of supplying population with products is one of the most important among present-day world challenges. This problem became particularly apparent because of the rapid growth of the world population in the 20th century and global financial and economic crises. In this regard, over the last years as a result of the international community efforts, the situation is gradually improving. However, 10.9% of the world population still goes hungry. People are particularly malnourished in developing regions (12.1%) and in African (20.0%) and a specific part of post-Soviet countries. In Georgia, the number of people which are on the verge of starvation makes up 400,000 (9.8%) [1].

Food security is one of the important components of the national security of the country. Preservation and reinforcement of political and economic sovereignty of the country depend significantly on it. The issue isn't given due consideration, especially in low-income countries, including Georgia. For example, in "The National Security Concept",

approved by the Parliament of Georgian in 2005, and later in its new version [2] passed in 2011, the issues of agricultural development and food security are ignored, whereas the mentioned problem is actually becoming a lot acute in post-Soviet Georgia.

About category content of food security

The term "food security" first appeared in the international scientific community in 1972–1973 during grain crisis. In 1974, the United Nations General Assembly endorsed a resolution "International commitments on food security in the world" developed by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). In 1996, a summit-level international meeting on food problems adopted Rome declaration on the world food security [3].

Researchers have different approaches and understanding while explaining food security category [4–7]. In their

E-mail address: iashameskhia@gmail.com.

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explanations they mainly focus on the provision food security world-wide through the import of food products, their self-sufficiency or through optimum compromise between own agricultural manufacturing and import. Today, relatively complete definition of “food security” is given in FAO annual report on “The State of Food Insecurity in the World”. According to this document, food security implies such a state of economy when all people, at all times, have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life [1]. In this definition the following fundamental measurements of food security show themselves: food sufficiency, its economic and physical access and stability for a long period. The given formulation is based on David Ricardo's widely known theory of comparative advantage in the international division of labour. In accordance with this theory, each country, proceeding from its resource capability, is specialized in producing every single good at minimum expense and under free market conditions exports this good to those countries where expenditures on its production are higher. However, in contemporary turbulent world where there are so frequent economic crises and local wars, where countries in their external economic and trade relations commonly use sanctions, embargos and other restrictive mechanisms, a problem of providing food sovereignty is actually brought to the forefront. The above-mentioned is important not only for small economy and developing countries but also for large economy and developed countries. For example, sugar manufacturing in the USA costs two times as much than its import, although the local sugar production wasn't ceased. In Japan, rice importation is prohibited in spite of the fact that rice development costs the farmers six-eight times as much than it costs in the world market. Producing one ton of wheat costs the Finnish four times as much than the USA's suggested price but Finland continues manufacturing its own wheat [8].

Sufficiency of food means when there are required amount and stock of local and imported food products in the domestic market. Physical access means when a country has an adequate supply of food and continuous availability of food in the local markets. Economic access to food implies that each citizen regardless of his/her age, financial shape and official capacity should have enough income to buy food products of minimum consumption basket. Stability means providing the population with food for a long period.

We should distinguish category content of national food security of the country from its understanding on a world-wide basis as the latter doesn't take into account other components included into the system of national food security of certain select countries. It cannot be ruled out that unbalanced policy pursued in a certain select country with the purpose of providing food security can do much harm to other components included into the national food security. Creatively different formulation of “food security” content at developing countries level belongs to American researchers Conway G., Barber E. In their view, food security, defined as continual assured access of the population to the required quantity of food in order to sustain active and healthy life, is groundless for developing countries because of insufficient purchasing power of customers. To solve this problem, they see proper to pursue a

state policy of supporting agro-industrial complexes, poverty reduction and birth control programs [[9], p.60]. However, in this definition, key components, which are given in the FAO definition, are not expressed evidently.

At the level of independent countries, “food security” definition needs more precise, specific and complex approach particularly for those countries which belong to low-income category or which, due to objective and subjective conditions and factors, have to achieve food sufficiency mainly through import or humanitarian aid of international community. Physical and economic access to food and its safety are necessary but insufficient components when defining food security category. Along with the above-mentioned, at the country level food security category should comprise also those sources which are used in order to supply the population with quality products and with the help of which it is attained physical and economic access of the population to food. Food security provision shouldn't undermine other components of the national security of the country. Together with providing the country with food, it should enable maintenance and strengthening of other elements of security entering into the national security. In the given situation it implies maximum import substitution, within the bounds of possibility, by locally manufactured agricultural raw materials and products. It is particularly important for such independent small economy countries which can't produce competitive export products and at the same time they have to purchase food commodities outside their national territories. Under such circumstances, unfavorable import and export balance will take a heavy toll on the pay balance of the country, distort macroeconomic equilibrium and create danger to economic and monetary stability of the country and will increase unemployment rate within the state. So, when it comes to food security in such countries, it is expedient to take into account the mentioned component.

While defining national food security category, it is necessary to include one more component. Certain countries have diverse climatic, natural and economic conditions, particular countries can't produce locally some standard types of food and they have to import it from other countries. At the same time in contemporary rapidly changing era, price increase on foreign goods is frequent because of current downturn and economic uncertainty in the international food markets and this increase causes food shortage in the country of importation. Proceeding from this, in response to the lack of self-sufficiency, food security should exercise import within certain limitations. It is known that from the standpoint of food security provision, import of core group of foodstuffs should not exceed 10–20% [4].

National food security should also take into consideration complete and uninterrupted supply of the population with vital energy calories. A person can replenish his/her energy norm by one or several food items (for example, by bread and bread products), but this doesn't mean that the person is provided with food security for he/she doesn't get energy in that variety (range) which is specified by physical standards. Diverse labor activities (intellectual and physical labour, physically demanding job and so on) should also be taken into account. This means that the employed are to be provided with different energy calories.

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