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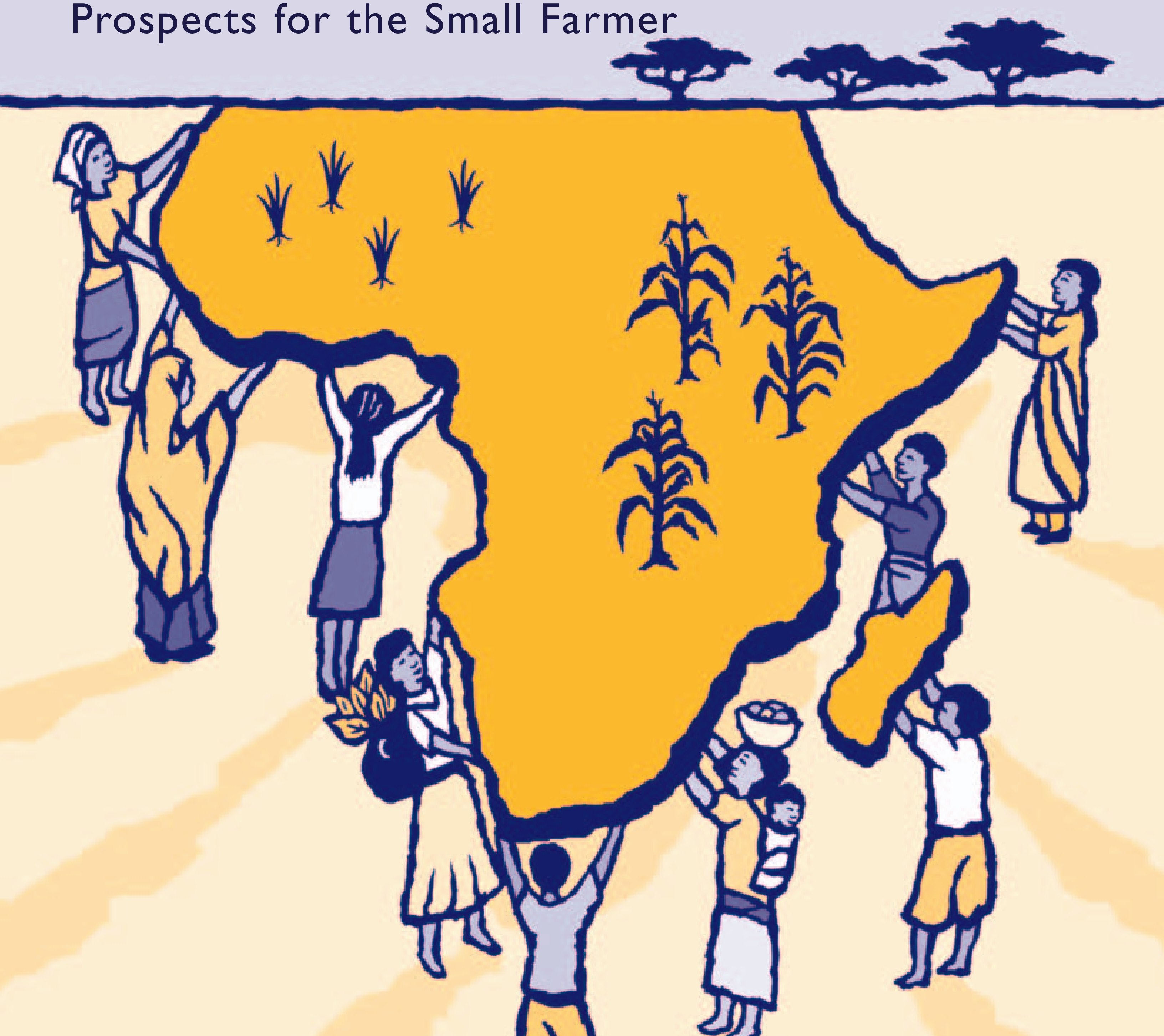
ENDING HUNGER IN AFRICA

Prospects for the Small Farmer



In contrast to widely held uncertainties about Sub-Saharan Africa's ability to meet the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), recent successes in African small-holder farming show that agriculture could play a key role in helping the region reach those goals. African governments and the donor community have recognized this potential and have pledged to help generate agricultural progress. This policy brief considers recent trends in poverty, malnutrition, and growth; outlines some of the challenges to boosting agricultural growth; and highlights cases of agricultural success in specific countries. By learning from case studies of smallholder success and building on the new enthusiasm of African governments, donors and their African partners can ensure that agriculture's role in meeting the MDGs is fully realized.

THE GOAL:

Cut Poverty and Hunger by Half

As of 2004, Sub-Saharan Africa is far from achieving the two targets of the first MDG: reduce by half, between 1990 and 2015, both the proportion of people living on less than US$1 a day and the proportion of people who suffer from hunger. One-half of Africa's people live below the international poverty line, and one-third are undernourished—the world's highest proportions. One-fourth of its children are underweight, and an astonishing one-third are stunted.

To meet the first MDG target, Africa must achieve an annual gross domestic product (GDP) growth rate of 7 percent. Yet only 10 out of 37 African countries achieved a 5 percent or higher average GDP growth rate between 1997 and 2003 (see Table 1). If this trend continues, World Bank projections indicate that 42.3 percent of the population—rather than the target of 23.7 percent—will remain in poverty by 2015.

THE KEY:

Strengthen Small-Scale Farming

Agriculture is the primary source of livelihood for about 65 percent of Africans. It represents 30–40 percent of Africa's GDP and accounts for almost 60 percent of Africa's export income. Reducing high levels of poverty and hunger will require greater agricultural and rural development. Since small-scale farms account for more than 90 percent of Africa's agricultural production and are dominated by the poor, this growth must be centered on the small farmer. According to the Millennium Project's Task Force on Hunger, smallholder-farming systems also contain 75 percent of Africa's underweight children. In spite of this recognized need, progress in improving the lot of Africa's smallholder farmers has been elusive over the last decade. Food insecurity remains a major problem, requiring shipments of some three million metric tons of cereal food aid in 2002 and resulting in food emergencies in 24 African countries by early 2004.

A number of well-known factors have left this legacy of hunger. Among them are low land productivity, inadequate rural infrastructure, vulnerability to natural disasters, and high levels of insecurity. Most of the countries with the lowest GDP growth rates between 1997 and 2003 experienced civil conflict, border wars, or extreme political instability during the same period. In addition, Africa is plagued by a high prevalence of HIV/AIDS, which decreases labor productivity, erodes assets, and blocks the transfer of knowledge from one generation to the next.

NEW OPPORTUNITIES FOR FARMERS

Although the last decade has been difficult, new market opportunities offer a chance to increase agricultural growth. Staple foods, many of which Africa currently imports, offer one of the most promising markets. IFPRI projections show that the continent's demand for staples for both human consumption and livestock feed will double by 2015, adding US$50 billion per year to demand. Many African farmers are well positioned to compete in these staple markets. Increasing traditional agricultural exports—such as coffee, tea, cocoa, cotton, and sugar—is also possible, through trade negotiations and capturing niche markets, such as organics. Although smallholder involvement in producing nontraditional exports—such as fruits, flowers, vegetables, and processed foods—has thus far been relatively limited, these products represent the most profitable market option.

IFPRI simulations reveal that if food staples and exportable goods grow at 1.5 percent and 6 percent per year, respectively, while productivity in the manufacturing and service sectors grows at 4 percent per year, then per capita agricultural income grows at 2.97 percent per year, per capita food consumption by 2 percent per year, and per capita agricultural exports by 5.7 percent per year.

Table 1 Comparison of Annual GDP Growth Rates across Countries

COUNTRIES	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	1997-2003
Africa	3.9	2.4	2.7	3.2	3.7	3.5	3.5	3.3
Angola	7.9	6.8	3.3	3.0	3.2	15.3	4.5	6.3
Benin	5.7	4.6	4.7	5.8	5.0	6.0	5.5	5.3
Botswana	6.7	5.9	5.5	7.5	5.2	3.9	5.4	5.7
Burkina Faso	6.8	8.5	3.7	1.5	5.9	4.4	6.5	5.3
Burundi	0.0	4.7	–0.9	–1.1	2.2	4.5	–0.5	1.3
Cameroon	5.1	5.0	4.4	4.2	5.3	6.5	4.2	5.0
Chad	4.2	7.7	2.3	1.0	9.5	9.9	10.0	6.4
Congo	–5.6	–1.6	–4.3	–6.2	–2.1	3.5	5.0	–1.6
Côte D'Ivoire	5.7	4.8	1.6	–2.3	0.1	–1.6	–3.8	0.6
Ethiopia	4.7	–1.4	6.0	5.4	7.7	1.2	–3.8	2.8
Ghana	4.2	4.7	4.4	3.7	4.2	4.5	4.7	4.3
Kenya	2.1	1.6	1.3	–0.1	1.2	1.0	1.5	1.2
Mali	6.1	8.7	3.0	–3.2	13.3	4.4	3.2	5.1
Mozambique	11.1	12.6	7.5	1.5	13.0	7.7	7.0	8.6
Nigeria	3.2	0.3	1.5	5.4	3.0	1.5	10.6	3.6
Rwanda	13.8	8.9	7.6	6.0	6.7	9.4	0.9	7.6
Senegal	5.0	5.7	5.0	5.6	5.6	1.1	6.3	4.9
Sierra Leone	–17.6	–0.8	–8.1	3.8	5.4	6.3	6.5	–0.6
South Africa	2.6	0.8	2.0	3.5	2.7	3.6	1.9	2.4
Tanzania	3.5	3.7	3.7	5.6	6.0	6.3	5.5	4.9
Uganda	5.1	4.7	7.9	5.4	5.3	6.7	4.9	5.7
Zambia	3.3	–1.9	2.2	3.6	4.9	3.3	4.2	2.8
Zimbabwe	1.4	0.8	–4.1	–6.8	–8.8	–12.8	–13.2	–6.2

SOURCE: IMF World Economic Outlook Database, 2004.
Notes: Highlighted countries are closest to the 7% GDP growth rate deemed necessary to achieve the MDGs. Data for additional countries can be found at http://www.ifpri.org/divs/dsgd/dp/dsgdp09.htm.

REDUCING BARRIERS TO TRADE

By reducing their trade barriers in both the agricultural and nonagricultural sectors, African countries can increase intraregional agricultural trade by more than 50 percent. In turn, intraregional trade can increase food security by facilitating the transfer of foods grown in higher-potential agricultural zones to areas with lower farm productivity. Greater cross-border trade in food staples could also help stabilize food supplies and prices in drought years.

Establishing a uniform system for controlling the quality of agricultural products would go a long way toward sharpening Africa's competitive edge in global markets. Reducing transportation and marketing margins would lower food costs and raise producer incomes. Improvements in road and transportation networks; increased access to market information systems; and better coordination among farmers, traders, and buyers are critical to reducing these margins. Investments in rural infrastructure and market development would stimulate employment and market demand in both rural and urban areas.

PROMOTING PAN-AFRICAN COMMITMENT

By promoting greater pan-African trade, Africa's subregional economic communities (RECs) provide a means for countries to pool resources, take advantage of economies of scale, and become competitive in the global market. This subregional focus is essential to the workings of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), established in 2001. In 2002, NEPAD launched the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Program (CAADP), which concentrates on land and water reclamation and management, infrastructure and markets, food production and hunger reduction, and institutional capacity building. In 2003, African heads of state and government pledged at least 10 percent of their national budgets to implement the CAADP, with the goal of achieving a 6 percent annual growth rate in the agricultural sector over the next 20–25 years.

SUSTAINING INTERNATIONAL SUPPORT

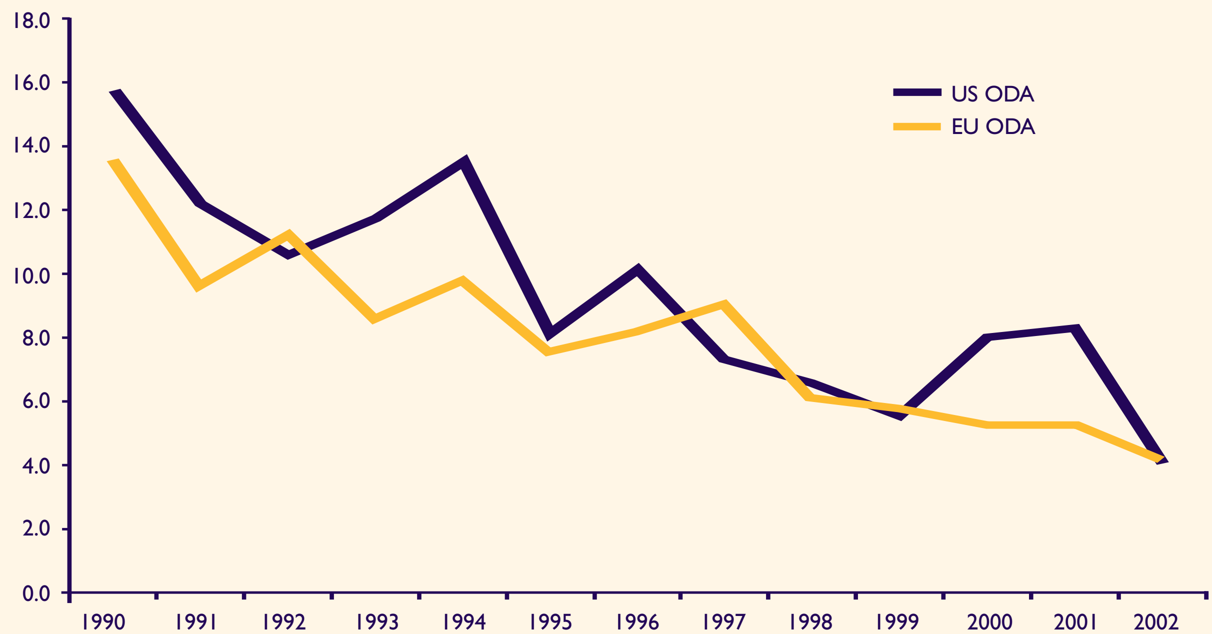
Support from the international community must complement the promising efforts by African governments to revitalize smallholder farming. In April 2004, an IFPRI-organized conference, Assuring Food and Nutrition Security in Africa by 2020: Prioritizing Actions, Strengthening Actors, and Facilitating Partnerships, brought together three African presidents as well as government officials, researchers, business executives, and representatives of multilateral and bilateral development organizations. Approximately 61 percent of conference participants said they believed food security can be attained in Africa by 2020, and almost 92 percent were more committed to the goal at the end of the conference than they were at the beginning.

However, in spite of extensive support by the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), the Department for International Development (DFID), the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), and others, levels of financial support to African agriculture remain disappointing. Although international assistance from members of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) has increased to Africa as a whole, assistance to African agriculture has fallen. U.S. assistance to Africa increased from US$1.5 billion in 2000 to US$2.3 billion by 2002. African agriculture's share decreased from 8 to 4 percent (Figure 1) and was overshadowed by the amount dedicated to food aid.

Africa's agricultural sector also needs greater access to international markets, as provided by the United States' African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) and the European Union's Everything But Arms (EBA) Initiative. Both provide duty- and quota-free access to markets for many products. But the impact of these agreements has been limited for a number of reasons. For example, in 2003, only 8 percent of AGOA imports were agricultural products—the majority were petroleum and textile or apparel imports. And the EBA stipulates that full freedom from tariffs on bananas, rice, and sugar—three of Africa's most important export commodities—will not be effective until the latter half of the decade.

Subsidies given by the United States and the European Union to their domestic agricultural producers often counteract the potential benefits of agreements such as AGOA and EBA. U.S. Farm Bill subsidies alone equal US$15–20 billion per year, more than the value of Africa's total annual agricultural exports. IFPRI model projections reveal that if both the United States and the European Union fully opened their markets and eliminated agricultural subsidies, Africa's total agricultural exports would increase by 20 percent.

Figure 1 Percent of Overseas Development Assitance (ODA) to Africa Allocated to Agriculture



SOURCE: Calculations based on data from the OECD Creditor Reporting System.

TRENDS AND SUCCESSES

The African continent's wide range of natural endowments, historical and cultural experiences, and political and economic structures make it necessary to take a subregional view of agricultural-related developments. This closer assessment can complement efforts, such as NEPAD, to promote agricultural growth through economies of scale and spillovers across countries.

SOUTHERN AFRICA: DISTRESS AND PROMISE

The Southern Africa region possesses a number of unique characteristics, including high urbanization rates, wide income disparities, a historical bias toward mineral exports, and the world's highest rates of HIV/AIDS prevalence.

Bad weather, poor infrastructure, and ineffective economic policies in some countries aggravated the region's low food production and agricultural productivity, culminating in the 2002–2003 famine, in which some 14 million people faced starvation. Recent high rainfall has helped the region recover, but drought persists in Lesotho and Swaziland, and flooding in Angola, Zambia, Botswana, Zimbabwe, and Mozambique has damaged crops.

Despite these trends, growth prospects are promising for the region, particularly for smallholders. For example, many South African supermarket chains are beginning to buy produce from African countries rather than importing it from overseas, and some are also participating in schemes that help small farmers better supply food retailers. But greater effort is needed to reduce transaction costs and improve efficiencies along the supply chain in order for smallholders to be better integrated into the emerging supermarket distribution system.

Such organizations as the Southern African Development Community (SADC) have played an important role in intra-regional trade. In 2000, SADC members signed a free-trade protocol, which should boost trade, especially between South Africa and the less developed SADC members of Malawi, Mozambique, Tanzania, and Zambia. SADC aims to establish a free-trade area by 2008.

SADC is also beginning to grapple with the complex intellectual property rights and safety issues related to biotechnology adoption. South Africa is the only African country to use genetically modified (GM) crops for commercial purposes, and smallholders are benefiting from this technology. In Kwa-Zulu Natal, for example, smallholders recently adopted Bacillus thuringiensis (Bt) cotton as a more effective, lower cost, and more environmentally sound way of controlling pests.

In Zambia and Malawi, disease- and pest-resistant varieties of cassava have increased production by an average annual growth rate of between 6 and 8 percent, respectively. Smallholders have doubled their cash returns, and subsistence farmers have enjoyed increased food security.

Zambia: Confronting Poverty and Promoting Smallholder Cotton. Poverty in Zambia has increased over the past 30 years, with 58 percent of the population living below the national poverty line. IFPRI model projections show that the country will not reduce poverty by half until 2040 if it continues at its current annual per capita GDP growth rate of 1.8 percent. Inflation, erratic exchange rates, high interest rates, dependence on copper exports and foreign aid, and lagging structural reforms partially account for the country's economic stagnation. Approximately 73 percent of the country's 5.6 million small-scale farmers live in poverty. They are hindered by poor infrastructure and irrigation systems, a lack of financing, difficult access to land, drought, and the HIV/AIDS pandemic. IFPRI projects that Zambia must maintain an 8.4 percent annual GDP per capita growth rate if it is to halve poverty by 2015. The ability of agriculture to contribute to this growth will depend on significant improvements in infrastructure and market development.

Thanks to assistance from the private sector, seed cotton production has increased fivefold in Zambia, from 20,000 to 100,000 metric tons between 1995 and 2002, with smallholders producing more than 98 percent of the country's cotton. Private cotton firms provide agricultural credit for smallholders by deducting input costs from farmers' earnings at the time of sale. Smallholder production may receive a further boost as African countries demand locally grown cotton to produce and export garments to the United States under AGOA.

Mozambique: Government Commitment to Success. Mozambique is still recovering from a civil war that ended more than a decade ago and from disastrous floods in 2000. Eighty percent of the population depends on agriculture for their livelihood, and 98 percent of the country's farms are smaller than three hectares. Seventy-one percent of the rural population lives below the national poverty line. Even so, the country's GDP growth rate between 2000 and 2003 averaged 8.1 percent, with agricultural growth reaching 13 and 9 percent in 2001 and 2002, respectively. Agricultural production particularly increased for smallholder crops, such as maize, cashew nuts, and cotton. Although most sugarcane cultivation occurs on large plantations, a production increase of about 172 percent in 2002 created new jobs for the rural poor and demonstrated the potential to stimulate backward linkages. These positive developments are partly the result of the government's continued commitment to macroeconomic reforms. In addition, the government's Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MADER) has fostered better farming techniques, simplified land-use rights, and created microfinance institutions. Road expansions are also on the government's agenda. Although government spending on agriculture as a percentage of total spending has increased only marginally in the past few years, spending on complementary sectors—including education, health, and infrastructure—is quite high.

WEST AFRICA: GROWTH AND NEED

In spite of war and instability, the West African subregion has experienced the continent's highest rates of growth over the past six years, with both GDP and agricultural growth averaging 3 percent. The subregion also has higher per capita agricultural incomes than East and Southern Africa and has at least maintained its 1989–1990 level of agricultural production, whereas the other two subregions have experienced a decrease (see Figure 2).

However, most of the subregion's countries use only one-third of their potentially arable land and irrigate about 1 percent of arable cropland. HIV/AIDS infection averages around 5 percent of the adult population and could cause Côte d'Ivoire and Burkina Faso to lose approximately one-fifth of their workforce by 2020.

The subregion has benefited from the recovery of prices for its primary export commodities, cocoa and cotton. But the US$6 billion in annual subsidies for domestic cotton producers in the United States, the European Union, and China have made it difficult for African smallholder farmers to compete in world markets.

Yet, IFPRI projections show that reducing marketing margins in the intra-African cotton trade could increase the total value of African cotton exports by more than 60 percent, tripling the gains that would occur from liberalizing world cotton markets and eliminating developed countries' cotton subsidies.

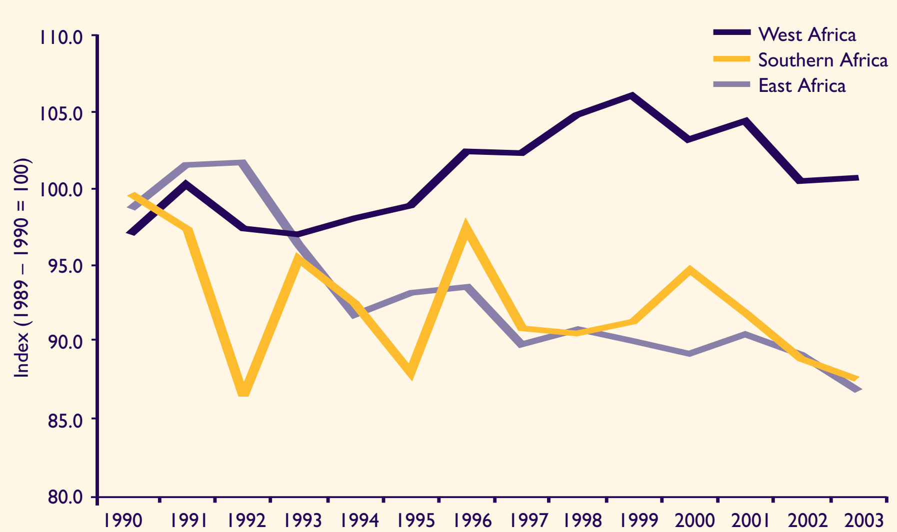
West Africa is also adopting technologies suitable to its geography and climate, most notably the cross-breeding of high-yielding Asian rice varieties with drought- and disease-resistant African varieties. This resulted in the New Rice for Africa (NERICA) cultivars, which have been introduced to 17 West and Central African countries. Research indicates that by 2006, West Africa could save approximately US$88 million annually in rice imports. The contribution of NERICA is so significant that its primary developers, Monty Jones and Yuan Longping, won the 2004 World Food Prize.

Ghana: Intraregional Trade and Diversification. The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) has fostered intraregional trade in West Africa. ECOWAS protocols and agreements have, for example, enabled Ghanaian smallholders to more actively participate in cross-border trade and the production of nontraditional goods. By 2001, at least 75 nontraditional agricultural products were being exported, including seafood, pineapples, yams, and shea nuts. Smallholders have also begun cultivating sunflowers, which require few herbicides, pesticides, and fertilizers and have modest water requirements. Governmental initiatives to provide improved cassava and rice seeds, give credit for fertilizers, and offer mass vaccinations of livestock have greatly benefited small farmers.

The Ghanaian government has already made impressive strides in poverty reduction. In fact, IFPRI projections show that if Ghana continues to achieve a 2 percent annual growth rate in per capita GDP, the poverty ratio could be reduced from 40 to 20 percent by 2020.

Senegal: New Exports Create Jobs. Between 1998 and 2001, Senegal's exports of fruits and vegetables grew by approximately 41 percent in volume and increased by 7 percent per annum in dollar terms. The volume of total horticultural exports is projected to double to 22,450 tons by 2007. These exports include cherry tomatoes, mangoes, melons, papaya, and asparagus, which complement a long-standing trade in green beans. Through the assistance of the autonomous Agricultural Export Promotion Project (AEPP), smallholders have become dominant in the sector. In addition to conducting market studies and supporting producer groups, the AEPP plans to create refrigeration centers and rehabilitate freight facilities. Although further infrastructure improvements and greater market integration are still needed, the horticultural sector has thus far created 10,000 rural jobs, 35 percent of which are filled by women.

Figure 2 Comparison of Per Capita Agricultural Production across Subregions



SOURCE: FAOSTAT

EAST AFRICA: INSECURITY AND HOPE

Conflict has also plagued most of East Africa's countries, stunting their economic growth and worsening food insecurity. East Africa has the lowest per capita agricultural incomes, agricultural production, and food production. Yet nearly 80 percent of East Africa's people depend on agriculture for their livelihood, and agriculture makes up 40 percent of the subregion's GDP.

Traditionally, East Africa has received more cereal food aid than the other two subregions. High food insecurity has coincided with high malnutrition. As a result, the subregion has Africa's highest rate of child stunting (around 44 percent) and is the only subregion expected to experience an increase in the percentage of underweight children by 2005.

However, these generally negative trends hide the disparities between the subregion's countries and do not take into account positive policy changes that have yet to make an impact.

Ethiopia: Working to Overcome Disadvantages. Ethiopia has East Africa's lowest per capita agricultural incomes, and structural food insecurity plagues some three million people every year. Extreme weather conditions, declining coffee prices, and conflict with Eritrea have contributed to Ethiopia's problems. Although governmental reforms such as market liberalization and tariff reductions have been under way since the 1990s, malnutrition and poverty remain major hurdles, with 44 percent of the population living below the poverty line.

Because agriculture represents a livelihood for about 85 percent of Ethiopia's population, growth in this sector is crucial for reducing hunger and poverty. However, IFPRI model projections show that if agriculture continues to grow at its current rate, the number of Ethiopians living in poverty will actually increase by 2015. If the staple crop, livestock, and nontraditional export sectors could achieve additional annual productivity improvements of 1.2 percent, 3.1 percent, and 8.8 percent, respectively, Ethiopia would see a 4.9 percent agricultural GDP growth rate. This could reduce national poverty to 25 percent by 2015. Supplementing these agricultural improvements with a decrease in marketing costs and an increase in service-sector productivity would halve poverty by 2015. Ethiopia's Agricultural Development-Led Industrialization (ADLI) strategy is making strides toward achieving these goals. Smallholders receive assistance through agricultural extension and credit plans, the expansion of primary education and health care, and greater provision of rural roads and water supplies.

Uganda: Success through Government Initiatives and Common Markets. Uganda is East Africa's wealthiest country in terms of GDP per capita and per capita agricultural incomes. The Ugandan government has created an environment of investment and growth by maintaining low inflation and export openness, by prudent fiscal management, and by initiating political and administrative reforms. Real GDP grew by 6.3 percent in 2001–2002, and agricultural growth has remained at between 4 and 5 percent since 1999.

Government initiatives under the Plan for the Modernization of Agriculture (PMA) include distributing tea plantlets to households, supplying cotton seeds to ginners, and stocking lakes with fish. As the central element of the government's strategy to increase rural incomes, the PMA has been a means for increasing the poor's access to productive assets, improving rural infrastructure, and linking national research to farmers. However, government expenditures on agriculture remain only a fraction of what it spends on public administration and security. And rural poverty is still high, at 39 percent. Although the percentage of children under age five who are underweight decreased slightly between 1995 and 2001, the percentage of children whose growth is stunted by malnutrition increased from 36 to 39 during the same period.

Uganda, with Kenya and Tanzania, revived the East African Community (EAC) in 1999 to facilitate greater regional trade and infrastructure investments. All three countries have removed a large percentage of tariff and nontariff barriers on cross-border trade and continue to implement a regional road network and railway system. Through the East African Customs Union (EACU), established in March 2004, the members aim for a common external tariff and hope to reduce internal tariffs to zero by 2008.

All of the countries in East Africa and six in Southern Africa belong to the Common Market for East and Southern Africa (COMESA). In October 2000, COMESA established a free-trade area that eliminates tariff and nontariff barriers on goods from other COMESA members. Member countries also plan to adopt a common external tariff, standardize tax and investment laws, promote the adoption of a single currency, and establish a monetary union.

Kenya: New Markets for Horticultural and Dairy Products. In Kenya, the value of fruit and vegetable exports has grown by more than US$147 million since gaining independence in 1963 and increased from 3 percent of agricultural exports to 17 percent during the same period. Kenyan smallholders produce about 60 percent of horticultural exports and benefit by about US$46 million from the industry, which increases domestic food security and creates markets for the goods and services of other rural households.

Limited government intervention, combined with realistic exchange rates and relative macroeconomic stability, have also attracted private domestic and international investment. An extensive road network in the highland areas allows fast transfer to the airport. Local supermarkets purchase three times the volume of fruits and vegetables that Kenya sells on the international export market.

In addition to horticultural exports, research shows that East Africa, which contains more than 40 percent of Africa's cattle, holds the most promise for increasing dairy production. In Kenya the sector has grown at 2.8 percent annually over the last 20 years, with smallholders producing almost 80 percent of the country's milk, which is their fastest growing income source.

THE FUTURE:

BUILDING ON AFRICAN COMMITMENT

There is a need for both prudence and optimism about the ability of Africa's smallholders to contribute to and benefit from reductions in hunger and poverty.

Africa is far from achieving the MDGs, and less than one-third of the countries in the region are even close to the 7 percent GDP growth rate deemed necessary to halve poverty by 2015.

Moreover, the goals of NEPAD's CAADP to increase agricultural growth by 6 percent and public expenditures on the agricultural sector by 10 percent have so far eluded most African countries.

Inadequate physical infrastructure and poor market development greatly hinder the reduction of poverty within countries and growth within agricultural sectors. As African countries diversify into nontraditional agricultural exports, they require access to storage and refrigeration facilities, as well as close proximity to roads and airports. Addressing transaction costs will help connect smallholders and expanding industries such as supermarkets and the textile sector. In addition, investments in biotechnology can help increase the nutritional content of food crops and lessen the effects of drought, diseases, and pests.

Subregional achievements provide a glimpse of the possibilities for creating synergies across countries and benefiting from economies of scale. Genuine and sustained political commitment to agriculture is paramount. As this policy brief has shown, in countries where governments have developed and implemented an agricultural strategy, smallholders are beginning to gain access to crucial markets.

Commitment among African leaders is forthcoming, and agriculture tops most African countries' agendas. International donors must echo this commitment by achieving greater coherence between their trade and aid policies and by clarifying how their agricultural initiatives fit with those of African governments, NEPAD, and other donors. If we work together, smallholder successes could become the rule rather than the exception—and poverty and hunger the exception rather than the rule.

SELECTED READINGS AND RESOURCES

This brief is based on "Smallholder African Agriculture: Progress and Problems in Confronting Hunger and Poverty," IFPRI Development Strategy and Governance Division Discussion Paper 9, by Danielle Resnick. The paper, written in support of USAID's Initiative to End Hunger in Africa, is available at <http://www.ifpri.org/divs/dsgd/dp/papers/dsgdp09.pdf>. Other suggested readings are listed below.

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