

## **V. POPULATION ASPECTS IN THE REDUCTION OF HUNGER**

*Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations*

### **A. INTRODUCTION**

The objective of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) was to raise the P.15ter

## B. UNDERNOURISHMENT AROUND THE WORLD: CURRENT SITUATION

According to FAO estimates, some 842 million people worldwide were undernourished in 1999-2001 (FAO, 2003a; 2004a). This included 10 million in industrialized countries, 34 million in countries in transition, and 798 million in developing countries. After falling by 37 million during the first half of the 1990s, the number of hungry people in developing countries increased by 18 million in the second half of the decade. Recent available figures for countries in transition showed an overall increase of 9 million between the period of 1993-1995 to 1999-2001.

Regionally, only the Latin America and the Caribbean region has seen a decline in the number of hungry since the mid-1990s. Merely 19 countries, including China, succeeded in reducing the number of undernourished throughout the 1990s by 80 million. In 22 countries, including Bangladesh, Haiti, and Mozambique, the number of undernourished declined during the second half of the decade. In 17 other countries, however, the trend shifted in the opposite direction and the number of undernourished people, which had been falling, began to rise. In another 26 countries the number of undernourished people increased by 60 million during the same period.

The progress of countries and regions towards the attainment of the MDG target on hunger is highly variable (table V.1). Out of a total of 122 developing and in-transition countries for which data exist, more than three fourths are either lagging behind or not on course to attain the goal of reducing the number of hungry people by 50 per cent in relation to the 1990-1992 base period. Twenty-five countries have achieved the objective while only six countries

## C. POPULATION ISSUES IN AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

How do population issues relate to food security and the MDG targets on hunger and poverty? Several population factors were recognized as relevant to sustainable agricultural and rural development and as such highlighted in the Plan of Action approved at the World Food Summit (WFS) in 1996, as well as in the WFS+5 Declaration adopted in June 2002. The following paragraphs present examples of important linkages.

Few of the population issues discussed below have simple, uniform effects on food security across time and space. To fully understand their impact requires careful examination of how they influence each other, and interact with other factors leading to undernutrition and hunger. However, in order to keep the discussion within reasonable bounds, such interactions will not be examined here.

### 1. *Population growth*

The latest United Nations assessment of global population prospects (United Nations, 2003) indicates that a radical slowdown in world demographic growth is likely. However, despite the considerable fall in the growth rate, the annual increments will continue to be large because of population momentum—the tendency for population growth to continue beyond the time that low fertility has been achieved due to the relatively high concentration of people in the childbearing ages. During the period from 2000 to 2015, the population of developing regions is currently expected to grow by another 22 per cent, with marked regional disparities—the added percentage ranging from 9 per cent for Eastern Asia to 26 per cent for South-Central Asia, 34 per cent for Western Asia, and as much as 38 per cent for Sub-Saharan Africa (United Nations, 2003).

Technological improvements in agriculture over the past century have allowed most regions of the world to increase food production well ahead of population growth at a steady falling economic cost,

better conditions for achieving progress in human development, including improvements in nutrition and food security.

## *2. HIV/AIDS and other diseases*

The inability to halt and reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS—a millennium development goal in its own right—is undermining food security in many countries. Some 38 million people are infected worldwide, of whom 36 million are in developing countries, 25 million in Sub-Saharan Africa and 7 million in Asia, of whom 4 million are in India (UNAIDS, 2004). HIV/AIDS prevalence rates of 10 per cent are common in many countries. Indeed, rates greater than 15 per cent are not exceptional, and Botswana, Lesotho, Swaziland and Zimbabwe are experiencing rates of over 30 per cent which are still rising.

The rural sector lies at the core of the AIDS epidemic. In most AIDS-affected countries, subsistence agriculture is the predominant source of livelihoods for the majority of the population (up to 80 per cent in some countries); crops, livestock and other natural resource products are the mainstay of economy and export earnings; and agriculture, forestry and fisheries traditionally provide vital safety nets

agriculture and contribute, with urban-based products and services such as over-land transportation, to agricultural progress and the modernization of rural life. However, insofar as the intensity of rural-to-urban migration is often determined by flight from rural poverty, rather than by actual economic opportunities in the urban sector, the livelihood and food security problems of urban populations are exacerbated: people migrating to urban areas cannot feed themselves by subsistence farming, and if urban employment opportunities are scarce, many of them may lack the income to buy the food they need. Rural to urban migration can also significantly reduce the availability of labour in rural areas, which could result in declines in agricultural production, increased dependency on agricultural imports, and growing food insecurity at the national level. Moreover, urbanization usually boosts industrialization, the environmental effects of which—such as soil and water contamination, acid rain, or climate change—can impact negatively on agricultural production in rural and peri-urban areas.

Migration can also trigger changes in dietary patterns as migrants often adopt new behaviours upon settling in the new environment. For instance, in the industrializing Asian countries, city dwellers tend to consume more transportable and storable grain, such as rice and wheat, and also more vegetables and livestock products, the production of which requires more arable land and grain to be used for animal feed (Leisinger and others, 2002). Urbanization, especially when coupled with rising per capita incomes, may also increase the demand for more high-value foods. This could prompt many domestic producers to reorient production towards more expensive foodstuffs, with negative consequences for the food security of poorer people.

In sum, changes in the spatial distribution of populations can considerably affect both the supply of food and the demand for types of food produced and consumed. Much still needs to be done to take into account migration flows, including their determinants and possible consequences, in the design of development interventions.

#### *4. Population ageing*

The ageing of human populations has emerged as one of the most significant demographic processes of the present time—and of the decades to come. In developing countries, the proportion of the population over 60, now estimated at slightly below 8 per cent, is expected to rise to 10 per cent by 2015 and to 20 per cent by 2050 (United Nations, 2003).

FAO studies (Marcoux, 1994, 2001; Stloukal, 2001, 2004) have demonstrated that ageing often manifests itself earlier, and proceeds faster, in rural areas than in the urban sector, due to the migration of young adults to the cities. Population ageing in rural areas will have major implications for patterns of agricultural production, food security, labour markets and the process of development itself. As a result of ageing, household livelihood strategies—productive activities, saving, investment, etc.—may become less forward-looking and more subsistence-oriented. Older farmers, many of whom are women, are more likely to shift to crops that are less labour-intensive, or to stop farming due to ill-health, retirement, or death. They may be less able to adapt to technological change and less willing to invest in land preservation or to adopt new modes of production, which in turn could result in environmental degradation and decreased agricultural production. Experience shows that many of these older farmers in developing regions will be marginal producers, requiring government subsidies and protection, if available (Leisinger and others, 2002).

However, it would be a mistake to view rural ageing as an all-negative trend. In some situations, it may offer valuable opportunities for positive change, such as altering rural socio-economic structures to new ones that are more supportive of agricultural intensification. The typical view of older persons as a liability or a constraint to development is inaccurate and should be challenged. There are many benefits of ageing that are usually not recognized, such as the wealth of skills and experience that older people bring

to the workplace, to public life and to the family. However, because mechanisms such as pension schemes or social safety nets require a considerable amount of lead-time to become truly effective, the need for developing countries to put appropriate policies in place is urgent.

Demographically speaking, it is the combination of fast population growth, HIV/AIDS-associated

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