Conclusion

Uneven distribution of the world's resources means that the poor, low-resource countries are vulnerable to food insecurity. Per capita food consumption is projected to decline in 47 of the 66 study countries in the next decade, and 39 countries are projected to be unable to meet their minimum nutritional requirements. Sub-Saharan Africa is identified as the most food-insecure region, and the situation is projected to deteriorate further during the next decade. The region's per capita consumption is projected to decline 0.5 percent per year through the next decade. The NIS region is projected to achieve the largest gains in per capita consumption—roughly 1 percent per year. The regional overview, however, masks the food problems faced by individual countries. For example, countries such as Afghanistan in Asia, Haiti in LAC, and Tajikistan in the NIS region are also considered vulnerable to food insecurity, despite their regions' more positive outlook, because their food consumption through 2008 is projected to be less than 80 percent of their nutritional requirement.

The main factors influencing the food security position of the countries are domestic food production, foreign exchange availability, population growth, and distribution of income. Among these factors, domestic food production is the most crucial. Domestic production contributes to more than 90 percent of consumption in the most food-insecure countries. In North Africa, LAC, and the NIS, domestic production contributed 50-60 percent of consumption. Domestic production, in addition to its direct impact on consumption, has a strong link to population growth. Improvements in technology reduce the traditional reliance on human labor and therefore the desirability of large families.

Sub-Saharan Africa, the most food-insecure region, is caught in a web of interlocking problems. Finding solutions amid continuing crises is the challenge facing policymakers. Based on the current trend, agricultural growth lags behind population growth, thereby widening food gaps and putting pressure on purchasing power. Commercial food imports, used to fill food gaps, divert limited foreign exchange availability from domestic investment. The countries remain unsuccessful in adopting new technologies to raise food crop yields and increase productivity, leaving people reliant on large families as the principal input in production. This will lead to little or no growth in per capita food supplies, stagnant or deteriorating caloric intake, and declining nutritional status. In addition, African countries face unfavorable terms of trade because of declining prices for their exports, and civil strife and political instability have continued even into the post-cold war period.

During 1980-97, Sub-Saharan Africa's imports were supported by external assistance—food aid provided additional support to reduce the financial burden of food imports. With the decline in external assistance, a larger share of foreign exchange availability must be allocated to food imports. Any increase in spending on food imports, however, will crowd out spending on essential raw materials and spare parts, raising concern over the region's long-term economic health. Most countries depend on imports of energy and capital to complement domestic production. In the long run, import capacity of the countries will depend mainly on the performance of their export sectors. Annual growth in Sub-Saharan Africa's export earnings was less than 1 percent during 1980-95, and agricultural exports accounted for 20 to 40 percent of the region's total export earnings. Although prices for these commodities are projected to decline in the next decade, an increase in the volume of exports can have a positive effect on the trend.

To improve food security, it is essential to promote policies that accelerate agricultural growth, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa. Foreign exchange availability is limited, which limits imports. Increases in production would translate into a gradual increase in food supplies, a decline in population growth, and an increase in export earnings to support food imports. A significant improvement in agricultural performance, however, requires innovative technologies to increase productivity of both land and labor. Reports indicate that such technologies are available throughout the region, but only experimentally and on a small scale (*2*). Kenya and Zimbabwe adopted high-yielding corn varieties and significantly increased yields in the region during the last two decades. Improved production practices such as mixed cropping, which is currently used extensively, can be used to further increase yields. Therefore, to close food gaps, regions must disseminate these technologies to prevent further food insecurity and perhaps stimulate domestic production.