

Introduction

In 2000, African population was estimated at 794 million. This number, compared to that of 1995, represents an annual growth of 2.4 % during the five-year period. Along with the slightly downward trend in population growth, the economy of the region performed quite well with some signs of improvement. In 1998, Africa recorded a sustained growth rate of its economy of 3.3% as compared to 2.9% in 1997 and 4.0% in 1996. The agricultural sector accounted for 19.4% of total output in 1997 as compared to 22.3% of 1980, and recorded a growth of 1.7% and 3.5% respectively in 1997 and 1998 .

Despite these encouraging figures, there was little progress in improving the average living standard of the population. Some 80% of low-human development countries - with high population growth rate, low income, low literacy and low life expectancy - are in Africa. Forty per cent of the population still live at or below the line of absolute poverty and the gap between rich and poor keeps on widening. The FAO statistics shows that Africa's per capita agricultural and food production indices were 99 and 100 in 2000 (1989-1991=100), much lower than the total production indices of 127 and 128. This fact attests that agricultural growth did not keep pace with population growth. Given disparities among countries, the little change in per capita food production combined with increasing inequalities in income and food distribution leads to the conclusion that there has been at best no change or worse, an increase in the number of food-insecure and malnour-

ished people in most countries in recent years.

There are several factors explaining the persisting food insecurity problem in Africa. Among them are: (a) Continuous rapid population growth; (b) Low agricultural productivity; (c) Environmental degradation and; (d) Weak science and technology infrastructure.

The Food Security and Sustainable Development Division (FSSDD) of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) has launched a series of activities with the underlying assumption that population, environment and agriculture strongly interact to have an impact on food security and sustainable development in Africa. One of the activities is the PEDDA (population-environment-development-agriculture) modelling project. This model shows the synergies of those different factors in relation to the goal of ensuring food security and advocates for a holistic approach to development.

To support the nexus approach and to help African leaders and development planners make informed policy decisions with regard to food security and sustainable development, the Division launched this publication on Africa's indicators of population, agriculture and environment. The intention is to make use of its comparative advantage as a division, tackling in a comprehensive manner, the issues relevant to food security and sustainable development - population, agriculture and environment - and to cover, with this unique opportunity, the widest range possible of relevant indicators in these areas. This publication also provides a quantitative reference for analysing the nexus interactions to all those involved in regional research and operational activities.

¹ In the preceding five years (1990-1995), Africa recorded an average annual growth of its population of 2.5 %.

² Source: UNECA, Economic Report on Africa 1999 - The Challenge of Poverty Reduction and Sustainability, 1999, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia