

FACTS ABOUT...

Africa

The Problem

By virtually every measure, development efforts have lagged in Africa more than in any other region and, at the United Nations Millennium Summit, governments agreed that special efforts were needed to address poverty eradication and sustainable development in Africa.

While there are more poor people living in South Asia, the proportion of people living in poverty in sub-Saharan Africa is the world's highest — almost half of all Africans live on less than one dollar a day.

Africa's problems have not been effectively addressed and, indeed, have grown over the last two decades. During the 1990s, when most areas of the world were experiencing economic growth, African countries — with several exceptions — did not. Bypassed by globalization, Africa's share of international trade is minuscule and declining. Conflicts still rage in many countries, HIV/AIDS has had a devastating impact, desertification is spreading and deforestation continues. At the same time, international assistance to Africa has fallen.

There are recent African initiatives to reverse these trends and chart a new course for development. But the international community must help. Sustainable development recognizes that poverty and environmental degradation in one area of the world soon become problems for the rest. During negotiations leading up to the Johannesburg Summit, African governments have urged that the outcome of the Summit should directly address African concerns.

Key Statistics

- While exports from developing countries grew at a rate of 9.6 per cent a year during the 1990s, African exports grew at a far slower rate, and the region's share of world trade fell from 2.7 per cent in 1990 to 2.1 per cent in 2000.
- Almost half of the population of sub-Saharan Africa lives in poverty, and the numbers of people living in poverty have increased substantially.
- Almost one third of the population of sub-Saharan Africa is undernourished, and that number is increasing.

- While most people worldwide experienced some growth in consumption in recent years, the consumption expenditure of the average African household is 20 per cent less than it was 25 years ago.
- The rate of deforestation in Africa is one of the highest in the world, with the continent losing 5.3 million hectares of forests each year during the 1990s.
- More than 40 per cent of African urban households live in absolute poverty, on less than one dollar a day.
- Official development assistance to most African countries fell by about 25 per cent over the last decade, and for seven countries, ODA declined by more than 50 per cent.
- There are 25 million people living with HIV/AIDS in sub-Saharan Africa, and over 12 million people have died of AIDS in Africa—more than 2 million in a single year. Some 13.2 million African children have been orphaned as a result of the epidemic.
- More than 500 million people in sub-Saharan Africa are dependent on fuelwood for energy. Burning wood and other biomass generates 90 to 98 per cent of household energy in most African countries.
- In sub-Saharan Africa, about 30 per cent of children's potentially healthy lives are lost to death or disability from acute respiratory infections, which, in 60 per cent of all cases, are caused by air pollution, both indoor and outdoor.
- Crop yields in Africa could drop by half if soil degradation continues at the present rate. Almost 65 per cent of agricultural lands have already been affected.

What Needs to Be Done

Spearheaded by the Presidents of South Africa, Nigeria, Algeria, Senegal and Egypt, a new African-led initiative has emerged over the last three years. Known as the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), the initiative



aims to eradicate poverty and place their countries, both individually and collectively, on a path of sustainable growth and development. It also aims to halt the marginalization of Africa in the globalization process, to restore peace, security and stability, and to promote the role of women in all activities. African governments have expressed their hope that the Johannesburg Summit, especially because it is taking place in Africa, can be a major catalyst in building support for NEPAD by attracting resources, financing and technology partnerships, and by spurring human and institutional capacity building.

United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan, in his report on the implementation of Agenda 21, and Dr. Emil Salim, the Chairman of the Preparatory Committee for the Summit, have identified several key areas on which the Summit's decisions about sustainable development in Africa should focus:

- Supporting regional, subregional and national initiatives for development, peace, security and stability.
- Providing greater financial support in the struggle against HIV/AIDS.

- Restructuring international aid and establishing appropriate and effective levels of aid.
- Supporting primary social development objectives such as safe drinking water, literacy and health care.
- Promoting initiatives to achieve access to diversified energy sources, especially in rural areas.
- Promoting affordable access to technology by African companies.
- Bridging the digital divide and reversing the marginalization of Africa.
- Supporting micro-, small and medium-sized enterprises in Africa, with an emphasis on agriculture-related industries.

African ministers, at a regional preparatory meeting for Johannesburg in October 2001, agreed that reaching the objectives of development and poverty eradication depends on good governance, both within each country and at the international level, as well as on transparency in financial, monetary and trading systems. They also stressed that an open and equitable rule-based, predictable and non-discriminatory multilateral trading and financial system was essential.