HIV/AIDS, Food Insecurity, and GDP:  
In the background at the World Food Summit  
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Introduction
The World Food Summit: Five Years Later was held in Rome from 10 through 13 June 2002. As in the World Food Summit (WFS) in 1996, the dominant frameworks five years later pitted a push for trade liberalisation against the right to food; open trade for the expansion of global markets versus pro-poor strategies that strengthen local resources, markets and strategies. Less attention went to crucial poverty issues such as the effect of the HIV/AIDS pandemic on food security and national economies (FAO, 2001; UN, 2001; Gillespie et al, 2001). The emphasis on some subjects over others may be linked to the ‘framework of indifference’ overarching the summit. There were less than a handful of senior level diplomats from developed countries in attendance. The poor turnout led to accusations of disinterest in the fate of malnourished and starving people (Carroll, 2002). Apathy stifles the investment needed for further research and strategies addressing the impact of HIV/AIDS on food insecurity and GDP. HIV/AIDS prevalence in countries dependent on agriculture increases vulnerability and threatens the sustainability of food and income acquisition strategies.

HIV/AIDS, Food Insecurity, and Economies
Among developing countries with a large agricultural sector, HIV/AIDS is clearly a poverty issue. Where there is high prevalence of the disease, there is also a restructuring of labour and human migration patterns and direct constraints on the food and income strategies of rural poor communities and governments.

- The effect of HIV on the total size of regional economies is great. By the beginning of the next decade, South Africa, which represents 40 percent of Sub-Saharan Africa's economic output, faces a real gross domestic product 17 percent lower than it would have been without AIDS.

- More than one-third of the gross national product of the worst affected African countries comes from agriculture. The vulnerability of agricultural productivity is particularly high in subsistence farming systems that depend on human labor. Such systems characteristically have a low level of mechanization and agricultural inputs.

- AIDS has killed around 7 million agricultural workers since 1985 in 25 African countries. It is estimated that the epidemic could claim as much as 25% of the agricultural labour force in badly affected countries by 2020.

- HIV prevalence rates can be unusually high among mobile populations. HIV/AIDS therefore disproportionately affects the agriculture, transportation and mining sectors, which rely on large numbers of migrant workers.
- Rural communities suffer as many HIV-infected urban dwellers tend to return to their rural communities when they fall ill. This places stress on rural social service systems that are already few and ill-equipped.

- The loss of assets and productive workers severely affects household capacities to produce and purchase food.

**Challenges: Towards linking HIV/AIDS and food security policy**

Mitigating the effects of HIV/AIDS on agricultural productivity and food security cannot be achieved without a sense of shared responsibility on the part of governments in both developed and developing countries. The WFS plan of action objectives 7-10 propose a combined global effort towards achieving all of the summit’s goals. However, from the outset the plan of action also acknowledges the greater responsibility of national governments (see action plan objectives 1, 3 and 12). It can be argued that the WFS emphasis on national responsibilities has been a significant endorsement for the more influential countries to retire their efforts in creating global food security. Research has shown that global food security benefits everyone, but it cannot be achieved without the full investment and interest of all countries.

**Implications of a ‘framework of indifference’: Is change possible?**

There has been slow progress towards the achievement of the goals established at the WFS in 1996 (FAO, 2001). The significance of this fact is reflected in that so few of the wealthier countries attended the summit. The message from the United Kingdom’s Department for International Development (DfID) was that the summit missed the point. They said that ‘poverty—rather than a lack of food—was the main problem’ (Carroll, 2002). Others felt the summit would achieve little more than rhetoric. The indifference of the more powerful parties has serious implications. Effective strategies that put human development at the centre must be accompanied by sound supporting policies.

An important outcome of a framework of indifference has been a lack of investment in the key sectors, such as health and agricultural research. Both developed and developing countries must play their part in bringing about improvements to agricultural production in developing countries through investments in research (Staff reporter, 2002; Pinstrup-Anderson, 2002). The comparative advantage in research and investment can be judged by the fact that low-income developing countries, which are also generally the most food insecure, invest less than 0.5 per cent of the value of their farm production in agricultural research. This can be compared to an investment of 2.0 to 5.0 per cent in higher income countries where food insecurity is a much smaller problem. Every dollar that the US has invested in international wheat research has led to US$190 in benefits for US consumers and farmers (Pinstrup-Anderson, 2002). Further research on the impact of major policies (like trade liberalisation), is needed at various levels—household, national, regional and global, and in various regions and places.

A likely reason for the low levels of interest and poor investments are the costs. Preliminary research conducted by IFPRI suggests long-term gains, however investing in key sectors will also come at some cost to governments. As shown in Table 1, investments in irrigation and roads will command a significant percentage of total investments over the long term. Investment budgets are further constrained by the AIDS pandemic. AIDS has a direct impact on rates of economic growth in the most affected developing countries. There is a direct relationship between the extent of HIV prevalence and the severity of negative GDP. When the rate of HIV in a population reaches 5 percent, per capita GDP can be
expected to decline by 0.4 percent a year. And when HIV reaches 15 percent, a country can expect an annual drop in GDP of more than 1 percent. On the positive side, however, the cost to provide basic services such as education and clean water will be relatively low for most regions.

Table 1 The cost of food security, 1997-2020

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sector</th>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Latin America</th>
<th>West Asia/North Africa</th>
<th>Sub-Saharan Africa</th>
<th>South Asia</th>
<th>Southeast Asia</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Irrigation</td>
<td></td>
<td>44,80</td>
<td>17,90</td>
<td>28,10</td>
<td>61,30</td>
<td>18,60</td>
<td>170,70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roads</td>
<td></td>
<td>36,70</td>
<td>7,30</td>
<td>37,90</td>
<td>27,40</td>
<td>3,90</td>
<td>113,20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td></td>
<td>12,10</td>
<td>21,50</td>
<td>15,70</td>
<td>14,50</td>
<td>6,80</td>
<td>70,60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clean Water</td>
<td></td>
<td>9,80</td>
<td>8,50</td>
<td>17,30</td>
<td>27,00</td>
<td>9,40</td>
<td>72,00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Agricultural Research</td>
<td></td>
<td>37,00</td>
<td>25,30</td>
<td>8,00</td>
<td>18,00</td>
<td>14,10</td>
<td>102,40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>140,40</td>
<td>80,50</td>
<td>106,90</td>
<td>148,20</td>
<td>52,60</td>
<td>528,60</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Rosegrant et al. (2001) 2020 Global Food Outlook

Conclusions
HIV/AIDS cripples the agricultural labour force and results in greater food insecurity as well as loss in national revenue. The situation promises to increase the demand on limited financial resources of poor people and poor countries by decreasing human and economic capacities to support demand for the most basic needs and services.

People-centred policies have a high potential to rectify the situation and to produce substantial economic and social benefits. However, leaders must share the commitment and sense of responsibility. There needs to be investment in key food security sectors and in enhancing human and social capacities. Investment costs will be high, and this may be a major disincentive to effective action. However the costs of inactivity in social sectors will be even higher and could be the most important deterrent to achieving the World Food Summit goals.

Some are calling for a policy framework based on the concept of food sovereignty. Food sovereignty was defined by NGOs at the WFS as the right of peoples, communities and countries to define their own agricultural, labour, fishing and land policies that are ecologically, socially economically and culturally appropriate (NGO/CSO Forum, 2002). Food sovereignty is also synonymous with the concept of food as a basic human right. This falls in line with objective 12 of the WFS action plan, which links food security for all to other human rights. Among the elements of food sovereignty framework the most significant for effecting policies, which incorporate the effects of HIV/AIDS on agricultural production, are public investment and interest.
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