

UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON TRADE AND DEVELOPMENT

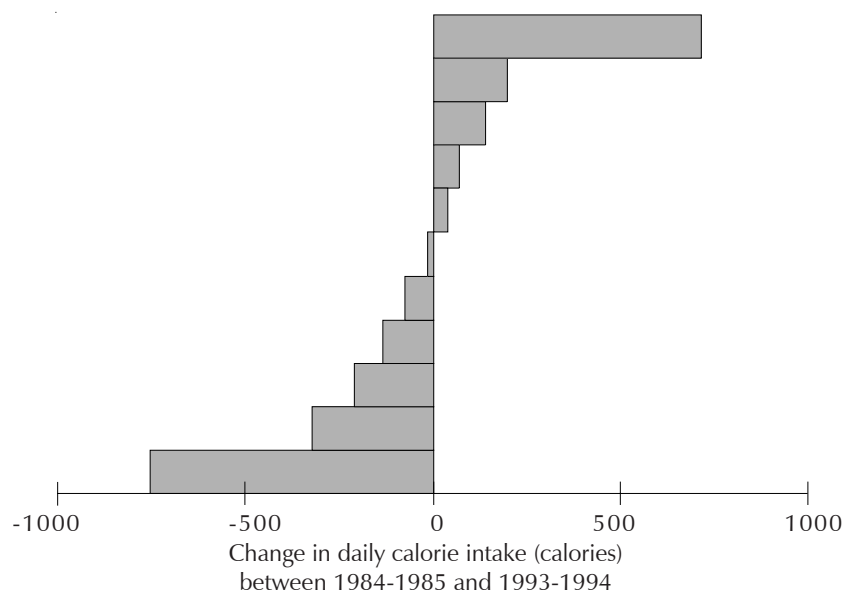
THE LEAST DEVELOPED COUNTRIES 1997 REPORT



UNITED NATIONS



Per Capita Food Availability in Selected LDCs between 1984-1985 and 1993-1994

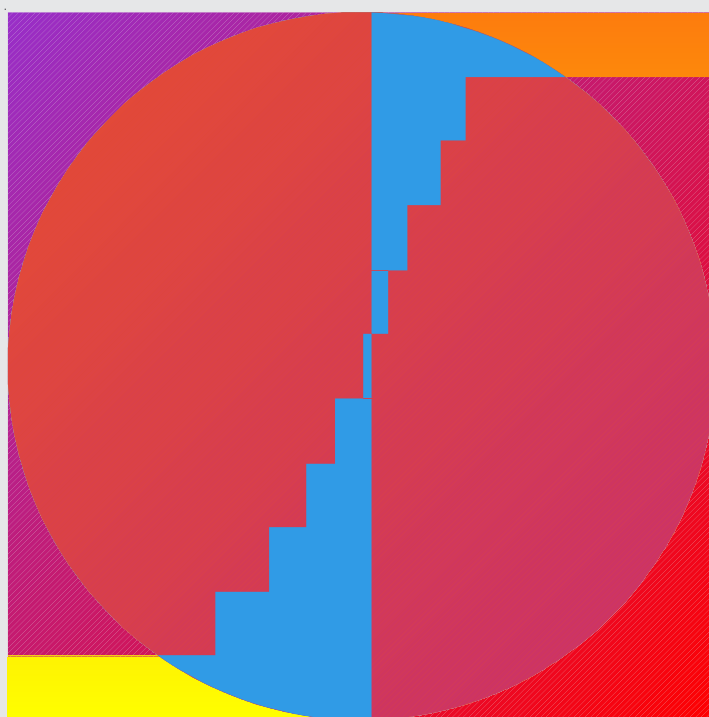


This year's Report examines two separate but related issues – agriculture and economic regress. Economic regress has an impact on agricultural performance, and one way in which this manifests itself is through a change in the amount of food people eat per day. The chart on the cover of this year's Report is based on data on per capita food consumption in selected LDCs. There has been a wide disparity in performance within the LDC group: for instance, while Burkina Faso has recorded an increase of around 700 calories per capita over the ten-year period, in some LDCs experiencing various forms of economic regress, daily calorie intake has fallen, in some cases by as much as 750 calories per person per day. For more information and the source data for the chart, see tables 9 and 12, on pages 66 and 130 of the Report, respectively.

UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON TRADE AND DEVELOPMENT
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THE LEAST DEVELOPED COUNTRIES 1997 REPORT

Prepared by the UNCTAD secretariat



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Foreword

The Least Developed Countries, 1997 Report is the thirteenth such Report, focusing the attention of the international community on the key developmental issues facing the least developed countries (LDCs), the most impoverished group in the world economy.

The Report is divided into three parts. Part One examines economic developments in LDCs during 1996 and discusses prospects for 1997; reviews recent developments in ODA flows and LDCs' external debt; examines the impact of recent economic reforms in LDCs and why the economic performance of some of these countries has improved while that of many others has not; and addresses commodity issues.

Part Two focuses on the agricultural sector in LDCs. It reviews the impact of their agricultural policy reforms, the major constraints on sustainable agricultural development, and the likely effects of changes in the international trading system on LDCs' agriculture.

Part Three considers the circumstances of a number of LDCs whose performance as regards certain economic and social indicators over the past decade has been significantly worse than average. These "economies in regress" often experience a progressive deterioration in the State's capacities to carry out basic functions, such as the maintenance of law and order and the provision of essential services, and present a particular challenge to those concerned with their development.

The Report this year has a number of functions. It is the principal background document for the annual review, by the Trade and Development Board, of progress in the implementation of the Programme of Action for the LDCs for the 1990s. Additionally, it will serve as a background document for the High-Level Meeting on the Integrated Initiatives for Least Developed Countries' Trade Development convened last year by the Ministerial Conference of the World Trade Organization in Singapore. This meeting, to be held in Geneva on 27 and 28 October 1997, will directly address the concerns and circumstances of the least developed countries in the post-Uruguay Round context, and is a welcome sign that the specific issues facing LDCs are finally moving up the international agenda.

The Report is intended for a broader readership of governments, policy makers, researchers and all those involved with LDCs in particular and development policy in general. For that purpose, it has been redesigned and updated to make it more accessible, readable and informative. The statistical annex has been re-examined and overhauled, bearing in mind the particular constraints on the gathering and interpretation of economic and social data from LDCs. Data are ultimately only as reliable as the national statistical offices that provide them, and a variety of factors affect the institutional capacity of LDCs to deliver adequate statistics. Thus, the quality and timeliness of the data will vary considerably between LDCs, and even between different years within the same country. In the light of this, the number of tables has been reduced so as to provide a more concise, accurate and realistic description of the current state of LDCs.

UNCTAD's commitment to LDCs is part of an ongoing process. It has extended its operations to the Internet (<http://www.unicc.org/unctad>), making freely available a range of current information on LDCs, and providing a further gateway for feedback and comments. In partnership with governments, multilateral and bilateral organizations and agencies, NGOs and academics, UNCTAD hopes to be able to increase understanding of the issues and challenges facing LDCs at this crucial time. It is hoped that this Report will go some way to furthering that process.

The UNCTAD secretariat gratefully acknowledges the participation of the governments of the member States of UNCTAD, the organizations of the United Nations system, and other national and international bodies that have made valuable contributions to this Report.

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