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Asia Leads World in Reducing Hunger

At the World Food Summit in November 1996, 186 countries pledged to reduce by half the number of undernourished people by 2015. Nearly 10 years later, the number of hungry people (those consuming below the nutritional target of 2,100 calories per day recommended by the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization) has declined by about 7 percent, on average. Some countries, however, have succeeded in reducing hunger much more, an outcome that appeared unlikely a decade ago. Asia has led the world in reducing hunger (down about 30 percent). Examples of success include Bangladesh and Vietnam, both of which already have met the World Food Summit goal.

Per capita food consumption in Bangladesh has increased roughly 2 percent per year, with the number of hungry people falling by 70 percent between 1992-94 and 2002-04. Grain output has grown by more than 3 percent per year, and a rapidly growing export sector provides foreign exchange to facilitate strong growth in food imports. Textiles account for more than half of the country's export earnings, and quotas protected Bangladeshi textiles from competition with China and India. Most of the gains in domestic agriculture are a result of increased productivity rather than area expansion. Government policy reforms have encouraged private-sector firms to invest in the supply and trade of inputs, such as irrigation equipment, seeds, and fertilizer. Irrigated area, for example, increased by nearly 50 percent over the past decade.

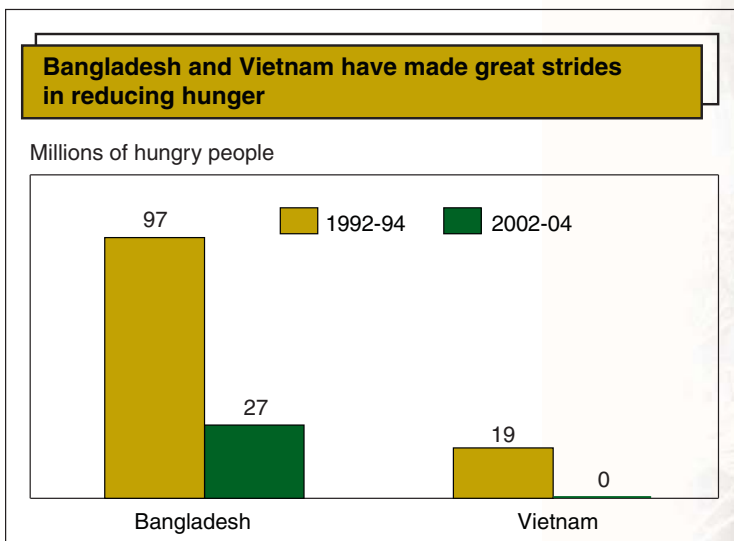
In Vietnam, the number of hungry people fell from an average of nearly 19 million in 1992-94 to close to zero in 2002-04, as per

capita consumption grew by 2.5 percent per year. Grain production has expanded more than 4 percent per year since 1990, while population growth has slowed to about 1.5 percent per year. The growth in the agricultural sector occurred at a time when the economy was moving from a centrally planned system to one that was more market oriented. Previously a net food importer, Vietnam has become a major exporter of aquacultural products and other commodities, including rice and cashews. This growth, coupled with gains in exports of oil and textiles, has provided foreign exchange sufficient to enable strong growth in imports, further expanding food supplies. W

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This finding is drawn from . . .

Food Security Assessment 2005, by Stacey Rosen, Birgit Meade, and Shahla Shapouri, GFA-17, USDA, Economic Research Service, May 2006, available at: www.ers.usda.gov/publications/gfa17/



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