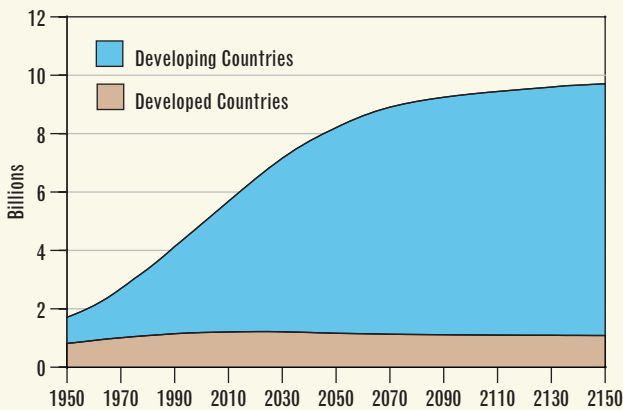


Box 1.12 The Human Population

Population growth stresses ecosystems because it contributes to increases in both consumption and conversion. Each year, the human population grows by approximately 80 million. Although global fertility rates decreased since the 1950s from 5.0 to 2.7 births per woman (UN Population Division 1998b:514–515), the population will continue to grow. Past high fertility rates created today's pool of more than 1.5 billion people at the prime reproductive age—between 15 and 29 years old; another 1.9 billion are younger than 15 (UN Population Division 1998a). An adjunct to population growth is the significant decrease in mortality. Since the 1950s the global mortality rate has dropped from about 20 to fewer than 10 deaths per year per 1,000 people (UNFPA 1999). In contrast, the seven African countries hardest hit by the AIDS epidemic have actually experienced a decrease in life expectancy because of the high number of deaths caused by the disease (UN Population Division 1998a).

- Growth is fastest in less developed nations, among populations most dependent on ecosystems for a subsistence living. Demographers expect 97 percent of all population growth in the next 5 decades to occur in developing countries.

World Population Growth

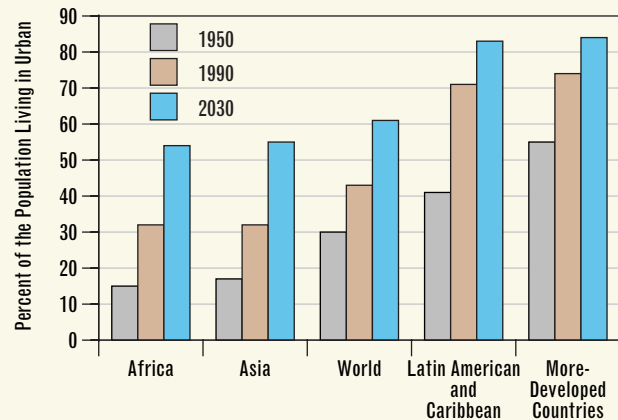


Source: UN Population Division (1998a).

- In both more and less developed nations, cities are drawing people into ever greater concentrations. Urban regions tend to offer more opportunities for economic development as well as better education and health resources. Although urban areas occupy only about 4 percent of the Earth's land area, they are home to nearly half the world's population (UNEP 1999:47; Wood et al. [PAGE] 2000). Currently cities are expansive consumers of ecosystem goods and services and prolific generators of ecosystem-damaging wastes—essen-

tially concentrated centers of ecosystem pressures. By 2030, more than 60 percent of all people are likely to be living in urban areas. In industrial countries and Latin America, the share is expected to exceed 80 percent (UN Population Division 1998a).

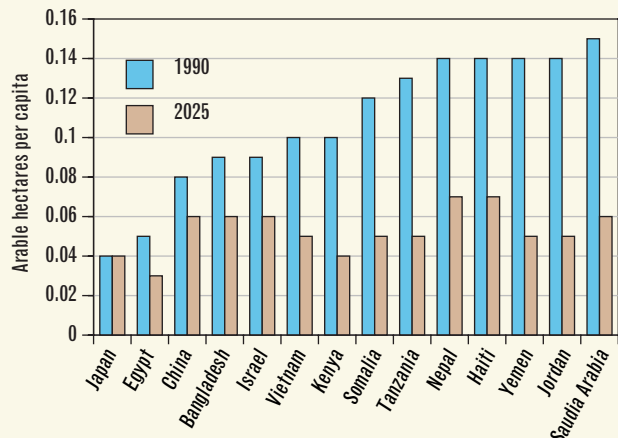
Trends in Urbanization



Source: UN Population Division 1998a.

- As the population grows in the next quarter century, pressures will increase, especially in countries where arable land is in short supply. In 14 countries, arable land per capita is expected to be less than 0.07 ha—equivalent to an area about 0.25 km²—to sustain each human life (WHO 1997:59). Richer countries may supplement their food resources with imports, but poorer countries will have a more difficult time following such a strategy to feed their hungry populations.

Available Arable Land per Capita in 2025 for Selected Countries



Source: WHO 1997:59.