This chapter seeks to outline some of the major elements which govern the performance of the region's agricultural sector and to discuss the factors and issues which must be addressed in formulating strategies for a viable and sustainable agricultural sector in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA). As argued in sections two and three of the chapter, sustainability is an old concern, but the search for clarity in defining its operational content continues to present a challenge. Nowhere is this challenge greater than in SSA, the nature of which is described in the fourth section. The fifth section identifies the policy, technological and institutional issues that must be addressed in shifting agriculture onto a sustainable path in SSA, while section six provides some initial ideas on leverage points for this. Before concluding on an optimistic note in section eight, section seven poses questions for further thought.

SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE: OLD CONCERNS, NEW PROBLEMS

Even before man began to practice sedentary agriculture, the need for sustainable harvesting systems to meet human food requirements was constantly addressed. Through the ages, humans shifted from hunting and gathering to sedentary forms of agricultural production systems which also have continued to be shaped by the need to maintain the productivity of the resource base. The traditional practice of shifting cultivation exemplifies a strategy adopted to pursue sustainable agriculture. Such practices were adopted to maintain the fertility of the resource base. As land became a limiting factor, these systems started to break down under population pressure, and