Agricultural commercialization is considered central to economic growth. In the study entitled “Commercialization of Agriculture under Population Pressure; Effects of Production, Consumption, and Nutrition in Rwanda,” anthropologist Joachim von Braun looks into the effects of commercialization in Rwanda, a sub-Saharan African nation. Studying production, income, employment, consumption, and nutrition in Rwanda’s northwestern area von Braun conducted his research in 1986 as part of a larger study by the International Food Policy Research Institute. (von Braun 1994: 11)

The key question von Braun addresses in his book is how to combat poverty in Rwanda at a time of extreme population growth. Believing commercialization to be the answer he declares as his main argument that while the benefits from commercialization and specialization provide a solution, they are not viable in this area. Researching the issue, von Braun conducted multiple surveys in which he gained insight on the resistance to the commercialization of tea production by subsistence farmers. In his study he notes that there is competition for tea production from staple crops. Of the two-hundred farms he researched, the production of maize and sorghum accounted for almost sixty percent of total farm production with the rest allocated to sweet potatoes and peas. (von Braun 1994:43) Being Given that the majority of Rwandans rely on their farms as their main source of food, many believe it to be more efficient to produce the goods they consume rather than goods such as tea which would increase income. (von Braun 1994:50) And Lastly, seasonal rainfall poses another limitation lasting more than half the year thus causing farm production to be reduced to an average of one-hundred and ninety eight days. (von Braun: 43)

Taking into account the low level of income von Braun makes as his second point that subsistence farming is directly linked to malnutrition (sentence is awkward--restructure). Due to the limited technology on farms in which most cases the hoe and machete are the only tools, agricultural production is less than what it could be thereby causing a decrease in the level of income another awkward sentence--simplify your sentence structure. In correlation with this the low level of income is resulting in are poor health conditions which he believes is a key contributing factor to malnutrition. However von Braun fails to completely clarify this correlation for in gathering information on the prevalence of malnutrition in children ages six to seventy-two months, both farms with little subsistence production and those maximized in it showed households in which children fell below the standard height and weight simplify--this sentence was very hard to follow. For instance households oriented more towards commercialization had the highest percentage of children that were below the standard height whereas households specialized in food consumption had the highest percentage of children below the standard weight. (von Braun 1994:88) Still von Bruan infers that only through commercialization will the labor market expand, increase income, and thus increase caloric consumption.

Taking into context the author’s argument it can be reasoned that a change in the economy is essential to improve food security in Rwanda. (von Braun 1994:109) According to von Braun if the people of Rwanda follow this reasoning commercialization and specialization will provide a long-term solution to the poverty issue. However technological change will not bring about all the benefits for the rise in population must also be combated. Still I agree with von Braun’s argument that conditions will not change until the nation’s rural sectors are improved.

It's interesting to see a market-oriented solution (e.g., the production of cash crops over subsistence foods) suggested based on research in the 1980’s when those sorts of solutions were in vogue (market-led reforms attract much more criticism these days e.g., through concepts of food sovereignty. Your group will have a chance to address these sorts of long term questions and I'll be interested to see what you conclude.