

## **Summary of DESA/OHRLLS briefing on Support to the Group of Least Developed Countries in the SDG Process**

A briefing was co-organized by DESA/DSD and OHRLLS on Tuesday 26 February at United Nations Headquarters in New York with the intention of providing information and support to the Group of Least Developed Countries (LDCs) with the aim of ensuring that their priorities would be considered by the Open Working Group (OWG) and ultimately reflected in the Sustainable Development Goals and the post-2015 framework.

**The Chair of the LDC Group, H.E. Jean-Francis Zinsou (Benin)** opened the briefing, noting that many LDCs face serious resource constraints that prevent their adequate representation and participation in UN intergovernmental processes and expressing the group's appreciation for the efforts of the UN Secretariat to address these limitations and support the LDC group. He further noted that while the 49 countries that form the LDC Group represent 25 percent of UN member States, they are underrepresented in the OWG at only 11 percent. A small LDC working group has been established to support the views of the LDCs in the OWG and to incorporate their concerns in the proposed goals, targets and indicators. He recalled that at Rio+20 member States agreed to "effectively implement the Istanbul Programme of Action (IPoA) and to fully integrate its priority areas into the present framework for action, the broader implementation of which will contribute to the overarching goal of the IPoA of enabling half the least developed countries to meet the criteria for graduation by 2020".<sup>1</sup> The outcome document also states that the international community commits to assist the LDCs with the implementation of the IPoA as well as with their efforts to implement sustainable development.<sup>2</sup> The main challenge will be to materialize pledges and commitments into concrete and quantifiable goals, targets and indicators. He highlighted the elements of finance, trade and technology from the Rio+20 outcome as very important for LDCs. He asked the Secretariat to ensure that the LDC group is regularly updated on relevant ongoing processes through regular interactions; promote the inclusion of LDCs in all forms of discussions and negotiations; ensure that priorities for LDCs are highlighted in all documents; and provide substantive inputs to LDCs in the context of the SDGs to enable their meaningful participation.

**Heidi Schroderus-Fox, Director of the Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Development States (OHRLLS)** noted the Office's support to the LDCs through advocacy and substantive inputs, including working with a broad range of stakeholders to ensure that LDCs' views are appropriately taken into account in the discussions around the SDGs. In this connection, the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) has identified a focal point to support the LDCs in forthcoming discussions. She agreed that, given their resource constraints, LDCs need specific support from the Secretariat so their voices are registered in the intergovernmental process. There is no dichotomy between development and environmental sustainability; indeed sustainable development must have poverty eradication at its center. While greener economies can provide opportunities for LDCs to leapfrog to new industries and economic opportunities, support measures must also be put in place to facilitate this process.

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<sup>1</sup> *The Future We Want*, (A/RES/66/288), paragraph 181

<sup>2</sup> A/RES/66/288, paragraph 34.

**Nikhil Seth, Director of the Division for Sustainable Development (DSD), DESA,** highlighted Rio+20 as an important milestone in development thinking, and raised questions regarding how to keep the priorities of the LDCs at the center of the post-2015 development agenda, including the formulation of the SDGs. He noted responses from 63 Member States, including six LDCs, in gathering inputs for the Secretary-General's Initial Input to the Open Working Group (OWG) on SDGs (A/67/634), and reiterated the LDCs' emphasis on key issues, including poverty eradication, agriculture and food security, employment, debt, health, security, land degradation and resilience. LDCs also highlighted the role of enablers such as governance, human rights, equality and solidarity, economic diversification, community and social cohesion. The legislative framework provided by the IPoA and the Rio+20 outcome places poverty eradication at the core of the narrative, and emphasizes the balance among the three dimensions of sustainable development, with a focus on reducing inequality and strengthening social cohesion while respecting planetary boundaries. Moreover, it is important to look at the root causes of poverty and to go beyond palliative measures. It is also essential that the methods of work of the Open Working Group be designed in a way that allows LDCs to incorporate their concerns in the programme of work. Ideally, the OWG working methods would allow open and transparent discussion that would include all stakeholders.

The importance of trade integration cannot be overemphasized. Success in trade is the common thread in success stories in recent decades. Trade, employment and means of implementation cannot be ignored in a discussion about a strategy towards development. Noting that the Technical Support Team will provide substantive inputs to the OWG, Mr. Seth noted requests from the LDCs for necessary technical information and pledged the Secretariat's support. In addition, parallel processes on finance and technology will be addressing the need for capacity building and resource flows; the concerns of LDCs should be at the center of these discussions.

**Surendra Shrestha, Focal Point for SDGs (UNEP),** discussed how to define global goals within national plans. Translation of international conferences and declarations into means of implementation at the national level has been lacking, and global frameworks have not inspired public action. It is essential that agencies engaging in trade, technology transfer and capacity building join with the UN system to support and enhance existing national plans. Development of new frameworks every few years poses challenges to their institutionalization at the national level; while national plans usually have a time span of three to five years, which frequently corresponds to the political cycle, multilateral agencies set strategies for 15 or 20 years. The suggestion in the context of the SDG discussion would be to have goals and targets that fit better into the national political process. A number of sub-goals could be set to match with short-term national plans. It is also essential to mainstream the SDGs into national planning processes. Many key issues such as poverty eradication and climate change are being implemented in the form of supplementary projects by bilateral and multilateral agencies rather than being integrated into national plans. It is also important to establish the link between poverty and affluence. We live on a planet with finite resources and high inequality. For instance, water is primarily an issue of access for LDCs, of efficiency for emerging economies, and of reduction of consumption and recycling for developed economies. Goals should advocate for meeting the basic needs of all people by 2030, and comprehend the opportunities inherent in sustainable development.

**David O'Connor, Chief, Policy and Analysis Branch, DSD/DESA**, stated that poverty eradication would not be sustainable in the medium and long term if environmental degradation continues, especially with regard to climate change. SDGs should apply to all countries, including those that are most responsible for environmental degradation. If we are going to tackle environmental drivers, the focus must expand beyond the poor to examine unsustainable consumption and production patterns. The MDGs were global but not universal, because the majority of them were not applicable to developed countries. The SDGs should be both global and universal, but at the same time differentiate according to national priorities, circumstances and capabilities.

Some goals will need to focus on poverty eradication and achieving a social minimum for all people. Countries, however, aspire to go beyond poverty eradication. They aspire to raise living standards by providing not just basic education, but also secondary and higher education, not just enough food to prevent starvation but adequate provision of nutritious food. The main issue will be how the post-2015 and SDG discussions will articulate the right to development in a way that respects ecological limits. This will imply changes in the patterns of production and consumption in the developed world and among wealthy consumers everywhere.

Paragraph 27 of the IPoA contains important elements in relation to inclusive development in LDCs. Strengthened domestic capacity, infrastructural development and technology are important components, but they have to be articulated in a way that can stimulate the economy of LDCs. The pillars of means of implementation are institutions, governance, capacity building, finance, technology facilitation—which includes technology access and strengthening technological capabilities—and trade, which includes market access and facilitation. LDC expertise will be very valuable to understand constraints at the national level.

The UN General Assembly will hold four workshops on technology facilitation to assess gaps and needs of developing countries. One of them will have, inter alia, a discussion on the establishment of a technology bank for LDCs as articulated in the IPoA, and DESA is coordinating with OHRLLS in this regard.

**Tonya Vaturi, Sustainable Development Officer, DSD/DESA**, as the newly designated focal point for LDCs within DSD/DESA, emphasized the need to convene briefings between the Secretariat and the LDC group on a regular basis, agreeing that it is essential for the Secretariat to work together with the LDCs to produce meaningful substantive work and understand their priorities. In this regard she highlighted the Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform (<http://www.sustainabledevelopment.un.org>) as a useful communication and information resource for the group.

During the **interactive discussion**, several member States expressed their concerns about the challenges to mainstreaming their views in the discussions around the SDGs and the post-2015 development agenda, noting that the IPoA already captures the main areas of concern for LDCs; the difficulty lies in ensuring that these perspectives are adequately reflected. It is essential that key opportunities be seized for LDCs to voice their concerns in the context of the work of the OWG on SDGs—at the beginning of the process, where the methods of work, agenda and

programme will be decided; and later when the OWG's report will be submitted to the 68<sup>th</sup> UN General Assembly.

The SDG process must be open and transparent, and the methods of work should allow for the articulation of LDCs' views as an integral part of the final report. It is important to note that the report of the OWG is ultimately an input to member States, who then will define an agreement that will culminate in 2015. LDCs should be prioritized in each of the areas defined in the process to articulate the SDGs. Moreover, the shortcomings of MDG8 should be addressed in discussions on means of implementation.

Sustainability will most likely be a core issue in the deliberations of the SDGs. However, poverty eradication, universality and common but differentiated responsibilities also are inter-linked with sustainability and need to be further discussed.

Health, education and food security are essential. Discussions about universality should take into account that many member States are unable to meet basic needs of their population. Participants underlined the importance of policy coherence, and that development assistance should be aligned with national priorities. It is essential to make available the perspectives of LDCs to a diverse range of stakeholders, including NGOs, at all levels. The LDCs will also need to make efforts to engage planning agencies and outreach to other stakeholders at the national level.

Means of implementation must include strengthening of institutions, policies and governance; capacity building; resource mobilization for ODA and other sources; access especially to green technology; strengthening trade to complement ODA; and access to markets. LDCs will advocate a strong role for the private sector and emerging economies in the post-2015 development agenda process. LDCs noted the lack of MOI in the MDGs framework. The Secretariat suggested LDCs make efforts to be adequately represented within the Working Group on a sustainable development financing strategy.

The General Assembly will organize technology workshops in late April and May 2013. The workshops will address the gaps and needs of developing countries throughout the technology cycle; research collaboration; equitable access to technology; and encouraging innovation in all countries.

The LDCs have decided to constitute a working group on SDGs. The group plans to have several rounds of discussions to understand better how LDCs can best direct their inputs into the OWG. OHRLLS and DESA will provide necessary support to the LDC working group, and appreciation for the work of DESA and OHRLLS in this regard was expressed. The LDC Group will prepare a paper articulating its concerns and positive contributions for the High-level Panel (HLP) on post-2015 development agenda and for the SDG process.