

A new Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries



QUICK FACTS

- In sub-Saharan Africa, from 2000 to 2018, the under-5 mortality rate dropped by half and the proportion of children under 5 who were stunted declined from 41% to 32%.
- Poor basic facilities and infrastructure (lack of access to computers and sanitation, lack of learning materials etc.), continue to affect the enjoyment of the right to education.
- Girls' access to education increased only marginally at the primary and secondary level.
- Life expectancy at birth in LDCs is 7.4 years behind the global average.
- Domestic resource mobilization ratio increased slowly, from 13.5% in 2011 to 15.5% in 2017, mostly driven by value-added taxes. This kind of taxes negatively impacts the poorest people as it makes food and other essential goods more expensive.



Foreign direct investment in LDCs is often concentrated in the extractive industries. This contributes to non-inclusive growth and provides few development opportunities to local populations.

The realization of the right to development in the Least Developed Countries will be key to overcome structural weaknesses and the shocks caused by the COVID-19 pandemic

For the millions of girls, boys, women and men living in Least Developed Countries (LDC), equitable development is one of the most urgent human rights imperatives. This goes well beyond economic growth. In the [Declaration on the Right to Development](#), development is described as “a comprehensive economic, social, cultural and political process, which aims at the constant improvement of the well-being of the entire population and of all individuals on the basis of their active, free and meaningful participation in development and in the fair distribution of benefits resulting therefrom”.

Countries are classified as LDCs based on three criteria: (a) their gross national income per capita; (b) their position on the human assets index; and (c) their position on the economic and environmental vulnerability index. These criteria do not, however, capture all dimensions of the right to development. For instance gross national income or domestic product per capita alone cannot fully reflect the overall well-being of a country's population and may hide pervasive domestic inequalities, poor health outcomes for some and chronic poverty. A country can appear to be improving on one dimension when it is decidedly not on many others, usually the most meaningful to most people.

Since the LDC category was created in 1971, very few countries have graduated from the UN official list. Economic growth in terms of gross domestic product in LDCs stood at an average of 4.7% for the 2011–2020 period, lower than the 6.6% average recorded during the previous decade. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, LDCs will suffer disproportionate consequences on their ability to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. These countries were affected by commodity price shocks and loss of exports, investment and remittances, along with a rapid plummet in tourism, with long-term ripple effects.

For these reasons, there is an urgent need to foster a more effective and more inclusive approach in the new Programme of Action for LDCs that will be adopted at the Fifth UN Conference on the LDCs. Human rights and the right to development in particular should be at the heart of this strengthened global partnership for development, as they empower everyone to realize their potential, irrespective of personal differences, geographic demarcations and economic classifications.

Recommendations

The new Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries (LDCs) should be multidimensional and ambitious in translating shared responsibilities and global solidarity to promote the sustainable development of these countries through new, creative and deliberate ways for the common good and the realization of all human rights, including the right to development. It should be strengthened by renewed multilateralism and global partnership.

Adequate international support should include consideration of commitments related to official development assistance, transfer of technology, international trade, foreign direct investment, debt relief, South-South cooperation, intellectual property rights and the negative impact of sanctions, including unilateral coercive measures, on the enjoyment of human rights.

The new Programme of Action should build on the lessons from the previous Programme of Action for the LDCs. It should also draw on the Secretary-General's "[The Highest Aspiration: A Call to Action for Human Rights](#)", and his policy briefs responding to the COVID-19 pandemic. The [reports of the Secretary-General and the High Commissioner on the right to development](#) also provides relevant recommendations that can inform the new Programme of Action for the LDCs.

The accountability and monitoring framework should use rights-based indicators, drawing upon key indicators for monitoring the human rights implications of COVID-19.

The new Programme of Action should promote expanding productive capacity for inclusive, equitable and sustainable development. It should address international and national resource mobilization challenges for transformative change for the least developed countries relating to access to new and traditional technologies, sustainable debt, urbanization, opportunities for young people, disaster risk reduction and smooth transition from least developed country status.

An inclusive, participatory process open to all stakeholders could favour an outcome that meets the challenges faced by the LDCs and recently graduated countries. To this end, the [Fifth UN Conference on the Least Developed Countries](#) preparatory committee should ensure broad, active, free and meaningful participation. The voices and priorities of the least developed countries and their peoples should be especially reflected in the Conference and its outcomes.

OHCHR and other UN entities should systematically take into consideration the challenges faced by LDCs in their work and should continue to support them in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, as well as the goals and targets of the new Programme of Action, based on the understanding that all human rights, including the right to development, are universal, indivisible, interdependent and interrelated.

A global stimulus package for the least developed countries to address the burgeoning challenges brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic should be considered.

LDCs should systematically integrate the right to development and other human rights into their national development plans, programmes and policies related to the [2030 Agenda](#), the [Addis Ababa Action Agenda](#), the [Paris Agreement](#), the [Sendai Framework](#), the [New Urban Agenda](#) and the [post-2020 global biodiversity framework](#).



Only 6 donor countries met the target of dedicating 0.15% or more of their gross national income as official development assistance to the Least Developed Countries in 2018, compared with 10 donor countries in 2011. Official development assistance allocations should be in line with country priorities and plans if the effectiveness of such assistance to realize the right to development is to be improved.



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