

Championing the cause of the vulnerables

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Within six years of the formation of the developing countries caucus of the Group of 77, the United Nations recognized in 1971 the special vulnerability of the 25 weakest among them, categorizing them as the Least Developed Countries (LDCs). In 2004 that number stands doubled to 50, thirtyfour of which are in Africa.

In true spirit of solidarity for the most vulnerable amongst them, the G-77 and China had always upheld their cause as part of the bigger agenda for just and equitable international development cooperation. It is the G-77 that provided the umbrella support of the Group to the LDCs in their struggle to get a special deal from the international community at the three UN Conferences for the LDCs. The first-ever South (G-77) Summit in 2003 called for urgent measures to address the needs of the 700 million impoverished people of the LDCs, emphasizing that otherwise globalization would provide "no lasting solutions to the essential problems of the developing countries".

In January 2003 while assuming the Chairmanship of the G-77, Foreign Minister

of Morocco underscored, "We all have to show solidarity with the LDCs and make the implementation of the Programme of Action in favour of these countries among our priorities." As a special gesture, Morocco cancelled the debt of all LDCs in Africa and allowed free access of their exports to Moroccan market. In January this year, assuming the G-77 leadership, Minister of State of Foreign Affairs of Qatar called upon the developing countries and their Least Developed components "...to stand together and strengthen their unity in the face of the tremendous challenges ..." On their part, the LDCs have also been part of the active core of the "mother group" at every multilateral forum in mutual solidarity.

The continued marginalization of the LDCs in the global development process could be arrested in a substantive way if the bigger family of developing countries accord special attention to the opportunities and potentials for South-South cooperation that benefit their fellow vulnerable members by providing technical assistance, cancelling debt,

bringing foreign investment and giving free access to their markets. The Brussels Programme for LDCs also affirmed the role that South-South cooperation could play to draw on the expertise and resources existing in the rest of the developing world.

In recent years, South-South support to LDCs ranged from health, capacity development, trade and agriculture to infrastructure development, debt cancellation, FDI and sharing of technology. Such support would also enhance the LDCs production processes and marketing skills and further equip them to tackle the more demanding markets of the North. South-South approaches focussing specially on LDCs should be given a major policy thrust by the entities of the UN system. So much can be done and achieved for the sustainable development of the most vulnerable countries if the UN system makes such an approach central in their fields of activities.

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