

# A Commitment to Least Developed Countries

**ANWARUL KARIM CHOWDHURY**



*High Representative for the United Nations Office for Least Developed Countries*

**NOSH NALAVALA** Ambassador, the UN General Assembly has scheduled in September the Midterm Comprehensive Global Review of the Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the Decade 2001–2010. What is your assessment of the five-year period that has gone by, of the achievements and the progress the least developed countries have made with the implementation of the Brussels Programme of Action? Is there a degree of satisfaction?

**A. K. C.** We are dealing with the 50 poorest and weakest countries of the world, so you cannot derive satisfaction right away, in five years time, and say that objectives have been achieved. It's a continuing endeavor. This is the third programme of action for LDCs. The UN system as a whole is trying to put its full support behind these countries. For the first time, the Brussels Programme of Action has done two things that have the potential of making a difference. One is to make the programme country-focused, aiming to give the LDCs themselves ownership of the programme and its activities. Second, both LDCs and their development partners have very specific sets of obligations. That act of taking responsibility in certain areas, in its specificity, is a remarkable achievement of the Brussels Programme. I believe that what we are doing is measuring progress through those objectives.

Through the whole programme, we have identified 30 goals. Our measurement is being done on the basis of indicators and goals. These indicators give us an opportunity to see how things are progressing. You asked a very direct question: am I satisfied with the progress? I believe that the rate of growth, the economic growth, in the LDCs has been remarkable during the

last five years. They have a cumulative growth rate of 5.5 percent every year. This has not happened to the LDCs in decades.

**N. N.** This is the upside. What is the downside?

**A. K. C.** There are many downsides. One should bear in mind that some of this growth rate has happened in countries that have oil or mineral resources. They have achieved a 14–15 percent growth rate. The downside is that the rate of growth has not been able to reduce extreme poverty and disease. But poverty reduction is much more complex and multidimensional. It needs input from all sides, not just economic growth. A social dimension, education, and health are absolutely essential to achieving poverty reduction. That is what we expect. Another positive side of the Brussels Programme has been the interest and focus of LDCs on governance issues. If any area has gone through change, it is in the area of governance.

**N. N.** You are referring to good governance?

**A. K. C.** Yes, of course. Governance has to be seen in that way. Good governance has a connotation. For the LDCs, it is very important that the focus is on the broader governance issues: democracy, appropriately functioning parliaments, freedom of speech, and freedom of association. For the LDCs, governance at the local level is even more meaningful; how the local bodies, the municipalities, the village council is working.

**N. N.** Your office, the United Nations Office of the High Representative for Least Developed Countries, and the other agencies of the United Nations have focused considerably on a suc-

cessful review this September. Have the donor countries come forward with any tangible suggestions? Are they going to be major participants in this review? And, if so, how are they looking at the achievements of the LDCs?

with the way they have carried out their mandates, and will the midterm review bring up any of those issues?

**A. K. C.** Every morning I wake up to see what needs to be done. That's my

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**A. K. C.** For the first part of your question, yes, they are going to participate. We have actively engaged them in the process. I attended the ECOSOC deliberations on the LDCs report by the secretary-general in Geneva. A number of major development partners have made statements there, reiterating their commitment to engage fully in the midterm review. In the United Nations, it is an issue of partnership, along with ownership.

We have to make an effort to get LDCs and their development partners engaged in a way that it helps them. I believe that in terms of donors' support, at the country level, it has been very good. The UN funds and programmes—all have increased their contribution, their allocation to the LDCs. As a matter of fact, 50 LDCs receive more than 55 percent of the resources given by the four major funds and programmes: UNDP, UNICEF, UNFPA, and the World Food Programme.

**N. N.** In 2001, when the Brussels Programme of Action did come into effect, a number of UN agencies made commitments and issued mandates to mainstream the programme. As the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, are you content

objective. This is the first-ever office of its kind, in the UN system, where advocacy, monitoring, and coordination are being done as part of the same job. And, yes, the UN agencies have done a commendable job and are continuing to do so.

**N. N.** Could you give some insight on the coordination efforts of your office with these UN agencies?

**A. K. C.** I believe that the UN system has done wonderfully well in a very vigorous way. They have lived up to their commitments, but much more needs to be done. The governing bodies of the United Nations system agencies need to devote a particular segment of their annual session to discuss that organization's commitment to the LDCs. The United Nations has good development coordination, the United Nations Development Group, which coordinates the resident coordinators in each country. During the next five years, that will be the effort of my office, to see how the Brussels Programme can be integrated at the country level among all of the development partners. The other is at the global level. At the global level it has been done pretty well, particularly in the exercise of the midterm review. ●