



REPORT

Workshop for the National Focal Points of the Least Developed Countries

**22 July 2013
Palais des Nations
Room XXV
Geneva, Switzerland**

Introduction

M. Gyan Chandra Acharya, Under-Secretary-General and High Representative for LDCs, LLDCs and SIDS (UN-OHRLS) underscored the importance of the annual workshop for LDC national focal points. He then assessed progress made so far in the implementation the Istanbul Programme of Action, including the rate of changes towards achieving the goals and targets of IPoA and the respective contribution of all stakeholders to these changes. H.E. M. Jean Francis Zinsou, Permanent Representative of Benin to the United Nations and Chair of LDC Global Bureau, shared his perspectives on the implementation of IPoA and challenges faced by LDCs. He also seized the opportunity to brief participations about the work that is being carried out by the LDC Group, under his chairmanship, in projecting the interests of the group at the global stage. Later in the meeting, M. Hari Odari, on behalf of H. E. M. Shanker Das Bairagi, Chair of the WTO LDC Group, Permanent Representative of Nepal to the UN, briefed participants on the current status of the Doha Round Negotiations, highlighting the current stalemate in which these negotiations are and LDC specific issues that will be tabled during the upcoming Doha meeting.

These introductory remarks were followed by a presentation by Ms. Luisa Bernal, UNDP, on the contribution of her institution to the implementation of IPoA, highlighting especially areas of programmatic interventions of UNDP. Ms. Bernal also shared with participants lessons that are emerging from such engagement.

Following this presentation, LDC national focal points took the floor (See Annex 1 for the list of participants). Representatives from Angola, Bangladesh, Benin, Burundi, Cambodia, Central African Republic, Chad, Comoros, Democratic Republic of Congo, Djibouti, Guinea, Lao PDR, Lesotho, Liberia, Madagascar, Mali, Myanmar, Nepal,

Niger, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Solomon Islands, Tanzania, Tuvalu, Yemen and Zambia assessed the state of implementation of IPoA in their respective countries, shared their experiences in mainstreaming IPoA into national development planning process, underlined their graduation strategies, if any, spelled out obstacles encountered and proposed a number of recommendations (All statements and presentations available at: www.ohrlls.org)

State of Implementation of the Istanbul Programme of Action (IPoA)

Participants highlighted that progress towards the goals and targets of IPoA has varied across the priority areas of the Programme of Action. Their reviews also reveal differences in performances across LDCs.

Some participants noted that commonalities between the Brussels Programme of Action and its successor, IPoA, on the one hand, and the MDGs, on the other hand, as well as greater national and global attention to the MDG agenda have triggered some actions and have therefore served very well LDCs. Indeed, national development plans and strategies of LDCs have taken up priorities expressed in these global frameworks and have resulted in the implementation, with the support of development partners, of some of the measures agreed under these frameworks. This has enabled some LDCs to record some achievements, albeit modest given--in most cases--the low bases from which they start off.

Participants underlined that, in the context of the implementation of these plans and strategies, their countries have boosted investments in infrastructure as well as human and social development. In the overwhelmingly majority of LDCs, these investments have been financed both domestic and external resources. Only very few, in particular some oil exporting LDCs, have relied on their own resources to carry forward their development agenda.

Participants noted that overall a growing attention has been given to infrastructure development as a means to improve competitiveness in international markets and to harness potential gains of regional and global economic integration. Some LDCs have issued Euro bonds and used the proceeds from these issues to upgrade their infrastructure, particularly in transport and energy sectors.

Some participants added that these efforts have been deployed against the backdrop of governance reforms. These reforms have covered public financial management (PFM) systems--including budget execution and reporting-- public procurement, public sector reforms, decentralization and deconcentration and the fight against corruption.

Experiences in mainstreaming IPoA into national development planning process

From the presentations made by participants, it turns out that the mainstreaming of the Istanbul Programme of Action into national development planning process proceeds through three complementary steps. First is the formulation of national

long-term vision, which provides the direction, consistency and focus required to sustain the structural transformation that the majority of LDCs envisions. Although country-driven and informed by aspirations expressed by citizens, the long-term vision of many LDCs espouses the notion of graduation from the least developed category—the overarching goal of the Istanbul Programme of Action. That is not surprising, as national, regional and global consultations guided the formulation of this programme of action in the first place. In most cases, the long-term vision envisages attainment of a radical economic transformation such as that of attaining, by a certain target date, a middle-income country status, which loosely equates to a position of exiting the least developed category. The target year varies across countries: 2021 for Bangladesh, 2022 for Nepal, 2025 for Ethiopia and Tanzania, 2030 for Zambia, and 2035 for Guinea, Liberia, Niger and Sierra-Leone.

The second step is the operationlization of the national long-term vision through the formulation of medium-term national development/sectoral plans and strategies, the time span of which is three to five years. The priority areas of IPoA are reflected when the contours and content of these strategies and plans are spelled out. These plans and strategies guide the interventions to be carried out as well as support both within society, including the government, the private sector, civil society, and development partners.

The third step is to use annual government budget as the key implementing vehicle of interventions set forth in medium-term national development/sectoral plans and strategies, which already integrate IPoA. Both the total budget envelope and the allocation of this envelope across sectors signal the degree of commitments to priorities defined in the above plans and strategies.

Graduation from LDC category

Some participants reiterated the commitments of their countries to graduate from the least developed category. To this intent, some countries have formulated or are in the midst of formulating a road map towards graduation as well as an inclusive and transparent national graduation strategy. Ministerial committees or other institutional arrangements have been established or are expected to be established with the view to guiding, overseeing, monitoring and evaluating the implementation of this strategy,

Participants mentioned that their countries are seeking the support of the international community in achieving this endeavour. In connection with this, participants underscored activities already undertaken, including visits to graduated countries, and welcomed missions already undertaken or planned and spearheaded by UNDP, OHRRLLS and UNCTAD.

While reiterating the importance of national leadership and ownership of the graduation process and its integration into national development planning cycle, participants emphasized the importance of support from development partners in ensuring a smooth transition and avoiding an abrupt loss of LDC-dedicated support

measures in areas of development financing, trade, technology and capacity building.

Challenges

Participants also reflected on the challenges they have been confronted with in implementing the Istanbul Programme of Action. These challenges are both domestic and external in nature.

Participants underlined that key obstacles to effective implementation of national development/sectoral plans and strategies, to which the IPoA is a constituent part, include inadequate financial, technical and technological capacities. In particular, technical and technological capacities of the public and the private sectors are seen as critical challenges to effectively implement and operate investment projects. In this regard, many participants expressed concern over delays in the execution of investment budgets. These delays are attributed not only to limited financial resources, which sometimes is due to delay in the disbursement of external budget support, but also to limited government and private sectors' absorptive capacities. Such limited absorptive capacities materialize through weak ability of governments to select and execute projects as well as that of the private sector to supply, on a timely and efficient manner, needed goods and services. Other inhibiting factors to implementation include scant coordination between ministries and misalignment between budget allocations and defined priorities.

Participants emphasized prevailing political and security situations in some LDCs hold back implementation. These developments have resulted in the weakening of production and exports bases, the deterioration of physical infrastructure, decline in government revenues, the erosion of social and natural capital, the suspension of development aid and the drying up of FDI.

Participants also underlined peculiar development challenges, particularly the ones faced by landlocked and small island LDCs, which added to those that are common to all LDCs. These challenges derive from geographical remoteness and obstacles and high cost of providing services to a sometimes widely-dispersed populations.

On external obstacles to the implementation of the Istanbul Programme of Action, participants mentioned sobering growth in the developed world and emerging economies, which have had some spillover effects on LDCs in the form of slower expansion in trade and private financial flows but also declining development assistance. They also underlined regional insecurity, which disrupts trade routes and depresses investors' sentiment.

Recommendations

Looking forward, participants indicated that national ownership of the aspirations contained in IPoA is key and that care must be taken to adapt these goals and targets to LDC peculiar circumstances. This is one of conditions for ensuring that these

countries have the policy space required to achieve the goals, targets and objectives of the Istanbul Programme of Action. In relation to this, participants concurred that strong political commitment and transformative leadership are essential if LDCs are to successfully integrate IPoA into the national development framework and ensure successful implementation of this programme of action through coordinated multi-stakeholder participation.

Participants recalled effective implementation of IPoA will also require bold support and engagement by development partners. Development partners should live up to their commitments in terms of development assistance, market access, technology and capacity building.

Participants also indicated that also they take note of growing importance of South-South cooperation as an engine for trade, finance, technology transfer and technical cooperation and call for increased experience sharing and peer learning between emerging countries and LDCs. They also welcome the proposal of Benin to convene a South-South cooperation meeting in 2013 and suggested that discussions on South-South and triangular Coalition in support of Africa—an African Union-led initiative run by Guinea, be featured as one of the items in the agenda of this meeting.

Participants also highlighted that the need for a continuous improvement on doing business environment so as to support the expansion of private sector, be it national and foreign.

ANNEX 1: List of Participants

Last Name	First Name	Countries/Institutions
Izata	Margarida	Angola
Siddiqui	Muhammad Alkama	Bangladesh
Elias	Andalib	Bangladesh
Houngbedji	Afiavi Fernande	Benin
Zinsou	Jean Francis	Benin
Djebou	Jonas	Benin
Chencho		Bhutan
Sebego	Mamadou	Burkina Faso
Nimubona	Jean Paul	Burundi
Thannara	Pin	Cambodia
Ouambeti	Eric	CAR
Hamida	Ahmat El hadj	Chad
Abdallah	Ahmed	Comoros
Empole	Paul Losoko Efambe	Congo DM
Cheikh	Samir Aden	Djibouti
Agegnehu	Temesgen Waleign	Ethiopia
Diallo	Chaikou Yaya	Guinea
Nuanthasing	Phavanh	Lao PDR
Molapo	Motulu	Lesotho
Dennis	Remongar T	Liberia
Rambolanomenahosolo	Sahondra Manana	Madagascar
Konate Traore	Safiatou	Mali
Abeid	Sidna	Mauritania
Htut	Than	Myanmar
Shakya	Pushpa Lal	Nepal
Ousmane	Oumarou	Niger
Simi	Noumea	Samoa
Traore	Abdourahmane	Senegal
Cummings	Avril Bertha	Sierra Leone
Daonga	Allan Christian	Solomon Islands
Tuni	Senya Robert	Tanzania
Simati	Aunese Makoi	Tuvalu
Tanei	Winnie Pura	Tuvalu
Abdo	Belal Abdulgabar Ali	Yemen
Mpokosa	Esnart Constance Phiri	Zambia
Acharya	Gyan Chandra	UN-OHRLS
Rahman	Khalil	UN-OHRLS
Diallo	Oumar	UN-OHRLS
Musollino-Berg	Margherita	UN-OHRLS
Bernal	Luisa	UNDP
Mollerus	Roland	UN-DESA