



Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific

**Special Body on least developed, landlocked developing and
Pacific island developing countries
Bangkok**

Bangkok, 27 May 2015

Concept note

I. Introduction

The Commission, in its sixty-ninth session, adopted Resolution 69/1 on a conference structure of the Commission for the inclusive and sustainable development of Asia and the Pacific, which decided that the sessions of the Special Body on Least Developed and Landlocked Developing Countries and the Special Body on Pacific Island Developing Countries would be held jointly for a maximum of one day during the senior officials segment and would have a status commensurate with the Committees of the Whole.

The United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) will organize the Special Body session in Bangkok, Thailand on 27 May 2015. The session will comprise of four main items, namely, (1) Presentation of the summary of the Chair of the Preparatory Meeting of the Special Body on Least Developed, Landlocked Developing and Pacific Island Developing Countries, held on 26 May; (2) Presentation of the highlights of the outcome of the High-level Policy Dialogue on the Implementation of the Istanbul Programme of Action for LDCs; (3) Presentation of the highlights of the outcome of the Second United Nations Conference on Landlocked Developing Countries and (4) a High-level Exchange on the 'SIDS Accelerated Modalities of Action (SAMOA) Pathway'.

II. Background

The group of 31 countries with special needs (CSN) in the Asia-Pacific region is comprised by least developed countries (LDCs), landlocked developing countries (LLDCs) and Small Island Developing States (SIDS). These countries are home to more than 380 million people, a quarter of the total population of the Asia-Pacific developing countries excluding China and India. Their economies are marked by persistent structural challenges, fluctuating growth and dependence on a limited number of commodities or low-wage manufactured products for export earnings. These countries have experienced limited structural transformation and the impact of growth on employment creation and poverty reduction has been limited.

Countries with special needs have lagged behind in progressing towards achieving the MDGs. Areas of particular concern are reducing

deaths among young children and mothers, improving sanitation and providing universal primary education. Socioeconomic development remains constrained by many factors including limited productive capacities, remoteness and isolation from the world markets, and high trade costs. These countries are also the most vulnerable to natural disasters making economic growth and poverty reduction a far greater challenge.

The LDCs in Asia-Pacific, for example, lag behind developing countries in the region on a number of socio-economic indicators. Only 28% of their population lives in cities, in comparison to 42% of ESCAP developing countries. Under-5 mortality rate (59.9) is 40% higher than ESCAP developing nations (42.5), and the share of their population living in poverty (38.8%) is twice of their developing counterparts (18.9%). GDP growth in a 20-year period has been similar for least developed and developing countries in the region, but GDP per capita of the former (US\$ 1,157) is nearly a quarter of the latter (US\$ 5,873)¹.

Similarly, LLDCs of the region have witnessed significant fluctuations in economic growth and export performance in recent years emanating mainly from the global economic crisis and the knock-on effects of sluggish growth in advanced countries. Despite notable progress, though uneven, landlocked developing countries continue to face difficulties in linking to global trade, thus preventing them from reaping the benefits of globalization and rising intraregional trade and foreign direct investment (FDI) flows. In addition, the trade structure of most of LLDCs is characterized by export baskets that are highly dominated by primary commodities. Landlocked developing countries have become more exposed to commodity-related risks compared with a decade ago making their economies more vulnerable to declines in commodity prices in the world market. Their import baskets, on the other hand, are dominated by manufactured goods, indicating the need for creating a diversified manufacturing base in most of these countries, an area in which regional cooperation in trade and FDI can play a critical role.

SIDS present a special case in sustainable development given the challenges they face in pursuing development and reducing poverty. While the people of the Pacific have experienced better economic circumstances and social development over the past half-century, development progress has not been consistently spread across the sub-region Pacific economies have varying natural resource endowments, environmental challenges and levels of economic and social development. There are, however, issues that are common across the subregion. The economies share the ocean resources of the Pacific and face similar challenges associated with geographic isolation, diseconomies of scale and climate change. Climate change has been acknowledged by Pacific leaders as the greatest threat to livelihoods, security and well-being of the peoples of the Pacific.

III. Rationale

The International Community adopted three separate global programmes to address the special needs and challenges faced by the three groups of countries with special needs. In May 2011, the Fourth United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries adopted the

¹ Asia-Pacific Countries with Special Needs Report 2015, Forth Coming.

Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the Decade 2011-2020 (the Istanbul Programme of Action). The overarching goal of the Istanbul Programme of Action is to overcome the structural challenges faced by the least developed countries in order to eradicate poverty, achieve internationally agreed development goals and enable graduation from the least developed country category. The aim of the Istanbul Programme of Action is to enable half the number of least developed countries to meet the criteria for graduation by 2020 with a strong focus on developing their productive capacities. The Istanbul Programme of Action also invited the General Assembly to consider conducting a comprehensive high-level midterm review of the implementation of the Programme of Action. The Commission, in its resolution 70/3 on the implementation of the Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the Decade 2011-2020 in Asia and the Pacific, requested the Executive Secretary to organize the Asia-Pacific midterm review of the implementation of the Istanbul Programme of Action.

The Second United Nations Conference on Landlocked Developing Countries was held in Vienna from 3 to 5 November 2014. The Conference adopted as the outcome document the Vienna Programme of Action for Landlocked Developing Countries for the Decade 2014-2024 (the Vienna Programme of Action), which has the overarching goal of addressing the special development needs and challenges of landlocked developing countries that arise from landlockedness and isolation from key global markets. The Vienna Programme of Action noted, among other things, that landlocked developing countries have achieved moderate economic growth since the adoption of the Almaty Programme of Action: Addressing the Special Needs of Landlocked Developing Countries within a New Global Framework for Transit Transport Cooperation for Landlocked and Transit Developing Countries. It also identified priority areas for action for the development and expansion of efficient transit systems and transport development, enhancement of competitiveness, expansion of trade, structural transformation, regional cooperation, and the promotion of inclusive economic growth and sustainable development to reduce poverty, build resilience, bridge economic and social gaps and ultimately help transform those countries into land-linked countries.

The Third International Conference on Small Island Developing States was held in Samoa from 1 to 4 September 2014. The outcome document of the Conference, the SIDS Accelerated Modalities of Action (Samoa Pathway), identifies priority areas for the sustainable development of small island developing States, and the means of implementation. It also highlights three main areas of support for small island developing States from the regional commissions, namely: (a) enhancing national capacities and institutions; (b) enhancing the Pacific voice in regional and global processes and platforms; and (c) monitoring and accountability. At the global level, the Samoa Pathway requires the collective efforts of the International Community including development partners to support the small island developing States in policy coherence, cooperation and coordination.

IV. Key questions

What actions are countries with special needs taking to incorporate the three global mandates into their national plans and policies? What are the priority areas that ESCAP can assist countries with special needs in the implementation of the three programmes?

What are the strategies required to implement the three programmes so they contribute to sustainable development in countries with special needs. What are the financial resources required to implement those strategies and how to mobilize them? How regional cooperation, including for the dissemination of best practices and for enhancing capacity building efforts, could support the implementation of the three global programmes?

V. Objectives

The objective of the Special Body session is to bring together eminent persons, senior government officials, experts from countries with special needs and development practitioners to exchange views on the three global programmes, identify challenges including financing requirements and priority areas for assistance from the international community including ESCAP, propose national strategies and actions needed to implement these programmes.

VI. Outcome document

The secretariat will prepare a summary of the Special Body session.

VII. Participants

Dr. Shamshad Akhtar, Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations and Executive Secretary of ESCAP will moderate the Special Body session. The panelists of the session will include selected leaders invited by the Executive Secretary, senior officials of countries with special needs, OHRRLLS and experts on countries with special needs issues.