Briefing note on the National Focal Point Meeting in Brussels on 7 and 8 December 2015

OHRLLS, in collaboration with the Development Directorate of the European Commission, organized on 7 and 8 December 2015 a two-day workshop of the national focal points of the Least Developed Countries (LDCs) on the Implementation of the Istanbul Programme of Action (IPoA).

The opening session counted with the presence of the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Development Cooperation of Belgium, H.E. Mr. Alexander De Croo; the Undersecretary General and High-Representative of OHRLLS, Mr. Gyan Chandra Acharya; the Ambassador of the Finish Ministry of Foreign Relations, H.E. Ms. Riita Resch; and the deputy Director General of the Directorate-General for International Cooperation and Development of the European Commission, Mr. Klaus Rudischhauser.

The remaining of the two days included presentations delivered by the national focal points, followed by questions and a discussion. Ms. Chiara Perdicca, from the Development Cooperation Directorate of the European Commission, delivered a presentation on the development cooperation of the European Commission in support to the LDCs. The Belgian Government hosted a reception after the closing session.

The workshop counted with the presence of focal points from 26 LDCs. (See annexed list). At the date of the workshop, 17 national reports had already been submitted so far. Many participants committed to submit their report in the coming months. The reports can be consulted at http://www.un-ngls.org/national-reports-mtr-ipoa/

Main messages from the keynote statement delivered by Belgian Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Development Cooperation

Mr. De Croo congratulated Benin and Bangladesh as former and current chair of the Global Coordination Bureau of the LDCs and hailed the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. He praised the ambition for leaving no one behind and the universality, transformative and integrated approach. He was of the view that anchoring its principles and priorities in national development plans should be a priority for the LDCs.

Mr. De Croo reaffirmed Belgium’s commitment to direct half of its ODA to the LDCs and shared with the group Belgium’s active efforts in encouraging other donors to make this commitment. He mentioned the development of the private sector in the South and the promotion of digitalization for development as part of the focus areas that will guide Belgium’s Development Cooperation in 2016. He also shared Belgium’s commitment to supporting both adaptation and mitigation activities in the developing world, in particular in the LDCs. as well as the implementation of the disaster risk reduction strategy agreed at Sendai.

The Deputy-Prime Minister reiterated his support to the OHRLLS and underscored the support of Belgium as co-facilitator of the intergovernmental consultations of the High-Level Midterm Review.
Messages emerging from the interventions of the national focal points

Synergies between the Agenda 2030, AAAA and the acceleration of the implementation of the IPoA were considered essential for the remainder of the decade. Many areas identified by the focal points as critical for implementation of the IPoA are also present in the SDGs.

Infrastructure development, particularly in the areas of energy, transport and telecommunications remains an important priority at the national level. Various countries has embarked upon major infrastructure development projects, especially in the areas of transport, electricity and Information and Communication Technologies (ICT), with increase in the number of land routes, expanded production of electricity. Despite major efforts and progress in some countries, challenges remain and the needs of infrastructure development are still very large, particularly in rural areas.

Limited access to finance and the difficulties in attracting investment to areas that have the potential to enhance the productive structure of the LDCs are among the major constraints. In this connection, engaging the private sector in infrastructure development, particularly in a resource-constrained context, can provide much needed finance and expertise.

Achieving food security constitutes a central priority for many LDCs. Linkages between infrastructure development and rural development in areas such as water management systems, transport or technology are of great importance to enhance productive capacity in rural areas.

Capacity building and access to adequate finance, particularly for smallholder agriculture, was identified as an important priority to be promoted with the cooperation of partners at all levels. Given the large number of smallholder farmers, increasing the productivity of the agricultural sector can contribute to poverty reduction, generate better employment and contribute to food security. Pro-poor measures, such as ensuring fair access to land, water and other assets and inputs, and to services, including education and health, can significantly contribute to address the challenges faced by vulnerable groups. Additionally, agricultural growth has the potential to increase the demand for non-farm products and services in rural areas, thus contributing to productive capacity building and structural transformation.

Poor donor coordination, aid fragmentation and limited ability to establish a comprehensive national development plan were some of the institutional challenges that have limited the articulation of a comprehensive policy to implement the priority areas of the IPoA in some LDCs. In some cases, a clear road map to implement the IPoA across different government areas is absent. Development partners should also include the implementation of the IPoA as a key element of their development cooperation frameworks.

Assessing the implementation of the IPoA will require greater focus on external shocks as they have a strong impact on the ability of the LDCs to implement the priority areas of the IPoA. The inability to cope with adverse weather events poses a serious challenge for the LDCs. Many LDCs have articulated measures to address the high vulnerability of regions or populations to environmental disasters, climate change or economic shocks. Limited domestic capacity for adaptation and excessive reliance on climate-sensitive economic sectors further exacerbate the vulnerability of the LDCs. Their limited capacity to cope with the impact of adverse weather events, climate change or
natural disasters seriously limits ability to foster sustainable development, but the LDCs are also affected by a broader range of impacts that increase their vulnerability due structural factors.

Regional cooperation was mentioned by many as essential in this process. In the LDCs affected by conflict or emerging from it, sustainable development is inextricably linked to peace and security.

Reduced revenue as a result of the collapse of oil prices is seriously affecting the LDCs whose economy activity is heavily concentrated on oil extraction. Since 2014, the fiscal space of many LDCs has shrunk considerably as a result of the decline in oil prices.

Economic diversification was cited as a key component towards vulnerability reduction, besides its importance as a key element for structural transformation. Favoring private investment in sectors beyond the extractive industries remains a priority for most resource-rich LDCs. Increased investment that supports the diversification of the productive fabric and help LDCs to shift towards higher value added activity was considered essential for implementation of the IPoA.

Reform of the tax system, from the perspective of broadening the tax base, but also in terms of improving the efficiency of the tax administration, could provide enhanced resources to support national economic and social development objectives. Domestic resource mobilization, particularly in a context of limited access to finance, remains an important priority. Broadening the tax base and increasing the efficiency of the public sector are among the measures taken by some of the LDCs in this area.

In the area of Human Development, many LDCs saw progress, particularly in relation to health, access to water and sanitation and education, with the exception of those countries affected by conflict or the health crises originated by the Ebola outburst. Yet, enhancing the quality of education and skill training, particularly in science and technology and promoting vocational training was deemed essential.