



United Nations Office of the High Representative for Least Developed Countries,  
Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States

## Ahead of 2020 Deadline World's Poorest Countries Struggle to Meet Goals of Istanbul Programme of Action

### Press Release

New York, 23 January 2019 – Progress on achieving the goals of the dedicated programme of action for the world's 47 least developed countries (LDCs) is falling short of what is needed by 2020. Alarming, poverty and malnutrition remain high with a third of the 1 billion people in LDCs living in extreme poverty. This is according to the latest edition of the [State of the Least Developed Countries](#) report by the United Nations Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States (UN-OHRLLS).

With two years left to achieve the Istanbul Programme of Action (IPoA), growth in the LDCs is estimated to have increased to 4.9 per cent in 2017 but falls short of the 7 per cent target of the IPoA. Food security is also presenting major challenges with the number of undernourished people having increased from 216 million in the period 2004–2007 to 237 million in 2015–2017.

LDCs are also lagging behind in other areas such as high rates of youth unemployment and low financial inclusion, with only 27 per cent of adults having bank accounts. The low levels of service provision in rural areas is particularly concerning where in 2015 only 33 per cent of rural populations had access to improved sanitation facilities and 61 per cent used an improved drinking water source. These challenges also pose major hurdles for the LDCs in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030.

“The latest findings on the state of the least developed countries clearly demonstrates that much more needs to be done to accelerate efforts to assist these countries in meeting their development objectives.” said Ms. Fekitamoeloa ‘Utoikamanu, High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States. “While progress continues to be mixed, there are silver linings which indicate tremendous potential to close the gaps through concerted efforts by LDCs, development partners, UN system and the wider international community.”

Now in its fifth edition, the report makes the case that LDCs continue to face challenges in mobilizing financial resources while capacity constraints further hamper

UN-OHRLLS  
United Nations Headquarters / 405 E. 42<sup>nd</sup> Street / New York 10017 / USA  
[www.unohrlls.org](http://www.unohrlls.org)

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development gains on the ground. Official Development Assistance (ODA) remains an important source of external financing and the report notes that the overall share of ODA to the LDCs in donor's Gross National Income (GNI) increased slightly from 0.08 per cent in 2015 to 0.09 per cent in 2016 but remains far below the IPoA target of 0.15 to 0.2 per cent.

Despite mixed results progress has been recorded in areas such as infrastructure development and telecommunications. Access to mobile phones and internet, including broadband services, has continued to increase. Major progress has been made in access to electricity, which has nearly doubled from 21.6 per cent in 2000 to 44.8 per cent in 2016. Of major concern however is that access to electricity is still largely concentrated in urban areas.

In 2018, the Technology Bank for the LDCs, a new United Nations institution focused on building the science, technology and innovation (STI) capacity of LDCs, started operations in Gebze, Turkey. The operationalization of this new UN entity marks the first Sustainable Development Goal target (target 17.8) to be achieved and is expected to provide much needed support in boosting STI capacity in this group of countries.

This edition's special topic addresses reducing vulnerabilities and increasing resilience in LDCs. It highlights that extreme vulnerability to shocks, including climate change, disasters, economic and social disturbances severely affect the ability of LDCs to achieve sustainable development and inflicts major financial and other collateral damage. The report underlines that global responses to some of these shocks, in particular to climate change, have not matched the magnitude of the challenges LDCs are facing. Furthermore, LDCs have little or no access to risk transfer mechanisms due to their limited ability to pay insurance premiums and other capacity constraints.

Among the report's recommendations, building resilience at individual, institutional, private sector and national levels is essential for LDCs to progress on achieving sustainable development. Furthermore, the resource-constrained LDCs need further support by development partners, including International Financial Institutions, to develop and access insurance schemes to shield against new and emerging shocks.

The *State of the Least Developed Countries* report can be found on the UN-OHRLLS website at: [unohrlls.org/state-of-ldcs-2018](http://unohrlls.org/state-of-ldcs-2018)

Media Contact: Mr. Damien Sass, UN-OHRLLS Public Information Officer  
Email: [sass@un.org](mailto:sass@un.org)

UN-OHRLLS  
United Nations Headquarters / 405 E. 42<sup>nd</sup> Street / New York 10017 / USA  
[www.unohrlls.org](http://www.unohrlls.org)

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