Statement

by

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Introducing

Report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of the Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the Decade 2011 to 2020 (A/74/69-E/2019/12)

Coordination and Management Meeting of ECOSOC
Item 11(b) Implementation of and follow-up to major United Nations conferences and summits: review and coordination of the implementation of the Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the Decade 2011–2020

Monday, 6 June 2019, 10 a.m.
ECOSOC Chamber
Madam Vice-President,

Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my honor to introduce the 2019 report of the Secretary-General on the Implementation of the Programme of Action for the least developed countries for the Decade 2011-2020.

We are at a critical juncture.

Only one and half years are now left to reach the goals member states set in the IPoA.

A broad picture emerges on overall performance as we now start preparations for the Fifth UN Conference on the LDCs in 2021.

The glass is half full.

First, we must congratulate the LDCs that have met the graduation criteria.

It is now an unprecedented number of member states.

The General Assembly resolution last December added Bhutan, Sao Tome and Principe and the Solomon Islands to the countries that will graduate in addition to Angola and Vanuatu.

And let us recall that prior to that, the number of countries that graduated since the creation of the category in 1971 was just five countries!

A further seven LDCs are in the graduation pipeline, four of which have met the graduation criteria twice.

We now need to focus on smooth transitions and I issue a call to all Member States to ensure the smooth transition of LDCs.

The UN must also do its part in support of smooth transitions.

OHRLLS set up an Inter-agency Task Force on the Graduation of LDCs.

The purpose is straightforward - we must step up coordinated UN system-wide support to graduating LDCs. This means we must work closely with the new UN Resident Coordinator system, and needless to say the graduating country Governments. Countries are the owners, are in the driver's seat.

Progress has also been made on select economic indicators. Yet, they stay below recommended targets.

In 2018, GDP growth of the LDCs as a group increased moderately at a 5 per cent rate.
Only seven LDCs however achieved economic growth of 7 per cent or more in 2018, while two experienced negative growth rates.

Extreme poverty in the LDCs fell to 35.5 per cent in 2015 compared to 36.2 per cent in 2013. Projections indicate that nearly 30 per cent of the LDC population will remain in extreme poverty by 2030, which is a matter of great and I add urgent concern for action.

On trade, the value of LDC exports of goods and services increased. But, their share of world exports remained insignificant at only 0.95% in 2018. This is even below the share the LDCs registered in 2011 at the launch of the IPoA!

In short, we are quite far from the target in the IPoA of doubling export share by 2020.

Progress in enhancing and diversifying productive capacity has been limited.

We see only a marginal increase in the contribution of manufacturing value added to growth. 80% of LDCs remain commodity-dependent.

Agriculture, food security and rural development remain all issues of major concern in LDCs. Agricultural productivity has experienced a decline in 2015 compared to its 2011 levels.

The number of undernourished people in LDCs increased by 32.7 million during the period from 2011 to 2017.

International support remains critically important to the LDCs. 2030 is around the corner and risks are mounting to see the peoples of the LDCs left behind.

ODA to the LDCs declined by 3.0 per cent in real terms in 2018 compared with 2017. Only a handful of donors provided 0.15 per cent or more of their GNI as ODA to the LDCs, in line with the targets of the IPoA and SDG17.

FDI flows to the LDCs decreased by 17 per cent in 2017 to $26 billion. This compounds a decline of 13 per cent we already saw in 2016.

LDCs account for a mere 2 per cent of global FDI.

Worse, the figure does not tell the entire story as FDI in LDCs remains concentrated in a few mineral and oil extracting countries.

External indebtedness remains a considerable obstacle for the LDCs, including those in the graduation pipeline.
Connectivity is a key feature for current and future socio-economic development for all countries.

The good news is that in 2016, mobile cellular subscriptions in LDCs rose from 33 per 100 people in 2010 to almost 70 per 100 in 2017.

In contrast, Internet access remains low in the LDCs.

Mobile broadband coverage increased to just over 20 per cent of the population in 2017 while it stood at 50 per cent for developing countries!

Electricity and clean energy access are a further determining factor for LDCs sustainable development.

Access to electricity increased to 45 per cent in 2016. However, the macro figure hides that three LDCs had access levels at below 10 per cent, and that there are major rural-urban disparities.

History has shown over and over how knowledge and innovation are key driver’s for development.

Just to take a simple measure, LDCs continue to lag far behind the rest of the world on the number of patents filed and journal articles published.

To address this and related issues, you had the foresight to create a Technology Bank for LDCs.

I am pleased to see that the Technology Bank for the LDCs, whose Offices were inaugurated in June 2018, in Gebze, Turkey, continues to make progress.

The Bank’s goals are to build national capacities for intellectual property rights, scientific production and dissemination and innovation adapted to the context of each LDC.

Once more, I thank the Government of Turkey for its contribution to the Technology Bank, as well as Norway, India, Bangladesh and Guinea.

At the core of the IPoA and Agenda 2030 is sustainable human development for all. Some progress has been made on human and social development indicators. But it is by far not enough.

School enrollment rates have improved, but 1 in 5 children of primary school age, are still not in school and gender disparities are of concern.

The growing number of youth in LDCs will face challenges in finding decent jobs. There is insufficient job creation, low productivity and weak labour standards. Even those who are educated and trained will face a mismatch with the skills in demand in the labour market.
On gender, some LDCs are among the top performers in terms of parliamentary seats held by women, and significant but not sufficient progress has been made on gender parity in education.

All of what I just mentioned also must be looked at in light of population growth rate in the LDCs being more than double that of the world average.

Maternal and infant mortality rates remain high - in 2017 alone, an estimated 2 million children died in the LDCs, mostly from preventable causes.

Notable progress has been made in select areas of governance and capacity-building.

This concerns planning processes, inter-ministerial coordination, engagement of diverse stakeholders, or implementation of the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative.

The impact of climate change is a key issue for LDCs.

Floods, droughts, hurricanes and cyclones took and continue to take a heavy toll in LDCs. In 2017, average annual losses from disasters were estimated at 8.5 per cent of GDP.

Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

So, the glass is half full and now we must build on this and accelerate action.

The results I just shared with you, and they all are inter-connected, do show progress in several key areas. For this, we must congratulate LDCs and also their development partners.

At the same time, it is clear that the time is now for all of us to step up efforts to maintain and build further momentum. We must increase productive capacity, focus on ways and means to meet the criteria for graduation, and it is urgent that we make progress towards the SDGs.

Development gains must at the same time be consolidated and safeguarded.

Ever since I took up office, you have heard me talk about the need for smooth transition strategies. Transition strategies with in-built climate change resilience and a focus on improved debt management.

As we look to the future, it is now that we must accelerate and intensify our preparations for the Fifth United Nations Conference on the LDCs taking place in 2021.

Today, the ECOSOC is expected to welcome and endorse a host country for the Conference.
I take this opportunity to express my gratitude to all those Governments that responded favourably to my invitation for support – whether these were offers to host the Conference or to contribute financial or in-kind resources.

Your full support and active engagement are just so very much needed in this critical preparatory phase.

As a UN family, we have also begun our preparations in earnest. LDCV preparations were the principal topic at the last two meetings of the UN system Inter-Agency Consultative Group on the LDCs, chaired by my Office.

The Regional Commissions, the CDP, UNCTAD, UNIDO, WTO, EIF, WIPO, ILO, WHO, IAEA, UNFPA, UNWTO and more, have all indicated keen interest in supporting the process.

Be it through thematic publications, dedicated preparatory events, or side-events at the Conference itself.

Guidelines and a template for the preparation of national reviews have been conveyed to all LDCs.

The Resident Coordinators and UN country teams have been requested to provide support during their preparation. Based on the findings and recommendations of the national reports, OHRLLS will prepare a synthesis report to inform the regional and global substantive preparations for the Conference.

We must deliver a new Programme of Action that completes the “unfinished business” of the IPoA. A programme that helps to accelerate the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs.

A programme that takes advantage of new opportunities while dealing with emerging challenges.

Why? The answer is simple - we must ensure that the LDCs do not fall further behind, we must ensure to leave no one behind.

OHRLLS for its part is committed to do our utmost to deliver a rigorous, inclusive and robust preparatory process to ensure a successful outcome at UNLDC V in 2021.

I count on all of you and invite your full engagement.

Thank you.