



## **Civil Society Assembly for Assessing Development Challenges in the Pacific Least Developed Countries (LDCs): Reviewing the Brussels Programme of Action (BPoA) and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) towards the 2011 Fourth UN Conference on LDCs (LDC IV)**

### **BACKGROUND**

In the world's 49 least developed countries (LDCs),<sup>1</sup> over half of the 800 million global population lives on less than US\$1 a day. Of the 49 countries, 33 are located in Africa, 15 in Asia-Pacific and 1 in the Caribbean. These countries are faced with multiple constraints, including most significantly, weak economies which have been undermined by neo-liberal globalization and vulnerability to economic shocks, inherent geographical constraints, and weak human assets. Additionally, and in many cases increasingly, the LDCs are also facing the implications of debt burden, the global food crisis, environmental degradation, gender injustice, human rights violations and a rise in conflicts – all of which are further exacerbating the structural hindrances that confront LDCs, and that continue to undermine the quality of life of people in the LDCs.

In 1971, the United Nations (UN) identified only 24 countries as LDCs, recognizing them as the most vulnerable of the international community and hence aiming for special measures in the global development strategies in favor of LDCs<sup>2</sup>. Yet, after three decades of so-called special attention – with three UN LDC conferences and three specific Programmes of Action for the LDCs – the number of LDCs has doubled to 49 today<sup>3</sup>. This indicates the failure of aid as well as development policies and practices to reverse the deterioration of socio-

---

<sup>1</sup> Afghanistan, Angola, Bangladesh, Benin, Bhutan, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cambodia, Cape Verde, Central African Republic, Chad, Comoros, Democratic Republic of Congo, Djibouti, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Gambia, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Haiti, Kiribati, Lao People's DR, Lesotho, Liberia, Madagascar, Malawi, Maldives, Mali, Mauritania, Mozambique, Myanmar, Nepal, Niger, Rwanda, Samoa, Sao Tome and Principe, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Solomon Islands, Somalia, Sudan, Timor L'este, Togo, Tuvalu, Uganda, United Republic of Tanzania, Vanuatu, Yemen, Zambia.

<sup>2</sup> The three principal criteria used to establish the first group of LDCs with 24 countries in 1971 were: (i) per capita GDP of US \$ 100 per person in 1968 or less; (ii) a share of manufacturing in total GDP of 10 per cent or less; and (iii) an adult literacy rate of 20 per cent or less.

<sup>3</sup> See Annex: Current criteria for identification and categorization of LDCs

economic conditions in these vulnerable countries. Relatively weak civil society engagement in the development processes is certainly considered one of the major setbacks, and thus a key reason for such failure.

The Least Developed Countries Report 2009 rightly states, "The shortcomings of the current development paradigm need to be addressed" and that "LDCs need to find new forms of development governance that are appropriate for the twenty-first century". The economic growth largely witnessed in LDCs lacks the vital component of human well-being and is lop-sided only widening the gap between the haves and the have-nots. A more sustainable and inclusive development model is imperative placing production, productive capacities and productive employment opportunities as strategic priorities in the development policies and programmes of the LDCs.

Unfortunately, not only the state actors, but also the non-state actors including civil society lack capacity in coordination and resources to cope with the prevalent crises of various magnitudes in LDCs. There are cases where civil societies are either non-existent or have limited coordination with other development actors, therefore, there is an urgent need to initiate a process so as to establish and strengthen an LDC-focused civil society campaign and mechanism with proper follow-up process for the development of the LDCs. Collaborative and concerted efforts by all actors are vital in order to address the added development upheavals due to rising food and fuel prices, climate change catastrophes and the economic and financial crises that have further undermined the possibility of achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in LDCs.

The First UN Conference on the LDCs (LDC I) was held in Paris in 1981 which adopted a comprehensive Substantial New Programme of Action (SNPA) for the 1980s for the LDCs. In order to continue focus and generate international attention and action on the LDCs, the Second UN Conference on the LDCs (UN LDCII) was held in 1990, also in Paris, adopting the Paris Declaration and the Programme of Action for the LDCs for the 1990s. The Third UN Conference on the LDCs (LDC III) was hosted by the European Union (EU) in Brussels in 2001 adopting the **Brussels Programme of Action (BPoA) for the LDCs for the Decade 2001-2010** which provides "a framework for a strong global partnership to accelerate sustained economic growth and sustainable development in LDCs, to end marginalization by eradicating poverty, inequality and deprivation in these countries, and to enable them to integrate beneficially into the global economy".

The BPoA contains 30 international development goals, including those contained in the Millennium Declaration, and are embedded in the **7 commitments** of the LDCs and their development partners. The 7 commitments are as follows: (i) fostering a people-centered policy framework; (ii) good governance at national and international levels; (iii) building human and institutional capacities; (iv) building productive capacities to make globalization work for LDCs; (v) enhancing the role of trade in development; (vi) reducing vulnerability and protecting the environment and (vii) mobilizing financial resources. The overarching goal of the BPoA is "to make substantial progress toward halving the proportion of people living in extreme poverty and suffering from hunger by 2015 and promote the sustainable development of the LDCs".

With the timeline of the BPoA ending in 2010, its review process is currently underway; this will culminate at the Fourth UN Conference on LDCs (LDC IV) in 2011 in Istanbul. Hence, for the LDCs, the upcoming MDG Summit (High-level Plenary Meeting) in September 2010 and the LDC IV in 2011 are promising opportunities to make a proper assessment of the existing development challenges and to further strategise on the way forward in building up a pro-poor agenda for poverty eradication and sustainable development in LDCs. The MDG Summit will undertake a comprehensive review of the Millennium Declaration and MDGs so as to reduce the lapses towards 2015, while the LDC IV will primarily review the status of implementation of the BPoA towards a next-generation LDC programme of action.

## **CONTEXT OF PACIFIC LDCs**

Of the 49 current LDCs in the world, 5 are in the Pacific – Kiribati, Samoa,<sup>4</sup> Solomon Islands, Tuvalu and Vanuatu. They are some of the smallest nations in the LDC group, with populations ranging from 10,000 to 500,000. These Pacific LDCs are geographically distant from each other, and from the rest of the world. Pacific regional cooperation has been very active for the past 50 years. There are at least 10 inter-governmental regional organizations active in the Pacific, and their programs are aimed to cover all of the 8 MDGs – regional programs in economic policies and trade, in education, health, water and sanitation, environment, gender/women, governance, and in coordination and partnership.

Regional cooperation can assist in mainstreaming MDGs tailored to the particular needs and circumstances of individual countries and regions. In the Pacific, poverty as defined in the MDGs is not all that relevant, but there is widespread poverty of opportunities, for income and for quality education. Universal education has been or is being achieved but there is a need to lift the quality of basic education to meet the challenges of globalization. HIV/AIDS is becoming a serious concern, as are other diseases like malaria.

In the Pacific, the UN Development Programme (UNDP), regional organizations and other partners are helping LDCs contextualize and mainstream MDGs, using the national planning and review exercises as entry points. This is being done in Vanuatu, where country-specific targets have been developed, in the Solomon Islands, through its National Recovery and Reform program, in Kiribati, through the review of its national Development Strategic Plan and in Samoa, with plans to do the same for Tuvalu. This ensures that MDGs are pursued in an integrated manner, while enhancing the national planning process itself.

There have been concerns raised at the UN General Assembly by members of the Pacific LDCs that many of their issues are considered too small for the international system to handle and that many of them tend to get swept under the carpet. This is a challenge that the Pacific LDCs continually face.

The impact of climate change has increased poverty and unpredictability in the region. Droughts, flooding, sea level rise, frequency of cyclones have battered the narrow agricultural base and pushed back the developments achieved in the past decades. These developments are a serious challenge to the attainment of the MDGs. The high costs of food and increase in price of energy are exacerbating the challenges; for many of the Pacific small islands, energy accounts for a third of their national budget. Acquiring adequate

---

<sup>4</sup> Samoa is scheduled for graduation in 2010.

technology to harness alternative sources of energy is needed to free up domestic resources to address all of the MDGs.

In this context, together with the aforementioned background, LDC Watch in cooperation with local partner, the Vanuatu Association of NGOs (VANGO) and the UN Millennium Campaign (UNMC) is organizing the regional Pacific LDC Assembly in Port Vila on 3-5 August 2010. The Assembly is strategically placed to feed into the 41<sup>st</sup> Pacific Islands Forum scheduled on 3-6 August 2010 in Port Vila, Vanuatu.

## **OBJECTIVES**

The specific objectives of the Pacific LDC Assembly are as follows:

- ✓ Raise awareness on the LDCs and the BPoA review process including the MDGs among all stakeholders, namely, CSOs, government representatives, the UN system, development partner organisations, the Bretton Woods institutions, other multilateral organizations and the media;
- ✓ Assess and review the policies and programmes of Pacific LDC governments, their development partners, the UN agencies and other multi-lateral institutions with regard to the implementation of the BPoA and the achievement of the MDGs;
- ✓ Raise the level of awareness among CSOs for their meaningful contribution and engagement towards and at the 2011 LDC IV including the 2010 MDG Summit;
- ✓ Strategize on the effective role of CSOs towards the LDC IV including the MDG Summit.
- ✓ Network and alliance-building from national to regional to global levels on the LDC IV as well as the MDGs processes;
- ✓ Expand membership of LDC Watch.

## **EXPECTED OUTCOMES**

- ✓ Shared knowledge and understanding among the different stakeholders on the status and issues of the BPoA and MDGs in the Pacific LDCs;
- ✓ Strengthened capacity of Pacific LDC CSOs to take on the issues of the BPoA and MDGs by sustained advocacy and campaigns,
- ✓ Enhanced networks, alliances, campaigns and policy advocacy at the national, regional and global levels towards poverty eradication and sustainable development in the LDCs;
- ✓ Established functional mechanism for follow up towards the LDC IV including the MDG Summit;
- ✓ Expanded LDC Watch network in the Pacific LDCs.

## **ABOUT LDC WATCH**

LDC Watch is a global alliance of national, regional and international civil society organizations (CSOs), networks and movements based in the LDCs and supported by civil society from development partner countries. It acts as a coordinating body for LDC civil society to advocate, campaign and network for the realization and the review of the BPoA including other internationally agreed development goals such as the MDGs. It therefore goes beyond the BPoA in addressing poverty, hunger, social injustices and human rights violations in the LDCs. LDC Watch, therefore, has been raising its voice and articulating its perspectives in a multi-stakeholder framework engaging with the UN, LDC governments and their development partners, both as partner and pressure group.

LDC Watch has grown out of the parallel NGO Forum process established by the UN and the European Commission to enable NGO/CSO involvement in the LDC III in Brussels in 2001. As the only international LDC civil society network engaging in both policy advocacy and campaigns in the interest of the LDCs since 2001, LDC Watch has been officially mandated by the UN Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States (UN-OHRLS) to lead the civil society process towards the LDC IV that is scheduled to take place in 2011 in Istanbul, Turkey.

## Annex

### WHAT ARE THE LEAST DEVELOPED COUNTRIES?

Forty-nine countries are currently designated by the United Nations as “least developed countries” (LDCs). These are:

Afghanistan, Angola, Bangladesh, Benin, Bhutan, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cambodia, the Central African Republic, Chad, the Comoros, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Djibouti, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Gambia, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Haiti, Kiribati, the Lao People’s Democratic Republic, Lesotho, Liberia, Madagascar, Malawi, Maldives, Mali, Mauritania, Mozambique, Myanmar, Nepal, Niger, Rwanda, Samoa, Sao Tome and Principe, Senegal, Sierra Leone, the Solomon Islands, Somalia, Sudan, Timor-Leste, Togo, Tuvalu, Uganda, the United Republic of Tanzania, Vanuatu, Yemen and Zambia.

The list of LDCs is reviewed every three years by the United Nations Economic and Social Council, in the light of recommendations by the Committee for Development Policy (CDP). The following **three criteria** were used by the CDP in the latest review of the list of LDCs, which took place in March 2009:

(a) the **“low-income”** criterion, based on a three-year average estimate of the gross national income (GNI) per capita, with a threshold of \$905 for addition to the list, and a threshold of \$1,086 for graduation from LDC status;

(b) the **“human assets weakness”** criterion, involving a composite index (the Human Assets Index) based on indicators of: (i) nutrition (the percentage of the population that is undernourished); (ii) health (the child mortality rate); (iii) school enrolment (the gross secondary school enrolment rate); and (iv) literacy (the adult literacy rate); and

(c) the **“economic vulnerability”** criterion, involving a composite index (the Economic Vulnerability Index) based on indicators of: (i) natural shocks (the index of the instability of agricultural production, and the share of the population displaced by natural disasters); (ii) trade shocks (the index of the instability of exports of goods and services); (iii) exposure to shocks (the share of agriculture, forestry and fisheries in GDP, and the index of merchandise export concentration); (iv) economic smallness (the population in logarithm); and (v) economic remoteness (the index of remoteness).

For all three criteria, different thresholds are used for identifying addition cases and graduation cases. **A country will qualify to be added to the list of LDCs if it meets the addition thresholds on all three criteria** and does not have a population **greater than 75 million**. Qualification for addition to the list will effectively lead to LDC status only if the government of the relevant country accepts this status. A country will normally qualify for graduation from LDC status if it has met the **graduation thresholds under at least two of the three criteria in at least two consecutive triennial reviews of the list**. However, if the GNI per capita of an LDC has risen to a level at least double that of the graduation threshold, the country will be deemed eligible for graduation regardless of its performance under the **Only two countries have so far graduated from LDC status:**

**Botswana in December 1994, and Cape Verde in December 2007. Samoa is currently expected to graduate on 17 December 2010, and Maldives on 1 January 2011. In 2009, the CDP recommended that Equatorial Guinea be graduated from the list of LDCs.** After a recommendation by the CDP to graduate a country has been endorsed by the Economic and Social Council and the General Assembly, **the graduating country is granted a three-year grace period before graduation effectively takes place.** This grace period, during which the country remains an LDC, is designed to enable the graduating State and its development and trade partners to agree on a “smooth transition” strategy, so that the possible loss of LDCs specific concessions at the time of graduation does not disrupt the socio-economic progress of the country.

## **COUNTRY CLASSIFICATION**

For statistical and analytical purposes, LDCs are classified according to three criteria: (a) geographical; and (b) export specialization; and (c) net agricultural trade. They are grouped as follows:

### **1. Geographical groupings**

**1.1 Africa and Haiti:** Angola, Benin, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Central African Republic, Chad, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Djibouti, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Gambia, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Haiti, Lesotho, Liberia,

Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Mauritania, Mozambique, Niger, Rwanda, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Sudan, Togo, Uganda, United Republic of Tanzania, Zambia.

**1.2 Asia :** Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Cambodia, Lao People’s Democratic Republic, Myanmar, Nepal, Yemen.

**1.3 Islands :** Comoros, Kiribati, Maldives, Samoa, Sao Tome and Principe, Solomon Islands, Timor-Leste, Tuvalu, Vanuatu.

Some of the island LDCs are geographically in Africa or Asia but are grouped together with the Pacific islands due to their structural similarities. For the same reason, Haiti and Madagascar are grouped together with African LDCs.

### **2. Groupings by export specialization**

**2.1 Oil exporters:** Angola, Chad, Equatorial Guinea, Sudan, Timor-Leste, Yemen.

**2.2 Agricultural exporters:** Afghanistan, Benin, Burkina Faso, Guinea-Bissau, Kiribati, Liberia, Malawi, Solomon Islands, Somalia, Tuvalu, Uganda.

**2.3 Mineral exporters:** Burundi, Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Guinea, Mali, Mauritania, Mozambique, Niger, Sierra Leone, Zambia.

**2.4 Manufactures exporters:** Bangladesh, Bhutan, Cambodia, Haiti, Lesotho, Nepal.

**2.5 Services exporters:** Comoros, Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Gambia, Maldives, Rwanda, Samoa, Sao Tome and Principe, United Republic of Tanzania, Vanuatu

**2.6 Mixed exporters:** Lao People's Democratic Republic, Madagascar, Senegal, Togo.

For these groupings LDCs are classified according to which export category accounts for at least 45 per cent of their total exports of goods and services, with some adjustments in a few cases. For a detailed discussion of the criteria and data, see UNCTAD (2008: xii–xiv).<sup>1</sup> Updated statistics on exports have been compiled for this Report and have confirmed the country classifications above.

### **3. Groupings according to net agricultural trade**

**3.1 Net food importers and net importers of agricultural raw materials:** Angola, Bangladesh, Comoros, Djibouti, Eritrea, Gambia, Haiti, Kiribati, Maldives, Nepal, Niger, Samoa, Sao Tome and Principe, Senegal, Sierra Leone,

Somalia, Tuvalu, Yemen.

**3.2 Net food importers and net exporters of agricultural raw materials:** Benin, Cambodia, Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Guinea, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Lesotho, Liberia,

Mozambique, Sudan, Chad, Togo, Mali.

**3.3 Net food exporters and net importers of agricultural raw materials:** Afghanistan, Bhutan, Burundi, Mauritania, Rwanda.

**3.4 Net food exporters and net exporters of agricultural raw materials:** Ethiopia, Guinea-Bissau, Madagascar, Malawi, Myanmar, Solomon Islands, Tanzania, Uganda, Vanuatu, Zambia.

-----