

# What are the Least Developed Countries?

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Forty-nine countries are currently designated by the United Nations as “least developed countries” (LDCs). A country is considered least developed if it faces structural impediments to growth. The list is reviewed every three years by the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). In its latest triennial review of the list of the LDCs in 2006, the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations used the following three criteria for the identification of the LDCs, as proposed by the Committee for Development Policy (CDP):

- Income value (Gross National Income per capita), based on a three year average. The threshold for inclusion was calculated at \$745 while the threshold for graduation was \$900.
- Stock of human assets (the Human Asset Index), a combination of four indicators: a) the percentage of the population undernourished; b) the mortality rate for children aged 5 or under; c) the gross secondary school enrolment ratio; and d) adult literacy rate.
- Economic vulnerability (the Economic Vulnerability Index), based on: a) population size; b) remoteness; c) merchandise export concentration; d) share of agriculture, forestry and fisheries; e) homelessness owing to natural disasters; f) instability of agricultural production; and g) instability of exports of goods and services.

To be included in the list, a country must satisfy all three criteria. In addition, since the fundamental meaning of the LDC category excludes large economies, the population must not exceed 75 million. To qualify for graduation, a country must meet the thresholds for two of the three criteria in two consecutive triennial reviews by the CDP. Based on the CDP report, ECOSOC will make a recommendation to the General Assembly, which is in turn responsible for the final decision. The following countries are currently listed as LDCs:

*Afghanistan, Angola, Bangladesh, Benin, Bhutan, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cambodia, Central African Republic, Chad, Comoros, Dem. Republic of Congo, Djibouti, Equatorial Guinea<sup>3</sup>, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Gambia, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Haiti, Kiribati<sup>3</sup>, Lao People's Dem. Republic, Lesotho, Liberia, Madagascar, Malawi, Maldives<sup>1</sup>, Mali, Mauritania, Mozambique, Myanmar, Nepal, Niger, Rwanda, Samoa<sup>2</sup>, Sao Tome and Principe, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Solomon Island, Somalia, Sudan, Timor-Leste, Togo, Tuvalu<sup>3</sup>, Uganda, United Rep. of Tanzania, Vanuatu<sup>3</sup>, Yemen, Zambia.*

<sup>1</sup>Maldives will graduate in 2011.

<sup>2</sup>With regard to the 2006 triennial review, Samoa was recommended for graduation by the committee.

<sup>3</sup>With regard to the 2006 triennial review, Kiribati, Tuvalu, Equatorial Guinea, and Vanuatu are eligible for graduation.

