

OUTLINE OF A SUGGESTED METHODOLOGY FOR MONITORING THE NATIONAL IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PROGRAMME OF ACTION FOR THE LEAST DEVELOPED COUNTRIES FOR THE DECADE 2001-2010

Background: Since late 1960s the world has increasingly been recognizing the special needs and vulnerabilities of the least developed countries. In the Millennium Declaration adopted at the dawn of the new century leaders of the world have called for international support to the efforts of the least developed countries to eradicate poverty eradication, reach economic growth and sustainable development. This strong international support culminated in the adoption of the Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the Decade 2001-2010 at the Third United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries in Brussels on 20 May 2001, subsequently endorsed by General Assembly resolution 55/279 of 12 July 2001.

The Brussels Programme of Action (BPOA) articulates policies and measures to be taken by the LDCs and their development partners in seven interlinked areas:

1. fostering a people-centered policy framework;
2. good governance at national and international levels;
3. building human and institutional capacities;
4. building productive capacities to make globalization work for the LDCs;
5. enhancing the role of trade in development;
6. reducing vulnerability and protecting the environment; and
7. mobilizing financial resources.

It is based on international development goals, including those contained in the Millennium Declaration and known as the Millennium Development Goals. These goals and targets are embedded into the commitments of the Programme of Action (para 5).

Rationale: Goals and targets mobilize national and international partners into action and help forge partnerships and alliances. Time bound and measurable goals and targets provide benchmarks against which the progress can be measured by indicators. They provide governments with an effective means for planning and budgeting, policy making, institutional reforms and mobilization of resources. They ensure transparency and accountability and allow peer reviews.

The Brussels Programme of Action contains 30 quantifiable goals in poverty reduction, economic growth, social inclusion and human development, infrastructure, transport and communication as well as Official Development Assistance (ODA).

The Programme states that “the goals and targets set out in the Programme of Action will be used to renew and evaluate performance of the LDCs and their development partners in implementing the various commitments” (para 94).

The Programme emphasizes that this evaluation must be result oriented: “The process of identifying, assessing and monitoring progress on processes and concrete outcomes will be a key aspect of the implementation of the Programme of Action and its success will be judged by its contribution to progress of LDCs towards achieving international development targets, as well as their graduation from the list of LDCs” (para 21 e).

The Committee on Development Policy (CDP) of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) has been given a mandate for monitoring progress and making recommendations on the inclusion and graduation from the list of LDCs.

As for measuring the progress on the BPOA goals and targets, UNCTAD had undertaken the task of identification of clearly defined indicators for them and came to the following conclusions¹:

1. Not all the quantifiable goals included in the Programme are specified in a way in which they can be monitored.
2. The data which are internationally available for monitoring the progress on the BPOA goals are woefully inadequate in terms of coverage of least developed countries, their quality and timelines;
3. The data problem is particularly acute in relation to the overarching goal of making substantial progress towards halving by 2015 the proportion of people living in extreme poverty by 2015;
4. Where data are available it is apparent that the majority of the least developed countries are off track.
5. Composite indicators for measuring progress towards graduation thresholds could enrich the monitoring progress in the implementation of the Programme.

In November 2002 UNCTAD also carried out a comparative study of the BPOA goals and targets and MDGs by identifying overlaps, gaps, close associations and

¹ UNCTAD report to the forty-eight session of the Trade and Development Board (TDB) on 1 October 2001 “The development goals of the Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the Decade 2001-2010: toward a set of indicators to monitor progress” (TD/B/48/14)

inconsistencies and recommended harmonization with the MDG indicators to measure the progress on the BPOA goals² that are similar to the MDGs.

Suggested methodology is based on a) harmonisation of indicators to be used for measuring the progress on the BPOA goals and targets that are similar to the MDGs with the MDGs indicators, b) selection of a minimum set of indicators³ for those BPOA goals and targets that are different from the MDGs and b) ‘localisation’ of harmonised and selected indicators by adjusting them to the national priorities of the LDCs.

Harmonisation of indicators to be used for measuring the progress on the BPOA goals and targets that are similar to the MDGs with the MDGs indicators is dictated by the following provision of the Programme: “The follow-up and monitoring of the Programme of Action should contribute to coordinated follow-up of the implementation of recommendations and commitments of global summits and conferences, including their major reviews, and the United Nations Millennium Declaration, as well as of other major agreements and initiatives on development as they relate to LDCs” (para 95)

Additionally, the “Secretary-General of the United Nations is requested to ensure at the secretariat level the full mobilization and coordination of all parts of the United Nations system to facilitate coordinated implementation as well as coherence in the follow-up and monitoring of the Programme of Action at the national, regional, subregional and global levels” (para98).

Given that other programmes at the national level, like PRSPs and CCAs, have been already brought in line with the MDGs it is only logical to follow suit. Such approach, besides ensuring the coherent follow-up and implementation of the BPOA at the national level avoids unnecessary duplication and lessens the burden of reporting on national statistical agencies of the LDCs.

Another reason for harmonization with the MDGs indicators is the complementarity of MDGs to the BPOA goals and targets. In addition to poverty and human development targets the MDGs also contain goals and targets on environmental sustainability, on trade and market access, debt relief and ODA to landlocked developing countries and small island developing states. Hence, the indicators used for measuring the progress on these targets could be used for measuring the progress in fulfilling the commitments by the LDCs and their development partners in these areas.

² Michael Herrmann “Millennium Development Goals and LDC-Specific Development Goals: An Assessment of differences and recommendations towards harmonization”, 2 November 2002, Geneva

³ The term indicator refers here to data and “simple” statistical composites (e. g., gross domestic Product and life expectancy) which are recognised as analytic decision-making tools; highly composite index-type indicators (e.g., human development index) are explicitly excluded)

Selection of a minimum set of indicators proposed in a separate table⁴ for those BPOA goals and targets that are different from the MDGs will be guided by the following criteria established by the Statistical Commission of the United Nations: a) ability of the indicators to measure the main conference goals and to respond quickly to changes; b) cost-effectiveness, including the infrastructure needed for regular compilation; c) availability of data for sufficient number of countries; and finally d) degree of independence of the indicators in the limited set⁵.

Localisation. Given that the main objective is to provide LDCs with an effective tool for monitoring and evaluation of the BPOA at the national level it is recommended that the global BPOA goals are translated into nationally agreed targets that balance ambition with realism. Practice shows that over-ambitious targets are not likely to trigger action while non-challenging targets are unlikely to mobilise resources or foster pro-poor policy reforms.

Ideally, they should be localised by the LDCs with the involvement of the UN Resident Coordinator system and the civil society, including the private sector.

Role of UN system. The BPOA attaches great importance to the role of the UN system, in particular the Resident Coordinator system, in assisting the LDCs to "translate goals and targets of major global conferences and summits into concrete actions in the light of national priorities". It further emphasises that "this process should be strengthened" (para 96).

Role of civil society. The role of civil society is absolutely crucial in the localisation of the BPOA goals and targets and for ensuring their national ownership. Its role is also important for securing human and financial resources for achieving the BPOA goals. The Programme emphasizes: "the implementation and follow-up of the Programme of Action at the national level are of primary importance. The LDC Governments should undertake this task...with the involvement of civil society, including the private sector, on the basis of a broad-based inclusive dialogue" (para 99).

⁴ See Annex 1.

⁵ Report of the Secretary-General "Activities and plans of the United Nations Statistics Division and the Statistical Commission in support of the harmonization and rationalization of indicators" (E/CN.3/2001.16)