

Regional preparatory meeting of African Least Developed
Countries for the comprehensive global midterm review
of the Brussels Programme of Action

**AFRICAN LDCs' STRATEGY FOR THE
FURTHER IMPLEMENTATION OF THE
PROGRAMME OF ACTION FOR THE
LEAST DEVELOPED COUNTRIES
FOR THE DECADE 2001-2010**

21-23 February 2006
United Nations Economic Commission for
Africa (UNECA), Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

1. INTRODUCTION

The African regional* preparatory meeting to review the implementation of the Brussels Programme of Action (BPOA) for the period 2001 to 2005 for African LDCs, which constitutes 68% of all LDCs worldwide, was held in Addis Ababa from 21 to 23 February 2006.

- The meeting assessed the progress made and identified obstacles and constraints encountered during the first five years of implementation, and formulated recommendations to overcome the identified obstacles and constraints so as to ensure the full and timely implementation of the seven commitments contained in the Program of Action. Furthermore, the meeting provided an opportunity for African LDCs to share best practices and lessons learned.
- The meeting recalled the 2005 World Summit Outcome, particularly the re-commitment of the international community to address the special needs of Africa, the only continent not on track to meet any of the goals of the Millennium Declaration by 2015. Consequently, the achievement of the MDGs within the agreed timeframe by African LDCs, which constitute 64% of the countries of the continent, is more challenging. This situation calls for an absolute need to place emphasis on the full implementation of the BPOA during the remaining period of the Programme of Action at the national, sub-regional, regional and global levels. To achieve this, there is an urgent need for concerted efforts by the LDCs, their development partners, the UN system organizations, international financial and trade institutions, including the Bretton Woods Institutions and the World Trade Organization, Global Environment Fund, civil society, non-governmental organizations and the private sector.

2. ACHIEVEMENTS

For the past five years, African LDCs have adopted a number of policies and measures to mainstream the implementation of the Brussels Programme of Action in their national development strategies and have registered, among others, the following achievements in the implementation of the BPOA:

i. Commitment 1: Fostering a People-Centred Policy Framework

* With the participation of Haiti

- Economic growth and macroeconomic performance have improved in African LDCs, particularly in oil-exporting countries.

ii. Commitment 2: Good Governance at national and international levels

Regarding the issue of good governance, the delegates reaffirmed that though their governments have made considerable progress, much more remains to be done:

- Governance reforms have been widely implemented and progress has been made in African LDCs.
- 17 African LDCs have acceded to the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM). Other new African institutions have been instrumental in improving governance in Member States.
- Progress has been made in gender equality.

iii. Commitment 3: Building Human and Institutional Capacities

There has been considerable and tangible progress in the area of strengthening human and institutional capacities.

- There have been significant improvements in primary enrolment rates.
- Gender disparity in education has decreased.
- Health indicators have improved in some African LDCs.

iv. Commitment 4: Building Productive Capacities to Make Globalization Work for LDCs:

- Through national, sub-regional and regional mechanisms, African LDCs have adopted cooperation frameworks and have projected to expand their physical transport infrastructure.
- Registered progress in the usage of information and communication technologies, in particular by improving access to telephone mainlines and mobile phones as well as by promoting the use of personal computers and the Internet.
- It was noted with satisfaction that the period of 2001-2005, teledensity and Internet connectivity have almost doubled in the LDCs, although the digital divide between LDCs and developed countries remains stark.
- Reformed regulatory and business environment has attracted marginal increase in the flow of the Foreign Direct Investment (FDI).

- Achievements have been made in the area of food security due to, inter alia, adaptation and dissemination of high-yield varieties, and the intensification of hydro-agricultural managements.

v. Commitment 5: Enhancing the Role of Trade in Development

- The least developed countries have increased their participation in the global economy through sub-regional, regional and international trade within the context of south-south co-operation, as well as through relevant trade initiatives by trading partners.
- Exports from LDCs grew between 2003 and 2004 by 10.7 per cent, above the growth rates in the LDC group as a whole (8.7 per cent).

vi. Commitment 6: Reducing Vulnerability and Protecting the Environment

- Since 2001, African LDCs have increasingly focused on measures to improve environmental agreements to which they are party. In addition to this, some countries have included these engagements in their constitutions.
- African LDCs have been instrumental in the development of the following instruments: The Programme of Action for the implementation of the Africa Regional Strategy for Disaster Risk Reduction, the Action Plan for the environmental initiative of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), the Sirte Declaration on Integrated Development of Water and Agriculture in Africa and the HABITAT Agenda.

vii. Commitment 7: Mobilizing Financial Resources

- African LDCs have made achievements in the area of domestic resource mobilisation through improved fiscal policy, financial sector reforms, budgetary and public financial management control mechanisms and strengthening and widening of the tax base.
- The wide-ranging and comprehensive economic, social and political reforms of African LDCs have resulted in 13 LDCs qualifying for the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) initiative. At the end of 2005, out of 18 African countries that reached the completion point, 13 were LDCs

and out of 20 African countries that had reached the decision point, 8 were LDCs. Furthermore, some African LDCs will benefit from the G8 proposal to write off multilateral debt owed by the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC), emanating from the July 2005 Gleneagles Summit.

3. CHALLENGES AND CONSTRAINTS

In spite of progress made in the implementation of the Brussels Programme of Action, there are still daunting challenges and constraints. Unless these constraints are fully addressed at the national, sub-regional, regional and the international levels, LDCs will not achieve the goals and targets of BPoA as well as other internationally agreed development goals, including the MDGs. The following constraints were identified:

i. Commitment 1: Fostering a People-Centred Policy Framework

- Growth has not led to improvements in living standards even in oil-exporting countries where growth has exceeded 7%. The main challenge is therefore to increase economic growth.
- Growth has not translated sufficiently into poverty reduction, in particular, the benefits of growth have not been equitably distributed among the populations.
- Growth needs to have a human face.
- PRSPs have not been successful enough in accelerating growth and reducing poverty

ii. Commitment 2: Good Governance at National and International Levels

The most important challenges can be grouped as follows:

- Major challenges include a lack of awareness of governance reforms, and inadequate political will and enforcement by governments.
- Conflict and internal security are major challenges for African LDCs
- Conflicts have always resulted into continuous increase of internally displaced persons (IDPs) and influx of refugees to the neighbouring countries.
- Governance at the international-level is inadequate.
- Gender equality is still lacking in many Member States.

iii. Commitment 3: Building Human and Institutional Capacities

However, as tangible as they are, these improvements might not be strong enough to face the difficulties emanating from the obstacles of the implementation of the commitments of the BPOA:

- Lack of domestic and external resources constraints governments from investing in these areas.
- Primary completion rates remain low resulting in inadequate secondary school enrolment rates.
- Quality of education is often poor, which is exacerbated by poor teaching standards and high rates of attrition stemming from insufficient salaries.
- Curricula are often inappropriate for the labour market. More vocational training is needed, especially in technical areas.
- Brain drain is still a major challenge for African LDCs.
- Infant mortality continues to be high, which results from such diseases as malaria. Antenatal health also needs more resources.
- Access to medication and mosquito nets is still a major constraint in many countries.
- Malnutrition is still a chronic problem.
- Population growth poses many challenges for African LDCs.
- Access to water and sanitation facilities remains too low, though this is essential for gender equality and development in general. Schools often lack these facilities.

iv. Commitment 4: Building Productive Capacities to Make Globalization Work For LDCs:

• Poor Infrastructure System

The lack of well-developed and reliable social and physical infrastructure continues to be one of the major bottlenecks for the LDCs to achieve the objectives of the BPOA. This problem has, among others, resulted into inability to mobilize resources through the attraction of foreign direct investment.

• Dependence on Traditional Agriculture Methods

More than 75% of the population in LDCs live in rural areas and depend on agriculture for their livelihood. Many farmers still depend on rudimentary

equipments and the use of old technologies. The agricultural sector in LDCs also depends largely on the unstable and difficult to predict natural weather conditions.

- **Lack and/or low Levels of Technology and ICT**

The lack of technology and information communication technology (ICT) has deterred LDCs from integrating into and, accruing benefits of the process of globalization. For example, personal computer availability in African LDCs is still in its infancy, which is only accessible to less than 10 per 1000 inhabitants.

v. Commitment 5: Enhancing the Role of Trade in Development

- **Vulnerability to International Commodity Prices and Commodity Dependency**

The fluctuating and unstable prices of the agricultural commodities at the world market combined with a downward trend in the terms of trade remain among the major challenges to the LDCs. The LDCs also suffer from primary commodity dependency. Many LDCs depend on a single or two commodities for their export earnings.

Moreover, the inability of LDCs to add value to the agricultural commodities deepens the negative impacts of lower prices in the economies. The situation is worsened by the fact that developed countries continue to grant high subsidies to their farmers, which deny LDCs a fair competition and market share.

African LDCs due to supply-side constraints, lack of trade-related capacity and non-tariff barriers are not making full use of preferential market access initiatives.

vi. Commitment 6: Reducing Vulnerability and Protecting the Environment

- **Vulnerability to Natural Disasters and Environmental Degradation**

African LDCs suffer considerably under the overpowering grip of natural disasters, ranging from droughts, floods, tropical cyclones and locust invasion. Due to their lack of preparedness and inability to respond in an effective and timely manner, the natural disasters have resulted in massive loss of lives, destruction of properties, infrastructure and reversal of economic growth.

African LDCs continue to face a number of serious environmental challenges including threats to key biological resources, desertification, land degradation and

rapid urbanization. Energy efficiency and increased use of renewable energy alternatives, integrated water resource management, coping with industrial and domestic waste and safe use of chemicals are among areas in which technology support and capacity building have been inadequate.

vii. Commitment 7: Mobilizing Financial Resources

- **Inadequate Financial Resources**

Despite the fact that LDCs have endeavoured to mobilize and increase domestic resources, their efforts have not yielded the required resources needed for the achievement of the goals and objectives of the Programme of Action for the Decade 2001-2010. The fulfilment of the Official Development Assistance (ODA) commitment still falls far short of the agreed target of 0.15% to 0.20% of the GNI in favour of the LDCs. Related to this problem is the unpredictability of donor resource flows.

African LDCs are confronted on the one hand with constraints in absorptive capacity and on the other hand with non-streamlined aid policies, procedures and practices and the non-alignment of aid to recipient needs.

The external debt overhang in the African LDCs continues to be a serious obstacle to their development and impacts economic growth. Debt service takes up a large part of scarce budgetary resources that could be directed to productive and social areas, and debt overhang harms internal and external investment climate.

- **Lack of Political Will**

Serious lack of political will on the part of some development partners adversely affects the global partnership upon which the BPoA is predicated. This lack of political will continues to frustrate the efforts of the LDCs in achieving the objectives and goals of the BPoA.

4. RECOMMENDATIONS

The analysis and identification of the above challenges and constraints, which were characterised as major obstacles to the full implementation of the BPoA and poverty reduction in LDCs, resulted in the adoption of the following recommendation to be carried out:

i. Commitment 1: Fostering a People-Centred Policy Framework

- Strategies to accelerate economic growth including economic diversification should be developed.
- International partners should meet their commitments in increasing ODA flows to African LDCs to assist with economic development.
- HIPC debt relief should be enhanced and expanded to cover all African LDCs.
- Governments should consider decentralisation as an important step towards making policies more people-centred.
- Poverty reduction strategies including PRSPs should involve all stakeholders.

ii. Commitment 2: Good Governance at National and International Levels

Delegates emphasized that international partners should also address good governance in terms of their activities with African LDCs. They also requested that there be an end to the stigmatisation of their deficiencies with respect to governance. Delegates repeated their appeal for disbursement of adequate technical assistance for the efforts in governance, delivered to all levels and means of politics and decentralisation in general. The recommendations are:

- Governance should be improved at the local, national and international levels, addressing such dimensions as gender equality.
- Improving governance at the local level requires decentralisation.
- International partners should assist countries in preventing conflict.
- Member States should also utilise African mechanisms and institutions.
- Governments should improve awareness of governance and rights of citizens through education and transparency.
- International partners should assist with financial resources, technical assistance and capacity building.
- Governments should reduce barriers to setting up a business and streamline administrative procedures.
- LDCs need to be assisted in their efforts to fight corruption, in particular through the strengthening of the capacities of the various institutions established in this regard.

iii. Commitment 3: Building Human and Institutional Capacities

The recommendations are:

- Member States should consider initiatives to address low primary school completion rates and transition rates to secondary school.
- African LDCs should improve the quality of education and retention of teachers through better employment conditions and wages.
- Governments should develop vocational training especially in technical areas including special initiatives for the informal sector.
- African LDCs should formulate policies to stem brain drain.
- Governments should improve access to drinking water and sanitation facilities, especially in rural areas.

iv. Commitment 4: Building Productive Capacities to Make Globalization Work for LDCs:

• Investment in Infrastructure

Development partners and the entire international community need to assist African LDCs in the development of reliable infrastructure system by providing both financial and technical assistance with a view to promoting wider market access as well as attracting both domestic and foreign direct investment. To this end, countries of the south, within the framework of the south-south co-operation, also need to render the required assistance

African LDCs should be assisted to access environmentally sound technologies, including the ICT, which are among the prerequisites to the fight against poverty and the achievement of sustained economic growth and sustainable development.

• Addressing Inequalities of the Globalization Process

Due to continuous marginalization of the LDCs in the global economy, deliberate and concerted efforts must be taken by the international community, spearheaded by the United Nations, to ensure that African LDCs are fairly integrated into, and benefit from the process of globalization.

v. Commitment 5: Enhancing the Role of Trade in Development

- **Better Integration of African LDCs in the International Trading System**

Establishment of a level plain field in the area of international trade is necessary for the LDCs to mobilize sufficient resources needed to implement the BPOA. In this regard, all trade distorting barriers, including high tariff peaks and tariff escalations, subsidies and other non-tariff mechanisms should be eliminated without further delay. Related to this is the need to ensure stable, predictable and fair agricultural commodity prices in the world market for products from LDCs. Likewise, the WTO should provide fast track to all African LDCs to its accession.

- vi. **Commitment 6: Reducing Vulnerability and Protecting the Environment**

- **Reducing Vulnerability to Natural Disasters and Protecting the Environment**

Technology support, capacity building and mobilization of new and additional resources to supplement national and regional efforts are required to meet the needs and priorities of African LDCs in environmental management, disaster prevention and mitigation, and sustainable urbanization. Likewise, development partners need to support LDCs to enhance their capacity to effectively participate in and benefit from regional and international early warning systems and response networks, including through satellite-driven technologies.

- vii. **Commitment 7: Mobilizing Financial Resources**

- **Increase of resources**

In order to eradicate poverty and achieve sustained economic growth and sustainable development, African LDCs need to mobilise both domestic and external resources. In this respect, ODA and other external sources of financing have an important role to play. In this regard, developed countries that have not achieved the target of ODA of 0.15% - 0.20% of GNI to LDCs were called upon to expeditiously fulfil their obligation.

- **Total debt cancellation**

Total, speedy and unconditional debt cancellation is the only lasting solution to the debt problem of all African LDCs, for it frees up resources which the LDCs could use to finance their development programmes, particularly the BPOA.

- **Access to microfinance**

African LDCs, supported by development partners, should promote microfinance and microcredit as a tool to increase production, economic growth and poverty eradication.

5. IMPLEMENTATION, MONITORING, EVALUATION AND FOLLOW UP MECHANISMS

For effective and full implementation of the BPoA, the arrangements for the implementation, follow-up, monitoring and review at the national, sub-regional, regional and global levels as outlined in the Programme of Action should be strengthened. The Measures at different levels should be conducted in a coherent and mutually supportive manner. The United Nations System, in particular the Office of the High Representative for Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States (UN-OHRLLS) should undertake necessary measures to monitor these activities;

i. National Level

The regional meeting in Addis Ababa accorded high priority to the implementation of and follow-up to the BPoA at country level. The Meeting acknowledged that most of the LDCs have already formulated their national development strategies and some progresses have been achieved. However the Meeting expressed deep concern over the following points:

- Lack of institutional and human capacity at the national level;
- Poor monitoring and assessment system by the UN country team;
- Lack of coordination among the UN country team and the government machinery;

Following steps are recommended:

- The Meeting reiterated the importance of provision the paragraph 92 (a) of the BPoA according to which at the national level, each LDC should ensure that the goals and targets contained in the BPoA are translated into specific measures within their national development framework and poverty eradication strategy, including where they exist, Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs), Common Country Assessment

(CCAs), and the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF);

- Development partners should support efforts by the LDCs in Africa to adopt and implement national development policies and strategies;
- International Community should provide necessary assistance for institutional and human capacity building for African LDCs;
- Development tools like PRSP, CCA, UNDAF and other frameworks at the country level should be crafted in a synchronized manner in line with national priorities;
- African LDCs should designate and strengthen national focal points with necessary financial and technical support from development partners;
- The Meeting stressed on building inclusive and participatory national institutional forums with the assistance of the development partners to serve as a platform for systematic follow-up and monitoring of the implementation of the BPoA;
- Resident Coordinator system should provide technical and financial support, and help LDCs translate goals and targets of the BPoA into concrete actions in line with national priorities; The Brussels Programme should be a matter of priority in the work of the UN system at the country level;
- The UN Resident Coordinator should provide adequate technical and financial support to national focal points for the preparation of the national report on the implementation of BPoA;
- The assessment and monitoring should be result oriented with special focus on achievements, failures, and recommendations;
- coherence and coordination among the different UN agencies should be strengthened at the country level;
- International Community should provide necessary assistance to African LDCs in building statistical capacity in all countries, including through statistical training, and effective international support in this context;

ii. Sub-regional and Regional levels

Sub-regional and regional entities should contribute effectively to the implementation of the BPoA. The Meeting noticed that most of them do not have any specific programme for the LDCs. With a view to making sub-regional and regional bodies more pro-active, the Meeting made the following recommendations:

- Assist LDCs in the implementation of the Programme of Action;
- Provide inputs for regional meetings;
- Attend all regional meetings effectively;
- Promote sub-regional responses to take better account of the needs for the LDCs.
- The ECA should establish urgently a specific unit within the Commission for the African LDCs and mainstream the provisions of the BPoA in ECA's programme of work;
- The regional and sub-regional bodies should undertake periodic, monitoring and review of progress in the implementation of the Programme of Action;
- They should offer an opportunity for African LDCs together with their neighbouring developing countries to exchange experiences and seek solutions to common development problems;
- The Meeting reaffirmed the role of regional and sub-regional financial institutions in the implementation of the BPoA
- The meeting urged the ECA to undertake a tripartite coordination among ECA, regional financial institutions and African LDCs on a regular basis;
- ECA, ADB and other regional institutions should play an active advocacy role for the causes of the LDCs
- Provide inputs to the ECOSOC during its annual review of the BPoA on the status of implementation of the BPoA at the countries of this region;
- Assist LDCs in meeting demands of global competition by appropriately adapting existing regional and sub regional frameworks and linkages in the areas of trade, finance and investment;

iii. Global level

BPoA has accorded critical role to the organizations of the UN System as well as other relevant multilateral organizations for follow-up and implementation of the BPoA. They are also mandated to undertake within their respective mandates multi-year programming of actions in favour of the LDCs. These organizations

are also invited to participate fully in reviews of the Programme of Action at national, sub-regional, regional and national levels. The Meeting recommended following concrete measures at the global level;

- High priority should be given to LDC issues in all major events as well as programmes of the UN System organizations;
- High-representative should be included in the Committee of the Chief Executives Board (CEB) and should attend the meeting and reflect the causes of the LDCs;
- Under strengthened ECOSOC, special focus should be given on the LDC issues in all relevant events;
- The UN Secretary General should submit reports on LDCs in a more analytical and action-oriented manner by highlighting critical areas requiring action by all stakeholders and by making specific recommendations. The report should reflect the country reports and should not be repetitive;
- The UN Secretary General should undertake appropriate measures to strengthen the efficiency and effectiveness of the OHRLLS so that it can carry out its functions, in accordance with the GA resolution 56/226;
- Peace Building Commission should give high priority to African LDCs in conflict or post-conflict situations;
- Assist African LDCs to prepare bankable projects at the country level.
- The UNOHRLLS should submit to the LDC group goals and targets in quantitative terms contained in the BPoA in view of examining them during the Ministerial Meeting in Cotonou;
- The regional meeting urged the UNOHRLLS to proceed to the identification and categorization of institutions in charge of the implementation of the BPoA on a sector by sector basis;
- The meeting insisted on the need for the evaluation of progress made by all relevant stakeholders in the implementation of the BPoA, using quantifiable criteria and indicators against agreed and defined goals and targets;

- The Meeting recommended that institutions or agencies responsible for coordination of specific sectors must include in their respective reports to their executive boards a quantifiable evaluation of the implementation of BPoA in their sector and, if necessary, also include the challenges encountered in meeting targets and goals;
- The commitments undertaken in the Programme of Action should be appropriately reflected in the review of major global summits and conferences;
- The United Nations Secretary-General is called on to undertake through the UN-OHRLLS sector-by-sector and agency-by-agency meetings as relevant to establishing concrete and time bound sectoral programmes, projects and contributions towards attaining definitive objectives to fulfil the seven commitments of the BPoA;
- The ECOSOC is urged to allocate sufficient time for comprehensive discussions on the implementation of the BPoA during the general segment of the Substantive Session of ECOSOC;
- The relevant UN System Organizations that have not yet done so are invited to nominate a focal point for undertaking review, implementation and follow-up of the BPoA;
- UNCTAD should continue to play its role in providing substantive and technical assistance to the African LDCs for the implementation of the Programme of Action;
- IFIs, GEF and other relevant international organizations should strengthen their efforts to ensure the effective implementation of the Programme;
- The UN Secretary General should include LDC issues in all relevant reports in the economic, social and related fields to ensure the follow-up of the implementation of the BPoA;
- The UN-OHRLLS should enhance its advocacy on behalf of the LDCs with a view to making the relevant issues in the BPoA more widely known, and mobilizing international support and resources to help the LDCs achieve the goals and targets of the Brussels Programme of Action;

- The Meeting stressed that UN Secretary General should ensure travel and DSA from regular resources for two representatives from each LDCs to attend the annual review of the Programme of Action;
- Holding in the year 2010 the fourth UN Conference on LDCs in order to make a comprehensive appraisal of the implementation of this Programme and decide on subsequent actions for the LDCs;