



**Session 6**  
**2 September 2021**

### SESSION 6

## SOCIAL AND HUMAN DEVELOPMENT AND GOOD GOVERNANCE AT ALL LEVELS

Social and human development progress in the least developed countries in Asia and the Pacific is constrained due underlying factors, such as weak health care systems and limited social protection systems, that slows down socioeconomic progress and limits positive human development outcomes.

The socio-economic crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic underlines the relevance of overlapping dimensions of poverty. In addition to low income, people living in poverty experience limited or no access to education, higher mortality rates, undernourishment and malnutrition, and lack of access to opportunities to gain income through decent employment. They live in underserved areas with poor infrastructure and limited access to clean water or sanitation and are excluded from social safety nets.


The multiple challenges faced by the most vulnerable and poor people across multiple areas of human development combined with the limited institutional capacities of LDCs underscore the need for a multifaceted approach, which is oriented towards tackling these deprivations simultaneously. Intersecting inequalities among groups and individuals through overlapping characteristics and identity, such as gender, age, disability, sexual orientation, ethnicity, or class play another important factor. Those individuals facing intersecting inequalities experience an amplification of their deprivation, leading to disenfranchisement and the erosion of their capabilities with respect to the rest of the population.

The new programme of action for the least developed countries constitutes an important opportunity to address the multidimensional vulnerabilities faced by societies in LDCs, particularly at a time where responses to the COVID-19 crisis must be focused on people and support greater equality and opportunities for all.

Limited institutional and financial resources constrain LDCs in Asia and the Pacific fighting against poverty and marginalization. Only 19 per cent of the population in the Asia-Pacific LDCs was covered by at least one social protection benefit in 2019, compared to 58 per cent for other developing countries in the region. On average, LDCs in the region, as a group, invest only 0.9 per cent of their aggregate GDP on social protection, compared to the average of 6.3 per cent for other developing countries.

Weak institutional capacity also limits the expansion of social protection, as it presents challenges in reaching the most marginalized groups. Effective social protection safety nets are key to eliminating poverty and are a core aspect of a socioeconomic development strategy. Limited social protection programmes and the-





large share of the population employed in the informal sector in LDCs limit the expansion of social safety nets, which tend to focus mostly on workers in the formal economy and their families.

For LDCs, achieving the SDGs and other internationally agreed development goals necessarily requires the empowerment of women and girls in all spheres of social, economic, and political life. In Asia-Pacific LDCs, women and girls are faced with significant obstacles. Reducing the gap between women and men with regards to economic opportunities, political participation, eliminating all forms of gender-based violence, ensuring the right to sexual and reproductive health, and eliminating all forms of discrimination against women are rooted in the foundational values of the United Nations and constitute a goal in itself.

Although data prior to the onset of the pandemic showed progress, LDCs in Asia and the Pacific still face serious health challenges, especially due to weak health care systems and limited capacities. The average maternal mortality rate of the Asia-Pacific LDCs decreased from 285 deaths per 100,000 live births in 2010 to 199 in 2017, while the average infant mortality rate declined from 40 per 1,000 live births in 2010 to 29 in 2019. The results for life expectancy were also encouraging, as it increased from 66.7 years in 2010 to 69.4 years in 2018.

However, weak capacities in the health care sector reduce the ability of LDCs in Asia and the Pacific to address the needs of vulnerable people, with an average of only 0.79 physicians per 1,000 people in 2017, compared to 2.79 in other developing countries of the region. Similar patterns for the number of hospital beds, nurses and midwives suggest that LDCs are not catching up with the rest of the region in terms of their health-care system's ability to deliver adequate care. One reason behind this is that investment in health-care infrastructure and health-care services is only 0.6 per cent of the aggregate GDP of Asia-Pacific LDCs, compared to 2.7 per cent for the group of other developing countries in the region.

Providing access to skills, training, and quality education are essential to help fulfill fundamental human needs that expand the individual's agency, capabilities, and ability to participate as a full member of society.

Access to education opportunities constitutes an essential aspect for structural transformation in the LDCs, which has become even more relevant with the rise of the digital economy. Economic growth in the LDCs in Asia and the Pacific has not resulted in adequate employment opportunities. Although efforts on promoting more training opportunities and better education are essential, one key challenge lies in increasing job opportunities for young people in LDCs through labor-intensive manufacturing or services, support to access to technology and innovation, infrastructure development, and legislation protecting the rights of young workers.

Strengthening the institutions that help societies to strengthen the social contract and that empower governments and societies to put in place inclusive governance responses. This includes supporting the capacity of the public sector to deliver services efficiently, with particular emphasis in reaching out the most vulnerable. Addressing the institutional capacities of LDCs in Asia and the Pacific is key to increase resilience and strengthen their ability to be able to better respond to external shocks. In conflict or post-conflict settings, responsive and inclusive institutions are vital to reduce violence and sustaining peace.





## Guiding questions:

- What policy and programmatic interventions are needed to accelerate transformation in LDCs in Asia and the Pacific to reduce poverty and inequality and furthering human development?
- What innovative enablers can be used to achieve wellbeing that can simultaneously address the issues of poverty, inequality, including the empowerment of women and girls, and human capital in LDC in Asia and the Pacific?
- In fragile and conflict affected settings, what interventions would be most effective to transition out of fragility towards resilient development?
- How can LDCs in Asia and the Pacific leverage its youth and women to accelerate development and well-being and to harness the demographic dividend?

