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the Fifth United Nations Conference on the Least
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review and coordination of the
implementation of the Programme of Action
for the Least Developed Countries for the
Decade 2011–2020**

Follow-up to the Fifth United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report provides information on the Doha Programme of Action for Least Developed Countries for the decade 2022–2031 and is submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution [76/216](#) and Economic and Social Council resolution [2021/19](#). It provides an update on the preparations for the Fifth United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries, which was rescheduled owing to the situation concerning the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic and its unprecedented impacts.

* [A/77/50](#).



I. Introduction to and progress on preparations for the Fifth United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries

1. By its resolutions [73/242](#) and [74/232 A](#), the General Assembly decided to convene the Fifth United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries at the highest possible level, including Heads of State and Government, in Doha from 21 to 25 March 2021, and, inter alia, outlined the mandate of the Conference and its organizational aspects. By its resolution [74/232 B](#), the Assembly, noting with concern the situation concerning the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic and its unprecedented effects, decided to reschedule the Conference and to hold it in Doha from 23 to 27 January 2022.

2. By its resolution [76/251](#), the General Assembly decided to further reschedule the Fifth United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries and, on an exceptional basis, to hold it in two parts, the first part in New York, on 17 March 2022, and the second part in Doha, from 5 to 9 March 2023. The Assembly also decided that the other events in connection with the Conference, including those mandated in its resolution [74/232 A](#), would be held during the second part of the Conference.

3. The first part of the Fifth United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries was held in New York on 17 March 2022, at which the Conference adopted the Doha Programme of Action for Least Developed Countries, as contained in the annex to document [A/CONF.219/2022/3](#). The General Assembly endorsed the Doha Programme of Action on 1 April 2022.

II. Doha Programme of Action for Least Developed Countries for the decade 2022–2031

4. The COVID-19 pandemic continues to have an impact on least developed countries. As at 28 February 2022, only 19 per cent of the population of those countries was fully vaccinated, compared with 73 per cent of the population of developed countries. COVID-19 testing rates in least developed countries remain extremely low, which hampers the ability of those countries to respond to highly contagious new variants of the virus, such as Omicron. There is an urgent need to meet the financing gap of \$16 billion for the Access to COVID-19 Tools (ACT) Accelerator to allow it to save lives, as well as to expand the access of developing countries to diagnostics, therapeutics and vaccines. The least developed countries require stepped-up support to address the pandemic, including technology transfer and capacity-building to produce their own diagnostics, vaccines and therapeutics.

5. In the least developed countries, the economic recovery of 2021 is slowing. Initial evidence and studies suggest that those will take several years longer than developed economies to return to pre-pandemic levels of gross domestic product. With limited online schooling options, extended school closures in many least developed countries can lead to long-term losses in education. Limited fiscal space has constrained the ability of least developed countries to take stimulus measures, including enhanced social protection, and might be further reduced owing to the increasing costs of borrowing. A large number of least developed countries are highly dependent on commodity exports or tourism and have been particularly hard hit by the pandemic-related recession. Debt burdens and increasing debt servicing costs are becoming increasingly challenging for least developed countries, placing them at higher risk of debt distress. The Debt Service Suspension Initiative, for least developed and low-income countries, expired at the end of 2021, and the deferred payments will increase debt servicing needs in the 24 participating least developed

countries. The addition of uncertain growth prospects and increasing climate risks, as well as tightening global liquidity conditions, means that countries are at high risk of entering protracted debt crises. Without adequate debt relief, the Sustainable Development Goals will be out of reach for the least developed countries.

6. In the recent report of working group II of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change entitled *Climate Change 2022: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability*, it was found that the adverse impacts of climate change, such as heatwaves, droughts and floods, continue to worsen. Millions of people, especially those in least developed countries, are exposed to acute food and water insecurity, with low-income populations the most affected.

7. Against this backdrop, the Doha Programme of Action for Least Developed Countries for the decade 2022–2031 was adopted during the first part of the Fifth United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries. The Programme of Action consists of a new generation of renewed and strengthened commitments by the least developed countries and their development partners, grounded in the overarching goals of achieving rapid, sustainable and inclusive recovery from the pandemic, building resilience against future shocks, eradicating extreme poverty, enabling graduation from the least developed country category, ensuring access to sustainable and innovative financing, leveraging the power of science and technology and innovation, bringing about structural transformation and achieving the Goals. The Programme of Action comprises an ambitious comprehensive and wide-ranging set of actions and targets, forging a renewed partnership between the least developed countries and their development partners, including the private sector, civil society and governments at all levels. The prompt and full implementation of the Programme of Action will help the least developed countries to address the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and its resulting negative socioeconomic impacts, return to a pathway to achieving the Goals, address climate change challenges and make strides towards sustainable and irreversible graduation.

8. The Doha Programme of Action for Least Developed Countries for the decade 2022–2031 includes six key focus areas:

(a) Investing in people in least developed countries: eradicating poverty and building capacity to leave no one behind;

(b) Leveraging the power of science, technology, and innovation to fight against multidimensional vulnerabilities and to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals;

(c) Supporting structural transformation as a driver of prosperity;

(d) Enhancing international trade of least developed countries and regional integration;

(e) Addressing climate change, environmental degradation, recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic and building resilience against future shocks for risk-informed sustainable development;

(f) Mobilizing international solidarity, reinvigorated global partnerships and innovative tools and instruments: a march towards sustainable graduation.

9. Investing in people is the key to achieving the Goals. This first focus area of the Programme of Action identifies a broad range of sectoral and cross-cutting targets and actions, including on eradicating poverty and building capacity; universal social protection systems; universal access to quality education, skills and lifelong learning; gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls; population and health; investing in young people; water, sanitation and hygiene; urbanization and shelter; migration and mobility; good and effective governance at all levels; and building and

sustaining peace. Together, these targets and actions will play a significant role in accelerating progress and building momentum for the decade of action to deliver the Sustainable Development Goals and leaving no one behind.

10. Science, technology and innovation have long been recognized as key to accelerating progress towards the Goals while also accelerating economic diversification and improving productivity. The Programme of Action recognizes the central role of science, technology and innovation for least developed countries in fighting multidimensional vulnerability, achieving the Goals, reaping the benefits of the fourth industrial revolution, recovering from the COVID-19 pandemic and building resilience against emerging challenges, and promoting private sector engagement, digitization and broadband connectivity. The targets and actions under this focus area, both quantitative and qualitative, together constitute a central enabler for least developed countries to benefit from technological progress and promote productive capacity development.

11. Structural transformation remains a central pillar of increasing productivity and growth in least developed countries, including through export diversification. The targets and actions relating to productive capacity-building, infrastructure development, connecting to global and regional value chains, and strengthening their services economy and trade, as well as private sector development, draw on experience and lessons learned from the previous Programmes of Action. Achieving these targets will not only strengthen the potential of least developed countries to generate sustainable economic growth and decent employment but will also contribute directly to improving the well-being of individuals and households.

12. International trade and regional integration are a cornerstone of the Programme of Action, offering important opportunities for the least developed countries to benefit from the multilateral trading system. However, the least developed countries as a group have not realized the potential benefits from agreements on international trade. The Programme of Action outlines a set of targets and actions relating to duty-free and quota-free market access, preferential rules of origin, the least developed countries services waiver, technical assistance and capacity-building, including through Aid for Trade, Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights, e-commerce, regional integration and several other areas, that will help least developed countries to take full advantage of the international support measures available to them to harness the economic gains from export-led growth.

13. The least developed countries remain the most vulnerable countries to external shocks, whether the shocks are related to public health, commodity prices, global economic recession, the adverse impacts of climate change or disaster risk. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the ongoing climate crisis have caused least developed countries to lose ground on hard-won development-related gains across a range of indicators. The focus area of the Programme of Action of addressing climate change, environmental degradation, recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic and building resilience against future shocks for risk-informed sustainable development will be concentrated on identifying targets and actions to help least developed countries to address the pandemic while building resilience in a manner that complements existing international sustainable development frameworks, such as the Paris Agreement and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction.

14. Progress towards sustainable development in least developed countries is critically dependent on securing the necessary resources, whether public or private. The sixth focus area of the Programme of Action is dedicated to mobilizing international solidarity, reinvigorated global partnerships and innovative tools and instruments, as well as sustainable graduation. The set of quantitative and qualitative targets and related actions address the range of sources of finance available for

resource mobilization, including domestic measures, combating illicit financial flows, international development cooperation, including through triangular and South-South cooperation, foreign direct investment, debt sustainability and debt treatment initiatives through improved and transparent debt architecture and remittances. The focus area includes the extension of international support measures to graduating and graduated least developed countries to make graduation sustainable and irreversible.

15. The Programme of Action includes dedicated sections on the availability and use of data, as well as on monitoring, follow-up and implementation. Implementation will play a critical role in assessing progress made by the least developed countries and their development partners and drive the effective implementation of the Programme of Action.

III. Requests to the Secretary-General in the Doha Programme of Action for Least Developed Countries for the decade 2022–2031

16. The Doha Programme of Action includes several requests made to the Secretary-General, including that reports be prepared for the seventy-seventh and seventy-eighth sessions of the General Assembly and that guidance be provided to ensure the full mobilization and coordination of all parts of the United Nations system to facilitate coordinated implementation and coherence in the follow-up and monitoring of the Programme of Action, as well as other actions. The present section provides a review of these requests and information on initial and planned steps.

17. In paragraph 42 of the Doha Programme of Action, Member States recognized the need for addressing severe food insecurities and requested the Secretary-General to explore the feasibility, effectiveness and administrative modalities of a system of stockholding for the least developed countries on a regional and subregional basis, or alternative means, such as cash transfers, taking into account possible economic implications and risks, and to report thereon to the General Assembly for its consideration at its seventy-seventh session.

18. In response, a report is under preparation, in consultation with relevant entities of the United Nations development system, that provides a review of recent evidence of the impact on food security in least developed countries of the COVID-19 pandemic, the worsening climate crisis, shocks and price volatility in food markets, and other factors, as well as an assessment of stockholding, and will provide recommendations for consideration by the General Assembly. The report will build on the outcome of and the follow-up to the 2021 United Nations Food Systems Summit.

19. In paragraph 52 of the Programme of Action, Member States committed to undertaking feasibility studies to explore the possibility of establishing an online university or other equivalent platforms to support online graduate and post-graduate university-level science, technology, engineering and mathematics education in least developed countries and recently graduated countries with a view to, inter alia, providing policy support to promote distance education and open learning for graduate and post-graduate studies in science, technology, engineering and mathematics, ensuring a 50/50 gender balance at all levels while guaranteeing special access for the poorest and people in vulnerable situations; creating a virtual network of educational institutions within and beyond least developed countries; assisting in course design and curriculum development; and leading to scale and sustainability of the education system, taking into account all pre-existing initiatives developed by the relevant partners in a comprehensive manner.

20. Work has begun, in consultation with relevant entities of the United Nations development system and academic institutions, to map existing initiatives, possible new modalities, resource requirements, accreditation and sustainable funding sources with a view to preparing a report of the Secretary-General for consideration by the General Assembly at its seventy-eighth session.

21. In paragraph 217 of the Programme of Action, Member States underlined the need for reinforcing the existing comprehensive multi-hazard early warning system and comprehensive multi-hazard crises mitigation and resilience-building measures for least developed countries aligned with the Sendai Framework as a key instrument to build resilience against and mitigate the impacts of various shocks, and were committed to making the best use of existing initiatives. They invited the Secretary-General to undertake, with least developed countries, a comprehensive study on the existing arrangements, lessons learned and identified gaps and submit it to the General Assembly for further consideration.

22. The third Multi-Hazard Early Warning Conference is being organized by the International Network for Multi-Hazard Early Warning Systems in conjunction with the 2022 Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction. Among other inputs, its proceedings and outcome will provide valuable inputs to the comprehensive study, which will be undertaken in consultation with all relevant entities of the United Nations development system and other relevant stakeholders.

23. In paragraph 261 of the Programme of Action, Member States committed to adopting and implementing investment promotion regimes for the least developed countries and reiterated the decision to provide financial and technical support for project preparation and contract negotiation, advisory support for investment-related dispute resolution, access to information on investment facilities, improving enabling environments, and risk insurance and guarantees, such as through the Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency. They requested the Secretary-General to explore the feasibility of establishing an international investment support centre for least developed countries in the form of a one-stop shop to mobilize support for implementation of the investment promotion regime for least developed countries and graduated countries, and to submit the study and recommendations to the General Assembly for its consideration at its seventy-eighth session.

24. In paragraphs 282 and 283 of the Programme of Action, Member States welcomed the work of the inter-agency task force on least developed country graduation, led by the Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States, to provide strengthened and coordinated United Nations system-wide support to the countries graduating from the least developed country category and invited the Office to advocate for appropriate predictable and additional incentives and support measures for graduating and recently graduated countries and to mobilize additional international support for the implementation of the smooth transition strategies. Member States welcomed the establishment of a Sustainable Graduation Support Facility jointly by the Office, as Chair of the inter-agency task force, and the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, as the secretariat for the Committee for Development Policy, as a concrete, country-led solution of dedicated capacity development support. Work is under way to further strengthen coordinated and coherent United Nations system support and bring together country-specific integrated graduation-related advisory and capacity-building services serving as a repository and clearing house of initiatives and projects pursued in support of these countries.

25. In paragraph 300 of the Programme of Action, the Secretary-General was requested to ensure the full mobilization and coordination of all parts of the United Nations system to facilitate coordinated implementation and coherence in the

follow-up and monitoring of the Programme of Action at the national, subregional, regional and global levels. The coordination mechanisms available, such as the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination and the United Nations Development Group, as well as United Nations resident coordinators, should be kept active in this regard.

26. In paragraph 302 of the Programme of Action, the Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States was invited to prepare a comprehensive road map for the accelerated implementation of the Doha Programme of Action, identifying specific roles and responsibilities of various stakeholders, with a view to ensuring that the commitments in favour of least developed countries lead to concrete deliverables that would facilitate implementation of the Programme of Action and help least developed countries to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. The principal mechanism for doing so is the Inter-Agency Consultative Group for Least Developed Countries, led by the Office of the High Representative. At its next meeting, the Inter-Agency Consultative Group will initiate the preparation of a comprehensive road map for accelerated implementation of the Programme of Action, which will include inputs from other stakeholders, including academia, civil society organizations, parliamentarians, the private sector and young people. The road map will be kept under continuous review in order to ensure the effective implementation of the Programme of Action. In addition, the Office of the High Representative is developing a monitoring framework that will include a set of indicators by which to assess progress made in implementation of the Programme of Action.

27. With regard to paragraph 307 of the Programme of Action, a report with recommendations will be prepared, in consultation with Member States and the relevant specialized agencies, funds, programmes and regional commissions, for the consideration of the General Assembly at its seventy-seventh session with a view to ensuring the effective implementation of the functions of the Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States and strengthening its capabilities and effectiveness to support the least developed countries, as well as the effectiveness of the United Nations system support provided to least developed countries.

28. The reports of the Secretary-General called for under the Programme of Action for the seventy-seventh and seventy-eighth sessions of the General Assembly will provide an outline of important ways in which the least developed countries and their development partners can make progress towards addressing critical challenges through targeted and focused action.

IV. Conclusions

29. The COVID-19 pandemic continues to exact a devastating health and socioeconomic toll in the least developed countries. Concerted efforts are required to address the pandemic, including through the roll-out of vaccines and economic recovery. It is imperative to begin the implementation of the new Programme of Action for Least Developed Countries in a timely manner and focus on their specific needs to regain ground lost with regard to the Goals.

30. The least developed countries and their development partners, including the private sector, civil society and governments at all levels, are invited to develop strategies, plans and actions to translate the Doha Programme of Action into concrete outcomes. The least developed countries are invited to mainstream the Programme of Action into their national development plans and strategies. The United Nations system has a critical role to play in advancing implementation at the global, regional

and national levels. Strong action by the governing bodies and executive boards of United Nations system entities will be instrumental in ensuring that the Programme of Action is translated into results on the ground. United Nations country teams under the leadership of the resident coordinators in least developed countries are invited to ensure that common country assessments and United Nations sustainable development frameworks in those countries fully reflect the provisions of the Programme of Action. Regular and systematic assessments of resources, strategic plans, programmes and activities in support of the least developed countries should be performed across United Nations system entities, as well as regular and more structured reporting on the work of the United Nations in support of those countries.

31. The lead-up to the second part of the United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries, which will be held in Doha from 5 to 9 March 2023, offers an important opportunity to build momentum in the implementation of the Programme of Action, showcase early progress made in all of its six focus areas and mobilize resources for accelerated implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals by least developed countries during the decade of action.
