

**Organizational Session of the Preparatory Committee of the Least
Developed Countries (LDC5 PrepCom)**

Monday 8 February

**Statement by Mr Haoliang Xu
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United Nations Development Programme**

Under Secretary General and High Representative,
Distinguished Co-Chairs,
Excellencies, esteemed delegates, and participants,

Last year, the COVID-19 pandemic pushed the world into a health and development emergency of major proportions. We expect the response period to be longer than the 18 months estimated at the outset of the crisis, and to combine episodes of recovery and regress as societies and economies respond to successive waves of the virus while rolling out vaccination and improved therapeutics.

While the crisis has spared no country, its impacts have been highly differentiated. The crisis compounded pre-existing vulnerabilities in terms of poverty, inequality, human development, environmental degradation, climate change, social cohesion and debt distress among others - hitting countries, societies and individuals with different coping capacity and means to respond. The picture emerging is one of great concern: two out of three deaths associated with COVID-19 occur in developing countries;¹ the standards of education, health and living standards are set to go down globally for the first time in 30 years, as indicated by our 2020 estimates of the human development index.

Unless we manage to collectively change course, the realization of the SDGs by 2030 is at risk: the number of people in extreme poverty could reach 1 billion by then, under the worst scenario of delayed economic recovery. Women have been particularly affected by the crisis, disproportionately losing livelihoods and income, and suffering increased gender-based violence.

UNDP is committed to support the LDCs and its partners to ensure the LDC 5 Conference defines an ambitious framework to facilitate an effective collective response to the multifaceted challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic in LDCs and carry them forward to a more equitable, prosperous, peaceful and resilient future in line with the aspirations of the Decade for Action.

Based on the evidence coming out of the COVID-19 socio-economic impact assessments (144 SEIAs in 97 countries) and with the SDGs in sight, UNDP believes that building forward better,

¹ As of 25 January 2021.

would involve action in five key areas. These can inform reflections on the LDC programme of action for the next decade to be adopted at the LDC 5:

- i) **Social protection.** The pandemic has increased poverty and exacerbated existing inequalities affecting the vulnerable populations including women and youth, the most. A focus on Leaving no one behind (LNOB) requires addressing vulnerabilities and exclusions, tackling systemic structural inequalities heads on.
- ii) **Green economy.** The COVID-19 pandemic stroke against the backdrop of the climate crisis. We have an opportunity to pivot support efforts for COVID-19 recovery to invest in nature-based solutions and build resilience to intersecting vulnerabilities, future proofing development.
- iii) **Digital disruption.** The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the deployment and uptake of digital solutions to transform our economies and societies through access to quality education, telemedicine, inclusive government, social protection and more. We must ensure it becomes a force for the good and not a source of more entrenched inequalities.
- iv) **Governance.** There is an urgent need to support effective, transparent, and accountable governance mechanisms at all levels, with governments and other actors working together to strengthen social cohesion, gender equality, upholding human rights and the rule of law, especially in fragile and crisis affected countries.
- v) **Financing.** Financing recovery from COVID-19 and the SDGs will require mobilizing resources from different sources – public and private, domestic and international – and use available resources in an effective manner. The integrated national financing frameworks supported by UNDP and partners provides such a vehicle, acting in solidarity.

Thank you.
