



HIGH-LEVEL POLITICAL FORUM ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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African countries, Least Developed Countries and Landlocked Developing Countries

Turning the tide, regaining lost ground and embarking on the road to the SDGs

Thursday, 13 July 2023, 4:15 PM - 6:00 PM

Secretariat Background Note

African countries, Least Developed Countries (LDCs) and Landlocked Developing Countries (LLDCs) have been disproportionately affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent confluence of interlinked global crises, reversing progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The high cost of food and energy due to increasing inflation and broken supply chains have affected millions of people, with poverty, hunger and inequality on the rise again. Drought, desertification, land degradation and disasters resulting from climate change are contributing to conflict and political instability in many places. These compounding challenges have further aggravated the situation of the poorest countries, which had already been pushed behind by the unequal global distribution of vaccines and gaps in healthcare and social protection systems. Women and girls have been disproportionately affected, with major setbacks to progress in gender equality.

The group of 46 LDCs, which includes 33 African countries, remains marginalized in the world economy and faces challenging financial situations that limit their ability to increase productive capacity and



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invest in climate mitigation and adaptation. For 2023, economic growth in LDCs is projected at 4.4 per cent,¹ significantly below the 7 per cent growth target set in SDG 8. While some countries have advanced on the path to graduation from the LDC category, many have suffered significant setbacks. Most LDCs continue to struggle with insufficient fiscal space, large macroeconomic imbalances and intensifying debt vulnerabilities.

At the Fifth United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries (LDC5) held in March 2023 in Doha, member States committed to bold and concrete measures for implementing the Doha Programme of Action, a ten-year plan to put LDCs back on track to achieving the SDGs. New initiatives include the development of a food stockholding mechanism for LDCs; an online university focusing on STEM education, especially for women and girls; an international investment support centre; a sustainable graduation support facility; and comprehensive multi-hazard crisis mitigation and resilience-building measures for LDCs.

The group of 32 LLDCs, which includes 17 LDCs, are further disadvantaged by lack of territorial access to the sea and high transit costs that continue to impose serious constraints on their socio-economic development, and require support for investments in transportation networks and trade facilitation. LLDCs are especially affected by lack of access to international markets and broken supply chains.

In the Africa region, countries continue to address some of the challenges that were exposed by the COVID-19 pandemic such as the

¹ United Nations (2023). World Economic Situation and Prospects, New York.



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digital divide by investing in human capital formation, creating new opportunities for youth, increasing digital connectivity and building toward greener and more resilient infrastructure and industry. Micro-, small and medium-sized enterprises continue to be major sources of jobs and are increasingly driving trade-led development in least developed countries. Support for initiatives that have strategic priorities around youth, gender, green and digital connectivity, innovation and new partnerships have also shown to have great potential to overcome structural barriers and strengthen means of implementation, including through gender-responsive public procurement and improved access to the digital economy.

The operationalization of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) is a potential game-changer, creating a single market that unites Africa's 54 countries, with a combined population of 1.3 billion and GDP of US\$3.4 trillion. It promises to boost intra-African trade and investment by reducing tariffs and other barriers, and harmonizing regulations in areas such as e-commerce and intellectual property rights, with potential to lift an estimated 30 million people out of extreme poverty.

In conclusion, in order to get countries back on track, the international community has been called upon to advance the Doha Programme of Action, as well as Africa's Agenda 2063, and the Vienna Programme of Action for Landlocked Developing Countries. This means fulfilling existing commitments for Official Development Assistance, and undertaking new partnerships that leverage progress along multiple pathways, to ensure that these countries are not left behind.



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Focus of the session

This session is expected to focus on the policies and measures needed now to improve the lives and livelihoods of people living in vulnerable countries, such as LDCs and LLDCs, as well as countries that are highly vulnerable to shocks and other disasters. It will include actions that must be taken urgently to ensure progress and apply solutions for bridging gaps in access to education, healthcare, sustainable energy and digital technologies, as well as for advancing gender equality.

The discussion will invite contributions from countries that can share examples of inclusive governance and strengthened institutions to advance the Doha Programme of Action, Africa's Agenda 2063, and the Vienna Programme of Action, that apply peer learning activities, whole-of-society and whole-of-government approaches. Examples from countries that have undertaken Voluntary National Reviews will also be shared, reflecting on progress in domestication of the SDGs and their alignment with national development plans, integrated national financing frameworks and strengthened statistical capacities for measuring progress.

Proposed questions for discussion

- What transformative financing measures are needed to accelerate recovery, ensure progress towards the SDGs, and advance the Doha Programme of Action, Africa's Agenda 2063, and the Vienna Programme of Action?
- Where have Governments succeeded in integrating the SDGs into national development plans, building capacity for implementation, strengthening institutions, and increasing national statistical capacities for measuring progress?



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- How can the global green energy transition, and the associated demand for natural resources to meet it, be leveraged to support sustainable and inclusive industrialization and structural transformation and ensure a just transition for LDCs, LLDCs and Africa?
- What is being done to increase participation and inclusion of women and youth in governance, institutional frameworks, and the labor force? What barriers need to be removed?
- What are development partners doing to close the digital divide, build capacities for inclusive participation in the digital economy, and improve connectivity for small- and medium-sized enterprises?
- What policies are being put in place to realize the potential of the African Continental Free Trade Area, and what needs to happen next?