



HIGH-LEVEL POLITICAL FORUM ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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Accelerating SDG Achievement in African Countries, Least Developed Countries and Landlocked Developing Countries

Tuesday 15 July 2025, 15:00-16:30

Conference Room 4

Secretariat Background Note

African countries, least developed countries (LDCs) and landlocked developing countries (LLDCs) face unique challenges in their pursuit of sustainable development. 32 of the 44 LDCs and 16 of the 32 LLDCs are in Africa.

The 44 LDCs, which are home to 14.5 per cent of the world's population, account for just 1.3 per cent of global gross domestic product (GDP) and less than 1 per cent of global trade. These countries are particularly vulnerable to external shocks, such as economic crises, climate change, and public health emergencies.

The least developed countries saw significant economic volatility: real GDP growth dropped to 0.5 per cent in 2020, rebounded to 4.7 per cent in 2022, then slowed to 3.5 per cent in 2023 and is estimated at 3.1 per cent for 2024. This is far below the 7 per cent growth target for LDCs as set out in the DPOA.

The proportion of the population living in LDCs who required interventions for neglected tropical diseases decreased from 79 per cent to 45 per cent between 2010 and 2022.¹

Ensuring that women and girls have equal access to education, healthcare, and economic opportunities is fundamental to advancing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its pledge to leave no one behind.

Yet, challenges persist. Women and girls in these regions continue to face higher rates of poverty, limited access to secondary and tertiary education, and

¹ See 2024 SDG Progress Report at [UN Statistics- SDG Indicators](#).



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disparities in healthcare and economic participation. For example, women represent two-thirds of the world's illiterate adults, and in rural areas of LDCs, less than 40 per cent of girls attend secondary school. Access to maternal healthcare and sexual and reproductive health and education, in the LDCs has been improving but remains below the global average. In 2023, 75 per cent of births in LDCs were attended by a skilled health professional, up from 73 per cent in 2022. However, this remains below the global average of 86 per cent. In 2024, only 60 per cent of women of reproductive age (15-49 years) in LDCs had their family planning needs met with modern methods, unchanged from 2023 and significantly lower than the global average of 78 per cent.

Economic opportunities are also constrained, as women are often relegated to lower-paid, less-secure jobs, particularly in sectors like agriculture, fisheries, and the blue economy, despite their critical contributions. Therefore, Partnerships at local, national, and international levels are essential for scaling up successful models, closing gender gaps, and ensuring that the benefits of sustainable development reach every woman and girl.

LDCs contributing less than 2 per cent to global marine pollution, grapple with existential threats to oceanic resources critical for survival. Despite the International Seabed Authority's 2025 tech-transfer initiative, less than 10 per cent of LDC coastal zones have effective management. With SDG 14.7's 2030 sustainable-use deadline nearing, urgent scaling of science-policy integration and blue finance mechanisms is critical to avert ecosystem collapse. The 2025 UN Ocean Conference highlights this urgency, as LDCs' reliance on oceanic GDP clashes with escalating climate-driven disruptions.

Landlocked developing countries (LLDCs) represent roughly 7 per cent of the world's population but barely 1 per cent of global GDP and 1.15 per cent of merchandise exports. Their geographic isolation translates into transport costs around 30 per cent higher than those faced by coastal developing nations and freight and insurance charges 2.1 times the world average, eroding competitiveness and limiting participation in global value chains.

They face significant challenges due to their lack of direct access to the sea, remoteness from international markets, and high transit costs. According to WTO, trade costs LLDCs face on manufacture are about 1.4 times higher than



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the trade costs for coastal developing countries.² LDCs on average pay more than double in transport costs than transit countries and experience longer times to send and receive merchandise from overseas markets.³ These factors hinder LLDCs' economic growth, diversification, and integration into global value chains.

Recognizing these structural handicaps, the General Assembly adopted the Awaza Programme of Action for LLDCs 2024-2034, which commits LLDCs and their partners to six priority clusters, transit and trade facilitation, infrastructure, digital connectivity, economic diversification, climate resilience and financing. African countries, many of which are LDCs and LLDCs, face additional challenges, including high levels of poverty, inequality, and unemployment, as well as limited access to basic services such as healthcare, education, and infrastructure. Almost one third of Africans (498 million) live in extreme poverty, and the continent's youth unemployment rate stands at 11 per cent. Moreover, Africa is highly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, with the World Meteorological Organization warning that the continent is warming faster than the global average, leading to increased frequency and intensity of droughts, floods, and other extreme weather events.

Climate change poses a significant threat to Africa, LDCs and LLDCs, although these countries have contributed the least to the problem. Many of these countries are prone to desertification, land degradation, and drought. Mountainous LLDCs are also subject to melting glaciers, floods and glacier lake outbursts floods. Coastal and small island LDCs face threats from hurricanes, cyclones and sea level rise.

The Sendai Framework monitor shows that the disaster-related mortality rate between 2014-2023 was 1.97 per 100,000 population in LDCs and 2.43 per 100,000 population in LLDCs, significantly higher than the global average of 0.79 per 100,000 population. LDCs accounted for 10.34 per cent of globally

² See *Easing Trade Bottlenecks in Landlocked Developing Countries*, World Trade Organization, 2021, at:

https://www.wto.org/english/res_e/booksp_e/00_landlocked2021_e.pdf.

³ See website of Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States at:

<https://www.un.org/ohrlls/content/about-landlocked-developing-countries>.



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reported economic losses between 2015 and 2022, despite having only 1.06 per cent of the total GDP of reporting countries. LLDCs reported 5.6 per cent of economic losses, while accounting for only 1 per cent of the GDP of reporting countries.⁴

Climate change impacts coupled with other crises have had a direct impact on SDG 2. Undernourishment has increased across the board in sub-Saharan Africa, LDCs and LLDCs as compared to pre-COVID-19 pandemic levels, while severe food insecurity has worsened since 2019.

Fiscal space continues to shrink, while many of these countries face worsening debt situations, in the face of slow economic recovery and rising interest rates, leading to an increasing number in debt distress or at high risk of debt distress, with some even defaulting for the first time.

While African countries, LDCs and LLDCs have experienced serious setbacks and cascading crises as a result of the series of external shocks witnessed over the past years, there have been some notable examples of progress. At its most recent triennial review in March 2024, the Committee for Development Policy found that fifteen LDCs had met the thresholds for graduation from the category, including three additional African LDCs.

Proposed questions for discussion

- How can African countries, LDCs and LLDCs accelerate inclusive economic growth and build resilience against economic and environmental shocks, and address the impacts of conflicts?
- What innovative financing and partnership models are most effective for expanding fiscal space and accelerating SDG progress in African countries, LDCs, and LLDCs facing persistent debt distress and limited resources?
- How can governments and development partners close persistent gender gaps in education, healthcare, and economic participation, ensuring that women and girls are fully included in sustainable development efforts?

⁴ See Snapshot of Sendai Framework Monitoring at [Sendai Framework Monitor Home page](#).