

Agenda item 3: Special Body of Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Pacific Island Developing States

ESCAP Hall and online
1100-1200 hours
28 April 2021

Concept note

Asia-Pacific least developed countries (LDCs) made significant progress in implementing the Fourth United Nations Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the Decade 2011-2020, also known as the Istanbul Programme of Action. Steady economic growth helped them in reducing income poverty and facilitated their progress towards meeting several targets of the Millennium Development Goals. The decade was also marked by the graduation of three Asia-Pacific countries from the group of least developed countries (Maldives in 2011, Samoa in 2014 and Vanuatu in 2020) with most others becoming eligible for graduation. The implementation of the Programme, however, encountered significant challenges and vulnerabilities that these countries continue to face. These challenges, if not addressed, will continue to have an enduring impact on the resilience of these countries and deteriorate the prospects of realizing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) even if they manage to graduate from the LDCs.

The most severe recent challenge encountered by the Asia-Pacific LDCs is the COVID-19 pandemic. Although initially viewed as a public health disaster, the pandemic rapidly turned into an unprecedented economic and social crisis. All Asia-Pacific LDCs have experienced considerable reductions in economic growth, widespread unemployment, sharp contractions in international trade, slow down in the flow of external resources, and almost a complete halt in the travel and tourism sectors.

The Fifth United Nations Conference of the Least Developed Countries (LDC-V), to be held in January 2022 in Doha, Qatar, will offer a fresh opportunity in crafting a new international agenda for supporting these countries in achieving sustainable development and putting them on a firm footing for graduation. The next Programme of Action for the LDCs must therefore address the unfinished business of implementing the Istanbul Programme of Action, achieving the SDGs by 2030, and overcoming the devastating impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Actions by least developed countries

Among other lessons, the processes of implementing the Istanbul Programme of Action and the impacts of COVID-19 pandemic highlight the need to undertake a more integrated approach to increasing economic diversification and structural transformation, reducing vulnerability to external shocks and disasters, as well as to going beyond income poverty and addressing multidimensional poverty in the Asia-Pacific LDCs.

For commodity-dependent LDCs, for example, an active economic diversification strategy and investment promotion that strengthens forward and backward linkages between the commodities sector and the rest of the economy would help diversify export baskets, which would eventually make them more resilient to external shocks. Those pursuing manufacturing-led development would benefit from a more strategic focus on producing more complex and differentiated products, improving labour productivity through skills formation and improving working conditions. To reduce vulnerability of people and communities, investment needs to be scaled up urgently in social sector, especially in the public healthcare and social protection systems. In the medium- to long-run, eliminating systematic disparities in accessing public infrastructure services and improving efficiency and equity in delivering

services will help address multidimensional poverty and achieve the SDGs by 2030. These actions will help build the resilience and capacities of LDCs in addressing new and emerging challenges, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, and harvesting opportunities that lie ahead.

Actions by development partners

The role of development partners will continue to be vital given the significant resilience gap revealed by the COVID-19 pandemic. The importance of international cooperation in coping with the pandemic has already been shown by the rapid development and manufacturing of COVID-19 vaccines, a number of calls for equitable distribution of vaccines, as well as several financial support initiatives, including provision of additional funding, debt reliefs and debt service suspension.

Moreover, as the pandemic has necessitated the preparations for graduation and smooth transition to focus on sustainability in a much more holistic manner, options can be explored to strengthen and extend international support measures to increase economic and social resilience of LDCs. Enhanced cooperation could also be beneficial for Asia-Pacific LDCs to build national statistical capacity through exchange of information and experiences, to support national climate goals and adaptation plans by scaled-up climate finance, and to facilitate transfer of technology, including emerging digital technologies and clean energy solutions, through technical cooperation projects.

Purpose of the session

The Special Body will bring forth policy messages that are specific to LDCs, of which 5 are also small island developing States (SIDS) and 4 are landlocked developing countries (LLDCs). The Commission is invited to deliberate on the policy priorities highlighted in Document ESCAP/77/4, *Summary of the Asia-Pacific Countries with Special Needs Development Report 2021: Strengthening the Resilience of LDCs in the Wake of the Coronavirus Pandemic*, and provide further guidance to the secretariat as to which of these should be explored further, with a view to implementing them at the country-level. This would facilitate the secretariat in giving shape to its forthcoming analytical work, and more importantly, in planning and formulating technical assistance and capacity building projects for LDCs.

Proposed panelists and programme

- 1100-1107 Under-Secretary-General and Executive Secretary of ESCAP, Ms. Armida Salsiah Alisjahbana, will present the main finding of the *Asia-Pacific Countries with Special Needs Development Report 2021: Strengthening the Resilience of LDCs in the Wake of the Coronavirus Disease Pandemic (ESCAP/77/4)*
- 1107-1110 Under-Secretary-General and High Representative for LDCs, LLDCs and SIDS (OHRLLS), Ms. Fekitamoeloa Katoa 'Utoikamanu, will highlight recent global processes that are relevant to the implementation of the programmes of action of LDCs, LLDCs and SIDS [live or video message]
- 1110-1113 Chair of the Committee on Development Policy (CDP), Mr. José Antonio Ocampo, will deliver his keynote address.
- 1113-1146 Video messages from high-level officials of Asia-Pacific LDCs will be played (3 minutes each). Their messages include:
- (a) Highlights of their development progress made through the implementation of the Istanbul Programme of Action, particularly towards the graduation from the LDC status;
 - (b) Elaboration on how their countries are preparing for graduation
 - (c) Lessons for other graduation LDCs;
 - (d) Discussions on priorities for LDCs, including graduating and graduated countries, for the next programme of action for LDCs for the next ten years (Deliberation on the policy priorities highlighted in Document ESCAP/77/4, *Summary of the Asia-Pacific Countries with Special Needs Development Report 2021*); and/or
 - (e) Further guidance to the secretariat as to which of these should be explored further.
- 1146-1200 Member States will be invited to take the floor for country statements on the topic of the *Asia-Pacific Countries with Special Needs Development Report 2021: Strengthening the Resilience of LDCs in the Wake of the Coronavirus Disease Pandemic (ESCAP/77/4)*