

Concept Note and Tentative Programme

Inception Workshop and Consultation on Graduation of South Asian LDCs

Dhaka: 28 April – 30 April 2019

Venue: CIRDAP International Conference Hall
(Chameli House, 17 Topkhana Road), Dhaka, Bangladesh

Background

Least developed countries (LDCs) face several challenges of low productivity, small economic base, highly concentrated export structure, lack of employment opportunities for emerging youth and multiple other vulnerabilities, including those stemming from climate change. The Istanbul Programme of Action for Least Developed Countries and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development specify several actions for LDCs including doubling their export shares, enhancing productivity etc. to achieve multifaceted goals including eradicating poverty and hunger. LDCs face specific challenges that are hampering their overall development. The fragile productive capacity, narrow export base, lack of political will to bring policy changes are several among many reasons which hinder them in meeting the graduation criteria and achieving structural transformation, and, ultimately, achievement of the sustainable development goals.

While rates of extreme poverty have seen consistent declines in LDCs, these economies need to urgently strengthen their development. As highlighted in the Istanbul Programme of Action for Least Developed Countries, of particular relevance to LDCs is strengthening productive capacities and addressing rural development, as most of the population in these economies lives in and depends upon the rural sector. Indeed, productivity needs to increase particularly in agriculture (and aquaculture) to eradicate poverty and hunger.

As per the existing schedule, Bangladesh has fulfilled the criteria to graduate for the first time in 2018 and could graduate as early as 2024. Bhutan is scheduled to graduate in 2023 and Nepal's case of graduation has been deferred to 2021 by the Committee for Development Policy (CDP). As LDCs, these countries receive special and differential treatment (S&DT) which is supportive of achieving structural transformation and diversification of market and product, benefit from Aid-for-Trade and other initiatives. They get S&DT in the multilateral context but also in their regional or bilateral preferential trade agreements. Upon graduation, these facilities will be withdrawn, and countries are required to put supporting policies in place to minimize the risk of being marginalised.

As a part of its mandate and against the backdrop of slow growth in LDCs, ESCAP has been providing customized capacity-building and policy advisories that support the South Asian member States in meeting their development goals. The efforts to prepare for meeting SDGs and overcome challenges relating to graduation will require a long-term multi-disciplinary approach and thus a collective support from different divisions of ESCAP will be required for effective delivery.

This activity has been prepared in consultation with the Ministry of Commerce, Government of Bangladesh, to make it more inclusive and demand-driven for its effective delivery. This workshop thus provides an opportunity to assist Bangladesh on its roadmap for graduation and identifying, by using an integrated approach, possible way forward for meeting the goals relating to IPoA and SDGs. This workshop will also provide opportunity to exchange views on common challenges relating to graduation, being faced by Bhutan and Nepal. This workshop will focus on:

- (i) *To identify priorities and developmental challenges by reviewing progress in Bangladesh towards smooth transition to graduation.*
- (ii) *Review impact on existing flexibilities and other special and differential treatments for LDC in the WTO and RTAs.*
- (iii) *To identify future capacity building needs for effective and smooth transition to graduate from LDC.*

Deliverables

This activity will include delivery of a workshop and a consultation process (through group exercise) to identify gaps and specific technical assistance needs of targeted LDCs (covering three pillars - research, policy advisory and training) which will help them to graduate and meet the targets relating to SDGs. Based on the outcome of the workshop, a follow-up action plan will be prepared which will focus on how to address these capacity development needs through integrated approaches.

This consultation will also enable ESCAP to identify the supports that it can provide to member States in their efforts to implement the 2030 Agenda in an integrated manner. Subsequent to this capacity building two more activities in Bhutan and Nepal will be carried out in 2019.

TENTATIVE PROGRAMME

| Sunday, 28 April 2019 | |
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| 0900-0930 hrs | Registration |
| 0930- 1045 hrs | Opening session Opening remarks: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dr Nagesh Kumar, Head, UNESCAP South and South-West Asia Office (ESCAP-SSWA), New Delhi • Dr Mia Seppo, UN Resident Coordinator, Dhaka Special addresses: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • H.E. Mr Monowar Ahmed, Secretary, Economic Relations Division, Ministry of Finance, Government of Bangladesh (tbc) • H.E. Mr Md. Mofizul Islam, Secretary, Ministry of Commerce, Government of Bangladesh Inaugural Address: H.E. Mr Abul Kalam Azad , Chief Coordinator (SDGs), Prime Minister's Office, and Chairman of the National Taskforce on Graduation <i>Self-introduction by participants</i> <i>Group photo</i> |

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| 1045-1100 hrs | <i>Tea/Coffee</i> |
| 1100-1230 hrs | <p>Session 1: Bangladesh's progress towards graduating from the LDC category: challenges, opportunities and policy options</p> <p>Chair: H.E. Dr Shamsul Alam, Member (Senior Secretary), GED, Planning Commission</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mr Anwar Hossain, Joint Secretary, ERD, Government of Bangladesh <p>Trade Policy challenges for LDC graduation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ms. Sharifa Khan, Additional Secretary (EXport-2), Ministry of Commerce, Government of Bangladesh <p>Private Sector perspective on graduation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dr. Rubana Huq, President, Bangladesh Garment manufacturers and Exporters Association(BGMEA) |
| 1230-1330 hrs | Lunch |
| 1330-1500 hrs | <p>Session 2: Challenges associated with graduation: Sharing of experiences</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Government of Bhutan • Government of Nepal • Open discussion |
| 1500-1515 hrs | <i>Tea/Coffee</i> |
| 1515-1630 hrs | <p>Session 3: Challenges of graduation and their relevance with development priorities of the 2030 Agenda</p> <p>Mr. Yusuke Tateno, CSN/MPFD, ESCAP</p> |
| Monday, 29 April 2019 | |
| 0930-1030 hrs | <p>Session 4: Supporting LDCs in graduation</p> <p>Mr. Abdul Alim, Senior Economic Affairs Officer, UN-OHRLLS (Video presentation)</p> |
| 1030-1045 hrs | <i>Tea/Coffee</i> |
| 1045-1145 hrs | <p>Session 5: Impact of graduation on Bangladesh</p> <p>Dr. Mohammad Razzaque, Senior Expert</p> |
| 1145-1245 hrs | <p>Session 6: Review of the current trade patterns (market and product structure) and likely impact of graduation</p> <p>Mr. Joseph George, UNESCAP-SSWA, New Delhi</p> |
| 1245-1345 hrs | Lunch |
| 1345-1445 hrs | <p>Session 7: Assessing the impacts of the loss of non-reciprocal preferences and S&D under RTAs: Policy options</p> <p>Mr. Rajan Sudesh Ratna, UNESCAP-SSWA, New Delhi</p> |
| 1445-1500 hrs | <i>Tea/Coffee</i> |
| 1500- 1630 hrs | <p>Session 8: Assessing the impacts on multilateral flexibilities and special treatment at the WTO</p> <p>Mr. Taufiqur Rahman, Development Division, WTO Secretariat, Geneva (Through Skype)</p> |

| Tuesday, 30 April 2019 | |
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| 0930-1015 | <i>Session 9: Economic and Social Survey of Asia and the Pacific 2019 – Ambitions beyond growth</i> <i>Mr. Yusuke Tateno, CSN/MPFD, ESCAP</i> |
| 1015-1100 | <i>Session 10: Group Exercise:</i> <i>Facilitator: Rajan Sudesh Ratna</i> The session will focus on facilitating discussions among different participants/stakeholders on the challenges associated with LDC Graduation and identification of areas which need technical assistance and capacity building at the national and local level from: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ministry of Commerce • Ministry of Agriculture • Ministry of Textiles • Garment Manufacturers Association • Ministry of Industry • Ministry of Finance (Customs and Excise) • Ministry of Environment • Think Tanks • Private Sector, etc. |
| 1100-1115 | <i>Tea</i> |
| 1115-1230 | <i>Session 11: Group Exercise continues</i> |
| 1230-1330 | <i>Lunch</i> |
| 1330-1445 | <i>Session 12: Group Presentations on Specific Issues for Technical Assistance Relating to:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research • Policy Advisory • Training |
| 1445-1500 | <i>Tea/Coffee</i> |
| 1500-1630 | <i>Session 13: Panel Discussion: Responding to the Group Presentations on Need for Technical Assistance in Preparing for Graduation</i> <i>Moderator: Dr Nagesh Kumar, UNESCAP-SSWA</i> <i>Speakers:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Debapriya Bhattacharya, Distinguished Fellow, Centre for Policy Dialogue • Selim Raihan, Executive Director, SANEM • Mohammad Razzaque, Senior Expert • Mostafa Abid Khan, Bangladesh Tariff Commission Open discussion |
| 1630-1700 | <i>Concluding Session</i> |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mr. Tapan Ghosh, Additional Secretary, Ministry of Commerce • Mr. Anwar Hossain, Joint Secretary, ERD, Ministry of Finance • Dr Nagesh Kumar, UNESCAP-SSWA |