

Implementation of the Istanbul Programme of Action
for the Least Developed Countries:

Progress Report

(Prepared by OHRLLS for the CEB High-level Committee on Programmes at its fortieth session)

I. Fifth UN Conference on LDCs

A. Background

1. The General Assembly, recognizing the unprecedented effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, decided to reschedule the Fifth United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries (LDC5) and to hold it in Doha from 23 to 27 January 2022 at the highest possible level, including Heads of State and Government, in line with the mandate specified in resolutions 73/242 and 74/232. The Assembly also decided to reschedule the meeting of the intergovernmental preparatory committee and to hold it in New York in two parts from 24 to 28 May 2021 and from 26 to 30 July 2021 (see A/74/232 B). These meetings will be preceded by two regional preparatory meetings, one in collaboration with the Economic Commission for Africa and the other in collaboration with the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (see E/2020/L.14).
2. The Assembly also invited the President of the General Assembly and the President of the Economic and Social Council to reschedule during its seventy-fifth session the half-day dedicated thematic event in order to provide substantive input to the Conference.
3. In resolution 74/232, the General Assembly invited the Secretary-General to convene a United Nations system high-level event during the Conference, with a view to ensuring the full mobilization of the United Nations system in support of the least developed countries. It also decided that the Under-Secretary-General and High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States shall serve as its Secretary-General and the Office of the High Representative (OHRLLS) will be the focal point for the preparations for the Conference.

B. Actions to date

4. OHRLLS has started necessary preparations for the LDC5. The Office is engaged with the host country to prepare the host country agreement for the Conference and to undertake organizational preparations as well as advocacy. Communications are being established with local counterparts to collaborate on various tracks of the Conference, namely the private sector, civil society organizations, parliamentarians, youth and south-south cooperation. As of August 2020, 34 LDCs have submitted their national reports highlighting the progress made at the national level in the implementation of the Istanbul Programme of Action (IPoA), as well as initiatives, policies or actions that contributed to positive change in meeting the objectives set out in the priority areas of the IPoA and the challenges encountered in its implementation. Based on these inputs, OHRLLS is finalizing a report on the Lessons Learned from Implementing the IPoA. A dedicated webpage is accessible at: <https://www.un.org/ohrlls/content/fifth-united-nations-conference-least-developed-countries-ldc5>.
5. Despite the outbreak of COVID-19, OHRLLS continues substantive preparations for the LDC5. The Office has already organized several thematic meetings on COVID-19, including on external debt, food security and agricultural development, broadband and digital access, contributing to the Decade of Action to deliver the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030. The Office has also supported the Group of LDCs in preparing a

statement of LDCs on COVID-19.¹ Preparations are underway to organize, jointly with the Government of Finland, an academic conference on the theme “Achieving Sustainable Development in the Least Developed Countries - Towards LDC5” to be held in Helsinki, Finland from 12-14 May 2021.

6. OHRLLS is mobilizing the entire United Nations system in support of the LDC5. The past three meetings of the Inter-Agency Consultative Group (IACG) on LDCs have discussed how different agencies can make contributions to the Conference and its preparatory processes. The report on “the UN System Support to the Least Developed Countries (LDCs): Overview and Analysis of Contributions from the Inter-agency Consultative Group on LDCs (IACG)”, currently being finalized, builds on the work of the UN system entities and other related organizations. It highlights the measures in support of the achievement of the goals of the IPoA in the LDCs undertaken by the UN system and other related organizations and provides an overview of existing internal structures, mechanisms and initiatives of UN system entities in support of the LDCs. The report also highlights challenges faced by the UN system on the ground, actions needed to strengthen its support in LDCs and includes the perspectives of UN Resident Coordinators in the LDCs. The report provides elements and recommendations to strengthen the effectiveness of the UN system in promoting sustainable development in the LDCs, including through the Decade of Action.

C. Recommendations

7. The organs, organizations, funds and programmes of the United Nations system are requested to undertake sectoral appraisals in their respective fields of competence on the implementation of the IPoA, with special emphasis on areas where implementation has remained insufficient, and to make proposals for new measures as further inputs to the Conference.² The contributions of the agencies may include undertaking thematic studies on their respective areas of competence, holding pre-conference events and mobilizing public support in favour of the LDC5 with a view to coming up with a credible and results-oriented Programme of Action for LDCs for the next decade. Furthermore, the United Nations development system is invited to continue to prioritize allocations to the least developed countries by developing operational guidelines.³

II. Graduation from the LDC category

A. Background

8. Progress towards the objective of the IPoA to enable half the number of LDCs to meet the criteria for graduation by 2020 has accelerated. The latest triennial review of the LDC category by the Committee for Development Policy (CDP) (see E/2018/33) found that a total of 12 LDCs were meeting the criteria. However, the effects of COVID-19 are likely to impact the development progress of LDCs, enhancing the risk that the graduation of some countries might be delayed. ECOSOC resolution 2020/L.17 therefore requests the Committee for Development Policy to closely monitor and incorporate fully into its triennial reviews the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on LDCs.

9. LDCs, as the most vulnerable group of countries, need enhanced support to overcome structural challenges that they face in implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Thus the United Nations development system is requested to provide assistance to graduating countries in the formulation and implementation of their national transition strategies and to consider country-specific support for graduated countries for a fixed period of time and in a predictable manner.⁴ Moreover, the Committee for Development Policy called for new and innovative forms of assistance for graduating and graduated countries, to ensure their

¹ A/74/843

² In accordance with the mandates contained in paragraph 53 of the General Assembly resolution 74/232.

³ As mandated by the ECOSOC resolution E/2020/L.14 in paragraph 11.

⁴ ECOSOC resolution 2020/L.17

continued sustainable development progress after graduation. It recommended increased attention to access to finance for graduating and graduated countries in line with the Secretary-General's road map for financing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development because of the continued structural handicaps and macroeconomic imbalances that many graduating countries face.⁵

B. Actions to date

10. OHRLLS chairs the Inter-Agency Task Force on Graduation of LDCs (IATF) with the objective to provide strengthened and coordinated UN system-wide support to the countries graduating from the LDC category. The Task Force meets on a regular basis to provide concrete support and is open to all members of the IACG on the IPoA. Work plans based on information on graduation support activities by IATF members are discussed at these meetings. The establishment of the IATF has led to improved collaboration among key UN partners in support of graduation.

11. The second joint mission of the Task Force in October 2019 was to support to the Government of Solomon Islands in their preparations for graduation and ensure smooth transition. Activities related to graduation are undertaken in close collaboration with the regional and local level, especially the UN Resident Coordinators and country teams. The Task Force will provide updates on its activities to the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB) through regular progress reports to the High-level Committee on Programmes (HLCP).

C. Recommendations

12. In response to the mandate contained in paragraph 14 of ECOSOC resolution 2018/26, all relevant UN entities are encouraged to develop operational guidelines for their support to LDCs, including assistance to graduating countries. Furthermore, UN system entities could step up graduation support, including in the area of access to development finance, policy support and capacity building. The role of the Secretary-General and the IATF will also be essential in further elaborating and advocating for concrete support measures by bilateral and multilateral partners (E/2020/33). CEB through HLCP is invited to encourage all relevant entities to collaborate closely with the Task Force with respect to extended support for graduation from the LDC category.

III. Investment promotion for the LDCs

A. Background

13. In the Political Declaration of the Comprehensive High-level Midterm Review of the Implementation of the IPoA held in Antalya, Turkey in May 2016,⁶ Member States invited the Secretary-General, in his capacity as the Chair of the CEB, to include the issue of investment promotion regimes for the LDCs in the agenda of the Board, with a view to enhancing the effectiveness of United Nations system support aimed at increasing the flow of foreign direct investment (FDI) to the LDCs and their ability to attract such investment.

14. OHRLLS and UNCTAD prepared a set of short, pragmatic recommendations intended to help increase the coverage, scope and effectiveness of the UN system's support for investment promotion to the LDCs. The recommendations (see CEB/2017/HLCP33/INF.1) were taken note of by the High-Level Committee on Programmes at its thirty-third session and, subsequently, by the CEB at its first regular session of 2017.

B. Actions to date

15. The recommendations provided for the creation of an Inter-Agency Technical Committee (IATC). The last meeting of the Committee took place in late 2018 and the next will be convened in the margin of an upcoming

⁵ Report on the twenty-second session of the CDP to the Economic and Social Council (E/2020/33)

⁶ Contained in General Assembly resolution 70/294, paragraph 69

investment-related event bringing together relevant colleagues through a virtual meeting. It is expected to galvanize action by the private sector pushing for the required transformations to achieve the SDGs in LDCs, contributing to the Decade of Action.

16. OHRLLS has worked with the UN Office of Information and Communication Technology (OICT) to host an on-line platform in accordance with cybersecurity and accessibility standards of the UN Secretariat and relevant technical requirements. OHRLLS has finalized the technical development of the Internet platform on investment promotion for the LDCs as well as the administrative arrangements for the transfer to the UN servers. The launch of the platform is expected to take place by the end of 2020.

17. The project proposal for a “Capacity Development Programme for Investment Promotion Agencies of the LDCs” has been revised following consultations between participating organizations. The programme brings together ILO, UNCTAD, UNIDO, OHRLLS, as well as the Enhanced Integrated Framework (EIF) and World Association of Investment Promotion Agencies (WAIPA) and aims at assisting the Investment Promotion Agencies (IPAs) of the LDCs with tailored capacity-building activities in line with their diverse needs with respect to FDI attraction and facilitation. UNCTAD is leading the discussion with the EIF in view of possible funding.

18. In 2019 UNCTAD prepared the annual note entitled “Overview of FDI in LDCs: Trends and Key Issues”, which provided an overview of FDI trends and prospects and looks at key issues in attracting investment for sustainable development in LDCs.

19. The WAIPA and the EIF established and co-funded the project “Capacity Building for EIF countries on Investment Promotion”, aimed at improving the skills in and the coordination among LDC investment promotions agencies and related institutions. OHRLLS supports this project.

20. OHRLLS has developed, in cooperation with the International Development Law Organization (IDLO), an initiative to support the LDCs in their efforts to increase foreign investment and the benefits they derive from such investment. The Investment Support Programme for the Least Developed Countries, an innovative programme of the IDLO, is operational and able to provide on-demand, investment-related negotiation and dispute-settlement advisory and representation services to the Governments of the least developed countries and under-resourced companies as well as related capacity-building. The programme is designed to harness the services of lawyers and other relevant experts who are ready to provide support to the least developed countries on a pro bono or reduced-fee basis. The EU provided in late 2019 a contribution of Euro 1 million for the implementation of the Investment Support Programme.

C. Recommendation

21. It is suggested that the members of the IATC on investment promotion work together to ensure that the issue of investment promotion is appropriately addressed at the LDC 5 and reflected in its outcome document.

IV. Technology Bank

22. The IPoA called for the establishment of a technology bank dedicated to the least developed countries. The creation of such an entity has been a long-standing priority of the least developed countries, as confirmed in the Addis Ababa Action Agenda of the Third International Conference on Financing for Development and in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, under Sustainable Development Goal 17.

23. On 23 December 2016, the General Assembly adopted resolution 71/251 on establishment of the Technology Bank for the Least Developed Countries (TBLDC). By that resolution, the Assembly decided to establish the TBLDC as a subsidiary organ of the General Assembly and adopted its Charter (see A/71/363). In the same resolution, the Assembly also invited Member States and other stakeholders to provide voluntary funding for the trust fund for the operationalization of the TBLDC.

24. The full operationalization of the TBLDC was achieved after the signing on 22 September 2017, of the agreement between the United Nations and Turkey concerning the establishment of the Technology Bank and the agreement between the United Nations and Turkey on financial and in-kind support for the Technology Bank, the inauguration of the premises of the TBLDC in Gebze, Turkey on 4 June 2018 (made available by the host country) and the subsequent appointment of the Managing Director in November 2018.

25. Besides Turkey, Norway has contributed US\$ 1 million towards the 2018/2019 programme and budget of the Bank. In addition, India contributed US\$ 100,000.00 and Bangladesh and Guinea also contributed US\$ 50,000.00 each towards the Bank's budget and programme of work.

26. In 2019, the management of the digital access to research programme transitioned from the Research4Life (R4L) Secretariat at the World Health Organization to the Technology Bank. Following an extensive internal review, the programme was streamlined to ensure cost effectiveness and uniformity of activities across all countries, as well as to improve planning and reporting. Awareness-raising and capacity development continued across 38 workshops in 15 countries and more than 1,400 researchers, academics and librarians from universities, research institutes, professional associations and national and local government agencies were trained to access and utilize the resources on the R4L portal.

27. In 2020, a decision was taken to move Digital Access Research (DAR) training online through a massive open online course developed for R4L and implemented in partnership with FAO pursuant to an implementation agreement signed by the two entities. In total, 1,452 applicants have enrolled and are participating and 57% are from LDCs, while the total number of countries represented in the course is 71 with 39 LDCs. The second course is scheduled for October 2020.

28. During 2019, as part of the Technology Needs Assessment (TNA) Programme, the Technology Bank in partnership with UNESCO has launched TNAs in Timor-Leste, Guinea, Bhutan, The Gambia and Uganda. The project focusses on the preparation and implementation of Science, Technology and Innovation (STI) reviews and TNAs with the objective to identify gaps and priorities in STI as a first step towards developing a coherent and integrated strategy tailored to the specific situation of the country. The objectives of the review include recommendations for strengthening policies and measures to improve national and regional technological capabilities and encourage innovation, including detailed assessments in areas of critical importance. The STI / TNA reviews aim to provide critical insights about the functioning of the national innovation capabilities and a better understanding of the policy and regulatory STI in the selected LDCs. The project activities facilitate policy dialogues among STI stakeholders in the selected countries. The overall aim of the project is thus to maximize the impact of STI for sustainable development and SDGs.

29. Continuing from the TNAs of 2019 the process enabled a better understanding of the policy and regulatory frameworks and resulted in recommendations for strengthening policies and other measures to improve national and regional technological capabilities and encourage innovation. In each country, the Technology Bank brought together stakeholders involved in science, technology and innovation and facilitated the creation of a national committee to guide the assessments. The validation phase of these reports has been disrupted by the current COVID-19 related restrictions and will be conducted at the earliest opportunity.

30. To enhance the alignment of the needs assessments process with the mandate and focus of the Technology Bank, a new methodology has been developed and is being utilized for the second group of technology assessments. Initial methodologies employed by the Bank's implementing partners were found to be excessively complex and hence largely not implementable.

31. In 2019, as part of its STI policy technical capacity building programme, the Technology Bank in partnership with the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) and the Network of African Science Academies (NASAC) launched the capacity building programme for academies of science in line with its mandate to

strengthen and support national academies of science in LDCs. For the Technology Bank to successfully deliver its mandate, a strong network of interlocutors and partners at the national and regional levels is critical. As part of this programme, the Technology Bank has organised and convened regional consultations for academies of science for the Southern African region held in Madagascar, for the West African region held in Guinea, for the East African region held in Uganda and for the North African region held in Mauritania. The regional consultations for Asia/Pacific was held in February 2020 in Bangkok in partnership with the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific. The Technology Bank is benefiting from the support of national academies of science from South Africa, Senegal, Egypt and Uganda that serve as lead academies in their respective regions. The programme objective is to strengthen the existing academies of science and support the establishment of academies in the LDCs that do not as yet have them, with their eventual success being determined by their ability to devise policies, form partnerships and encourage interactions at all levels of STI.

32. In 2020, the Technology Bank has planned to support four countries, Democratic Republic of Congo, Guinea, Lesotho and Sierra Leone to establish the academies of science in Africa with the support of NASAC. Under the current COVID-19 conditions, the Technology Bank in collaboration with NASAC is pursuing the programme with online support to the countries establishing academies. Ten countries have requested support from the Technology Bank towards the establishment of a national academy of science.

33. The Technology Bank in partnership with Inter Agency Task Team (IATT) Workstream (WS) 6 under the Technology Facilitation Mechanism (TFM) had funded and planned three capacity building courses on science, technology and innovation policies (one in Asia-Pacific, two in Africa (English, French)) for policy makers. Unfortunately, due to COVID-19 and travel restrictions, the training has been postponed to 2021.

34. The Technology Bank partnered with United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR) to enhance the capacity of experts in LDCs to access and use geospatial data and information technologies in support of decision-making for climate change adaptation, disaster risk management and natural resources management. Three pilot countries for the programme are The Gambia, Mozambique and Uganda. The first training for experts and workshop for policy-makers was held in Uganda in March 2020. The planned training and workshops in Mozambique and The Gambia have been postponed due to COVID19 restrictions. Phase II of the programme is planned for 10 LDCs (Bangladesh, Burundi, Cambodia, Kiribati , Malawi, Niger, Solomon Islands, South Sudan, Tuvalu and Vanuatu) in 2021 provided COVID-19 restrictions are eased.

35. The UN Technology Bank was in advanced discussions with key private sector partners to launch a global technology transfer digital platform in 2020 to facilitate technology transfer and also strengthen absorptive and adaptive capacity in the LDCs. The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the technology transfer programme where the Technology Bank in core partnership with UNDP, UNCTAD and WHO has successfully launched a new initiative, the Tech Access Partnership (TAP) to support developing countries to enhance their capacity to manufacture essential COVID-19 related medical equipment, including PPEs, diagnostics and medical devices including ventilators.

36. The operationalization of the TBLDC marked the first target of Sustainable Development Goal 17 to have been achieved (target 17.8) and contributes directly to the objective of the 2030 Agenda to leave no one behind, as well as to the implementation of the Istanbul Programme of Action.