

**Division for Africa,
Least Developed Countries
and Special Programmes**

A L D C

**Division de l'Afrique,
des pays les moins avancés et
des programmes spéciaux**



ALDC AT A GLANCE



Promoting growth and well-being through research analysis, technical assistance, policy formulation and advice

Countries Represented: More than 80 countries in Africa, Asia, the Caribbean and the Pacific

Low Income Levels: Of the total population in the Least Developed Countries (LDCs), one-third subsists on less than \$1 a day, while more than two-thirds live on \$2 a day

High Vulnerability: Fragile economies, low levels of health, education and adult literacy, vulnerable to price changes in commodities traded on world markets

Major Goals

- Collaborate with structurally disadvantaged developing countries to ensure growth opportunities from trade and investment, to improve development prospects, and to enable their more effective participation in the global economy
- Provide timely, targeted research analysis and innovative policy recommendations for development, trade and investment.

Key Activities

Research, policy analysis, data collection and dissemination

- *The Least Developed Countries Report*
- *The Least Developed Countries Report Overview*
- *LDC Report Highlights*
- *Economic Development in Africa Report*
- *Enhancing the Role of Domestic Financial Resources in Africa's Development: A Policy Handbook*
- *Statistical Profiles of Least Developed Countries*
- Sector-specific and national case studies

Discussion, intergovernmental deliberations and consensus-building

- Workshops and conference presentations
- Coordination of UNCTAD-wide activities in support of Africa; Least Developed Countries (LDCs); Landlocked Developing Countries (LLDCs); Small Island Developing States (SIDS); and "Structurally Weak, Vulnerable and Small Economies" (SWVSEs)
- Management of the UNCTAD-LDC Trust Fund

Technical assistance and capacity-building

- Enhanced Integrated Framework (EIF) for trade-related technical assistance
- Trade Facilitation

Online dissemination

- Reports
- Speeches, presentations, workshop proceedings

Africa

Dependence on primary commodity exports, combined with reliance on manufactured imports, has limited the opportunities for robust intraregional trade. Strict rules of origin create impediments for nascent firms, while bureaucratic and physical non-tariff barriers create obstacles for African firms and sectors.

The global economic crisis has reduced development assistance and private capital flows. Policy responses focus on strengthening regional integration and cooperation. Broadening small domestic markets to create larger regional markets will justify larger-scale manufacturing, stimulate infrastructure development, and strengthen the region's bargaining position in world markets and trade negotiations. UNCTAD contends that, while global integration is important for development and poverty reduction, without improvements in productive capacities and associated employment, external integration does not lead to inclusive



development. Renewed efforts are necessary to develop the productive base and address structural weaknesses, raising agricultural productivity, moving up the value chain from low-skills manufacturing, through investment in education, health, infrastructure and technology.

The annual *Economic Development in Africa Reports* analyse selected aspects of Africa's development problems and major policy issues confronting sub-Saharan African countries, offering policy perspectives. Past reports have examined critical issues, such as domestic resource mobilization, aid levels, role of FDI, debt sustainability, trade performance, commodity dependence and capital flows.

Least Developed Countries

Based on three criteria, (i) low income, (ii) human assets, and (iii) economic vulnerability, forty-nine countries, with nearly 770 million people, are currently designated as Least Developed Countries (LDCs). They are deemed highly vulnerable to external natural and economic shocks and disadvantaged in their development process, because of structural deficiencies in their economies or for geographic reasons. The 2001 Brussels conference agreed on the Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the Decade 2001-2010.

UN system-wide preparations for the Fourth UN Least Developed Countries Conference (UNLDC-IV) in 2011 were launched at the first Interagency Consultative Group Meeting in March 2009. More than 40 participants from 29 UN agencies and other international organizations, including the Bretton Woods institutions, participated. As one of the lead UN agencies in support of least developed countries, UNCTAD participated in, and made substantive contributions to, the deliberations. UNCTAD is expected to play an important role in providing substantive research and analysis through its LDC and Africa Reports, and its analysis of sectoral and thematic issues of trade and development of interest to least developed countries, as its contribution to UNLDC-IV.

The *Least Developed Countries Reports* explore timely issues, seeking to offer national and international policies to effect rapid economic change. *The Least Developed Countries Report Overview*, by the Secretary-General of UNCTAD provides a synopsis of the full LDC Report. *LDC Report Highlights* summarise the main policy points in the full LDC Reports, for use by policymakers in LDCs and their development partners.

Sector-specific and national case studies analyse the potential of particular sectors of trade and development of interest to LDCs, such as horticulture, bringing to light the key challenges facing them in taking advantage of such sectors. Country-specific vulnerability profiles analyse the capacity of select states to face the challenge of eventual graduation from LDC status.

Landlocked Developing Countries

UNCTAD contributes to global efforts to mitigate the adverse effects of geographic isolation and long distance to markets on landlocked developing countries (LLDCs). In addition to activities that develop efficient national transportation networks and transit systems, UNCTAD advocates policies that promote regional trade expansion and facilitate investment and economic restructuring. Of the thirty-one LLDCs, sixteen are also in the LDC category, experiencing the difficulties of LDCs and the disadvantage of having no territorial access to the sea.

The 2003 Conference in Almaty, Kazakhstan, was a major step towards a new global framework for developing efficient transit transport systems in landlocked and transit developing countries, taking into account the interests of both landlocked and transit developing countries. The outcome documents, the Almaty Declaration and the Almaty Programme of Action, have since served as a basis for international discussions on improving transport infrastructure and trade facilitation measures for LLDCs.



Small Island Developing States

Small Island Developing States (SIDS) risk severe marginalization from the global economy because of their small size, distance from large markets, and high economic and environmental vulnerability to external shocks. UNCTAD supports global efforts on behalf of these countries, as stated in the *Mauritius Strategy for the Further Implementation of the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States* (January 2005).

UNCTAD uses an unofficial list of 29 SIDS, for analytical purposes only. Of these, nine are also designated as LDCs. UNCTAD's 2004 publication, *Is a special treatment of small island developing states possible?* describes the situation of these countries.

“Structurally weak, vulnerable and small economies” (SWVSEs)

During the 2004 UNCTAD XI Conference in São Paulo, Brazil, members states agreed that “UNCTAD should enhance its work on the special problems of LDCs, small island developing States, and of landlocked developing countries and the related problems and challenges faced by transit developing countries as well as “structurally weak, vulnerable, and small economies” (paragraph 33 of the São Paulo Consensus/SPC). Support for SWVSEs was reiterated in the UNCTAD XII Accra Accord in 2008.

Ninety-two countries are recognized by UNCTAD as “structurally weak, vulnerable and small economies” (SWVSEs). Nearly four -fifths of these States (72) are already included in one or two of the three United Nations-recognized special categories of developing countries (LDCs, LLDCs, SIDS), while 20 stand out as freshly recognized SWVSEs, or disadvantaged countries that have not received any special attention within the UN system.

Alleviating the economic vulnerability of SWVSEs involves reducing their exposure to external (economic and natural) shocks. This can be achieved through an enhanced economic base in which more resilient — less exposed — activities will play a greater role. Resilience-building, therefore, requires sustained investment efforts to diversify productive capacities, notably in the sphere of trade in services and in economic sectors with a greater “knowledge content.”

Research and Policy Analysis Branch

The overall goal of the Branch is to undertake research and policy analysis on issues affecting development in Africa and LDCs with a view to identifying better national and international policies and influencing policy choices in these countries and their development partners. This involves undertaking policy-oriented research and mobilizing the outside research community to work on the development of Africa and the LDCs, identifying the practical implications of research findings for policy makers, disseminating findings and playing an advocacy role in promoting consensus in the international development community. A major aim is to add value to current policy debates with innovative thinking. The Branch is responsible for two of UNCTAD's flagship reports: *The Least Developed Countries Report* and the *Economic Development in Africa Report*. The findings of the reports and other research endeavours are circulated in press launches and through distribution of the reports and organization of regional workshops with policy-makers. Branch members actively participate in stakeholder workshops and expert meetings, inter-governmental and inter-agency meetings, research networks, and deliver lectures and outreach events to diverse audiences.



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Despite a history of regional integration and cooperation agreements, significant expansion of intraregional trade and investment has not followed. Intra-African trade as percentage of total exports is 9 per cent, compared with 67 per cent for Europe, 46 per cent for developing Asia, and 16 per cent for Latin America.

Dependence on primary commodity exports, combined with reliance on manufactured imports, has limited the opportunities for robust intraregional trade. Strict rules of origin create impediments for nascent firms, while bureaucratic and physical non-tariff barriers create obstacles for African firms and sectors.

The global economic crisis has reduced development assistance and private capital flows. Policy responses must focus on strengthening regional integration and cooperation. Broadening small domestic markets to create larger regional markets will justify larger-scale manufacturing, stimulate infrastructure development, and strengthen the region's bargaining position in world markets and trade negotiations.

Efforts to diversify and expand value-added commodities production and manufactured goods and services in the context of developmental regionalism can reduce over-reliance on a deteriorating global economy.

UNCTAD, in conjunction with regional and international organizations, attempts to extend and deepen an understanding of the continent's development issues, promoting action to accelerate growth and positive integration into the global economy.

UNCTAD activities in support of Africa

- Annual *Economic Development in Africa Reports* (EDAR) analyse key aspects of Africa's development challenges, offering policy perspectives. Past reports have examined critical issues, such as domestic resource mobilization, aid levels, role of FDI, debt sustainability, trade performance,

commodity dependence and capital flows. *The 2009 Report, Strengthening Regional Economic Integration for Africa's Development*, asserts that intra-African integration, when implemented within a broader development strategy, is essential for development.

- Through the multi-donor trust fund, UNCTAD supports productive capacity-building through support and training during the WTO negotiating process. Activities include drafting technical background papers on negotiation issues, conducting regional and national awareness-raising workshops, organizing round-tables for Geneva-based delegations and the financing participation by officials from developing countries at meetings of the WTO Negotiations Group on Trade Facilitation.
- *Enhancing the Role of Domestic Financial Resources in Africa's Development: A Policy Handbook* was produced in the context of the UN Development Account Project (Fifth Tranche). Distilling insights from country studies, Expert Group Meeting discussions, regional seminars and stakeholder workshops into a practical policy-oriented guide, it highlights some largely neglected opportunities for increasing the types and levels of financial resources for the continent's development through an improvement in domestic financial resource mobilization and efficient use.
- Special presentations of EDAR 2007 and 2008 were made to the African Economic Research Consortium biannual research workshops, and at an international conference organized by AfDB/ECA.
- A *Trade and Development for Africa's Prosperity* Issues Note was prepared for the High-level Segment of Heads of State and Government at the twelfth session of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD XII) held in Accra, Ghana from 20 to 25 April 2008. Responding to concerns that trade and economic development did not figure prominently in the Millennium



Development Goals, this high-level segment was convened to strengthen the action of the international community in those areas. It focused attention on the African host region, with a view to contributing to its development processes and economic progress in those areas, within the mandate of UNCTAD. Participants strongly supported UNCTAD's efforts to focus on Africa in its research and policy analysis, as well as its capacity-building work.

- Substantive contributions were provided to the Economic Commission for Africa Report on Governance.
- Advisory services and technical cooperation, as well as technical input for several South-South cooperation initiatives, are on-going. UNCTAD offers advisory services in conjunction with the WTO Aid for Trade initiative, the ACP-EU Economic Partnership Agreement negotiations, and various activities that are part of the Joint Integrated Technical Assistance Programme to Selected Least Developed and Other African Countries (JITAP).
- UNCTAD's private-sector development initiatives have been consolidated through the expansion of Empretec, a programme that supports small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in Africa.
- UNCTAD has contributed to the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), especially the cluster on agriculture, market access and diversification. Activities included in the 'development and poverty reduction' purview of NEPAD include infrastructure and transportation, "bridging the digital divide," market access, and capital flows.
- Participation in the annual regional consultations of the UN agencies working in Africa on NEPAD

Past Reports

2009: *Strengthening Regional Economic Integration for Africa's Development*

2008: *Export Performance Following Trade Liberalization: Some Patterns and Policy Perspectives*

2007: *Reclaiming Policy Space: Domestic Resource Mobilization and Developmental States*

2006: *Doubling Aid: Making the Big Push Work*

2005: *Rethinking the Role of Foreign Direct Investment*

2004: *Debt Sustainability: Oasis or Mirage?*

2003: *Trade Performance and Commodity Dependence*

2002: *From Adjustment to Poverty Reduction: What is New?*

2001: *Performance, Prospects and Policy Issues*

2000: *Capital Flows and Growth in Africa*

LEAST DEVELOPED COUNTRIES



Least developed countries (LDCs) encounter substantial hurdles to overcoming poverty due to serious limitations in their human, institutional and productive capacities, and in their physical infrastructure. Reliant on commodity exports and low-value manufactured goods, LDCs are highly vulnerable to external economic shocks. Nearly sixty per cent are classified as heavily indebted poor countries (HIPC).

Anticipated benefits derived from economic liberalization have not been fully realized by least-developed countries. Uneven, volatile or stagnant economic performance, especially in Africa, has been the norm. More than two-thirds of all people in LDCs live on less than \$2 a day, while absolute poverty has increased. Food independence has given way to food insecurity and malnutrition. Attainment of the MDG goals remains a distant possibility.

Forty-nine countries, with nearly 770 million people, are currently designated as LDCs by the United Nations, and thus are eligible to receive special international trade concessions, advantageous financing, and technical assistance support. These countries are deemed highly disadvantaged in their development process, because of structural deficiencies in their economics or for geographical reasons.

Most UN agencies and programmes, along with several

- **in the field of development financing**, where bilateral, regional and multilateral donors and financial institutions are expected to give LDCs favourable consideration, including debt reduction, in their decisions on concessionary financing; and
- **in the area of technical assistance**, where priority is given to LDCs under all cooperation programmes of the UN, and bilateral and regional development partners are encouraged to follow the same preferential policy.

Three United Nations Conferences on the Least Developed Countries have taken place: in 1981, 1990, and 2001, under the leadership of UNCTAD. The third Conference (Brussels, 14-20 May 2001) agreed on the Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the Decade 2001-2010.

UN system-wide preparations for the Fourth UN Least Developed Countries Conference (UNLDC-IV) in 2011 were launched at the first Interagency Consultative Group Meeting in March 2009. More than 40 participants from 29 UN agencies and other international organizations, including the Bretton Woods institutions, participated. As one of the lead UN agencies in support of least developed countries, UNCTAD participated in, and made substantive contributions to, the deliberations. UNCTAD is expected to play an important role in providing substantive research and analysis through

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