

Regional Workshop on the Adaptation of the 2030 Agenda and the Istanbul Programme of Action at the National Level for the Least Developed Countries in Asia and the Pacific

Proceedings of the meeting

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Introduction



The Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the Decade 2011-2020, informally called the Istanbul Programme of Action, has given impetus to building productive capacities in least developed countries (LDCs) and achieving graduation from the status through structural transformation. The Programme has also stressed the need to reduce the vulnerabilities of these countries to various shocks, such as the food, fuel and financial crises that have affected all countries in the world in the late 2000s and climate change-related consequences.

During the first half of the implementation period of the Programme, the Asia-Pacific least developed countries made remarkable progress towards meeting the criteria for graduation. After the graduation of Samoa in January 2014, the number of least developing countries in the region is 12, of which seven of them met the criteria for graduation during the 2015 triennial review of the Committee for Development Policy. Graduation from least developed country status is, however, not enough, as many of these countries are still highly vulnerable to external shocks arising from global financial crises, natural disasters or high volatility in commodity markets. Thus, the global community needs to formulate frameworks and alternative actions to support these countries, particularly in the context of climate change adaptation.

The second half of the Istanbul Programme of Action coincides with the first five years of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. A major issue to be addressed is how to implement these two ambitious development objectives for LDCs effectively. ESCAP has already initiated a process to support member States in implementing these global agendas by organizing a regional macroeconomic modelling workshop in December 2015. The ESCAP secretariat has been mandated by the Commission in its resolution 72/6 to further expand the process by conducting workshops and training programmes on applying models in an effort to integrate the three dimensions of sustainable development and to identify the linkages and impacts of national policies and strategies.

With 251 actions included in the Istanbul Programme of Action and 17 Sustainable Development Goals and 169 targets in the 2030 Agenda, it is clear that a strategic approach based on the prioritization and sequencing of actions, the Goals and targets is necessary. In the latest publication of ESCAP, *From the Istanbul Programme of Action to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, effective ways to address the challenges involved in the simultaneous implementation of the Programme and the 2030 Agenda for Asia-Pacific least developed countries are explored. For that purpose,

the report examines to what extent the Programme can support the achievement of specific Goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda. It also proposes a unique analytical framework for the prioritization and sequencing of the 2030 Agenda in each country.

One of the distinctive features of the 2030 Agenda is the importance it accords to means of implementation, among which the mobilization of financial resources plays an important role. Without a far-reaching financing strategy, graduation and promotion of sustainable development is not possible. This is particularly important in the light of the scarcity of financial and human resources that characterize LDCs. ESCAP has recently conducted a perception survey of experts and practitioners from Asia-Pacific least developed countries to identify their priorities that pertain to domestic and foreign sources of finance for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. The aggregate view was that national government revenue and improved management of public expenditure were the main priorities, with a particular focus on the role of official development assistance (ODA) for least developed countries.

Challenges

Despite the progress achieved so far, the socioeconomic development of LDCs remains constrained by many factors, including, among them, limited productive capacities, high trade costs and geographic features, which causes isolation from the major regional and extra-regional markets. These countries are also the most vulnerable to climate change consequences and natural disasters, making economic growth, social inclusion and environmental management a far greater challenge.



Some economies in the region are also facing the challenge of declining commodity prices, which is severely affecting the commodity export-dependent economies, underscoring the need for diversifying sources of growth. For example, in 2015, the global oil price plunged by 47 per cent and the global non-fuel commodity price index fell by 17 per cent. These sharp drops in prices are threatening to slow economic growth, poverty reduction, the achievement of SDGs and inclusive development.

In addition, at this critical juncture, a significant challenge to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda is the lack of a clear road map or strategy for implementation. The 169 targets provide a comprehensive framework for tracking progress, but they fail to provide guidance on how to achieve SDGs. A major issue to be addressed by policymakers is how to effectively prioritize and sequence their actions for achieving SDGs. At the national level, it is a challenging undertaking because of (a) interlinkages across ADGs and (b) bottlenecks that are impeding progress towards inclusive growth and sustainable development.

Furthermore, graduation from least developed country status is, however, not enough, as indicated earlier, many of these countries are still highly vulnerable to external shocks arising from crises, natural disasters or high volatility in commodity markets. Thus, the global community needs to formulate frameworks and alternative actions to support these countries.

Opportunities

To further promote a cross-sectoral and integrated approach in the adaptation of the 2030 Agenda, policymakers and other stakeholders need to be aware of development strategies and policy options, for example, those related to the implementation of IPoA that focus on similar priority areas and development goals. For that purpose, regional cooperation, can play a key role in this effort and can be promoted through the dissemination of good practices and lessons learned, and capacity-building efforts.

Cross-sectoral coordination is also essential for creating synergies across the priorities of action and between global agendas. It will be even more critical, given that the 2030 Agenda entails pursuing simultaneously economic, social and environmental objectives. It is clear that a strategic approach based on the prioritization and sequencing of actions, the Goals and targets is necessary.



The importance of prioritization and sequencing is further amplified in LDCs, as these countries are also committed to implementing policies that advance progress towards the Istanbul Programme of Action. The Policy Declaration, which was adopted during the Midterm Review of the Implementation of the Istanbul Programme of Action in May 2016, reaffirmed that national policies should be geared towards catalysing action within the context of the 2030 Agenda and other agreed international development accords.

Way forward

Given these challenges and prospects Asia-Pacific LDCs are facing, the 2030 Agenda must be adapted and localized to maximize its impact. Policymakers could develop country-specific policies and strategies for prioritizing and sequencing the actions that need to be taken as part of the overall effort to achieve SDGs.

In this context, a recent ESCAP report, Asia-Pacific Countries with Special Needs Development Report 2016, which will be presented shortly, emphasizes the importance of country-specific strategies for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. The analytical framework proposed in the Report could be used to inform policymakers of their optimal, country-specific pathways on progress towards reaching SDGs. This information would ultimately contribute to efforts aimed at adapting the 2030 Agenda into their national context, including through innovative policy initiatives and institutional reforms.

Finally, planning and prioritization are essential for making progress towards achieving sustainable development. This workshop provides a timely and important opportunity to discuss how the 2030 Agenda could be most effectively adapted to the national realities of LDCs of the region.

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Session discussions



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