



**FROM THE ISTANBUL
PROGRAMME OF ACTION
TO THE 2030 AGENDA
FOR SUSTAINABLE
DEVELOPMENT**

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From the Istanbul Programme of Action to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is a contribution by the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) to the deliberations of the Midterm Review of the Istanbul Programme of Action for Least Developed Countries (LDCs), to be held in Antalya, Turkey, from 27 to 29 May 2016.

The Istanbul Programme of Action has provided impetus to building productive capacities in LDCs and achieving graduation from that status through structural transformation. The Programme also stresses reducing the vulnerabilities of these countries to various shocks, such as the food, fuel and financial crises, which affected all countries in late 2000, as well as to climate change-related risks.

With the recent launch of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals, the timing of the Midterm Review could not be more opportune. As the priorities of the Programme are specific to the needs of LDCs and are ultimately expected to support the sustainable development of these countries, they should be seen as instrumental for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

However, with 251 actions included in the Istanbul Programme of Action and with 17 Goals and 169 associated targets with the 2030 Agenda, it is clear that governments should have a clear understanding of the complementarities between these two agendas, and set effective strategies to meet their objectives.

This report explores opportunities to address the challenge of simultaneous implementation of the Istanbul Programme of Action and the 2030 Agenda in LDCs. It presents an analytical framework, based on a set of 82 indicators, representing the 17 Goals, and the 174 countries for which data are available. This includes details about the interlinkages, synergies and trade-offs across different indicators from the viewpoint of each individual country. The framework aims to identify optimal, country-specific pathways for achieving sustainable development.

ESCAP is committed to support our member States, especially the LDCs, in adapting the Istanbul Programme of Action and the 2030 Agenda to their specific national circumstances and priorities, and to facilitate the subsequent follow-up and review processes at the regional level.

Shamshad Akhtar
Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations and
Executive Secretary, United Nations Economic and
Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific



Despite recent technological advances and the commitments of international community to provide help, the Asia-Pacific least developed countries (LDCs) continue to face structural challenges in their development processes. Such challenges are highly idiosyncratic and, in most cases, associated with disadvantages in their initial endowments and geographic features, including remoteness, costly access to international markets, insufficient human, natural and financial resources, and vulnerability to disasters. Currently there are 12 LDCs in the Asia-Pacific region – Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Cambodia, Kiribati, the Lao People’s Democratic Republic, Myanmar, Nepal, Solomon Islands, Timor-Leste, Tuvalu and Vanuatu – seven of which have met the criteria for graduation in the 2015 triennial review of the Committee for Development Policy.

The Istanbul Programme of Action aims at overcoming the structural challenges of the LDCs through building their human and productive capacities and enabling their graduation from the LDC category. The overarching objective of the Programme, which received a strong endorsement from the international community through the adoption in September 2015 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, is to support the sustainable development of LDCs.

The last five years of the Istanbul Programme of Action will be implemented simultaneously with the first five years of the 2030 Agenda. With 251 actions included in the Programme and 17 Sustainable Development Goals and 169 associated targets in the 2030 Agenda, it is clear that a strategic approach with clearly defined priorities and sequencing of actions is necessary. This is particularly important in the light of the scarcity of financial and human resources that characterizes LDCs.

Complementarities between the Istanbul Programme of Action and the 2030 Agenda

A mapping of the contribution of the Istanbul Programme of Action to the 2030 Agenda reveals that actions undertaken in the Programme can, at the same time, contribute to progress in implementing the 2030 Agenda. The Programme covers the 17 Sustainable Development Goals of the 2030 Agenda, with particular emphasis on Goal 2 (zero hunger), Goal 8 (decent work and economic growth), Goal 9 (industry, innovation and infrastructure), Goal 16 (peace, justice and strong institutions) and Goal 17 (partnerships for the Goals). The Programme and the 2030 Agenda are highly complementary in that the former provides concrete guidance for LDCs about how to achieve the Goals and their associated targets.

A unique analytical framework

This report proposes a unique analytical framework for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda based on cutting-edge methods from complexity science coupled with economic analyses. The Sustainable Development Goal system is conceptualized as a network consisting of (a) a set of 82 indicators representative of the 17 Goals, (b) 174 countries for which there are adequate data available for the indicators and (c) the linkages among and between countries and indicators. The framework allows the computation of a country-specific measure – termed “SDG capacity” – which quantifies the capacity of each country to implement the Goals. The analytical framework also proposes the optimal strategies of implementation of the Goals, including specific recommendations for their prioritization and sequencing.

Identifying priorities and sequencing

The report illustrates the functioning of the framework for Bangladesh. It proposes that the initial priority of Bangladesh should be placed on education, reduction of inequalities and infrastructure. The first two elements could be related to the importance of human capital for a country to increase the diversification and

sophistication of its production and the potential for a more even distribution of income to boost aggregate demand.

Identifying bottlenecks and trade-offs

In addition to identifying optimal strategies, the exercise singles out indicators that can be considered bottlenecks for making progress and isolated areas of the country networks that represent trade-offs. An important regularity found was the absence of progress expected in the environmental goals of the 2030 Agenda. This result seems to be due to the isolation of the environmental indicators in the countries' network from the core socioeconomic indicators. The finding suggests that the integration of the three pillars envisioned in the 2030 Agenda is not going to be easy to achieve.

The lack of progress in addressing issues related to the environmental pillar and the identification of bottlenecks to attaining Goals require careful consideration by national policymakers of LDCs and development partners. In particular, the identified bottlenecks represent areas that require the most attention and for which additional financial resources and support from development partners could be most effectively allocated.

The need to exploit synergies in formulating optimal policies for sustainable development

A comparison of different scenarios strongly indicates the importance of a thorough understanding of linkages, synergies and trade-offs across the Goals, as well as the relative benefits of different implementation plans for each country. The case study of Bangladesh demonstrates that the main areas of focus of the Istanbul Programme of Action could provide good guidance for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda in LDCs. Nevertheless, planning and prioritization are essential for making progress towards achieving sustainable development as the expected outcome from randomized policies are strictly inferior, justifying the need for policy coordination across different state agencies and different levels of governments.



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