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DRAFT CONCEPT NOTE

Asia-Pacific Regional Workshop on Graduation Strategies from the Least Developed Country Category as part of the Implementation of the Istanbul Programme of Action for the LDCs

Organized by

**The United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
The United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs**

and

The Royal Government of Cambodia

4-6 December 2013, Siem Reap, Cambodia

Introduction

United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs and the Royal Government of Cambodia will jointly convene the Asia-Pacific Regional Training Workshop on Graduation Strategies from 4 to 6 December 2013 in Siem Reap, Cambodia.

I. Background

The United Nations LDC IV Conference adopted the Istanbul Programme of Action for the Decade 2011-2020 in May 2011. The overarching goal of the IPoA for the decade 2011-2020 is to overcome the structural challenges faced by the least developed countries (LDCs) in order to eradicate poverty, achieve internationally agreed development goals and enable graduation from LDC category. The aim of IPoA is to enable half the number of LDCs to meet the criteria for graduation by 2020 with a strong focus on developing their productive capacities. Genuine partnership and solidarity with understanding and recognition that LDCs, as the most vulnerable group of countries, need effective national policies, enhanced global support and appropriate mechanisms at all levels for the achievement of the goals and objectives of IPoA.

As a follow-up to the LDC IV Conference, ESCAP has undertaken several activities mainly aimed at capacity building in Asia-Pacific LDCs. ESCAP also organized the Asia-Pacific Regional Meeting on the Implementation of the Istanbul Programme of Action (IPoA) for the Decade 2011-2020, in December 2011 in Bangkok which adopted the Regional Road Map.¹ The Regional Road Map contains a set of capacity development activities aimed at

¹ ESCAP Resolution 68/2 on “Implementation of the Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the Decade 2011-2020 in the Asia-Pacific region” requested the Executive Secretary of ESCAP to assist the Asia-Pacific least developed countries in implementing the Regional Road Map.

delivering knowledge products for dissemination and advocacy, expert services, sectoral reviews, monitoring and evaluation, and provides a basis for formulating technical assistance programmes and projects at regional, sub-regional and national levels. It identifies the key agencies and entities which would be involved in delivering these products and services, all aimed at assisting these countries to graduate from their LDC status.

In May 2013, ESCAP received a request from the Government of Cambodia to organize a Regional Training Workshop on Graduation Strategies. In response to that request, UN ESCAP and UNDESA in cooperation with the Government of Cambodia will jointly organize the Asia-Pacific Regional Training Workshop on Graduation Strategies in Siem Reap, Cambodia during 4 to 6 December 2013.

II. Graduation from LDC status

The issue of graduation from the LDC category has recently found increased attention by the international community and by the LDCs themselves. The Istanbul Programme of Action (IPOA) adopted at the 4th United Nations Conference on the LDCs held in Istanbul, Turkey, on 9-13 May 2012 explicitly stipulates the aim of enabling half of the LDCs to meet the criteria for graduation by 2020. LDCs in Asia and the Pacific have taken a lead in this regard, with several countries like Bangladesh, Cambodia, Lao People's Democratic Republic and Nepal formally expressing their commitment to graduate by 2020.

During the 69th ESCAP session in May 2013, the Commission was informed by the Governments of Cambodia and Lao PDR of the stated goal of the respective countries to graduate from the least developed country category by 2020. Bangladesh also informed the Commission that it was planning to graduate from that category to become a middle-income country by 2021. Nepal also informed the Commission of its long-term vision to graduate as early as possible.² Other LDCs in the region have also taken interest in accelerating progress towards graduation.

Graduation from the LDC category indicates the successful outcome of policies and strategies followed and which have significantly reduced important development gaps that existed between the LDC and the other developing countries. The country is no longer lagging behind. Besides the very concrete benefits that development per se brings in terms of improved social outcomes, higher incomes and a more robust economic base, graduation can also be seen as an international recognition of the progress made by the country concerned. At the same time, it implies a phasing-out of international support measures that are available only for LDCs. And while the phasing out does not imply that the country no longer needs support from the international community, it does indicate that development needs change as countries progress in the development ladder and support needs to be adjusted accordingly.

² Source: para. 348 of ESCAP Annual Report 24 May 2012-1 May 2013.

Graduation is a complex process. It combines a technical process led by the United Nations Committee for Development Policy (CDP) with a political process undertaken by the United Nations Economic and Social Council and the United Nations General Assembly. Developing policy strategies to expedite graduation and to prepare a country for exiting the LDC category requires therefore knowledge on both processes.

The CDP reviews the list of LDCs and bases its recommendations on graduation and inclusion on an assessment of a country's progress utilizing three development indices. The indices measure country's income (GNI per capita) and its structural impediments towards sustainable development, indicated by the human asset index (HAI) and the economic vulnerability index (EVI). Graduation decisions also take a range of additional country-specific information into account, which are compiled and analysed in two independent reports; one prepared by DESA, the other by UNCTAD. Consultations are also held with the country concerned which thus have the opportunity to share with the CDP its views on graduation prospects. CDP recommendations are subsequently submitted to the ECOSOC for endorsement and ultimately to the General Assembly for confirmation. Graduation normally takes place three years after the General Assembly decision, followed by a transition stage in which support is withdrawn smoothly.

Preparing for graduation requires understanding on how to meet the graduation criteria set by the CDP, that is to say, it entails having some familiarity with the relevant indicators that compose the criteria so as to develop the necessary policies that will lead to an improvement in the country's scores. Furthermore, getting ready for graduation requires understanding of international support available for LDCs on an exclusive basis, including the special provisions for graduating countries. Such knowledge allows countries to make effective use of support available for them and accelerate progress towards graduation as well as to prepare the relevant strategies for when graduation takes place and that support is eventually phased out.

Generally, international support to LDCs falls into three categories: development assistance, international trade (preferential market access and other special and differential treatment under the WTO provisions) and general support (such as travel funds, scholarships and special discounts on country's assessments to funding international organizations). UN DESA has recently launched an information portal on LDC-specific support measures (<http://www.un.org/ldcportal>). The Portal lists and describes 122 different support measures, indicating the complexity that graduation may have on available support.

III. Objectives and Format of the Training Workshop

The workshop on Graduation Strategies in Siem Reap would bring together key stakeholders of the IPoA, including senior officials from the Asia-Pacific LDCs who are directly involved with the implementation of the IPoA. Member governments, experts dealing with LDC issues, the UN system, relevant regional organizations, development partners and a broad spectrum of civil society representatives from Asia and the Pacific will also be invited to attend the workshop.

The main objective of the Regional Training Workshop is to review the progress made and challenges encountered by Asia-Pacific LDCs towards the graduation thresholds, assess the prospects and suggest policy options for way forward.

The discussions will be organized in 6 sessions, reflecting the commitments and priority areas contained in the IPoA and the criteria for graduation. The first session on Promoting inclusive and sustainable development in Asia-Pacific LDCs during the Decade 2011-2020 would set the tone for in-depth discussions to follow. It will cover important issues such promoting policies for inclusive and sustainable economic growth, the importance of ensuring human and social development, promoting productive capacity development and enhancing trade in commodities which are necessary for graduation. Session 2 will cover LDC category and criteria while session 3 will address International Support Measures for LDCs and the LDC Portal. Session 4 will cover the road to graduation and review country case studies on Bangladesh, Cambodia and Lao Peoples Democratic Republic (Lao PDR). Session 5 will address the issue of graduation from LDC category. It will consider the graduation process in detail and also present the experiences of several recently graduated countries, namely Cape Verde in 2007 and Maldives in 2011 as well by currently graduating Samoa. Session 6 is a special session on looking to the next UN Development Agenda, especially on the post-2015 development agenda from the perspectives of the LDCs.

The representatives of each LDC will have an opportunity to deliver a brief (10-15 minutes) presentation each on the key issues, challenges and opportunities in their country under the respective sessions, particularly with a focus on how forward looking actions can be adopted in moving toward graduation from LDC category. Other non-LDC member States, United Nations agencies and other inter-governmental organizations will also be invited to deliver brief statements under each session.

IV. Participants

Senior government policymakers dealing directly with the implementation of the IPoA and other stakeholders from 13 Asia-Pacific LDCs: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Cambodia, Kiribati, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Myanmar, Nepal, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Timor-Leste, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu will take part in the training workshop. The

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