



**UN-OHRLLS**



**UN LDC-IV**

Istanbul, Turkey

## **High-Level Interactive Thematic Debate**

### **Concept Note**

**Title:** HUMAN AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT, GENDER EQUALITY AND EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN

**Date:** Thursday 12 May 2011

**Time:** 10:00 a.m. – 1:00 p.m.

**Venue:** Rumeli Ballroom C

### **Introduction**

The Fourth United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries<sup>1</sup> (LDC-IV) will take place in Istanbul, Turkey<sup>2</sup>, from 9-13 May 2011. The Conference's objectives are to<sup>3</sup>: (a) undertake a comprehensive appraisal of the implementation of the 10-year Brussels Programme of Action (BPoA) adopted at the previous Conference on the LDCs in Brussels in 2001; (b) identify effective international and domestic policies, in the light of the outcome of the appraisal, as well as new and emerging challenges and opportunities and the means to address them; (c) reaffirm the global commitment addressing the special needs of the LDCs, in particular related to sustainable development, and to support the LDCs in eradicating poverty and integrating beneficially into the global economy; and (d) mobilize additional international support measures in favour of the LDCs, and, in this regard, formulate and adopt a renewed partnership between the LDCs and their development partners.

The world's 48 LDCs – 33 of which are in Africa, 14 are in Asia-Pacific and one in the Caribbean – currently account for 12% of the world's population. Half of these people live in conditions of extreme poverty, with women being the most affected due to their lower access to social capabilities such as education, economic opportunities such as decent jobs, land and other productive assets, and political voice to shape the development agenda. The 2010 Human Development Report showed that the countries with low human development score highest for the Gender Inequality Index (GII): for year 2008, the gender inequality index for OECD countries equals 0.317 while it amounts 0.746 for LDCs, showing the loss in human development due to inequality between female and male achievements in three dimensions measured by the index: reproductive health, empowerment (seats in parliament, secondary education) and labour market participation. LDCs face multidimensional challenges with regard to their special and emerging needs in the context of heterogeneity within the groups, rising environmental vulnerability, and the recent global crises in food, energy and commodity markets. Therefore, new initiatives are required to both broaden and strengthen the support base for the LDCs, taking into account the very diverse nature of the LDCs.

<sup>1</sup> The Least Developed Countries (LDCs) category was established in 1971. It is currently characterized by a low GNI per capita, and structural impediments to growth measured by a low Human Assets Index (HAI) and a high Economic Vulnerability Index (EVI). The HAI has 4 indicators: undernourishment, size, remoteness, merchandise export concentration, share of agriculture, forestry and fisheries in GDP, homelessness due to natural disasters, instability of agricultural production, and instability of exports of goods and services.

<sup>2</sup> UNGA Resolution A/C.2/65/L.55 of 22 November 2010.

<sup>3</sup> UNGA Resolution A/RES/63/227 of 19 December 2008.

## Situational Analysis

Since the Third UN-Conference on LDCs, the overall socio-economic performance of the LDCs, has improved although it varies from region to region, from country to country and across sectors. Progress made towards achieving human development targets of the Brussels Programme of Action (PoA) and internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) is also mixed. Some LDCs have made concrete progress, notably in reducing child mortality, improving access to safe water, expanding universal primary education and promoting adult literacy as well as in reducing gender disparities. A great majority of LDCs have ratified the Convention for the Elimination of all forms of Discriminations Against Women (for instance 51 out of 53 countries in Africa) and elaborated gender sensitive policies. However these measures have not always translated into concrete deliverables for the majority of women in LDCs as shown by the prevailing gender disparities in all sectors. The 2010 MDG Summit Outcome acknowledged that LDCs face significant constraints and structural impediments in their development efforts and there are lagging behind in meeting the MDGs.

Overall, the state and quality of human development remains poor in most LDCs. High rate of population growth is also undermining efforts to improve the quality and access to education, healthcare and skill development, especially in the rural areas. Nearly 30 years into the HIV epidemic, persistent gender inequality and human rights violations that put women and girls at a greater risk of and vulnerability to HIV continue to hamper progress and threaten the gains that have been made in preventing HIV transmission and in increasing access to antiretroviral therapy. In addition to women and girls biological susceptibility to HIV, women, young women and girls face many interacting socio-cultural, economic and legal challenges that worsen their vulnerability.

The five most challenging human and social development issues in LDCs include slow process of poverty reduction and hunger, neo-natal mortality which now constitutes nearly 40% of under 5 mortality rate, maternal mortality, insufficient access to basic education of good quality, sanitation and AIDS related deaths. There is widening disparity in both access and utilization of sexual and reproductive health services which requires more inclusive set of strategies, political leadership and partnership at all levels, including at the community level, to influence and catalyze change. It involves addressing weak health systems, promoting a multisectoral approach, fulfilling the resource needs (financial, technical, material) for sexual and reproductive health, including HIV and ensuring greater investment in achieving gender equality and women's empowerment. Inadequate access to reproductive health care, poor maternal and child health, high maternal and child mortality, and a high unmet need for family planning, are closely associated with a low ranking on gender equality indices.<sup>4</sup>

Progress towards achieving universal primary education has been mixed in LDCs. Three LDC countries have net enrolment rates below 50% and only 17 have rates above 80%, and the quality of schooling is inadequate for the acquisition of essential information and skills for life, livelihood and life-long learning. Further, the demographic bulge and the success of universal primary education in the last decade have translated into huge systemic pressures to expand both secondary and tertiary education. Skills development, particularly technical and vocational training, is crucial to educational development, labor market inclusion and economic growth.

## Major Challenges facing LDCs

In spite of progress made there are still daunting challenges and constraints. Majority of the people in LDCs live in dehumanizing conditions of poverty and hunger and the number continues to grow.

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<sup>4</sup> <http://hdr.undp.org/en/mediacentre/news/announcements/title,22853,en.html>

Poverty is multi-dimensional problem that impedes human progress due to inability to get access to essential services such as education, health, water and sanitation. Women in LDCs are disproportionately affected due to their lower access to economic opportunities, social assets and representation in the process of preparing development policies. For instance in Africa, LDCs are facing serious human and social development challenges. With a combined total population of 880 million and fast rate of population growth of 2.3 percent per annum, and rapid urbanization rates, LDCs will continue to face significant burden of poverty in the coming years unless concrete steps are taken to address the root causes. Inequalities with respect to health, education, water and sanitation, and protective services because of gender, ethnicity/caste, language, disability and location are considered one of the major obstacles whereby a large number of the population are excluded from participation in economic and social development of their countries. Since children from poor households usually face multiple deprivations, they are disadvantaged in a number of areas further widening inequities, in many cases from one generation to the next.

Poverty in LDCs is still severe, persistent and widespread, the burden of hunger and disease is still heavy and unemployment is high and the growing youth power is underutilized. On the other hand, new challenges are emerging which threaten to derail LDCs' progress towards human development. These challenges are becoming even more acute in light of the converging crises of food, climate change and ongoing global financial and economic crisis. The impact of national disasters and conflict is severe in LDCs because of relatively weak social development systems. The increase in the use of Information, Communication and computer Technologies (ICTs), though potentially a mitigating factor, if not made accessible and relevant to LDCs will exacerbate inequities between those who have access to these technologies and those who do not. Without an effective international response, these challenges will serve to heighten the vulnerability of LDCs and reverse hard earned gains made by LDCs on the economic and social fronts.

Whereas some LDCs have made some progress on some aspects of gender equality and empowerment of women, such as gender parity in primary education and women's representation in parliament, gender disparities persist and women still have unequal access to social opportunities such as economic empowerment, productive resources, healthcare, education and they are heavily affected by gender-based violence, especially in conflict and crisis situations. For instance women in Africa produce 80% in food & agriculture but receive less than 10% of disbursed credit, 84% of active women work in the informal sector<sup>5</sup>, but their activities are not supported by trade related institutions, services and resources. Women and girls in LDCs also face a disproportionate burden of unpaid care work, which limits their time for the education; skill building and employment that would help lift them out of poverty. Furthermore, 60% of population in LDCs is under the age of 25, compared to 46% in other developing countries. Although large youthful population is a potential asset for LDCs, there are constraints due to lack of productive employment.

Stable trends in HIV/AIDS prevalence are now estimated in 25 of 35 LDCs for which trend and data are available. However, there are pronounced intra-and interregional differences. In Asia the epidemic has largely been confined to below 1 percent, but low prevalence may be masking large numbers of population. The highest rates are still found in the countries of southern and eastern Africa, with prevalence rates over 10 percent in four of them. HIV/AIDS epidemic impoverishes people, their households, communities, enterprises and leads to financial, resource and income impoverishment. Households become poorer as a result of the illness and death of members, and in many cases it is the income-earning adults who are lost. For instance in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), women constitute 60% of people living with HIV<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> MDG Report, 2010

<sup>6</sup> WHO &UNAIDS 2008.

Inequalities in access to water and sanitation services depending on the place of residence are alarming in LDCs. On average a household in an urban area is around 7 times more likely to have access to improved sanitation services than a household situated in the rural area. Women in LDCs carry most of the work burden associated with fetching water and firewood, and other domestic tasks. Moreover, social development is more closely linked to access to water and sanitation than other development drivers, including spending on health, education or access to energy services. Also, the adverse effects of climate change will exacerbate this slow and inequitable progress. According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, the provision of safe drinking water will be significantly affected by climate change in the coming years, as fresh water resources are highly vulnerable.

### **Key Objectives and Targets for the Decade 2011-2021 and beyond**

To achieve the human and social development objectives, LDCs must adopt a gender-inclusive agenda whereby they advance women’s education and access to information and employment, protect women’s legal rights, including land, property and inheritance rights, improve women’s access to agricultural inputs and security over their land, promote female entrepreneurship, address the disproportionate impact on women of climate change and consider their specific needs and roles in responses, and increase the participation of women in government and public life. LDC-IV will provide a renewed momentum and opportunity for LDCs and their development partners to engage in new commitments and significantly improve human conditions of the people in LDCs and help them achieve their overall development objectives:

- Increase and sustain high economic growth, bring about structural transformation through building viable endogenous productive capacity;
- Achieve durable and faster reduction of poverty, fight hunger and ensure food security, generate high levels of employment and decent work;
- Foster inclusive human and social development, gender equality and promotion and protection of human rights;
- Provide universal access to sexual and reproductive health services – including family planning – with emphasis on demand generation and associated decision-making power of women and adolescent girls;
- Facilitate the inclusion of rural poor women into national, regional and global supply chains; and
- “Significantly increase and coordinate” political and financial commitment to address gender equality and equity in national HIV and AIDS responses, urging Governments to reflect in their policies and budgets the gender dimension of the pandemic.

### **Policy Measures by both LDCs and Development Partners**

#### *Education and learning*

- Increase access and enhance the quality of basic education, including early childhood education and care, particularly for the most marginalised and excluded, including through alternative education activities and the increased involvement of non-government partners;
- Support countries to achieve MDG plus in education especially in increasing enrolment and decreasing drop-out rates by supporting programmes like school meal, scholarships to girls and students coming from disadvantaged communities;
- Assist in establishing and upgrading higher education and technical or vocational training institutions in each LDC for youth employment and skills development;
- Support Universal Primary Education (UPE) as a crucial medium to halting the spread of HIV/AIDS;
- Ensure the quality and efficiency of education at all levels through effective implementation of national quality education improvement policies and programmes; and

- Ensure equitable access of women and girls to education and learning opportunities, including in higher education and science and technology.

#### *Population and Primary Health*

- Train and retain healthcare providers;
- Establish and continue implementing National Health Development Plans highlighting priority actions to achieve the health-related MDGs (MDGs 4,5, and 6);
- Strengthen basic health care systems, expand primary healthcare centres in rural areas and increase access to and availability of the widest range of quality health care, including safe, effective, and affordable sexual reproductive health care and promoting reproductive rights, with particular emphasis on maternal/child health, including prevention of mother-to-child transmission of HIV;
- Scale up programmes to achieve universal access to HIV prevention, treatment, care and support, in order to reduce the spread of HIV/AIDS, and mainstream gender in national, regional and global HIV/AIDS response;
- Support demand generation for sexual and reproductive health and family planning services through analysis of gender, social and cultural barriers to women's participation in their own health decisions; and
- Facilitate the export of generic medicines at affordable costs to countries without manufacturing capacity by incorporating the relevant Trade-Related aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) flexibilities into domestic legislation and assist LDCs to develop their pharmaceutical product manufacturing and export capacities through transfer of appropriate and affordable technologies.

#### *Youth Development*

- Develop policies and programmes for engaging the youth in productive employment;
- Foster youth entrepreneurship, access to ICTs and establish youth enterprise centres for providing training and assistance to young people, including helping them to develop business projects;
- Establish entrepreneurship funds to target youth such as those in post-conflict situations, in consultation with the private sector and training institutions;
- Encourage Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) that capitalises on full employment and decent work creation for the youth; and
- Research around the world has found that comprehensive school and community-based HIV prevention programs and access to contraceptive supplies and services help reduce HIV rates and improve risk behaviors among all people, including young people.

#### *Shelter*

- Create supportive institutional, regulatory and policy environment for investment by the private sector into housing, providing the low-cost housing for the poor;
- Continue implementing national plans that promote housing for all;
- Support LDCs in building the capabilities and capacities of local institutions for delivery, quality of monitoring, financing mechanism, and operation and maintenance of housing; and
- Support LDCs by way of technology transfer for low-cost building technology utilizing local materials.

#### *Water and Sanitation*

- Develop, mainstream and strengthen, as appropriate, integrated strategies and programmes to ensure sustainable access by all to safe drinking water and basic sanitation by the end of the implementation in the country's national development plans;
- Include provision of water and sanitation in the country's national development plans and develop national programmes to ensure access to quality of water;
- Ensure adequate investment in behaviour change as a foundation for eliminating open defecation and improving access to sanitation;

- Support the global effort to realize “sustainable sanitation: five-year to 2015” as a platform on which to build political will and promote action at all levels, in order to improve hygiene and increase the coverage of basic sanitation, especially for the poor in LDCs; and
- Support transfer of technology for water treatment, management of solid waste including medical waste as well as improve sanitation systems.

*Gender Equality and Womens Empowerment*

- Strengthen accountability and political will for gender equality and women’s empowerment at all levels;
- Develop, strengthen and implement policy and legal measures to respond to gender based violence;
- Ensure more equitable economic opportunities for women including through better access and control of land, credit, labour market, decent work and new technologies;
- Support the equal participation of women in all aspects of peace-building as well as ensure necessary financing for gender equality in post conflict context;
- Implement capacity-building programmes enhancing women’s economic and political empowerment and mainstream gender in planning processes, development strategies and budget allocation mechanisms at both national and local levels;
- Strengthen partnership with women’s groups, civil society organizations, the media and the private sector in advancing gender equality and women’s empowerment;
- Develop and implement special measures for the economic, social and political empowerment of rural women, women migrants, women living with aids and survivors of gender based violence;
- Strengthen the collection and analysis of sex-disaggregated data to inform strategies, policies, programmes and research in all sectors; and
- Jointly generate better evidence and increased understanding of the specific needs of women and girls in the context of HIV and ensure prioritized and tailored national AIDS responses that protect and promote the rights of women and girls.

*Social Protection*

- Mainstream social protection into the development programmes, and ensure that social protection policies are gender responsive and inclusive;
- Support the development of social safety nets designed to buffer vulnerable communities from economic shocks; and
- Support countries technically and financially to develop and implement social protection policies especially for disadvantaged and poor communities.

**Institutional Framework to be set up**

The new programme will seek primarily to provide an efficient operational framework and identify areas in which the LDCs, their development partners and international organizations need to take urgent and concrete action based on the principles, policies and commitments including Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) mechanisms of the new Programme of Action should be set at three levels; national, regional, and global. Gender analysis must be done for all LDC issues and empowerment measures incorporated into all processes including capacity building as well as dedicated resources to catalyze and support analysis and gender mainstreaming.