

Issues paper: Proposed Methodology for the Assessment of the BPoA

Draft

July 2010

Susanna Wolf

Introduction

The Fourth United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries (UNLDC IV) will have among others the following substantive agenda:

“To undertake a comprehensive appraisal of the implementation of the Programme of Action for the Decade 2001-2010 by the least developed countries and their development partners, share best practices and lessons learned, and identify obstacles and constraints encountered as well as actions and initiatives needed to overcome them;” (A/RES/63/277).

The comprehensive appraisal is expected to shed light on key accomplishments and critical constraints in delivering the goals of the current programme, and suggest new strategies to address the gaps identified at national, regional and global levels. Based on the outcome of the appraisal the Conference will identify effective international and domestic policies in support of LDCs.

There is growing support for the use of monitoring and evaluation as an integral part of development activities at both the national and international levels. By undertaking a systematic appraisal of the effects of a specific intervention, monitoring and evaluation provides governments in LDCs, international development partners and civil society with means for learning from past experience, improving future performance, and demonstrating results as part of accountability and transparency in partnership.

This consensus has been reflected in the text of the Brussels Programme of action especially in paragraph 21 (e): “The process of identifying, assessing and monitoring progress on processes and concrete outcomes will be a key aspect of the implementation of the Programme of Action and its success will be judged by its contribution to progress

of LDCs towards achieving international development targets, as well as their graduation from the list of LDCs.”

Preparations for the UNLDC IV Conference are taking place at the country, regional and global level. The country level preparations, which fed into the regional review meetings, are a central pillar of the overall preparatory process. Country reports contain the assessment of the progress made at the country level in the implementation of the Brussels Programme of Action, challenges confronted and constraints, priorities and opportunities.

Both regional review meetings – the Asia Pacific and the Africa review - have concluded that despite significant progress achieved in different areas for a number of countries, the BPoA as yet remains an unfinished agenda. LDCs have in general lagged behind other developing countries in achieving the MDGs and other internationally agreed development goals. This is despite considerable efforts LDCs have made in implementing the commitments contained in the Programme of Action and notable progress made towards improving their institutions of governance. A global assessment of the implementation of the Brussels Programme should build on the country and regional assessments. It should also complement these reports by providing information from a global perspective, consistent across countries.

There is the need to develop a methodological guidance that can be used for the appraisal of the implementation of the Brussels Programme. This is one of the aims of an expert group meeting organized by OHRLLS. Participants will include all relevant stakeholders, including representatives and experts from LDCs and partner countries, experts on measurement of indicators as well as representatives from key UN departments, offices and agencies and other international organizations. The aim of this issues paper is to provide a background for the discussions about this methodology, summarizing the results of recent publications related to the implementation of the BPoA, highlighting the existing gaps and proposing elements of the methodology for the appraisal.

Previous assessments of the implementation of the BPoA

The Brussels Programme of Action for LDCs (BPoA) for the decade 2001-2010 contains a number of quantified and time- specific development targets. This was believed to enable LDCs and their development partners to assess and monitor the implementation of the Programme of Action. Paragraph 94 underscores that "the goals and targets set out in the Programme of Action will be used to review and evaluate performance of LDCs and their development partners in implementing the various commitments".

The only global review of the BpoA was carried out during the Mid-Term Review in 2006 and painted a mixed picture on the implementation of the BPoA. The General Assembly Declaration of the high-level meeting of the sixty-first session of the General Assembly on the midterm comprehensive global review of the implementation of the Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the Decade 2001-2010 (A/61/L.2, OPs 6-9) adopted the following statements:

- “ 6. Note that, while the Programme of Action has, since its adoption, registered some progress in its implementation, at the same time the overall socioeconomic situation in the least developed countries continues to be precarious;
7. Stress that, given current trends, many least developed countries are unlikely to achieve the goals and objectives set out in the Programme of Action;
8. Emphasize, however, that many least developed countries, with the support of their development partners, have, despite many difficulties, produced notable achievements through wide-ranging and far-reaching reforms;
9. Acknowledge the significant efforts by development partners in the implementation of the Programme of Action, also acknowledge that there is more to be done to implement the Programme of Action, in particular in the area of poverty eradication, and recognize that the situation in the least developed countries requires continued attention;”

UNCTAD’s assessment of the implementation of the BPoA in preparation for the Mid-term Review of the BPoA "highlighted that a major cause of the difficulties in the assessment of progress was the loose conceptual and factual relationship between the socio-economic goals pursued (such as poverty reduction) on the one hand and the action

envisaged under the various commitments in the Programme of Action, on the other hand".

As mentioned above, graduation of countries from the category could also be seen as a measure of success of the BPoA. However, until the end of 2009, only Cape Verde had graduated since the adoption of the Brussels Programme of Action in 2001. Three more countries out of 49 – Samoa, Maldives and Equatorial Guinea - are scheduled for graduation between 2010 and 2012, reflecting some acceleration. Countries are recommended for graduation based on criteria of income per capita, economic vulnerability and human assets, which define the LDC category. Thus the distance of LDCs from reaching graduation thresholds could be an additional measure for the assessment of the implementation of the BPoA.

Assessments of goals and targets

Since 2001 regular assessments of the implementation of the Brussels Programme of Action and the achievement of the internationally agreed development goals of LDCs have been carried out. These include the annual Reports of the Secretary-General on the Implementation of the Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the Decade 2001-2010, UNCTAD's LDC Reports and the CDP's Handbook on the LDC Category.

Most of the assessments so far have mainly focused on the 30 goals and targets. Starting in 2005, the annual report of the Secretary-General entitled "Implementation of the Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the Decade 2001-2010" has included statistical data on indicators of implementation as agreed by the Economic and Social Council in 2004. These indicators were selected to track as closely as possible progress in achieving the objectives and targets of the Brussels Programme of Action. Pursuant to the views expressed by the General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council and the Statistical Commission on the harmonization of statistics and indicators for follow up to the outcome of the Millennium Summit and integrated and coordinated implementation of and follow-up to the outcomes of the major United Nations conferences in the economic and social fields, indicators on implementation of the

Brussels Programme have been made fully consistent with the Millennium Development Goals indicators, to the extent the goals and targets are similar. Other data have largely been compiled from official, published international sources, provided by UN departments and agencies.

For the assessment of the MDGs UNSD - in collaboration with the agencies who provide the underlying data - developed a methodology to provide aggregate information on trends towards meeting the targets by region. The categories used are the following: Already met the target or very close to meeting the target; Progress sufficient to reach the target if prevailing trends persists; Progress insufficient to reach the target if prevailing trends persists; No progress or deterioration; Missing or insufficient data. A careful analysis of trends and forecasts is needed for this approach.

Recent Secretary General's Reports on the implementation of the BPoA show that the achievement of goals and targets varies substantially. However, only for a small number of goals more than half of the LDCs have met the target or are on track. These include 1. Attain a GDP growth rate of at least 7 per cent per annum, 2. Increase the ratio of investment to GDP to 25 per cent per annum, 9.a. Eliminating gender disparities in primary education by 2005, 16. Increasing the percentage of women receiving maternal and prenatal care by 60 per cent, 19. Promotion of children health and survival. Likewise only 9 out of 22 DAC donors met the target of providing at least 0.15 per cent of their GNI in ODA to LDCs in 2007. Based on this preliminary assessment it cannot be concluded that the Brussels Programme of Action has been implemented successfully.

One major shortcoming is the fact that for some commitments no goals and targets exist, thus they have been largely neglected in existing assessments. These are Commitment 2: Good governance at national and international levels, Commitment 5: Enhancing the role of trade in development and Commitment 6: Reducing vulnerability and protecting the environment. In addition, for some other commitments explicit goals and targets only cover parts of the issues listed in the BPoA. For example under Commitment 4: Building productive capacities to make globalization work for LDCs, goals and targets exist for physical infrastructure and technology but not for enterprise development, energy, and agriculture and agro-industry.

Even for the goals and targets with specified indicators there are a number for which no data exist for a significant number of countries as per the 2009 Secretary Generals Report on the Implementation of the BPoA. For example for Goal 4: Make substantial progress toward halving the proportion of people suffering from hunger by 2015 data for 2 points in time which are needed to make a statement about progress only exist for 34 countries out of 49. For Goal 9: Eliminating gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2005 and achieving gender equality in tertiary education by 2015 data on the indicator for secondary education are only available for 30 LDCs and for tertiary education only for 19 LDCs. Thus it is not possible to assess whether the implementation of the Programme of Action has been successful in these areas.

Based on these considerations it needs to be decided whether some goals and targets should be given priority over others, based on what criteria. It also needs to be considered whether and which additional indicators should be used for the appraisal based on their relevance and availability.

Commitments and actions

To fully assess the implementation of the BPoA, the role that LDCs and their development partners played in implementing the commitments and actions also need to be assessed. Issues to consider in this respect are the setting of priorities (for example expressed through development plans, sectoral expenditure allocation), reforms of related institutions and building of capacities. However, there is a very large number of proposed actions in the BPoA and their implementation is not easy to measure. In addition, LDCs are very heterogeneous with respect to achieving the goals and targets as well as implementing supportive policies.

To establish a link between the implementation of the commitments through actions by LDCs and development partners and the achievement of the goals and targets will be a complex task. In general, assessing the impacts of broad programmes is complex due to the interaction of measures within the programme and with other international development strategies. Another challenge concerns the time period for the evaluation and the scope of the assessment. The effects of an intervention take time to emerge, and

the evaluation may need to extend well beyond the programme's duration. The issue of scale may also arise in terms of the spread of the effects of the programme. The intervention can have significant indirect effects which extend well beyond the immediate targets or objectives of the programme.

For some specific actions required from LDCs there are indicators available for a significant number of LDCs. For example to cover the action: Embark on prioritized and verifiable programmes for the prevention, treatment and control of communicable disease (39 (d)) data on treatment for malaria and tuberculosis have been included in the SG Report, finding relatively widespread use of anti-malaria drugs and good progress in the treatment of tuberculosis under DOTS. Related to action 58.(i)(i): Diversifying production and exports, the UNCTAD database shows an increase in export concentration between 1995 and 2006 for African LDCs and a slight decrease for Asian LDCs.

However, for other commitments, especially those related to good governance, it might be more difficult to find adequate measures. The 2009 LDC report by UNCTAD lists a number of problems with respect to measuring governance including the use of subjective indicators, aggregation problems, and limited comparability over time (for details see UNCTAD, 2009 LDC Report, Box 1). For assessing the implementation of specific actions for example related to "Strengthening efforts to fight corruption..." (29 (k)) the corruption perception index provided by Transparency International could be used. This index has been used in some poverty reduction strategies of LDCs in recent years, for example in Mali and Haiti. However, Transparency International is not an International Organization.

Likewise for some of the actions by development partners like preferential market access for LDCs and implementation of the HIPC initiative there do exist some assessments (e.g. in the SG report and the MDG Gap Task Force Report). For example for the action of improving preferential market access for LDCs by working towards the objective of duty free and quota free market access for all LDCs' products the percentage of LDC exports admitted duty free into trading partners and the average tariffs imposed by developed countries on commodities from LDCs have been used. On average there has been only modest progress but that differs among the main trading partners of LDCs. In

addition, there are other factors with a big impact on market access like the Rules of Origin associated with trade preferences and sanitary and phytosanitary standards. As these factors are more difficult to measure they have rarely been used so far.

With respect to aid commitments the amount of aid is relatively easy to measure. Most DAC members have increased ODA to LDCs somewhat but on average they still only provide only 0.09 % of GNI as ODA to LDCs against the target of 0.15 to 0.2%. The number of donor countries providing 0.2 % or more of their GNI in ODA to LDCs even decreased from 5 in 2000 to 4 in 2008. However, the recent discourse on aid has focused on the quality of aid, related to effectiveness, ownership, conditionalities etc, which are more difficult to assess but probably more relevant with respect to achieving the development goals. Progress has also been made in reducing the burden of external debt on the least developed countries, mostly through the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Initiative and the Multilateral Debt Relief Initiative. However, there are still a few LDCs with a high external debt service ratio.

Finally it would be desirable to have a better understanding of why some goals were achieved in some countries and not in others. Thus, the achievement - or lack thereof - of the goals and targets needs to be linked to the commitments of both LDCs and donor countries. Issues to consider in this respect are the setting of priorities (for example expressed through development plans, sectoral expenditure allocation), reforms of related institutions and building of capacities in LDCs and development partners alike. However, it also has to be taken into account that the investments required differ by target and that some targets can be achieved faster than others due to different time-lags for implementation. Furthermore it is important to take into account country specific circumstances. For example growth is determined by a multitude of factors and their role might differ from country to country.

When considering attribution, there is also the need to account for external factors. The most striking example is GDP growth were the LDCs on average were on track of meeting the 7 per cent growth target for the years 2004 to 2007. However, due to the effects of the financial and economic crisis average growth in LDCs is estimated to drop by around half in 2009 compared to 2007 levels.

Issues for discussion

The overarching question for assessing the implementation of the BPoA is: What worked and why and what did not work and why?

The more specific questions that an appraisal should answer include the following:

- Which of the goals and targets of the BPoA have been achieved?
- What are the gaps in available information on achieving the goals and targets?
- What are the reasons for these results?
- What are the factors behind implementation gaps?

The following issues should be considered in developing a methodology for the appraisal:

- Some of the Commitments in the BPoA do not have specified goals and targets but should somehow be included in the appraisal, using reports from the UN system, other International Organizations and research institutions.
- For a number of countries no data is available for the targets and indicators specified in the programme of action.
- Some goals and targets might be more important than others in assessing the overall success of the BPoA.
- Most of the goals do not specify a baseline explicitly. In the SG reports the year 2000 is used as a baseline for most indicators as this is the year for which data was available when the BPoA was agreed. However the baseline used for assessing the goals and targets related to MDGs is the value of the indicator in 1990, consistent with the reporting on MDGs by other agencies.
- There is a time lag of around 2 years for the availability of data on most indicators. For goals and indicators with significant variability and frequent data (e.g. GDP growth) using an average over several years could be a better indication of progress than using only the latest available value.
- Criteria need to be established on how to assess progress especially for those indicators with a target of 2015, where it will not be sure in 2010 or 2011 whether

- the target will be met. Thus criteria of being “on target” or “off target” could be useful.
- The overall assessment can be based on different aggregates, e.g. the number of countries that have achieved the goal or the average achievement by all LDCs for which data exist.
 - For the assessment of the implementation of actions key actions and indicators for their implementation need to be identified.
 - It should also be considered how the country reports could feed into the measurement of progress at the regional and global level.

Way forward

The issues related to the measurement of progress with respect to the implementation of the BPoA discussed above show that the effectiveness of the mechanisms for its implementation, follow-up, monitoring and review at national, regional and global levels are insufficient. There is some indication that country capacities are overburdened by reporting obligations on different international frameworks of cooperation in parallel with their national development policies and strategies.

In addition, the statistical capacity to track progress with respect to indicators is weak in many countries making systematic and results-oriented monitoring and evaluation difficult. Thus there is a need to enhance national statistical capacities beyond the ongoing efforts which focus on MDG related indicators.

In a future development strategy for LDCs provisions for monitoring and evaluation need to be revised including streamlining and balancing of goals and targets. This should be done in the context of better integrating a new development strategy for LDCs with their national programmes and reinforce a focus on LDC specific vulnerabilities.

Annex

List of relevant documents (to be completed)

UN: Secretary-General Reports: Implementation of the Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the Decade 2001-2010

UN-CDP: Handbook on the LDC Category.

UNCTAD: The Least developed countries reports

UN: MDG progress reports

UN: MDG Gap Task Force Reports

UNESCO: Education for All progress reports

UNDP: Human Development Report

FAO: The State of Food Insecurity

UNICEF: The State of the World's Children

WHO: The World Health Reports

WHO/UNICEF: Joint Monitoring Programme (JMP) for water supply and sanitation

WTO: World Trade Reports

OECD/WTO: Aid for Trade at a Glance

OECD-DAC: Development Cooperation Reports, Progress Reports on Implementing the Paris Declaration