

# Facts About Least Developed Countries (LDCs)

*In the early 70s, the international community recognized the existence of a category of countries whose distinctness lies in their profound poverty, structural weakness of their economies often compounded by geophysical handicaps, limited capacity for growth and development and extreme vulnerability to external shocks.*

*Currently, this category classified as Least Developed Countries (LDCs) includes 50 countries. These countries represent the weakest segment of humanity and need international support in order to break out of the vicious cycle of poverty.*

## **Basic Facts**

### **50 Least Developed Countries**

- 34 in Africa
- 14 in Asia and the Pacific Region
- 1 in Western Asia – Yemen
- 1 in the Caribbean – Haiti

- 16 LDCs are Landlocked
- 12 are Small Islands

- Total LDC Population – 750 million (2005)
- Projected Population – 950 million (2015)
- Projected number of people living in extreme poverty by 2015 – 470 million

## **Economic Growth**

- Since 2001, LDCs have generally grown faster than other developing countries.
- In 2004, LDCs saw the fastest annual growth rate (6%) in four decades.

## **Debt Relief**

- Total debt burden for LDCs increased to a record \$158.9 billion in 2003, up \$20.8 billion from 2001.
- 13 LDCs were chosen to receive 100% cancellation under the Multilateral Debt Relief Initiative effective July 2006.
- An additional 9 LDCs have been recommended for such debt relief.

## **Foreign Direct Investment**

- Foreign direct investment (FDI) in LDCs increased from \$6.8 billion in 2001 to a record \$10.7 billion in 2004.

## **Foreign Direct Investment (cont'd)**

However, FDI in LDCs accounted for only 1.6% of world FDI inflows.

- 70% of investment in LDCs in 2004 went to 6 oil-producing countries (Angola, Chad, Equatorial Guinea, Mauritania, Sudan, and Yemen).

## **Trade**

- Exports of LDCs increased from \$45.9 billion in 2003 to \$57.8 billion in 2004. The 4 largest oil-exporting LDCs (Angola, Equatorial Guinea, Sudan, and Yemen) accounted for 56% of that increase.
- The share of LDC exports was a meager 0.6% of world merchandise exports in 2004.

## **Poverty**

- Almost 50% of the population in LDCs lives on less than \$1 a day.
- Rates of undernourishment over 40% reported in 10 LDCs.

## **Aid**

- Total ODA to LDCs from developed countries increased from \$12.4 billion in 2000 to \$23.5 billion in 2004.
- Almost 90% of aid was provided in grants and 86% of aid to LDCs was untied by 2004.
- 36% of all aid was directed to the social sector.
- Of 22 donors, 7 met the 0.20% target for ODA to LDCs as a share of their GNI in 2004. 2 more reached 0.15%.



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# Facts About Least Developed Countries (LDCs)

## Infrastructure and Communication

- In 2004, only 4 LDCs met the target of five telephone lines per 1,000 inhabitants by 2010.
- Only 4 LDCs reported the extensive use of railways for freight in 2004.
- In 2000, there were only 7 LDCs with one or more Internet connections per 100 inhabitants. In 2006, use has grown by 3 to 10 times although still below 1 per 100 in 25 LDCs.
- Road length has been increased by at least 20% since 1990 in 13 LDCs.

## Education

- Universal primary enrollment in primary education has improved.
- The target of 50% adult literacy by 2015 has been met for women in 26 of 33 LDCs with data. For men, the target has been met in only 10 of 32 LDCs with trend data.

## Population

- Average annual population growth in LDCs is 5%, the highest in the world, compared to developing countries (1.2%).
- Annual fertility rate in LDCs is at 5 children per woman compared to an average of 2.6 in the rest of the world.
- Over 40% of LDC population is under 15 years compared to 28% in developing countries.
- Average life expectancy is the lowest in the world (51 years), compared to 65 years in industrialized nations.

## Health

- Maternal mortality in the LDCs remains the highest (890 deaths per 100,000 live births) in the world.
- Under five mortality rate is 160 deaths per 1,000 live births compared to 86 in the rest of the world.
- 2.1 million new TB cases were reported in 2004, mainly as a result of HIV/AIDS.
- Rate of new HIV/AIDS cases (3.2%) in LDCs remains the highest in the world.

## Malaria

- Reduction in malaria prevalence in 15 LDCs but deterioration in 13 among 30 LDCs with trend data.

## Water

- Only 58 % of the population in LDCs has access to improved water.

## Slums

- Nearly 140 million people in LDCs live in poor housing conditions.

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*The United Nations Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries (LDCs), Landlocked Developing Countries (LLDCs) and Small Island Developing States (SIDS), was established by the United Nations General Assembly in January 2002 with the responsibility of mobilizing international support for the effective implementation of the Brussels Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the Decade 2001-2010. The office undertakes advocacy and awareness raising activities on issues of concern to the most vulnerable countries. In addition, it has monitoring, coordination and reporting responsibilities.*

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## References:

- *UN Secretary-General Report 2006 on the Implementation of the Brussels Programme of Action for Least Developed Countries for the Decade 2001-2010.*
- *The World Population Prospects: 2004 Revision Volume (UN).*
- *World Urbanization Prospects: 2005 (Dept. of Economic and Social Affairs – Population Division).*
- *Development at a Glance - Development Co-operation Directorate, OECD, June 2006.*

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