

Reflections on the Conference from the LDC Independent Expert Group¹

Cotonou, 31 July 2014

The Least Developed Countries Independent Expert Group on the Post-2015 agenda is comprised of around 15 development experts from LDCs who have come together to offer independent perspectives, ideas and challenges to international development debates and agendas, including the post-2015 process. We have worked in governments, academia and NGOs, and our expertise is based on practical experience, applied research and practice. We have been honoured to be able to participate in this important Conference and to share our diverse perspectives with the representatives of LDC governments and international agencies here.

The discussions we have had here have stimulated a few ideas from our Group for consideration by LDC governments as they take the themes of the Conference forward in each of your countries. This note includes our analysis of the development context in LDCs now and over the coming decades, along with a few suggestions on follow-up to this Conference and on concrete actions that countries can take to make progress on the agenda that has been laid out here over the past few days.

The context

The general theme of this Ministerial conference is on new partnerships for building productive capacities in LDCs. What is 'new' about the partnerships which LDCs require? A key characteristic is that they promote solidarity and mutual accountability. We need to invent new modes for the exchange and circulation of information. We must learn to recognize the potential of each, rather than emphasizing their weaknesses, and acknowledge the progress of others, rather than claiming our own superiority. This approach can help to promote the "capabilities" of which Amartya Sen speaks; raise the power of both sides, and be jointly and individually accountable to each other's actions through a shared long-term perspective.

We have spent a good deal of time here talking about technocratic solutions to our challenges, but perhaps not enough time talking about the politics of change, the values inherent in the choices and trade-offs we make, and the factors that really influence how decisions are made. Development is a complex, long-term, iterative process and we need not just the technical answers but the politics, governance arrangements and institutions to support that process.

We are living in a world of rapidly increasing complexity, change and uncertainty. LDCs have been the countries most left behind by the pace of global change. What happens locally in LDCs cannot be disentangled from actions and changes happening in virtually all other parts of the world. The strategies that might have worked 30 or 40 years ago are no longer viable. We don't know for certain what strategies will work in this changing context, but we know we need get beyond simply reacting to change. If we are to make progress, we will need to learn to be flexible, resilient and innovative, and to start investing in our future.

Our aim is eradication of poverty and equitable prosperity; our challenge is creating the wealth to achieve that aim. Perhaps we focus too much on strategies for poverty eradication and not enough on crafting strategies for wealth creation that would achieve poverty eradication. Poverty is our greatest development challenge, but it is also an indicator of how well or badly we're doing at

¹ This document is a complement to the assessment of the key outcomes from the conference provided in the closing session by Dr Michèle Pierre-Louis, Chair of the LDC Independent Expert Group and President of the FOKAL Foundation, Haiti. Members of the Group who are participating in the Ministerial Conference are: Michèle Pierre-Louis (Haiti), Hama Arba Diallo (Burkina Faso), Youba Sokona (Mali), Pa Ousman Jarju (Gambia), Mariteuw Chimère Diaw (Senegal).

creating wealth and using it for development that is inclusive and sustainable. Productive capacity building is thus an essential means to achieving both poverty eradication and economic progress more broadly.

Sustainable development must be our direction. Sustainable development implies a shift from a narrow focus on economic growth and poverty reduction, to broad attention to building economic, environmental and social capacity and resilience in an integrated way for the long-term. A sustainable development orientation helps us to define our priorities, assess how they can be achieved and balance them over different time frames and geographic scales, from meeting immediate local needs to achieving longer-term objectives.

Capacity-building is essential but whose and for what? We have talked a good deal in this Conference about capacity-building but perhaps not enough about what capacity is needed, by whom and why. A strategy like the IPoA implies the need for many kinds of capacity. Are we focusing too much on governments or the private sector, and not enough on building capacity in academia or research?

Education is clearly a key element of capacity-building across society. Much has been said here of the value chain, not enough perhaps of the educational chain: the investment required for a deep reappraisal of educational systems that are no longer adapted to the world of today and do not work in many of our LDCs, from early childhood to higher level vocational training to ensure our countries have the skills we so desperately need in this technological age.

We need international partnerships that work for LDCs. When we talk of “new partnerships for development”, do we mean new ways of defining partnerships or just additional partners? We need international partners to achieve many of our objectives, but until LDCs are in the driving seat at each stage -- setting the agenda and leading the discussions and the implementation -- these partnerships risk being unhelpful and disempowering. We should not still have to be raising the issue of country ownership at this late date. We need to build partnerships not around inequities in geopolitical power relations but instead around principles of solidarity and mutual support. One concrete place to start is by transforming ODA into a catalyst for investment from diverse sources to achieve our development objectives.

We need to make better use, and take better care, of our natural assets. Our financial wealth is very limited but our natural wealth is abundant. We have spoken a good deal here about the need to make better use of that wealth, by shifting away from economies based on natural resource extraction to value addition. We really need to think about our natural environment on three levels: The first is how to use it most effectively and efficiently to grow the economy. The second is how to use it so that it brings equitable benefits – not just to feed natural resource-based industries but as importantly to feed and to bring energy to the households of small farmers, of fishing villages and of forest communities. Thirdly, we need to manage our environmental assets as our contribution to a healthy planet.

We need to make change happen on the ground. To make change happen we need to build the soft infrastructure of governance, institutions, networks and communities. We need systems of governance that are oriented towards and capable of forging strong and effective partnerships and creating transformative institutions in the form of organizations, rules and ways of working. We need institutions and networks that can work across scales, bringing communities into policy processes and getting policies to work for communities. Because change by definition is dynamic rather than static, this soft infrastructure is generally messy and clumsy, involving multiple actors in different configurations that change over time. So we need attention to the building the networks that bring all these messy pieces together.

Some best bet actions for LDC governments

The agenda that has been set out at the Conference is enormous and much of it deals with development of frameworks and strategies. There is therefore and unsurprisingly a desire by many participants to consider concrete actions that could be taken with limited resources over a relatively short term but that could have a catalytic effect. We would like to propose these possibilities:

- **South-South cooperation on energy:** Development of a mechanism for small-scale technology transfer between India and interested African LDCs (facilitated by the South Centre)
- **African High Level Panel on Sustainable Energy for All (SE4ALL).** Creation of a forum to get energy up on the agenda of African countries (facilitated by SE4ALL and the South Centre)
- **National trust funds for low carbon development:** Trust funds are already being set up in several LDCs (e.g., Ethiopia, Rwanda, Nepal, Bangladesh) to direct national resources and leverage international climate finance with much potential for productive capacity building.
- **Strategies for economic empowerment of women:** National growth is closely correlated with increased economic participation. Productive capacity-building needs to include policies and actions that empower women as economic actors.

Proposals for follow-up to this Conference

The Independent Expert Group is keen to support activities to follow up on and so enhance the impact of the Conference. We have identified the following potential opportunities over the next few months:

- Facilitate a review by interested LDC Governments of the Outcome Document of the UN Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals with the aim of developing collective views and positions to take forward in the negotiations;
- Bring together LDC Governments to prepare collectively for their participation in the UN Financing for Development Conference to be held in Addis Ababa in July 2015
- Support interested LDCs to move forward on specific issues addressed in the IPoA and Benin Conference (such as energy or water), by facilitating processes of assessing what solutions will work in the country; what are the bottlenecks; and how can they be addressed.

The Independent Expert Group: promoting LDC expertise

Like all countries in this post-2015 process, the LDCs need good information and advice with which to frame and promote their positions. Unlike many other actors in this crowded arena, our governments have few knowledgeable sources or high-profile forums to draw upon.

IIED has brought together a diverse 12-member group of experts from 10 LDC countries to address this (an initiative that builds on the Istanbul Programme of Action agreed by LDCs and development partners in 2011). This group of thought leaders will generate compelling evidence and ideas, which can contribute to the post-2015 development agenda. The aim is that the post-2015 process becomes better at recognising and supporting the sustainable development agenda of LDCs themselves. To that end, the group will also provide support to New York-based LDC delegations in formulating and negotiating outcomes from the process.

The group will:

- provide guidance on the practical realities of designing and achieving global goals and targets in LDC contexts
- showcase the leadership, experience and expertise that LDCs can contribute to global policy and practice

- influence the post-2015 political process through constructive engagement and communication
- present a vision of transformation for international development cooperation to achieve the potential these countries have to emerge from 'least developed' status and prosper.

Members of the IEG are as follows. Chair: President of FOKAL Foundation **and** Former Haitian Prime Minister Michèle Duvivier Pierre-Louis. **Panel members:** James Murombedzi, CODESRIA (Zimbabwe, based in Senegal); Youba Sokona (Mali); Hama Arba Diallo, Mayor of Dori (Burkina Faso); Farah Kabir, ActionAid (Bangladesh); Dipak Gyawali, ISET (Nepal); Fatima Denton, African Climate Policy Centre (Gambia, based in Ethiopia); Rosebell Kagumire, Africans Act for Africa (Uganda); Pa Ousman Jarju (The Gambia); Chimere Mariteuw Diaw, African Model Forests Network Secretariat (Senegal, based in Cameroon); Chime P Wangdi, Tarayana Foundation (Bhutan); Saleemul Huq, IIED (Bangladesh); Essam Yassin Mohammed, IIED (Eritrea, based in London)

For further information on the LDC Independent Expert Group please go to:

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