



LDC Watch Position Paper on the Millennium Development Goals

No MDGs without LDCs !



LDC Watch

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Development Effectiveness NOT Aid Effectiveness

For LDC civil society, the upcoming MDG Summit is an important milestone in the lead-up to the LDC IV in 2011 and we are focusing specially on Goal 8 – Global Partnerships for Development, and on Target 8b – Addressing the special needs of the LDCs – which includes: tariff and quota free access for the LDCs' exports; enhanced programme of debt relief for heavily indebted poor countries (HIPC) and cancellation of official bilateral debts, and; more generous Official Development Assistance (ODA) for countries committed to poverty reduction. The issue of ODA is key, and will have major implications for the achievement of the MDGs in LDCs.

Within the target of 0.7 per cent of Gross National Income (GNI) for total ODA, the international community has also committed to providing 0.15-0.20 per cent of their GNI to the LDCs as per the Brussels Programme and this target itself has been reaffirmed in various subsequent international forums. As the MDG Gap Taskforce Report 2009 states, although total ODA flows to the LDCs have risen from 0.05 per cent of the GNI of DAC countries in 2001 to 0.09 per cent in 2007, it remains hugely short of the target of 0.15-0.20 per cent contained in the Brussels Programme. Since the onset of the financial crisis, developed countries have mobilised hundreds of billions of dollars for "saving" banks, financial companies and a number of industrial companies. But, to save and uplift the world's most vulnerable citizens, despite repeated promises, has so far not been a priority for development partner countries. This fact is a mere lack of political will, as we believe that the comparatively small levels of finance needed to meet ODA targets and to fund additional efforts towards meeting the MDGs, can be mobilised immediately. We emphasise that the international community must honour its financial commitments and put its money firmly where its mouth is.

ODA figures to LDCs also mask unacceptable geographic disparities in the distribution of aid that are linked to foreign policy and security, the so-called "war on terror", trade and other strategic interests. In many cases, this is not development aid! In 2007, 55 percent of LDC aid went to 8 countries: Afghanistan, Tanzania, Ethiopia, Sudan, Mozambique, Uganda, Bangladesh and DRC. As you will have noticed, at the top of this list was Afghanistan. The remaining 41 LDCs (an enormous 84 percent of the LDC population) were forced to share

45 percent of the flows. LDC Watch demands that ODA be used for its rightful purpose which is to address pockets of poverty, uphold human rights and address gender justice and social exclusion towards a pro-poor development. The current coverage gap in ODA to LDCs and use of aid to support non-development activities is a major barrier to achieving the MDGs in LDCs.

The issue of *quality* of ODA is also central to the debate. As LDC civil society, what we are saying is that meeting commitments on aid is important. However, more aid by itself is not sufficient! Change is needed in the quality of ODA. We need better aid! Firstly, increases in ODA flows must be genuine! Between 1996 and 2006, much of the ODA to LDCs made up of debt relief initiatives, emergency aid, and support to foreign students. The distortions of the figures by inclusion of debt and other non-aid items facilitate donor countries to get away with clear repudiation of their own commitments, and "highly distorts the reality of aid".

As CSOs, we emphasise that the focus of development partners on aid and its timely disbursement according to their national budgetary timelines is not enough. The message that comes time and time again from our CSO partners in LDCs is that while development partners focus on aid effectiveness, they are missing the point of development effectiveness! The Paris Declaration (PD) and Accra Agenda for Action (AAA) have been important changes. As CSOs, we demand that development partners "walk the talk", and truly adhere to aspects such as ownership and use of country capacities and systems. We demand an approach of development that effectively addresses the issues of women, children and the most vulnerable, as well the impacts of global climate change on LDCs, by placing the achievement of equitable and pro-poor development at the centre.

Let us live up to our promises and NOT fail the world's poorest and most vulnerable citizens.

Excerpt from the statement by Dr. Arjun karki, International co-ordinator of LDC Watch, at the UN General Assembly informal session in preparation for the 2010 MDG Summit, at the UN Headquarters, New York, on 13 April 2010

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Cover photo: A woman in western Nepal crossing the river with the help of a *Tuin*, a steel rope hanging across the river.

Photo source: Rural Reconstruction Nepal (RRN, 2008)

No MDGs without LDCs!

The MDGs: A Global Commitment

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) represent the reaffirmed commitments made by world leaders at the turn of the new millennium towards reducing global poverty to half of 1990 levels and attaining sustainable development by 2015. The MDGs also seek to promote universal education, healthcare, gender parity, and environmental sustainability in all of the world's developing and least developed countries (LDCs) through an effective 'global partnership for development'. However, 10 years on from the agreement on these global targets for development, the MDGs remain far from being met.

We must be clear that the Goals contained in the Millennium Declaration do not represent the best that humanity can do to deal with global problems such as structural poverty, hunger, illiteracy, poor health and environmental destruction. Critics argue that aiming to reduce abject poverty only by half indicates a clear reluctance to pull out all the stops to address what is an unacceptable malaise in a prosperous world. They argue that the MDGs are not concerned with human rights and social justice, which are essential to the long term development of every nation. LDC Watch therefore advocates that the MDGs represent the very minimum standards that must be achieved for the world's citizens. And yet, many of the goals and targets of the Millennium Declaration will not be achieved in the world's 49 LDCs by 2015.

Facing New Crises

All countries have differences that must be considered when establishing national priorities, and devising policies and programmes. However, LDCs also share some common challenges, including inherent geographical and environmental constraints, being constrained by limited financial resources and technology, and are often characterised by weak and/or undemocratic governance systems. Many face additional hurdles of ongoing conflict and political instability.

While some countries have made strong efforts and progress towards achieving these goals, some LDCs that are marred by protracted conflict and socio-political instability have been unable to do so, or have in some cases seen the progress made by civil society groups, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and government agencies, tragically reversed.

Compounding this situation, the world has witnessed multiple crises in recent years. The global financial crisis, food crisis, energy or fuel crisis, and the crisis brought about by human-induced climate change, are affecting people across the planet. However, the world's most vulnerable citizens – those in LDCs – are facing suffering that is not only extremely disproportionate, but also unprecedented in scale. Essential and hard-won achievements towards reaching the MDGs can be unravelled in no time, as evidenced during the food and financial crises that marked the latter part of this decade. These additional challenges, many of which

were created by the advanced industrialised countries, therefore undermine the prospects of reducing poverty and hunger and realising other basic goals in the LDCs.

Uncovering Difficult Truths

Despite the reality that not all the MDGs will be achieved by 2015, and that some countries will be lagging far behind, the situation is often portrayed – both globally and nationally – in a largely positive light, in that trends show that developing countries are tending towards progress, however unacceptable the rate of improvement may be. Though positive examples exist and must be acknowledged, such a trend in reporting on the MDGs also masks unpleasant realities.

The "tyranny of averages" hides worrying disparities not only between developing countries, but also within countries. As the case from Nepal reveals, a closer examination of the data often shows that progress is uneven, with disparities of income and opportunity between geographic

LDCs: Did you know?

Data from the UN Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States (UN-OHRLLS) reveals some glaring facts about LDCs, and the dramatic differences in the quality of life of LDC citizens as compared to developing and developed countries:

- Electricity consumption per capita in LDCs is 7% of the level in other developing countries and 1.6% of the level in the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries. Only 16% of LDC population has access to electricity compared to 53% in other developing countries.
- Only 22% of roads are paved in LDCs compared with 43% in developing countries and 88% in OECD countries.
- Only four of the LDCs - Guinea, Malawi, Nepal and Tuvalu - have met the drinking water target.
- Women in LDCs have a 1 in 16 chance of dying in childbirth compared to 1 in 3,500 in North America.
- In sub-Saharan Africa, there are currently 4.1 million people with AIDS who are in immediate need of life-saving anti-retroviral drugs. Malaria kills an African child every 30 seconds.
- A child born in an LDC is 26 times more likely to die before its 5th birthday than a child born in a developed country, and 31% of LDC children are undernourished compared to 17% in other developing countries.
- There are only 94.3 scientific researchers per million people in the LDCs, compared to 313 in other developing countries and 3,728 in rich countries.

Source: UNOHRLLS (2009), *The Least Developed Countries: Things to Know, Things to Do*

regions and social groups often rising rather than decreasing. There is need to disaggregate national data by specific populations, to look at the progress of marginalized groups rather than just overall figures, and for development actors to resist complacency upon achieving superficially positive trends. There is also urgent need to find ways to measure progress in human rights and social justice in the LDCs to accompany the social and economic progress reflected in the MDGs.

Effective leadership and functioning of the state is a key requisite for accelerated progress on the MDGs. However, citizens in some LDCs are faced with a lack of transparent, accountable and inclusive governance, while others face unstable governments and restricted space for civil society participation. The situation is worsened by violent conflicts that destroy lives and livelihoods. These are issues on which LDC governments must shoulder their responsibilities to their citizens, in part by including and genuinely engaging with civil society, NGOs and other actors, which all have essential roles to play in sustainable development. For its part, the international community must tailor its initiatives for such contexts, while ensuring that industrialised countries do not support anti-people regimes, or play dubious roles in fuelling further violence and undermining fundamental human rights.

Significantly, the international community must sincerely live up to the promises announced at the Millennium Summit. Current approaches of giving with one hand and taking back with the other visibly contradict and undermine potential for the eventual achievement of the MDGs. If development partners are serious about the task at hand, undemocratic global governance institutions and distorted trade policies are aspects of MDG 8 that are critical to address.

Failure of MDG 8

Goal 8, with its overarching vision of “a global partnership for development” is constituted of commitments made in the areas of Official Development Assistance (ODA), market access, debt sustainability, and access to essential medicines and technologies,

especially focusing on information and communications. Target 8b, “addressing the special needs of the least developed countries” includes “tariff and quota free access for the least developed countries' exports; enhanced programme of debt relief for heavily indebted poor countries (HIPC) and cancellation of official bilateral debt; and more generous ODA for countries committed to poverty reduction”. However, implementation has been inadequate to address the needs of the LDCs, and the measures prescribed in this goal have by far been the least implemented of all targets.

Life and Debt

There have been very few agreeable debt cancellations in the past decade. The much-hyped Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) Initiative and Multilateral Debt Relief Initiative (MDRI) are the same old “adjustment” programmes of previous years continuing under a new guise – providing yet new ways for rich countries to further indebt poor countries by imposing strict conditionalities which they must fulfil in order to qualify for sham relief measures. The debt sustainability framework promoted by the Bretton Woods Institutions has led to “debt” being repaid over and over again, with debt servicing eating up a major portion of annual national budgets in LDCs, as in Bangladesh. Within the prevalent framework, the historical and environmental aspects of Southern debt are completely unacknowledged and overlooked. The onerous implications of enormous amounts of debt should not to be borne by citizens who have little or no responsibility for creating such a mess. Therefore, we call for full and unconditional cancellation of illegitimate and onerous debt.

CSOs including NGOs, social movements and academics need to play their part by undertaking public audit/citizens audits of sovereign debt, and to campaign that the finances used to service a country's debt are instead channelled into constructive measures, in the public sector, and towards social development services. Many LDCs spend more on debt servicing than on public education and health. There are some positive

Bangladesh: Debt Servicing Hindering Progress on the MDGs

Bangladesh is a highly indebted country. In 2009, the government's total outstanding external debt stood at US\$ 21,575 million. Annual debt servicing was around US\$ 2100 million (according to the 2010-11 National Budget), which is approximately two times the national health budget (US\$ 1160 million for the year 2010-11) and 16% of the total revenue.

The enormous chunk of money that leaves the country in the name of debt servicing dramatically reduces the funds that can contribute towards the MDGs. These funds could also go towards government initiatives on climate change adaptation – essential in a country where the issue of climate change induced migrants has already reached a state of emergency. According to the MDGs Need Assessment and Costing 2009-2015 Bangladesh Report 2009 (jointly produced by the Government of Bangladesh and the UN), the average yearly costs of filling in the gaps on MDG achievement will be as follows:

- Agricultural and rural development including employment generation and road infrastructure (MDG 1): US\$ 4.83 billion

- Education including pre-primary, primary, secondary and non-formal education (MDG 2): US\$ 2.27 billion
- Gender parity initiatives (MDG 3): US\$ 0.59 billion
- Health systems including health infrastructure and human resource (MDGs 4, 5, 6): US\$ 1.63 billion
- Child health excluding health systems (MDG 4): US\$ 0.67 billion
- Maternal health excluding health systems (MDG 5): US\$ 0.26 billion
- HIV/AIDS, Malaria and TB (MDG 6): US\$ 0.48 billion
- Environmental sustainability (MDG 7): US\$ 0.26 billion
- Energy (MDG 7): US\$ 1.88 billion
- Water supply and sanitation (MDG 7): US\$ 2.02 billion.

The total finance needed each year from 2009 to 2015 on average, is estimated to be US\$ 14.88 billion.

Ethiopia: Citizens' Report Card on the MDGs

In 2010, Poverty Action Network in Ethiopia (PANE) conducted the 2nd Citizens' Report Card (CRC) in six regions of Ethiopia: Afar, Amhara, Oromia, SNNPR, Tigray Regional States, and Dire Dawa City Administration. The CRC is a simple but powerful tool to provide public agencies with systematic feedback from users of public services and is intended to complement the MDG-based national strategy focusing on water, health, education and agriculture. It elicits citizen's feedback through sample surveys about aspects of service quality, to enable public agencies to identify the strengths and weaknesses of their work, as experienced by the users.

Despite growing efforts, access and coverage of safe drinking water continues to be a major concern for a significant number of Ethiopians. As a large number of people continue to depend on unprotected water sources, the need for ensuring the safety of such sources cannot be overemphasized. The expansion of public sources is also essential, as is the participation and involvement of local communities, which needs to be enhanced in order to ensure sustainability.

In terms of health, subsidies through various modalities for healthcare financing are in the pipe-line. Given the cost burden on the poor, these are important steps that need to be strengthened. The voices of local communities need to be accounted for in decision-making processes of primary schools, as it is currently either low or non-existent. Innovative mechanisms need to be developed to address the burden carried by households for education: the cost of sending a child to school is reported as high both in terms of annual registration or monthly fees, and contributions imposed on local communities. Expansion of extension services in agricultural marketing and finance is felt to be needed, given the low proportion of rural households currently benefiting from these services, and public service delivery packages need to be tailored to meet the specific needs of the pastoralist community. Finally, it is important to look at equity issues in the coverage and utilisation of services. Gender variations are particularly notable, and for some regions such as Afar, access to effective essential services is exceptionally low.

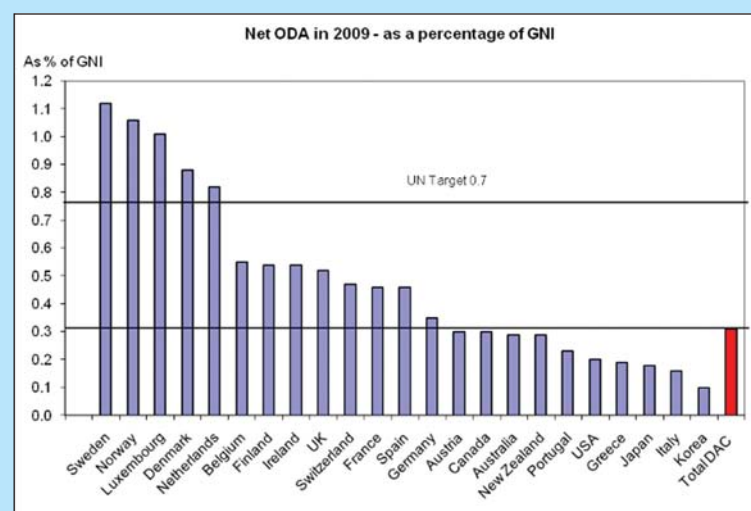
examples of poor countries utilising funds from debt relief: uses have included primary education initiatives in Tanzania, vaccination of children in Mozambique, and provision of effective and essential drugs to its populace. Cancellation of debt for LDCs is an ethical and human rights imperative, and would provide much-needed resources for development progress.

Aid Commitments not Honoured

As of 2009, only Netherlands, Norway, Luxembourg, Sweden, and Denmark have reached or exceeded the ODA target of 0.7% of Gross National Income (GNI), while only Belgium, Ireland, and the UK have met the target of providing 0.15-0.20% of GNI as aid to LDCs, as stipulated in the Brussels Programme of Action for LDCs for the Decade 2000-2010 (BPoA). Net ODA stood at around 0.31% of GNI for OECD-DAC (Development Assistance Committee) countries in 2008, which is half of the promised 0.7%. LDCs are receiving only 0.09% of the promised 0.15-0.20% of GNI.

It is natural to expect that as donor countries' wealth (i.e. GNI) increased through the 1990s and most of the 2000s, levels of aid should also have increased. Instead, they actually fell in the 1990s, then picked up somewhat in the 2000s. Some of the recent increases were almost entirely due to debt write-off for a handful of countries — such as Iraq. Given that the overall wealth of development partner countries had increased during this time, this in effect means that donor countries reduced their aid to the poorest countries in recent decades.

So has there been any change at all in levels of aid to LDCs? The answer is yes. As noted in *The Least Developed Countries: Things to Know, Things to Do* (OHRLLS 2009), aid to LDCs increased from US\$ 13 billion in 1996 to US\$ 30 billion in 2006. However, and this is essential: much of this was made up of debt relief initiatives, emergency aid, and support to foreign students. The enormous distortions of the figures by inclusion of debt and other non-aid items facilitate donor countries to get away with the blatant undermining of their own commitments. LDCs need better aid; and better aid means real aid.



Source: OECD, 2010

Trade Distortion

The United States (US) and the European Union (EU) still provide massive agricultural subsidies and protect their own markets through various non-tariff barriers while simultaneously enforcing poorer countries to open up their markets to cheap, subsidised, foreign products. Despite commitments by developed countries to provide duty-free and quota-free market access for LDCs, tariffs are still levied on LDC exports such as textiles and agricultural products by developed and other developing countries. The tariff on textile products is remarkably high in the US and on agricultural products in Canada and Japan. The value of aid is dwarfed by such protectionism on the part of rich countries. The denial of market access for poor country products is completely unacceptable, as is the use of aid as a lever by rich countries, to open poor country markets to their products.

'Aid for Trade', introduced in the Hong Kong Ministerial Declaration in 2005 is oriented only towards strengthening export-oriented industries and infrastructure. This is yet another way of getting poorer countries to concentrate on their export industry (which will in turn be denied fair

Somalia: MDGs in Conflict and Violence

One of the limitations of the MDGs is that they do not address – or even recognize – the complex and dynamic issue of conflict, violence and political instability vis-à-vis development.

Somalia has been ravaged by civil war for the last two decades, and since its outbreak, many of Somalia's residents have left the country in search of asylum. Armed confrontations, political assassinations, suicide bombings, landmine explosions, rape and other atrocities have become the norm. At the end of 2009, around 678,000 were under the responsibility of the UNHCR, constituting the third largest refugee population after war-afflicted Iraq and Afghanistan. Due to renewed fighting in the southern part of the country, an estimated 132,000 people left in 2009, and another 300,000 were internally displaced, deprived of every basic human right – nutrition, shelter, potable water, sanitation, health care and education. (UNHCR (2009), *Global Trends: Refugees, Asylum-Seekers, Returnees, Internally Displaced and Stateless Persons*)

Existing records reveal a quarter of under-five children being underweight, just over 20% of children enrolled in primary school, and an adult literacy rate of under 20%. Poor health service affects mothers, infants and children more than any other group in the country: 1,100 mothers perish per 100,000 live births, and 225 under-5s and 132 infants die per 1000 live births. The violent civil war has resulted in reduced productivity, mass unemployment and lack of opportunities to generate the necessary income to support a sustainable economy and basic services such as health.

Civil society organisations in Somalia argue that the country has been orphaned in relation to the “global partnership for development”, with the international community engaging with Somalia mainly on humanitarian grounds rather than for development cooperation.

access to Western markets), leaving them in a position of complete reliance on imports for basic goods like food and medicine – while also changing their ways of living to fit into the neoliberal paradigm.

Energy and the MDGs

LDC Watch believes that ‘energy poverty’ is an issue that needs considerably more attention than it currently receives. According to a recent report by UNDP/WHO, more than 1.5 billion of the world's people (i.e. almost a quarter of the global population) live without electricity; the vast majority of these people are in the LDCs (*The Energy Access Situation in Developing Countries: A Review Focusing on the Least Developed Countries and Sub-Saharan Africa*, 2009). The same report calculates that, to halve the proportion of people living in poverty by 2015, 1.2 billion more people will need access to electricity and 2 billion

more people will need access to modern fuels including natural gases. Sustainable sources must also be developed. A vast majority of the LDC population remains deprived of energy security and this is having a tremendous impact on the productive development of these communities. The availability of affordable energy is directly related to all of the MDGs, and to invest in energy is to invest in all of the MDGs at the same time.

The downstream effects of insufficient energy production can be felt in every aspect of rural lives in LDCs. Access to electricity improves hospital facilities, encourages children to read, allows people to communicate easily and to access the benefits of modern technology. At a time when too much energy consumption is being blamed for the changing global climate, the global need of the moment is to invest in alternative energy sources that not only provide essential energy in an eco-friendly way, but

Moving Mountains: Maintaining Progress on Primary Education in Nepal

As a result of Nepal's rugged terrain, lack of transport infrastructure and patchy provision of essential services like power, communication, and basic health care, several areas are cut off from the rest of the country, and are lagging behind on development indicators. Remarkable progress has been achieved in Nepal's education sector, with 95% of children enrolled in primary schools. However, the remaining 5%, living in areas such as those described above are admittedly the hardest to reach and must not be forgotten.

Access to school opportunities and in the literacy rate is unequal between urban and rural areas, as well as between different ecological zones and administrative regions; the mid-western and far-western development regions have lower literacy rates than the other three development regions, with the capital region faring best. Significantly, traditional patterns of social exclusion are mirrored in the literacy rates of different caste and ethnic groups, with traditionally marginalised (women, “low-caste” and indigenous groups) having low literacy.

Despite considerable progress on primary education enrolment and gender



Photo: Abhas Ghimire

parity in schools, the environment for quality education across the country leaves much to be desired. Almost all government schools lack even basic services such as running water, toilets and electricity. The student/teacher ratio is very high, especially at the primary level, compounded by a desperate shortage of educational materials. The low quality of education is also linked to the exclusion of local communities from the school management system, the high level of absenteeism and unprofessional behaviour among schoolteachers, and the increasing politicisation of the teaching community, which shifts the focus away from teaching students. Much remains to be done in coming years to surpass the basic minimum established by MDG 2.

also create thousands of 'green jobs' and use human resources towards the creation of a new 'green economy'.

If industrialised countries are serious about reversing the build-up of greenhouse gases and mitigating the effects of climate change, they must find alternative and renewable sources of energy rather presenting dubious schemes and false solutions like carbon trading. There is need at the same time for LDCs to pursue widespread and sustainable electrification, which will yield multiple spillover benefits for the achievement of the MDGs.

Financing the MDGs

During the past two years, we have seen trillions of dollars being doled out to the "too-big-to-fail" banks and financial institutions that were responsible for bringing about the financial crisis in the first place. At the same time, investment in the poor, through social services or direct cash transfers, has not been able to garner support from developed country partners. Instead, in the name of the financial crisis, aid commitments have seen drastic and unpredicted cuts that have impacted LDC governments, NGOs and other essential development actors. The need for aid that is higher in quality and quantity is fundamental for scaling up progress on the MDGs by 2015.

The World Bank projects the cost of achieving the MDGs to be around US\$ 40-60 billion a year. For comparison's sake, US\$ 700 billion was approved by the US Government for the initial bailout package for Wall Street banks in 2008! For many LDCs such as Afghanistan, Nepal and Timor-Leste, the costs of reaching the MDG targets requires more than 15% of Gross Domestic Product (GDP). This is an enormous task for the world's poorest countries, and solid international support is needed if we are to see such countries achieve their goals. Already these countries are spending giant chunks of their GDPs to service the loans from bilateral and multilateral development partners. In the spirit of a global partnership for development, the poorest countries should be able to rely on debt cancellation from the donor countries and the international financial institutions.

Voice of the Pacific LDCs on MDGs

The Pacific LDC Civil Society Assembly on the Brussels Programme of Action (BPoA) and MDGs that met on 3-6 August 2010 in Port Vila, Vanuatu, concluded with the following calls on the MDGs:

- We pledge our commitment first, in achieving the priority needs of our people which are obligatory to our family security, community sustenance and national development priorities.
- We call on our individual governments, to take leadership in initiating, collaborating and partnering with civil society organisations and citizens, in the planning, implementation and achievements of national priorities and the BPoA, to accelerate the removal of the LDC label.
- We call on Pacific Islands governments, specifically to consult Traditional Leaders on the proper use of indigenous value systems and traditional knowledge, which could be used to achieve the MDGs/BPoA.
- We urge the Pacific Island governments to collectively ensure accelerated achievement of the MDGs 1 – 8, by engaging citizens and civil societies in



Photo: Jyoti Upadhyay

Gender, Education and Literacy: Accelerating Monitoring and Progress in Niger

MDG3 – Promote gender equality and empower women – has not been achieved in this West African LDC by 2010. Having said this, measurable progress has been made in recent years by the Ministry of Basic Education and Literacy. As a result of efforts by the Government and development partners to promote primary education, particularly that of girls in rural areas, the ratio increased from 64 girls per 100 boys in 2000, to 70 girls per 100 boys in 2006. Similar trends have been achieved in secondary education also: while there were 58 girls to 100 boys in 1996, by 2005 there were 64 girls to 100 boys.

The picture in terms of literacy, however, remains dismal. While the general literacy rate is improving due to efforts by the state and by NGOs, civil society in Niger are concerned regarding the gender disparity. While literacy increased from 30.4% in 2000 to 42.9% in 2005, the rate for women stood at 15.1% in 2005 as against 10.6% in 2000. Despite this slight improvement, the ratio of women to men has remained stable. The facts are stark: there are about 35 women in Niger literate for every 100 men.

LDC Watch's civil society partners in Niger emphasise the need for the following in order to speed up progress towards MDG3:

- Further efforts on enrolment and reduction of disparities between girls and boys in the education system, especially in rural areas
- Application of laws guaranteeing women's access to economic and political positions
- Strengthening of entrepreneurship of women, including widening access to credit systems for women
- A consensus around the new Family Code and changing attitudes on promoting the status of women and on relief of women's domestic duties
- Concerted efforts on reducing violence against women
- Strengthening capacities for data collection on gender and development

monitoring the delivery of basic services throughout their national communities.

- We commit ourselves as Pacific Islands civil society leaders, to engage actively in the upcoming national, regional and international review processes of the MDGs, including the UN Global Summit in New York in September 2010 and the Fourth UN Conference on Least Developed Countries (LDCs) in Istanbul in May 2011.
- We request governments of industrialized nations, who have seriously lagged behind on climate change commitments leading to our security threats, to step-up tangible action with urgency on MDG 7, ensuring environmental sustainability at all times.

Excerpt from the Port Vila Declaration, 5th August 2010

With conventional aid budgets being slashed, there is need for establishing new sources of funding for development. In the long term, the LDCs must take steps towards becoming capable of independently meeting the needs of their people. LDCs should begin in earnest to mobilise domestic resources through progressive taxation and other sustainable measures; they should also increasingly engage in South-South Cooperation. More immediately, on a global level, discussion on innovative sources of financing offer much potential but these must be pursued in practice rather than merely being talked about. According to a report by the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), a tax of 0.1% on global foreign exchange transactions running at around US\$ 3.2 trillion per day, could yield revenues of about \$640 billion annually – more than 3.5 times the total ODA in 2008 (*Financing an Inclusive and Green Future*, 2010). Shutting down offshore tax havens and bringing large corporations into the tax net would bring in untold billions, since it is estimated that billions of dollars are transferred into offshore bank accounts with a secrecy clause around the world. These sources must be tapped.

Looking Ahead - No MDGs without LDCs!

Achieving the MDGs in LDCs is a global responsibility that calls for global research, coordination and genuine commitment. While reviewing the progress made on the Millennium Declaration at the High Level Plenary in September 2010 and beyond, progress and setbacks on the MDGs in the LDCs must be assessed separately. This is because while the situation in other developing countries may be improving, owing to the growing number of global crises that compound their structural vulnerabilities,

conditions in the LDCs are likely to deteriorate in this decade.

As we move towards the final stretch leading to 2015, industrialised countries must honour their moral responsibilities and the financial commitments made to developing countries and to LDCs. For this reason, it is critical that Goal 8 is taken seriously, that donor countries meet the target of 0.15-0.2 percent of their GNI as unconditional grants to LDCs, and improve the quality of the aid delivered. Fundamentally, this must be done without illegitimately indebting the world's most impoverished countries.

Civil society in LDCs needs enhanced capacities and mobilisation to ensure that local and national governments as well as development partner countries effectively allocate the resources needed for universal access to food, energy, education, health, social services, gender equality, human rights and social justice. CSOs have an important role to play in building stronger and more accountable development partnerships. We emphasise that the realisation of the MDGs can *only* be possible through meaningful cooperation between developed country partners, multilateral institutions, developing country governments and civil society in both the global North and South.

Finally, the MDGs cannot be met without being achieved in the world's least developed countries. For this reason, in the lead-up to MDG Summit 2010, the Fourth UN Conference on LDCs in 2011, and the agreed 'deadline' for achieving the MDGs in 2015, the achievement of **MDGs in LDCs** is the single greatest challenge facing the development community at this critical juncture.

Let us act effectively for LDCs. Let us act NOW!

About LDCs

There are 49 Least Developed Countries (LDCs) in the world, which are home to around 850 million people. By 2015, the year by which the international community has targeted to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), this population is projected to reach 942 million. LDCs account for 32 of the 35 countries in the lowest category of the Human Development Index (HDI) measured in terms of life expectancy, literacy, standard of living and Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita.

In 1971, the United Nations (UN) identified 24 countries as LDCs, recognising them as the world's most vulnerable countries, and therefore called for LDC-targeted special measures in global development strategies. Yet, after three decades of special development attention, including three UN LDC conferences and three specific Programmes of Action for the LDCs, the number of countries falling under this category has more than doubled. This clearly proves the failure of past and current development paradigms to effectively address the challenges and constraints to development in these vulnerable and marginalised countries. The increasing tide of neoliberal globalisation has further threatened LDC economies characterised by increasing debt burden, economic shocks, hunger, war, conflict, weak governance, human rights violations including gender injustice, and inherent environmental vulnerabilities.

The LDC Criteria is reviewed every three years by the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). In its fourth review of the list of LDCs in March 2009, the Committee for Development Policy used the following criteria for the identification of LDCs:

- A "low-income" criterion, based on the gross national income (GNI) per capita (a 3-year average), with thresholds of US\$ 905 for cases of addition to the list and a threshold of \$1,086 for graduation;
- A human capital status criterion, involving a composite Human Assets Index (HAI) based on indicators of: (a) nutrition: percentage of population undernourished; (b) health: mortality rate for children aged five years or under; (c) education: the gross secondary school enrolment ratio; and (d) adult literacy rate; and
- An economic vulnerability criterion, involving a composite Economic Vulnerability Index (EVI) based on indicators of: (a) population size; (b) remoteness; (c) merchandise export concentration; (d) share of agriculture, forestry and fisheries in gross domestic product; (e) homelessness owing to natural disasters; (f) instability of agricultural production; and (g) instability of exports of goods and services.

LDC Watch

LDC Watch is a global alliance of national, regional and international civil society organisations (CSOs), networks and movements based in the LDCs and supported by civil society from development partner countries. LDC Watch acts as a coordinating body for LDC civil society to advocate, lobby, campaign and network for the realisation of the Brussels Programme of Action (BPoA) as well as other Internationally Agreed Development Goals (IADGs). For the past decade, LDC Watch has been raising its voice and articulating LDC civil society perspectives in a multi-stakeholder framework, engaging with the UN, LDC governments and their development partners, both as partner and pressure group.