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Watch

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PMA

Fighting for justice, peace and human rights of the LDCs

# LDC5

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# NEWSLETTER

*Fighting for peace, justice and human rights*

## AT A GLANCE

- Civil society organisations call for reforms in international development paradigm
- Fight for 'data sovereignty'
- Civil societies' role critical in implementing DPoA
- LDCs need urgent help to deal with multiple crises

## Civil society organisations call for reforms in international development paradigm

Doha, March 8 – Civil society organisations from the UN-designated Least Developed Countries (LDCs) have called for reforms in international development paradigm.

Addressing a press meet organised at the Qatar National Convention Center on Wednesday, President of LDC Watch Demba Moussa Dembele, said that LDCs are facing multiple crises including the concentration of poverty, high unemployment, the sluggish pace of structural transformation, low participation in global trade, disproportionate impact of climate hazards, health and educational inequality, and gender discrimination.

'We are deeply concerned that despite the creation of a separate UN LDC category five decades ago, there is no significant progress in the living standards of people in LDCs. LDCs are at a critical juncture and adopting a "business as usual" approach will lead to an impasse and further marginalize LDCs in the global economy. During the Civil Society Forum, we deliberated on various structural constraints that prevent the development of LDCs, and have become increasingly convinced that the current neoliberal paradigm does not have a solution,' he added.

### ***Unequal Power Relations***

LDC Watch Global Coordinator Dr Arjun Karki said, 'We recognize the root cause as an unequal power relationship between the Global North and the Global South. It has been evident, by the failure of LDC-specific Programmes of Action (PoA), that unless there is a fundamental shift in power between the LDCs and the developed North, the series of programmes of action, including the Doha Programme of Action (DPoA), cannot achieve much,' he added.

Civil Society members in Doha are calling for a new framework for international cooperation with the LDCs to shape international economic relations to produce sustained and inclusive development. 'This includes reforming global

economies, which directly affect development and poverty reduction in LDCs, and producing a new generation of international support mechanisms for the LDCs. But a new framework for international cooperation is only useful if it supplements LDCs' own efforts. The process must have LDC-ownership. Self-determination of priority areas and implementation must be an important component to take forward the DPoA,' said a press statement issued by the LDC Watch.

'As we have traversed from 1971 to 2021, it is worth acknowledging that civil society has grown remarkably and decolonized. What used to be a North-led forum has become more vibrant. We must preserve this space amidst the increasing attempts by states to close it.'

We call on civil society to put more pressure on those who hold the power – the Global North. Civil society should be the connecting link between people and government, and at the same time lobby for the rights of LDCs in international frameworks. We commend the capabilities of civil societies that come from the grassroots, and have the capacity for global engagement, the statement said.

While the LDC-specific programmes have repeatedly failed to deliver, civil society must continue to engage with local/national governments and in international framework to get what is rightfully ours. While it is important to challenge the government to ensure it delivers good governance and accountability, we should also work with national/local government and monitor and review the implementation of the DPoA in coherence with the Sustainable Development Goals. We shall continue advocating and lobbying for key policy changes in regional and multilateral frameworks, including with the UN and development partners, to make global policies LDC-friendly, the statement said.

'We aim for a world free of poverty and inequality, and LDCs' sustainable and non-reversible graduation to a higher development status is a milestone to be achieved for the same,' said Demba.

LDC Watch is a global network of national, regional and international civil society organisations, alliance and movements based in LDCs.

## **Developments in data protection and storage in developing countries and LDCs**

Data is the most valuable commodity in the world, but we don't realise it. Tesfit Gebremeskel Gebreslassie from Ethiopia is very concerned that data created in Africa is being stolen by the big tech companies, which, incidentally, mirrors the process of colonialization when outsiders stole African territory. To overcome this, he has created VODANAfrica, a platform that leverages the indexer services to prevent automatic data mining by international tech companies of data created in Africa.

Testfit wants 'data sovereignty' so that data collected in Africa stays in Africa, and can be used to build up a very useful source of knowledge for local users, rather than being exported and lost. He illustrated how this has already happened: during the Ebola outbreak in Liberia all the data involving health facilities was collected by an outside company, but not passed on to the government, so it was not available when Covid struck the country. This frequently happens in developing countries, which don't realise how important this data is, and why they should protect it.

VODANAfrica, will keep data collected at source. This is based on what he calls FAIR data principles: Fair, Accessible, Interoperable and Reuseable. This would change the current scenario where raw data is leaving LDCs or developing countries to be sold by big tech.

Another challenge to confront is that there are many data collections by different stakeholders around the developing world, but it is fragmented, so not reusable. Of course, Tesfit is keen that data collected in Africa is available to other people on the continent, so the project is building a dataspace, to host all the data initiatives from different parts of Africa, in a similar way to European data space or American data space, which has regulation, monitoring and evaluation mechanisms. This would be based on the FAIR principles to make the data findable for machines (using specific algorithms) and for humans, and with regulations about how it can be accessed.

When asked if this meant that the data would be stored in the cloud, as happens at the moment, Tasfit says that this form of data collection and storage would challenge the scenario, to keep the data “in residence where it was collected”.



The idea is to create hubs where the data is stored and build them into a network. There are currently hubs in countries participating in the project: Ethiopia, Nigeria, Uganda, and Somalia, linking up via networks. ‘This means I am sitting in my office from Tigray, Ethiopia, and can have access to Nigerian metadata, the information about the data. Then I request access to the actual data, so I can access that information, not take it,’ he said.

### ***The challenges – Interconnectivity and being gender sensitive***

What are the obstacles to this innovative project? ‘Interconnectivity is a great challenge that we are facing right now. We expect it will be alleviated through the ongoing process of establishing different ICT infrastructure. But yes, we are facing some hindrances with the infrastructure.’

He agreed that another challenge was to be ‘gender sensitive’ because there are not as many women as men engaging in such activities. ‘But we try to somehow encourage girls, starting from our center and the network of networks,’ he said. An interesting fact he has learned is that women are more concerned with details than men. ‘I find they track everything and data is about details so it’s well suited to women.’

### ***‘Most people don’t have a clue about data’***

Asked whether his project had generated a lot of interest at the Conference, he felt that most people ‘didn’t have a clue about the advantage of keeping data in the continent it was collected from unless they were the really technical guys,’ but hoped that when they returned home, they would think again. Let’s hope they agree to be part of this innovative project.

## Civil Society's role critical in implementing DPoA - UN High Representative Fatima



Doha, March 8 – UN Under-Secretary-General and High Representative for LDCs, LLDCs and SIDS Ms Rabab Fatima, has said civil society organisations (CSO)'s role will be critical in implementing the Doha Programme of Action (DPoA). Addressing the Civil Society Assembly organised by LDC Watch on the sidelines of the UN LDC5 on Wednesday, Ms Fatima said that DPoA represents an important opportunity to support 1.2 billion people living in the LDCs.

'DPoA acknowledges the importance of strong institutions. Peace, security, human rights and humanitarian efforts are complimentary and need to reinforce one another. Gender equality of all women and girls is equally important. Good words and good intentions alone will not bring the fundamental change. That is why civil society is so critical,' said Ms Fatima adding, 'You all are here because of the extraordinary work you do. The CSOs have a critical role to play in the decade ahead. Your advocacy can help ensure promises made in the DPoA is translated into action.'

Ms Fatima said that by working directly with communities in the LDCs, CSOs participate fully in the development process. 'We can make a difference together. We need to maximise the momentum we have built this week. By working together, we can support the LDCs to deal the challenges they face,' Ms Fatima added.

Addressing the Assembly, Nepal's Permanent Representative to the United Nations, Amrit Bahadur Rai said that CSOs can complement efforts of the government. 'CSOs can identify areas of improvement, can facilitate dialogue and cooperation among stakeholders. We want to see vibrant CSOs. We need to work together so that DPoA is implemented effectively,' said Amrit Rai.

'CSOs directly reach out to people. They listen to the people, motivate them, empower them and organise them. They are essential building blocks of development. The CSOs are rooted locally providing services to poor and

disadvantaged communities. People of LDCs are destined for progress and we should work together,' he added.

Permanent Representative of the Republic of Malawi to the UN, Dr. Agnes Mary Chimbiri-Molande, said that implementation of DPoA will lead towards achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). 'You are a very wonderful group that makes a difference in people's lives. We need inclusive policies to ensure gender equality and inclusion in our strategies and programmes. We need a monitoring and evaluation framework. Any assessment you are going to do will help us,' she added.

Jane Nalunga, executive director, SEATINI, Uganda, said that what we do after this summit will be very important. 'We need clear strategies on how we are going to monitor the implementation of DPoA. We should work at international as well as at the national level.'

LDC Watch Secretary Simon Stocker said the context in which LDCs are working is a dysfunctional international structure and needs to change. 'There needs to be dialogue about how this change could take place. National governments should be working together in the international framework,' he added.

Welcoming high-level guests, LDC Watch President Demba Moussa Dembele said that CSOs will play the role of a partner in the implementation of DPoA.

Moderating the discussions, LDC Watch Global Coordinator Dr Arjun Karki thanked CSO delegates for their active participation in Civil Society Fora at the UN LDC 5.

The Assembly was organised by LDC Watch – a network of CSOs in the LDCs.

## LDCs need urgent help to deal with multiple crises, Civil Society leaders say

Civil society leaders from global South have called for urgent help to the UN-designated Least Developed Countries (LDCs) to deal with multiple crises.

Addressing a panel discussion at the sidelines of the UN LDC5, Demba Moussa Dembele, Chair of the LDC Watch, said that LDCs have less capacity to face multiple crises. 'LDCs that have been suffering from drought, flood and desertification are now facing food crisis,' said Demba, 'Debt crisis is the consequence of all these crises.'

Mr Demba added that LDCs don't have a fiscal space to raise money domestically, so they have to borrow. 'They can't pay back their debt and they can't borrow more. More than 40 million African citizens could follow into extreme poverty due to COVID-19.' Mr Demba also called for South-South solidarity. 'International solidarity can play a role only if it fits into our own agenda,' he added.



## ***We need engagement with all stakeholders***

One of LDC Watch's founders Simon Stocker, said that we often talk about challenges that affect LDCs but we should also talk about solutions and needs engagement with all stakeholders.

Simon, who attended all UN conferences on LDCs, recalled that when he went to the Paris conference in 1990, all the people were white, from the North and virtually no civil society representatives. 'We have come a long way since then. We now have a vibrant civil society. We need to recognise that,' he added. 'We need to engage with governments, parliaments, the United Nations and also with so-called development partners.'

Executive Director of the Kampala-based Southern and Eastern Africa Trade Information and Negotiations Institute (SEATINI), Jane Nalunga, said that most of the crises were interlinked and reinforcing challenges. 'We have had challenge of Covid affecting the economy leading to debt crisis. Our economies are really weak. In Uganda, when we had Covid, we found that some districts didn't have health centers or clinics. That worsened the situation,' said Jane adding, 'Our approaches should complement each other. We need to work together.'

Wildred Luiramo of the Ocean Servant Foundation, Solomon Islands, said that climate change is affecting small islands in the form of sea level rise, coastal erosion, changing weather patterns and so on.

## ***With climate change our resources are gone, our income is gone***

'Climate change has multiple effects. It is affecting our health care system, our education system. We need good infrastructure to keep our citizens informed about effects of climate change. Continuous change in sea temperature is very dangerous. We rely on marine resources. Our resources are gone, our income is gone, these are some of the challenges we face,' he added.

Norm Sina from Gender and Development in Cambodia (GADC) said that women and men have different capacities to respond. The discrimination against women and girls are reducing. Cambodia has ratified the CEDAW convention. Cambodian constitution treats men and women equally but in practice women face gender discrimination. Women facing sexual harassment, domestic violence taking place because of inequality between men and women, she added.

Moderating the discussions, Global Coordinator of the LDC Watch, Dr Arjun Karki, said that civil society organisations should observe how the Doha Programme of Action will be implemented. 'We are ready to work with the LDC governments and all other stakeholders to implement the DPoA,' he added. He also called upon the Civil Society Organisations to remain united to lobby for the rights of millions of people living in the LDCs.

The discussion was organised jointly by LDC Watch together with South Asia Alliance for Poverty Eradication (SAAPE) and Asian Peoples' Movement on Debt and Development (APMDD).

## **Reach Out**

For questions, feedback, article ideas, or story contributions, email [ldcnewsservice@gmail.com](mailto:ldcnewsservice@gmail.com) and we'll be in touch.

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