

UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON TRADE AND DEVELOPMENT

THE LEAST DEVELOPED COUNTRIES REPORT 2008

*Growth, Poverty and the Terms of
Development Partnership*



UNITED NATIONS

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UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON TRADE AND DEVELOPMENT
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THE LEAST DEVELOPED COUNTRIES REPORT 2008

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What are the Least Developed Countries?

Fifty countries are currently designated by the United Nations as “least developed countries” (LDCs): Afghanistan, Angola, Bangladesh, Benin, Bhutan, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cambodia, Cape Verde (until December 2007), Central African Republic, Chad, Comoros, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Djibouti, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Gambia, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Haiti, Kiribati, Lao People’s Democratic Republic, Lesotho, Liberia, Madagascar, Malawi, Maldives, Mali, Mauritania, Mozambique, Myanmar, Nepal, Niger, Rwanda, Samoa, Sao Tome and Principe, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Solomon Islands, Somalia, Sudan, Timor–Leste, Togo, Tuvalu, Uganda, United Republic of Tanzania, Vanuatu, Yemen and Zambia. The list of LDCs is reviewed every three years by the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) in the light of recommendations by the Committee for Development Policy (CDP).

The following criteria were used by the CDP in the 2006 review of the list of LDCs:

- (a) A “**low-income**” criterion, based on the *gross national income (GNI) per capita* (a 3-year average, 2002–2004), with thresholds of \$750 for cases of addition to the list, and \$900 for cases of graduation from LDC status;
- (b) A “**human assets**” criterion, involving a composite index (the *Human Assets Index*) based on indicators of (i) nutrition (percentage of the population undernourished); (ii) health (child mortality rate); (iii) school enrolment (gross secondary school enrolment rate); and (iv) literacy (adult literacy rate); and
- (c) An “**economic vulnerability**” criterion, involving a composite index (the *Economic Vulnerability Index*) based on indicators of (i) natural shocks (index of instability of agricultural production; share of population displaced by natural disasters); (ii) trade shocks (index of instability of exports of goods and services); (iii) exposure to shocks (share of agriculture, forestry and fisheries in GDP; merchandise export concentration index); (iv) economic smallness (population in logarithm); and (v) economic remoteness (index of remoteness).

For all three criteria, different thresholds are used for addition to, and graduation from, the list of LDCs. A country will qualify to be added to the list if it meets the three criteria and does not have a population greater than 75 million. A country will normally qualify for graduation from LDC status if it has met graduation thresholds under at least two of the three criteria in at least two consecutive reviews of the list. However, if the GNI per capita of an LDC has risen to a level at least double the graduation threshold, this country will be deemed eligible for graduation regardless of its performance under the other two criteria. After a recommendation to graduate a country has been made by the CDP and endorsed by ECOSOC and the General Assembly, the graduating country will be granted a three-year grace period before actual graduation takes place. In accordance with General Assembly resolution 59/209, this standard grace period is expected to enable the relevant country and its development partners to agree on a “smooth transition” strategy, so that the loss of LDC-specific concessions at the end of the grace period does not disturb the socioeconomic progress of the country.

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An ad hoc expert group meeting was organized as part of the preparations for the report. Entitled “Managing structural transformation in least developed countries”, it was held in Geneva on 8 and 9 November 2007. It brought together specialists in the fields of official development assistance, agricultural development, mineral development, urban management, development planning, governance, state capability and finance. The participants in the meeting were: Debapriya Bhattacharya, Marquise David, John Di John, Gerald Epstein, Shenggen Fan, Samuel Gayi, Padmashree Gehl Sampath, Paul Jourdan, William Kalema, Mushtaq Khan, Tony Killick, Ibrahim Lipumba, Richard Marshall, Banji Oyelaran-Oyeyinka, Alice Sindzingre, Morris Teubal, Ole Therkilsson, Brian Van Arkadie, Meiner Pieter van Dijk and Robert Wade.

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Explanatory Notes

The term “dollars” (\$) refers to United States dollars unless otherwise stated. The term “billion” signifies 1,000 million. Annual rates of growth and changes refer to compound rates. Exports are valued f.o.b. (free on board) and imports c.i.f. (cost, insurance, freight) unless otherwise specified.

Use of a dash (–) between dates representing years, e.g. 1981–1990, signifies the full period involved, including the initial and final years. An oblique stroke (/) between two years, e.g. 1991/92, signifies a fiscal or crop year.

The term “least developed country” (LDC) refers, throughout this report, to a country included in the United Nations list of least developed countries.

In the tables:

Two dots (..) indicate that the data are not available, or are not separately reported.

One dot (.) indicates that the data are not applicable.

A hyphen (-) indicates that the amount is nil or negligible.

Details and percentages do not necessarily add up to totals, because of rounding.

Abbreviations

AFRODAD	African Forum and Network on Debt and Development
AIDS	acquired immunodeficiency syndrome
AR	antiretroviral (drugs)
CPIA	country policy and institutional assessment
CRS	creditor reporting system
DAC	Development Assistance Committee
DC	developed country
DFID	Department for International Development
DOTS	directly observed treatment short
ESAF	Enhanced Structural Adjustment Facility
EURODAD	European Network on Debt and Development
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
FDI	foreign direct investment
GDP	gross domestic product
GER	gross enrolment ratio
GFCF	gross fixed capital formation
GNI	gross national income
GPI	Gender Parity Index
HIPC	heavily indebted poor country
HIV	human immunodeficiency virus
IAEG	Inter-Agency and Expert Group
ICP	International Comparison Programme
IDA	International Development Association
IEG	Independent Evaluation Group
IEO	Independent Evaluation Office (of the IMF)
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
IFI	international financial institution
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IMG	independent monitoring group
LDC	least developed country
M&E	monitoring and evaluation
MDG	Millennium Development Goal
MDRI	Multilateral Debt Relief Initiative
NGO	non-governmental organization
ODA	official development assistance
ODC	other developing country
ODP	ozone depletion potential
ODS	ozone-depleting substance
OD-RO	operational development strategies and result-oriented framework

Abbreviations

OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PAF	performance assessment framework
PIU	project implementation unit
PPP	purchasing power parity
PRGF	Poverty Reduction and Growth Facility
PRS	poverty reduction strategy
PRSC	poverty reduction strategy credit
PRSP	poverty reduction strategy paper
R&D	research and development
S&T	science and technology
SAG	Sector Advisory Group
SIDS	small island developing State
SITC	Standard International Trade Classification
SME	small and medium-sized enterprise
T/A	technical assistance
TAS	Tanzania Assistance Strategy
TB	tuberculosis
TNC	transnational corporation
TRTA	trade-related technical assistance
UNCTAD	United Nations Conference on Trade and Development
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNDESA	United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs
UNESCAP	United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNRISD	United Nations Research Institute for Social Development
UNSTAT	United Nations Statistics Division
WFP	World Food Programme

Country classification used in this Report

The least developed countries covered in this report consist of all the countries in that category in 2007. Cape Verde is therefore included even though it has now graduated (see box below). The 50 LDCs covered are subdivided, for the purpose of analysis, according to (a) geographical groups and (b) export specialization.

Geographical classification

African LDCs (and Haiti): Angola, Benin, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Central African Republic, Chad, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Djibouti, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Gambia, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Haiti, Lesotho, Liberia, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Mauritania, Mozambique, Niger, Rwanda, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Sudan, Togo, Uganda, United Republic of Tanzania, Zambia (32).

Asian LDCs: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Cambodia, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Myanmar, Nepal, Yemen (8).

Island LDCs: Cape Verde, Comoros, Kiribati, Maldives, Samoa, Sao Tome and Principe, Solomon Islands, Timor-Leste, Tuvalu, Vanuatu (10).

Some of the island LDCs are geographically in Africa or Asia, but they are grouped together with the Pacific islands due to their structural similarities. Similarly, Haiti and Madagascar are grouped together with African LDCs.

Classification according to export specialization

UNCTAD has classified the LDCs into six export specialization categories, namely, agriculture, fuels, manufacture, mining, mixed and services. They are classified in these categories according to which export category accounts for at least 45 per cent of the total exports of merchandise goods and services (see table A). Mineral exports from Burundi and Mali do not quite meet the required thresholds but since they account for over 40 per cent of those countries' total exports and play a major role in their economies, they are classified as mineral exporters.

The data used for this analysis are taken from the United Nations Commodity Trade Statistics Database (UN Comtrade), the Balance of Payments and International Investment Position Statistics of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the UNCTAD Handbook of Statistics 2007. The classification involves some degree of arbitrariness: the LDCs have been classified using their average merchandise export and service data for the period 2003–2005, except for Sierra Leone, for which only the estimates for the period 2004–2005 were available.

The merchandise exports of individual LDCs have been divided, using SITC Rev. 3 codes, into: agriculture (sections 0, 1, 2 and 4, excluding divisions 27 and 28), fuels (section 3), minerals (divisions 27, 28 and 68, and groups 667 and 971), manufactures (sections 5–8, excluding division 68 and group 667). With the exception of group 971 (non-monetary gold), SITC Rev. 3 section 9 (commodities and transactions not classified elsewhere in the SITC) has been included only in the total export of goods and services. It follows that the export shares of table B do not necessarily add up to 100.

Data for Afghanistan, Chad, Liberia, Somalia, Togo and Tuvalu have been estimated using mirror statistics. The unavailability of services data for Afghanistan, Liberia, Somalia and Tuvalu limit the exercise to merchandise exports in these countries. Merchandise export data for Liberia and Togo exclude re-export of ships, boats and floating structures (SITC Rev. 3 group 793).

Six LDCs have been classified as oil exporters, 11 as agricultural exporters, 10 as mineral exporters, 6 as manufactures exporters, 12 as services exporters, and 5 as mixed exporters (see table B). Madagascar, Senegal and Togo also export services, agricultural goods and manufactured goods. The Lao People's Democratic Republic also exports manufactured and agricultural goods. Myanmar has become an exporter of fuels and agricultural goods.

The Least Developed Countries Report 2002 (p. 131) classified 21 LDCs as agricultural exporters on the basis of their export structure in the late 1990s. Of these, only 11 are still exporting mostly agricultural products. Two (Chad and Sudan) have become oil exporters, three (Burundi, Mali and Mauritania) have become mineral exporters, five have become service exporters (Eritrea, Ethiopia, Rwanda, Sao Tome and Principe, and the United Republic of Tanzania), one (Togo) is also exporting manufactures and services, and one (Bhutan) is re-classified as manufactures exporter.

Graduation of Cape Verde from the group of LDCs

Cape Verde graduated from the group of LDCs on 21 December 2007. In the 2006 review of the list of least developed countries, Cape Verde met, for the second time, two of the three indicators required for graduation: it had a GNI per capita in 2004 of \$1,487 (with the graduation threshold set at \$900) and a human assets indicator of 82.1 (with the graduation threshold set at more than 64). However, Cape Verde did not meet the third indicator: its economic vulnerability indicator stood at 57.9, with the graduation threshold set at less than 38.

The analysis contained in this report covers Cape Verde as one of the least developed countries as the data in this report do not refer beyond the year 2006, when Cape Verde was still part of the group of LDCs.

Table A. Classification of LDCs according to their export specialization, 2003–2005

Oil exporters	Agricultural exporters	Mineral exporters	Manufactures exporters	Services exporters	Mixed exporters
Angola	Afghanistan	Burundi	Bangladesh	Cape Verde	Lao People's Dem. Republic
Chad	Benin	Central African Republic	Bhutan	Comoros	Madagascar
Equatorial Guinea	Burkina Faso	Dem. Republic of the Congo	Cambodia	Djibouti	Myanmar
Sudan	Guinea Bissau	Guinea	Haiti	Eritrea	Senegal
Timor-Leste	Kiribati	Mali	Lesotho	Ethiopia	Togo
Yemen	Liberia	Mauritania	Nepal	Gambia	
	Malawi	Mozambique		Maldives	
	Solomon Islands	Niger		Rwanda	
	Somalia	Sierra Leone		Samoa	
	Tuvalu	Zambia		Sao Tome and Principe	
	Uganda			United Republic of Tanzania	
				Vanuatu	

Source: UNCTAD secretariat estimates based on United Nations COMTRADE data; IMF, *Balance of Payments and International Investment Position Statistics*, online, December 2007; and UNCTAD, *Handbook of Statistics 2007*.

Table B. Shares in total merchandise goods and services exports for the LDCs, by country and main sectors, 2003–2005
(Per cent)

Country	Export specialization	Agriculture	Minerals	Fuels	Manufactures	Services
Afghanistan	A	65.0	7.5	10.1	17.4	..
Angola	O	0.1	2.2	95.8	0.3	1.5
Bangladesh	MF	6.6	0.1	0.3	80.8	12.2
Benin	A	51.1	1.1	0.2	6.5	40.4
Bhutan	MF	12.6	15.8	0.5	47.6	21.6
Burkina Faso	A	74.4	0.8	1.2	8.3	13.9
Burundi	MN	37.8	41.8	0.1	2.4	17.9
Cambodia	MF	3.1	0.4	0.0	73.0	23.5
Cape Verde	S	1.9	0.0	5.0	7.1	86.0
Central African Republic	MN	30.2	58.0	0.2	1.5	8.3
Chad	O	6.9	0.0	86.3	2.5	4.2
Comoros	S	19.7	0.0	0.0	3.7	76.5
Democratic Republic of the Congo	MN	5.7	71.9	10.2	2.3	8.5
Djibouti	S	1.7	1.0	0.2	1.2	94.5
Equatorial Guinea	O	2.3	0.0	90.8	4.1	2.4
Eritrea	S	3.5	0.2	0.0	2.0	94.0
Ethiopia	S	36.2	2.8	0.0	2.6	57.5
Gambia	S	6.8	0.1	0.0	3.7	89.3
Guinea	MN	4.3	71.8	2.0	10.8	10.8
Guinea-Bissau	A	70.2	0.6	7.4	14.2	7.2
Haiti	MF	4.6	0.5	0.0	70.2	24.0
Kiribati	A	77.8	1.1	0.5	16.3	0.0
Lao People's Democratic Republic	MX: A, MF	29.6	5.9	3.6	32.4	27.4
Lesotho	MF	7.4	14.1	0.0	69.3	8.8
Liberia	A	76.2	9.3	6.1	8.3	..
Madagascar	MX: A, MF, S	29.6	2.6	2.9	29.1	30.9
Malawi	A	78.3	0.3	0.1	13.2	8.1
Maldives	S	15.9	0.1	4.2	5.4	74.3
Mali	MN	32.2	42.7	0.4	5.2	19.1
Mauritania	MN	25.6	56.3	0.0	1.5	10.8
Mozambique	MN	15.6	48.5	11.3	5.6	17.2
Myanmar	MX: A, O	36.7	3.7	31.8	18.8	7.8
Nepal	MF	13.8	2.5	0.0	48.5	35.2
Niger	MN	24.1	44.7	1.2	7.1	22.2
Rwanda	S	28.4	11.7	1.7	4.4	53.0
Samoa	S	9.7	0.1	0.1	36.9	52.9
Sao Tome and Principe	S	20.8	0.0	0.0	1.1	78.1
Senegal	MX: A, MF, S	23.9	2.3	13.4	26.6	33.8
Sierra Leone	MN	6.5	52.8	0.4	8.2	31.3
Solomon Islands	A	70.0	0.3	0.0	1.4	27.6
Somalia	A	89.3	4.0	0.3	6.4	..
Sudan	O	13.1	2.7	78.8	2.9	1.8
Timor-Leste	O	17.7	1.1	70.0	10.7	0.0
Togo	MX: A, MF, S	25.9	7.9	0.6	37.9	26.5
Tuvalu	MF	11.1	1.7	0.0	87.2	..
Uganda	A	44.8	6.0	3.8	9.1	36.2
United Republic of Tanzania	S	24.5	26.4	0.1	3.5	45.5
Vanuatu	S	14.1	0.0	0.3	8.3	77.1
Yemen	O	4.5	0.5	84.9	2.8	7.3
Zambia	MN	17.8	51.9	1.1	16.0	13.3

Source: UNCTAD Secretariat estimates based on UN Comtrade; IMF, *Balance of Payments and International Investment Position Statistics*, online, December 2007; UNCTAD, *Handbook of Statistics, 2007*.

Note: A: agricultural exporter, MF: manufactures exporter, MN: mineral exporter, MX: mixed exporter, O: oil exporter, S: services exporter. For the SITC codes, Rev. 3 used for the classification, see text. The country shares do not add up to 100 as SITC Rev. 3, section 9, except group 971 (non-monetary gold), has not been included. Data on services were not available for Afghanistan, Liberia, Somalia and Tuvalu.