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## Green Transition and Poverty Alleviation in Least Developed Countries (LDCs): Taking Stock of LDC-IV

For many years, efforts have been made to alleviate poverty in the poorest countries of the world, namely the Least Developed Countries (LDCs). Since 1981, the UN General Assembly convenes every ten years so called LDC-Conferences with the aim to identify and strengthen efforts in order to improve their situation.

Nonetheless, their situation is still disastrous: More than half the population of LDCs lives below the poverty line of 1.25 USD per day and most countries are far away from reaching the Millennium Development Goals. Recently, discussions have started that the transition into green economies could not work against, but just to the contrary, would help the LDCs to resolve their problems.

Inspired by this new approach to fighting poverty, the Geneva offices of Consumer Unity & Trust Society (CUTS) and Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) organized this breakout session to the 2011 UNCTAD Public Symposium with the agenda of:

1. Evaluating the outcomes of the Fourth United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries (LDC-IV) at the example of its

resulting Plan of Action. (Charles Gore, UNCTAD Geneva)

2. Presenting two positive examples of concrete work being undertaken in Bangladesh to facilitate transformation into a green economy. (Gerhard Schories, ttz Bremerhaven)
3. Discussing poverty related issues and their implications to the environment in the LDCs and possible strategies to ensure inclusive resolution of this challenge. (Asad Naqvi, UNEP Geneva)

According to Charles Gore an important aspect of poverty was unemployment. Solving the problem of already high unemployment through creation of decent jobs would be a major challenge for governments of LDCs. Such jobs would be desperately needed to accommodate the 10 million additional entrants into the labor market between 2005 and 2015 which were projected by the International Labour Organization. Traditional teachings on development would have been wrong, contributing to the situation of employment in LDCs. It was the mission of the LDC-IV to find alternatives to such examples of unsuccessful patterns of development and growth.

The Istanbul Program of Action (IPoA) followed on high expectations prior to the conference, stated Gore. Especially NGOs

would have been strongly disappointed in the outcomes of the conference. Despite all weaknesses of the IPoA, there would be opportunities which should be taken by all stakeholders. Implementation of the program would be a necessity in order to make the results meaningful.

According to Gore, LDCs showed a strong desire for independence in the IPoA; by 2020 half the number of LDCs should be enabled to graduate from their status through improvements in the following areas: accelerating growth and increasing income per capita, strengthening national human resources, and overcoming vulnerabilities.

Development of productive capacities could assist the necessary structural transformation away from traditional patterns. Such capacities could be created through: increased energy access using renewable sources, a green revolution in the agricultural sector, and an initiative for green cities to adapt to migration and urbanization.

Gerhard Schories from ttz Bremerhaven provided the participants of the breakout session with two examples of concrete projects undertaken in Bangladesh using solar energy. He pointed out that access to energy would be the driving force behind economic development. Both projects had technical assistance through ttz Bremerhaven.

The first project reported on was the “Solar energy production and training centre” in Khulna, Bangladesh. More than 100 technicians had been trained to determine electricity demands, design and construct photovoltaic systems and to maintain these. Schories highlighted that the project was a success in capacity building and the establishment of local supply chains as well as of service networks.

The second project would use photovoltaic systems to drive electro-dialysis to adjust hatcheries of an organic shrimp farm to changing requirements of shrimp during its life-cycle. This project would help to make transportation of water across more than 500 km redundant. The pilot hatchery would be in operation as of 2012.

Transferring technology should imply providing training to the local population in designing, installing, and maintaining technical systems. Schories emphasized the importance of working with the private sector as well as with governments. At the same time country-specific conditions need to be kept in mind. In the two above mentioned projects, small and medium sized enterprises endorsed the topic of a green economy more quickly than the government. Nevertheless, governments would have a major role to play in promoting the structural change necessary

for the sustainable transition into a green economy.

After these practical examples, Asad Naqvi from UNEP shed light on the interconnections of the environment and poverty, especially in LDC. He pointed out that agriculture remains the dominant sector in LDCs' economies. The environment would thus play a central role for wealth creation in LDCs. Trade of organic goods could help to alleviate poverty and had at the same time advantages to non-organic farming in terms of the environment: Organic goods were up to 68 per cent less carbon intensive and would further respect the need for exporting value-added products. Investment in such areas could help LDCs to leapfrog a carbon-intensive industrial economy and to eradicate poverty.

LDCs would face structural constraints, such as access to energy, on their journey of development. 77 per cent of the population of LDCs would be without access to electricity while 71 per cent of the rural population would rely on biomass as the only source of energy. Burning biomass could have severe health implications. Decentralized, green energy (e.g. solar energy) could provide clean and reliable access to energy to the rural poor. Further, investment like modernizing the kind of light bulbs in use could immensely reduce electricity cost for households and lead to lower carbon emissions.

Naqvi said that the current political momentum to strengthen the idea of a green economy needed to be built on sound regulatory frameworks, removal of harmful subsidies, prioritizing green investment, market utilization of mechanisms and taxation, and capacity building.

To facilitate the transition into a green economy, external sources of finance, an appropriate technology, and equitable access to the world market would be necessary. Economic growth and environmental protection would be no luxury and could provide a chance for LDCs to alleviate poverty.

During the discussion following the panelists' presentations, education was identified to be a crucial precondition for awareness in terms of sustainability and implementation of policies. There would also still be a huge potential for increasing the market share of green goods in the future.

A human rights-based approach was suggested for dealing with the issue of transition into a green economy. Traditional non-green economies would accelerate climate change, hence eminently impacting on human rights. Governments can be held responsible under human right treaties they have ratified. This would apply to LDCs as well. This mechanism could be an instrument to request governments to take the necessary

steps to turn towards a green and sustainable economy.

There was a consensus during the breakout session that LDCs and the stakeholders of development have to divert from unsustainable and unsuccessful patterns of

the past. There are successful projects in place, demonstrating opportunities for a green economy. The current disastrous situation of LDCs could be alleviated through the transition into a green economy, working towards achieving the MDGs, and the eradication of poverty.

On the author:

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