



UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL, SCIENTIFIC AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATION

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# THE LEAST-DEVELOPED COUNTRIES AND THE CHALLENGE OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

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UNESCO's contribution to promoting international action  
to support LDCs

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WORLD SUMMIT  
FOR SOCIAL  
DEVELOPMENT



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*'It is for the poorest people,  
those most exposed to despair,  
those who are most deprived  
as regards access to knowledge and  
those who are the most vulnerable,  
that UNESCO  
has a duty to work'*

FEDERICO MAYOR

Director-General of UNESCO,  
at the twenty-fifth session of the General Conference 1989

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## *Introduction:* A brief history of inegalitarian progress towards development

Immediately after the Second World War, at the time when the Marshall Plan was assisting in the reconstruction of Europe, the international community became aware of the importance of world co-operation to enable the developing countries to overcome their backwardness. This international movement, initially carried along with the economic euphoria of '30 glorious years', suffered a setback with the sudden rise in oil prices of 1973-1975. This world crisis brought out glaring inequalities among the Third World countries with regard to development; and a need was felt to construct a New International Economic Order. The major international aid organizations established the satisfaction of basic human needs as the immediate priority objective (Geneva, 1976).

At the beginning of the 1980s, attention was drawn to the situation of the least-developed countries (LDCs) which were seen as the most vulnerable and as unable to set a process of development in motion without a **specific strategy**.

The first United Nations Conference on LDCs was held in 1981, under the auspices of UNCTAD. In order to deal with structural and temporal problems, it adopted a Substantial New Programme of Action for the 1980s for the Least-Developed Countries (SNPA). Ten years later, in 1990, UNCTAD convened in Paris, in collaboration with UNESCO, the second Conference, which adopted a **'Paris Declaration' and a 'Programme of Action for the Least-Developed Countries for the 1990s'**.

Its results are to be assessed, at mid-term, on the occasion of the fiftieth session of the United Nations General Assembly in New York, in September 1995.

*It was already widely recognized, however, that the results of the first Decade (1980-1990) covered by SNPA had been disappointing (see box on next page).*

In March 1990, the World Conference on Education for All, held in Jomtien on the initiative of UNESCO, UNDP, UNICEF and the World Bank, sounded the alarm, and gave priority to *Human resource development*, the foundation of all development.

**The more ground a country has to make up to achieve its development, the more priority must be given to increasing the potential of the men and women of whom it is formed.**

An assessment of this shortfall in terms of social development has to consider three fundamental questions relating to LDCs:

- I. Looking at the obstacles to social development in LDCs.
- II. Developing appropriate means to overcome the obstacles.
- III. Constructing an internationally shared and sustainable future.

- *Average annual growth of global GDP* for the 1970s: 3.4 per cent (in fact -0.4 per cent of per capita GDP).
- Growth as estimated by SNPA for the 1980s: 7.2 per cent; in fact, real growth was only 2.3 per cent (-0.5 per cent of per capita GDP).
- *Real demographic growth*: 2.8 per cent.
- *Agricultural production*: annual average during the 1970s: 2 per cent; SNPA goal: 4 per cent; real growth: 1.6 per cent (per capita: -0.8 per cent).
- *Industrial production*: annual average during the 1970s: 6.4 per cent; SNPA goal: 9 per cent; real growth: 2 per cent.
- *Foreign trade*: between 1960 and 1988 LDCs' share of world exports fell from 1.4 per cent to 0.3 per cent.
- *The terms of trade*, taking 100 as the base figure in 1980, had fallen to 84 in 1988.
- *Development aid*, which SNPA suggested should be increased to 0.15 per cent of GNP of the donor countries, represented only 0.09 per cent at the end of the 1980s.
- *The debt/GDP* ratio grew from 55 per cent in 1982 to 63 per cent in 1991.
- *With regard to human resources*, the situation continued to be serious and the difference from other developing countries became more marked.
- There was a 13 point difference for the literacy rate in 1990, while the enrolment ratio in primary schools over ten years increased only by 1 point (66 as compared with 65) as compared with 3 for the developing countries as a whole (90 as against 87).

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## Key indicators for LDCS

Indicators	LDC average	All developing countries	Developed countries
Per capita GDP 1980 (dollars 1991)	369	1035	16159
Per capita GDP 1991	349	1118	20309
Average annual rate of increase in per capita GDP:			
1970-1980	-0,4	3,1	2,2
1980-1991	-0,5	0,7	2,1
Average annual per capita rate of increase in agricultural production:			
1970-1980	-0,8	0,4	
1980-1992	-1,2	0,4	
Average annual rate of increase in industrial production:			
1970-1980	6,4		
1980-1991	2,0		
Ratio of total debt/GDP (%):			
1982	55%		
1991	63%	45%	
Population growth:			
1985	2,8	2,3	
1991	2,8	2,4	0,6
Life expectancy at birth:			
– average 1985-1990	49	57	75
– average 1990-1995	50	59	
Literacy rates for adults 1990:	Total 48 (M59-F36)	Total 61 (M70-F51)	99
Enrolment ratio in primary schools:			
1980	Total 65 (M77-F52)	Total 87 (M96-F77)	100
1990	Total 66 (M74-F58)	Total 90 (M98-F80)	100
Gross enrolment ratio pre-primary:			
1980	3,9	12,3	59,3
1990	12,5	19,2	71,5
Pupil/teacher ratio in formal education:			
1980	40	26	17
1988	37	25	16

Sources: UNCTAD – *The Least-Developed Countries 1993-1994 Report*. *World Education Report*, UNESCO, 1993.



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# I LOOKING AT THE OBSTACLES TO SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT IN LDC'S

Social development lies at the heart of LDCs' problems: it is only by tackling this problem that the spiral of exclusion will be broken.

## 1. Diverting paths

The conditions in which peoples live involve increasing disparities between different groups of society separated by growing inequalities in wealth, access to education, welfare and human development.

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In 1980, the average per capita GDP of the industrialized countries was 44 times the average for LDCs (US \$16,159 as against US \$369).

In 1991, the figure was roughly 59 times higher (US \$20,309 as against US \$349).

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In terms of *human development*, as evaluated by the UNDP indicators, LDCs are still towards the bottom of the table. They include countries that, far from seeking to build a culture of peace, are ravaged by conflict (Rwanda, Cambodia, Myanmar, Somalia, Liberia ...).

Clearly, *the path of growth and development can no longer be seen as a single path for all*, on which the privileged are the front runners, moving ever further ahead of the disadvantaged. Rather, there has been a *parting of the ways* between the two groups which has made the merely disadvantaged become the rejected, the outcast.

We can now see the divisive systems of differentiation relegating disadvantaged social groups to the sidelines in the richest countries also applying to countries which have been marginalized in the international community.

The UNDP Human Development Report shows clearly, every year, that *the gap is no longer just quantitative but qualitative too*.

The implications of this are considerable. Deficiencies in economic performance cannot be explained simply in terms of particular combination of circumstances. They reflect *structural problems* of which they constitute a *downstream* effect. Looking upstream, it seems that the first requirement of the least-developed countries is **the ability to establish a viable blueprint for society**, ensuring for their inhabitants both men and women, a form of human development that matches their cultural identity. In that way, they would be able **to satisfy their basic needs, as they themselves understand them, becoming the masters of their own development, in a culture of peace that would guarantee human rights and encourage democratic participation** by citizens of local, regional and national responsibilities.

Social development is the main means whereby such *blueprints* are devised. Equitable economic growth must become the essential instrument of that process.

**In order to give some impetus to the development of LDCs we must recognize social development as the frame of reference for economic development.**

## 2. The spiral of exclusion

All the analyses point towards the same conclusion: ***the pressure of external constraints*** has combined with *the weakness of endogenous development* in a diabolical alliance to hold up genuine social development and thereby risk ***creating a spiral of social as well as economic recession***.

This spiral eliminates those who are unable to produce and export to an external market that is foreign to their culture, except on highly disadvantageous terms (***domination by an exogenous market culture***). It also makes them increasingly vulnerable to imports from better endowed countries which carve themselves a share in the local market at the expense of local production.

***The spiral of exclusion can only be broken by building up the endogenous capacity of LDCs*** to identify their own social objectives within the international community and to achieve them. This would require development of education and training as the foundations of a ***self-confidence*** rooted in a dynamic identity.

The relations of LDCs with their outside partners should, therefore, seek to ensure that their blueprints for society are acceptable to the latter, thus helping to bring about a new chapter in international co-operation.

More than for all other groups of countries, development in this sense demands a **'radically new approach'** outlined by the Director-General of UNESCO in the Position Paper prepared for the World Summit for Social Development.

Trying to deal with the disparities between the rich and the poor through *macro-economic structural adjustment*, in a bid to bring the poorer countries' basic economic parameters into line with the optimum performance of the industrialized world's prosperous economies. This has, in many cases, helped to stifle both social potential and human resources. One could say that, in a reversal of normal logic, downstream factors are being allowed to affect what goes on upstream.

It would be healthier and more productive if, reversing this counterflow, **social adjustment with a human face**, building up endogenous capabilities and creative potential, constituted **the base** to which the tools of economic readjustment were required to contribute.

The United Nations programmes of action for LDCs in the 1980s and 1990s took this course, but were unable to overcome all the obstacles. There is thus now **a need to go the whole way by paying the price for development**. Such is the view of UNESCO for LDCs.

## II DEVELOPING APPROPRIATE MEANS TO OVERCOME THE OBSTACLES

The Paris Declaration and Programme of Action for the Least-Developed Countries for the 1990s adopted a set of *basic principles* and drew up a number of *fundamental objectives*.

### Basic principles

1. Success depends on a shared responsibility and a strengthened partnership for the growth and development of LDCs.
2. LDCs have the primary responsibility for the formulation and effective implementation of appropriate policies and priorities for their growth and development.
3. The strengthened partnership for development necessitates adequate external support from LDCs' development partners.
4. Commitments undertaken should be measurable and sufficiently transparent to enable monitoring and assessment of the Programme of Action for the 1990s.

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Within the field of competence of UNESCO, the basic goals included: *the mobilization and development of human resources in LDCs.*

### Objectives of mobilization

1. The full involvement, integration and participation of all groups, especially women, in the development process.
2. The strengthening of human capital, in particular through access of the population to basic and adequate social services, with **special priority for education.**

Stress was laid, as a prerequisite, on 'the creation of an environment conducive to releasing the full energies and potential of all men and women to contribute to the improvement of the societies of LDCs'.

## 1. Actions of global scope

- *The Jomtien Conference* defined a strategy aimed at ensuring *education for all* and instituting a structure for action designed to meet basic learning needs, going beyond the division between formal and non-formal education, while also addressing problems of health, science and technology, and environment. Supported by the World Bank and UNDP, the "Jomtien Programmes" primarily concern LDCs.
- In 1992, UNESCO took active part in *the Earth Summit at Rio de Janeiro* by contributing to the elaboration of Agenda 21 and by placing at the disposal of the international community, and in particular LDCs, the experience acquired by its programmes on environmental protection and development, with respect to science and technology, biotechnology, and renewable energies (Man and the Biosphere: MAB).
- In 1993 at the *World Conference on Human Rights*, UNESCO endeavoured to define and lay the groundwork for a *Culture of Peace*. UNESCO is also the lead agency for the United Nations Year for Tolerance (1995).

## 2. Actions specifically aimed at LDCs

In 1991, a special *LDCs Unit* was established in UNESCO. Functioning now as part of the Directorate, its purpose is to undertake 'transverse' action to encourage the convergence of those components of the major sectoral programmes which most concern LDCs.

Support for LDCs brings into play the majority of UNESCO's commitments. By way of illustration, a number of significant examples may be mentioned.

### (i) Development of institutional capacities

#### *Education*

- Involvement of LDCs in the UNITWIN/UNESCO chairs programme and the International Project on Technical and Vocational Education (UNEVOC) (Niger, Botswana, Mozambique, United Republic of Tanzania).
- Establishment of 'UNESCO chairs' in Distance Education (United Republic of Tanzania), and Human Rights Education (Benin, Ethiopia).
- Equipment and buildings for schools and teacher-training centres (Ethiopia, Somalia, Yemen, Sudan, Mauritania, Bhutan, Maldives, Nepal).
- Establishment of a unit for co-operation with donors in the Ministry of Education (Cambodia).

#### *Science*

- Establishment of 'UNESCO chairs' to strengthen the potential of scientific training (Sudan, Uganda, Yemen, Mozambique, Malawi, Mauritania, Sierra Leone).



- Establishment of an International Fund for the Technological Development of Africa. The Fund has an initial endowment of US \$1 million.

#### **Communication and information**

- Assistance with the launching of a project on rural radio using solar energy (Haiti).

### **(ii) Development of human potential**

#### **Education**

- Execution of a programme of human resources development (with UNDP) in Guinea.
- A consultation and support mission to the Government of Mali for basic education programming and the launching of development education centres (DECs).
- Support for the establishment of a network linking teacher-training centres in Côte d'Ivoire, Senegal, Togo and Niger, and creation of a 'UNESCO chair' in educational sciences for French-speaking Africa.
- Various training workshops on themes related to education (Harare, Dhaka, Dakar).

#### **Social Sciences**

- Training seminar for the safeguarding and protection of the family (Haiti).

#### **Communication and information**

Establishment of national press agencies in a number of countries, more particularly in Benin, Chad and Togo. In Haiti, assistance is given for the launching of a project on community radio using solar energy.

Seminars on the role of the press in democratic societies (Malawi, Madagascar).

### **(iii) Assistance in the formulation of sectoral and global policies and in studies and analyses aimed at identifying the specific needs of LDCs**

This work is carried out in Cambodia (support for the elaboration of an education policy), Burkina Faso (a new human resources development policy), Burundi, Madagascar and Haiti (education planning).

In Mali, a major project is under way which would provide support for the elaboration of a human resources programme.

UNESCO is setting up a Young People's Centre for the Culture of Peace in Burundi, which should pave the way for the establishment of similar centres in a number of other countries.

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These different types of activity, which are all associated with one aspect of social development or another, converge on the achievement of the objectives set out in the Paris Declaration and the United Nations Programme of Action for the Least-Developed Countries for the 1990s.

These kinds of activity, essential for sustainable development, even if inadequate, could clearly be the points of departure for strategies requiring even more force and consistency in international action for LDCs.



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# III CONSTRUCTING AN INTERNATIONALLY SHARED AND SUSTAINABLE FUTURE

The broad lines of emphasis of a new convergence of forces to help LDCs advance along the road to social development – must focus on the following types of activity – viewed as the key to people-centred sustainable development.

## 1. Mobilizing knowledge and experience for the development of LDCs

The paradox is that as the most underprivileged do not have the means to analyse and deal with their situation and problems, they are influenced by external references and models and thus poorly equipped to find appropriate solutions.

In order to be able to construct a viable future ***they must have, within themselves and for themselves, the capacity to produce and manage basic knowledge and to capitalize on relevant experience so as to establish their own development programmes.***

UNESCO would use its newly set up MOST Programme in social sciences for creating in LDCs Data Base and reference centres to record and analyse useful experience.

## 2. Strengthening capacity-building in LDCs through enhanced human resources development

If LDCs make the most of the impetus created by the *Jomtien Conference on Education for All*, they should be able to devise and implement ***human resources development plans involving society as a whole in a spirit of partnership***, restoring the balance as necessary for deprived population groups (as with Mali's national charter for a new basic education, for example).

UNESCO would put the experience acquired by some at the disposal of others, through 'networking'.

## 3. Creating an organized reserve of scientific and technical references to break the vicious circle created by the lack of resources for the development of LDCs

Insufficient consideration has been given to the potential of contemporary science and technology, used in the first instance to promote the development of the advanced industrial and post-industrial societies, to respond to the problems of the most deprived. In fact, LDCs will only be able to escape from stagnation and exclusion if they are enabled to take a short cut to development by tapping into this ready-made potential and then use their own originality and creativity to find ways of rejoining the world community.

***Special, strongly resourced programmes shall be implemented immediately in priority sectors, such as renewable energy, biotechnology, information technology and remote processing, in a response to the needs of LDCs.***

#### **4. Supporting the development of strategies and practices to encourage democratic participation, respect for human rights and a culture of peace in LDCs**

It is generally acknowledged that there can be no development without the responsible participation of all the citizens, and one of the strengths of social development is that it provides the tools for effective participation.

Looking to the future in LDCs, international action must be taken to support them in co-ordinated attempts **to encourage both a decentralization of responsibility (local and regional democracy) and eradication of illiteracy and universalization of education.**

UNESCO should encourage the establishment of, and provide direct support for, networks that would assist in devising and extending education strategies aimed at collective participation in the management of LDCs.

#### **5. Promoting the creation of development partnerships in regional groups to enhance their synergy**

Regional synergies between groups of countries at different levels of development have an essential role to play in the emergence of LDCs, which would then be able to adopt a more active stance, and express their own potential within an equitable system of international exchange.

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Annex Per capita GDP and population: levels and growth

Country	Per capita GDP in 1991 dollars				Annual average growth rates of per capita real GDP (%)		Population		
	Actual		Projected 2000		1970-1980	1980-1991	Level (million) 1991	Annual average growth rates (%)	
	1980	1991	A <sup>a</sup>	B <sup>b</sup>				1970-1980	1980-1991
Afghanistan <sup>c</sup>	663	485 <sup>d</sup>	376	589	0.9 <sup>e</sup>	-2.8 <sup>e</sup>	17.7	1.6	0.6
Bangladesh <sup>f</sup>	167	201	234	298	-0.5	1.7	116.4	2.8	2.6
Benin	418	396	379	554	-0.3	-0.5	4.8	2.5	3.0
Bhutan <sup>g</sup>	86	146	225	218	..	4.9	1.6	2.0	2.2
Botswana <sup>f</sup>	1442	2853	4986	4053	9.7	6.4	1.3	3.8	3.2
Burkina Faso	261	298	332	428	2.2	1.2	9.2	2.2	2.6
Burundi	176	205	232	295	2.8	1.4	5.7	1.6	2.9
Cambodia	..	230	..	342	..	..	8.6	-0.7	2.5
Cape Verde	563	813	1098	1164	2.0	3.4	0.4	0.8	2.3
Central African Republic	460	407	368	599	0.0	-1.1	3.1	2.3	2.7
Chad	150	228	322	327	-2.9	3.9	5.7	2.1	2.2
Comoros	486	435	397	580	-4.1	-1.0	0.6	3.4	3.6
Djibouti	1505	983	694	1386	-2.9	-3.8	0.5	6.1	3.7
Equatorial Guinea	511	400	327	586	..	-2.2	0.4	-2.9	4.7
Ethiopia <sup>h</sup>	142	129	119	181	0.0	-0.9	51.4	2.4	2.6
Gambia <sup>f</sup>	425	444	460	653	2.2	0.4	0.9	3.3	3.0
Guinea	700	495	373	696	2.9	-3.1	5.9	1.4	2.6
Guinea-Bissau	168	202 <sup>i</sup>	235	307	-1.8	1.7	1.0	4.2	1.9
Haiti <sup>f</sup>	533	399	315	610	2.0	-2.6	6.6	1.7	1.9
Kiribati	582	493	430	742	..	-1.5	0.1	1.7	2.1
Lao People's Democratic Republic	197	237	276	338	-1.8	1.7	4.3	1.7	2.8
Lesotho <sup>g</sup>	297	361	424	532	7.0	1.8	1.8	2.3	2.7
Liberia	742	479 <sup>d</sup>	335	657	-0.8	-3.9 <sup>k</sup>	2.7	3.1	3.2
Madagascar	277	222	185	306	-2.0	-2.0	12.0	2.6	3.0
Malawi	257	249	242	362	2.8	-0.3	8.8	3.1	3.3
Maldives	277	667	1367	942 <sup>o</sup>	10.9 <sup>l</sup>	8.3	0.2	3.2	3.1
Mali	271	238	247	399	2.6	-0.3	9.5	2.3	3.0
Mauritania	606	543	496	776	-1.2	-1.0	2.1	2.4	2.7
Mozambique	91	75	64	103	-4.9	-1.7	14.5	2.6	1.6
Myanmar <sup>g</sup>	782	655	566	998	2.3	-1.6	42.7	2.2	2.1
Nepal <sup>m</sup>	134	168	203	249	0.0	2.1	20.1	2.6	2.8
Niger	453	286	196	395	-1.3	-4.1	8.0	3.0	3.3
Rwanda	287	217	173	297	1.4	-2.5	7.3	3.3	3.2
Samoa	860	908	950	1628	..	0.5	0.2	0.7	0.3
Sao Tome and Principe	532	426	355	649	3.0	-2.0	0.1	2.6	2.7
Sierra Leone <sup>f</sup>	224	190	166	276	-0.8	-1.5	4.3	2.1	2.4
Solomon Islands	632	668	699	916	..	0.5	0.3	3.6	3.0
Somalia	142	134 <sup>d</sup>	128	185	1.3	-0.5 <sup>n</sup>	8.9	3.4	2.5
Sudan <sup>f</sup>	..	..	..	..	2.2	-2.3	25.9	3.0	3.0
Togo	512	448	402	623	1.3	-1.2	3.6	2.6	3.1
Tuvalu	..	688 <sup>d</sup>	..	1012	..	..	0.0	4.0	1.3
Uganda	138	168	197	239	-5.2	1.8	18.1	3.0	3.0
United Republic of Tanzania	127	119	113	164	-0.6	-0.6	26.5	3.6	3.3
Vanuatu	1063	1148	1222	1691	..	0.7	0.2	3.5	2.4
Yemen	..	668	..	905	..	..	12.1	2.6	3.6
Zaire	276	221	184	308	-3.2	-2.0	38.6	2.9	3.3
Zambia	622	460	360	665	-1.5	-2.7	8.3	3.0	3.6
<b>All LDCs</b>	<b>369</b>	<b>349</b>	<b>334</b>	<b>499</b>	<b>-0.4</b>	<b>-0.5</b>	<b>522.8</b>	<b>2.6</b>	<b>2.7</b>
<b>All developing countries</b>	<b>1035</b>	<b>1118</b>	<b>1190</b>	<b>1694</b>	<b>3.1</b>	<b>0.7</b>	<b>2888.0</b>	<b>2.4</b>	<b>2.3</b>
<b>Developed market economy countries</b>	<b>16159</b>	<b>20309</b>	<b>24487</b>	<b>..</b>	<b>2.2</b>	<b>2.1</b>	<b>830.2</b>	<b>0.9</b>	<b>0.7</b>
<b>Countries in Eastern Europe</b>	<b>3880</b>	<b>4620<sup>f</sup></b>	<b>5330</b>	<b>..</b>	<b>4.5</b>	<b>1.6<sup>n</sup></b>	<b>398.9</b>	<b>0.8</b>	<b>0.7</b>

Source: UNCTAD secretariat calculations based on data from the United Nations Statistical Office, the Economic Commission for Africa, the World Bank and other international and national sources.

a At 1980-1991 growth rate.

b Based on the target rate of 7.0 per cent for total GDP growth as called for by the International Development Strategy for the Fourth United Nations Development Decade.

c Years beginning 21 March.

d 1989.

e Net material product.

f Years ending 30 June.

g Years beginning 1 April.

h Years ending 7 July.

i 1990.

j Years ending 30 September.

k 1980-1989.

l 1974-1980.

m Years ending 15 July.

n 1980-1990.

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