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**Groups of countries in special situations: follow-up
to the Fifth United Nations Conference on the Least
Developed Countries**

Ensuring the effective implementation of the functions of the Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States

Report of the Secretary-General*

Summary

The present report is submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution [76/258](#) and its annex containing the Doha Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries, in which the Secretary-General was requested to prepare a report with a view to ensuring the effective implementation of the functions of the Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States and strengthening its capabilities and effectiveness to support the least developed countries, as well as the effectiveness of the United Nations system support provided to least developed countries. The report examines the evolving mandates of the Office of the High Representative, its functions and available resources and the United Nations system-wide support provided to least developed countries and its effectiveness. The report reveals that, over the years, the mandates of the Office have evolved and the need for support to least developed countries, landlocked developing countries and small island developing States has increased considerably. To that end, the report contains specific proposals on strengthening the Office's capabilities and effectiveness to ensure the effective implementation of its functions and to better serve the three most vulnerable groups of countries by catering to their emerging needs.

* The present report was submitted late owing to delays in the approval process.



I. Background and mandate of the Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States

1. The General Assembly, by its resolution [56/227](#) of 24 December 2001, established the Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States, with the main objective of ensuring a highly visible, efficient and effective follow-up and monitoring arrangement for the implementation of programmes of action for the least developed countries, landlocked developing countries and small island developing States. The key functions of the Office of the High Representative, approved by the General Assembly following the recommendations set out in the report of the Secretary-General ([A/56/645](#), para. 17), were as follows:

(a) To assist the Secretary-General in ensuring the full mobilization and coordination of all parts of the United Nations system, with a view to facilitating the coordinated implementation of and coherence in the follow-up and monitoring of the Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries at the country, regional and global levels;

(b) To provide coordinated support to the Economic and Social Council as well as the General Assembly in assessing progress and in conducting the annual review of the implementation of the Programme of Action;

(c) To support, as appropriate, the coordinated follow-up of the implementation of the Global Framework for Transit Transport Cooperation between Landlocked and Transit Developing Countries and the Donor Community and the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States;

(d) To undertake appropriate advocacy work in favour of the least developed countries, landlocked developing countries and small island developing States in partnership with the relevant parts of the United Nations as well as with the civil society, media, academia and foundations;

(e) To assist in mobilizing international support and resources for the implementation of the Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries and other programmes and initiatives for landlocked developing countries and small island developing States;

(f) To provide appropriate support to group consultations of least developed countries, landlocked developing countries and small island developing States.

2. The Office supports 92 vulnerable countries, comprising 46 least developed countries, 32 landlocked developing countries, 39 small island developing States and 6 graduated countries, which represent nearly half of the total membership of the United Nations. Of the 32 landlocked developing countries, 16 are least developed countries, and of the 39 small island developing States, 9 are least developed countries, and those countries are facing multiple vulnerabilities and constraints.

3. The Office is organized into four units, three of which deal with the least developed countries, landlocked developing countries and small island developing States, respectively, and are overseen by the Chief of the Policy Development and Coordination, Monitoring and Reporting Service, who in turn is overseen by the Director of the Office. The fourth unit is the Advocacy and Outreach Unit, which is responsible for communication and outreach activities for the three groups of countries and is overseen directly by the Director of the Office, who in turn is overseen by the High Representative.

4. The Office successfully organized the Fifth United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries and its preparatory activities, and is currently engaged in its follow-up. The General Assembly, in its resolution [73/242](#), decided to convene the Conference in 2021. Owing to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, the Assembly decided, in its resolution [76/251](#), to further reschedule the Conference and, on an exceptional basis, to hold it in two parts, as follows: the first part at United Nations Headquarters in New York, on 17 March 2022, and the second part in Doha, from 5 to 9 March 2023. In its resolution [76/258](#), the General Assembly endorsed the Doha Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries, which was adopted during the first part of the Conference and is contained in the annex to the resolution. During the second part of the Conference, the Doha Political Declaration was adopted.

5. The General Assembly, in its resolution [77/246](#), decided to convene the third United Nations Conference on Landlocked Developing Countries in 2024 in line with the mandate specified in resolution [76/217](#), namely, to undertake a comprehensive review of the implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action for Landlocked Developing Countries for the Decade 2014–2024, to formulate and adopt a renewed framework for international support to address the special needs of landlocked developing countries and to strengthen partnerships between the landlocked developing countries and transit countries and their development partners. The Office was designated as the United Nations system-wide focal point for the preparatory process. The Secretary-General has appointed the High Representative as the Secretary-General for the Conference. The Government of Rwanda has offered to host the Conference in Kigali.

6. In its resolution [77/245](#), the General Assembly reaffirmed its call to convene in 2024 the fourth International Conference on Small Island Developing States, which will be aimed at assessing the ability of small island developing States to achieve sustainable development, including the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals. The Government of Antigua and Barbuda has offered to host the Conference. The High Representative has been designated as the Special Adviser of the Secretary-General on the Conference, with the following responsibilities: (a) coordinating advocacy and outreach efforts for the Conference; and (b) leading fundraising efforts to support the participation of the least developed countries and small island developing States in the official preparations, and the participation of non-State actors in the Conference and its preparations.

II. Key functions of the Office of the High Representative

A. Mobilization and coordination of all parts of the United Nations system

7. The Office of the High Representative contributes to strengthening the coordination and coherence of the United Nations system support provided to least developed countries, landlocked developing countries and small island developing States, in particular through the respective Inter-Agency Consultative Groups, as the Chair of the inter-agency task force on least developed country graduation, and the respective national focal point networks. The Office and the Department of Economic and Social Affairs provide support to the Inter-Agency Consultative Group on Small Island Developing States within their respective mandates. The Office also supports the Steering Committee on Partnerships for Small Island Developing States and the Small Island Developing States Global Business Network. The Office works collaboratively with the International Think Tank for Landlocked Developing Countries within the framework of a memorandum of understanding.

8. The Office also provides annual reports to the High-level Committee on Programmes of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB), the most recent of which was a progress report on the implementation of the Doha Programme of Action,¹ in which CEB was informed of the progress made in the preparations for the Fifth United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries. In the Doha Programme of Action, the Secretary-General was requested to ensure the full mobilization and coordination of all parts of the United Nations system to facilitate coordinated implementation and coherence in the follow-up and monitoring of the Doha Programme of Action at the national, subregional, regional and global levels. The coordination mechanisms available, such as CEB and the United Nations Sustainable Development Group, should be broadly utilized and the Inter-Agency Consultative Group for Least Developed Countries should be kept active in this regard.²

9. The Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS), in its report on its evaluation of the Office of the High Representative (E/AC.51/2021/2), recommended that the Executive Office of the Secretary-General should identify opportunities for the greater engagement of the Office of the High Representative with the United Nations Sustainable Development Group and its members, in particular on issues of the most relevance to least developed countries, landlocked developing countries and small island developing States. Views were also expressed by Member States that the Office's participation in the United Nations Sustainable Development Group Executive Board is a good opportunity to support least developed countries.³

B. Support for United Nations intergovernmental bodies and group consultations of least developed countries, landlocked developing countries and small island developing States

10. The Office of the High Representative has been providing secretariat support to the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council for negotiations on resolutions on least developed countries and landlocked developing countries. The Office also provides substantive support to the Chairs of the Inter-Agency Consultative Groups for the three groups of countries upon request.

11. An independent consultant conducted a survey among experts from the least developed countries and key development partners on the work of the Office. Member States noted with appreciation the active engagement of the Office with diplomatic missions and focal points in national Governments, while also raising the need to address the human and financial resources challenges faced by the national focal points, preventing them from engaging effectively with the United Nations system, especially at relevant regional and international events. The consultant recommended building the capacity of national focal points, especially with regard to drafting reports and preparing project documents to enable least developed countries to obtain access to available windows of financial resources, including concessional windows.

12. Member States also raised the need for the Office to sustain its effective engagement with mission focal points and help them to coordinate, strategize and decide on common priorities such as climate change, in particular for countries facing multiple vulnerabilities as least developed countries, landlocked developing countries or small island developing States, and to optimize collective strength for their effective participation in deliberations and negotiations. Since most least developed country delegations are small and are responsible for multiple priorities, it was recommended ensuring that least developed country meetings and other events do not

¹ CEB/2022/6.

² General Assembly resolution 76/258, annex, para. 300.

³ Survey conducted by an independent consultant.

overlap. In addition, the need was raised for enhanced coherence among the three groups of countries on common issues and priorities and for them to support each other on issues that are unique to a specific group.

13. Member States emphasized the importance of ensuring that the needs of the three groups of countries remain at the forefront of the Organization's work. It was recommended that legislative organs and governing bodies of United Nations system organizations that have not yet done so should mainstream the priorities of the programmes of action that are pertinent to their mandated work. Member States also noted insufficient focus on the issues of the three groups of countries in international meetings. For example, in the agendas of key international meetings, least developed countries are often not singled out, even in the context of leaving no one behind or financing for development. Member States also underlined the need to allocate time to least developed country issues, including critical support for graduating countries and those that have just graduated, and other important challenges such as fragility, conflict situations and food security.

14. Member States recognized with appreciation the support that they receive from the Office notwithstanding the resource and capacity constraints in the missions. They called for scaled up substantive and analytical support to enable their active participation in various meetings and negotiations with evidence-based and up-to-date facts and figures.

C. Mobilization of international support and resources for the implementation of the programmes of action

15. The Office of the High Representative undertakes vigorous campaign and advocacy work to mobilize international support and resources for the implementation of the programmes of action for the least developed countries, landlocked developing countries and small island developing States. The Office supports the bureaux of the three Inter-Agency Consultative Groups in intergovernmental deliberations and gives special attention to resource mobilization in its reports and documents and at the various events that it organizes.

16. Despite considerable efforts, progress on resource mobilization from domestic and international sources is limited, mostly as a result of new and emerging global challenges affecting the least developed countries domestically and the donor community. For instance, in 2022, the gross domestic product (GDP) growth rate in least developed countries was only 4.3 per cent, against the Doha Programme of Action target of 7 per cent. The official development assistance provided to least developed countries was only 0.1 per cent, against the target of 0.2 per cent of the gross national income of the Development Assistance Committee countries. Foreign direct investment (FDI) flows to the least developed countries as a group increased slightly over the past decade, and the preliminary data for 2022 show a decline of about 30 per cent.⁴ The average external debt of the least developed countries rose from 41 per cent in 2011 to 54 per cent in 2022. More than half of the least developed countries are either in debt distress or at serious risk of debt default (see [A/78/112-E/2023/94](#)). The level of climate finance that the least developed countries are currently receiving is far below requirements. As of May 2021, the least developed countries had received a cumulative total of \$971 million from the Global Environment Facility trust fund for national projects on climate, an amount only

⁴ United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), "Investment flows to least developed countries affected disproportionately by global crises", Investment Trends Monitor, March 2023.

equivalent to 14.5 per cent of total climate change funding since the creation of the Facility (*ibid.*, para. 60).

17. The Office has raised extrabudgetary funds for conducting activities related to following up on, monitoring and coordinating the implementation of the programmes of action for the least developed countries, landlocked developing countries and small island developing States; for conducting relevant campaigns and advocacy activities in support of the programmes of action worldwide and effectively engaging actors such as the private sector, civil society, young people and parliaments in the process; and for facilitating the participation of national focal points from least developed countries, landlocked developing countries and small island developing States in seminars and workshops organized by the Office.

18. The Office needs to further strengthen its strategy for and approach to mobilizing support and resources for the International Conference on Small Island Developing States in 2024 and the implementation of the programmes of action for the least developed countries, landlocked developing countries and small island developing States.

D. Advocacy and outreach

19. The Office of the High Representative developed an advocacy and communications strategy for the period 2021–2024 to highlight the challenges facing the three groups of countries, utilizing various communications tools to disseminate information to relevant stakeholders. A campaign entitled “Most Vulnerable 91” was launched in the light of the devastating impact of COVID-19 on these countries. The Office regularly produced and distributed printed information materials and contributed articles, op-ed pieces and features to leading development newspapers in North America, Europe and Africa.

20. Since 2016, the Office has organized four outreach activities: two campaigns aimed at raising awareness through engagement with journalists (“Voices of a Brighter Future” and “Island Voices”) and two campaigns focused on raising awareness regarding least developed country graduation and achievements (“Towards a Bright Future for Least Developed Countries” and “Least Not Last”). The “Island Voices” podcast series on small island developing States, launched in 2018, will be expanded to tell the stories of people living in other vulnerable country groups in a series called “Together Far Apart”. Some of the episodes were produced in collaboration with the Department of Global Communications.

21. The Fifth United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries was a major opportunity to bring the world’s attention to the plight of the 1.1 billion people living in the most vulnerable States, through major partnerships with, for example, Doha Debates, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization and Canon. In the lead-up to and during the Conference, the Advocacy and Outreach Unit, in close cooperation with the Department of Global Communications, initiated a global campaign to raise the visibility of the Conference and the issues at stake for the least developed countries.

22. In a survey conducted by the Office, Member States expressed the view that the website of the Office should be streamlined for easy navigation and updated with timely and comprehensive information, and suggested that the Office be more active on social and mainstream media.

23. The Office will further strengthen its awareness-raising and advocacy work in support of the least developed countries, landlocked developing countries and small island developing States, in partnership with relevant entities of the United Nations

system, as well as with parliaments, civil society, the media, academia and foundations, to support the effective and timely implementation of the Doha Programme of Action and the next programmes of action for landlocked developing countries and small island developing States. Efforts will also be accelerated to strengthen critical support to ensure the successful and irreversible graduation of least developed countries, in particular through the Sustainable Graduation Support Facility.

24. OIOS noted that the Office has limited resources for advocacy activities. The Office will continue to use these resources in the most efficient and creative way possible, especially with the Advocacy and Outreach Unit being the only team in the Office leading the advocacy and outreach activities for both the third United Nations Conference on Landlocked Developing Countries and the fourth International Conference on Small Island Developing States in 2024. In service of this responsibility, the Office will continue to collaborate with the Department of Global Communications to further enhance its work and to ensure that the information required by stakeholders is delivered in a manner that is timely, comprehensive, creative and easy to navigate.

III. Overview of the programme performance

25. The outputs delivered by the Office of the High Representative from 2008 to 2017 are provided in table 1 below. The number of outputs increased over this period, and the implementation rate of outputs has been consistently high. This reflects the increasing workload of the Office despite limited resources, as observed by OIOS, the Joint Inspection Unit and Member States. The Committee for Programme and Coordination reviewed the programme performance reports for programme 8, Least developed countries, landlocked developing countries and small island developing States, including from the period 2016 to 2022.⁵ During its consideration of the proposed programme plan for 2022 and the programme performance for 2020, the Committee commended the continuous efforts of the Office in supporting the three groups of countries in achieving the 2030 Agenda. It made several recommendations with a view to advancing the sustainable development of these countries, including that the Office continue to forge broad and durable partnerships within and outside the United Nations system, further support and strengthen policies and capacities, and should increase structural transformation in landlocked developing countries. The Committee noted with concern the devastating socioeconomic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and recommended that the General Assembly request the Office to mobilize resources to ensure the participation of the three groups of countries in various processes, and that the Office implement interconnectivity initiatives to bridge islands, combat isolation and maintain small island developing States in the international community. The Committee noted with appreciation the creation of networks of national focal points for the three groups that would promote cooperation between the Office and other entities at all levels and serve as an interface between the global and regional processes and national policy formulation, implementation, monitoring and review. The Committee recommended that the Assembly encourage the Office to fully associate youth and women in that project so that they could fully contribute to finding solutions to challenges faced by those countries. The Assembly endorsed the conclusions and recommendations of the Committee. These recommendations have been incorporated into the 2023 programme and workplans of the Office.

⁵ A/69/16, A/71/16, A/74/16, A/75/16 and A/76/16.

Table 1
Programme performance by outputs delivered from the biennium 2008–2009 to the biennium 2016–2017

	2008–2009	2010–2011	2012–2013	2014–2015	2016–2017
Number of outputs delivered	115	174	252	393	388
Implementation rate (%) of outputs mandated by legislation	89	100	95	94	100
Implementation rate (%) of total outputs mandated and added by the Secretariat	90	100	95	95	100
Ratio of all implemented outputs to outputs initially programmed (%)	117	110	123	104	102

Source: Programme performance reports for the respective bienniums ([A/65/70](#), [A/67/77](#), [A/69/144](#), [A/71/75](#) and [A/73/77](#)).

Note: Data on programme performance by outputs delivered are not available from 2018 onwards.

Table 2
Programme performance by deliverables from 2020 to 2022

	2020	2021	2022
Number of deliverables planned	137	184	193
Number of deliverables delivered	119	189	181
Implementation rate (%) of deliverables	87	103	94

26. In 2020, the Integrated Monitoring and Documentation Information System, which captured biennial results, was replaced by the strategic management application in Umoja, which captures annual results, integrates strategy definition and performance monitoring, and includes dashboards as an end-to-end solution. In 2020, the number of outputs delivered by the Office decreased slightly owing in part to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the liquidity crisis. However, the number of outputs increased in the subsequent years (see table 2 above), matching or exceeding the number of outputs during some of the busiest bienniums for the United Nations system (2014–2015 and 2016–2017).

27. From the biennium 2008–2009 to the biennium 2016–2017, the number of outputs produced by the Office increased by 337 per cent, and the implementation rate of mandated outputs increased from 89 per cent to 100 per cent. During the same period, the total number of regular budget posts increased from 18 to 28, indicating the high efficiency of the Office given its low resource levels despite the expanded workload and demand from the three groups of countries, as described in section V below.

28. The initial regular budget of the Office, for the biennium 2002–2003, was approved with 13 temporary posts, which were subsequently made permanent in the following biennium. In addition, for the biennium 2004–2005, one new post (D-1) was established.⁶ The Secretary-General continues to give priority to section 10 in the programme budget and has increased the allocation to the Office in a context in which the overall budget has been kept at maintenance level. Accordingly, during the past several years, the operational capacity of the Office has been strengthened on both a recurrent and a non-recurrent basis. The Office now has 33 posts with an appropriated budget of \$8.6 million for the year 2023.

⁶ General Assembly resolution [58/270](#) and [A/58/6 \(Sect. 10\)](#).

29. Approximately 80 per cent of total appropriations for the Office are for posts, while non-post resources are mainly for other staff costs, experts, travel of staff and contractual services.

30. The regular budget appropriations are supplemented by extrabudgetary resources, the level of which fluctuates depending on the activities undertaken by the Office during the year for the programmes of action. They are generally earmarked. For example, while a significant amount of voluntary contributions was made available for the preparatory process for the Fifth United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries, funding is not guaranteed after the Conference. The Office has developed its resource mobilization strategy and prepared project documents on mobilizing extrabudgetary resources to support the implementation of the Doha Programme of Action and take forward its five key deliverables. Similarly, resource mobilization strategies have been developed to support the third United Nations Conference on Landlocked Developing Countries and the fourth International Conference on Small Island Developing States and their preparatory processes, as well as follow-up activities for the next programmes of action.

31. In the review by the Joint Inspection Unit of United Nations system support for landlocked developing countries to implement the Vienna Programme of Action (JIU/REP/2021/2), the Inspector noted with concern that, given the broad mandate of the Office, there are vast gaps between the expectations of partners and stakeholders and what the Landlocked Developing Countries Unit can practically deliver given its existing resources. The General Assembly took note of the review in its resolution [77/246](#).

IV. Review of the United Nations system support provided to least developed countries

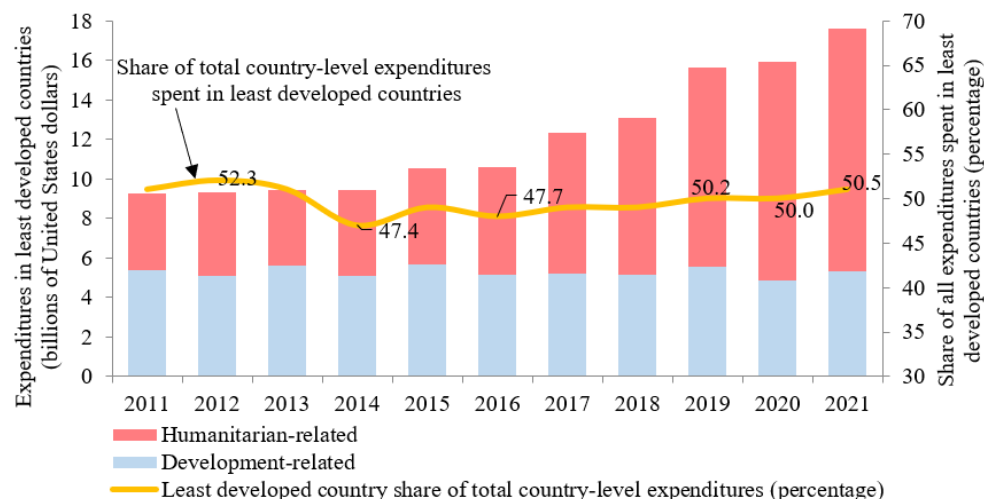
32. The General Assembly, in paragraph 64 of its resolution [75/233](#), urged the United Nations development system to continue to prioritize allocations to least developed countries, while reaffirming that the least developed countries, as the most vulnerable group of countries, need enhanced support to overcome structural challenges that they face in implementing the 2030 Agenda, and requested the United Nations development system to provide assistance to graduating countries in the formulation and implementation of their national transition strategies and to consider country-specific support for graduated countries for a fixed period of time and in a predictable manner.

33. The United Nations system support provided to the least developed countries has become increasingly robust. According to a survey conducted by the Office of the High Representative, there was a high level of involvement of organizations of the United Nations system and other entities in the implementation of the Doha Programme of Action. Some organizations have established specific programmes for the least developed countries, participate in relevant joint programmes with other United Nations system entities and have specific funds and programmes earmarked for least developed countries, including resources for travel to attend intergovernmental meetings, scholarships and research-related travel grants to participate in international processes and knowledge-sharing events on smooth transition strategies. To a large extent, this is a successful outcome of the advocacy efforts of the Office to engage and partner with other United Nations entities, including their governing bodies.

34. There was a notable scaling up of resources for operational activities in the least developed countries between 2017 and 2021 (see figure below). More than half of total country expenditures occurred in least developed countries, after a period that saw this share drop to below 50 per cent. Most of the recent increase can be attributed

to an increase in humanitarian activities. Spending on development activities has remained stable over the past decade, and in 2021 only 40 per cent of total development spending benefited the least developed countries (accounting for 57 per cent of total humanitarian expenditures). Only 13 per cent of the resources used in the least developed countries in 2021 came from core funding. Core resources facilitate the kind of strategic, flexible and rapid response that is particularly important for this group of vulnerable countries, where circumstances often change rapidly (see [A/78/72/Add.1-E/2023/59/Add.1](#)).

Expenditures in least developed countries, 2011–2021



Source: Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2023.

A. Review of the recognition and use of the least developed country category by United Nations development system entities

35. The Office reviewed the results of a questionnaire on the application of the least developed country category by the United Nations development system, which was sent to members of the Inter-Agency Consultative Group for Least Developed Countries in 2022 as part of a joint effort with the Committee for Development Policy to gather information about how the United Nations development system applies the least developed country category.

36. The questionnaire results showed that all United Nations development system organizations recognized the least developed country category. Through their operational activities, they make contributions to development efforts in least developed countries at various levels. However, only a few United Nations development system organizations have earmarked allocations or targets for shares of their core budgets to be allocated to the least developed countries. It was noted with concern that the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank still did not recognize the category in their operations. As in 2017 and 2019, the recognition of the category by United Nations development system organizations does not translate into a consistent application of priorities and budget allocation, and there are large variations in the type and level of assistance provided to least developed countries. No significant policy changes have been reported since 2017 with regard to the application of the category. Assistance is often based on the organizations' own policies, priorities and criteria, which are not necessarily related to least developed country status (see [E/2023/33](#)).

B. Support for graduating and graduated countries

37. Under the Doha Programme of Action, Member States aim to ensure an incentive-based international support structure to graduating and graduated least developed countries, including support for their smooth transition from development and trading partners, as well as the United Nations system, to make graduation sustainable and ensure post-graduation development momentum and the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. The inter-agency task force on least developed country graduation, led by the Office of the High Representative, is providing strengthened and coordinated United Nations system-wide support to the countries graduating from the least developed country category. Some United Nations entities have already set a clear target to continue to provide least-developed-country-specific support to graduated countries. For instance, the United Nations Capital Development Fund continues to support least developed countries for three years after graduation. The Technology Bank for the Least Developed Countries provides support to countries in the process of graduation and for an additional five years post graduation. The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development adjusts the analytical and technical cooperation aspects of its activities to the new institutional environment faced by graduating countries, but its commitment to support these countries does not change. The configuration and resources of resident coordinator offices remain the same irrespective of the graduation status of least developed countries. The new Sustainable Graduation Support Facility established by the Office, together with the Department of Economic and Social Affairs and the Committee for Development Policy secretariat, focuses on the provision of support to countries graduating and graduated from the least developed country category.

38. It is noted with concern that support for graduating and graduated countries and the phasing out of least-developed-country-specific benefits have often been reviewed on a case-by-case basis rather than through an established institutional approach, despite the increasing number of graduating countries.

C. Reporting and monitoring framework

39. Some organizations have reporting and monitoring processes that are tailored to the three groups of countries. The Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) has a planning, monitoring and evaluation platform, known as the programme monitoring tool, that reflects the contribution of their activities to least developed countries, landlocked developing countries and small island developing States, and an aggregate reporting platform, known as the programmatic dashboard, that provides an overview of activities and funds channelled towards least developed countries. The dashboard shows that, in 2021, 65 per cent of all ESCAP activities and projects included the region's least developed countries. The United Nations Population Fund has specific indicators to measure the support provided to the least developed countries through the country programmes, and the indicators of its strategic plan are disaggregated by least developed countries. As part of its Hand-in-Hand Initiative, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations is developing dashboards to monitor progress, wherein relevant indicators are disaggregated by least developed countries and non-least developed countries. The United Nations Industrial Development Organization reports yearly on achievements and the implementation of projects and programmes in all Member States, including the least developed countries, through its integrated results performance framework dashboard. In June 2022, the World Intellectual Property Organization established an in-house coordination mechanism for the implementation of its deliverables for the least developed countries for 2022–2031 to ensure effective coordination and follow-

up on its progress on specific deliverables. The Economic Commission for Africa is helping the least developed countries to align their national planning frameworks with the Doha Programme of Action and track performance by incorporating the Programme of Action as a module in its integrated planning and reporting tool, which enables the alignment of national development plans with the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want. Some entities are developing or have developed data platforms and dashboards to monitor progress.

D. Joint and collaborative partnerships

40. Through its survey, the Office of the High Representative found strong evidence of practices and commitments by organizations of the United Nations system with respect to establishing and implementing joint development support programmes to support the three groups of countries. Resident coordinators are championing efforts to deliver coordinated support of the United Nations development system in least developed countries. They are also endeavouring to harness the expertise of resident and non-resident United Nations entities to meet the specific demands of country Governments.

41. The Office and the World Trade Organization signed a partnership agreement on 11 June 2022 to strengthen cooperation with a view to boosting the participation of least developed countries in the global trading system, in particular by supporting the implementation of the trade-related targets and commitments of the Doha Programme of Action. Under the Partner2Connect initiative, the International Telecommunication Union, the Office of the Envoy of the Secretary-General on Technology and the Office of the High Representative are mobilizing partnerships to facilitate meaningful connectivity and digital transformation, primarily in the hardest-to-connect communities in the least developed countries, landlocked developing countries and small island developing States. Spearheaded by the Office of the High Representative, the Small Island Developing States Global Business Network was established at the Private Sector Partnerships Forum, held in 2014 on the sidelines of the third International Conference on Small Island Developing States. The Network brings together small island developing States and international private sector actors to share best practices and lessons learned in forging private sector partnerships for small island developing States. The Office is working closely and collaboratively with the regional commissions on a range of issues. For instance, ESCAP has integrated a special body on least developed countries, landlocked developing countries and small island developing States into the ministerial segment of its annual session, and the Office substantively contributes to and actively participates in this important annual event. In November 2020, the Office, on behalf of the United Nations, and the International Think Tank for Landlocked Developing Countries signed a memorandum of understanding to forge greater collaboration in their work.

V. Expanded demand and workload

A. Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

42. The special challenges and priorities of the least developed countries feature prominently in the 2030 Agenda. The 2030 Agenda recognized the Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the Decade 2011–2020 as an integral part and provided for effective linkages with the follow-up and review arrangements of all relevant United Nations conferences and processes, including on least developed countries, landlocked developing countries and small island developing

States.⁷ The least developed countries have integrated the 2030 Agenda into their national development strategies.

43. Some countries have made progress towards the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda. However, the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic and its lingering impacts, the war in Ukraine and its severe economic and social consequences, and the devastating impacts of climate change have seriously affected the global development landscape. Hard-won development gains have reversed, and the Goals have faced a major setback. A preliminary assessment of the roughly 140 targets with data show that only about 12 per cent are on track and the rest are either off track or have regressed. Under current trends, 575 million people will still be living in extreme poverty in 2030. About half of them will be living in least developed countries.

44. The fulfilment of the 2030 Agenda is vitally important for securing the well-being, dignity and rights of the millions of people in the least developed countries, landlocked developing countries and small island developing States that are suffering from extreme poverty, hunger, malnutrition and various health emergencies. Unfortunately, with a business-as-usual approach, those groups of countries are highly unlikely to achieve the Goals by 2030.

45. The Organization needs to strengthen its capacity and sharpen the focus of its work on the Goals, with particular attention to the least developed countries, landlocked developing countries and small island developing States. This will require the Office of the High Representative to redouble its efforts in pushing for the implementation of the Goals in the remaining years of the 2030 Agenda. The Office must therefore be strengthened to enable it to improve the coordination of United Nations system-wide support to the least developed countries, landlocked developing countries and small island developing States to ensure the accelerated implementation of the 2030 Agenda in these countries.

46. The Office needs to play a key role in providing substantive and analytical support to the least developed countries, without duplicating the existing work of the United Nations system, including at the regional and country levels, to ensure that those countries can actively participate in all major United Nations conferences and summits and related follow-up activities, and that their priorities are duly reflected in the proceedings and outcome documents. This includes the high-level political forum on sustainable development, the Sustainable Development Goals Summit, the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the Economic and Social Council forum on financing for development follow-up and processes related to Our Common Agenda, including the Summit of the Future. In this context, it is important to strengthen the capacity of the Office to enhance its role in providing support to the least developed countries in reflecting their priorities in major conferences and summits in the economic, social and environmental fields, building upon the proposals included in the proposed programme budget for 2024.

B. Support for the implementation of the Doha Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries

47. Under the Doha Programme of Action, the Office of the High Representative is mandated to assist the Secretary-General in the systematic and effective follow-up and monitoring of the implementation of the Programme of Action and the full mobilization and coordination of all parts of the United Nations system, including

⁷ General Assembly resolution 70/1, para. 82.

through the use of data, with a view to facilitating the coordinated implementation of and coherence in the follow-up and monitoring of the Programme of Action at the country, regional and global levels aligned with the 2030 Agenda.

48. The Doha Programme of Action contains a number of ambitious and quantifiable targets, deliverables and commitments in support of the sustainable development of the least developed countries. The Secretary-General is requested to explore the feasibility of establishing five key deliverables for the least developed countries, namely, an online university, food stockholding, an international investment support centre, the Sustainable Graduation Support Facility and a crises mitigation and resilience-building mechanism. Preparations are under way to carry out the feasibility studies necessary for these deliverables.

49. While the Doha Programme of Action is guided by the principle of shared responsibility and mutual accountability between least developed countries and their development partners, the ownership, leadership and primary responsibility for development in least developed countries rests with the countries themselves. The successful implementation of the Programme of Action is therefore contingent upon its meaningful integration into the national strategic plans of least developed countries and its timely application in relevant fields, in tandem with the support that the development partners of those countries committed themselves to providing in the Programme of Action.

50. Under the Doha Programme of Action, each least developed country Government should develop an ambitious national implementation strategy regarding the Programme of Action and integrate the provisions thereof into its national policies and strategies and United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework and conduct regular country-led and country-driven reviews, with the full involvement of all key stakeholders.

51. In the Doha Programme of Action, Member States called upon the entities of the United Nations development system to integrate the Programme of Action into their strategic plans and annual work programmes and reporting, and also to support the resident coordinators in the least developed countries and to assist them in the mainstreaming of the Programme of Action into development planning at the country level in a coordinated and cohesive manner.⁸

52. Similarly, the General Assembly called upon development partners and all other relevant actors to implement the Doha Programme of Action by integrating it into their respective national cooperation policy frameworks, programmes and activities, as appropriate, to ensure enhanced, predictable and targeted support to the least developed countries, as set out in the Programme of Action, and the delivery of their commitments, and to consider appropriate measures to overcome shortfalls or shortcomings, if any.⁹

53. The implementation of the Doha Programme of Action and its integration into national development strategies are vitally important for the least developed countries and could contribute significantly to addressing the ongoing challenges that they have been facing in a sustainable and resilient manner and leveraging the opportunities offered by their natural resources, growing working-age population, innovative homegrown ideas and creativities, as well as to addressing new and emerging issues to catalyse the greatest multiplier effects on growth and development.

⁸ General Assembly resolution [76/258](#), annex, para. 291.

⁹ General Assembly resolution [77/177](#), para. 4.

54. The Office of the High Representative will build knowledge resources that will inform national-level mainstreaming of the Doha Programme of Action in all least developed countries and that will also support the achievement of the 2030 Agenda and the Paris Agreement, and recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. The Office needs to strengthen the capacity of stakeholders in the least developed countries, in particular national policymakers, to mainstream the Programme of Action into national development plans and strategies, as well as other policy formulation, budgeting, monitoring, evaluation and reporting processes. The Office also needs to facilitate the sharing of experiences and best practices in mainstreaming the Programme of Action into national development processes by using the network of national focal points of least developed countries.

C. National-level follow-up and monitoring, and support for the national focal points

55. In paragraph 306 of the Doha Programme of Action, the Office of the High Representative is invited to further strengthen the network of national focal points of least developed countries and to convene annual meetings of the focal points to facilitate the sharing of experiences and best practices in mainstreaming the Programme of Action and the Sustainable Development Goals into national development processes, as well as their implementation and follow-up; networking among peers; and better understanding of existing means of implementation, including viable financing and business models.

56. In the Doha Programme of Action, it is stated that efficient follow-up and monitoring mechanisms adapted at the national, subregional, regional and global levels are crucial for the successful implementation of the Programme of Action and are fully aligned with existing frameworks such as the Sustainable Development Goals. National, regional and global mechanisms should be mutually complementary and reinforcing. Necessary steps will be taken to ensure the mutual accountability of least developed countries and their development partners for delivering on their commitments under the Doha Programme of Action.

57. National-level arrangements are particularly important given that the Doha Programme of Action is owned and led by the least developed countries themselves. At the national level, each least developed country Government should develop an ambitious national implementation strategy regarding the Programme of Action and integrate the provisions of the Programme of Action into its national policies and development and United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework and conduct regular country-led and country-driven reviews, with the full involvement of all key stakeholders.

58. The Office of the High Representative, in coordination with the relevant resident coordinator offices, needs to conduct regular follow-up with the 46 national focal points and provide them with the necessary technical advice and specific tools for mainstreaming the Doha Programme of Action in their national development strategies, developing national implementation road maps, implementing specific projects and programmes, and conducting regular reviews and monitoring of the implementation of the Programme of Action with authentic and comparable data and statistics. The Office also needs to adopt capacity-building measures for the national focal points to enable them to carry out these activities in an effective and efficient manner.

D. Support for the implementation of the five key deliverables

1. Online university

59. The Doha Programme of Action contains a target to undertake feasibility studies to explore the possibility of establishing an online university or other equivalent platforms for least developed countries to support online graduate and post-graduate university-level science, technology, engineering and mathematics education in least developed countries and recently graduated countries. The key objectives of the proposed online university are: (a) to provide policy support to promote distance education and open learning for graduate and post-graduate studies in science, technology, engineering and mathematics; (b) to ensure a 50/50 gender balance at all levels while guaranteeing special access for the poorest and people in vulnerable situations; (c) to create a virtual network of educational institutions within and beyond least developed countries; (d) to assist in course design and curriculum development; and (e) to lead to scale and sustainability of the education system. Member States requested the Secretary-General to submit a report outlining, inter alia, the mapping of existing initiatives, possible new modalities, resource requirements, accreditation and sustainable funding sources to the General Assembly at its seventy-eighth session for its consideration.¹⁰

60. In the Doha Programme of Action, Member States committed themselves to supporting the least developed countries in gaining access to and effectively utilizing digital tools and technologies to improve education outcomes for all learners to meet learning and educational requirements according to the local context. Member States also committed themselves to supporting large-scale national efforts to utilize all forms of distance learning technology, including low-cost technology, in support of remote learning and online education, including through digital technologies, for better resilience in national equitable and efficient education systems, as well as training to develop the digital skills of students and educators.

61. While least developed countries have been making considerable progress in access to education in terms of enrolment in primary and secondary school, they are facing persistent challenges in tertiary-level enrolment, with gross enrolment in tertiary education at only 11 per cent in 2020. Gender disparities and disparities for the poorest and most vulnerable also exist in tertiary-level education. Furthermore, the education systems of least developed countries are not fully fit for purpose, as the existing systems are unable to equip young people with the knowledge, experience, skills and values needed to thrive in a rapidly changing world of work, in which many traditional jobs are becoming obsolete.

62. An online university would make important contributions to addressing the challenges related to the quantity and quality of tertiary education and the achievement of Goal 4, which has the overarching vision of enabling all learners to acquire the knowledge and skills to promote sustainable development.

63. The Office of the High Representative, in full coordination with the United Nations system, will prepare the report of the Secretary-General and carry out follow-up activities in accordance with relevant intergovernmental mandates in the run-up to the establishment of the entity through policy, technical and logistical support. The Office will also contribute to the mobilization of the necessary political support and resources through advocacy and outreach activities. The Office will leverage United Nations system-wide expertise, facilities and resources to support online education facilities in least developed countries in order to provide poor and disadvantaged students with access to the Internet and digital devices. The proposed entity, if

¹⁰ General Assembly resolution [76/258](#), annex, paras. 45 and 52.

established, could make important contributions to the achievement of Goal 4 and other relevant Goals.

2. Food stockholding

64. In the Doha Programme of Action, Member States recognized the need for dealing with severe food insecurities in the least developed countries and requested the Secretary-General to explore the feasibility, effectiveness and administrative modalities of a system of stockholding for those countries on a regional and subregional basis, or alternative means, such as cash transfers, taking into account possible economic implications and risks, and to report thereon to the General Assembly for its consideration at its seventy-seventh session.¹¹ Accordingly, the Secretary-General submitted his report to the Assembly on food insecurity in the least developed countries: options for a system of stockholding and complementary means at the global, regional and subregional levels ([A/77/291](#)).

65. The General Assembly took note of the recommendations of the Secretary-General, including with regard to a food import financing facility, a credit guarantee facility and a special food reserve system, and requested the Secretary-General to carry out a study, with secretariat support provided by the Office of the High Representative, in order to further assess the proposed recommendations for the least developed countries, outlining their modalities, terms of reference, governance and support structures, and to submit a report with his recommendations to the Assembly at its seventy-eighth session.¹²

66. Food and nutrition security remain a serious challenge for the least developed countries, where the average rate of undernourishment was 22.1 per cent in 2022 (see [A/78/112-E/2023/94](#)). Food systems in the least developed countries are highly vulnerable to external shocks, and many of those countries often experience food emergencies. All least developed countries are classified as net food-importing developing countries by the World Trade Organization. Estimates from the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations show that the number of people experiencing severe food insecurity increased from 243.2 in 2020 to 265.9 million in 2021 in those countries (*ibid.*).

67. Food insecurity, malnourishment and the impact of food emergencies put the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals by the least developed countries at serious risk. The implementation of a robust food stockholding system could help in effectively responding to food emergencies and enhance the social safety net in the least developed countries by ensuring a more sustainable and inclusive future for all. The forthcoming Food Systems Stocktaking Moment, the first to be convened by the Secretary-General following the United Nations Food Systems Summit in 2021, will be an opportunity to further advance this recommendation.

68. As mandated by the General Assembly, the Office will support a scoping exercise to identify the essential elements and considerations for an efficient stockholding system that is tailored to the specific needs of the least developed countries. Operational requirements, stakeholder engagement, governance structures, financial mechanisms and logistical considerations will be assessed as part of the exercise. The proposed system will ensure complementarity with existing initiatives while avoiding duplication of efforts. Under the system, food stocks will be procured, stored and distributed to support least developed countries during emergencies, with both physical and virtual stocks utilized to ensure flexibility and efficiency.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, para. 42.

¹² General Assembly resolution [77/177](#), para. 26.

69. The Office, in full coordination with the United Nations system, will support the scoping exercise and subsequent measures as mandated by the General Assembly in the run-up to the implementation of food stockholding for the least developed countries by leveraging the collective expertise of the United Nations system and mobilizing political support and advocacy work.

3. Investment promotion regime for least developed countries

70. In the Doha Programme of Action, Member States committed themselves to implementing the decision contained in the Addis Ababa Action Agenda to adopt and implement investment promotion regimes for least developed countries. They reiterated the decision to provide financial and technical support for project preparation and contract negotiation, advisory support for investment-related dispute resolution, access to information on investment facilities, improving enabling environments, and risk insurance and guarantees such as through the Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency. In this regard, Member States requested the Secretary-General to explore the feasibility of establishing an international investment support centre for the least developed countries in the form of a one-stop shop to mobilize support for implementation of the investment promotion regime for least developed countries and graduated countries, and to submit the study and recommendations to the General Assembly for its consideration at its seventy-eighth session.¹³

71. FDI is an important source of development finance for the 46 least developed countries. However, FDI flows to those countries are historically small in volume and concentrated in a few countries and sectors. After a steep decline in the biennium 2016–2017, FDI flows to least developed countries recorded a slight uptick in 2021, reaching \$26 billion. Their share of global FDI flows remains low at just 1.6 per cent.¹⁴

72. There is growing consensus within the international community that much more could and should be done to increase the share of FDI flows to least developed countries and their geographical and sectoral diversification and to mobilize flows towards accelerating the sustainable development process in those countries and helping them to graduate.

73. As requested by Member States,¹⁵ the Office of the High Representative will conduct a comprehensive mapping of the investment support facilities currently available to the least developed countries, including within the United Nations system, at the global, regional and national levels, through a critical analysis of their effectiveness and ease of access for beneficiaries, with a view to avoiding duplication of existing facilities, mechanisms or initiatives. The Office will also make proposals on the establishment of an international investment support centre for the least developed countries and its administrative and governance aspects for the consideration of Member States.

74. The Office, in full coordination with the United Nations system, will support the subsequent measures mandated by the General Assembly in the run-up to the establishment of an international investment support centre for the least developed countries in the form of a one-stop shop. The Office will leverage the collective resources and expertise available in the United Nations and carry out the advocacy necessary to mobilize resources and support.

¹³ General Assembly resolution 76/258, annex, para. 261.

¹⁴ UNCTAD, “Investment flows to least developed countries affected disproportionately by global crises”.

¹⁵ General Assembly resolution 76/258, annex, para. 261.

4. Sustainable Graduation Support Facility

75. The Doha Programme of Action places special focus on the priorities of graduating and graduated countries and contains provisions for special support measures for these countries. Member States reiterated their conviction that no country graduating from the least developed country category should have its development progress disrupted or reversed.

76. In the Doha Programme of Action, Member States welcomed the establishment of the Sustainable Graduation Support Facility by the Office of the High Representative, as Chair of the inter-agency task force on least developed country graduation, and the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, as the secretariat for the Committee for Development Policy, as a concrete, country-led solution of dedicated capacity development support. Member States are called upon to support this initiative in order to strengthen coordinated and coherent United Nations system support and bring together country-specific integrated graduation-related advisory and capacity-building services responding to the concerns of Member States regarding graduation and serving as a repository and clearing house of initiatives and projects pursued in support of these countries.¹⁶

77. Despite the considerable progress in and opportunities that underpin graduation, the fact remains that many of the development challenges faced by least developed countries continue to prevail even after graduation and are exacerbated in the light of ongoing global challenges, which are expected to result in serious contractions of their economies and major setbacks for the development prospects of the graduated countries.

78. The Office, as Chair of the inter-agency task force on least developed country graduation, will support the full operationalization of the Sustainable Graduation Support Facility, aimed at assisting all least developed countries that have been assessed as eligible for graduation at least once and the graduated countries. As of April 2023, there were 16 graduating least developed countries (6 in Africa, 7 in Asia and 3 in the Pacific). The Facility is designed to operate on the basis of demand and has six main service lines, as follows:

- (a) Addressing the loss of existing least-developed-country-specific international support measures;
- (b) Improving the ability of graduating and graduated least developed countries to obtain non-least-developed-country-specific support;
- (c) Preparing and implementing a smooth transition strategy;
- (d) Assistance in accessing financing transition and beyond;
- (e) Facilitating South-South cooperation, dialogue and the sharing of country- and region-specific knowledge and experience;
- (f) Ensuring effective participation in the monitoring process of the Committee for Development Policy.

5. Crises mitigation and resilience-building measures for least developed countries

79. In the Doha Programme of Action, Member States underlined the need for reinforcing the existing comprehensive multi-hazard early warning system and comprehensive multi-hazard crises mitigation and resilience-building measures for least developed countries aligned with the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030 as a key instrument to build resilience against and mitigate the

¹⁶ Ibid., para. 283.

impacts of various shocks, and committed themselves to making the best use of existing initiatives. They also invited the Secretary-General to undertake, with least developed countries, a comprehensive study involving all relevant United Nations development system entities and other relevant stakeholders on the existing arrangements, lessons learned and identified gaps, and to submit it to the General Assembly for further consideration.¹⁷

80. The least developed countries are highly exposed and vulnerable to natural disasters and other impacts of climate change. Among the more than 120 countries reporting across all the Sendai Framework targets for disaster losses in 2019, least developed countries accounted for 48 per cent of livelihood disruptions, 40 per cent of deaths, 17 per cent of economic losses and 14 per cent of infrastructure damage, although their combined GDP amounted to only 1.3 per cent of global GDP,¹⁸ owing primarily to their limited fiscal space and resilience capacity.

81. Comprehensive multi-hazard crises mitigation and resilience-building measures will contribute directly to the implementation of the Doha Programme of Action by addressing climate change and environmental degradation and building resilience against future shocks for achieving sustainable development.

82. The Office of the High Representative, in full consultation with the United Nations system, will contribute to the report of the Secretary-General and provide the support necessary to carry out the subsequent follow-up activities mandated by the General Assembly. The Office will also mobilize resources and support to implement the following measures, mindful of the need to avoid duplication of efforts across the United Nations system:

(a) Adaptation planning and implementation through the formulation of national adaptation plans and the subsequent implementation of the policies, programmes and projects identified by least developed countries;

(b) Technical assistance to develop operational national risk information systems that support policymaking and decision-making by all stakeholders, including national and local governments, private sector business operations and the insurance industry;

(c) Technical assistance to prepare for financial risk management, especially as related to disasters, and to prepare least developed countries for engagement with the insurance sector with a view to closing the huge gap in insurance coverage;

(d) Identification of gaps in early warning systems in least developed countries, related advocacy to address the gaps, and the sharing of experiences and best practices among least developed countries as a complementary contribution to the work under way under the Early Warnings for All initiative of the Secretary-General;

(e) Reinforcement of comprehensive multi-hazard early warning systems and comprehensive multi-hazard crises mitigation and resilience-building measures.

E. Strategic engagement and partnerships with the resident coordinator system

83. The resident coordinator system is the backbone of system-wide coordinated support for countries to achieve the 2030 Agenda and other intergovernmental agreements implemented at the national level. A total of 92 per cent of host country

¹⁷ Ibid., para. 217.

¹⁸ Ibid., para. 198.

Governments expressed appreciation for the work of resident coordinators in leveraging partnerships to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. Resident coordinators provide the leadership and impartiality required for an integrated policy and programmatic response by United Nations country teams, focused squarely on country needs and priorities. The United Nations country teams are accountable to resident coordinators in terms of their support for efforts to implement the 2030 Agenda, through the management and accountability framework (see [A/78/72-E/2023/59](#)).

84. In the Doha Programme of Action, resident coordinators and United Nations country teams, as well as country-level representatives of the World Bank Group, IMF and other multilateral institutions, are invited to continue to collaborate with and provide support to national follow-up and monitoring.

85. The Office of the High Representative has established a network of resident coordinators in least developed countries with a view to bringing coherence to the United Nations system support for the integration of the Doha Programme of Action into the common country analysis and sustainable development assistance framework and mobilizing partnerships for the implementation of the Programme of Action. The resident coordinators will work collaboratively with least developed country Governments, especially the national focal points for the Doha Programme of Action, and support them in building their capacity to integrate and implement the Programme of Action, as well as to carry out follow-up and monitoring of, and evidence-based reporting on, its implementation. The Office will conduct regular follow-up and coordination with the resident coordinators through the Development Coordination Office to ensure their continued engagement in country-level implementation, follow-up and monitoring of the Programme of Action and to establish seamless connections among the national, regional and global processes. Doing so will help to build a strong foundation for the implementation of the Programme of Action at the country level and ensure the alignment of planning, programming, policy and financing support for the national priorities and needs of least developed countries, enabling the full implementation of the Programme of Action. A similar resident coordinator network has also been established for the landlocked developing countries to support the preparations for the third United Nations Conference on Landlocked Developing Countries and the integration and implementation of the next programme of action for those countries.

F. Research and analytical works

86. Under the Doha Programme of Action, the Office of the High Representative is mandated to strengthen its research and analytical functions to provide substantive support to least developed countries in group consultations and in their participation in other intergovernmental meetings and conferences, in order to facilitate science- and evidence-based decisions in favour of least developed countries, taking into account new and emerging challenges and opportunities; to support the work of the General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council, the high-level political forum on sustainable development and CEB as they relate to least developed countries; and to foster debate and innovative thinking, promote consensus on ways forward and coordinate efforts to achieve the implementation of the Programme of Action. The Office is also mandated to monitor sectoral policy developments at the intergovernmental processes of relevant international and regional organizations.¹⁹

87. The challenges and priorities of the three groups of countries, as reflected in their respective programmes of action, are unique in nature. In the current fast-

¹⁹ Ibid., para. 304 (b).

changing global context, the state of the poor and the prospects of these countries are seriously affected by major global economic, financial and trade-related developments, as well as new and emerging challenges, which often cannot be fully anticipated. These factors require the conduct of in-depth diagnostic studies and increased evidence-based monitoring activities. The existing research and analytical work carried out by the United Nations system is focused on the trends and situations of countries by level of income and often by geographical location divided into various regions and subregions. Very few studies provide disaggregated data and analysis on the least developed countries, landlocked developing countries and small island developing States, which seriously constrains the ability of those groups of countries to participate effectively in discussions with evidence-based data and information. The Office therefore needs to be able to carry out research and analytical work on the issues faced by these countries, including new and emerging ones, in order to better underpin policy advice and operational and advocacy work.

88. The Office requires the capability and expertise to support science- and evidence-based decisions and policy formulation at the intergovernmental level. Data expertise can play a vital role by enabling the Office to conduct thorough research and analysis, providing a solid foundation for evidence-based decisions that favour the least developed countries. Gathering and evaluating pertinent data will help in identifying emerging challenges and potential opportunities. By providing scientifically backed insights, the Office will facilitate constructive discussions during group consultations and intergovernmental meetings. This approach will ensure that the Office can support Member States in making well-informed decisions that take into account the evolving circumstances of the most vulnerable countries.

89. In addition, data expertise will facilitate diligent monitoring of international policy developments that are relevant to least developed countries. It will also facilitate a vigilant watch over the outcomes of major global conferences and continuous assessment of their implications. This proactive approach will allow for the identification of gaps, the anticipation of potential impacts and engagement in advocacy efforts aimed at the effective and timely implementation of the Doha Programme of Action. By staying up-to-date on sectoral policy developments at the international and regional levels, the Office will provide valuable insights that contribute to the Organization's efforts to support and empower these vulnerable nations.

90. Data expertise will also enable the Office to produce flagship reports, analytical papers, briefing notes and issue papers focusing on the complex economic, social and environmental challenges and contemporary issues facing the world, with a particular focus on the three groups of countries, and to make recommendations on policy options to tackle the challenges on the ground that can inform ongoing discussions. It will also help in identifying effective interventions for tangible solutions, enhancing resilience and strengthening multilateral cooperation.

G. Monitoring of sectoral policy developments

91. In the Doha Programme of Action, it was decided that the Office of the High Representative will monitor sectoral policy developments at the intergovernmental processes of relevant international and regional organizations and international policy developments of relevance to least developed countries, including the outcomes of major global conferences, and carry out relevant advocacy efforts aimed at the effective and timely implementation of the Doha Programme of Action.²⁰

²⁰ Ibid., paras. 304–305.

92. As mentioned earlier, discussions and consultations continue to take place on various thematic issues under the umbrella of various United Nations conferences, summits and forums. These thematic and sectoral discussions lead to specific recommendations and action plans that often have ramifications for the least developed countries and other vulnerable countries. The Office therefore needs to closely monitor sectoral policy developments at the intergovernmental processes of relevant international and regional organizations, analyse their ramifications for the least developed countries, landlocked developing countries and small island developing States and provide substantive support to enable the least developed countries to actively participate in these processes and highlight their challenges and key priorities.

H. Operational guidelines for the support provided to countries in conflict and post-conflict situations

93. In the Doha Programme of Action, the work of the Inter-Agency Consultative Group for Least Developed Countries, led by the Office of the High Representative, is welcomed, and all relevant United Nations entities are invited to collaborate under the Inter-Agency Consultative Group to develop operational guidelines for their support to countries in conflict and post-conflict situations.

94. The world is facing the highest number of violent conflicts since the Second World War, and 2 billion people, a quarter of humanity, are living in places affected by such conflict (see [S/PV.9250](#)). Three in four least developed countries are also affected by conflict and post-conflict situations. A total of 24 of the 46 least developed countries had active conflicts in 2019. Conflict-affected least developed countries require context-specific approaches to address poverty, security and governance in an integrated manner.²¹

95. The international community must strengthen support for least developed countries affected by fragility and conflict in order to address root causes of conflict, country-specific needs and situations, including broad-based, inclusive and rapid socioeconomic development, with a special focus on rebuilding better national institutions and capacity, rebuilding critical infrastructure and generating productive employment and decent work for all.²²

96. In the Doha Programme of Action, bilateral donors and multilateral institutions are encouraged to scale up support for these countries. The support should be tailored to peacebuilding and State-building with a view to achieving sustainable development, building a peaceful society that is just and inclusive, building resilience against future crises, promoting a skilled workforce and efficient institutions, and accelerating inclusive economic growth and sustainable development.

97. The United Nations system has extensive programmes addressing conflict and post-conflict situations. The Office of the High Representative, under the framework of the Inter-Agency Consultative Group for Least Developed Countries, will coordinate the development of operational guidelines for the United Nations system support provided to countries in conflict and post-conflict situations and conduct regular reviews and follow-up of their implementation.

²¹ Ibid., para. 81.

²² Ibid., para. 91.

I. Support for the development of a multidimensional vulnerability index

98. The General Assembly decided that the Department of Economic and Social Affairs and the Office of the High Representative, within their respective mandates, should support the work of the High-level Panel on the Development of a Multidimensional Vulnerability Index for Small Island Developing States by acting as secretariat, and requested the Secretary-General to provide an update report on the progress of work to the Assembly at its seventy-seventh session.²³ The Office, together with the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, thus serves as secretariat of the Panel and is responsible for producing and editing background papers and the Panel's interim and final reports, supporting the Panel's communications and outreach, coordinating the engagement of the Panel with all stakeholders and organizing the Panel's meetings and other events.²⁴ The Office and the Department of Economic and Social Affairs have been providing focused substantive, technical and political expertise in support of the Panel's work, including by coordinating contributions from across the United Nations system and leading an advocacy strategy that seeks to encourage the adoption and use of the index, including among international financial institutions (A/77/218, para. 19). The Office will continue to provide substantive and technical support to the work related to the index and the advocacy strategy.

J. Substantive and organizational support for the fourth International Conference on Small Island Developing States and the third United Nations Conference on Landlocked Developing Countries and follow-up to the next programmes of action

99. The Office of the High Representative is providing substantive and organizational support to the fourth International Conference on Small Island Developing States and the third United Nations Conference on Landlocked Developing Countries. The High Representative has been appointed as the Special Adviser of the Secretary-General on the fourth International Conference on Small Island Developing States and the Secretary-General for the third United Nations Conference on Landlocked Developing Countries.

VI. Conclusions and recommendations

100. The support provided by United Nations system organizations, other international organizations and the Office of the High Representative to the least developed countries has increased. However, the needs of those 46 countries – which constitute almost one quarter of the 193 States Members of the United Nations, are the most vulnerable countries and have a cumulative population of more than 1.1 billion – are significant and increasingly urgent.

101. The United Nations system must therefore scale up its substantive and technical assistance to the least developed countries in a timely, long-term, predictable and flexible manner. The system should also play an active and

²³ General Assembly resolution 76/203, para. 8 (a).

²⁴ The terms of reference of the High-level Panel are prepared by the Office of the President of the General Assembly and the secretariat (Department of Economic and Social Affairs and the Office of the High Representative) in line with General Assembly resolution 76/203 and other relevant documents. See <https://sdgs.un.org/topics/small-island-developing-states/mvi>.

catalytic role in representing those countries at the forums in which they are not represented.

102. The United Nations development system organizations should develop internal guidelines on how to translate the stated priority for least developed countries into their budget allocations or their capacity development projects. They can also establish earmarked allocations or targets for shares of their core budgets to be allocated to least developed countries. There is a need for international organizations, including the World Bank and IMF, to recognize the category of least developed countries and implement tailored programmes to ensure coherent and consistent global support for the most vulnerable countries of the world. It is important for international organizations to fully integrate the Doha Programme of Action into their operational mandates and to create a specific unit and focal points for the least developed countries.

103. The United Nations development system should expand the use of the least developed country category in programming and budgeting. Support for graduating and graduated countries needs to be integrated into work programmes as an established institutional approach in the light of the increasing number of graduating countries and their need for continued support from the United Nations development system.

104. The Office supports the 92 most vulnerable countries in accordance with its large and diverse mandate. Given the complexity of the geographical and structural constraints that these countries are facing, together with the disproportionate impacts of new and emerging challenges, the need for support from the Office is paramount. Over the years, the responsibilities of the Office have increased significantly in their scope and complexity. In addition to its original mandates, the Office is required to carry out the following mandatory activities: provision of substantive and technical support to the least developed countries, landlocked developing countries and small island developing States for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the respective programmes of action; national-level follow-up and monitoring of their implementation; and monitoring of sectoral policy developments at the intergovernmental processes of relevant international and regional organizations. The substantive and technical support provided to group consultative processes has also expanded considerably compared with earlier periods.

105. The Office, in cooperation with other organizational entities, will assist the least developed countries in mainstreaming the Doha Programme of Action into their national policies and programmes. The Office will follow up on action taken at the national level on the basis of input from Governments, United Nations system agencies, civil society organizations and other relevant stakeholders, and will support follow-up of the Programme of Action by least developed countries at the global and sectoral levels. The Office is also mandated to further strengthen the network of national focal points of least developed countries. Such activities will entail significant increases in the responsibilities of the Office and other actors in terms of organizing and conducting workshops, seminars and other activities at the global, regional and national levels and conducting regular follow-up and monitoring at the country level.

106. The Office will conduct research and analytical work to facilitate science- and evidence-based decisions on least developed country and landlocked developing country priorities, taking into account new and emerging challenges and opportunities; to support the work of the General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council, the high-level political forum on sustainable development, Our Common Agenda and CEB as they relate to the least developed countries; and to

foster debate and innovative thinking, promote consensus on ways forward and coordinate efforts to achieve the implementation of the Doha Programme of Action.

107. The five key deliverables of the Doha Programme of Action, namely, an online university, food stockholding, an international investment support centre, the Sustainable Graduation Support Facility and a crises mitigation and resilience-building mechanism, will require a significant amount of substantive work to conduct a detailed mapping exercise and feasibility studies and to carry out subsequent activities in the run-up to their final implementation and the necessary follow-up activities in line with intergovernmental mandates.

108. The Office will strengthen the Inter-Agency Consultative Groups for Least Developed Countries and for Landlocked Developing Countries. The Office will coordinate the development of operational guidelines for the United Nations system support provided to countries in conflict and post-conflict situations and conduct regular reviews and follow-up of their implementation to ensure tailored and scaled-up support in a coordinated manner to those countries.

109. The Office has been providing focused substantive, technical and political expertise in support of the High-level Panel on the Development of a Multidimensional Vulnerability Index, including by coordinating contributions from across the United Nations system and leading an advocacy strategy that seeks to encourage the adoption and use of the index, including among international financial institutions. The Office will continue to provide substantive and technical support to the work related to the index and the advocacy strategy.

110. With a view to increasing coherence and coordination in the implementation of the Doha Programme of Action and promoting the research, analytical and data management capacity of the Office, the placement of the Policy Development and Coordination, Monitoring and Reporting Service, the Advocacy and Outreach Unit and the research and analytical coordination functions in the Office's organizational structure will be reviewed.

111. Trust funds for least developed countries and landlocked developing countries provide important complementary support to the work of the Office in fulfilling its expanded mandate and carrying out advocacy and outreach activities. Member States are urged to substantially increase their extrabudgetary contributions for effective follow-up to the Doha Programme of Action and the Vienna Programme of Action.

112. The Secretary-General proposes significantly strengthening the capacity and functions of the Office in view of the increased demand from the three groups of countries, improving its strategic position in dealing with key development issues and processes relevant to the most vulnerable countries and providing important service benefits to them while improving its performance implementation rate. It is recommended that the General Assembly endorse these proposals.