



**United Nations**

# **Committee for Development Policy**

**Report on the twenty-sixth session  
(4–8 March 2024)**

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*Note*

Symbols of United Nations documents are composed of letters combined with figures. Mention of such a symbol indicates a reference to a United Nations document.

## *Summary*

The present report contains the main findings and recommendations of the Committee for Development Policy at its twenty-sixth session. As its contribution to the theme of the 2024 session of the Economic and Social Council, the Committee addressed the challenges and opportunities of innovation ecosystems for development, structural change and equity. It also undertook the triennial review of the least developed countries; the monitoring of countries that are graduating or have graduated from the list of least developed countries; a discussion of graduation in the global context; and other activities related to the least developed countries in support of a smooth transition from the least developed country category.

The Committee analysed the challenges and opportunities of innovation ecosystems for development, structural change and equity. Innovation can be a powerful driver of sustainable development, yet that potential remains vastly under-realized, particularly in developing countries but also for public interest purposes across the world. The current global crises and shifts in the global economy and innovation landscape are reshaping challenges and opportunities for harnessing technology for sustainable development. That requires a reassessment of science, technology and innovation policy frameworks by national Governments and global institutions to create an effective national and global innovation system fit for the twenty-first century. Intellectual property rights are one of the key policy levers in a functioning innovation ecosystem to advance development, structural change and equity, and build resilience to crises. Developing countries require policy frameworks for innovation tailored to their specific priorities and could make more effective use of the existing policy space to pursue priorities for development, equity and productive capacity. The global system in place to support innovation for development needs to be reassessed to be made fit for purpose to ensure innovation for global and regional public goods and for countries to address the challenges of the twenty-first century.

The Committee conducted its triennial review of the list of least developed countries. It recommended Cambodia, Djibouti and Senegal for graduation and found that those countries require a five-year preparatory period. It deferred its decision on a possible recommendation for graduation of the Comoros and Myanmar to the 2027 triennial review. In that review, it will also consider whether Rwanda, Uganda and the United Republic of Tanzania, which met the graduation criteria for the first time in 2024, can be recommended for graduation.

In its enhanced monitoring of countries that are graduating or have graduated from the least developed country category, the Committee reviewed the development progress of three recently graduated countries and six graduating countries. Expressing concern over the limited national capacity of those countries to address various challenges, including those stemming from rising food and fuel prices, less affordable finance, geopolitical tensions, volatile commodity prices, high transportation costs and more frequent and severe disasters, the Committee underscored the importance of addressing those issues with continued support from trading and development partners, as well as United Nations entities. The Committee found that Angola no longer met the criteria for graduation and concluded that the graduation process would recommence when Angola met the criteria for graduation again at a future triennial review.

The Committee welcomed the improved participation of countries in the enhanced monitoring mechanism and encouraged continued reporting on progress in preparing and implementing smooth transition strategies. Acknowledging the positive

feedback and support from Member States regarding the enhanced monitoring mechanism, and subject to the availability of resources, the Committee will review its options regarding the ongoing customization and enhancement of the mechanism to better serve the needs of countries graduating and graduated from the least developed country category.

The Committee reviewed how the changing global context is affecting processes and prospects of graduation from the least developed country category. It found that global shocks and their interplay with domestic factors are posing significant challenges to countries already graduating, and dimming the graduation prospects of many remaining least developed countries. Current international support for graduation processes is insufficient. While noting a need to redesign international support measures for least developed countries in general, the Committee also calls specifically for the rapid operationalization of the new Sustainable Graduation Support Facility (iGRAD), at a scale commensurate with the challenges. The Committee also found that the concept of graduation and a smooth transition requires a broader rethink and that the graduation framework provided by the General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council and the Committee itself requires updating. The Committee will include that topic in its work programme and looks forward to contributing to the upcoming efforts to update the existing resolutions on smooth transition from the least developed country category.

The Committee proposed to continue holding its current interaction with the Economic and Social Council during its plenary session, as well as separate Council briefings, and will seek additional opportunities to engage with the Council.

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## Chapter I

### **Matters calling for action by the Economic and Social Council or brought to its attention**

#### **A. Matters calling for action by the Council**

##### **Triennial review of the list of least developed countries**

1. The Committee recommends that Cambodia, Djibouti and Senegal graduate from the list of least developed countries. In line with General Assembly resolutions [59/209](#) and [67/221](#), the Committee advises the Economic and Social Council to reiterate the importance for development and trading partners to support graduating countries with concrete measures to facilitate a smooth transition. The Committee finds that all three countries require an extended preparatory period of five years to effectively prepare for graduation.

##### **Monitoring of countries that are graduating or have graduated from the list of least developed countries**

2. The Committee finds that, based on an analysis of the situation and following consultations with the Government of Angola, Angola no longer satisfies the graduation criteria. Based on this finding, the Committee concludes that the graduation process would recommence when, in accordance with the established procedures, and at a future triennial review, Angola meets the criteria for graduation once more. The Committee recommends that the Council take note of this finding and endorse this conclusion.

##### **Graduation support**

3. The changing global context of graduation, including an increase in the frequency and severity of crises and an increase in the number of graduating and graduated countries, increases the demand on the Committee and its secretariat under the enhanced monitoring mechanism. In this context, the Committee views the further strengthening of the capacity of countries to effectively engage in preparing and implementing the smooth transition strategy and the monitoring mechanism as a key element. As a contribution to ensuring the achievement of sustainable graduation, the Committee recommends that the Council request the Secretary-General to provide adequate resources to the Committee's secretariat to enable effective engagement between the Committee and countries participating in the enhanced monitoring mechanism.

4. The Committee finds that countries graduating from the least developed country category are facing an increasingly challenging external environment. This calls for additional support for graduating countries, to ensure that their graduations are smooth and sustainable. A failure to provide adequate support would be a failure of the international community, in particular the United Nations. The Committee is very concerned about the slow operationalization and implementation of the newly established Sustainable Graduation Support Facility (iGRAD). In this regard, the Committee recommends that the Council call upon development partners to urgently provide adequate financial resources to iGRAD to significantly scale up graduation support.



## **B. Matters brought to the attention of the Council**

### **Triennial review**

5. The Committee found that Rwanda, Uganda and the United Republic of Tanzania fulfilled the criteria for graduation for the first time. These countries will be considered for graduation at the next triennial review in 2027.

6. The Committee deferred decisions on a possible recommendation for the graduation of the Comoros and Myanmar to the 2027 triennial review. Timor-Leste and Zambia no longer meet the graduation criteria and are thus not eligible for graduation.

### **Monitoring of countries that are graduating or have graduated from the list of least developed countries**

7. The Committee monitored the development progress of nine countries that have recently graduated or are graduating from the list of least developed countries. It noted, with one exception, an overall advancement towards sustainable graduation, albeit amid challenges stemming from various global crises, geopolitical tensions and climate change. Due to those challenges, many of the countries struggle to maintain macroeconomic stability owing to mounting debt, inflationary pressures and currency devaluation.

8. As a result, many countries require substantial support from their trading and development partners, including entities within the United Nations system, to facilitate their progress towards sustainable graduation. The Committee will continue to review the lessons learned from the implementation of its enhanced monitoring mechanism and report its findings to the Council in 2025.

### **Graduation in the global context**

9. The Committee appreciates that the Council welcomed in 2023 the Committee's finding on the need to update the General Assembly resolutions on smooth transitions. It reiterates its commitment to contribute substantively to that process. The Committee will also initiate a review of the least developed country graduation framework.

## Chapter II

### **Innovation ecosystems for development, structural change and equity**

10. In the Political Declaration adopted at the 2023 Sustainable Development Goals Summit, Member States committed to “bridging the science, technology and innovation divides and the responsible use of science, technology and innovation as drivers of sustainable development and to build the capacities necessary for sustainable transformations” and to “take action to enhance the ability of developing countries to benefit from science, technology, and innovation and address the major structural impediments to accessing new and emerging technologies”. The Committee has analysed the challenges and opportunities of innovation ecosystems for development, structural change and equity. Harnessing the opportunities while overcoming the challenges will be essential for achieving the objectives of the theme of the 2024 session of the Economic and Social Council and the high-level political forum on sustainable development, “Reinforcing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and eradicating poverty in times of multiple crises: the effective delivery of sustainable, resilient and innovative solutions”.

#### **Potential of technological innovation for development is underutilized, which requires a reassessment of domestic and international policy frameworks**

11. Technological innovation can be a powerful driver of sustainable development, yet that potential remains vastly underrealized, particularly in developing countries but also for public interest purposes across the world. At the same time, contemporary global crises, shifts in the global economy and the evolving innovation landscape are reshaping challenges and opportunities for harnessing technology for sustainable development. That requires a reassessment of science, technology and innovation policy frameworks by national Governments and global institutions to create an effective national and global innovation system fit for the twenty-first century.

12. Technology can increase productivity, advance inclusion, build resilience against crises, and address urgent global priorities such as climate change, infectious diseases, food insecurity, and gender and other social inequities. The importance of technological innovation is recognized throughout the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and in the Political Declaration adopted at the 2023 Sustainable Development Goals Summit. However, that potential has not been fully realized, particularly for the structural transformation of developing countries, the transition of least developed countries out of systemic vulnerability, and inclusion and equity in all countries.

13. Critical gaps include the undersupply of technologies for many development priorities; extreme concentration of global science, technology and innovation investments and capacity in a few countries; and weak science, technology and innovation capacity and knowledge assets in most developing countries, despite the emergence of China and other global South countries as poles of innovation. Policy arrangements for the transfer of technology have been unfavourable, and the diffusion of technologies to address global climate and pandemic challenges has been inadequate. Existing frameworks and institutions are often inadequate to incentivize innovation in a dynamic setting where the drivers of innovation are continuously evolving, and to ensure access to the products of innovation, especially in responding to emergencies. There are severe inequities, including social and gender inequities, in both access to science, technology and innovation opportunities, such as education in science, technology, engineering and mathematics, and the outputs of science, technology and innovation systems.

14. For developing countries, the long-standing challenges remain acute, but are aggravated in the twenty-first century knowledge economy driven by knowledge assets and dominated by intellectual property monopolies. We are at a juncture in which Governments are still working to address the long-standing challenges while confronted with a new generation of global shifts and trends. There are ongoing transformations in how and where innovation, research and development take place, and in the drivers of productivity growth. Those include the shifts in the global economy with the rise of financialization and the increasing importance of intangibles; the advance of the fourth industrial revolution; demographic changes, such as ageing populations in countries at various stages of development and the untapped potential of a youthful population in many developing countries; climate change; new geopolitics tied to, among other things, the distribution of critical minerals for the energy transition; and developments in global agriculture.

15. Those developments have great potential, but present equally great challenges. Depending on how they are harnessed in domestic and global science, technology, and innovation policy frameworks and corresponding legislation, they can work for or against public priorities, defining how the benefits of the new economy are distributed.

16. The current context demands a fundamental discussion about national and global innovation ecosystems, which should lead to a reframing of policy discourse and policy on innovation and innovation ecosystems. The Committee's work in 2023 and 2024 addresses those challenges and focuses on issues related to intellectual property rights as an important part of a well-functioning innovation ecosystem.

**Intellectual property rights are one of the key policy levers in a functioning innovation ecosystem that can advance development, structural change and equity, and build resilience to crises**

17. Innovation is not an end in itself but serves multiple ends that extend beyond economic growth, including structural change, meeting social and environmental goals and building resilience against crises. Intellectual property rights are a public policy tool in innovation ecosystems. The objective of such rights is to incentivize innovation and ensure the dissemination of its benefits. The myth that the stronger the patent protection, the better, is not grounded in evidence. Strong patent protection can also create obstacles to innovation and limit the diffusion of the benefits of scientific progress.

18. The current intellectual property system (national, regional and international frameworks) is dysfunctional in many ways for the purposes of equitable and sustainable development. The existing rules and institutions were not formulated with a view to supporting innovation or the dissemination of new technologies for development purposes or for facing planetary-scale shocks. They are biased towards rewarding innovators over users. Intellectual property protection often far exceeds what would be necessary to incentivize innovation, leading to high prices and an undersupply of public goods and reducing the global dissemination of the benefits of innovation, which contributes to new inequalities.

19. Existing international agreements leave Governments the policy space to balance the goals of innovation and access in the form of flexibilities such as compulsory licensing and government procurement, and to formulate and implement intellectual property frameworks and policies fit for their national priorities. Flexibilities are well established in legal frameworks and practice in technologically advanced economies, to meet public objectives. This is exemplified in the use of compulsory licences for pandemic countermeasures in many countries with well-established intellectual property frameworks and innovation ecosystems. Yet

developing countries face obstacles in making use of flexibilities owing to gaps in information, trade sanctions and other forms of political pressure, and incompatible national legal frameworks.

**Developing countries can make more effective use of the existing policy space to pursue priorities for development, equity and productive capacity**

20. Countries require policy frameworks for innovation that are tailor-made to their specific priorities. Countries at different stages of science, technology and innovation development require different approaches.

21. All countries have policy space to use a range of intellectual property policy tools and approaches to pursue national development priorities. There are considerable opportunities to make more effective use of intellectual property rights as an incentive for stimulating local innovation in developing countries, such as through copyright in creative industries, utility models for small and medium enterprises, and the protection of indigenous knowledge in design. Similarly, flexibilities can be utilized more proactively for public priorities, for example to reduce the cost of medicines as part of a pandemic response strategy. The first step would be to review the administrative and legal obstacles to the effective implementation of flexibilities.

22. The new generation of industrial policies, ushered in by the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic and the climate crisis, will need to use intellectual property rights, and the policy space available in international frameworks, as tools for building local technological and innovative capacities. Ongoing debates on policy space for industrial policy and trade are an opportunity for an integrated approach to those issues.

23. Digital creative industries are an example of knowledge industries that are growth areas that contribute to the structural diversification of economies, creating new opportunities for income generation. They face the challenges of copyright management, negotiations, and the distribution of revenue between platforms and creators.

24. Energy transition in developing countries, particularly least developed countries, will require meeting the objectives of both expanding access to clean energy and deploying clean energy infrastructure. That requires considering multiple challenges, including limited finance, concentration of clean technology intellectual property rights and supply chains, and unilateral environment-related trade measures. A feasible approach would be technology co-development and co-ownership with mechanisms rooted in equity and transparency, innovative finance for technological development, and using clean technology solutions to improve livelihoods and build the resilience of vulnerable communities.

**Global system to support innovation for development needs to be reassessed to be made fit-for-purpose to ensure innovation for global and regional public goods and for countries to address the challenges of the twenty-first century**

25. The international intellectual property system was developed in the 1980s and 1990s and did not address the critical need for openly accessible technology as a global public good for addressing the planetary shocks (climate change, pandemics) of the twenty-first century. Better models of collaborative research and development are needed to address challenges such as climate change and to promote the expansion of research and development in developing countries. One example is the CGIAR model, in which research is patented but access to technology is free. There are multiple other forms of collaboration and financing models for innovation, research and development, each presenting solutions and lessons for different situations.

26. The potential for South-South and regional frameworks that incentivize innovation in and for developing countries is large and growing but underexploited. The African Continental Free Trade Area is illustrative of an opportunity to develop a coherent regional intellectual property rights policy that is supportive of the goals of structural transformation, inclusion and equity, addressing issues such as traditional knowledge, traditional expression and genetic resources, and realizing the use of utility models. More investment is needed in policy research and the sharing of experiences on approaches that have worked in developing countries.

27. The implementation of Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) provisions for technology transfer and to support development have not had the desired impact. The challenges of science, technology and innovation and the role of intellectual property frameworks are a neglected issue in international organizations with a mandate for development. Such organizations should provide developing countries with proactive support at the country level for the development of intellectual property architecture and policy frameworks, for the deployment of intellectual property as a development policy tool, and for the implementation of TRIPS flexibilities and other measures to pursue public interest. That includes providing policy analysis on alternative approaches. International organizations should also expand their work on global governance for the ethical use of new technologies.

28. The importance of innovation and intellectual property rights needs to be elevated in the least developed country graduation process, including in graduation impact assessments and in the development of smooth transition strategies and development strategies beyond graduation. Those should include a stronger focus on the role of intellectual property as both a catalyst and obstacle to innovation and access, and as a policy tool for structural transformation and equity including strategic management and use of flexibilities.

## Chapter III

### 2024 triennial review of the list of least developed countries

#### A. Introduction

29. The identification of least developed countries – defined as low-income countries suffering from severe structural impediments to sustainable development – is based on three criteria: per capita gross national income; the human assets index; and the economic and environmental vulnerability index.

30. Graduation from least developed country status follows the procedures specified in General Assembly resolution [59/209](#) and the guidelines adopted by the Committee in 2007 and endorsed by the Council.

31. The latest refinements of the criteria for identifying least developed countries and the application procedures, including thresholds, were adopted in 2023. In preparation for the triennial review, a preliminary review of the list of least developed countries was conducted by an expert group in January 2024. The Committee also consulted country representatives on their views regarding graduation and considered graduation assessments, based on vulnerability profiles prepared by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, impact assessments prepared by the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, and the set of supplementary graduation indicators.

#### B. Criteria in the 2024 triennial review

32. The table below shows the criteria values of least developed countries in the 2024 triennial review. Data for all Member States in developing regions is available on the Committee's website.<sup>1</sup>

Table 1  
Criteria values for all least developed countries in the 2024 triennial review

	<i>Gross national income per capita (2020–2022 average)</i>	<i>Human assets index</i>	<i>Economic and environmental vulnerability index</i>
Burundi	298	South Sudan	19.3
Yemen	350	Chad	21.5
South Sudan	395	Niger	25.5
Afghanistan	437	Central African Republic	29.4
Central African Republic	473	Somalia	31.8
Liberia	473	Afghanistan	37.5
Madagascar	487	Burundi	45.5
Mozambique	491	Mozambique	45.8
Sierra Leone	497	Guinea	46.4
Democratic Republic of the Congo	547	Mali	46.7
Somalia	573	Benin	48.6
Niger	589	Guinea-Bissau	49.2
Malawi	606	Liberia	50.6
Eritrea	609	Angola	55.2
		Eritrea	56.4
		Djibouti	54.7
		South Sudan	54.5
		Somalia	54.4
		Niger	54.2
		Kiribati	53.6
		Mauritania	52.9
		Tuvalu	50.8
		Chad	50.2
		Solomon Islands	49.6
		Mali	49.0
		Lesotho	47.8
		Burkina Faso	46.9
		Afghanistan	46.8

<sup>1</sup> See [www.un.org/development/desa/dpad/least-developed-country-category/ldc-data-retrieval.html](http://www.un.org/development/desa/dpad/least-developed-country-category/ldc-data-retrieval.html).

<i>Gross national income per capita (2020–2022 average)</i>		<i>Human assets index</i>		<i>Economic and environmental vulnerability index</i>	
Sudan	619	Sierra Leone	55.3	Sudan	46.4
Gambia	750	Ethiopia	58.1	Liberia	45.9
Guinea-Bissau	764	Madagascar	58.6	Gambia	45.5
Burkina Faso	835	Democratic Republic of the Congo	59.5	Malawi	43.2
Mali	838	Burkina Faso	59.9	Senegal	42.3
Rwanda	843	Malawi	60.5	Yemen	41.3
Uganda	909	Lesotho	60.7	Timor-Leste	41.3
Chad	922	Togo	61.1	Mozambique	41.0
Togo	942	Sudan	62.0	Sao Tome and Principe	40.0
Ethiopia	1 008	Eritrea	62.0	Zambia	39.8
Guinea	1 037	Yemen	62.5	Haiti	39.1
United Republic of Tanzania	1 093	Mauritania	64.5	Sierra Leone	38.7
Zambia	1 113	Haiti	64.8	Angola	38.5
Lesotho	1 184	Timor-Leste	65.6	Burundi	37.3
Nepal	1 300	Uganda	66.3	Comoros	37.0
Benin	1 316	Senegal	66.7	Ethiopia	36.9
Myanmar	1 381	Rwanda	66.8	Democratic Republic of the Congo	34.6
Haiti	1 536	Djibouti	66.9	Central African Republic	34.2
Senegal	1 558	United Republic of Tanzania	68.1	Benin	34.2
Cambodia	1 590	Comoros	68.7	Guinea-Bissau	34.0
Comoros	1 603	Gambia	69.0	Madagascar	32.3
Mauritania	1 797	Zambia	71.4	Myanmar	30.2
Angola	2 027	Lao People's Democratic Republic	74.8	Lao People's Democratic Republic	29.8
Sao Tome and Principe	2 271	Nepal	76.3	Nepal	29.7
Solomon Islands	2 281	Myanmar	76.3	United Republic of Tanzania	29.5
Timor-Leste	2 314	Bangladesh	77.5	Guinea	29.2
Lao People's Democratic Republic	2 503	Cambodia	77.8	Togo	29.1
Bangladesh	2 684	Solomon Islands	79.4	Rwanda	28.2
Kiribati	2 916	Kiribati	84.6	Uganda	28.2
Djibouti	3 238	Sao Tome and Principe	91.4	Cambodia	24.1
Tuvalu	6 830	Tuvalu	92.9	Bangladesh	21.9

Graduation thresholds

Gross national income per capita: \$1,306 or above;  
human assets index: 66 or above;  
economic and environmental vulnerability index: 32 or below

Income-only graduation exception threshold

Gross national income per capita: \$3,912 or above

## C. Eligibility for inclusion and graduation

### 1. Countries considered for inclusion

33. No country met all three criteria for inclusion in the list of least developed countries.

## 2. Countries considered for graduation

34. The Committee notes that 15 least developed countries are meeting the graduation eligibility criteria, one less than in 2021. Of these, five countries were already graduating, two had been previously recommended for graduation, five met the graduation criteria for the second consecutive time and were considered for a possible recommendation, and three were meeting the criteria for the first time. Three countries that had met the criteria in 2021 no longer met them, while one country graduated in 2023. The lack of progress at the aggregate level underscores the difficult global environment that least developed countries are facing in their pursuit of graduation.

### **Cambodia**

35. The Committee recommends Cambodia for graduation, noting that it meets all three criteria for graduation for the second consecutive time and with significant margins. The Committee welcomes the Government's strong commitment to graduation. It considered the Government's request for an extended preparatory period of five years to ensure a smooth transition. The Committee found the request justifiable and credible. Cambodia has utilized international support measures effectively, in particular preferential market access and intellectual property arrangements, which has contributed to high female participation in the labour market. It therefore needs to implement exceptionally extensive measures to prepare for graduation. Cambodia must advance both product and market diversification and develop productive capacity that is resilient to geopolitical and geoeconomic shifts, to ensure that the country can compete without least developed country-specific international support measures.

36. Cambodia needs to increase its fiscal space to become more resilient to economic, health and environmental shocks. Cambodia also needs to focus on seizing the opportunities emerging from the energy transition and strengthen its science, technology and innovation capabilities (including human capital and women's participation), which are essential if the country is to maintain the structural transformation drive by moving up the value chain and productivity and technological development ladders, while making full use of existing policy space provided by international agreements. In these efforts, as well as in its efforts to build climate resilience, Cambodia requires continued support from its development and trading partners.

### **Djibouti**

37. The Committee recommends Djibouti for graduation. Djibouti meets the graduation criteria for the second consecutive time. It meets the income criterion by a wide margin and the human assets index by a small margin. The Government's strong commitment can contribute to a smooth transition out of the category, with continued support from its development partners. The Committee considered the Government's request for an extended preparatory period of five years and finds the request justifiable and credible. Djibouti requires an extended period to implement measures to address its exceptionally high vulnerability, as reflected by the fact that it has the second highest economic and environmental vulnerability index score of all least developed countries and as underscored by recent regional events. That period would provide Djibouti with the time to increase its competitiveness and overcome fragilities by reducing the cost of electricity, improving the quality and affordability of Internet services, diversifying the economy beyond port-related services and increasing public investment in social sectors.



## Senegal

38. The Committee recommends Senegal for graduation. Senegal meets the income criterion and, by a small margin, the human assets index, for the second consecutive time. The Committee found the Government's request for an extended period of five years justifiable. That period will enable the country to prepare effectively for its graduation, with the support of its development and trading partners, by aligning the preparations with its development planning processes, engaging all stakeholders meaningfully, and further improving its human assets index score.

39. The Committee welcomes the strong commitment of the Government to graduate and the decision to integrate graduation into the country's national development plan. A successful and smooth transition requires strengthening strategies for diversification, industrialization and scientific and technological development. This includes revising legislative frameworks to make full use of the policy space provided by international agreements and the regional Bangui agreement on intellectual property rights. A smooth transition also requires enhancing the country's education system to ensure greater rates of completion, as well as addressing urban-rural inequalities, including by improving connectivity and basic infrastructure in rural areas.

## Comoros

40. The Committee deferred a decision on the graduation of the Comoros to the 2027 triennial review. While the country meets the income and human assets index criteria for the second consecutive time and is eligible for graduation, multiple global crises have underscored the high vulnerability of the Comoros to external economic and environmental shocks. Accordingly, the ability of the Comoros to sustain the progress achieved to date is uncertain, as also confirmed by the Government. The Committee welcomes the serious and determined efforts by the Government to identify and address key vulnerabilities and highlights the need for increased support from development partners.

## Myanmar

41. The Committee deferred a decision on the graduation of Myanmar. While the country meets all three criteria, as in the previous two triennial reviews, the available data do not reflect the severe negative impacts on the country's development triggered by the military takeover in 2021. Since then, there has been a significant deterioration in the country's socioeconomic situation. The Committee also notes discrepancies between international data sources on the level of income. The Committee had already deferred a decision on Myanmar in 2021 because of concerns about the sustainability of development progress owing to the takeover, which had occurred just prior to that triennial review. Evidence suggests that the progress achieved in the years prior to the military takeover has been reversed and that socioeconomic conditions are likely to continue to deteriorate.

## Timor-Leste

42. Timor-Leste is no longer eligible for graduation as it now only meets the income criterion. The Committee previously deferred a decision on a recommendation owing to concerns about the sustainability of the country's development progress. The Committee welcomes the constructive and fruitful dialogue with the Government. It appreciates the determined efforts by the Government to address the long-standing problem of extraordinarily high stunting rates and encourages the Government and its partners to urgently implement the necessary measures to address the multidimensional drivers of child undernutrition. The Committee also shares the

concerns of the Government regarding the sustainability of the current economic model and the reliance on the Petroleum Fund for State revenue. Economic diversification and the development of a vibrant private sector are essential for the country to embark on a path towards sustainable graduation.

### **Zambia**

43. Zambia is no longer eligible for graduation as it now meets only one criterion, the human assets index, owing to a decline in income since the previous triennial review. The Committee welcomes the constructive and fruitful dialogue with the Government. The strong commitment of the Government to graduate and the preparatory activities that have already been undertaken will no doubt contribute to a smooth graduation process once the country becomes eligible again in a future review. Overcoming the macroeconomic instability is the main immediate priority and requires support from the country's development partners as well as private creditors for resolving the debt restructuring. In the longer term, reducing the excessive dependence on copper exports is essential not only for economic diversification but also for ensuring macroeconomic stability.

### **3. Other countries**

44. Three countries met the eligibility criteria for the first time: Rwanda, Uganda and the United Republic of Tanzania. All three have met the economic and environmental vulnerability index criterion and, with relatively low margins, the human assets index criterion, while failing to meet the income criterion. In line with the established procedures, the Committee will consider those countries for eligibility and a possible recommendation for graduation from the least developed country category at the 2027 triennial review.

45. Kiribati and Tuvalu continue to be eligible for graduation, surpassing the income and human assets index thresholds by wide margins, while continuing to show a very high degree of vulnerability in the economic and environmental vulnerability index. The Committee recalled that it has already recommended Tuvalu (in 2012) and Kiribati (in 2018) for graduation, but that the Council has repeatedly deferred its consideration of those recommendations. The Committee welcomes the consultations that it has had with both countries since the previous review on the question of graduation. It reiterates that graduation must not be seen as a signal that those countries no longer need special treatment. The extreme and permanent vulnerability of those countries to climate change requires specific, sustained and easily accessible financial and technical support that is outside the scope of specific support measures for least developed countries. The Committee believes that keeping countries in the least developed country category for a prolonged period, when they no longer share the essential characteristics of the group, creates inconsistency and poses negative risks for the credibility of the category.

## Chapter IV

### Enhanced monitoring of countries that are graduating or have graduated from the list of least developed countries

#### A. Introduction

46. As mandated in Council resolution [2023/10](#) and General Assembly resolution [67/221](#), the Committee monitored the development progress of three recently graduated countries, namely, Bhutan, Equatorial Guinea and Vanuatu, and six graduating countries, namely, Angola, Bangladesh, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Nepal, Sao Tome and Principe, and Solomon Islands. The detailed monitoring reports, with recommendations on policy priorities and support needs, as well as the full reports submitted by the countries, are available on the Committee's website. The table below shows the least developed country criteria scores vis-à-vis the graduation thresholds established in the 2024 triennial review of least developed countries.

Table 2  
Least developed country criteria for the countries monitored, 2024

	Least developed country criteria		
	Gross national income per capita (United States dollars)	Human assets index	Economic and environmental vulnerability index
Graduation threshold	≥1 306	≥66.0	≤32.0
<b>Graduated country</b>			
Bhutan	3 311	79.4	31.2
Equatorial Guinea	5 768	69.9	19.3
Vanuatu	3 420	75.8	46.0
<b>Graduating countries</b>			
Angola	2 027	55.2	38.5
Bangladesh	2 684	77.5	21.9
Lao People's Democratic Republic	2 503	74.8	29.8
Nepal	1 300	76.3	29.7
Sao Tome and Principe	2 271	91.4	40.0
Solomon Islands	2 281	79.4	49.6
<b>Averages</b>			
Least developed countries	1 307	59.6	40.6
Other developing countries	9 358	88.0	31.9

Source: Committee for Development Policy secretariat.

Note: Details on the least developed country criteria are available on the Committee's website.

#### B. Graduated countries

##### Bhutan

47. Bhutan graduated in December 2023, a significant milestone acknowledged by Member States. Despite facing a severe blow to its economy from the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly due to the halt in tourism, the country managed to recover swiftly and resume its trajectory of progress. In the medium term, challenges include

mounting fiscal and current account deficits, while long-term challenges include diversification efforts, reducing reliance on hydropower exports, and fortifying resilience against environmental shifts. The Committee cautions that the target outlined in the national development plan of achieving high-income status by 2034 may be overly ambitious. It suggests considering advancements in manufacturing and the digital sector, with a focus on enhancing the digitalization of the service sector. In addition, addressing the gap in productive capacity and incorporating agriculture into future plans are emphasized as crucial steps forward. The Committee also acknowledges and supports the country's requests for further United Nations support, through iGRAD, such as on South-South exchange and monitoring process.

### **Equatorial Guinea**

48. Equatorial Guinea, since its graduation in 2017, has faced a rapid decrease in real income, largely attributable to diminishing oil production. Despite its massive economic boom in the 1990s and 2000s, the country has struggled to foster widespread development, with limited investment in health and education. Persistent challenges including weak governance, lack of transparency and endemic corruption continue to hinder progress. The Committee emphasizes the critical need for Equatorial Guinea to establish a solid economic foundation for diversifying the economy away from the oil and gas sector and to invest in human assets.

### **Vanuatu**

49. Vanuatu graduated in 2020, despite remaining highly susceptible to external and environmental shocks, such as those caused by COVID-19 and recurrent cyclones. The Government has been diligently implementing its smooth transition strategy and is seeking additional support from the United Nations system, particularly through iGRAD, to integrate the strategy into planning, budgeting and monitoring processes.

## **C. Graduating countries**

### **Angola**

50. Angola no longer satisfies the graduation criteria, as its gross national income per capita has been in decline for several years, dropping below the graduation threshold of the income-only exception in 2024. Moreover, there have been minimal improvements in the human assets index and the economic and environmental vulnerability index, with scores remaining far off the graduation thresholds. The macroeconomic landscape presents numerous challenges, including decreased oil production, high inflation, currency devaluation, constrained fiscal capacity, significant debt servicing obligations and limited productive capabilities. External factors such as volatile international oil prices and geopolitical instability further compound the country's development hurdles. Based on this finding, the Committee concludes that the graduation process should recommence when, in accordance with the established procedures and at a future triennial review, Angola meets the criteria for graduation once more. The Committee commends the Government for its steadfast commitment to diversifying the economy and addressing the challenges posed by population growth. It underscores the importance of the Government's resolute efforts to effectively implement its national development plan, which should put Angola back on the path to graduation and contribute to an effective smooth transition strategy once the process resumes.

## **Bangladesh**

51. Bangladesh is making significant progress towards sustainable graduation. Despite the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, the country has effectively mitigated its adverse effects and continues to show notable advancements in development. That progress is evident in the improvement across most least developed country indicators and several supplementary graduation indicators. However, the negative impacts of the food, energy and finance crises, driven by the war in Ukraine and global monetary tightening, have created macroeconomic challenges, which are currently being addressed. The Committee recommends that Bangladesh finalize its smooth transition strategy in 2024 and persist in implementing sound policies, with a particular focus on structural economic reform. Given the importance of least developed country-specific support for the development progress achieved, there is an urgent need for the international community, including the country's trading partners and the United Nations, to provide Bangladesh with the requested support.

## **Lao People's Democratic Republic**

52. The Lao People's Democratic Republic continues to meet all least developed country criteria and is making progress towards sustainable graduation. The Government's adoption of a smooth transition strategy in 2023, following thorough and effective preparation, underscores its commitment to progress. Despite successfully navigating many challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic and global food and energy crises, the country faces notable difficulties in managing its currency value and debt levels. The Committee advises continued implementation of appropriate macroeconomic policies to address those issues in line with the smooth transition strategy and other relevant strategies. It emphasizes the importance of international support for debt management and economic diversification.

## **Nepal**

53. Nepal is advancing steadily towards sustainable graduation. Its gross national income per capita is nearing the graduation threshold in 2024 and it continues to meet the human assets index and economic and environmental vulnerability index criteria. The Government is in the final stages of refining the smooth transition strategy and aligning it with the national development plan. Although the economy experienced a significant slowdown due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the global food, energy and finance crises have caused macroeconomic challenges, recovery has been relatively swift, particularly with the revival of the tourism and manufacturing sectors. Sustained efforts in implementing effective policies focused on economic diversification, trade policy (combined with investment promotion) and disaster risk reduction will be crucial in achieving sustainable graduation.

## **Adequacy of the five-year preparatory period**

54. In its 2024 triennial review, the Committee analysed whether the length of the preparatory period for Bangladesh, the Lao People's Democratic Republic and Nepal had been adequate. It finds that all three countries have effectively mitigated the adverse effects of the COVID-19 pandemic to some extent and have made significant progress in preparing for sustainable graduation and a smooth transition after the extended five-year preparatory period. The Committee concurred that further extending the additional preparatory period for those countries beyond 2026 is unnecessary. The Committee will continue to monitor closely progress made in preparing and implementing the smooth transition strategies, including the support received by development and trading partners.

### **Sao Tome and Principe**

55. Sao Tome and Principe is progressing towards graduation in 2024. The Government opted not to have a separate smooth transition strategy, but to have key elements of smooth transition measures integrated into its national development plan. While the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on growth were not substantial, the country's economic foundation remains fragile and heavily dependent on external assistance, while its production and export base remain limited. Elevated inflation, driven by increases in food, energy and other consumer goods, along with low foreign reserves stemming from limited revenue and extensive imports, pose challenges. The Committee recommends increased government involvement in the enhanced monitoring mechanism to monitor the country's continued development progress beyond graduation.

### **Solomon Islands**

56. Solomon Islands, having had its graduation postponed to 2027, has resumed its preparations for graduation. The Committee welcomes the adoption of the extension in line with its enhanced monitoring mechanism. The Government has devised a comprehensive work plan, timeline and outline for the smooth transition strategy, is working towards an adoption of the strategy in 2024 and is receiving assistance from the United Nations system. The Committee highlights the importance of addressing deep-rooted challenges for sustainable graduation, including the need for an inclusive graduation process, and the low level of productive capacities, through the timely delivery of international support.

## **D. Enhanced monitoring mechanism**

57. The Committee acknowledges the progress made in implementing the enhanced monitoring mechanism. The mechanism has leveraged existing national and international monitoring processes, incorporating factors related to disruptive events that may impact the smooth transition out of the least developed country category, as well as considering the short-term and long-term socioeconomic and environmental challenges.

58. Effective implementation of the enhanced monitoring mechanism necessitates close collaboration among relevant United Nations entities, in particular the inter-agency task force on graduation and smooth transition and the United Nations resident coordinator system. It is imperative that the mechanism be intricately linked to a country's own monitoring of its preparation for graduation and the implementation of smooth transition strategies.

59. The Committee notes that the national capacity of the countries being monitored to fully engage in the enhanced monitoring mechanism and to reap maximum benefits remains limited. It reiterates the call for support by Member States for the mechanism, as outlined in Council resolution [2023/10](#) and General Assembly resolution [76/258](#) (annex, para. 284).

60. The Committee commits to ongoing review and improvement of the enhanced monitoring mechanism, tailored to address country-specific challenges and contexts. It will continue to review the lessons learned on the implementation of the enhanced monitoring mechanism and report its findings to the Council in 2025. Subject to available resources, the Committee will consider options regarding the ongoing customization and enhancement of the mechanism to better serve the needs of countries graduating and graduated from the least developed country category. Key areas of focus could include:

- (a) Continued improvement in data coverage and relevance;
- (b) Clarifying the monitoring procedures, roles of Committee country rapporteurs, and expert group meetings on the enhanced monitoring mechanism;
- (c) Streamlining processes for short-term, high-frequency monitoring and responses;
- (d) Improving coordination of strengthened support provided within the framework of the enhanced monitoring mechanism, exploring possible resources for the Committee secretariat, and synergies among United Nations entities with relevant expertise in the area.

## Chapter V

### Graduation – the global context

#### A. Challenging global environment

61. The Committee reviewed how the changing global context is affecting graduation processes and prospects. Countries that have graduated from the least developed country category since 2020 have had to cope with an increase in the frequency and severity of global crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic; the spike in food and energy prices prompted by the war in Ukraine; rising global interest rates; steep currency depreciation in several least developed countries and other developing countries; an increase in protectionism amid rising geopolitical and geoeconomic tensions; supply chain and transportation disruptions; armed conflict; displaced persons; and the intensification of climate change. Moreover, graduations are happening amid accelerating technological change, including rapid advances in artificial intelligence, and the global low-carbon transition, posing both challenges and opportunities.

62. There are clear signs that the changes in the global environment are having negative impacts on graduation, often amplified if they interact with domestic shocks. Such impacts manifest themselves in several ways. First, certain graduation processes were interrupted, requiring extensions of the preparatory period. Second, some countries at various stages of the graduation process saw their move towards graduation derailed as they no longer met the necessary criteria. Third, the graduation prospects of many least developed countries that remain far below the necessary thresholds are becoming even dimmer, increasing the risk that those countries will be left behind in the development process. That holds particularly true for countries affected by conflict. Fourth, almost all least developed countries, including graduating countries, are facing difficulties as their fiscal space is diminishing, making it more difficult to undertake necessary investments to boost productivity and innovation capabilities for post-graduation periods while also mitigating cost of living crises caused by price shocks. Such difficulties are particularly acute in countries that already faced domestic and international macroeconomic imbalances for longer periods of time.

63. Despite those difficulties, commitment to graduation among least developed countries remains strong overall. In each of the two previous reviews, the Committee recommended three countries for graduation and, during their consultations with the Committee, all welcomed their forthcoming graduation.

64. The Committee believes that the changes in the global environment and the experiences of countries in the graduation process require reflection on the concept of graduation, the strengthening of international support, and the adaptation of the graduation framework.

#### B. Required global response

##### 1. Reflecting on the concept of graduation from the least developed country category

65. It is widely acknowledged that graduation should be seen as a milestone, rather than an endpoint, in the pursuit towards sustainable development. However, further reflection might yield a common understanding of what is required in the current and future eras to arrive at graduation and how to progress after reaching it. Such reflections would include how the current changes in the global context affect the



understanding of the least developed country category itself, beyond being a classification of those developing countries that are facing particularly severe development impediments. While acknowledging the evolving nature of the least developed country category over the past 50 years, the conceptual work must analyse whether the current global context necessitates changes to the set of impediments that define the category and the associated measures to overcome those impediments.

66. Those conceptual issues have a direct bearing on the conceptualization of the smooth transition strategies that graduating countries are invited to prepare and implement in cooperation with their development and trading partners. Experience reveals that countries follow different approaches. Some countries fully integrate their smooth transition strategy into existing national development strategies without producing separate strategy documents and processes for graduation. Other countries prepare separate smooth transition strategies with clear and explicit linkages to national development strategies. A third way combines both approaches, utilizing existing or updated development strategies as the main instrument for smooth transition, while including specific actions directly related to the impact of graduation in specific smooth transition documents.

67. Analysing such experiences and fostering exchanges between graduating and graduated countries may lead to further guidance on smooth transition strategies. That would include considering the balance between defensive approaches dealing with the possible losses of graduation and approaches focusing on sustainable post-graduation development. The guidance would also include the time frame for preparing and implementing smooth transition strategies, as well as the role of development and trading partners.

## **2. Enhancing international support for graduation**

68. The current context requires improved and additional support for graduating and recently graduated countries. Development and trading partners should provide generous support, including through the extension of support measures for least developed countries. The Committee welcomes the progress made under the World Trade Organization in that regard but views further efforts as essential, particularly in cases where such support measures have been fundamental for achieving graduation. Given the increasing importance of financing disaster recovery and rehabilitation and climate action, adequate smooth transition provisions of climate change-related instruments and disaster rehabilitation funds are critical, including improving access to alternative sources. However, graduation support should not be confined to extensions of existing measures and should include specific measures targeting the post-graduation development pathway. The Committee notes that 15 least developed countries are meeting the graduation eligibility criteria, one less than in 2021, while only one country has graduated since the previous triennial review. That lack of progress at the aggregate level underscores the difficult global environment that least developed countries are facing in their pursuit of graduation.

69. The Committee welcomes the establishment of the Sustainable Graduation Support Facility (iGRAD) in 2022. First proposed by the Committee in 2019, iGRAD can provide much needed country-led demand-driven technical assistance to countries during the graduation process. However, the Committee is very concerned about the slow progress in its operationalization and the limited funding of the Facility. The least developed country category was created and prioritized by the United Nations and the commitments to graduation in the recent programmes of action for the least developed countries were adopted by all Member States. Accordingly, accountability for achieving smooth and sustainable graduations does not rest with the Governments of graduating countries alone, but must be mutually shouldered by development and trading partners, including the United Nations. The credibility of the international

system, in particular the United Nations, is at stake if graduations from the least developed country category are not sustainable.

### **3. Making the graduation framework fit for purpose**

70. The changing global context also requires updating the existing graduation framework, to make it fit for purpose. The framework should include rules to deal with interruptions to graduation processes, rather than dealing with them on an ad hoc basis. That could include rules on: (a) extensions of preparatory periods; (b) deferments by the Committee, the Council or the General Assembly; and (c) actions in the event of reversals in graduation eligibility during the graduation process. The notion of a standard three-year preparatory period provided for in the current framework needs revisiting, given that the previous five completed and all ongoing graduations include longer preparatory periods. The linkages between monitoring of graduating and graduated countries by the Committee through its enhanced monitoring mechanism, the preparation and implementation of smooth transition strategies, and graduation-specific support may also require further clarification.

71. In the changing global context, monitoring by the Committee is not only prolonged but also becoming more demanding in terms of assessing linkages between development setbacks and graduation processes, requiring a review of the internal functioning of the enhanced monitoring mechanism. A rethinking of the concept of graduation may impact the triennial review of the list of least developed countries undertaken by the Committee and, hence, require changes to the least developed country criteria, the application procedures and the analytical information used by the Committee before making recommendations.

## **C. Way forward**

72. There is a clear need to scale up the delivery of graduation support. As an immediate action, development partners should urgently provide generous funding to iGRAD, and the Secretary-General should ensure that such funding can be rapidly deployed to respond to the increasing demands of countries. However, development and trading partners also need to provide significantly more direct support to graduating countries to support their smooth transition.

73. The Committee appreciates the positive response by the Council to its finding in 2023 that the General Assembly resolutions on smooth transitions require updating and stands ready to substantively support the process. A new resolution is an important opportunity to provide specificity to the incentives and support measures for graduation that countries have already committed to in the Istanbul and Doha programmes of action. The resolution should also provide for improvements to the graduation procedures.

74. The Committee will initiate work on a review of the graduation framework. The work will include reviewing the conceptual underpinnings of the least developed country category, graduation, smooth transition and smooth transition strategies. Over the next year, it will also develop proposals for updating the graduation procedures, both as input to the planned new General Assembly resolution on smooth transitions and as guidance to the preparations for the upcoming triennial reviews. Based on this work, the Committee will undertake a review of the least developed country criteria and the application procedures for the upcoming triennial reviews, to be adopted at the 2026 Plenary. It will report its findings and conclusions in its reports to the Council in 2025 and 2026.

## Chapter VI

### Future work of the Committee

75. The Committee will continue to align its work programme with the needs and priorities established by the Council, with a view to contributing effectively to the Council's deliberations and assisting it in the performance of its functions. In that context, the Committee will examine, in a multi-year programme, development policy issues under the framework of fundamental shifts and megatrends redefining the global economy and requiring new development pathways. The Committee will also undertake a multi-year work programme on a review of the least developed country graduation framework.

76. In accordance with the relevant mandates, the Committee will monitor the development progress of recently graduated and currently graduating countries. In the event that the Council endorses and the General Assembly takes note of any additional previous or current recommendations of the Committee regarding the graduation of countries from the least developed country category, the Committee will also monitor the progress of such countries. The Committee will hold consultations with graduating and recently graduated countries, as well as with countries whose graduation has been deferred, in accordance with the provisions of Council resolution [2023/10](#) and Assembly resolution [76/258](#). The Committee will continue to review the enhanced monitoring mechanism, particularly its effectiveness in the face of crises, which have increased in frequency and severity and have already interrupted and extended graduation processes. Subject to available resources, the Committee will improve the mechanism to accommodate these circumstances and adequately support countries on their graduation pathways.

## Chapter VII

### Organization of the session

77. The Committee held its twenty-sixth session from 4 to 8 March 2024. Twenty members of the Committee, as well as observers from several international organizations, attended the session. The list of participants is included in annex I to the present report.

78. The Department of Economic and Social Affairs provided substantive services for the session. The Chair of the Committee opened the session and welcomed the participants. Subsequently, the Vice-President of the Economic and Social Council and the Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs addressed the Committee. Statements are available on the Committee's website.<sup>2</sup>

79. The agenda for the twenty-sixth session is contained in annex II to the present report.

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<sup>2</sup> See [www.un.org/development/desa/dpad/publication/cdp-plenary-2024/](http://www.un.org/development/desa/dpad/publication/cdp-plenary-2024/).

## Annex I

### List of participants

1. The following members of the Committee attended the session:

Sabina Alkire  
Debapriya Bhattacharya  
Sofia Borges  
Ha-Joon Chang (virtual)  
Sakiko Fukuda-Parr  
Ahmed Galal  
Arunabha Ghosh  
Trudi Hartzenberg  
Rolph van der Hoeven  
Anne-Laure Kiechel (virtual)  
Carlos Lopes (virtual)  
Amina Mama  
Keith Nurse  
José Antonio Ocampo Gaviria  
Annalisa Prizzon  
Liliana Rojas-Suarez  
Taffere Tesfachew  
Kori Udovicki  
Natalya Volchkova  
Xufeng Zhu

2. The following entities of the United Nations system and other international organizations were represented at the session:

Committee of Experts on Public Administration secretariat  
Department of Economic and Social Affairs  
Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific  
Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries,  
Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States  
Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights  
United Nations Conference on Trade and Development  
United Nations Development Programme  
United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change secretariat  
United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction

## Annex II

### Agenda

1. Opening session and overview.
  2. Committee's linkages to the intergovernmental process.
  3. Innovation ecosystems for development, structural change and equity.
  4. Triennial review of the list of least developed countries.
  5. Open session: innovation ecosystems – making intellectual property work for development, equity and structural change.
  6. Graduation in the global context.
  7. Committee inputs to the new smooth transition resolution.
  8. Perspectives on graduation.
  9. Country monitoring.
  10. Implementing and improving the enhanced monitoring mechanism.
  11. Least developed countries' capacity development work.
  12. Committee's work in the year ahead.
  13. Next steps.
  14. Interaction with the Economic and Social Council.
  15. Briefing: least developed countries policy issues and the role of the Committee.
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