



IPU Briefing Session on LDC IV

4 October 2010

Summary

I. Introduction

In 2001, the global community adopted the decade long Brussels Programme of Action (BPOA) in support of the Least Developed Countries (LDCs). However, progress towards the BPOA commitments has left much to be desired. In the coming months, a new programme of action for the LDCs will be negotiated, in view of the Fourth United Nations Conference on the LDCs, which is scheduled to take place in Istanbul, Turkey, from 30 May to 3 June 2011.

Over the years, it has become clear that many parliaments in LDCs as well as in developing and developed countries are not sufficiently aware of the BPOA. Furthermore, the concerns of parliaments received only scant attention in the BPOA itself. The IPU has worked to raise awareness of the BPOA among LDC parliaments, and has helped engage parliaments in the national reviews of the BPOA and in follow-up regional consultations. The IPU is now seeking to articulate a strong parliamentary position that may help inform negotiations of the new programme of action for the LDCs. It was in this context that the IPU organised a consultation with parliaments during the IPU's 123rd Assembly on 4 October 2010, under the aegis of the IPU Committee on UN Affairs. A **Parliamentary Forum on LDCs** organised by the IPU will also take place on the eve of LDC IV, in Istanbul.

The meeting on 4 October proceeded in two parts: a first one consisting of presentations, which provided participants with a general review of progress and challenges in the implementation of the BPOA to date; and a second part, in the form of a roundtable discussion designed to gather input from participants with respect to the new programme of action for the LDCs.

II. Part I - Presentations

The first part of the session was chaired by Hon. Alice Foyah from the Parliament of Sierra Leone, and included statements delivered by Mr. Cheick Sidi Diarra, UN Under-Secretary General Special Adviser on Africa and High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States, and Dr. Arjun Karki, International Co-ordinator of LDC Watch. Hon. Duarte Pacheco, the Deputy Speaker of the Assembly of the Republic of Portugal, was also invited to provide feedback on the UN-OHRLLS Ministerial Meeting "Enhancing the Mobilization of Financial Resources for the LDCs' Development", which took place in Lisbon on 2 and 3 of October. Hon. Ephraim Kayembe, Member of Parliament at the National Assembly of Malawi, delivered a PowerPoint presentation at the end of the session.

Mr. Diarra briefed participants on LDC progress to date, current trends and outstanding development challenges facing the LDCs. Current challenges include a lack of food security; limited progress in reducing extreme poverty; the need to create sustainable employment, increase agricultural productivity, and build human institutional capacities; and lastly, a lack of key infrastructure, such as roads and electricity. These challenges, in addition to enhancing productive capacity, managing climate change, mobilizing financial resources, and ensuring good governance and gender equality, were identified by the LDCs during the BPOA review as thematic priorities.

With regard to good governance, Mr. Diarra acknowledged that the appropriate institutional arrangements are not always in place within LDCs: the mechanisms for fostering development leadership are weak, and the mechanisms for constituency engagement are limited. However, Mr. Diarra emphasised that over the past decade there have been incremental positive changes towards improving governance and in promoting democracy. There has been a firm commitment on the part of many LDC governments to institute reforms that target corruption and empower citizens. Some degree of democracy exists in most LDCs, and elections are now the norm rather than the exception.

Mr. Diarra underlined that the rise of multi-partisanship and capacity development assistance have strengthened LDC parliaments. Nevertheless, LDC parliaments continue to face significant challenges whilst attempting to fully realize their role in democratic governance. Indeed, citizen participation in the legislative processes, as well as efforts to increase citizens' understanding of parliaments and citizens' knowledge of how they can access their elected representatives, remain limited.

The UN-OHRLS considers the Parliamentary Forum as an opportunity for parliaments to strengthen their ownership of the new programme of action and draw up their national plan of action for implementing, monitoring and evaluating the global action plan.

In the second presentation, **Dr. Karki** elaborated on the key elements that should be part of the new international commitment for the LDCs. Dr. Karki noted the importance of official development assistance (ODA) and the need to increase and improve aid. Dr. Karki appealed for the total and unconditional cancellation of all LDC debt, and called for an increased role and policy space for parliaments. The new programme of action should also include provisions related to human rights. What the LDCs required was a stimulus package.

Hon Kayembe delivered a presentation on the role of parliaments in the implementation of the BPOA and related challenges. Hon. Kayembe emphasised that the effective implementation of the BPOA heavily relies on good governance at national and international levels, and acknowledged the lack of parliamentary involvement in the implementation of the BPOA. Hon. Kayembe felt that periodic reviews of the implementation of development plans are essential.

Hon. Kayembe noted numerous challenges. The reluctance of some government institutions to promote transparency and accountability affects the implementation of the BPOA; and there is often a lack of an intra-party position on achieving good governance. Furthermore, weak opposition parties and the domination of the executive challenge the concept of separation of powers and compromise parliament's oversight role. The lack of parliament's financial independence further affects the implementation of its activities and programmes. Lastly, women's role in politics and the decision making process must be strengthened.

The mobilisation of resources which ensure the implementation of the programmes of action is a shared responsibility between the LDCs and their developed partners. Unfulfilled commitments from developed countries have negatively impacted the achievement of development targets.

With reference to the recent UN-OHRLS meeting on mobilising resources, **Hon. Pacheco** noted that the programmes of action for LDCs have benefits for all countries, not only the LDCs. It is clear that a great deal of work remains to be done, and Hon. Pacheco emphasised that all of the statements delivered during the meeting included concrete measures on how to raise money. It was felt that all countries had shown a real commitment.

III. Part II - Roundtable Discussion

The interactive session was chaired by **Hon. Saber Chowdhury** of **Bangladesh**.

Hon. Gawali of **India** noted that developed societies hold a significant degree of responsibility in ensuring the development of LDCs. The representative insisted further efforts are made to reduce poverty.

Hon. Toure of **Senegal**, who was participating in the meeting on behalf of Hon. Sene, the parliamentary focal point for this process, stated that despite financial aid and progress made, any developments can be destroyed in a matter of seconds by natural disasters. The 2009 Climate Conference in Copenhagen acknowledged that despite vulnerable countries reducing their pollution levels, developed countries continue to emit high levels of pollution. It is essential that parliaments insist that national levels of pollution are reduced, particularly in developed countries. Hon. Toure referred to the "Great Green Wall" of trees which will stretch from Senegal to Djibouti as part of a plan to thwart the southward spread of the Sahara. This will allow for diversified vegetation, and will assist in the fight against poverty. **Mr. Diarra** expressed his support for the Great Green Wall, and his hope that the international community assists in its realisation.

Hon. Changwe, the **Zambian** parliamentary focal point, was anxious about parliaments' lack of involvement in monitoring and evaluating the BPOA. Concern regarding parliament's relationship with the executive branch of government was also expressed. Hon. Changwe noted the disparity between the executive and legislative branches of government, and asked whether there was any way that the IPU can empower the parliamentary focal points. **Mr. Diarra** explained his participation in this session aims at encouraging and supporting parliamentary involvement in this process. So as to increase the awareness of and participation in the implementation of the BPOA, LDC parliaments have been encouraged to appoint parliamentary focal points and establish caucuses to discuss this matter. Mr. Diarra referred to the 2007 Tanzania meeting and the IPU/UN-OHRLLS handbook as additional examples of raising parliamentary awareness of the BPOA. Parliaments were encouraged to enact provisions of the new programme into law. Finally, Mr. Diarra described the new joint-project, proposed by UN-OHRLLS to the IPU. This project will aim to promote parliamentary participation in the implementation of the new programme.

At this point, **Hon. Chowdhury** emphasised that the IPU had requested that all LDC parliaments appoint focal points for this process. Parliaments are encouraged to appoint focal points if they have not already done so.

The **Australian** delegate, Hon. Crossin, explained that it has taken the needs of the 15 Asia-Pacific LDCs into consideration, and it is working to devote 0.15% of its GDP to support to these LDCs. Hon. Crossin asked for Mr. Diarra's thoughts on providing support to trade, commerce and capacity building, and asked how this will be included within the new programme. **Mr. Diarra** agreed that ODA is necessary as LDCs have limited savings. It is essential that an investment into the private sectors of LDCs is carried out as this will allow for profitable exports. LDC access to international markets is essential. Preferential treatment for LDCs does exist, but the exportation of raw materials limits all developments. It is therefore essential that LDC's productive capacities are improved.

The **Saudi Arabian** delegation expressed its disappointment in the lack of progress made within the LDC category, and stated that the international community has not made a strong enough effort. The representative described Saudi Arabia's donor capacities and the central role parliaments must play in this process. **Mr. Diarra** fully agreed that there has been a lack of progress. Only 2 countries, Botswana (1994) and Cape Verde (2007), have graduated so far, and many LDCs are

afraid to graduate, especially the small island developing states as they have great concerns regarding environmental disasters.

Hon. Chowdhury noted that a lack of coordination between the executive and legislative branches of government results in little progress being made within the development sector. All participants were invited to share information on how they have been involved in this process.

The **Kenyan** delegate, Hon. Laboso, described Kenya's efforts to strengthen Parliament through the adoption of a new constitution. Hon. Laboso asked for advice on how they can assist in the strengthening of LDC parliaments. It is clear that LDCs must increase the quality of exported raw materials, without which they simply cannot compete in international trade. Furthermore, corruption is still common. Parliaments should fight it and ensure transparency and accountability, especially in the use of donor assistance so that it can be used to address the real needs of the people. **Mr. Diarra** agreed that LDCs should set their own priorities, and referred to the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness. The UN's role was support those priorities. Mr. Diarra also provided the participants with further information on the inclusion and graduation process.

The Speaker of the National Assembly of **Lesotho**, Hon. Motsamai, noted that development activities tend to be addressed at the executive level. Any information provided rarely trickles down to the LDC parliaments. Hon. Motsamai thanked the IPU for raising awareness of the LDC category, and explained that ensuring people accept a role within this process is a challenge in itself. Amongst the LDCs, some countries are more marginalised than others, especially with regards to ODA. Therefore, a one size fits all programme, such as the BPOA, will not be effective. Many LDCs lack the capacity to even advocate their needs. It would be useful for UN-OHRLLS to share LDC best practices. **Mr. Diarra** explained that the 2009/2010 LDC national reports will allow UN-OHRLLS to extract LDC best practices.

Hon. Pacheco emphasised the importance of strengthening ties between parliaments, and between parliaments and citizens. For example, there are special programmes amongst Portuguese speaking countries. These links allow assistance to be provided and money to be raised for a variety of programmes. Good governance is crucial to achieving any goals, as it is essential to possess the support of the population when implementing programmes. Cape Verde had graduated from LDC status largely thanks to good governance.

Hon. Sheriff, from the Parliament of **Sierra Leone**, voiced his Parliament's primary concern: the waste of the majority of Sierra Leone's mineral resources. The Parliament had called on the President to visit other countries, such as Zimbabwe, where effective plans are in place for maximising the benefits of natural resources. However, this has not occurred. Parliament's mandate of oversight is simply not in place. The Parliament of Sierra Leone would like to learn about the experiences other parliaments have had in managing their natural resources. The IPU should help in this regard.

Hon. Chowdhury observed that there is no reference to parliament within the BPOA. **Mr. Diarra** assured the participants that there is a place for parliaments within the new programme of action, and that parliaments should be involved in this process. Enacting legislation was important. Equally important was the establishment of infrastructure that would attract direct foreign investment. As national constitutions recognise parliaments' mandate, parliaments should be involved in the process. **Dr. Karki** reaffirmed the importance of parliamentary oversight and involvement in future programmes of action and encouraged the IPU to facilitate such a role for parliaments.

In conclusion, **Hon. Chowdhury** addressed the need to motivate parliamentarians to become actively engaged in this process. In Bangladesh, a MDG constituency assessment encourages parliamentarians to ensure that development plans are implemented. This method could be

replicated for LDC programmes of action. In sum, the new programme should allow for more regular reviews. **Hon. Foyah** agreed and explained that given the limited term of parliaments and high turnover among MPs, it is essential that there are regular reviews of the programmes of action. It was proposed that parliaments develop cross-party positions to ensure the priority issues of national development agendas continue in future legislative mandates.

Mr. Martin Chungong, IPU Director for the Promotion of Democracy, reiterated the IPU's commitment to promoting parliamentary input into the new LDC programme of action. It was committed to pursuing its co-operation with Mr Diarra's office in this regard. The IPU provided assistance to parliaments, and capacity building was an area of focus. This would be strengthened, including in the key area of the extractive industries as the delegate from Sierra Leone had requested.

IV. Conclusion

This briefing session provide the IPU with the opportunity to raise the awareness of all parliaments regarding the LDC process. Participants were provided with further information on the Parliamentary Forum to be held in May 2011, and on the preparatory process leading up to LDC IV.

Most importantly, parliaments were given the opportunity to begin identifying the priority areas they would like to see in the new programme.

Firstly, parliaments recognized the need to become involved in all development activities, and not limit themselves to those related to good governance. It must be acknowledged that the achievement of development goals rests upon the support of parliamentarians, as the representatives of the people. Parliaments are central to ensuring a sense of national ownership of the programme of action.

Secondly, parliaments felt that the BPOA did not take the situation of "fragile states" into great enough consideration. It is not possible to have a "one size fits all" programme of action, but the programme must acknowledge, and cater for, the unique differences between LDCs.

Lastly, if parliaments are to ensure the implementation of the new programme of action, their mandate must be referred to within the programme of action itself. By formally recognising parliaments' role in this process, parliaments will be provided with an additional tool for assuming their responsibilities.

All parliaments were encouraged to further discuss this issue within their parliaments, and to engage with their government counterparts to ensure such priority areas are included in the new programme of action. Parliaments recognised the need to do this without delay.