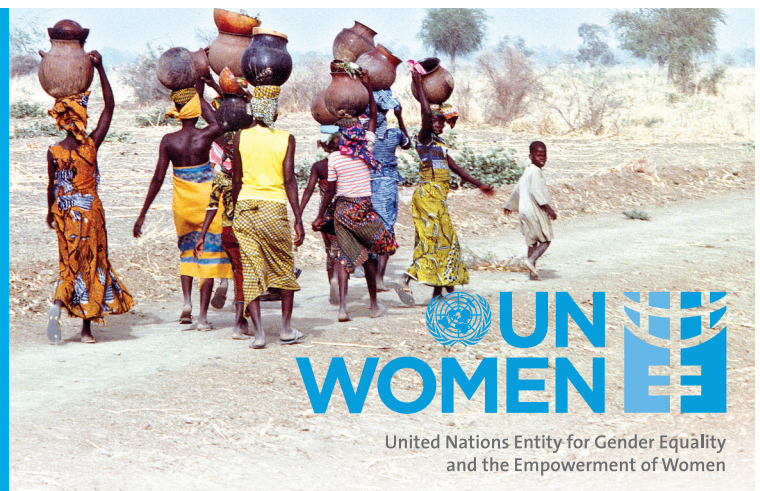


# Fourth United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries

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**Equality between women and men is critical for making progress in development, peace and security and the realization of human rights.**

**Progress for women is progress for all. Gender dimensions need to be systematically addressed in all priority areas of the Programme of Action, including productive capacity, agriculture, food security and rural development.** Achieving gender equality and empowerment of women is both a key development goal and an important means for achieving the Millennium Development Goals. It is increasingly recognized that investing in women is not only a matter of rights but also makes good economic sense. Promoting gender equality and women's empowerment will contribute to sustainable economic growth and poverty reduction, and long-term prosperity for all. While we acknowledge the dedicated paragraphs on gender equality and women's empowerment in the Programme of Action for the LDCs for the Decade 2011-2020, systematic attention to gender dimensions is needed in all areas.

## Productive capacity

**Unlocking the productivity potential of women in agriculture, manufacturing and services will contribute to economic and social development.** About 72 per cent of the population in LDCs lives in rural areas.<sup>1</sup> Out of the 48 LDCs, 33 are located in Africa where 300 million people face food insecurity<sup>2</sup>. The share of agriculture in GDP has increased in 18 LDCs, averaging 25 per cent. Agriculture continues to be the main source of employment and concentrates two thirds of the labour force.<sup>3</sup> Women in agriculture and those living in rural areas, however, have less access than men to productive resources and opportunities. Estimates suggest that if women had the same access to productive resources as men, they could increase yields on their farms by 20–30 per cent, raising total agricultural output in developing countries by 2.5–4 percent, thereby contributing to both food security and economic growth.<sup>4</sup>

**Ensuring women's access to land and other productive resources requires not only legislative changes, but also advocacy and training for all stakeholders.** Some progress has been made in changing laws that prevent women from owning land, but the persistence of discriminatory customary laws and practices as well as women's lack of knowledge of their entitlements can hinder the implementation of such laws. The share of female smallholder farmers who can access credit is 5-10 percentage points lower than for male smallholders, and women are much less likely to use agricultural technologies in most

countries.<sup>5</sup> Advocacy and training for all relevant stakeholders should be an integral part of measures aimed at promoting women's equal access to productive resources to ensure effective implementation of such measures.

**Investments in fuel-efficient and labour-saving technologies are critical for women's economic empowerment.** Investment in fuel-efficient and labour-saving technologies will not only reduce women's unpaid care work and free their time for income-generating activities, but will also reduce emissions, improve health, create jobs for both women and men, and reduce poverty. In LDCs, the electrification rate ranges from below 10 to 40 per cent<sup>6</sup> and the percentage of population with improved access to drinking water in rural areas ranges from 9 to 97 per cent with significant disparities between urban and rural areas<sup>7</sup>. This burden is compounded for rural women by poor infrastructure, distance to energy sources and inadequate service provision.

**Women's innovation potential is underutilized – empowering them to fully contribute to science and technology production must become a priority.** Innovation and the development, deployment and transfer of green technologies are critical to sustainable development. Women, however, remain under-represented in the sciences, research and related policy fora. Participatory processes that involve end-users of technology in all stages of R&D can help ensure that their specific needs are addressed, and that technologies are developed that contribute to the promotion of gender equality and women's economic empowerment, sustainable development and poverty eradication.

## Trade

**Women's participation in national, regional and international trade decision-making structures and processes is imperative for women's economic empowerment.** During the last decade, the participation of LDCs in international trade increased, although their share in global trade still remains marginal. Trade policies can have differential impact on women through employment, prices and incomes. The full potential of the Enhanced Integrated Framework for the development of LDCs can only be harnessed if the LDCs identify and address the gender-specific constraints in trade, and increase trading opportunities for women.

## Human and social development

**Linking policies on economic and social development will help ensure that both women and men, including those in poor and marginalized groups, benefit from economic growth and development.**

The interdependencies between economic and social policies, the formal and informal economy, and paid and unpaid work must be recognized and explicitly addressed. For example, investments in health, education and social protection, conventionally seen as “social policy”, not only ease the burden of unpaid work for women, but also contribute to their labour productivity and capacity to take risks and adapt to changing economic opportunities. On the other hand, improvements in roads and transportation systems, categorized as economic investments, can have differential social impacts for women and men, depending on how they are designed.

**Increasing women’s access to social protection measures can help promote productive employment and decent work.**

LDCs have made significant progress in gender parity in primary education in recent years, with the ratio of girls to boys enrolled in primary education ranging from 0.7 to 1.1 in 2008.<sup>8</sup> Improvements in education, however, have yet to translate into better employment opportunities for women. In 2008, labour force participation was 64.7 per cent for women and 85.2 per cent for men in LDCs.<sup>9</sup> In addition, women work mostly in agriculture, comprising about half of the agricultural labour force on average.<sup>10</sup> The proportion of women in non-agricultural work, which is generally better paying, is much lower. The share of people in vulnerable employment was 81 per cent in LDCs compared with 59 per cent in developing countries in 2008.<sup>11</sup> Women are more likely than men to have vulnerable jobs, which are generally precarious, poorly paid, not covered by labour legislation and social protection. In Sub-Saharan Africa, where the majority of the LDCs are located, approximately eight out of ten women workers were in vulnerable employment in 2009.<sup>12</sup>

**Women migrant workers, the majority of whom work in the informal sector, contribute through remittances to the wellbeing of their families and communities in their countries of origin.** Appropriate policies and programmes can help protect women at all stages of migration, and reduce transaction costs of remittances.

## Good Governance

**Women’s equal participation and representation in decision-making processes is essential for peace, security and development.**

Greater participation of women in parliament can ensure that political and policy debates and decisions promote gender equality and women’s rights. While women have an increasing presence in public life, they remain significantly underrepresented in decision-making. As of March 2011, women occupy 20 per cent or more seats in parliament in 16 LDCs.<sup>13</sup> While systematic efforts are needed to promote women’s participation in decision-making bodies, support is also important for gender equality advocates.

## Resources for development and capacity-building

**Allocation of sufficient resources is critical for the implementation of commitments on gender equality and the empowerment of women.** Despite a growing body of evidence demonstrating that gender equality makes good economic

sense, adequate resources have not been systematically allocated to ending discrimination and empowering women.

**Further efforts are needed to strengthen the focus and impact of development assistance targeting gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls.**

Official development assistance (ODA) continues to be a key source of LDCs financing for development. Stronger mechanisms that effectively measure the resources allocated to incorporating gender perspectives in all areas of development assistance are needed.

## Multiple crises and other emerging challenges

**The economic and financial crisis has hampered progress in promoting gender equality and women’s empowerment.** It is critical that recovery measures take into account the negative impact of the crisis on women and men and integrate gender equality concerns in all response measures.

**Women must be at the centre of peace talks and post-conflict reconstruction processes.** Efforts to promote sustainable development by countries can be hindered by the challenges of armed conflicts and crises. Despite the negative impact of conflicts on women, they are active agents of peace and continue to rebuild societies in the most difficult times.

**Women are effective agents of change in relation to both mitigation and adaptation to climate change.** While the contribution of LDCs to climate change is the least with less than 1 per cent of the world’s total greenhouse gas emissions, they are among the groups of countries most affected by it.<sup>14</sup> Small island least developed countries remain especially vulnerable to the threat of climate change. Women and men are affected by and contribute differently to climate change mitigation and adaptation, and their specific needs and roles need to be considered in response.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>United Nations (2009). Report of the Secretary-General on “Improvement of the situation of women in rural areas”, A/64/190.

<sup>2</sup>OHRLLS (2011). LDC-IV Quick facts, [www.un.org/wcm/content/site/ldc/home/quick\\_facts](http://www.un.org/wcm/content/site/ldc/home/quick_facts).

<sup>3</sup>United Nations (2011). Report of the Secretary General on ‘Ten-year appraisal and review of the implementation of the Brussels Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the Decade 2001-2010’.

<sup>4</sup>FAO (2011). The State of Food and Agriculture: Women in Agriculture, Closing the Gender Gap for Development’, Rome.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

<sup>6</sup>UNIDO (2011). Contribution to the LDC IV Conference on Energy Access, [www.unohrrls.org](http://www.unohrrls.org).

<sup>7</sup>United Nations (2011). op. cit.

<sup>8</sup>United Nations (2011). op. cit.

<sup>9</sup>UNDP (2010). Human Development Report 2010, 20th anniversary edition: The Real Wealth of Nations: Pathways to Human Development.

<sup>10</sup>United Nations (2011). op. cit.

<sup>11</sup>UNCTAD (2010). The Least Developed Countries Report 2010, Geneva.

<sup>12</sup>United Nations (2010). MDG Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment Progress Chart 2010

<sup>13</sup>IPU <http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/classif.htm>

<sup>14</sup>UNCTAD (2010). op. cit.

Photo: UN Photo/A Rozberg