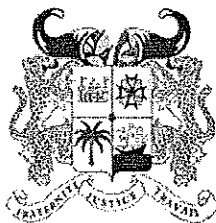


*Mission Permanente
de la République du Bénin
auprès des Nations Unies*



*Permanent Mission of
the Republic of Benin
to the United Nations*

*67th SESSION OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE UNITED NATIONS
OPEN WORKING GROUP ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS*

*FOOD SECURITY & NUTRITION, SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE, DESERTIFICATION, LAND
DEGRADATION AND DROUGHT*

**STATEMENT OF H.E. JEAN-FRANCIS R. ZINSOU
AMBASSADOR PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF BENIN
TO THE UNITED NATIONS
ON BEHALF OF THE LEAST DEVELOPED COUNTRIES**

New York, 22 MAY 2013

**Distinguished Co-Chairs
Excellencies
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

There has been close link between income poverty and food access. Though recent data indicates that the world has succeeded in achieving the poverty target of MDG1, progress in reducing food insecurity and malnutrition has not been much encouraging.

The proportion of undernourished people in LDCs declined during the last decade, moving from an average of 37.9 per cent in 1990-1992 to an average of 30.6 per cent for the period 2010-2012 compared to 12 per cent in other developing countries in 2010. Despite this progress, the proportion of undernourished in the total population of LDCs was the highest among all groups of countries. Further, the number of people living with hunger continued to grow, jumping from 201 million in 1990-1992 to 260 million in 2010-2012. The prevalence of food inadequacy was 38.5 per cent in 2010-12 in LDCs, the highest among all country groups.

The vast majority of LDCs' population-and particularly those who are food-insecure- lives in rural areas and relies on agriculture as primary means of subsistence. The state of rural economy, which is intrinsically linked to improvement in agricultural productivity, therefore determines the pace at which these countries reduce hunger.

The total value of LDCs' imports of food increased annually by an average of 17 per cent to reach US\$40.4 billion in 2011 from US\$7 billion in 2000, nearly six-fold increase. The corresponding annual increases for developing and developed economies were 15 per cent and 9 per cent respectively.

For LDCs as a group, the share of food in their total merchandise imports was 17 per cent in 2011 - double those of developed and developing economies. On the other hand, available statistics indicate a declining share of food in their total merchandise exports from 12 per cent in 2000 to 8 per cent in 2011. Thus, the net position of the trade balance in foodstuff has deteriorated for the LDC group. In 2011, LDCs spent 20 per cent of their total merchandise export earnings on food imports. Most LDCs are net food importers. Out of 28 LDCs for which reported data are readily available, 21 countries are net food importers. For 15 LDCs, their food exports could only finance less than 50 per cent of their food import bills.

In the summer of 2012, food prices, in particular for maize and wheat, were once again on the rise due to drought in major producing countries. This affected many poor people in LDCs, who generally spend 50 to 80 per cent of their income on food.

Indeed, the availability and affordability of food are not only affected by periodic events—including rising prices, inauspicious weather conditions, conflict and violence—but also by structural factors such as under-capitalized agriculture, underdeveloped markets, high dependence on food imports, poor transport infrastructure and food distribution systems and long distances.

With a view to addressing the challenges that LDCs face in the area of food and nutrition, we intend to make following three recommendations:

First: We support Secretary-General's zero hunger initiative and call for concretizing the goal of the IPoA to eradicate hunger by 2020 including by substantially increasing investment in rural infrastructure and ensuring access to safe food and emergency food assistance in all LDCs.

Second: In the same vein as agreed in the IPoA, we call upon the international community to establish a food stockholding or food bank for LDCs in dealing with humanitarian food emergencies or as a means to limit price volatility. This should be included in the SDGs.

Finally: We would also call the global community to improve the international institutional and policy environment to reduce price volatility, including improved information systems for stocks and production, greater transparency in commodity markets, and free movement of food supplies without any restrictions.

Mr. Co-Chairs,

The agriculture sector in least developed countries faces huge challenges owing to lack of adequate investment in physical infrastructure, scientific and technological development, research and agricultural extension services. Furthermore, agriculture development has been suffering from adverse impacts of climate change, environmental degradation, desertification, land and soil degradation, extreme weather events, floods, droughts and cyclones, deforestation and loss of biodiversity, declining water availability and degrading water quality. Other natural disasters such as earthquakes and tsunamis can also have negative impacts on sustainable agricultural development.

Low agricultural productivity is a major challenge in LDCs. In 2011, they produced 190.4 metric tons of cereals, at around 2,019 kilograms per hectare. In comparison, MICs produced 3,548 kilograms of cereals per hectare and produced nearly 8x as many metric tons of cereals.

Preservation of food stocks is also a big challenge. Roughly one third of food produced – 1.3 billion tonnes per year – is lost or wasted globally. In LDCs food is lost mostly on farm – due to pests or lack of effective storage – or in transportation and processing.

With a view to addressing the challenges related to Agriculture, we would make the following recommendations:

First: New investments are required in regional and national agricultural and fishery research and rural infrastructure.

Second: Development partners should provide enhanced financial and technical support for the development of the agricultural sector as promised in the IPoA. They should also support least developed countries' national, regional and international agricultural and fishery research institutions to build capacities in tropical agricultural technologies and strengthen agricultural knowledge and information systems.

Third: The WTO members should ensure the parallel elimination in agriculture of all forms of export subsidies and disciplines on all export measures with equivalent effect to be completed by the end of 2013.

Fourth: Development partners should support least developed countries' efforts to establish or strengthen safety nets such as access to agricultural finance, insurance and other risk-mitigation tools.

Finally: International community should provide least developed countries with high yielding and climate-resilient crop varieties, including saline-, drought- and submersion-compatible species, through transfer of appropriate technology and technical know-how.

Mr. Co-Chairs,

Desertification, land degradation and drought have continued to hamper sustainable development efforts of LDCs. They are major obstacles for LDCs to achieve MDGs, especially those related to poverty and hunger. If scientific predictions are correct, it is likely that poverty rates would increase and food security would decline in many countries. The continuous loss of fertile land, which in most cases is the only asset of the poor, has deepened poverty and food insecurity levels.

A billion hectares are affected by desertification in LDCs in Africa alone leading to estimated losses of approximately \$ 9 billion a year. As a result, sustainable development remains elusive for many LDCs. Among the major impediments to sustainable development, extreme poverty and land degradation and desertification rank highest since many LDCs are heavily dependent on a fragile natural resource base for their growth.

The percentage of people living on severely and very severely degraded land was 25 per cent in 2010 in LDCs. Land degradation indicates that biotic functions are largely destroyed and that land is nonreclaimable at the farm level or nonreclaimable at all, imposing additional hurdles to economic growth and poverty reduction efforts.

Land degradation and desertification particularly in LDCs also carry a high human cost by placing the livelihoods of around 900 million people of LDCs, almost a fifth of the entire population of the globe, at risk. Millions have already been uprooted from their traditional lands as a result of desertification. Desertification has also played a role in sparking off several of the armed conflicts currently in progress. In many instances, it contributes to political instability starvation and social breakdown.

Climate change is further aggravating the situation. LDCs have a limited capacity to manage the catastrophic consequences of climate change and yet are at risk of being the most affected by climate changes. Loss of fertile topsoil and arable land leads to food insecurity, a real challenge in many LDCs countries; water shortage is also threatening the sustainable livelihood of lower income groups, notably in the rural communities.

Although developing regions of the world are suffering the impacts of extreme weather events, droughts and land degradation, their contribution to CO₂ emissions was very low. The LDCs emitted 0.24 tones of carbon per capita in 2009, which contrast with 3.63 tones per capita of other developing countries and 9.98 tones per capita of the OECD in the same year.

The Group of LDCs is happy with the outcome of the recently held High-Level Meeting on National Drought Policy which, among others encouraged Governments around the world to develop and implement National Drought Management Policies.

The Group agrees with the warning contained in the issues paper on DLDD that if we do not take bold action to protect, restore and manage land and soils sustainably, we will not achieve our commitments for climate change adaptation and mitigation, biodiversity conservation, forest and MDG targets; we will not alleviate rural poverty and hunger, ensure long-term food security or build resilience to drought and water stress.

It is against this backdrop that the Group of LDCs fully supports the establishment of an SDG to achieve a land-degradation neutral world and calls on its partners to support such a move and all needed enablers to achieve a land degradation neutral world. We also need advanced technologies, such as high resolution satellite images and meteorological satellite data to gather information necessary to examine the nature, trend and scope of DLDD processes and formulate relevant policies.

I thank you all.