

Foreword by United Nations Under-Secretary-General

Eight years ago, United Nations members signed off on the ambitious Istanbul Programme of Action, in response to the urgent need to accelerate the development of the least developed countries (LDCs). The global community set itself the ambitious goal of ensuring that half of LDCs would reach graduation thresholds by 2021.

The LDC grouping of countries was established in 1971. Since then, and as of just this year, only five countries have graduated! In March 2018, the Committee for Development Policy found 12 LDCs had met the criteria for graduation. This is major progress and it is noteworthy that, out of the 12 countries, half are small island nations.

Without a doubt, graduation is a milestone achievement. Yet we must see it as a step and not an end on the longer road towards equitable, inclusive and sustainable development. The Istanbul Programme of Action provisions aim to ensure graduating countries are eased onto a sustainable development path without any disruption to development plans, programmes and projects.

This report is timely. It comes at a time when many LDCs are preparing for graduation. We hope that its analysis and recommendations will help countries map out effective policy and operational responses to ensure smooth and above all sustainable transitions.

Trade and trade preferences are key for most LDCs in their efforts to graduate and, in the longer run, follow a sustainable development path. There must therefore be a focus on the trade-related consequences of graduation.

Many LDCs experience deep structural constraints, including their disproportionately high vulnerability to external shocks and the impacts of climate change. We hope that the example of Mozambique provided in this report will be of use for other LDCs.

Clearly, leadership on graduation has to lie with the graduating country. Yet we must recognise that a smooth and above all sustainable transition hinges on partnership –with development partners, both bilateral and multilateral, the private sector and civil society. The United Nations General Assembly has already called for support to the implementation of such partnership strategies.

Our work also identifies the need to support transition through targeted packages of continued support for the graduated countries, in order not avoid disrupting or, worse, jeopardising development dynamics and progress. Such incentive measures

accompanying graduation should include enhanced access to new sources of financing and targeted support to reap the benefits of trade.

This report presents concrete options for LDCs and their development partners. The global community's 2030 Agenda demands that we accelerate progress towards sustainable graduations, enhance partnerships and work together if indeed we wish the Sustainable Development Goals to become reality for ALL by 2030.

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