

2019

Update on the progress of the multi year work programme on a comprehensive review of the least developed country criteria *

The Committee took stock of its implementation of the multi year (2017–2020) work programme on a comprehensive review of the least developed country criteria. It found that the least developed country category and its criteria remain highly relevant in the current development thinking represented, inter alia, by the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. It reviewed the basic structure of the criteria and the

Committee takes additional country specific information and the views of the country concerned country must meet designated thresholds for all criteria in a single review, while for graduation it must pass the graduation thresholds of multiple criteria in two consecutive reviews. Inclusion is effective immediately, but graduation becomes effective after a preparatory into account. The recommendations must be endorsed by the Economic and Social Council and taken note of by the General Assembly.

The Committee confirmed the relevance of the least developed country criteria in the current development thinking represented, inter alia, by the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, while acknowledging the need for further refinements. Progress towards graduation signifies progress towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals because overcoming structural impediments moves countries closer to achieving sustainable development objectives. Graduation must be seen as a milestone, rather than an independent development objective, because graduated countries will continue to face difficult challenges in pursuing the sustainable development objectives outlined in the transformative and universal 2030 Agenda. Progress towards these broader objectives requires not only that structural impediments (such as those captured by the least developed country criteria) be addressed, but also that non structural barriers be overcome and that improved governance and policy choices be adopted. The Committee found that almost all indicators included in the least developed country criteria are directly related to the 17 Sustainable Development Goals. To a large extent, this reflects the fact that the Committee has adopted a multi dimensional concept of development since the inception of the least developed country category and has frequently refined the criteria in line with changes in development thinking, including the emergence of the sustainable development paradigm.

The Committee also confirmed the suitability of the basic structure of the least developed country criteria, including the “two out of three” graduation rule and the “income only” exception, which enables countries with sufficiently and sustainably high income to graduate, even if they fail to pass the other two criteria. The current exception allowing only countries with a population below 75 million to be added to the category (while allowing existing least developed countries to remain on the list even if they have a larger population) could be eliminated for simplification. Graduation of countries with high vulnerability or low human assets (but who are not covered by the income only exception) continues to be justified, if and only if these countries

are generating sufficient income and have overcome their other main structural impediment with a sufficient margin. Moreover, requiring countries to meet all three criteria for graduation would violate the principle of intertemporal consistency and equitable treatment of countries, and would prevent most least developed countries from ever being able to leave the category. The Committee will be able to provide a brief assessment of how countries can address their remaining structural handicaps without specific least developed country international support and how the international community can support them, building on the proposed graduation assessment discussed in chapter VII.

The Committee resolved to strengthen the graduation process by amending the procedures governing the application of the least developed country criteria. In this regard, it

will therefore play a critical role in providing a comprehensive picture. Accordingly, the Committee requests that the assessments include data for a wider set of vulnerability indicators, covering the least developed countries and all other developing countries to the greatest extent possible.

During the remainder of the implementation period, the Committee will continue to monitor the progress of the implementation of the Doha Development Agenda.