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Qatar and the Least Developed Countries

Bülent Aras

The world's least developed countries (LDCs) face significant challenges in achieving sustainable development and improving the well-being of their citizens. With a population of over 1.1 billion people, the 46 countries designated as LDCs by the United Nations (UN) face a range of economic, social, and environmental obstacles that hinder their ability to break out of the poverty trap and achieve inclusive growth. The Fifth United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries (LDC5) was convened in Doha on March 5-9, 2023 to set the priorities, responsibilities and implementation of policies pertaining to the LDCs in the next decade. Center for International Policy Research (CIPR) organized the 'Workshop on Qatar and the Least Developed Countries' as an academic preliminary side event on March 4th as a customary feature of UN LDC Conferences to stir discussion and provide information for experts, Qatari stakeholders, the local community, and interested international parties. The ideas and perspectives presented in the workshop served as the basis for the development of this policy brief.

Introduction

The LDC5 Conference, which was held at the Heads of State and Government level, took place in Doha from March 5-9, 2023. It was attended by Member and Observer States of the United Nations, International Organizations, and various other relevant stakeholders. The countries that have an average per capita income below USD 1,018 are listed by the United Nations (UN) as the Least Developed Countries (LDCs) and should raise above USD 1,222 to be able to graduate from this list. The commitment made during LDC4 to graduate a half of the 48 LDCs has not been fulfilled and there are still 46 LDCs. While the targets set in 2011 have not been fully met, a certain level of progress has been achieved with 16 countries having met the criteria in one way or another, 4 of them having graduated and another 5 will be graduating soon.[1]

The crises faced by the LDCs have manifold. The COVID19 pandemic had a considerable negative impact, in addition to global warming, human and nature- made disasters, civil wars, armed conflicts, lack of food security, poverty and hunger, among others. Doha Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the decade 2022-2031 (DPoA) targets the graduation of another 15 LDCs by 2031. Meanwhile, more than one-third of LDCs are at different stages of the graduation process. As such, there is a reason for optimism while considerable number of challenges and uncertainties stand on this bumpy road.

The UN LDC Conference is convened every 10 years, in current case 12 years due to the pandemic. The LDC5 Conference took place amidst an unparalleled crisis, with 46 LDCs and their 1.1 billion inhabitants facing the worst impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, climate change, human and nature-made disasters, civil wars, armed conflicts, lack of food security,

poverty and hunger, among others, all of which are pushing them towards devastating outcomes. The progress made in these nations is a critical indicator of the success of the 2030 Agenda. The pandemic continues to pose a significant threat to entire societies, causing a setback of decades of development progress. Additionally, the closure of schools in the LDCs has resulted in millions of children being out of school for several years, creating a generational crisis.

The previous conference, UN LDC4, was held under the auspices of Türkiye in Istanbul in 2011. The LDC5 Conference was hosted in Doha to set the priorities, responsibilities and implementation of policies pertaining to the LDCs in the next ten years. There was countless number of references to DPoA and the conference assigned a supervisory and regulatory role to Qatar. This perception will position Qatar as both a bearer of success and failure regarding the UN-led performance on LDC issues. In any case, hosting LDC5 and adopting DPoA will enhance Qatar's state brand and soft power, empowering Qatar in the LDC geographies over the next decade. The maximization of benefits, in this sense, will depend on effectively utilizing the opportunities in this regard.

Center for International Policy Research (CIPR) hosted the 'Workshop on Qatar and the Least Developed Countries' as an academic preliminary event with the objective of promoting discussion from a Qatari viewpoint and fostering dialogue among various groups, including experts from major research institutions in Qatar, experts from LDCs and other nations, as well as interested parties worldwide. Such informative and introductory academic side events have become a customary practice at past UN LDC Conferences. For example, the Intellectuals Forum that had been organized in Istanbul in 2011 preceded UN LDC4 in a similar vein.

The 'Workshop on Qatar and the Least Developed

Countries' centered on the theme of the current LDC Conference, "From Potential to Prosperity," and addressed various topics related to the LDCs. The workshop delved into Qatar's involvement with the LDCs, its expected role(s) in the implementation of the DPoA, and its efforts towards the development and provision of humanitarian aid to the LDCs. Additionally, the workshop aimed to draw insights from Türkiye's experience as the host of LDC4. It also discussed major challenges facing the LDCs, including disaster relief and conflict resolution, which hinder their potential for achieving prosperity. The participants explored Qatar's possible contributions towards addressing these challenges. The subsequent sections will highlight the key points of discussion that emerged during the workshop.

The Doha Programme of Action and the LDCs

The first part of the LDC5 was held on March 17, 2022, at the United Nations Headquarters in New York during which the DPoA was adopted by consensus. The DPoA is an ambitious document that establishes a new development compact to support the sustainable development of LDCs. The Programme's primary objectives are to address the most pressing challenges of our time, such as swiftly and sustainably recovering from the COVID-19 pandemic, increasing resilience to future shocks, and expediting the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

The DPoA has six key focus areas for action, as follows:

- (a) Investing in people in least developed countries: Eradicating poverty and building capacity to leave no one behind;
- (b) Leveraging the power of science, technology, and innovation to fight against multidimensional vulnerabilities and to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals;
- (c) Supporting structural transformation as a driver of prosperity;
- (d) Enhancing international trade of least developed countries and regional integration;
- (e) Addressing climate change, environmental degradation, recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic and building resilience against future shocks for risk-informed sustainable development;
- (f) Mobilizing international solidarity, reinvigorated global partnerships and innovative tools and instruments: a march towards sustainable graduation.

The DPoA has established several deliverables, including the creation of an online university, an investment promotion framework, a food stockholding system, a mechanism for mitigating crises and building resilience, and a support facility for LDCs graduating from the programme. It has also set crucial targets, such as enabling 15 additional LDCs to meet the graduation criteria, doubling the proportion of exports and aid for trade allocated to LDCs. Although the primary responsibility for their own development lies with the LDCs, their development partners must ensure that they receive adequate support to achieve these targets.

Qatar's Development Cooperation and LDCs

The "Workshop on Qatar and Least Developed Countries" emphasized Qatar's emergence as a donor country in recent years, which is significant given its role as the host country of LDC5. According to research highlighted during the workshop, Qatar's aid priorities are the MENA region, followed by Sub-Saharan Africa, Europe and Central Asia, East Asia, and the Pacific. Most of the aid goes to low-income countries, and the majority of it is in the form of

humanitarian and emergency response aid. Qatar provides aid through Qatar government and NGOs such as Qatar Charity and Qatar Red Crescent, and the NGOs are regulated. Sudan, Yemen, Somalia, Bangladesh, and Myanmar are the top five LDCs that receive the most aid from Qatar. It prioritizes health aid for refugees in other countries and follows the OECD's directions. Qatar's official development is around 600 million every year, and its ODA as a share of Gross National Income is 0.42, which will reach 0.5 this year and aims to reach the UN target of 0.7 by 2030-2031. It was suggested that while Qatar is in a unique position for humanitarian diplomacy with its civil society, the aid numbers need to increase, and it needs to play an exemplary role as a host country to reach the UN-specified numbers.

It was also indicated that Qatar donated a total of 1.368 billion US dollars to 40 Least Developed Countries (LDCs) from 2012 to 2023. The aid was given to 10 countries in Asia and the Pacific, 29 in Africa, and one in Latin America and the Caribbean. The two biggest beneficiaries were Sudan, which received 4.8 million US dollars, and Yemen, which received 293 million US dollars. While some countries received aid for only one year, others stopped receiving aid due to various reasons or improved their economic situation. In 2022, almost all LDCs received aid from Qatar, with only 9 or 10 countries not included.

During the workshop, it was highlighted that the COVID-19 pandemic underscored the importance and value of South-South cooperation. The pandemic presented various lessons that can be learned from the international community's failure to effectively address the challenges. The two superpowers, the US and China, were expected to collaborate in meeting the challenges of the pandemic, but instead, their rivalry increased, resulting in negative impacts on the rest of the world. Moreover, multilateral

organizations also failed to meet the challenges, thus highlighting the need for South-South cooperation, in which Qatar can play an important role by presenting the voice of the non-Western world and facilitating diplomacy and mediation.

Türkiye's role as a donor country was also highlighted during the workshop, with its pandemic diplomacy being noteworthy, reaching out to 161 countries across the world, most of which were LDC countries. The workshop suggested that Türkiye and Qatar are trying to fit into the traditional understanding of the aid architecture, which contradicts with Qatar's image of non-traditional donor. As such, the focus should be more on qualitative aspects, revising old concepts, and utilizing cultural understanding. The LDC5 conference was indicated as an opportunity to present a different perspective. It was also proposed that Qatar should consider a more comprehensive role other than OECD countries by underlining that Qatar has achieved significant impact and results in disaster response and aid delivery that bureaucratic constellations like the UN cannot achieve. NGOs like Qatar charity have donated to countries in need without too much concern over registration and reporting. Qatar's technical support to countries has increased ten-fold in the last ten years, and it has worked with countries that felt hostage to strings attached aid design when it came to development and aid. While some of Qatar's aid goes through the UN mechanism, most of it goes through its NGOs or its support to NGOs in those countries, allowing it to affect the UN mechanism.

Qatar Charity, which is one of Qatar's major humanitarian NGOs, is a donation-based NGO that operates in over 50 countries with more than 2000 employees overseas and an annual budget exceeding 400 million US dollars. It focuses on emergency relief, social welfare, and development programs such as shelters, vocational schools, clinics, hospitals, and economic endowment programs. In Sudan, they have been present for almost three decades, spending over 100 million US dollars and completing over two

thousand projects in the last decade. Their big projects in Sudan include the Darfur Infrastructure project, the Educational Village for Orphans program, and the Hospital project. Qatar Charity conducts intensive studies before intervening in an area, relying on local and international stakeholders and their multicultural department of experts. It was argued during the workshop that Qatar Charity does not politicize humanitarian work and target people of all races, religions, and ethnicities. As part of its strategy, the charity aims to have a significant impact on the community and then phase-out within a decade or two.

Istanbul Program of Action and the LDCs

LDC4, which was held in Istanbul in 2011, aimed to support LDCs in overcoming poverty and achieving sustainable development through trade, aid, and technology transfer. However, progress has been slow. Only three countries graduated and 48 remain LDCs, well below the pledge to graduate half of the LDCs by 2021. While there have been some improvements, such as increases in phone usage, internet access, and agricultural production, there have also been declines in areas such as literacy rates and corruption. Access to clean water and basic sanitation remains low, and the number of girls out of school has decreased. Overall, while some progress has been made, it falls short of the promises made in 2011.

As the host country of LDC4, Türkiye's support for the LDCs was analyzed during the workshop based on the eight priorities of the conference as well as the importance of Türkiye's support for the LDCs in international platforms. Türkiye has developed several packages that have had an impact on LDCs, such as the technical cooperation package that crosses several priorities and the triangular cooperation packages implemented with the UN or specific countries

like Singapore. Additionally, the Istanbul International Center for Private Sector Development was established to support LDCs.

In terms of the eight priorities, Türkiye has taken action in several areas. For example, it hosts the United Technology Bank in Gebze, which was founded in 2018 and signed a 50-year financial agreement with the UN Technology Bank for the development of science, technology, and innovation in reaching the SDGs. Türkiye's national scientific organization, TÜBİTAK, also supports joint projects like research projects related to agriculture, food security, and rural development, and Türkiye offers scholarships focusing on agriculture, engineering, and medicine. It also provides training and technical assistance to LDCs, has many business connections with them and hosts councils in specific countries. Additionally, Türkiye offers scholarships and capacity building programs for small and medium-sized enterprises, as well as support for climate change. 20% of Türkiye's official development assistance goes to the LDCs. Türkiye's priorities are shaped by its foreign policy priorities, with Somalia and Afghanistan being top recipients.

Conflict, Disaster Relief and the LDCs: The Case of East Africa

Conflicts and disasters are major impediments to the development of the LDCs. During the workshop, East Africa was discussed as a case for the management of conflicts and disasters with a focus on countries such as Somalia, Sudan, South Sudan and Ethiopia. Somalia is widely recognized as one of the most vulnerable countries to conflict and disasters among the LDCs, primarily due to factors such as persistent intrastate conflict and weak governance. It has been experiencing drought and conflict which has resulted in food and water scarcity, displacement, and income loss. It was indicated during the workshop that the severe drought has been ongoing for six seasons, leading to high prices and a shortage of drinkable water, affecting the agricultural sector, which

employs 6% of the population. Droughts have also displaced about 1.2 million people, resulting in economic hardship and lack of sanitation. The ongoing conflict has made it difficult for humanitarian organizations to provide aid. It was recommended in the workshop that interventions in drought relief should include promoting water conservation, implementing conservation missions, increasing storage capacity, promoting drought-resistant crops, providing financial support for farmers, and promoting rainwater harvesting.

Moreover, given that drought can exacerbate the risk of waterborne diseases and malnutrition, it's crucial to ensure that affected communities have access to healthcare services. This could involve establishing basic clinics in hard-to-reach areas where medical personnel are scarce, so that affected individuals can receive timely and appropriate care. It was also suggested that long-term interventions are necessary to build community resilience to avoid future droughts. There is a need for better coordination and collaboration among humanitarian actors, the government, and the community to ensure effective and efficient drought relief interventions.

It was underscored during the workshop that addressing conflict drivers should be a priority for any humanitarian and development corporation. Violent conflict has increased in the last decade, and countries experiencing low GDP per capita have a higher risk of experiencing conflict. Horizontal inequality, which refers to inequality between groups, also causes conflict which requires careful assessment of the local context before designing an aid campaign. It was emphasized that poverty and conflict are interlinked, with 73% of the world's extremely poor living in fragile contexts, where there is a huge overlap between extreme poverty and conflict-affected situations. It is crucial to have a

great awareness of what drives conflict and to shift budgets into those contexts. Multiple conflicts of different types are intertwined in many LDCs, making it difficult to address concerns and leading to similar shocks that affect all countries in the region, such as climate-related shocks and COVID-19. Structural drivers differ among countries and even within territories, but addressing conflict drivers is essential to allow LDCs to graduate out of poverty.

The workshop also suggested that it is important to distinguish between internal and external shocks and the ability of a state and system to deal with those shocks in a non-violent manner. Conflict resolution must come from national actors, and it is their responsibility to indicate what they need to be able to deal with those tensions. Three examples of mistakes made in European aid were provided, including humanitarian aid being manipulated to reward political loyalties, investment in Ethiopian Dutch flower farms leading to attacks for political reasons, and the support of the dairy sector in South Sudan fueling a power struggle between two ethnic groups. The need for a conflict-sensitive approach was emphasized in addition to understanding the conflict drivers, and considering who benefits and who doesn't from an intervention. It was also highlighted that the private sector should be utilized more, and massive humanitarian interventions should not hurt the local private sector.

It was pinpointed during the workshop that in order to address conflicts in developed countries, it is important to understand the root causes. DDR-SSR process and foreign actors providing assistance and advisory programs at various levels is important was drawn attention to. In order to address issues such as humanitarian aid, investment promotion, and food insecurity, it was argued that it is crucial to first address the root causes of security sector reform and reintegration. The presence of Islamist organizations, insurgency, organized crime, rebel movements, and ethnic divisions were listed as examples of issues that need to be analyzed to understand why they are

happening and to determine whether interventions could exacerbate or ease the conflict.

The workshop also expressed frustration with the UN's failure to reform and the dilemma of dual accountability. In this view, the focus should shift from output to process, and that transparency and inclusivity are crucial in aid processes. The importance of identifying solutions that are not just copy-pasted from the West, and instead finding solutions that are specific to each region was emphasized. The failures of DDR-SSR and the importance of prioritizing the reintegration part of peace processes was also indicated. The workshop cautioned against creating expectations that cannot be met and frustrating people, which may lead them to take up arms again. As such, examples from Colombia and Iraq were drawn and the importance of following various mission masters to handle the process effectively was underlined.

Looking Ahead: Lessons for Qatar

Addressing the challenges faced by LDCs requires a comprehensive approach, and Qatar, as the host of LDC5, has the potential to make a significant impact. The following policy recommendations could be utilized to address the issues faced by LDCs:

- Increase aid numbers and aim to reach the UN target of 0.7 ODA as a share of Gross National Income by 2030-2031.
- Aid should focus more on supporting LDCs in terms of good governance, long-term development and self-sufficiency to help them graduate from the LDC category.
- Qatar could promote South-South cooperation and present the voice of the non-Western world to facilitate diplomacy and mediation.
- Focus more on qualitative aspects of aid, revise old concepts, and increase cultural understanding in aid delivery.
- Revisit the modus operandi and work culture of the existing mechanisms within the UN and other organizations such as OECD and promote their transformation.
- Policy efforts should focus on improving the structure and implementation of governmental institutions in LDCs which can be achieved by providing technical assistance and capacity-building programs to enhance the capabilities of institutions responsible for aid implementation.
- It is important to address the structural issues of policy implementation in LDCs, such as corruption and lack of accountability, which hinder the effectiveness of aid. This can be accomplished by creating a transparent and accountable aid delivery system, empowering civil society organizations, and promoting good governance practices.
- Qatar has several advantages that could be utilized for LDCs, including its energy transition strategy, specific training and capacity building, and south-to-south diplomacy. Its geographic location gives it a logistical advantage for the management of upcoming plans and projects.
- Institutional capacity is also crucial, and political will is necessary to ensure policies and strategies are in line with the host or donor country's foreign policy or national interests.

Endnotes

[1] United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, LDCs at a Glance, <https://www.un.org/development/desa/dpad/least-developed-country-category/lDCs-at-a-glance.html>, accessed March 28, 2023.

About the Author

Dr. Bülent Aras is Research Director of Center for International Policy Research (CIPR) and visiting professor of international relations at Qatar University.

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Center for International Policy Research (CIPR) is a research center with focus on economic, political, energy and security issues in the GCC region. Based in Doha, CIPR specializes in political risk analysis, government and corporate advisory, conflict advisory, track II diplomacy, humanitarian/development advisory, and event management in the GCC region and beyond. The CIPR aims at becoming a primary research and debate platform in the region with relevant publications, events, projects and media productions to nurture a comprehensive understanding of the intertwined affairs of this geography. With an inclusive, scholarly and innovative approach, the CIPR presents a platform where diverse voices from academia, business and policy world from both the region and the nation's capital interact to produce distinct ideas and insights to the outstanding issues of the region.

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pyna@pynadc.com

Center for International Policy Research
Laffan Tower, Ambassadors Street
Doha, Qatar

www.cipresearch.org
info@cipresearch.org