Progress in the implementation of the priority areas of the **Istanbul Programme of Action** for the **Least Developed Countries** for the Decade 2011-2020

United Nations
Economic Commission for Africa

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I. Introduction

The year 2015 witnessed the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, the Paris Agreement on climate change and Agenda 2063, the African continent's own regional framework for development. For least developed countries in general, and African least developed countries in particular, these regionally and internationally agreed frameworks will have to be implemented alongside the Istanbul Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the Decade 2011-2020 in an integrated and coherent manner. Effective implementation will require strengthened capacities to integrate all the above initiatives in national planning frameworks, along with capacities to identify and leverage synergies among the interrelated goals, targets and indicators so as to optimize policy impact.

II. Progress in the implementation of the Istanbul Programme of Action

A. Infrastructure and energy

1. General situation

Infrastructure and energy are major prerequisites for efforts to promote industrialization and structural transformation. For example, the establishment of special economic zones to promote the development of manufacturing requires good-quality and sufficient infrastructure, notably in the areas of transport, energy, water and information and communications technology. The present section assesses progress made in recent years in the provision of infrastructure and energy in African least developed countries.

African least developed countries are characterized by weak productive capacities, with significant infrastructure gaps keeping them in a development trajectory of low economic diversification, with factors of production – and in particular the labour force – concentrated in less productive sectors, such as subsistence agriculture and informal services. Processing activities and value addition remain relatively insignificant, as the export of raw materials is still the norm in these countries. The contribution of the manufacturing sector to gross domestic product (GDP) is weak by comparison with that in the rest of the world. As may be seen in table 1, in 2015 the manufacturing value added as a percentage of GDP stood at 8.33 per cent in African least developed countries. This figure is exactly equal to the level that prevailed in 2010 and even lower than that of 2001, which was 10.29 per cent. By way of comparison, in 2015 the same indicator measured 12.58 per cent for all least developed countries and 10.54 per cent for those in sub-Saharan Africa. The figure for the world was 14.95 per cent in 2014.

2. Energy

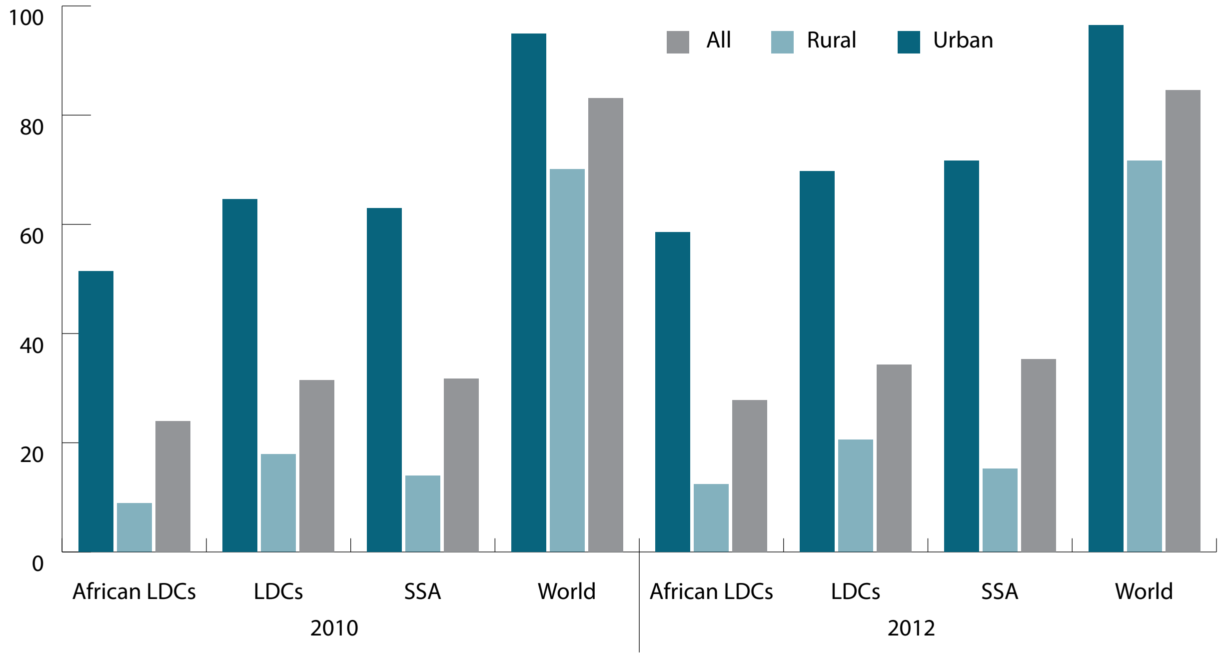
The percentage of people with access to electricity provides a useful indicator of the development of energy in developing countries, as shown in figure 1 below. Latest data available indicate that, between 2010 and 2012, the average proportion of the population of African least

Table 1: Manufacturing value added as a percentage of GDP

	2001	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
African LDCs	10.29	8.33	8.57	8.45	8.31	8.20	8.33
All LDCs	10.08	11.48	11.69	12.25	12.16	12.17	12.58
Sub-Saharan Africa	11.65	10.31	10.21	10.35	10.53	10.78	10.54
World	18.51	16.71	16.57	16.39	16.34	14.95	-

Source: *Computed from world development indicator (WDI) data downloaded in January 2017.*

Figure 1: Percentage of people with access to electricity by area of residence



Source: *Computed from WDI data downloaded in January 2017.*

developed countries with access to electricity increased marginally, rising from 24 to 28 per cent. Substantial disparities exist between areas of residence, with access proportions of 59 and 12 per cent in urban and rural areas respectively. A comparison of the situations in 2012 and 2010 shows significant progress over those two years, with gains of 8 percentage points in the urban area; 3 percentage points in the rural area; and an increase of 4 percentage points when the entire group is considered. The world average for the same indicator was 85 per cent in 2012, which is three times higher than in African least developed countries. Levels for the entire group of least developed countries and for countries in sub-Saharan Africa are also higher than those for African least developed countries, standing respectively at 34 and 35 per cent in 2012.

3. Information and communications technology

The penetration of information and communications technology in African least developed countries has increased significantly. Access to such technology is key to the raising of productivity in all sectors and for the development of a competitive private sector capable of playing its desired role as an engine of economic growth. Indeed, mobile telephony has played an important role in facilitating financial inclusion in Africa. African least developed countries continue to make good progress in the penetration of information and communications technology: thus, the number of internet users per 100 people doubled between 2011 and 2015; and the number of mobile cellular subscriptions rose by 47.7 per cent over the same period. Indeed, relative to 2011 African least developed countries grew faster in these domains in 2015 than both the countries of sub-Saharan Africa and the world as a whole (table 2).

Internet penetration has been growing since 2011. For least developed countries as a whole, it rose from 10.0 per cent in 2010 and 2011 to 21.9 per cent over the period 2014-2015 (see figure 2 below). If that pace is maintained, a strong level of penetration may be expected by the end of the Istanbul Programme of Action. By contrast, for the countries of sub-Saharan Africa, the rate of growth is relatively static.

B. Agriculture and food security

1. General situation

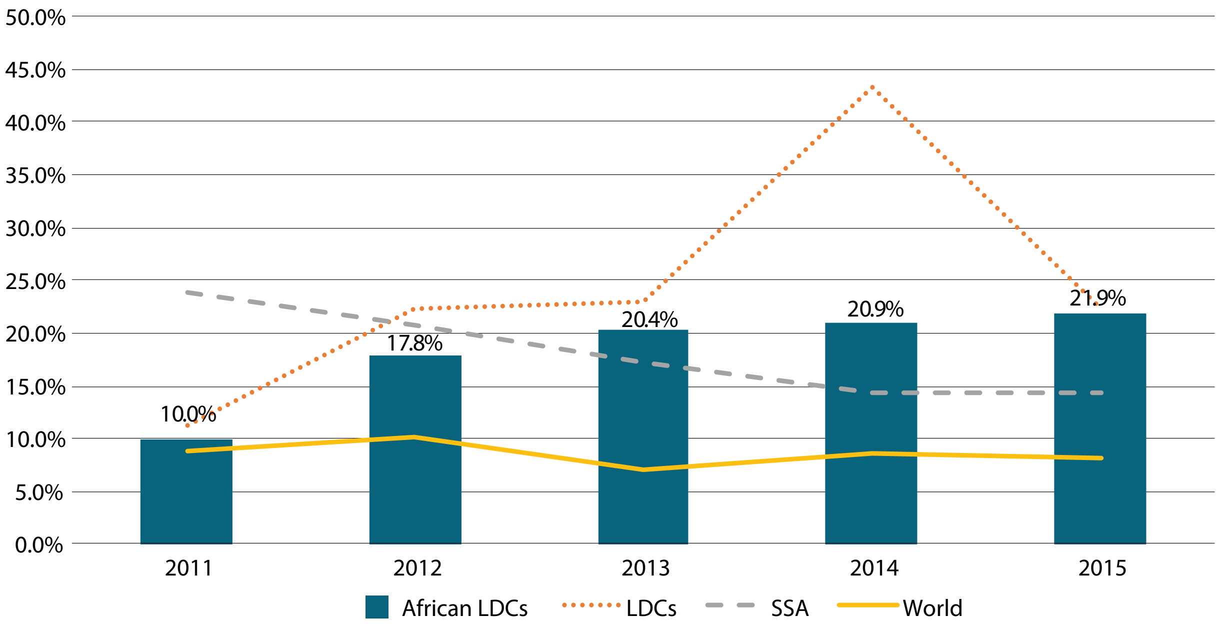
The Istanbul Programme of Action identifies agriculture as a critical sector in least developed

Table 2: Penetration of information and communications technology

	Mobile cellular subscriptions per 100 people			Internet users per 100 people		
	2011	2015	Variation (%)	2011	2015	Variation (%)
African LDCs	44.5	65.8	47.7%	5.1	10.7	109%
All LDCs	42.2	68.2	61.6%	4.8	12.6	164%
Sub-Saharan Africa	53.1	75.7	42.7%	12.1	22.4	85%
World	84.2	98.6	17.1%	31.7	44.0	39%

Source: *Computed from WDI data downloaded in January 2017.*

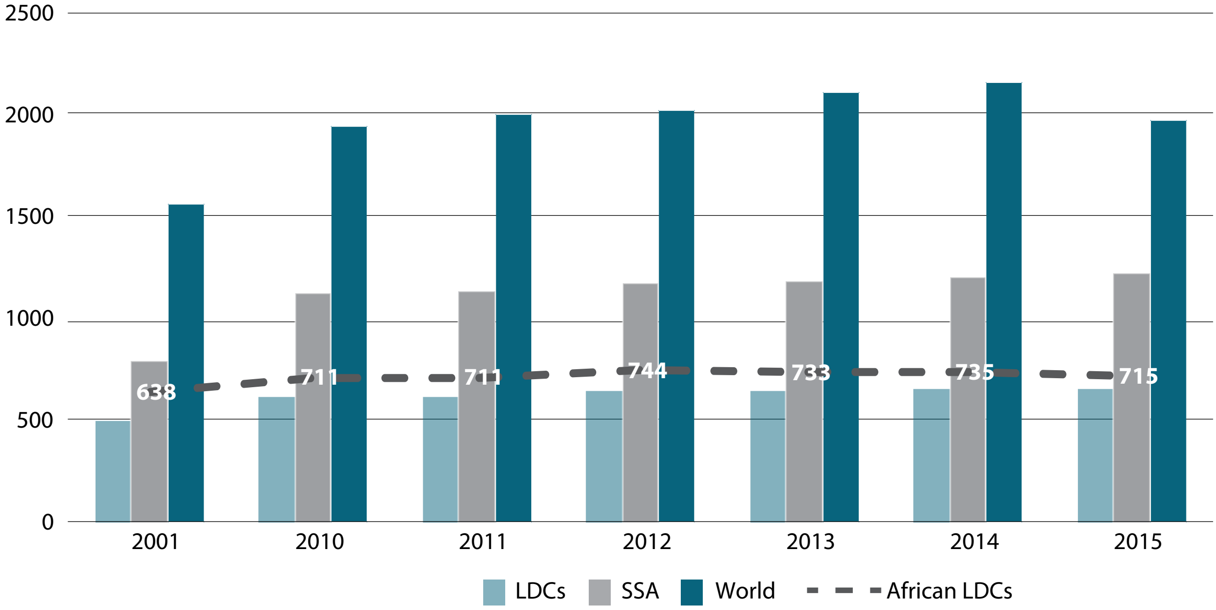
Figure 2: Variation of internet penetration



countries for the promotion of rural development, the empowerment of women and food security, and for the eradication of poverty and hunger. The sector has great potential for economic diversification, and the expansion of exports through, above all, the improvement of countries' agro-processing capacities. Increasing agricultural productivity as measured by agricultural value added is critical if the sector is to play its role as a driver of growth and transformation. Over the last 15 years, agricultural productivity in African least developed countries has been higher than the average for all such countries as a whole but lower than the corresponding average for sub-Saharan Africa and also for the world.

For instance, in 2001, agricultural value added per worker measured $638 in African least developed countries, as against $502 in least developed countries, $794 in sub-Saharan Africa and $1,569 in the world as a whole, as set out in figure 3 below. In 2015, the gap between the two levels has narrowed slightly, but more because of a drop in the performance of the world than because of progress made by African least developed countries. The gap in levels of agricultural productivity between African least developed countries and the rest of the world may be attributed to differences in access to agricultural inputs and machinery. For example, African least developed countries lag behind the rest of the world in their use of fertilizer. In 2012 (latest data available), fertilizer consumption in kg per hectare of arable land was 12 times lower for African least developed countries (11.3 kg/ha) than for the rest of the world (135.3 kg/ha). Both the groups of least developed countries as a whole and the countries of sub-Saharan Africa do much better than African least developed countries in this area,

Figure 3: Agricultural value added per worker (at constant US$ values of 2010)



Source: *Drawn by authors from data downloaded from WDI database in January 2017.*

with fertilizer consumption of 24.5 kg/ha and 17.5 kg/ha respectively (see table 3).

Fertilizer consumption in African least developed countries has increased at a relatively faster pace in recent years, rising by 16 per cent between 2010 and 2012 and surpassed only by the average rate in sub-Saharan African countries over the same period.

2. Malnutrition

Agricultural productivity levels have implications for food security and nutritional conditions. Indeed, malnutrition rankings mirror the agricultural productivity rankings depicted in table 4 below. Specifically, the prevalence of malnutrition in African least developed countries is below the least developed country average but higher than the average for sub-Saharan Africa and the world as a whole. Furthermore, malnutrition has been declining more rapidly (in terms of percentage point decline) in African least developed countries than in other categories of countries. The average prevalence of malnourishment declined by 1.9 percentage points between 2011 and 2015, a rate higher than the corresponding rates for all least developed countries (1.7 per cent), sub-Saharan Africa (1.3 per cent) and the world as a whole (1.0 per cent), as shown in table 4 below.

Nonetheless, with a prevalence of 22.8 per cent in 2015, malnourishment remains high in African least developed countries, representing almost twice the world average of 10.8 per cent.

Extreme weather conditions have also contributed to malnutrition trends. A significant rainfall deficit was recorded over the period October-December

Table 3: Fertilizer consumption (in kg per hectare of arable land)

	2010	2011	2012	Variation over 2010-2012
African LDCs	9.8	10.2	11.3	16%
LDCs	22.9	24.1	24.5	7%
Sub-Saharan Africa	14.4	16.0	17.5	21%
World	134.1	133.6	135.3	1%

Source: *WDI.*

Table 4: Percentage of the population affected by malnourishment

	2001	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	*Reduction of the indicator between 2011 and 2015 in percentage points*
African LDCs	31.9	23.6	22.8	22.2	21.7	21.3	20.9	1.9
All LDCs	34.4	24.7	24.0	23.4	23.0	22.6	22.3	1.7
SSA	27.2	20.4	19.8	19.3	19.0	18.7	18.5	1.3
World	14.9	12.1	11.8	11.4	11.2	11.0	10.8	1.0

Source: *Figures computed by authors based on data downloaded from WDI database in January 2017.*

2016 in the Horn of Africa, generating drought conditions that are threatening food security and nutritional conditions in the region. In fact, some 12 million people in Ethiopia, Somalia, Kenya and Uganda are faced with a situation of limited access to food and income and require urgent food assistance (FAO, 2017). This situation points to the persistent need for concerted efforts to promote agricultural development and food security.

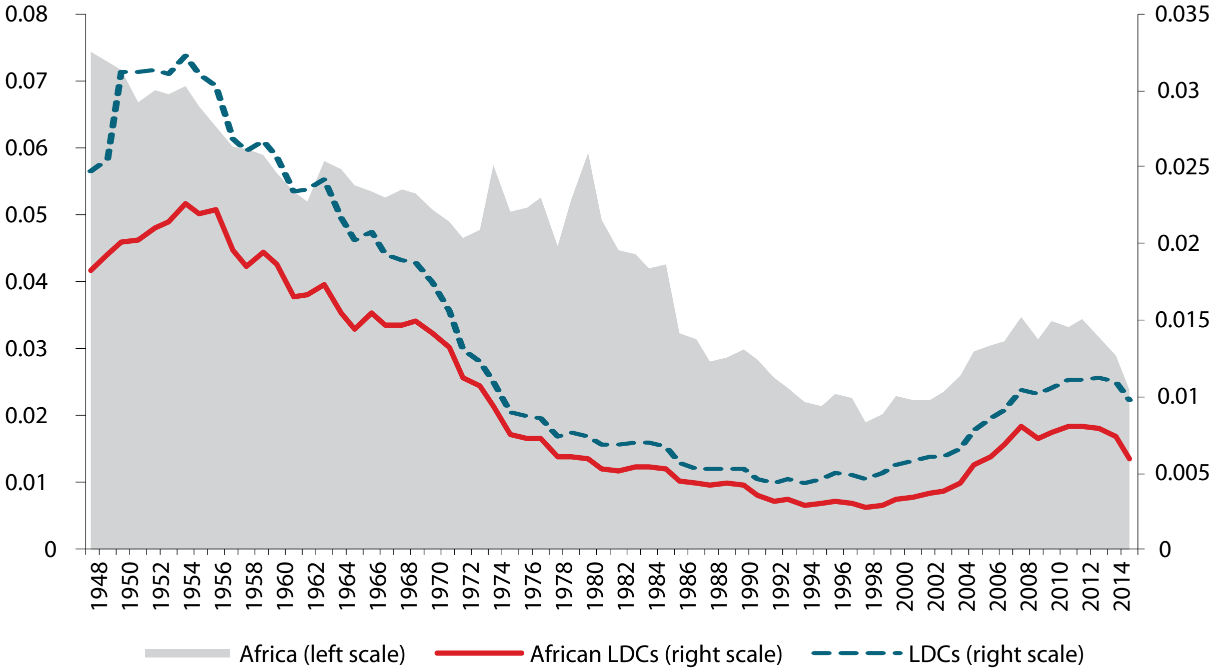
C. Trade

Trade can play an essential role for least developed countries, not only by creating employment but also by enhancing access to finance for sustainable development. Because of its important role, a number of global level trade facilitation initiatives have been implemented for least developed countries. These include the 2013 Bali Package; the duty-free and quota-free market access initiative; the African Growth and Opportunity Act of the United States Government; the preferential rules of origin; and the Aid for Trade initiative. At the regional level, several free-trade-area initiatives aimed at promoting intra-regional trade have also been undertaken among such subregional bodies as the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), the East African Community (EAC) and the Southern African Development Community (SADC), whose combined membership covers almost all African least developed countries. At the national level, remarkable efforts have been made by some African least developed countries. Zambia, for instance, has implemented a number of measures aimed at enhancing its export competitiveness, including programmes on export promotion and market development and on trade facilitation, through the creation of one-stop border posts (OHRLLS, 2016a).

Thanks principally to such initiatives and programmes, exports from least developed countries have increased sharply – from $36.1 billion in 2000 to $160.1 billion in 2015, according to latest data from the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD). Notwithstanding this increase, the least developed country share of world merchandise exports remains negligible. After rising from 0.56 per cent in 2000 to 1.13 per cent in 2013, the global share fell slightly to 0.97 per cent in 2015, which is well below the Istanbul Programme of Action target of 2 per cent. A similar trajectory is observed for African least developed countries: their share of global exports over the period 2000-2013 rose from 0.32 to 0.81 per cent, before falling to 0.59 per cent in 2015, as shown in figure 4 below.

Low and declining global export shares in least developed countries in general and those in Africa in particular may be attributed to their high level of export concentration, particularly in agricultural products, fuels and mining products: two thirds of Africa's merchandise exports consist of natural resource products (ECA and others, 2016). The latest available data (averaged 2000-2015) on the Herfindahl-Hirschmann Index (HHI), a measure of the degree of product concentration, are 35.8 per cent (Africa), 35.9 per cent (least developed countries) and 46.2 per cent (African least developed countries). By comparison, the figures for America, Europe, and Asia are much lower, at 7.3, 6.4 and 10.4 per cent, respectively. In particular, although African least developed countries have recently made some progress (their

Figure 4: Share of exports from African least developed countries, 1948-2015



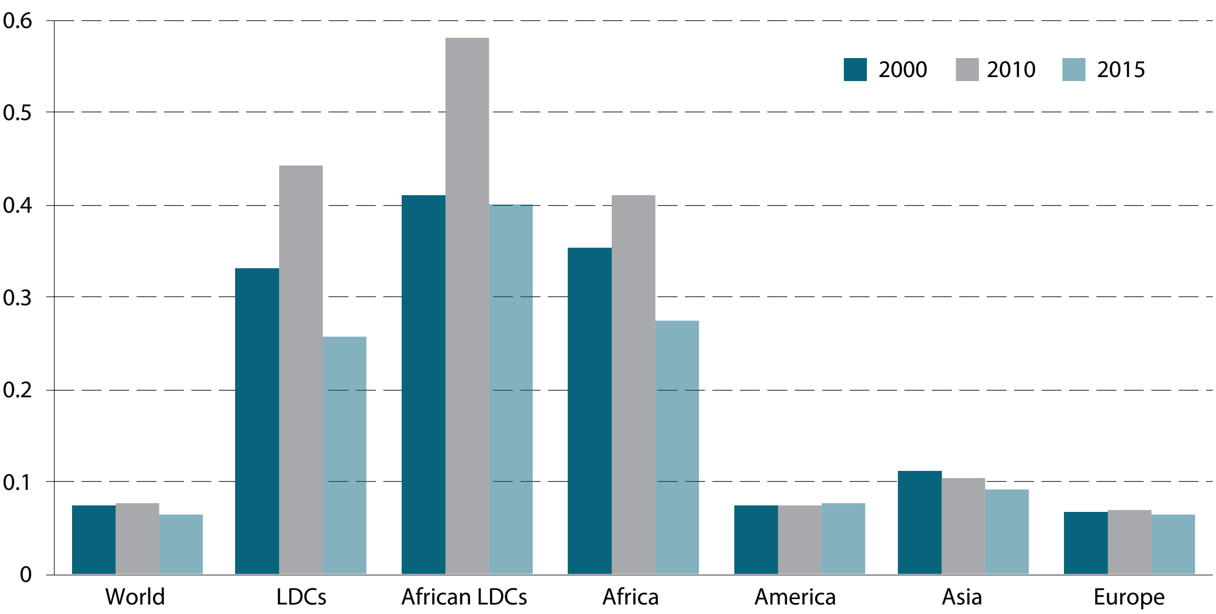
Source: *Author's calculations based on UNCTADstat figures (UNCTADstat, 2017).*

HHI decreased by 18 percentage points from 58.0 per cent in 2010 to 40.0 per cent in 2015), their 2015 HHI is still substantially higher than other groups of countries. Figure 5 below shows export diversification index rates by country groups, for the years 2000, 2010 and 2015.

D. Commodities

Commodities continue to represent the bulk of Africa's exports to the rest of the world. Over the period 2010-2015, exports were dominated by fuels with crude oil, gas and petroleum constituting 55 per cent of the total. By contrast, manufactured goods represented only 18 per cent of total exports (ECA, 2017).

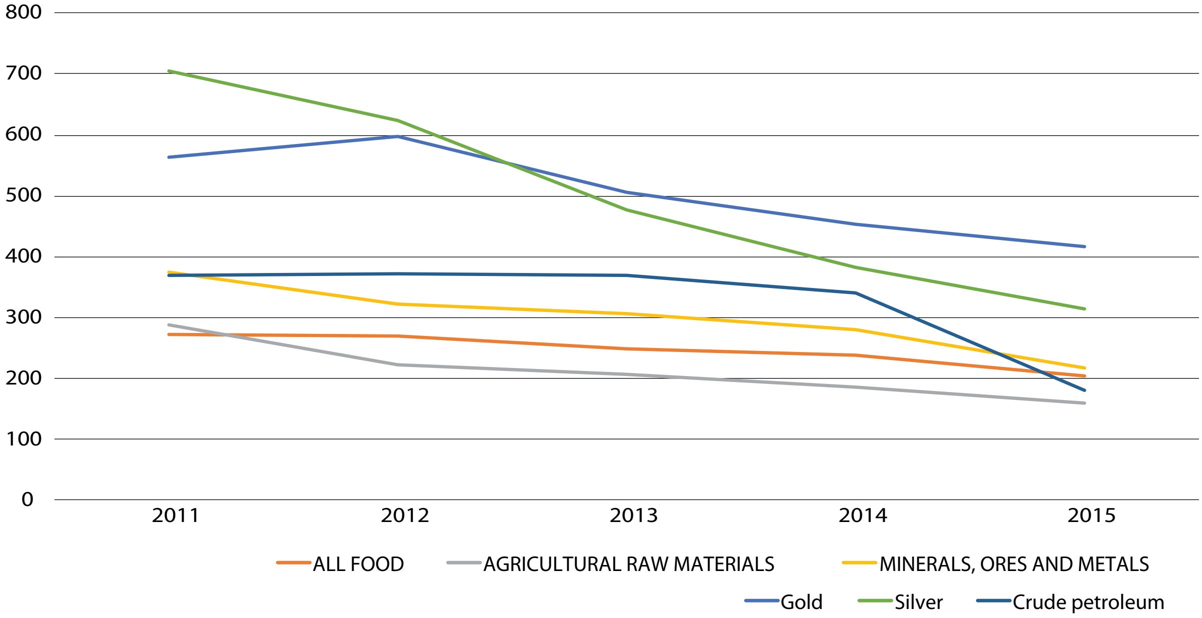
Figure 5: Export diversification index by country group, 2000, 2010 and 2015



Source: *Author's calculations based on UNCTADstat figures (UNCTADstat, 2017).*

Note: *An index value closer to 1 indicates that a country's exports or imports are highly concentrated on a few products. By contrast, values closer to zero suggest that exports or imports are more homogeneously distributed among a series of products.*

Figure 6: Commodity price indices, 2011-2015



Source: Based on data downloaded from UNCTADstat in January 2017.

As shown in figure 6 above, most commodity prices manifested a constant or downward trend over the first half of the current decade. This is notably the case for the groups of food items; agricultural raw materials; minerals, ores and metals; silver; and crude petroleum. Only gold showed a slightly different trajectory as its price rose significantly in 2012, before following a downward trend over the rest of the period. Of all commodities, it is the price of oil that experienced the most abrupt fall in the recent past.

As noted in the January 2017 monthly report of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), on average, the sharp decline in the price of crude oil that started in 2014 grew worse over time. From $108 per barrel in 2014, the price of oil decreased to an average of $49.49 per barrel in 2015 and $40.76 per barrel in 2016. The yearly average price of oil for 2016 represents the lowest level registered in more than 12 years. The significant deterioration in oil prices may be attributed in part to the overwhelming oversupply of crude oil. Fortunately, a significant reversal occurred in December 2016, in response to historic cooperation between OPEC and non-OPEC countries. As a result, the monthly price jumped by nearly 20 per cent, from $43.22 per barrel in November 2016 to $51.67 per barrel in December 2016, ending above $50 per barrel for the first time in 18 months (OPEC, 2017).

A drop in demand from their trade partners, due to overall sluggish economic performance coupled with lower prices, has created harsh macroeconomic imbalances in African oil-exporting countries in general and the least developed countries among them in particular. The situation has led to lower fiscal and export revenues, generating twin deficits, in both the fiscal and current account balances, placing stress on their external positions and reducing the possibilities of public investment. As a result, growth outcomes in 2015 and 2016 have been much poorer.

Thus, between 2013 and 2015, the GDP growth rate was cut by two or more percentage points in Angola, Chad and Equatorial Guinea, all of which are both least developed countries and oil exporters. In Angola, the rate dropped from 6 to 3 per cent; in Chad from 5.7 to 1.8 per cent; and in Equatorial Guinea from -4.1 to -8.3 per cent. The cut in investments and low economic performance may in turn jeopardize the prospects for long–term growth and development. For instance, dramatic declines were also observed in the growth rates of per capita GDP in those three countries: in the course of a single year – 2013 –

that indicator dropped from 3.3 to -0.3 per cent in Angola; from 2.2 to -1.5 per cent in Chad; and from -6.9 to -10.9 per cent in Equatorial Guinea.

As of 2015, 90 per cent of the total exports of Angola, Chad and Equatorial Guinea consisted of fuels.[1] The vulnerability to external shocks arising from a heavy dependency on commodities yet again highlights the imperative need for diversification and structural transformation in African least developed countries. The fact that an agreement between OPEC and non-OPEC countries was key to the rebound in oil prices illustrates the positive role that global partnership can play in easing the vulnerability of African least developed countries.

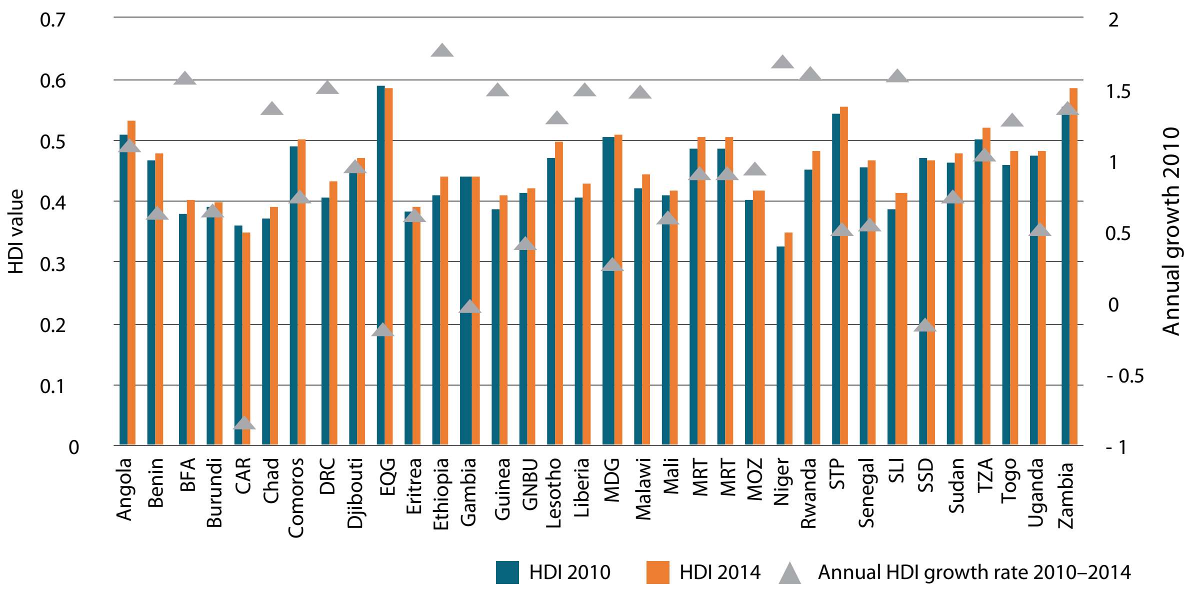
E. Human and social development

1. General situation

Advancement in human capital and social development is critical for the sustained economic growth and transformation of economies, most particularly for the African least developed countries. Education and skills development for young people are important for the employability of the population across countries and within the region. Good health, nutrition and access to water and sanitation are key to good living, increased production and productivity. To this end, African least developed countries recorded positive trends in human and social development over the five years leading up to 2015, as demonstrated by the human development index (see figure 7 below). Primary school enrolments continue to increase with improving gender parity; the education and empowerment of women, together with their access to gainful employment, are improving; and notable reductions in infant and child mortality and the spread of HIV/AIDS and malaria have been recorded in most of the African least developed countries.

In 2014, out of the total of 34 African least developed countries,[2] eight – Angola, Chad, Equatorial Guinea, Madagascar, Mauritania, Sao Tome and Principe, the United Republic of Tanzania and Zambia – had scores of 0.5 or above on the human development index. Over the period 2010-2014, all African least developed countries, except the Central African Republic, Equatorial Guinea, the Gambia and South Sudan, recorded positive annual growth in their human development index scores. This trend in human

Figure 7: Performance of African least developed countries on the human development index, 2010-2014



Source: *UNDP (2016).*

[1] Source: UNCTAD country profiles consulted in January 2017.

[2] See annex for a list of African least developed countries.

capital development is also borne out by the Ibrahim Index of African Governance.

2. Education and training

African least developed countries continue to invest in education and training, with notable progress over the period 2010-2015. These countries made progress towards improving primary school enrolment, although their progress is uneven and data are not available for all countries. In 2014, 13 out of the 29 African least developed countries with data available recorded a net primary school enrolment of over 80 per cent, compared to 10 such countries in 2010. Over the period 2010-2014, 16 African least developed countries (Benin, Central African Republic, Chad, Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, the Gambia, Lesotho, Mali, Mauritania, Sao Tome and Principe, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Togo)[3] recorded a progression from primary to secondary school of 80 per cent and above (World Bank, 2017).

School retention rates to the last grade of primary school and secondary school enrolment rates remain low, however. For the 28 African least developed countries with data, retention rates to the last grade of primary range from 82 to below 30 per cent. Over this period, only three African least developed countries (Benin, Comoros, Sierra Leone) recorded a net enrolment rate at secondary level of over 35 per cent (World Bank, 2017).

The proportion of primary school teachers who are trained is improving. In the school year 2013/2014, 22 of the 32 countries with data had over 80 per cent of trained primary school teachers, compared to 18 in 2010. Nevertheless, public expenditure on education remains low, with implications for equity in access and the quality of learning. Of the 28 African least developed countries with data for 2010-2014, only six (Burundi, Ethiopia, Malawi, Mozambique, Niger, Sao Tome and Principe) spent over 5 per cent of their annual GDP on education. It remains debatable, however, whether this has any discernible effect on the actual learning by pupils (Economist, 2017).

African least developed countries need to pay more attention to the quality of learning and skills acquisition to ensure equity and reap the benefits of increased investment in education. Despite the progress in enrolment noted above, many school-age children remain out of school because of the lack of teachers, books and uniform, harassment at school, and other factors. In 2010, some 17.6 million children in African least developed countries (65 per cent of all such countries) were out of school and, in 2014, over 9 million children (for the countries with data) remained out of school. As noted by ECA (ECA and others, 2016), African countries perform poorly in the international assessment of educational performance because of poor learning conditions, including the lack of textbooks.

3. Population and primary health

On the whole, the health situation of African least developed countries continues to improve, thanks to increased investments in the sector by governments, development partners, private sector and civil society. At the same time, their population growth rates are high, diminishing the potential impact of such investments.

(a) Population levels and growth

Excluding Eritrea and Liberia which have no data for 2015, the African least developed countries had a total population of 585.7 million (some 61 per cent of the total population of all least developed countries) in 2015, compared to 507.3 million in 2010, representing a growth rate close to 3.1 per cent per year over the period. In all, 11 countries (Angola, Burundi, Central African Republic, the Gambia, Malawi, Niger, Senegal, South Sudan, Uganda, United Republic of Tanzania, Zambia) posted population growth rates above 3 per cent during this period. Overall, the proportion of the population living in urban areas is about 35 per cent, but in five countries (Djibouti, the Gambia, Mali, Mauritania, Sao Tome and Principe) the proportion of urban population exceeds 50 per cent. The high population growth rates have adverse implications for poverty reduction, access to social services such as education and

[3] Madagascar, which had recorded progress of 81 per cent in 2010, dropped back to 76 per cent in 2014.

healthcare and the quality of housing, in particular in informal urban settings.

(b) Public expenditure on health

While public expenditures as a proportion of total government spending fluctuated widely across all the African least developed countries over the period 2010-2015, 15 countries recorded steady increases during this same period. In nine of the 34 African least developed countries, public expenditure on health exceeded 15 per cent of the Government's total budget (World Bank, 2017), as recommended in the Abuja Declaration on HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis and Other Related Infectious Diseases of 2001, with a view to improving the health sector. With few exceptions, under-five mortality declined in all the African least developed countries over the period 2010-2015 (figure 8).

(c) HIV/AIDS prevalence

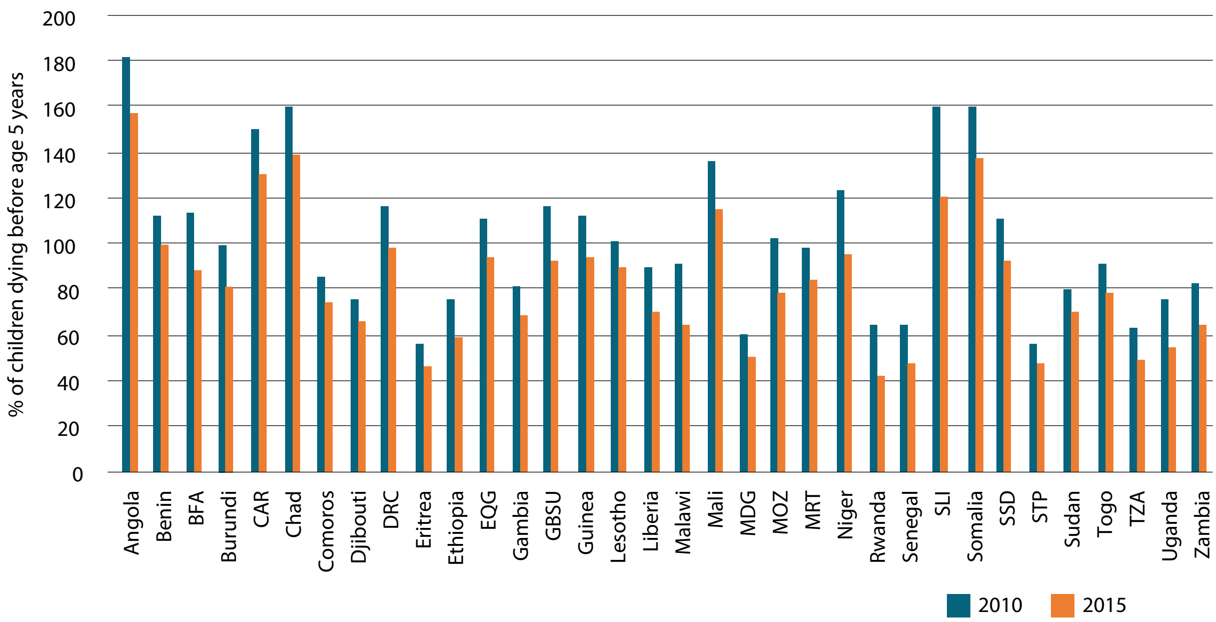
The prevalence of HIV/AIDS among young people (15-24 years) is generally low, at around 1 per cent across most of the African least developed countries. But in four countries (Lesotho, Mozambique, Uganda, Zambia), the rate is above 2 per cent, and even higher among girls. In Lesotho, for example, HIV/AIDS prevalence rates among girls and boys aged 15-24 years are 9 and 5 per cent, respectively and in Zambia the corresponding figures are 5 and 3 per cent (World Bank, 2017).

4. Shelter, access to water and sanitation

(a) General situation in urban areas

The process of urbanization is one dimension of structural transformation, whereby the proportion of the population living in urban areas is constantly increasing, as a result of both the natural growth rate and migration from rural areas. While Africa is still the least urbanized continent, its rate of urbanization is the highest, at 3.5 per cent per year, a rate expected to hold until 2050, compared to 2 per cent for Asia, 0.36 per cent for Europe, 1.23 per cent for Latin America and the Caribbean and 1.04 per cent for North America. Based on latest data, urban population growth in the 31 African least developed countries with available data is higher than the national population growth rates, at about 4.5 per cent per year. In nine countries (Burkina Faso, Burundi, Ethiopia, Mali, Niger, Rwanda, South Sudan, Uganda, United Republic of Tanzania), the urban population growth rates exceed 5 per cent per year. In these countries, 37 per cent of the population lived in urban areas in 2015, up from 35 per cent in 2010. In four countries (Djibouti, the Gambia, Mauritania, Sao Tome and Principe) the share of urban population exceeds 50 per cent of the total (United Nations, 2017b; World Bank, 2017).

Figure 8: Under-five mortality rate per 1,000



Source: *United Nations Statistics Division (United Nations, 2017a).*

For the 32 African least developed countries with data for 2014, almost 65 per cent of the urban population lived in slums or informal settlements. In eight countries – the Central African Republic, Chad, Guinea-Bissau, Mauritania, Mozambique, Sao Tome and Principe, South Sudan and the Sudan – the proportion is 80 per cent and above (figure 9). Slums are characterized by abject poverty, overcrowding, lack of access to water, and exposure to HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted infections (APHCR, 2014).

All too often the increased urban populations in the least developed countries of Africa far exceed the capacity of their existing private and public infrastructure and the social amenities available to meet the demand for housing, education, health care, transport, and other services. Conditions, in particular in urban slums and informal settlements, are deplorable, with limited access to education, health, water and sanitation. It is therefore critical for national governments and urban authorities to focus on adequate planning and investment in the requisite urban infrastructure in order to meet the increasing demand and to ensure security as urban populations expand.

(b) Access to improved water

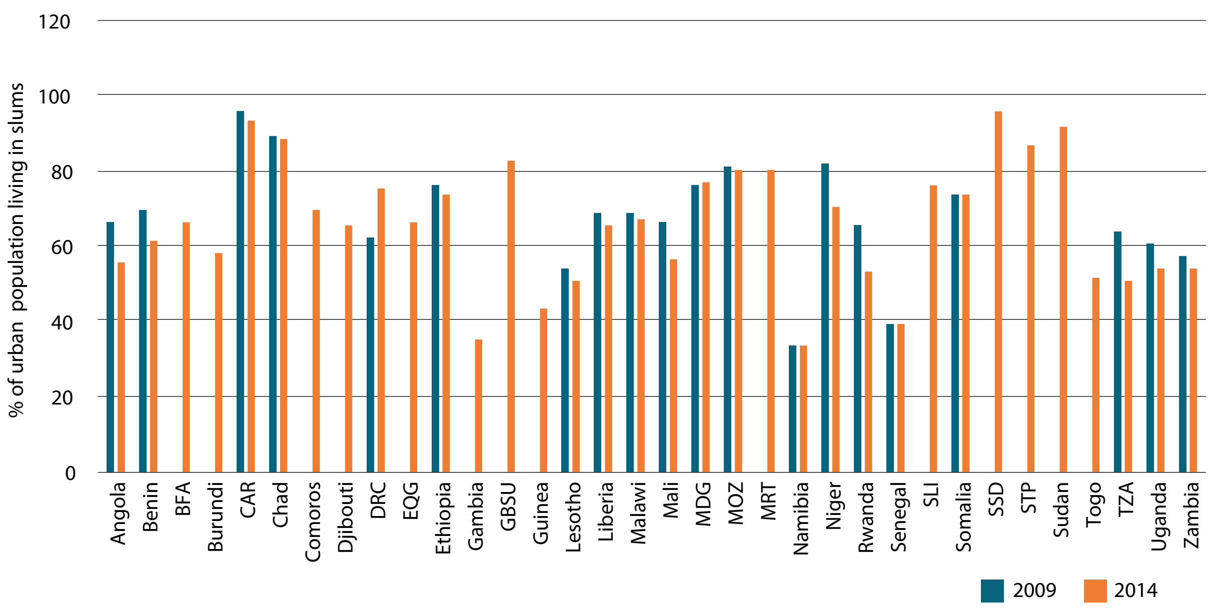
Access to improved water sources – and also data availability – have greatly improved across all African least developed countries. Between 2010 and 2015, the proportion of the population with access to improved water rose from 66 per cent to almost 71 per cent. In seven African countries (Burkina Faso, Comoros, Djibouti, the Gambia, Lesotho, Malawi, Sao Tome and Principe), over 80 per cent of the population have access to improved water sources (figure 10). As expected, access remains much higher among urban residents, at 87 per cent on average in 2015, up from 83 per cent in 2010, while for those living in the rural areas it averages 59 per cent, up from 54 per cent, for the same years.

(c) Access to improved sanitation

Notable improvements have been scored in access to improved sanitation facilities in 29 of the 34 African countries with data. In four countries (Angola, Equatorial Guinea, the Gambia, Rwanda), over 50 per cent of the population had access to improved sanitation in 2015. In 12 others, however, access to improved sanitation remains below 20 per cent (figure 11).

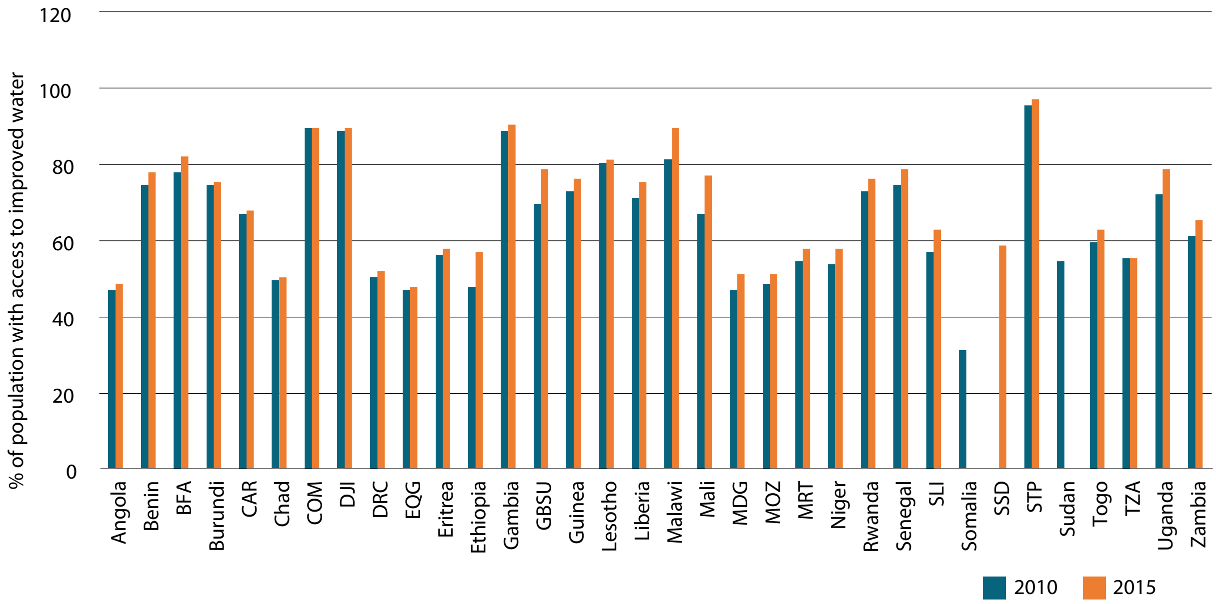
The prevalence of open defecation is generally declining (figure 12); thus, in nine countries (Burundi, Comoros, Equatorial Guinea, the Gambia, Malawi, Mali, Rwanda, Uganda) it is practised by only 10 per cent of the population. In eight countries, however, over 50 per cent of the

Figure 9: Population of African least developed countries living in slums



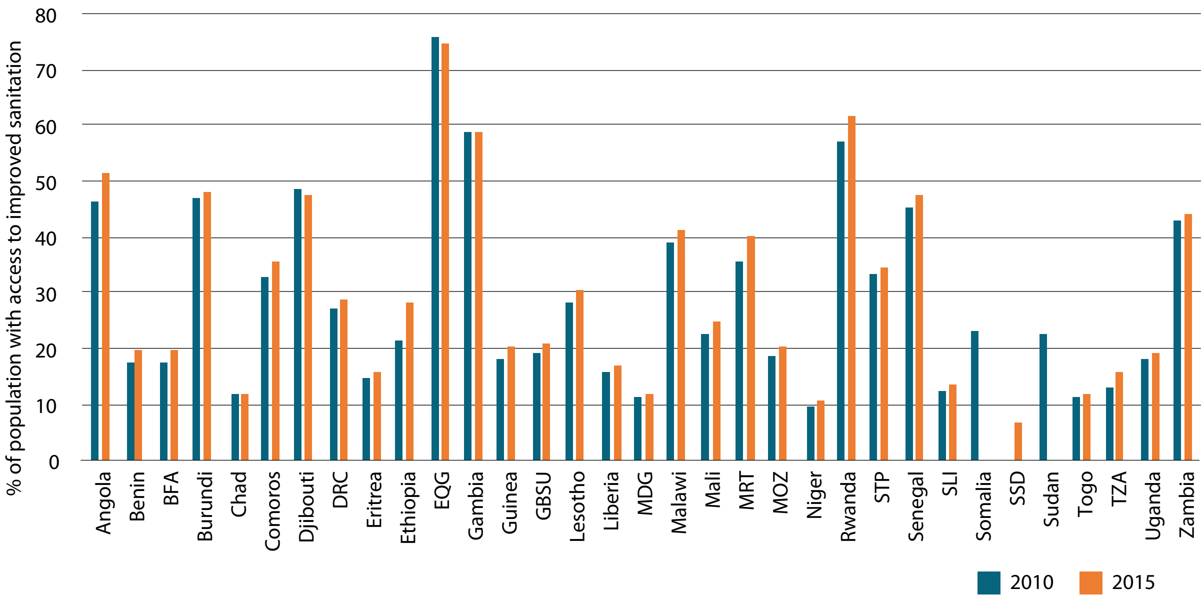
Source: *United Nations Statistics Division (United Nations, 2017b).*

Figure 10: Access to improved water



Source: *United Nations Statistics Division (United Nations, 2017b).*

Figure 11: Access to improved sanitation



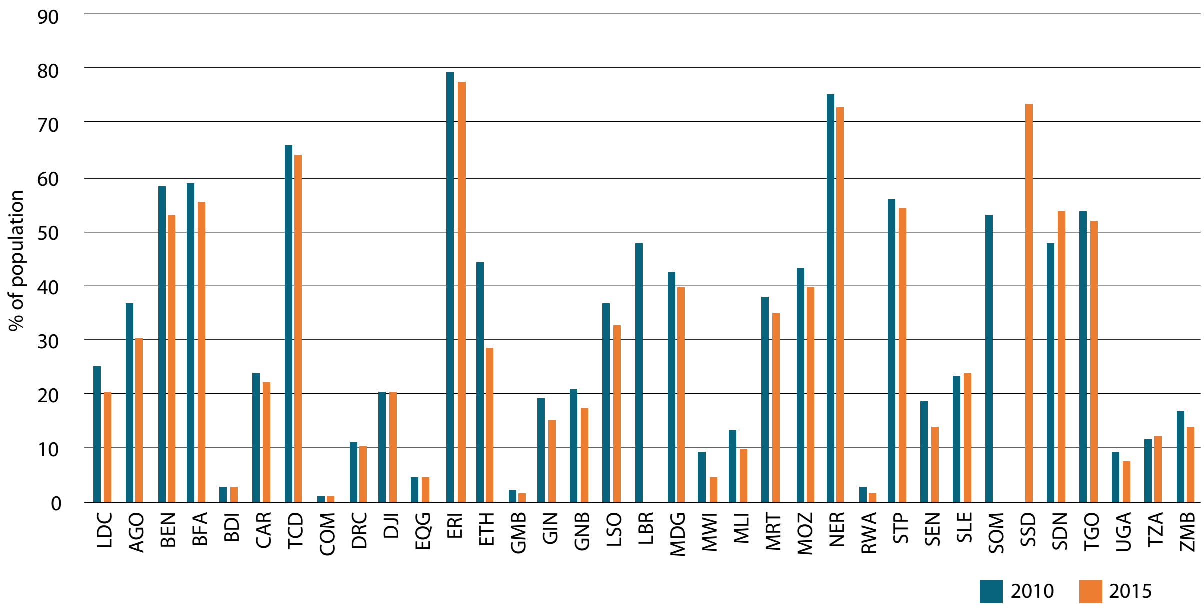
Source: *United Nations Statistics Division (United Nations, 2017a).*

population are still practicing open defecation. This necessitates further efforts to increase access to improved sanitation and to eliminate the practice, which has serious implications for the health and nutrition of the population, in particular among children.

5. Gender equality and women empowerment

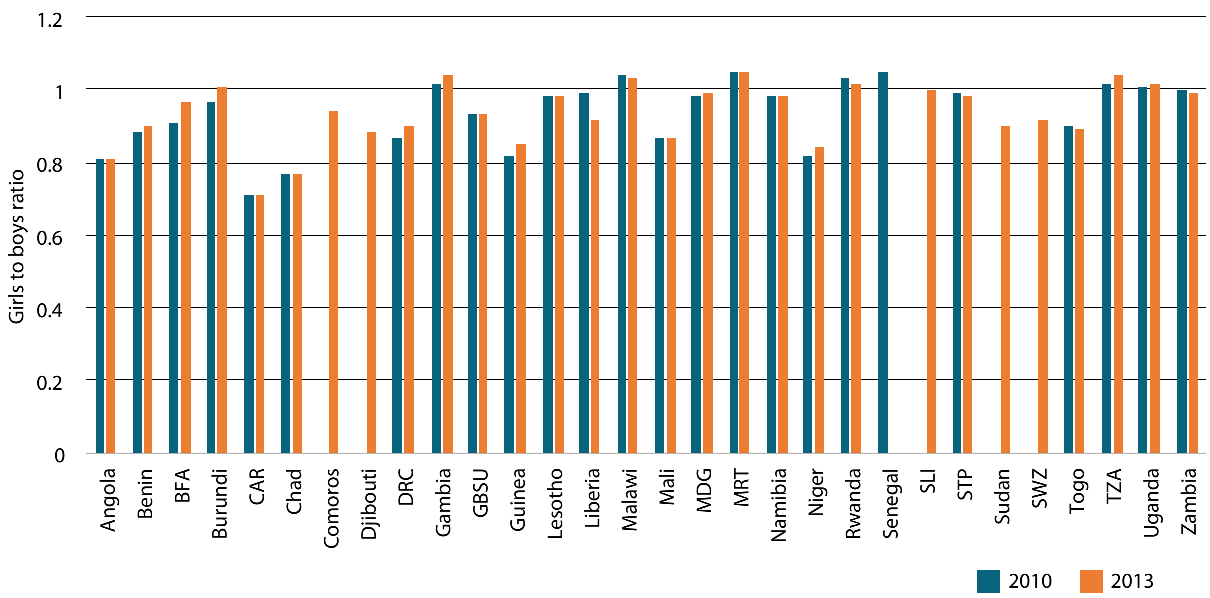
Progress continues to be recorded in the area of gender equality and women's empowerment. With regard to primary school enrolment, a positive trend between 2010 and 2013 is noted in the majority of African least developed countries, with six (Burundi, Malawi, Mauritania, Rwanda, Uganda, United Republic of Tanzania) out of the 29 countries with data for 2013 reporting a parity

Figure 12: Practice of open defecation in African least developed countries



Source: *World Bank (2017).*

Figure 13: Gender parity in primary education



Source: *United Nations Statistics Division (United Nations, 2017a).*

ratio of greater than one, meaning that more girls are enrolled than boys (figure 13).

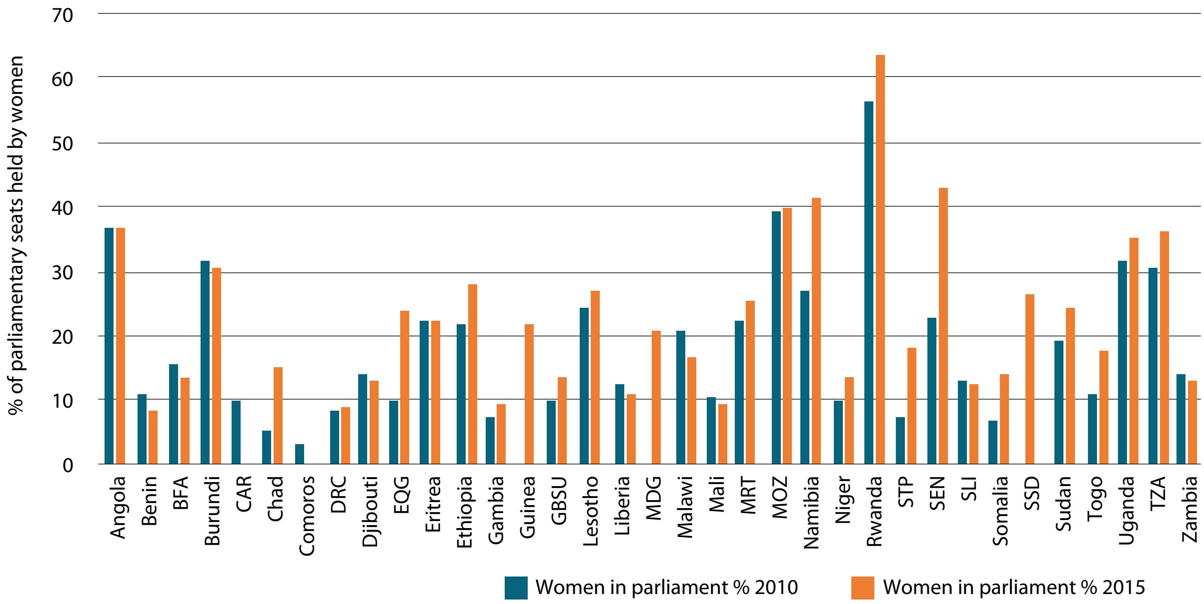
In 2015, in eight African least developed countries (Angola, Burundi, Mozambique, Rwanda, Senegal, Uganda, United Republic of Tanzania), over 30 per cent of national parliamentary seats were held by women. At almost 64 per cent in 2015, Rwanda is the country with the most women representatives as a proportion of the total. In nine others, the proportion of seats held by women exceeded 20 per cent (figure 14).

6. Youth development

Youth literacy rates[4] have been improving since 2010, underscored by the increasing levels of school enrolment. In 2015, in 11 African least

[4] Percentage of the population aged 15-24 years who can, with understanding, read and write a short, simple statement on their everyday life. Generally, the notion of "literacy" also encompasses "numeracy", the ability to make simple arithmetic calculations.

Figure 14: Women's representation in national parliament

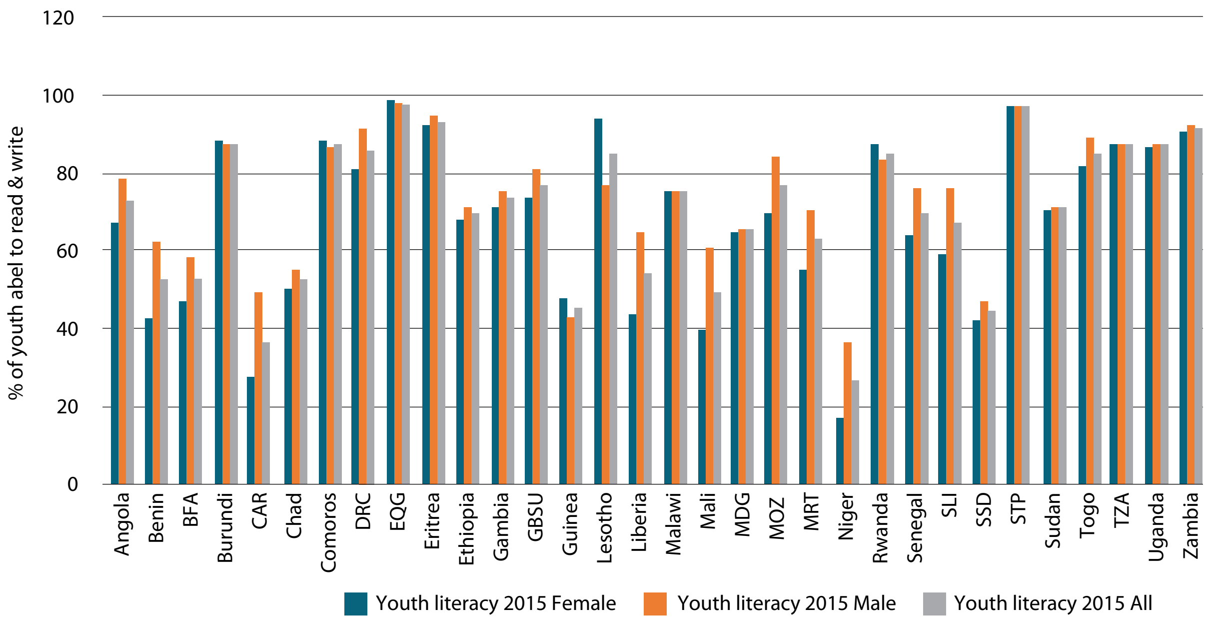


Source: *United Nations Statistics Division (United Nations, 2017a).*

developed countries (Burundi, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Lesotho, Rwanda, Sao Tome and Principe, Togo, Uganda, United Republic of Tanzania, Zambia), literacy rates were above 80 per cent. Inequalities by gender, income and geographic location persist; for example, young males on average have higher levels of literacy than their female counterparts, at 74 per cent compared to 68 per cent. In all but two of the African least developed countries (Central African Republic, Niger), overall youth literacy rates are above 40 per cent (figure 15).

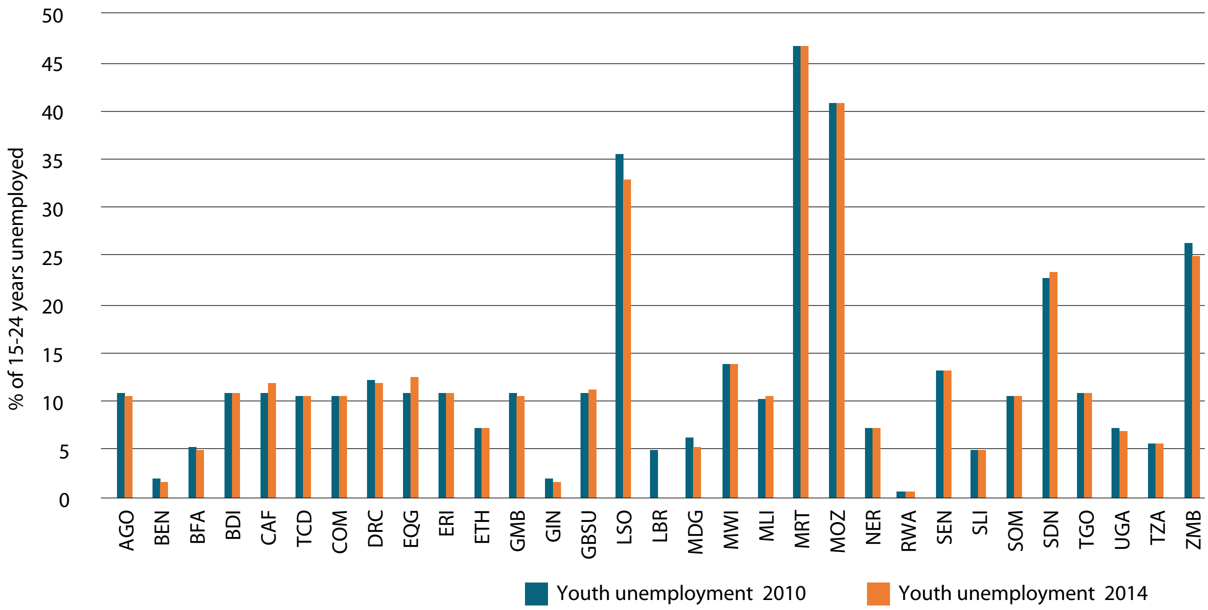
While school enrolment and literary rates among young people are improving, youth unemployment remains staggeringly high. Between 2010 and 2014, youth unemployment rates of over 10 per cent were recorded in 20 of the 31 African least developed countries with data. Youth unemployment is highest in Lesotho,

Figure 15: Youth (15-24 years) literacy rates, 2015



Source: *UNESCO Institute for Statistics (2017); United Nations Statistics Division (United Nations, 2017a).*

Figure 16: Youth unemployment (as a percentage of the total labour force between the ages of 15 and 24)



Source: *World Bank (2017).*

Mauritania, Mozambique, South Sudan and Zambia, where the rates reach over 20 per cent (figure 16). It is also much higher among women than men, in particular in Mali, Lesotho, Senegal and the Sudan. Female youth unemployment in Lesotho was 41 per cent in 2014, compared to 27.5 per cent for men. In the Sudan, it was 32.2 per cent for women, compared to 17.8 per cent for men.

Sustained economic growth and poverty reduction will depend on job-seekers, in particular young people, finding meaningful employment opportunities. Thus, African least developed countries need to invest more in skills development to ensure that their young people have access to gainful employment.

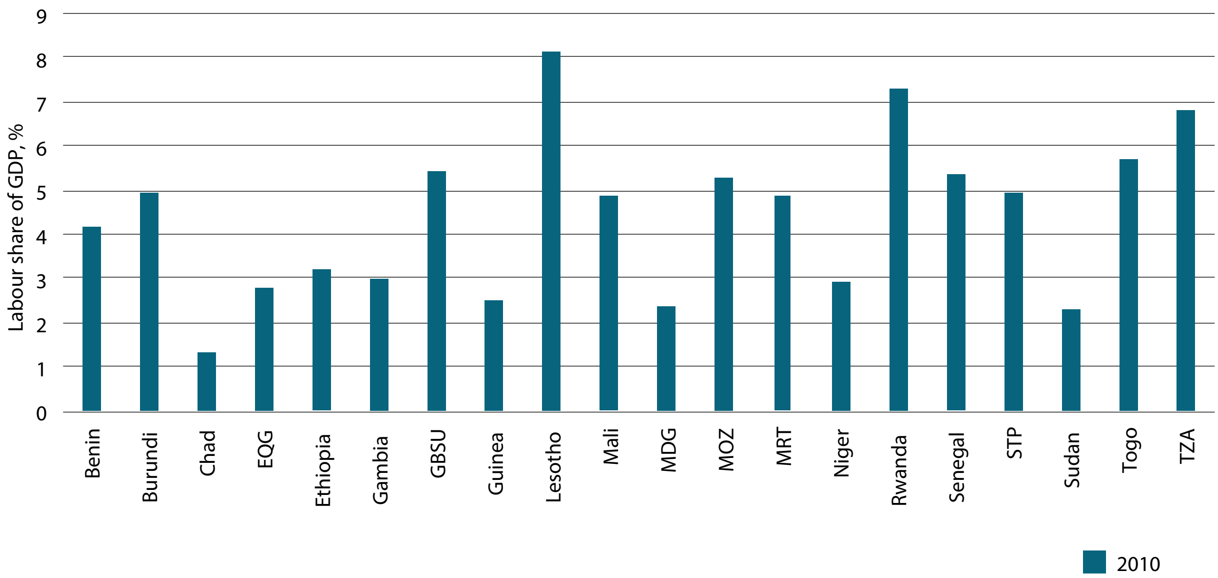
Teenage pregnancies have negative impacts on female youth development. In eight of the 22 African least developed countries with data (Angola, Guinea, Liberia, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Mozambique, Niger), over 30 per cent of girls aged 15-19 have either had children or are currently pregnant. For many teenage girls, this leads to them dropping out of school and starting to fend for children and the family at a very early age. The associated complications in childbirth can lead to death.

7. Social protection

Social protection involves public, civil society and private actions and investment to enable populations to deal with deprivations arising from chronic poverty and also with the risks of and their vulnerability to life crises and changes in circumstances, such as unemployment and old age (DfID, 2006). It involves providing safety-nets for the people, especially the most vulnerable to withstand shocks and to strengthen their resilience. It involves providing safety-nets for the people, in particular those least able to withstand shocks, and working to strengthen their resilience. Data on social protection expenditure by African least developed countries are scant, however. In all the 20 African least developed countries with data for 2010, the share of GDP constituted by labour, including wages and social protection transfers[5] is less than 10 per cent (figure 17). This compares very poorly with the 47 per cent and 49 per cent labour share of GDP for Africa excluding the North and North Africa, respectively, or the over 60 per cent for the more developed countries (ILO and OECD, 2015).

[5] This is an indicator measuring progress on target 10.4 of Sustainable Development Goal 10: "Adopt policies especially fiscal, wage, and social protection policies and progressively achieve greater equality". The measure reflects the distribution of national income between labour and capital.

Figure 17: Labour share of GDP including wages and social protection transfers



Source: *United Nations Statistics Division (United Nations, 2017a).*

Evidence shows that investments in social protection have positive impacts on reducing poverty, including in African least developed countries such as Ethiopia, Malawi and Rwanda. In Rwanda, the national health insurance programme Mutuelles de Santé has rapidly expanded access to child health services and a payment-for-performance scheme has improved the number of preventive care visits for children aged 23 months or younger by 56 per cent (Basinga and others, 2014). Government investments in social infrastructure have greatly improved access to social services: now, in urban and rural areas, 90 and 83.7 per cent, respectively, of households have access to improved water sources and 93 and 81.3 per cent have access to improved sanitation (National Institute of Statistics of Rwanda, 2015).

F. Multiple crises and other emerging challenges

Africa is currently the only region whose share of reported disasters in the world total has actually increased over past years (AUC and others, 2004). Its geographical position and limited adaptive capacity, exacerbated by widespread poverty, render the continent particularly prone to disasters. In particular, the effects of the HIV/AIDS pandemic and the malaria and tuberculosis epidemics are having an adverse effect on communities. In the future, climate change will be a key trigger for the occurrence of disasters and an escalation of other climate-change-related challenges.

In supporting such risk reduction efforts, a range of regional programmes have been mounted by international and regional organizations, including the World Bank, the African Development Bank, the African Union Commission and the Inter-Agency Secretariat of the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UNISDR). In particular, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030 is intended to address the issue of resilience building and disaster management for least developed countries, setting seven specific targets calling for the design and implementation of disaster risk reduction strategies at the national level. In part thanks to the Sendai Framework, the level of preparedness by African least developed countries has been increased: only one out of the 18 such countries still has no disaster risk reduction strategy (United Nations, 2017b).

In fact, many African least developed countries are challenged by the increasing economic losses (mostly uninsured) caused by natural disasters. To make matters worse, they have difficulties in rapidly accessing contingency financing to recover and rebuild their economies, given their insufficient financial reserves. Enhanced international cooperation and support to deal with fiscal and financial issues would also be critical in this regard. In addition to the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Initiative, the Multilateral Debt Relief Initiative, which provides for 100 per cent cancellation of eligible debt, offers another major channel for African least developed countries to mitigate the effects of their external debt burden. In particular, the recently restructured Catastrophe Containment and Relief Trust can play an important role in reducing such risk, since it can provide exceptional assistance in the event of health disasters, such as the Ebola crisis, which could be the most serious threat faced by West African countries. Such health disasters could severely hamper countries' poverty reduction, job creation, food security and other social and economic development-related efforts for at least the next five years (ECA and others, 2015).

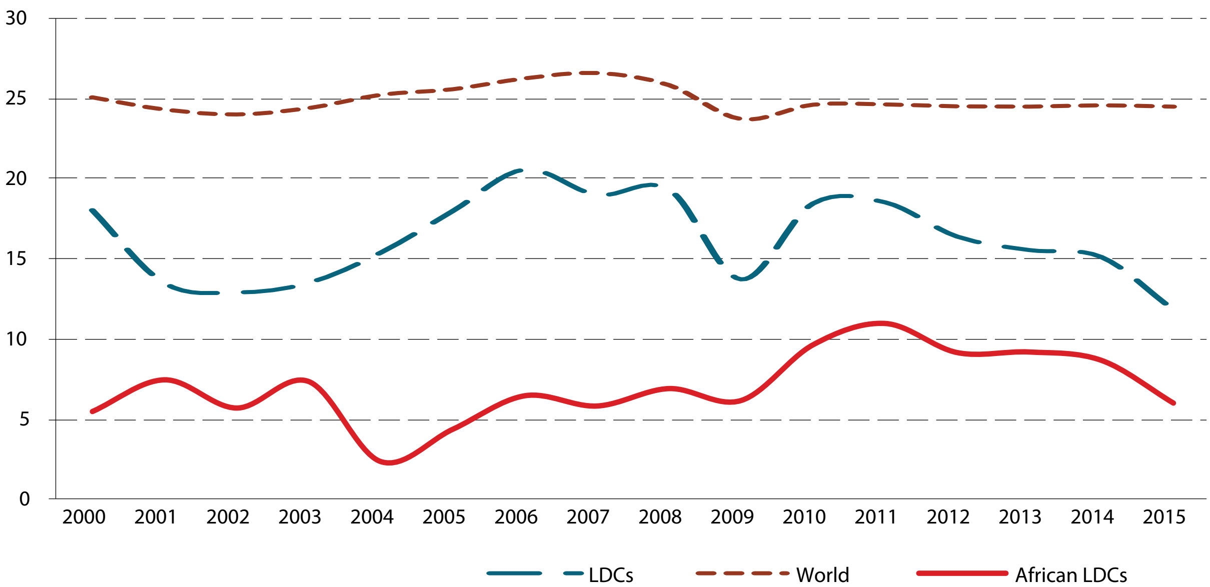
G. Mobilizing financial resources for development and capacity-building

The priority area of mobilizing financial resources for development capacity-building includes five sub-pillars: domestic resource mobilization, official development assistance, external debt, foreign direct investment and remittances.

Undoubtedly, robust domestic resource mobilization is essential to finance for sustainable development. Yet this is constrained by low levels of domestic savings, the lack of capacity by tax administrations to oppose the aggressive tax avoidance practices of multinational companies and a high incidence of illicit financial outflows, estimated at some $50 billion annually (AUC and ECA, 2015). The combined effect is to render African least developed countries largely dependent on external funding. On average, gross domestic savings as a per cent of GDP in such countries measured 5.5 per cent in 2000, 9.6 per cent in 2010 and 6.0 per cent in 2015. Much higher rates are registered in the least developed countries taken in their totality (18.0 per cent in 2000, 18.4 per cent in 2010 and 11.8 per cent in 2015) and in the world as a whole (25.1 per cent in 2000, 24.6 per cent in 2010 and 24.5 per cent in 2015), as illustrated in figure 18 below.

Another essential channel via which African least developed countries can mitigate their external debt burden is official development assistance. Based on an analysis of recent data from the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), Africa has maintained its position as the largest recipient of such assistance over the past three decades, with a regional share of some 43 per cent – meaning that almost half of the global official development assistance was channelled to Africa.

Figure 18: Gross domestic savings as a percentage of GDP, 2000-2015



Source: *Author's calculations based on WDI (World Bank, 2017).*

It should be noted, however, that most countries members of the OECD Development Assistance Committee do not meet their commitments to provide 0.7 per cent of their countries' gross national income in official development assistance. In fact, the total official development assistance provided under the Development Assistance Committee amounted to only 0.29 per cent of the countries' combined gross national income – implying a delivery gap of 0.41 per cent. For African least developed countries in particular, net disbursements of official development assistance from countries in the OECD Development Assistance Committee have consistently decreased in current prices over the past five years: from $19.9 billion in 2011 to $16.1 billion in 2015. Out of the 34 African least developed countries, the top five largest recipients in 2015 were Ethiopia ($1.85 billion), the United Republic of Tanzania ($1.44 billion), the Democratic Republic of the Congo ($1.41 billion), South Sudan ($1.38 billion) and Mozambique ($1.06 billion).

In terms of external debt stock, a significant reduction occurred in African least developed countries over the period 2000-2015. Based on an average for the 24 African least developed countries with data, the debt stock declined from 134.0 per cent of gross national income in 2000 to 31.9 per cent in 2015. At country level, the most significant reduction over the same period was made by Liberia (from 663.2 to 47.2 per cent), followed by Guinea-Bissau (from 265.2 to 29.9 per cent), Sierra Leone (from 202.6 to 31.4 per cent) and Malawi (from 159.1 to 27.3 per cent).

Inflows of foreign direct investment to African least developed countries have radically increased at current prices, from $3.1 billion in 2000 to $27.9 billion in 2015, which is 9 times greater between the two periods (see table 5 below). Measuring foreign direct investment as a percentage of GDP, African least developed countries have also displayed a higher rate than other groups since 2010: they reported 3.4 per cent of GDP in 2010 and 4.9 per cent of GDP in 2015, while other groups of countries registered rates of around 2 per cent of GDP. The inflows are highly concentrated in a few countries, however, including Mozambique ($4.9 billion), Zambia ($2.5 billion), the Democratic Republic of the Congo ($2.1 billion), the United Republic of Tanzania ($2.1 billion) and Equatorial Guinea ($1.9 billion) (OHRLLS, 2016b).

Remittance inflows are another major source of foreign exchange earnings and, in some African least developed countries represent an even more important source of financing than foreign direct investment. In this regard, it is imperative that steps be taken to scale up the development impact of such inflows on African least developed countries, through the further reduction of transaction costs and strategic orienting of the funds towards the productive sector and prioritized industries. According to latest UNCTAD data, 19 out of the 34 African least developed countries which have available data for comparison between 2010 and 2015 reveal an upward trend in remittance inflows: from 5.3 per cent of GDP in 2010 to 7.0 per cent of GDP in 2015. The top four countries in this respect, registering rates over 10 per cent of GDP, are Liberia (31.3 per cent), Lesotho (19.6

Table 5: Foreign direct investment inward flows

Group of countries	2000	2005	2010	2015
America	477.1 (3.6)	212.1 (1.2)	459.5 (2.1)	667.9 (2.6)
Asia	159.9 (1.7)	237.6 (2.0)	436.7 (2.1)	565.6 (2.1)
Europe	712.9 (7.4)	502.3 (3.1)	476.1 (2.4)	523.0 (2.8)
Africa	9.7 (1.5)	29.6 (2.7)	43.6 (2.3)	54.1 (2.3)
LDCs	4.0 (2.1)	6.7 (2.0)	23.8 (3.6)	35.1 (3.6)
African LDCs	3.1 (2.9)	5.3 (2.5)	13.5 (3.4)	27.9 (4.9)

Source: *Author's calculations based on UNCTADstat figures (2017).*

Note: *Unit is US$ at current prices in billion and the number in parentheses is the percentage of GDP.*

per cent), the Gambia (19.4 per cent) and Senegal (11.6 per cent).

H. Good governance at all levels

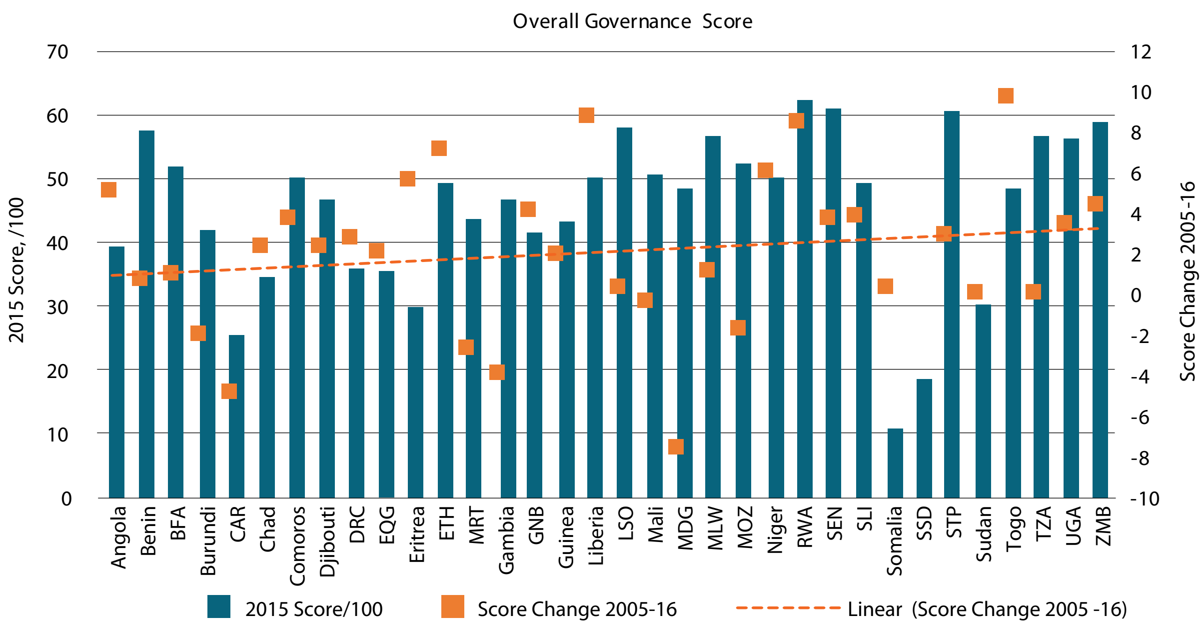
The importance of good governance in the transition of African least developed countries to middle income status cannot be overstated. Good leadership, strong institutions underscoring accountability in the use of public resources and sound management of the private sector are critical for sustained growth and development in Africa as a whole and the least developed countries in particular. Good governance also leads to peaceful coexistence and the security of people and property.

The worst performing African countries on the Ibrahim Index of African Governance are all least developed countries. Some of these are mineral-rich or oil-exporting countries, such as Angola, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Equatorial Guinea. Nevertheless, during the period 2006-2015, African least developed countries recorded a 2.1 change in their Ibrahim Index score, demonstrating an overall improvement in their governance performance. Individual country performance varied greatly, however, from the high of 60/100 and above in Rwanda, Sao Tome and Principe and Senegal to under 30/100 in the Central African Republic, Somalia and South Sudan. Some 19 African least developed countries registered an overall score below the continental average of 50/100, with Somalia and South Sudan at the bottom of the list (figure 19).

On a more positive note, over the period 2005-2016 most of the African least developed countries recorded improvements on at least one of the four dimensions of the Ibrahim Index (figure 20). Those four dimensions are: human development; sustainable economic opportunity; participation and human rights; and safety and the rule of law. The most impressive progress was registered in the areas of human development and participation and human rights. At the same time, 18 countries registered a deterioration in the area of safety and the rule of law and nine in participation and human rights. These patterns suggest an increased denial of basic human rights to the population, something that requires regular monitoring by the relevant authorities. According to the 2016 report on the Ibrahim Index, some 66 per cent of people in Africa lived in a country with marked levels of insecurity.

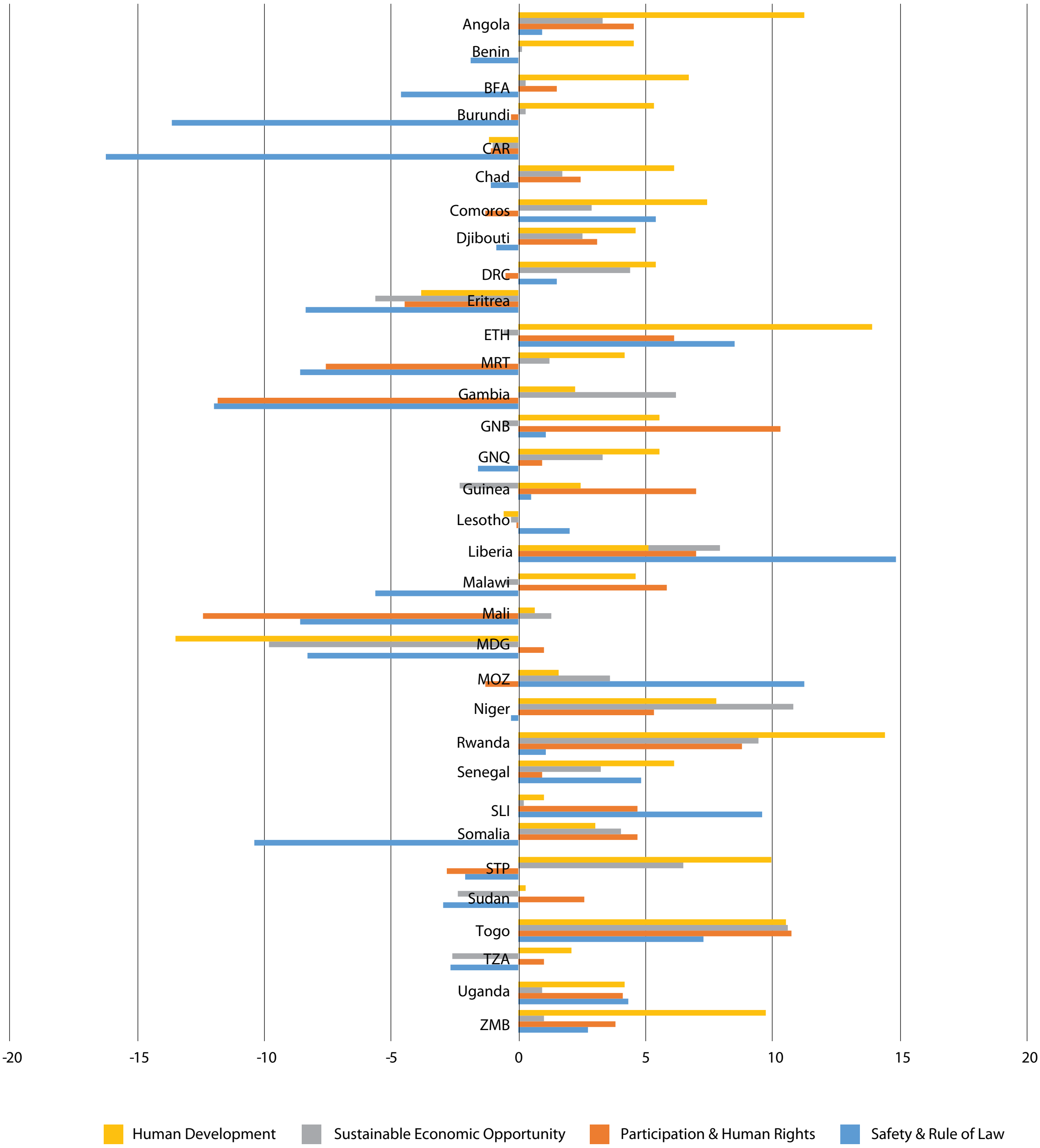
The high incidence of corruption and low accountability in the use of public resources seriously impedes inclusive growth and

Figure 19: Governance performance by African least developed countries



Source: *Mo Ibrahim Foundation (2016).*

Figure 20: Trends in the four dimensions of the Ibrahim Index of African Governance



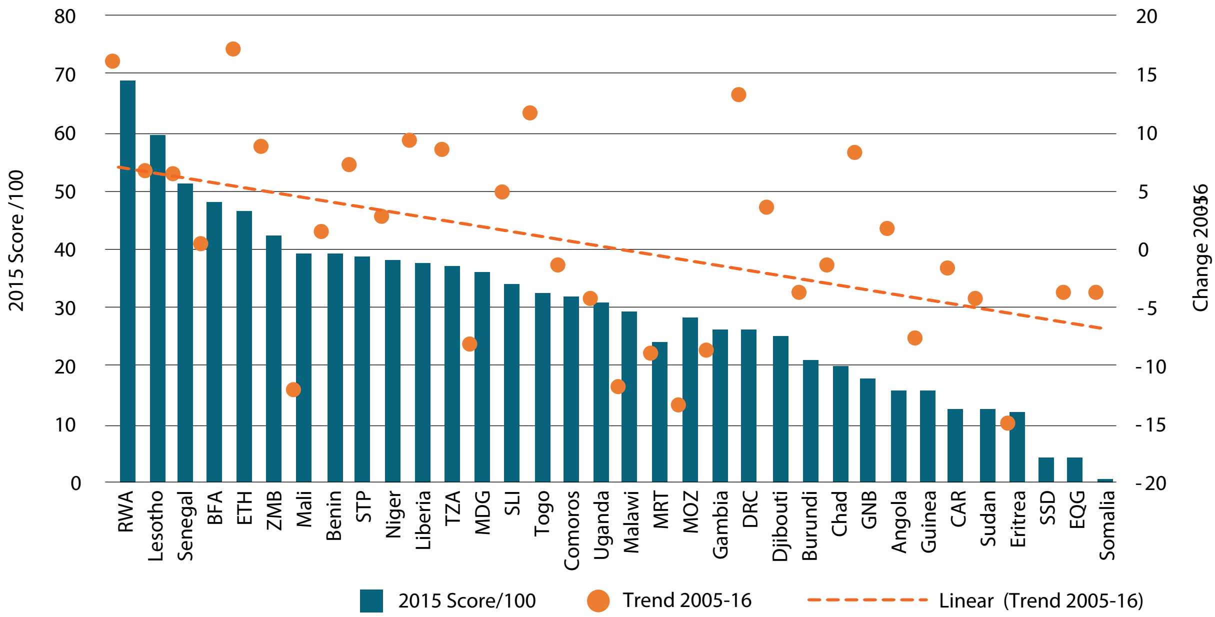
Source: *Mo Ibrahim Foundation (2016).*

transformation. Declining trends in accountability have been noted since 2005, with 16 out the 34 African least developed countries registering negative scores, four of them with declines of over 10 points (figure 21). Indeed, for these countries, accountability is the lowest scoring subcategory of the entire index.

The score under the "Fighting corruption" indicator surveyed by the Afrobarometer research network, which assesses citizens' perception of their satisfaction with government efforts to fight corruption, remains low for the continent, at 36.3, having declined by 14.4 points since 2006. In the case of five African least developed countries, scores under this indicator dropped by more than 40 points.

As of 2016, 22 of the 34 least developed countries in Africa had a long-term development plan or vision and all have a medium-term strategic plan. The development plans underscore sustainable

Figure 21: Deteriorating accountability among African least developed countries



Source: *Mo Ibrahim Foundation (2016).*

development, poverty reduction, human capital development, inclusive economic growth, decent and equitable employment growth and good governance as some of the key pillars for national development. Political leadership and the will to finance and implement them remain problematic, however.

Good planning for inclusive growth is critical so as to ensure that the graduation from least developed status is underpinned by transformation. As UNCTAD highlights: "Some LDCs are projected to reach graduation without having undergone meaningful structural economic transformation. This may be the case, in particular, for economies based on fuel extraction and, to some extent, SIDS. While fuel extraction boosts income, in most cases it does not lead to diversification or to commensurate social and economic inclusion, and does not necessarily provide a basis for sustainable development progress. Thus good planning mobilizing domestic resources and technical support to implement broad strategies for inclusive growth and diversification are needed. For resource-rich African least developed countries, good management accountability mechanisms and policies are needed, along with strategies to reinvest resource rents in productive-capacity development in other sectors beyond the extractive industries" (UNCTAD, 2016).

African least developed countries need to build strong and independent institutions to promote economic growth and transformation and, for that, institutions capable of implementing the vision and medium term plans and strategies are required. These are strong institutions based on constitutionalism and the rule of law: an independent judiciary, representative political institutions, effective regulatory bodies and law enforcement agencies that uphold property rights are important for success. Similarly, strong leadership at the political and technical levels is key to driving the plans and visions for shared growth and development.

Many least developed countries experience financing gaps, due to a combination of low income levels, narrow tax bases, weak tax collection and management systems, along with illicit financial flows (UNCTAD, 2016). At the same time, most least developed countries have a substantial need for additional revenue to meet the required social sector and infrastructure investments to eliminate poverty (IMF, 2011). In addition, the accountability and management of collected revenues and donor resources pose a serious challenge in many African least developed countries and, in combination, these factors are significantly reducing the impact of government fiscal policy on economic performance and the attainment of basic social goals. A number of African least developed countries, including Angola, Burundi, Ethiopia, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mauritania, Mali, Senegal and Uganda, have implemented tax reforms to improve tax revenues by simplifying and modernizing tax collection and expanding the tax base (IMF, 2011). Deepening such reforms will be essential to expanding the fiscal and policy space required for such countries sustainably to transform their economies.

III. Performance and progress towards graduation

As of 2015, ten countries (Angola, Bhutan, Equatorial Guinea, Kiribati, Nepal, Sao Tome and Principe, Solomon Islands, Timor-Leste, Tuvalu, Vanuatu) had met the eligibility criteria for graduation from least developed country status. Five of the ten (Bhutan, Nepal, Sao Tome and Principe, Solomon Islands, Timor-Leste) met the criteria for the first time and will be considered for possible graduation at the next triennial review in 2018. Even though 34 of the 48 least developed countries are from Africa, only three of the ten countries that met the eligibility criteria are African (Angola, Equatorial Guinea, Sao Tome and Principe).

Angola and Equatorial Guinea met the eligibility criteria for the second time and are eligible for graduation based on their exceptionally high per capita gross national income levels. Their economies are largely dependent on crude oil exports, the values of which have fallen in recent months. The relatively high per capita gross national incomes of Angola and Equatorial Guinea stand in stark contrast to their low human capital development, limited economic diversification and high vulnerability to economic shocks.

Apart from Equatorial Guinea and Angola, which have already met the graduation eligibility criteria, Sao Tome and Principe is the only other African least developed country with a strong chance of meeting the eligibility criteria by the next triennial meeting of the Committee for Development Policy in 2018. It met two of the three graduation criteria (gross national income per capita and human asset index) for the first time in 2015.

Other likely candidates for graduation in the medium term are Djibouti, Lesotho, Uganda and the United Republic of Tanzania. They all met at least one of the eligibility criteria in 2015: Lesotho – per capita gross national income; United Republic of Tanzania – economic vulnerability index; and Uganda – economic vulnerability index (table 6). In contrast to Lesotho, both Uganda and the United Republic of Tanzania met the economic vulnerability index threshold in 2015 but are well below the per capita gross national income thresholds and hence will need to focus on social development if they are to be eligible for graduation for the first time in 2018. On current trends, both Uganda and the United Republic of Tanzania will meet the human asset

Table 6: Performance of selected least developed countries against the graduation eligibility criteria (2015)

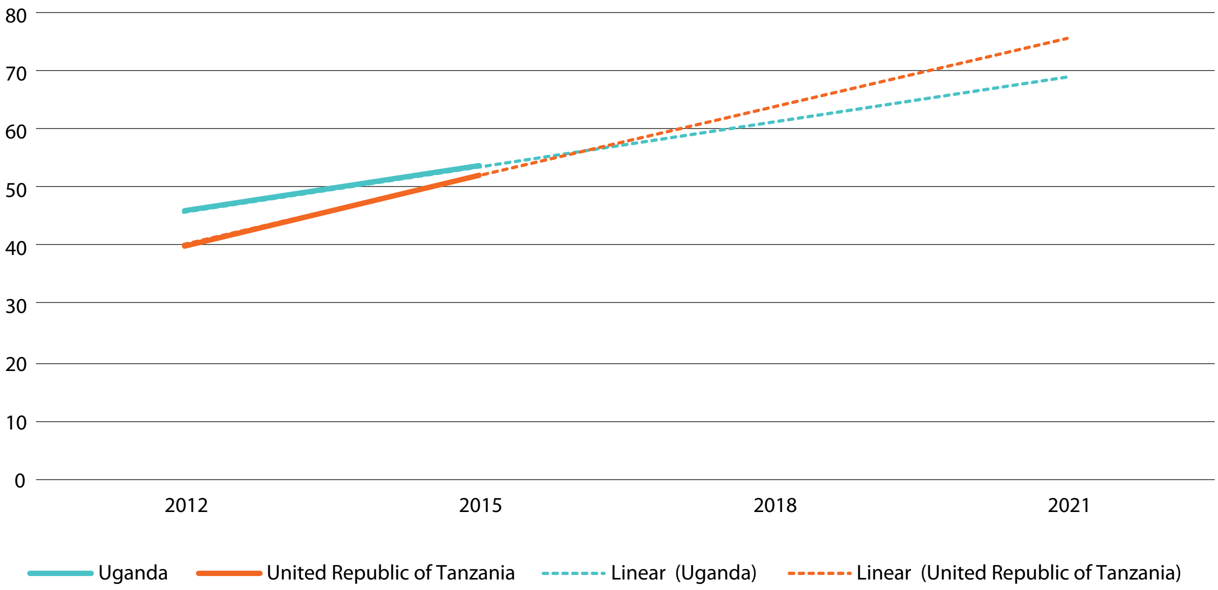
	GNI per capita	HAI	EVI
Graduation thresholds	$1242 (2484 income-only rule)	66>	32<
Djibouti	1629	54.6	37.7
Lesotho	1374	62.9	42.9
United Rep. of Tanzania	779	52.0	28.8
Uganda	663	53.6	31.8

Source: *https://www.un.org/development/desa/dpad/least-developed-country-category/ldc-data-retrieval.html.*

index criterion by the 2021 triennial review (figure 22). Djibouti on the other hand, will meet both the human asset and economic vulnerability criteria by 2018 if current trends continue (figure 23).

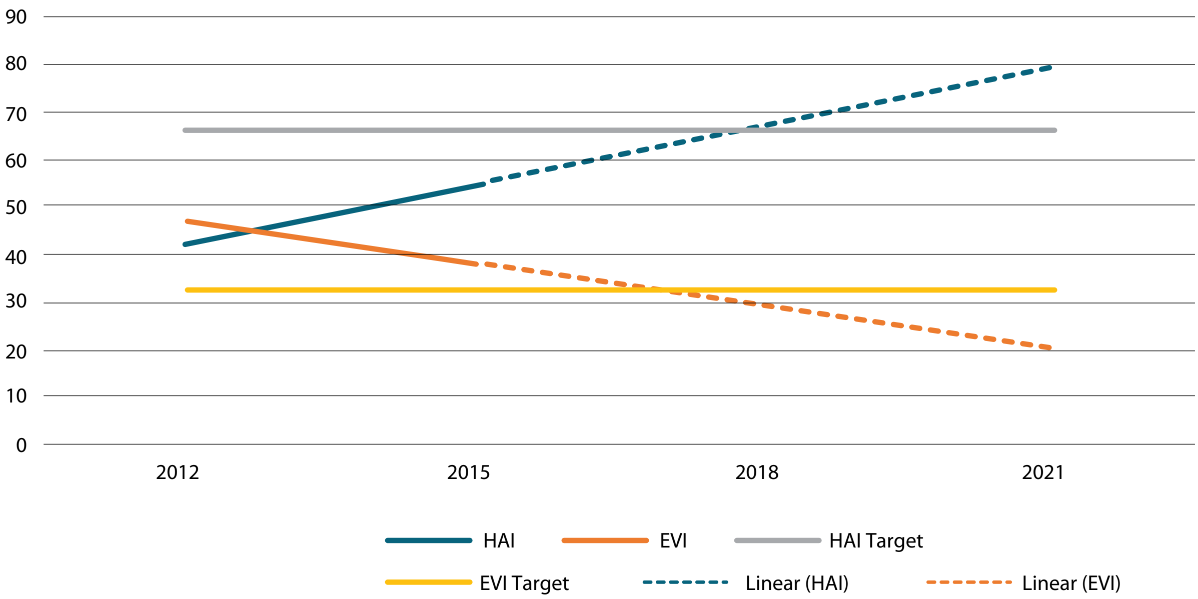
Graduation prospects are somewhat dimmer for Lesotho. Even though Lesotho is only 3.1 points below the human asset index threshold, on the basis of current trends it is not likely to meet that criterion until 2026 at the earliest (figure 24). Over the three-year period 2012-2015 the country improved its human asset index score by only 0.8 points, hence concerted efforts will be required if it is to reach the threshold at an earlier date.

Figure 22: Human asset index linear trends for Uganda and the United Republic of Tanzania



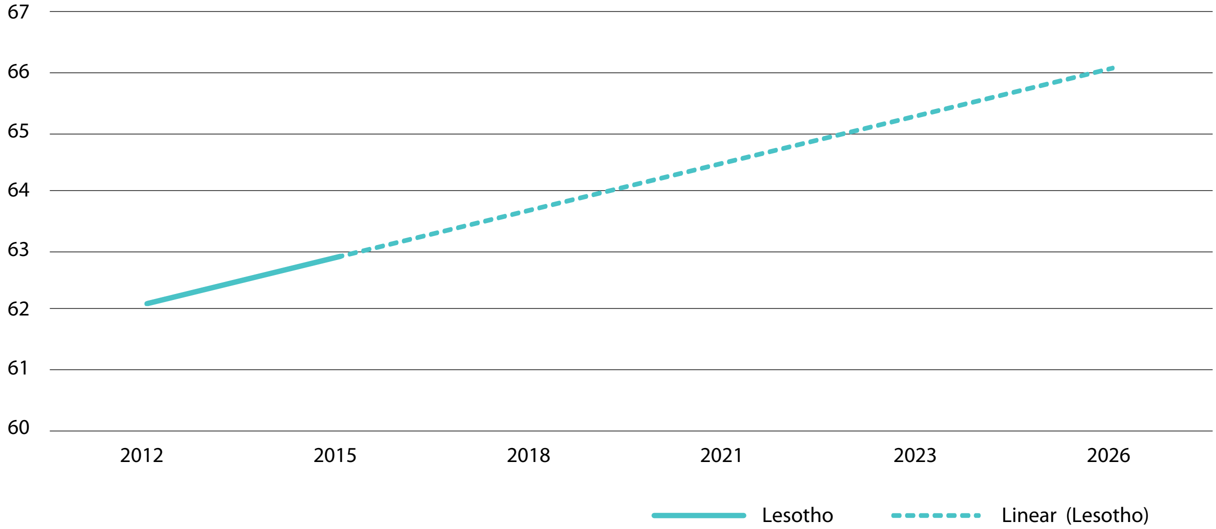
Source: *Author's estimates based on data from: https://www.un.org/development/desa/dpad/least-developed-country-category/ldc-data-retrieval.html.*

Figure 23: Projected EVI and HAI: Djibouti



Source: *Author's estimates based on data from: https://www.un.org/development/desa/dpad/least-developed-country-category/ldc-data-retrieval.html.*

Figure 24: Human asset index linear trend projection for Lesotho



Source: *Author's estimates based on data from: https://www.un.org/development/desa/dpad/least-developed-country-category/ldc-data-retrieval.html.*

Even though Senegal did not meet any of the eligibility criteria in 2015, the country missed the economic vulnerability index target by only 1 point in 2015. To achieve the economic vulnerability index threshold, Senegal needs to focus on reducing the volatility of its agricultural values. Over the period 2012-2015 the country displayed favourable trends in export concentration, dependence on agriculture forestry and fisheries, and resilience to natural disasters.

On the other hand, the country manifested a small increase in the variability of export values, implying increased vulnerability to external shocks. By comparison, enhancing export diversification, reducing the GDP share of agriculture forestry and fisheries and improving resilience to natural disasters will be critical to efforts by Lesotho to attain the economic vulnerability index threshold (table 7).

Beyond achieving the economic vulnerability index threshold, Senegal must put in place effective measures to improve its performance indicators on either the gross national income index or the human asset index, or both. The country is 10 points below the human asset index threshold and $136 below the per capita gross national income threshold. Accordingly, significant investments in growth, health and education will be necessary to ensure that it meets the criteria of either index in the short term.

Table 7: Performance of Lesotho and Senegal on the economic vulnerability index

	Lesotho			Senegal		
EVI sub-indices	2012	2015	% change	2012	2015	% change
Economic structure						
Merchandise export concentration	0.5	0.5	0	0.3	0.2	-0.1
Share of agriculture, forestry & fisheries	7.9	8.1	0.2	15.9	15.5	-2.5
Trade shock						
Instability of exports of goods and services	13.0	11.3	-1.7	6.9	4.7	-2.2
Natural shock						
Victims of natural disasters	3.4	4.4	29.1	31.5	10.1	-67.9
Instability of agricultural production	9.3	6.5	-2.8	14.2	14.8	0.6

Source: https://www.un.org/development/desa/dpad/least-developed-country-category/ldc-data-retrieval.html.

IV. Engagement of stakeholders in the implementation of the Istanbul Programme of Action

The international community's vision and strategy for the sustainable development of least developed countries for the decade 2011-2020 are mapped out by the Istanbul Programme of Action with a strong focus on developing their productive capacities. The Programme is designed to be implemented by a broad range of parties, including donor countries, developing countries, parliaments, the private sector, civil society, organizations of the United Nations system and international and regional financial institutions (OHRLLS, 2017). These diverse stakeholders will be encouraged to contribute to the implementation of the Programme in their respective areas of competence in line with least developed countries' national priorities (see paragraph 33 of the Programme of Action – United Nations, 2011). The Istanbul Programme of Action clearly recognizes the role and contribution of stakeholders such as parliaments, the private sector and civil society in its implementation, monitoring, follow-up and review.

A. Synergies between the Istanbul Programme of Action and the Sustainable Development Goals

The Istanbul Programme of Action may be considered as setting out the priorities for attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals by least developed countries. Thus there is a strong overlap between the Programme's 47 goals and targets and the Sustainable Development Goals, in particular in such areas as health, education, gender empowerment, poverty and hunger, energy and infrastructure, and also in those of peace, justice and institutions, and means of implementation. Furthermore, the Sustainable Development Goals seek to promote economic growth, structural transformation, environmental sustainability and human and social development, which are priority areas for least developed countries. Since full implementation of the priorities of the Istanbul Programme of Action will lead towards the attainment of Agenda 2030, activities undertaken by civil society organizations to promote implementation of Agenda 2030 will therefore also be conducive to implementation of the Programme.

B. Civil society organizations and the Istanbul Programme of Action

The Istanbul Programme of Action recognizes that civil society has a role complementary to that of governments and the private sector in its implementation. Engagement of civil society as a watchdog is vital for raising awareness of societal issues and challenges regarding effective implementation of the Programme. In this context, civil society involvement in policy dialogue will help to ensure a participatory and inclusive development process in least developed countries (see paragraph 39 of the Programme – United Nations, 2011).

In practice, civil society organizations have remained active in the implementation process, in particular in recent years. Notably, LDC Watch campaigned to engage least developed countries in the post-2015 process and called for an alignment of the post-2015 agenda with the Istanbul Programme of Action. The ONE campaign sought an end to extreme poverty in least developed countries. In April 2015, the Office of the High Representative, the ONE campaign and the executive directors representing the least developed countries on the Board of Directors of the World Bank jointly organized a ministerial breakfast for the least developed country members of the World Bank to raise awareness of the importance of the third International Conference on Financing for Development (United Nations, 2016a). In the awareness that no single sector is capable on its own of solving the problems faced by the least developed countries, civil society needs to broaden and strengthen partnerships and collaborative frameworks by engaging stakeholders from governments and international organizations, alongside those from the private sector.

C. Role of the academic sector

As part of civil society, academic institutions have also been increasingly involved in the implementation and monitoring of the Istanbul Programme of Action. An independent monitoring mechanism for the implementation of the Programme was established by a group of think-tanks and academic institutions from least developed countries and partner countries. This new initiative, known as the LDC IV Monitor, draws its strength from the expertise and capacity of its members to undertake policy research, organize dialogues and carry out outreach activities covering key issues laid out in the Programme. It also complements the official follow-up and review mechanism of the Istanbul Programme of Action (United Nations, 2012, paragraph 65). The LDC IV Monitor is designed to provide a credible, evidence-based and policy-oriented assessment of the delivery of the commitments contained in the Istanbul Programme of Action. The partnership's objectives include striving to enhance the transparency of the Programme's implementation; promoting accountability by the least developed countries, development partners, international agencies and stakeholders; and fostering efficiency in the implementation of the Programme with a view to the graduation of the least developed countries.

Furthermore, academic experts contributed to the establishment of a technology bank and a science, technology and innovation facilitation mechanism for the least developed countries through a feasibility study prepared by the High-level Panel of Experts on a Technology Bank for the Least Developed Countries convened by the Secretary-General (United Nations, 2016a).

D. Engaging parliaments

An important innovation of the Istanbul Programme of Action compared to its predecessor, the Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the Decade 2001-2010 (Brussels Programme of Action) is that the former places strong emphasis on the role of parliaments as agents of change in the implementation of the Programme (OHRLLS, 2013). Parliaments have an important role to play both in debating development strategies and in overseeing their implementation. The engagement of parliaments will ensure effectiveness, transparency and accountability in the design, implementation and review of the policies and projects initiated under the Istanbul Programme of Action (see paragraph 37 – United Nations, 2011). The Istanbul Programme of Action takes an unprecedented approach in assigning parliaments the role of important stakeholders and setting great store by their function in strengthening national ownership, accountability and transparency.

In effect, promoting the parliamentary contribution to implementation of the Istanbul Programme of Action can accelerate the process of the graduation of least developed countries. Although parliaments have been assigned this vital role in the implementation of the Programme, the role has yet to be fully optimized. Nonetheless, they have already made measurable contributions towards implementation of the Programme (United Nations, 2016a). For instance, the International Parliamentary Union (IPU) has launched guidelines on mainstreaming the Istanbul Programme of Action into the work of national parliaments.

Looking ahead, parliamentary engagement can be further enhanced by: strengthening the ability of parliaments in the least developed countries to design, implement, monitor, assess and follow up on the Istanbul Programme of Action, fostering discussions on current development topics among parliaments; engaging parliamentarians in research and training in development matters; and ensuring the presence of parliamentary voices in global decision-making (United Nations, 2012).

E. Private sector engagement in the Istanbul Programme of Action

The private sector plays an important role in promoting entrepreneurship, generating employment and investment, increasing revenue potential, developing new technologies and enabling high, sustained, inclusive and equitable economic growth in least developed countries. Engaging the private sector, in particular in making investments in sectors critical for development such as energy, transport, information and communications technology and technology transfer, and also in irrigation and other agriculture-related infrastructure, will be critical to the implementation of the Istanbul Programme of Action. Given the central importance of energy to development, a dedicated financial facility for the financing of energy projects in least developed countries in a holistic and comprehensive manner could be instrumental in driving the transformation agenda of such countries (United Nations, 2016a).

During the fourth United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries, the Private Sector Steering Committee proposed initiatives to stimulate private sector engagement in the implementation of the Istanbul Programme of Action. These include a series of recommendations to Governments to: support entrepreneurship and private enterprise; promote domestic markets; invest in infrastructure connectivity and workforce development; encourage foreign investment; increase international trade; and engage in partnerships. It was also agreed that consideration should be given to the development of a mentoring system for the stock exchanges of least developed countries with developed and emerging market exchanges (United Nations, 2012).

V. Conclusions and recommendations

On the plus side, African least developed countries have experienced significant increases in the penetration of information and communications technology. The population of African least developed countries with access to electricity increased marginally from 24 to 28 per cent, albeit with substantial rural urban disparities. Agricultural productivity in African least developed countries is rising and higher than the average for all least developed countries, but lower than the corresponding average for sub-Saharan Africa and also for the world as a whole.

While agricultural productivity has translated into improvements in malnutrition, extreme weather conditions such as droughts threaten to derail progress. Despite substantial increases in absolute export values, the share of African least developed countries of global exports remains low and is on the decline, largely because of these countries' high levels of export concentration.

Also to their credit, African least developed countries recorded positive trends in human and social development over the five years leading up to 2015. Primary school enrolments continue to increase with improving gender parity; the education and empowerment of women, and also their access to gainful employment, are improving; and notable reductions in infant and child mortality and the spread of HIV/AIDS and malaria have been recorded in most African least developed countries. Those advances notwithstanding, the quality of education and access to sanitation are areas that require improvement.

Where resource mobilization is concerned, the official development assistance shares of African least developed countries are declining while foreign direct investment and diasporan remittances continue to rise. Robust domestic resource mobilization is essential to finance sustainable development. This, however, will require an increase in domestic savings, the strengthening of capacities for tax administration, measures to stem the high incidence of illicit financial outflows and improvements in governance.

Angola and Equatorial Guinea have met the eligibility criteria for graduation from least developed country status. Sao Tome and Principe met the eligibility criteria for the first time in 2015 after attaining the per capita gross national income and human asset index thresholds. Djibouti, Lesotho, Uganda and the United Republic of Tanzania each met at least one of the eligibility criteria in 2015 and are therefore among the African least developed countries with prospects for graduation in the coming years. Uganda and the United Republic of Tanzania will have to focus on improving social development, while Lesotho needs to strengthen its performance on the human asset index and the economic vulnerability index.

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Annex: Least developed countries in Africa

	Country	Year added	Short name in graphs where used
1	Angola*	1994	AGO
2	Benin	1971	BEN
3	Burkina Faso	1971	BFA
4	Burundi	1971	BDI
5	Central African Republic	1975	CAR
6	Chad	1971	TCD
7	Comoros	1977	COM
8	Democratic Republic of the Congo	1991	DRC
9	Djibouti	1982	DJI
10	Equatorial Guinea**	1982	EQG
11	Eritrea	1994	ERI
12	Ethiopia	1971	ETH
13	Gambia	1975	GMB
14	Guinea	1971	GIN
15	Guinea-Bissau	1981	GBSU
16	Lesotho	1971	LSO
17	Liberia	1990	LBR
18	Madagascar	1991	MDG
19	Malawi	1971	MWI
20	Mali	1971	MLI
21	Mauritania	1986	MRT
22	Mozambique	1988	MOZ
23	Niger	1971	NER
24	Rwanda	1971	RWA
25	Sao Tome and Principe	1982	STP
26	Senegal	2000	ZMB
27	Sierra Leone	1982	SLI
28	Somalia	1971	SOM
29	South Sudan	2012	SSD
30	Sudan	1971	SDN
31	Togo	1982	TGO
32	Uganda	1971	UGA
33	United Republic of Tanzania	1971	TZA
34	Zambia	1991	ZMB

Source: *United Nations Committee for Development Policy, 2016.*

* *Expected to graduate to middle income status in 2021; **Expected to graduate to middle income status in 2017.*