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THE LEAST DEVELOPED COUNTRIES: PRINCIPAL
CHARACTERISTICS AND STRATEGIES FOR ENDOGENOUS
SELF-CENTERED DEVELOPMENT

by

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REVIEW OF PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS IN THE LEAST DEVELOPED COUNTRIES

The aim of the United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries, which was held in Paris from 1 to 14 September 1981, was to finalize, adopt and support the Substantial New Programme of Action for the 1980s for the least developed countries, outlined in resolution 122 (V) adopted in Manila in December 1979 at the fifth United Nations Conference on Trade and Development.

The preparatory work and the debates that took place at the conference drew attention to the extreme poverty of the peoples of thirty-one Third World countries, the poorest of the poor, and a programme of action for these countries during the present decade was outlined as a result.

Which are these countries? To which region do they belong? What are their characteristics and prospects?

1. Principal characteristics of the least developed countries

The 31 countries classified by the United Nations Committee for Development Planning in the category of 'least developed countries' have 270 million inhabitants, i.e. approximately 13 per cent of the total population of the developing countries (not including China). Of the 31 'least developed countries', 21 are in Africa, 8 in Asia, 1 in the Caribbean region (Haiti) and 1 in Oceania (Western Samoa). Despite their socio-political diversity and their cultural richness, all these countries are in a tragic state of destitution which is reflected in the low income per head of population (gross domestic product at market price equal to or less than 100 dollars, 1968 value), the very small amount of industrialization in relation to production (equal to or less than 10 per cent of the gross domestic product) and a low level of education (literacy rate equal to or less than 20 per cent for the population group aged 15 and over). Apart from these three main basic criteria, which have been adopted officially for purposes of classification, the least developed countries have the following characteristics: predominance of subsistence farming, unsuitable and rudimentary economic infrastructure, acute scarcity of skilled personnel, weak and inappropriate public administration and governmental organization, rudimentary sanitary services, high cost of transport etc. Almost all of these countries are situated in the tropical areas of Africa and Asia: their unfavourable geographical conditions are the result of the following situations: almost half the countries (14 countries, 11 of which are in Africa and 3 in Asia) are completely land-locked (Chad, Rwanda, Nepal etc.), others are island countries (Maldives, Western Samoa, Haiti) and still others are dependent on a large neighbouring country such as India (Bangladesh) or South Africa (Botswana). The climatic conditions, although differing greatly—they range from the arid zones of the Sahel to the Ganges Delta and the Himalaya Valley—are extremely unfavourable. In addition to this, the demographic situation is characterized by the following factors: the least developed countries are mostly small in area; their population density per kilometre is either too low or too high, and their population growth rate is very high in relation to economic growth, and exceeds the rate of food production: thus 7 countries have less than 1 million inhabitants, 11 countries—i.e. a third of the least developed countries—

have less than 2 million inhabitants, 19 countries--i.e. two-thirds of the least
developed countries--have less than 5 million inhabitants, and only 5 countries have
between 10 and 20 million inhabitants, apart from Ethiopia, which has 30 million and
Bangladesh, which has 90 million; the population density varies from one inhabitant
per square kilometre in Botswana to 600 in Bangladesh; the population growth rate is
2.6 per cent a year, whereas the food production rate is 1.6 per cent (for the period

These unfavourable structural characteristics, some of which are linked with
historical and geopolitical factors, are aggravated by phenomena connected with interna-
tional, economic, commercial, political and strategic relations: the deterioration of
terms of trade due to the rise in the price of imports (industrial and agricultural
products, oil),\(^1\) the land-division system that was in force when decolonization
took place, under which little heed was paid to ethnological, linguistic and cultural
boundaries, the rivalry of the great powers,\(^2\) whose overriding purpose is to defend
or extend their zones of influence, a state of affairs that results either in political
immobilism or in drastic changes which do nothing to facilitate the establishment and
implementation of appropriate and truly self-reliant development strategies; even in
the matter of financial assistance, these countries, which in any case have an acute
shortage of administrative personnel, have to meet high bureaucratic costs because so
many states and international bodies are involved in the allocation and management of
such assistance and because of the lack of co-ordination between them.

These structural handicaps lead to a state of chronic destitution and almost
total dependence on natural phenomena and the fluctuations of the international economic
and political situation. The results of this situation are reflected in the following
characteristics which are common to all these countries:

- very low per capita income--barely $200 (at current prices) on average, as
  against almost $700 for the developing countries, almost $4,000 for the socialist
countries of Eastern Europe and over $8,000 in the developed Western countries;

- very limited development of the manufacturing industry sector, which contributes
  very little to the gross domestic product (approximately 9 per cent, as against
  19 per cent for the developing countries);

- weakness of the agricultural sector, despite its predominance in the economic
  structure of these countries: it contributes on average half the GNP, and by
  itself it has to bear the weight of the transformation and development process;
  4/5 of the working population are employed in this sector, which supplies 2/3
  of the exports, themselves very limited (10 per cent of the GDP instead of
  16 per cent for the developing countries);

- low level of investment and equipment: the least developed countries invest on
  average five or six times less a year per inhabitant than the developing
countries;

\(^1\) A striking example of this was given by the representative of Tanzania at the
Paris Conference: in 1970 the exportation of 5 tons of tea made it possible to
import one tractor; in 1980 17 tons of tea (i.e. three and a half times as much)
have to be exported in order to import one tractor.

\(^2\) Cf. Afghanistan, Laos, the Horn of Africa--Ethiopia, Somalia--Chad and the two
Yemens.
low level of exploitation of natural energy and mineral resources, even in cases where these resources are known and have been identified, due to the extreme shortage of capital and of qualified personnel at all levels, both in public administration and in the private sector, and to the lack of scientific and technological infrastructures;

rapid deterioration of the physical environment as a result of deforestation (Nepal), desertification (Sahel), flooding (Bangladesh), drought (Africa), soil erosion (Haiti) (which causes a decrease in agricultural output) and uncontrolled urbanization (which produces large areas of shanty-towns).

Finally the extreme poverty of the least developed countries, which is evidenced by malnutrition, illiteracy, disease, lack of hygiene and drinking-water, etc. results in a very short expectation of life—between 40 and 45 years (Nepal, Maldives, Upper Volta...) instead of 70 to 75 years in the developed countries—and high birth and death rates.

The situation in the least developed countries is made intolerable not only by their extreme poverty and their present inability to meet immediate basic needs, but even more so by the impossibility of planning improvements in the foreseeable future. In the last twenty years, from 1960 to 1979, the per capita gross domestic product of the least developed countries has increased little more than 0.7 per cent per annum, i.e. their economic growth has been only slightly higher than their population growth. This growth rate varies from one country to another, but it exceeds 1 per cent in only six countries, and has even been negative (as low as—3 per cent in about 10 countries. The gap between the least developed countries and the developing countries, and especially between them and the richest countries, has thus been widened: it increased from 2.5 times in 1960 to 3.5 times in 1979, in relation to the first group, and from 25 to 45 times in relation to the group of OECD countries.

The above-mentioned structural weaknesses are often much aggravated by the occurrence of natural catastrophes whose impact is made even greater by the inadequacy of available resources to combat them, the lack of reserves and the powerlessness of the people, whose situation is precarious even in normal circumstances.

The acute 'crisis' of the least developed countries, which is in fact a structural weakness, often leads to disasters—famine, insolvency, destruction of both country areas and towns, and so on. Those in turn call for emergency measures which, though bringing immediate assistance, do not provide a long-term solution.

The emergency assistance granted by the international community in times of catastrophe, sometimes both generous and effective, sometimes less generous, slow or ineffective, often tends to distract attention from the urgent need to solve the structural problems of the least developed countries, i.e. to encourage them and assist them, through vigorous and sustained international action, gradually to achieve self-reliant, self-sustained and long-term development.

In seeking new ways of improving the situation of the least developed countries, we must bear in mind the lessons to be learnt from failures in development strategies in the last two decades. One of the main weaknesses was that these strategies amounted to a juxtaposition of economic objectives and social considerations that were not adequately linked together by any common vision or plan for the future and lacked explicit recognition of the importance of the cultural dimension of the development process'.

(1) Unesco - 'Endogenous development, culture and society' paper prepared for the new international development strategy - June 1979.
This juxtaposition of objectives based on necessarily simplified criteria is likely to perpetuate the practice of applying palliative measures and failing to initiate real and deep-rooted changes.

2. The idea of least developed countries: its ambiguity and tardy acceptance

The fact is that the international community has been very slow to realize how tragic the situation of the least developed countries is and to decide upon the joint action that should be taken to remedy it. It took 15 years for the very idea of least developed countries to be accepted, before being finally sanctioned at the Paris Conference.\(^1\) The idea of establishing a subcategory of the poorest countries within the group of underdeveloped countries was put forward for the first time by the industrialized countries in 1964 at the first UNCTAD Conference in Geneva, not so much because they sincerely desired to help the poorest countries to emerge from their serious situation as because they wished to challenge the principle of creating a single generalized system of trade preferences for all manufactured products from all underdeveloped countries. Arguing that a uniform system of generalized preferences would benefit only the most advanced Third World countries, the industrialized countries recommended a system of graduated and selective preference for each product and each country, priority being given to the least developed countries.

This 'discrimination' proposed by the industrialized countries was regarded by most of the delegations, including those of the African countries principally concerned as a policy of 'fractionism' aimed at dividing the countries of the Third World, and they rejected it. And the developing countries concluded the first UNCTAD Conference by issuing a joint declaration proclaiming their solidarity, cohesion and unity.

A last minute and somewhat vaguely formulated compromise, however, was adopted, by the recommendation to take into account, in the adoption of international policies and measures for the economic development of the developing countries, the specific characteristics and the different stages of development of these countries, giving special attention to the least developed among them. The ambiguity of the idea of least developed countries that was present at the outset has never in fact been resolved: the different groups of countries interpret it in their own way. The group of 77\(^2\), for instance, sees it as a reason why the industrialized countries should make a greater effort to assist all the developing countries equitably, according to the gravity of their situation; it considers that the special advantages granted to the least developed countries should in no way decrease the responsibility of the developed countries towards the other developing countries and should not lead to the adoption of a system under which only these countries would be given advantages. The least developed countries, for their part, seek to avail themselves of the general arguments of the Group of 77 and to gain its support in order to put forward their own particular claims. The industrialized countries, however, consider that recognition of the situation of the least developed countries implies recognition of the duties of the more advanced developing countries, in particular the duty to moderate their claims on the industrialized countries and themselves help the least developed countries. (In particular, they stress the responsibilities of the OPEC countries since the oil crisis and those of the socialist countries.)

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\(^2\) The Group of 77 now consists of over 120 developing countries.
At the second UNCTAD Conference, held in New Delhi in 1968, a general resolution (24(II)) was adopted, recommending that UNCTAD and other international bodies seek to identify the least developed countries and to establish special measures in their favour in all the fields of competence of UNCTAD.

In December 1969, just before the Second Development Decade, the United Nations General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to take similar steps, in consultation with the Specialized Agencies, the Regional Economic Commissions, the United Nations Committee for Development Planning and other competent consultants: this broad consultation was indicative of the complexity of the institutional network which was to deal with this issue.\(^{(1)}\)

The text of the 'International Development Strategy' for the Second Development Decade adopted in October 1970 included a separate section on special measures in favour of the least developed among the developing countries. In the Spring of 1971 the Committee for Development Planning which was responsible for identifying these countries proposed, on the basis of the three above-mentioned criteria, a list of the 25 countries that formed the hard core of the least developed countries, which was approved by the General Assembly in November 1971. This decision in favour of a limited choice of criteria satisfied the industrialized countries, which were not in favour of extending the list. Nevertheless, the Planning Committee sought to apply these criteria in a fairly flexible fashion; it believed that the list should include not only the countries in which all three above-mentioned characteristics were to be found, but also those which met only two of the criteria, provided that the figure for the third criterion was only slightly higher than the figure proposed by the Committee. In examining borderline cases, the Committee also took into account the average growth rate of the gross domestic product in real terms during the last few years, as well as any special conditions which might have recently interfered with development.\(^{(2)}\)

While recognizing that the criteria applied were far from satisfactory and keeping in view 'the possibility of modifying the list', the General Assembly met the wishes of the industrialized countries by entrusting the further examination of the appropriate criteria to the Planning Committee, under the responsibility of the United Nations Economic and Social Council, thus limiting the role of UNCTAD in the search for new criteria, while the developing countries sought to base their position on the studies made by UNCTAD, in which a large number of criteria were applied and a much broader definition of the idea of least developed countries was proposed.

That being the situation, at the third and fourth UNCTAD Conferences, held at Santiago de Chile in 1972 and at Nairobi in 1976, the Group of 77 sought to extend the list, assimilating three categories of underprivileged countries in the resolutions adopted: the least developed countries, land-locked developing countries and island developing countries. The industrialized countries, however, had succeeded in establishing a distinction between 'special measures' on behalf of the least developed countries and 'specific actions' on behalf of island or land-locked countries. It was not until the fifth UNCTAD Conference, held at Manila in 1979, that the idea of least developed countries was clearly recognized, that 'special attention' was granted to their problems and that a 'Substantial New Programme' was planned for them.

But the problem of identifying the least developed countries has not only given rise to conflict between the group of OECD countries and the Group of 77. It has also caused dissension among the developed countries themselves, in particular between France

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\(^{(1)}\) Cf. Marie Claude SMOULTS, op. cit., page 52.
\(^{(2)}\) Guy de Lacharrière--Identification et statut des pays 'moins développés' in the 'Annuaire français de droit international', 1971, p. 470.
and Great Britain, which wanted assistance to be given to the groups of countries with which they were traditionally linked by colonization—French-speaking Africa and the Commonwealth. France has been anxious to avoid extending the list of least developed countries, so that assistance to the least developed countries of Africa would not be reduced; it has done so by defending the restrictive classification based on the criteria set out by the Planning Committee and by laying emphasis on the structural and constitutional criteria of the handicaps of the least developed countries and not only on the characteristic criterion of low income, as certain major Asiatic countries (India, Pakistan and Indonesia, for instance) have wished to do, emphasizing the poverty of their own people by using terms such as: 'poorest countries', 'lowest income countries' (IBRD), 'low income countries', 'countries most seriously affected by the economic crisis', and so on.

The last definition of the least developed countries was adopted in December 1980 by the United Nations General Assembly in the text of the International Development Strategy for the Third Development Decade, which includes a Section K concerning the 'least developed countries, most seriously affected countries, developing island countries and land-locked developing countries'. This definition is a compromise; it juxtaposes these different considerations: 'a special programme in favour of the least developed countries—i.e. the economically weakest and poorest countries with the most formidable structural problems'.

 Whereas the Group of 77 regards the special measures for the least developed countries as measures additional and complementary to those already adopted for the developing countries as a whole and believes that international aid should be increased and that a special fund should be opened to assist the least developed countries, the industrialized countries emphasize the need to strengthen national programmes and the action of international bodies, for which existing resources should be used. Thus, despite the many resolutions adopted unanimously by UNCTAD or the General Assembly, the industrialized countries of OECD have never shown any firm determination to increase their aid to the least developed countries. The Nairobi Conference of 1976, recalling the commitments undertaken previously by the industrialized countries to reach the target of 0.70 per cent of their GNP allocated to public aid to development, mainly in the form of donations, called for a larger proportion of aid to developing countries to be allocated to the least developed countries. Resolution 122 (V) adopted at Manila expressed increased concern about the situation of the least developed countries, calling upon the international community to make a particularly vigorous effort and requesting the developed countries to double as soon as possible the amount of aid for development to these countries. But the most definite step forward is the effort that has been made to analyse the causes of under-development and the recognition of the need to transform the principal structural characteristics of the least developed countries, thus going beyond the scope of the usual debate on the amount and conditions of assistance, to which discussions on the subject are too often confined.

Recently the International Development Strategy for the Third Development Decade granted essential priority to the special programme in favour of the least developed
countries. Drawing the attention of the international community to the situation of the least developed countries, the Manila Conference appealed to all donors to accord priority to the special programme in favour of least developed countries, and the Eleventh Special Session of the United Nations General Assembly, in 1980, made a similar appeal to 'all donors in a position to do so', the objective of the Western countries being to draw the attention of the whole international community to the situation of the least developed countries and not to remain the sole target of the claims of the Third World countries. The traditional attitude of the group of socialist countries to the matter is to reaffirm that, having never practised colonial exploitation, they are not responsible for the present situation of the developing countries, the prime responsibility for which lies with the former colonizing countries and the capitalist countries which, through the operations of their transnational corporations, practise neo-colonialism and engage in plundering—the prime cause of the distress of the Third World and particularly of the least developed countries; these countries accordingly attach great importance to bilateral agreements and aid. The OPEC countries seek to demonstrate that their aid is greater than that provided by the developed countries and have declared that they are willing to accept greater geographical diversification of their assistance. As for China, recently recognized as being the equivalent of a separate group in a multipolar world and classified among the developing countries, its assistance cannot be compared to that of the developed countries, but must be regarded rather as mutual assistance between poor friends. China considers in particular that economic and technical co-operation (ECDC and TCDC) between the developing countries should be increased and that a greater effort should be made to establish a new international economic order—a view which the international community as a whole supports.

(1) Cf. op. cit. paragraph 136: 'As an essential priority within the International Development Strategy for the Third United Nations Development Decade, the least developed countries...require a special programme of sufficient size and intensity consistent with their national plans and priorities to make a decisive break from their past and present situation and their bleak prospects. Efforts must therefore be immediately and substantially expanded in order to transform their economies, to promote a self-sustained process of development, to accelerate agricultural and industrial progress and to ensure development of human resources and broadly based participation in the development process concurrent and consistent with equitable distribution of the gains of socio-economic development. Therefore, the international community will take urgently the necessary steps to finalize and implement the Substantial New Programme of Action for the 1980s for the least developed countries, which was launched by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development at its fifth session in its resolution 122(V) of 3 June 1979. The Programme is to be finalized, adopted and supported by the United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries, to be convened in 1981'.

(2) Cf. Statement by the representative of the German Democratic Republic at the Paris Conference.

(3) Assistance to least developed countries in relation to the GNP of the donor countries: (a) group of industrialized countries in the OECD: 0.08 per cent; (b) oil-producing countries of OPEC: 0.20 per cent; (c) developed countries of the socialist bloc: approximately 0.01 per cent.

(4) Cf. Statement by the representative of China at the Paris Conference.

+ See A/S-11/14, Annex I.
3. The need for international solidarity

In fact, apart from the concern of the international community over the future of the least developed countries, what is really at stake is human solidarity among all societies, in a world made up of closely interdependent countries. 'Never has the world been such an integrated whole, never has its diversity been so evident'; 'the world forms a whole, a unity of interrelated parts'. (1) As the nineteenth century sociologists saw, whereas 'mechanical' solidarity is based on similarities and convergence of interests, 'organic' solidarity is based on differences which engender complementarity. It is on this principle that the new international economic order should be based, and perhaps later a new world human order.

It has to be admitted, however, that, while the nations are increasingly aware of this interdependence, it has not yet led to a spirit of solidarity between them. Solidarity must therefore be given a legal basis, so that it is transferred from the field of moral obligation to that of legal constraint. Unless this fresh step is taken—a step which would be a real corner-stone for the establishment of a new international economic order—international co-operation will continue to be regarded as international charity work, because it is unilateral, seems to be generous, and is apparently free, whereas in reality furnishing a counterpart—which may not be economic, but is at least political or strategic, and in any case concealed—often tends to re-establish the former relations of domination or to accentuate inequalities. Modern experts in international law on development consider that there are three principles linking the responsibility of the northern countries to the development of the south. (2)

(a) The first is the right to compensation for damage caused, which is recognized in national legislation but is also applicable to international law: 'A person by whose fault damage has been caused shall compensate for that damage either in kind or in its equivalent'. (3) Such damage may be: excessive exploitation of resources, whether renewable or not, inequitable terms of international trade, fictitious transfer of technology for lucrative ends, an unjust international monetary system, and so on'. This notion of compensation could be used as an argument in favour of international aid.

(b) The second principle is that of 'compensatory inequality'. Whereas the principle of the legal equality of nations normally implies 'treat[ing] all states in the same way in all fields', which, in the prevailing conditions, would simply increase the inequalities, the very spirit of the principle of equality calls for compensatory unequal treatment: not being a reality, it is thus adopted as a goal to be attained. (4)

It is in accordance with this principle that the countries of the European Economic Community and other rich countries agreed not to expect strict reciprocity in the so-called 'Dillon' negotiations on international trade with the developing countries, and the Algiers Charter of the Group of 77 (1967) called for the outright abolition of the principle of reciprocity. Moreover, the developing countries have often put forward the argument of 'implicit reciprocity': although the poor countries can export more, because of the advantages which they obtain from the rich countries, their needs are so great that they have to use their surplus income on further purchases from the

(1) Introduction by Mr Amadou-Mahtar M'Bo, Director-General of Unesco to the Medium-Term Plan (1977-1982).
(2) Thérèse Pang—'Solidaire et contrats de solidarité dans la perspective d'un nouvel ordre économique international' in 'Recherche pédagogique et culture'. September-October 1980—AUDECAM, Paris.
(4) Thérèse Pang, article quoted, page 20.
industrialized countries. Thus the latter are sure of profiting by any increase in the resources which the poorer countries obtain through stepping up their exports, and there is therefore no need to request them to make reciprocal concessions.

The long recession in the 1970s showed that the Third World markets were important because they compensated for the decline in world demand in the industrialized countries, thus limiting unemployment in those countries. According to an OECD report quoted by Marie Claude Céleste,[1] exchanges of industrial products between the developing countries and France have resulted in the outright creation of a hundred thousand jobs in that country between 1970 and 1976. A more recent OECD study reaches similar conclusions for its Member States as a whole. Between 1960 and 1980, exports from the OECD countries to the developing countries have made it possible to create thirty million jobs in the industrialized countries. Referring to this aspect of the question, French political leaders have recently sought to demonstrate that there is a community of interest between the development of the Third World and that of the developed countries.[2]

What is in fact happening, however, is that, instead of helping the poor countries to attain a certain level of purchasing power, so as to create markets in those countries by putting their raw materials to good account, opening up access to the markets of the northern countries and transferring resources and technology so as to establish appropriate conditions for industrialization etc., the industrialized countries concentrate on sales promotion techniques. They prefer to appear unilaterally generous, to negotiate case by case, to accept secondary concessions which do not threaten their own prerogatives or the present international structures, to remain entrenched behind their system of 'liberalism' and market economy so as to avoid concluding specific agreements, instead of committing themselves by contract, which by definition would be binding for a definite period.[3]

The principle of compensatory inequality therefore constitutes a reason for both differential treatment and the right to compensation.

(c) The third principle is based on collective responsibility for development; for the only true, lasting development is worldwide development. The United Nations General Assembly resolutions (in particular resolution 3201(S-VI)), concerning the establishment of a new international economic order, are based on the following considerations: 'Economic events since 1970 have brought into sharp focus the realization that the interests of the developed countries and those of the developing countries can no longer be isolated from each other, that there is a close inter-relationship between the prosperity of the developed countries and the growth and development of the developing countries. ... The benefits of technological progress are not shared equitably by all members of the international community. The developing countries, which constitute 70 per cent of the world's population, account for only 30 per cent of the world's income. It has proved impossible to achieve an even and balanced development of the international community under the existing international

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[2] Cf. Interview with Mr J.P. Cot, French Minister of Co-operation and Development, Le Monde, 1 September 1981. 'What we must do, is to demonstrate constantly, both to our Western partners and to the public at large, that the development of the Third World is in our own interest and that it is only through the establishment of a new international order that we shall solve our economic problems'.
economic order...'. The world must be considered as a totality of a system, whose parts are organically linked. A global view must therefore be a prerequisite to any attempt to solve the different problems of today'. (1) These ideas are indeed new. Formerly it was possible to be moved to pity by the hardship of the most dispossessed countries of the Third World and to speak of a necessary interdependence. What was involved was moral interdependence. It is clear that interdependence today has become a reality. 'Misfortune and poverty in one part of the world, together with the conflict and total despair thus created, will inevitably affect stability and progress throughout the rest of the globe. In the world of today there is no possibility of lasting development for a small group of privileged countries. Development concerns everyone or no one'. (2) The interdependence which has been noted as an international sociological fact calls for the establishment of a contract of solidarity which transcends national frontiers and establishes each country's right to development as a means of ensuring its true national sovereignty through economic liberation following the gaining of political independence. One of the principal conditions for effective control by a country's inhabitants over its future is their freedom to choose its political, economic and social systems, to have complete possession of its land and subterranean resources and to receive assistance from the international community, if necessary.

The above mentioned three principles—namely, the right to compensation for damage caused, the principle of 'compensatory inequality' (with the reality of 'implicit reciprocity'), and the right to development and to international solidarity—provide a basis for the right of all developing countries to assistance for development, in particular the least developed among them, and also for the establishment of a new international economic order. (3) Seen in this light, the development of the least developed countries is not only the responsibility of these individual states but also the collective responsibility of the international community. At a time when the international community is studying ways of acting on their behalf, the question seems to have two aspects: that of the material volume of assistance, obviously, but above all that of its nature, or more precisely its ultimate purpose. Should this action serve to mitigate the pain or to cure the disease? Is it to be a palliative, which would create an increasing habituation to external support, or a vaccine which would strengthen the social body's own defences? If we settle for expedients, viewed as temporary assistance, we delude ourselves into thinking we have solved a crisis which in fact is only deferred, while the situation of dependence remains. The only viable solutions are those which set aid in the context of long-term co-operation and relieve the immediate sufferings of populations while supplying them with the means of developing their own potential and exploiting their own resources for their future development. (4)

4. Development strategies for the least developed countries

The Substantial New Programme of Action for the 1980s in favour of the least developed countries opens up new horizons until the end of the decade and even beyond. It is therefore desirable to try to see how the problem of long-term, self-sustained development can be tackled and what sort of strategy should be adopted to achieve such development—i.e., development which will meet the real needs of these countries and is suited to their socio-cultural circumstances.

(3) For details concerning these questions, cf. Mohammed Bedjaoui, Towards a New International Economic Order, Unesco, 1979.
(4) Address by Mr Amadou-MaliM'bow, Director-General of Unesco, at the United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries, 10 September 1981.
At least two dimensions of the idea of development may be distinguished: 'action' or development work and the 'end-purpose' of development. Development work consists mainly in the mobilization of national resources which are often present in a latent state and plentiful in the developing countries and even in the least developed countries: (a) human resources (i.e., people) which are often unemployed, under-employed or badly employed, and which need to be mobilized and turned to account through education and training in order to increase their capacity to contribute to development; (b) material resources in the form of raw materials, still unexploited and under-exploited by the countries themselves, or else 'over-exploited' by other countries, as they are not controlled by the owner countries and fetch a low price on the international market; (c) technical resources in the form of know-how, traditional technology and 'home-grown science' which, despite their simple and rudimentary nature, are often functional and suited to both the level of development and the socio-cultural circumstances of these countries.

The end-purpose of development is to meet the needs of the people, particularly their basic needs, and especially those of the least privileged among them. Apart from 'objective needs', which may be based on standards pertaining to vital needs, needs for further development, functions exercised or a certain standard of living in a national or international society during a given period, subjective needs vary from one individual, social group or community to another, according to their different ideas, aspirations and capacities. Thus, apart from its instrumental aspect, which makes it the *sine qua non* of action for development, the participation of the people in identifying their own needs is an essential stage—but one which has hitherto been neglected—in the process of planning aimed at establishing appropriate and practical development objectives.

At this point we might perhaps indicate briefly the main features of the kind of development that would fulfil the aspirations of the developing countries, including the least developed countries. Its aim would be to meet the real needs of the people, in particular the least privileged sectors, by mobilizing the available resources and potential capacities of the societies concerned and by turning them to account, while preserving the cultural identity of the peoples, respecting their deep-seated aspirations and promoting the development of their true personality, which is expressed through traditional values, social structures, human relations and ways of life which often correspond to real needs and to the specific possibilities and limitations of the social context. This type of development must meet the following basic criteria: it must achieve harmony in social relations, through justice and social peace within societies and between nations and through a more equitable distribution of benefits, efforts and sacrifices, and its aim must be to ensure the harmonious development of the many facets of man's nature; it must ensure the increasing democratization and humanization of the ways and means of development through the active and extended participation of individuals and groups in all planning processes and in all aspects of development (participation being understood not only as a means of development, but also as an essential human need, a process of social and civic self-education, and being recognized as a fundamental human right); and it must ensure harmony between man and nature (environment and quality of life). Such development, in short, is global, multidimensional and integrated; it entails the active participation of all, as agents and beneficiaries of the development process, and it has a unified approach to planning, for which it uses multidisciplinary instruments of analysis. This approach to 'endogenous man-centred development' having been made clear, we may turn our attention to the specific situation of the least developed countries and try to discern some of the basic principles underlying strategies for self-reliant, appropriate and long-term development.

Firstly, the priority areas and objectives of development depend on the specific situation of each country.
In the least developed countries, agriculture, especially subsistence farming, is the most important sector of the economy. The agricultural sector employs four-fifths of the working population and provides two-thirds of the income from exports, but it does not provide sufficient food for these countries.

During the last two years, the agricultural and food situation of the least developed countries has shown a decrease in food production per capita (approximately 1 per cent a year), a deterioration in the food situation, a decline in imports of agricultural products, and a rapid increase in imports of food and agricultural products. Agricultural production is very unstable, and the marked annual fluctuations and regional disparities lead to chronic food insecurity, particularly in the countries of the Sahel. It is estimated that at present average food production per capita of the least developed countries is 15 per cent lower than its level in 1960 and that, if present trends continue, some countries will have to import as much as one-third (Bangladesh) and even 45 per cent (Sahel) of their food requirements by the end of the 1980s. With regard to agricultural exports, the decrease in volume has been accompanied by a deterioration in the terms of trade for the main products (cotton, tea, groundnuts, sesame, jute and so on).

This makes it clear that the development of agriculture and integrated rural development must have top priority if these countries are to survive. As regards industry, the emphasis should be laid on the agricultural and food industries, the clothing industry, pharmaceuticals and housing, and available local resources should be used as far as possible. With regard to education, literacy courses and primary education should include basic scientific information, so that people can understand the environment, and basic technical knowledge, so that the standard of life can be improved. But priority should be given to the development of scientific and technical education adapted to agricultural needs, and the emphasis should be placed on strategically important levels such as secondary and higher education and research for development. The latter will make it possible to encourage the study and application of appropriate technologies based on the real needs, potential resources and capabilities of the people, thus avoiding technical unemployment, wastage of local resources, an increase in socio-economic inequalities and ecological imbalance. As the least developed countries are those most seriously affected by the oil crisis and are also situated in regions where there are plentiful sources of renewable energy (solar, wind, hydraulic), every effort should be made to explore possibilities and apply technologies in order to exploit these rich potentials. This policy for the development of science and technology that are adapted to the real needs and circumstances of the least developed countries, particularly in the rural and energy sectors, should be given absolute priority, even in a strategy aimed at the minimum satisfaction of basic needs, since it is a sine qua non for ensuring that these countries achieve self-sustaining, self-reliant and continuous development, in the medium and long term, so that they can gradually dispense with assistance from the international community.

The population structure of the least developed countries is such that their main resource is their young people. Every effort should be made to turn the enthusiasm of young people to account and encourage them to take part in the task of national construction and development. Women are a category of citizens who are in many cases marginalized, and they should be given a status and rights equal to those of men, so as to promote social democracy and mobilize these human resources for the socio-economic and cultural development of the country. In the fields of literacy, primary education, physical education and sport, education for peace, the preservation of the environment and the safeguarding of the cultural heritage, the active and motivated participation of young people who have been made aware of the situation would to some extent supply the administrative officials and teachers needed in the least developed countries; it would enrich educational content and make educational structures more flexible, so that they meet the needs of society and the individual. Introducing young people to science would open up for them a field of experimentation, which would greatly encourage them to become agents in development.

Different strategies must be employed for participation and different methods used according to the socio-political, economic and cultural circumstances of each country, but the main aim will always be to find appropriate and practical ways of mobilizing human resources and making the best use of their contribution. As the private sector
of the economy in the least developed countries is usually small, the role of the public sector—planning, public administration and management—has increased in importance.

The difficulties facing the least developed countries stem not only from the quantitative shortage of the means of production but also from the qualitative inability of the administrative and organizational infrastructures of society to meet its needs. Public administration is a means of communication between the authorities and the people, and so, if it is to act as an agent of development by strengthening the dialogue with the people and increasing their participation, it should employ the communication system normally used by them. What measures can be taken to reduce the disparity between a bureaucracy based on the written word and imported from the Western world and the people of the least developed countries, who have an essentially oral culture and a high illiteracy rate? How can the administration be adapted to the local culture and society and be humanized so that it will be more effective? The least developed countries, like the developing countries, suffer from ‘under-administration’ in quantitative terms as much as from bad administration (ill-adapted to the socio-cultural context). Every effort should be made not only to train large numbers of administrative personnel but also to adapt public administration and management to the socio-cultural circumstances of the least developed countries (and of the developing countries) by ensuring that the administrative system and management methods used for development projects are rooted in the socio-cultural environment concerned. If this is not done—as is frequently the case—the duality between ‘imported modernity’ and ‘endogenous tradition’ will continue to provoke a conflict of identity between the public administration and the people, thus reducing the credibility of the public authorities and jeopardizing their efforts, however great these may be, to further the development of the country. In education, the structures of the school system should be adapted not only to the socio-economic needs and financial limitations of the country, but also to the limitations in time imposed by the urgency of the people’s needs and their expectation of life. Most education courses, however, are based on the systems in highly developed countries—where the expectation of life is 70 to 75 years, as compared with 40 to 45 years in some of the least developed countries (Nepal, Maldives, Upper Volta, etc.) and where the needs are less urgent—and they are too long for the time and effort expended on training to be put to effective use, especially if the student is to reach a higher level of specialization. For example, a specialist doctor trained under the present system will often be over thirty before he begins to practise his profession: (1) he therefore has only ten to fifteen years of working life before him. Of course, the expectation of life of members of the social classes that can afford to pursue higher specialized studies is often greater than that of the average. However, such a system of education not only makes it impossible to achieve democratization—it can produce only a very small minority of doctors, specialists and technicians, too few to meet the needs of the population. The education system should be reorganized so as to adapt educational structures and content to the real needs and also to the financial constraints and limitations in time of the least developed countries. A long educational course is not necessarily the best, nor is it necessarily the most practical or the most suitable for the development of the least developed countries, especially since it is known that the extension of the length of school courses in developed countries in the past was often due to economic, social or political factors peculiar to those countries (and not to purely educational factors, for one of the conditions which made it possible to increase the length of courses was a relatively long expectation of life). The simplest method, which is commonly used at present, for ‘raising the standard of living of pupils’, taking into account the fact that the field of knowledge is constantly increasing in size, is to add an extra year to the length of the present course, whereas instead of that a lot of useless material could be cut out, and more attention could be given to the study of the most practical subjects and those best calculated to meet the real needs of the country, while maintaining (or even possibly reducing) the duration of studies.

(1) Cf. Age of admission to school: 6 years, plus average duration (theoretical duration plus one year) of primary studies (7 years), secondary studies (8 years), general medicine (8 years), and specialization (3 years). Total: 32 years.
The least developed countries are desperately short of qualified personnel in all fields. Moreover, despite their immense needs, many of them have no development projects because they have no qualified administrative staff who could prepare studies and projects for submission with a view to obtaining international assistance. One of the first needs is a programme for the development of human resources, particularly in agriculture, including specialized training in the preparation of development projects.

Some of the least developed countries (Maldives, Western Samoa) suffer from a lack of manpower in absolute terms at all levels, and their domestic market is too small to stimulate national production, whereas in others population growth is a handicap to development. In these circumstances, one may wonder whether a very small population, accompanied by an extremely low population density per square kilometre, does not in fact constitute one of the most serious handicaps of the least developed countries. Population policies should therefore be worked out judiciously, so as to avoid increasing the weakness of the least developed countries in this respect.

In view of their serious handicaps in many fields, the least developed countries need to make innovations of various kinds, not only in technological matters but also in the educational, social, economic and political fields, at the structural and organizational level, in order to achieve endogenous, self-sustained and long-term development. One of the most important questions is that of the best path to development, on which we offer a few comments.

As financial resources are extremely limited in the least developed countries—where the non-monetary sector of the subsistence economy accounts for a large proportion of the GDP—in these countries those searching for the best path to development and strategies for achieving it should explore methods of mobilizing national resources that are complementary to the monetary, budgetary and 'capitalistic' paths.

We see all too frequently the disastrous consequences of following the usual path to development, which is based on the monopolistic role of money as the factor which ultimately determines all social activities: hundreds of thousands of employable people, who ask nothing more than to make their contribution to development, are reduced to unemployment and poverty, while abundant natural resources remain unused because it is generally accepted that there is no other way of using and developing them than going through the 'monetary circuit' and the market system: the labour market, raw materials and so on. What is paralysing many developing countries and especially the least developed among them is that they find it impossible to mobilize their potential wealth, because the path to development which they are following places too much emphasis on the role—that of a dominating intermediary—played by money and capital, which, by definition, is precisely what they lack. If they rely solely on the monetary path to mobilize their national resources for development, as is often the case, the least developed countries (and also the developing countries) are likely to experience either (1) paralysis due to lack of financial resources, a lack which is inherent in their subsistence economy, or (2) relatively rapid but 'exogenous' development, as a result of the necessary importation of foreign capital, which has many deplorable consequences, as we know. Moreover, the least developed countries have no influence on the parity of their currency in relation to foreign currencies, because of their powerlessness.

Stimuli other than those of a pecuniary nature must be found in order to diversify and enrich the ways of mobilizing national resources and the capacities and energy of the people with a view to sustained development. Between the monetary way and the alternative ideological way that is sometimes proposed, there are probably other ways not yet tried—ways that are predominantly cultural and are based on authentic aspirations which draw their motivation and strength from the cultural roots of the people. Such is in fact endogenous development centred on man, on real needs and aspirations and on the creativity and potential capacity of the people.
While following the path of endogenous, self-sustained development, the least developed countries, which are often small in area, would benefit from participating in efforts to achieve regional co-operation and integration—in the context of economic and technical co-operation between developing countries (South-South)—so that it will be worth their while to invest in infrastructures, which often represent very heavy obligations, and so that they can gain access to more sources of supply and wider markets and establish a network of solidarity in order to strengthen their negotiating capacity with a view to the establishment of a new international economic order, which would help them to achieve the economic and social progress that they need. The first preambular paragraph of the text of the International Development Strategy for the Third Development Decade reads: 'In launching the Third United Nations Development Decade...governments...reaffirm solemnly their determination to establish a new international economic order'. Thus, if the various development strategies of the least developed countries are based on the requirements and possibilities offered by endogenous man-centred development at national level and also on economic and technical co-operation at regional and subregional levels, particularly in the case of groups of countries which have similar ecosystems and cultural characteristics, they should find their place in the context of the new international economic order. For it is within the context of the restructuring of international relations in all fields, with a view to achieving world equity and solidarity, that the least developed countries can hope to attain the economic and social progress which they have so long awaited.

To sum up, the national development strategies of the least developed countries should in the long term be based on endogenous, self-sustained development, diversified so as to suit the actual conditions and integrated in a regional strategy for collective self-reliance, with a view to the establishment of a new international economic order.

5. Some proposals for the improvement of international assistance

It must be remembered that the past difficulties, the present crisis and also the disastrous future that awaits the least developed countries—unless the international community takes large-scale and sustained action to help them out of their present intolerable situation—are neither transitory nor the result of special circumstances; rather, they reflect chronic structural problems, which are at the root of all underdevelopment.

International assistance should be given to developing countries and in particular to the least developed among them for reasons of an economic, political (strategic) and moral nature. But both the level and the results of assistance have so far been disappointing. The amount of assistance and the methods used to provide it should therefore be such as to meet the needs of the least developed countries and suit their possibilities: the volume of assistance needs to be increased and the methods of providing it altered, for in view of the rigidity of the assistance system an improvement in quality must go hand in hand with an increase in quantity.

(a) Aid without obligations

The programme of aid to the least developed countries should include a maximum of donations without specific conditions regarding their allocation, in particular to projects which could be harmful to the beneficiary countries. Instances of harmful conditions are the obligation to invest in industrial or other activities which are more profitable to the donors than to the beneficiary countries and the imposition of certain measures involving politically unacceptable changes, such as a reduction in the number of civil servants.

The granting of aid often gives the donor a chance to establish or consolidate his position in the beneficiary country. Machinery should be set up to enable the least developed countries to resist such pressure and to prepare and select projects
for aid in consultation with the donors, but nevertheless with full freedom of choice. For this purpose national staff in the least developed countries must be trained so that they can make a rational identification of their needs and the forms of assistance they desire and can draw up the project documents themselves. This provision of aid without obligations would make it possible to eliminate the unjustifiable and undesirable substitution of the concepts, methods and obsessions of foreign specialists for the real needs of national development.

(b) Co-ordination and integration of aid

The idea that development should be global and integrated means that assistance projects should be properly integrated into the general sectoral programmes and into the overall national plan. There must be greater co-ordination between the different donors, whether states or institutions, and the beneficiary countries, especially in the joint programming stage (as in Nepal) and in that of the implementation of projects.

In view of the magnitude of the needs of the least developed countries in the coming years, and in order to assist these countries in the forward planning of their programmes of action, an automatic financing mechanism should be established for part of the assistance, which would thus be protected from budgetary and political vicissitudes in the donor countries.

(c) Part of the local and recurrent expenses of the projects and the preparatory studies they entail (definition of conditions, specifications, etc.) should be financed from the aid provided. When the new approach to development is adopted—an approach adapted to the circumstances and possibilities of the least developed countries (priority to agriculture, literacy education and rural community organization, preventive medicine for the masses, irrigation of villages, protection of the environment, etc. in an integrated rural development strategy)—projects should be small in scope and large in number. Large-scale investment expenditure for a small number of projects should be replaced by more modest and more numerous projects, which would need less investment at the start but would have proportionately higher annual running and maintenance costs. For example, a road to a village constructed by local builders with local material and equipment will have a low investment cost compared with an asphalt road, but will require more maintenance work. In such cases assistance should cover the local recurrent costs of the projects and their preparatory work, as it does already in the case of projects financed by the International Development Association (IDA).

(d) Assistance to promote the participation of the people and support local initiative

One of the ways in which endogenous development that is suited to the country's needs could be achieved is to do away with the excessive centralization that is commonly found and support local initiative instead. International technical assistance, however, is often based on the techno-bureaucratic model, which overemphasizes expertise and the role of the administrative authorities, and this makes it difficult for the people to take any part in choices and decision-making.

The criteria for the allocation of assistance to the least developed countries should therefore include the extent to which the people participate in the various stages of the development project. In view of the flexibility of the non-governmental organizations' methods of action, it might be desirable to strengthen their means of action and extend their field of application, in order to encourage local action and initiative, while at the same time seeing that they do not infringe the national sovereignty of the host countries.
(c) The 'training' component in technical assistance projects has not yet been used as much as it should be. It should be strengthened so as to create an infrastructure of skilled manpower capable of gradually taking over from foreign experts. The policy of technical co-operation between developing countries should be extended as well as economic co-operation between them, so as to develop appropriate technologies.

(f) The various forms of assistance from the international community which have been mentioned so far—direct and indirect, financial and technical—however vital and essential they may be, cannot solve the long-term problems of the least developed countries. In the long term, machinery must be established to make the least developed countries less dependent on outside assistance. Apart from the various arrangements which could be proposed for the 'automatic' financing of certain parts of development assistance—for example, the introduction of an international tax on armament expenditure, on international trade, on part of the product of marine exploitation, etc.—a programme of action for the least developed countries should include, as a matter of urgency, measures to stabilize export revenue and extend foreign trade outlets, especially on the markets of the developed countries for products from the least developed countries. In view of recent 'neo-protectionist' trends in the developed countries, however, it would be wiser to base an increasing proportion of exports on products intended also for home consumption, with a view to self-sustained development.

(g) The least developed countries, which have few foreign currency resources, have been more affected by the oil crisis than other countries. Only generous aid from the oil-producing countries, and aid that is more diversified and better distributed, can enable them to overcome their present acute difficulties in this field.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion it may be said that the international community, when taking measures and proposing action to help the least developed countries, should be guided by the principle that 'we must deal with the causes of poverty and not only with its consequences, by assisting the people to solve their problems themselves'.

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