

UN/LDC III

Agenda for the Least Developed Countries

by Katya Michos-Ederer*

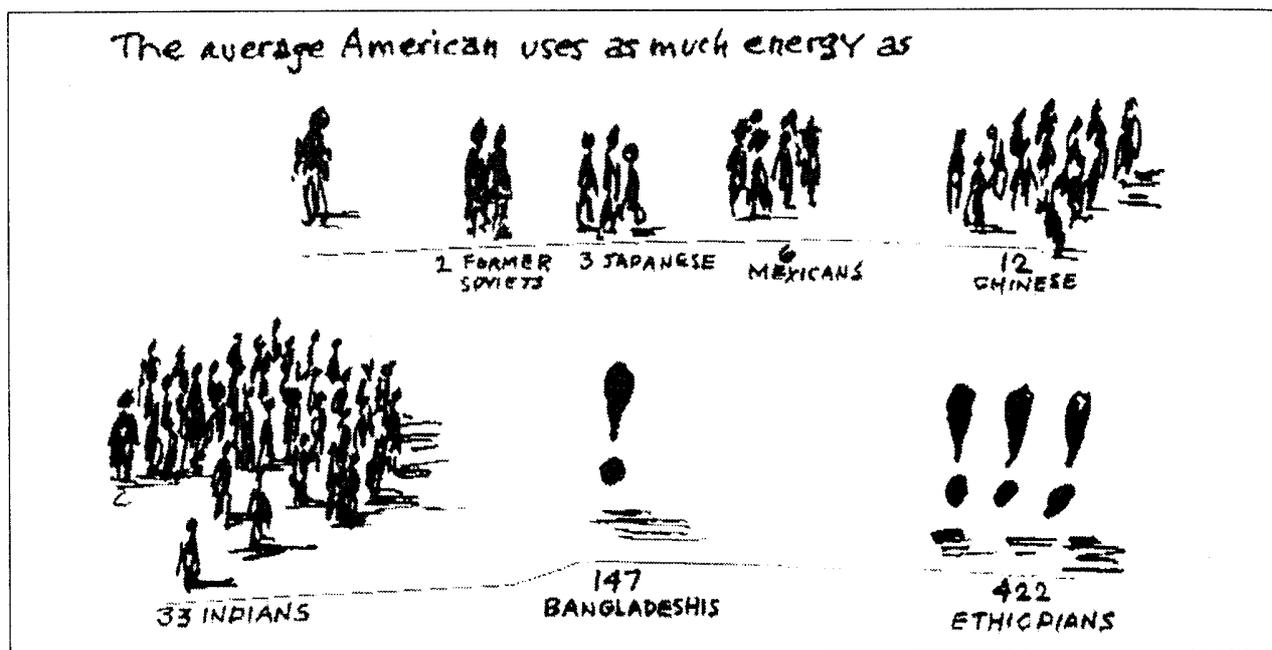
The Governments and organisations participating in the Third UN Conference on Least Developed Countries (LDC III), held at Brussels from 14 to 20 May 2001, committed themselves in their final Declaration to the eradication of poverty and the improvement of the quality of lives of the people in the LDCs. Equitable and sustained economic growth was linked to sustainable development. The Declaration emphasised the goals of the Rio Declaration in particular regarding combating desertification, preserving biological diversity, supplying safe drinking water and climate change "in accordance with common but differentiated responsibilities."

Environmental and conservation issues were not the subjects of debate. Although at the Conference itself they were little addressed, they could not be ignored. In November 2000 the Climate Change Conference passed a resolution encouraging the LDC III Conference to estab-

effects of climate change in a possible reform of international development co-operation was stressed.

Right before the Conference, the Parliament of the European Union passed a resolution acknowledging that 60 per cent of the poorest people in the LDCs live in environmentally vulnerable regions. Environmental degradation was cited as one of the causes of wars and armed conflict, which in the case of the LDCs wipes out years of development efforts. Among other issues, the resolution called on the Conference to undertake to implement the commitments made in Rio. Sustainable development must become a political priority and the basis for the guiding mechanisms of the world economy.¹

As expected, the Conference itself focused largely on the heavy debt burden and related economic issues. The number of countries classified as LDCs has grown from 25 in the 1980s to 48 today. Botswana, which is the only



SOURCE: ZPG FACT SHEETS

Courtesy: The Earth Times

lish debt relief mechanisms that consider the effect of climate change in agricultural and other economic sectors, as well as on health. The need to incorporate the adverse

country to "graduate" in the last two decades, is devastated by Aids. The previous two Programmes of Action have not worked.

What are the environmental problems faced by LDCs today? They are significant: inadequate sanitation facilities, land degradation, drought and desertification (recently in the horn of Africa), floods (such as in Mozambique

* ICEL member.

¹ European Parliament resolution on the Third UN Conference on the Least Developed Countries, Brussels, 5 April 2001. Provisional doc. no.B5-0246/2001.

² New York, 14 July 2000. A/CONF.191/IPC/12.

earlier this year), cyclones, deforestation and loss of biodiversity. In island LDCs global warming has severe implications both in the short term (coral bleaching) and in the long term (sea-level rise). In many LDCs most people live and work in rural areas, where loss of vegetation and soil degradation is severe. Water is scarce due to both desertification and poor water management.

A year ago, the Intergovernmental Preparatory Committee began to address these problems in the context of elaborating the Programme of Action for the LDC III Conference.² They raised the following questions:

- What measures in terms of education, awareness and capacity-building would be required to improve the precarious health conditions in LDCs which are directly related to environmental degradation?
- To what extent can ODA (official development assistance) and other sources of public aid contribute to the alleviation of poverty, which is the root cause of environmental degradation? How can projects be developed, in particular at the grass-roots level, to address simultaneously poverty and environmental degradation?
- To what extent have LDCs benefited from enabling measures aimed at facilitating their participation in multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs)? Why have only a few LDCs so far benefited from the Global Environmental Facility (GEF)? How can LDCs be best assisted in the formulation of projects and the implementation of measures at the national level?
- What are the impacts of climate change on LDCs and what measures are needed to mitigate such impacts?
- How can the LDCs be assisted in their efforts to secure an adequate water supply and improve water resource management?
- How far have the current environmental deliberations addressed the environmental preoccupations and priorities of LDCs?

- What is the best systemic framework within which the development of LDCs in general and agricultural production in particular can be enhanced without leading to widespread environmental damage?
- What are the environmental implications of different industrial sectors of interest to LDCs, and what policies can be implemented to reduce potential negative effects?
- How can the UNEP-UNCTAD Task Force on Capacity Building on Trade, Environment and Development assist LDCs in addressing trade-related environmental concerns and environment-related trade concerns?

Obviously, there is a clear need to improve performance. How is this to be done? The LDC III Conference adopted a Programme of Action based on international development targets, actions by LDCs and support by development partners, and the values, principles and objectives of the Millennium Declaration. This Programme of Action sets out objectives, a framework for partnership, and arrangements for implementation, follow-up and monitoring. The framework for partnership is based on seven commitments:

1. fostering a people-centred policy framework
2. ensuring good governance
3. building human and institutional capacities
4. building productive capacities towards globalisation
5. enhancing the role of trade in development
6. reducing vulnerability and protecting the environment
7. mobilising financial resources

This then is the agenda. As the UN Secretary-General said in Brussels, "any strategy to achieve sustainable development must address economic, ecological and social concerns all at once." Commitment 6 of the Programme of Action is reprinted on page 262. 