



# PRESS RELEASE

## Good Governance Improving in the Poorest Countries, says UN

**New UN Report says the most vulnerable countries are leading in democratic innovation despite extreme obstacles, but critical challenges remain**

*United Nations, 19 May:* Roving judges in the Maldives and a community justice system in post-genocide Rwanda are just two of the pioneering democratic governance initiatives captured in the first UN report on governance in the fifty most vulnerable countries in the world, which was launched in New York today.

*'Governance for the Future: Democracy and Development in Least Developed Countries' (LDCs)*, a joint report of the UN Development Programme (UNDP) and the UN Office of the High Representative for Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States (OHRLLS), challenges skepticism around the ability of the poorest countries to progress towards stable democracies.

While LDCs continue to face enormous challenges, including effectively tackling corruption, the lack of access to justice, and ongoing human rights violations, a state's income level does not necessarily determine its democratic future, it says. The report goes further to say that LDCs can in fact be a global force behind practical democratic innovations.

Despite severe human resource constraints and structural weaknesses, many LDCs have made significant strides towards durable democratic governance over the past two decades. The report clearly highlights women's progress. Since 1990 the number of women in the Mozambican parliament has doubled. Rwanda now leads the world in terms of women's representation in parliament, at 48.8 percent. This figure is substantially ahead of the United States, at 14.8 percent, and the United Kingdom, at 17.9 percent.

### **Access to justice**

According to the report, building democratic governance means ensuring that the poor have a real political voice, alongside access to justice and basic services, including health and education.

"Throughout the study there are commendable examples which illustrate how some of the most efficient and creative solutions in overcoming development problems can be found in LDCs themselves. Indeed, the findings in this report are testament to the determination of the world's poorest nations to break through the barrier of underdevelopment," UN-OHRLLS Under-Secretary-General, Anwarul K. Chowdhury, said at the launch on Friday.

Among the innovations showcased in the report is the use of ‘mobile judges’, particularly in many Pacific LDCs, including Vanuatu, Kiribati and the Solomon Islands. This initiative significantly expands access to justice to citizens despite human and institutional constraints.

In Rwanda, a unique community-based justice system provides an innovative alternative to the delays of the formal justice structures. The ‘gacaca court’ system emphasizes public involvement in rendering justice to the accused. It provides a forum for witnesses, survivors and assumed perpetrators to debate about what happened during the 1994 genocide with the goal of establishing the truth and identifying the victims and the guilty.

### **Education and information**

In the Solomon Islands, to increase access to information and to build knowledge, the ‘People First Network’ was established. Starting off as an internet cafe and an e-mail station in 2001, the project now transmits e-mail messages over high frequency radio waves, allowing isolated communities access to affordable communication.

The Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC) allows for schools to run two hours a day, six days a week and educate children who otherwise have no chance of accessing a classroom. With total enrolments now at 1.2 million—and a majority of girls and female teachers--the programme is considered a success. BRAC is now being adapted for Ethiopia.

### **Challenges remain**

“Much more now needs to be done at a national level to build on these successes,” said UNDP Administrator Kemal Derviş. “Democratic governance is not only a good in itself, it is critical to furthering human development. We must spare no effort in supporting LDCs in building the governance institutions needed to bring peace, economic growth and human development to their citizens.”

The authors recommend that capacity development efforts are now needed to create public administration that embodies the core values of democratic governance, including transparency, accountability, predictability, responsiveness and participation.

Such national progress will not occur in isolation, however. Global governance structures are often not favourable to LDCs’ needs, which means that the most vulnerable countries are insufficiently integrated into global economic and political governance systems. According to the report, increased support from development partners and non-state actors is necessary and could produce significant gains.

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**About UN-OHRLLS:** UN-OHRLLS was established by the UN General Assembly in December 2001. Its mandate is global coordination and advocacy for the implementation of the Brussels Programme of Action for Least Developed Countries and other relevant programmes for Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States.