Note: The information below is indicative and is meant to provide suggestions on useful areas of research and for possible paper proposals. Please note that the suggestions are non-exhaustive. Papers addressing several topics are welcome.

1. **Eradicating poverty, promoting sustainable agriculture, ending hunger and malnutrition in the LDCs**

   Recent projections suggest, if current trends persist, poverty will be concentrated in LDCs in 2030. It is estimated that nearly 30 per cent of the population in LDCs will remain in extreme poverty by 2030. Furthermore, a significant proportion of the population in LDCs depends on agriculture for livelihoods. The prevalence of undernourishment as well as stunting levels in LDCs are still high, although some progress has been made over the past decade.

   **Poverty**
   
   *The papers under this sub-theme could address issues including the following:* what are the determinants of extreme poverty, currently measured as people living on less than $1.90 a day, across LDCs?; What will it take for LDCs to eradicate poverty?; What will be the contributions of the international community, including through enhanced development cooperation, in providing adequate and predictable means for LDCs, to implement programmes and policies to end poverty in all its dimensions; and, achieve substantial social protection coverage of the poor and vulnerable in LDCs?

   **Hunger and malnutrition**
   
   *The papers under this sub-theme could address issues including the following:* ensure access to safe, nutritious and sufficient food in LDCs; and, end all forms of malnutrition, including meeting international agreed targets on stunting and wasting in children under 5 years of age, and address the nutritional needs of adolescent girls, pregnant and lactating women and older persons. Ultimately, the papers should provide concrete recommendations on what LDCs and their development partners can do to prevent and address hunger and malnutrition across LDCs.

   **Sustainable agriculture**
   
   *The papers under this sub-theme could address issues including the following:* highlighting successful examples and initiatives that have led to significant increase in agricultural productivity and incomes of small-scale food producers have been significantly increased; best practices on how increasing investment towards core rural development programmes (for example, rural infrastructure, research and extension programmes and technology development), including through enhanced international cooperation, has enhanced agricultural productive capacity; and, provide concrete recommendations how LDCs and their development partners can ensure sustainable food production systems and practice resilient agricultural practices and help maintain ecosystems while increasing productivity and production in LDCs.

2. **Wellbeing in LDCs: addressing health, education, water, energy, ICT and reducing inequalities within LDCs and between LDCs and other countries**

   LDCs still face challenges in ensuring universal access to quality education and health care. A healthy and well-educated population, with the knowledge and skills needed for productive and fulfilling work and full participation in society will be crucial to achieving sustainable development in LDCs. Similarly, LDCs are lagging far behind other countries in access to water, electricity and ICT which, also contribute to social progress, inclusive development and enhanced governance.

   While income varies across countries, it has increased in nearly all world regions in recent decades. Other forms of inequality involve social and political exclusion and unequal opportunities in accessing financial and human capital. In LDCs, little is known about the long-run dynamics of inequality.
Health and Education

The papers under these sub-themes could address issues including the following: how to improve the quality of education; achieving higher rates of secondary school completion; acquiring the skills required by the digital era; how to increase the supply of qualified teachers; how to increase health financing and the recruitment, training and retention of the health workforce; and, strengthening the capacity for early warning, risk reduction and management of national and global health risks. The papers should ultimately provide concrete recommendations on what LDCs and their development partners can do to ensure healthy lives and quality education, and, promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.

Water, Energy, ICT

The papers under this sub-theme could address issues including the following: availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all; affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all; and, increasing access to ICT and provision of universal and affordable access to the Internet and to broadband, which is at the core of driving the new technologies and is minimal in LDCs. The papers should ultimately provide concrete recommendations on what LDCs and their development partners can do to ensure access to affordable, reliable and sustainable water, energy and ICT.

Inequalities

The papers under this sub-theme could address issues including the following: examine the extent and causes of inequality within LDCs and between LDCs and other countries; and, long-run dynamics of inequality in LDCs. The papers should provide concrete recommendations on what LDCs and their development partners can do to reduce inequality within LDCs and between LDCs and other more developed countries.

3. Rethinking structural transformation in LDCs to achieve strong and sustained growth and robust employment generation, especially for the youth

Historically, structural transformation has been linked to a growing contribution of manufacturing to the economy, or in short, the movement of production factors from low-productivity sectors to high-productivity sectors. While the share of the manufacturing sector has long been stagnant in most LDCs, tradeable high-productivity services have the potential to drive growth in many of them, especially in Africa.

In terms of economic growth, between 2010 and 2017, average rate of growth of real GDP in LDCs was less than 5% and fluctuated significantly. In addition to the challenge of the level and volatility of economic expansion, growth does not fully translate into decent employment generation, poverty reduction and other meaningful social outcomes.

The papers under this theme could among others address the following: what the contributions of various sectors, including services sectors to growth are; what the potential sources of growth in LDCs will be over the next decade, given the technological and structural changes across the world; and, whether 7% growth is a realistic target to end extreme poverty in LDCs by 2030 as well as to move towards convergence with the other developing countries; highlight some of the best practices for promoting entrepreneurship, creativity and innovation, and encouraging the formalization and growth of micro-, small- and medium-sized enterprises, including through access to financial services; and, assess how the emerging technologies will affect the industries in LDCs and how the LDCs can be enabled to tap into these new technologies. The papers should provide concrete recommendations on what LDCs and their development partners can do to promote inclusive and sustainable structural transformation and foster innovation in LDCs.

4. Megatrends impacting sustainable development in LDCs: frontier technologies, changing nature of work, migration and demographic changes

While the digital revolution and other technological changes, like artificial intelligence (AI), automation, new materials and biotech, big data, etc. may offer the prospect of solutions and opportunities for LDCs to achieve sustainable development, they also create concerns about their impact on employment, especially for low-skilled workers, and competitiveness, which could make attraction of investment to LDCs even more difficult. Lack of mass digitalization and low penetration of broadband in LDCs provide additional challenges for many LDCs to fully compete in the digital area. Furthermore, LDCs are still lagging behind in Science, Technology and Innovation – including in research and development, human resources, patents application, and innovation.

Many LDCs face challenges in creating opportunities for work that is productive and, inter alia, delivers a fair income, security in the workplace and social protection for families. In addition, many workers are informally employed, making it more challenging to
achieve decent work. The number of adolescents and youth aged 15 to 24 years is projected to grow from 207 million in 2019 to 336 million in 2050, in LDCs. Additionally, the number of migrants has increased (both international and internal) with LDCs being countries of both origin and destination.

Frontier technologies

The papers under this sub-theme could address issues including the following: challenges and opportunities created by new technologies in LDCs; provide recommendations on how LDCs and international community can enhance scientific research, upgrade technological capabilities, encourage innovation and substantially increase the number of research and development workers as well as public and private research and development spending, in LDCs; examine the skills required to effectively compete in the digital world.

Changing nature of work

The papers under this sub-theme could address issues including the following: how the shares of various sectors in total employment have evolved over the years, and, what the key drivers for this trend are; and, analyze the potential jobs to be created or lost from technological advancement and the skills required to match the new opportunities necessary for future jobs. The papers should provide concrete recommendations on what LDCs and the international community can do to ensure decent work in LDCs within the context of the changing nature of work.

Demographic changes

The papers under this sub-theme could address issues including the following: how LDCs can leverage the opportunity presented by the demographic dividend; how the LDCs and international community can ensure that the adolescents and youth are fully prepared to productively contribute to their economies.

Migration

The papers under this sub-theme could address issues including the following: assess the net effect of migration in LDCs (anecdotal evidence could be used in case of data limitations) including brain-drain/ brain gain, transfers of skills, knowledge and entrepreneurship, and social networks that foster trade; and, what should be done by the LDCs and the international community to facilitate safe, orderly, responsible and regular migration of people.

5. Building resilience and sustainability: infrastructure, climate change, natural disasters, environmental degradation, management of natural resources and urbanization in LDCs

The poor state of infrastructure in the LDCs is a crippling constraint for their sustainable development. The investment gap in infrastructure between the LDCs and other developing countries is widening, and infrastructure quality is often inadequate.

The LDCs are especially vulnerable to the negative impacts of climate change and natural disasters. However, resources provided for adaptation to climate change for LDCs under various mechanisms are far from meeting needs. Furthermore, as climate impacts become more acute, climate change is moving from being a “threat-multiplier” to a threat in itself. For example, water scarcity, loss of land, pressures on pastures, displacement of populations, disruption of traditional lifestyles, and threats to livelihoods, all have the potential of causing conflicts, creating social tensions and exacerbating competition for scarce natural resources.

Furthermore, while the percentage of people living in rural areas in LDCs is expected to decline by 2050, urban dwellers are expected to grow. Given the high growth projections for most cities in developing countries, the challenges of urban poverty and more broadly of city management will only worsen in many places, including LDCs, if not addressed more aggressively.

Infrastructure

The papers under this sub-theme could address issues including the following: the existing estimates of investment gaps, considering climate adaptation and mitigation aspects; concrete recommendations on how to meet the investment gap in building sustainable and resilient infrastructure in LDCs, including through the combinations of private and public ownership, operation and financing of projects.

Climate change, natural disasters, environmental degradation, management of natural resources

The papers under this sub-theme could address issues including the following: how to ensure resilience and adaptive capacity to climate-related hazards and natural disasters; how to make all investments and policy interventions climate-smart; assess the interlinkages among the various threats posed by climate change, and how to factor them into policy response; concrete recommendations on how the sustainable management and efficient use of natural resources can be achieved in LDCs; and, assess
best practice in combatting desertification, restoring degraded land and soil, including land affected by desertification, drought and floods.

**Urbanization**

*The papers under this sub-theme could address issues including the following:* explore ways in which LDCs can harness the full potential of urbanization; and, provide recommendations on how the urbanization process in LDCs can simultaneously contribute to reducing poverty, promoting equality and transitioning to environmental sustainability. In doing so, the papers could discuss the root causes of urban poverty, urban exclusion and climate related impacts of rapid urbanization in LDCs.

### 6. Increasing LDCs’ share in global trade during a time of rising protectionism and, commodity dependence

Rising protectionism in some major economies could have significant negative effects for the LDCs, including through weaker investment and the disruption of production networks. Such external factors risk reducing the ability of LDCs to improve their trade performance and to integrate their economies into regional and global value chains.

Furthermore, the majority of LDCs are dependent on commodities and extremely vulnerable to commodity price shocks and volatility.

*Increasing LDCs’ share in global trade during a time of rising protectionism*

*The papers under this sub-theme could address issues including the following:* how the volume of trade in LDCs, its composition and direction changed over time and what has driven these changes; the challenges that have prevented LDCs from increasing their share in world’s total trade, and making full use of trade preferences; how the principle of special and differential treatment for developing countries, in accordance with World Trade Organization agreements, can be adapted to the advantage of the LDCs; how the LDCs can benefit from regional trade agreements; and, how the growth in e-commerce affect LDC trade in the near-future.

Ultimately, the papers should provide concrete recommendations on inter alia, what LDCs and the international community for LDCs to significantly increase its exports.

**Commodity dependence**

*The papers under this sub-theme could address issues including the following:* assess the main commodities exported by the LDCs and suggest mechanisms that can contain or reverse the effects of sudden drops in commodity prices, based on lessons learned; suggest specific opportunities for value addition to commodities in LDCs; suggest measures that could be taken by the LDCs and the international community to ensure the proper functioning of commodity markets and their derivatives and facilitate timely access to market information, including on food reserves, to help limit extreme commodity price volatility in LDCs; and, show some of the successful case studies on how countries handled windfalls from commodity prices.

### 7. Building peaceful, just and inclusive societies, including achieving gender equality

It is broadly recognized that there cannot be sustainable development without peace and peace without sustainable development. Similarly, the relationship between peace and justice, including though realizing gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, is crucial for achieving sustainable development in LDCs. Conflict-affected and post-conflict LDCs have also unique challenges in achieving durable peace and sustainable development including the difficulty of attracting investors and building productive capacity.

**Building peaceful, just and inclusive societies**

*The papers under this sub-theme could address issues including the following:* factors leading to conflicts or increasing the likelihood of falling back into conflict in a post-conflict situation in LDCs; how conflicts and vulnerability to conflicts are affecting the ability of LDCs to achieve sustainable development; examine options to achieve development needs in conflict-affected LDCs or in countries where the likelihood of conflicts emerging is high; and, propose what LDCs and their development partners can do to prevent and address conflicts across LDCs.

**Achieving gender equality**

*The papers under this sub-theme could address issues including the following:* assess the progress made in achieving gender equality in LDCs; and, propose what LDCs and their development partners can do to achieve gender equality and empowerment of women in LDCs.
LDCs are largely dependent on public resources to finance sustainable development needs. These include domestic resources, official development assistance (ODA) and debt. But public expenditure has not been sufficient to meet the investment needs. While domestic revenue trends in LDCs have been rising, the levels are still low and the scope to increase is limited. The increase in ODA flows to LDCs in 2017, mostly reflected humanitarian emergencies in a few countries and the changing aid allocation patterns may create funding gaps adversely affecting the LDCs.

External debt has increased since 2012, and it is, in some cases, exacerbated by large costs caused by disasters and structural vulnerabilities. In addition, increased risks also derive from the changing composition of the public and publicly-guaranteed debt, with some LDCs starting to issue bonds in the international capital markets and/or contracting non-concessional debt from external private and public sources.

Private flows to the LDCs also remain limited, including private participation in infrastructure investment. In addition, Public private partnerships (PPPs) projects tend to be complex and many LDCs may lack the necessary capacity to negotiate PPP deals, effectively regulate private operators and manage liabilities in the event a project is unsuccessful.

Foreign investment to the LDCs remains negligible, with less than 2 per cent of global FDI flows in 2017, mainly concentrated in the extractive industries.

The existing limited resources are further depleted by Illicit Financial Flows (IFFs), which reduce the fiscal space for financing sustainable development in the affected countries.

Public resources

The papers under this sub-theme could address issues including the following: ways in which LDCs can increase domestic resources (successful case examples should be provided); how to make best use of the limited ODA flows: examine the best practices in terms of blending and development finance.

Rising and changing composition of debt

The papers under this sub-theme could address issues including the following: analyze why some LDCs are borrowing from external private sources and not traditional donors; assess the debt refinancing options for the LDCs that are borrowing from external private sources; examine the initiatives the international community can undertake to help avoid another debt crisis in LDCs.

Private resources

The papers under this sub-theme could address issues including the following: assess the potential of PPP projects in LDCs; examine the key capacity constraints LDCs face, and the support that the international community can provide, in translating infrastructure plans into concrete project pipelines, to negotiate complex contracts, and to ensure effective project management; analyze options for ensuring foreign investors significantly contribute to the sustainable development of host LDCs, including through job creation.

Illicit financial flows (IFFs)

The papers under this sub-theme could address issues including the following: the extent of IFFs in LDCs and, what the driving forces of IFFs are; to what extent existing initiatives to reduce IFFs, like asset recovery and repatriation, have worked in LDCs, and what the main challenges encountered are; examine the elements of reform at the national, regional and global levels that can help LDCs to curb IFFs.