

Least developed countries (LDCs) - newly determined

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**Least Developed Countries (LDCs) –
Newly Determined**

by

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The United Nations Committee for Development Policy (CDP) in its 2000 report has attempted to redefine and update the list of countries classified as least developed in order to give guidance to donor agencies and countries about an equitable allocation of foreign assistance and preferential treatment. In the following, Udo E. Simonis, a member of the CDP, summarizes the main findings and recommendations of that report.

1. INTRODUCTION

When in 1998 ECOSOC decided to reconstitute the previous Committee for Development Planning under the name Committee for Development Policy, it mandated the new CDP, among other tasks, to “... continue the triennial review of the status of least developed countries¹”, with the next review to be held in the year 2000.

The review has been conducted every three years since 1991, when two composite indices were introduced to replace two single indicators to better reflect the structural weaknesses of low level of human resources and low degree of economic diversification.

During its 1997 session, the former CDP put on its agenda the improvement of LDC criteria and the usefulness of a vulnerability index as an element of these criteria. At its first session in April 1999, the new CDP “... recognized that vulnerability should be taken explicitly into account in the least developed countries identification criteria². And in its 1999 report the CDP spelled out in some detail its proposed methodology and procedure for conducting the triennial review in the year 2000 of the list of LDCs.

In this regard, the Committee proposed to construct an Economic Vulnerability Index (EVI) to replace the previous Economic Diversification Index (EDI) as one of the criteria for LDC identification, and to consider specific “vulnerability profiles” to be prepared by UNCTAD, of the countries eligible for graduation from the existing list of LDCs or close to the borderline of the quantitative criteria. The Committee also proposed improvements in the other LDC criteria in view of the availability of better statistical indicators.

In 1999 ECOSOC welcomed “... the report of the Committee for Development Policy - the views contained therein regarding the criteria for the identification of the least developed countries and the recognition that vulnerability should be explicitly taken into account in the identification criteria for the least developed

¹ ECOSOC resolution 1998/46, Annex I Section B, Para. 9.

² *Vulnerability and Poverty in a Global Economy*, 1999 Report of the Committee for Development Policy, United Nations Publications (Sales No. E.99.II.A.5), p. 33.

countries.“ It requested “... the Secretary General to facilitate an expert group meeting of members of the Committee ... in order to enable them to carry out the necessary diagnostic testing and simulations of the proposed criteria“. It further requested “the Committee ... to recommend, as appropriate, revised criteria for the identification of the least developed countries for the consideration of the Economic and Social Council as soon as possible, but no later than its substantive session of 2000, so that the review and decision on the list of least developed countries can be completed by the end of 2000³“

At the invitation of the Secretariat, an expert group meeting of five CDP members was held from 29 February - 2 March 2000 in Paris. The report of the expert group meeting was subjected to further review by the CDP at its session held from 3 - 7 April 2000 in New York. These here are the results of the review of the list of LCDs and the implementation of the new criteria.

2. TESTING THE REVISION OF LDC IDENTIFICATION CRITERIA

2.1 *Recommendation of CDP in 1999*

In its 1999 report, the Committee recognized that “... vulnerability should be taken explicitly into account in the least developed countries’ identification criteria“. It proposed that the least developed category should cover the low-income countries suffering from a low level of human resources and a high degree of economic vulnerability. The Committee recognized that the Economic Diversification Index (EDI) reflected some elements of vulnerability, but felt that this reflection was inadequate to cover its notion of vulnerability as “structural vulnerability“, which it defined as the risk of being negatively affected by unforeseen events beyond the control of a country.

The Committee therefore recommended that the EDI be replaced by an Economic Vulnerability Index (EVI) which would include additional indicators of vulnerability. The EVI would include five indicators - export concentration, instability of export earnings, instability of agricultural production, share of manufacturing and services (transportation, communication, finance, insurance, business services and real estate) in Gross Domestic Product (GDP), and population size.

³ ECOSOC Resolution 1999/67, p.17.

Two of these indicators were included in the EDI - export concentration and the share of manufacturing in the GDP, except that the latter would now include services. It was intended also that export earnings would include the export of goods and services.

The Committee recognized the need for an indicator to cover natural shocks (such as hurricanes, floods, droughts, tidal waves, earthquakes, volcanic eruptions and locust invasions). However, in view of the unavailability of reliable, appropriate and comparative data to construct this index, the Committee proposed as an alternative, the instability of agricultural production as a proxy measure. It was recognised that some effects of natural shocks would also be reflected in the instability of exports of goods and services.

The Committee recognized that the EVI as an initial construct would need to be progressively refined and because of its proximate nature would need to be complemented by case studies of individual countries -*vulnerability profiles* - for countries that were on the margins for inclusion in or graduation from the list of LDCs. Meanwhile UNCTAD provided such profiles for four borderline cases (see below).

The Committee also made recommendations for improvements in respect of the two other criteria - GDP per capita and the Augmented Physical Quality of Life Index (APQLI). In the case of GDP per capita, it proposed the replacement of the three-year average of per capita GDP, expressed in US dollars at current official exchange rates by per capita GDP for the benchmark year, converted to US dollars at the country's average exchange rate over three years adjusted by the relative rate of inflation (the *World Bank Atlas Method*).

The Committee proposed two changes in relation to the APQLI - instead of per capita calorie intake, this would be shown as a percentage of calorie requirement, and life expectancy at birth would be replaced by under-five child mortality. In the case of the former, the Committee preferred the percentage of population und and undernourished, but adequate statistics were not available. The latter was regarded as a better index both from the standpoint of data reliability and responsiveness to change.

2.2 Dialogue with international organizations

As requested by ECOSOC of the CDP “... to continue its dialogue with other international organizations working on vulnerability issues“, the CDP benefited from presentations by the Commonwealth Secretariat on its vulnerability index and SOPAC on its work on an ecological vulnerability index, and from UNCTAD on its work on vulnerability profiles. It received technical support from the UN Secretariat in undertaking rigorous diagnostic testing and simulations of the proposed variables. It also submitted the derived EVI to other interested organizations for their comments and received favorable response from the European Commission.

2.3 Adoption of the Revised Criteria

Drawing on the work of the Expert Group as well as its own considerations of the issues in its triennial review, the Committee is making the following recommendations:

GDP per Capita

The Committee has already recommended the World Bank Atlas method to convert per capita GDP in national currency into internationally comparable US dollars. This helps to smooth the impact of fluctuations in the exchange rates. However, the shift to one-year from three-year averages was found to be inappropriate since sharp falls or rises in one year's income could affect a country's position regarding inclusion in or graduation from the list, and thus render the operation of this criterion unstable. The Committee recommends, therefore, the retention of three-year averages.

The APQLI

The Committee found data readily available for the shift to per capita calorie consumption as a percentage of requirements. However it was felt that deficiencies have a more important significance than adequacies, this would be better reflected by using the logarithm.

The Committee would have preferred as the indicator the percentage of population undernourished. These data are not available now for many countries, but, depending on the availability of such data, future improvement could be made.

For similar data reasons, the Committee recommends the adoption of under-five mortality.

Regarding education, the Committee recommends no change in the present two indicators - the combined primary and secondary enrolment ratio - and the adult literacy rate. It would have preferred "mean years of schooling" but very limited data on this are now available.

The EVI

The testing and further analysis confirm the choice of a composite index of five indicators - export concentration, instability of import earnings, instability of agricultural production, manufacturing and services as a percentage of GDP, and population. Data for 128 developing countries were used for the testing exercise.

In the case of population, the log of population was used since population size varies widely and it reflects better the larger significance of vulnerability for small countries.

In the case of agricultural production, this is used as a proxy for natural shocks. It reflects damage to other sectors also to the extent that damage to agriculture represents a more general situation. Most low-income countries have a substantial dependence on agriculture. When this was not the case, a problem would only arise where the proportion of damage to agriculture was significantly different from that of other sectors.

The Committee revisited the issue examined in its 1999 report of whether a more direct measure of economic impact of natural shocks such as economic damage could be introduced in the EVI. The Committee concluded that when comparable data on natural shocks is available on a global basis, the indicator should be revised.

For the simulation exercise on the instability indices - agricultural production, and export of goods and services - a 20-year time series was used. For the future a rolling 20-year period is envisaged.

In the case of export of goods and services, since the intention is to show fluctuations in purchasing power, the current dollar proceeds (based on IMF

balance of payments statistics) is deflated by an index of import unit value (also from IMF data).

Statistical testing showed that each indicator adds information which reflects structural handicaps. On the whole the composite index was deemed robust and of the right specification.

Population Size

The Committee takes as given ECOSOC's decision that the maximum population level for inclusion in the list of LDCs should be 75 million.

Methodological Issue

The Committee emphasized the importance of using as far as possible homogenous methods in the treatment of all indices, and especially the two composite indices.

Data Availability

The Committee continued to emphasize the importance of data comparability, reliability, ready availability for most countries, transparency, satisfactory methods of gap filling and, for some indicators, the availability of long time series.

For various reasons, the required data have been missing for a few countries. The Committee however was satisfied with the proxies and estimation methods used, and this was confirmed by sensitivity tests.

Outliers and Scaling

In constructing the two composite indices, the values of components were converted to a scale of 0-100, and the final composite index number is an average of the converted values of each component. This raised the question of possible distortions that could arise where distributions were skewed or had long tails. However in most cases outliers did not prove a significant issue. Where it is an issue, the 1997 CDP report recommended decile compression, i.e. the average values of the top and bottom deciles were used to replace

actual data values, greater than the upper decile average and lower than the bottom decile average.

The Committee recommends that only when the presence of outliers appears to entail significant distortions, compression is to be undertaken and this would be done for either 10 per cent or 5 per cent of the outliers as seems appropriate.

3. REVIEWING THE LDC LIST

According to the principles and practice of the Committee in the past, four steps have to be followed to review the list.

Step 1: Determine the countries in the group of current LDCs and other low-income countries

In addition to the 48 current LDCs, there are 19 other low-income countries. Low-income countries are those that have been considered as such by the World Bank in any of the last three years. In the 1997 review, the GDP cut-off point for inclusion in the list was \$800, \$100 more than the criterion used in 1994, which was itself \$100 higher than the criterion used in 1991. The threshold of low-income is located between the high-level of GDP in the low-income group and the lowest level in the middle-income countries. A cut-off point of \$900, consistent with the absolute increments in the past, is recommended by the Committee.

Step 2: Determine the thresholds of APQLI and EVI for inclusion

As agreed in 1991, the cut-off point for inclusion for the two criteria other than GDP would be the index value of a criterion for the upper quartile of current LDCs and other low-income countries. Of course, in the case of the EVI where high values signify high vulnerability, the cut-off point will be the lower quartile value. This principle is consistent with the view that LDCs are designed as those low-income countries with a low level of human resources and a high level of vulnerability. According to this guideline, the threshold of APQLI is 59 and that of EVI is 36.

Step 3: Determine the threshold for graduation

It has been agreed in the past to allow a margin between the threshold for inclusion and that for graduation in order to maintain some stability in the list.

The Committee noted that in the three previous reviews, the margin had been between 11 and 17 percent, depending on the value of inclusion threshold. The Committee was also concerned about the impact on GDP of possible reductions in international aid resulting from graduation in countries where the ratio of aid to GDP is very high. The Committee, therefore, recommends a 15 percent margin for all three criteria. This will result in a graduation threshold of \$1035 for GDP, 68 for APQLI, and 31 for EVI.

Step 4: *Determine potential inclusion and graduation cases*

Only one additional country (*Senegal*) would clearly appear to be eligible for inclusion in the list, and two countries (*Ghana* and the *Republic of Congo*) are close to the threshold with regard to APQLI. In considering possible inclusions, the Committee recalled that Ghana had declined to be included after the 1994 review, and the recent decline in economic and social indicators in the Republic of Congo, an oil-exporter, has been associated with civil war.

According to the rule for graduation used since 1991, a country qualifies for graduation when it meets two out of the three criteria. It would be recommended for graduation if it meets graduation criteria in two consecutive triennial reviews. The Committee reviewed the four countries (*Vanuatu*, *Samoa*, *Cap Verde*, *Maldives*) considered for graduation in the year 2000.

Vanuatu, first considered eligible for graduation in 1994 with respect to both GDP and APQLI, has still a high level of GDP per capita clearly above the threshold for graduation, but the APQLI is now lower than the new graduation threshold. The EVI is higher than the threshold. According to the new criteria, *Vanuatu* would not qualify for graduation. The findings of the vulnerability profile corroborate the above assessment based on quantitative indicators.

Samoa, with a GDP per capita close to \$1000, no longer meets the GDP graduation criterion. Moreover, it ranks as very vulnerable on EVI. Again, this quantitative assessment is reaffirmed by findings in the vulnerability profile. It now meets only one graduation criterion. Therefore, it would not be recommended for graduation.

(The Committee noted that the change in its recommendation regarding *Vanuatu* and *Samoa* was not due to the replacement of EDI by EVI).

Cape Verde appears to meet the graduation criteria with regard to GDP per capita and the APQLI. However, it ranks as one of the most vulnerable among all developing countries on EVI. The vulnerability profile also highlights the country's high dependence on aid and remittances, which appear to have been unstable in recent years. In such a case, the Committee recommends ECOSOC to postpone the graduation of Cape Verde to the next triennial review.

Maldives has a GDP per capita much higher than the graduation threshold, and an APQLI well above the graduation threshold, so that it is eligible for graduation. Its EVI is the lowest among the four potential graduation cases and marginally higher than the threshold. The findings of the vulnerability profile corroborates the conclusion based on quantitative indicators, as far as Maldives is less affected than the other three countries by exogenous shocks. However, the vulnerability profile also underlined the country's main concern over the consequences of possible rising sea levels in the longer term. With regard to the exceptional challenge this country faces from climate change, ECOSOC and other international institutions might wish to consider how special assistance could be provided to cover the costs of insurance, infrastructure development and possible population relocation.

4. CONCLUSION

No other countries appear to be eligible for inclusion in or graduation from the list of LDCs according to the new criteria developed by the Committee for Development Policy.

Guideline Tables for the Review of the List

Table A: Position of present LDCs with regard to graduation criteria

1. Current LDCs meeting none of the criteria for graduation, with 14% margin

	GDP per capita more than \$ 1035	APQL more than 68	EVI less than 31
Afghanistan	286	12.76	44.89
Angola	596	30.90	55.19
Benin	378	39.96	58.68
Bhutan	197	43.34	42.27
Burkina Faso	241	21.74	44.58
Burundi	143	21.71	51.55
Cambodia	296	40.74	61.00
Central African Republic	316	36.20	42.43
Chad	227	31.08	64.41
Comoros	394	40.36	55.36
Democratic Republic of the Congo	132	42.67	51.89
Djibouti	773	29.05	46.60
Ethiopia	106	21.34	44.58
Gambia	348	32.60	61.83
Guinea	575	26.21	45.77
Guinea-Bissau	221	34.17	55.91
Haiti	385	38.18	45.61
Lao People's Democratic Republic	379	44.35	45.65
Malawi	193	45.75	41.57
Mali	255	18.40	48.81
Mauritania	458	42.15	41.42
Mozambique	171	23.27	37.36
Nepal	212	49.11	36.37
Niger	199	16.36	58.98
Rwanda	216	36.88	55.85
Sao Tome and Principe	336	46.50	59.07
Sierra Leone	170	21.94	46.30
Salomon Islands	846	58.20	53.93
Somalia	169	16.69	58.04
Sudan	328	45.43	44.45
Tanzania, United Republic of	193	42.68	36.23
Togo	337	52.51	45.30
Uganda	315	39.28	56.52
Yemen	305	41.31	49.54.
Zambia	379	48.38	51,82

2. Current LDCs meeting one graduation criterion (in bold), with 15 % margin

	GDP per capita more than \$ 1035	APQL more than 68	EVI less than 31
Bangladesh	337	40.72	23.77
Equatorial Guinea	1,093	51.88	55.81
Eritrea	172	27.30	27.06
Kiribati	609	65.93	74.32
Lesotho	463	59.59	53.11
Liberia	1,242	39.85	63.62
Madagascar	261	39.87	26.75
Myanmar	274	64.88	49.82
Samoa	1,021	70.00	52.45
Tuvalu	1,320	57.72	73.68
Vanuatu	1,419	64.25	41.31

3. Current LDCs meeting two graduation criteria (in bold), with 15 % margin

	GDP per capita more than \$ 1035	APQL more than 68	EVI less than 31
Cape Verde	1.089	72.64	56.98
Maldives	1,311	75.96	32.18

Table B: Position of non-LDCs with population less than 75 million with regard to inclusion criteria

1. Countries meeting three criteria (in bold)

	GDP per capita more than \$ 900	APQL more than 59	EVI less than 36
Congo, Republic of	850	57.16	46.90
Ghana	390	57.04	43.13
Senegal	545	40.02	40.86

2. Countries meeting two criteria (in bold)

	GDP per capita more than \$ 900	APQL more than 59	EVI less than 36
Cameroon	656	50.07	31.59
Cote d'Ivoire	757	43.63	32.81
Guyana	835	73.39	51.41
Kenya	335	53.61	27.75
Mongolia	389	60.99	49.73
Nicaragua	473	59.59	43.16
Zimbabwe	708	63.36	40.94

3. Countries meeting one criterion (in bold)

	GDP per capita more than \$ 900	APQL more than 59	EVI less than 36
Democratic Republic of Korea	232	61.63	32.31
Honduras	727	64.51	35.73
Sri Lanka	793	75.46	26.18

Table C: Position of non-LDCs with population more than 75 million with regard to inclusion criteria

1. Countries meeting three criteria

	GDP per capita more than \$ 900	APQL more than 59	EVI less than 36
Nigeria	299	54.33	58.41

2. Countries meeting two criteria (in bold)

	GDP per capita more than \$ 900	APQL more than 59	EVI less than 36
India	407	56.19	12.20
Pakistan	502	48.31	22.21

3. Countries meeting one criterion (in bold)

	GDP per capita more than \$ 900	APQL more than 59	EVI less than 36
China	705	78.22	4.18
Vietnam	316	70.12	31.02

Table D: Position of Developing Countries with regard to CDP inclusion criteria

	GDP per capita		APOLI		EV!	
1	Singapore	30,245	Cyprus	92.92	China	4.18
2	United Arab Emirates	17,107	Malta	90.23	India	12.20
3	Brunei	16,624	Israel	90.08	Brazil	15.20
4	Israel	16,409	Korea,Rep. of	89.07	Argentina	15.22
5	Qatar	16,166	Barbados	88.12	MeAco	15.47
6	Bahamas	13,047	Argentina	87.34	K~ Republic of	16.09
7	Cyprus	11,106	Singapore	86.73	Malaysia	16.55
8	Korea Rep of	9,829	Uruguay	85.22	Indonesia	17.38
9	Bahrain	9,248	Bahrain	84.83	Thailand	17.92
10	Malta	9,241	Libyan Arab Jamahiriya	84.55	Turkey	19.33
11	Argentina	8,966	Lebanon	84.45	Pakistan	22.21
12	Antigua and Barbuda	8,661	Chile	83.51	South Africa	22.43
13	Barbados	8,178	Fiji	83.41	Israel	23.35
14	Seychelles	6,892	South Africa	83.03	Bangladesh	23.77
15	Saudi Arabia	6,856	Brazil	82.46	Costa Rica	23.99
16	Oman	6,751	Brunei Darussalam	82.36	Uruguay	24.09
17	Saint. Kitts-Nevis-Anguilla	6,499	United Arab Emirates	81.74	Colombia	24.28
18	Uruguay	6,083	MeAco	81.69	Egypt	24.85
19	Libyan Arab Jamahiriya	5,621	Trinidad and Tobago	81.47	Philippines	25.00
20	Chile	4,851	Cuba	80.27	Chile	25.09
21	Gabon	4,673	Clatar	80.02	Guatemala	25.99
22	Brazil	4,648	Saint Kitts and Nevis	80.01	Peru	26.13
23	Trinidad and Tobago	4,483	Bahamas	79.89	Sri Lanka	26.18
24	Malaysia	4,380	Mauritius	79.85	Madagascar	26.75
25	MeAco	3,906	Belize	79.61	Eritrea	27.06
26	Mauritius	3,794	Turkey	79.51	Bolivia	27.24
27	Suriname	3,733	Seychelles	79.48	Jordan	27.70
28	Saint Lucia	3,646	Malaysia	79.20	Kenya	27.75
29	Venezuela	3,435	Antigua and Barbuda	78.65	El Salvador	28.36
30	Lebanon	3,295	Costa Rica	78.26	Panama	28.89
31	Dominica	3,237	China	78.22	Ecuador	29.40
32	Grenada	3,230	Jordan	78.07	Cyprus	29.87
33	South Africa	3,209	Philippines	77.57	Singapore	31.02
34	Panama	3,209	Tunisia	77.33	Viet Nam	31.02
35	Turkey	2,978	Dominica	77.04	Jamaica	31.18
36	Belize	2,787	Colombia	76.52	Cameroon	31.59
37	Costa Rica	2,752	Maldives	75.96	Maldives	32.18
38	Thailand	2,669	Sri Lanka	75.46	Dem. P.Rep. Of Korea	32.31
39	Peru	2,581	Syrian Arab Republic	75.43	Cote crivoire	32.81
40	Saint Vincent and the Grenadines	2,505	Ecuador	75.13	Venezuela	33.79
41	Fiji	2,440	Panama	75.11	Morocco	33.82
42	Colombia	2,351	Suriname	74.97	Swaziland	35.02
43	Tunisia	2,149	Saint Lucia	74.94	Mauritius	35.21
44	Cuba	2,100	Indonesia	74.07	Honduras	35.73
45	Paraguay	1,843	Jamaica	73.82	Tanzania, United Rep of	36.23
46	El Salvador	1,796	Grenada	73.51	Nepal	36.37
47	Iran (Islamic Republic o~	1,770	Paraguay	73.43	Barbados	36.54
48	Dominican Republic	1,768	Guyana	73.39	Mozambique	37.36
49	Tonga	1,731	Cape Verde	72.64	Fiji Islands	37.39
50	Jordan	1,700	Iran, Islamic Rep. of	72.39	Malta	38.98
51	Jamaica	1,648	Peru	71.97	Trinidad and Tobago	39.03
52	Algeria	1,600	Egypt	70.58	Belize	40.47
53	Ecuador	1,595	Venezuela	70.23	Senegal	40.86
54	Guatemala	1,584	Saudi Arabia	70.22	Zimbabwe	40.94
55	Vanuatu	1,419	Oman	70.13	Tunisia	41.08
56	Swaziland	1,340	Viet Nam	70.12	Antigua and Barbuda	41.20
57	Tuvalu	1,320	Samoa	70.00	Algeria	41.30
58	Morocco	1,315	Thailand	69.88	Vanuatu	41.31
59	Maldives	1,311	Algeria	68.94	Papua New Guinea	41.40
60	Liberia	1,242	Saint Vincent /Grenadines	67.93	Mauritania	41.42
61	Egypt	1,170	Swaziland	67.92	Cuba	41.50
62	Syrian Arab Republic	1,159	El Salvador	67.88	Malawi	41.57
63	Papua New Guinea	1,097	Dominican Republic	67.26	Lebanon	41.90
64	Equatorial Guinea	1,093	Tonga	67.05	Bhutan	42.27
65	Cape Verde	1,089	Kiribati	65.93	Central African Republic	42.43

	GDP per capita		APQLI		EVI	
66	Philippines	1,088	Myanmar	64.88	Paraguay	43.05
67	Samoa	1,021	Honduras	64.51	Ghana	43.13
68	Indonesia	1,010	Vanuatu	64.25	Nicaragua	43.16
69	Bolivia	994	Zimbabwe	63.36	Grenada	43.67
70	Congo,Rep of	850	Dem. P.R.of Korea	61.63	Suriname	44.28
71	Solomon Islands	846	Mongolia	60.99	Sudan	44.45
72	Guyana	835	Bolivia	60.73	Burkina Faso	44.58
73	Sri Lanka	793	Gabon	59.76	Ethiopia	44.58
74	Djibouti	773	Nicaragua	59.59	Afghanistan	44.89
75	Cote d'Ivoire	757	Lesotho	59.59	Togo	45.30
76	Honduras	727	Morocco	59.32	Bahamas	45.37
77	Zimbabwe	708	Guatemala	58.37	Dominican Republic	45.54
78	China	705	Solomon Islands	58.20	Haiti	45.61
79	Cameroon	656	Tuvalu	57.72	Laos	45.65
80	Kiribati	609	Congo,Rep. of	57.16	Guinea	45.77
81	Angola	596	Ghana	57.04	Sierra Leone	46.30
82	Guinea	575	India	56.19	Djibouti	46.60
83	Senegal	545	Nigeria	54.33	Congo, Republic of	46.90
84	Pakistan	502	Kenya	53.61	Bahrain	48.15
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