Expert Group Meeting on Improving Transit Cooperation, Trade and Trade Facilitation for the Benefit of the LLDCs

UNHQ New York, United States of America

10 and 11 December 2015

Context of the meeting
Landlocked developing countries (LLDCs) face development challenges owing to their geographical disadvantage of lacking direct territorial access to the sea and their remoteness and isolation from world markets. LLDCs, whose international trade depends on transit through other countries, face substantially increased total expenses for transport and other transaction costs as a result of the additional border crossings and long distances from major markets. These transport and transaction costs remain a major stumbling block to LLDCs’ equitable and competitive access to global markets, as they pay more than double what the transit countries incur as well as require a longer amount of time to send and receive merchandise from overseas markets. Because of these disadvantages, landlockedness has an enormous negative impact on the overall development of LLDCs. It is estimated that the level of development in LLDCs is, on average, 20 percent lower than what it would be were they not landlocked.

Reducing these high costs and improving the export competitiveness of the LLDCs requires addressing the transit issues between the LLDCs and the transit countries. The World Bank indicates that a transit system consists of “hard” physical infrastructure, “soft” infrastructure that includes legal framework and institutions, and the procedures that operate and serve trade corridors. Improving the physical movement of goods belonging to LLDCs, i.e. the actual transport within, across and through countries’ sovereign territories, can be achieved through developing physical infrastructure such as roads, bridges, railroads, seaports, and airports that act as the necessary landing docks for the business of doing trade. It also requires improving the soft infrastructure that involves enhancing the legal framework (international transit treaties, and regional, sub-regional and bilateral agreements), customs and border procedures, automation of processes, transparent and consistent fees and charges, regulatory consistency in how rules at the border are applied, harmonization of policies between the LLDCs and transit countries, the institutions involved (Transport sector, customs, immigration etc.), and finally the private sector, including truckers, forwarders, banks, business associations etc.

In order to increase the efficiency of the transit processes, it is also important to strengthen the implementation activities that make the corridor work. For example, enforcement of transport policies on international movement of vehicles and services; customs transit regime and facilitation for international movement of goods; and corridor management for cross-border cooperation and sharing of information would
greatly help transit efficiency. These improvements depend on effective transit cooperation between the LLDCs, their transit neighbors, and development partners. Furthermore, in order to address the transit issues in a holistic and sustainable manner, it is important to: develop ancillary infrastructure along the transit corridor to properly spur growth and development; explore investment options to support development in transit infrastructure; and promote increased trade. This is critical for achieving sustainable development in the LLDCs.

The Vienna Programme of Action (VPoA) for the LLDCs for the decade 2014 to 2024 underscores the importance of partnerships between LLDCs and transit countries for the improvement and constant maintenance of their infrastructure connectivity and of technical and administrative arrangements in their transport, customs and logistic systems and while also stressing the importance of promoting enabling legal environments and institutional arrangements. The VPoA stresses the need to promote harmonization, simplification and standardization of rules and documentation, including the full and effective implementation of international conventions on transport and transit and bilateral, sub-regional and regional agreements. It underscores that bilateral provisions should be no less favourable than what is provided for in the international conventions standards and best practices. It stresses that the cooperation on fundamental transit policies, laws and regulations between LLDCs and their transit neighbours is crucial for the effective and integrated solution to cross-border trade and transit transport problems. The VPoA also underlines that it is important to promote free movement of people between LLDCs and their transit neighbours through development and implementation of simplified and harmonized visa systems for drivers involved in international transport (freight and passengers).

The VPoA, under its priority area on fundamental transit policy issues, sets specific, ambitious objectives of reducing travel time along corridors with the aim of allowing transit cargo to move 300-400 kilometres per 24 hours; significantly reducing the time spent at land borders; and improving intermodal connectivity so as to ensure efficient transfers from rail to road and vice versa and from port to rail and/or road and vice versa. In order to achieve these specific goals within the ten years of implementing the VPoA, it is important to review the status of transit issues in the regions with LLDCs, identify the major achievements and obstacles and provide recommendations to improve transit for the accelerated development of the LLDCs.

It is against this background that OHRLLS has commissioned preparation of reports for the Africa, Asia and Latin America regions on “Improving transit cooperation, trade and trade facilitation for the benefit of the LLDCs: Current Status and Policy implications”. In each region, the substantive study will comprehensively review the status of transit issues in that region, identify key achievements and constraints and suggest comprehensive solutions required to realistically address transit issues for the successful participation of the LLDCs in international trade and for their overall development. OHRLLS is also preparing a report at the global level that will synthesize the regional reports to provide the global picture.
OHRLSS is organizing the Expert Group Meeting to review the draft reports and thoroughly discuss the issues relevant to improving transit transport cooperation for the LLDCs.

**Objectives of the meeting**
The main objective of the meeting will be to review the key issues related to transit cooperation, trade and trade facilitation for the benefit of the LLDCs; and provide recommendations that can advance the implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action and support the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals by the LLDCs. In this regard the meeting is expected to:

1. Peer review the global and regional reports on “Improving transit cooperation, trade and trade facilitation for the benefit of the LLDCs: Current Status and Policy implications”.
2. Analyse and assess the key issues in transit cooperation, trade and trade facilitation for the benefit of the LLDCs;
3. Share ideas, lessons and best practices on how to improve transit cooperation, trade and trade facilitation for the benefit of the LLDCs;
4. Exchange views on future policies, programmes and initiatives that can address transit issues at bi-lateral, regional and global levels; and
5. Offer suggestions on how to strengthen the draft reports.

**Expected outcome**
- The meeting will provide recommendations on improving the quality and content of the global and regional reports on “Improving transit cooperation, trade and trade facilitation for the benefit of the LLDCs: Current Status and Policy implications”.
- It will also provide policy recommendations and lessons based on best practices and experiences to address transit issues for the successful participation of the LLDCs in international trade and for their overall development;
- The reports will provide information for lobbying and advocacy on the transit issues for the LLDCs.

**Format of the meeting**
The meeting will consist of several sessions focused on discussing the key issues. For each session there will be a keynote presentation or some brief presentations by invited experts and discussants on the main issues to kick off discussions.

**Working Language**
The working language of the Expert Group Meeting will be English.

**Dates and Venue**
The Expert Group Meeting on “Improving Transit Cooperation, Trade and Trade Facilitation for the Benefit of the LLDCs” is scheduled to take place at the UN Headquarters in New York, United States of America on 10 and 11 December 2015.
Speakers/Participants
Participants invited to attend the event will include technical experts from the UN, international and regional organisations, officials from LLDCs, transit countries and other Member States, civil society, private sector, and academia.

Contact Information for the Event
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