Most of the participants at this side-event may not know or even imagine the scale of aviation sector relative to overall economic activity and its contribution to economies and societies. In fact, despite its cross-cutting nature and multiple links to other sectors, aviation has so far received limited public attention in the context of sustainable development.

Commercial aviation is already 100 years old. For this 100 years, air traffic has grown remarkably from only one passenger of a 34 kilometre journey to 3.5 billion passengers of 46 billion kilometres, which are equivalent to 10 times of the travel distance to Neptune in the space trip.

Over half of the 1.1 billion tourists cross the border by air. Airplanes transported only 1% of the total volume of goods traded internationally but 35% of world trade by value.

If aviation was a country, its gross domestic product (GDP) would be that of the United Kingdom’s at 2.8 trillion dollars, and the total number of jobs supported by aviation would equal the size of the United Kingdom’s population, around 65 million people.

To better showcase the economic benefits of aviation to the public, ICAO, in cooperation with the United Nations, States and international organizations, is developing a universally-accepted methodology to measure aviation’s GDP relative to overall economic activity.

Although passenger traffic originating from LLDCs (a total of 26.5 million flying to approximately 2,100 destinations in 2015) is 2.1 per cent of the world traffic, aviation represents an essential lifeline to enhance connectivity, which in turn promotes greater tourism, trade and other vital business activities of LLDCs.

It is projected that global air traffic will double by 2030, placing an increased pressure on existing aviation infrastructure. Without a large number of investments over a long period of time and the collaboration of multiple States to modernize and expand aviation infrastructure, the use of aviation as an economic development driver will be severely constrained.

However, air transport received a mere 4.2 per cent (USD 4.6 billion) of the total Official Development Assistance (ODA) provided by all donors for economic infrastructure and services for the past decade (2005-2013). In comparison, road transport was allocated a share of 54.7 per cent which amounts to USD 60.9 billion.

To maximize the benefits from aviation, States, especially LLDCs, are encouraged to incorporate the aviation sector into the integrated transport system and prioritize aviation in their development plans.

The special needs and structural characteristics of LLDCs should be taken into account in the coordination, prioritization, facilitation and implementation of assistance programmes, for example, through the ICAO Aviation Partnerships for Sustainable Development and various assistance platforms.