

**The High-Level Meeting for the Euro-Asia Region on Improving Cooperation on
Transit, Trade Facilitation and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development
March, 7-9, Ha Noi, Viet Nam**

Summary of key Recommendations

Introduction

Effective co-operation of the landlocked developing countries (LLDCs) and transit developing countries is crucial for their effective participation in international and regional trade and sustainable development. The 32 LLDCs face development challenges owing to their geographical disadvantage of lacking territorial access to the sea and their remoteness and isolation from world markets. They account for 0.9 per cent of global exports, lack export diversification, have limited participation in Global Value Chains, and high trade costs.

There are 34 transit developing countries that provide transit services to the LLDCs that also have the major seaports that are used by the LLDCs. The LLDCs and transit countries need each other as the LLDCs also provide transit corridors important for connecting the transit countries to other countries in the region and they also offer markets to transit countries. 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 in the implementation of its priority areas. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable development, The 2030 Agenda is intended to deliver sustainable development and has transformative Sustainable Development Goals and targets that can help all countries including LLDCs and transit countries to achieve inclusive sustainable development and to leave no one behind. The 2030 Agenda recognizes that the Vienna Programme of Action which includes transit policy, trade and infrastructure issues is integral to the Agenda. Thus effective implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action is crucial for the attainment of the SDGs and in leaving no one behind in the LLDCs. Effective partnerships between LLDCs and transit countries are important and necessary to drive the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the VPoA forward.

The Government of the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam in collaboration with the United Nations Office of the High Representative for Least Developing Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States (UN-OHRLLS) organized a High-Level Meeting for the Euro-Asia Region on Improving Cooperation on Transit, Trade Facilitation and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development from 7 to 9 March in Ha Noi, Viet Nam. The event brought together 200 participants including ministers, senior representatives and participants from member states UN, international, regional and sub-regional organizations, private sector, think tanks and other stakeholders. The meeting discussed areas of how to improve cooperation between the LLDCs and the transit countries to increase their trade potential and achievement of the SDGs. The meeting offered a platform for participants to share ideas, lessons learnt, good practices, future policies, programmes and initiatives on how to improve transit cooperation, connectivity, trade and trade facilitation and strengthen the linkages between the implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The meeting also called for revitalized global partnerships and support from the development partners and international financial institutions and organizations.

In view of the discussions, the meeting made the following recommendations to enhance cooperation between the LLDCs and transit countries.

I. Enhancing implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

1. LLDCs and transit countries should work together to enhance cooperation in areas that have a great impact on stimulating economic diversification and value addition to achieve sustainable economic development including: enhancing regional and trans-border physical infrastructure connectivity (roads, transport, power, ICTs); and soft infrastructure (policies and institutions to promote transit and trade facilitation), sharing of markets, investment, ideas, knowledge, expertise, and technologies including through South-South and Triangular Co-operation.
2. LLDCs and transit countries should integrate the VPoA and the 2030 Agenda into national plans, strategies and budgets at the national level.
3. LLDCs and transit countries should strengthen cooperation to address environmental and climatic issues such as glacier melting, pollution, drought and floods and desertification.
4. LLDCs and transit countries should intensify sharing of experiences, lessons learned and best practices on successful sustainable development policies, initiatives and solutions to accelerate the achievement of the SDGs. It is also important for the LLDCs and transit countries to replicate and scale up best practice initiatives. South-South and Triangular Co-operation to support initiatives by the LLDCs and transit countries should be promoted, for example support towards exchange of visits or establishment of a mechanism for experience sharing.
5. Greater international support should be mobilized to support regional and bilateral cooperation initiatives that boost inclusive and sustainable economic development, trade, and tourism, and improve infrastructure (transport, energy and ICT).
6. LLDCs and transit countries should share experiences on statistics and data collection to support rigorous and evidence-based follow-up, monitoring and review. Development partners, international and regional institutions and national stakeholders are encouraged to support these efforts and to strengthen national statistical capacity for monitoring progress.

II. Cooperation on Transit Infrastructure Development and Transit Corridors - best practices, challenges and opportunities

1. LLDCs and transit countries should collaborate to establish secure, reliable, efficient, quality and sustainable infrastructure and transit transport systems, and upgrade existing infrastructure to international standards, with the support of development partners, including multilateral financial and development institutions and regional banks.
2. LLDCs and transit countries should develop and engage in subregional and regional transport agreements on the development of infrastructure and facilitation of goods in transit.

3. Countries should build upon and expand existing initiatives to develop high quality, effective and reliable transport routes between Europe and Asia, with a view to strengthening connectivity between the two regions.
4. LLDCs and transit countries should enhance cooperation to ensure harmonized and simplified customs procedures and regulatory policies, smoother border crossing procedures, enhanced use of information technologies and electronic systems and improved border agency cooperation to improve transit traffic along transport routes.
5. Multilateral and regional development banks should support LLDCs and transit countries in developing bankable implementable infrastructure and transport projects that are financially viable, environmentally friendly and accepted by the local communities.
6. There is a need to allocate considerable financial resources for the improvement of transport systems, including from public and private sources. Cooperation with international financial institutions and enhancing participation of private sector in financing, including through public private partnerships for transport infrastructure development, should be promoted.

III. Enhancing Cooperation on International Trade and Trade Facilitation

1. LLDCs and transit countries who are Members of the WTO should expedite the implementation of the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement. LLDCs and transit country Members who have not ratified the Agreement should ratify the Agreement in order to reduce trade costs. LLDCs should notify their category C commitments, including their capacity needs to take advantage of the technical assistance opportunities.
2. Cooperation for trade facilitation should be enhanced at all levels – national, bi-lateral and regional.
3. The development assistance provided in the context of the Aid for Trade initiative should give greater consideration to the special needs and requirements of LLDCs and support initiatives of LLDCs and transit countries that are aimed at improving trade facilitation.
4. The 11th WTO Ministerial Conference should deliver development oriented outcome which can contribute to the sustainable development of the vulnerable members of the organization including the LLDCs.
5. LLDCs should create conducive environment for industrial development including through building infrastructure, building productivity capacity, and enhancing the services sector. Greater focus should also be given to investment facilitation and should address capacity challenges of the micro small and medium enterprises.
6. The participation of LLDCs in the WTO should be strengthened, and particular attention should be given to the future work programme of LLDCs that would have trade facilitation as one of its main focus.

IV. Enhancing Cooperation on Legal Framework for Transit at bilateral, regional, and global levels

1. LLDCs and transit countries should cooperate and coordinate on fundamental transit policies, laws and regulations and towards enhancing freedom of transit.
2. LLDCs and transit countries are encouraged to join relevant international conventions, in particular the TIR Convention, Harmonization Conventions, the Revised Kyoto Convention given their potential benefits, as well as bilateral, sub-regional and regional agreements and ensure their effective implementation, with a view to promote the harmonization, simplification and standardization of rules, formalities and documentation for all modes of transport.
3. Bilateral and regional agreements on transit should consider provisions for effective information exchange, including information protection issues, limitations on the use of information and provide for harmonization of information requirements in line with international standards.
4. LLDCs and transit countries should be guided by and in conformity with international standards when developing bilateral and regional transit agreements.
5. LLDCs and transit countries should make use of the technical assistance and capacity-building support provided by relevant international organizations towards the effective accession, ratification and implementation of relevant international conventions.

V. Strategies and experience sharing on promoting customs cooperation

- Customs Administrations should modernize their Customs transit regimes, based on the WCO Transit Guidelines to be published in July 2017, in order to facilitate transit movement with a view of supporting economic development of LLDCs.
- Customs Administrations should enhance cooperation with other border regulatory agencies to effectively implement the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA).
- Customs Administrations should establish bilateral, sub-regional or regional cooperative mechanisms with their neighbouring Customs Administrations to ensure smooth movement of transit goods, including data exchange of transit goods, guarantees and Customs seals.

VI. Enhancing Partnerships and the Means of Implementation

1. Bilateral and multilateral development partners are encouraged to increase their technical and financial assistance to support joint infrastructure development initiatives by LLDCs and transit countries.
2. Development Partners are encouraged to scale up provision of technical, financial and capacity building assistance to LLDCs and transit countries for the effective implementation of the Trade Facilitation Agreement, infrastructure development, and

other areas of cooperation for the effective achievement of the SDGs including through enhanced ODA, and aid for trade.

3. While ODA will remain critical, ODA alone cannot finance the programs and projects needed to achieve the SDGs. More private sector resources need to be brought on board to help finance the needed programs and projects including Public Private Partnerships.
4. Strengthen technical and scientific cooperation including North-South, South-South and triangular cooperation on human resource development, including training, exchange of experiences and expertise, knowledge transfer and technical assistance for capacity-building.

VII. Way Forward

1. The meeting proposes that the key recommendations be submitted to the 2017 Meeting of Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Ministers responsible for trade to be held in Ha Noi on 20-21 May 2017, to consider reflecting the recommendations in the Ministerial Statement as appropriate.
2. The meeting also called on all partner institutions to take into account the issue of LLDCs and transit countries and consider establishing dedicated support towards their joint initiatives.
3. The Meeting calls on Special Meeting of ECOSOC on “Innovations for Infrastructure Development and promoting Sustainable Industrialization”, to be held on 31 May in New York to take into account the relevant recommendations on sustainable infrastructure development from this meeting.
4. The recommendations will be presented to the High-Level Political Forum, which among others is considering SDG 9 on infrastructure and industrialization which are particularly relevant to LLDCs.
5. The Meeting calls on the UN PGA to take into account the recommendations of this meeting in his upcoming events including: on climate change, sustainable financing, technology and innovation; and education for all.
6. LLDCs have to remain engaged in the discussions in preparation for WTO's 11th Ministerial Conference which will take place in Buenos Aires in December 2017 on some of the issues being discussed that would be of benefit to them.
7. The LLDCs and transit countries should continue to be engaged in the follow up processes to the Global Sustainable Transport Conference.
8. The LLDCs and transit countries are encouraged to attend and participate in the WCO Global Transit Conference to be held 10-11 July 2017 in Brussels, Belgium.
9. The Global Infrastructure Forum should give due attention to LLDCs and transit issues.

10. The LLDCs should be actively involved in advancing the on Sustainable Mobility for All initiative given its potential benefits including among other issues; access, safety and efficient systems which can only improve transport logistics and facilitate transit trade.

Acknowledgment

The Meeting expressed profound appreciation to the Government of the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam for generously hosting the meeting. The Meeting expressed gratitude to the substantive support and financial contribution of the Office of the High Representative for LDCs, LLDCs and SIDS (UN-OHRLLS) and financial contribution by the World Customs Organization and International Road Transport Union. Paraguay was appreciated for its role as Coordinator for trade and development issues of the Group of LLDCs in Geneva. The Meeting also appreciated the active participation and substantive contributions of other development partners such as UN system organizations, multi-lateral and regional development banks, other international and regional organizations, development partners, the private sector, the think tanks and other stakeholders.