



**Summary of the Ambassadorial Retreat on the Comprehensive
High-level Midterm Review of the implementation of the Vienna
Programme of Action for Landlocked Developing Countries for the
Decade 2014–2024**

**Held on 7-8 May 2019
At HNA Palisades Premier Conference Center, Palisades, New York**

A. Introduction

The United Nations Office of the High-Representative for Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States (UN-OHRLLS) organized an Ambassadorial Retreat on the Comprehensive High-level Midterm Review of the implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action for Landlocked Developing Countries for the Decade 2014–2024. The retreat was held at the HNA Palisades Premier Conference Center, Palisades, New York on 7 and 8 May 2019.

The main objective of the retreat was to provide an opportunity for LLDCs, transit countries and their development partners to exchange views on the outcome document of the Midterm Review of the Vienna Programme of Action. The meeting was expected to come up with key elements for the preparation of the draft outcome document of the Midterm Review of the Vienna Programme of Action.

The meeting was comprised of a working dinner on Tuesday 7 May 2019 and a full day of thematic working sessions on Wednesday 8 May 2019. The working dinner and opening session were moderated by Mr. Sandagdorj Erdenebileg, Chief, LDCs, LLDCs and SIDS, UN-OHRLLS. Ms. Fekitamoeloa 'Utoikamanu, Under-Secretary-General and High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States moderated all the remaining sessions of the meeting. The meeting followed the programme of work presented in annex 1.

The meeting was attended by about 75 participants that included Ambassadors and Permanent Representatives, and delegates from LLDCs, transit developing and donor countries and experts from United Nations System organizations, as well as international organizations as shown in the participant list in annex 2.

B. Working Dinner

Five statements were delivered at the working dinner by: Ms. Fekitamoeloa Katoa 'Utoikamanu, Under Secretary-General, and High Representative; H.E. Ms. Inga Rhonda King, President of ECOSOC and Permanent Representative of Saint Vincent and Grenadines; Statement of H.E. Ms. María Fernanda Espinosa President of the 73rd Session of the United Nations General Assembly, delivered by Ms. Toni-Shae Freckleton, Senior Adviser, Office of the President of the 73rd Session of the United Nations General Assembly; and Ms. Ahunna Eziakonwa, Assistant Administrator, Director of the Regional Bureau for Africa, United Nations Development Programme.

In her opening remarks, **Ms. Utoikamanu, Under Secretary-General, and High Representative for LDCs, LLDCs, and SIDS** welcomed the participants to the retreat. The USG shared that the Midterm Review of the Vienna Programme of Action is a critical opportunity to identify practical and forward-looking ways and means to accelerate the implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action and the SDGs.

The USG shared that the retreat should aim to provide clarity on outstanding areas for action and an action plan for the LLDCs, transit countries, development partners, and the international community to guide the work ahead. She noted that the outcome of the retreat will set the tone for the draft outcome document of the midterm review. She urged all participants to focus on how to accelerate implementation of the programme and achieve the SDGs contained in Agenda 2030.

H.E. Ms. Inga Rhonda King, President of ECOSOC and Permanent Representative of Saint Vincent and Grenadines underscored the need to improve LLDC's productive capacity, including their transit systems and connectivity to achieve the SDGs. She called on the retreat and the Midterm Review to critically look at areas where there are opportunities to accelerate progress; forge greater synergies between VPoA and other international development agenda; strengthen partnerships to scale up contributions to sustainable development financing and develop great connectivity. She also called on building greater resilience, redoubling of efforts to climate change, addressing land degradation and drought and increased investments in disaster risk reduction, including disaster preparedness, early warning and early action.

The President of ECOSOC reiterated her commitment to address the special challenges of LLDCs to achieve sustainable development and to ensure that due attention is paid to their challenges and to raise the support of the international community to LLDCs.

The President of the United Nations' General Assembly, H.E. Ms. María Fernanda Espinosa, in her statement read by Ms. Toni-Shae Freckleton, Senior Adviser, acknowledged the potential of 32 LLDCs to contribute to the global green growth and innovative development practices. She underscored that supporting LLDCs in achieving the SDGs is essential to fulfilling the promise to leave no one behind, and to realizing the 2030 Agenda as a whole.

She highlighted the need to find ways to maintain progress in high-skill and technology-intensive exports; continue to increase regional and bilateral cooperation with neighboring states in areas such as tourism and transit arrangements; and intensify efforts to close the "infrastructure gap" in LLDCs.

The President called on member states to ensure that the Midterm Review strengthens and refines existing initiatives, and expands and enhances partnerships with stakeholders international, regional, national and local. She shared that the Vienna Programme of Action is integral to achieve the 2030 Agenda and suggested that every key meeting – the High-Level Political Forum in July, all the meetings during High-Level Week in September – be used to incorporate actions to make progress on the VPoA.

Ms. Ahunna Eziakonwa, Assistant Secretary General and Director, UNDP Regional Bureau for Africa underscored the need to look at opportunities that the people in LLDCs provide for sustainable development. She called for collective efforts to continue supporting LLDCs in mobilizing the means of implementation for the VPoA to be brought to scale and faster. She touched on the need to follow up on the FfD financing compact to fill huge gaps in development financing. She also touched on UNDP's role on supporting LLDCs in leveraging existing and potential funding flows, policy support, and programmatic support.

The Director called for the global community to do more on advocating for critical action on catalytic financing for private sector investment, reduction of remittance costs, curbing illicit financial flows and sharing knowledge as expanded by means of implementation.

C. Opening Session: Fostering Synergies between the VPoA and 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

In this session statements were presented by Ms. Fekitamoeloa Katoa ‘Utoikamanu, Under Secretary-General, and High Representative, H.E. Ms. Inga Rhonda King, President of ECOSOC and Permanent Representative of Saint Vincent and Grenadines, H.E. Mr. Julio Cesar Arriola Ramirez, Permanent Representative of Paraguay to the UN, Chair of the LLDC Group, and H.E. Ms. Doma Tshering, Permanent Representative of the Kingdom of Bhutan to the United Nations in New York and Co-Facilitator for the Mid Term Review of the Vienna Programme of Action.

Ms. Utoikamanu, Under Secretary-General and High Representative stated that LLDCs have made some progress in the implementation of the SDGs. However, too many remain at the bottom of the development ladder. She underscored that considerable additional effort and resources will be required to achieve the targets by 2030 to ensure the LLDCs are not left behind. More efforts, more and faster action are needed.

The USG called for effective linkages between the follow-up and review arrangements of the 2030 Agenda and the Vienna Programme. She proposed adequate time be devoted to the special needs and challenges of the LLDCs at the HLPF and FfD forum’s follow-up processes.

The USG underscored the need to leverage the midterm review (MTR) to comprehensively assess progress, identify achievements, obstacles, constraints and propose ways forward. She suggested that the MTR should consider actions that worked, actions that did not work and initiatives needed to close gaps and accelerate implementation of the programme.

She shared that preparations for the review are continuing at the national, regional and global levels to address issues on transit, transport, trade and border cooperation, energy, ICT, foreign direct investment, productive capacity building, structural economic transformation and science, technology and innovation. This participatory process will continue to inform the outcome document of the midterm review.

The USG called for a day of open dialogue and urged the participants to identify concrete recommendations to feed into the outcome document of the MTR. The USG reiterated that the MTR is the opportunity to come up with concrete, targeted initiatives and actions to accelerate the implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action in the next five years. It is also the time to rally, to partner for this purpose.

She thanked the Government of the Russian Federation for support which made the retreat possible

H.E. Ms. Inga Rhonda King, President of ECOSOC and Permanent Representative of Saint Vincent and Grenadines stated that effective implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action is critical for the attainment of the SDGs and in leaving no one behind in the LLDCs. She shared that the voluntary national reviews (VNRs) present an important opportunity to learn from the LLDCs' experiences on how to address the challenges related with being landlocked. She encouraged all LLDCs to actively engage in the VNR process and avail the opportunity to raise LLDC issues. This is the only way that their issues can be embedded into the outcome document of the Summit.

The President reaffirmed her commitment to continue to address the special challenges of the LLDCs at ECOSOC, and to ensure that attention is paid to their challenges in the follow-up processes under the auspices of the Council.

The **Chair of the Group of LLDCs, H.E. Mr. Julio Cesar Arriola Ramirez, Permanent Representative of Paraguay to the UN**, highlighted the importance of fostering synergies between the VPoA and 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. He shared that almost five years into the implementation of the VPoA and four years into the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, key indicators clearly show that progress achieved so far in the LLDCs is not enough for LLDCs to achieve the SDGs.

To accelerate the implementation of the VPoA, the Chair called for development partners and transit countries to support LLDCs' efforts to mobilize domestic resources through technical assistance and capacity building; support to implement the trade facilitation reforms; scale up funding and financing to close transport infrastructure gaps; to develop renewable energy sources; encourage private sector development through creation of enabling environment for SMMEs to participate in international trade; access to trade finance as well as technology transfer; UN development system should accord high priority to the economic sectors and productive capacity building; technology transfer; address challenges facing the WTO; recognize the impact of climate change and make concerted efforts to address them, and help build resilience.

The Chair called on the global community to live up to the commitment of "leaving no one behind". He called for the outcome document of the Midterm review to be ambitious, comprehensive, forward-looking and result oriented to enable achievement of the desired socio-economic transformation of LLDCs in the remaining five years.

The **Co-facilitator of the Mid Term Review of the Vienna Programme of Action, H.E. Ms. Doma Tshering, Permanent Representative of the Kingdom of Bhutan to the United Nations** acknowledged that the retreat marks an important milestone in the preparations towards the high-level midterm review of the implementation of the VPoA.

She shared that the VPoA embodies the commitment of the international community to address the specific challenges faced by LLDCs in their pursuit of poverty eradication through sustainable and inclusive growth. Agenda 2030 and the Addis Ababa Action Agenda further builds upon this and promises to leave no one behind. UNGA resolutions 72/232 and 73/243 provide for a comprehensive high-level midterm review of its implementation, as also called for in paragraph

78 of the VPoA. The MTR which will be convened in December 2019, will adopt an intergovernmentally negotiated and agreed outcome in the form of a political declaration.

She reaffirmed that the Co-Facilitators will continue supporting the collective efforts to arrive at a political declaration to further accelerate the implementation of the VPoA. She shared that the outcome documents of the three regional reviews, the outcomes of pre-conference events coordinated by the UN-OHRLLS, including this retreat, together with the report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of the VPoA will all serve to inform the outcome document of the high-level midterm review. The Co-facilitator shared that they will ensure an effective and meaningful outcome document for the High-Level Review.

D. Session 1. International Trade and Trade Facilitation: Key achievements, challenges, lessons learnt and Implications for outcome document

In this session representatives of UN-OHRLLS, UNCTAD and WTO made presentations.

Ms. Nnana Pheto, Economic Affairs Officer, UN-OHRLLS made a presentation on the implementation of Priority 3 of the VPoA on International Trade and Trade Facilitation. She highlighted the objectives of the Vienna Programme of Action under the priority area and highlighted the LLDCs performance relative to the objectives set out in the Vienna Programme of Action. She stated that the LLDCs' share of global merchandise exports declined from 1.19% in 2014 to an estimated 0.98% in 2018. She noted the disparities within the LLDCs group data and highlighted that only 4 of the LLDCs accounted for 50% of the LLDCs Group merchandise exports and the majority of the LLDCs accounted for lower than 2 per cent. She pointed out that the share of primary commodity exports reduced from 86.7% when the VPoA was adopted to 82.3% in 2018 but emphasized that the share of commodity exports remained very high in LLDCs compared to the average of 30% for developing countries. She accentuated that lack of diversification makes LLDCs not only vulnerable to external shocks but limits their competitiveness and ability to create high value-added products, meaningful productive employment and innovative technologies.

On services exports she noted that LLDCs' export of services grew from 14.6% to 20.2% in 2017 but is still dominated by travel. She emphasized that services were fundamental as inputs to other economic sectors and create linkages with production in another sector. She emphasized the need for the LLDCs to strengthen their services sectors as this was essential for enhancing their participation in the value chains and in e-commerce as well as for trade facilitation. On trade facilitation she noted that the implementation of the trade facilitation agreement was lower in LLDCs compared to developing countries. She emphasized the need to enhance technical assistance to LLDCs in areas that LLDCs have notified as priority.

Ms. Chantal Line Carpentier, Chief of the UNCTAD New York Office highlighted that UNCTAD provided research and analysis on the challenges facing LLDCs and provided substantive support to the group. She noted that UNCTAD organized a similar brainstorming session in collaboration with OHRLLS in January 2019. She highlighted that UNCTAD has

developed a database (UNCTADSTAT) which could be used to review performance of every country.

She pointed out that progress in the implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action was not encouraging. She stressed that since the adoption of the Vienna Programme of Action, LLDCs had experienced a sharp reduction in their GDP, trade share and FDI inflows which they still had to recover. She reported that FDI flows to LLDCs have fallen sharply from US\$ 36 billion in 2011 to 22bn in 2016. She however noted the increase by 3 per cent in 2017, to US\$23 billion but this still left FDI flows to the group around 40% below their peak in 2011.

Ms. Carpentier noted that in the last 5 years (2013-2018) 13 LLDCs adopted new industrial policies. She highlighted the common features of the industrial policies of the developing countries which also include LLDCs and these features included: policies tend to have more industry-specific programs, and initiatives focusing on key segments of the economy, such as MSMEs policies; contain numerous initiatives to build horizontal productive capacity; most have investment policy components (such as Special Economic Zone, investment facilitation and investment targeting). She further highlighted that many LDCs, some of which are also LLDCs focus on protection of investors to attract investment, but do not sufficiently promote or facilitate investments based on contribution to industrial development. She informed that policies rarely reference gender (23%), especially new industrial strategies (7%), while increasingly incorporating social and sustainable development objectives. Furthermore, she stressed that the policies contain rare or insufficient integration with ICT and e-commerce policies. LLDCs continue to face challenges achieving structural transformation and export diversification. She discussed the ongoing work to develop a productive capacity index for LLDCs that includes three main components: (1) productive resources; (2) Entrepreneurial capacities; and (3) production linkages and network. Validation meetings for the index were held in Rwanda, Lao DPR, Botswana, and Namibia.

Ms. Carpentier informed that UNCTAD carried out 7 Rapid e-trade readiness assessments in Africa and countries assessed included 3 LLDCs (Burkina Faso, Uganda and Zambia). She reported that e-commerce readiness in developed World was 87.4%, against 32.2% for Africa and 21.5% for African LDCs. She highlighted some of the key findings of the assessment as follows: countries lack a unified vision on e-commerce, development of e-commerce policies initiative and active is fragmented, and public-private dialogue is underutilized. She further highlighted recommendations from the assessment to included: the need to develop national e-commerce strategies, improve inter-ministerial coordination, strengthening overall stakeholder perception about e-commerce development. On legal and regulatory frameworks, she pointed out the following findings: lack of an adopted framework on e-commerce, lack of enforcement agencies to implementation and compliance with existing framework and missing cross-border provision. On trade facilitation she informed that UNCTAD was providing support to developing countries in the implementation of the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement. She further informed that 23 LLDCs were using the ASYCUDA system for their customs administration and that the ASYCUDA had transit management module.

Ms. Carpentier further informed about other support programmes implemented including the UNCTAD's business Linkage Programme, UNCTAD Business Facilitation Programme and Bio & Blue Trade program. She concluded by proposing the following recommendations: Put greater focus on building productive capacities; Call for a move away from "project-based" problem solving approach towards "programme-based" "whole of government interventions"; Provide support for LLDCs to identify specific sectors or sub-sectors with export potential and implement policies to promote their development; Identify possible targets for the proportion of Aid-for-trade for LLDCs and STI; Greater proportion of ODA to be allocated to productive sectors and provide support to enable the private sector to grow and bring about structural transformation; International Support Measures that go beyond the confines of ODA, market access and debt restructuring are needed; strengthened monitoring and evaluation of the implementation of the VPOA through the measurable indicators, and Support to step up efforts to improve the implementation capacities of development policies and strategies, including integrated industrial and eCommerce policies - whole of government approach.

Ms. Sheri Rosenow Senior Counsellor, World Trade Organisation gave the state of play in the implementation of the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA). She informed that 142 out of the 164 members of the WTO had ratified the TFA. She highlighted that the TFA was unique in that it allows developing and least-developed countries to set their own timetables for implementing the Agreement depending on their capacities to do so. She pointed out that because of the special and differential treatment, the Members could categorise provisions in the TFA into three categories: Category A (provisions already implemented), Category B (provisions to be implemented after a transitional period following the entry into force of the agreement) and Category C (provisions to be implemented after a transitional period following the entry into force of the agreement and requiring the acquisition of assistance and support for capacity building).

She highlighted that Members are mandated to notify the WTO of their notifications under categories A, B and C. She informed about the status of notifications already received as 115 for category A, 78 for Category B and 66 for Category C. She highlighted that 48.3% of the provisions were notified under category A, 12.9% under Category B, 17.6% under Category C and 21.2% were not yet notified. On LLDCs, she pointed out that about 34% of the measures were notified under category A compared to about 58% for developing countries. She further pointed out that the implementation rate of the TFA was 61.1%.

Ms. Rosenow further informed about the transparency notification requirement of the TFA. She noted that donors are mandated to notify their contact point of the technical assistance and capacity building agencies and process and mechanism to request technical assistance and capacity building to be dispersed. She also noted that developing countries were mandated to notify the contacts for donors. She further informed about the Trade Facilitation Committee Meetings and its mandate. She concluded by providing information on the Trade facilitation facility database and the matrix of notifications presented under the TFA.

Interactive Discussion

In their interventions, participants highlighted that whilst the LLDCs were all faced with challenges associated with landlockedness, they were also heterogenous and were at different

levels of development. They therefore emphasized the need to disaggregate data as this will clearly show where challenges persist so that support could be directed to where it is most needed. They emphasized the importance of showing examples of good progress with a view to identifying good practices that could be replicated.

Participants expressed concern over the LLDCs' trade performance and their continuous reliance on commodities. They noted that the extractive industry could not generate the much-needed employment in LLDCs due to weak linkages with the rest of the economy and therefore cannot make meaningful contribution to alleviating poverty. They emphasized the need to strengthen linkages between the extractives sector and the rest of the economy by putting in place the necessary policies, legislative and regulatory frameworks. They underscored the need for value addition and integration into regional and global value chains. They stressed the importance of targeted interventions for value addition including capacity building and technical assistance.

Lack of implementation was highlighted as one of key challenges and this was said to bring some mistrust. The importance of building human capacity was emphasized.

Participant noted the opportunities brought by e-commerce. They noted with concern the high incidents of tax avoidance in the digital economy. They therefore called for capacity building and technical assistance to deal with the challenges associated with e-commerce.

Participants underscored the need to enhance support to the implementation of the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement and further highlighted the need to ensure that such support is predictable. The need for enhanced coordination of support towards trade facilitation programmes and projects was also emphasized.

It was also noted that some of the LLDCs are mountainous and therefore support to these countries particularly infrastructure development should be taking these challenges into account. In addition, participants emphasized the need to address climate change in the midterm review of the VPoA.

E. Session 2. Fundamental Transit Policy Issues, Infrastructure Development and Maintenance, and Regional Integration: Key achievements, challenges, lessons learnt and Implications for outcome document

In this session representatives of UN-OHRLLS, World Bank, DOALOS, and ITU made presentations.

Ms. Gladys Mutangadura, Senior Programme Officer, UN-OHRLLS, made a presentation on the Implementation of VPoA Priority Areas on Fundamental Transit Policy Issues; Infrastructure Development and Maintenance, and Regional Integration. She stated that a strong supportive legal framework is important to promote harmonization, simplification and standardization of rules, documents and procedures to promote transit. Progress has been made to ratify international conventions, where more LLDCs and transit countries have become party to the WTO TFA, the Revised Kyoto Convention. She noted that 3 transit countries had ratified the TIR Convention over the review period. She also noted that much less countries had become party to the Convention on

the Harmonization of Frontier Controls of Goods during the review period. While progress on ratification is good, Ms. Mutangadura stressed that the LLDCs and transit countries need capacity building support for effective implementation of the conventions and agreements.

Ms. Mutangadura stated that one of the specific objectives of the VPoA is to reduce travel time along the corridors with the aim of allowing transit cargo to move 300-400km for every 24 hours. She reported that some corridors such as the CAREC Programme in Asia and Central Corridor and Trans Kalahari Corridor in Africa have managed to achieve this VPoA specific objective, however other corridors have not yet achieved the target while some corridors do not have readily available data on the indicator.

Furthermore, she indicated that the other specific objective is aimed at reducing the amount of time spent at points of intermodal transfer between rail, road and port. Although data to measure progress on this objective are not readily available, she noted that World Bank studies indicate that the average cargo dwell time in most ports in East Asia and Europe is close to four days. In Africa, the port of Durban is comparable, with a dwell time of four days. Some progress has been made in reducing cargo dwell time, which decreased from 14 days in 2012 to 9 days in 2017 at Dar es Salaam port and from 11 days to 4 at Mombasa port over the same period. Other port dwell times identified in 2017 were: in Douala, Cameroon, 17 days; in Lomé, Togo, 9 days; in Tema, Ghana, 15 days. More efforts are needed to reduce the port dwell times, and there is a need to capture data and update it regularly in order to monitor this objective.

Ms. Mutangadura stated that the World Bank logistic performance index (LPI) can be used to monitor the third specific objective of reducing time spent at the land borders. She noted that the LPI is the weighted average of the country scores on six key dimensions, including efficiency of the clearance process by border control agencies; quality of trade and transport related infrastructure; ease of arranging competitively priced shipments; competence and quality of logistics services. She indicated that the LLDCs had a lower LPI of 2.49 in 2014 when compared to 2.69 for the transit developing countries and 2.89 for the world. In 2018 the LLDCs still had a lower LPI of 2.45 when compared to 2.72 for the transit developing countries and 2.87 for the world. More effort is needed to improve the movement of goods across the borders.

On the sustainable energy, Ms. Mutangadura highlighted that the average proportion of population with access to electricity in LLDCs increased from 49.2% in 2015 to 53% in 2016, however the LLDCs still lag behind the world average of 88% in 2016. Further disaggregation by region shows that the Euro-Asia region has been able to achieve greater access with an access rate of greater than 95%, followed by Latin America with an access rate of 94% whilst the African LLDCs are trailing behind with an average access rate of 28% in 2016. Although the LLDCs experienced an increase in electricity in rural areas between 2014 and 2016, the rural urban gap is still significant with 87.6% of the population in urban areas having access compared to 42.7% in rural areas.

Ms. Mutangadura pointed out that access to clean fuels and technologies for cooking only marginally improved over the review period. Two thirds of the 503 million still depend on biomass and therefore remain unable to utilize the benefits of clean energy to improve their health and overall social and economic development. More efforts are needed to ensure clean energy for cooking.

Energy intensity, measured in terms of primary energy and GDP, improved over the review period. The share of renewable energy in total energy consumption increased slightly between 2015 and 2016. Despite the potential that renewable energy has for LLDCs, the share of renewable energy has remained rather constant, with only 1 percentage point increase between 2010 and 2016.

Ms. Mutangadura highlighted some of the challenges that the LLDCs face in developing energy infrastructure and connectivity. She noted that lack of long-term energy development strategy, policies and programmes have hindered the growth of energy sector. Furthermore, she stated that the outdated and inefficient grid and transmission systems result in transmission and distribution loss. Ms. Mutangadura added that the cross-border energy trade is still at its early stages of development, and often lack of investment resources act as a binding constraint.

On the transport connectivity, the LLDCs are making progress in the development of transport infrastructure and maintenance, including roads, railways, dry ports, air links, and logistics services. Ms. Mutangadura highlighted the notable achievements that have been made to close missing links, however there are challenges such as large infrastructure financing gaps in all regions. Furthermore, Ms. Mutangadura stated that collaboration and partnerships are key for capacity building to develop feasible, bankable, transport infrastructure projects.

On regional integration, Ms. Mutangadura indicated that there has been some progress. She highlighted examples that include - Eurasian Economic Union that includes 3 LLDCs that was established and entered into force in August 2015; Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal and India signed a Motor Vehicles Agreement in 2015 to facilitate movement of cargo across their borders; in Nov 2018, ASEAN adopted the Master Plan on ASEAN Connectivity 2025; The Belt and Road Initiative; In June 2016, China-Mongolia-Russia agreed on economic corridor between the countries; The COMESA-EAC-SADC Tripartite Free Trade Area, 2015; The African Continental Free Trade Area; and The Single African Air Transport Market. She highlighted some suggested recommendations.

Ms. Nancy Vandycke, Lead Economist and Program Manager, Sustainable Mobility for All Initiative, World Bank Group highlighted that the World Bank works closely with the governments of 30 LLDCs on the Priority areas of the VPoA. She indicated that the World Bank's transport portfolio, equals to US\$ 37.55 Billion and includes 180 projects realized in 82 countries, where World Bank is the largest provider of development finance for transport globally. She noted that more than 22% of all transport-related programs are for enhancing the connectivity and regional integration of LLDCs. World Bank's assistance include corridor projects, backbone internet connectivity, intermodal connection, especially at the interface between ports, rail, road, and inland waterways, asset preservation, and expansion of broadband coverage and border crossing interventions.

Ms. Vandycke pointed that 48 active ongoing lending projects are in LLDCs and amount to \$10.8billion. She noted that the support is concentrated in 2 region Asia and Africa. She noted that the support includes maintenance, rehabilitation, upgrading or new construction. She noted that the main areas of support include highways/roads (40%) - telecommunications (20%) - public administration (16%) and railways (10%). The WBG also works to promote developing necessary

broadband infrastructure and in promoting national broadband policy. Support to activities aimed at improving transport corridors and simplifying, streamlining and harmonizing border procedures.

She mentioned that all the aspects of transport were not being adequately addressed in particular sustainability issues. She highlighted the Sustainable Mobility for All initiative (SuM4All), which is supported by 55 organizations and presents solutions to addressing the 21st century mobility challenges. To achieve a sustainable global mobility system, countries need to pursue four policy goals namely universal access, efficiency, safety, and green mobility. World Bank assessed indicators of sustainable mobility for 180 countries, and not a single country is able to reach all 4 sustainable mobility goals. Ms. Vandycke reported that the LLDCs' transport sectors are the least safe and efficient with the lowest level of universal access and highest GHG Emissions. She encouraged the LLDCs to address sustainable mobility by pursuing all four policy goals.

Mr. Luigi Santosuosso, Senior Legal Officer, United Nations Division for Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea (DOALOS) of the Office of Legal Affairs made a presentation aimed at drawing attention to the benefits that the regime established in Part X of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) offers to LLDCs.

He noted that whereas 20 LLDCs and 28 transit States are already parties to UNCLOS, 12 LLDCs have not yet ratified or acceded to it. After recalling that UNCLOS sets out the legal framework within which all activities in the oceans and seas must be carried out, Mr. Santosuosso stated that the level of implementation of the Convention towards the conservation and sustainable use of marine resources will be key for the achievement of SDG 14 and also other goals in the 2030 Agenda.

He drew attention to the benefits that LLCs enjoy under Part X of UNCLOS. After describing 1) the right of access to and from the sea, 2) the freedom of transit through transit States by all means of transport, and 3) the right to sail ships flying its flag and to exercise rights of navigation in the various maritime zones, he provided an overview of the rights stemming from UNCLOS and their relationship with SDG 14.c in the fields of navigation, fishing in the high seas and exclusive economic zone, laying of pipelines and cables, construction of artificial islands and installations, exploration and exploitation of the Area, marine scientific research, and transfer of marine technology, leading to increased economic benefits. He also described the duties which come together with the above-described rights.

He highlighted other benefits of being party to UNCLOS which include benefits derived from activities in the Area; benefits from payments and contributions made by coastal States arising from exploitation of non-living resources on the continental shelf beyond 200 nautical miles; and access to mechanisms for the settlement of disputes. He also recalled the benefit of participation in the three bodies established under UNCLOS, namely the International Seabed Authority; the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea; and the Commission on the Limits on the Continental Shelf.

He concluded with a brief overview of the capacity-building activities offered by DOALOS, which could be of assistance to LLDCs, in particular with regard to the process of becoming parties to UNCLOS.

Ms. Kadiatou Sall-Beye, Project Officer, LDCs International Telecommunication Union Liaison Office to the United Nations highlighted the fundamental challenges faced by LLDCs that are related to their geography which puts them at a distinct disadvantage in the development process. She noted that long routes, complicated administrative transit procedures, multiple border crossings and inadequate infrastructure all are important factors increasing transport and trade transaction costs. In addition, Ms. Sall-Beye pointed out that LLDCs also face severe challenges regarding broadband internet access, and in keeping up with the necessary infrastructure deployment. She added that the high cost for ICTs and ICT prices in LLDCs remains high, as there are difficulties in the rollout of terrestrial communication infrastructure throughout large areas. Ms. Sall-Beye stated that because of their geographical position, there is low interest in investing in ICT Infrastructure development in LLDCs.

Ms. Sall-Beye reported that according to ITU and LLDCs data for the last five years, there has been growth in population covered by at least 3G network; population covered by a mobile-cellular network; mobile-cellular subscriptions; mobile and fixed-broadband; and the proportion of people using the Internet. Fixed telephone subscriptions is the only area recording a slight decrease. In addition, many LLDCs have made rapid progress towards achieving universal and affordable access to the Internet, as measured by mobile population coverage and the price of a monthly mobile Internet package of at least 500 mega bites. Rwanda has achieved tremendous progress in access to the Internet through universal population coverage. And alongside Lesotho, exceeds the world average for mobile LTE population coverage.

In addition, a growing number of LLDCs have flexible mobile internet plans catering to hourly, daily, weekend and weekly use, enhancing affordability for those who do not use the Internet every day. However, the extent of this progress varies between countries, and infrastructure investment gaps exists. To tackle these gaps the ITU, alongside partners and governments, had spearheaded several programmes such as the deployment of broadband infrastructure in Burundi, Burkina Faso, Lesotho, Mali, Rwanda and Eswatini; harmonized training to Burkina-Faso, Mali, and Niger to improve their knowledge and shared best practice approaches for infrastructure connectivity; And is reinforcing both institutional and technical capacities of Burundi to speed up sustainable broadband development by leveraging the potential of ICT/Broadband infrastructures as engines for growth.

She highlighted some suggested recommendations that include: create an enabling regulatory environment and policies in support of ICT infrastructure development and sharing, take collective measures to narrow the digital divide in LLDCs but also bridge the gap between rural and urban areas, take measures to make ICTs/ broadband more affordable as it provides great development opportunities for the LLDCs; promote digital inclusion, digital literacy, and use of ICT applications, and services, foster development of appropriate skills to encourage increased use of internet opportunities for everyone, develop local content and investment in both human and institutional capacity, promote universal service funds, create tax incentives, nurture e-commerce and small medium enterprises, encourage increased ODA, establish ICT public-private partnerships for viable business models, and encourage partnerships to allocate a higher percentage of infrastructure in LLDCs. She concluded by emphasizing the need to prioritize investment in

ICT infrastructure and connectivity as this equates investing in people and accelerates the implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action. She ended on ITU's mission to ensure that people wherever they live and whatever their means take advantage of the benefits of ICT and broadband infrastructures for an inclusive world.

Interactive Discussion

In the ensuing discussion, participants underscored that LLDCs should take responsibility for addressing their development challenges and work hard to address the special needs. They also noted that LLDCs cannot graduate from landlockedness and suggested that there is need to have a solution that can show if LLDCs are closer to achieving their goals. They noted that there have been some changes that have taken place since 2014, and it is important to reflect them in the outcome document. For example, they underscored the importance of building climate change resilient infrastructure in LLDCs. They also noted the need to include gender equality such as mainstreaming gender into industrial policies.

Participants underlined the need to recognize the progress that has been made on regional integration in particular in Africa in the outcome of the MTR and underscored the importance of building the capacity of the key negotiators in the Africa Continental Free Trade Agreement so that they can come up with supportive outcomes for LLDCs.

Participants noted that the LLDC group was heterogenous. However, they stressed that in the outcome, we should reflect issues that have commonality across the LLDCs. They also cautioned that normative issues of trade that are dealt with in Geneva should not be introduced.

On ICTs, participants noted the need for the LLDCs to be part of the new UN ICT Strategy that is being developed. Participants were interested in learning about ICT programmes for LLDCs that are mountainous. They also pointed out that mountain terrains provide challenges in constructing railroads, roads, and cell-towers. The Google Loon project was mentioned as a solution in combating mountain environment, and inquiry on further research of the potential financing of the project was made. They stressed the importance of E-commerce to LLDCs and called for support.

On energy the meeting underscored that LLDCs should focus on renewable energy sources.

The meeting suggested that call for ratification of the International Think Tank Agreement should also be reflected in the Midterm Review since the focus of the Think Tank is to address the problem of landlockness.

Participants noted that the MTR should pay adequate attention to all the 6 priority areas and the interlinkages of the priority areas need to be addressed.

The meeting underscored the importance of harmonizing customs and transit procedures. They noted that the African Continental Free trade Agreement will lead to improved harmonization. They underscored the need to support the LLDCs to ratify the agreement and to build their capacity to comprehensively develop policies that are harmonized. Participants shared experience on the agreements and conventions that they had ratified including the WTO Trade Facilitation

Agreement and the Revised Kyoto Convention. They also discussed initiatives that promote transit that they have implemented including One-Stop Border posts.

F. Session 3. Fostering Structural Economic Transformation of LLDCs, Enhancing Means of Implementation and Effective monitoring, review and follow-up

In this session representatives of UN-OHRLLS, UN-DESA, UNCCD, UNDRR, UNDP and UNIDO made presentations.

Ms. Dagmar Hertova, Programme Management Officer, UN-OHRLLS noted that since the adoption of the VPoA, many LLDCs have incorporated economic transformation into their national development plans and adopted strategies for diversification and upgrading of their economies, industrialization, export promotion and private sector development. She highlighted that some progress in creating conducive business and regulatory environment for the private sector has been made in the LLDCs and that domestic credit to private sector increased slightly, even though it remains low. In addition, she informed that one of the main challenges for the LLDCs is combatting the de-industrialization trend, as value-added contribution of the manufacturing and agriculture sector in GDP has remained low.

Ms. Hertova proposed that LLDCs should continue to develop and implement effective, targeted and quality industrial policies and identify specific sectors such as agro-processing; light manufacturing; and services, with potential for export promotion, diversification and value-addition and provide targeted incentives. She called for improving the enabling environment in the LLDCs for business, in particular MSMEs, including through enabling regulations and policies, specific grants, finance and enhanced access to credit. She suggested that using new and existing technologies in the production of manufactured products can add value to LLDC products and that new technologies, the digital economy, including the emergence of e-commerce also present bountiful opportunities for the LLDCs to better connect to the global economy and global value chains. She noted that enhancement of skills and capacity building is one of the key ways to enable domestic innovation, adapt and benefit from new technologies. She called for higher investments into research and development from LLDCs, as well as from the international community, to promote innovation.

In terms of Means of Implementation, Ms. Hertova noted that first priority of all LLDCs should be to mobilize domestic sources. She informed that the average tax revenue to GDP in LLDCs in 2017 was 13%, well below the 18% rule of thumb to meet development needs. She highlighted that ODA to LLDCs increased from \$24 to \$28 billion between 2014 and 2017 and has been relatively stable and important source of external finance for many LLDCs. She added that FDI flows to LLDCs recovered slightly in 2017 but remain 40% lower than their peak in 2011. She also noted that remittance present important source of external finance for some LLDCs. She cautioned that external flows to LLDCs vary widely by country. She highlighted particular role of Aid for Trade in helping LLDCs in the formulation of trade policies, the implementation of trade facilitation measures, building of productive capacities and the development of economic and trade-related infrastructure.

Ms. Hertova suggested that enhanced resources and efforts from the LLDCs and the international community are needed in order to accelerate progress in implementing the VPoA, including through enhanced domestic resource mobilization and enhanced ODA. She recommended that development partners should align ODA and Aid for Trade with national priorities of the LLDCs. She noted that LLDCs should adopt policies and measures to attract more FDI and more diversified FDI and also consider identifying new sources of development finance, including through South-South Cooperation. UN system, international organizations and multilateral and regional development banks have a role to play by continuing to provide technical and capacity building assistance. She stressed that LLDCs require continued and enhanced assistance aimed at strengthening their statistical capacity for collection and analysis data and that enhanced partnerships at all levels are needed for ensuring coherence between VPoA and 2030 Agenda monitoring and follow-up processes.

Mr. Hamid Rashid, Chief, Economic Analysis and Policy Division, DESA, started his presentation with a discussion of the disadvantages and advantages of landlockedness. He implied that while being landlocked presents many challenges, remoteness may not be entirely a disadvantage because it also provides opportunities for creating a robust domestic market, with resilience to fluctuations to business cycles, shocks, and contagion. In addition, he noted that the current position of the LLDCs provides an opportunity to leapfrog and avoid the pain of premature deindustrialization. Furthermore, Mr. Rashid explained that relative productivity growth is a key driver for structural transformation, adding that productivity growth itself is driven by access to international trade and competition; skilled labor force; physical investments; and efficient public policy in development of human capital and institutions and fighting economic inequality. In addition, Mr. Rashid stated that trade and global integration are necessary but are not sufficient for productivity growth and structural transformation.

Mr. Rashid furthermore accented on inequality as a binding constraint to productivity growth and structural transformation. He noted that inequality hurts growth directly through productivity channels by discouraging education and skill accumulation which in turn discourage investment. Also, he mentioned that inequality indirectly impacts growth as it erodes trust in institutions, increases uncertainties and sense of insecurity, makes contract enforcement difficult, increases transaction costs in businesses, and decreases FDI.

Mr. Rashid reported that LLDCs average GINI index is 55.1% compared to 47.3% in the rest of the World and that LLDCs' inequality continues to rise. He posited that the excessive dependency on natural resource exports largely explains the high level of income inequality in LLDCs. He stressed that the now developed countries began with very low level of income inequality. He concluded by emphasizing that inequality is a matter of public policy choice and that political will is needed in LLDCs to combat and reverse inequality to spur productivity growth and structural economic transformation.

Mr. Melchiade Bukuru, Chief of UNCCD Liaison Office in New York, stated that, on a positive note, there has been a shift in thinking on development, away from a trade-driven agenda and more towards national development. He noted that LLDCs often export agricultural products and due to the high agricultural usage of the small portion of the land, without exploitation of new technologies and fertilizers, the lands start to deteriorate. He reported that LLDCs experience desertification, drought, land degradation, with decreasing land productivity. He cautioned that

land degradation leads to ecological and environmental problems for LLDCs, including poverty, health issues, food shortage, and decreased trade capacity of agricultural sectors of LLDCs, migration, and leading in long term to more land degradation and climate change. Mr. Bukuru highlighted that if countries continue to follow DAM (degradation of the land, abandonment of the agricultural land, and migration to new land), the SDGs cannot be achieved.

He referred to a recent General Assembly resolution identifying land degradation neutrality as a key SDG accelerator and integrator. Land degradation neutrality means to stop degrading cultivated land and recovery of degraded areas, whereby the amount and quality of land resources remains stable or increases. He suggested that LLDCs should make land degradation neutrality a priority and should aim to restore degraded land. He noted that LLDCs have committed to engage in activities to achieve land degradation neutrality by setting targets. Furthermore, Mr. Bukuru implied that restoration of degraded land would provide the opportunity to feed people, get them out of poverty and reduce carbon emissions.

Mr. Bukuru noted that Ethiopia and Niger were able to recover the productivity of entire regions. For example, more than 5 million hectares have been restored in Niger boosting food security for more than 2.5 million people, and 15 million hectares have been restored in Ethiopia in the past two decades. Mr. Bukuru also called for LLDCs to pay attention to drought and develop policies to prepare for drought and its effects.

Mr. Marco Toscano-Rivalta, Chief of the New York Liaison Office of United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UN DRR), noted the impact of recent major disasters and underlined that small scale and frequent disasters also have a major toll, especially for the poor, and erode the capital of countries and communities. He noted that disasters exacerbate inequality and, push people into poverty (24 million into poverty annually, as per a World Bank report). He noted the cascading effects of disasters across sectors and geographical areas due to the interdependence of our systems, societies and economies, hence the need to look at disasters in a systemic way. Mr. Toscano-Rivalta emphasized that disasters keep increasing due to climate change and unsustainable development practices, that disaster response is not sufficient and that much more need to be done on prevention. He noted that prevention would reduce the cost of disaster response and avoid that funds for the SDGs are used for the emergency, thus jeopardizing the achievement of the SDGs. He particularly stressed that a very serious problem is that disaster risk is increasing, paving the way to future disasters.

Mr. Toscano-Rivalta noted that reducing disaster risk is possible and yields results, and that the Sendai Framework clearly indicates that disaster risk is determined by the way we develop and invest, and therefore in risk-informed development lays the solution. However, disaster risk reduction is not yet fully integrated into national development policies, but that the Sendai Framework can provide useful guidance. As a matter of priority, he noted that the adoption of national and local strategies for disaster risk reduction by 2020 as per Target E of the Sendai Framework represent a key opportunity to integrate disaster risk management across all development sectors and services, in national adaptation plans and NDCs. This would foster a strong coherence in implementation across disaster risk reduction, climate action and sustainable development. He also stressed the importance for countries to collect disaggregated data on disaster losses to monitor the implementation of the Sendai Framework and the SDGs given the shared indicators across the two instruments; to carry out multi-hazard risk assessments. He also

stressed the need to develop ex-ante financing instruments for the prevention of new risk and the reduction of existing risk, and on the development of risk-informed integrated national financing frameworks.

On the way forward, Mr. Toscano-Rivalta mentioned that the VPoA and the Sendai Framework are mutually reinforcing and require integrated implementation, and that it would be important for the Political Declaration to recognise this. He stressed the importance to scale up international cooperation, including cross-border and regional cooperation, to more effectively manage disaster risk. He stressed that further progress on disaster risk management was contingent upon the adoption of integrated national and local strategies, disaggregated data collection, the integration of monitoring systems to reduce reporting burdens and foster coherence in policy setting and implementation. He also pointed out the importance of resilient infrastructure and services and their relevance for the resilience of people, communities and nations. He also suggested to explore further the potential of trade for prevention, disaster risk reduction and resilience and the benefit of disaster risk reduction for a resilient trade.

Ms. Eunice Kamwendo, Strategic Advisor, Regional Bureau for Africa, UNDP, stated that the world needs to invest an average of \$3.3 trillion annually in infrastructure such as energy, transportation, water, and telecommunication between 2016 and 2030, with developing countries accounting for up to 60% of that need. She highlighted that some LLDCs were amongst the fastest growing economies in the world in 2015-2017, such as Ethiopia, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Bhutan. She suggested that Mega corridors, such as the AfCFTA, can generate 50% of the continent's economic and industrial activity, adding that the North-South Corridor is expected to generate around a billion dollars in investment opportunities in transport infrastructure. She added that the economic and transit corridors in Europe and Asia, including for example the Belt and Road Initiative can support infrastructure development and trade facilitation. Ms. Kamwendo also discussed financing trends and the changes in debt composition in developing countries towards domestic, bilateral and commercial lending, noting the challenges of significant financing needs for sustainable development, rising debt levels, and high-risk level of financing. In addition, Ms. Kamwendo added that some LLDCs are in debt distress.

Ms. Kamwendo discussed UNDP's support to VPoA implementation. On the policy level actions, she noted that UNDP provides support for integration of VPoA priority area on structural transformation in national development planning through the Mainstreaming, Acceleration, Policy Support (MAPS) for at least 11 LLDCs since 2016. Furthermore, she mentioned that UNDP provides platform for knowledge exchange, such as the International Conference on Emergence in Africa, as well as advocacy work and broadening of partnerships.

In addition, UNDP's Tax Inspectors Without Borders Initiative (TIWB) supports tax audits in countries especially where multi-national enterprises are involved and where there is lack of knowledge and information asymmetry. Ms. Kamwendo reported that the initiative involves the deployment of tax inspectors into countries that work with tax authorities over a period of time and help carry out tax audits for increased domestic resource mobilisation.

She stressed that UNDP also launched a Finance Sector Hub within UNDP, to support countries to expand the space for means of implementation, including from private sector. Ms. Kamwendo noted that UNDP also has large portfolio in terms of the Global Environmental Facility. Also, Ms.

Kamwendo discussed the UNDP's Development Finance Assessments (DFA), which provide data and analysis on changing trends in development finance and their alignment with national priorities and monitor and track progress on implementation of effective development cooperation principles. She concluded by highlighting the need for better tracking and reporting on the implementation of the various initiatives for the LLDCs and building synergies between different programmes of actions.

Mr. Manuel Mattiat, Programme Officer, UNIDO, stated that UNIDO's guiding principles include its mandate of Inclusive and Sustainable Industrial Development (ISID), the implementation of the 3rd Industrial Development Decade for Africa (IDDA III), and LDC Operational Strategy. Mr. Mattiat touched upon LLDCs' challenges and discussed UNIDO focus in LLDCs, centered on structural transformation and economic diversification to generate the emergence of an inclusive and sustainable industrial sector.

He informed that UNIDO aims to improve the economic competitiveness of LLDCs and increase their integration in the international market. He added that UNIDO provides technical assistance and capacity building programmes in all LLDCs; has comprehensive country programmes in 6 LLDCs, with another 6 under development; and is implementing its innovative Programme for Country Partnership (PCP) model in Ethiopia and Kyrgyzstan, with formulation phases started for Zambia and Rwanda. He mentioned several technical cooperation projects in LLDCs such as on quality infrastructure development, coffee value chain development and establishment of hydropower plants in Burundi; rural electrification project and development of agro-food value chains in Chad; establishing a production plant for solar thermal panels in Moldova (industrial park of Balti); and other value chain and trade capacity projects.

He stressed that large-scale public and private financing is engaged through the PCP multi-stakeholder model in priority industrial sectors. He noted the PCP is led by Governments and UNIDO provides a convening and advisory role and provides technical assistance. He presented the example of PCP in Ethiopia which focused on agro-food processing, leather and textiles sectors, which resulted in the establishment of four pilot Integrated Agro-Industrial Parks (IAIPs) and the Modjo Leather City (MLC). He concluded by calling for holistic programmes and partnerships for more strategic resource mobilization in specific sectors and for enhanced tools, methodologies and indicators to better track the socio-economic impact of technical cooperation projects.

Interactive Discussion

In the ensuing discussion, the meeting elaborated on the potential of LLDCs to leverage their position to also be transit countries. The meeting discussed the link between inequality productivity and growth, noting that large economies have more diversified risks. It was also mentioned that inequality matters for climate risk and disaster preparedness as more equal societies are typically more prepared to respond to shocks.

The participants touched on the challenge of climate induced vulnerability. The meeting agreed that LLDCs and development partners have to address climate change, disaster relief and land recovery with effective policies. The participants were called to engage in the land restoration movement. Development of drought policies was highlighted. The meeting noted that focus should be on moving from disasters to reduced risk and this should be reflected more in national and

international policies. The meeting discussed the small- and large-scale disasters, which differ in the dimension of the losses. National and local strategies for disaster risk reduction were highlighted as key since risk is localized. Ongoing initiatives to tackle climate change were mentioned, including UNIDO's efforts to identify projects with strong climate change impacts and provide matchmaking platform between and international investors and actors on the ground.

The participants called for guidance on how to tackle debt issues and clear guidelines on debt sustainability and debt limits. It was suggested that last year's Secretary-General report on sovereign debt acknowledged the need for new definition of debt sustainability, taking into account the high investments needed to meet the SDGs. It was noted that debt service to GDP ratio should be used as indicator rather than debt stock to GDP. It was also noted that composition of debt and residency debt are important factors for debt sustainability.

The participants also called for asset recovery and combating illicit financial flows to be added to means of implementation discussions. It was noted that international cooperation and global governance is needed on illicit financial flows.

The meeting acknowledged the need for disaggregated data for LLDCs, in addition to averages, some of which can be found in the Statistical Annex produced by OHRLLS to accompany the report of the Secretary-General on VPoA implementation. The meeting acknowledged the need for international support in order to ensure that no one is left behind.

G. Closing remarks and Way Forward

At the closing session on conclusion and way forward, **H.E. Mr. Jan Kickert, Permanent Representative, Permanent Mission of Austria to the UN, New York and Co-Facilitator for the Mid Term Review of the Vienna Programme of Action** thanked the participants and the panelists for the substantive discussion. He informed that the outcomes of the regional review meetings, the outcomes of the various pre-conference events coordinated by UN-OHRLLS, the report of the Secretary General on the implementation of the VPoA will all serve as critical inputs into the outcome document of the MTR.

The Co-facilitator recalled that the outcome document of the MTR will be an intergovernmental negotiated and agreed outcome in the form of a political declaration. The outcome document would not need to repeat the analysis of the reports but should be a balanced, concise, action-oriented document as well as "punchy". The co-facilitators would aim at having a political declaration which would be acceptable for all and could be adopted by consensus.

He then informed that consultations on the outcome document would begin right after the third and last regional conference in Santiago and should conclude before the beginning of the HLPF in July.

Ms. Utoikamanu, the Under Secretary-General and High Representative for the LDCs, LLDCs, and SIDS, thanked the participants for the productive, intense and forward-looking retreat. She shared that the meeting acknowledged that there has been progress in the implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action but much more remains to be done.

She noted that forging of synergies between the Vienna Programme and the 2030 Agenda and other global development frameworks was underscored during the discussions. The financing needs for transport, energy and ICT infrastructure development need to be addressed to accelerate connectivity of the LLDCs to regional and international markets. Development of greater connectivity must go hand in hand with increased industrialization to diversify LLDC economies and increase their export potential.

The trade potential of LLDCs must be stimulated and trade facilitation reforms including implementation of the WTO Trade Facilitation agreement should be enhanced. There is need to foster productive capacities, value addition and promote higher productivity in LLDCs. Science technology and innovations and nurturing an enabling business environment were noted as key drivers.

She indicated that the meeting also noted the need to support the LLDCs to develop their private sector and underscored the importance of e-commerce as an area of opportunity. It recognized that deepening of cooperation between neighbors is important to improve the integration of the LLDCs into regional and international markets. The impact of climate change, desertification and disasters need to be addressed in the Midterm Review.

On means of implementation the importance of enhanced domestic resource mobilization, ODA including Aid for Trade, foreign direct investment and South-South cooperation were highlighted. She underscored the important role of multilateral development banks and of international organizations including the UN system and regional organizations.

The USG shared that the elements that came out of the meeting are important contribution into the upcoming intergovernmental consultations and called on the participants to build on the exchange of experiences and ideas discussed today. The USG informed that OHRLLS will be organizing additional pre-conference events focused on corridor development and trade facilitation.

H. Suggested Recommendations

Based on the presentations and discussions in the meeting, the following key elements were raised for consideration in the preparation of the outcome document of the midterm review of the Vienna Programme of Action.

Overarching approach

- The Midterm Review should comprehensively assess progress, identify achievements, obstacles, constraints and propose ways forward to accelerate implementation of the VPoA.
- The Midterm Review should critically look at areas where there are opportunities to accelerate progress in implementation of the VPoA. It should strengthen and refine existing initiatives, expand and enhance partnerships with stakeholders at the international, regional, national and local levels.

- Outcome document of the MTR must be ambitious, comprehensive, forward-looking and result oriented to enable achievement of the desired socio-economic transformation of LLDCs in the remaining five years.
- Utilize every key meeting at the High-Level Political Forum in July and September as an opportunity to make progress on the VPoA.
- Raise considerable resources to support the LLDCs to achieve SDG targets by 2030 to ensure they are not left behind.
- The VPoA and the Sendai Framework are mutually reinforcing and require integrated implementation.
- Development partners and transit countries must support LLDCs efforts to: mobilize domestic resources through technical assistance and capacity building; implement the trade facilitation reforms; scale up funding and financing to close transport infrastructure gap; develop renewable energy sources; private sector development through creation of enabling environment for SMEs to participate in international trade; access to trade finance as well as technology transfer; UN development system should accord high priority to the economic sectors and productive capacity building; technology transfer; address challenges facing the WTO; recognize the impact of climate change and make concerted efforts to address them, and help build resilience.

Priority 1: Fundamental transit policy issues

- LLDCs and transit countries should make more efforts to meet the VPoA specific objectives of reducing travel time along the corridors; reducing cargo dwell times at seaports and reduce time spent at the land border.
- LLDCs and transit countries are encouraged to effectively implement the WTO TFA and other relevant international and regional agreements to improve transit.
- LLDCs should consider ratifying UNCLOS.
- LLDCs and transit countries are encouraged to use available tools such as the WCO Transit Guidelines.

Priority 2: Infrastructure development and maintenance

- Scale up contribution of development partners, development banks and the private sector to the transport, energy and ICT infrastructure with the objective of connecting LLDCs to regional and international markets.
- Intensify efforts to close the transport infrastructure gaps in LLDCs and build resilient infrastructure.
- LLDCs and transit countries should consider promoting corridor approach to improve transit transport.
- LLDCs and transit states should accelerate preparation of power projects (in particular renewables) and scale up projects on cross border inter-connectors to enable LLDCs to purchase power from neighbors.
- International community to provide technical and financial support to these efforts LLDCs to take full advantage of climate funding especially for energy.
- Encourage private sector participation in the development of country's energy sector.

- LLDCs to intensify implementation of Rural Electrification Programmes to promote Universal Access to electricity.
- LLDCs should address the energy and ICT gap between rural and urban areas.
- LLDCs should take measures to make ICTs/ broadband more affordable as it provides great development opportunities.
- LLDCs with support of development partners and UN, other international and regional organizations should promote digital inclusion, digital literacy, and use of ICT applications, and services.
- Foster development of appropriate skills to encourage increased use of internet of opportunities for everyone, develop local content and investment in both human and institutional capacity.
- Promote universal service funds.
- Establish ICT public-private partnerships for viable business models, including long-term institutional investors, and encourage those partnerships to allocate a higher percentage of infrastructure in LLDCs. In addition, improve partnerships between transit countries and landlocked countries.
- LLDCs are encouraged to create appropriate enabling environment including the necessary policies, legal and regulatory framework to support ICT development. In particular, the reduction of costs of broadband access, digital skills, increased adoption and utilization of ICT applications and services are strongly recommended. Harmonization of policies and regulatory frameworks.
- LLDCs should consider improving ICT infrastructure development in particular in rural areas so as to bridge the rural urban gap. Great consideration should be taken to improve cross-border collaboration.
- LLDCs are encouraged to provide for mechanisms to facilitate the deployment of networks and services in non-profitable area, including rural areas through public investment, public private partnerships, or other incentives.
- LLDCs need to foster development of appropriate skills to encourage increased use of internet and e-commerce.

Priority 3: International trade and trade facilitation

- Development partners and international organizations should work with LLDCs to identify specific sectors and sub-sectors with export potential and implement targeted policies to promote their development.
- There is need to enhance market access for LLDCs' products especially by addressing tariff peaks and escalations as well as nontariff barriers imposed on manufactured goods from LLDCs.
- LLDCs need to notify the Category C measures to the WTO as well as their implementation plans to facilitate access to available assistance.
- Support to LLDCs to implement trade facilitation reforms including the Trade Facilitation Agreement should be enhanced and this should include regional and sub-regional initiatives.
- LLDCs should consider fully implementing the TFA including best endeavor provision to realize greater impact in addressing trade costs.

- LLDCs need to make efforts to integrate into electronic commerce (e-commerce) including through putting in place the necessary legal framework, developing national e-commerce strategies, and appoint e-commerce champions.
- A supportive multilateral trading system is fundamental for integration of LLDCs in global trade and therefore it is necessary to make concerted efforts to address challenges facing the WTO.
- LLDCs need to strengthen their services sector in view of the fundamental role of the services sector to e-commerce and trade facilitation as well as in the production process.
- Maintain progress in high-skill and technology-intensive exports – particularly in the context of the decline in LLDCs’ overall share in global merchandise exports.

Priority 4: Regional integration and cooperation

- Increase regional and bilateral cooperation with neighboring states in areas such as tourism and transit arrangements.
- Deepening of cooperation between neighbors is important to improve the integration of the LLDCs into regional and international markets.
- LLDCs need to be encouraged and assisted, especially with building the necessary skills that would enable them to leverage the opportunities provided by the regional initiatives.
- International community should support regional initiatives for their effective implementation.
- LLDCs and partners need to promote greater sharing of experiences between regions sub regions.
- LLDCs should further consider greater focus on the quality, rather than the quantity, of regional integration agreements, and strengthen cooperation beyond trade, including on development projects in infrastructure, transport, and industrial development.

Priority 5: Structural economic transformation

- There is need to foster productive capacities, value addition and promote higher productivity in LLDCs. There is need for a greater focus on the overall objective of building productive capacities in LLDCs.
- LLDCs need to develop and implement quality, effective and targeted industrial policies.
- LLDCs need to focus on higher value-added products and high productivity sectors.
- LLDCs should identify specific sectors with potential for export promotion, diversification and value-addition and provide targeted incentives.
- New generation domestic policies and strategies need to foster “productive capacities,” “export diversification” and “structural economic transformation”, and should focus on economic diversification, ICT, energy and human capital development as key pillars of productive capacities.
- LLDCs should support the development of the private sector and nurture an enabling environment for business, in particular MSMEs, including through enabling regulations and policies, as well as specific grants, finance and enhanced access to credit.
- LLDCs should utilize new and existing technologies in the production of manufactured and agricultural products to add value and connect into higher ends of regional and global value chains.

- LLDCs need to increase availability of skilled labor force and capacity for domestic innovation and adaptation of new technologies.
- LLDCs should explore the opportunities provided by the digital economy and e-commerce.
- Higher investments into research and development are needed, from LLDCs, as well as from the international community.
- In order to spur productivity growth and structural economic transformation, LLDCs need to implement public policy designed to combat and reverse inequality.
- In order to accelerate SDGs achievement, use SDG15.3 (Achieve Land degradation Neutrality) as an accelerator and integrator of other SDGs as acknowledged by the General Assembly in its resolution 73/233
- Give priority to LLDCs in developing large-scale and transformative projects to achieve land degradation neutrality
- LLDCS to be assisted to prepare and implement drought preparedness, mitigation and resilience policies

Priority 6: Means of implementation

- Strengthen partnerships for the accelerated implementation of the VPoA are needed to support LLDCs in mobilizing the means of implementation, including catalytic financing for private sector investments, reduction of remittance costs, curbing illicit financial flows and sharing knowledge- as expanded by means of implementation.
- Development partners should honour their ODA commitments and enhance ODA to LLDCs and continue to increase their support for the Aid for Trade initiative. They should align their development assistance with LLDC priorities.
- The international community needs to continue to advocate for ODA.
- LLDCs need to enhance their domestic resource mobilization.
- Combatting illicit financial flows and efforts on asset recovery should be pursued by the LLDCs, supported by the international community, which can in particular promote global governance on illicit financial flows.
- LLDCs should adopt policies and measures to attract more FDI and more diversified FDI.
- LLDCs should explore new sources of development finance, as well as opportunities provided by South-South Cooperation.
- UN system, international organizations and multilateral and regional development banks should continue to provide technical and capacity building assistance to LLDCs.
- International community should provide guidance to LLDCs on how to tackle debt issues and provide clear guidelines on debt sustainability and debt limits, taking into account the high investments needed to meet the SDGs.

Monitoring, follow-up and review

- LLDCs require continued and enhanced investment and technical assistance aimed at strengthening their statistical capacity for the collection and analysis of data, in order to produce reliable and frequent statistics to monitor the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals and the Vienna Programme of Action.
- There is need for better tracking and reporting on the implementation of the various initiatives and technical cooperation projects in the LLDCs.

- Forge greater synergies between the Vienna Programme and the follow-up processes of the 2030 Agenda; the Addis Ababa Action Agenda on financing; the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction; the Paris Agreement; the Convention to combat desertification; the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement, and Convention on the Law of the Sea.
- There is a need for stronger and more coordinated partnerships at all levels to ensure greater coherence in the monitoring and follow-up efforts between 2030 Agenda and the VPoA.
- Adequate time should be devoted to the special needs and challenges of the LLDCs at the HLPF and FFD forum's follow-up processes.

Other challenges and recommendations

- The impact of climate change, desertification, land degradation and disaster risk need to be addressed in the Midterm Review.
- Climate change, desertification and disasters need to be effectively addressed through greater resilience building, redoubling of efforts to climate change and increased investments in disaster risk reduction, including disaster preparedness, early warning and early action.
- LLDCs should make land degradation neutrality a priority and should aim to restore degraded land.
- LLDCs should develop policies to prepare for drought and its effects.
- LLDCs need to identify disaster risks and incorporate disaster risk management, reduction and prevention policies into their national development strategies and nationally determined contributions (NDCs).
- Enhanced data collection on effects of disasters, for disaster risk assessment and a better understanding of the disaster risk is needed.
- Enhanced investment and research into ex-ante financing for disasters is needed and how these instruments can be more effective.
- Include gender equality in the outcome document of the Midterm Review.
- LLDCs need to go beyond current promotion of women's participation or mainstream gender issues in government policies, to concrete policy instruments, e.g. mainstreaming, stakeholder's awareness and training, gender focal points, dedicated vocational and technical education, financial support for women entrepreneurs.

ANNEX 1 – Programme of Retreat on the Comprehensive High-level Midterm Review on the implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action for Landlocked Developing Countries for the Decade 2014–2024 held at HNA Palisades Premier Conference Center, Palisades, New York, 7-8 May 2019

Tuesday, 7 May 2019	
17:30	Departure from UN Headquarters
20:00	<p>Working Dinner welcoming remarks by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ms. Fekitamoeloa Katoa ‘Utoikamanu, Under Secretary-General, and High Representative • H.E. Ms. Inga Rhonda King, President of ECOSOC and Permanent Representative of Saint Vincent and Grenadines • Statement of H.E. Ms. María Fernanda Espinosa President of the 73rd Session of the United Nations General Assembly, to be delivered by Ms. Toni-Shae Freckleton, Senior Adviser, Office of the President of the 73rd Session of the United Nations General Assembly • Ms. Ahunna Eziakonwa, Assistant Administrator, Director of the Regional Bureau for Africa, United Nations Development Programme
Wednesday, 8 May 2019	
09:00 - 09:30	<p>Opening session <i>Fostering Synergies between the VPoA and 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ms. Fekitamoeloa Katoa ‘Utoikamanu, Under Secretary-General, and High Representative • H.E. Ms. Inga Rhonda King, President of ECOSOC and Permanent Representative of Saint Vincent and Grenadines • H.E. Mr. Julio Cesar Arriola Ramirez, Permanent Representative of Paraguay to the UN, Chair of the LLDC Group • H.E. Ms. Doma Tshering, Permanent Representative of the Kingdom of Bhutan to the United Nations in New York and Co-Facilitator for the Mid Term Review of the Vienna Programme of Action
09:30 - 11:15	<p><i>The Review of the Implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action – 2014 to 2019: Key achievements, challenges, lessons learnt and Implications for outcome document</i></p> <p><u>Session 1. International Trade and Trade Facilitation</u></p> <p><i>This session will provide an overview of International Trade and Trade Facilitation and the efforts to promote synergies with the SDGs. It will identify the</i></p>

	<p><i>achievements, some of the key challenges and lessons learnt and implications for outcome document. Guiding questions:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>What are the key achievements from the first five years of implementation of these VPoA priority areas?</i> • <i>What are the challenges faced by the LLDCs, key constraints and lessons learnt?</i> • <i>What are the key actions and recommendations that can be included in the outcome document?</i> <p>➤ Ms. Nnana Mmanyabela Pheto, Economic Affairs Officer UN-OHRLLS</p> <p>➤ Ms. Chantal Line Carpentier, Chief of the UNCTAD New York Office</p> <p>➤ Ms. Sheri Rosenow, Senior Counsellor, Trade Facilitation Agreement Facility, WTO (By Video Presentation)</p> <p><i>Interactive discussion on the possible elements for the outcome document</i></p>
11:15 - 11:30	Coffee Break
11:30 – 13:00	<p><i>The Review of the Implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action – 2014 to 2019: Key achievements, challenges, lessons learnt and Implications for outcome document</i></p> <p><u>Session 2. Fundamental Transit Policy Issues, Infrastructure Development and Maintenance, and Regional Integration</u></p> <p><i>This session will provide an overview of the implementation of the VPoA on Fundamental Transit Policy Issues, Infrastructure Development and Maintenance, and Regional Integration and the efforts to promote synergies with the SDGs. It will identify the achievements, some of the key challenges and lessons learnt and implications for outcome document. Guiding questions:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>What are the key achievements from the first five years of implementation of the VPoA on Fundamental Transit Policy Issues, Infrastructure Development and Maintenance, and Regional Integration?</i> • <i>What are the challenges, key constraints and lessons learnt?</i> • <i>What are the key actions and recommendations that can be included in the outcome document?</i> <p>➤ Ms. Gladys Mutangadura, Senior Programme Officer, UN-OHRLLS</p> <p>➤ Ms. Nancy Vandycke, Lead Economist and Program Manager, Sustainable Mobility for All Initiative, World Bank Group</p> <p>➤ Mr. Luigi Santosuosso, Senior Legal Officer, United Nations Division for Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea of the Office of Legal Affairs</p> <p>➤ Ms. Kadiatou Sall-Beye, Project Officer, LDCs International Telecommunication Union Liaison Office to the United Nations</p> <p><i>Interactive discussion on the possible elements for the outcome document</i></p>
13:00 – 14:30	Lunch break

<p>14:30 – 16:30</p>	<p><i>Session 3. Fostering Structural Economic Transformation of LLDCs, Enhancing Means of Implementation and Effective monitoring, review and follow-up</i></p> <p><i>This session will review the progress made on Structural Transformation of LLDCs' economies and means of implementation accorded to LLDCs for the implementation of the VPoA and the SDGs, identify key challenges and lessons learnt and implications for outcome document. The session will also discuss the emerging issues that have been experienced during the implementation of the VPoA and explore how these can be addressed in the remaining 5 years. The session will also review how to foster effective monitoring and follow-up. Guiding questions:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>What are the achievements on means of implementation to the LLDCs, the challenges, and the key actions and recommendations that can be included in the outcome document?</i> • <i>What are the key emerging issues from the first five years of implementation of the VPoA and how can they be addressed?</i> • <i>How can monitoring and follow-up of the VPoA be further improved and integrated with the SDGs.</i> • <i>How can the UN development system better support the LLDCs?</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Ms. Dagmar Hertova, Programme Officer, UN-OHRLS ➤ Mr. Hamid Rashid, Chief, Economic Analysis and Policy Division, DESA ➤ Mr. Melchiade Bukuru, Chief of UNCCD Liaison Office in New York ➤ Mr. Marco Toscano-Rivalta, Chief of the New York Liaison Office of United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction ➤ Ms. Eunice Kamwendo, Strategic Advisor, Regional Bureau for Africa, UNDP ➤ Mr. Manuel Mattiat, Programme Officer, UNIDO <p><i>Interactive discussion on the possible elements for the outcome document</i></p>
<p>16:30 – 16:45</p>	<p>Coffee Break</p>
<p>16:45 – 17:30</p>	<p><i>Conclusions, way forward and closing remarks</i></p> <p><i>This session will highlight the key messages that came out of the discussions on the possible elements of the outcome document for the Midterm Review of the VPoA, the way forward and closing.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • H.E. Mr. Jan Kickert, Permanent Representative, Permanent Mission of Austria to the UN, New York and Co-Facilitator for the Mid Term Review of the Vienna Programme of Action • Ms. Fekitamoeloa Katoa 'Utoikamanu Under Secretary-General, and High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States
<p>17:30</p>	<p>Departure from HNA Palisades Premier Conference Center, Palisades, New York</p>

ANNEX 2: List of participants

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