



**Report of UNESCAP/UN-OHRRLLS/UNECE Euro-Asian Regional Midterm
Review of the Implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action for LLDCs
for the decade 2014-2024**

Bangkok, Thailand, 11-12 February 2019

The Regional Review meeting was held as an activity of the project led by UN-OHRRLLS entitled: Strengthening the capacity of Landlocked Developing Countries under the “Belt and Road Initiative” to design and implement policies that promote transport connectivity for the achievement of the SDGs which is funded by the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Sub-Fund - United Nations Peace and Development Trust Fund. Other sources of funding for the meeting included: the Government of India; ESCAP, and UNECE and are acknowledged.

I. Introduction

1. The Midterm Review of the Implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action for LLDCs for the decade 2014-2024 in the Euro-Asia Region was held in Bangkok from 11-12 February 2019.
2. The meeting held six thematic sessions: Session 1, which included Session 1a on Assessing Progress – Introduction of Report of the Meeting and Session 1b on Fundamental Transit Policy Issues; Session 2 on Connectivity and Transport Infrastructure Development; Session 3 on ICT Connectivity, Sustainable Energy and Regional Integration; Session 4 on International Trade and Trade Facilitation; Session 5 on the Structural Economic Transformation; Session 6 on the Means of Implementation Partnerships and Follow-up and Review.
3. The meeting elected H.E. Mr. Sukhbold Sukhee, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Mongolia to the United Nations in New York as Chair of the meeting, Mr. Khomraj Koirala, Joint Secretary of National Planning Commission of Nepal as Vice Chair/Rapporteur and Ms. Shoista Saidmurodova, Head of Economic Analysis at Ministry of Transport of Tajikistan as Vice Chair.
4. The Outcome Document adopted by the Meeting is contained in annex I. The list of participants of the Meeting is contained in annex II.

II. Opening of the Meeting

1. The opening session was moderated by Mr. Hamza Ali Malik, Director, Macroeconomic Policy and Financing for Development Division, UNESCAP. Statements were made by Ms. Armida Salsiah Alisjahbana, Executive Secretary and USG of UNESCAP; Ms. Fekitamoeloa Katoa ‘Utoikamanu, Under-Secretary-General and High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States (UN-OHRLLS); Ms. Olga Algayerova, Executive Secretary and USG of UNECE, and Ms. Valerie Cliff, Deputy Regional Director of the Regional Bureau of Asia and the Pacific of UNDP.
2. Ms. Armida Salsiah Alisjahbana, Executive Secretary and USG of UNESCAP welcomed participants to UNESCAP and expressed appreciation for the common cause to support the integration of LLDCs into the global economy. She acknowledged the LLDCs’ diversity, with different economic systems and endowments, but with the same geographical constraints that cause high transaction and transport costs which negatively impact competitiveness, economic transformation and access to global economy.
3. Ms. Alisjahbana mentioned encouraging developments in transit policies, infrastructure development and maintenance, citing ESCAP’s recently agreed digital trade treaty and its norm setting and policy advisory work to support LLDCs, including in the context of the Intergovernmental Agreement on International Road Transport between China, Mongolia and Russian Federation. In addition, Ms. Alisjahbana cited LLDCs’ strengthened efforts to support the soft infrastructure required to facilitate trade and attract investment, finance, technology

and services needed to improve productive capacity, with commendable implementation of WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement. She noted the potential to deepen LLDCs' regional integration through harmonizing policies and creating regional markets. In closing remarks, Ms. Alisjhabana expressed her hope for tangible recommendations to accelerate progress in LLDCs and fully implementing the Vienna Programme of Action.

4. Ms. Fekitamoeloa Katoa 'Utoikamanu, USG and High Representative, UN-OHRLLS welcomed delegates and expressed her gratitude to the partners, UN ESCAP and UNECE, for co-organizing the meeting and the participants for attending the event. Ms. 'Utoikamanu highlighted progress made by LLDCs especially on health and gender equality related SDGs but pointed out the slow progress in access to drinking water sources and sanitation facilities, food insecurity and LLDCs' high vulnerability to negative impacts of climate change. In terms of the implementation of the VPoA, she talked about the achievement that all but one Euro-Asian LLDC WTO members had ratified the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA). She however mentioned that implementation of TFA has been lagging and improvement in building capacity of LLDCs is needed.
5. Ms. 'Utoikamanu stressed that LLDCs' trade accounted for less than 1% of global trade and is focused on few commodities. She urged international community to work on decreasing cost of trade for LLDCs. She noted that LLDCs are active participants in regional trade agreements, but she suggested that LLDCs need to focus on economic diversification, where progress has been slow. Further, she informed that UN-OHRLLS was mandated to coordinate the midterm review process and emphasized that the outcome of the meeting will feed into the deliberations of the outcome of the global midterm review, to be co-facilitated by Ambassadors of Bhutan and Austria. She gave overview of the preparatory process, with national report preparations, two additional regional review meetings and global preparatory events. In conclusion, Ms. 'Utoikamanu highlighted the importance of international cooperation in supporting LLDCs in implementing the VPoA and achieving the SDGs.
6. Ms. Olga Algayerova, Executive Secretary and USG, UNECE, presented her opening statement through video message. Ms. Algayerova talked about UNECE's focus on supporting harmonization of technical and regulatory standards, the development of infrastructure networks and corridors and the provision of facilitation tools and capacity building. She highlighted that UNECE is the custodian of 58 transport-related legal instruments and that 147 UN Member States are contracting parties to at least one of these. She highlighted the many advantages for LLDCs related to implementation of the TIR Convention. In the field of transport infrastructure development she referred to the Euro-Asian Transport Links (EATL) project which in its third phase gathered stakeholders from nearly 40 countries in Europe and Asia and resulted in the identification of 9 rail and road links, 17 water transport links, 52 inland river ports and 70 maritime ports; the prioritization of over 300 infrastructure investment projects; an in-depth analysis of non-physical obstacles to Euro-Asian transport, to name a few of its tangible outputs.
7. Ms. Algayerova referred to UNECE's leading role regarding the creation of a Unified Railway Law enabling railway operators to conduct activity within a single legal regime along the entire East-West axis connecting European and Asian LLDCs. In addition, Ms. Algayerova noted

that UNECE is in the process of developing an International Transport Infrastructure Observatory, an innovative electronic platform enabling Governments to retrieve data to prepare their transport infrastructure projects and IFIs to identify those they wish to finance. In closing, Ms. Algayerova urged participants to identify remaining needs and challenges and develop tailored responses to untap the economic and trade potential of Euro-Asian LLDCs.

8. Ms. Valerie Cliff, Deputy Regional Director of the Regional Bureau of Asia and the Pacific of UNDP underlined the importance that UNDP attaches to supporting LLDCs, noting that UNDP, in collaboration with other UN agencies and international entities, engages with LLDCs to mainstream SDGs into national development policies; promote information and knowledge gathering and sharing; pursue innovative financing mechanisms; and review data and capacity for national statistical offices and systems for follow up, review and reporting on the 2030 Agenda.
9. Ms. Cliff presented examples of UNDP's work in LLDCs: In Bhutan, UNDP is advancing biodiversity finance initiative, Biofin, and works toward green investment plan for Bhutan to advance innovative financing options for environment, biodiversity and climate change. In Lao PDR, UNDP has been working on localizing SDGs and enhancing capacity for data collection, monitoring, reporting on SDG targets. In Mongolia, UNDP in partnership with UNFPA, UNICEF, and ADB is recommending integrative actions to address air pollution, land degradation, and implications of demographic trends on public expenditure and service provision. She added that UNDP has also been offering technical support in developing trade policy and supporting business and trade support institutions in Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan. In conclusion, Ms. Cliff expressed her hope that the discussions during the event will provide a strategy for reaching VPoA by 2024.

III. Election of the Bureau

10. The meeting elected H.E. Mr. Sukhbold Sukhee, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Mongolia to the United Nations in New York as Chair of the meeting, Mr. Khomraj Koirala, Joint Secretary of National Planning Commission of Nepal as Vice Chair/Rapporteur and Ms. Shoista Saidmurodova, Head of Economic Analysis at Ministry of Transport of Tajikistan as Vice Chair

IV. Sessions

11. The Meeting held 6 sessions, which were comprised of presentations by panellists, followed by country interventions and where time allowed, interactive discussion.

Session 1a: Assessing Progress – Introduction of Report for the Meeting

12. The session was chaired by H.E. Mr. Sukhbold Sukhee, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Mongolia to the United Nations in New York and moderated by Ms. Heidi Schroderus-Fox, Director, UN-OHRLLS. In this session presentations were made by Ms. Gladys Mutangadura, Senior Programme Officer, UN-OHRLLS and Ms. Azhar Jaimurzina, Chief, Transport Facilitation and Logistics Section, Transport Division, UNESCAP
13. Ms. Gladys Mutangadura, Senior Programme Officer, UN-OHRLLS presented Background Report for the Euro-Asia regional review meeting on the implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action. She mentioned significant progress and notable achievements that have

been made on infrastructure development in LLDCs to close missing links, expand transport, energy, ICT infrastructure. However, she also pointed out the challenge of the infrastructure funding gap. Ms. Mutangadura discussed the variety of measures to improve trade capacity and harness the potential of international trade by the LLDCs, noting the challenges of insignificant share of LLDCs' global exports, dependency on commodity exports, limited export diversification, and high transit and transport costs. Furthermore, she highlighted that progress has been made on regional integration, but there has been limited progress on structural economic transformation with pre-mature deindustrialization and high commodity dependence by the LLDCs. Ms. Mutangadura finished by highlighting that on means of implementation for the VPoA, LLDCs require international support from development partners because their domestic resources are not adequate.

14. Ms. Azhar Jaimurzina, Chief, Transport Facilitation and Logistics Section, Transport Division, UNESCAP focused on VPoA Priority 1: fundamental transit policies and pointed out that many developments and initiatives have taken place since adoption of VPoA at national, regional, multilateral and bilateral levels, with significant amount of synergy between LLDCs, LLDCs and transit countries, and positive developments in WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement ratifications. Ms. Jaimurzina pointed out that achievement of priority 1 targets is half-way done, however, there are challenges that still need to be addressed. In addition, Ms. Jaimurzina mentioned that there are lessons learned and past practices observed from the experience of the LLDCs in the region. Furthermore, Ms. Jaimurzina thanked all stakeholders who contributed to the report and expressed hope that member states will provide their comments to improve the paper.

Session 1b: Fundamental Transit Policy Issues

15. The session was chaired by H.E. Mr. Sukhbold Sukhee, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Mongolia to the United Nations in New York and moderated by Ms. Heidi Schroderus-Fox, Director, UN-OHRLLS. In this session presentations were made by Mr Shishir Priyadarshi, Director, Development Division, World Trade Organization (WTO); Ms. Azhar Jaimurzina, Chief, Transport Facilitation and Logistics Section, Transport Division, UNESCAP; Mr. Roel Janssens, Economic Affairs Officer, UNECE. This was followed by countries' interventions.
16. Ms. Schroderus-Fox introduced the session, highlighting that it will review progress made, challenges, opportunities and best practices in improving connectivity through transit policy coordination and harmonization and legal frameworks for transit. She highlighted recent developments, such as entry into force of the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA), increased ratification of the TIR Convention and the launch of the World Customs Organization's transit guidelines.
17. Mr Shishir Priyadarshi, Director, Development Division, WTO discussed the importance of the Trade Facilitation Agreement for VPoA implementation. He emphasized that LLDCs stand to benefit from the TFA, by enhancing trade with the hope of economic growth, economic diversification and better achievement of SDGs. Mr. Priyadarshi referenced the preamble part of TFA, which points out the importance of transit issues on TFA and noted that the word transit is mentioned more than 50 times in the TFA. In addition, he highlighted Article 11 of

the TFA, “Freedom of Transit,” which includes all the interests of the LLDCs on transit, such as elimination of duties and fees on goods in transit; guarantee provisions; requirements and restrictions kept at the bare minimum; and equal treatment of goods in transit.

18. Furthermore, Mr. Priyadarshi talked about Category A, B and C commitments under the TFA. He pointed out that only two LLDCs, Kazakhstan and Mongolia, and four transit countries (China, Georgia, Thailand, and Turkey) identified large percentage of Article 11 as category A. He called for the last LLDC WTO Member in the region to ratify the Agreement. In conclusion, Mr. Priyadarshi stressed the need for increase in international cooperation and harmonization; enhanced funding for development of infrastructure and enhanced Aid for Trade, calling on LLDCs to submit their responses on their needs and requirements through the Aid for Trade Questionnaire ahead of the Aid for Trade review in July. He urged all stakeholders to take the opportunity of the next WTO Ministerial Meeting in Kazakhstan in 2020 to bring out LLDCs’ issues and enhanced implementation of Article 11.
19. Ms. Azhar Jaimurzina, Chief, Transport Facilitation and Logistics Section, Transport Division, UNESCAP presented the progress made on Priority 1 of the VPoA in the region. She highlighted the regional Intergovernmental Agreements on Asian Highway network, Trans-Asian Railway network and Dry Ports as ESCAP’s institutional framework. She emphasized the significant amount of new accessions and ratifications of conventions and international agreements related to transit transport in the period 2014-2018 by LLDCs and transit countries, with some countries joining up to 4 conventions in 4 years. She emphasized the importance of neighbouring countries ratifying the same agreements in order to fully utilize the benefits. Ms. Jaimurzina noted the dynamism of the region and the various sub-regional initiatives and multilateral agreements. Furthermore, Ms. Jaimurzina pointed out that transit transport in the region is mainly regulated at the bilateral level, noting that some bilateral arrangements have been created or updated in the period between 2014-2018.
20. Ms. Jaimurzina noted that while transit cargo moves with an average speed of 300-400 km per 24 hours on most corridors in North, Central and South-East Asia, many bottlenecks remain, and average time has increased for several corridors. She highlighted some clear reductions in time spent at border-crossing points but noted that average time at borders on CAREC Corridors by road increased by 69% between 2014 and 2017, stressing that performance depends on the mode of transport. On the objective to significantly improve intermodal connectivity, Ms. Jaimurzina pointed out that it is very challenging to assess the progress due to lack of available quantifiable indicators. She noted that the potential for intermodal connectivity has improved, for example through the use of block container trains, but that the potential of rail and inland shipping transport is underutilized. In conclusion, Ms. Jaimurzina highlighted that in addition to the regulatory framework that is in place, concrete steps in terms of coordination and cooperation, at all levels, are needed and that implementation is key.
21. Mr. Roel Janssens, Economic Affairs Officer, United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, briefly introduced two of the UNECE’s key legal instruments aimed at border crossing facilitation, i.e. the TIR and Harmonization Conventions. He stressed the tangible time and cost efficiencies that the implementation of these instruments brings both for public and private sector stakeholders. Mr. Janssens emphasized that the latest TIR accessions of Saudi Arabia,

Qatar, India and Pakistan and the activation of the TIR system in China and UAE create significant opportunities for LLDCs. He noted that electronic tools have been introduced to the TIR system, in particular eTIR, with first pilots that have taken place between Iran and Turkey and Georgia and Turkey respectively, enabling real-time exchange of information about TIR operations, improved risk management and customs-to-customs electronic data exchange of TIR data.

Mr. Janssens then focused on the Convention on the Contract for the International Carriage of Goods by Road (CMR) and its additional protocol concerning the electronic consignment note (eCMR), noting that benefits related to their implementation include handling cost reductions, faster administration, increased data accuracy and real-time information on progress of shipments. He informed that there are currently 17 Contracting Parties to eCMR and that pilot projects have already taken place between France and Spain and in Belgium. He noted that the recent accession, to the Additional Protocol, of the Republic of Moldova, Russian Federation, Armenia, Turkey and Estonia only further strengthens its road transport facilitation potential for the region. Lastly, Mr. Janssens pointed out that progress is being made in strengthening administrative railway operability across the region. In this regard, he highlighted ongoing UNECE efforts to create a Unified Railway Law (URL) aimed at establishing a unified set of transparent and predictable provisions and legal rules for Euro-Asian rail transport operations. He explained that in the framework of this undertaken, pilot tests will be held to test the real-life application of specific legal provisions of the URL.

Summary of Countries Interventions

22. During countries' interventions, Ms. Battsetseg Tuvshintugs, Deputy Director General, Foreign Trade and Economic Cooperation Department, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Mongolia; and Mr. Khomraj Koirala, Joint Secretary, National Planning Commission, Government of Nepal talked about fundamental transit policy developments in their respective countries.
23. Ms. Battsetseg Tuvshintugs, Deputy Director General, Foreign Trade and Economic Cooperation Department, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Mongolia highlighted Mongolia's various intergovernmental agreements since 2014 on road, rail and transit transport with China and Russia, as well as Latvia and Hungary. Additionally, she went in depth on the projects and activities under the Mongolia-Russia-China Economic Corridor Development Program, including feasibility studies and priority infrastructure projects. She noted that the three countries agreed to establish in Mongolia a joint centre for investment and project planning. She also highlighted that through cooperation with neighbours, technology at railway border crossings and faster processing of trains, freight travel time between Russia and China was reduced by 26-27%. In addition, Ms. Tuvshintugs discussed developments between Mongolian and Russian railway authorities on exchange of electronic documents and implementation of E-sign for international and domestic transport documents; development of Zamiin-Uud regional logistics center and domestic transport policy reforms.
24. Ms. Battsetseg Tuvshintugs also presented internal challenges, such as insufficient coordination, lack of adequate financial resources for infrastructure facilities that connect with transit countries; and lack of capacity in formulating financially viable infrastructure projects.

In terms of external challenges, she mentioned insufficient attention given by the transit countries to the VPoA and insufficient cooperation with transit countries' authorities. In concluding, Ms. Tuvshintugs highlighted that Mongolia is working to establish a National Working Group on the coordination of VPoA implementation. She stressed the need for deeper cooperation with transit countries and called upon transit countries and development partners to prepare their reports on the implementation of the VPoA.

25. Mr. Khomraj Koirala, Joint Secretary, National Planning Commission, Government of Nepal presented the geographic and topographic challenges of Nepal that make transport more costly. He stated that Nepal has access to transit through China and India and is using some ports in Bangladesh. He informed that Nepal has focused on strengthening supply-side capacity, export promotion, trade mainstreaming, increasing access to regional and world markets, is drafting new Transit Policy and has Trade and Facilitation Committee. Mr. Kiorala pointed out that Nepal has been concentrating on improving fundamental transit policy through various agreements at bilateral level (agreements on transit and transport development with India, China and Bangladesh), regional (Bangladesh, Bhutan, India and Nepal motor Vehicle Agreement) and multilateral level (Nepal ratified the TFA and acceded to the Revised Kyoto Convention). He noted that Nepal has installed 18 automated web-based customs systems, built Integrated Check posts between India and Nepal; and set up electronic tracking systems. In terms of Nepal's challenges, Mr. Koirala talked about lack of adequate connectivity infrastructure, low average speed of Cargo Movement, lack of adequate resources and capital, low diversification of trade goods and destinations, and large trade deficit. In concluding, Mr. Koirala stressed the importance of international cooperation at bilateral, regional and multilateral levels in order to implement VPoA and SDGs.

Session 2: Connectivity and Transport Infrastructure Development

26. The session was chaired by H.E. Mr. Sukhbold Sukhee, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Mongolia to the United Nations in New York and moderated by Mr. Sandagdorj Erdenebileg, Chief of Policy Development, Coordination, Monitoring and Reporting Service, UN-OHRLLS. In this session presentations were made by Ms. Azhar Jaimurzina, Chief, Transport Facilitation and Logistics Section, Transport Division, UNESCAP; Mr. Roel Janssens, Economic Affairs Officer, UNECE; and Mr. Krishnan Lal Thapar, Chairman, Asian Institute of Transport Development. This was followed by countries interventions.
27. Mr. Erdenebileg introduced the session, highlighting that it will review experiences on progress made, challenges, opportunities and best practices in improving transport connectivity for the LLDCs. He noted that despite LLDCs making progress in expanding and upgrading transport infrastructure, they still lag behind in road and rail density and face challenges that constrain development of their aviation industry. He stressed that large infrastructure financing gap in the region remains.
28. Ms. Azhar Jaimurzina, Chief, Transport Facilitation and Logistics Section, Transport Division, UNESCAP informed that there has been some progress in infrastructure development in the region in majority of LLDCs between 2014 and 2018, based on the Logistics Performance Index (LPI). She added that often infrastructure is qualified as one of the weakest amongst the

six components of the LPI. Ms. Jaimurzina highlighted the Asian Highway network which covers 143,000 km across 32 countries. However, she pointed out that 7% of its routes still do not meet the minimum desirable class-III standards and that there are many missing links along the network. She stressed that operational requirements, such as road permits for bilateral transport, highly limit the performance of the network and added that ESCAP is supporting governments in this regard to develop tailor-made solutions, such as the Intergovernmental Agreement on International Road Transport along the Asian Highway Network.

29. Ms. Jaimurzina then mentioned that the Trans-Asian Railway Network covers 118,000 km across 28 countries, but that 10.5% of the network still needs to be constructed and there is unequal level of operational readiness along the network. Ms. Jaimurzina talked about the Intergovernmental Agreement of Dry Ports, that includes 247 dry ports in 27 countries and provides consistency across the region in the approach to dry port development and operation. She concluded by offering ESCAP's transport facilitation technical assistance, tools and model agreements.
30. Mr. Roel Janssens, Economic Affairs Officer, United Nations Economic Commission for Europe focused on UNECE's Euro-Asian transport links project (EATL) that recently concluded its phase III and connected nearly 40 countries in Europe and Asia. Mr. Janssens shared some of the EATL Phase III key findings, including the fact that on-time delivery, rather than economic and trade growth, is now driving the increase in Euro-Asian freight flows. He also noted that road and rail transportation along Euro-Asian corridors is supplementing rather than competing with maritime transport providing alternative delivery options, especially for high value and time-sensitive cargo, including in the context of growing e-commerce. He mentioned that the share of rail transport is growing rapidly, with introduction of container "block trains" and highlighted the complementarities and potential synergies between local/regional road transport and long distance rail transport. Mr. Janssens explained that train routes between China and Europe grew from almost non-existent 10 years ago to connecting 35 Chinese cities with 34 European cities today. He noted that Euro-Asian rail freight transport transit time has more than halved over the past decade.
31. Mr. Janssens discussed constraints for further development of Euro-Asian Transport links, such as Eastbound cargo traffic being lower than Westbound traffic; lack of harmonized interoperability standards for railway infrastructure; absence of corridor-specific work plans and multi-stakeholder coordination efforts; inefficient use of network capacity for railway operations; different legal regimes for railway transport contracts; cumbersome border crossing, customs and transit procedures; missing or outdated infrastructure links; and poor ICT connectivity and interoperability. Furthermore, Mr. Janssens went into details on the challenges and needs along several EATL routes. He stressed that one of the main challenges towards sustainable transport infrastructure development in the EATL region is lack of funding. In this regard, he noted that UNECE is developing an International Transport Infrastructure Observatory which will be an electronic space developed in a Geographic Information System (GIS) environment which would allow users to retrieve and analyse data about transport networks and modes, corridors, new transport infrastructure projects as well as traffic and cargo flows and the results of different regional studies. It would allow Governments to present their transport infrastructure project to financial institutions and other

donors in a transparent, comprehensive and ‘bankable’ way. In conclusion, Mr. Janssens briefly mentioned the UNECE work being undertaken on the creation of a hotspots map to illustrate the threats climate change could pose to existing transport infrastructure. By combining data from the World meteorological Organization with available data on transport infrastructure networks possible catastrophic impacts by climate change can be illustrated and adaptation measures identified.

32. Mr. Krishnan Lal Thapar, Chairman, Asian Institute of Transport Development talked about the global trends related to technological growth, trade decline and increase in protectionist measures and geopolitical pressures that negatively affect development prospects of the LLDCs and expressed that more action needs to be taken in transport development. Mr. Thapar talked about one of the main pillars of VPoA, free trade, as a tool for economic development and poverty elimination and pointed out that LLDCs have potential to become important trading partners at regional and bilateral levels. He talked about a series of steps that LLDCs need to take in order to take advantage of their untapped potential. He highlighted that medium and small sized enterprises make up the bulk of enterprises and employment in the LLDCs and contribute significantly to GDP and stressed their integration into the regional and global markets. Furthermore, Mr. Thapar noted that more efforts are needed to develop pipelines and electric grid connection in the LLDCs in order to ensure access for all.

Summary of Countries Interventions

33. During countries intervention, Ms. Nahid Sultana Mallik Deputy Secretary, Economic Relations Division, Ministry of Finance, Bangladesh; Mr. Nijat Mikayilov, Senior Adviser, Ministry of Transport, Communications and High Technologies, International Cooperations Department, Azerbaijan and Mr. Serik Bashimov, Director, Transit and Transport Logistic Development Department, Ministry of Industry and Infrastructural Development of the Republic of Kazakhstan presented on their national experiences.
34. Ms. Nahid Sultana Mallik, Deputy Secretary, Economic Relations Division, Ministry of Finance, Bangladesh highlighted the progress of Bangladesh, pointing to 5.14% average growth of GDP per capita in 2015 and decreases in poverty. She mentioned the policy interventions taken to promote transport connectivity, including 6th five-year national plan, Road Master Plan 2009, SAARC Motor Vehicle Act, National Core Committee on Transit, National Multimodal Transport Policy. He highlighted government efforts to achieve SDG 9, such as upgrading national transport and ICT infrastructure, fostering PPPs, developing strategic corridors and improving road connectivity with neighbours along Asian Highway and SAARC road corridors. She gave overview of water infrastructure and railway infrastructure development, noting efforts to renovate existing rail tracks, purchase trains, modernize signal system and establish railway links with neighbours.
35. Ms. Mallik noted the strategic role of Bangladesh in providing LLDCs with seaport access, such as at the Port of Payra where the deep-water port that will serve neighbouring LLDCs is planned. She further highlighted Bangladesh’s efforts to promote regional connectivity of LLDCs, including upgrading road and economic corridors, completing missing links, developing Dohazari-Gumdum Dual Gauge Rail Line and establishing deep sea port in Sonadia. Ms. Mallik stressed the need to invest in road infrastructure, noting possibility of

creating regional fund; streamline customs procedures and enhance land port facilities; promote multimodal transport; enhance PPPs by learning from experiences of others; and prioritize sections of infrastructure that provide LLDCs with access to seaports.

36. Ms. Nijat Mikayilov, Senior Adviser, Ministry of Transport, Communications and High Technologies, International Cooperation Department, Azerbaijan stated the goals of Azerbaijan's transport and transit policy as to develop new infrastructure, diversify transport corridors, rational usage of transit corridors, government support for transport projects, harmonizing the legal and institutional framework, widespread introduction of transport and logistics systems to facilitate the transport and movement of goods. He mentioned active participation of Azerbaijan in Trans-European and Trans-Asian networks and implementation of projects along the East-West and North-South transport corridors to increase its transit potential. In addition, Mr. Mikayilov highlighted Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway line, which opened in October 2017, construction of bridge at border with Iran, completion in 2018 of phase 1 of Baku sea port development, and creation of special economic zone in Baku.
37. The creation of Transit Transport Coordinating Council in 2015 was mentioned by Mr. Mikayilov. He noted that as a result of its activities, cost of transportation decreased, transit procedures were simplified and tariffs reduced at Aktau and Turkmenbashi ports. Furthermore, Mr. Mikayilov talked about Trans-Caspian International Transport Corridor and creation in 2016 of international association for the corridor to enhance its competitiveness. He also noted that Azerbaijan participates in TRACECA, BRI, concluded an agreement with Afghanistan, Georgia, Turkey and Turkmenistan on creation of Lapis Lazuli transit route and opened Absheron Logistics Center near Baku in 2018.
38. Mr. Serik Bashimov, Director, Transit and Transport Logistic Development Department, Ministry of Industry and Infrastructural Development of the Republic of Kazakhstan pointed out that as the biggest landlocked country, Kazakhstan is interested in finding effective solutions to transport challenges of LLDCs. He discussed the 11 transit corridors that transport goods through Kazakhstan in 13-15 days, which is twice as fast as sea transportation. He talked about National Program Nurly-Zhol focused on lowering infrastructural constraints, reconstruction and development of 5,900 km of roads especially on Center-South, Center-East, and Center-West routes. He emphasized that by 2020, 90% of roads will be brought to good or satisfactory condition. In addition, introduction of transport and logistic service on China-Europe-China rail lines, which includes 17 international routes and where volume of container transit increased 100 times from 2012, and creation of United Transport and Logistics Company to improve efficiency of transport corridors, were discussed. Mr. Bashimov also touched on the topic of Trans-Caspian International Transport Corridor development, and Aktau port on Caspian Sea which was modernized with Single Window system which reduced the cargo handling process from 10-12 hours on average to 4 hours. He highlighted that Khorgos-Gate Way dry port was fully opened, with industrial and logistics zones and logistics terminal was created at Lianyungang port.

Session 3: ICT Connectivity, Sustainable Energy and Regional Integration

39. The session was chaired by H.E. Mr. Sukhbold Sukhee, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Mongolia to the United Nations in New York and moderated by Mr.

Sandagdorj Erdenebileg, Chief of Policy Development, Coordination, and Reporting Service, UN-OHRLLS. In this session presentations were made by Ms. Gladys Mutangadura, Senior Programme Officer, UN-OHRLLS; Mr. Mircea Ciopraga, Secretary General, Permanent Secretariat of the Intergovernmental Commission TRACECA; Mr. Ashish Narayan, Programme Coordinator, ITU Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific. This was followed by countries interventions.

40. Mr. Erdenebileg introduced the session, highlighting that it will review the progress made on ICT connectivity, sustainable energy and regional integration identifying the challenges and best practices. He stressed that enhanced digital and energy connectivity needs to accompany transport connectivity. He noted that the regional integration initiatives in the region present opportunity to advance integration of the LLDCs.
41. Ms. Gladys Mutangadura, Senior Programme Officer, UN-OHRLLS showcased the progress in improving access to electricity, which grew to 96% of the population for LLDCs in the region, compared to 61.7% for all LLDCs. She noted that Euro-Asian LLDCs need to increase renewable energy consumption, which was lower than total LLDC average. Ms. Mutangadura mentioned significant progress in energy connectivity in LLDCs, and progress in areas such as oil and gas line connectivity, hydro power production and connectivity, and increased public-private partnerships. In order to combat outstanding challenges, Ms. Mutangadura suggested expansion and upgrade of energy distribution infrastructure; increased use of renewable energy sources; strengthening of cross-border energy trade and transit; adoption of national strategies and policies to promote modern, reliable and renewable energy; increased investments in improving energy efficiency and renewable energy; and encouragement of private sector participation. In terms of ICT, she noted that despite significant progress, LLDCs lag behind in mobile penetration and internet use and face high cost of ICT services and poor-quality regulation and suggested LLDCs should formulate national broadband policies.
42. Furthermore, various examples of regional integration were discussed, and recommendations suggested for enhancing integration of LLDCs, which included support for effective implementation of regional initiatives; greater sharing of experiences; regional integration initiatives that encompass investment, research and development and industrial development; and considering the corridor approach.
43. Mr. Mircea Ciopraga, Secretary General, Permanent Secretariat of the Intergovernmental Commission (IGC) TRACECA introduced the Europe-the Caucasus-Asia corridor, noting that for 26 years the TRACECA institutions have been carrying out continuous activity on the development of transport communication in the corridor and more than 1 billion tons of trade goods have been transported along the corridor since then. He added that 85 projects surpassing 187 million euros have been financed, with more than 40% of this budget utilized for the development of transport infrastructure along the TRACECA corridor. He highlighted that the two past TRACECA Investment Forums, which bring together countries with potential private investors, presented 33 projects, with 14 already implemented or in progress. He informed that application of modern methods, such as the single window concept, will ensure cooperation of the relevant authorities and will facilitate traffic volumes along the corridor. He added that a TRACECA Guide for Border Crossing is being prepared. He concluded by saying that

facilitation of regional trade and corridors is one of the key factors in overcoming geographical challenges and appealed to international organizations to work in this area and proposed that arrangements be made for intensification of joint activities.

44. Mr. Ashish Narayan, Programme Coordinator, ITU Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific emphasized that digital transformation is key to achieving the SDGs as the ICTs are impacting multiple sectors. He presented growth experienced in several different fields such as mobile and broadband subscriptions, internet users, as well as the number of users of messaging and hybrid networks, and talked about the evolution from LTE to 5G mobile broadband speeds. He noted that by 2025 5G connections are expected to reach 1.1 billion mobile connections and pointed out sixteen key issues for policy-makers to consider to further advance 5G development.
45. Mr. Narayan presented new technological drivers such as cloud computing, IOT, AI, big data which will be the critical engines for digital transformation in the future. He highlighted the significant progress in ICT development in LLDCs. He stressed that making broadband affordable is very important as many developing countries face very high costs. Mr. Narayan provided some examples of ITU assistance to LLDCs in Asia-Pacific and identified the persistent common challenges that the LLDCs face in their ambition to enhance ICT development. He suggested LLDCs should make connectivity part of national development strategies; implement appropriate policies to favour new technologies and increase access to ICT; and establish ICT PPPs, amongst other things.

Summary of Countries Interventions

46. Under countries interventions, the meeting heard on national experiences from Mr. M. Hassan Soroosh Y., Director General for Economic Cooperation, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Afghanistan; Mr. Kalden Dorji, Senior Desk Officer, Department of Multilateral Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Bhutan; Ms. Shoista Ochildieva Saidmuradova, Head of Analysis and Economic Forecasting, Ministry of Transportation, Tajikistan and Mr. Kim Veara, National Committee for ESCAP, Cambodia.
47. Mr. M. Hassan Soroosh Y., Director General for Economic Cooperation, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Afghanistan highlighted geographical and post-conflict challenges of Afghanistan, potential of regional cooperation and Afghanistan's vision for becoming land bridge to, amongst other things, unlock the potential of trade complementarity between Central and South Asia. He informed that Afghanistan has pursued this strategy through two major regional cooperation platforms: Regional Economic Cooperation Conference on Afghanistan (RECCA) and Heart of Asia – Istanbul Process (HoA-IP). Mr. Soroosh outlined several projects under these, including Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India Gas pipeline project, Central Asia-South Asia Regional Energy Market CASA 1000, Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan 500-KV energy project, Lapis-Lazuli Route Agreement, the Five Nations Railway Corridor, Afghanistan's involvements in the Belt and Road initiative, the Chabahar Corridor Agreement, Air Cargo Corridors, Kandhar Special Economic Zone and Aqina and Zaranj dry ports development. He added that new initiatives under RECCA include Center for Research and Evaluation; RECCA Chamber of Commerce and Industries; Women's Economic Empowerment Initiative. In conclusion, Mr. Soroosh highlighted importance of regional

integration and suggested VPoA should be further mainstreamed into regional cooperation platforms. He added that regional cooperation platforms should address hard and soft infrastructure and focus also on policy coordination, investment promotion, research and capacity building; that greater synergy is needed between regional and sub-regional economic cooperation initiatives, corridors, and transport, energy and ICT sectors; that effective partnership among all institutional partners are needed.

48. Mr. Kalden Dorji, Senior Desk Officer, Department of Multilateral Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Bhutan presented on the Energy sector in Bhutan, which gives priority to the growth of hydropower sector and strategies geared towards promotion of renewable energy technology. He informed that Bhutan has one of the largest repositories of hydropower in Asia with a theoretical potential of 30,000 MW, of which 23,760 MW is techno-economically feasible for development, however Bhutan has installed generating capacity of over 1600 MW, with 70% of power exported to India. In addition, Bhutan faces challenges during dry season to meet its own demand. Mr. Dorji reported that 96.6% of the households in Bhutan used electricity as the main source of energy for lighting in 2017. In addition, he stated that detailed studies for various energy projects are being undertaken and other renewable energy sources are being promoted to meet growing domestic demand. He expressed concern over the impacts of climate change on Bhutan's energy security. Mr. Dorji talked about other initiatives such as promotion of efficient cooking stoves, installation of biogas plants, promotion and distribution LED bulbs; promotion of regional hydropower energy cooperation with Bangladesh and India to combat global warming. In addition, Mr. Dorji briefly touched on challenges of the significant investments needed to ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy.
49. Ms. Shoista Ochildievna Saidmurarodova, Head of Analysis and Economic Forecasting, Ministry of Transportation, Tajikistan presented the economic situation of Tajikistan, stressing importance of development of transport and communication spheres for socio-economic growth of the country, noting Tajikistan's potential to connect Southeast Asia with Middle East and Europe. She mentioned that Tajikistan is becoming one of the main exporters of clean energy and is embarking on regional energy project.
50. She discussed strategical goals of Tajikistan to become a transit country; development of New Silk Road; improve conditions for international transport corridors. She highlighted the National Strategy of Development of the Republic of Tajikistan up to 2030 which includes amongst its aims development of transport corridors, investment in transport infrastructure and expansion of new information and communication services. She mentioned that key objectives and actions for achieving key priorities of Tajikistan include development of transit transport corridors; aligning transport facilities with international standards; construction of modern border terminals; acquisition of vehicles for international transport; reduce the dependence on transit routes of one country; creating border transport and logistics centers; and bringing roads and bridges up to international standards. She highlighted that Tajikistan attracted around \$2 billion to invest in (re-)construction of over 2100 km of roads, 31 km of tunnels, 240 bridges, 132 km railroads. She highlighted key challenges as limited railway access to other countries; weak links between international transport corridors and the internal road network; absence of a network of transport and logistics centers; non-compliance with the requirements of

international standards for safety and operation of transport; the growth of air pollution and lack of emission controls and quality checks for compliance with environmental standards and regulations.

51. Mr. Kim Veara, National Committee for ESCAP, Cambodia introduced Cambodian energy sector and National Policy, Strategy and Action Plan on Energy efficiency to reach 2020 goal – electric access for all. Currently, he noted that 97.6% of Cambodian households have access to at least one source of electricity – 71.5% from the grid and 26.1% from off the grid, such as solar home systems and rechargeable batteries. He added that capacity of power sources increased 12.5 times and energy delivered increased by 11.4 times since 2004; in addition, energy generation shifted towards more sustainable and renewable energy sources. He showcased main hydropower and thermal power plants in Cambodia.
52. Mr. Veara discussed key challenges of Cambodia, including heavy dependency on imported fossil fuels and electricity; rising international fuel prices; low electrical grid coverage in rural areas; high electricity prices; one of the lowest electrification rates in Asia. He added that nearly two thirds of households face frequent power shortages; 30% of rural households rely on off-grid power for electricity; and more than 66% of households still use biomass stoves. He highlighted that the shift towards coal and hydro generation implies its own challenges, such as seasonality of hydroenergy production and negative environmental impacts of coal energy, which will require cooperation with partners in terms of technological and financial support.

Session 4: International Trade and Trade Facilitation

53. The session was chaired by Mr. Khomraj Koirala, Joint Secretary of National Planning Commission of Nepal and moderated by Ms. Mia Mikic, Director, Trade, Investment and Innovation Division, UNESCAP. In this session presentations were made by Mr. Mussie Delelegn, Chief, LLDC Section, Division for Africa, LDCs and Special Programmes, UNCTAD and Mr. Yann Duval, Chief, Trade Policy and Facilitation Section Trade, Investment and Innovation Division, UNESCAP. This was followed by countries interventions.
54. Ms. Mikic introduced the session, highlighting that it will review the progress made in increasing the trade potential of the LLDCs and promoting trade facilitation, share best practice experiences and identify the outstanding challenges and recommendations. She noted the linkages between trade, investment and means of implementation and highlighted the trend of moving away from multilateral and to bilateral and regional agreements to address not only trade but other issues.
55. Mr. Mussie Delelegn, Chief, LLDC Section, Division for Africa, LDCs and Special Programmes, UNCTAD reported that LLDCs have removed most notable forms of trade distortions and their trade increased by about 6 folds during 2000-2017, but this has not reversed the marginalization of LLDCs with only 1% of the global output and less than 1% world trade. He added that LLDCs' exports are driven by primary commodities, and imports are predominantly light-manufactures, intermediate goods and/or consumer products. He cautioned on the continuing expansion of negative trade balance; high trade cost; and the fact

that economic growth in LLDCs follow commodities' boom-bust cycle. Furthermore, he expressed that trade facilitation should be development-oriented; should be modern, efficient, regionally interconnected and ICT-driven; rule-based flexible regulations, rules and procedures; consistent with regional and multilateral agreements; facilitate participation of the private sector, including through PPPs; and promote bilateral, regional and international cooperation and partnerships.

56. In conclusion, Mr. Delelegn highlighted the importance of economic diversification, with focus on export orientation, that should go hand in hand with trade facilitation, streamlined, simplified and harmonized customs procedures and modern trade logistics. He stated that LLDCs need to look for intensive margin for value addition, including to participate in regional and global value chains; that agriculture, agri-processing and tourism hold huge potential for economic diversification in LLDCs; that LLDCs need to incentivize the private sector especially in sectors of comparative advantages; and that managing and investing commodities rents in socioeconomic transformation would have multiplier effects.
57. Mr. Yann Duval, Chief, Trade Policy and Facilitation Section Trade, Investment and Innovation Division, UNESCAP reported that trade in Asia-Pacific LLDCs has recovered from three-year consecutive declines, but the momentum may not sustain and LLDCs' shares in global exports and imports remain negligible. Mr. Duval stated that LLDCs face limited integration into value chains and lack of diversification of export markets and products, where export performance is driven by fuel-commodity exports. He highlighted services exports, which account for 17% of exports of Asia-Pacific LLDCs, as potential area for diversification. Furthermore, preferential trade agreements between LLDCs and transit countries, in particular the EAEU, were presented. Mr. Duval also discussed improvements in trade facilitation and paperless trade implementation performance. He identified the impacts from US-China trade tensions as a challenge for the LLDCs, but also an opportunity. He added that non-tariff measures are on the rise.
58. Mr. Duval stressed that LLDCs need to deal with fundamental bottlenecks such as limited manufacturing capacity and export diversification, limited and low-quality infrastructure, limited stock of human capital, high trade and transit costs, and need to build immunity to external shocks. He suggested that LLDCs need to expedite the process of WTO accession, consider unilateral liberalization in goods and services, as well as participation in deeper plurilateral integration agreements, and accelerate implementation of trade facilitation and digitalization measures. He highlighted the useful role of regional integration in managing risks associated with global uncertainties.

Summary of Countries Interventions

59. During countries intervention, the meeting heard on national experiences from H.E. Mr. Khiane Phansourivong, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Lao PDR to the UN; and Ms. Battsetseg Tuvshintugs, Deputy Director General, Foreign Trade and Economic Cooperation Department, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Mongolia.

60. H.E. Mr. Khiane Phansourivong, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Lao PDR to the UN started his presentation with overview of Lao PDR impressive export growth achievements since 2014. Some key achievements of Lao PDR were highlighted, including: five-year Trade Facilitation Strategic Plan adopted in 2011; Lao Trade Portal (LTP) set up in 2012; ratification of WTO TFA in 2015; Accession to the Revised Kyoto Convention (RKC) in 2016; countrywide automation of customs procedures; electronic payment of customs duties; successful launch of Single-Stop Inspection facility in 2016 with Vietnam; piloting of the National Single Window program; initiating Authorized Economic Operators (AEO) program; establishment of Trade Facilitation Committee.
61. Mr. Phansourivong also discussed major challenges to trade facilitation, such as document compliance; incidence of Non-Tariff Measures; lack of coordination among concerned agencies and with private sector; not unified roadside checks and payment points. He presented the Trade Facilitation Road Map, which aims to reduce time to export and import by 50% and decrease cost by 30% and mentioned recent trade facilitation measures and efforts in implementation of the TFA. In conclusion, the Ambassador spoke about the future strategy of Lao that included close monitoring of TF Road Map implementation; increased collaboration with private sector partners; and continued cooperation at regional level under ASEAN, Economic Community and GMS framework.
62. Ms. Battsetseg Tuvshintugs, Deputy Director General, Foreign Trade and Economic Cooperation Department, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Mongolia presented the recovery in foreign trade turnover and export volumes in Mongolia since 2015. Ms. Tuyshintugs pointed out Mongolia's need to diversify exports, where 85.9% consist of mineral products and in this regard introduced the Mongol Export Program and its goals. In addition, she presented national policy documents passed by Mongolian Government related to trade, including the Mongolian Sustainable Development Vision 2030, Action Program of The Government Mongolia 2016-2020, "Industrialization 21:100" program. She highlighted that the national export strategy of Mongolia included a long-term trade and investment growth map and a 5-year action plan to achieve the National Export Strategy.
63. Furthermore, Ms. Tuyshintugs noted Mongolia's participation in WTO TFA and possible accession to Asia Pacific Trade Agreement, highlighting activities of the National Trade Facilitation Committee. In addition, she noted the various trade-related assistance provided by Asian Development Bank, European Union, and World Bank. In conclusion, Ms. Tuyshintugs highlighted the remaining challenges, including underdeveloped infrastructure and logistics system; missing links; insufficient coordination between various programs; weak institutional capacity to formulate and implement trade policy; lack of financial resources; non-tariff measures; poor business environment; insufficient attention on trade facilitation issues.

Session 5: Structural Economic Transformation

64. The session was chaired by Mr. Khomraj Koirala, Joint Secretary of National Planning Commission of Nepal and moderated by Mr. Sandagdorj Erdenebileg, Chief of Policy Development, Coordination, and Reporting Service, UN-OHRLLS. In this session presentations were made by Mr. Stein Hansen, Regional Director and Representative of UNIDO; Mr. Nyingtob Norbu, Countries with Special Needs Section, Macroeconomic Policy

and Financing for Development Division, UNESCAP; and Mr. Erdenetsogt Odbayar, Executive Director, International Think Tank for LLDCs. This was followed by an interactive discussion with participant countries interventions.

65. Mr. Erdenebileg introduced the session, highlighting that it will review experiences on the progress that the LLDCs have made on structural economic transformation, industrialization, as well as economic diversification and value-addition. He noted the limited industrialization of LLDCs and their dependence on raw agricultural products, calling for concrete diversification efforts and policies to promote structural economic transformation.
66. Mr. Stein Hansen, UNIDO Regional Director and Representative gave an overview of UNIDO's support to LLDCs, noting that UNIDO's interventions in LLDCs include improving their competitiveness, regional and global value chain development, trade capacity building, investment promotion, renewable energy, energy efficiency and eco-industrial parks. He noted that development of the manufacturing sector is critical for the ability of LLDCs to compete in global markets. He informed that UNIDO provides technical assistance and capacity building programmes in LLDCs, comprising over 150 stand-alone projects in LLDCs, as well Country Programmes (CP) and Programme for Country Partnership (PCP). Mr. Hansen reviewed UNIDO's recent contributions in selected LLDCs in the region such as: comprehensive CPs in Afghanistan; PCP in Kyrgyzstan expected to be finalized in 2019; supporting renewable energy roadmap in Bhutan; promoting construction materials sector in Kyrgyzstan; job and SME creation in agriculture sector in Mongolia and regional integration projects in Lao PDR, Nepal and Bhutan. Finally, Mr. Hansen summarized recommendations to accelerate implementation of VPoA based on UNIDO's experience, including strengthening partnerships with the private sector; enhancing the role of policymakers and other stakeholders at national, regional and international levels and ensuring strong political will and mutual accountability.
67. Mr. Nyngtob Norbu, Countries with Special Needs Section, Macroeconomic Policy and Financing for Development Division, UNESCAP highlighted the importance of structural transformation because it results in higher productivity gains, higher wages and stable sources of incomes, thereby reducing poverty and closing productivity gaps across sectors. He explained that the pattern of structural transformation in the Asia-Pacific suggests premature deindustrialization. He suggested that most LLDCs are structurally developing, with the least developed LLDCs mostly structurally underdeveloped. Mr. Norbu suggested that largest potential for gains from structural transformation can be observed for countries like Nepal, Lao PDR, Afghanistan and Tajikistan, by bringing more efficient production output from employed labor and moving production from agricultural sectors to other sectors of economy. He noted a generally positive movements of workers in those countries from agriculture sector to more productive sectors, which are however mainly extractive industries where potential of employment is very limited. In non-least developed LLDCs, some positive signs can be seen, however most productivity has been driven by the extraction and construction sectors. He concluded by saying that while there is evidence of structural transformation unfolding, with productivity increases taking place, this has not resulted in an expansion of the productive capacities of LLDC economies.

68. Mr. Erdenetsogt Odbayar, Executive Director, International Think Tank for LLDCs presented the results of their study on Economic Diversification of LLDCs: Case of Mongolia, Nepal, Bhutan and Paraguay. The project aimed to analyze the trends, opportunities and obstacles of economic, export and market diversification and recommend policy options for further structural transformation. He explained that the research project was implemented from October 2017 to May 2018. Mr. Odbayar presented the results for the countries from several different perspectives, such as key economic indicators, export product and market diversification, FDI concentration, value added of key sectors in the economy, private sector development as well as the existing policy frameworks in the countries to reveal the challenges they face. He then highlighted the opportunities and policy recommendations, which focused on, amongst other things, developing sustainable industries and sectors, modernizing business procedures, increasing support to SMEs, taking advantage of natural resources and initiatives aimed at increasing investment.

Summary of Countries Interventions

69. During countries intervention, the meeting heard from Ms. Anastasiya Valerevna Belova, Chief Officer at Ministry of Foreign Trade of Uzbekistan, Mr. Artem Aznaurian, representative of Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Armenia and H.E. Ambassador Doma Tshering, Permanent Representative of Bhutan to the United Nations.

70. Ms. Anastasiya Valerevna Belova, Chief Officer at Ministry of Foreign Trade of Uzbekistan introduced recent economic developments in Uzbekistan, market reforms introduced in recent years, as well as progress in trade and economic policy development. She noted that Uzbekistan is working on tax system reform, enhancing investment climate and competitiveness, promoting reforms in agricultural sector, fighting corruption, as well as introducing policies to improve social stability and encouraging youth engagement in business. She stressed that 23 special economic zones were created, and efforts were made to diversify the export structure, noting that China, Russia and Korea account for more than 50% of trade volume of Uzbekistan. She further informed that due to liberalization reforms, Uzbekistan raised its rating in international trade. She highlighted that in order to facilitate customs clearance, risk assessment systems have been introduced, as well as online customs documents system. Ms. Belova highlighted that volume of transport through Uzbekistan is growing by 6-7% yearly and passenger transport has doubled. She added that infrastructure is growing, with transit amounting to 8 million tonnes per year and generating income of \$1 billion. She highlighted the need for harmonized rail legislation, as well as introducing single window systems in Uzbekistan.

71. Mr. Artem Aznaurian, representative of Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Armenia. Mr. Aznaurian started with economic development of Armenia, pointing out Armenia's fastest GDP growth in 2017 since 2008-2009 of 7.5%. He added that poverty was reduced to 25.7% in 2017 from 54% since 2004, and GDP per capita increased from \$3,512 in 2012 to \$4,219 in 2018. He explained that the biggest impact on GDP came from expansion in service sectors, with minor expansion in agribusiness of beverages and tobacco. Mr. Aznaurian discussed Armenia's goals to raise human capital, stimulate competition, use natural resources prudently, promote good governance and the rule of law, including combatting corruption. He explained that the Prospective Development Strategy of Armenia for 2012-2024 is in line with 2030 Agenda and

the VPoA. Mr. Aznaurin talked about launching of Engineering City in 2018 and establishment of three Free Economic Zones (Alliance, Meridian, Meghri). Mr. Aznaurin also mentioned promotion of tourism, which has tripled in last ten years which plays a significant role in Armenia's diversification of foreign direct investment and promotion of service-based economy.

72. H.E. Ambassador Doma Tshering, Permanent Representative of Bhutan to the United Nations drew attention to the fact that 17 of the LLDCs are LDCs and suggested that the issue of smooth graduation from the LDC category is of relevance when discussing progress towards implementation of the VPoA. She added that Bhutan will be the first LLDC to graduate in 2023, but cautioned that many LDCs, like Bhutan, have not been able to meet the economic vulnerability index, directly related to structural economic transformation. She highlighted that Bhutan's 12th Five-Year Plan is focused on fostering structural economic transformation. She noted that partnerships with development partners and international organizations and private sector will be critical in ensuring success of a smooth transition strategy towards graduation.

Session 6: Means of Implementation Partnerships and Follow-up and Review

73. The session was chaired by H.E. Mr. Sukhbold Sukhee, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Mongolia to the United Nations in New York and moderated by Mr. Hamza Ali Malik, Director, Macroeconomic Policy and Financing for Development Division, UNESCAP. In this session presentations were made by Ms. Dagmar Hertova, Programme Officer, UN-OHRLLS; Mr. Denis Nkala, Regional Coordinator and Representative for Asia-Pacific, United Nations Office for Office South-South Cooperation; Ms. Johanna Lindner, First Secretary, Permanent Mission of Austria to the United Nations in New York and Federal Ministry for Europe, Integration and Foreign Affairs. This was followed by countries interventions and interactive discussion.
74. Mr. Malik introduced the session, highlighting that it will review the state of means of implementation, follow-up and review and how to foster partnerships for accelerated implementation of the VPoA. He posed the question of whether the priorities and areas of the VPoA should be re-visited in order to be better aligned with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and include issues such as the role of technology and systemic economic issues.
75. Ms. Dagmar Hertova presented on the progress made in priority 6 of the VPoA. She noted that many LLDCs face capacity constraints and lack adequate domestic financial resources, as most have tax revenue below 20% of GDP. She noted that despite the stagnation since 2009, ODA has been relatively stable source of external finance for the 32 LLDCs. She mentioned that in addition to ODA, Aid for Trade, FDI, remittances are also important international resources for some LLDCs, for reducing poverty by boosting household consumption. She showed that FDI and remittances are more important sources of external finance than ODA for the Euro-Asian LLDCs. She emphasized that Euro-Asian LLDCs account for majority of FDI flows to the LLDC Group. She pointed out new multilateral institutions devoted to South-South Cooperation, including the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank and the New Development Bank and the presence of major SSC actors in the Euro-Asia region.

76. In conclusion, Ms. Hertova suggested following policy recommendations: enhancing domestic resource mobilization through improved tax systems, more efficient tax collection, improving transparency and reducing illicit financial flows; development partners to increase ODA to LLDCs, including Aid for Trade; LLDCs to adopt policies and measures to attract more FDI and create an enabling regulatory framework; LLDCs to utilize new regional initiatives and explore the potentials of South-South Cooperation; the international community to continue to provide technical and capacity-building assistance to the LLDCs.
77. Mr. Denis Nkala, Regional Coordinator and Representative for Asia-Pacific, United Nations Office for Office South-South Cooperation reviewed the benefits of South-South Cooperation for LLDCs, based on the principles of mutual interest and solidarity. He noted that currently, two regional Offices of UNOSSC work with the countries in the Euro-Asia LLDCs; Asia-Pacific and Eastern Europe and Arab States. He highlighted that Asian South-South Mapping study showed South-South Cooperation cutting across all sectors, economy, politics, culture, peace-making and conflict prevention etc. and that connectivity was a central integration strategy including people connectivity. Mr. Nkala emphasised the idea of regional public goods. He noted that there are statistics showing that countries connected by Belt and Road have already increased trade among themselves, but he cautioned about the increasing levels of debt in many developing countries caused by actions taken by Southern providers. In conclusion, Mr. Nkala stressed the need to promote inter-regional exchanges and the need to address rising indebtedness, citing a successful example of UNCDF working to create Diaspora Bonds to attract investment in own countries.
78. Ms. Johanna Lindner, First Secretary, Permanent Mission of Austria to the United Nations in New York, and Federal Ministry for Europe, Integration and Foreign Affairs stressed that support of development partners can help complement the efforts of the LLDCs themselves. She highlighted the measures that have proven to be especially important in addressing landlockedness in Austria's experience: regional cooperation and integration; investment in the development and maintenance of infrastructure; importance of trade facilitation; international support measures, including ODA; creating "factors for success" to attract private sector investment.
79. Ms. Lindner illustrated the importance of these measures from Austria's example. Since accession to the European Union, Austria's exports have tripled and 13,000 new jobs per year have been created. She also noted that Austria was the 10th biggest bilateral donor to UNECE in 2016 and highlighted Austria's partnership with UNIDO on establishment of a network of Regional Sustainable Energy Centers. She stressed that Austrian ODA to LLDCs in 2017 amounted to 42.7 million EUR, that half of Austria's priority countries are LLDCs and pointed out Austria's cooperation in Bhutan, in particular in energy supply and strengthening of rule of law. Lastly, she mentioned that the Development Bank of Austria provides finance for the implementation of private sector projects in developing countries, citing examples of multi-million-dollar support to SME development in Armenia and Nepal.

Summary of Countries Interventions

80. Under country interventions, Mr. M. Hassan Soroosh Y., Director General for Economic Cooperation, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Afghanistan and Dr. Damaru Ballabha Paudel,

Under Secretary Ministry of Foreign Affairs Government of Nepal presented on means of implementations in their respective countries.

81. Mr. Hassan Soroosh, Director General for Economic Cooperation, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Afghanistan talked about Afghanistan's effort in increasing levels of domestic resources, reporting that revenue collection has been increasing each year, with 20% increase in 2017, and that development expenditure increased first time in the last decade. Furthermore, he also noted increased funding into the development budget over past two years. Mr. Soroosh also mentioned ODA continues to be important in funding development budget despite declining for the past two years. He highlighted importance of Aid effectiveness and predictability for Afghanistan to ensure ODA is aligned with national priorities and needs. Mr. Soroosh discussed Afghanistan's special focus on FDI and domestic private sector, with the effort to attract investment across diverse public and private sector sources and new PPP law to support development of new bankable projects for replication across various sectors including awarding energy projects to domestic private companies and joint ventures.
82. Mr. Soroosh stressed that cost of obtaining business license decreased from \$440 to \$1 and that Afghanistan was identified as top improver in business climate in the World Bank's Doing Business Rankings. He informed that Afghanistan established private sector development committee and developed national export strategy and post WTO accession strategy. Mr. Soroosh noted that Afghanistan is part of many regional cooperation platforms and has integrated South-South Cooperation in the work of its national committee on SDGs, but expressed a need for a better cooperation on every level. Mr. Soroosh highlighted importance of pursuing diversification of funds for development.
83. Dr. Damaru Ballabha Paudel, Under Secretary Ministry of Foreign Affairs Government of Nepal briefed on recent economic developments in Nepal, noting declining consumption, increasing budget deficit but declining foreign debt. He pointed out that Nepal's ODA comes from partners in the North and South, but mainly from international organizations, while FDI mainly comes from neighbouring countries. Dr. Paudel also talked about domestic resource mobilization, stressing that 10.3% of GDP in domestic savings is low to meet investment needs. He added that ODA will have to double for Nepal to meet the SDGs. In 2017, inflow of Aid for Trade to Nepal equalled to \$400 million with \$87 million going to transport sector. However, Dr. Rupel pointed out that Nepal still requires around \$17.6 billion in investments.
84. Furthermore, Dr. Rupel discussed policies and instrument for international partnership implementation such as Development Cooperation Policy and Foreign Investment Policy. He noted that additional efforts were made to involve private sector in the implementation of VPoA through PPPs and creation of an investment friendly business environment, implementing flexible labor laws and prioritizing investment in infrastructure. In conclusion, Dr. Rupel discussed challenges that Nepal faces including new political federalist system which requires resources for its implementation; and the unsustainability of remittances (30% of GDP) as a financing resource.

Interactive discussion

85. During the interactive discussion, participants discussed countries' dependence on ODA, in particular for social purposes, which may discourage sustainable reforms. The participants reaffirmed the capacity challenges in LLDCs. It was highlighted that LLDCs need to persist on donors meeting their ODA commitments. The high concentration of ODA and FDI in just a handful of LLDCs was mentioned and concerted efforts to diversify the flows was suggested. Participants also discussed the challenges of climate change for landlocked and mountainous countries, but also opportunities in the form of tourism and experience sharing on avalanche preparedness.

V. Consideration of the outcome document

86. This session was chaired by H.E. Mr. Sukhbold Sukhee, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Mongolia to the United Nations in New York. The Chair presented and briefly introduced the outcome document of the meeting, as contained in Annex I. The meeting adopted the outcome document, with the caveat that minor amendments, in particular on country data, can be communicated to the Secretariat for final revision.

87. Mr. Serik Bashimov, Director, Transit and Transport Logistics Development Department, Ministry of Industry and Infrastructure Development of Kazakhstan informed the meeting of the intention of Kazakhstan to put forward its candidacy for the position of the Global Chair of the LLDC Group for the period of 2020-2021.

VI. Closing of the Meeting

88. In the closing of the meeting, statements were made by Ms. Fekitamoeloa Katoa 'Utoikamanu, Under-Secretary-General and High Representative, UN-OHRLLS, Mr. Hongjoo Hahm, Deputy Executive Secretary, ESCAP and H.E. Ambassador Doma Tshering, Permanent Representative of Bhutan to the United Nations and Co-facilitator for the outcome document of the High-Level MTR of the VPoA.

89. Ms. Fekitamoeloa Katoa 'Utoikamanu, Under-Secretary-General and High Representative, UN-OHRLLS expressed her appreciation to the Chair and Bureau for efficiently steering the meeting and to UNESCAP and UNECE for co-organizing the meeting and thanked all the participants. Ms. 'Utoikamanu congratulated on the adopted outcome document which raises very important areas crucial for accelerating the implementation of the VPoA and the 2030 Agenda. She highlighted the tangible progress such as high ratification of Agreements, reduction in transit times, deepened regional integration and infrastructure development. But she also pointed out slow progress areas in LLDCs such as structural economic transformation and export diversification. Ms. 'Utoikamanu encouraged strong emphasis on partnerships and enhanced international support to ensure enhanced implementation of the VPoA, and strong collection and analyzation of data to monitor, review and report on the progress. In conclusion, Ms. Utoikamanu highlighted that the outcome document will provide inputs into the preparatory process for the midterm review and should feed into the ESCAP Commission session.

90. Mr. Hongjoo Hahm, Deputy Executive Secretary, ESCAP thanked staff of OHRLLS, ECE and ESCAP for organizing the event, noting that the meeting brought together some 60 delegates

and multiple UN entities. Mr. Hahn emphasized an importance of the midterm review to analyze achievements and draft a plan of action for the future. The importance of transit countries for VPoA achievement was mentioned by the Deputy Executive Secretary. Mr. Hahn noted the achievements of Asian Highway, Trans-Asian Railway, Asian-Pacific Information Super-Highway agreements in supporting connectivity of LLDCs. Mr. Hahn mentioned the high cost of trade for Central Asian countries and noted efficient future possibilities in paperless trade. Mr. Hahn talked about the importance of diversification of LLDCs economies to combat issues of structural transformation. In addition, he stressed the need for more development assistance and financing, from all sources, to the LLDCs. He informed that the outcome document will be presented to the ESCAP commission session in May 2019.

91. H.E. Ambassador Doma Tshering, Permanent Representative of Bhutan to the United Nations and Co-facilitator for the outcome document of the High-Level MTR of the VPoA, on her behalf and behalf of H.E. Ambassador Jan Kickert, Permanent Representative of Austria to the United Nations, extended her appreciation to ESCAP, ECE, and OHRLLS for convening the meeting. She highlighted the importance of the outcome of the meeting in enriching and further informing deliberations in New York on the outcome document of the High-Level Mid Term Review. She expressed commitment to a transparent process and eagerness to listen to the views of member states and other stakeholders, to being guided by their national perspectives, as well as learning of their challenges and concerns. In addition, Ambassador Tshering shared her observations from the meeting's deliberations, which centered on the importance of partnerships and active participation of all stakeholders; the need for the principle of Leave No One Behind to remain central going forward; and the need to take advantage of opportunities to learn from each other's experiences, to take advantage of innovation in the field of science and technology and also opportunities to strengthen existing collaboration and forge new partnerships, that will eventually help LLDCs to transform from landlocked to landlinked.

Annex I: Outcome Document

OUTCOME DOCUMENT

UNESCAP/UN-OHRLLS/UNECE Euro-Asian Regional Midterm Review of the Vienna Programme of Action for the Landlocked Developing Countries for the Decade 2014–2024

11-12 February 2019, Bangkok, Thailand

Introduction

The Vienna Programme of Action (VPoA) for Landlocked Developing Countries for the Decade 2014-2024 was adopted in 2014 at the Second UN Conference on LLDCs. It was endorsed by the UN General Assembly in resolution 69/137. The General Assembly of the United Nations decided, in its resolution 72/232, to convene in 2019 a comprehensive high-level midterm review on the implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action for the Decade 2014–2024 that shall be preceded by regional preparatory meetings. The comprehensive high-level midterm review will review progress made in the implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action, identify obstacles and constraints encountered and actions and initiatives needed to overcome them, as well as new challenges and emerging issues, in order to further accelerate the implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action. The high-level midterm review shall adopt an inter-governmentally negotiated and agreed outcome in the form of a political declaration.

Accordingly, the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UN ESCAP), United Nations Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States (UN-OHRLLS) and the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UN ECE) organized the Euro-Asian Regional Review Meeting of the VPoA for the LLDCs on 11 and 12 February 2019 at the United Nations Conference Centre in Bangkok, Thailand.

The meeting was attended by senior government policymakers and other stakeholders from Euro-Asian LLDCs, transit countries, development partners as well as participants from the UN system, relevant international and regional organizations, civil society representatives and the private sector from the Euro-Asian region.

The progress on implementation of the VPoA made by LLDCs and transit developing countries of the region was assessed along the six priority areas. The assessment was based on the national reports, substantive regional report and through presentations from participating countries and work undertaken by UNESCAP, UNECE and UN-OHRLLS and other relevant organizations and discussions conducted during the meeting. For each priority area, participants identified achievements made. They also identified challenges and constraints and proposed recommendations to accelerate the implementation of the VPoA.

The meeting agreed on the following assessment and recommendations for each priority area:

Priority Area 1: Fundamental Transit Policy issues

In the period 2014-2018, the Asia and the Pacific landlocked countries and transit countries have made progress in ratifying important international and regional agreements that support improved transit. Over the review period, 2 LLDCs became full members of the WTO Kazakhstan in 2015 and Afghanistan in 2016. Three Asia-Pacific landlocked countries presently have a WTO observer status and are at different stages of negotiation towards accessing to the WTO.

Nine LLDCs and 11 transit countries have ratified the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement over the review period. More Euro-Asian LLDCs and transit countries became party to some of the main ECE transport-related international agreements. Vietnam ratified the conventions on Road Traffic and Convention on Road Signals; Turkmenistan ratified the International Convention on Harmonization of Frontier Controls of Goods; and China, India and Pakistan ratified the TIR Convention. TIR Contracting Parties have started the eTIR project (i.e. the computerization of the TIR procedure) and in 2017 eTIR pilots have been held between Iran and Turkey and Georgia and Turkey respectively, engaging customs authorities as well as road transport associations in all countries involved.

Afghanistan has recently conducted a number of pilot shipments with some of its neighbours and countries in the region. The recent accession, of the Republic of Moldova, Russian Federation, Armenia, Turkey and Estonia to the CMR Additional Protocol concerning the Electronic Consignment Note (eCMR) will further enhance road transport facilitation in the Euro-Asian region. During the review period, 3 LLDCs (Bhutan (2014); Lao PDR (2016); Nepal (2017)) and 3 transit countries (Cambodia (2014), Islamic Republic of Iran (2016), and Thailand (2015)) ratified the Revised Kyoto Convention. Regarding Euro-Asian railway facilitation for cargo, UNECE-led efforts are underway to create of a full-fledged Unified Railway Law (URL). Through the URL, operators will be able to carry out their activity within a single legal regime along the entire East-West axis. As of 2017, draft legal provisions of the URL are being tested in real-life. A virtual pilot test took place, in May 2017, along the corridor Germany – Poland – Belarus – Russian Federation. Real pilot tests will be carried out by the railway companies involved in the UNECE Group of Experts towards Unified Railway Law along the corridors agreed and along other corridors if proposed by Governments to ensure the operational validity and effectiveness of the legal provisions prepared.

The Intergovernmental Agreement on Dry Ports entered into force on 23 April 2016. Five LLDCs (Afghanistan (2016), Kazakhstan (2016), Mongolia (2016), Tajikistan (2015), Turkmenistan (2016)) and six transit countries (Bangladesh (2016), China (2016), India (2015), Islamic Republic of Iran (2017), Russian Federation (2015), Viet Nam (2014)) have ratified the Intergovernmental Agreement on Dry Ports.

Euro-Asia LLDCs have also made progress in entering into sub-regional and bilateral agreements to improve transit. Overall during the review period, landlocked and transit countries in the region have been particularly active in negotiation and preparation for implementation of sub-regional and multilateral transit and transport facilitation arrangements (e.g. under Eurasian Economic Union; ASEAN and Greater Mekong Subregion; Shanghai Cooperation Organization; South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation, Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation and intergovernmental agreements in several sub-regions). In November

2017, Afghanistan, Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan, Georgia and Turkey signed the Lapis Lazuli Route Agreement with a view to build an integrated transport and transit system among the contracting parties. The first shipment via this route was conducted recently.

Despite the progress made, a majority of sub-regional and multilateral arrangements are, however, still not fully implemented in practice. More needs to be done to ensure the full and effective implementation of the agreements. Both LLDCs and transit countries face challenges, including capacity constraints and lack of effective coordination among the different stakeholders involved on transit issues.

With regard to the VPoA specific objective of reducing travel time along corridors with the aim of allowing transit cargo to move 300-400 kilometres every 24 hours, available data on road corridor performance in the different corridors of the Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation Program (which serves 8 LLDCs) shows an overall improvement and achievement of the target on all corridors except corridor 5 that goes along Pakistan, Afghanistan and China. This is the slowest corridor with a speed of only 240 km per 24 hours in 2017. The VPoA target for transit travel speed is also not achieved in South Asia transit corridors (e.g. corridors between India-Nepal, Bangladesh-India-Nepal, India-Bhutan). The speed for travel in railway transport is lower than the speed in road transport. Despite increased speeds, the VPoA target is still not achieved in several railway transport corridors (e.g. CAREC corridors 4 and 6). The container block trains are an exception, and travel much faster than the VPoA target speed.

Achievements regarding the VPoA specific objective of reducing time spent at land borders varies significantly for different border crossings across the landlocked countries in the Asia-Pacific region. The overall average time to complete border-crossing formalities at selected CAREC Corridors in period 2014 – 2017 actually increased and the VPoA target was not achieved at many border crossings (e.g. at CAREC corridors 2, 3, 5, and 6). However, in some corridors a significant reduction of time to clear the border crossing has been recorded (e.g. at CAREC corridors 1 and 4) and the VPoA target was achieved. The time spent at borders in 2016 ranges substantially from less than an hour (e.g. at CAREC corridor 1 border crossings between Kazakhstan and Russian Federation where there is no a customs control under the EAEU) to 3-4 days (e.g. at border crossings between Afghanistan and Pakistan). In general, the average time for railway border crossings is much longer than the average time for road border crossings.

Due to limited publicly available information (e.g. on time release studies or surveys conducted), it is not possible to make detailed assessment on progress made regarding the VPoA target to significantly reduce the time spent at land borders for all Asia and the Pacific landlocked countries.

Recommendations

- There is need for LLDCs and transit countries to enhance their efforts to accede to and implement transport and border crossing facilitation conventions and legal instruments. Full implementation of these instruments represents an opportunity to make quick gains in terms of border crossing time and cost efficiency and yet, many LLDCs globally, including some in the Euro-Asian region have not yet acceded to either the TIR or the Harmonization Convention.

- LLDCs and transit countries are encouraged to cooperate and coordinate on fundamental transit policies, laws and regulations and towards enhancing freedom of transit and transpose the international standards based on international conventions/agreements into national legislation. International organizations are encouraged to scale up technical assistance and capacity building support towards the effective accession, ratification and implementation of relevant international conventions and regional agreements.
- LLDCs and transit countries are encouraged to use available tools to promote transit with a view of supporting economic development of LLDCs. These include the WCO Transit Guidelines, the TIR Handbook and related UNECE training courses covering topics such as computerization and electronic tools including the TIR database (ITDB), eTIR and the electronic pre-declaration tool (TIR-EPD) designed to improve risk management. Training materials are also available on controlled access to the TIR procedure, vehicle control and claims on customs duties and taxes. Furthermore, also the UNECE-OSCE Handbook of Best Practices at Border Crossings – A Trade and Transport Facilitation Perspective provides a wealth of information and examples in support of LLDCs. These also include ESCAP's Intergovernmental Agreement on Dry Ports; the Regional Strategic Framework for the Facilitation of International Road Transport; the Regional Cooperation Framework for Facilitation of International Rail Transport; ESCAP's transport facilitation models to comprehensively address non-physical barriers and enable seamless international transport in the region.
- Countries are encouraged to strengthen or adopt a corridor approach to improve transit. UNECE, ESCAP, UN-OHRLLS, the International Think Tank for LLDCs and other relevant partners are invited to provide further technical support.
- Countries should continue to monitor travel time along major Euro-Asian transit transport corridors for landlocked countries at regular intervals (e.g. every second year by using the ESCAP Time/Cost Distance methodology). For the corridors where the VPoA target of travelling 300-400 kilometers per 24 hours has not yet been achieved, countries should identify main impediments, develop action plans and implement measures to reduce travel times.
- Countries should monitor the time spent at land borders along major transit transport corridors for landlocked countries on regular intervals (e.g. every second year by using WCO Time Release Studies and/or the ESCAP Time/Cost Distance methodology) and should publish the main findings.
- Countries should identify the reasons for major delays and possibilities for streamlined movement across borders (e.g. by using the ESCAP-ECE Business Process Analysis guide); develop action plans and implement measures to reduce time spent at land borders (e.g. electronic exchange of cargo manifests; automated customs clearance system and paperless customs transit procedures; improvements of facilities and border crossing infrastructure; reduction of transloading at border crossings; comprehensive integrity programme).
- The landlocked countries, transit countries and developing partners should continue developing and implementing joint projects to support the VPoA activities (including research,

advocacy, training, technical and financial assistance to the landlocked countries). The effects of such activities could be maximized with additional synergies to avoid duplication and better respond to the needs of individual landlocked developing countries for transit transport facilitation.

- The landlocked countries, transit countries and development partners should work together to bring greater synergy and complementarity among various transport and transit corridors in the wider Eurasian region.

Priority Area 2: Infrastructure Development and Maintenance

The Euro-Asian LLDCs have made progress in the development of transport infrastructure and maintenance including rail, road, air, waterways and energy pipelines. LLDCs have continued to invest in their infrastructure and connectivity by undertaking a large number of infrastructure projects and programmes, encompassing a wide spectrum of activities including development of roads, railways, dry ports, air links, and logistics services.

Progress has been made in completing missing links and improving the quality of infrastructure, although significant challenges remain. Several LLDCs have adopted new and innovative policies and programmes including transport policy reforms and institutions of appropriate regulatory frameworks and adoption of innovative approaches such as road funds or public-private-partnerships for infrastructure financing. As far as road connectivity is concerned, LLDCs in general have made significant progress in expanding and upgrading the roads, although many gaps and challenges remain in terms of quality of infrastructure and missing links. Estimates suggest a paved road density (Kms per 1,000 square kilometer) for Eastern Europe and Central Asia to be 181, whereas in South Asia – 80, as compared to the world average of 151, indicating huge scope for further expansion of road network in South Asia. Participants discussed the road infrastructure upgrading and expansion that their countries were undertaking. Overall, despite the progress made, more is needed to establish a transit road network that will improve connectivity of the LLDCs with the global markets.

Euro-Asian LLDCs highlighted their efforts in expanding and improving the existing network. Asian LLDCs noted the railway projects that they have engaged in to improve and modernize their railway systems and their connectivity with their neighbours and transit countries under the framework of the Intergovernmental Agreement on the Trans-Asian Railway Network and through participation in the UNECE Euro-Asian Transport Links (EATL) project.

The meeting noted that the Trans-Asian Railway network plays an important role in the integration efforts of LLDCs in the region. However, there are currently an estimated 10,900 km of missing links, representing 9.3% of the identified network. The efficiency of rail transport in the Euro-Asian LLDCs is also hampered by poor maintenance and existence of different technical standards and regulations across the region. The total estimated investment required to put in place these missing links is estimated at \$75.6 billion. Participants noted some recent promising progress made including the Afghanistan-Turkmenistan railway network (inaugurated in 2016); the Five Nations Railway Corridor; the ongoing construction of China-Lao Railway Project and a rail link connecting China, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and the Islamic Republic of Iran (inaugurated in

2016). The meeting also noted that the implementation of the UNECE EATL project, in its subsequent phases (since 2002) has yielded substantive results. The identification of 9 rail & road routes, 17 water transport links, 52 inland river ports and 70 maritime ports, the prioritization of infrastructure investment projects worth USD 215 billion, the development of a Geographical Information System (GIS) database, the analysis of non-physical obstacles to transport, the comparison study between maritime and inland transport, the organization of numerous national capacity-building workshops on transport facilitation as well as the efforts to operationalize those corridors by preparing common time schedules and tariffs, have all helped to lay the foundation for a more efficient Euro-Asian transport network. Phase III, which has recently come to an end, gathered 38 countries from Europe and Asia and *inter alia* concluded that road and rail transportation along Euro-Asian corridors is supplementing rather than competing with maritime transport, providing alternative delivery options, especially for high value and time-sensitive cargo, including in the context of growing e-commerce between Europe and Asia. During Phase III of the project, Governments in the EATL region have consistently worked on addressing the physical and non-physical obstacles to international transport on the EATL routes. Yet some key challenges remain, including: Missing or outdated road & railway links and inter-modal/transshipment infrastructure on some segments; Cumbersome border crossing, customs and transit procedures due to a lack of access to & implementation of UN legal instruments; Lack of harmonized operating and technical inter-operability standards for railway infrastructure & rolling stock; Different legal regimes for railway transport contracts; as well as discrepancies between West and Eastbound cargo traffic on EATL routes, the lack of efficient, corridor specific public-private sector coordination platforms, work plans and key performance indicators.

It should however be noted that progress is being made when it comes to administrative railway interoperability, particularly through the use of the common CIM/SMGS Consignment Note prepared by CIT and OSJD. Building on this achievement, UNECE member States are currently trying to solve remaining administrative issues through the creation of a full-fledged Unified Railway Law, which would establish a single legal rail regime (one contract of carriage, one liability and one consignment note) along the entire West-East axis connecting Europe to Asia.

Air transport is particularly important for the LLDCs because it is a mode of transport that provides direct access to international markets without having to pass through transit countries. According to the United Nations SDG Indicators Global Database, the Euro-Asian LLDCs' freight and passenger volumes transported by air amounted to 37% and 48% respectively of the total LLDCs' freight and passenger volumes in 2016. The challenges faced by LLDCs' air transport industry include high scale of investment that is needed for infrastructure development and maintenance, rehabilitation and replacement of aged fleet, and upgrading of airports and terminals, poor airport infrastructures, lack of physical and human resources and new technologies, limited connectivity, and lack of transit facilities.

Dry ports are becoming increasingly popular with the Euro-Asian LLDCs, particularly along their borders with transit countries. They are important for facilitating customs clearance procedures intermodal transfers and for other diverse cargo handling, warehousing, and logistics services and have the potential to transform landlocked developing countries into land-linked developing countries. Several LLDCs have signed the ESCAP Intergovernmental Agreement on Dry Ports. Kazakhstan completed the construction of a dry port and related infrastructure in the east of the

country, bordering China, as part of the Khorgos-Eastern Gate Free Economic Zone initiative. It has a total area of 129 hectares and integrated with logistics and industrial zones. This dry port provides customers a full range of transport and logistics services under the “one-stop-shop” principle including customs and brokerage services. Lack of financial resources and shortage of skilled personnel have hampered the development of dry ports in the LLDCs.

With regard to seaports, the share of port throughput for the transit developing countries as measured by the number of containers that pass through the Asian transit countries’ ports has increased by 42% from 2010 to 2016, while the world’s throughput grew by 27%. Asian transit developing countries accounted for 35% of world total container throughput in 2016 while Latin America and Africa regions account for 2.6% and 1.9% respectively. China continues to lead the world in terms of port throughput and efficiency and increasingly as a provider of expertise in port construction and management. Major challenges to port infrastructure include natural disasters and the impact of climate change in particular coastal flooding. This heightens the need for adaptation strategies to improve the resilience of port infrastructure and systems.

Despite these efforts and the increase in the number of facilities, significant infrastructure financing gaps remain, calling for strengthened international support measures, development of implementation capacity and reform of policy and regulatory frameworks including the creation of an enabling environment to increase investment in the infrastructure development. Although there are encouraging signs of increased financial resources available for implementing infrastructure projects and improve trade capacity, the infrastructure investment gaps in the LLDCs far exceed the supply of resources presently available. ESCAP estimates total investment needed to upgrade the regional transport systems and close missing links to be \$106 billion, including \$64 billion for the Trans-Asian Railway, \$40 billion for Asian Highway projects and \$2 billion for dry ports. One of the key challenges faced by the LLDCs is the insufficient data and information as well as local underdeveloped capacity in estimating accurately the infrastructure investments gaps they presently face.

LLDCs continue to encounter challenges and constraints including institutional bottlenecks and lack of skilled human resources in developing their infrastructure and improving connectivity. Recognizing that financing of Euro-Asian transport links remains a major obstacle, UNECE is taking the lead in developing an International Transport Infrastructure Observatory. Once fully operational it will become an innovative example, of how Governments’ data on new transport infrastructure projects are presented to financial institutions in a transparent, comprehensive and "bankable" way. The observatory will be devised as an online platform in a Geographic Information System (GIS) environment where (a) governments find all the relevant data to prepare, benchmark and present their transport infrastructure projects and (b) International Financial Institutions (IFIs) can consider, analyze and compare projects from a regional/international perspective and identify projects to finance. IFIs could at a glance not only see online in the format of digital maps all relevant information (incl. pre-feasibility studies) about projects that are in need of funding but also they will be able to see if these projects are part of international corridors, if these corridors are facilitated by the UN international agreements, if these regions will be impacted by climate changes and what kind of transport infrastructure adaptation measures should be further considered, how much other Governments in the region have paid for similar projects etc. The

project is at its initial stage where Central Asian countries members States of both UNECE and ESCAP provide data and are being trained to use the tool.

Recommendations

- LLDCs need to upgrade and properly maintain existing road and rail networks as a major priority in collaboration with transit developing countries and development partners. Landlocked developing countries and transit countries, should in a coordinated manner, develop and upgrade international transport and transit corridors encompassing all modes of transportation, such as inland waterways, roads, rail networks, ports and pipelines, to address the special development needs and challenges of landlocked developing countries.
- More specifically, Euro-Asian countries both at the public and private sector levels should join forces to address the common bottlenecks identified in the framework of international transport master plans such as the UNECE Euro-Asian Transport Links Project. Identified, and well-documented remaining challenges include: missing or outdated road and railway and inter-modal/transshipment infrastructure, outdated border crossing infrastructure and equipment, the lack of harmonized operating and technical inter-operability standards for railway infrastructure and rolling stock, inefficient use of current network capacity for railway operations and poor ICT connectivity and ICT interoperability on EATL corridors.
- LLDCs and transit countries should integrate development and maintenance of trans-boundary transport and infrastructure corridors in the national development strategies. These should not be seen as stand-alone initiatives. Moreover, in addition to national development strategies, cross-border, public and private sector cooperation and coordination efforts on Euro-Asian routes should also be enhanced. For instance, through the development of corridor-specific work plans where Governments and private sector stakeholders can inter alia agree on: Common transport infrastructure development goals and priorities, Priority list of technical inter-operability standards to be streamlined along corridors, and on efforts to enhance the network capacity such as the pooling of rolling stock and containers. Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) could be developed to measure progress being made on an annual or bi-annual basis.
- International community particularly the international and regional financial institutions, the UN system and other development partners should strengthen their technical assistance programs for improving the institutional capacities of the LLDCs to formulate and implement bankable infrastructure development projects more effectively and efficiently. In this regard, Euro-Asian countries, regional and subregional organizations in the EATL region, private sector and IFIs should make the best of use of the on-going UNECE efforts regarding the establishment of the International Transport Infrastructure Observatory.
- Building further on the EATL Phase III finding that multi stakeholder dialogue on a corridor specific bases is lacking, Governments and the private sector are encouraged to work together to launch public-private partnerships to support transport, ICT and energy infrastructure development.

- Regional bodies and their members are encouraged to prioritize programmes of infrastructure development involving LLDCs, as often other countries may have different priorities, thereby leaving the LLDCs interests not being addressed.
- LLDCs are encouraged to design and implement policies that promote transport connectivity. UN-OHRLLS, UNECE, ESCAP, the International Think Tank for LLDCs and other relevant partners are invited to provide further technical support.
- LLDCs and transit countries are encouraged to adopt an integrated and sustainable approach to transport corridors to maximize the contribution of transport connectivity to sustainable development. OHRLLS, UNESCAP and UNECE and other development partners are invited to support those efforts by providing policy, analytical and technical support.
- LLDCs and their development partners and regional and international financial institutions, should strengthen their efforts to mobilize and allocate more resources for infrastructure development and maintenance including through establishment of dedicated fund
- LLDCs need to strengthen their efforts in mobilizing domestic resources and bring about necessary tax administration reforms to meet their growing infrastructure financing needs. Regulatory and governance structures should be streamlined and made more efficient so that private sector is incentivized to increase their participation in infrastructure development projects and programmes.
- LLDCs need to find innovative solutions in combining domestic resources with ODA, FDI and other forms of external financial flows including blended finance in building sustainable and resilient transport infrastructure and improving their connectivity in roads, railways, aviation, energy, telecommunications and ICT.

Sustainable Energy and Connectivity

Euro-Asian LLDCs have made progress in improving access to clean energy for their populations. The average proportion of population with access to electricity increased from 95.2% in 2014 to 96% in 2016 which is much higher than the LLDC group average of 59.7% in 2014 to 61.7% in 2016. Only 4 LLDCs in the region have not yet reached 100% access. However, LLDCs continue to face several challenges in developing electricity energy infrastructure and connectivity and there is a rural-urban gap. Challenges posed by climate change are adversely impacting LLDCs. Outdated and inefficient grid and transmission systems result in transmission and distribution loss. As far as energy efficiency is concerned, in spite of the progress that countries in the region have made, energy intensity is still high implying the need to improve. Increased investments in overcoming these deficiencies and improving their electricity energy infrastructure would be needed to improve the energy connectivity in these countries.

Furthermore, the Euro-Asian LLDCs have lower level of proportion of total final energy consumption that is renewable which was 27.3% in 2015 compared to the LLDC group average of 43% that same year implying the need for greater efforts to increase renewable sources of energy.

Recommendations

- LLDCs and transit countries are encouraged to strengthen cooperation in the region through sub-regional and regional energy cooperation to increase cross-border power grid connectivity, enhance energy security, advance economic integration and sustainable development.
- Development partners, financial institutions, and regional organizations are called upon to support sub-regional cooperation and capacities to accelerate national efforts and, in particular, to promote innovation and facilitate financing.
- LLDCs are encouraged to share country experiences as well as the best practices regarding increased energy access and renewable energy. UNECE, ESCAP and OHRLLS are called upon to facilitate such sharing of information.

Information and communications technology (ICT)

The LLDCs in the region have made progress in improving access to internet in terms of percentage of population with internet use which increased from 36.5% in 2014 to 43% in 2016. While this is an achievement, LLDCs still lag behind world average and developed countries. Fixed-broadband subscriptions per 100 inhabitants increased from 6.3 in 2014 to 7 in 2016. The Euro-Asian LLDCs also experienced growth in mobile cellular subscriptions that increased from 101 per 100 people in 2014 to 103 in 2016. However, this varies widely among countries with 4 countries having mobile cellular subscriptions of less than 80 per 100 people. The LLDCs continue to face high costs for broadband and more efforts are required to lower prices. Some LLDCs have been able to make strides in creating a sustainable information and communication technology infrastructure and bring about digital transformation in their countries through development and utilization of new digital technologies applications and services, promotion of e-governance and e-applications, effective and transparent public administration, ICT skills training, and cyber security. However continued efforts are required from all stakeholders to take the progress forward. Sharing of experiences will be critical.

Recommendations

- LLDCs and transit countries are encouraged to collaborate to establish ICT infrastructure, applications and services with the support of governments, private sector, development partners, multilateral financial and development institutions and regional banks.
- LLDCs are encouraged to create appropriate enabling environment to reap the benefits of digital economy. UNESCAP, UNECE, ITU and other partners are called upon to enhance technical assistance to LLDCs to develop the necessary hard and soft ICT infrastructure as well as the necessary legal framework and policies to support ICT development including enhancement of digital skills, promotion of digital inclusion, increased adoption and utilization of ICT applications and services and to close the digital divide;
- Initiatives such as the UNESCAP-led initiative for the Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway that aims to increase the availability and affordability of broadband internet across the region by strengthening the underlying internet infrastructure in the region should be strengthened.

Priority 3: International trade and trade facilitation

International trade

LLDCs have undertaken a wide variety of measures to improve their trade capacity and harness the potential of international trade as an engine for their growth and development. Yet, their share of exports in global trade remains insignificant. Euro-Asian LLDCs' exports accounted for just 0.6% of global exports in 2017 and decreased from 0.85% in 2014. Their exports are dominated by limited number of products, principally natural resources such as oil, gas and minerals, raw agricultural products or low value-added manufactured goods. Although several LLDCs such as Armenia, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Lao PDR, Mongolia and Uzbekistan have been able to add value to natural resources and agricultural products, overall their exports of manufactures as a proportion of total merchandise exports tends to be low and has progressed slowly if at all.

High-technology exports do not feature prominently in the LLDCs except for Kazakhstan and Lao PDR. LLDCs also continue to rely on limited number of destination countries, mainly non-LLDC transit neighbours within the region and developed countries, in particular the EU. For example, China and Thailand are main trading partners of Lao PDR; India is Bhutan largest partner absorbing 85.5% of Bhutan's exports; China and Russia are dominant partners for Mongolia; EU and Russia are major partners for Armenia; India is largest trading partner of Nepal.

The commodities sector holds significant potential for export diversification, value addition, employment and income generation for LLDCs, given the disproportionate share of commodities in their exports. However, despite the important role of commodities in LLDCs there are limited commodity-based policies and strategies in most LLDCs. Euro-Asian LLDCs, demonstrate that they have comparative advantages in agriculture, agro-processing, light manufacturing (textiles, leather and leather products) and tourism.

The overall lacklustre trade performance of the LLDCs is attributable to their limited manufacturing capacity and export diversification, transit barriers, low quality infrastructure, missing links, high trade costs, but also their dependence on external conditions, such as the projected slowing down of the global economy, volatility in commodity prices and demand from and economic conditions in key trading partners.

Recommendations

- LLDCs focus on diversification of markets and products for export. The Governments should formulate policies aimed at diversifying their export base and adding value to their exports in order to expand their participation in regional and global value chains.
- The international community should support LLDCs in diversifying their exports, including through transfer of relevant technologies and support in developing their productive capacities.
- LLDCs are encouraged to formulate and implement domestic policies and strategies that take into account commodity diversification and the overall role of the commodities sector and UNCTAD, the Common Fund for Commodities, in collaboration with UN-OHRLLS, should continue supporting LLDCs in harnessing the role of the commodities sector for their socio-economic development by putting in place commodity-based policies and strategies.

- Maintaining stable export markets for export is key for the Euro-Asian LLDCs for maintaining growth momentum. The trade dependence of LLDC on narrow range of countries for their exports should be addressed by LLDCs, the transit countries and development partners in a comprehensive way.
- LLDCs need to make enhanced effort aimed at improving their business environment if they want to make significant inroads into export markets and improve growth prospects.

Trade facilitation

Trade facilitation plays a crucial role improving the trade competitiveness of the LLDCs, reducing the high trade costs and boosting their exports. A wide range of trade facilitation reforms aimed at simplifying trade regulations, procedures and documents have been implemented by LLDCs and their transit neighbours, with support from development partners. These include promotion of cross-border paperless trade, adoption of e-based transit and transport facilitation tools single-stop inspections, single windows for documentation, electronic payment and transparency and modernization of border posts and customs services. But Euro-Asian LLDCs continue to face high trade and transit costs, cumbersome border crossing documentation and regulatory requirements and their logistics performance lacks behind other developing countries.

Some progress has been made in establishing or strengthening national committees on trade facilitation during the review period, such as in Bhutan, Lao PDR or Mongolia, and Armenia is considering establishment of national committee on trade facilitation. Some progress has been made in adopting ICT solutions for streamlining and modernizing customs clearance procedures and formalities, reducing the number of documents, introducing electronic declaration system, and improving vehicle movements speedily and less expensively. A number of LLDCs have adopted the Single Window facilitation tools and Automated System of Customs Data (ASYCUDA) which have improved customs clearance and procedures. The LLDCs have made significant progress in ratifying the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement, with all the one Euro-Asian LLDCs that are members of the WTO having ratified it, as of February 2019.

Recommendations

- LLDCs which are yet to become members of WTO are encouraged to do so as soon as possible and should be provided with technical assistance and capacity-building support by the international community in their accession efforts.
- LLDCs and transit countries are encouraged to ratify and implement relevant international conventions and agreements, including the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement, ESCAP Framework Agreement on Facilitation of Cross-Border Paperless Trade in Asia and the Pacific, as well as other regional and sub-regional agreements on trade and trade facilitation.
- Enhanced provision of technical, financial and capacity-building assistance to LLDCs and transit countries is necessary to ensure the effective implementation of the Trade Facilitation Agreement. To facilitate the acquisition of assistance, landlocked developing countries should be proactive in indicating their capacity needs under Category C of the Agreement.

- Those LLDCs that have not yet done so, are encouraged to establish a national committee on trade facilitation, with the involvement of all relevant stakeholders, including the private sector. They should also establish mechanisms to monitor progress made in streamlining trade procedures, following e.g., the ADB-ESCAP guide and related UN/CEFACT Recommendation 42 on Trade and Transport Facilitation Monitoring Mechanism.
- LLDCs need to enhance their efforts in improving and harmonizing their customs administrations and streamlining border-crossing procedures, including by reducing the number of documents needed for export and import.
- LLDCs should promote greater use of technology-driven and ICT solutions to trade facilitation, including introduction of paperless trade, automation of customs procedures and clearance systems, and implementation of single window environment.
- LLDCs and transit countries should fully utilize the trade facilitation tools developed by international organizations. Neighbouring transit countries should enhance their involvement relating to facilitation measures.

Priority Area 4: Regional Integration and cooperation

Regional cooperation and bilateral, trilateral and multilateral trading agreements and cooperation frameworks are important in boosting LLDCs' exports and expanding their domestic markets. Most of the LLDCs in the region have actively sought to utilize opportunities offered by several regional and sub-regional trade, transport and transit facilitation agreements and strengthen their participation in regional value chains. Since the adoption of the VPoA, the Eurasian Economic Union that includes 3 LLDCs was established and entered into force on 6 August 2015. The union aims, among others, to create a common market for goods, capital and labour, and promote harmonization of policies in areas such as energy and transport. Common transport, agriculture and energy policies with provisions for a single currency and greater integration are also planned.

Bangladesh, Bhutan, India and Nepal signed a Motor Vehicles Agreement on 15 June 2015 to facilitate movement of cargo across their borders. The Agreement has the potential to reduce trade costs and contribute significantly to realizing trade opportunities that exist amongst these four countries. In November 2016, ASEAN adopted the Master Plan on ASEAN Connectivity 2025 aimed at deepening integration aimed at promoting competitiveness and inclusiveness. The Belt and Road Initiative is also aimed at deepening regional integration and enhanced infrastructure connectivity. In June 2016, China-Mongolia-Russia adopted a program of building an economic corridor between the countries. The program of the China-Mongolia-Russia Economic Corridor includes some projects aimed at strengthening transport, logistics and trade in the region.

Utilization of new policy tools such as the UNESCAP-led Framework Agreement on the Facilitation of Cross-Border Paperless Trade in Asia and the Pacific, adopted in 2016 for the digitization of trade procedures and establishment of single-window systems has helped in advancing regional integration. Since 2017, about twenty-five ESCAP member States have been actively engaged in developing a roadmap for implementation of the substantive provisions of the

Framework Agreement, also supported by the United Nations Network of Experts for Paperless Trade and Transport in Asia and the Pacific (UNNEXT).

The Vienna Programme of Action also calls for regional integration and cooperation among landlocked developing countries that goes beyond trade and transport facilitation to encompass investment, research and development, and policies supportive of regional industrial development and regional connectivity. This broader approach is necessary to foster structural change in landlocked developing countries and to enhance their competitiveness in international markets. There are signs that such broader cooperation is taking place both among landlocked developing countries and between them and other non-landlocked developing countries. For example, industrial enterprises from other countries, including China, have set up production bases in the special economic zones in the Lao People's Democratic Republic.

Recommendations

- Regional initiatives that provide opportunities for the LLDCs to integrate into the regional and global economy should be supported for their effective implementation. Regional and international development partners, UN organizations and other international organizations are encouraged to support the LLDCs and transit countries with technical, financial and capacity building support to advance their regional integration efforts.
- UNESCAP is uniquely placed to promote deeper cooperation in Asia and the Pacific by providing a forum to share experiences on fostering broader regional integration.
- 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 and regional cooperation agreements and frameworks.
- LLDCs and transit countries should also consider undertaking regional integration initiatives that encompass investment, research and development, policy coordination dialogue, industrial development and regional connectivity.
- LLDCs, transit countries, regional organisations and development partners are encouraged to bring greater synergy and complementarity among various regional and sub-regional cooperation framework.

Priority 5: Structural economic transformation

Structural economic transformation is the key to reducing the vulnerabilities of the LLDCs, creating jobs, building local productive capacity, and reducing poverty and inequality. Diversification of their economies and progressive reduction of dependency on extraction and simple processing of commodities can bring about significant gains in achieving structural change. Although some progress has been made, landlocked developing countries as a whole are far from achieving significant structural transformation that would put their economies on a sustained growth and development path that is driven by a productive and innovative manufacturing sector and supported by equally efficient and productive agricultural and services sectors.

Almost all Euro-Asian LLDCs are experiencing negative or pre-mature deindustrialization, where the decline in the role of manufacturing is not due to natural advancement to high productivity service sector, but due to the decline in manufacturing competitiveness. The value-added contribution of the agricultural sector has declined between 2014 and 2017 (or 2016) in 10 of the 14 Euro-Asian LLDCs. At the same time, this trend has not been followed by a more important role of modern and dynamic manufacturing sector. The value-added contribution of manufacturing sector has also declined or remained constant in 7 LLDCs during the same period.

LLDCs' lack of diversification makes them not only vulnerable to external shocks but limits their competitiveness and ability to create high value-added products, meaningful productive employment and innovative technologies. The limited manufacturing and industrial capacity hampers the integration of LLDCs into value chains, as modern manufacturing relies on the import and export of components through regional and global value chains. Producers of low value-added manufactures also face the danger of their cost advantage disappearing in the face of new technologies.

One of the most important requirements for promoting growth, developing an industrial base and bringing about structural change is the investment climate and enabling regulatory environment for the local private sector. Many Euro-Asian LLDCs have shown improvements in creating enabling regulatory environments for the local private sector during the review period and all have improved their World Bank's Doing Business rankings between 2018 and 2019. Domestic credit to the private sector has either shrank or stagnated in most of the LLDCs in particular in Central Asia. Only Nepal was able to significantly increase domestic credit to private sector during the review period. Furthermore, R&D expenditures in the Euro-Asian LLDCs are low, ranging between 0.11 and 0.44% of GDP. In addition, they hardly show increasing trends, which is not supportive for innovations required for facilitating economic transformation through knowledge acquisition and innovation.

Some LLDCs have implemented domestic policies for fostering structural transformation. For example, Bhutan has adopted in 2016 Economic Development Policy, FDI Policy and Public Private Partnership Policy in order to boost investment in key sectors, attract investors and create a greater role for the private sector. In an effort for export diversification, Mongolia adopted in 2018 the Mongol Export Program aimed at stabilizing enabling environment for non-mining exports, supporting value-addition processing and strengthening competitiveness of those exports. Azerbaijan established in 2018 an Agency for Small and Medium-Sized Enterprise. In Nepal major sectoral policies on agricultural development, trade integration, ICT, foreign investment and national tourism were adopted since 2015.

Recommendations

- Domestic policies in LLDCs need to focus on fostering productive capacities and structural economic transformation. Economic structural transformation requires industrial policy, supported by enabling macroeconomic, trade, financial, labour market, human resource and research & development policies.

- LLDCs should focus on enhancing their capacity in modern higher value-added products and high-productivity sectors, including through targeted incentives for sectors and/or firms delivering higher value-added production and/or exports. They should continue to utilize new and existing technology in the production of manufactured products in order to add value to their products.
- In order to be able to participate at the higher end of global and regional value chains, LLDCs need to increase levels of human capital, improve connectivity, enhance research, development and innovation capacity and strengthen institutional as well as governance capabilities.
- The key to creating competitive advantages in high-value-added products is through creating backward and forward linkages among manufacturing, agriculture and services sectors by linking small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to the supply chains and production networks.
- LLDCs should continue to make improvements in the enabling regulatory environment for business which is crucial for developing a strong industrial base and attracting investment. Development partners should provide technical, financial and capacity-building assistance to support such efforts. There is also a need to incentivize the private sector, especially in sectors of comparative advantages, and improving access to low-cost finance for SMEs.
- To promote higher productivity and high value-added production, LLDCs should make efforts to raise agricultural productivity and industrialize agriculture, including by employing industrial production methods, provision of necessary infrastructure and technology to link with the industrial sector, and promoting agribusiness and agro-processing, which hold large potential for economic diversification for some LLDCs.
- Similarly, for high productivity and value-added services sector activities, there needs to be strong backward and forward linkages with the industrial sector, along with the narrowing of skills gap required in the market, increase in R&D investment to promote innovation, and investment in education and health sectors to boost the capacity of the economy to sustain progress and prosperity.
- LLDCs should aim to strengthen state capacity, as creator of institutions, policy reformer and productive capacity enhancer, for managing transition and navigating structural transformation.

Priority 6: Means of implementation

LLDCs need strong support from their development partners and transit neighbours in developing their infrastructure, building resilient transport connectivity, improving their trade capacity, adopting trade facilitation measures and tools and supporting overall development. The recent experience of Euro-Asian LLDCs in raising domestic resources through central government taxes is a mixed picture. In most LLDCs, domestic resources are insufficient to meet their growing development needs. Many LLDCs have limited capacity to raise domestic and other resources on their own.

ODA has continued to play a critical role for the LLDCs in effective implementation of the VPoA, even though flows have stagnated since 2014 and declined in some countries. Net ODA to Euro-Asian LLDCs fell from \$9.4 billion in 2014 to \$8.7 billion in 2017. However, ODA receipt vary largely between the countries. The Aid for Trade initiative is a further important source of financing for developing trade-related infrastructure, capacity-building on trade policies and trade facilitation measures and linking LLDCs to the regional value chains. Aid for trade, in combination with complementary policies, has contributed to lowering of trade costs, better border institutions and smoother regulatory procedures. While Aid for Trade flows to the Euro-Asian LLDCs tapered off after 2010, receipt in 2017 amounted to \$3 billion, up from \$2.6 in 2014.

FDI has a critical role in supplementing other official development flows in driving LLDCs' economic growth and boosting their trade potential. Inflows of FDI to the LLDCs have been falling over the years under review, falling by 35% between 2014 and 2017. In addition, FDI inflows are highly concentrated in few LLDCs, with three countries accounting for over three quarters of the FDI flows to the Euro-Asian LLDCs.

South-South cooperation has recently emerged as a very effective platform for mobilizing resources for LLDCs, in particular for infrastructure development. Similarly, various multilateral initiatives can be an important source of financing for LLDCs, again in particular for infrastructure development.

Recommendations

- A coherent and comprehensive strategy to mobilize resources for implementation of VPoA should include mobilization and efficient use of domestic resources, attracting FDI, better and targeted use of ODA, promotion of south-south cooperation, and increased use of innovative financing.
- Fulfilment of ODA commitments remain crucial and development partners are encouraged to increase ODA flows to LLDCs and to continue and to increase their support to the Aid for Trade initiative, giving adequate consideration to the special needs and requirements of LLDCs.
- LLDCs should strengthen their efforts in raising domestic savings, including through carrying out reforms in tax administration, broadening the tax base and strengthening domestic capital markets. The international community should assist in efforts to coordinate tax policies among countries to eliminate tax loopholes and flight of capital.
- To fully leverage the impact of the private sector, national and foreign, a stable, predictable and enabling investment environment is needed encourage entrepreneurship, vibrant domestic business and attract FDI. LLDCs can also attract increased and more diversified FDI by engaging in regional integration initiatives and deepening their cooperation with neighbouring countries, especially transit countries.
- LLDCs will also need to better leverage ODA for attracting further finance from other sources such as foreign direct investment, public-private sector partnerships, and blended finance.

Furthermore, FDI, public-private partnerships, blended finance need to be utilized more effectively in promoting growth and structural change in the LLDCs.

- LLDCs should make advantage of the financial and technical resources from multilateral initiatives such as the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, the New Development Bank, the World Bank's Global Infrastructure Facility, the ASEAN Infrastructure Fund and the SAARC Development Fund.
- Those LLDCs that have not yet done so are encouraged to ratify or accede to the Multilateral Agreement for the Establishment of an International Think Tank for LLDCs.
- LLDCs, with the support of their development partners, are encouraged to take advantage of the growing opportunities offered by private investment through impact investing to enhance their commodity diversification efforts and UNCTAD and CFC in collaboration with other commodity bodies, UN-ESCAP and UN-OHRLLS should assist LLDCs in this process.

Way Forward

1. The meeting calls upon UN ESCAP and UN ECE to continue providing technical support to the region's landlocked developing countries in areas related to the priorities of the Vienna Programme of Action in order to accelerate its implementation.
2. The meeting requests the Chair to submit the outcome of the Euro-Asia Regional Review to the seventy-fifth session of the Commission to be held 27 to 31 May 2019.
3. The meeting requests the UN ESCAP, UN ECE and UN-OHRLLS to submit the outcome of the Euro-Asia Regional Review to the Comprehensive High-level Midterm review on the implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action to be held in December 2019 in New York.
4. The meeting requests the UN ESCAP and UN ECE, in collaboration with UN-OHRLLS, to undertake the ten-year regional review of the implementation of the Programme of Action for LLDCs.
5. The Meeting calls on LLDCs, transit developing countries, development partners and regional and international organizations to actively participate in the Comprehensive High-level Midterm review on the implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action to be held in December 2019 in New York in accordance with the General Assembly resolutions 72/232 and 73/243.
6. The meeting requests that in accordance with the mandate given by the General Assembly, the Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States should continue to ensure the coordinated follow-up to, effective monitoring of and reporting on the implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action and undertake advocacy efforts at the national, regional and global levels.

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