



Third United Nations Conference on Landlocked Developing Countries

High-level Thematic Round Table 3: Building sustainable infrastructure, strengthening connectivity, and promoting unfettered transit systems for landlocked developing countries

Wednesday 11 December 2024, 10 am – 1 pm

Introduction

Landlocked developing countries (LLDCs) face inherent geographical and logistical challenges due to their lack of direct territorial access to the sea. Long distances to seaports and major markets, multiple border crossings, cumbersome transit procedures, and inadequate infrastructure pose major connectivity challenges for LLDCs, leading to their marginalization from the global economy. These constraints are further exacerbated by severe financing deficit, limited data, and technical capacity constraints, undermining their sustainable development progress.

Transport infrastructure connectivity

LLDCs' myriad transport and transit-related challenges contribute significantly to high trade costs. It is estimated that LLDCs pay more than double what coastal countries incur for imports and exports, as well as require about double the time to move goods across borders. The COVID-19 pandemic further exacerbated these constraints causing supply chain disruptions and negatively affected LLDC's trade. Their exports dropped precipitously by 40 per cent between April 2019 and April 2020, a rate more than double the global average, illustrating their higher vulnerability to external shocks.

While progress has been made in facilitating trade and fostering regional integration, inadequate physical infrastructure persists as a major obstacle to viable and predictable transit transport systems. LLDCs' road and rail network densities remain significantly lower compared to global averages. For paved roads, LLDCs have only 12 per cent of the global density, while for railways, they have just over 55 per cent. An estimated 46,000 km of railways would need to be constructed for them to reach the global average in railway density. Another major issue concerning railways is the lack of harmonization which hinders connectivity between countries.

Air transport plays a vital role in promoting connectivity of LLDCs. However, the International Air Transport Association (IATA) Airport Connectivity Indicator shows that LLDCs as group score less than 50 compared to the world average of 100, indicating their limited air connectivity. Expanding air transport infrastructure requires very high investment, while export commodities of many LLDCs have low-value addition.

Inland water transport and dry ports both play a large role as in international trade and for improving transit efficiency. However, these modes of transport also face several challenges, including high initial and maintenance costs.

Effective development and management of multi-modal transit corridors are crucial for unlocking the economic potential of LLDCs and improving their overall connectivity with the global economy.

Digital connectivity

Information and communication technologies (ICTs) present a transformative opportunity for LLDCs by facilitating the flow of information and services, enabling businesses to reach global markets without extensive physical infrastructure. However, internet penetration in LLDCs lags behind global averages. At 85 kbit/s on average, an Internet user in an LLDC uses about a third of the international bandwidth compared to the world average, and this gap increased by four percentage points over the 2019 to 2022 period.

Connectivity is further hampered by poor adoption of key connectivity policies. Only 38 per cent of LLDCs have operationalized digital strategy implementation mechanisms and operational objectives compared to the world average of 57 per cent.

The level of ICT regulatory maturity varies significantly among LLDCs, with 53 per cent remaining in the less advanced stages of ICT regulation (G1 and G2).

Energy

While notable progress has been made in recent years towards access to reliable, sustainable, modern and reasonably-priced energy, 215 million people in LLDCs still live without reliable energy and 11 out of 32 LLDCs are significantly lagging behind, with electricity access rates below 50 per cent.

In 2021, electrification rates in LLDCs had grown to 60 per cent from 45 per cent in 2010, but remained lower than the global average of 93 per cent. A significant disparity also remains between urban and rural populations in LLDCs, with 88 per cent and 46 per cent having access to electricity in 2020, respectively. Meanwhile, in 2020, the global average was significantly higher, at 97 per cent for urban areas and 83 per cent in rural areas.

Regional cooperation

Regional integration and cooperation in the development of transport, ICT, and energy infrastructure are essential for LLDCs to overcome their geographical disadvantages. Collaborative regional infrastructure projects and networks can enable LLDCs to achieve economies of scale in infrastructure development and maintenance. Regional infrastructure networks provide alternative routes and options for transportation, energy supply, and ICT connectivity for LLDCs as well as for their neighboring transit countries. In view of the above, exploring innovative approaches for new infrastructure finance facilities for LLDCs is urgent and timely.

Way forward

The Gaborone Programme of Action for LLDCs (2024-2034) sets forth ambitious targets and commitments to address the unique challenges faced by LLDCs in building sustainable infrastructure, strengthening connectivity, and promoting unfettered transit systems.

The Programme of Action has agreed on two key deliverables to address connectivity and transit infrastructure challenges, which are: to establish a high-level panel of experts with a view to identifying ways and means to ensure seamless access for the LLDCs to and from the sea; and to explore the establishment of an infrastructure investment finance facility for the LLDCs.

The Programme of Action has set a number of concrete targets and commitments which include, significantly increasing the quality of road, rail, and where applicable, inland waterway infrastructure in LLDCs by 2034; substantially improving transport and transit corridor efficiency; and increasing the share of renewable energy in the transport sector. The programme also aims to expand and upgrade airport and port facilities in LLDCs and transit countries, increase air connectivity, and achieve universal and affordable access to the internet in LLDCs by 2030. It also sets a target to achieve universal access to affordable, reliable, and modern energy services for all in LLDCs by 2030.

The Programme of Action also contains commitments related to developing and implementing comprehensive national policies for infrastructure development and maintenance, promoting public-private partnerships for infrastructure projects, and enhancing regional connectivity. There's a focus on implementing trade and transport facilitation tools, harmonizing legal frameworks, and promoting the use of new technologies in transit and transport operations. The programme also commits to supporting LLDCs in developing sustainable and resilient transport infrastructure, improving road safety, and increasing investment in transport infrastructure maintenance.

To achieve these targets and commitments, concerted efforts and partnerships between LLDCs, transit countries, development partners, and the international community are crucial. This will also require innovative financing mechanisms, technology transfer, and capacity-building initiatives tailored to the specific needs of LLDCs.

Against this backdrop, the roundtable will seek to undertake in-depth discussions on key challenges and opportunities related to closing infrastructure gaps in LLDCs and enhancing their connectivity and transit systems. It will also provide an opportunity for explore ideas for achieving targets identified in the new Programme of Action for LLDCs over the next decade.

Guiding Questions

1. Based on the lessons learned in the implementation of VPoA and targets set out in the new Programme of Action for LLDCs, what key measures can accelerate infrastructure development in transport, ICT and energy to enhance LLDCs' connectivity in the next decade?
2. What are the main barriers to improving ICT connectivity and digital infrastructure in LLDCs, and how can they be addressed?

3. How do regional integration and cooperation enhance LLDCs' connectivity? What are the key requirements for successful cross-border infrastructure collaboration?
4. How can LLDCs leverage existing infrastructure investment finance facilities? What are the most effective financing mechanisms considering LLDCs' challenges?
5. What measures are needed to build LLDCs' capacity for infrastructure projects? How can international organizations and development partners support this?

Programme

Co-chairs (interventions - 4 minutes each)

1. Co-Chair 1
2. Co-Chair 2

Keynote (interventions - 12 mins)

3. Keynote presenter

Panel (interventions - 7 minutes each)

4. Member State 1
5. Member State 2
6. UN system 1
7. UN system 2
8. Stakeholder

Discussion