



Third United Nations Conference on Landlocked Developing Countries

Awaza, Turkmenistan, 5-8 August 2025

High-Level Special Event

Establishing Regional Agriculture Research Hubs (RARH) to Support LLDCs' Agricultural Transformation

Wednesday 6 August 2025, 9:00 – 10:30 AM
Awaza Conference Centre, Building 3-07.09

CONCEPT NOTE

A. Background

Landlocked Developing Countries (LLDCs) face a distinct set of structural challenges. Without direct access to the sea, they endure disproportionately high trade transaction costs, experience limited access to global markets, and suffer from significant infrastructure deficits. These constraints hinder economic diversification, slow progress toward Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and reinforce structural vulnerabilities.

Agriculture remains a critical sector in LLDCs, providing livelihoods for large segments of the population, particularly in rural areas. However, its contribution to economic growth has been modest. In 2024, agriculture accounted for only around 17.18% of value added as a percentage of GDP, reflecting significant untapped potential.

Meanwhile, food security in LLDCs has deteriorated. According to FAO, the prevalence of moderate or severe food insecurity rose from 42.7% in 2015 to 50.7% in 2023. The rate of undernourishment also increased, from 15.3% to 19.3% during the same period. In 2020, 60% of LLDCs experienced moderately to abnormally high food prices, a record level before falling to 33.3% in 2023.¹ These trends were exacerbated by elevated global food prices, commodity dependence, and supply chain disruptions affecting food imports.

LLDCs face major obstacles in tapping the full potential of their agricultural sectors. Challenges include reliance on traditional farming practices, difficult topographies (arid, semi-arid, and mountainous regions), underutilized land, and inefficient supply chains. Their geographic disadvantage, and lack of access to seaports further compounds high trade and transport costs and heightens exposure to external shocks.

To address these challenges, increasing agricultural productivity is vital. Higher productivity can transform rural livelihoods, reduce poverty, and generate decent employment. Research and innovation can play a pivotal role in reversing negative trends and unlocking agricultural potential. Adopting modern technologies and digital tools can make agrifood systems more efficient, sustainable, and inclusive. Digitalization enables farmers to boost yields, manage inputs more effectively, diversify crops, enhance quality, conserve resources, and adapt to climate change.

Robust and well-funded agricultural research and development (R&D) systems are more important than ever. In the face of global uncertainties including climate change, water stress, conflicts, and economic volatility, LLDCs must prioritize domestic agricultural development and reduce import dependence. Science and innovation offer long-term solutions to enhance food security, support livelihoods, and build resilience.

To realize this vision, LLDCs must scale up investments in agricultural R&D and forge stronger partnerships, including through South-South, North-South, and triangular cooperation. Coordinated and sustained support from the international community can empower LLDCs to harness agricultural innovation as a cornerstone of sustainable development.

¹ FAO Food/General CPI: <https://www.fao.org/faostat/en/#data/CP> accessed on 18 June 2025

B. Rationale

Evidence shows that growth in agriculture is two to four times more effective in reducing poverty than growth in other sectors.² Increasing agricultural productivity can significantly improve rural incomes and generate decent employment, particularly for youth and women.

Digitalization, innovation, and improved research systems are key to unlocking this potential. By integrating new technologies such as precision agriculture, climate-smart techniques, and Artificial Intelligence (AI), LLDCs can modernize their agrifood systems and reduce dependency on imports. Recognizing this, Member States have committed under the Awaza Programme of Action (APoA) to improving access to agricultural research and innovation, including the promotion of agroecological practices and sustainable technologies. The APoA also calls for the establishment of regional agricultural research hubs tailored to the specific needs of LLDCs with a view to addressing structural impediments to agricultural productivity, promoting value-addition, supporting capacity building and facilitating improved agricultural practices.

The proposed Regional Agriculture Research Hubs for LLDCs (RARH-LLDCs) can play a crucial role in achieving SDG2: Zero hunger. It has enormous potential to overcome existing challenges and leverage extraordinary opportunities in the agricultural sector of LLDCs, by leveraging existing agricultural research resources, integrating emerging technologies, including AI. It can ensure food security, improved nutrition, and build sustainable agriculture for present and future generations.

The event will feature a high-level panel discussion with representatives from member states and UN agencies. It will include interactive dialogues and opportunities for audience engagement.

C. Expected Outcomes

This High-level special event will examine the urgent need to strengthen agricultural research, innovation, and technology in LLDCs. It will discuss the concept of RARH-LLDCs as a transformative solution to enhance food security, support rural livelihoods, and promote sustainable agriculture. It aims to build a consensus around:

1. Raising awareness and promoting partnerships for the critical role of agricultural R&D in achieving SDG 2 in LLDCs
2. Generating support for advancing the concept of RARH-LLDCs
3. Identifying the next steps for implementation

² Over the period of the implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action for landlocked developing countries 2014-24

D. Speakers

Opening remarks:

- Ms. Rabab Fatima, *Under-Secretary-General and High Representative of Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States (UN-OHRLLS), and Secretary-General of the Third United Nations conference on Landlocked Developing Countries*

Moderator:

- H.E. Ms. Agnes Mary Chimbiri-Molande, Permanent Representative of Malawi to the United Nations in New York

Keynote speaker:

- H.E. Mr. Amrit Bahadur Rai, Foreign Secretary, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of Nepal

Panelists:

- H.E Mr. Ibrokhim Yu. Abdurakhmonov, Minister, Ministry of Agriculture Resources, Uzbekistan
- H.E Mr. Lejone Mpotjoana, Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Relations, Lesotho
- Mr. Dejene Tezera, Director of the Agribusiness and Infrastructure Development Division, UNIDO
- Ms. Xiangjun Yao, Director of the Office of SIDS, LDCs, and LLDCs (OSL), FAO

E. Interactive discussions and Q&A

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