

INTERNATIONAL THINK TANK FOR LANDLOCKED DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

An input by the International Think Tank for Landlocked Developing Countries to the report of the Secretary-General on the Implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action for the LLDCs

1. Introduction

The main goal of the International Think Tank for Landlocked Developing Countries (ITLLDC) is to dedicate its work to the special needs and challenges facing landlocked developing countries which is the basis for our organization to work in line with the implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action (VPoA) for landlocked developing countries.

Since it has started its work as an independent intergovernmental organization in 2019 the ITLLDC participates in the General session of the United Nations' General Assembly as an official observer on the account of the United Nations' resolution that granted the ITLLDC a status of an observer to the General Assembly of the United Nations to promote cooperation between the ITLLDC and the United Nations for the successful implementation of the VPoA for LLDCs and the Sustainable Development Goals.

In 2021, the ITT organized and participated in a number of events, such as conferences and workshops, and disseminated the findings from the research conducted by the ITLLDC, which positively contribute to the improved implementation of the VPoA as well as the Sustainable Development Goals.

This report will outline the highlight activities and initiatives carried out by the ITLLDC in 2021 in line with the six priority areas of the VPoA.

2. Working within the scope of the six priorities of the VPoA

Priority 1: Fundamental transit policy issues. As landlocked developing countries lack territorial access to the sea, the ITLLDC seeks to facilitate those countries to have access to and from the sea by means of producing and disseminating research and studies on transport and transit related topics as well as by strengthening LLDCs' analytical capacity in transit transportation. Actions and initiatives relevant to the implementation of the "Priority 1: Fundamental transit policy issues" of the VPoA is consistently included in our work plan and the following actions have successfully completed.

- Accordingly, the ITLLDC co-organized a virtual seminar on "Current state of transportation and logistics, and opportunities for improvement in landlocked Mongolia" with the Mongolian Maritime Administration, GS1 Mongolia international organization, Federation of Mongolian Freight Forwarders, and Mongolian Logistics Association on March 5, 2021. Representatives from the Mongolian logistics and freight forwarding industries attended the virtual seminar and discussed the existing issues as well as the feasible opportunities in the sector. The participants held an open discussion and reached an informal agreement on joining forces to improve the regulatory framework affecting the transit and transportation sector.

- The ITTTLLDC also participated in the virtual discussion on “Facilitating transit and transport operation in a crisis situation: lessons learned from COVID-19” during the WTO Public Forum-2021 on September 29, 2021. Panelists from the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, World Customs Organization, ITTTLLDC, and Deutsche Post DHL participated in the discussions, exchanging their views on international trade, especially on transit and transport issues in landlocked developing countries and the opportunities to address them with policy recommendations.
- In addition, on May 21, 2021 the ITTTLLDC participated in an online meeting organized by the Mongolian Freight Forwarders Association, where representatives from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Mongolia, National Trade and Facilitation Committee of Mongolia, Maritime Administration of Mongolia, and freight forwarding companies thoroughly discussed the crisis situation at Chinese major seaports including Tianjin port. Containers meant to be imported to Mongolia were stuck for an unforeseeable amount of time and the participants discussed possible ways to solve the problems caused by the pandemic.

Priority 2: Infrastructure development and maintenance. Strengthening the analytical capacity of LLDCs in key areas such as infrastructure development and investment is one of the activities that the ITTTLLDC pursues to reach its goal. Within this framework, the ITTTLLDC co-organized the Online Workshop Series on "ESCAP Web-Toolkit for Integrated Planning of Infrastructure Corridors" for Kazakhstan, Mongolia, and Kyrgyz Republic’s policymakers and invited participants in May of 2021.

As all of you know, for any developing country the infrastructure is a crucial part of development, especially for the LLDCs. Construction and management costs are too high for landlocked countries with an unstable and vulnerable economy.

In 2021, the ITTTLLDC cooperated in the implementation of the project titled “Addressing the Transboundary Dimensions of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development through Regional Cooperation and Integration in Asia and the Pacific Countries, which was aimed at policymakers and private sector partners of Mongolia, Kazakhstan and the Kyrgyz Republic as main target beneficiaries.

Under this cooperation two web-based toolkits were verified and validated. The first web-based toolkit is a “Simulator of the Integrated Infrastructure Corridors”. The second toolkit is the Partnership Portal on Co-deployment. These tools provide policy makers, developers and owners of ICT, road and energy infrastructure and other stakeholders with the opportunity to register new infrastructure facilities and find other compatible infrastructure development projects in planning the early developmental stages of co-infrastructures comprising ICT, energy and transport, which are vital priority areas of the Vienna Programme of Action for LLDCs. The ITTTLLDC team worked on the collection and verification of policies, data and applicability of the methodology for these web-based toolkits. The ITTTLLDC Secretariat will continue its cooperation with not just all of you but also the representatives of national policy making bodies and private sector entities to facilitate the coordination and cooperation for infrastructure co-deployment at the country level.

As you are all aware that in order to achieve our goal to develop these web-based tools for the benefit of the landlocked developing countries, it will need thorough funding. So the ITTTLLDC,

in collaboration with the UN-ESCAP, seeks the funding opportunities and contributions from other international organizations, development agencies, donor countries and private sectors.

Priority 3: International trade and trade facilitation. Building capacity of LLDCs in areas of trade facilitation and negotiations is another principal function of the ITTLLDC. With this in mind, the ITTLLDC participated in the 6th meeting of the Mongolian National Committee on Trade Facilitation responsible for ensuring the implementation of WTO's Trade Facilitation Agreement and cross-sectoral coordination. During the meeting, the Executive Director of the ITT made a presentation under the theme "Current state of landlocked Mongolia's transportation and logistics sector, and opportunities for improvement", and put forward a package of proposals to address the challenges facing the logistics sector.

Priority 4: Regional integration and cooperation. Promoting cooperation between landlocked developing countries is undoubtedly one of the foremost goals of the ITT. Hence, the ITT participated and organized the following events:

- On the invitation of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific and the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, the ITTLLDC participated virtually in the Sub-regional Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia Workshop on Innovation and Technology for Sustainable Development and the 2nd Session of the SPECA Working Group on Innovation and Technology for Sustainable Development. The Working Group on Innovation and Technology for Sustainable Development is a subsidiary body under UN SPECA, comprising senior policymakers, researchers, decision makers, and other stakeholders in the area of innovation and technology from 7 landlocked developing countries, namely Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. The ITTLLDC's role in this event was to provide in-depth analysis on the project Co-deployment of infrastructure for Integrated Corridor Development.
- On 15 November 2021, the ITTLLDC participated in the virtual Expert Group Consultation on the Establishment of Digital Solutions Center for Sustainable Development on the invitation of the UN-ESCAP. During this virtual meeting, the ITT provided a brief update on projects and studies implemented in LLDCs that it has conducted in cooperation with ESCAP and OHRLLS. Within the framework of the project "Addressing the Transboundary Dimensions of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development through Regional Cooperation and Integration in Asia and the Pacific", the ITTLLDC provided expertise in confirming and testing the web-based tools – the infrastructure co-deployment portal and the simulator, co-organized online training workshops and collaborated in updating and developing sector-specific policy briefs for policymakers and private sector partners of Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic and Mongolia as main target beneficiaries.
- The ITTLLDC participated in the two-day regional workshop on "Strengthening capacity to design and implement policies and identify solutions that promote transport connectivity for the achievement of the SDGs" that was virtually organized by the UN-OHRLLS for policy-makers from Landlocked Developing Countries and Transit Countries on 30 September and 1 October of 2021. During the workshop, the ITT presented key findings on "Transports and Logistics situation of the LLDCs during the COVID-19 Pandemic: Case of Mongolia". Representatives from Cambodia, Turkey, Nepal, Kazakhstan, Thailand, Myanmar, Mongolia, Bhutan, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan participated in the virtual workshop and learned about the

complexities of designing policies that promote transport connectivity for the achievement of the SDGs; addressing soft infrastructure; resilient transport infrastructure; impact of COVID-19 on transport connectivity – experiences, solutions and lessons learned; and financing transport connectivity in LLDCs.

Priority 5: Structural economic transformation. In order to display the importance of fostering productive capacities and structural economic transformation, in October of 2021 the ITTTLLDC signed a MoU with the Mongolian Agricultural Commodity Exchange, which is the only organization in Mongolia with aims of increasing the range of goods and commodities to be traded on the exchange market, increasing the number of participants in the exchange market, establishing a logistics center connected to the integrated information network, improving the sector’s infrastructure, increasing market liquidity, improving corporate governance and competitive capabilities.

Both parties agreed to develop a cooperation plan to strengthen our research capacity through the exchange of information and materials on the experience of landlocked countries, conduct comparative research on commodity exchanges in developing and developed countries, and provide training for specialists to improve their knowledge and expertise.

Priority 6: Means of implementation. The ITTTLLDC has taken following actions to strengthen the cooperation between existing development partners while seeking to establish new partnerships that would complement the efforts of LLDCs.

- On March 2 of 2021, the ITTTLLDC and the United Nations Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States, and the United Nations Development Coordination Office (UN-DCO) jointly organized a virtual technical meeting with Economists of Resident Coordinators Office in LLDCs to discuss the impact of COVID-19 on landlocked developing countries and their responses.
- The ITTTLLDC joined the Asian Development Bank in their 54th Annual Meeting of the Board of Governors, as the ITTTLLDC was granted observer status in 2015. The meeting, with a focus on deepening collaboration for a resilient and green recovery from the coronavirus disease pandemic, was held in a virtual format from 3 to 5 May of 2021.
- Our think-tank participated in the 76th session of the United Nations’ General Assembly as an official observer to promote cooperation between the ITTTLLDC and the United Nations for the successful implementation of the VPoA for LLDCs and the Sustainable Development Goals.
- The ITTTLLDC also participated in the Annual Ministerial Meeting of Foreign Ministers of Landlocked Developing Countries that was held virtually.
- The ITTTLLDC has held bilateral and courtesy meetings with representatives and officials from the UN-OHRLLS, Permanent Mission of the Republic of Armenia to the United Nations, Permanent Mission of Paraguay to the United Nations, Permanent Mission of Lao People’s Democratic Republic to the United Nations, and Permanent Mission of Bhutan to the United Nations in New York, USA in September of 2021.
- The Pre-COP 26 Workshop on Greening Mongolia’s Development, intended to support the Government of Mongolia’s constructive engagement in the 26th UN Climate Conference of the Parties, was jointly organized by the Office of the President of

Mongolia, the Asian Development Bank, and the United Nations RC Office, the Embassy of the United Kingdom and ITTLLDC and on October 21, 2021. The workshop brought together high-level government officials and representatives from relevant international organizations to discuss Mongolia's commitments under the Paris Agreement and the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change. The ITTLLDC participated in the discussions and provided recommendations on the impact of climate change on landlocked developing countries, and the role of research institutions in addressing those challenges.

- On the invitation of the UN-OHRLLS, the ITTLLDC participated in the side event titled “Enhancing Capacity of Landlocked Developing Countries to Address Climate Change, energy and water-related challenges during COVID-19 era: Experiences and Solutions”, that was held on the 3rd of November 2021 on the sidelines of the 2021 United Nations Climate Change Conference COP26. At the side event the ITTLLDC took the opportunity to not only inform the participants of the various climate change impacts in Mongolia but also to highlight the importance of the ITTLLDC as the only Intergovernmental Institution of the Group of Landlocked Developing Countries at the United Nations and called on all participants to utilize the think tank as a platform for knowledge sharing, deepening collaboration, generating knowledge and developing the analytical tools to overcome LLDCs common challenges.

3. Substantive research by the ITT for LLDCs

The COVID-19 pandemic has revealed the crucial need for multilateralism and more collaboration between us, landlocked developing countries, and once again urges us to improve our commitment to knowledge sharing, and exchange of best practices and highlights the importance of evidence-based high-quality research. In 2021, the ITTLLDC has completed the following researches.

- At the request of the Government of Kazakhstan in consultation with the UN-OHRLLS, the ITTLLDC implemented a research project on “Exploring the Connectivity of Kazakhstan”.

With no direct access to the sea, and with maritime trade accounting for more than 80% of total global trade, landlocked developing countries face significant trade and development handicaps. It is essential for LLDCs to enhance transport and transit connectivity and ICT connectivity in order to boost international trade connectivity. There is an important opportunity for LLDCs to learn from the experience of other LLDCs in terms of the policy infrastructure and national strategic projects that contribute to increasing connectivity in the framework of the South-South Cooperation. Kazakhstan has the largest economy and the highest per capita income among the thirty-two (32) landlocked developing countries in the world. Gaining insights into the country's strategic national initiatives supporting increased trade, transport and transit, and ICT connectivity underscores important lessons from which other LLDCs can draw.

The research project explores the dimensions of connectivity in Kazakhstan and further explores implications on the country's industrial competitiveness. It is composed of three components: Transport and transit connectivity, ICT connectivity, and Trade connectivity and industrial competitiveness. As some of you are aware of this, the consolidated research report was planned to display and serve as a key input to the Twelfth World Trade Organization Ministerial Conference in Dec 2021, which unfortunately postponed. However, the ITT, as promised and planned, successfully introduced the outcome and findings of the research at the Expert group meeting on “Enhancing trade and trade facilitation for increased diversification and the structural economic transformation of landlocked developing countries” which was held on 29-30 November in Geneva.

- The International Think Tank for LLDCs cooperated with the OHRLLS to complete the report on “Impact of COVID-19 and Responses in Landlocked Developing Countries” in 2021.

This report aims to review the impact of COVID-19 on LLDCs, identify the responses that have been undertaken so far and the challenges faced. The report proposes recommendations to promote sustainable recovery for LLDCs.

Each of the thematic sections of 12 sections of the report discusses the key impacts, issues and challenges experienced and offers recommendations to assist the LLDCs in their recovery efforts to build back better.

It is important that development partners, transit countries, South-South partners, United Nations Development System, Multilateral Development Banks, International Monetary Fund, private sector, and foundations support the LLDCs in addressing the impact of COVID-19 and to help LLDCs to build back better in their recovery effort. You can see the full report is available at our webpage.