

**INTERNATIONAL THINK TANK FOR
LANDLOCKED DEVELOPING COUNTRIES**

**United Nations House,
Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia**

An input of the International Think Tank for LLDCs to the report of the Secretary-General for the 76th Session of the General Assembly on the Implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action for the LLDCs

As COVID-19 has taken its toll on the entire world, the International Think Tank for Landlocked Developing Countries (ITLLDC) also experienced the hardships brought by the pandemic throughout the year 2020. Due to the constant lockdowns and quarantine measures taken by the Government, the Secretariat of the ITLLDC had to adapt to remote working for nearly one-third of the year and had changed the schedules of activities and studies that we planned to complete in 2020.

Although numbers of planned research projects, capacity building workshops, events and meetings had to be cancelled or postponed due to the pandemic, the ITLLDC did its best to carry out the planned activities. It should be noted that, the ITLLDC increased its number of researchers at the global level as well as the local staff at the headquarter in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia.

All of these were possible thanks to the generosity of our donors as it made it available to sustain our activities even in a pandemic period. The Government of Mongolia, the host country of the ITLLDC, carried on with its fixed annual contribution to the Trust Fund of the International Think Tank without which the regular operation of the think tank would be impossible. Moreover, the governments of Kazakhstan, Bhutan and Afghanistan provided earmarked contributions to the Trust Fund.

The ITLLDC's financial status of 2019 has been audited by the independent international audit firm as per the clause 8.4 of the Multilateral Agreement for the Establishment of an International Think Tank for Landlocked Developing Countries, and the audited financial statement was duly presented to the Board of the Governors of the ITLLDC.

As mentioned earlier, the pandemic was a major setback for our 2020 work plan which is the reason why the ITLLDC had to adjust to the circumstances by making substantial changes to the annual work plan. Thus, the ITLLDC shifted our focus to two approaches of operation in order to contribute to the implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action for Landlocked Developing Countries for the Decade 2014-2024 (VPoA):

- 1) Using virtual platforms to expand the networking and outreach activities; enhance cooperation with development partners; and to organize and participate in online workshops and meetings.
- 2) Focusing on carrying out more activities in the host country of the ITLLDC as international travel has become not possible due to COVID-19 related travel restrictions.

1. Activities implemented in line with the six Priorities of the VPoA

1) Panel discussion on aviation sector development – October 20, 2020

Project Rationale. ITTLLDC and Urug.mn, Mongolian private media group, co-organized a panel discussion on the issue of Aviation Sector Development in Mongolia on October 20, 2020 in Ulaanbaatar. The aviation industry is the only direct gateway to the global market for landlocked countries, and it is inherently related to infrastructure and international trade development, meaning that it is also in line with Priorities 2 and 3 of the VPoA. The issue of aviation liberalization in Mongolia as well as other LLDC's has been a topic of debate for many years, organizing such discussion was an opportunity to disseminate a relevant study that we already have on our hands.

Objectives. During the panel discussion, some of the findings from the research project conducted by the ITTLLDC on transport connectivity in Landlocked Developing Countries “Modelling the Potential for Aviation Liberalization in Central Asia” and shared thoughts on aviation sector development in some of the LLDCs. The main objective of the panel discussion was to disseminate the findings from the aforementioned research project in order to raise the awareness of decision makers in the host country of the ITT on the importance of infrastructure development, transport infrastructure and international trade.

Outcome. The findings from our research were successfully disseminated to the public as the discussion panel got decent views on social media platforms and television broadcasts. Moreover, the invited panellists representing the public and private airlines, civil aviation authority and the ITTLLDC had a fruitful discussion on the aviation liberalization in landlocked Mongolia and possible solutions to the issues facing in the industry.

2) “Guidelines to writing policy briefs” a training for graduate and doctoral students – October 29, 2020

Project Rationale. A provision of a capacity-building support to the most comprehensive higher education institution in the host country of the ITTLLDC was necessary to promote the functioning of the think tank as well as to raise awareness of issues of landlockedness to the future generation of academics. Furthermore, the project was in line with Priority 6: Means of implementation of the VPoA where it says that the organizations and bodies of the United Nation system as well as relevant international organizations are invited to give priority to requests for technical assistance and capacity-building support from LLDCs in the implementation of the present Programme of Action.

Objective. Within the framework of the MoU signed with the School of International Relations and Public Administration of the National University of Mongolia (NUM), the ITTLLDC organized a training on “Guidelines to writing policy briefs” for graduate and doctoral students at the National University of Mongolia at the UN House on October 29, 2020. The National University of Mongolia is the biggest university in the landlocked Mongolia where the future

generations of academics are prepared. As mentioned in the project rationale, organizing a capacity building training for the future generation academics was the objective, with goals to draw their attention to research and studies on LLDCs.

Outcome. The capacity building training was successfully organized with active engagement of the students. Since the capacity building training, number of undergraduate and graduate students applied for internship at the ITTLLDC, although, it was not possible to accept internships at the think tank due to the Covid-19 related restrictions in the host country. As the result, the ITTLLDC and the NUM agreed to continue the effective cooperation by organizing more capacity building workshops and trainings in the future.

3) Academic debate on “Geopolitics of Mongolia: Economic Security” – October 30, 2020

Project Rationale. As mentioned previously, The ITTLLDC and the SIRPA of the National University of Mongolia (NUM) agreed to continue the cooperation by organizing further workshops and trainings together. In this framework, the ITTLLDC and the NUM have co-organized the academic debate on “Geopolitics of Mongolia: Economic Security” on 30 October 2020 at the NUM.

Objective. The main objective of the academic debate was to share the simulation results of the study on “Economic Impacts of Economic Corridors in Mongolia: An Application of IDE-GSM” conducted by the ITTLLDC and IDE-JETRO in 2017. The Executive Director of the ITTLLDC, Mr. E.Odbayar shared the results during his presentation “Economic Security of Mongolia and Economic Corridor”. Sharing best practices in corridor management, and promotion of sustainable and resilient transit systems through, inter alia, regular upgrading and maintenance, development of corridors is in conformity with Priorities 2 & 3 of the VPoA.

Outcome. By disseminating the simulation results of the prior study, we were able to start a fruitful discussion about impacts of economic corridors in Mongolia and other LLDCs among Mongolian scholars and academics. We believe that such projects will help to increase research and studies on economic corridors in LLDCs in the future.

4) Second Annual Meeting of the Board of Governors of the ITTLLDC – December 21, 2020

Project Rationale. In accordance with Article 6.7 of the Multilateral Agreement for the Establishment of an ITTLLDC, the Secretariat is obliged to organize the annual meeting of the board of governors. Thus, the Secretariat of the ITTLLDC organized the 2nd Annual Meeting of the Board of Governors of the ITTLLDC virtually on December 21, 2020.

Objective. The objectives of the annual meeting were to elect the new chairperson of the board, brief the board of governors on keys issues and core legal documents related to the operation of the ITTLLDC such as financial and audit reports, staff rules and regulations, Annual Report and Work Plan for 2021.

Outcome. Kazakhstan represented by Vice Minister for Trade and Integration of Kazakhstan, Mr. Kairat Torebayev was elected as the Chairperson of the Board. The platform enables LLDCs to promote regional integration and to strengthen participation of LLDCs in bilateral and regional

integration frameworks. Furthermore, development partners were able to communicate with a great number of representatives from LLDCs simultaneously which we believe that it was a good occasion to support efforts made by LLDCs and their transit partners. Thus, this effort was thoroughly in accordance with Priority 4: Regional integration and cooperation of the VPoA.

5) Disseminating the research findings and supporting research works.

Project Rationale. The ITLLDC's door is always open to researchers who work on LLDC relevant projects. Dr. Antonio Graceffo approached our think tank for support to his upcoming policy review paper on "Mongolia and the Belt and Road Initiative: The Prospects for the China-Mongolia-Russia Economic Corridor", which we gladly accepted his request by introducing our prior research and studies.

Objective. The research paper by Dr. Graceffo examines the impact of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) on Mongolia's prospects for trade and access to overland routes to Europe and seaports in Asia. This policy article on economic corridor development by Dr. Graceffo referred to "Economic Impacts of Economic Corridors in Mongolia: An Application of IDE-GSM", a research project conducted jointly by the ITLLDC and the Institute of Developing Economic, Japan External Trade Organization (IDE-JETRO). It was an opportunity to promote our research through Dr. Graceffo's work.

Outcome. The policy review paper by Dr. Graceffo was published by Jamestown Foundation, an American think tank, mentioning the research by ITLLDC in the references.

6) Covid-19 pandemic situation analyses for LLDCs

Project Rationale. All countries in the world struggled to cope with the unprecedented effects of the Covid-19 pandemic. However, the pandemic is having gruelling impact on LLDCs which are heavily reliant on transit neighbouring countries. Therefore, we decided to provide Covid-19 situation analyses and reports for LLDCs by using our social media platforms and official website.

Objective. The main objective of the project was to provide information about the ongoing Covid-19 situations in LLDCs so that we learn from each other's mistakes and successes. LLDCs face unique developmental constraints and challenges which means that the circumstances these countries face during the pandemic could be quite different. The ITLLDC has been striving to provide with useful information on the pandemic to LLDCs ahead of the adoption of the Roadmap, and we are continuing with the effort to date.

Outcome. We delivered the following analyses and articles on our social media platforms and the website: Covid-19 confirmed cases in Landlocked Developing Countries; the Global Humanitarian Response Plan; LLDCs' migrants and the calamity of the Covid-19; Coronavirus and cross-border trade flowing; Massive Donations & The Blame Game; and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on education in landlocked developing countries were done and shared through social media. The outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic increased the gravity of the necessity to come up with a comprehensive roadmap in regard to the implementation of the VPoA. Consequently, LLDCs Foreign Ministers adopted the Roadmap for Accelerated Implementation of the VPoA on September 23, 2020.

7) A joint report on socio-economic impact of Covid-19

Project rationale. As mentioned in the previous paragraph, the ITTLLDC regularly delivered Covid-19 situation analyses in LLDCs. But there was a necessity for a more comprehensive and full-scale report in this area which is the reason why the think tank supported and collaborated with the United Nations Office of the High Representative for Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States (UN-OHRLLS).

Objective. The main aim of the joint report "Impact of COVID-19 and Responses in Landlocked Developing Countries" was to identify the specific challenges faced by LLDCs in responding to the COVID-19 crisis and suggest recommendations to effectively address the pandemic. The ITTLLDC added its inputs to the chapters on education, ICT connectivity, food security and social protections sections of this highly sophisticated report led by the OHRLLS team.

Outcome. We see the report as a significant analytical contribution to the implementation of the Roadmap for Accelerated Implementation of the VPoA. In addition, it can be said that it is a comprehensive guideline on Covid-19 for LLDCs.

2. Networking & Cooperation

The ITTLLDC gives a significant importance on networking and establishing MoUs to cooperate and conduct joint research, exchange experts and researchers. The ITTLLDC:

- The ITTLLDC signed a MoU with the School of International Relations and Public Administration of the National University of Mongolia on September 16, 2020. The purpose of this Memorandum of Understanding is to collaborate in the field of research and capacity building of researchers and students in the framework of Mongolian human resource development.
- The ITTLLDC and the United Nations, represented by its office of the High Representative for the LDCs, LLDCs, and the SIDS, have concluded their negotiations and signed MoU on 19 October 2020. The signing of this symbolic document signifies the next step in strengthening the already resolute partnership that has existed between the two organizations throughout the years.
- ITTLLDC attended the virtual meeting on E-resilience for Pandemic Recovery: intercountry consultations in preparation for Committee on ICT& Science Technology and Innovation on 3 July 2020 organized by the UN-ESCAP. Mr. Odbayar Erdenetsogt, Executive Director of the ITTLLDC, shared his view and experience on ICT development in LLDCs during the COVID-19 pandemic, ITT research papers on economic and transport corridors using Geographic simulation model and E-Resilience.
- On the invitation of the United Nations Resident Coordinator in Mongolia, ITTLLDC participated in the seminar for academics and research institutes titled "UN-75: 2020 AND BEYOND", which was held on August 4, 2020 at the UN House in Ulaanbaatar. The ITTLLDC participated in the discussions and provided recommendations on the challenges

facing landlocked developing countries and Mongolia, and the role of research institutions in addressing those challenges.

- The ITLLDC virtually participated in the Annual Ministerial Meeting of Foreign Ministers of the Group of Landlocked Developing Countries held on September 23, 2020 in the margins of the 75th Session of the United Nations General Assembly. Mr. Odbayar Erdenetsogt Executive Director of the International Think Tank for LLDC Annual Ministerial Meeting of LLDCs delivered the remarks that highlighted the crucial need for multilateralism and more collaboration between LLDCs and more commitment to knowledge sharing, exchange of best practices and the importance of evidence based high quality research.
- The International Think Tank for Landlocked Developing Countries has signed a MoU with the Ethiopian Freight Forwarders and Shipping Agents Association (EFFSAA) on September 29, 2020. The two sides agreed to collaborate in areas of mutual interest such as research and academic collaborations; exchange of information; assistance on networking with other relevant organizations; and organization of joint seminars, conferences, workshops, and training.

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