



**Summary Report of
Capacity building workshop on strengthening connectivity along the
China-Mongolia-Russian Federation Economic Corridor held
Virtually on 21 October 2021**

Organized by UN-OHRLLS and ESCAP

The Training Workshop was held within the context of the project 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 (UN-OHRLLS) and technical cooperation activity entitled “Strengthening regional collaboration in support of greater transport connectivity of Asian Landlocked development countries” (ESCAP)

Introduction

As part of its efforts in implementing the project “Strengthening the capacity of LLDCs to design and implement policies that promote transport connectivity in line with the Belt and Road Initiative for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals”, the United Nations Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States (UN-OHRLLS) and ESCAP has conducted a two training workshops for policy-makers from Ministries of Transport from LLDCs and transit countries from Asia region in May and September 2021.

The first training was focused on how to develop bankable transport infrastructure projects for enhanced connectivity while the second training was focused on policies needed for improving transport connectivity in LLDCs; responding to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on transport systems; building of climate- and disaster-resilient transport infrastructure; establishment of legal and regulatory frameworks to promote efficient transit transport and collecting data for designing and monitoring policies that promote transport connectivity for the achievement of the VPoA and SDGs.

The aim of the project is also to provide specific capacity building support to prepare bankable project/s to improve transport connectivity. In the Asia-Pacific region ESCAP provided training on the China-Mongolia-Russia Economic Corridor Management on 19-20 January 2021 that focused on cross-border infrastructure financing and institutional issues related to economic corridors.

In the context of the project, UN-OHRLLS and ESCAP commissioned a study on promoting transport connectivity along the China-Mongolia-Russian Federation Economic Corridor. They also co-organized the capacity building event held on Thursday, 21 October, 13.00 to 17.00 Bangkok time to share and discuss the findings and recommendations of technical paper, the latest developments in the implementation of ESCAP’s activities on international transport corridors as well as experiences from other partners.

The event was attended by more than 30 participants including Government Officials from Mongolia, China, and the Russian Federation and participants from UN and other international organizations. The full list of participants is included in the annex.

Opening and welcome remarks

Mr. Weimin Ren, Director of Transport division of ESCAP stated that Mongolia is a landlocked country and can only reach the seaports via China and the Russian Federation. He expressed that transport corridors and looking broader, economic corridors have very important role in strengthening transport connectivity in the vast region of Asia and the Pacific.

Mr. Weimin Ren announced that the Fourth Ministerial Conference on Transport would be held in December 2021. The Conference will decide on priority areas of work and actions in terms of transport connectivity for the ESCAP secretariat during the next five years by adoption of the Regional Action Programme for Sustainable Transport Development in Asia and the Pacific 2022-2026. The ESCAP secretariat will be putting

a lot of emphasis on the matters of development, increasing efficiency of operations of transport corridors as well as building up their resilience to external shocks, such as the current COVID-19 pandemic, bearing in mind the overall context of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Mr. Sandagdorj Erdenebileg, Chief of Policy Development, Coordination, and Reporting Service, UN-OHRLLS emphasized that the disruption caused by COVID-19 pandemic showed the need of strengthening connectivity. He stated that the economic corridor project played important role in bilateral trade and trilateral trade, foreign direct investment as well as the expansion of new sectors cooperation between three countries.

Mr. Sandagdorj Erdenebileg stated that the economic corridor project can transform Mongolia from a landlocked to a land-linked country to serve as a transit corridor between the Russian Federation and China. Bilateral trade of Mongolia with China and the Russian Federation increased by 20% and 30% on average annually between 2016 and 2019, respectively. The completion of the corridor will encourage higher efficiency and market-seeking foreign investment in Mongolia by firms that seek to capitalize on its central location between two major global value chains (GVC) intensive economies and markets. Mongolia can also expect higher investment from both China and the Russian Federation. The successful project can also lead to expansion of their cooperation to a new sector, including possible development of transit gas pipeline from the Russian Federation to China along the shortest route and the tourism sector.

Mr. Sandagdorj Erdenebileg believed that it is crucial to work on the realization of this tripartite economic corridor. He expressed that there is strong political will by the three countries and 32 projects have already been identified for feasibility studies. OHRLLS is actively conducting training programmes in cooperation with other stakeholders. The Office recently conducted training on the development of bankable transport infrastructure projects for policymakers from several Asian countries.

Mr. Tapan Mishra, United Nations Resident Coordinator (UN RC) for Mongolia focused on the contribution to the sustainable development of China, Mongolia, and the Russian Federation by the implementation of the China-Mongolia-Russia Economic Corridor (CMREC) since 2016. Mr. Tapan Mishra stated that despite Mongolia's high potential to provide easy passage of goods between China and the Russian Federation, relatively small volumes transit through Mongolia in reality.

Mr. Tapan Mishra stated that the key constraint of Mongolia to trade and economic cooperation with neighbouring countries and the rest of the world are poor transport and logistics infrastructure. These challenges are compounded by huge mineral resources, which have driven the economic growth of Mongolia over the past 15 years but left the economy highly dependent on the mining sector. Mr. Tapan Mishra emphasized the impact of CMREC programme to the livestock industry, including cashmere, meat, and dairy production; tourism sector; digital services and e-commerce, founded upon Mongolia's high internet penetration rate and high level of human capital; and the renewable energy sector, including wind and solar power.

The other feature of Mongolia that Mr. Tapan Mishra mentioned is its vast territorial expanse and low population density that require huge investments to connect the whole

country with infrastructure. Mongolia needs to be selective in making public infrastructure investments based on a careful assessment of the economic opportunities. Attracting more private sector investment and Public-Private Partnerships (PPP) options could become a solution to fill the infrastructure investment gap and provide the population with better technology, governance, and efficiency in building necessary traditional and digital infrastructure. He was pleased to note the most recent efforts by the President to engage the Parliament and Prime Minister with the private sector and investors.

Panelists' statements

Ms. Dorothea Lazaro, Regional Cooperation Specialist, East Asia Department, Asian Development Bank firstly stated that to foster regional cooperation and integration is one of ADB's important strategies. Such strategy provides greater and higher quality connectivity between economics, expanded global and regional trade and investment opportunities, and increased and diversified regional public goods. Ms. Lazaro declared that the Asian Development Bank has always supported the development of economic corridors. She gave several examples that ADB assisted launch the economic corridor program including the Greater Mekong Subregion Program (GMS) in 1992, Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation Program (CAREC) and South Asia Subregional Economic Cooperation (SASEC).

Ms. Lazaro provided financial support that between 2001 and 2020, \$39.8 billion has been invested to 211 investment projects and grants within the framework of Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation Program (CAREC) and 20% of which comes from local governments and companies. Besides financial support, ADB also provided technical, knowledge and organizational support as well as financing and public-private dialogue. ADB helped to design a network of 6 corridors to connect CAREC including Corridor 4 from the Russian Federation to East Asia. Ms. Lazaro mentioned the Cross-Border Economic Cooperation Zone between China and Mongolia which was signed in 2019 and ADB provided financial support. The two free zones remained independently run under bilateral cooperation mechanism.

Mr. Almas Baitenov, Institutional Development and Regional Cooperation Expert, ABEC Coordinator in Kazakhstan provided the overview of Almaty-Bishkek Economic Corridor project (ABEC). ABEC is a pilot project by Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation Program (CAREC) Program and the first regional initiative by ADB to date aiming to create regional growth poles between Almaty and Bishkek. The goal of the economic corridor is to bring the two cities' economies closer together and to create a larger more competitive market. ABEC aims to increase connectivity by reducing travel times; create one competitive market for tourism, health, and education services; and aggregate agricultural produce in modern wholesale markets to exploit the sector's export potential. Mr. Almas Baitenov described ABEC institutions and governance. There are three ABEC subcommittee in agriculture, tourism, and connectivity. Similar sub-groups on education and urban development will be created before long. ADB played as an observer and supporter.

Mr. Almas Baitenov stressed that ABEC is among the top 10 growth destinations in tourism globally in 2017 and the Kyrgyz Republic is globally ranking first in growth of tourism's contribution to GDP. Tourism related ABEC initiatives include Mountain

Cluster Master Plan, Medical and Health tourism and Common Branding and Tourism Products. They developed a Master Plan for Tourism Almaty-Bishkek. Leading experts and international consultants prepared the Master Plan for the development of similar tourist destinations and mountainous areas. Within the Master Plan, they conducted an in-depth analysis of the main points of the tourist area growth in the ABEC region, identified potential directions for the development of priority types of tourism, and provided recommendations for the two countries on the development and creation of tourism projects.

ABEC Modern Agriculture Wholesale Market Development Project includes further integration of cross-border food value-chains, mainstreaming of sanitary and phytosanitary controls and modernized logistics, and storage infrastructure. Connectivity project concepts include Almaty-Issyk-Kul alternative road, border-crossing point modernization and regular direct bus connection between the two cities and airports. Mr. Baitenov ended his speech by summarising the lessons they learned such as the written commitments, institutions within established framework and creation of trust among parties.

Mr. Shigang Zhang, Senior Programme Management Officer, UNEP firstly stated that he would focus on how to make economic corridor green especially from the perspective of Mongolia. He stressed that Mongolia has a unique opportunity to strengthen trade linkages between Asia and Europe by locating between China and the Russian Federation. In 2016, the three countries reached a comprehensive deal on developing the China–Mongolia–Russia economic corridor (CMREC) that aims to improve transport connectivity and cross-border trade services through infrastructure development, and to strengthen cooperation across energy, agribusiness, communication technology, tourism, and environmental protection.

Mr. Zhang stated that the use of inefficient coal-burning stoves during long winters has led to a serious air pollution challenge in urban areas. Owing to its vast coal reserves, Mongolia generates 93 per cent of its power from coal. Government of Mongolia has set the energy targets of achieving universal access to electricity and a minimum of 30 per cent share of renewables in the energy mix by 2030. To meet the substantial needs for infrastructure investments, the Government has given high priority to the use of public–private partnerships to improve the delivery of public infrastructure and services. A number of green public-private projects (PPPs) in renewable energy and municipal infrastructure have been developed and supported by multilateral development loans and private investment.

With some 270 sunny days a year and nearly one-tenth of the territory rich in wind resources, Mongolia has the potential to become a regional clean energy exporter. One aspirational project under consideration along the corridor is the creation of a regionally integrated power supply and transmission network, part of the ambitious Asia Super Grid, for exporting clean energy out of the Gobi Desert to China, Japan, and other northeast Asia destinations. Mr. Zhang emphasized that new investment and planning need to be aligned with long-term energy goals. The proposed infrastructure development in the CMREC corridor, given its long-term sustainability impacts, could be a make-or-break force to the country’s green development trajectory. If not planned carefully, the massive scale of Belt and Road Initiative infrastructure may pose irreversible environmental risks to Mongolia’s fragile ecosystems and threaten the

socially vulnerable. The deployment of renewable energy technologies and grid, of which China is a world leader, can provide green investment opportunities for Mongolia's energy transition.

Ms. Varvara Krechetova, consultant provided main findings of the report of the study on strengthening connectivity along the China-Mongolia-Russian Federation Economic Corridor (CMREC). Ms. Varvara Krechetova stated four transport routes of the China-Mongolia-Russian Federation Economic Corridor which is also part of the Belt and Road Initiative. The connectivity program along the four routes includes railway construction, highway activation, international road transport facilitation, modernization of border crossing posts and communications infrastructure.

In the last decades, the development of container shipment increased a lot especially between China and Europe via China/Kazakhstan border, China/Mongolia border (and China/Russian Federation border). However, the share in train numbers of CMREC in Eurasian container railway transit grows slower than total train numbers. Indicating that this was an area of potential expansion for the CMREC.

Ms. Krechetova also analysed the traffic potential for minerals and tourism. For minerals, the maximum of export bulk in recent years is about 47 million ton per year while current capacity of the UBTZ (Ulaanbaatar railway) is about 30 million ton per year. Current capacity is less than needed and should be expanded.

For tourism, CMREC members and their Northeast Asia neighbors are among global leaders in tourist departures. Number of tourism arrivals in Mongolia tripled between 2010 and 2019. CMREC will provide a great opportunity to strengthen tourism.

Ms. Krechetova also highlighted several issues and challenges for expanding the capacity. For example, she noted that the railway gauge between China, Mongolia and the Russian Federation is different. The electrification of railway is also different which will affect the transportation capacity. Therefore, actions are needed. Ms. Varvara Krechetova indicated that the road class should be updated, and the equipment, layout and capacity of the border crossings should be modernized. She also noted the need to create required inland logistics terminal capacity at Mongolia's section.

Ms. Krechetova concluded by noting the trilateral agreements signed by China, Mongolia and the Russian Federation including on road transport and on customs cooperation. She raised several issues that include joint customs, digitalization of business processes in international transport and electronic signatures in Mongolia.

Mr. Fedor Kormilitsyn, Economic Affairs Officer, Transport Division, ESCAP began with the overall context of ESCAP's work on transport corridors. One of the important pillars of their work is regional transport connectivity which is based on three intergovernmental agreements on infrastructural framework and network. He then explained that dry ports are intermodal facilities, intermodal hubs enabling interchange between transport modes. They are the nodes on transport corridors and thus should be considered as components of transport corridor. Therefore, the matters of operation of dry ports should also be considered in the context of a operation of multimodal transport corridors. The Working Group on Dry Ports considers the matters related to operations of multimodal transport corridors, matters of transport corridors management and

discusses the main factors contributing to successful operation of transport corridors. The main conclusion of the Working Group is that there is need for data collection and systematization as a practical step. It is important to develop an online tool for collecting data on multimodal transport corridors and initial data can be inserted through desk research. Member States are enabled to access the available information that is needed to be updated. Success of the tool will depend on willingness of member States to provide and update information on transport corridors.

Mr. Kormilitsyn mentioned the comparative study on coordination arrangements for transport for select transport corridors in Asia completed by ESCAP two years ago. One of the corridors which was explored under this study report was the China-Mongolia-Russian Federation Economic Corridor. The study report published two years ago provides an approach to the transport corridor coordination mechanisms and analyses available good practices. The report serves as the basis for the online tool for data collection.

Mr. Fedor Kormilitsyn shared updates on the implementation of the Intergovernmental Agreement on Road Transport along the Asian Highway Network. UNESCAP secretariat developed the draft agreement, subsequently discussed and elaborated at a series of negotiating meetings organized by UNESCAP TD and SRO-ENEA. It was signed by the Governments of China, Mongolia and the Russian Federation during the third session of the Ministerial Conference on Transport, on 8 December 2016. The Agreement entered into force on 21 September 2018. The Agreement opens the Asian Highway route No. 3 from Ulan-Ude (Russian Federation) - Ulaanbaatar (Mongolia) – Beijing to Tianjin port (China), and Asian Highway route No. 4 from Novosibirsk (Russian Federation) – Urumqi (China) – Kashi – Honqiraf (Chinese border with Pakistan) providing for international road transport operations on these routes. Though transport operations under the Agreement were disrupted due to the COVID-19 pandemic, ESCAP continued to provide technical assistance to member states.

Ms. Frida Youssef, Chief, Transport Section, Division on Transport and Logistics, UNCTAD focused on the economic and transport corridor development and coordination, the importance of management and institutional framework. She stated that corridors are strategic mechanisms that allow for a coordinated and integrated approach to transport, transit, trade facilitation and interrelated issues at the regional, subregional, or national level. Integration is the ability of corridors to link the heart infrastructure in terms of the road rail, ports, waterway, borders, and other facilities to sub infrastructure that is the institution the procedures, the operation inside as well as ICT application and technologies. At the same time, these corridors can become more than just transport trade facilitator but also to promote the development of supply chain or any sector of the economy, like agriculture and tourism. It also enables coordination and collaboration among corridors stakeholders, public and private.

Ms. Youssef stressed the importance of corridor management and legal instruments by giving an example of the Northern Corridor which was established in 1985. The legal framework for sustainable transport in Northern Corridor is Northern Corridor Transit and Transport Coordination Authority (NC-TTCA) which was ratified in 1986 and aim to coordinate and oversee the implementation of the Northern Corridor Transit and Transport Agreement and 11 Protocols. Ms. Youssef indicated several important reforms and measures of the Northern Corridor that include Single Customs Territory,

a regional customs transit system, real-time sharing of customs information, digital tracking systems, introducing cargo tracking systems, etc. The outcome is outstanding, for example, the time to move cargo from Mombasa to Kampala decreased from 18 days to 3 days and from Mombasa to Kigali from 21 days to 6 days.

Ms. Youssef also stressed UNCTAD's experience and achievements in promoting sustainable transit and transport corridors. In the 80s, the adoption of the Northern Corridor Transit Agreement was the result of 6-year development of a subregional corridor approach. Today the NCTTCA remains a reference model for the formalization of transit agreements around the world. In 2003, UNCTAD developed a supply chain approach applied to transit transport corridors and developed the cluster institutional collaborative arrangements solution to identify and tackle bottlenecks along the corridor. UNESCAP/UNCTAD introduced the Toolkit for cross border and corridor management for LLDCs and transit countries. The toolkit combines the cluster development approach and the corridor performance measurement methodology of ESCAP Time/Cost distance Model. Ms. Youssef stated that UNCTAD through its three pillars of work, is dedicating particular attention in supporting effective integration of developing countries into the global/regional trade and value chains through, efficient, cost-effective, environmentally- and climate-resilient and socially inclusive freight transport systems in infrastructure, services, and logistics.

Dr. Irakly Danelia, Commercial Representative in Caucasus Region, Maersk Line stated that global economy is projected to grow at 6 percent in 2021, moderating to 4.4 percent in 2022. Total imports for 2021 is expected to be increased by 9.05%, while export targeted for 7.75% growth. Dr. Danelia then stated that global container throughput rose by an annual average rate of more than 35%. There are many reasons for the historical growth of global container shipping. He emphasized two core reasons. The first is that advances in container technology allow more and more goods to be transported via container. The second is that extensive investment in port infrastructure has been and remains essential for fast growth. Since development in the mid-20th century, container shipping enabled a standardized method of freight transportation that made it safe and efficient to transport goods overseas.

Dr. Danelia stressed that global trade is highly inefficient and burdened by paper-based processes. Supply chains are struggling with fragmentation of data, low visibility and low levels of collaboration between partners. COVID-19 and disruptions in the Industry shows importance of digitalization. Dr. Danelia introduced the concept of Logistic Performance Index (LPI) which ranks countries on 6 dimensions of trade. He stated that Maersk wants to change logistics and adopt new technology to simplify and connect supply chains. The combination of big data application and AI algorithms makes all aspects of the supply more accurate and efficient.

Mr. Danelia described an open and neutral supply chain platform underpinned by blockchain technology from Maersk which is called TradeLens. Through the platform, TradeLens customers gain access to end-to-end container transportation visibility, can collaborate with their logistics and trading partners including sharing documents on blockchain, and gain a comprehensive picture of the flow of goods. Partner Access can help drive synergies across supply chain ecosystem, and TradeLens electronic Bill of Lading helps eliminate costly paperless processes that are prone to human error. It benefits both for transport/logistic companies by reducing the costs of different

processes and by improving analysis on shipping times and eliminating manual processes.

Closing remarks

Mr. Ganbold Baasanjav, Head, ESCAP Subregional Office for East and North-East Asia thanked all the participants. He noted that it is crucial and necessary to strengthen the cooperation between China, Mongolia, and Russian Federation. The Economic Corridor can benefit not only these three countries but also other countries in East Asia and North Asia. The effort on improving the transportation infrastructure is even more important in the post pandemic period. He mentioned that the Economic Corridor can also help to improve the efficiency of transnational transportation and logistics and help landlocked countries like Mongolia to develop. He reiterated that ESCAP would continue to support the development of the Economic Corridor and provide assistance to member states. The Capacity building workshop on strengthening connectivity along the China-Mongolia-Russian Federation Economic Corridor closed.

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