Third United Nations Conference on Landlocked Developing Countries

High-level Thematic Round Table 4

Thursday, 7 August 2025, 10 am - 1 pm

Awaza, Turkmenistan

CONCEPT NOTE

High-level Thematic Round Table 4: Building sustainable infrastructure, strengthening connectivity, and promoting unfettered transit systems for landlocked developing countries

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, the resultant delays and increased costs of importing and exporting goods affects the competitiveness of LLDCs in the global market. 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.

Recent developments on the global landscape with respect to trade, have served to underscore the importance of accelerating efforts to resolve LLDCs transit gaps and challenges including through regional integration and leveraging home-grown solutions and responses to address and overcome these challenges.

Despite improvements in transport infrastructure, inadequate physical infrastructure persists as a major obstacle to viable and predictable transit transport systems in landlocked developing countries, with transport infrastructure remaining largely unconnected to regional networks, resulting in high transport, trade and travel costs for both goods and services.

LLDCs therefore need support to accelerate efforts in facilitating trade and fostering regional integration, a crucial component of this process is the resolution of physical infrastructure inadequacies, 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 additional 46,000 km of railways would be needed 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, a measure of 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 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, by enabling businesses to reach global markets without the need for extensive physical infrastructure, and alleviating pressure due to geographic and topological constraints. E-commerce, for instance, allows for the buying and selling of goods and services over the Internet, reducing the need for physical storefronts and costly distribution networks.

In 2023, about 226 million people in LLDCs were using the Internet. This accounts for 39% of the population, compared with 67% of the world's population using the Internet, representing a 28% gap. The remaining 351 million people still offline in LLDCs is equal to 13% of the world's offline population.

According to ITU benchmarks, LLDCs perform in line with world averages in key areas such as national digital policy agendas and regulatory capacity. LLDCs achieve 43% of the overall benchmark for the readiness of national legal, policy and governance frameworks for digital transformation, against the world average of 51 per cent, in 2023. Overall, the development of policy and regulatory instruments in LLDCs is in line with world averages, although the majority of LLDCs, 53 per cent, remain in the less advanced stages of ICT regulation. To truly advance, LLDCs need to focus on effective implementation.

Furthermore, 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.

In LLDCs, the price gap between mobile and fixed broadband is also wider than elsewhere in the world. The fixed broadband basket in LLDCs typically costs more than twice the global median. In addition, fixed broadband affordability differs significantly between LLDCs in Asia and Africa, as the median price in Africa, at 12.8 per cent of GNI per capita, was nearly three times that in Asia and more than four times the world median.

Energy

While international public financial flows in support of clean energy in developing countries rebounded in 2022, the rebound did not correct a declining five-year trend that may delay the achievement of SDG 7 by LLDCs, where 215 million people still lack reliable energy. Equally of note, for the first time in more than a decade, the number of people living without electricity around the world increased in 2022.

In 2022, the global share of installed renewable energy on a per capita basis peaked at 40.3 percent of the total energy mix, or 424 watts per capita. In LLDCs, there has been some increase from 102 watts of renewable energy generating capacity per capita in 2022, from 98 in 2021.

The electrification rate in LLDCs increased to 61% in 2023, up from 48% in 2015 but remained lower than the global average of 91,6 per cent. A significant disparity also remains between urban and rural populations in LLDCs, with 88.9 per cent of urban areas and 48.3 per cent of rural areas having access to electricity in 2023, calling for more targeted efforts and solutions to reach rural areas. Meanwhile, in 2023, the global average was significantly higher, at 98 per cent for urban areas and 83.9 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 Awaza Programme of Action for the LLDCs (APoA) 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 APoA includes two key deliverables to address connectivity and transit infrastructure challenges, namely: 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 APOA 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 APOA 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 for LLDCs to achieve universal access to affordable, reliable, and modern energy services for all by 2030.

The APOA 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 APOA 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 to explore ideas for achieving targets identified in the APOA over the next decade.

Guiding Questions

1. Based on the lessons learned in the implementation of Vienna Programme of Action (VPOA) and targets set out in the Awaza 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?