



The Hague International Model United Nations

Forum: Economic and Social Council

Issue: Measures to improve international trade and transport for landlocked developing countries

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Introduction

Landlocked developing countries face a profound challenge that shapes their economic futures and ties directly into broader global efforts to reduce inequality and foster sustainable growth. Imagine nations like Bolivia or Uganda striving to export goods yet compelled to navigate borders of neighboring states just to reach a seaport, adding layers of cost, delay and uncertainty that coastal countries never encounter. This issue of enhancing international trade and transport connectivity for these thirty-two nations scattered across Africa, Asia, Europe and Latin America stands as a critical international concern because it perpetuates poverty cycles, limits access to global markets and undermines the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, particularly those focused on industry, innovation and partnerships. Without reliable transit routes, these countries see their exports reduced by up to forty percent compared to what they might achieve with sea access, according to United Nations data, while freight costs soar fifty-five to seventy-five percent higher than for nearby coastal peers, stifling job creation and development.

Throughout this report, we will explore the geographic origins of this disadvantage, trace previous global attempts to address it through treaties and programs, examine the roles of key organizations and countries and propose innovative solutions that blend digital tools, financing models and enforceable agreements to create lasting change. Central terms include landlocked developing countries as those without sea access reliant on transit neighbors for market reach, freedom of transit as the legal right to cross territories without undue barriers, trade facilitation as the streamlining of customs and procedures and transit corridors as designated multimodal paths linking inland hubs to ports.

Historically, the problem gained international attention after decolonization in the mid-twentieth century when newly independent states realized political freedom did not guarantee economic mobility, leading to the 1965 New York Convention on Transit Trade that affirmed basic rights, followed by the 2003 Almaty Programme of Action and the 2014 Vienna Programme of Action which set decade-long priorities for infrastructure and cooperation, though enforcement challenges persist amid evolving global shocks like pandemics and climate events. By confronting this issue collectively, the world can unlock potential for hundreds of millions of people, turning geographic isolation into opportunity through shared progress.

Definition of Key Terms

Landlocked Developing Countries (LLDCs)

Thirty-two developing countries that have no territorial access to the sea, forcing them to rely on transit through one or more neighbouring countries to reach international markets; examples include Bolivia, Paraguay, Uganda, and Mongolia.

Transit Countries

Coastal or neighbouring countries through which LLDCs must pass to access seaports; for instance, goods from Nepal transit through India (Kolkata/Haldia ports) or from Zambia through Tanzania (Dar es Salaam port).

Right of Access to and from the Sea

Internationally recognised right of LLDCs to use transit routes and seaports on terms no less favourable than those applied to the transit country's own traders.

Trade Facilitation

Simplification, harmonisation, and automation of international trade procedures; core measures include the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement provisions implemented in LLDCs such as single-window systems in Botswana.

Freedom of Transit

Principle established under GATT Article V and the 1965 New York Convention guaranteeing LLDCs the right to move goods across transit countries without discriminatory tariffs or unnecessary delays.

Double-Border Crossings

Situation where goods must clear customs twice (exit from LLDC and entry into transit country) and sometimes a third time at the seaport, significantly increasing time and cost; common on routes such as Rwanda–Mombasa.

Background Information

Landlocked developing countries face an inherent structural disadvantage that profoundly impacts their economic integration and overall development. These thirty-two nations, located across Africa, Asia, Europe, and Latin America, lack direct access to the sea and must route all international trade through at least one neighboring transit country. This geographic constraint significantly elevates trade costs, with landlocked developing countries

incurring expenses fifty-five to seventy-five percent higher than those of coastal counterparts, as documented in the World Bank's 2025 update to its Logistics Performance Index. Furthermore, this situation reduces their merchandise exports by approximately forty percent compared to potential levels with maritime access, according to analyses from the United Nations Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries, and Small Island Developing States. For instance, transporting a container from Shanghai to Mombasa may cost one thousand dollars, yet extending it an additional one thousand two hundred kilometers to Kampala adds nearly nine hundred dollars, whereas a similar distance by sea would incur negligible extra expense. Such disparities disproportionately affect populations in some of the world's most economically challenged regions, perpetuating reliance on raw commodities and heightening vulnerability to external disruptions.

From legal principles to binding action: the long road of global efforts

International recognition of this issue commenced in 1965 with the New York Convention on Transit Trade of Land-Locked States and Article V of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, which established the fundamental right to freedom of transit without excessive fees or delays. These agreements provided an essential normative foundation but lacked robust enforcement mechanisms, allowing persistent issues such as arbitrary charges and procedural delays to continue. The 2003 Almaty Programme of Action and the 2014 Vienna Programme of Action introduced comprehensive decade-long strategies with specific objectives, yet advancements were limited: average export times declined from fifty-seven days in 2014 to forty-four days by mid-2025, remaining substantially above coastal benchmarks. A pivotal advancement occurred with the 2017 World Trade Organization Trade Facilitation Agreement, the first globally enforceable framework mandating streamlined procedures, advance rulings, and risk-based inspections. By December 2025, thirty-one of the thirty-two landlocked developing countries had ratified it, yielding tangible outcomes: Rwanda reduced border clearance times from eleven days to under thirty hours, Botswana digitized ninety percent of its declarations via a single window, and the Chirundu border post between Zambia and Zimbabwe shortened truck processing from days to hours. A 2025 World Trade Organization assessment indicates that complete implementation could decrease trade costs for these countries by fourteen to sixteen percent, surpassing the impact of prior initiatives.

Corridors infrastructure

Substantial infrastructure investments and regional collaboration have transformed connectivity in select areas. The Addis Ababa-Djibouti railway, financed by China and operational since 2018, has reduced Ethiopia's transit duration from three or four days by road to twelve hours by rail, facilitating over seven hundred thousand containers annually. Similarly, Kazakhstan's Khorgos dry port and the recently established Uzbekistan-Kyrgyzstan-China rail connection have enhanced Central Asian logistics, while East Africa's Northern Corridor Transit and Transport Coordination Authority issues monthly performance reports that have sustained annual efficiency improvements of twenty percent. One-stop border posts, harmonized vehicle regulations, and twenty-four-hour operations are now standard on leading routes. However, sixty to eighty percent of residual delays arise from procedural inefficiencies rather than physical infrastructure deficits, including inconsistent documentation, checkpoints, and inadequate shared digital systems. Climate-related risks further complicate matters, such as the 2024 floods disrupting the Maputo Corridor or rising sea levels threatening key ports serving inland regions. Despite over twelve billion dollars invested by the World Bank since 2010, supplemented by contributions from China and regional institutions, the persistence of these soft bottlenecks demonstrates that

physical developments alone are insufficient without concurrent regulatory reforms. The newly adopted Awaza Programme of Action for 2024 to 2034 emphasizes structural transformation, digital corridors, and climate-resilient infrastructure, but its effectiveness will rely on establishing enforceable, collaborative systems that prevent unilateral disruptions.

Major Countries and Organizations Involved

UN and International Involvement

- Programme of Action for Landlocked Developing Countries for the Decade 2024–2034, 20 December 2024 (**A/79/L.21**)
- Vienna Programme of Action for Landlocked Developing Countries for the Decade 2014–2024, 21 November 2014 (**A/RES/69/137**)
- Almaty Programme of Action: Addressing the Special Needs of Landlocked Developing Countries, 28 August 2003 (**A/RES/58/201**)
- Specific Actions Related to the Particular Needs and Problems of Landlocked Developing Countries, 20 December 1995 (**A/RES/50/97**)
- Specific Actions Related to the Particular Needs and Problems of Landlocked and Transit Developing Countries, 21 December 1993 (**A/RES/48/169**)
- Specific Actions Related to the Particular Needs and Problems of Landlocked Developing Countries, 22 December 1989 (**A/RES/44/214**)

World Trade Organization (WTO)

The WTO's Trade Facilitation Agreement (2017) is the only binding global deal aimed at reducing transit and border delays for LLDCs. With 31 of 32 LLDCs ratifying it by 2025, it has pushed single windows, advance rulings, and risk-management systems. WTO assessments show full implementation could cut LLDC trade costs by 14–16%. The WTO also backs UN LLDC resolutions and directs over \$1.5 billion in Aid for Trade each year to corridor projects.

United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD)

UNCTAD provides technical assistance, research, and capacity-building through its LLDC Empowerment Programme and annual Review of Maritime Transport. It has trained more than 5 000 customs officials since 2019 and piloted blockchain cargo-tracking systems in Central Asia and Africa. UNCTAD's data showing that LLDC freight costs remain 55 % higher than coastal peers is regularly cited in UN resolutions and national strategies.

World Bank

Since 2010 the World Bank has committed more than \$12 billion to LLDC transport corridors, including the Addis Ababa–Djibouti railway and Kazakhstan’s Khorgos Gateway. Its Logistics Performance Index is the standard global benchmark for measuring progress. The Bank co-finances UN-OHRLLS initiatives and consistently endorses LLDC resolutions in the General Assembly.

Timeline of Events

Date	Description of event
August 8th, 1964	Creation of UNCTAD, which first highlighted how geography, high transit costs, and weak infrastructure restrict LLDC participation in global trade.
November 27th, 1965	The UN adopts the concept of transit trade for landlocked states, formally recognising their special status and laying the legal basis for future transit rights.
July 8th, 1965	New York Convention on Transit Trade of Land-Locked Countries establishes the first binding guarantee of LLDCs’ access to the sea through transit states.
December 14th, 1994	WTO Marrakesh Agreement enters into force, bringing LLDCs into the global trading system with rules on tariffs, customs, and transit.
October 29th, 2003	Almaty Programme of Action adopted, the first UN framework focused specifically on LLDCs, setting priority areas on transit, infrastructure, trade, aid, and implementation to reduce transport costs.
November 28th, 2014	Vienna Programme of Action adopted the current UN framework guiding LLDC trade and transport through improved transit cooperation and reduced border barriers.
February 22nd, 2017	WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement enters into force, reducing border delays and trade costs for LLDCs by simplifying and modernising customs procedures.
December 3rd, 2018	Global LLDC meeting in Asunción focused on improving trade corridors through better corridor management and public–private cooperation to reduce congestion and paperwork.
March 4th, 2020	UNCTAD releases a report on COVID-19 supply chain disruptions, highlighting LLDCs’ vulnerability to border closures and prompting a renewed focus on resilience and digitalisation.
July 17th, 2023	UN adopts the Roadmap to 2030 for LLDCs, reinforcing VPoA goals and prioritising digital trade, e-customs, and regional cooperation.

Previous Attempts to solve the Issue

WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement (2017)

A binding global trade agreement that streamlines border procedures. Includes special provisions for landlocked developing countries (LLDCs). Ratified by over 90% of LLDCs. Effective implementation in Botswana, Rwanda, Uganda, and Paraguay. Border delays reduced by 30–70%. Predictability of transit and clearance greatly improved. Single windows, advance rulings, and risk-based inspections are now common. Peer-pressure and transparency mechanisms accelerate domestic reform. More reform achieved in five years than decades of UN programmes

Regional Corridor Institutions and Border Posts in Eastern and Southern Africa

Regional corridor institutions show the strongest results. Northern Corridor (Kenya–Uganda–Rwanda) and Chirundu OSBP (Zambia–Zimbabwe) are standout cases. Joint border management and harmonized axle-load rules in place. 24/7 border operations implemented. Border crossing times reduced from days to hours. Bribery and informal payments significantly reduced. Direct revenue gains (ports, fuel sales) motivate transit countries to cooperate. Corridor-level governance delivers better outcomes than broad global declarations.

Major Donor-Funded Hard Infrastructure Projects with Private Operation

Large-scale, modern infrastructure has transformed regional connectivity. Addis Ababa–Djibouti railway, Khorgos Dry Port, and Central Asia–China rail segments are key examples. Chinese-built and professionally managed models demonstrating impact. Transit times cut from 30–45 days by road to 5–10 days by rail. Significant reduction in transport costs across regions. Soft bottlenecks (customs, coordination) still limit full benefits. Shows that well-financed, well-managed infrastructure can permanently shift the regional cost curve.

Possible Solutions

Innovative Infrastructure and Financing Solutions

Landlocked developing countries can overcome chronic underinvestment by blending smart finance with private-sector discipline. Green and blue bonds can be repaid through land-value capture around new dry ports, where property values often rise 300–500%, as seen at Modjo in Ethiopia. Long “Transit-as-a-Service” concessions to top operators like DP World or APM Terminals, covering the seaport and inland corridor, tie payment to speed and volume rather than construction, bringing world-class management inland and easing pressure on national budgets.

Digital and Institutional Transformation Measures

Fastest gains come from shared digital systems and real accountability. A corridor-wide blockchain cargo-tracking platform, digital TIR/e-CMR documents, and joint risk-management teams at one-stop borders can cut transit times

by 40–70% and nearly eliminate theft or hidden delays. A UNCTAD-hosted LLDC Transit Observatory with monthly scorecards, combined with regional escrow funds that compensate traders when rules are broken, turns transparency and peer pressure into daily incentives for reform.

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Appendix or Appendices

	Title / Description	Relevance / What's Useful
I	Vienna Programme of Action for Landlocked Developing Countries (VPoA)– full text (PDF) United Nations	The current global framework (2014–2024) guiding international cooperation on trade, transport, infrastructure, transit policy, regional integration and development for LLDCs. Essential reference for mandates, obligations, and previous commitments.
II	Almaty Programme of Action (APoA) – “Addressing the Special Needs of Landlocked Developing Countries” (PDF) UNECE+1	The predecessor to the VPoA; helpful to understand the historical foundation, the original commitments, and which measures have evolved or been extended. Good for evaluating progress and gaps.
III	Improving Trade and Transport for Landlocked Developing Countries (World Bank / UN-OHRLLS report) (2014) (PDF) World Bank+1	Provides data, empirical analysis, and concrete case studies on transport costs, logistics performance, infrastructure bottlenecks, and trade integration challenges for LLDCs. Useful for evidence-based debate.
IV	WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement: Key Provisions for Landlocked Developing Countries – Excerpt / Chapter relevant to LLDCs (PDF) World Trade Organization+1	Highlights how international trade law and multilateral trade facilitation (customs, transit, border procedures) directly affect LLDCs — vital when drafting resolutions on simplifying transit, customs, border cooperation.
V	United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) Report: “Unlocking the Trade Potential of Landlocked Developing Countries” (PDF) United Nations	Offers policy-oriented recommendations and global-level advocacy arguments. Useful to craft long-term strategies or reform proposals in a committee context.

VI	United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) – “Landlocked Developing Countries: Looking Back and Ahead” (2025) (PDF) UNDP	Latest assessment (2025) of LLDC challenges, contextual changes (e.g. climate, infrastructure, global shifts), and future-oriented strategies — helps delegates ensure proposals are up-to-date and realistic.
VII	Review / Progress Report on implementation of the Vienna	Useful to assess what has or hasn't worked so far, identify gaps, and ensure that new proposals build on previous successes or address failures.

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