Introduction

Spread across four continents, the UN counts 32 Landlocked Developing Countries (LLDCs) in the world (see appendix I for map of all LLDCs), the vast majority of which are situated in Africa (16) and Asia (10), and 17 of which are Least Developed Countries (LDCs). Their population totaled at 478.7 million in 2015, which represented about 6.5% of the total world population. The human development index (HDI) of LLDCs is among the lowest in the world and 9 of the 12 lowest ranked countries according to their HDI are LLDCs. Also, according to the data of the Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and the Small Island Developing States (UN-OHRLLS), the average annual real growth rate of LLDCs’ Gross Domestic Product (GDP) was estimated at 2.6% for the year of 2016 compared to the 5.5% rate in 2014, and the average GDP per person being US$4,770 in 2015. In addition, trade accounted for an average 69.5% of LLDCs’ GDP in 2015, which shows the correlation between trade and poverty in LLDCs.

The geographical constraint of being landlocked is severed by the lack of adequate transportation infrastructure, overwhelming administration and paper work, political instability, weak institutions and long distances, all of which result in a long transportation delay and a very high transportation cost in comparison to bordering transit countries. In LLDCs, US$3,444 was the average exportation cost of a container in 2014, and US$4,344 its import cost, while in transit countries, these costs were of about US$1,429 on average for transit countries. Moreover, the dependency of LLDCs on transit countries (which stems from their trade routes needing to cross their borders before reaching ports for shipment) makes them most vulnerable to political instabilities or disagreements and blockades more particularly.

Thus, solving the issue at hand requires international cooperation in order to improve and implement trade agreements that would allow the creation of trading corridors, optimized administration, better infrastructure and lowered transport costs in order to permit a more rapid economic growth and development of LLDCs, which would advance the process of poverty eradication across LLDCs. This
issue therefore mainly focuses on SDGs 1 (No Poverty), 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), 9 (Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure), 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions) and 17 (Partnerships for the Goals).

Definition of Key Terms

Landlocked Developing Countries (LLDCs)

Geographically, countries that do not have a direct access to the sea are called landlocked countries. Landlocked countries that are less economically developed are called Landlocked Developing Countries (LLDCs). Their indirect access to the sea forces them to transit through other countries and cross often long distances for transportation of exported and imported goods to and from world markets.

_Do not confuse LLDCs with LEDCs (Less Economically Developed Countries), which are not always landlocked, therefore LLDCs representing a particular category of LEDCs._

Transit

It is the passage through or across from one departure point to a defined destination point. Here, transit more specifically designs the transportation of goods from one country to another passing through a third. A transit country is a coastal country bordering a landlocked country through which the transportation of goods is executed both when exporting and importing.

For example, China is a potential transit country for Mongolia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Afghanistan, Nepal, Bhutan and Laos.

Policy

Here, a plan or course of action adopted and implemented by either a government or other form of organization, administration or authority, on a specified matter. On this specific issue, a policy (be it governmental or non-governmental) would be adopted with the aim of improving trade agreements facilitating transit for LLDCs and contains the specifics to implementing these agreements on various levels.

 NOTE: The term “policy” here is used often, but it does not relate to the “policy statements” prepared by the delegates for the conference.

Corridor
When talking in terms of geography, corridors are the surrounding zones of heavy traffic and major routes. They are characterized by a dense population and usually industrial and innovative cities.

**Market**

Any place where trade can occur between buyer and seller regularly and which becomes a regular destination for both parties. A market can be a geographically, economically or socially defined region or a more specific location such as a country, city or district. Sometimes, markets can even be virtual.

**Background Information**

The correlation between trade and poverty can be resumed in the fact that trade is a motor activity which increases national development in specialized industries as well as transport, tertiary education and other services. The population of a country possessing a weak national trade is often poor on average. With the GDP per capita not even reaching US$2,500 in 14 different LLDCs in 2015; it is especially the case in such countries, where landlockedness has been an obstacle to the augmentation of trade due to the increased transport costs and time.

**Landlockedness: a political and geographical constraints.**

**20th century changes**

With many countries claiming their independence and the settling of shifting borders during the 20th century and with the seaborne trade intensifying thanks to industrialization and the rapid developing of emerging nations, LLDCs found their geographical position to be a barrier to their economic development on many levels. For example, since the 1950s, Nepal’s trade, as an LLDC, has been struggling due to its landlockedness. Only bordered by China to the north and India to the south, Nepal’s position between two BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) transit countries has benefitted it from the better transport infrastructure of more economically developed countries, but with only India opening its sea-access to Nepal for many years, India found itself in a position of monopoly over Nepal’s transport of goods, which heightened the overall cost of transportation and hindered Nepal’s trade.

The period between the 1950s and the 1990s saw the creation of a few agreements between LLDCs and transit countries on the issue of transportation. However, outside of Europe and the BRICS, most transit countries are also developing countries, therefore they do not possess a very strong transportation infrastructure.
The effects of geographical constraints

Although multiple factors such as political instability and weak institutions play a role, poverty in Landlocked Developing Countries (LLDCs) is generally due to the struggle of developing the national economy in these countries. This struggle partly results from the geographical constraints of landlockedness, which heighten the cost of transportation, reducing the profit rate, and highly limits the access to world markets. That is shown by the 0.97% representation of LLDCs’ share in global exports in 2015. However, trade has changed; it is not access to world markets that makes a successful trade, but the export and import delays. Although this new trade makes a country’s remoteness from world markets almost irrelevant, for LLDCs, it is all the same, with the average time required to export goods being 41 days and 49 days to import them (2014 data); almost twice as much as their neighboring transit countries. The transportation cost rate is even more extreme, with the average cost of exportation of a container from an LLDC reaching three times that of a transit country.

As well as the augmented transportation cost caused by the need to transit through another country, the passing of goods requires much administrative work in order to mostly address customs operations and the management of itineraries, loading and unloading, vehicles and human resources and necessities. This all adds in and compounds the complexity of trade with LLDCs for other nations as well as LLDCs themselves, thus limiting these countries’ capacities to develop their trade and further develop their national economy.

Transit countries

In the past, borders being less defined and much less controlled by the governing authorities, anyone and anything could cross countries freely, especially trades, which were represented on much smaller scales. But borders gradually started to be better defined and more controlled and restrictive as to the passing of goods and persons, and trade grew enormously in size and destinations, trade routes now being very numerous and varied. This evolution has posed the problem of transit for both LLDCs and transit countries and little has been done to regulate transit of goods.

The vast majority of, if not all, transit countries are LEDCs as well. Exceptions include BRICS, which are large in surface and emerging countries and therefore do not always possess the best infrastructure, especially on goods’ transit and general transport itinerary. Some LLDCs have the choice to change their transit routes if they border more than one transit country, however there are many LLDCs that either only have one transit route or distances are too long to be more optimal or in any way better. Indeed, there are more than five total LLDCs with a distance to the nearest coast exceeding the 2,000 kilometers, Kazakhstan even reaching 3,750 kilometers, which is the longest. Not to mention the
administration process that crossing such distances requires going through, only for customs procedures.

This extends the issue to more than just LLDCs, as solving this issue specifically requires attention to transit countries as well. The quality of infrastructure and simplification of administration in transit countries must be taken into account when creating and implementing trade agreements for the development of trade in LLDCs. It must also match that of its neighboring LLDCs to a certain level that it will be effective in facilitating the transit of goods and any trade between the countries as well.

**Major Countries and Organizations Involved**

**UN-OHRLLS**

The United Nations Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and the Small Island Developing States (UN-OHRLLS) has been charged, since its instauration in 2001, with the tasks of coordinating and monitoring the implementation of programmes on all levels, supporting discussions concerning the development of the above mentioned countries and coordinating such actions with the UN Secretary General and the Economic and Social Council. It has issued various reports and documents and supported international discussions about the economic development of LLDCs as well as LDCs and SIDS, including on the issue of trade. It is the UN-OHRLLS that holds the responsibility of the coordination of the follow-up on the implementation of the Almaty Programme of Action and now the Vienna Program of Action. As such, the UN-OHRLLS has created the “Belt and Road Initiative” in cooperation with the Chinese Ministry of Transport. It is a program that runs meetings and workshops to discuss ways to better implement the Vienna Programme of Action on a local and national level and instruct officers of both the private and public sectors concerned on the adequate means of developing infrastructure, facilitating administrative procedures and implementing appropriate policies and legal framework.

**World Bank [Group]**

Since the Almaty Ministerial Conference was held, the World Bank Group (WBG) has contributed to over 150 projects through technical and financial assistance to LLDCs. In the year of 2010, the WBG, through setting up the Trade Facilitation Facility trust fund, has promoted and encouraged the instillation of reforms concerning the improvement of trade and transport facilitation. It has also played an important role in raising awareness on the issue of transit management in LLDCs and the need to create and implement stronger policies with regards to corridors, transit infrastructure and customs operations among others, and that is mostly through its frequent data publications and in-depth analysis of these policies.
China

As one of the BRICS and biggest transit countries, China has had an important role in the issue of transit and transport of goods to and from LLDCs. It is a major trading partner for most Asian LLDCs, and has recently worked on creating new and developing some of its already existing corridors. Multiple bilateral, multilateral and even international agreements aiming to facilitate transit for LLDCs were signed and ratified by China. The “Belt and Road Initiative” is currently one of the major ongoing initiatives by the Chinese government (Ministry of Transport) in collaboration with the UN-OHRLLS to facilitate the creation of transit corridors. China is investing and supporting many Central and South Asia railroad projects which will facilitate trade in the region and further connect with the European railroad infrastructure. In order to facilitate the connection of Mongolian trade to other major regional and international markets through Russia and China, the Chinese government has also signed the Program of Trilateral Economic Corridor, thus supporting more than 30 projects to this extent. It represents one of the biggest transit countries and a supporting trading partner in the region.

Uzbekistan

A prominent landlocked country, Uzbekistan is, along with South Sudan, the only LLDC in the world to be doubly-landlocked, which means that two countries separate it from the sea, and two borders need to be crossed to reach the nearest seaport, as it is surrounded by landlocked countries. However, trade between Uzbekistan and its neighboring countries (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Afghanistan and Turkmenistan) is much lower than it could be expected. It can be seen by the fact that Uzbekistan’s main export partners are China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Turkey and Afghanistan, with China and Russia representing almost 50% of its total export trade. Its main import partners on the other hand are Russia, China, South Korea, Kazakhstan, Turkey, Germany and Japan, totaling at 74% of its import trade. Although it can be seen as an attractive market for other nations because of its dense population (about 33 million), over half of which is located in the region of the capital Tashkent, its inadequate border control and administration represents an important obstacle to trade in imports as well as exports.

Timeline of Events

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Description of event</th>
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<tr>
<td>28-29th of August 2003</td>
<td>The Almaty Ministerial Conference took place in Almaty, Kazakhstan, and was the first big step towards implementing agreements and treaties to improve transport of goods in LLDCs and transit developing countries.</td>
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<tr>
<td>December 2013</td>
<td>The WTO’s Ministerial Conference in Bali, Indonesia adopted the Trade Facilitation Agreement.</td>
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November 2014 The UN-OHRLLS adopted the Vienna Programme of Action.

2015 Drop in international trade, especially between developed and developing countries, heavily affecting LLDCs’ seaborne trade.

December 2019 The Vienna Programme of Action mid-term review is held.

### Relevant UN Treaties and Events

- Almaty Programme of Action: Addressing the Special Needs of Landlocked Developing Countries within a New Global Framework for Transit Transport Cooperation for Landlocked and Transit Developing Countries *(29th of August 2003)*
- Specific actions related to the particular needs and problems of landlocked developing countries: outcome of the [Almaty Ministerial Conference] *(A/RES/66/214)*
- Vienna Programme of Action for Landlocked Developing Countries for the Decade 2014-2024 (UN-OHRLLS) *(November 2014)*

### Previous Attempts to solve the Issue

The first successful effort made by the international community to address the issue at hand is the Almaty Ministerial Conference. This conference that took place in the city of Almaty in Kazakhstan on the 28th and 29th of August of the year 2003 adopted the Almaty Ministerial Declaration and the Almaty Programme of Action *(Almaty Programme of Action: Addressing the Special Needs of Landlocked Developing Countries within a New Global Framework for Transit Transport Cooperation for Landlocked and Transit Developing Countries)*, the two of which originated in the issuance of a few other documents as part of the plan of action by the UN (see Relevant UN Treaties and Events sections).

The Almaty Programme of Action, as truly one of the first to address the issue specifically, provided a framework that concerned both LLDCs and transit countries under an angle of multinational cooperation on a more local level that would encourage neighboring countries to partake in discussions towards this goal. It was designed as a framework for the decade of 2003-2013, and was an acclaimed reference for all discussions on the matter.

Following its end in 2013, the Vienna Programme of Action was implemented for the ongoing decade of 2014-2024 with the aim of advancing the accomplishment of the SDGs in LLDCs and more specifically eradicating poverty. In 2019, the Programme’s mid-term review seeks to inquire on the progress of its implementation and its success in both LLDCs and transit countries. The UN-OHRLLS has also launched
the “Belt and Road Initiative” project as part of the Vienna Programme of Action mid-term review and runs this project for the period of November 2018 until October 2020. The “Belt and Road Initiative”, although not yet terminated, has propelled some governments into action, such as the Chinese government, who has been a key actor in this project. China has also conceived multiple ambitious projects to develop a unified railroad infrastructure for the Central and South Asian regions. Some of these projects have allowed for local people to develop new competencies and experience and gain a new job that can better their conditions, such as China’s railroad project in Lao PDR, where Chinese engineers and other qualified staff are training local workers hands on and afterwards will offer them certifications.

However, the impact of the implementation of these two Programmes remains to be seen in international trade agreements on the matter that not only concern LLDCs and their neighbors but also all of their trading partners and potential trading partners from all regions of the world.

**Possible Solutions**

Addressing the multiple faces of the issue is most essential to implementing adequate trade agreements that will aid in the economic transformation of LLDCs to work on eradicating poverty effectively. It is important to take into account the framework set by the six priorities of the Vienna Programme of Action (see appendices II and III for more details).

The strengthening of the LLDCs’ public institutions represents an important step to advance in the successful implementation of national policies and legal framework to facilitate transit. Strong institutions can then create policies that would encourage public-private partnerships (PPPs) to work on facilitating transit through improving infrastructure, providing international expertise, sharing perspectives when elaborating laws and policies and participating in other initiatives.

In LLDCs as well as transit countries, the creation of legal frameworks in which simplified and standardized regulations on border-crossing and other transit administrations can be implemented along with room for national policies and bilateral agreements is highly important. Such frameworks need to concord between LLDCs and their neighboring transit countries to ensure some standardized procedures for transit.

The needs of trade transportation in terms of infrastructure should to be specified as requirements in bilateral trade agreements. Where infrastructure does not suffice to the trade transportation needs, the creation of local projects should be encouraged in order to fulfill these requirements. Here, the collaboration of LLDCs and transit countries along with their more economically developed trading partners can help motorize these projects, and, just like China’s railroad projects in Lao PDR, create higher chances of and better employment for the poorer local populations.
To properly develop infrastructure, transit corridors across regions and between countries should be brought to life and maintained. This can then support an economic growth in the zone thanks to the apparition of multiple services that would have become necessary with the inflation of traffic along these routes, thus reducing poverty through the multiplication of jobs and opportunities for development.

**Guiding Questions**

- How can LLDCs and transit countries better link their transport infrastructure in transit routes and through borders?
- What policies need to be implemented nationally in order to facilitate trade and more particularly transit?
- How can LLDCs’ more developed trading partners support their trade and access to world markets?
- What local projects could be launched to implement the Vienna Programme of Action’s priorities?

**Bibliography**

“About LLDCs - UN-OHRLLS” *UN*, [https://unohrlls.org/about-lldcs/](https://unohrlls.org/about-lldcs/)


Appendices


This map highlights all 32 LLDCs recognized by the UN (2017):


Section V (page 13) of this document details the six priorities in the Vienna Programme of Action, it is recommended to have a read as it gives a comprehensive, solution-based approach of the various aspects of the issue to be solved and is a good starter for new solutions.


This document contains many facts and realistic solutions that give a direction of action to solve the issue. It is highly recommended as it is very clear and simply put.