

# **Beyond Borders: United Nations Assistance for Landlocked Developing Countries (LLDCs), 2015–2020**

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## **Abstract**

*Landlocked Developing Countries (LLDCs) face unique development challenges due to their lack of direct access to the sea, leading to high trade costs and limited integration into global markets. Between 2015 and 2020, the United Nations and its partners implemented various initiatives to address these challenges, focusing on enhancing transport connectivity, trade facilitation, and economic diversification. This paper examines the key UN-led programs and their impacts on LLDCs during this period.*

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## **I. Introduction**

LLDCs, comprising 32 nations across Africa, Asia, Latin America, and Europe, are characterized by their geographical remoteness, inadequate infrastructure, and dependence on neighbouring transit countries. These factors contribute to higher trade costs and hinder economic development. Recognizing these challenges, the United Nations has prioritized support for LLDCs through various frameworks and initiatives.

The Vienna Programme of Action (VPoA): A Decadal Framework

The VPoA (2014–2024) serves as the primary UN framework guiding support for LLDCs. It outlines six priority areas:

1. Fundamental transit policy issues.
2. Infrastructure development and maintenance.
3. International trade and trade facilitation.
4. Regional integration and cooperation.
5. Structural economic transformation.
6. Means of implementation.

A midterm review in 2019 highlighted progress in areas such as health, education, gender equality, and ICT access. However, challenges persisted, including limited trade integration and inadequate infrastructure.

Key UN Initiatives (2015–2020)

### **1. Strengthening Transport Connectivity under the Belt and Road Initiative**

From November 2018 to October 2021, the UN-OHRLLS implemented a project to enhance transport connectivity for LLDCs under the Belt and Road Initiative. The project focused on:

Designing policies to promote resilient transport infrastructure

Improving trade potential and global market integration.

Enhancing productive capacity and structural transformation

Key outcomes included regional review meetings, development of training materials, and support for the midterm review of the VPoA.

### **2. UNCTAD's Support for Economic Diversification**

The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) assisted LLDCs in:

Identifying growth opportunities in sectors like horticulture, mining, and fisheries.

Formulating policies centered on productive capacities.

Providing advisory services for structural economic transformation.

These efforts aimed to reduce LLDCs' dependence on a narrow range of exports and enhance their participation in global value chains.

### 3. Implementation of the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement

The World Trade Organization's Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA), which entered into force in 2017, aimed to expedite the movement of goods across borders. LLDCs actively participated in the negotiations and benefited from capacity-building initiatives under the WTO's Aid for Trade program. Full implementation of the TFA was projected to reduce trade costs in LLDCs by over 15% on average.

### 4. Enhanced Integrated Framework (EIF)

The EIF is a multi-donor program that supports least developed countries, including LLDCs, in integrating trade into their national development strategies. Its activities encompass:

Mainstreaming trade into development plans  
Building institutional capacities for trade-related assistance  
Addressing supply-side constraints to trade

Through the EIF, LLDCs received support in areas such as policy formulation, infrastructure development, and capacity building.

#### Impact of COVID-19 on LLDCs

The COVID-19 pandemic posed significant economic challenges for LLDCs, including:

Projected economic contractions in 2020  
Collapse in commodity prices affecting export revenues  
Reduced official development assistance (ODA) flows  
Increased fiscal deficits and balance of payments pressures

These impacts underscored the vulnerabilities of LLDCs and the need for continued international support.

## II. Conclusion

Between 2015 and 2020, the United Nations and its partners implemented various initiatives to support LLDCs in overcoming their unique development challenges. While progress was made in areas such as transport connectivity, trade facilitation, and economic diversification, LLDCs continue to face significant obstacles, exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Sustained international cooperation and targeted support remain essential to ensure that LLDCs are not left behind in global development efforts.

## Sources

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