



Inaugural Intergovernmental Meeting of the International Think Tank for LLDCs

**Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia,
June 11-12, 2018**

Concept note

Context

Mongolia and other landlocked developing countries (LLDCs) have a long way to go to fully benefit from globalization and to achieve sustained and inclusive economic growth, sustainable development, poverty eradication, employment generation and structural transformation.

These goals are the priority of the International Think Tank for LLDCs (ITT for LLDCs), however to achieve them, there is a need for a better integration of these issues into development strategies at the national, regional and global levels. Strengthened partnerships between LLDCs, transit countries and development partners, within the context of North-South, South - South and triangular cooperation, as well as strengthened partnerships with the relevant international and regional organizations and between public and private sector actors, are essential.

LLDCs have numerous particular aspects and challenges that are related to landlockedness and very often also remoteness from major markets. Those aspects impose serious constraints on the overall socio-economic development of landlocked developing countries.

Landlocked developing countries are generally among the poorest of the developing countries, with insufficient infrastructure, transit challenges, productive capacity deficiencies and are typically heavily dependent on a limited number of commodities for their export earnings. Moreover, out of 32 landlocked developing countries 16 are classified as least developed countries. The remoteness from major world markets is the principal reason why many landlocked developing countries have not been very successful in overcoming the geographical handicap as compared to landlocked countries in Europe.

To deal with the constraints facing LLDCs, the International Ministerial Conference of Landlocked and Transit Developing Countries and Donor Countries and International Financial and Development Institutions on Transit Transport Cooperation was held in Almaty, Kazakhstan, in August 2003. It adopted the 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 and the Almaty Ministerial Declaration. In 2014, the Almaty Programme of Action was succeeded by the Vienna Programme of Action for Landlocked Developing Countries for the Decade 2014-2024 (VPoA) which was adopted as the outcome document of the Second UN Conference on LLDCs.

The ITT for LLDCs is following the lead set by the VPoA as well as the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The activities of the Think Tank, such as sharing of experiences, information exchange,

consultation, brokering and common positioning on pro-poor trade policies, transport and transit-related development strategies for the LLDCs, aim to contribute to the main goal of VPoA which is to address the special development needs and challenges of LLDCs arising from landlockedness, remoteness and geographical constraints in a more coherent manner and thus contribute to an enhanced rate of sustainable and inclusive growth, which can contribute to the eradication of poverty by moving towards the goal of ending extreme poverty as well as raising human development.

Landlocked developing countries are working towards mainstreaming the Vienna Programme of Action as well as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) into their national strategies. These countries may consider creating a high-level national multi-stakeholder body in order to give strong impetus to coherently implement all Programme priorities with medium-term plans and programmes. Because these priorities are interlinked and mutually reinforcing, only high-level attention and a coordinated multi-stakeholder approach will be able to help landlocked developing countries to overcome their constraints. The UN General Assembly in its resolution 72/232 decided to hold a comprehensive high-level midterm review on the implementation of the VPoA in 2019. The work of the ITT for LLDCs will contribute to the Midterm Review of the VPoA.

The 2030 Agenda makes specific reference to LLDCs, including in 3 SDGs, namely Goal 7 (Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all), Goal 9 (Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation) and Goal 10 (Reduce inequality within and among countries). However, all the 17 SDGs are relevant for LLDCs in their pursuit to achieve sustainable development.

History of the International Think Tank for LLDCs

The idea of establishing an International Think Tank for LLDCs originates in the International Ministerial Conference of Landlocked and Transit Developing Countries, Donor Countries and International Financial and Development Institutions on Transit Transport Cooperation in 2003. Three years later the idea of having a think tank became an initiative when the president of Mongolia addressed a meeting of LLDCs in Havana. The UN General Assembly in 2007 adopted the Ulaanbaatar declaration and in 2009 passed a resolution welcoming “the proposal to set up an International Think Tank in Ulaanbaatar to enhance the analytical capability of landlocked developing countries needed to maximize the efficiency of our coordinated efforts for the effective implementations of the internationally agreed provisions, particularly the Almaty Programme of Action and the Millennium Development Goals”. In 2009, UNESCAP adopted a resolution entitled “Support for the Establishment of an International Think Tank for Landlocked Developing Countries”. The International Think Tank for LLDCs was officially launched in Ulaanbaatar by the United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and H.E. S. Batbold, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Mongolia in 2009.

The Government of Mongolia, UN-OHRLS, and UN Office of Legal Affairs supported the group of LLDCs to elaborate the Multilateral Agreement for the Establishment of an International Think Tank. The Multilateral Agreement for the Establishment of an International Think Tank for LLDCs was endorsed at the meeting of Foreign Ministers of LLDCs in 2010. The Multilateral Agreement entered into force on October 6, 2017 following the accession of Nepal on August 7, 2017 which became the 10th member state of the ITT for LLDCs. The Government of Mongolia and the Interim Secretariat of the ITT for LLDCs have worked actively to have the required ten ratifications by LLDCs in order to fulfill the legal requirements for the establishment of the ITT for LLDCs. 12 landlocked developing countries namely Mongolia, Lao PDR, Armenia, Afghanistan, Kazakhstan, Burkina Faso, Paraguay, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Nepal, Ethiopia and Bhutan have ratified the Multilateral Agreement as of March 21, 2018.

Objectives of the meeting

This historic meeting will be the first ever inaugural meeting of the ITT for LLDCs organized for member states, observers and supporters. It will be a symbolic event, at the same time a platform for thematic multilateral discussion of LLDCs’ special needs, challenges and international development issues.

The main goal of this meeting is to provide all the LLDCs with the possibility to attend the first inaugural meeting of the ITT for LLDCs and have an opportunity to express areas of interest for future collaboration with the ITT for LLDCs. This meeting will also bring together all current and potential members of the ITT for LLDCs and other development partners and stakeholders.

This meeting will not only mark the historic inauguration of the ITT for LLDCs, but will also facilitate information and experience sharing through interactive discussions among government officials of LLDCs, donor countries and international experts during the thematic sessions.

The overall goal of the ITT is to use top-quality research and advocacy to improve the ability of landlocked developing countries to build their capacities with a view to benefiting from the international, trade system including WTO negotiations, with the ultimate aim of raising human development and reducing poverty and achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

Specific objectives are to:

- Share knowledge, publications, research results and studies, on good practices, strategies and solutions to effectively address landlockedness for the use and benefit of all landlocked developing countries therefore contributing to the formulation of strategies and policies aimed at better understanding the challenges that landlocked developing countries are facing and the effective implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action.
- Discuss cooperation areas and research topics to be conducted in the future.
- Foster convergent views and approaches among landlocked developing countries with respect to global economic issues of interest, such as effects of the global economic and financial crisis, climate change and food security.

Expected outcomes

The inaugural meeting of the ITT for LLDCs is expected to generate the following outcomes:

- LLDC Member States and all stakeholders identify priority areas of interest for future collaboration with the ITT for LLDCs
- Enhanced networking via fruitful exchanges of ideas, knowledge and relevant experiences and good practices on what needs to be done to effectively and sustainably tackle the challenges faced by LLDCs;
- The outcome would contribute to the Midterm Review of the Vienna Programme of Action.

Format of the meeting

The meeting will consist of an opening ceremony and 3 thematic sessions involving interactive discussions and the closing ceremony. At its conclusion, the meeting will adopt an outcome that will contribute to the development of a roadmap for the priority areas of the ITT for LLDCs and it will also form input to the Midterm Review of the VPoA.

The meeting will be held over the period of two days in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia on June 11-12, 2018. The languages of the meeting will be English, with Russian and French interpretation.

Thematic sessions/panels

Session1: Foreign Direct Investment and Economic diversification of LLDCs

This session will review the impact of foreign direct investment on economic diversification in LLDCs, and further explore the effects of economic diversification on economic growth, international trade position and food security. The event will also raise questions on the relationship between industrial development, domestic economic diversification (driven by FDI in mining), and the international business and trade

activities of LLDCs. The discussion would explore insights into how significant FDI in primary industries is correlated with the diversification of economic activity, the growth of international business, and the integration of a landlocked developing country into the regional and global economy.

Session 2: ICT-Connectivity and LLDCs

This session will discuss the ICT infrastructure development of LLDCs and draw insights into how to achieve high Internet penetration rate and aim to close the digital divide. The event will also explore the role of digital connectivity in supporting business activity, and in promoting regional and international business expansion in LLDCs. The discussion will raise insights into best practices in establishing digital connectivity in a landlocked context, which can be used to aid other landlocked countries in developing more robust digital connectivity networks to support regional and international business activity.

Session 3: Transport, transit and trade facilitation challenges and opportunities of LLDCs

This session will focus on transport connectivity issues of LLDCs, including the market potential of different transport sectors and different liberalization schemes. The session will also explore the challenges faced by transport companies of LLDCs, where businesses incur high operating costs due to severe geographic constraints and barriers within small markets. The discussion will raise insights into the business model innovation required by transport companies to operate effectively and profitably within the landlocked business context given other businesses access to robust and cost-effective transport services, which supports regional and international business activity.

Participants

The meeting will bring together senior government representatives from all 32 LLDCs, transit developing countries and developed countries responsible for trade, transport and/or infrastructure; and representatives from UN and other international organizations, international financial institutions and representatives of the private sector.

Core organizers

The meeting is being organized by the Government of Mongolia and the International Think Tank for LLDCs in collaboration with the Office of the High Representative for Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States (UN-OHRLLS), as well as international organizations and the private sector.