

# Unlocking Development: The United Nations and the Landlocked Developing Countries (2010-2015)

Dr Indu Bala

---

## **Abstract**

*Landlocked Developing Countries (LLDCs) face unique structural challenges due to their geographical isolation from global markets. From 2010 to 2015, the United Nations (UN) continued its focused efforts to assist LLDCs through policy frameworks, partnerships, technical aid, and development funding. This paper explores the scope, effectiveness, and impact of UN assistance to LLDCs in this period, highlighting major frameworks like the Almaty Programme of Action and the Vienna Programme of Action. The analysis reveals the extent to which the UN's multilateral efforts have addressed the infrastructure deficits, trade inefficiencies, and institutional capacity issues of LLDCs while pointing out persistent challenges.*

---

## **I. Introduction**

Landlocked Developing Countries (LLDCs) are nations without direct access to the sea, which severely limits their trade opportunities and economic development. In 2015, there were 32 such countries—most of them in Africa, Asia, and Central Europe. Due to dependence on transit countries and high transportation costs, LLDCs face formidable barriers to integration into the global economy. The United Nations has recognized these unique vulnerabilities and committed to supporting LLDCs since the 1990s.

From 2010 to 2015, this commitment was marked by the implementation of the Almaty Programme of Action and the launching of the Vienna Programme of Action. The paper examines how the UN responded to LLDC challenges in this period through political engagement, development aid, capacity-building, and monitoring mechanisms.

### **I. Background and the Unique Challenges of LLDCs**

LLDCs lack territorial access to the sea, which increases their cost of trading goods and slows economic development. These constraints are compounded by poor infrastructure, limited financial resources, fragile institutions, and political instability in some cases. LLDCs spend, on average, 45% more to export and 55% more to import than coastal developing countries.

The UN has long emphasized that without addressing these geographic constraints, sustainable development in LLDCs is impossible. Their structural disadvantages directly contribute to poverty, inequality, and dependency on foreign aid. Hence, a major goal of the UN between 2010 and 2015 was to reduce these gaps through integrated development strategies.

### **II. The Almaty Programme of Action: Continuing Impact (2010–2015)**

#### **1. Overview**

The Almaty Programme of Action (APoA), adopted in 2003, remained the key UN strategy until 2014. It identified five priority areas:

- Transit policy and regulatory frameworks.
- Infrastructure development.
- Trade facilitation.
- International support measures.
- Implementation and review.

From 2010 to 2015, the UN continued to monitor APoA's implementation, pushing for collaboration between LLDCs and their transit neighbours.

## 2. Achievements by 2015

By 2015, several LLDCs had improved customs procedures and enhanced road and rail networks with UN assistance. For instance, the UN supported the construction of transport corridors in Africa (such as the North-South Corridor), and customs harmonization initiatives in Central Asia.

According to the Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States (OHRLLS), trade facilitation programs under APoA helped reduce delays at borders in several LLDCs, notably in the Southern African Development Community (SADC).

## 2. Priority Areas

VPoA laid out six priority areas:

Fundamental transit policy issues

Infrastructure development and maintenance.

International trade and trade facilitation.

Regional integration and cooperation.

Structural economic transformation

Means of implementation (finance, technology, capacity-building)

The VPoA adopted a broader development approach, linking LLDC challenges with global issues such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

## 3. UN Implementation Support

The UN supported VPoA through:

Advocacy and policy coordination

Technical support from UN agencies (e.g., UNCTAD, UNDP, UNESCAP, UNECA)

Monitoring and reporting via annual LLDC reports

Capacity-building workshops and knowledge sharing platforms

The UN General Assembly adopted several resolutions reaffirming commitment to the VPoA and calling for donor countries and international financial institutions to contribute more to LLDC development.

## IV. Key UN Agencies Supporting LLDCs (2010–2015)

### 1. OHRLLS

OHRLLS served as the main coordinating body for LLDC affairs. It facilitated high-level events, provided technical advice, and monitored VPoA and APoA progress.

### 2. UNCTAD

The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) offered analytical support and capacity building for trade policy formulation and logistics reform. It developed the “ASYCUDA” customs management system, which was implemented in many LLDCs to streamline border procedures.

### 3. UNDP

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) helped LLDCs with governance reform, poverty reduction, and resilience-building. For example, in 2013–2015, UNDP programs in Niger and Lao PDR focused on boosting local economic development through microfinance and institutional strengthening.

### 4. UNECA, UNESCAP, UNECE

The regional UN commissions were instrumental in promoting transport infrastructure, energy connectivity, and transit cooperation among LLDCs and neighbouring countries.

## V. Case Studies

### 1. Burkina Faso

Burkina Faso benefited from UNCTAD and UNECA-supported projects to improve trade logistics and border procedures. The implementation of ASYCUDA helped reduce customs clearance time by over 40% between 2010 and 2014.

## 2. Nepal

The UN, via UNESCAP and UNDP, supported Nepal in transport modernization and regional integration with India and China. Road corridors developed with UN-facilitated funding enhanced Nepal's access to global trade routes despite political instability.

## 3. Kazakhstan

As a relatively better-developed LLDC, Kazakhstan received UN assistance for diversifying its economy and improving rail and energy infrastructure. It served as a model in the region for leveraging international cooperation under APoA and VPoA.

# VI. Evaluation and Challenges

## 1. Achievements

Infrastructure development accelerated in many LLDCs.  
Trade facilitation measures reduced some transit inefficiencies.  
LLDC representation in global forums increased.  
Regional partnerships became more prominent.

## 2. Remaining Challenges

Financing gaps: Many LLDCs struggled to attract investment.  
Limited progress in structural transformation: Over-reliance on primary exports persisted.  
Political instability and corruption slowed implementation in several countries.  
Regional tensions often disrupted transit agreements.

# VII. Coordination with Other International Actors

UN assistance was often implemented in partnership with:  
World Bank (e.g., Trade Facilitation Support Program).  
WTO (e.g., Trade Facilitation Agreement negotiations).  
African Union, ASEAN, and other regional organizations.  
Donor governments (e.g., Japan, EU, USA)  
The 2012 High-Level Meeting on LLDCs in Geneva emphasized the importance of global partnerships and coherence in development financing for LLDCs.

# VIII. Conclusion

Between 2010 and 2015, the United Nations provided essential assistance to LLDCs through frameworks like the Almaty and Vienna Programmes of Action. While meaningful progress was made in infrastructure, trade facilitation, and regional cooperation, significant barriers remained. UN agencies played a critical role in bringing global attention to LLDCs and aligning their needs with broader development goals.

## References

- [1]. United Nations (2014). Vienna Programme of Action for LLDCs 2014–2024. UN General Assembly.
- [2]. United Nations (2013). Review of the Implementation of the Almaty Programme of Action. OHRLLS.
- [3]. UNCTAD (2015). Trade Facilitation and the Development of LLDCs. Geneva.
- [4]. UNDP (2013–2015). Country Reports: Burkina Faso, Nepal, Kazakhstan.
- [5]. World Bank (2014). Connecting to Compete: Trade Logistics in the Global Economy.
- [6]. WTO (2013). Trade Facilitation Agreement: Implications for LLDCs.