

# Geography as Destiny: UN Assistance for Landlocked Developing Countries from 2005 to 2010

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## Abstract

*This paper explores the United Nations' initiatives and strategies in assisting Landlocked Developing Countries (LLDCs) between 2005 and 2010. LLDCs face specific developmental challenges due to lack of direct access to the sea, which hampers their trade, infrastructure development, and socio-economic progress. The research focuses on multilateral frameworks, such as the Almaty Programme of Action (APOA), and evaluates their impact on trade facilitation, transport infrastructure, capacity building, and regional cooperation. Additionally, the paper analyses the roles of relevant UN agencies, development partners, and LLDC governments during the period.*

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## I. Introduction

Landlocked Developing Countries (LLDCs) are confronted with unique obstacles stemming from their geographical disadvantage. Without territorial access to the sea, these countries face higher transport costs, delays in transit, and overdependence on neighbouring countries' infrastructure and policies. The United Nations has acknowledged these constraints and has taken several steps to alleviate them, especially through multilateral partnerships and development frameworks. The years 2005 to 2010 mark a crucial period for these initiatives, particularly with the midterm review of the Almaty Programme of Action.

### -I. Background of LLDCs and the UN's Engagement

#### 1.1 Definition and Distribution

As of 2005, there were 31 LLDCs spread across Africa, Asia, Europe, and South America. These include countries like Nepal, Afghanistan, Bolivia, Mali, Chad, and Kazakhstan. These nations typically struggle with underdeveloped transport infrastructure, limited market access, and socio-political instability.

#### 1.2 Challenges Faced by LLDCs

High transport and transit costs  
Limited access to global markets  
Dependence on neighbours' political stability and infrastructure  
Weak bargaining power in global trade negotiations  
Vulnerability to environmental and economic shocks

#### 1.3 UN's Early Role and the Almaty Programme of Action

In 2003, the UN launched the Almaty Programme of Action (APoA) as the first global framework to address the special needs of LLDCs. This program laid the groundwork for international cooperation, emphasizing five priority areas:

Transit policy and regulatory frameworks  
Infrastructure development and maintenance  
International trade and trade facilitation  
International support measures  
Implementation and monitoring  
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## **II. Major UN Mechanisms and Assistance from 2005–2010**

### **2.1 Continued Implementation of the Almaty Programme of Action**

From 2005 onward, the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), UNCTAD, UN-OHRLLS (Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, LLDCs and Small Island Developing States), and other agencies intensified support for the APoA. Key developments included:

The establishment of regional coordination mechanisms

The integration of APoA objectives into national development plans

Capacity-building workshops on trade and customs reforms

### **2.2 2008 Midterm Review of the Almaty Programme**

Held in New York, this review assessed progress and challenges. Key findings:

Some LLDCs had made progress in improving transport infrastructure.

Trade facilitation was lagging due to outdated customs procedures.

Greater donor support was needed for implementation.

The review concluded with recommendations to increase aid effectiveness and foster partnerships with transit countries.

### **2.3 Infrastructure Development Projects**

Under UN coordination:

The Trans-African Highway projects received international support.

South-South cooperation was promoted in Asia through ESCAP and ADB-backed transport corridors (e.g., the Asian Highway Network).

The Aid for Trade initiative launched by WTO in 2006 also supported LLDC infrastructure.

### **2.4 Trade Facilitation Efforts**

UNCTAD and the World Customs Organization (WCO), with UN support, provided technical assistance for:

Simplifying customs procedures

Promoting the use of electronic data interchange (EDI)

Implementing single-window systems

### **2.5 Capacity Building and Technical Assistance**

The UN organized regional and global workshops to train LLDC policymakers on:

WTO negotiation strategies

Sustainable transport planning

Climate adaptation in trade

Countries like Uganda, Bhutan, and Paraguay benefited from targeted workshops between 2007 and 2009.

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## **III. Regional Approaches and Case Studies**

### **3.1 Africa**

The Sub-Saharan LLDCs (e.g., Burkina Faso, Malawi, Zambia) were supported via the NEPAD framework and African Union development plans.

The Abuja Transport Summit (2007) emphasized corridor development.

UNDP and UNECA collaborated on data collection for policy planning.

### 3.2 Asia

UNESCAP worked with Central Asian republics (e.g., Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan) to enhance transport connectivity with China and Europe.

The UN helped harmonize transit agreements between countries like Mongolia and Kazakhstan.

Afghanistan received special UN attention for post-conflict transport reconstruction.

### 3.3 Latin America

Bolivia and Paraguay, supported through the UN-ECLAC, improved riverine and road access via multilateral agreements with Brazil and Argentina.

The MERCOSUR and UN cooperation allowed regional integration of LLDC interests.

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## **IV. Roles of UN Agencies and Partners**

### 4.1 UN-OHRLLS

Acted as the main coordinating body, ensuring that LLDC issues remained on the global agenda and promoting donor engagement.

### 4.2 UNCTAD

Focused on trade logistics and customs modernization. It released regular reports measuring progress.

### 4.3 UNDP

Invested in capacity-building, especially in governance and regional cooperation.

### 4.4 World Bank and IMF Collaboration

The UN collaborated with Bretton Woods institutions to fund trade corridor development and policy reforms.

### 4.5 Donor Countries and Partnerships

Major donor nations (e.g., Japan, Germany, the EU) supported LLDC-specific infrastructure and training programs, often under UN umbrella coordination.

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## **V. Assessment of Impact (2005–2010)**

### 5.1 Achievements

Greater visibility for LLDC issues at the global level

Development of new regional transport corridors

Inclusion of LLDCs in WTO and UN dialogues

Improvement in trade logistics indicators for some countries

Stronger regional cooperation in transit policies

### 5.2 Limitations

Funding gaps and donor fatigue

Political instability in several LLDCs (e.g., Chad, Afghanistan) hindered progress

Continued reliance on neighbouring countries with weak infrastructure

Lack of effective monitoring in some cases

### 5.3 UN System Limitations

While the UN provided important coordination and technical assistance, it relied heavily on voluntary contributions and regional cooperation, which were not always forthcoming.

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## **VI. Policy Recommendations and Way Forward**

### **6.1 Strengthening Multilateral Partnerships**

Increase financing through international financial institutions (IFIs)  
Foster trilateral partnerships involving LLDCs, transit countries, and donors

### **6.2 Enhancing Data Collection and Monitoring**

Build robust national statistical systems to track logistics and trade data

### **6.3 Deepening Regional Integration**

Expand regional trade blocs to incorporate LLDCs more equitably  
Harmonize customs and transit procedures regionally

### **6.4 Leveraging Technology**

Encourage adoption of digital platforms for trade and transport  
Support e-learning programs to build human capital

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## **Conclusion**

Between 2005 and 2010, the United Nations played a pivotal role in addressing the complex challenges faced by Landlocked Developing Countries. Through frameworks like the Almaty Programme of Action, global partnerships, and capacity-building efforts, significant progress was made. However, the journey was uneven, with several limitations in implementation and coordination. A sustained global commitment, including the successor Vienna Programme of Action, became essential to continue supporting LLDCs toward sustainable development.

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