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Groups of countries in special situations: follow-up to the second United Nations Conference on Landlocked Developing Countries

Joint Inspection Unit

Review of United Nations system support for landlocked developing countries to implement the Vienna Programme of Action

Note by the Secretary-General

The Secretary-General has the honour to transmit to the members of the General Assembly his comments and those of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination on the report of the Joint Inspection Unit entitled “Review of United Nations system support for landlocked developing countries to implement the Vienna Programme of Action” (see [A/77/89](#)).

* [A/77/50](#).



I. Introduction

1. In its report entitled “Review of United Nations system support for landlocked developing countries to implement the Vienna Programme of Action” (see [A/77/89](#)),¹ the Joint Inspection Unit assesses the challenges, opportunities, good practices and lessons learned with regard to the work of the United Nations system organizations to support landlocked developing countries in the implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action for Landlocked Developing Countries for the Decade 2014–2024 during its first five years and provides suggestions for improvement.

II. General comments

2. Organizations welcome the report and its findings.

3. While the implementation of some aspects of the proposed recommendations is already ongoing, entities would require resources additional to those currently allocated in order to be able to implement the proposed recommendations in full. Additional analysis and related recommendations on how to reduce or close such resource gaps would have been helpful. This is particularly true in the case of the expectations placed on the Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States, the main office of the United Nations Secretariat with responsibility for this area of work.

4. When addressing intergovernmental support for landlocked developing countries, the report fails to mention the high-level political forum on sustainable development, the special meetings of the Economic and Social Council, or the Committee for Development Policy. The annual meeting of the high-level political forum, convened under the auspices of the Council, includes a dedicated session on countries in special situations, including landlocked developing countries, in relation to the forum’s theme and the Sustainable Development Goals under review. It also provides these countries with the opportunity to submit their voluntary national reviews on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its integrated implementation with the Vienna Programme of Action. In addition, the special needs of countries in special situations, including landlocked developing countries, are also addressed in meetings of the Council, as mandated by the General Assembly. These countries’ needs are also underlined in the ministerial declarations adopted annually by the Council and the forum. The Committee for Development Policy, which is tasked with providing independent advice to the Council on development policy issues, including the triennial reviews of the least developed country category, makes recommendations to the Council and the Assembly as to which countries should be included on or graduated from the category. In both cases, support is provided by the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat, which also implements capacity development projects focused on graduation support, international support measures and analytical tools to assist countries in special situations, including the least developed countries and landlocked developing countries.

5. While organizations agree with the inspector’s analysis regarding the need for a dedicated capacity to strengthen internal coordination and technical support for landlocked developing countries, some note that recommendations for action addressed to participating organizations should be based on relevant analysis and considering individual mandates.

¹ The report of the Joint Inspection Unit is available under the symbol [JIU/REP/2021/2](#).

6. In addition, where the contents of the report relate to transit countries, it would have been appropriate to engage in discussions with those countries and to hold further consultations with Office of the High Representative.
7. Organizations partially support the review's recommendations.

III. Comments on specific recommendations

Recommendation 1

The executive heads of United Nations system organizations should designate, if they have not already done so, by the end of 2022, an organizational focal point on landlocked developing countries with clear terms of reference, developed with guidance from Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States, that define the focal point's role and responsibilities in supporting the implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action for Landlocked Developing Countries.

8. Organizations partially support this recommendation.
9. While several entities report having already implemented this recommendation, others link its implementation to the availability of human and financial resources, especially in technical entities. Others underscore the absence of differentiated policy and technical assistance for landlocked developing countries within their mandates.
10. Organizations that have country-level strategic planning in place to guide the approach to country-level strategic and programmatic engagement note that support to landlocked developing countries will continue to be provided in line with the tailored strategies for the landlocked developing countries in question, in partnership with the relevant United Nations country team and stakeholders, rather than relying on a central focal point for all landlocked developing countries.
11. The Inter-Agency Consultative Group for Landlocked Developing Countries, convened by the Office of the High Representative, actively works on issues related to this subject. The Inter-Agency Consultative Group, in keeping with one of the recommendations arising from the evaluation of the Office of the High Representative conducted by the Office of Internal Oversight Services (E/AC.51/2021/2), developed and adopted its terms of reference² in a participatory manner. Moreover, in its resolution 75/228 the General Assembly recognized the Inter-Agency Consultative Group as a strengthened mechanism for coordinating implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action. The terms of reference contain a definition of the roles and responsibilities of the focal points in supporting the implementation of the Programme.

Recommendation 2

The Secretary-General should task the Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States with engaging with relevant United Nations system organizations to develop, by the end of 2022, a well-defined and comprehensive strategy and implementation plan for the design, conduct, monitoring and evaluation of training on mainstreaming the Vienna Programme of Action for Landlocked Developing Countries at the national level in such countries.

12. Organizations partially support this recommendation.

² Available at www.un.org/ohrlls/sites/www.un.org.ohrlls/files/terms_of_reference_iacg_lldcs_final.pdf.

13. In the light of the fact that the Vienna Programme of Action comes to a conclusion in 2024, the recommendation to develop, by the end of 2022, a well-defined and comprehensive strategy and implementation plan for the design, conduct, monitoring and evaluation of training on mainstreaming the Vienna Programme of Action for Landlocked Developing Countries at the national level in such countries comes at a late point in time, as mainstreaming and training are best done soon after the adoption of a new programme of action.

14. In the case of the United Nations Secretariat, in particular, given the limited resources available to the subprogramme, it would be better to undertake extensive mainstreaming and training soon after the adoption of a new programme of action in 2024. In the meantime, the Secretariat can raise awareness within the United Nations system of the importance of mainstreaming the Vienna Programme of Action or future iterations, including in the context of the formulation thereof.

15. In addition, the Secretariat considers it important to include transit countries in these training activities and to ensure the participation of relevant entities with specialized expertise in different subject areas and regional commissions with their region-specific knowledge and experience.

16. Training modules are also seen as vehicles for integrating the implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and leveraging synergies between the Programme and the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals.

Recommendation 3

The executive heads of United Nations system organizations should develop, by the end of 2022, a clear results framework on support for landlocked developing countries, including linkages among the outcomes to be achieved, the main outputs strategy and core activities.

17. Organizations partially support this recommendation.

18. Entities recognize the leadership of the Inter-Agency Consultative Group for Landlocked Developing Countries and caution against the risk of setting up duplicative reporting mechanisms and processes. Many share the view that the implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action and the requisite reporting should continue to be done as a system-wide effort and that recommendations from this review should help in strengthening system-wide mechanisms, with individual entities being guided by system-wide work in this regard.

19. The Office of the High Representative notes that it coordinated, in the context of the Inter-Agency Consultative Group, the formulation of a clear results framework in the form of a road map³ for the accelerated implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action. The road map comprises a detailed mapping of the activities to be carried out by United Nations system organizations, as well as mechanisms for coordination and the development of linkages among outcomes.

20. Some further note that the objective of this recommendation would be more effectively reached through recommendation 7.

³ Available at: <https://www.un.org/ohrlls/content/roadmap-implementation-vpoa-lldcs>.

Recommendation 4

The Secretary-General should task the United Nations Sustainable Development Group, supported by the Development Coordination Office, with providing, by the end of 2022, guidance on a consistent basis to country teams in landlocked developing countries on factoring in the Vienna Programme of Action for Landlocked Developing Countries when carrying out common country analyses and developing cooperation frameworks.

21. Organizations support this recommendation, although they note that the proposed deadline would be extremely difficult to meet.

22. As an initial step, the Office of the High Representative established a working rapport, including through the holding of regular meetings, with economists in resident coordinator offices in landlocked developing countries. Furthermore, in March 2021, the Office of the High Representative and the Development Coordination Office established a resident coordinators' network for landlocked developing countries, a joint initiative that will soon also include Department of Economic and Social Affairs and the regional commissions. In addition, the Development Coordination Office, as part of its review of common country analyses from landlocked countries, is already encouraging the integration of elements of the Vienna Programme of Action into these analyses, especially under the economic transformation analysis section. This practice will continue until specific guidance is developed.

Recommendation 5

The Secretary-General should task the system-wide evaluation office of the United Nations Sustainable Development Group to conduct, by the end of 2023, a system-wide evaluation of the contribution by the United Nations system to the development results of the Vienna Programme of Action for Landlocked Developing Countries and ensure that the findings feed into the preparation of the successor programme of action for landlocked developing countries.

23. Member organizations of the United Nations Sustainable Development Group support this recommendation and the related improved monitoring of and reporting on the implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action, although they note that it would prove challenging to measure the development results of the Programme and the United Nations contribution thereto. For this reason, they would rather that the evaluation be centred on whether the United Nations development system's support is aligned with the Programme and the needs of landlocked developing countries and on the availability of resources for the Programme's implementation.

24. It should also be considered whether a year is enough time to achieve results given that several other recommendations are only to be implemented by the end of 2022.

Recommendation 6

The Secretary-General should task the Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States with developing, by the end of 2022, a well-defined integrated results framework, budget and programme plan for its subprogramme on landlocked developing countries, accompanied by information on the conditions for success, including partnerships for collective impact, a risk management plan and a monitoring and evaluation plan.

25. Organizations support this recommendation and confirm their continued support for the Office of the High Representative.

26. The United Nations Secretariat suggests that a needs assessment be undertaken prior to the implementation of this recommendation, in the light of the vast gap between the expectations of stakeholders and partners and the reality of what the Office of the High Representative is able to deliver. This needs assessment should include the identification of sources of financing, given the existing financial constraints affecting the Organization.

27. Once a needs assessment has been carried out, a well-defined results framework, backed by adequate resource allocation to implementing entities, in particular the Office of the High Representative, will be a major step towards improved implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action. However, the development of a well-defined integrated results framework by the Office should also be preceded by an inclusive round of consultations with system-wide partners and stakeholders so as to promote alignment with their plans and programmes of work, where applicable.

28. To avoid duplication of efforts and ensure a United Nations system-wide response, it is important that the proposed integrated results framework, budget and programme plan go hand in hand with the strategy and the overall result frameworks specified in recommendations 2 and 3.

29. In the light of the above, the timeline given for these activities is extremely short.

Recommendation 7

The legislative organs and governing bodies of the United Nations system organizations should issue directives, if they have not already done so, by the end of 2022, for their organizations to mainstream the priorities of the Vienna Programme of Action for Landlocked Developing Countries that are pertinent to their mandated work and request that their organizations report periodically on its implementation.

30. Organizations note that this recommendation is addressed to the legislative organs and the governing bodies of the United Nations system organizations.

31. Some note that this recommendation addresses in a more adequate and efficient manner what seems to be the aim of recommendation 3 by promoting reporting through the logic of a strategic plan.

Recommendation 8

The Secretary-General should task the Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States, in collaboration with the Development Coordination Office, with working with resident coordinator offices in landlocked developing countries and transit developing countries in order to invite national Governments to designate focal points for the Vienna Programme of Action for Landlocked Developing Countries with clearly defined roles and responsibilities.

32. Organizations support this recommendation. Some suggest it should be carried out in close alignment with recommendation 4.

33. The Secretariat, through the Office of the High Representative, will be working with landlocked developing countries to identify and designate capital-based national focal points from among those officials responsible for coordinating national committees on trade facilitation, established under the World Trade Organization Agreement on Trade Facilitation, in view of the significance of transit issues, international trade and trade facilitation in the development of landlocked developing countries and the successful implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action. For

those countries where this is not applicable, the Office will invite the designation of officials from the ministries responsible for international trade, transport or planning.

34. The Office of the High Representative is already working with national Governments of landlocked developing countries, through their permanent missions to the United Nations in New York, on the designation of capital-based national focal points. A first meeting was expected to take place at the end of 2021, which would also include the adoption of the terms of reference for national focal points.

Recommendation 9

The Secretary-General should task the Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States, as the Chair of the Inter-Agency Consultative Group for Landlocked Developing Countries, to review the modalities of the Group so as, by the end of 2022, to ensure for all meetings provisions, developed in collaboration with the Development Coordination Office, for the engagement of resident coordinators and invitations, when deemed appropriate, to landlocked developing countries and transit developing countries to participate in interactive discussions on thematic issues.

35. Organizations support this recommendation.

36. The Inter-Agency Consultative Group recently formalized and established its terms of reference, which were developed through a participatory and transparent process.

37. The Development Coordination Office is already a member of the Inter-Agency Consultative Group, as are the resident coordinators who are invited to participate in its meetings. Landlocked developing countries and transit countries will also be invited, whenever appropriate and feasible. The Chair of the Group of Landlocked Developing Countries is also included in the meetings of the Inter-Agency Consultative Group.

38. In the terms of reference of the Inter-Agency Consultative Group, it is specified that the Chair of the Group of Landlocked Developing Countries will be invited to the opening sessions of the meetings of the Inter-Agency Consultative Group. It is also stated that the Inter-Agency Consultative Group may, on an ad hoc basis, invite experts, government officials, representatives of non-governmental organizations, the private sector and other entities with expertise that may contribute to the work of the Inter-Agency Consultative Group, as observers and contributors to its discussions.

39. It is only through regular dialogue and the exchange of information, as well as the sharing of best practices among various Vienna Programme of Action stakeholders, that the effective and impactful implementation of the Programme will be achieved. In addition, the Inter-Agency Consultative Group is prepared to provide support and advice on aligning the implementation of the Programme with the 2030 Agenda.