Summary report of the Side event of the midterm review of the Vienna Programme of Action for Landlocked Developing Countries

**Strengthening the private sector role in the implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action**

Friday 6 December 2019, New York, United States
Executive Summary

The key role of the private sector in stimulating economic development and contributing to poverty reduction is widely acknowledged. Key international decisions including the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, Addis Ababa Action Agenda and the Vienna Programme of Action (VPoA), recognize the vital role of the private sector in their implementation as well as in the overall development. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development recognizes the role of the private sector to support the international community’s endeavors to tackle economic, social and environmental challenges. The VPoA recognizes that the contribution of the private sector is critical for its successful implementation hence the role of the private sector is highlighted in almost all the priority areas of the VPoA and the highlighted aspects include: improving transit facilitation and establishing efficient transit transport regimes; infrastructure development and maintenance; trade facilitation reforms, structural economic transformation and in the overall implementation of the VPoA. The VPoA also recognizes the private sector as the service provider and user of services as well as the main contributor to the development of infrastructure and productive capacities in both LLDCs and in transit countries.

Despite the widely recognized critical role of the private sector in achieving SDGs and VPoA targets, the private sector in LLDCs remains small and thus its contribution to the implementation of the VPoA is limited. Building the capacity of the LLDCs’ private sector as well as providing a conducive environment to enhance their participation is therefore fundamental.

The side event on strengthening the private sector role in the implementation of the VPoA was organized in the margins of the Comprehensive High-level midterm review of the VPoA. It aimed to enhance the private sector participation in the implementation of the VPoA. The meeting discussed policy options for creating a supportive business environment for growth and development of the private sector.

The meeting made several recommendations necessary for private sector development in LLDCs. It was observed that administrative barriers in cross border movements of goods remains a challenge and one of the biggest obstacles towards seamless movement of goods in global supply chains and integrating LLDCs into the world economy. Enhancing trade facilitation was therefore emphasized including considering the use of a single multimodal fully digital transit document based on the modern (blockchain) technologies. The need to build the capacity of the SMMEs and the indigenous private sector including building their capacity to participate in international trade as well enhancing access to finance. The need to enhance public private partnerships, and public and private sector dialogues was emphasized. It was recognized that despite the various challenges faced by LLDCs there were
opportunities that could be exploited including development of industries that could add value to commodities and develop downstream industries.

**Objective**

The event was organized in the margins of the Comprehensive High-level midterm review of the Vienna Programme of Action it was aimed at enhancing private sector participation in the implementation of the VPoA and the 2030 Agenda by showcasing good practices. The meeting discussed policy options for creating a supportive business environment for growth and development of the private sector.

**Proceedings**

**Remarks by Ms. Fekitamoeloa Katoa ‘Utoikamanu, High-Representative and Under Secretary-General, UN-OHRLLS**

In her opening remarks, Ms. Fekitamoeloa Katoa ‘Utoikamanu recalled the importance of the private sector in contributing to sustainable development as an engine of growth. She noted that successful businesses drive growth, create jobs, pay the taxes that finance public services and investment, develop the manufacturing capacity required for structural economic transformation and also provide increasing share of essential services, such as banking, telecommunications, health and education. She underscored that achieving the ambitious goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda will not be possible without a revitalized and enhanced Global Partnership including with the private sector. She recalled that the Vienna Programme stresses the importance of the private sector in its implementation including in improving transit facilitation and establishing efficient transit transport regimes; infrastructure development and maintenance; trade facilitation reforms, structural economic transformation as well as in the overall implementation of the VPoA.

She noted that despite the key role of the private sector several reports indicate that the private sector in many developing countries including in LLDCs faces several challenges and as such private sector has not been able to make meaningful contribution to development. She emphasized that efficiency and competitiveness are very important for attracting, building and retaining a strong and resilient private sector. She noted that LLDCs are faced with several challenges linked with their landlockedness and this affected their competitiveness and their ability to attract Foreign Direct Investment. She emphasized the importance of supportive policies, strong institutions, access to finance, and adequate infrastructure to improving efficiency and the competitiveness of LLDCs. She further emphasized the importance of reliable and cost-effective infrastructure for the efficient operation of existing productive assets and enterprises and for attracting new investments. She noted that whilst infrastructure is among the most important determinants in foreign investors’ choice of location for new investments, infrastructure in many LLDCs remains insufficient and LLDCs
still lack the capacity to develop and maintain the much-needed infrastructure including transport, ICT and Energy. She thus called for more investment towards infrastructure development and maintenance in LLDCs.

**Remarks by Honorable Mr. Manqoba Bheki Khumalo, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Trade, Kingdom of Eswatini**

Honorable Mr. Manqoba Bheki Khumalo shared the Kingdom of Eswatini’s experience in implementing the Vienna Programme of Action as well as national initiatives to develop the private sector. On implementing the priority on Trade and Trade Facilitation he indicated that the Kingdom of Eswatini had established by a legal notice a National Trade Facilitation Committee (NTFC) with membership drawn from various stakeholders including public, private, and academia representatives. He indicated that the Committee was a forum for the private sector to engage with Government to discuss issues that impede trade across borders and trade facilitation in general. He informed that the committee was co-chaired by the Principal Secretary of Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Trade and the Commissioner General of the Revenue Authority as well as CEO from the Private Sector.

Regarding regional integration and cooperation, he indicated that Eswatini belonged to different regional economic blocs, such as SACU, SADC, COMESA and the AfCFTA. He highlighted that Government encourage the participation of the private sector in business forums of these economic blocks. He also highlighted that the private sector participates in trade negotiations as observers to input in the engagements. He further informed that Government support, on cost sharing basis, SMMEs, particularly women and youth to participate in regional trade fairs and expos.

On means of implementation, Honorable Khumalo indicated that mobilization of financial resources was a priority for Government to fund bankable infrastructure projects that have potential to transform the economy. He noted that Government continues to engage different financial institutions at international level as well as in Africa for funding of such projects with participation of the private sector. He informed that Eswatini had signed an Agreement to electronic commerce with African Electronic Group platform for Southern Africa under a collaborative arrangement with the African Union. The African Electronic Group comprises private sector representatives, the diaspora and philanthropists, who see a great potential for the integration of SMMEs in regional and global trade using the e-commerce platform. He further informed that Eswatini planned to host a donor conference before the end of 2020, which will not only consider category C commitments under the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement, but other projects of national importance.

In concluding his remarks, he highlighted that the large investment and formal export sector, the private sector in Eswatini was predominantly South African, with a few players from Asia, United States and Europe. He noted that indigenous private sector, particularly SMMEs,
lacked necessary expertise and capital to sustain their businesses. He highlighted that in that regard the Government was in the process of developing a Citizens Economic Empowerment Bill that will level the playing field, by creating synergies between large and small firms.

**Remarks by Honorable Mr. Ralph Pachalo Jooma, Minister of Transport and Public Works**

In sharing Malawi’s national experience Honorable Mr. Ralph Pachalo Jooma highlighted that Malawi like other LLDCs was not attractive for private sector investment due to challenges associated with being landlocked and as such Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) flows were limited. He noted that the growth of the private sector was limited due to small local market as well as lack of competitiveness of their commodities in the export market. He highlighted that other compounding factors including poor infrastructure in transport, energy and ICT sectors. He also highlighted that financing was also unattractive as such long-term financing within the financial market which was appropriate for financing the emerging private sector in the LLDCs was not available. He noted that the high risks associated with LLDCs act as barriers to accessing financing by the private sector.

Honorable Mr. Jooma emphasized that despite the various challenges in LLDCs there were some opportunities that can be exploited by the private sector. He noted that most LLDCs are exporters of primary commodities which presents an opportunity for the private sector to develop industries for value addition and developing downstream initiatives. He highlighted that LLDCs are virgin territories waiting to be unlocked. He also highlighted that there are also opportunities to invest in infrastructure including energy, ICT, pharmaceuticals, climate change and skills development.

He highlighted that with the continuing reduction of ODA, private sector partnerships cannot be avoided by governments. He noted that to attract private sector participation, government offers preferences and incentives including tax incentives and sovereign guarantees. He underscored that in order to realize the effective participation of the private sector there is need for convergence of interests on both sides as there is usually conflict of interest between government’s long-term objectives and private sectors short-termism sort of objectives. He informed that Malawi had tried several models including PPPs, BOTs, IPPs in energy sector and concessions and some of the models had worked while some had not. He noted that with these models Government had learnt that sometimes Government concede to conditions that pose fiscal risks for the sake of anticipated development initiative and as such there was need for thorough scrutiny of business agreements by competent authorities. He highlighted that the LLDCs should not offer all preferences to a foreign multinational investor only to kill their own home-grown industry.

He informed that the private sector in Malawi focused on Priority 2 on infrastructure development and maintenance. He noted that being a virgin territory, infrastructure
development was low hanging fruits in Malawi. There was opportunity to justify financing by government as it could leverage the finance application by offering sovereign guarantees. Under priority 5 on Promoting structural economic transformation he mentioned that the private sector was fostering a shift from commodity dependency to diversified exports hence great opportunity for manufacturing taking advantage of the available cheap raw materials and labor. He noted that more needs to be done on priority 4 on regional cooperation and integration to scale up private sector involvement. He highlighted that other initiatives could include a) orientation of new investment opportunities; and b) bilateral and regional agreements between LLDCs and transit countries as such would guarantee business opportunities, robust clientele across borders etc. He emphasized that the governments in LLDCs should harness skills development for the labor force, development of bankable projects and research and development from local and regional think tanks through public-private partnerships.

**Remarks by Ms. Fatou Haidara, Managing Director, United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO)**

Ms. Fatou Haidara highlighted that UNIDO’s mandate is achieving inclusive, sustainable industrial development. She noted that UNIDO is committed to support each country in accomplishing high level of industrialization and in benefiting from globalization of markets for industry goods and services, supporting broader economic and social growth within environmentally sustainable framework and combining knowledge resources of development actors. She highlighted that the VPoA recognizes the key role private sector plays in industrialization process. She explained that UNIDO addresses this in two ways, the first of which was private sector development. She highlighted that it is important to remove constraints to SMEs, upgrade production system of SMEs in order for them to become efficient and competitive, capable to access markets with the aim to improve productivity and increase employment. She mentioned the second way is promoting public-private partnership. She mentioned that partnerships with the private sector leads to larger investment through innovative industrial models. She further explained that making a bridge between investor and project developer to facilitate financing projects and creation of more SMEs is needed.

Ms. Fatou Haidara emphasized that the LLDCs face challenges in meeting the target of the VPoA. She highlighted that strengthening private sector, increasing competitiveness of SMEs and improving business climate are required. She mentioned that strengthening the private sector is a major objective in UNIDO and it is achieved through advisory services and technical cooperation projects.

Ms. Haidara highlighted the three areas of UNIDO’s support. She stated that the first area was enabling environment and policy framework. She explained that the key step for public-private partnership and attracting investment is establishing enabling environment for businesses. She mentioned that UNIDO was working with countries to assist them to
formulate optimal industrial policy, tailored to national specification requirement. She explained that the second area was capacity building. She highlighted that it was vital to develop necessary skills to provide adequate professional and technical training for young people to become more employable and able to start their own businesses. She noted that some of the examples were vocational training for youth, women and refugees and she stressed that all activities include enhancing entrepreneurial culture and providing digital skills for greater employability. She shared that improving competitiveness in export-oriented industries and supporting strengthening of operational, and institutional capacities were important. She added that awareness raising, policy advice for implementation of national, industrial strategies, to develop export-oriented industries are required. She stated that lastly, institutional support and training to establish trade and quality infrastructure are important.

The third focus area she highlighted was partnerships which she emphasized as being a vital foundation to achieve greater impact. She described that UNIDO participated in new model of country level of engagement based on partnership with objective of leveraging private investment. She informed that Programme for Country Partnership was a partnership that links efforts of various actors to contribute to industrial development. She concluded that in order to accelerate implementation of the VPoA, strengthening partnership with private sector for continued investment and technical assistance was needed.

**Remarks by Mr. Ashish Shah, Director for Country Programmes, International Trade Centre**

Mr. Ashish Shah emphasized on the need to give greater focus to micro enterprises and small enterprises since these encompass a large majority of private sector entities in developing countries. He gave three examples on how ITC contributed to the implementation of the VPoA. He informed that ITC was providing support to Burkina Faso towards achieving structural, economic transformation. He indicated the support was towards the ethical fashion initiative which links artisans with high-end fashion lifestyle market across the world. He noted that the initiative applies ethical, and social impact model which ensures that artisans are earning living wages and meeting environmental standard. He also informed that ITC was supporting Afghanistan to boost their economic growth and enhance regional cooperation. He noted that although Afghanistan was ravaged by war, the country sat at the cross point of ancient trade routes, known as “The Silk Road”. He highlighted that the project brought together silk artisans to make beautiful silk product. He indicated that women artisans were connected to social enterprices and were now earning living wages.

Mr. Ashish Shah also reported that ITC was providing support towards trade facilitation. He emphasized the importance of removing trade obstacles and ensuring a transparent and predictable trade environment. He also emphasized that it is crucial to simplify border procedures to reduce time and cost to trade and build private sector capacity to comply with trade formalities across the border. He emphasized the need for enhancing public private
partnerships, and public and private sector dialogues. He concluded by echoing the importance of designing enabling policies for private sector to grow and the need to building their capacity to engage in international trade and enhanced market access.

Remarks by Mr. Igor Runov, Executive Secretary, International Center for Transport Diplomacy (ICTD)

In his presentation Mr. Igor Runov noted that compared to when the VPoA was adopted, the world had changed. He stressed the importance and the role of soft infrastructure. He emphasized that maintaining seamless movement of goods along the global transit corridor was crucial. He highlighted that although international organizations strived to have unified transit document, it was challenging due to factors such as risk handling as well as other technical issues. He however noted that with the development of block chain technologies, it was possible to take advantage of single, digital, multi modal transit document that acts as real visa for goods including for producers in LLDCs. He stressed that this would open a new market for the LLDCs.

Mr. Igor Runov underscored that digital divide, gender divide and education divide need to be addressed. He therefore highlighted that distant learning program would be crucial. He highlighted that ICTD would make distance learning program accessible from 2020. He noted that the program includes contents such as environment issues and road safety.

Remarks by Dr. Sandra Seno-Alday, Professor, University of Sydney (Partner of the International Think Tank for LLDCs)

In her presentation Dr. Sandra Seno-Alday focused on regional integration in particular on outcome of a study on International Trade, Risk and Competitiveness: The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and Landlocked Developing Countries undertaken by the University of Sydney.

She highlighted that Regional Integration was an important strategy aimed at promoting international trade, economic development, peace and stability. She highlighted several regional integration initiatives implemented over the years ranging from free trade agreements (FTAs) such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) to fully integrated regions such as the European Union (EU). She indicated that China introduced an innovation to the traditional models of regional integration with the introduction of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). She noted that whilst the BRI share the same major objectives and key components as existing integration models, it was unique in its vision of global markets connected by a vast physical infrastructure of road, rail, port, and ICT networks of which the physical infrastructure was mainly financed by debt administered by the Asian Infrastructure
Investment Bank (AIIB). She noted that around half of the countries in continental Asia that are along the Belt and Road were LLDCs.

She indicated that the study investigated the evolution of international trade networks in continental Asia from 1996 to 2014. She reported that the study found that the continental Asian trade network has grown relatively slowly over the 19-year period and had remained loosely coupled and nebulous. She further reported that the LLDCs have persistently remained at the vulnerable fringes of the international trade network and have not successfully integrated into any of the trade clusters that have formed within the continent over time. She highlighted that the study also found that the network remained heavily dependent on China to maintain the structure of the trade network and that the position of LLDCs at the fringes of the trade network and the continued dominance of large economies such as China, Thailand and South Korea point to weak international competitiveness among continental Asian LLDCs.

She informed that the study also explored the case of private sector organizations in Mongolia to understand the challenges to achieving international competitiveness and some of the findings included; that the domestic economic infrastructure is insufficient to support efficient and cost-effective business operations; businesses continued to rely heavily on imported inputs, thus driving up prices of domestic products and services; while Mongolia was rich in natural and mineral resources, the insufficient industrial infrastructure had not allowed the country to fully optimize the development of the sector; the development of other resources (including financial and human capital) remains relatively weak; and the small domestic market represents relatively low levels of demand.

Dr. Sandra Seno-Alday informed that the study concluded that the increased connectivity of the BRI infrastructure would benefit the larger economies in continental Asia in the short- to medium-term, given their greater capacity to engage in international trade and that the increased connectivity may counter-intuitively have the effect of stifling domestic economic growth and international business competitiveness in smaller countries, including LLDCs. She advised that in the short to medium-term, LLDCs must therefore strengthen government policies as well as financing. She emphasized the need to strengthen and support domestic businesses, with a particular focus on developing their capacity to innovate and engage in entrepreneurial activity (including improving export readiness). She also emphasized strengthening of domestic infrastructure and supporting industries; as well as strengthening domestic resources (including human capital). She emphasized that whilst increased international connectivity would ultimately be good for LLDCs, domestic economies and domestic businesses must first be strengthened in order to ensure LLDCs’ readiness to compete in the global business environment.

**Interactive discussion**
In their interactive discussion the participants emphasized the importance of enhanced access to finance. The use of national and regional financial institutions was underscored as a way to avoid cumbersome international financial regulations. The need to tap into impact financiers was also emphasized. Innovation, entrepreneurship and regional integration were highlighted. E-commerce was also highlighted as an opportunity for LLDCs SMMEs to integrate into global trade.

It was also emphasized that there was need to build the capacity of LLDCs to deal with Public-Private Partnerships (PPP). The need to revisit the PPP models with a view to ensuring power sharing was highlighted. Global partnerships in addressing the private sector challenges in LLDCs was emphasized.

The need to eliminate administrative barriers and investing in human resources by providing up to date education were also stressed.

**Suggested recommendations**

- LLDCs must direct government policy and financing to strengthen and support domestic businesses, with a focus on developing their capacity to innovate and engage in entrepreneurial activity including export readiness.
- There is need for LLDCs to strengthen domestic infrastructure, strengthen support to domestic industries as well as domestic resources including human capital.
- Removing trade obstacles and ensuring a transparent and predictable trade environment is key to creating enabling environment for private sector development and therefore it was crucial to simplify border procedures to reduce time and cost to trade and build private sector capacity to comply with cross border and trade formalities. Enhanced implementation of the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement is therefore key.
- Adopting an elaborating single multimodal fully digital transit document by LLDCs and transit countries is the most important immediate task in the area of trade and transport facilitation and can be achieved at minimal financial cost based on the modern (blockchain) technologies.
- Building human capacities in transport state agencies, customs and border entities including on trade negotiation process and implementation of UN conventions, transit and trade facilitation agreements is fundamental for integration of LLDCs in global trade.
- While increased international connectivity will ultimately be good for LLDCs, domestic economies and domestic businesses must be first strengthened in order to ensure LLDCs’ readiness to compete in the global business environment.
- There is need to create an enabling policy and regulatory environment to spur private sector led growth with a focus on SMME.
- It is important to ensure that private sector is an equal partner and engaged in regular dialogue with government including on trade policy and trade facilitation reforms. It is important to support LLDCs to build their capacity to deal with Public-Private Partnerships (PPP) and there is need to revisit the PPP models with a view to ensuring power sharing.
- The digital divide, gender divide and education divide need to be addressed.
- Enhanced support towards infrastructure development and maintenance including, transport, ICT and Energy is important.

Annex 1: List of Participants

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