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**TRANSPORT INFRASTRUCTURE FOR TRANSIT TRADE OF THE
LANDLOCKED COUNTRIES IN WEST AND
CENTRAL AFRICA: AN OVERVIEW**

**Contribution by the UNCTAD secretariat to the Mid-term
Review of the Almaty Programme of Action**

Report by the UNCTAD secretariat

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I. TRANSPORT INFRASTRUCTURE FOR TRANSIT TRADE OF THE LANDLOCKED COUNTRIES IN WEST AND CENTRAL AFRICA: AN OVERVIEW

The setting

1. There are 24 countries in West and Central Africa [1], five of which are landlocked: Burkina Faso, the Central African Republic, Chad, Mali and Niger. As countries that have no sea coast, they are bound to transport most of their merchandise trade through foreign territory. Although the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea stipulates that "land-locked States shall enjoy freedom of transit through the territory of transit States by all means of transport" [2, para. 125], transit trade is often beset by a wide array of administrative, technical and logistical problems. Moreover, the transit requirement makes landlocked countries dependent on their neighbours' transport infrastructure, increases transaction costs and adversely affects their international competitiveness.
2. Moreover, for Burkina Faso, the Central African Republic, Chad, Mali and Niger, the right of access to the sea is seriously impaired by regional transit transport systems that are among the least developed in the world. In general, the transport infrastructure is poor and deteriorating, while significant non-physical bottlenecks impede the fluidity of transit traffic in the regions' main transit corridors. The poor condition of transport infrastructure also prevents large parts of the population from participating in the modern economy.
3. Insufficient trade connectivity adversely impacts on the socio-economic development of those countries. In 2001, GDP per capita ranged from \$198 in Chad to \$255 in the Central African Republic. The group's average GDP per capita was \$202, which is 57 per cent lower than the average for sub-Saharan Africa. Life expectancy at birth is below 50 years. The illiteracy rate is high and ranges from 50 per cent in the Central Africa Republic to 83 per cent in Niger. All five landlocked countries in West and Central Africa belong to the category of least developed countries — that is, they are among the poorest countries in the world.
4. The Almaty Programme of Action (APoA) adopted at the International Ministerial Conference of Landlocked and Transit Developing Countries and Donor Countries and International Financial and Development Institutions on Transit Transport Cooperation, held in 2003, recognized the critical importance of the transport sector for economic growth and development. It set out a framework for the establishment of efficient transit transport systems for landlocked developing countries (LLDCs) and emphasized the need for partnerships between LLDCs and transit developing countries, as well as with their bilateral and multilateral partners. The APoA also identified seven priority areas for infrastructure development and maintenance: rail transport, road transport, ports, inland waterways, pipelines, air transport and communications [14].
5. The present overview, which was prepared by the Division for Africa, LDCs and Special Programmes, presents key features of the current state of transport infrastructure for transit trade of landlocked countries in West and Central Africa, with a special focus on terrestrial transport other than pipelines and on seaports. It identifies specific problems that affect utilization, development and maintenance of transit transport infrastructure in the regions and discusses possible options for more efficient use of transit transport infrastructure in both the landlocked and transit countries of those two regions.

II. TRANSIT TRANSPORT INFRASTRUCTURE FOR THE LANDLOCKED COUNTRIES IN WEST AND CENTRAL AFRICA AND TRANSIT NEIGHBOUR COUNTRIES

A. Overview

6. In West and Central Africa, transit freight is carried through 13 major transit corridors: seven road corridors, five rail or rail/road corridors and one rail/water corridor. This transit transport infrastructure is, however, among the least developed in the world. It is often poorly maintained, technically outdated and weak in terms of intermodal connectivity. Freight movement along the main transit corridors is hindered by physical and non-physical bottlenecks, which cause transport costs to be high, thus adversely affecting export competitiveness and posing formidable obstacles to the import of essential capital goods, food and fuels. The Governments of those countries have signed numerous bilateral, multilateral and regional agreements on transit transport cooperation in the two regions, but their practical implementation still leaves room for improvement.

7. Road is the most important mode of transport in the region and has steadily gained in importance for transit transport. About nine tenths of transit freight is carried by road. However, the condition of the roads is often insufficient for the safe and expeditious movement of cargo.

8. Rail is the second most important mode of transport in West Africa. It links two capitals, Ouagadougou (Burkina Faso) and Bamako (Mali), with two regional seaports, Abidjan (Côte d'Ivoire) and Dakar (Senegal), respectively. Niamey (Niger) cannot be reached by rail, and hence goods to and from the country need to take the Cotonou–Niamey rail-and-road corridor.

9. Rail plays a less important role in international transit transport in Central Africa, as national railway lines are limited and not interconnected. Only Cameroon has a significant railway infrastructure, which is operated by Camrail, a private sector company. The railway in Cameroon is not only important for domestic transport, but also serves as a means to facilitate the transit trade with Chad and the Central African Republic.

10. Inland waterways transport is little used in West Africa despite the potential offered by the Niger River. Water is the second most important mode of transit transport in the Central African Republic. Transit cargo between Brazzaville and Bangui can be shipped on the Congo and Oubangui rivers. However, the Oubangui River is navigable only eight months in the year because of low water levels in the dry season.

11. The 1,070-km Chad–Cameroon pipeline, supported by the World Bank, is the major transit pipeline in the regions, transporting crude oil from the Doba oilfields in southern Chad to the coast of Cameroon. The \$4-billion project also includes three pump stations and the offshore marine terminal near Kribi in Cameroon [18]. Other countries in the regions run domestic pipeline networks.

12. There are several major international airports in the region, but these hubs are located outside landlocked countries. The bankruptcy of a major airline in 2002 that serviced the regions dealt a heavy blow to air transport in West and Central Africa. However, it has recovered from this setback, although freight transport by air is still relatively insignificant, mainly owing to the high cost. Nevertheless, the full implementation of the Yamoussoukro Decision of 1999 on the liberalization of the air transport markets in Africa is expected to

have positive effects on the intra- and interregional air connectivity of countries in West and Central Africa.

13. West and Central Africa are relatively well equipped in terms of numbers of maritime ports. In most of them, port operations have been concessioned to private operators, with the expectation that this will improve the quality of services. The ports of Abidjan (Côte d'Ivoire), Dakar (Senegal), Douala (Cameroon) and Tema (Ghana) are of particular importance for the merchandise trade of the landlocked countries in Central and West Africa.

Table 1. Transport infrastructure indicators for West and Central Africa
(year 2004)

Length of roads	670 148 km
of which	
paved	107 785 km
unpaved	562 263 km
Length of railway tracks	18 134 km
Length of inland waterways	27 731 km
Number of airports	621
of which	
paved runways	145
unpaved runways	476
Number of maritime ports	48
Length of pipelines	12 692 km

Source: Proinvest, p. 3 [8].

14. Shortcomings in terms of inadequate regional cooperation, insufficient use of information and communications technology (ICT) due to technical and user problems and human resources constraints cause non-physical bottlenecks that keep transport costs unduly high. In particular, customs documents are not harmonized and border-crossing procedures are lengthy and cumbersome despite regional agreements on the free movement of persons and goods.

B. Road transport

15. Road transport is the principal mode of transport for the export and import of goods of landlocked countries in West and Central Africa. Although transport by railway may be more economical for bulk transports of key regional products, such as cotton, concerns regarding the regularity of railway services and capacity bottlenecks at the railway terminals, as well as problems related to the poor conditions of a large part of the regional railways lines, militate in favour of the more expensive but more reliable road transport.

16. Road infrastructure density and quality vary from country to country. In general, roads are in better condition in West Africa than in Central Africa. Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire have the best road infrastructure among the transit countries. Before the outbreak of civil unrest in Côte d'Ivoire, the corridors through this country were the most active ones in the subregion.

17. The road infrastructure is less dense and has more severe maintenance problems in Central Africa. Cameroon is the main transit country for the Central African Republic and Chad. Four fifths of the transit transport traffic in Central Africa takes place in two road corridors through Cameroon — the Douala–Bangui corridor (1,500 kilometres) and the Douala–N'djamena corridor (2,100 kilometres).

18. Road corridors through other countries, such as Congo and Gabon, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Sudan, the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Niger and Nigeria, play minor roles. Nonetheless, such corridors have great potential and can not only help the two landlocked countries diversify their transit partners but also contribute to greater regional trade and integration. In particular, links to Nigeria could help Chad reduce transport costs, since Port Harcourt (Nigeria) is the closest seaport to N'djamena.

19. With a view to upgrading the quality of road infrastructure in West and Central Africa, Governments and regional economic communities, in cooperation with bilateral and multilateral donors, notably the African Development Fund, have initiated in recent years several national and regional road rehabilitation and transport facilitation projects. Most prominent among these projects are the Tibiri–Dakoro and Madaoua–Bouza–Tahoua road project in Niger, the PST (transport sector programme) 2000–2008 in Burkina Faso and the rehabilitation project of the southbound Bamako–Dakar Corridor, which are expected to lead to a substantial improvement in the road infrastructure [3, 4, 11].

20. Freight distribution quotas are applied in certain road transit corridors with a view to ensuring that transporters from both landlocked and transit countries share in gains and benefits. Usually, two thirds of the transit freight at a port is allocated to carriers from the landlocked country and one third to those from the transit country.

21. Although these quotas were established with development objectives in mind, such as to help develop the transport sector of landlocked countries, their strict application can give rise to efficiency issues and may have unintended results. In particular, transport quotas may cause transport capacity bottlenecks and increase transport costs, if the supply, capacity and quality of vehicles are not the same in the landlocked country as in its transit partner. Therefore, the quota system may economically be disadvantageous to landlocked countries if the effects of the increase in transport costs outweigh the benefits generated in the transport sector.

22. In addition to problems related to the physical state of road infrastructure and to transport quota issues, road transport in West and Central Africa is beset by various additional constraints. A key problem is the obsolescence of a large part of the truck fleet and the increasing number of second-hand vehicles, both of which increase operating costs and the frequency of accidents. Moreover, most vehicles lack equipment that could help expedite transit transport. For instance, they cannot be sealed or cannot be connected to cargo-tracking facilities.

23. Governments are concerned about ageing vehicle fleets and have taken various measures to remedy the situation. The Government of Mali, for example, has put in place a mechanism consisting of tax exemptions for new vehicles in order to foster the renewal of the truck fleet for inter-State goods transportation. In Senegal, the Government prohibited the importation of vehicles more than five years old [3, p. 9]. The Government of Niger, where an estimated 80 per cent of vehicles are in a state of advanced depreciation, is using tax incentives to encourage transporters to renew their fleet of vehicles [4, p. 7].

24. A second serious problem relates to the widespread disregard of axle load regulations by transporters. Trucks are overloaded to compensate for low freight rates per ton as a result of intense competition among transporters due to an oversupply of transport capacity relative to the volume of transport goods. In addition, the export/import imbalance — for example, imports represent about 85 per cent of the total transport volume to and from landlocked countries in the UEMOA States [3, p. 9] — also encourages overloading of inbound trucks to offset the deficit incurred as a result of the lack of sufficient volumes of outbound cargo to the seaports.

This practice not only contributes to the deterioration of road infrastructure but also poses serious road safety risks.

25. However, probably the most serious impediments to the expeditious transit of goods on roads in West and Central Africa are the numerous roadblocks and the concomitant imposition of *droits de facilitation*. The latter may include a variety of illicit financial charges, ranging from community road tolls to "document control fees" to outright requests for bribes.

26. Roadblocks and other checkpoints have proliferated to the extent that there are involuntary stops at short intervals (see table 2). Even if the toll fees extorted at each of the checkpoints are relatively small, they add up to sizeable sums in their totality. Economically, they represent a loss to the transport economy and, in addition, make road taxes on a two-lane road in West Africa as expensive as on a four-lane highway in Europe [5].

Table 2. Frequency of checkpoints on major transit transport routes in West Africa

Route	Distance (km)	Number of checkpoints	Frequency (km)
Lagos–Abidjan	992	69	14
Niamey–Ouagadougou	337	20	17
Lomé–Ouagadougou	989	34	29
Cotonou–Niamey	1 036	34	30
Abidjan–Ouagadougou	1 122	37	30
Accra–Ouagadougou	972	15	65

Source: OECD/Sahel and West Africa Club [5, p. 16].

27. Efforts to reduce the numbers of roadblocks are supported by projects such as the road rehabilitation and transport facilitation project on the southbound Bamako–Dakar corridor. That project aims, inter alia, at a 20 per cent reduction of invisible transport costs by limiting checks at borders and at the arrival point for transit transport by container, by tanker and, under certain conditions, by trucks sealed at the departure point. Loan disbursement under this programme is subject to proof of the implementation of policies that reduce the number of road checkpoints in both Mali and Senegal [3, p. 10].

C. Rail transport

28. Railways operate in 15 of the 24 countries of West and Central Africa. However, only two of the five landlocked countries — Burkina Faso and Mali — have railways on their territories. Goods to and from Niger, Chad and the Central African Republic can be shipped on combined rail-and-road corridors.

29. Since the majority of the tracks only stretch perpendicularly from the coast into the hinterland without interconnections among them, regional railway networks do not exist. The lines are mostly geared to the export of large quantities of minerals. Most of them are single track and operated with diesel engines. Moreover, many lines date back to the nineteenth century and are in a precarious state. The rolling stock is outdated and inadequate in terms of quantity and quality. In addition, low volumes of return freight keep wagons unduly idle at terminal points.

30. Interruptions of rail services due to technical problems are common. Moreover, many railways have not been profitable as parastatals and therefore lack the funds for maintenance work and the delivery of better services. Unreliable railway services have made the railways

sector unattractive to transporters. Consequently, the share of railway transport has been declining relative to road transport.

31. However, the privatization of railways and subsequent investments in rolling stock and other hardware, as well as staff retraining and restructuring, opened up new possibilities for the rehabilitation and modernization of the railways sector. The privatization of the Abidjan–Ouagadougou line in 1995 led to a massive increase in goods traffic. By the year 2000, about one half of all Burkina-bound cargo from the port of Abidjan was hauled by rail. However, the outbreak of civil unrest in Côte d'Ivoire had a disastrous impact on its operation. The line had to be closed repeatedly; goods traffic fell by 80 per cent between 2002 and 2003. Although operations have resumed temporarily, the political situation in Côte d'Ivoire remains unstable and it is difficult to insure goods [6, p. 161–162].

32. The railway line from Dakar to Bamako has been run since 2003 under a private management contract, which grants leasing rights to the Canadian–French consortium Transrail for a 25-year period, with an option of renewal for another 10-year lease. The private consortium has committed itself to annual royalty payments of about \$900,000 to each country and investments of \$72.7 million over a five-year period to upgrade the railway and to renew the rolling stock [7]. In spite of the consortium's obligation to maintain the passenger service, Transrail has concentrated on the transport of goods, which increased sixfold within a short period of time. However, this progress was achieved at the expense of the railway connections of numerous isolated communities, where stations were closed; this closure curtailed the economic activity that had developed around the railway.

33. Transit cargo to and from the landlocked countries in Central Africa is also carried through a rail/inland waterways corridor that includes the Congolese rail corridor from Pointe Noire to Brazzaville (512 km). Freight is then trans-shipped from rail to waterways transport (and vice versa) at Brazzaville.

34. Although about 25 to 30 million tons of ores and minerals are carried annually by rail in West and Central Africa, the railway sector currently has only a limited role as transit transport infrastructure. However, the increasing demand for ores and minerals from Asian countries could make the rehabilitation of existing railway lines and the building of new ones an attractive target for foreign direct investment. Several projects to rehabilitate and expand railway lines with the funding of local and foreign private investors are under discussion — for example, in Ghana, and also the AFRICARAIL project, which aims inter alia at building new double-track lines to interconnect the existing railway circuits of Benin, Burkina Faso and Togo. Once completed, these projects could revitalize the rail sector and significantly improve the transit transport situation of landlocked countries in West Africa.

D. Inland waterways transport

35. Inland waterways transport is used in several countries in West and Central Africa. However, the period of navigability of rivers and lakes is often limited to the rainy season. Longer dry seasons resulting from climate change could further shorten navigation periods on inland waterways in those countries. Moreover, inland waterways are typically used for domestic transport rather than being part of international transit transport connections.

36. Nevertheless, transit cargo is still transported on waterways in Central Africa, where the Congo River and its tributaries, the Oubangui and the Shanga rivers, are used for transit traffic, and also in combination with rail transport. Traffic in the Bangui–Brazzaville–Pointe Noire rail-waterways corridor is currently one fifth of that in the Douala–Bangui road corridor. The rail-waterways corridor was much more active in the 1980s, when more than

half of all freight to and from the Central African Republic was carried over this route. However, lack of maintenance has severely reduced the capacity of the corridor. In addition, the quantity and the quality of transport services offered by local ships and barges have also declined. Freight volume fell by 92 per cent, from 223,635 tons to 18,218 tons, between 1985 and 2000.

37. Waterways transport still has potential, particularly in Central Africa. Since it is more economical than road transport, it can help reduce transport costs for the Central African Republic and the southern regions of Chad. However, efficient use of this mode of transport has been hindered by inadequate cooperation between landlocked and transit countries and by political instability in the subregion. Moreover, a return to the freight volume levels of the 1980s would necessitate considerable investments both in transportation equipment and in maintenance of the waterways installations.

E. Maritime ports

38. The coastal States of West and Central Africa are relatively well equipped in terms of numbers of maritime ports. Their handling capacity is largely in line with transport demand, and the availability and the technical condition of equipment are in most cases better than for other transport subsectors. Most of the main seaports have been transferred from the public to the private sector and several of them are operated by large international enterprises.

39. Several maritime ports have recently invested in equipment that helps expedite the release of goods and makes transit traffic more secure. Thus, in February 2006 the port of Dakar participated in the testing of a new seal system to be used along the 2,700-km corridor from Dakar (Senegal) via Bamako (Mali) and Ouagadougou (Burkina Faso) to Niamey (Niger). It can be fitted to trucks with a cargo capacity of between 10 and 40 tons [15]. The port of Abidjan began operation of the world's first high-energy (6MeV) double-tunnel X-ray scanner on 6 March 2007. This scanner, which can handle up to 30 trucks per hour, will help reduce bottlenecks in customs clearance at the port and speed up the release of goods [16]. The actual ship/port turnaround times of seven days or more in most West African maritime ports continue to be above the target time frames of 72 hours [3, p. 5].

F. Border-crossing facilities

40. Border-crossing formalities are complicated and cumbersome, mainly because of the multiplicity of customs and police documents. Countries use their own transit documents, which are not mutually accepted. One-stop windows and joint customs facilities are more the exception than the rule. The use of modern information and communication technology, in particular for goods inspection, data collection and data processing, is still limited and/or subject to technical problems that reduce the efficiency of automated customs data management systems, such as electricity shortages or computer maintenance issues, as well as problems related to insufficient manpower training and skills in computerized data collection and data processing.

41. The major ports have bonded warehouse and storage facilities, including for dangerous goods, bulk commodities and containers. However, problems often arise at trans-shipment points in rail-and-road corridors, where the limited off-take capacity of railways and/or the not-in-time availability of transportation equipment lead to backlogs of goods in transit. In addition, safe parking facilities for trucks that also meet minimum sanitary requirements for drivers are often lacking at border-crossing points.

G. Transit trade in West and Central Africa and regional political instability

42. The safe and expeditious movement of cargo to and from landlocked countries, particularly by road and by rail and on inland waterways, depends on free and unhindered access to and use of transport infrastructure in both landlocked and transit countries. Civil strife, uprisings and other forms of political instability have seriously affected transit trade of landlocked countries in West and Central Africa in the past and continue to do so.

43. A particularly grave impediment to transit trade in the region has been the political crisis in Côte d'Ivoire, affecting the trade flows of Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger. Before the crisis, more than half of the goods transport to and from those countries was through the port of Abidjan. The other half was shared between Cotonou (19 per cent), Lomé (17 per cent), Dakar (11 per cent) and Tema (1 per cent). Both the geographical location and the relatively good quality of the road and rail transport infrastructure in Côte d'Ivoire helped establish this regional dominance. However, since the outbreak of political instability, transit trade has been diverted to Tema and Lomé. Between 2002 and 2003, the traffic of goods in transit between Abidjan and the landlocked countries fell to 20 per cent of the original level. Operations with Burkina Faso have declined from 390,000 tons to 15,000 tons. Whereas Burkina Faso exported 80 per cent of its cotton through Abidjan in 1998, in 2003 not one export transaction from that country was registered with the Ivorian port [9, p. 20]. Conversely, the cargo volumes between the port of Tema and Burkina Faso and Mali increased by factors of 8 and 16 respectively between 2000 and 2003 [10, p. 30].

44. Although escorted transit truck convoys were organized in Côte d'Ivoire, transporters quickly adapted to the new situation by switching to routes through Ghana, Benin and Togo, whose Governments were cooperative and facilitated the dispatch of goods through their ports. In fact, the Ivorian crisis showed the flexibility and ingenuity of the local transport sector in swiftly adapting to changing circumstances and reaping the benefits resulting from new opportunities. In addition, the crisis had the effect of reviving major infrastructure projects in the region and heightened the need for closer regional cooperation and integration in the transport sector.

III. CONVENTIONS AND AGREEMENTS REGULATING THE USE OF TRADE-RELATED TRANSIT TRANSPORT INFRASTRUCTURE IN WEST AND CENTRAL AFRICA

45. The efficient use of neighbouring countries' transport infrastructure by landlocked countries necessitates an adequate legal framework. Within the regional context and under the auspices of ECOWAS, UEMOA, CEMAC and the Maritime Organization of West and Central Africa (MOWCA), landlocked and transit countries in West and Central Africa have concluded more than 40 regional, multilateral and bilateral conventions and agreements on transport and logistics issues. They cover issues such as trade in goods and services, access to seaports, transit transport, and the harmonization of documents, taxes, duties and nomenclature, as well as agreements on market sharing and specialized truck transport.

46. The three most important multilateral transit agreements in West Africa are the Inter-State Road Transport Convention (IST), the Inter-State Road Transit Convention (ISRT) and the agreement on the West African Brown Card insurance scheme.

47. Given the number of agreements and conventions regulating the use of transport infrastructure for transit traffic in West and Central Africa, and the overlapping between and among them, their application and interpretation are not without differences of opinion. In

practice, these legal instruments are often ignored or national regulations take precedence over regional agreements. Thus, the IST Convention, which was expected to facilitate road transport by ensuring greater fluidity of transit traffic, has failed to reduce the number of roadblocks in most transit corridors. The application of the ISRT Convention, which was to replace national transit documents by a ISRT booklet, representing a single ECOWAS transit document, has been plagued by issues related to the sharing of revenues from the ISRT booklet sales, differences regarding the ISRT guarantee system and reluctance to accept transit documents issued by other member States since there were doubts about the quality of the customs clearance system in partner countries. Lack of cooperation and trust between insurance companies is another important reason for the inadequate application of the ECOWAS Brown Card insurance scheme.

48. In Central Africa, a set of agreements on carriage of goods by road were adopted in the second half of the 1990s under the auspices of the Communauté Économique et Monétaire de l'Afrique Centrale (CEMAC). These agreements include the Interstate Convention on Carriage of Goods by Road, an interstate multimodal transport convention and a regional insurance scheme, the Orange Card Insurance System. However, despite these regional conventions, bilateral agreements and national regulations continue to dominate legal arrangements for transit transport activities in the subregion.

49. The bilateral agreements linking landlocked countries in West and Central Africa and their transit developing neighbours cover cooperation on all modes of transport and all aspects of transit transport, including transport infrastructure, transport coordination and transport facilitation. Table 3 provides an overview of bilateral transit and transport agreements between the landlocked countries in West and Central Africa and neighbouring transit countries.

Table 3. Bilateral agreements between landlocked countries in West and Central Africa and their transit neighbours on transit traffic issues

	Benin	Côte d'Ivoire	Senegal	Togo	Cameroon
Burkina Faso	a, b, c	a, b, c, d	a, b, c	a, b, c	
Mali	a, b, c	a, b, c	a, b, c, d	a, b, c	
Niger	a, b, c, d	a, b, c	a, b, c	a, b, c	
Central African Republic					a, b, c, d
Chad					a, b, c, d

a = port agreement; b = transit agreement; c = road transport agreement; d = rail transport agreement.

Source: N'Guessan N'Guessan. Improvement of transit transport in West Africa. UNCTAD/LDC/ 003/2, Geneva, 2003, p. 18.

50. The level of implementation is generally higher for bilateral agreements than for multilateral ones in West and Central Africa, because Governments tend to show a greater commitment to bilateral agreements. As a result, such agreements often take precedence over multilateral agreements. Problems arise whenever international agreements enter into conflict with national legislation.

IV. POLICY INITIATIVES TO IMPROVE TRANSPORT INFRASTRUCTURE IN WEST AND CENTRAL AFRICA

51. There have been several regional initiatives aimed at improving the availability and use of trade-related transit transport infrastructure for landlocked countries in West and Central Africa. Most of these initiatives are inspired by the NEPAD Short Term Action Plan

on Infrastructure and are in conformity with the Sub-Saharan Africa Transport Programme (SSATP), conceived jointly by the World Bank and ECA. Regional economic communities such as ECOWAS, UEMOA and CEMAC are also important institutions that cooperate with multilateral and bilateral donors, as well as regional financial institutions, in the design and implementation of policies for improved transport infrastructure in West and Central Africa.

52. ECOWAS and UEMOA are joining forces to implement a road transport and transit facilitation programme aimed at improving the competitiveness of member States by making regional trade more fluid through the improvement of transport systems and the elimination of non-tariff barriers. The components of the programme will be implemented, tested and evaluated on an experimental basis between 2004 and 2009. Full implementation will follow in 2009. The programme has the following components:

- Harmonization of Inter-State Road Transit Convention to pave the way for the adoption of a single ISRT document;
- Establishment of observatories to identify and discourage bad practices along key transit transport corridors;
- Building of joint border posts to speed up customs formalities at borders;
- Extension of the World Bank Initiative on HIV/AIDS Prevention [17].

53. While many policy initiatives by regional economic communities for the improvement of transit transport infrastructure date back to their foundation and major programmatic documents were issued in the meantime, [11] progress in implementation has been slow. Lack of funds and human resources constraints, but also the lack of political will to implement and enforce regional transit transport programmes and agreements, are major factors underlying the limited progress achieved.

54. A new effort to accelerate progress in meeting the urgent infrastructure needs, including for transit transport, of African countries in support of economic growth and development was launched with the foundation of the Infrastructure Consortium for Africa (ICA) in 2005. The ICA constitutes a tripartite relationship involving bilateral donors, multilateral agencies and African institutions [12]. Its objective is to make its members more effective in supporting infrastructure development in Africa by pooling efforts in selected areas, such as information sharing, project development and good practice.

55. The ICA addresses both national and regional constraints on infrastructure development, with an emphasis on regional infrastructure, recognising the particular challenges at this level. However, since most infrastructure services are addressed at the national level, within national budgets and national implementation frameworks, it will also become active at the country level. In addition, critical issues of harmonization need to be addressed at the national level.

56. The ICA is not a financing agency; rather, it is construed as a platform to broker more donor financing for infrastructure projects and programmes in Africa, in particular for the implementation of regional projects under NEPAD's Short Term Action Plan (STAP). Between October 2005 and June 2006 funding was committed for 11 NEPAD-STAP projects totalling \$764.3 million. About 60 per cent of those funds will be spent in the ECOWAS region on activities that include road construction, and air transport and safety, as well as transport facilitation projects.

V. THE WAY FORWARD

57. The rehabilitation, modernization and expansion of transport infrastructure are a *sine qua non* both for the development of the landlocked countries in West and Central Africa and for the economic integration and advancement of the regions.

58. The achievement of this objective necessitates the implementation of several policy actions, practical measures and technical regulations, including those described below.

A. Capacity-building

59. There is a need to improve and expand human and institutional capacities that deal with the development, utilization and maintenance of transport infrastructure in both landlocked and transit countries in West and Central Africa. The availability of adequate funding is critical in this respect. However, instead of overstretching their limited resources, Governments should develop practical and implementable legal and regulatory frameworks that would allow the private sector — both local and foreign — to bring its capacity to bear in terms of expertise, finance and project management, as well as facilitate long-term private sector investment in transport infrastructure.

B. National and regional transport infrastructure strategies

60. Governments need to devise long-term transport infrastructure strategies that have short-term and medium-term objectives and built-in implementation mechanisms. Aspects of regional cooperation and development need to be included in such strategies from the outset and not be added as an afterthought. Regional economic communities such as ECOWAS, UEMOA and CEMAC need to better discharge their regional coordination and cooperation functions on the basis of the principle of subsidiarity, whereby regional economic communities do not take action unless it would be more effective than action taken at national or local levels. Conversely, States that are members of regional economic communities need to strengthen their commitments vis-à-vis those regional bodies and muster the political will to implement decisions taken by and within them.

C. Balanced and complementary development of transport subsectors

61. The balanced and complementary development of road and railway transport subsectors, as well as the expansion and modernization of maritime ports, commensurate with the growth in demand for transport services, should be an integral part of national and regional transport infrastructure strategies. In particular, subsectors that have an enormous transport potential, but have been neglected for long periods, such as railways, need to be rehabilitated and expanded where it is economically appropriate (e.g. for regular long-distance transports of bulk commodities). Shifting a substantial part of transit transport services from roads to rails would also help reduce the excessive wear and tear of the existing road network caused by trucks that infringe axle load regulations.

D. Modernization of transport equipment

62. Governments need to enact and to enforce regulations on technical specifications of transport equipment with a view to enhancing transport regularity and transport reliability, as well as transport safety and transport efficiency. Those measures need to be complemented by fiscal incentives that stimulate the renewal and the replacement of existing means of

transport by more modern and more efficient transport equipment. Reductions of customs duties levied on new transport vehicles and spare parts could provide fiscal incentives and stimulate the implementation of vehicle replacement policies. Moreover, the landlocked countries of West and Central Africa also need more specialized transport equipment, for example cold storage trucks, for the transport of perishable goods such as vegetables, fruit and meat. Finally, the modernization of mobile transport equipment needs to be complemented by building up a network of adequate service and maintenance facilities.

E. Involvement of the private sector in the provision and maintenance of transport infrastructure

63. Since the Governments of landlocked and transit countries in West and Central Africa face serious financial, human and institutional constraints, they need to revisit their approach to the development and upgrading of transport infrastructure. On the basis of legal, investment and other regulatory frameworks, they should adopt a more favourable attitude towards the participation of the private sector — both domestic and foreign — in the provision and the maintenance of transport infrastructure and allow investors to bring in their capital, entrepreneurial initiative, operational skills and know-how for those activities. The provision and the maintenance of transport infrastructure by private companies do not necessarily imply private ownership of that infrastructure. Private sector involvement in the development and operation of transport infrastructure may take various forms, ranging from contracting services and management functions, to the privatization of development rights, including the awarding of concessions and build-operate-transfer contracts, to partial and full divestiture [13, p. 137 ff.].

F. Trade facilitation measures

64. Trade facilitation comprises a wide range of measures aimed at the simplification, harmonization and standardization of procedures affecting border-crossing goods, including customs, regulatory issues, insurance and banking aspects, and other measures that impact on the transborder movement of goods. For landlocked countries, a main objective of trade facilitation is to increase the fluidity of goods in transit.

65. Both landlocked and transit countries in West and Central Africa should put particular emphasis on the simplification, harmonization and standardization of administrative and legal procedures related to customs, transit and port formalities at the regional level. The use of cargo information management systems can also facilitate and accelerate the physical movement of transit cargo. In addition, compromises on issues that hinder the strict implementation of agreed regional transit agreements, such as the Inter-State Road Transit Convention, would greatly facilitate the application of those agreements and hence facilitate transit transport.

66. Modern and efficient transport infrastructure can contribute significantly to the economic development of landlocked countries by facilitating their beneficial participation in the process of globalization, as well as by improving their international competitiveness and enhancing their potential role as hosts for foreign direct investment. The full and expeditious implementation of the objectives and commitments of the Almaty Programme of Action by landlocked developing countries and their transit neighbours in cooperation with their development partners provides an opportunity for the landlocked countries in West and Central Africa to take a step forward towards the improvement of transport infrastructure and transit traffic in the subregions. However, in addition to the funding and investment needed

for the implementation of national and regional transport infrastructure strategies, the political will among Governments of both landlocked and transit countries in West and Central Africa to address long-standing transit issues is a prerequisite for the success of those endeavours.

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