

Abbreviations	2
I. Introduction	3
II. Major Transit Transport Issues	3
2.1 Administrative and Legal Procedures	3
2.1.1 Port Formalities	3
2.1.2 Escorting	4
2.1.3 Border Formalities	4
2.1.4 Customs and Police Control	4
2.2 Political Will and Economic Factors	4
2.2.1 Political Instability	4
2.2.2 Economic Factors	5
2.3 Transport Infrastructure and Rolling Stock	5
2.4 Human Resources and Capacity Building	6
2.5 Transit Freight Coordination	7
2.6 Insurance	7
2.7 Implication of the Private Sector	7
2.8 Governance	8
III New Initiatives to Improve the Transit Transport Environment	9
3.1 Transport Facilitation	9
3.1.1 Harmonisation of Interstate Road Transit Documents and Procedures	10
3.1.2 Monitoring Improper Practices in Transit Transport Corridors	11
3.1.3 Improvement of the Fluidity of Road Transit Transport Traffic	11
3.1.4 HIV/AIDS Control in Transit Transport Corridors	11
3.2 Cooperation in Other Areas	11
3.2.1 Railway Interconnection	11
3.2.2 Maritime Transport	12
3.2.3 Air Transport	12
IV The Way Forward	12
4.1 Improvement of Capacity	13
4.1.1 At the National Level	13
4.1.2 At the Regional Level	13
4.2 Enhancing Transit Transport Cooperation through Regional Integration	14
4.3 Empowering the Private Sector	15
4.4 Improving Governance	15
4.5 Protecting the Environment	16
References	17

ABBREVIATIONS

ADB	African Development Bank
ACIS	advanced cargo information system
AIDS	acquired immune deficiency syndrome
APA	Almaty Programme of Action
ASYCUDA	automated system of customs data management
CET	common external tariff
CTR	Carnet de Transit Routier
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
EU	European Union
FDI	foreign direct investment
GDP	gross domestic product
HCST	Higher Committee for Surface Transport
HIPC	highly indebted poor country
HIV	human immunodeficiency virus
ICT	information and communications technology
IGO	intergovernmental organization
IMF	International Monetary Fund
SRT	Interstate Road Transit
IST	Interstate Road Transport
LDC	least developed country
LLDC	landlocked developing country
NEPAD	New Partnership for Africa's Development
NGO	non-governmental organization
ODA	official development assistance
RIA	regional integration arrangement
RMP	Railway Master Plan
SSA	Sub-Saharan Africa
SSATP	Sub-Saharan African Transport Programme
TAHP	Trans-African Highway Programme
UEMOA	Union Economique et Monétaire Ouest Africaine
UNCTAD	United Nations Conference on Trade and Development
UNECA	United Nations Economic Commission for Africa
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WACC	West African Chamber of Commerce
WAHCST	West African Higher Commission for Surface Transport
WATU	West African Transporters Union
WTO	World Trade Organization

I. INTRODUCTION

The transit transport systems in the West African landlocked developing countries (LLDCs) and their transit developing neighbours are among the least developed in the world. The transport infrastructure is poor and deteriorating while significant non-physical barriers impede the fluidity of transit traffic. Cooperation on transit transport is inadequate despite achievement of significant level of regional integration.

Nine tenths of transit freight is carried by road. But the density of the road network is weak and the state of the infrastructure generally poor. Similarly, the rail network is very weak and lacks maintenance. National railways are limited and not well interconnected. Only two of the three LLDC capitals of the subregion, Bamako and Ouagadougou, are entirely linked to the sea by rail. Inland waterways transport is not developed. Most fluvial transport activities in the subregion take place in Nigeria, Ghana and Mali. But these are usually internal transport activities that are not linked to regional transit transport. The Niger River, the longest river in the subregion, is not navigable in Niger, which limits its potential to be a viable transit option.

High transport costs hinder the LLDCs' integration into the global economy. Export performance and capacity to attract foreign direct investment (FDI) are weaker in the LLDCs than in the average of LDCs. Clearly, effectiveness of development policies in landlocked developing countries hangs crucially on efficiency of transit transport systems in both the LLDCs and their transit developing neighbours.

II. MAJOR TRANSIT RASPORT ISSUES

Several hanging issues, including inadequacy of human, technical and financial resources, weakness of the private sector, lack of good governance and, above all, inadequate cooperation, have to be resolved in order to enhance efficiency in the transit transport sector.

2.1 Administrative and Legal Procedures

Administrative and legal formalities and procedures to be completed at the ports, along transit routes and at borders are lengthy, cumbersome, inefficient and costly.

2.1.1 Port Formalities

Clearing formalities at the ports, which could take a maximum of 48 hours, often take up to ten days to be completed. Port formalities and procedures would be more efficient if (a) they were simplified and harmonised at the regional level and (b) if port administrations were adequately equipped with information management systems such as UNCTAD's ACIS. Currently, ACIS is not used in the region. It was applied earlier at the port of Dakar and in the Dakar-Bamako corridor. However, its use has been suspended since the Senegalese and Malian railways were concessioned.

2.1.2 Escorting

Most transit countries escort transit cargo to make sure that transit merchandise is not dumped on their territories. Usually, escorted convoys leave the country of origin two or three times a week. Escorting is a rigid practice that hinders the fluidity of transit traffic and causes excessive time loss. For example, a vehicle that misses a convoy may have to wait two or three days for the next convoy. Escorting would not be necessary if ECOWAS protocols on free movement of persons and goods were fully implemented.

2.1.3 Border Formalities

Border formalities are complicated and cumbersome, because of multiplicity of customs and police documents. In particular, every country has its own transit document. For example, Cote d'Ivoire uses a document called D25. In Burkina Faso and Niger, the document used is the Carnet de Transit Routier (CTR). However, none of the two countries accepts the other's CTR document. Likewise, the ECOWAS-adopted ISRT document is used in Togo, Benin and Mali. Each country issues its own ISRT document and does not accept the ones issued by other countries. Burkina Faso accepts other countries' ISRT document only for petroleum products. By and large, the ECOWAS Interstate Road Transit Convention is not implemented in part because of disagreements about its bond guarantee scheme and related financial issues.

2.1.4 Customs and Police Controls

Customs and police controls and harassment are a major cause of delay particularly in the road corridors. Checkpoints are very frequent in most corridors. Their exact numbers are not always known since there are also mobile checkpoints. Their frequency can reach one every twelve kilometres in Togo in the Lome-Ouagadougou road corridor and one every ten kilometres in Côte d'Ivoire in the Abidjan-Ouagadougou road corridor. Average cost per checkpoint is twenty minutes (in time loss) and 20, 000 CFA francs (in undue fees). Undue payments represent 10% of transport costs on average.

2.2 Political Will and Economic Factors

The level of implementation of regional agreements on transit transport is low in part because of inadequate political will. Governments have the tendency to weigh benefits and costs of complying with these agreements often in ways that overlook long-run effects of regional integration. In general, there is a sense of insecurity that hinders governments' adherence to Community initiatives.

2.2.1 Political Instability

Political instability hampers smooth application of Community agreements on transport. It causes setbacks on progress achieved and creates further hindrances. Agreements on free movement of persons and goods are often the prime victims of insecurity situations arising from political instability. The ECOWAS Interstate Road Transport (IST) Convention, which aims at removing roadblocks, always suffers major setbacks in member countries in crisis. In crisis affected areas, the number of checkpoints sometimes increases tenfold or more and controls are longer and more harassing at every checkpoint.

2.2.2 Economic Factors

Economic insecurity is the principal reason for customs controls in most transit corridors. Transit countries often fear that transit merchandise can be dumped on their territories. Such illegal dumping could not only have adverse effects on their industrial sectors, but also, and more importantly, cost them financial resources. Developing countries usually rely heavily on the international trade sector for a significant part of their fiscal revenue, because tax collection is easier in this sector. Import duties alone account for more than two fifths of fiscal revenue in most ECOWAS member countries. Such a situation gives the governments a strong incentive to protect this source of financial resource.

The behaviour of the governments is due primarily to lack of progress with respect to regional integration. It would make no sense in the context of advanced regional economic communities (RECs) such as the European Union, where imported goods and services are taxed only at the point where they enter into the economic space of the Community.

2.3 Transport Infrastructure and Rolling Stock

Inadequacy of the transport infrastructure and rolling stock is the most serious problem faced by transit transport systems in West Africa. On the one hand, the infrastructure network is thin and weak, and lack maintenance. In the road corridors, improper practices such as non-respect of axle load regulations are among the most important causes of damage to the infrastructure. Not all roads are adequately equipped with weighbridges. In some cases, the weighbridges do not function or are avoided by vehicle operators. On the other hand, many operators complain that some axle load legislations are too restrictive. They argue that the issue is not always the weight of transport vehicles, but often the poor quality of the infrastructure. They think that roads should be built in a way as to take larger vehicles; they also argue that forcing transporters to operate with small vehicles will only cause average transport costs to rise. Indeed, most roads are not properly built; they are too narrow and are covered with thin layers of asphalt that are quickly worn out.

The rolling stock is inadequate. Vehicles carrying transit merchandise are old and weak, lack maintenance and breakdown too often. In addition, most of the vehicles are not suitable for transit transport operations. By not meeting defined standards, such vehicles are more exposed to the risk of being subjected to police and customs controls.

2.4 Human Resources and Capacity Building

Human resource capacity needs to be strengthened at all levels of the transit transport activity chain, from port services to vehicle operation and to border control and other support services. Adequate capacity is also needed in the institutions that run the transit transport sector, at the sectoral, national and regional levels.

The institutions in charge of running the transit transport systems do not have the resources needed for proper oversight and coordination. At the national level, the capacity of the Department of Transport to design, implement and evaluate transit transport programmes is generally weak. Greater capacity is also needed to provide leadership and develop appropriate cooperation with all services connected to the transit transport sector (Infrastructure Department, Customs Administration, Trade

Department, etc.). Capacity for transport facilitation is generally inadequate in the LLDCs and their transit neighbours. In particular, capacity to link up with regional and international agencies and programmes needs to be enhanced.

At the regional level, the departments in charge of transit transport do not have adequate capacity. Available human resources are stretched so thin that they cannot perform well. Regional transport facilitation programmes suffer from shortage of both human and financial resources and do not have proper documentation and technical support.

Human resource capacity needs to be improved particularly at the level of transit and transport operations. Efficiency of handling operations and port clearing formalities will be enhanced if the quality of human resources is improved. In particular, most clearing agents and freight forwarders do not have the required technical qualification. An important part of clearing and forwarding operations are conducted by informal sector operators who lack proper training. Port personnel and customs agents also need training. ICT instruments, such as UNCTAD's ACIS and ASYCUDA, are not widely used in part because of lack of equipment and human resources.

Education level is particularly low among vehicle operators. Inability to read and write makes it difficult for most vehicle operators to fulfil basic requirements like completing formalities and procedures. Illiteracy of vehicle operators is an important factor that causes delays not only at the ports, but also at checkpoints along the corridors. Illiterate truckers are easy targets and the principal victims of improper practices by police and customs agents, since they are less likely to discern, denounce or report such practices.

Along the transit corridors, police and customs agents need training in order to refrain from certain inappropriate practices consisting notably in “punishing”, extorting and ransoming “disobedient vehicle operators.” These agents need to be able to understand that the ultimate victims of their improper behaviour are not vehicle operators or transporters, but the friendly populations of the landlocked countries.

2.5 Transit Freight Coordination

Coordination is necessary for smooth and efficient operation of transit transport activities. Good coordination can lead to reduction in time loss and costs. Coordination can also help resolve equity issues relating to freight distribution among carriers from landlocked country and those from transit countries. Freight distribution quotas are usually part of bilateral agreements the landlocked countries have signed with their transit neighbours. 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.

Strict application of such arrangements raises the efficiency issues usually associated with quota systems. Notably, it reduces competition among carriers, may cause bottlenecks and raise costs in particular, if the supply, capacity and quality of vehicles are not the same in the landlocked countries as in their transit partners. The problem often arises when there are large loads, such as grain or food aid, to be hauled while vehicles from the destination country are not in adequate supply. For

example, it was reported in 1999 that in the Accra-Ouagadougou corridor, hauling certain bulky merchandise cost as much as 37% higher with Burkina vehicles than with Ghanaian ones¹.

2.6 Insurance

ECOWAS has introduced its Brown Card insurance scheme since 1982. The Brown Card system functions on the basis of joint guarantee provided by authorized insurance companies. Unfortunately, the Brown Card insurance agreement is not fully applied. The most important roadblock lies in lack of cooperation between insurance companies. As a consequence, transporters operate on the basis of local insurance schemes. Lack of regional insurance systems complicates transit procedures and increases costs.

2.7 Implication of the Private Sector

Extensive economic restructuring and trade liberalization programmes have given the private sector an increasing importance in the region. However, the sector is not well structured to perform adequately. The often-blurred demarcation between formal and informal sector practices hurts efficiency in the transit transport sector. In particular, some middlemen who act as clearing/forwarding agents and the majority of transporters operate with informal sector methods, which complicates the transit trade environment.

The private sector plays a leading role in road transport. First, all road carriers are private. Second, the private sector is the main provider of most transit services such as freight forwarding, customs clearing and insurance. Third, the private sector, through national chambers of commerce, banks and insurance companies, is implicated in the management of the bond guarantee scheme of the ECOWAS Interstate Road Transit Convention. Fourth, the private sector is given a consultative role in transport facilitation through the West African Transporters Union and national professional associations.

Ports are State-owned and generally State-operated. But there is an increasing implication of the private sector in port operations. Some countries are taking actions to contract the management of their ports to private firms. Ports, such as the port of Lome, have been concessioned since 2001. The private sector also plays a major role in the development and operation of dry ports and storage facilities at railway terminals in the landlocked countries.

Nonetheless, the private sector is weak because it does not have adequate resources to function efficiently. First, lack of financial resources does not make it possible for transporters to buy new or adequate vehicles. Most transporters can afford only used vehicles that sometimes are more than ten years old. Second, human and technical capacity is inadequate at all levels of the private sector. For example, in the area of freight operation, capacity to repair or provide maintenance for vehicles and other equipment is lacking. In addition, illiteracy rate is very high among vehicle operators. Third, the private sector is not well organized, particularly at the regional level, to defend its interests when needed. The West African Transporters Union (WATU) has been established to this end, but has never been given the means to fulfil its mission.

¹ According to data obtained from truckers in 1999, haulage of 500 metric tons of rice from Accra/Tema to Ouagadougou would cost 12 million CFA francs with Ghanaian trucks and 16.5 million CFA francs with Burkina ones.

2.8 Governance

Lack of good governance is observed at all levels of the transit transport systems. The flow of information is not optimal, which creates opportunities for illegal practices and corruption. Several cases of improper practices or misbehaviour are not sanctioned because they are condoned, or because they are not noticed or reported to relevant authorities. Poor governance makes the environment conducive to factors causing physical and non-physical bottlenecks.

Poor governance affects the state of the transport infrastructure in several ways. First, the transport sector is not adequately financed because of lack of resources. Yet the budgetary resources allocated to the sector are not used judiciously or in a transparent manner. As a result, some infrastructure development programmes are not always implemented as officially planned. Roads are built narrower and thinner than planned. Second, the behaviour of certain vehicle operators has detrimental effects on the road infrastructure. Truckers often dodge weighbridges or intentionally violate axle load regulations. They view the infrastructure as a public good, and do not care much about preserving it.

An important part of customs clearing and freight forwarding operations is not conducted in transparency. The complicated structure artificially given to the procedures has given rise to a host of superfluous services that only contribute to increasing transit and transport costs. Simplification of the procedures would eliminate a good part of these services both at the ports and along the transit corridors. For example, unloading and reloading operations required by customs agents at the borders (or at checkpoints) require clearing and forwarding services that do not cost less than 100,000 CFA francs per vehicle (about 4% of transport cost). Added to that are other costs including handling, customs and police fees, etc., and time loss. Customs clearing and freight forwarding has become a prosperous business that thrives in part because of complications caused by non-physical bottlenecks. Efforts to harmonize and simplify procedures at the regional level encounter strong opposition from the customs clearing and freight forwarding industry that has acquired a significant lobby power. The influence of this industry is determinant in the lacklustre behaviour of governments toward the ECOWAS Interstate Road Transit Convention

The behaviour of police and customs agents is not always exemplary. Some of these agents indulge in improper or illegal practices that prevent them from doing their job with professionalism. They take undue fees from vehicle operators, even if the latter comply with all officially relevant regulations. Lack of transparency, corruption and abuse of power have become fair characterizations of the behaviour of a large number of these law enforcement agents along the subregion's main road corridors. The situation sometimes gets out of the control of national authorities. Often, law enforcement agents set up 'mobile' checkpoints without the consent or authorization of their supervisors, to ransom vehicle operators. Improvement in governance is necessary to address these issues.

III. NEW INITIATIVES UNDER WAY TO IMPROVE THE TRANSIT TRANSPORT ENVIRONMENT

Clearly, most of the issues referred to above are due to inadequate cooperation. But the situation has been changing over the past two years. New initiatives are under way to improve cooperation in the area of transit transport. More importantly, these initiatives acknowledge the urgency of the needs of the landlocked countries, and give priority to improvement of these countries' access to the sea. The new initiatives aim at helping implement ECOWAS agreements and conventions on transport, in particular the Interstate Road Transport (IST) and Interstate Road Transit (ISRT) conventions, as well as the Brown Card insurance scheme.

The level of cooperation has increased not only among the member countries of each REC, but also, on the one hand, between ECOWAS and UEMOA and, on the other hand, between the RECs and the donor community. In particular, ECOWAS and UEMOA are joining efforts and resources to prepare and implement a single transport facilitation programme for the subregion.

Most of these initiatives are inspired by the short-term action plan of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) and are in conformity with the Sub-Saharan Africa Transport Programme (SSATP). The initiatives are supported by donors including the World Bank, the African Development Bank (ADB), the European Union (EU), the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the French Cooperation.

3.1 Transport Facilitation

The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the Union Economique et Monétaire Ouest Africaine (UEMOA) are joining efforts to implement a road transport and transit facilitation programme that they have been developing over the past few years. The goal of the programme is to improve transport systems by eliminating primarily non-physical barriers. All components of the programme will be implemented on experimental bases, tested and evaluated between 2004 and 2009. Full implementation will follow in 2009. The programme has the following components:

- harmonization of Inter-State Road Transit (ISRT) procedures and 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

Various components of the programme have been validated at meetings attended by national and REC officials and donors in 2003 and 2004.

3.1.1 Harmonisation of Interstate Road Transit Documents and Procedures

The ISRT Convention has been adopted since 1982. However, implementation has been limited so far because of unresolved issues about its application. A few Member States including Benin, Mali and Togo have adopted the ISRT document as drafted by ECOWAS. However, no member country accepts the ISRT document issued by another member country, because of financial implications and disagreements about the underlying guarantee system. The objective of the new initiatives is to reactivate the ISRT convention and make it work. The solution would be adoption of a single ISRT

document printed by ECOWAS with a guarantee system that heeds national concerns including financial ones.

To overcome these difficulties, the ECOWAS Executive Secretariat and the UEMOA Commission have set up a task force to work on the issues. Consultants have been recruited to carry out studies and determine the factors that impede progress. To increase political support to the ISRT Convention, the task force has put the issue on the agenda of the December 2003 meeting of the UEMOA Finance Ministers. It has also launched a public awareness campaign in Member States and is undertaking actions to establish national transport facilitation committees by the end of 2004. The top challenge before the task force is to design a guarantee scheme and a revenue distribution system that are acceptable to all Member States. The task force is reviewing national transit procedures and regulations with a view to simplifying and harmonising them. Relevant mechanisms will be set up to allow for smooth application of the ISRT and IST conventions by 2009. These mechanisms include actions to be taken at both the regional and national levels. Specific indicators have been defined to monitor progress toward achievement of established objectives.

3.1.2 Monitoring Improper Practices in Transit Transport Corridors

Observatories will be established to identify and discourage bad practices along key transit transport corridors, in particular the Abidjan-Ouagadougou-Niamey, Tema-Ouagadougou-Niamey and Lome-Ouagadougou-Niamey corridors. A mechanism will be set up to allow victims or witnesses of such practices to report to the observatories. The observatories will publish reports as the cases arise and disseminate these reports among all stakeholders. Appropriate corrective measures will be taken by national authorities. Progress indicators will be defined and quarterly reports will be produced at the regional level by the body coordinating the observatories.

The observatories and all their support systems will be put in place before the end of 2004. A public awareness campaign has begun that involves all stakeholders. The ECOWAS-UEMOA task force works with a committee made up by representatives of all groups of stakeholders (traders, transporters, vehicle operators, and police and customs agents) and all member countries to finalise the programme.

3.1.3 Improvement of the Fluidity of Road Transit Transport Traffic

The objective of this component of the programme is to reduce time loss at border posts as well as other checkpoints. As regards border posts, ECOWAS and UEMOA are working toward building joint border posts to facilitate and speed up formalities and procedures. Border crossing formalities will be simplified and harmonised, and will be conducted jointly. Two joint border posts (including one in the Abidjan-Ouagadougou corridor) will be built and tested before the end of 2004.

As regards checkpoints, the programme aims at reactivating the ECOWAS Interstate Road transport (IST) Convention, which calls for reduction of the number of roadblocks in regional corridors. A consultant has been recruited to conduct a study on the physical state of the infrastructure and existing roadblocks in the relevant corridors, and help determine the sequence in which non-approved roadblocks should be removed. Parallel to that, a study will be carried out to design a

regulatory framework for Community corridor management to be applied in corridors used for transit transport in the West Africa subregion.

3.1.4 HIV/AIDS Control in Transit Transport Corridors

This component of the programme aims at extending the World Bank Initiative on HIV/AIDS prevention to the transit transport sector. The HIV/AIDS pandemic is integrated into the design and implementation of transport facilitation and infrastructure programmes at both the regional and national levels. The HIV/AIDS component is currently implemented as a pilot project in the Lagos-Abidjan corridor.

3.2 Cooperation in Other Areas

ECOWAS has recently made commendable efforts to implement various other components of its transport programme. Overall, progress is slow; nonetheless, a few encouraging results have been achieved.

3.2.1 Railway Interconnection

ECOWAS is working toward development of an interconnecting Railway Master Plan (RMP). Activities preparing feasibility studies have been carried out in 2003. Notably, a steering committee has been established and consultants recruited to undertake the studies. The studies will focus on the seventeen interconnection lines identified in the ECOWAS Railway Master Plan and determine the potentials offered by these links in terms of partnership between the private and public sectors.

3.2.2 Maritime Transport

ECOWAS' maritime transport programme aims at improving coastal shipping services. This requires harmonisation of maritime policies and implication of the private sector for joint ventures. The West African regional private coastal shipping company, ECOMARINE, has effectively started operations by the commissioning of its first vessel in Dakar on 6 September 2003.

The Community regulation on maritime cabotage is ready for adoption at the experts level. The International Maritime Organization code on maritime and port facilities and security is ready to enter into force. A regional Action Plan has been adopted and is expected to be implemented in 2004.

3.2.3 Air Transport

In the area of air transport, implementation of an Action Plan adopted in Lome on 28 February 2003, has started. The plan seeks to address capacity building needs and the institutional restructuring of the aviation sector and to carry out reforms in the area of aviation safety and security. A harmonisation committee has been set up with the ultimate goal of achieving a common set of regulations for the subregion and formulating common competition rules. A grouping of States has been established with a view to carrying out safety oversight programmes and setting up a regional

safety oversight agency. Finally, efforts are being made to encourage the private sector to create regional airline companies to fill the vacuum left by the demise of national airlines.

4. THE WAY FORWARD

The most important factors that undermine the transit transport environment in West Africa include inadequate capacity, weakness of the private sector, poor governance and, most importantly, inadequate level of regional cooperation. While the first two factors can be linked to the difficult socio economic conditions in the region, the third and fourth can be remedied by increased political will. In particular, the recent initiatives undertaken by the RECs should be pursued with greater intensity and should benefit from sustained support from the countries and the donor community.

4.1 Improvement of Capacity

Human, technical and financial capacity needs to be enhanced at both the regional and national levels. Additional resources should be provided by the countries themselves, the RECs, the United Nations system and the donor community. In particular, UNCTAD should adopt a more regional integration-oriented approach in order to enhance the effectiveness of its actions for implementation of the Almaty Programme of Action.

4.1.1 At the National Levels

The governments should be encouraged to continue and intensify efforts to build, rehabilitate or upgrade the transit transport infrastructure. Improvement of infrastructure will help the LLDCs diversify their transit routes. The LLDCs and their neighbours as well should be encouraged to make adequate budget allocations to the transport sector, in particular to transport infrastructure development. The international community should assist by increasing financial support to the sector, notably by promoting new and innovative modalities of financing, such as regional venture funds, participation in local financial institutions, co-financing and bank-to-bank loans.

As regards road transport, the LLDCs and their transit neighbours should be provided with the means to support and implement without delay the transport programmes initiated by the RECs, as well as their own national programmes.

The international community can facilitate implementation of the ECOWAS-UEMOA transport facilitation programme at several levels. First, it can support national transport facilitation committees by providing them with financial and technical resources. UNCTAD, other agencies of the United Nations system, such as the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and other donors can provide the national committees with training and technical assistance. Training programmes can take the format of seminars or workshops organized at the national or regional level.

Second, Efforts to build and operate joint border posts should be encouraged and assisted by the international community. In particular, the international community can provide the countries where pilot projects are implemented with financial and technical assistance as well as training. UCNTAD

can provide technical assistance and training, in particular by helping customs agents get familiar with, and apply, computer-assisted information management tools such as ASYCUDA.

4.1.2 At the Regional Level

The regional economic communities should be encouraged to continue working toward improvement of physical integration of transport. Increased efforts are needed to accelerate implementation of agreed programmes and to help reach new agreements where needed, both on infrastructure building and transport facilitation. They need to improve the capacity to bring on board reluctant Member States so as to avoid the possibility that the latter constitute missing links in the implementation process. ECOWAS and UEMOA should intensify cooperation with RECs of Central Africa (and of other regions as well) in order to facilitate integration of regional transport networks by improving cooperation and accelerating implementation of programmes agreed to in the framework of NEPAD, UNECA's Trans-African Highway Programme (TAHP), and the Sub-Saharan African Transport Programme (SSATP). Such inter-regional cooperation would be particularly helpful for LLDCs, such as Niger and Chad, whose geographic position allow them to take advantage of transit routes through both RECs.

The RECs should be encouraged to keep the momentum they have reached in initiating actions to improve the transit transport systems. The donor community has been providing support to the RECs in the development of the regional programmes. It has participated in the preparation in these programmes and has accepted to provide financial and technical assistance. UNCTAD should play a bigger role as well in the implementation of these programmes. In particular, it should intensify its cooperation with the RECs and increase its participation in the ongoing actions for implementation of the regional programmes. In addition, it is desirable that UNCTAD establish a focal point or a correspondent at the RECs to facilitate such cooperation. UNCTAD can share with the RECs and other partners its long experience in matters of transport facilitation. It can also provide technical assistance and training for implementation of various components of the programmes at the regional level. For example, UNCTAD can provide inputs to the periodic meetings of the ECOWAS-UEMOA transport facilitation committee and assist in the evaluation of the joint border posts pilot projects.

As regards the hanging issues impeding application of a single IRST document in West Africa, it can be suggested that a mechanism be set up to levy the required duties on all imported goods arriving at each port, whether the final destination of these goods is the transit country or its landlocked neighbours. The tariff revenue would be remitted to the country of official destination, with appropriate provisions made to cover administrative costs. The mechanism should be run by the RECs to avoid suspicions. This exercise would be relatively easy if a common external tariff (CET) was applied on imports from third countries, as is the case in UEMOA. Application of such a system will appease the transit countries since traders will no longer have any incentive to cheat. UNCTAD and the donor community can assist in setting up and operating such a mechanism.

4.2 Enhancing Transit Transport Cooperation through Regional Integration

The LLDCs and their transit neighbours do participate in regional integration arrangements that include transport in their development programmes. Specific agreements have been signed with a

view to facilitating transit transport. However, little progress has been made, largely because of slow implementation of these agreements. Recently, the LLDCs and their transit developing neighbours have been showing increased commitment to regional transport programmes. The international community should encourage these new developments through various incentives. It should also help the governments adjust their policies so as to facilitate compliance with regional agreements. A public awareness campaign should be launched by the RECs with the support of the donor community to help the governments and the populations understand the long-run benefits of regional integration

UNCTAD, UNECA, UNDP and other donors, such as the African Development Bank and the European Union, can help set up technical assistance programmes to promote effective regional integration in West and Central Africa. Such a programme can benefit from recent studies on regional integration done by the ADB and UNECA.

4.3 Empowering the Private Sector

The implication of the private sector in transit transport systems is quite extensive. However, the sector does not have the capacity to function properly. Inadequacy of financial, technical and human resources impede efficiency in areas such as freight operation and also in various support services. The donor community should assist in increasing financial support to the private sector through creative financing modalities including direct financing and development of regional venture funds. The donor community should also help the private sector develop partnership with foreign companies. Such partnership would help increase capacity and improve efficiency in the private sector. It would be particularly useful in freight operations where it could help transporters improve the state of the rolling stock and communications equipment. Effective ways to attract foreign direct investment to the transport sector have to be developed.

The private sector also needs training at all levels. The international community should develop and implement appropriate training programmes for the private sector. The private sector should be included in UNCTAD training programmes implemented at both the regional and national levels.

4.4 Improving Governance

Lack of good governance hinders the efficiency of the transit transport systems. Improper practices and widespread corruption cause undue increase in costs at all levels of the transit transport operations chain. Part of such practices stems from the complexity of the formalities and procedures or from lack of transparency in the conduct of these formalities. For examples, some traders or transporters are willing to bribe their way through the process in order to skip lengthy and cumbersome formalities.

Port and customs formalities and procedures should be simplified and harmonised, and should be made widely known to all stakeholders. In addition, the ECOWAS-UEMOA bad practices observatories that are being established should extend their activities to port and customs procedures. Bodies such as the West African Chamber of Commerce (WACC) should be implicated in this exercise at the regional level. At the national levels, professional associations, such as transporters unions, traders unions, etc., should be part of the bad-practice watchdog.

A public awareness campaign should be launched, including actions such as posting of billboards along the main transit routes to constantly remind everyone of the behaviour to adopt. Certain aspects of improper practice, such as abuse of infrastructure by vehicle operators, abuse of vehicle operators by customs and police agents, or abuse of the environment, are due in part to inadequate level of education or lack of information. Therefore, practice of good governance and protection of the environment should be included in the continuous training programmes to be carried out, free of charge or subsidised, if possible, but mandatory.

The donor community is playing a significant role in efforts to improve governance. It has participated in the preparation of the ECOWAS-UEMOA programme aiming at establishing a bad-practice watchdog. UN systems agencies including UNDP, which has done a lot of work on governance at the national levels, can provide useful input to this programme.

4.5 Protecting the Environment

Transport activities have detrimental effects on the environment. These effects, which include physical pollution, gas emission and greenhouse effect, are becoming a major concern in Africa. Weak income levels and high import duties make it difficult for many Africans to buy new vehicles. Imported used vehicles constitute an important part of the vehicle fleet in the majority of Sub-Saharan African countries. Some of these vehicles are so old that they become junk a few months after they are imported. And the junkyard of used vehicles and used tyres imported from Europe is growing very fast in many African countries. A few countries try to regulate import of used car. However, such regulations have limited scope and are largely ineffective, as they are not harmonised at the regional level. Similarly, regulations on gas emission are not properly enforced given the age of the vehicle fleet.

Actions should be taken at the national levels to discourage imports of used vehicles and tyres that are too old. These actions could include reduction of import duties on new vehicles, and should be coordinated at the regional level. Likewise, coordinated measures should be introduced at the national and regional levels to encourage use of improved fuel such as unleaded gasoline and to raise public awareness about the environmental impact of transport.

REFERNCES

ADB (2000), *Regional Integration in Africa*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

ECOWAS (1999), *ECOWAS Social and Economic Indicators 1999*. Abuja.

----- (2000), *ECOWAS Statistical Bulletin*, No. 1, November

----- (2000), *ECOWAS Handbook of International Trade*, Abuja.

----- (2003), *Annual Report 2003*. Abuja.

----- (2004), *ECOWAS Trade Liberalisation Scheme*, Abuja.

Nguessan, Nguessan (2003), "Improvement of Transit Transport in West Africa," UNCTAD, Geneva

UNCTAD (2003), "Challenges and Opportunities for further Improving the Transit Systems and Economic Development of Landlocked and Transit Developing Countries," Geneva.

----- (2003), *UNCTAD Handbook of Statistics 2003*, Geneva.

----- (2004), *The Least Developed Countries Report 2004*, Geneva.

UNECA (2004) *Assessing Regional Integration in Africa*, Addis Ababa.

The United Nations (2003), "Report of the International Ministerial Conference of Landlocked and Transit Developing Countries and Donor Countries and International Financial and Development Institutions on Transit Transport Cooperation," New York.