TRADE AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN LLDCS: A CASE OF MONGOLIA

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Abstract: International trade and sustainable development in landlocked developing countries are interdependent, and barriers to cross-border trade can be a major obstacle to sustainable development. High transportation costs and limited market access due to geographical location prevent landlocked developing countries from keeping up with the global market. In Mongolia, 93.2% of exports are mining commodities, the majority of which are exported to neighboring China, which makes the Mongolian economy dependent on a single country and source, which poses the potential risks. The study examined the impact of tariffs and non-tariff measures on trade and unemployment in landlocked developing countries such as Mongolia, Ethiopia, Malawi, Zambia, Mali, Burkina Faso, and Botswana, and landlocked developed countries such as Switzerland and Liechtenstein, based on quantitative evidence.

Keywords: Land Locked Developing Countries (LLDCS), Trade liberalization, sustainable development, foreign direct investment

ДАЛАЙД ГАРЦГҮЙ ХӨГЖИЖ БУЙ УЛСУУДЫН ГАДААД ХУДАЛДАА БА ТОГТВОРТОЙ ХӨГЖИЛ: МОНГОЛ УЛСЫН ЖИШЭЭН ДЭЭР

Хураангуй: Далайд гарцгүй хөгжиж буй орнуудын оу-ын худалдаа болон тогтвортой хөгжил нь бие биетэйгээ харилцан уялдаа хамааралтай байдаг бөгөөд хил дамнасан худалдаанд үүсэх саад бэрхшээлүүд нь тогтвортой хөгжилд гол тотгор нь болдог талтай. Газарзүйн байршлаас шалтгаалсан тээврийн өндөр зардал, зах зээлд нэвтрэх хягзаарлагдмал боломж нь далайд гарцгүй хөгжиж буй орнуудад дэлхийн зах зээлтэй хөл нийлүүлэн алхахад саад болдог. Монгол улсын хувьд экспортын 93.2% нь уул уурхайн түүхий эд эзлэх бөгөөд үүний дийлэнх хувь нь урд хөрш Хятад улс руу экспортлогддог нь Монголын эдийн засаг нэг улс, эх сурвалжаас хамааралтай болгож, эрсдлийг дагуулж байна. Тус судалгаа нь далайд гарцгүй хөгжиж буй орнууд болох Монгол, Этиоп, Малави, Замби, Мали, Буркино Фасо, Боцвана болон далайд гарцгүй хөгжингүй орнууд болох Швейцарь болон Лихтенштейн зэрэг орнуудын тарифын болон тарифын бус хязгаарлалтууд нь гадаад худалдааг хэрхэн нөлөөлж, ажилгүйдлийг бууруулахад түлхэц үзүүлдэг эсэхийг тоон баримтан дээр тулгуурлан судалсан.

Түлхүүр үгс: Далайд гарцгүй хөгжиж буй орнууд, худалдааны либералчлал, тогтвортой хөгжил, гадаадын шууд хөрөнгө оруулалт,

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1. INTRODUCTION

As a Landlocked Developing Country (LLDC), Mongolia faces significant hurdles in achieving sustainable economic growth. Its lacks of direct sea access, coupled with limited infrastructure, trade imbalance, and ineffective trade facilitation, increases the cost and time required for cross border goods transport. Consequently, Mongolia experiences lower income levels, low wage distribution, unemployment and constrained export capabilities, hindering sustainable development.

Mongolian exports are heavily dependent on mining products /93.2% as of November, 2025/ and primarily destined for a single market, which is China. This dependence makes the economy vulnerable, considering that 19 billion USD of its total 2024 turnover 27.4 billion USD is derived from solely China.

Moreover, Mongolia's score of 58.06% in the UN Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation (2025) is considerably below the averages for LLDCs (66.87%) and the global average (70.53%). With detailed results of transparency 86.67%, formalities 66.67%, institutional arrangement and cooperation 66.67% and failing in paperless trade with 51.86% and cross border paperless trade with 22.78%.

Despite these significant hurdles, Mongolia possesses considerable intrinsic strengths and untapped potential for sustainable economic growth. It's abundant natural resources and youthful demographic exemplify these advantages. In recent years, the Mongolian government has been actively fostering multiple regional integration programs as a strategic approach to diversify trade beyond its immediate neighbors, to reduce transit vulnerability, and participate in global value chains. These initiatives include: "Program of Action for Landlocked Developing countries for the Decade 2024-2025", "Central Asia Regional Economic Integration Cooperation Program", "Forum for East Asia-Latin America Cooperation", "Integration of Transport Logistics & Digital Trade Initiatives", "Integration of Value-Chain (Agriculture/Meat, Green Economy)", "Broader Strategic & Transit Integration (Geopolitical & Transit Hub Aspirations)".

In general, trade liberalization causes shifts in relative costs and prices, which in turn alter the sectoral makeup of production and employment, ultimately supporting sustainable development.

Recognized by the UN Resolution as "an engine for inclusive economic growth and poverty reduction, which contributes to the promotion of sustainable development," trade plays a critical role in advancing sustainable development. Its most important effects are seen in improved employment, labor earnings, and job security, as workers in trade-driven growth

sectors enjoy higher productivity and wages. Trade also acts as a potent catalyst for infrastructure investment in areas such as roads, ports, and electricity grids, with these enhancements boosting trade gains and creating widespread benefits beyond the direct participants in importing and exporting industries. Yet, trade and other international transactions, including Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), are seldom explicitly incorporated as leading contributors to the SGGs or their targets. FDI itself brings a crucial bundle of technology, know-how, and international network, facilitating efficient sales, sourcing, and management (Coxhead, 2025).

Study done in 70 developing countries revealed that developing nations that attract the most per-capita non-extractive foreign direct investment are typically characterized by significant urbanization, robust infrastructure, comparatively high economic growth rates and per capita GDP, and political stability (Franklin R.Root, Ahmed A. Ahmed, 1972).

Hence, to fully realize it's potential, Mongolia must adopt a multifaceted strategy addressing both internal and external limitations. A comprehensive and strategically targeted approach, encompassing economic diversification, focused transit facilitation, pursue political stability, promote public sector integrity, robust support for regional integration programs, and leveraging inherent strength, will pave the way for attracting Foreign Direct Investors hence, trade-led sustainable development.

This study tries to define the tariff and non-tariff barriers that FDI in order to ensure sustainable development goals (SDGs) in resource based-LLDC. In other words, the research reveals how to create employment and further capital in non-mining sector through FDI incentives which lead to sustainable development of Mongolia.

Section two delves into the theoretical underpinnings of the nexus between trade liberalization and its developmental impacts, specifically its concurrent influence on employment dynamics. Section three presents a comparative analysis of comparative studies, examining labor reallocation stemming from liberalization policies. Section four delineates the methodological framework, elucidating the selected measurement criteria and their underlying rationale. Finally, the concluding section synthesizes the study's findings and elaborates on the derived outcomes.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Trade reshapes prices, the production of goods and services, the efficiency of resource utilization, and investment incentives. These transformations directly influence employment and wages, thereby affecting almost all household incomes which are the achievement of all economic antipoverty (1-5) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). And advancing the achievements particularly in social SDGs 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) and 9

(Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure). More broadly, trade holds promise for contributing to SDGs 4 (Quality Education), 5 (Gender Equality) and 10 (Reduced Inequalities) by typically elevating incomes, enhancing the value labor, and improving households' ability to access quality education) (Coxhead, 2025).

In several related economic and trade theories explained international cooperation via trade-promotion programs indicating its influence on trade flows and employment outcomes. With interconnected theories framework with joint policies and cross-border collaboration can boost economic activity and generate jobs as promoted by UNESCAP. But it also has downsides that require careful attention. While it raises aggregate welfare, it redistributes income across factors, workers, firms, and regions.

The "Liberal Trade Theory" originated from Adam Smith's principles of free market and the advantages of free trade, as outlined in his 1776 work "The Wealth of Nations". (Smith, 2010) This foundation was further reinforced by David Ricardo's formalization of the theory of comparative advantage in the early 19th century, which illustrated how nations can benefit from specialization and internal trade. The theory promotes the reduction of tariffs, trade barriers and trade restrictions, emphasizing that open market nurture economic efficiency and growth. Basing to this theory perspective, initiate policy programs that support free trade initiatives designed to facilitate the removal of transaction costs, such as tariffs, quotas, and customs procedures is essential. Which is the major downfall for Mongolian customs that hinder the smooth flow for goods across boarder leading increased cost and time inefficiency. By diminishing these barriers and improving the border crossing procedure will support higher level of international trade, consequently, stimulate employment across sectors. Trade liberalization not only expand consumer choice and access to foreign markets but also create competitive pressure that push entities to innovate and improve its efficiency, ultimately benefiting the broader economy as well as employment. Furthermore, David Ricardo's seminal work On the Principles of Political Economy by Taxation in 1817 posited that two countries can simultaneously benefit from free trade if they have different relative opportunity costs in producing the same goods. Additionally, his model shows that engaging in specialization through trade allows countries to reap greater benefits that relying solely on their domestic labor inputs, making it one of the most straightforward general equilibrium models of international trade (Ricardo, 1817).

Numerous developing countries have achieved notable success in trade liberalization through the implementation of comprehensive policy frameworks, thereby establishing a strong linkage between trade liberalization and employment growth. Madagascar serves as a prominent example in the regard. Through the enactment of effective trade policy reforms — such as harmonizing customs procedure with international standards, reducing tariffs, and eliminating non-tariff barriers across various sectors, including textiles- the country significantly

enhanced its export competitiveness and experienced substantial trade growth. Madagascar has emerged as one of the fastest growing nations in Sub-Sahara African region. It's textile and apparel industry expanded from a value of less than $50 million in 1990 to over $450 million within a decade. The country initially commenced successful export to Europe followed by USA. The employment within the textile and apparel sector grew from 46'000 individuals to 200'000 within just four years (Center, 2020). Currently, textile industry ranks as the fourth-largest sector in terms of employment, following agriculture, commerce, and public administration (Export led growth, pro poor or not?, 2006).

In support, "Market Access Theory" posits that enhancing a country's ability to reach international markets through "Trade promotion policies" significantly boosts its competitiveness, leading to greater export levels and economic growth. The theory underscores that reducing trade barriers such as tariffs and non-tariff restrictions- along with improving transportation and logistical infrastructure, lowers the costs and difficulties associated with exporting goods and services. By improving market access, nations can expand their export opportunities, allowing firms to increase sales, realize economies of scale, and strengthen their presence in global markets. This growth in exports subsequently stimulates employment in export sectors and related industries like logistics, marketing and manufacturing. In sense, the theory highlights the pivotal role of trade facilitation policies in driving export expansion, economic diversification, and job creation, thereby supporting overall economic development.

As is often said, everything has two sides, like a coin, there are also drawbacks that necessitate careful consideration to apply trade liberalization. While it can bring significant economic benefits it can also lead to adverse effect, including income inequality, sectoral disruption, and potential loss of jobs in vulnerable industries. Recognizing the negative consequences is crucial for designing policies that balance the gains from trade with measures to mitigate its drawbacks.

Based on Heckscher- Ohlin (H-O) model formulated by Heckscher (1919) and Ohlin (1933), emphasizes comparative advantage arising from factor endowments, trade increases demand for abundant factors, thereby influencing wages and employment in skill-specific sectors. Hence, the "Stolper-Samuelson theorem", developed by Wesley Stopler and Paul Samuelson in 1941, articulated theorem within the framework of the Heckscher-Ohlin model indicating that trade liberalization benefits owners of abundant factors while adversely affecting owners of scarce factors, leading to implications such as increased wage inequality (Paul R.Krugman, Maurice Obstfeld, and Marc Melitz, 2021).

Moreover, the "Specific Factor model", which was originated by Jacob Viner and later constructed and formalized by Jones (1971) and Mussa (1974), illustrates how free trade promotes export growth and influences income distribution. It highlights that trade liberalization

impacts the distribution of income among industries engaged in export, based on differing demand for production factors primarily capital and labor. Specially, since capital tied to a particular industry remains immobile, while labor is assumed to move freely, a shift toward free trade is likely to benefit owners of the specific export sectors, while harming owners of the same capital in competing import-competing industries. Conversely, the mobility of labor across industries can lead to gains or losses depending in whether the real wages for export-oriented goods increase and those for import-competing goods decrease simultaneously. (The Specific Factors Model, 2021)

Additionally, in the model developed by David Ricardo the "Ricardian model", is emphasized the overall benefits of trade liberalization through comparative advantage, focusing on productivity differences, suggests that trade enhances overall welfare through specialization. But indirectly, the model suggests that certain sectors or industries — particularly those that are less competitive or less efficient, might encounter difficulties or decline due free trade. This could result in job losses or hardships for specific local employees within those industries, especially in sectors lacking a comparative advantage.

As of the most recent data, Mongolian registered active Small and Medium- sized enterprises (SMEs) is 76.6 thousand in 2023 (Mongolia, 2024) that covers 98-99% of all enterprises in the country. These SME's play a crucial role in country's economy, and their potential to mitigate unemployment could be significant if the above-mentioned opposing models are effectively implemented, as it would leverage factor endowments to promote sectoral growth and job creation. However, this approach may primarily benefit export-oriented sectors and a few large enterprises, harming capital distribution for inactive sectors, potentially limiting the inclusive growth of smaller and import- competing firms, further rising unemployment for low-skilled employees.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

The relationship between trade and employment in sustainable development goals is intricate, with evidence indicating that trade can boost employment and wages in certain dynamic sectors, while reducing them on others and potentially increasing unemployment during crisis. A compelling example for developing countries implementing market access strategies is Morocco's accession to the European Union (EU) Trade Agreement in 2000. The agreement aimed to progressively eliminate tariffs and non-tariff barriers between Morocco and the EU. As a result, Morocco experienced a substantial increase in export to the EU, growing by approximately 8-10% annually over the past five years, reaching 60.6 billion euros in 2024. (Trade and Economic Security, 2025) The country's leading export sector textile employ over 200'000 workers, with employment continuing to grow alongside export expansion. (ITC, 2020)

Through systematic review on 150 developing countries' evaluation there was found that in alignment with the strategic focus areas of the German Aid for Trade Strategy, Regional Trade Agreements (RTAs) and Trade Policy adjustments, particularly reduction in both tariff and non-tariff barriers, increased trade openness. This effect is especially pronounced when these policy changes are accompanied by enhancement in quality of economic and physical infrastructure, along with a responsible regulatory framework. Main findings related with labor is trade liberalization has the potential to enhance employment in certain firms and sectors, such as agriculture, but heightened wage disparities by increasing the earnings of workers in exporting firms and sectors relative to their counterparts in non-exporting entities. With absence of an appropriate regulatory environment, the level of informality increases, hence less skilled workers gained significantly less than more skilled workers (Laura Barros, 2022).

International cooperation through trade promotion policies yields varied employment outcomes that significantly differ by country context; some initiatives, such as NAFTA (now USMCA), have been associated with notable job creation. In Mexico, NAFTA resulted in significant benefits, including a 23.72% drop in unemployment and a 12.62% increase in manufacturing employment, particularly benefiting unskilled workers. Nevertheless, these advancements were later undermined by negative effects, in non-manufacturing industry, of competition from China following its entry into the WTO. The research shows that trade promotion policies lead to highly diverse employment outcomes, influenced by sector composition, demographic characteristics, and geographic proximity to trade partners, with particularly pronounced effects in region of Mexico bordering US. Key mechanism included the comparative advantage in labor-incentive manufacturing, competitive impacts from trade liberalization in third countries, and labor market adjustments occurring mainly through wage fluctuations rather than changes in employment level.

Another, one of most efficient way of trade liberalization, Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) has a complex, context-dependent influence on labor, with potential for both positive and negative effects depending on specific economic condition. The overall effect depends on factors like industry type, skill levels, and economic development, making a universal assessment challenging (Wacker & Vadlamannati, 2011). Evidence shows FDI can impact labor through multiple mechanisms. In 2015 research highlighted a "creative destruction" phenomenon where FDI initially reduced employment through labor-saving techniques but can create long-term employment effects (C. Jude, Monica Ioana Pop Silaghi, 2015). In the other hand 2022 research demonstrated FDI's positive impact on labor productivity, particularly in foreign -owned companies (Krismanti Tri Wahyuni, Anugerah Karta Monika, Robert Kurniawan, Rezzy Eko, 2022). Moreover, FDI can rise employment standards, especially in skilled labor sectors (Mateus C Almeida, Ana CG de Carvalho, Eduardo Polloni-Silva, Herick F Moralles, 2024).

Regarding, effect of trade policy on employment and sustainable development in land-locked countries can be slightly different than developing coastal countries. Specifically, Mali, Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, and Uzbekistan. The impact of trade changes on employment varied widely across different contexts. In West Africa, two neighboring landlocked countries Mali and Burkina Faso, a temporary trade disruption triggered by the Ivorian civil war required a rerouting of trade. By building general equilibrium model it was clear that accelerated structural transformations declined employment in agricultural sector while favoring employment in manufacturing and services in areas utilizing non-Abidjan routes, from Abidjan to Dakar, Accra, Lomй and Cotonou. These impacts lasted over a decade, bolstered by the concentration of skilled labor and infrastructure investments (M. Emran, Forhad Shilpi, H. Coulombe, B. Blankespoor, 2019).

Meanwhile The movement of people from Uzbekistan to Russia, Kazakhstan, Turkey, and South Korea has been considerable, profoundly influencing the country's unemployment situation, social welfare, and inflow of hard currency. While figures can vary, it is estimated that up to 6 million out of Uzbekistan's 15 million workforce pursue seasonal work overseas. Hence, Uzbekistan maintained agriculture as a key employer, representing 27% of the labor force through actively seeking to address several Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by implementing trade reforms such as customs facilitation, zero duty utilization fees for Euro-5 vehicles, duty free imports of technology and equipment as well as implementing initiatives to position itself as a regional transit hub but still facing trade-offs between focusing on exports and job creation versus other sustainability aims, with identified institutional weaknesses acting as barriers (Rahmetov, Anvar and Rakhmetova, Malika, 2022).

In contrast, by using rich micro-level data analysis there was analyzed that Ethiopia's import tariff liberalization led to an overall decrease in employment, by 1% of male employment varies 3% of female employment, disproportionately affecting female workers as the economy shifted from agriculture to services. Hence, gender inequality emerged as a significant social issue (Giorgia Giovannetti, Marco Sanfilippo, Arianna Vivoli, 2022).

It is essential to recognize that the way trade liberalization is handled during crises can differ significantly from country to country.

Through qualitative and mixed research there was documented that, during global crises, trade acts as a transmission channel that heightens unemployment and gender disparities in countries like Brazil, Egypt, India, Liberia, South Africa, Uganda, and Ukraine. The extend and characteristics of employment impacts largely relied on country's degree of openness and its specific export composition. In certain cases, such as Uganda and the tourism sector in Egypt, impacts were primarily observed through reduction in wages or working hours. However, Brazil, Egypt's textile sector, and South Africa faced notable declines

in employment levels. Studies from Ukraine and Liberia indicated both reductions in employment and wages, along with rising wage arrears. Additionally, in Liberia and Uganda, there was evidence of increasing casualization of labor. However, policies such as stimulus packages incorporating infrastructure and cross- sectoral measures can mitigate these adverse effects (Marion Jansen, Eric Von Uexkull, 2010).

4. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK, DATA AND METHODS

As previously mentioned, this paper outlines a multiple- case study of trade liberalization across selected Land Locked Developing Countries (LLDCs) including Mongolia, Ethiopia, Uzbekistan, Malawi, Zambia, Mali, Burkina Faso, Botswana and Land-locked Developed Countries like Switzerland, Liechtenstein. The study examines the association between trade liberalization (tariff and non-tariff barriers) and employment across these countries. It is hypothesized that to attract Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) and to translate trade-liberalization into higher employment and overall economic development, depends on improvements in Mongolia's domestic business environment prior to investing to large-scale trade-promotion efforts.

The research methodology is to adopt a comparative case-study approach combined with cross-country descriptive statistics using secondary data in the aforementioned countries. Countries were selected purposively to represent varied income levels and regional contexts among landlocked economies. Period of analysis varies based on evaluation instruments including data from 1960 to 2025. The data and extractions are compiled publicly available data from World Integrated Trade Solution (WITS)/ ITC/ MFN (tariffs, trade flows), ILOSTAT (labor and occupation- based skill distribution), UN Global Survey on Digital & Sustainable Trade Facilitation, World Bank Logistic Performance Index (LPI), World Bank Doing Business (historical; latest available year per country), Heritage Foundation Index of Economic Freedom, Transparency International Corruption Perception Index (CPI), World Bank Governance Indicators (WGI- political stability), UNCTAD/ World Investment Report (FDI inflows) and ITC Trade Map (export structure). For each indicator is recorded the year and extraction date; tariff and product- level data were extracted using HS code 3926100000 (office/ school plastic articles) for comparability. WITS provides data on trade, tariffs, and non-tariff measures through sections like Trade Stats /trade flows, tariff, key trading partners and development indicators without detailed queries/, Analytical Database /in depth analysis using official data sources/, GPTAD/enables customization and simulation of tariff reductions, helping users analyze trade patterns and indicators effectively, and the WITS Application. (Trade statistics by country, 2025) Ethical statement: study uses publicly available secondary data which is no human subject approval required. Variable construction and measurements: Tariff variables — weighted average applied tariffs and MFN tariffs (percent), NTB variables — summary NTB indicators where available

and proxy measures (trade facilitation score). Labor measures — labor force participation, unemployment rate, and occupational skill distribution (ISCO classification). FDI — net inflows (USD millions). Political stability -WGI percentile rank (0-100). Corruption -CPI score and rank. Integration — membership in RTAs and number of trading partners (ITC). For transparency the data source, years, HS codes, and extraction dates are documented in a supplementary data table. All comparisons report units, years, sample sizes, and data sources are stated as well.

As it is said, for governments, the advantage of non-tariff barriers (NTBs) to trade is that their impacts are more predictable than those of tariffs. As tariff barriers have been considerably reduced, there is a rising interest in understanding how non-tariff barriers can distort and restrict international trade (Alan V. Deardorff, Robert M. Stern, 1997).

Trade development application evaluation instruments conclude:

4.1 Number of workforces, labor market data

In industrial economies, international trade has promoted greater specialization in the production of skill-incentive goods and has driven technological advancements. The increased for skilled labor has encouraged investments in improving the population's quality, accelerating the demographic transition, fostering technological progress, and further strengthening these economies' comparative advantage in producing skill-incentive goods. Hence, it is considerable to include in the research the literacy and educational level of the countries' workforce.

ILOSTAT is statistic, done under International Labor Organization (ILO), offering a selection of labor market data, encompassing various key indicators such as labor force participation, employment, underutilization, working condition, social protection, and occupational safety and health. Statistical data of skill level by ILOSTAT is based on occupation (ILOSTAT, 2025).

4.2 Trade Facilitation

Trade facilitation for sustainable development is essential due to its capabilities to implement economic development while safeguarding the environment and promoting social fairness. By evaluation the progress of its implementation in one's country is displays the level of acceptance any international trade hereby improvement in economy as well as employment rate.
The UN Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation is an evaluation that spans over 180 economies and assesses 62 measures related to the World Trade Organization's (WTO), Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA). Its purpose is assisting countries in tracking their progress in implementing measures that enhance sustainable development,

in the other hand through the survey result it can be identified level of trade transparency, formalities, institutional arrangements and other aspects related to trade facilitation.

4.3 Trade Promotion

Study using fixed effect regression model including 30 countries (15 developing and 15 developed) from 1970 to 2015, resulted that increase in government expenditure of trade promotion leads to higher rate of economic growth. (Huong Le, Ly Bui, 2022)

Doing Business Index by World Bank, starting from 2002, offers results of two primary aggregate measures; the ease of doing business score and the ease of doing business ranking. The ranking facilitates comparisons among economies, while the ease of doing business scores evaluate economies against regulatory best practices, highlighting their proximity to the highest regulatory performances for each Doing Business Indicator. When reviewed over the years, the ease of doing business score demonstrates how much the regulatory environment for local small and medium-sized enterprises in a given economy has evolved in absolute terms, whereas the ease of doing business ranking indicates how much the regulatory environment has shifted relative to that of other economies. Hence it measures, ease of starting business to getting a location (ease of dealing with construction permits, getting electricity, registering property), accessing finance (ease of getting credit, protecting minority investors), dealing with day-to-day operations (ease of paying taxes, trading across borders, contracting with government), operating in secure business environment (ease in enforcing contracts, resolving insolvency). (Group, 2020) As mentioned previously, SMEs in Mongolia covers 98-99%, indicating that trade labialization will be broad opportunity for those entities to export. It is essential for enterprises to be able to cooperate with government agencies with ease.

Index of Economic Freedom is index by The Heritage Foundation in collaboration with The Wall Street Journal, measures 12 quantitative and qualitative factors, grouped into four broad categories. Each of these categories are graded on a scale of 1to 100. A country's overall score is determined by averaging the twelve economic freedoms, with each being signed equal weight. The four categories are rule of law (property rights, government integrity, judicial effectiveness) government size (government spending, tax burden, fiscal health), regulatory efficiency (business freedom, labor freedom, monetary freedom) and open market (trade freedom, investment freedom, financial freedom) (Index of Economic Freedom, 2025).

4.4 Trade connectivity

Ta on international trade flows and transportation costs in developing counties indicate that

landlocked nations face approximately 50 percent higher transport expenses for foreign trade compared to average coastal economies. Additionally, being landlocked can decrease trade volume by as much as 60 percent (Nuno Limro and Anthony J. Venables, 2001). Hence, to identity the strategies and level of transportation efficiency is essential for the study.
Logistic Performance Index (LPI) is derived from detailed, high frequency data related to marinate shipping, container tracking, postal services, and air freight activities, which has been provided by multiple data partners.

For effective trade liberalization in developing countries, it is crucial to establish a favorable trade business environment that enables free trade policies to realize their full potential. Economist such as Doughlas Irwin in his book "Free Trade Under Fire" (IRWIN, 2015), contend that trade liberalization alone cannot lead to economic growth in these countries. Rather, it necessitates the support of government initiatives to create a suitable framework for successful implementation of trade liberalization. It is notably to concentrate country's environment of establishing and doing business, corruption rate, political stability and main resource of capital (Abduraawf Hadili, Mohamed Khaled Al-Jafari, James Demetrios, 2021).

4.5 Corruption

Corruption in any level of public institutions significantly discourages foreign investments hence, slows down trade liberalization further its economic growth. A study done by Ben Shepherd, resulted that the combination of ineffective border procedure and pervasive corruption serves as a substantial impediment to international trade. In particular, the elasticity of bilateral trade in relation to trade time is roughly 5% higher in a country experiencing widespread corruption compared to one that is free corruption. (Shepherd, 2010) Due to that evaluate and compare corruption rate of the countries that resulted successful trade liberalization activity and those couldn't, is essential.

The score for each country is based on at least three data sources taken from 13 different corruption surveys and assessments. These sources are compiled by various reputable institutions, including the World Bank and the World Economic Forum. CPI results are derived from data sources from public sectors like bribery, diversion of public funds, officials using their public office for private gain without facing consequences, ability of government to contain corruption in the public sector, excessive red tape in the public sector which any increase opportunities for corruption, nepotistic appointments in the civil service, law insuring that public officials must disclose their finances and potential conflicts in interest, legal protection for people who report cases of bribery and corruption, state capture by narrow vested interests, and access to information on public affairs/ government activities. (The ABCs of the CPI: How the Corruption Perceptions Index is calculated, 2025)

4.6 Political stability

A stable political environment leads to consistent trade policies, which are essential for creating predictable conditions for businesses. Furthermore, political stability enhances a country's negation power in international trade agreement and promotes social cohesion, reducing the likelihood of disruptions that can impede trade activities. Based on data from 169 countries across nine consecutive and nonoverlapping five-year periods between 1960 and 2004, revealed that each additional cabinet change per year corresponds to a 2.39 percentage point drop in the annual growth (How Does Political Instability Affect Economic, 2011).

Political Stability and Absence of Violence/Terrorism evaluate perceptions regarding the likelihood of political instability and political motive violence, including act of terrorism. The World Governance Indicators (WGI) constitute a research dataset that captures the perception of governance quality from a wide range of respondents, including businesses, citizens, and experts, in both industrialized and developed countries. The percentile rank indicates the country's standing among all nations included in the aggregate indicator, with a rank of 0 representing the lowest position and 100 indicating the highest. (Political Stability and Absence of Violence/Terrorism: Percentile Rank, 2023)

4.7 Foreign Direct Investment

Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) can significantly foster development and alleviate poverty in regions with limited local resources, providing employment, technology and process transfer, export market knowledge, and non-debt capital. Crucially, FDI also supports vital infrastructure (transport, utilities, telecommunications), thus freeing up scarce government funds for essential social services like education and healthcare. However, most Landlocked Developing Countries (LLDCs) have largely failed to attract enough FDI to offset their poor domestic factor endowments and spur economic growth through capital imports. Indeed, only a handful of 31 LLDCs host sizable FDI, typically resource-rich nations where foreign equity-driven investment in extractive industries plays a critical role in economic restructuring and enables them to capitalize on rising commodity prices. (UNCTAD, 2009)

The World Investment Report annually provides comprehensive analysis of global, regional, and country-level foreign direct investment (FDI) trends, exploring their development implications, global value chains, and multinational enterprise operations, and features policy recommendations, transnational corporation ranking, detailed thematic analysis, and extensive statistical data. (World Investment Report, 2025)

4.8 Main capital resource

Through examines the effects of multilateral trade liberalization on resource revenue in 57 countries between 1995 and 2015, trade liberalization generally appears to negative affect on resource revenue. Nonetheless, it offers opportunities for poorer countries to increase their resource revenue and diversify their economic activities. But in wealthier countries resource-richness there may be a decline in resource revenue as they liberalize their trade practices. The impact of trade liberalization on resource revenue is also influenced by the extent of domestic trade liberalization, highlighting the importance of balanced policy approach (Sena Kimm Gnangnon and Jean-François Brun, 2018). Hence, it is essential to consider the main resource, based on the export rate, of the country's capital to have clear outcome.

The International Trade Center (ITC) -Trade Map is valuable online platform that provides detailed trade statistics and market analysis for international trade. It offers data on exports, imports, and trade balances between countries, broken down by products and trade partners (The International Trade Center, 2025).

4.9 Integration

Regional trade agreements (RTAs) have complex and conditional advantages for trade liberalization, with potential benefits but also significant limitations. The evidence suggests a nuanced picture that RTAs can create aggregate trade benefits and welfare gains, particularly when incorporating some aspects (S. Robinson, 2002). Moreover, there was found that economies actually grew faster with broad liberalization rather than limited regional agreements. (Vamvakidis, 1991).

World Trade Organization (WTO) collects Trade Policy Reviews (TPR) by country which allows to record integration of Regional Trade Agreements (RTAs) (Trade Policy Review, 2025).

5. RESULTS

5.1 Tariff measures

In sense to identify applied average tariff on imported products on Table 1 listed country level weighted average applied tariff, weighted average tariffs for Most Favored Nations / MFN/ and exemplified import tax on goods (HS3926100000) from the USA. (ITC, 2025)

Table 1. Country- level weighted average applied tariff, MFN tariff, and example import tariff rate (HS 3926100000)

#	Country	Weighted Average of Effective Applied Tariff (in percentile)	Weighted Average of Most Favored Nations (MFN)'s Effective Applied Tariff	Import tax on US goods /example country/ *
1	Mali	7.23%	12.85%	10%
2	Burkina Faso	7.63%	10.01%	20%
3	Kyrgyzstan	n/a	n/a	6.50%
4	Bolivia	5.17%	9.95%	10%
5	Mongolia	5.36%	5.64%	5%
6	Paraguay	4.29%	7.71%	6%
7	Kazakhstan	3.08%	5.20%	6.50%
8	Botswana	2.77%	7.47%	20%
9	Switzerland	1.19%	2.60%	0%
10	Luxemburg	2.18%	4.48%	6.50%

Source: ITC / WITS (specify extraction date and HS code used). "n/a" indicates data not available or not reported for that cell — please verify and replace if you can retrieve values. All tariff values are percentages (2025).

5.2 Non-tariff measures

Table 2. Key country indicators relevant to trade liberalization

#	Classification	Mali	Burkina Faso	Kyrgyzstan	Bolivia	Mongolia	Paraguay	Kazakhstan	Botswana	Switzerland	Luxemburg
1	Region	Sub-Saharan Africa	Sub-Saharan Africa	Europe& Central Asia	Latin-America& Caribbean	East & Asia Pacific	Latin-America& Caribbean	Europe& Central Asia	Sub-Saharan Africa	OECD high Income	OECD high Income
2	Income Level	Low-Income	Low-Income	Lower-Middle Income	Lower-Middle Income	Lower-middle Income	Upper-Middle Income	Upper-Middle Income	High Income	High Income	High Income
3	GDP/ per capita USD, 2022/	$833	$846	$1,649	$3,600	$5,046	$6,153	$11,625	$7,738	$93,588	$125,897

4	Population /2024/	24.48mln	23.55mln	6.3mln	11.3mln	3.48 mln	6.9mln	18.28 mln	2.52 mln	8.92mln	0.67mln
5	Labor force rate /%, 2024/	67.20%	64.80%	65.60%	72.30%	60.80%	70.70%	68.30%	64.40%	66.30%	62.20%
6	Unemployment rate /%, 2024/	3.20%	4.90%	4.10%	4.10%	5.10%	5.80%	4.60%	23.50%	3.80%	5.40%
7	Labor Skill level /Medium Skilled Occupation /	92% /2022/	81% /2024/	67% /2023/	77% /2024/	64% /2023/	59% /2024/	45% /2013/	53% /2024/	High skilled occupation 53% /2024/	High skilled occupation 68% /2024/
8	UN Trade Facilitation Score /0-100, 2025/	34.41%	46.42%	84.95%	75.27%	58.06%	82.80%	76.34%	58.06%	92.47%	87.10%
9	Doing Business Rank /2020 rank/	148	151	80	150	81	125	25	n/a	36	72
10	Economic. Freedom /2025 by score/	52.6	51	55.6	44.1	62.6	65.2	63.8	69.9	83.7	79.5
11	Logistic Performance Index /2023 in rank/	88	123	123	115	97	79	79	57	3	26
12	Corruption Perception Index /2024 in rank/	135	82	146	133	114	149	88	43	5	5
13	Political Stability /2023 value 0-100/	0	6	17	20	67	36	23	87	89	88
14	FDI /USD, mln, 2024/	708.6	82.9	705.3	246.8	2782.2	399.9	-2550.5	467.4	-60708.3	105986.6

15	Top 3 export sectors /HS chapter and share, 2025/	71	71	71	26	27	12	27	71	All services	Financial Service
		27	52	27	27	26	210	28	26	71	Other business service
		52	8	26	71	71	27	26	85	30	Transport

Sources: ILOSTAT 2024, UN Global Survey 2025, Doing Business (archived)2020, Heritage Index 2025, World Bank LPI 2023, Transparency International CPI 2024, WGI 2023, UNCTAD 2024, ITC 2025.

HS code	**Top Export products by code**
71	Natural or cultured pearls, precious or semi-precious stones, precious metals, metals clad with precious metal, and articles thereof; imitation jewellery; coin
26	Ores, slag and ash
27	Mineral fuels, mineral oils and products of their distillation; bituminous substances; mineral waxes
52	cotton
8	Edible fruit and nuts; peel of citrus fruit or melons
12	Oil seeds and oleaginous fruits; miscellaneous grains, seeds and fruit; industrial or medicinal plants; straw and fodder
02	Meat and edible offal, salted, in brine, dried or smoked; edible flours and meals of meat or meat offal
28	Inorganic chemicals; organic or inorganic compounds of precious metals, of rare-earth metals, of radioactive elements or of isotopes
85	Electrical machinery and equipment and parts thereof; sound recorders and reproducers, television image and sound recorders and reproducers, and parts and accessories of such articles
30	Pharmaceutical products

Table 3. Regional integration and number of trade partners (2025)

#	Country	Main TRA/ Agreements	Number of import partners	Number of export partners
1	Mali	Economic Community or West African States (ECOWAS)	169	97
		West African Economic and Monetary Union (WAEMU)		
		World Trade Organization (WTO)		
		African Continental Tree Trade Area (AfCFTA)		
		Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA)		
2	Burkina Faco	Economic Community or West African States (ECOWAS)	162	105
		West African Economic and Monetary Union (WAEMU)		
		Multilateral Trade with World Trade Organization (WTO)		
		African Continental Tree Trade Area (AfCFTA)		
		Preferential Trade/ Preferential Regimes		
		Trade Facilitation West Africa (TFWA)		
3	Kyrgyzstan	Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU)	125	89
		World Trade Organization (WTO)		
		Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) Free Trade Area		
		Free Trade Agreement with Specific CIS with Russia		
		Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO)		
		Biliteral Investment /China, India, Turkey, UK, Russia etc.,/		
4	Bolivia	Andean Community of Nations (CAN)	187	120
		Mercosur (Southern Common Market)		
		World Trade Organization (WTO)		
		Latin American Integration Association (ALADI)		
		Bolivian Alliance for the People of Our America (ALBA)-TCP		
5	Mongolia	Mongolian Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA)	147	78
		Asian Pacific Trade Agreement (APTA)		
		Interim Free Trade Deal with the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU)		
		Mongolia- Republic of Korea (FTA/EPA)		
		European Free Trade Association (EFTA) -Mongolia Cooperation		
		Greater Tumen Initiative (CTI)		

6	Paraguay	Southern Common Market (MERCOSUR)	144	130
		Bilateral and Partial-Scope Trade Agreements (through ALADI/ACEs)		
		Andean Community of Nations (CAN) /Partial Agreement/		
		Latin American Integration Association (ALADI)		
		Trade Facilitation & Regional Initiatives /MERCOSUR, ALADI/		
		World Trade Organization (WTO)		
7	Kazakhstan	Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU)	177	130
		EAEU -Vietnam Free Trade Agreement		
		EUEU - China Trade & Economic Cooperation Agreement		
		CIS Free Trade/ Service Integration		
		Common Economic Zone (Single Economic Space)		
8	Botswana	Southern African Customs Union (SACU)	144	106
		Southern African Development Community (SADC) Free Trade Portal		
		COMESA- Eastern African Community (EAC)-SADC Tripartite Free Trade Area		
		SACU -European Free Trade Association (EFTA) Free Trade Agreement		
		SADC - European Union (EU) Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA)		
		African Continental Tree Trade Area (AfCFTA)		
9	Switzerland	EFTA Convention	198	222
		Switzerland - European Union FTA		
		Bilateral Free-Trade Agreements Outside EFTA /China, Japan, United Kingdom/		
		EFTA -Third country Free-Trade Agreement /Indonesia, Albania, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Georgian, GCC counties, Hong Kong		
		Investment Intellectual Property in FTA		
10	Luxemburg	European Union Single Market	217	198
		EU Customs Union		
		EU Free Trade Agreements /Canada, Japan, South Korea, Singapore, Vietnam, Mexico Global Agreement, Chile Advanced Framework Agreement, Central American Association Agreement, Colombia/Peru/Ecuador FTA		
		EU FTAs/ Agreements Under Negotiation / India, Australia, Indonesia, Mercosur/Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay, Paraguay/, Thailand		
		World Trade Organization (WTO)		

		Benelux Economic Union /Belgium, Netherlands, Luxembourg/		
		Bilateral Investment Treaties (BITs)		

Source: ITC/WTO TPR.

Summary of key results

- Tariffs: Weighted average applied tariff and MFN tariffs vary across countries; high – income landlocked economies show lower applied tariffs and MFN rates than many low-income LLDCS (see Table 1)
- Trade facilitation & Logistics: Developing LLDCs score substantially lower on UN trade facilitation metrics and LPI (higher trade cost and less efficient procedure), while high- income landlocked countries score highly.
- Governance and corruption: Higher GDP per capita and better trade performance correlate with higher political stability and lower perceived corruption.
- Labor and employment: Labor force participation rates are broadly comparable, but occupational skill composition differs; LLDCs have larger shares in medium/low-skill occupation. Reported unemployment rates may understate underemployment and informality;
- FDI & export structure: FDI inflows are uneven – resource-rich LLDCs attract more FDI when commodity sectors dominate exports; diversified economies and strong business environments attract higher service and manufacturing exports.

Conclusion

The data reveals immerse range in economic development, with GDP per capita varying from under $1,000 in low-income African nations like Mali and Burkina Faso to over $90,000 in high-income European countries like Switzerland and Luxembourg. This underscores that while landlocked, economic success in largely driven by other factors. As revealed in the chart, developing countries (Mali, Burkina Faso, Ethiopia) generally score much lower on trade facilitation metrics like the UN Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation, Doing Business Index, and Logistics Performance Index.

This indicates significant barriers, high cost, and less efficient trade process. In stark contrast, high- income landlocked nations (Switzerland, Luxembourg, Kazakhstan to some extend) demonstrate highly efficient trade facilitation, evidenced by top ranks and score, suggesting their ability to mitigate geographical disadvantages through robust infrastructure and streamlined procedures. It is demonstrated that governance and stability correlate with development, that countries with higher GDP per capita and better trade performance (Switzerland, Luxemburg, Botswana) typically exhibit higher political stability and lower perceived corruption. Conversely, many low-income landlocked countries struggle with lower

stability and higher corruption indices, which can deter investment and hinder economic growth, trade integration and Foreign Direct Investment. Moreover, developing landlocked economies often trade imbalance that rely on exporting primary commodities like minerals, precious stones, and agricultural goods, making them vulnerable to global price fluctuations. In contrast, even though with high mineral resources developed landlocked nations have diversified into high-value services, indicative of more resilient and advanced economic structures.

Most countries show relatively high labor force participation rates, but quality of employment differs substantially. Developing nations primarily have a workforce dominated by "Medium skilled occupation", suggesting a reliance on less complex labor. High-income landlocked countries, in the other hand, boast a majority of their workforce in "High skilled occupation", reflecting advanced, service-based economies that generate higher per capita income and drive innovation. While overall unemployment rates appear low in many developing LLDCs, there figures might not capture underemployment or informal work sectors. Botswana is an outlier with a high unemployment rate of 23.5% despite being a high-income nation. It can be indicating that in Botswana have high rate of self-employment with unregistered SMEs, which can be generating high capital.

While trade liberalization is theorized to enhance aggregate welfare, its application necessitates meticulous consideration of its multifaceted implications, particularly regarding heterogeneous resource redistribution. As posited by established economic theories, including the Heckscher-Ohlin and Ricardian model, Stolper-Samuelson theorem, pursuing comparative advantages often engenders a reallocation of capital and labor. Capital, often sector-specific, exhibits immobility, whereas labor is frequently posited as freely mobile which can lead to a concentrated shift of labor towards expanding export sectors. This dynamic may precipitate decline and exacerbate challenges for less competitive regions, sectors, and factors of production, potentially instigating employment displacement and economic hardship for specific segments of the workforce. Moreover, the distributional effects within factors and entities can be highly asymmetric. Skill-intensive sectors may yield disproportionate gains for owners of abundant factors, attributable to entrenched market power and access to superior resources, enabling them to secure prime talent through attractive remuneration packages. This scenario can deleteriously impact nascent enterprises and SMEs, which are characterized by attenuated capital, limited experiential reservoirs and diminished market influence.

The FDI data reveals a highly polarized investment landscape among landlocked countries. While Mongolia demonstrates a strong capacity to attract significant foreign direct investment (over $2,7 billion) relative to its LLDC peers. Elevated corruption rates, as exemplified by Mongolia's 114th position out of 180 countries, exacerbate this by allowing established, politically- connected entities to disproportionately capitalize on trade liberaliza-

tion advantage, acquiring advanced technology support from foreign potential entities, capital from FDIs and attracting highly skilled local personnel. Consequently, a vast majority of SMEs and startups may encounter substantial impediments in capital acquisition, market penetration, and the recruitment and retention of high-skilled personnel within a comparatively limited labor pool of 3.5 million. Furthermore, if liberalization predominantly leverages factor endowments to stimulate sectoral expansion solely based on resource-based sectors, this simultaneously renders other domestic sectors susceptible to displacement by imported commodities, leading to heightened unemployment and substantial detriment to import-competing domestic enterprises. More over making the economy more vulnerable with severe trade imbalance with dependence of sole mining sectors.

Consequently, the economic gains and benefits of trade liberalization specially to attract FDI with balanced sectoral development necessitates a precondition of political stabilization, coupled with the formulation and robust development of protective policies for domestic industries, labor, and SMEs, characterized by precise and granular focus. Simultaneously, a strategic imperative involves fostering diversified sectoral development, underpinned by efficient trade facilitation mechanism and proactive export promotion strategies, to mitigate adverse distribution effects and ensure more equitable and sustainable economic progression. When these supportive frameworks are in place, trade liberalization can become a highly cost-effective pathway to fulfilling numerous Sustainable Development Goals. Furthermore, aligning trade policies with SDG-focused budgeting can create powerful synergies that enhance social, economic, and environmental well-being of Mongolia.

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