



Sub-regional Dialogue on Inland Waterways

Expanding Tradable Benefits of Trans-boundary Water: Promoting Navigational Usage of Inland Waterways in Ganga and Brahmaputra Basins

Hotel Hindusthan International, Kolkata, India, 26th – 27th October, 2017

Background Note

Objectives

- To promote alternative policy discourses for enabling reform measures on inland waterways to ensure regional connectivity and river-to-bay connectivity in the BBIN (Bangladesh, Bhutan, India and Nepal) sub-region
- To present the synthesis report based on country studies from Bangladesh, Bhutan, India and Nepal and facilitate knowledge sharing on waterways governance within and across borders

Expected Outcome

- Dissemination of the knowledge from synthesis report among policy makers and CSOs as well as creation of a regional discourse on the need for cooperation among the BBIN countries for better management of inland waterways

Background and Context

Rivers supports lifeline for millions in the Ganga-Brahmaputra basin encompassing the BBIN countries and holds a wider importance in the region's geographical, cultural, religious, and economic development. Apart from providing several ecosystem services, rivers have been predominantly used as a means of domestic and cross-border trade and passenger transit within/between Bangladesh and India. Regarded as a cost cum energy efficient means of transportation, development of inland waterway (IW) transportation is presently been considered as a harbinger for stimulating connectivity and trade in this sub-regional grouping. Therefore, it is imperative to understand the dynamics of its development through the lens of economic, social, environmental and geo-political factors.

As part of the Civil Society Fund by The Asia Foundation, CUTS International and its strategic partners have implemented the project titled 'Expanding Tradable Benefits of Trans-boundary Water: Promoting Navigational Usage of Inland Waterways in Ganga and Brahmaputra Basins'. CUTS has implemented the project in partnership with Unnayan Shamannay, Bangladesh; Royal Society for the Protection of Nature (RSPN), Bhutan; and South Asia Watch on Trade, Economics and Environment (SAWTEE), Nepal.

The goal of the project is to contribute to improving policies, laws and regulations for inland waterways governance with particular emphasis on transport connectivity and livelihood in the BBIN sub-region. We envision achieving this goal by promoting alternative policy discourses for enabling reform measures between policy-makers, civil society, and communities. More details about the project is available here: <http://www.cuts-citee.org/IW/>

Integrating the outcomes from preceding diagnostic studies and dialogues at sub-national, national, and basin levels, this meeting aims to share the collective knowledge on the institutions governing inland waterways and alternative policy discourses for enabling reform measures will be advocated for at national, basin level and regional meetings. This regional dialogue will also be a greater chance for governments and civil society to engage with each other on inland waterways governance in the BBIN sub-region. The participants and the broader community engaged in inland waterways are expected to show an intention to take up the alternative policy discourse for enabling reform measures.

Key Discussions Points

- **Promoting transboundary cooperation and regional discourse for better governance of inland waterways:** The opening sessions will deliberate the importance and scope of enhancing regional connectivity through the development of inland waterways by discussing the existing legislative and governing mechanisms. The discussion would focus on the synergising three developmental pillars of regulatory reforms, legislative changes (required for managing waterways at a national and regional front) and capital investment (required to finance IW infrastructure, creation of economic zones along waterway routes, and related issues).
- **Promoting trade and transit through inland waterways:** Considering the unexplored benefits of cross border trade, this session will discuss the prospects of enhancing domestic, sub-regional and regional trade and transit through inland waterways by looking into the governance and regulatory framework and further exploring opportunities for aligning it with river-to-bay connectivity.
- **Fostering private sector participation to promote trade and tourism within and across borders:** This session will explore the opportunities of promoting different kinds of trade and tourism over inland waterways by engaging private sector and advocating an enabling environment for their participation.
- **Streamlining community and environmental concerns in inland waterways development discourse:** Given concerns of riverine-dependent livelihoods and ecological losses due to development of inland waterway navigation, this session will focus on issues and opportunities regarding livelihood generation of river dependent communities as well as environmental concerns by engaging civil society voices for inclusive and sustainable development of inland waterways in the BBIN sub-region.