

Creating an Enabling and Inclusive Policy and Political Economy Discourse for Trade, Transport and Transit Facilitation in and among Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Myanmar and Nepal

Facilitating implementation and stakeholder buy-in in the Bay of Bengal region

1. Background

1.1 South Asia's challenges to connectivity and integration has long been accepted as one of the biggest contributors to the sub-optimal utilisation of the region's economic potential. Though the countries in the region have been negotiating amongst themselves through the SAARC (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation) platform to reduce current physical and non-physical barriers to transportation and transit, the progress has been rather slow and costs of intra-regional movement of goods are increasingly becoming critical.

1.2 Cargo movement between countries in the region is mostly through trans-shipment arrangements at the border points. Issues like procedural delays, infrastructure bottlenecks (particularly parking and warehousing facilities and the security of the cargo in such facilities), corruption, governance issues, etc. further compound and complicate the scenario. It was with this backdrop that the Bangladesh-Bhutan-India-Nepal Motor Vehicles Agreement (BBIN MVA) was signed on June 15, 2015, by these four countries to facilitate trade and transit in the sub-region. Another similar tool for promoting connectivity, viz. India-Myanmar-Thailand (IMT) MVA is also being discussed at present.

1.3 Given this Background, CUTS and its country partners in Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal and Myanmar undertook a project to understand the policy, procedural and political-economy hurdles to trade, transport and transit facilitation regime between Eastern South Asia (comprising of the BBIN group of countries, viz. Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, and Nepal) and Myanmar, hinging on how facilitating such connectivity will have a direct/indirect impact on development parameters such as livelihoods, poverty and gender. The project is expected to facilitate trade and transit among the five countries by enabling the implementation of the BBIN Motor Vehicles Agreement (MVA) and such other enabling connectivity initiatives through evidence-based advocacy, facilitative dialogues, and capacity building.

2. National Policy Dialogue

2.1 Under the project, a National Policy Dialogue will be organised in each of the five countries to share draft research findings, key advocacy points and recommendations that emerge from the study. The National Policy Dialogue will be a one day event in each of the five focus countries and is aimed at bouncing off the research findings and recommendations at the national level, with policymakers, subject experts, academicians, private sector players, thinktanks and media.

2.2 The expected outcome from this event will be a collective action agenda for CUTS and its partners in their respective countries. It will also prepare the ground for a Regional Policy Dialogue that will be organised subsequently in New Delhi, India, to bring together findings and key advocacy messages from each of the five countries to deliberate on a regional action agenda and strategies as follow-up to the National Policy Dialogues in the respective countries.