

CUTS CITEE IN ACTION

JANUARY-MARCH 2020



NEW PROJECT

Enabling a Political Economy Discourse for Multi-modal Connectivity in the BBIN (Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal) Sub-region (M-Connect)

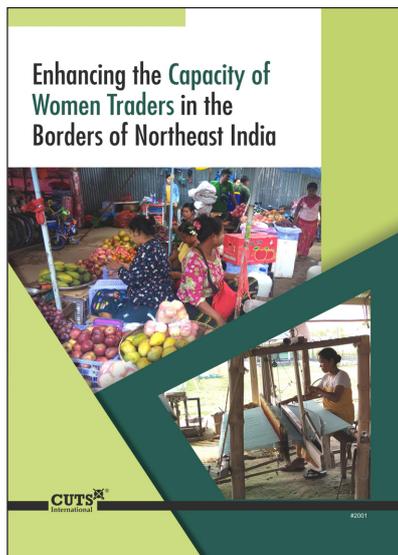
Objectives

- Addressing implementation challenges of the BBIN MVA
- Identification of gaps in infrastructure policy and regulations, which can pose hurdles to multi-modal connectivity in this sub-region
- Understanding the possible impact of multi-modal transport and transit facilitation on local economic development parameters with an emphasis on how it can enhance women's economic empowerment
- Identification of possible livelihood generation opportunities that can be gained through the development of regional/sub-regional/bilateral value chains and their facilitation through multi-modal connectivity
- Contribution towards formulating an inclusive transport and transit protocols for an effective multi-modal connectivity in this sub-region through a participatory approach
- Organising multi-level, multi-stakeholder advocacy and awareness generation to push for identified infrastructure development and policy, regulatory and procedural changes

Expected Outcomes

- Effective implementation of the BBIN MVA
- Comprehensive understanding of political economy challenges of initiating multi-modal connectivity initiatives in the BBIN sub-region.
- Identification of critical and prioritised infrastructure needs to enable multi-modal connectivity in the BBIN sub-region through linkages between and among roads, inland waterways including coastal shipping and railways
- Mapping of national and regional policies, regulations, existing/proposed protocols and trade/transport processes and practices with regard to transport and transit using multi-modal connectivity system
- Understanding of stakeholder concerns and benefits/costs of multi-modal connectivity initiatives, with a particular reference to local economic development parameters for better livelihood generations.

<https://cuts-citee.org/enabling-a-political-economy-discourse-for-multi-modal-connectivity-in-the-bbin-bangladesh-bhutan-india-nepal-sub-region/>



Enhancing the Capacity of Women Traders in the Borders of Northeast India

CUTS initiated a project to reach identify the challenges faced by women traders located in five of India's northeast states viz. Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya, Nagaland. The aim was not only to collect evidence and stories but also to build their capacity to conduct international trade and effectively utilise available schemes and opportunities.

This study reviewed various socio-economic challenges faced by women traders in the given locations, by surveying a number of women-led, managed and owned enterprises. Following that, training programmes on export procedures were organised in all five states. A national dissemination meeting and roundtable discussion led to the development of an action agenda for enhancing women's participation in trade operations.

<https://cuts-citee.org/pdf/enhancing-the-capacity-of-women-traders-in-the-borders-of-northeast-india.pdf>

Occasional News Wrap – #3/February 2020

RCEP Waiting at India's Doorsteps

India has thus far refrained from joining RCEP. Most recently, it rejected an invitation to attend the meeting of RCEP trade bloc on February 03-04, 2020 at Bangkok. New Delhi has made it clear that a call on returning to the RCEP depends on an indication from other participating nations that they are willing to consider some of the its key concerns. India has also indicated that a cost and benefit analysis (CBA) will be carried out to evaluate RCEP on its economic and trade merit.

Given India's firm stand, RCEP members, and China in particular, must genuinely review India's demands and make efforts to get it back in the RCEP fold. An India-less RCEP dominated by China, increasingly battling slowing economy and uncertain times, is much less attractive than one with India as a member.

<https://cuts-citee.org/pdf/onw-3-rcep.pdf>





PARTICIPATION

- Bipul Chatterjee attended the Eighth Foundation Day Celebrations of the Land Ports Authority of India, which was held at New Delhi on March 02, 2020. He spoke in a session titled '*Land ports infrastructure requirement and best practices*'. He also attended The Economic Times Global Business Summit, held at New Delhi on March 06-07, 2020.
- Saurabh Kumar participated in a Roundtable Consultation on 'Transboundary cooperation for Inclusive and Sustainable Development of Riparian Communities in Brahmaputra Basin' organised by Oxfam, India at Kokrajhar, Assam, India on February 24-25, 2020. He presented CUTS TROSA research findings on '*Regional Connectivity and Inclusive Trade: Opportunities for Riparian Communities in Brahmaputra Basin*'. The objective of the session was to Identify entry points to engage with National State and Bilateral Governments.
- Veena Vidyadharan participated in the Meghna Advisory Group meeting being organised by IUCN at Bangladesh, Dhaka on February 11-12, 2020. Meghna Advisory Group (MAG) is an informal technical group involving representatives nominated by governments, the academic sector and civil society organisation (CSOs) from Bangladesh and India to ensure the development of framework in the Meghna Basin in an inclusive manner. The purpose of the meeting was to present preliminary findings of the research on policy, land use and socio-ecological analysis in the Meghna basin and to provide inputs for the designing and facilitation of the Meghna Knowledge Forum.
- Muvafaq Sheeshaikh participated in the Inception Workshop on 'E-Commerce Capacity Building for Women-led MSMEs in South Asia' organised by UNESCAP at Thimphu, Bhutan on February 04-05, 2020. He spoke at the session titled '*Discussion on developing e-learning module*'.



IN MEDIA

Whither The Multilateral Trading System? Time to Reflect and Take Specific Actions

Modern Ghana, February 06, 2020, By Pradeep S. Mehta & Bipul Chatterjee

The WTO has three major functions and one of them is to ensure transparency in the system of governing the multilateral trading system as per its rules and regulations. This is done through various committees of the WTO. Unfortunately, over the years the functioning of these Committees has weakened, primarily because of an over-emphasis on the two other functions of the WTO, which are negotiations and dispute settlement.

Thus, the multilateral trading system under the aegis of the WTO is facing a number of challenges and they have to be addressed. This is not just for its full blooded revival but more importantly for highlighting its virtues of facilitating sustainable economic development including job creation as enshrined in its Preamble.

<https://cuts-citee.org/whither-the-multilateral-trading-system-time-to-reflect-and-take-specific-actions/>



Shaking hands with neighbours: Border Haats between India and Bangladesh

North East Now, February 09, 2020, By Bipul Chatterjee and Indranil Bose

Border Haats along the fringes of the Indo-Bangladesh border are rough and ready markets that have been established in order to enable local residents on both sides of the border to market and consume their 'local produce'. The idea of Border Haats was conceived by the Governments of India and Bangladesh with the aim of promoting the well-being of such marginalised people. Results are encouraging. People are happy.

People residing in the part of the Indian sub-continent that today comprise the territories of India and Bangladesh. They have shared languages and dialects, lifestyles and food habits, Gods and Goddesses and customs and traditions through history. After years of such togetherness and generations of co-existence, a fence ran through their lives splitting families and friends, relatives and neighbours.

<https://cuts-citee.org/shaking-hands-with-neighbours-border-haats-between-india-and-bangladesh/>

Time to Implement the BBIN Motor Vehicles Agreement

Economic Times, February 12, 2020, By Bipul Chatterjee and Arnab Ganguly

After a couple of years of lull, it was heartening to see that the governments of Bangladesh, Bhutan, India and Nepal (BBIN) discussed modalities for implementing the BBIN Motor Vehicles Agreement (MVA) for seamless passenger, personal and cargo movements. Due to some internal concerns, Bhutan decided to opt-out of the Agreement for the time-being but has offered its consent to the other three to go ahead. It must be thanked for its flexibility.

They met in New Delhi to discuss a draft enabling MoU among Bangladesh, India and Nepal for implementing the BBIN MVA, without obligation to Bhutan. This will usher in a new era of neighbourhood cooperation in this sub-region. They reaffirmed their understanding that the BBIN MVA safeguards the rights and obligations of all parties under other international agreements and bilateral agreements within the group.

<https://cuts-citee.org/time-to-implement-the-bbin-motor-vehicles-agreement/>

A US-India Trade Deal Can Only be Sealed if Both Move Past Clearly Defined Red Lines

The Wire, February 22, 2020, By Pradeep S. Mehta and Amol Kulkarni

The US President Donald Trump will shortly land in India on his first state visit. In the run-up to his visit, Trump has been his chaotic self. He has praised Prime Minister Narendra Modi, exuded excitement about being greeted by a large number of people, displayed hope of a very big trade deal in due course, complained about being treated unfairly by New Delhi and finally, unilaterally removed India from a list of developing countries.

Apparently, the trust factor is missing and that must be restored to enable both countries to become better friends than they are, as they need each other in this rapidly evolving geo-economic world.

<https://cuts-citee.org/a-us-india-trade-deal-can-only-be-sealed-if-both-move-past-clearly-defined-red-lines/>