

CUTS CITEE IN ACTION

APRIL-JUNE 2021



WEBINARS

Public Private Dialogue on India-Bangladesh Cross-border Tourism and Cruise Operations

CUTS International organised a webinar on ‘Public-Private Dialogue on India-Bangladesh Cross-border Tourism and Cruise Operations’ on April 29, 2021, which witnessed over 50 people from diverse backgrounds and expertise.

The speakers and moderators of the webinar were Bipul Chatterjee (Executive Director of CUTS International); Amita Prasad (Chairperson, Inland Waterways Authority of India); Commodore Golam Sadeq (Chairperson, Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority); Taufiq Rahman (Chief Executive, Journey Plus); Raj Singh (Director, M/S Heritage River Cruises Pvt. Ltd); Samudra Gupta Kashyap (State Information Commissioner, Government of Assam); Biswajit Chakrabarty (Director, North East Advisory Council, Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry); and Enamul Mazid Khan Siddique, Head of Climate Justice and Natural Resource Rights, Oxfam Bangladesh.

“Cross-border tourism and trade through transboundary rivers between India and Bangladesh is poised to play a significant role in the socio-economic development of local communities and environmental and cultural preservation in India and Bangladesh,” said Chatterjee.

Narrating the glory of northeast India, Kashyap said that most of the tourist and old cities in northeast India are on the river banks. He suggested creating a partnership with media and new-age travel writers who can write on various aspects of the Brahmaputra river and explore stories to promote river tourism. Furthermore, he emphasised exploring other minor transboundary rivers for tourism purposes.

<https://cuts-citee.org/public-private-dialogue-on-cross-border-tourism-cruise-operations-and-community-concerns-between-india-and-bangladesh/>





Cage Fish Farming: Prospects for Bilateral Cooperation between India and Bangladesh

CUTS International organised a webinar on ‘Cage Fish Farming: Prospects for Bilateral Cooperation between India and Bangladesh’ on June 30, 2021. This webinar was attended by more than 50 participants, including academicians, non-profits, civil societies, multilateral development banks, among others.

The speakers and moderators of the webinar were Veena Vidyadharan, Fellow, CUTS International; Jyotiraj Patra, Project Manager, Transboundary Rivers of South Asia (TROSA), Oxfam; Chandan Chettri, State Nodal Officer, Directorate of Fisheries, Government of Assam; Supratim Chowdhury, Associate Professor, West Bengal University of Animal & Fishery Sciences; Joydeep Gupta, South Asia Director, The Third Pole; Shanta Soheli Moyna, Project Officer, Centre for Natural Resource Studies, TROSA; Mohammed Mukteruzzaman, Senior Specialist, Center for Environmental & Geographic Information Services (CEGIS); Avinash Singh, Programme Quality and Learning Specialist – TROSA, Oxfam India



India and Bangladesh collaborate in research, share the success stories, policies and practices in cage fish farming followed in each country, said Vidyadharan. “We need to have inclusive policies to protect the rights of fisher folks who depend on common property resources for livelihoods.”

The study also highlighted that in cage fish production, the wastage of fish food is minimum and the feed is utilised only by the targeted variety of fish, which is being cultivated. Pangash, Kawai, Rohu, Katla, Java Chitol and Puti fishes are being cultivated under these projects.

<https://cuts-citee.org/webinar-on-cage-fish-farming-prospects-for-bilateral-cooperation-between-india-and-bangladesh/>



Engaging the Private Sector for Inclusive Cross-border Navigation and Trade in the Meghna River Basin

Meghna river basin is shared by Bangladesh and India and includes 29 transboundary rivers originating from India and flowing into Bangladesh. More than 50 million people depend on the ecosystem services provided by the Meghna river basin.

To support the identification of key knowledge gaps and the development of potential partnerships to address these gaps, a scientific symposium, the Meghna Knowledge Forum (MKF) was organised by International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), funded by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA) through the regional programme 'Transboundary Rivers of South Asia' (TROSA). CUTS International hosted a parallel side event as part of the Meghna Knowledge Forum Event on June 23, 2021.

The session moderated by Bipul Chatterjee, Executive Director, CUTS International, had the following panellists; Selima Ahmad, Member of Parliament, Bangladesh and President, Bangladesh Women Chamber of Commerce



and Industry; ML Debnath, President of Tripura Chamber of Commerce and Industry; Sujit Chakraborty, President of Centre for Aquatic Research and Environment and bureau chief of the Indo-Asian News Services; Syed Monowar Hussain, Former Director of the Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority.

Chatterjee said that a small volume of trade among local communities of both countries should be prioritised on the waterways. However, people are not aware of the exchange of products that will be of mutual benefit. An awareness of local trade will increase people-to-people connectivity.

Ahmad said, "We need to do dredging to increase the river's navigability as it is a barrier to discovering the prospects of waterways trade. Besides, access to travels has to be eased for the same purpose."

<https://www.tbsnews.net/bangladesh/transport/trade-potentials-meghna-basin-river-routes-mostly-unused-stakeholders-265300>



PUBLICATIONS

Occasional News Wraps

**WTO TRIPs | Waiver on COVID-19 vaccines:
Nobody is safe until everyone is safe**

A new COVID-19 variant is on an outbreak leading to a more deadly and infectious strain spreading around the globe. Millions are getting infected and dying every day. The need for affordable and accessible healthcare has become more crucial than last year. Even though eight vaccine candidates from around the world are made available in the market in less than one year of the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak, the world is still facing a shortage of medical supplies. To control the current situation, more than 70 per cent of the world population, i.e., 05 billion people, needs to be vaccinated against the novel coronavirus to develop herd immunity. With two doses each, this amounts to 10 billion doses of vaccines.

<https://cuts-citee.org/pdf/onw-2-wto.pdf>



**WTO TRIPs | Waiver on COVID-19 vaccines:
Promoting One World, One Health**

After the outbreak of new COVID-19 variants, which are more infectious and deadly, the world saw a catastrophic impact on developing countries like India. We witnessed the most unfortunate sight of people suffering due to inadequate supply of oxygen, ventilators, beds, medical staff and other medical equipment. Collapsing healthcare system brought out the vulnerabilities of low- and middle-income countries to this pandemic. The current situation has intensified scary prospects of future waves of the COVID and the only resort is vaccination. Despite eight vaccines worldwide in the market in less than one year of the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak, India is facing shortages and inequitable distribution of the vaccines.

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

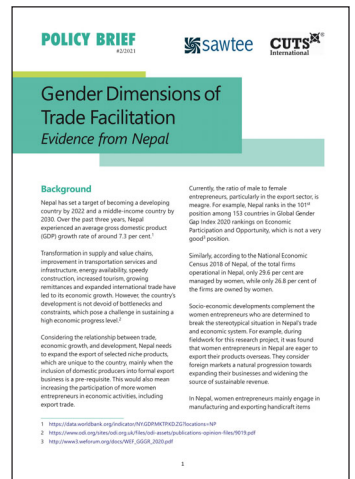
BRIEFS

**Gender Dimensions of Trade Facilitation
Evidence from Nepal**

In Nepal, women entrepreneurs mainly engage in manufacturing and exporting handicraft items such as pashmina, carpets, felt products, papers and items made from natural fibres, handbags and herbal-based beauty and skincare products. However, overall, women entrepreneurs' participation in international trade is limited. The reasons for not engaging in trade range from lack of understanding about global standards and quality, concentration on the domestic market, and lack of knowledge about foreign markets and buyers.

This Policy Brief suggests specific recommendations to benefit women entrepreneurs such as incorporating gender-specific components (schemes and incentives) in the trade policies, industrial, finance, and other economic policies, conducting awareness generation campaigns and capacity-building workshops for women entrepreneurs, gender-sensitive infrastructure and establishing business linkages.

<https://cuts-citee.org/pdf/policy-brief-gender-dimensions-of-trade-facilitation-evidence-from-nepal.pdf>





PUBLICATIONS

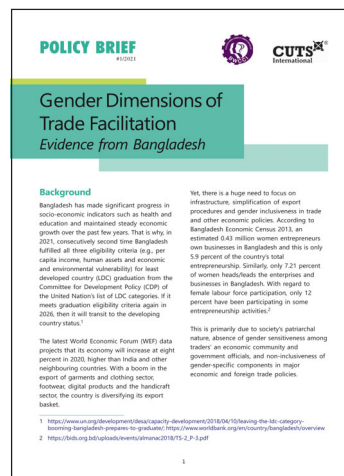
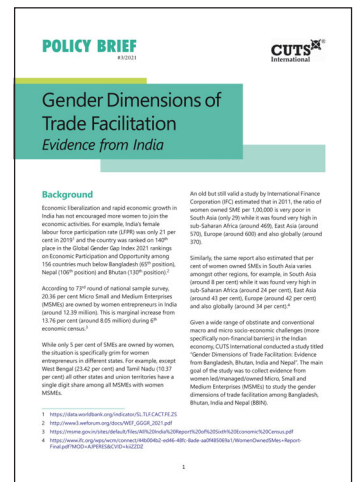
BRIEFS

Gender Dimensions of Trade Facilitation Evidence from India

Economic liberalisation and rapid economic growth in India has not encouraged more women to join the economic activities. For example, India's female labour force participation rate (LFPR) was only 21 per cent in 2019 and the country was ranked on 140th place in the Global Gender Gap Index 2021 rankings on Economic Participation and Opportunity among 156 countries much below Bangladesh (65th position), Nepal (106th position) and Bhutan (130th position).

This Policy Brief suggests specific recommendations to benefit women entrepreneurs such as enabling financial sector reforms, awareness generation and training programmes, women-centric policy initiatives and inclusive women entrepreneurship.

<https://cuts-citee.org/pdf/policy-brief-gender-dimensions-of-trade-facilitation-evidence-from-india.pdf>



Gender Dimensions of Trade Facilitation Evidence from Bangladesh

The socio-economic situations are changing for women entrepreneurs who are determined to break the stereotypical conditions in Bangladesh's economic system. Still, it is not easy, particularly for women exporters, to start, operate and expand a business in Bangladesh compared to women entrepreneurs of neighbouring countries, such as Nepal or Bhutan.

This Policy Brief suggests specific recommendations to benefit women entrepreneurs such as incorporating gender-specific components (schemes and incentives) in the trade policies, industrial, finance, and other economic policies, providing capacity building programmes for women entrepreneurs, implementing easy and accessible financial schemes for women including provisions for collateral-free loans and discounted interest rates, building gender-sensitive infrastructure and establishing business linkages.

<https://cuts-citee.org/pdf/policy-brief-gender-dimensions-of-trade-facilitation-evidence-from-bangladesh.pdf>

Strengthening Railway Networks in Northeast India A Key Driver to Deepen Sub-regional Connectivity and Trade

The Indian railways system has done an incredible job in connecting people and their lives. However, one region within India that has remained the least connected is Northeast India which includes eight states (Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim, Tripura). Lately, however, the government has taken several steps to create new and improve existing infrastructure in the Northeast Region. These include concerted efforts to boost air, road, rail, waterways, and telecom connectivity.

This Briefing Paper attempts to understand railways connectivity initiatives in Northeast India and their potential to foster connectivity, trade, and economic cooperation within and outside the region, particularly with Bangladesh, Bhutan, and Nepal.

<https://cuts-citee.org/pdf/briefing-paper-strengthening-railway-networks.pdf>





PUBLICATIONS

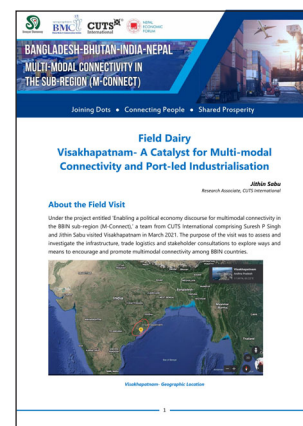
FIELD DIARIES

A series of Field Diaries were published under the project entitled, 'Enabling a political economy discourse for multimodal connectivity in the BBIN sub-region (M-Connect).' The project is implemented by CUTS International in partnership with Unnayan Shamannay, Bangladesh, Bhutan Media and Communications Institute and Nepal Economic Forum. It is supported by the United Kingdom's Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) under its Asia Regional Trade and Connectivity Programme. The Asian Development Bank is a knowledge partner.

Visakhapatnam: A Catalyst for Multi-modal Connectivity and Port-led Industrialisation

A team from CUTS International visited Visakhapatnam in March 2021. Their field diary discusses the role of Visakhapatnam in boosting the multimodal connectivity in the BBIN sub-region along with highlighting its case of port-led industrialisation. The diary looks into the facilities and prospects of Visakhapatnam Port, which is the second gateway port in India for Nepal bound cargo. It also explains the role of CONCOR in getting more Nepal bound cargo in Visakhapatnam than Kolkata-Haldia, despite double the distance. Apart from Visakhapatnam port, the diary covers the Gangavaram port, which is the deepest port in the country.

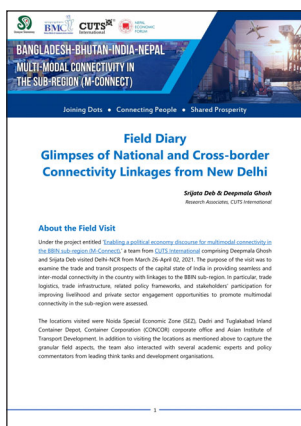
<https://cuts-citee.org/pdf/field-diary-visakhapatnam-a-catalyst-m-connect.pdf>



Glimpses of National and Cross-border Connectivity Linkages from New Delhi

A team from CUTS International visited New Delhi in March 2021. Their field diary discusses the role of the country's capital in boosting the multimodal connectivity in the BBIN sub-region. New Delhi, in particular, offers insight into initiatives that can potentially catalyse the development of the transportation and logistics landscape in the sub-region. The diary highlights several connectivity and livelihood initiatives like the Delhi-Mumbai Industrial Corridor and the emerging operations at Noida SEZ. It further underlines experts' comments and insights regarding cross-border trade, gender inclusivity and enhancing livelihoods in the sub-region.

<https://cuts-citee.org/pdf/field-diary-national-and-cross-border-connectivity-linkages-from-new-delhi-m-connect.pdf>



Matarbari Sea Port: Along the Asian Highway Corridor connecting East Asian Countries with South Asian Sub-region

A team from Unnayan Shamannay visited Matarbari, Dhalghata, Moheshkhali, Cox's Bazar, and Chattogram areas in February 2021. Their field diary assesses the current status of development of the Matarbari port areas and its surrounding hinterland connectivity situation in the context of multi-modal connectivity initiatives. The future potentials for connectivity in the regional landscape are also evaluated in the diary. The diary also reflects on the concerns of various stakeholders in the visited areas regarding the new development initiatives taking away their livelihood.

<https://cuts-citee.org/pdf/field-diary-matarbari-sea-port-m-connect.pdf>





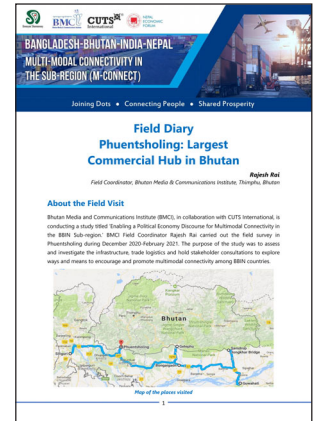
PUBLICATIONS

FIELD DIARIES

Phuentsholing: Largest Commercial Hub in Bhutan

A team from Bhutan Media & Communications Institute (BMCI) visited Phuentsholing. Their field diary assesses the current status of development of the Phuentsholing as a commercial hub and its connectivity to the strategic locations in Bhutan and the neighboring countries. It has been highlighted that the city suffers from inadequate and unutilised trade infrastructure which has dampened trade of agricultural goods, in particular. The diary further highlights the need to capacitate alternate entry points to the country and decongest Phuentsholing along with enhancing the market linkages to optimise trade and commerce with other BBIN countries.

<https://cuts-citee.org/pdf/field-diary-phuentsholing.pdf>



Mongla Sea Port: A Potential Maritime Access Point for Bhutan and Nepal

A team from Unnayan Shamannay visited the Mongla Sea Port. Their field diary is aimed at gathering valuable insights into the unique perspectives of the stakeholders and the on-ground development status of the trade and port infrastructure at Mongla. It additionally highlights the importance of maintaining an ecological balance near the Pasur river given the presence of Sunderbans in the region, alongside the emerging industries. Further, the diary discusses the significance of Mongla-Khulna connectivity and the perspectives of the relevant policymakers situated in Khulna regarding the Mongla sea port.

<https://cuts-citee.org/pdf/field-diary-mongla.pdf>

BBIN Motor Vehicles Agreement

Implementation Concerns and Available Safeguards

The BBIN Motor Vehicles Agreement is a milestone for these countries in the South Asia region. The Agreement was signed by the four countries in June 2015 to enable seamless movement of passenger and cargo vehicles across borders among them. It was also expected that the Agreement would bring the four countries closer and aid trade and economic integration.

For its implementation, the Agreement required its ratification by the parliaments of the four countries, followed by the signing of two protocols – one for passenger vehicles and another for cargo vehicles.

While the Agreement has been ratified by the three countries, namely Bangladesh, India and Nepal, Bhutan's Parliament withheld its ratification. However, the Government of Bhutan gave its consent for the implementation of the Agreement among the other three countries, with Bhutan to join at a later stage after due ratification by its Parliament.

A major issue that appears to adversely affect the implementation of the Agreement is perceived concerns of stakeholders, whose economic lives and activities are thought to be affected. In addition to some genuine concerns, there appears to be an inter-play of a number of other perceived issues, which are hampering its progress towards implementation – many of these could be misplanned as well – considering safeguards available in the BBIN MVA itself.

Therefore, the purpose of this document is to shed light on available safeguards in the BBIN MVA as against perceived concerns of relevant stakeholders.

<https://cuts-citee.org/pdf/mconnect-implementation-concerns-and-available-safeguards.pdf>





PARTICIPATION

- Bipul Chatterjee spoke at a Session on “Connectivity between India and Sri Lanka” organised by The Pathfinder Foundation and Vivekananda International Foundation on April 07, 2021. The webinar focused on enhancing the connectivity between Sri Lanka and India and identifying challenges and opportunities.
- Bipul Chatterjee moderated a webinar on “Technology and Innovation Report 2021, innovation with equity. The role of civil activism” organised by UNCTAD, CUTS International and The South Centre on April 08, 2021. The webinar served as a platform for discussing and disseminating inclusive innovation strategies that various organisations explore.
- Bipul Chatterjee moderated a Regional Consultation on “Indo-Bhutan–Bangladesh Consultation on Trade and Inland Waterways navigation in the Brahmaputra Basin,” organised by Oxfam India on April 12, 2021. The consultation focused on exploring navigation and trade opportunities in the Brahmaputra and Saralbhanga Basin to enable cooperation for transboundary stakeholders.
He also spoke at an Annual Reflection Forum on “Inclusive Water Governance for Resilient Recovery” organised by Oxfam on April 21, 2021. The forum aimed at fostering long-term engagement and synergies across various stakeholders and identifying ways for sustainability.
- Veena Vidyadharan and Deepmala Ghosh participated in the Kailash Cafe (a Consortium of Academics and Researchers in the Kailash Landscape for Experience sharing), organised by the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD), Kathmandu, from April 20-23, 2021. Vidyadharan delivered a presentation on ‘*Building the resilience of women traders in the Kailash Landscape*’ to highlight CUTS research findings in the Kailash Landscape.
- Veena Vidyadharan, Srijata Deb and Deepmala Ghosh participated in the Annual Learning Forum of the regional programme TROSA organised by Oxfam Novib during April 20-22, 2021 and shared the insights from CUTS work in the Brahmaputra and Meghna basins.
- Jithin Sabu attended a webinar entitled ‘Australia and India in China’s Indo-Pacific Strategy’ organised by Australia India Institute on May 31, 2021. The webinar discussed the response of India and Australia to China’s strong opposition to the use of the Indo-Pacific security concept by the US and its partners.
- Bipul Chatterjee participated in a meeting of Consultative Group for Northeast States Division for discussion on Tea, Tourism, Bamboo, Pisciculture and Dairy organised by NITI Aayog on June 28, 2021. The discussion was based on the application of new ideas and innovations in the areas mentioned above.
- Deepmala Ghosh and Srijata Deb participated in the Meghna Knowledge Forum of the regional programme TROSA organised by International Union for Conservation of Nature from June 22-24, 2021.
- Jithin Sabu attended the Digital Watch Internet Governance Briefing organised by the Diplo Foundation on June 29, 2021. It provided a round-up of policy updates, analysed by experts, including the Biden-Putin summit in Geneva, which signalled the start of a consultation process on cybersecurity; the G7 Summit, NATO Summit, and the EU-US Summit, all of which discussed digital policy, including frontier technologies, taxation, ransomware, e-trade, and data flows; and the second cyber OEWG’s organisational session, which mapped out its work for the upcoming five years.



Revive the defunct Mahishasan railway station in Assam's Karimganj

NorthEast Now, April 12, 2021 • Deepmala Ghosh and Jithin Sabu

The closure of the railway link between Mahishasan in Karimganj, Assam, India and Shahbajpur in Sylhet, Bangladesh, has taken away my hope to reunite with my family. When this link was functional, we could get to meet our families whenever required," expressed an old lady who runs a small shop adjacent to this railway station. It is a defunct railway transit point between India and Bangladesh along the erstwhile Chattogram-Lumding line. This station, along with the adjoining Kusiara River, can play an essential role in developing the north-eastern states of India and strengthening India's bilateral trade and transit connectivity with Bangladesh. That will help to generate new livelihood opportunities leading to a reduction in poverty.

<https://cuts-citee.org/revive-the-defunct-mahishasan-railway-station-in-assams-karimganj/>

Harnessing Inland Waterways for Inclusive Trade among Bay of Bengal Countries

Asia Pacific Bulletin, May 12, 2021 • Veena Vidyadharan

The transboundary rivers Ganges, Brahmaputra, and Meghna and their tributaries create a vibrant water grid connecting their riparian countries. Historically, these rivers have played a prominent role in shaping the economy of the Indian sub continent as a significant means of trade and transportation. In the post colonial era, new political boundaries between countries mostly cut off these riverine networks because the newly established countries and their governments prioritised developing road and rail networks for internal consolidation and integration more efficiently. Hence, waterways connectivity among new regional countries was comparatively neglected

<https://cuts-citee.org/pdf/article-harnessing-inland-waterways-for-inclusive-trade-may12-2021.pdf>

A connectivity game changer

World Commerce Review, June 22, 2021 • Arnab Ganguly and Jithin Sabu

The BBIN sub-region, comprising Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, and Nepal, is home to nearly 1.6 billion people with a combined gross domestic product (GDP) of US\$3.5tn. India and Bangladesh are the two largest economies, while Bhutan and Nepal are land-locked and are primarily dependent on India's road, rail and waterways for their third country exports and imports. Additionally, India enjoys a trade surplus with the rest of the countries in the BBIN sub-region, including Bangladesh. These countries are dependent on India to supply food grains and various essential agricultural products, among others.

<https://cuts-citee.org/pdf/article-a-connectivity-game-changer.pdf>