

CUTS CITEE IN ACTION

JULY-SEPTEMBER 2021



WEBINARS

Inclusion of Voices of Riparian Communities in Trans-boundary Rivers

An interactive session on 'Inclusion of Voices of Riparian Communities in Transboundary Rivers' was co-organised by CUTS International and Oxfam as part of a project entitled "Transboundary Rivers of South Asia." More than 50 high-profile dignitaries and stakeholders from around the world participated in the event. This webinar was being organised as a part of World Water Week 2021 titled "Building Resilience Faster".

The speakers and moderators of the webinar were Veena Vidyadharan, (Fellow, CUTS International); Archana Chatterjee, (Programme Manager, International Union for Conservation of Nature); Shanta Soheli Moyna, (Project Officer, Centre for Natural Resource Studies, Bangladesh); Atowar Rahman, (President, Dhubri Water Ways International Traders Association); Sharmila Khanam, (Deputy Director, Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority).

The webinar aimed to draw actionable messages from the discussion to enhance further collaboration between small traders, producers, women, local marginalised communities, fishermen and boatmen whose livelihood depends on transboundary rivers of India and Bangladesh, particularly in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The discussion highlighted the need for policies and projects that respect and protect the rights of riverine communities. Another suggestion was establishing river haats, similar to border haats, for enhanced livelihood generation in border areas regions. The speakers stressed the relevance of the Track 3 dialogue in addressing the concerns of the affected communities and its further contribution to the bilateral dialogues in the South Asian context.

<https://cuts-citee.org/inclusion-of-voices-of-riparian-communities-in-trans-boundary-rivers-at-world-water-week-2021/>





Knowledge Sharing for Inter-modal Connectivity in the BBIN Sub-region

The webinar was organised in relation to the Working Notes published by CUTS International as part of the Enabling a Political Economy Discourse for Multi-modal Connectivity in the BBIN Sub-region (M-Connect) project on September 01, 2021

The speakers and moderators of the webinar were Bipul Chatterjee (Executive Director, CUTS International); Dongxiang Li (Lead Regional Cooperation Specialist, South Asian Department, Asian Development Bank); and Gopal Krishna, (Former Shipping Secretary of India).



“The Bangladesh-Bhutan-India-Nepal (BBIN) sub-region should develop a cooperative approach for multi-modal connectivity, learning from successful sub-regional connectivity models of the world”, said Chatterjee. He said initiatives such as India’s upcoming national multi-modal connectivity plan would be crucial in boosting the competitiveness of the sub-region in terms of logistics performance.

The main challenge in implementing multi-modal connectivity projects arises at the local level. The issues are more concrete there and hence, there is a need to enhance soft infrastructure. Multilateral and international development institutions should contribute more to the soft infrastructure development, including regulatory reforms and capacity building in the sub-region, along with their significant and remarkable contribution to the hard infrastructure development.

<https://cuts-citee.org/webinar-on-knowledge-sharing-for-inter-modal-connectivity-in-the-bbin-sub-region/>



Promoting Cross-border Trade through Trans-boundary Waterways

CUTS International, in collaboration with Oxfam and the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI), organised this multi-stakeholder dialogue titled ‘Promoting Cross-border Trade through Trans-boundary Waterways between Bangladesh, Bhutan and India’ at Guwahati, Assam on September 29, 2021. The dialogue was attended by more than 50 high-profile dignitaries and stakeholders from Bangladesh, Bhutan and various parts of India.

The speakers and moderators of the webinar included Bipul Chatterjee (Executive Director, CUTS International); Biswajit Chakraborty (Director, North-East Advisory Council, Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry); Shah Mohammad Tanvir Monsur (Bangladesh Assistant High Commissioner, Guwahati, Assam); and Subimal Bhattacharjee (Director, Jookto), among others.

The dialogue highlighted the need for involving farmers, local traders, women, youth, non-government organisations and local indigenous communities in discussions on trade, navigation and cross-border transportation.

The project aims to reduce the poverty of marginalised and vulnerable river basin communities through increased access to and control over water resources, over which their livelihoods depend.





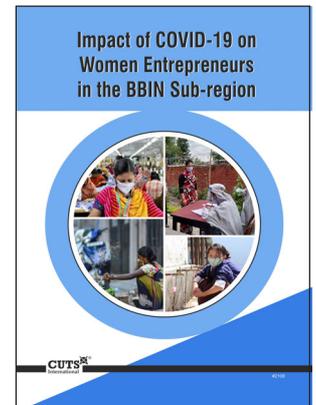
PUBLICATIONS

RESEARCH REPORT

Impact of COVID-19 on Women Entrepreneurs in the BBIN Sub-region

This report attempts to analyse the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on women entrepreneurs in the BBIN sub-region. It highlights the challenges women entrepreneurs faced during the COVID-19 pandemic and how it affected their businesses. Reduced demand, shortage of raw material, inability to meet the working costs and increased stress at home were cited by respondents across the sub-region. Also, the report underpins the emerging role of digital platforms sustaining businesses during the pandemic and its immediate aftermath.

<https://cuts-citee.org/pdf/impact-covid19-on-women-entrepreneures-in-bbin-sub-region.pdf>



RESEARCH REPORT

A Network of Multi-modal Logistics Parks in the BBIN Sub-region



Of late, governments of the BBIN countries have taken several initiatives to revamp the waterways routes and shift the traffic from road to water. Evidence suggests that using waterways as a mode of transportation is cheaper, greener and provides various other benefits when compared to other modes of transportation. It can also enhance the logistical competence of the region as a whole. This would, however, require establishing necessary infrastructure in the form of multi-modal logistics parks (MMLPs) with connectivity to different modes of transport to facilitate easier movement and transfer of freights from one mode to others, such as from roadways and railways to waterways, and vice versa.

This Discussion Paper explores the possibility of setting up a network of four interlinked MMLPs in the BBIN sub-region to enhance trade among the member countries through waterways. The authors have identified four locations, namely Jogighopa, Sahibganj, Tribeni (India) and Ashuganj (Bangladesh), taking into account their strategic location in the sub-region.

<https://cuts-citee.org/pdf/discussion-paper-a-network-of-multi-modal-logistics-parks-in-the-bbin-sub-region.pdf>

BRIEFS

Freight Digitalisation in India: Possible Way Forward



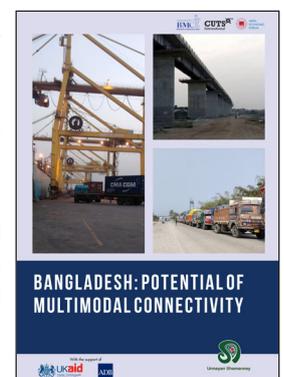
The digitalisation of logistics and supply chain management remains the final frontier for the heavy paper-driven road transport system. The government will build digital platforms and enable Indian startups to build user interfaces to provide hassle-free IT services to clients. A close and successful partnership between the government and the private sector software companies can go a long way towards the 'Digital India' mission.

<https://cuts-citee.org/pdf/briefing-paper-freight-digitalisation-in-india-possible-way-forward.pdf>

Bangladesh: Potential of Multi-modal Connectivity

Multimodal transport essentially facilitates door-to-door transport of goods. Bangladesh has immense potential to implement an efficient multimodal transport network thereby facilitating seamless transport of goods between suppliers and receivers. Bangladesh, following an export-led growth model, plans to become a developed nation by 2041 which will invariably strain the already under-pressure transport infrastructure. In light of the reality, multimodal transport system offers itself as potential model to enhance the efficiency of the transport network for Bangladesh by domestic, regional and international integration.

<https://cuts-citee.org/pdf/bangladesh-potential-of-multimodal-connectivity.pdf>





PUBLICATIONS

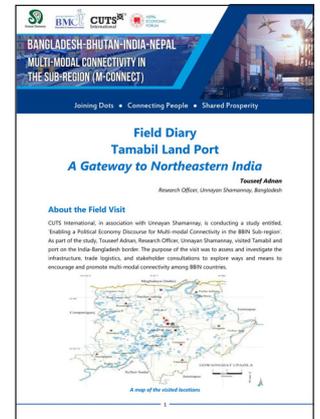
FIELD DIARIES

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).' CUTS International implemented this project 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.

Tamabil Land Port A Gateway to Northeastern India

Touseef Adnan, Research Officer, Unnayan Shamannay, visited Tamabil and port on the India-Bangladesh border as part of the study. The purpose of the visit was to assess and investigate the infrastructure, trade logistics, and stakeholder consultations to explore ways and means to encourage and promote multi-modal connectivity among Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal (BBIN) countries.

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



Ashuganj

A Strategic Location in Bangladesh for Trade and Transit

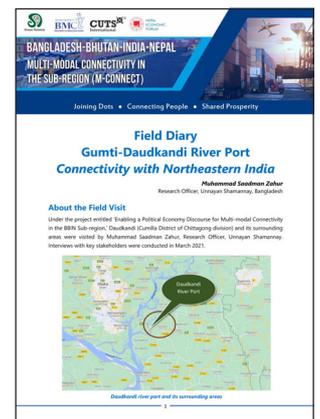
An officer from Unnayan Shamannay, Muhammad Saadman Zahur visited Ashuganj, Bhairab and Brahmanbaria in Dhaka and Chittagong division in March 2021. The purpose of the visit was to analyse and investigate the policy and protocols associated with the Inland Water Transport (IWT) through the Mongla-Ashuganj and Chittagong-Ashuganj route. In addition, the available infrastructure and trade logistics were studied, along with stakeholder consultations for finding ways to encourage and facilitate multi-modal connectivity among BBIn countries.

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

Gumti-Daudkandi River Port Connectivity with Northeastern India

Muhammad Saadman Zahur, Research Officer, Unnayan Shamannay visited Daudkandi and its surrounding areas in March 2021. The purpose was to investigate and analyse the policy and protocols associated with the Inland Water Transport (IWT) through the Mongla-Daudkandi and Chittagong-Daudkandi route along with any other probable route for trade and transport. The objective of the visit was also to analyse infrastructure and trade logistics and conduct stakeholder consultations to find ways to encourage and facilitate multi-modal connectivity between BBIN countries.

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





PUBLICATIONS

FIELD DIARIES

Banglabandha

A Dynamic Connectivity Hub in the BBIN Sub-region

A team from Unnayan Shamannay visited Panchagarh Town, Banglabandha, and adjacent locations in March 2021. The purpose of the visit was to assess and investigate the infrastructure and trade logistics and do stakeholder consultations to explore ways and means to encourage and promote multi-modal connectivity in the BBIN sub-region.

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



Chattogram Port

Transition from National to Regional Transportation Hub

A team from Unnayan Shamannay visited Chattogram port and other critical infrastructure in the port city of Bangladesh. The purpose of the visit was to understand policy, planning, and infrastructure related to connectivity that facilitates trade and commerce at Chattogram. With nearly 90 per cent of Bangladesh's trade taking place through Chattogram Port, it can be considered the maritime gateway of Bangladesh. Thus, it is poised to play an essential role in any multimodal connectivity initiative in BBIN sub-region.

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

Muktarpur Port

First Private Inland Container Terminal in Bangladesh

A minor field visit was undertaken at Inland Container Terminal in Muktarpur, run by Summit Alliance Port Limited (SAPL) and nearby areas. The purpose was to visit Muktarpur River Port, a private river port that is an extended port of call between Bangladesh and India. SAPL is a Bangladeshi company that provides off-dock services. In addition to its facilities in the Chattogram Port, it also has a river terminal situated on the bank of Dhaleshwari River in Muktarpur in Munshiganj. SAPL also operates and manages three river terminals in India as well.

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





PUBLICATIONS

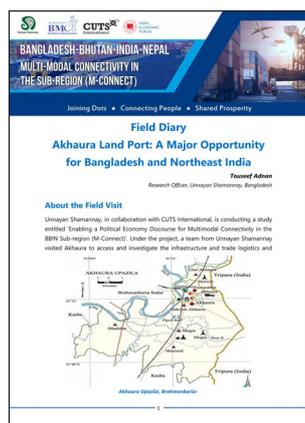
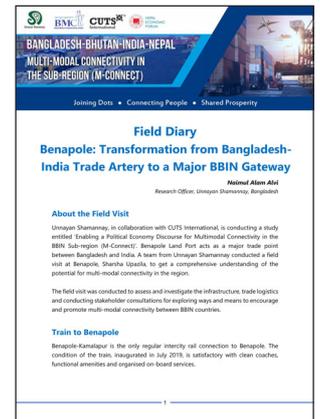
FIELD DIARIES

Benapole

Transformation from Bangladesh-India Trade Artery to a Major BBIN Gateway

A team from Unnayan Shamannay conducted a field visit at Benapole, Sharsha Upazila, to get a comprehensive understanding of the potential for multi-modal connectivity in the region. The field visit was conducted to assess and investigate the infrastructure, trade logistics and conducting stakeholder consultations for exploring ways and means to encourage and promote multi-modal connectivity between BBIN countries.

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



Akhaura Land Port

A Major Opportunity for Bangladesh and Northeast India

A team from Unnayan Shamannay visited Akhaura to access and investigate the infrastructure and trade logistics and Akhaura Upazila, Brahmanbaria- 2 conduct stakeholder consultation to explore ways and means to encourage and promote multi-modal connectivity in the BBIN sub-region. Akhaura is an Upazilla of Brahmanbaria district under the Chittagong division in the east of Dhaka and it is the adjoining area to the North Eastern Indian State Tripura. Trade and passenger transit occurs through the Akhaura-Agartala check post.

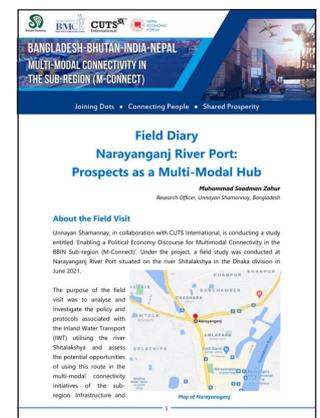
<https://cuts-citee.org/pdf/field-diary-akhaura-land-port.pdf>

Narayanganj River Port

Prospects as a Multi-Modal Hub

A field study was conducted at Narayanganj River Port situated on the river Shitalakshya in the Dhaka division in June 2021. The purpose of the field visit was to analyse and investigate the policy and protocols associated with the Inland Water Transport utilising the river Shitalakshya and assess the potential opportunities of using this route in the multi-modal connectivity initiatives of the subregion. Infrastructure and Map of Narayanganj 2 trade logistics were studied, while stakeholder consultations were conducted to encourage and facilitate multi-modal connectivity between BBIN countries.

<https://cuts-citee.org/pdf/field-diary-narayanganj-river-port.pdf>





PARTICIPATION

- Jithin Sabu attended a webinar entitled 'India and the World Webinar Series | Book Talk - India and Asian Geopolitics: The Past, Present by Shivshankar Menon', organised by Carnegie India on July 08, 2021. He also attended a webinar entitled 'Book Talk - The Long Game: How the Chinese Negotiate with India by Vijay Gokhale' organised by Carnegie India on July 28, 2021.
- Bipul Chatterjee spoke at a seminar on 'The Importance of the Integrated Check Posts for India's Cross-border Trade with its Neighbouring Countries' organised by the Land Ports Authority of India on August 04, 2021. He also delivered an address on 'Multi-Model Connectivity with India's Neighbour: Developments in East and Northeast India' organised by the Atal Bihari Vajpayee Institute of Policy Research and International Studies, The Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda, Vadodara on August 06, 2021.
- Bipul Chatterjee spoke at the National Stakeholder Consultation on 'Common Country Analysis: Leveraging Evidence-Based Policy Research for the Sustainable Developments Goals in India' organised by the South and South-West Asia Office of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP) on August 16, 2021. He also spoke at a virtual panel discussion on 'Agri-financing for Farmer-Producer Organisations: Challenges and Opportunities' organised by The Lucknow Management Association in collaboration with AWOKE India on August 16, 2021.
- Deepmala Ghosh attended the Bangladesh National Reference Group (NRG) Meeting organised by Unnayan Shamannay on August 17, 2021.
- Jithin Sabu attended a webinar titled 'A New Cold War: Henry Kissinger and the Rise of China' organised by the Institute of South Asian Studies, NUS, on August 25, 2021.
- Deepmala Ghosh and Swati Verma attended the Bhutan NRG Meeting organised by Bhutan Media and Communications Institute on August 31, 2021.
- Bipul Chatterjee spoke on perspectives of sustainable development at a session on 'Trade in Times of Crisis' organised by the UNESCAP as part of the WTO Public Forum 2021 on September 29, 2021.
- Deepmala Ghosh, Swati Verma and Yatika Agarwal attended the Nepal NRG Meeting organised by Nepal Economic Forum on September 07, 2021.
- Swati Verma and Yatika Agarwal attended a webinar entitled 'Non-Tariff Measures' Impacts', organised by UNCTAD, on September 07, 2021. The discussion was based on understanding the uses and implications of NTMs to formulate effective development strategies to meet the Sustainable Development Goals.
- Swati Verma attended a webinar entitled 'India and Bangladesh: Re-imagining a Connected Destiny', organised by Ananta Centre under their 'The Ambassador Series' on September 07, 2021. The webinar discussed opportunities for Indian stakeholders to engage extensively with Bangladesh through investment, trade, and economic relationships.
- Deepmala Ghosh, Swati Verma and Yatika Agarwal attended a webinar entitled 'Training on Blog and Success Story Writing', organised by Oxfam on September 09, 2021. The webinar provided guidelines and tips for a successful blog and field report writing.
- Jithin Sabu attended a webinar entitled 'Implications of CAATSA on US-India Relations' organised by the US-India Strategic Partnership Forum on September 16, 2021.
- Yatika Agrawal attended a webinar entitled 'Sambandh as Strategy: Regional Connectivity and India's Neighbourhood First Policy', organised by the Atal Bihari Vajpayee Institute of Policy Research and International Studies, The Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda, Vadodara, on September 17, 2021. The discussion was based on the key findings of Sambandh initiatives on regional connectivity. It examined the political security and economic relations of India with its neighbouring countries.
- Veena Vidyadharan, Saurabh Kumar, Jithin Sabu, Swati, Yatika Agrawal and Md Quaiser Ali attended various sessions at WTO Public Forum 2021 during September 30-October 01, 2021.



Indian defence sector waking up to the call of hour

Economic Times, July 15, 2021 • Pradeep S. Mehta and Jithin Sabu

If Atmanirbharta has to be promoted, it should not distinguish between the public and private sectors. Both will create jobs and also pay taxes to the treasury. The government must maintain competitive neutrality so that the whole defence industry prospers competitively. With the recent cabinet approval for corporatisation of the Ordnance Factory Board (OFB), the defence sector in India is moving forward in the right direction with much-needed reforms, which should have been initiated decades before... India should be aware that its adversaries are constantly upgrading their military arsenal with advanced technologies such as the modern hunter-killer tanks, posing a significant threat to India.

<https://cuts-citee.org/indian-defence-sector-waking-up-to-the-call-of-hour/>

Behavioural Economics of Trade by the Himalayan Mountain Women

NorthEast Now, August 05, 2021 • Apoorva Lalwani and Veena Vidyadharan

Mountain societies are one of the most isolated ones. Inaccessibility to remote and rugged locations is a key feature. This has led mountain people to be one of the most deprived sections of our society. The Hindu Kush Himalayan (HKH) region is no exception and faces the brunt of climate crises. The HKH region embraces four trans-boundary landscapes (Kailash Sacred Landscape, Kangchenjunga Landscape, Pamir Karakoram Landscape and Far-Eastern Himalayan Landscape) and eight countries (Bhutan, India, China, Nepal, Myanmar, Afghanistan, Pakistan and Tajikistan). These four landscapes have some common attributes. Historically, mountain people have remained marginalised politically, economically, and socially compared to those in the main lowlands. Furthermore, the mountain areas show similar resource management patterns, use of production factors, and even social organisation.

<https://cuts-citee.org/behavioral-economics-of-trade-by-the-himalayan-mountain-women/>

Vaccination without discrimination: Equitable access now, for equal opportunities later

Economic Times, August 17, 2021 • Pradeep S. Mehta and Advaiyot Sharma

In the first half of this year, trade restrictions on vaccine raw materials and their consequent impact on vaccine production dominated news headlines. Now, the second half of the year is poised to see the vaccination status of individuals and its associated consequences — vaccine certificates/passports — as a crucial factor in the discussions on the revival of trade, travel and tourism. This comes with its own set of challenges. Given the scale of the pandemic and a global vaccination programme that is expected to stretch for a couple of years, India should formulate a coherent position on issues surrounding vaccine certificates, considering all the legal, policy and ethical aspects involved.

<https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/economy/foreign-trade/vaccination-without-discrimination-equitable-access-now-for-equal-opportunities-later/articleshow/85390766.cms>

A blue MMLP Quadrilateral in the BBIN sub-region

India Narrative, August 26, 2021 • Kajal Sharda and Deepankar Sinha

A number of freight quadrilaterals/initiatives connecting major economic centres of India, viz. 'Golden Quadrilateral', a network of upgraded highways, 'Diamond Quadrilateral', a network of high-speed railways, the dedicated railway freight corridors, the Sagarmala project for boosting coastal shipping, etc. have primarily optimised transportation planning in the country. Now, the system demands similar networks connecting economic and logistic hubs facilitating domestic and global trade. India proposes a Multi-modal Logistics Parks (MMLPs) grid to cater to this need. The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs had mandated the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways to develop 35 MMLPs across India as a part of the 'Bharatmala Pariyojana'. The locations are envisioned at and near various economic hubs such as Chennai, Bangalore, Indore, Pune, and Ahmedabad.

<https://cuts-citee.org/a-blue-mmlp-quadrilateral-in-the-bbin-sub-region/>