

CUTS CITEE IN ACTION

OCTOBER-DECEMBER 2021



WEBINAR

Time to Agree, Not disagree: Imperative of Reforming the WTO's Appellate Body

CUTS organised a session on “Time to Agree, Not disagree: Imperative of Reforming the WTO's Appellate Body” at the WTO Public Forum 2021 on October 01, 2021.

The COVID-19 pandemic and its aftermath are expected to damage the existing geopolitical and geo-economic equilibrium further. Given this situation, it is more critical for the global trade governing body to become more functional by making its dispute settlement system effective again. There is a need to go to the root cause of why the US has expressed its displeasure at various junctures on account of long delays, including interpretations of various provisions of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) agreements by its Appellate Body.

This has challenged the functioning of the rules-based multilateral trading system and raised questions concerning the relevance of other multilateral institutions in the current geopolitical environment. The responsibility of strengthening the multilateral trading system lies with the member countries. There is no alternative but to reform the WTO's dispute settlement system to rebuild a modern and dynamic WTO.

The resurrection of the Appellate Body of the WTO lacks political will or action, creating shaky ground for international trade, Pradeep S Mehta, CUTS International Secretary-General said while moderating a session at the WTO platform in Geneva.

<https://cuts-citee.org/cuts-session-at-the-wto-public-forum-2021time-to-agree-not-disagree/>





Waterways to Boost India-Bangladesh Ties

This dialogue titled “Promoting Cross-border Tourism in India and Bangladesh through Transboundary Waterways” was organised by CUTS International in collaboration with Oxfam and the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) at Guwahati, Assam, India, on October 29, 2021. The dialogue was attended by more than 30 high-profile dignitaries and stakeholders from Bangladesh, Bhutan, and various parts of India.

As discussed by experts, there is a strong need to connect and acknowledge the potential benefits of cross-border tourism and cruise operations between India and Bangladesh.

Transboundary-river-based trade, tourism, and cruise operations between India and Bangladesh have an immense scope of the region’s economic, social, and cultural prospects. The signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) and a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for the movement of small boats and cruise vessels on the routes of Protocol on Inland Water Transit and Trade (PIWTT) have made some traction in these regions.

<https://cuts-citee.org/public-private-dialogue-on-promoting-cross-border-tourism-in-india-and-bangladesh/>





Enhancing Multimodal Connectivity in the BBIN Sub-region

National Advocacy Meetings in Nepal and Bhutan were held as part of the Enabling a Political Economy Discourse for Multi-modal Connectivity in the BBIN Sub-region (M-Connect) project.

National Advocacy Meeting, Nepal

In association with CUTS International, Nepal Economic Forum (NEF) organised the Nepal National Advocacy Dialogue at Kathmandu, Nepal, on November 18, 2021. This was a hybrid event, where participants and speakers from Nepal were physically present while representatives from partner organisations outside Nepal joined virtually through Zoom. The event was chaired and moderated by Sujeev Shakya, Chairperson of the Nepal Economic Forum (NEF).

The dialogue agenda included a welcome note by Shakya, followed by the opening remarks by Suresh P. Singh, a fellow at CUTS international. Raju Tuladhar, Project Coordinator, NEF, presented the study's key findings and critical observations.

Singh said that the BBIN initiative would integrate trade and build people-to-people connectivity while opening economic and livelihood opportunities for the people, particularly in the trade corridors, and fostering economic development in infrastructure, social development, and value creation.

<https://cuts-citee.org/national-advocacy-meeting-nepal/>



National Advocacy Meeting, Bhutan

With support from CUTS International, Bhutan Media and Communications Institute (BMCI) organised the Bhutan National Advocacy Meeting “Enabling Political Economy Discourse on Multimodal Connectivity in the BBIN Sub-region” at Thimphu, Bhutan on December 10, 2021.

The dialogue was attended by relevant officials from different government agencies, the private sector and civil society organisations. His Excellency, Loknath Sharma, Honourable Minister for Ministry of Economic Affairs, chaired the meeting. He stated that seamless transport is critical to achieving higher trade. For this purpose, development and promoting multimodal transport, railways, and inland waterways are essential for cross-border connectivity within the sub-region. Shiva Chhetri of BMCI presented the study's key findings undertaken under the M-Connect project.

Sithar Dorji, Chief Transport Officer, Road Safety & Transport Authority, Ministry of Information & Communications, briefed on Bhutan's transport vision. The panel discussion was followed by an interactive session wherein participants had a fruitful discussion on various aspects of trade and connectivity.

<https://cuts-citee.org/national-advocacy-meeting-bhutan/>



Cage Fish Farming in India and Bangladesh Prospects for Bilateral Cooperation

This Policy Brief analyses the evidence regarding the potentials of enclosed fish culture amongst the local communities of India (particularly the Assam region) and Bangladesh through its cross-border trade prospects. It proposes recommendations to enhance the arena's opportunities and promote the empowerment of local indigenous communities, including youth and women.

<https://cuts-citee.org/pdf/policy-brief-cage-fish-farming.pdf>



Facilitating Cross Border Paperless Trade Benefits of Cooperation for BBIN Countries

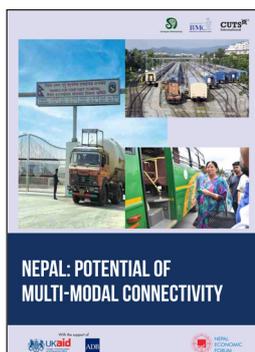
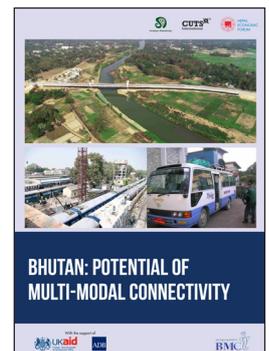
This Briefing Paper examines the benefits which Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal (BBIN) as a subregional group will achieve after joining the Cross-border Paperless Trade in Asia and the Pacific (CPTA). The paper finds that by joining the CPTA, BBIN countries will have enhanced opportunities for their trade integration and improve their competitiveness with reduced trade costs. When bundled together with the Trade Facilitation Agreement of the WTO and BBIN Motor Vehicles Act, it is evident that this CPTA will make the movement of goods from one BBIN member to another more seamless.

<https://cuts-citee.org/pdf/bp-facilitating-cross-border-paperless-trade.pdf>

Bhutan: Potential of Multi-modal Connectivity

Bhutan Media and Communications Institute, in association with CUTS International, India, Nepal Economic Forum, Nepal and Unnayan Shamannay, Bangladesh, has undertaken research entitled 'Enabling a Political Economy Discourse for Multimodal Connectivity in the BBIN Sub-region (M-Connect)' supported by Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) of the United Kingdom and Asian Development Bank as Knowledge Partner, to understand the challenges and opportunities for the development of multimodal transport network in Bhutan. This Policy Brief captures the findings of the research conducted under the project in Bhutan.

<https://cuts-citee.org/pdf/bhutan-potential-of-multi-modal-connectivity.pdf>



Nepal: Potential of Multi-modal Connectivity

Nepal Economic Forum, Nepal, in association with CUTS International, India, Unnayan Shamannay, Bangladesh and Bhutan Media and Communication Institute, Bhutan has undertaken research entitled 'Enabling a Political Economy Discourse for Multi-modal Connectivity in the BBIN Sub-region (M-Connect).' The project is supported by the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO), The UK and Asian Development Bank as a knowledge partner to understand the challenges and opportunities of establishing an efficient multi-modal transport network in Nepal. This Policy Brief captures the findings of the research conducted under the project in Nepal.

<https://cuts-citee.org/pdf/nepal-potential-of-multi-modal-connectivity.pdf>



PARTICIPATION

- Pradeep S Mehta spoke at the CUTS International Session “Time to Agree, Not Disagree: Imperative of Reforming the WTO’s Appellate Body” at the WTO Public Forum 2021” on October 01, 2021. This session examined the imperative of reforming the WTO’s Appellate Body as it is almost two years since it has ceased to function.
- Swati Verma and Yatika Agrawal attended an online training, titled “Online training on expanding online business through e-commerce and digital marketing”, organised by United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UN ESCAP) from October 04-06, 2021.
- Bipul Chatterjee spoke at a Plenary Session on “The EU’s Foreign Trade Policy”, as part of World Trade Forum 2021, whose theme was “Digital, Green and Open? Global Trade Policy at a Crossroads.” It was organised by the European University Institute, Florence, and the World Trade Institute, Berne, on October 14-15, 2021.
- Swati Verma, Yatika Agrawal and Md. Quaisar Ali attended several sessions at UNCTAD’s 7th Edition of the World Investment Forum 2021 during October 18-22, 2021.
- Swati Verma and Yatika Agrawal attended Nepal Advocacy Meeting on November 18, 2021. The webinar disseminated the findings and observations gathered through fieldwork and consultations with stakeholders, focusing on the current status of transport infrastructure, existing gaps, and the need for policy and other interventions in Nepal.
- Yatika Agrawal and Md. Quaisar Ali attended an “Australia-India Free Trade Agreement Conference” organised by the Centre for International Trade and Investment Law, India, on November 23-24, 2021.
- Bipul Chatterjee participated in the “Fifth Annual Summit of the Global Trade and Innovation Policy Alliance” led by the Information Technology and Innovation Foundation at Washington DC on December 02, 2021. He spoke at a panel on “Future of Trade and the WTO.”
- Pradeep S Mehta spoke at the CUTS-IIS Joint Session In Trade + Sustainability Hub, “Resilient and Sustainable Supply Chains: Role of Efficient Connectivity and Trade Facilitation Measures for Food and Nutrition Security in the BBIN Sub-region” on December 03, 2021. This session focussed on the best trade facilitation measures to develop a robust system for seamless cross-border movement of goods and services.
- Swati Verma and Md. Quaisar Ali attended a webinar entitled “Resilient and Sustainable Supply Chains: Role of Efficient Connectivity and Trade Facilitation Measures for Food and Nutrition Security in the BBIN Sub-region”, on December 03, 2021.
- Veena Vidyadharan and Saurabh Kumar participated in TROSA India Partners’ Meeting organised by Oxfam at Kolkata on December 06-07, 2021. The objective of the meeting was to provide an opportunity for partners to come together to share key progress, learnings, opportunities and ideas for programme sustainability.
- Deepak Kumar attended a National Workshop on “Next Phase of Reforms for Reducing Compliance Burden” at Dr. Ambedkar International Centre, New Delhi, on December 22, 2021.
- Swati Verma attended an online training entitled “Bay of Bengal Regional Trade and Connectivity Capacity Building Programme for India”, organised by South Asian Network on Economic Modelling (SANEM) in collaboration with US Agency for International Development (USAID). The training discussed the pilot module on trade policy and trade analysis skills.



GatiShakti master plan– the pathway to a \$5 trillion economy

India Narrative, October 19, 2021 • Bipul Chatterjee and Yatika Agrawal

The foundation of a country's economic progress depends on effective, efficient, safe, and accessible logistics. For India, it is essential to focus on the logistics sector to propel its economic growth for achieving its aspiration to become a \$ 5 trillion economy over the next few years. There is a strong need to formalise, standardise, modernise, and democratise the logistics sector to achieve better results.

With the GatiShakti National Master Plan launched on October 13, 2021, by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, India's slowing economic growth will find renewed momentum (Gati) through major infrastructure upgrades that will reduce logistics costs, increase cargo handling capacity, reduce the turnaround time, and raise the overall efficiency.

<https://cuts-citee.org/gatishakti-master-plan-the-pathway-to-a-5-trillion-economy/>

Is India recalibrating its approach towards FTA negotiations?

Economic Times, November 09, 2021 • Pradeep S. Mehta and Advaiyot Sharma

Early signs are that India may be recalibrating its approach towards PTA negotiations. The direction in which its trade policy tilts will determine the success of India's plans for export-led economic growth. It will also influence India's positions on emerging global trade issues.

India has recently reaffirmed its commitment to trade multilateralism with the World Trade Organisation (WTO) at its centre. Parallely, India has renewed its Preferential Trade Agreement (PTA) negotiations with many countries with vigour. While it has maintained certain long-held positions at the WTO, there are early signs that India may be recalibrating its approach towards PTA negotiations.

<https://cuts-citee.org/is-india-recalibrating-its-approach-towards-fta-negotiations/>

Time to address local fears and concerns to connect the Bay of Bengal community

India Narrative, November 11, 2021 • Suresh P Singh and Swati Verma

In any discourse on regional integration in South Asia, one is bound to hear a cliché – in terms of intra-regional trade, South Asia is the least integrated region globally. Indeed, intra-regional trade in South Asia is just about US\$ 23 billion, which is about five percent of the total trade of the eight-country group.

However, is it true that the region is least integrated just because of this low volume of intra-regional trade? According to a 2018 World Bank publication 'A Glass Half Full: The Promise of Regional Trade in South Asia', potential intra-regional trade in South Asia is US\$ 65 billion, of which normalisation of India-Pakistan bilateral trade would account for about US\$ 43 billion.

<https://cuts-citee.org/time-to-address-local-fears-and-concerns-to-connect-the-bay-of-bengal-community/>

Arriving at an equitable response to the pandemic

Economic Times, December 10, 2021 • Pradeep S. Mehta and Sneha Singh

World Trade Organisation (WTO) had been gearing up for its 12th Ministerial Conference (MC12) in Geneva end of November. In a cruel twist of fate, the outbreak of a particularly transmissible strain of the COVID-19 virus led to its postponement and put a dampener on WTO's much-awaited response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The hope was that the MC12 would follow the precedence set by the Ministerial Decision on public health in 2001 at Doha (Doha Declaration on TRIPs and Public Health).

The Doha Declaration on TRIPs and public health clarified pre-existing flexibilities in the Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPs). It also waived those obligations that prevented the export of life-saving drugs produced under compulsory licenses to countries without adequate manufacturing capacity.

<https://cuts-citee.org/arriving-at-an-equitable-response-to-the-pandemic/>