

**Event Report of the Project Launch Meeting on
'Expanding Tradable Benefits of Transboundary Water:
Promoting Navigational Usage of Inland Waterways in Ganga
and Brahmaputra Basins'**



(Participants at the interactive workshop at Hotel Lily, Guwahati on 24th October, 2016)

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Background

1. The launch meeting for the project titled 'Expanding tradable benefits of transboundary water: Promoting navigational usage of inland waterways in Ganga and Brahmaputra basins' (IW Project) was organised at Hotel Lily in Guwahati on 24th October 2016 by CUTS International.
2. The objective of the meeting was:
 - Discussion and validation of activities, outputs and desired/expected outcomes
 - Explore possible collaborations with other Civil Society Fund (CSF) partners

3. The project supported by The Asia Foundation (TAF) and implemented by CUTS International in India with the cooperation of Unnayan Shamannay (US) in Bangladesh, Royal Society for Protection of Nature (RSPN) in Bhutan, South Asia Watch on Trade, Economics and Environment (SAWTEE) in Nepal. The project aims to create an alternative discourse between policy-makers, civil society, and communities for enabling reform measures and better governance of inland waterways; and share knowledge between governments and CSOs on governance of inland waterways.



4. The event had participation from around 30 key stakeholders from Bangladesh, Bhutan, India and Nepal comprising of representatives from government departments related to inland water transport, trade groups, universities and research institutions, subject-matter experts, civil society organisations (CSOs) and media working on issues related to river and water-borne transportation.

Inaugural session

5. Bipul Chatterjee gave the welcome remarks and mentioned the navigational, traditional and transboundary and political aspects of inland waterways navigation in the BBIN¹ region. He stressed on the importance of water sharing for the purpose

¹ Bangladesh, Bhutan, Indian and Nepal

of connectivity among these countries. He also talked about the governance aspect of waterways in Ganga and Brahmaputra to understand connectivity issues.

6. Aditya V. Pillai elaborated that the Civil Society Fund (CSF) of The Asia Foundation (TAF) aims to focus on the issues related to transboundary water management, actors and water cooperation. The main goal is also to bring community views on these issues and incorporate the perspectives of inland water trade and communities.

7. Arup Kumar Dutta said that rivers in the ancient time have shaped the cultural aspects of the Brahmaputra valley. The Brahmaputra-Ganga route acted as a natural highway between the Indian mainland and China and South East Asia. This link was also used by merchants for trade to other South Asian countries such as to Sri Lanka. British government also used steamer services for their tea empire expansion. But currently, Brahmaputra and use of inland waterways has been neglected. To revive this route, a psychological renovation is required. For the development of the North East region, development and connectivity through inland waterways is also important.

The keys to rejuvenation of this region also lie in restoring the severed water communication link through Bangladesh as well as creating scope for greater and more suitable use of the Brahmaputra and its



tributaries for commerce and communication. He further said that there are projects ongoing to construct a trilateral highway connecting India, Myanmar and Thailand and a great Asian highway linking SAARC and ASEAN. These would provide the connectivity which is essential for creating development opportunities for the North East.

8. Bharat Bhushan Dev Choudhury said that recently World Bank has given a loan of 150 million USD to develop inland waterways transportation. He suggested that along with cargo transportation, ferry and cruise services should also be digitized. He cited the example of famous poet and singer Bhupen Hazarika whose songs are about rivers and their relevance.

He also said that, at the moment it is difficult to find experts in the North East on inland waterway transport. Assam state has a rudimentary form of inland waterways transport where connectivity has been a challenge that leads to

inequality – no fixed terminals, weak river banks, no night navigation, and out-of-date vessels.

The inefficiency of Assam ports leads people to prefer to travel 150-200 km just to cross the Brahmaputra. Right now there are just wood planks and bamboo poles that make up our ports and docks for landing. People of the state also need high quality ferry transportation. The challenge for river development is that the river also has rights also and thus any infrastructure development, such as dredging or building ports has to take into account the social, cultural, and environmental protection of the river too.

Session 1: Work plan – activities, outputs and outcomes

9. Dina Mani Pokharel said that objectives of most of the river agreement are on flood control, agriculture and water sharing agreements, such as India-Bangladesh and India-Nepal.



The focus on water transportation provisions is limited and sometimes even neglected due to political will power which leans towards irrigation and energy production.

10. Veena Vidyadharan gave a presentation on the work plan of the IW project and

explained that four country specific diagnostic studies in BBIN will be conducted which will contribute to a final synthesis report. Locations for field work will be as follows:

- Bangladesh: three locations (one location each in Ganges, Meghna and Jamuna rivers);
- Bhutan: two locations (one location each in Manas and Sankosh rivers);
- India: six locations (one location each in Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, and West Bengal along the Ganges river, one location each in Assam along Barak and Brahmaputra rivers and one location in Arunachal Pradesh along the Brahmaputra river);
- Nepal: two locations (one location each in Kosi and Gandak rivers).

11. Other participants suggested that in the North East, women are important decision-makers, especially in remote areas where they are the heads of households. In this context, Asian Development Bank's (ADB) toolkit of gender should be taken into consideration. Development of inland waterways can reduce the time needed for

trade and give more time for production.

Discourse on India's inland waterways act does not include the voice of fishermen or the environmental view. It doesn't consider pollution or include an environmental

impact study thus this must also be part of CUTS study.



12. Participants also stressed on the need of specialised vessels that produce a less pollution or are based on solar energy so that trade with reduced carbon footprint can be promoted. With regard to Brahmaputra and its tributaries they are dynamic rivers and keep changing their river route so issues related to dredging, dolphins and environment should also be taken care. Participants also discussed the possibility of the revival of *Triple Helix model* from North East point of view and establishment of a river study centre.

Session 2: Country - specific institutional analysis of governing inland waterways

13. In this session, CUTS consortium partners discussed the IW project work plan in their respective locations. They also shed light on the institutional challenges in their state and countries and focus of water related institutions.
14. With regard to cross country study, it was discussed that the India-Bangladesh protocol will allow passenger ships to cross borders, but it has not been implemented completely yet. There were also discussions about how are national and regional experts communicating with each other and with governments so that the local knowledge and research that has already been done can inform new decision-making. The IW Project country diagnostic studies should take into account each other's country study so that they can complement each other. Water sharing agreements rarely take the view of the local people, how it will benefit and impact the local area. A challenge is the perception difference and multiple viewpoints when discussing IWT issues.
15. Participants also discussed that tourism is possible on the Brahmaputra and other inland waterways and foreign clients will enjoy it, but it is expensive at the moment. Thus there is a need to bring the costs down and make it digital. There are many

infrastructure challenges and the understanding on jurisdiction of building ports is often missing. For example, the temporary port built in Varanasi for the Maruti car transport test was built in tidal areas governed by Government of Uttar Pradesh and not the IWAI. Subsidies can help businesses and the 30 percent subsidy that used to be in place for building new vessels in India should be reinstated.

Session 3: Scope of cooperation under civil society fund in water governance and diplomacy in BBIN region

16. In this session, partner organization of TAF CSF presented their work related to South Asian Water Governance.
17. Shilpa Chohan from IELO said that existing water cooperation instruments such as top down hydro-diplomacy do not take into account people living in the basins and their dependence on the shared river (eco) systems. She also pointed out that not a single river agreement has been negotiated between India and Nepal based on local communities perception of developmental projects over these river systems and their real survival and developmental needs.
18. Vishwaranjan Sinha from IUCN presented his work titled 'Building River Dialogue and Governance for the Civil Society Organisations in the Ganges-Brahmaputra-Meghna River Basins' which has a goal of engagement of CSOs at transboundary level catalyzes cooperative water governance and long-term economic growth and livelihood security in the GBM river basins shared by the 5 countries (Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, India and Nepal).
19. Partha Jyoti Das from Aaranyak shared his experiences working with participatory public engagement in trans-boundary river management in the lower Brahmaputra river basin in Bangladesh and India.
20. Arundhati Deka identified the major challenges related to water cooperation, which are: lack of awareness on rights and legalities related to transboundary waters (TBW) of CSOs and communities; requirement for improved communication, advocacy and negotiation skills of CSOs, women groups and community leaders; incomplete information on standardised government policy and scientific terminologies/proc



eedings; lack of knowledge on international and regional principles and conventions that support the role of women in water governance; low level of trust between state and non-state actors in some countries; suspicion and distrust, and lack of open communication between countries; bilateral and confidential nature of negotiations; token public involvement, marred with taint of existing distrust, conflict and uncertainty; negotiations reflect state-centric, technocratic, exclusionary, and nationalistic hydro-political viewpoints of elite actors

21. Participants also discussed that a lot of studies have been conducted on this issue in the past and there is a need to revisit those old studies. They also cited the example of Mekong River where dialogues and discussions are comparatively high in comparison to discussion and dialogues on Ganga and Brahmaputra. A number of policy reforms are needed as the perception for navigational usage is not positive in this region. Participants also discussed the problems of inland waterways navigation in the region such as issue of bridges, lack of night navigation facilities, least available depth (LAD) issue, lack of subsidy, high cost, far established ports etc.

Session 4: Monitoring and evaluation of the project

22. Ratnesh Kumar noted that the CUTS IW project discusses seven SDGs out of the 17 SDGs. The seven SDGs discussed today were: SDG 1 – poverty; SDG 5 – gender; SDG 9 – industry and infrastructure; SDG 10 – inequality; SDG 13 – climate action; SDG 14 – life under water and ecosystems; SDG 17 – partnership. He also pointed out that it will be a challenge to create a win-win situation for all countries and stakeholders in navigation discussions.

23. Kyle Cote presented the monitoring and evaluation (M&E) plan for CUTS as well as CUTS consortium partners. He explained that the quarterly progress reports (QPR) will review progress and performance to date; compare against planned activity/output/outcome; describe challenges faced, how they were addressed and any unexpected outcomes; and the next steps to meeting objectives. After receiving each partner's QPR, CUTS will discuss any challenges faced by partners and provide assistance in keeping the project on track. Any important findings from the QPRs, especially those that impact future activities, will be communicated with partners.

Event reports will be used to ensure event activities have



achieved their stated outcome, focusing on the content of the event, and if any follow-up is needed moving forward with other activities. Participant list of each meeting will inform indicator measurements. Knowledge products will also be tracked through distribution lists and electronic forum subscriptions. For the purpose of evaluation, he explained that a baseline survey at the launch meeting followed by a survey at the final regional meeting will be used to measure acceptance or receptiveness of institutional changes and policy reform measures in inland waterways governance and an alternative policy discourse for enabling reform measures. Indicators for objectives will attempt to show changes over the course of the project.

Way Forward

24. Ratnesh and Aditya also echoed the need to measure and be consistent with the issues and stakeholders in the final report. The navigation usage is of a limited concern right now due to environmental and stakeholder concerns in the BBIN region. The IW project should look at emphasising and understanding the issues and concerns related to inland waterways navigation and especially with relevance to gender involvement.
25. Bipul Chatterjee concluded by sharing that all the topics related to inland waterways cannot be addressed in a short period but this project will aim to give the right diagnostic to start off with. He also suggested that as a follow-up, there should be relevant sustainability impact assessments including social, economic, environmental etc. In the coming days the BBIN group of countries can be united over the common usage of inland waterways for navigation.

Annexure 1: Background note & Agenda for the workshop

The presentations in the agenda are available on request by email request to sma@cuts.org. The background note and agenda for the event can be accessed here: <http://www.cuts-citee.org/IW/Events.htm>

Annexure 2: Press Release for the event







The press release for the event can be accessed here: [http://www.cuts-citee.org/IW/Press Releases.htm](http://www.cuts-citee.org/IW/Press_Releases.htm)









Annexure 3: List of Participants

For contact details of participants, please email: sma@cuts.org

Project Launch Meeting
Expanding Tradable Benefits of Trans-boundary Water: Promoting Navigational Usage of Inland Waterways in Ganga and Brahmaputra Basins
 The Lily Hotel, Guwahati, India
 Monday, 24th October, 2016

REGISTRATION

S.NO.	NAME	ORGANISATION	SIGNATURE
1.	Saurabh Kumar	CUTS, Jaipur	
2.	Veena Vidyadharan	CUTS, Jaipur	
3.	Susan Mathew	CUTS, Jaipur	
4.	Bipul Chatterjee	CUTS	
5.	INDRANIL BOSE	CONSULTANT, CUTS, CRC	
6.	Narayan Ghosh	RSPN, Bhuban	

7.	Banika N. Ghoshal	-	
8.	Dikshya Singh	SAWTEE	
9.	VISHWA RANJAN SINHA	IUCN	
10.	B.B. Dev Choudhury	Director, IWIT	
11.	Sabyasachi Ghosh	Director Asian Conference	
12.	A.K. Enamul Haque	Hon. Res. Director Uruguay Shamony	
13.	Govinda S. Bhatnagar	NWCF, Kathmandu	
14.	Sobhanlal Banerjee		

15.	Shateen W Khan	PE, Ummyan Shanny	Shateen
16.	Md. Mahabub Hasan	SFA Ummyan Shannay	MH
17.	Fakir Sauro Gudu	SRA	SOF
18.	SUSHAMA TALUKDAR	EDINSE, NERINE	SunJen
19.	Arundhati Beba	Research Associate, SocWATERs	Arundhati
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21.	Aditya Vaidyanathan Pillai	Asia Foundation	Aditya
22.	Alina Mousa portkand	ISET - K-EDU	Alina

31.	WAHID		Wahid
32.	ARUP KUMAR DUTTA		AR
33.	Ratnum		R
34.	Nirmalya Choudhury		NChoudhury
35.	Mari Mousa of JICA		Mari
36.	Prakash Jha		Prakash
37.			
38.			

23.	Kyle Cote	CUTS, Jaipur	Kyle
24.	Shilpa Choudhan	IED	-
25.	Madhusudan Saitta	TISS - Guj.	Madhu
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