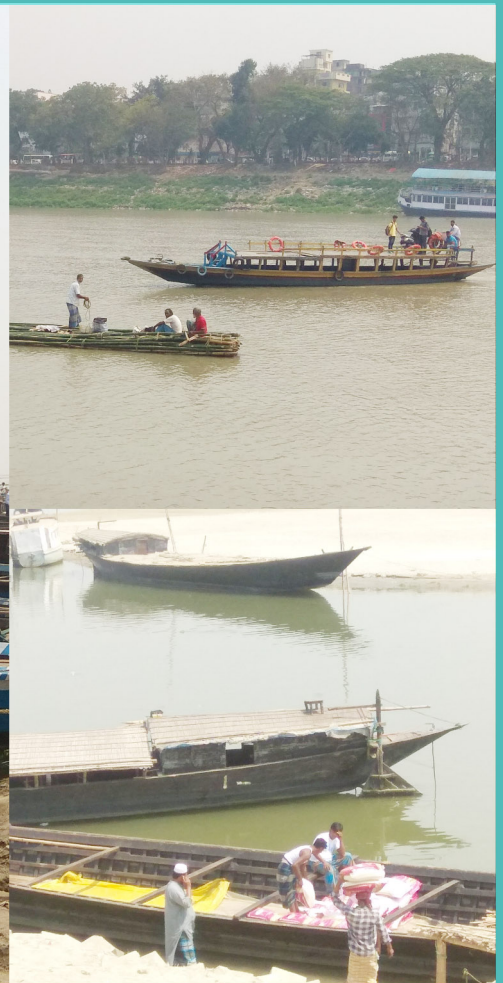


Boating Towards Inclusivity

Facilitating short haul cross-border trade between Dhubri (Assam, India) and Chilmari (Kurigram, Bangladesh) through waterways



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Content

Abbreviations	4
Contributors	5
Acknowledgement	6
Preface	7
Executive Summary	9
Introduction	11
Background	11
Connecting the dots	12
Why Dhubri & Chilmari?	13
Rationale	14
Goal & Objectives	15
Study Location & Methodology	16
Brief Profile of Project Area	16
Methodology	18
Key Findings	20
Tradable commodities between Dhubri & Chilmari	20
The Economics – time, distance & cost factor	23
Livelihood Benefits	26
Challenges & Recommendations	28
Regulatory & Infrastructural Challenges	28
Recommendations	29
Way Forward	30
Bibliography	31
Endnotes	31
Annexure 1	32
Annexure 2	34

List of Tables Figures and Boxes

Table 1:	Demographic Profile of Dhubri and Kurigram	17
Figure 1:	India-Bangladesh PIWT&T Routes	11
Figure 2:	Map of Dhubri District, Assam	16
Figure 3:	Map of Kurigram District, Bangladesh	17
Figure 4:	Percentage share of export value of major commodities from India to Bangladesh via Golakganj LCS from 2016 - April, 2018	21
Figure 5:	Percentage share of total export value of major commodities traded from India to Bangladesh via Mankachar LCS from 2016 - April, 2018 (values in USD)	22
Figure 6:	Volume of major commodities exported from India to Bangladesh via Mankachar LCS from 2010 to 2017 (values in tonnes)	22
Figure 7:	Percentage share of total import value of major commodities traded from Bangladesh to India via Mankachar LCS from 2016 - April, 2018	23
Figure 8:	Volume of major commodities imported to India from Bangladesh via Mankachar LCS from 2013 - 2017 (values in kg)	23
Box 1:	Menace at land borders	21
Box 2:	Formalising trade via waterways to counter informal channels	24
Box 3:	Why go for big steel hull vessels?	25
Box 4:	Gender and social inclusion	27

Abbreviations

BIWTA	Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority
CIBMS	Comprehensive Integrated Border Management System
ICPs	Integrated Check Posts
IWAI	Inland Waterways Authority India
LCS	Land Custom Stations
ODC	Over Dimensional Cargo
PIWT&T	Protocol on Inland Water Transit and Trade

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This report has immensely benefitted from the overall guidance and contribution of Arun Roy, Expert on River Engineering & Inland Water Transport Operations, and Consultant, CUTS International, in planning and execution of project activities and deliverables. We would also like to acknowledge the support rendered by our partner Unnayan Shamannay, Bangladesh for conducting project related activities in Bangladesh.

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Many other names deserve special mention but prefer anonymity. We thank them all for their support and guidance. This publication presents the findings of the field study and builds a case for short haul cross border trade via waterways between Dhubri (Assam, India) and Chilmari (Kurigram, Bangladesh). Any error that may have remained is solely ours.

Project Team
CUTS International

Preface

Bipul Chatterjee
Executive Director
CUTS International



A part from its role of sustaining the lives and livelihood of millions of people in Bangladesh and India, the river Brahmaputra also provides a means of transportation of goods not only within the national boundaries but also between the two countries. However, cross-border trade through waterways face significant competition from roadways and railways owing to several factors.

Of late there has been a renewed focus on inland waterways as an alternative means of transportation between India and Bangladesh. It has been looked upon as a prospective mode to cut down the logistics cost incurred in the bilateral trade which has increased mainly because of suboptimal road infrastructure, traffic congestion and cumbersome border procedures. The waterways of Ganga and Brahmaputra can effectively shift the traffic load from roadways in a cheaper and environment-friendly manner.

Though the Protocol for Inland Water Transit and Trade (PIWT&T) between India and Bangladesh has been operational since 1972, regular cargo movement exists only between Kolkata, India and Narayanganj, Bangladesh stretch, which falls in Protocol Route 1 (Kolkata-Silghat). The upper stretches of the route (from Naryanganj to Pandu in Assam, India) is relatively dormant owing to sub-optimal navigability. Development of riverine routes can be economically viable only if the volume of trade outshines the huge amount required for undertaking dredging activities.

The cargo vessels that ply in the Protocol Routes are big, steel hulled vessels mostly from Bangladesh. This kind of arrangement bypasses the locally made mechanised boats that are quite common in Assam and Bangladesh. Being the cheapest and most convenient mode of transportation, these boats provide a source of livelihood to many. These boats, if permitted to carry trade operations within a short stretch across border, can enhance the trade volume through the Protocol Routes and improve the local economy.

In this context, the present study has explored the prospects of cross border trade using small mechanised boats between Dhubri (Assam, India) and Chilmari

(Kurigram, Bangladesh). Both these locations have an under-developed socio-economic background with a considerable population living in numerous river islets (locally known as *chars*) that are prone to flood and erosion.

Therefore, this study relied on secondary and primary research and has identified tradable commodities, which are in demand on both sides of the border, and the existing regulatory challenges to permit the movement of small mechanised boats across border. While looking at the trade prospects of the proposed movement of mechanised boats, it also explored its implications on local livelihoods. Being the last customs stations at the respective border of India and Bangladesh, Dhubri and Chilmari present an ideal case for the study to follow customs regulations. Thus, the study has come up with granular evidences and specific recommendations to meet the regulatory and infrastructural challenges in realising the proposed cross-border movement of small mechanised boats.

The proposal was taken up by Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority (BIWTA) in the agenda of the 19th Standing Committee meeting under PIWT&T held at New Delhi on October 24 2018. It was agreed that only those vessels as per the definition in Article 1.3 of PIWT&T could be considered for movement between Dhubri and Chilmari along the Protocol Route. While IWAI has declared Dhubri as a Port of Call in India, BIWTA has agreed to declare Chilmari as a Port of Call in Bangladesh.

Finally, I thank The Asia Foundation for supporting this project and our partner Unnayan Shamannay, Bangladesh for facilitating the implementation of its activities in Bangladesh. I also thank Arun Roy, Expert on River Engineering & Inland Water Transport Operations, and Consultant, CUTS International for his overall guidance to the project and my colleagues who have worked sincerely for its successful completion.

Executive Summary

India and Bangladesh have agreed to make use of waterways for passage of goods between two places within a country and to a third country through the territory of other by signing the PIWT&T in 1972. The current cross-border trade along the Protocol Routes is mainly through three routes viz. Kolkata-Dhubri (Pandu), Kolkata-Karimganj and Kolkata-Ashuganj-Agartala. Among these, the Protocol Route 1 (Kolkata–Silghat) is most active where there is regular cargo movement between Kolkata and Narayanganj.

However, the water-borne cargo movement in the upper stretch of Protocol Route -1 (from Narayanganj to Dhubri and upper Assam) remains restricted to project-based Over Dimensional Cargo (ODC). The reasons could be attributed to high rate of sedimentation leading to availability of lower navigable depth during lean season, low industrialisation and absence of return cargo.

Other than the organised sector of big steel hull vessels, mechanised boats of the capacity 10-50 tonne are quite popular in lower Assam particularly in the border areas of Dhubri (Assam, India) and Kurigram (Bangladesh). These boats are having lower haulage capacity and also are able to navigate in very low water conditions. There are many such smaller wooden hull built mechanised vessels/boats operating in both the countries; a part of which as per guidelines of IWT operation of either country are registered and surveyed as per norms but are unable to participate in cross border trade due to lack of information and awareness both by the owners and the nodal agencies.

Keeping this view, a study was undertaken by CUTS International on a pilot basis to explore the prospects of cross border trade along the stretch between Dhubri and Chilmari falling under Protocol Route 1, using small mechanised boats. The goal of this study was to facilitate cross-border local trade using small mechanised boats in the international border area of Dhubri (Assam, India) and Chilmari (Kurigram, Bangladesh) along the banks of the Brahmaputra River for improved livelihoods and local economy.

Both Dhubri and Chilmari are marked with numerous river islands (*chars*) and high population density, and are synonymous in terms of underdevelopment, poverty and suffer from frequent floods and erosion. These locations are also the last custom stations in India and Bangladesh. The methodology for the study consisted of desk and field research in Dhubri, parts of Meghalaya, Chilmari and parts of Kurigram.

CUTS International identified that from India, coal, boulders/ stones, rice, ginger and betel nut are the major commodities that are exported to Bangladesh, mostly through the land customs stations in Golakganj, Mankachar and Mahendraganj. Of these, Manckachar and Golakganj are closer to Dhubri. From Bangladesh, waste cotton, jute, textiles and plastic goods come to India. Ginger and other fruits produced in Garo hills goes to Bangladesh mostly through Mankachar and Mahendraganj. The distance between Dhubri and Chilmari is around 60km and it takes 5-6 hours to reach Chilmari whereas the return trip takes about 8-10 hours.

The interactions with traders revealed that due to poor condition of roads, traffic congestion and procedural delays at land custom stations, trade through waterways would be much more economical in terms of cost and time. Exporters from India and Bangladesh opined that Rowmari port could be a better option than Chilmari as it is well connected to Dhaka. Furthermore, for exporting perishable goods produced in Meghalaya, Hatsinghimari, rather than Dhubri could be the ideal loading station.

Inland water transportation using mechanised boats offers livelihood opportunities to the riverine communities. The boatmen and the pilots are from local communities; the boats are built locally. Local people will get opportunities in freight handling, warehouses and as vendors. Apart from small traders who are sure to benefit from cross border trade via waterways, the producers/farmers will have access to new market across the border and may fetch better price.

The study also identified the regulatory and infrastructural challenges and proposes recommendations that have to be implemented by the competent authorities in both countries in order to facilitate cross border movement of mechanised boats. Though PIWT&T does not specify the kind of vessels plying in Protocol Routes, it mentions that the vessel has to be registered and surveyed for its fitness. In India, all mechanised boats are registered by the respective state government but in Bangladesh, registration of mechanised boat is not mandatory and is a complex process.

In this regard, decision has to be made by the competent authorities to allow mechanised boats to ply between Dhubri and Chilmari on a pilot basis. The country may entrust the local government (Upazilla Parishad) to undertake the registration (in consultation with boat associations and Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority (BIWTA) and issue a permit number and fitness certificate to a limited number of mechanised boats which have documents suggesting clear ownership, identification proof of the owner, good vessel condition and have engaged boat operators with certificate of competency to ply between Chilmari and Dhubri subjected to clearance by IWAI.

Other infrastructure like approach road, warehouse and cold storage, etc. also need to be developed by local/state government. Boat owners in India and Bangladesh will have to ensure a boxed chamber for customs sealing to adhere to the stipulations of custom formalities. Preference should be given to the commodities that are of local demand in Dhubri/Chilmari and nearby areas.

The study highlights the need for an inclusive developmental regime so that the marginalised people benefit from the development of inland waterways. Small initiatives for cooperation at subnational level would indeed create an enabling environment for larger cooperation in terms of trade and connectivity.

Introduction

Background

Brahmaputra, also known as the life line of Assam, supports lives and livelihoods of millions living along its bank. This river is of immense geographical, economic, social and cultural significance for India and Bangladesh since it is used for various purposes - from supporting the agricultural needs of its communities and sustaining the regions' biodiversity hotspots, to facilitating local and cross-border trade through the means of waterways.

Besides crafting the landscape of eastern part of India and Bangladesh, Brahmaputra sustains a multiplicity of ethnic agrarian communities and is also the chief means of transportation for the riverine people in these two countries. The 891 km of this transboundary river that traverses the state of Assam from Sadiya to few kilometres down stream of Dhubri is classified as National Waterway 2 and enters Bangladesh close to Hatsinghimari, downstream of Dhubri. This stretch of waterway is also part of the India-Bangladesh Protocol Routes 1& 2 from Kolkata to Silghat (and back) covering a distance of 1700 km under the Protocol on Inland Water Transit and Trade (PIWT&T) signed between both countries in 1972.

Historically, the Brahmaputra played a significant role in facilitating trade through waterways by connecting the Indian subcontinent with far east. Post-independence, the new demarcations of national boundaries segmented the transboundary river and slowly it lost its importance as a viable trade route since the connectivity by roads and railways gained much attention. However, in the present time, these surface based transportation system have been crippled with several bottlenecks, which prompts the nations to look into developing neglected waterway routes as an alternative, cost-effective and sustainable means of transportation for trade and transit purposes.

Figure 1: India-Bangladesh PIWT&T Routes



Issues like poor road conditions, traffic congestion, infrastructural impediments, limited railway connectivity in hinterlands, procedural delays at Land Custom Stations (LCS) and Integrated Check Posts (ICPs) have escalated the cost and time of transportation. As per the latest statistics, the average time for border compliance for export is around 106.1 hours and for documentary compliance it is 38.4 hours in India, while it is 99.7 hours and 147 hours respectively in Bangladesh (World Bank, 2018). As such, inland waterways would serve as an alternate mode of transportation by decreasing the traffic congestion at existing LCS/ICP, as well as saving time and cost.

The Governments of India and Bangladesh have mutually signed the PIWT&T under the Trade Agreement. Under this, the two governments have agreed to make use of waterways for passage of goods between two places within a country and to a third country through the territory of other. Though PIWT&T is operational since 1972, it has gained traction since 2015 when it was mutually agreed by the signing countries for automatic renewal after every five years. In 2016, when India enacted the National Waterway Act by declaring 106 waterways as national waterways (NW) to the existing five NWs, inland navigation elevated the pitch of connectivity discourse between India and its neighbouring countries, particularly Bangladesh.

Connecting the dots

Current cross-border trade through inland waterways between India and Bangladesh is 2618436 metric tonne (MT) and is carried out by mainly three routes viz. Kolkata-Dhubri (Pandu), Kolkata-Karimganj and Kolkata-Ashuganj-Agartala. Among these, the Protocol Route 1 (Kolkata–Silghat) is the most active route where there is regular cargo movement between Kolkata and Narayanganj.

Currently, fly ash, coal, iron and steel coil, stone chips, wheat/food grains and over dimensional cargo (ODC) are being transported between India and Bangladesh using inland waterways. Development of new routes will make a positive impact not only on inter-country cargo transportation (which is currently only 2624614 MT) but also on transit cargo movement (which is currently only 6178 MT) (BIWTA, 2018).

However, the water-borne cargo movement in the upper stretch of Protocol Route 1 (from Narayanganj to Dhubri and upper Assam) remains restricted to project-based ODC. The reasons could be attributed to high rate of sedimentation leading to availability of lower navigable depth during lean season, low industrialisation and absence of return cargo. In lower Assam and nearby border areas, Brahmaputra is highly braided with shifting unstable channels through its course. As such, the investments made by India and Bangladesh to develop fairway and maintaining navigability would be futile if waterways are not economically viable. It will take approximately 10-12 days for a vessel from Kolkata to reach Dhubri due to its sailing upstream, negotiating a journey against water current amidst uncertainties in navigability.

Other than the organised sector of big steel hull vessels that ply along the Protocol Routes, mechanised boats of the capacity 10-50 tonne are quite popular in Dhubri, Assam and on the Bangladesh side of the border. Nevertheless, these boats carrying passengers and commercial goods to *char* areas ply within the borders of respective countries and are not allowed to cross the border. These boats if permitted to cross the international border for shorter stretches, for instance between Dhubri and Chilmari (Kurigram, Bangladesh), could benefit local people and promote trade between two countries via waterways, thereby making it economically viable and inclusive.

The prospects of cross border movement of mechanised boats evolved in the Bangladesh-India Dialogues facilitated by IUCN under the project ‘Building River Dialogue and Governance in Ganga, Brahmaputra and Meghna Basins’ (BRIDGE GBM)¹ and also through the diagnostic

study of CUTS International (2017)². The study concludes that for movement in short stretches of waterways the vessels have to be designed and commissioned accordingly to meet the requirement of the kind of cargo in demand.

There are many smaller wooden/steel hull built mechanised vessels/boats operating in both the countries, a part of which as per guidelines of IWT operation of either country are registered and surveyed as per norms but are unable to participate in cross border trade due to lack of information and awareness both by the owners and the nodal agencies. These boats operate in both the countries and have lower haulage capacity but are also able to navigate in very low water conditions. The owners are from the lower socio- economic strata of the society and represent a major portion of the riverine community.

Small mechanised boats are of varying capacity and can be built locally thus generating local employment. Further the masters/sarongs of these boats being local men and very much acquainted with the navigational characteristics of the river and thus operating within a short stretch will be easy for them. As it is the cheapest and at times the only mode of transportation in isolated river islands, these boats are very popular particularly in remote *char* areas. Keeping this view, the present study was undertaken by CUTS International on a pilot basis to explore the prospects of cross border trade between Dhubri and Chilmari falling under Protocol Route 1 using small mechanised boats.

Why Dhubri & Chilmari?

Being the last custom stations along Protocol Route 1 in Bangladesh and India, Chilmari and Dhubri make a perfect case for this study. Both areas are socially and economically marginalised and characterised by poverty and malnutrition. Prone to calamities like flood and erosion, the people residing on the river banks and *char* areas are quite vulnerable and depend on mechanised boats for transportation. There are thousands of mechanised boats of capacity ranging from 10 to 50 tonne that ply in Dhubri and Chilmari which indicate a vibrant inland water transportation system.

Almost the entire produce of South Garo Hills in Meghalaya is transported to Dhubri market by small mechanised boats. Similarly, all produces from the *char* areas of Brahmaputra and from the south bank of Brahmaputra in the Bangladeshi side are taken by small mechanised boats to the Kurigram market. Both out-bound cargo from south bank and the *char* areas, and in-bound

Jogomaya ghat, Dhubri



Thanahat, Chilmari, Bangladesh



cargo to south bank and the *char* areas (like fertiliser, pulses, medicines, grocery items and finished household goods) make use of small mechanised boats in Dhubri and Chilmari.

Despite historical and pre-dominant trade ties with Bangladesh, Dhubri has been in the news for the wrong reasons. Dhubri which was once a thriving port in British era and was termed as gateway to Assam, today is known to many as one of the five illegal cross-border trading points for cattle smuggling³ between India and Bangladesh. However, Government of India has been strengthening up its border security along Dhubri district, primarily to engage in a stricter and organized method for controlling illegal trade and migration. For instance, the maiden testing of surveillance and alarm gadgetry as part of India's Comprehensive Integrated Border Management System (CIBMS) was recently operationalised on the 55-km long stretch in Dhubri across the Brahmaputra. In January 2018, Dhubri was designated as an authorized immigration check post⁴.

In the meantime, the waterways route along Dhubri presents a calmer picture for trade connectivity for within the border as well as across the border. IWAI plans to transport 1200 metric tonnes of cement every month from Pandu (Guwahati) to Dhubri on the Brahmaputra based on previous trial runs. The demand for cement and other construction materials has risen due to various developmental projects including river front and river port development, tourism infrastructure and border trade centre developments in Dhubri.

Similarly, the Government of Bangladesh has proposed plans to develop the Chilmari port with warehousing and custom facilities. The government has also planned to undertake dredging to transform Chilmari to a full-fledged river port to keep the river route navigable from Chilmari to Paira Sea Port. Modernisation of ports with adequate facilities would attract more cargo through waterways thus improving connectivity.

Trade across the border would lead to new market access opportunities for producers and consumers living in both locations. Both the areas are deprived of any major industries, and any developmental intervention at transboundary level would have multiplier effect on the local economy and livelihoods of the marginalised communities of the border areas.

Rationale

Dhubri acts as a gateway for the movement of goods produced in the South Garo region of Meghalaya and in lower Assam, whereas Chilmari connects Kurigram and nearby areas in Bangladesh. Since the road connectivity to these two bordering areas is very poor, farmers do not get a good price for their produce. Ginger, oranges, pineapple, etc. produced in the South Garo Hills reach the local markets in India via Dhubri. Poor shelf life of these products forces the farmers to sell it in nearby areas at distressingly low prices. Access to new markets across the border would fetch better price for both the producers and consumers.

While the Governments of India and Bangladesh have set-up four Border Haats in the North East region of India adjoining Bangladesh and is planning to add six more with an aim to improve and regularise local cross-border trade between the people living on both sides of the designated border areas, allowing similar kind of trade activities cross-border through river instead of land routes would be a unique development case that has a potential to improve the livelihoods of many people.

With regard to the literature, a substantial rise has been witnessed in the number of studies conducted on the potential of inland waterways navigation, cross-border trade through it and probability of livelihood options depending on it in the past three-four years [Sinha (2016); Banerjee (2018); Chawla (2017); Government of Assam (2017)]. But only a few studies have highlighted the potential gains of and tradable aspects of transboundary rivers for example, CUTS (2017); Chatterjee and Kumar (Kumar, 2017); Chaudhary *et al.* (2018). But these studies present a macro analysis of benefits of PIWT&T and are less specific with regard to particular stretch or commodity.

Thus there exists a critical gap in terms of possible benefits due to trade across particular stretches in border areas of transboundary river (in this case Brahmaputra) and its impact on livelihoods. In this context, this study is an attempt to create knowledge base for necessary policy action in operationalising cross border movement of small mechanised boats between Dhubri and Chilmari.

Goal & Objectives

The goal of this study is to facilitate cross-border local trade using small mechanised boats in the international border area of Dhubri (Assam, India) and Chilmari (Kurigram, Bangladesh) along the banks of the Brahmaputra river for improved livelihoods and local economy.

The objectives of the study are as follows:

- To inform policy makers about the costs and benefits of facilitating cross-border local trade using small mechanised boats with empirical evidence.
- To sensitise local communities on the economic advantage of such cross-border local trade.

Study Location & Methodology

Brief Profile of Project Area

The study was conducted in Dhubri district of Assam, India and Chilmari *upazila* of Kurigram district, Bangladesh, and in selected adjoining areas of these two places (see Figure 2).

Dhubri district which falls in lower Assam, is surrounded on three sides by river. Dhubri has a historical prominence in trade routes between North East India and farther east through waterways. Currently, Dhubri is an emerging commercial hub having its borders shared with Bangladesh, Bhutan, West Bengal and Meghalaya and has road, rail and air connectivity. The Rupsi airport which was defunct since 1983 is being revived as part of the UDAN-RCS (*Ude Desh Ka Aam Nagrik* – Regional Connectivity Scheme) initiative by Government of India. A new railway line is also coming up connecting Dhubri to Joghichopa-the proposed site of multi modal terminal.

The economy of Dhubri is predominantly agrarian, with rice, jute and mustard being the major crops. Forest products like timber and bamboo also add to the economy of the district.

Figure 2: Map of Dhubri District, Assam



Figure 3: Map of Kurigram District, Bangladesh

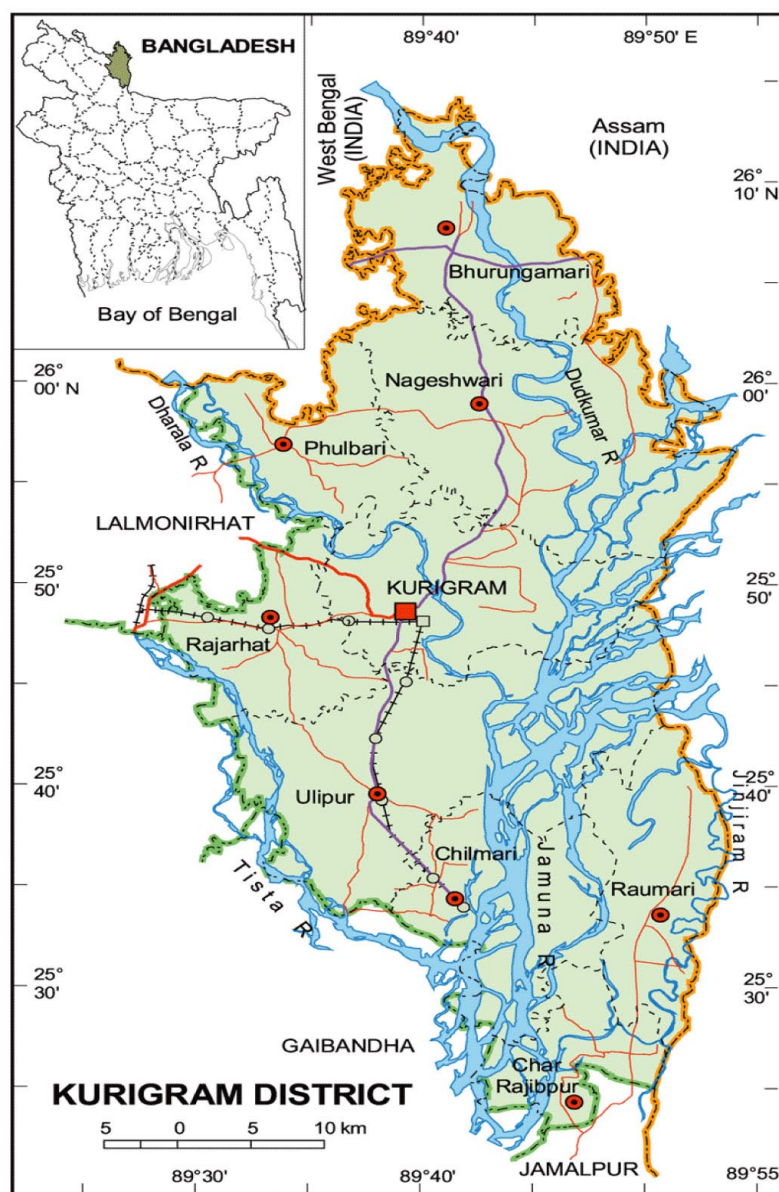


Table 1: Demographic Profile of Dhubri⁵ and Kurigram⁶

Demographic Profile	Kurigram	Dhubri ⁷
Area	2245. 04 sq. km	2838 sq. km
Population	20.69 lakh	19.49lakh
Male Population	48.81%	51%
Female Population	51.18%	49%
Population density	900 per sq km	896 per sq km
Average literacy rate	56%	58.3%
Poverty	70.8% ⁸	41.5%

Other than Dhubri, the study was also extended to Hatsinghimari, Mankachar, (Assam) and South and West Garo Hills of Meghalaya.

Chilmari is one of the nine *upazilas* of the Kurigram district in Rangpur division of Bangladesh, the others being Dinajpur, Gaibandha, Kurigram, Lalmonirhat, Nilphamari, Panchagarh and Rangpur and Thakurgaon. Chilmari river port has historically been part of multiple military expeditions. More recently, in September 2018, two 1000-tonne barges carrying 1233 tonnes of bagged fly ash from Kahalgaon in Bihar traversed through Chilmari in Bangladesh and reached Dhubri.

Kurigram has been a land of agriculture; rice, jute, wheat, tobacco, potato, etc. are the major crops. Many cold storages can be seen in the district for storing potato which also has contributed to the economy of the district. Brick kilns and *beedi* factories are also prevalent in the area and provide livelihoods to many. Sharing borders with Assam, West Bengal and Meghalaya and with about 16 rivers (Teesta, Dharola and Brahmaputra are the major rivers) flowing near and around the district, the area faces severe flood and erosion and people are most vulnerable. Repeated environmental shocks affect the economy as well. Men migrate to Dhaka in search of wage labour.

Discussion with boatmen at Melaghat, Dhubri



Methodology

The methodology consisted of desk research on the profile of project locations and secondary data collection about the trade happening through LCS near and around Dhubri. This was followed by scoping visits to Dhubri and Chilmari comprising Key Informant Interviews (KII)

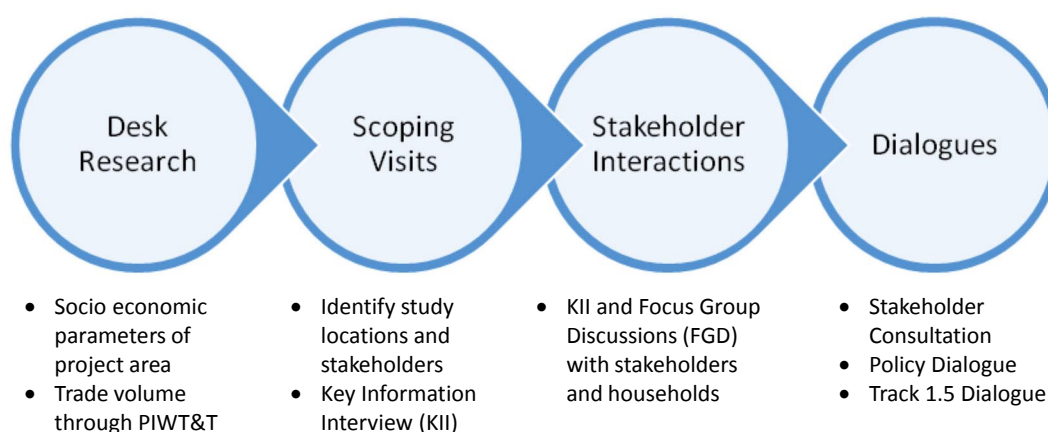
Discussion with traders at Thanahat, Chilmari



with representatives of government departments, traders, river pilot, border security officials, customs, quarantine officials and Focus Group Discussions with boat men, boat owners, and riverine communities. The scoping visits enabled to finalise the study locations and also the key stakeholders. Later, the project team also visited LCS at Golakganj, Mankachar and Mahendraganj and conducted extensive survey with traders, truck drivers and exporters and also consulted farmers in Hatsinghimari and Meghalaya. Similar exercise was done in Chilmari and Kurigram.

The findings were validated in the stakeholder consultation at Dhubri following

which a Policy Dialogue was organised at Guwahati with participants from India and Bangladesh. The dialogue brought together government officials, traders, exporters and civil society organisations from both countries and facilitated an informed discussion among them. Finally, a Track 1.5 Dialogue was organised at Dhaka with representatives of key ministries and competent authorities involved in facilitating cross border movement of mechanised boats to develop consensus on this.



Key Findings

The Dhubri-Chilmari cross-border inland waterway route on the river Brahmaputra has immense potential for trade of local goods as noted in earlier chapters. This section essentially captures the key findings of the study in terms of tradable commodities between Dhubri and Chilmari (which is substantiated with secondary data); the regulatory and infrastructural challenges and the opportunities.

Tradable commodities between Dhubri and Chilmari

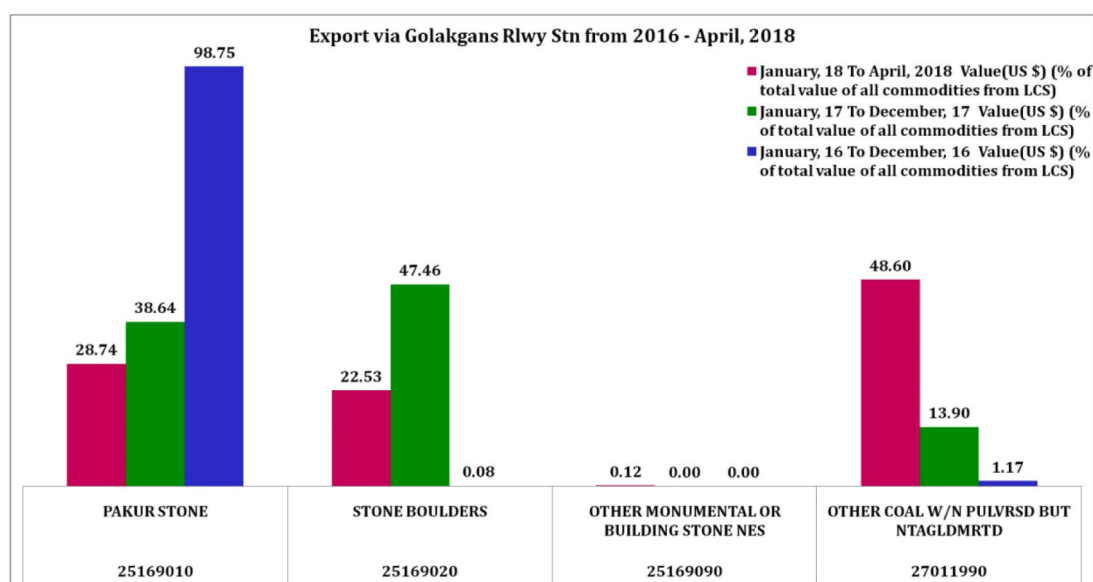
Dhubri district is covered under the jurisdiction of Shillong Customs Commissionerate⁹. CUTS' study identified that from India, coal, boulders/ stones, rice, ginger and betel nut are the major commodities that are exported to Bangladesh, mostly through the land customs stations (LCS) in Golakganj, Mankachar and Mahendraganj. Of these, Mankachar and Golakganj are closer to Dhubri. These two LCS are burdened with excessive truck movement and delay in vehicle clearance. Moreover, Golakganj LCS falls in a disturbed area and hence there is an uncertainty in the time taken for cargo clearance. Also, in the Bangladesh side (near Sonahaat the other side of Golakganj) there is an old bridge which poses restrictions in height and weight of trucks carrying cargo.

The International Border Trade Centre constructed by Assam Industrial Development Corporation at Mankachar in Dhubri district is currently functioning with substantial interest originating from India and Bangladesh. The proposed Golokganj-Sonahat International Trade Centre is coming up at the Lakhimari village near Sonahat border outpost in the district. At both the locations, security issues continue to be the sole discouraging factor. Hence, using an alternative waterway route from Dhubri to Chilmari would provide much required relief for traders in the region.

Currently, ginger and other fruits produced in Garo Hills go to Bangladesh, mostly through Mankachar and Mahendraganj. These findings were corroborated by the data from Directorate General of Commercial Intelligence and Statistics (DGCIS). Figure 4 indicates that four major commodities¹⁰ have been traded via Golakganj (recorded as 'Golakgans Rlwy Stn' on the DGCIS website). All four commodities are primarily used as construction material. Predominantly *pakur* stone (small black stone chips) and stone boulders form the chunk of exported commodities via Golakganj LCS. On closer examination, CUTS field work verified that these stones and boulders come from Pakur, Bhutan and North Bengal. Golakganj LCS Superintendent informed that during peak season (November to February) about 125 trucks per day carry goods to Bangladesh. Local traders/truckers/agents informed that there are issues related to infrastructure for example, parking of trucks, road condition and so on.

As indicated in Figure 5, the products that are exported via Mankachar from India to Bangladesh are also primarily stones and boulders. Additionally, ginger seems to be another commodity that

Figure 4: Percentage share of export value of major commodities from India to Bangladesh via Golakganj LCS from 2016 - April, 2018



Source: DGCIS Port-wise data for Port: Golakganj Rlyw Station, 2018.

is exported predominantly from India to Bangladesh. Figure 6 reveals that though the quantity of ginger (both fresh and dry) exported is less compared to boulders and *pakur* stone, its value is quite high as evident in Figure 7.

The export of coal has come down since 2012 following the ban on coal mining in Meghalaya by National Green Tribunal in 2014¹¹. As shown in Figure 8, India predominantly imports cement and cotton waste via Mankachar from Bangladesh. The export of stones has increased recently owing to the demand of the construction sector in Bangladesh.

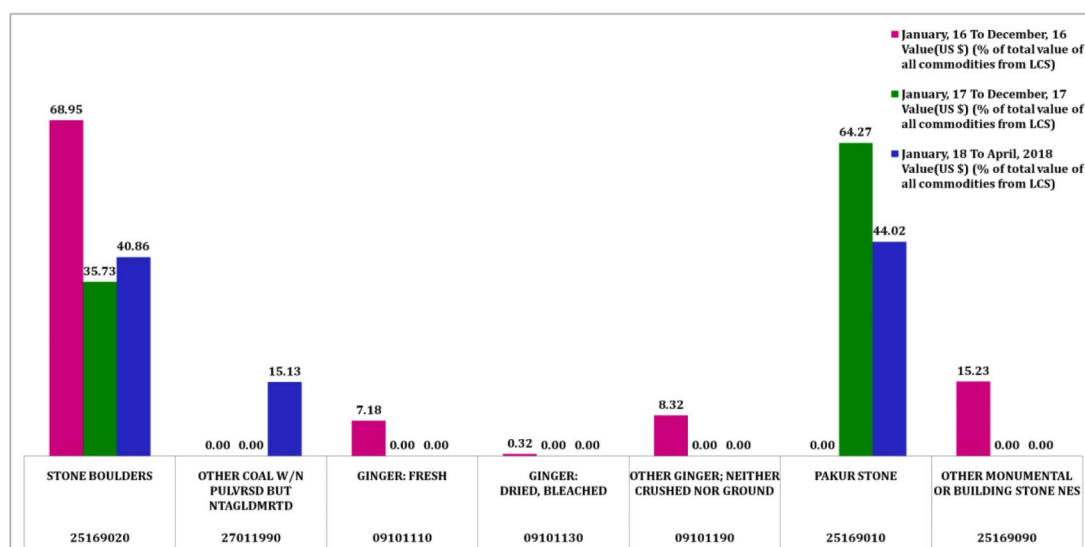
Figure 7 depicts that the import values of plastics, tableware and kitchenware and household articles are fairly high followed by cement compared to other commodities. However, the volume of cement imported is higher in the recent years though its value is lesser than plastic goods that too in 2017 (Figure 8).

It can be inferred from the data that considerable volume of trade already exists through Golakganj and Mankachar LCS and shifting a share of that volume to waterways from Dhubri to Chilmari would not only ease the congestion at land ports but also provide a cheaper and reliable source of transportation. But as stated by an official at Mahendraganj LCS “*Although trade through waterways is economical, cause less damage and is environment friendly, the active political lobby of truckers of North India won’t allow this to happen.*”

Box 1: Menace at land borders

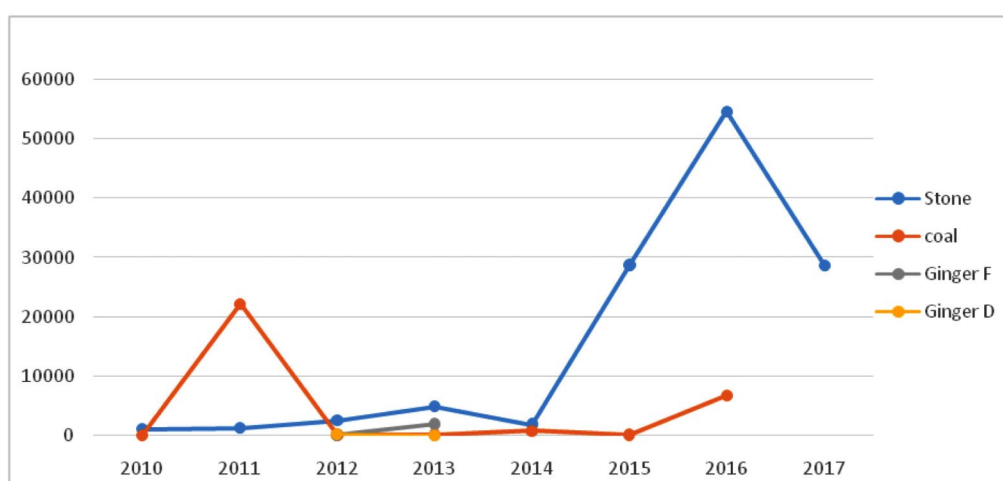
A coal exporter shared that the major problems in export via LCS are poor road conditions, sub optimal infrastructure (parking facilities, warehouses etc.), rent seeking behaviour of officials which create problems for truckers at border. Apart from this, presence of multiple taxes like GST (18% for stone) and Meghalaya state’s sales tax have also added the cost. He also said that some big traders are member of various associations and can clear the border procedures easily but small exporters are excluded from such privilege.

Figure 5: Percentage share of total export value of major commodities traded from India to Bangladesh via Mankachar LCS from 2016 - April, 2018 (values in USD)



Source: DGCIS Port-wise data for Port Mankachar, 2018

Figure 6: Volume of major commodities exported from India to Bangladesh via Mankachar LCS from 2010 to 2017 (values in tonnes)

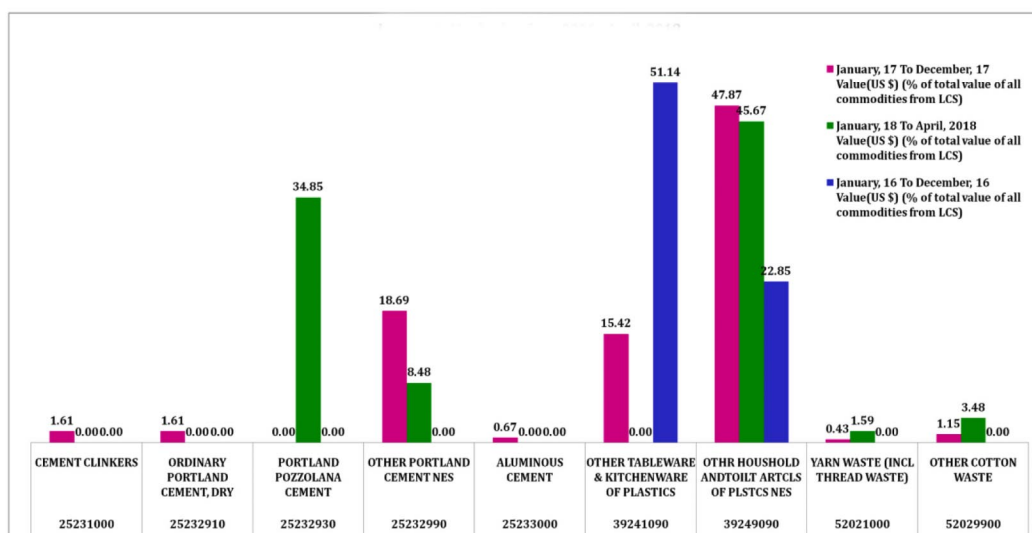


Source: DGCIS, 2018.

Apart from the goods mentioned in the data, there are other potential cargo that can be traded between Dhubri and Chilmari. Kurigram being agriculturally dominant area, agricultural products like potato, jute and maize can be exported from Chilmari to Dhubri, through waterways. Further, as evident from the discussions with traders in Chilmari, coal from India can be directly supplied to the brick kilns of Chilmari and bricks can in turn be exported to India. There are 67 brick kilns in Chilmari and the entire coal requirement is met through coal imported from India. The demand is as high as one lakh metric tonne per year. Presently, coal reaches Chilmari crossing LCS at Mankachar and Mahendraganj.

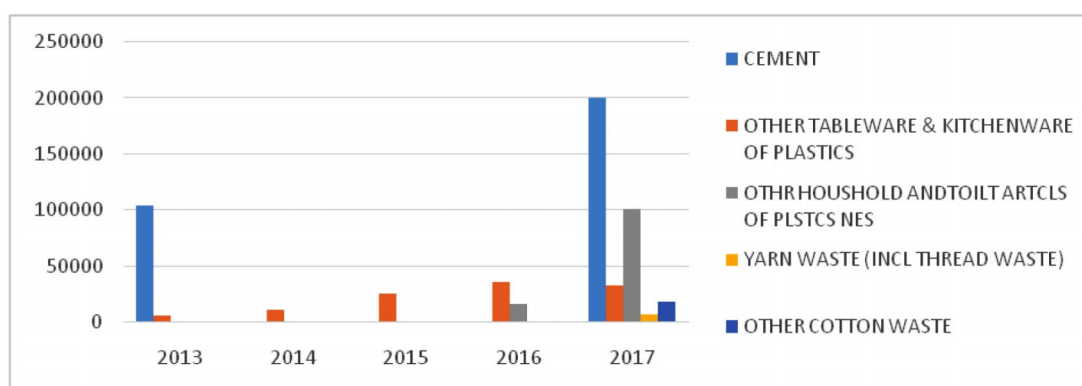
CUTS field research indicates that while commodities reaching Dhubri agricultural market are from various surrounding villages as well as from West Bengal, some commodities also reach the Dhubri market from East, West and South Garo Hills districts of Meghalaya. DGCIS has also

Figure 7: Percentage share of total import value of major commodities traded from Bangladesh to India via Mankachar LCS from 2016 - April, 2018



Source: DGCIS Port-wise data for Port: Mankachar, 2018.

Figure 8: Volume of major commodities imported to India from Bangladesh via Mankachar LCS from 2013 - 2017 (values in kg)



indicated the randomness incurred while compiling the State of Origin-wise Export data¹². The problem of identifying the State of Origin for agricultural commodities is exemplified as compared to manufactured goods, since multiple locations in and around Dhubri and Chilmari have similar cropping pattern and forest-origin products. Thus trade between Dhubri and Chilmari would essentially benefit the farmers/ producers of nearby areas of Meghalaya and Kurigram respectively.

The Economics – time, distance & cost factor

The distance between Dhubri and Chilmari is around 60km and it takes 5-6 hours to reach Chilmari by boat whereas the return trip will take about 8-10 hours. Dhubri to Hatsingimari is around 2.5 hours of sailing time, while Hatsingimari to Chilmari is again 2.5 hours of sailing time. While returning, since it is upstream it will take 4 hours each from Chilmari to Hatsingimari and again the same time for sailing from there to Dhubri. Expected fuel consumption is 36- 50 litres for every round trip considering the engine powers of a mechanised boat with 20 MT carrying capacity. Border is about 30 km away from Chilmari. Saheber Alga is the place near the border point and Chilmari is 2.5-hour drive by boat from Saheber Alga.

With regard to trade of perishables produced in Garo hills of Meghalaya, Hatsinghimari would be the nearest terminal for loading. But since it is not a notified custom station, the boats will have to go to Dhubri for customs clearance and then come back along the same route and cross border to Chilmari, Bangladesh. Similarly, quarantine facilities are also required at the ports for trading agricultural products. However, this could be the mode of movement for all commodities originating from Meghalaya/Garo Hills requiring customs clearance till customs facilities are set up at Hatsinghimari.

In the same line, Rowmari, Bangladesh (which is on the other side of Mankachar, on the bank of Brahmaputra) has better connectivity to Dhaka. The road from Dhaka to Chilmari is under maintenance and will consume 8-10 hours to reach Dhaka due to traffic congestion whereas from Rowmari it is a 5-hour drive. With multi-modal connectivity to Dhaka, cotton waste which comes from the textile mills in Dhaka can come to Rowmari by road and then take a riverine route to Dhubri. Let alone the issue of bank erosion in Rowmari, it could have been an ideal location for multimodal transit, but Rowmari is not a notified custom point. Banks of Chilmari port are protected and have a deep pool so small boats can come closer to the bank.

Cotton waste comes to India mostly via Mahendraganj and Mankachar LCS and has great demand locally for making mattress and blankets. As shared by a trader in Dhubri, the average cost of truck load coming from Dhaka to Dhubri by road is about 45000 INR and it will reach Dhubri on the third day.

From Dhaka to Mahendraganj -17000 INR

Mahendraganj to Singhimari- 10000 INR

Singhimari to Dhubri by boat - 9000 INR

Cost for multiple loading / unloading and for border clearance -9000 INR

If the same consignment is brought Rowmari by road and from there to Dhubri by waterway, it will cost much less as it can avoid multiple loading/unloading and save time as it will reach Dhubri in less than 24 hours and can carry higher volume.

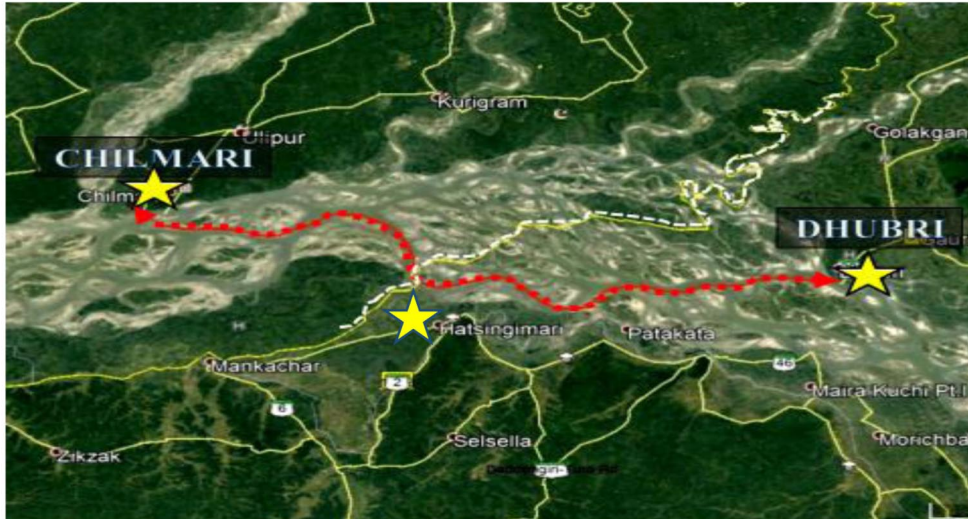
Our interaction with boatmen at Jogomaya and Mela *ghats* have given an estimate of the cost involved in transporting goods from Dhubri to Hatsinghimari (around 30km). Every boat leaving

Box 2: Formalising trade via waterways to counter informal channels

Interactions at field revealed that rice seeds (HYV - BRRI Dhan-28, BRRI Dhan-29 @ ₹50/kg, and Hybrid-Hera Dhan-12, Balia-2 @ ₹280-300/kg) come to India from Bangladesh through informal channels, while jute seeds go to Bangladesh. People living in the border area of Bangladesh cultivate large quantity of seeds and later informally send these to India. Most of the traders involved in informal trade of seeds are from Dinhata and Cooch Behar of West Bengal and later these seeds reach Indian farmers through their network and small traders. One retail shop owner revealed that packaged goods like cumin, red chilli, wheat, rice and salt (used for curing hides) also go to Bangladesh.

Many stakeholders in Dhubri and Chilmari have agreed that rice, wheat, maida (during Eid festival) and cumin, have high demand in Bangladesh and these products are traded informally. Similarly, jute, onion seeds, mosquito net, fishing net and plastic items come from Bangladesh through informal channels. Hence opening up of waterways for cross border trade would actually diversify the tradable commodities and reduce the volume of informal trade.

River route between Chilmari and Dhubri



Dhubri with goods has to pay the *ghat* tax (for municipality and IWT) which is 300 rupees per boat. The hiring charges for 25 tonne capacity boat up to Hatsingimari varies from INR 9000-12000 and the daily expenses is about INR 1500/day. The return trip may fetch INR 4500, but for that sometimes the boatmen will have to wait for 4-5 days or even 10 days in non-season to get a return cargo. This implies that for a boat carrying cargo across the border to Chilmari can get a return cargo from Hatsingimari, while coming back to Dhubri.

Box 3: Why go for big steel hull vessels?

Vessels of 500 MT capacity carrying diesel regularly come from Narayanganj and Baghabari to Chilmari where two dumb Petroleum, Oil and Lubricants (POL) storage barge are stationed. Bangladesh Petroleum Corporation supplies diesel to Chilmari and other adjoining areas through the river route and the storage barges are distributing points for diesel to Kurigram Upazilla. A depth of 5.5 feet is available throughout the year in river Brahmaputra (known as Jamuna in Bangladesh) between Baghabari to the Indian border.

This indicates that vessels up to 500 MT capacity which have a loaded draft of around 1.8 meters can ply in this stretch even up to Dhubri during lean season. Thus instead of promoting bigger capacity vessels (1000 MT & more) which cannot assure regular cargo



POL barge at
Chilmari,
Bangladesh

movement due to less navigability, and lack of available bulk cargo we need to look at vessels of >500 MT capacity vessels that can ply on a regular basis for short stretches along the protocol route making it an economically viable option.

It is to be noted that the current volume of trade in the upper stretches of Protocol Route is very low. Hence trade between Dhubri and Chilmari using mechanised boats will in effect enhance the volume of trade in the protocol route.

Livelihood Benefits

As discussed in the previous sections, inland water transportation using mechanised boats offers livelihood opportunities to the riverine communities. The boatmen and the pilots are from local communities; the boats are built locally. Local people will get opportunities in freight handling, warehouses and as vendors. Apart from small traders who are sure to benefit from cross border trade via waterways, the producers/farmers will have access to new market across the border and may fetch better price.

The proposed bridge between Dhubri and Phulbari would displace and reduce the business of many boatmen currently engaged in inland water transport and Dhubri Chilmari water transport would probably be a prospective way of engaging them. The boatmen mostly belong to the marginalised communities in the lower socio- economic strata.

Men engaged in bamboo industry at Melaghat, Dhubri



Stone crusher at Burimari border, Bangladesh



Likewise, in Kurigram which faces massive floods every year, river is the main source of livelihood for the people. “*There is no space and no scope for Kurigram without Brahmaputra*”, says a civil society activist in Chilmari. He opined that if boulders can reach Chilmari via waterways, setting up a stone crusher nearby would provide livelihood to many. Similarly, people can also engage in bamboo-based small scale industries.

Box 4: Gender and Social inclusion

The focus of the project was to facilitate cross border movement of small mechanised boats between Dhubri and Chilmari. The masters and helpers of the small mechanised boats are mostly from socially and economically backward minority and scheduled caste communities and hence this kind of arrangement would provide better livelihood opportunities.

Owing to the social dimension in a minority dominated locality like Dhubri, women are mostly engaged in household chores, livestock and poultry management while men go for waged labour. In the flood and erosion prone area of Dhubri and Kurigram women are most vulnerable and are often burdened. Prima facie, the study reveals that a number of food items like rice, pineapple, oranges and ginger can be sent to Chilmari from Dhubri. Availability of such goods in Chilmari at a cheaper price would ensure food and nutrition security of women and children in Chilmari and nearby areas. Our interactions with women in Chilmari revealed that they are engaged in pottery, and farming in *char* lands (with the support of local non-governmental organisation).

Discussion with women at Chilmari



Woman engaged in pottery, Chilmari



These women live in the erosion prone bank of the river and are not aware of the Protocol Route and Indian vessels. But they unanimously said that they will benefit due to cheaper price of consumer goods and newer livelihood opportunities (loading/unloading and other business opportunities for men and women). Newer opportunities within the locality/district would also reduce the migration of men to cities like Dhaka thereby improving the socio economic status of the society.

Challenges & Recommendations

PIWT&T necessitates that the vessels moving through this route has to be registered under Inland Vessel Act (1917) in case of Indian vessels and Inland Shipping Ordinance in case of Bangladesh (1976). The master of the vessel will have to produce the survey certificate to be shown at entry/exit points. The vessels will also carry national flags of both countries and has to be equipped with radio-telephone for communication. The manning personnel should carry certificate of employment /permit with photograph duly authenticated by concerned officials. The protocol, however, does not mention any specification on the built of the vessel other than indicating that all vessels participating in the movement should have valid registration and survey certificate

The mode of trade being proposed across the border with mechanised boats is within the ambit of protocol, in properly customs sealed hatches/cargo compartment of vessels done after regular customs checking and clearance. Manning personnel will be limited to 2 or 3 including master, lascar and cook, just as in the case of big vessels. However, there are some regulatory and infrastructural challenges that need to be addressed to facilitate cross border movement of mechanised boats to reap its benefits.

Regulatory & Infrastructural Challenges

- The PIWT&T has to include the provision of allowing small mechanised boats to ply in short stretches across border in the Protocol Routes. Decision regarding this has to be taken in the standing committee meeting of competent authorities of India and Bangladesh (IWAI and BIWTA) following all the norms of protocol but with moderate considerations regarding documentations like registration & survey.

India-Bangladesh Policy Dialogue at Guwahati, India



- Vessel has to be registered and surveyed for its fitness. In India, all mechanised boats are registered by the respective State government but in Bangladesh, registration of mechanised boat is not mandatory and is a complex process.
- Other infrastructure like approach road, warehouse and cold storage, etc. need to developed by local/state government
- Boat owners in India and Bangladesh will have to ensure a boxed chamber for customs sealing to adhere to the stipulations of custom formalities.
- Department of Customs in India as well as Bangladesh will have to notify the commodities that can be traded through Dhubri and Chilmari custom points.
- Plant quarantine stations are to be located near Dhubri and Chilmari for trading agricultural products through these points
- Hatsinghimari which falls in between Dhubri and Chilmari, is an ideal location for loading agricultural products from Garo hills of Meghalaya. Currently IWAI is constructing a terminal at Hatsinghimari, but it is not a notified custom point.
- Rowmari port, Bangladesh has better connectivity to Dhaka by road than Chilmari. Hence for those commodities destined for Dhaka, Rowmari could be the ideal port instead of Chilmari, but again it is not a notified custom point.

Recommendations

- As a trial case, registered mechanized country boats may be allowed to ply between Dhubri and Chilmari (a stretch of 60 km) following all norms of the protocol but with moderate considerations regarding documentations like registration & survey
- Since vessel registration is a complex process in Bangladesh as per Inland Shipping Ordinance (1976), the country may entrust the local government (Upazilla Parishad) to undertake the registration (in consultation with boat associations and BIWTA) and issue a permit number and fitness certificate to a limited number of mechanised boats
- Preference should be given to the commodities that are of local demand in Dhubri / Chilmari and nearby areas
- Notifying Rowmari and Hatsinghimari as custom points or proposing a suitable alternate arrangement for customs clearance in these locations would speed up the transportation with multimodal connectivity.

Way Forward

The study was successful in creating awareness to various stakeholders including government officials, traders, boatmen and communities on the possible benefits of cross border movement of mechanised boats. Though there were ambiguities about the proposed trade route as it is not operational at present, the dialogues organised under the project have created ripples in both India and Bangladesh. The cargo boat association in Dhubri has also submitted a memorandum to the local Member of Parliament seeking support to allow cross border trade using mechanised boat between Dhubri and Chilmari (Annexure 1).

CUTS advocacy initiatives have been successful in bringing up the issue in the Standing Committee meeting of PIWT&T held on October 24th, 2018. Consequently, Dhubri has been declared as a Port of Call by IWAI whereas BIWTA has agreed to declare Chilmari as a Port of Call in Bangladesh (Annexure 2).

However, it is necessary to create further evidence in this regard from similar locations on both sides of border along Protocol Routes and also to generate demand by local stakeholders and build political consensus at subnational level. Allowing mechanised boats to cross border is a political decision under the realm of protocol. The other potential locations with similar prospects identified by CUTS include:

- Barak river Karimganj, Assam – Zakiganj, Sylhet (Protocol Route 3)
- Gomati and Haora rivers of Tripura (Protocol Route 3)

The dynamic political economy of the sub region will impact the developmental initiatives taken by countries. Given that India and Bangladesh are very keen in improving connectivity by developing waterways, cross border movement of mechanised boats could be the perfect example of transboundary cooperation at subnational level.

Track 1.5 Dialogue at Dhaka, Bangladesh



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World Bank. (2018). *Doing Business 2018*. Retrieved from World Bank Group: http://www.doingbusiness.org/reports/~/_media/WBG/DoingBusiness/Documents/Profiles/Regional/DB2018/SA.pdf

Endnotes

- 1 https://www.iucn.org/sites/dev/files/content/documents/report_bridge_gbm_dhaka_workshop_final.pdf
- 2 http://www.cuts-citee.org/IW/pdf/IW_India_Report.pdf
- 3 A cow beyond its productivity life costing INR 5,000 in India is smuggled across the border to Bangladesh where it fetches around INR 50,000. More details: India-Bangladesh Border Management: The Challenge of Cattle Smuggling, 2013, Observer Research Foundation (Link: https://www.orfonline.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/Special_Report.pdf)
- 4 Statutory Orders laid on the Table of the Rajya Sabha during the week ending March 23, 2018 (245th Session) (Link: http://164.100.47.5/BulletinPart2/bulletin2_dates_files/18_04_2018.pdf)
- 5 http://niti.gov.in/writereaddata/files/human-development/Assam_HDR_30Sep2016.pdfs
- 6 <http://www.kurigram.gov.bd/>
- 7 More details about demographic profile of Dhubri can be accessed at: dhubri.gov.in
- 8 http://bbs.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/bbs.portal.gov.bd/page/b343a8b4_956b_45ca_872f_4cf9b2f1a6e0/HIES%20Preliminary%20Report%202016.pdf
- 9 The Dhubri Division has nine Land Customs Stations (LCS) viz., Baghmara, Ghasuapara, Dalu, Mahendraganj, Mankachar, Dhubri Steamerghat, Hattisar, Golakganj, Ultapani. Out of these nine LCS, Ultapani and Hattisar border Bhutan and the remaining seven are along the India-Bangladesh border.
- 10 HS Code of Commodities are 25169010 (pakur stone), 25169020 (Stone Boulders), 25169090 (Other monumental or building stones) and 27011990 (Other coal whether or not pulverized, but not agglomerated).
- 11 <http://www.indiaenvironmentportal.org.in/files/rat%20hole%20mining%20Jaintia%20NGT%2017Apr2014.pdf>
- 12 More details: <http://121.241.212.143/disclaimer.html>

Annexure-1

M/S. DHUBRI RIVER TRANSPORT CORPORATION DHUBRI

REGISTER NO. 1158 OF 1989-90

Prop. Soleman Khan & Others

Govt order, Boat Supplier

(All River Road :- Brahmaputra)

Permanent Residence Address :

Soleman Khan (Khokan)

Vill:- Subash Nagar, W/ No. 12

P.O.- A.M.Co. Road P.S. & Dist. Dhubri (Assam)



M. No. 9435029675

9859929675

Ref No.

Date: 07-08-18

To
The Hon'ble Member of Parliament,
4-Dhubri H.P.C.

Dated, Dhubri the 7th August/2018.

Sub:- Regarding improvement for facilitating Dhubri River Brahmaputra Ghat, India to Chilmari Ghat/ Roumari Ghat of Bangladesh cross border local trade.

Respected Sir,

With reference to the subject cited above we the undersigned for and on behalf of **Dhubri River Transport Corporation, Dhubri (Assam)** beg to lay before you the following few lines for favour of your kind information and taking necessary action.

That Sir, one N.G.O. namely **CUTS International Consumer Unity & Trust Society**, D-217, Bhaskar Marg, Bani Park, Jaipur 302 016, India has taken initiative to improve and facilitate Dhubri River Brahmaputra Ghat, India to Chilmari Ghat/ Roumari Ghat of Bangladesh cross border local trade and in the meantime the said N.G.O. shared the knowledge between CSO and Governments of both the Country by holding several meetings and last meeting held on 31st July/2018 at Guwahati.

That Sir, the Engine Fitted Country Boats under my Corporation are mostly operated in carry out the passengers/goods from Dhubri to Phulbari Ghat and vis-versa and earns livelihood of myself as well as the EFC Boat owners. In the meantime construction work of Dhubri – Phulbari Bridge has already started and after completion of the Bridge construction work the demand/requirement of Engine Fitted Country Boats of two States- Assam and Meghalaya shall definitely reduced and E.F.C. Boat owners shall become workless. If the cross-border local trade from Dhubri River Brahmaputra Ghat, India to Chilmari Ghat/ Roumari Ghat of Bangladesh is started not only the EFC Boat Owners of Assam and Meghalaya, local

Contd..

M/S. DHUBRI RIVER TRANSPORT CORPORATION DHUBRI

REGISTER NO. 1158 OF 1989-90

Prop. Soleman Khan & Others

Govt order, Boat Supplier

(All River Road :- Brahmaputra)

Permanent Residence Address :

Soleman Khan (Khokan)

Vill:- Subash Nagar, W/ No. 12
P.O.- A.M.Co. Road P.S. & Dist. Dhubri (Assam)



M. No. 9435029675
9859929675

Ref No.

Date: 07-08-18

[2]

traders, unemployed youths of both the Country shall not only be benefited, meet up the requirement of goods but also economy of both the country will be uplifted. So, the initiative undertaken by the said N.G.O. namely CUTS International Consumer Unity & Trust Society, D-217, Bhaskar Marg, Bani Park, Jaipur 302 016, India is fully supported by my firm.

It is therefore humbly pray before you kindly to place the matter in the House of Parliament for doing needful for immediate starting of cross-border local trade from Dhubri River Brahmaputra Ghat, India to Chilmari Ghat/ Roumari Ghat of Bangladesh which is being initiated by the said N.G.O. namely CUTS International Consumer Unity & Trust Society in the greater public interest of both the Country and thus oblige.


Enclo:-

Copy of letter No.C.235(6)/2018/03076, dtd. 2018-07-05 of CUTS International Consumer Unity & Trust Society addressed to the undersigned inviting to attend in the meeting held on 31st July/2018 at Guwahati.

(Soleman Khan)
Proprietor,
Dhubri River Transport Corporation, Dhubri
(Assam)
Mobile No. 9435029675

✓ Copy to:-

The Executive Director, CUTS International Consumer Unity & Trust Society, D-217, Bhaskar Marg, Bani Park, Jaipur 302 016, India, Ph.91 141 228 2821, Fx: 91 141 228 2485 for favour of your kind information and taking necessary action.


(Soleman Khan)
Proprietor,
Dhubri River Transport Corporation, Dhubri
(Assam)
Mobile No. 9435029675

Dhubri River Transport Corporation
Regd. No-1158
SOLEMAN KHAN
Dhubri, Assam

Annexure-2



भारतीय अन्तर्देशीय जलमार्ग प्राधिकरण (पोत परिवहन मंत्रालय, भारत सरकार)

मुख्यालय : ए-13, सेक्टर-1, नोएडा-201 301, (उ.प्र.)

INLAND WATERWAYS AUTHORITY OF INDIA

(Ministry of Shipping, Govt. of India)

Head Office : A-13, Sector-1, Noida-201 301 (U.P.)

Website : www.iwai.gov.in | www.iwai.nic.in

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IWAI/IBP/2018-19

06 November 2018

To

The CUTS International,
D-217, Bhaskar Marg,
Bani Park, Jaipur-302016

(Attn: Sh. Bipul Chatterjee, Executive Director)

Sub: Cross border trade between Dhubri (Assam, India) and Chilmari (Kurigram, Bangladesh) using mechanized country boat on Indo Bangladesh Protocol (IBP) route -reg.

Ref: Your letter no. C-235(2)/2018/03245 dated:23.08.2018


Sir,

With reference to the above, the issue on introduction of trade between Chilmari-Dhubri on IBP route was discussed during 19th standing committee meeting with Bangladesh held at New Delhi on 24th October 2018 and it was decided that the vessels which comply with the stipulations laid down in the Article 1.3 of Protocol on Inland Water Transit and Trade (PIWT&T) between India and Bangladesh could be considered for movement in these stretches.

2. Further it is to inform that Dhubri (India) has been declared as Port of Call and Chilmari (Bangladesh) is agreed for declaration as new Port of Call and shall be effective from the date of issue of notification by the respective Governments to that extent.

3. The above may kindly be noted and complied.

Yours faithfully,


(S.V.K Reddy)
Chief Engineer (Tech)

Expanding Tradable Benefits of Trans-boundary Water: Promoting Navigational Usage of Inland Waterways in Ganga and Brahmaputra Basins

Access to consumer goods and assured markets for local produce are the key factors which affect household income and local economy of economically backward areas. This is particularly true for areas along the international borders of India and Bangladesh on the banks of the river Brahmaputra. Dhubri in Assam, India and Chilmari in Kurigram, Bangladesh are two economically backward areas located on the banks of Brahmaputra, which are the last custom stations in both countries along the currently functional Protocol routes between India and Bangladesh. This study explores the prospects of cross-border trade using small mechanised boats between Dhubri and Chilmari and its effects on livelihoods and local economy. More details about the project can be accessed here: <http://www.cuts-citee.org/IW/PHASE2.htm>

CUTS International

Established in 1983, CUTS International (Consumer Unity & Trust Society) is a non-governmental organisation, engaged in consumer sovereignty in the framework of social justice and economic equality and environmental balance, within and across borders. More information about the organisation and its centres can be accessed here: <http://www.cuts-international.org>



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