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Public-Private Dialogue

On

Promoting Cross-border Tourism in India and Bangladesh through Trans-boundary Waterways

Friday, October 29th, 2021

Time: 10:00 to 14:00 (IST)

The Lily Hotel, Guwahati, India

Background Note

Transboundary-rivers based trade, tourism and cruise operations between India and Bangladesh have an immense scope of economic, social and cultural prospects for the region. 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.

Such cross-border trade and tourism activities offer immense social, cultural, and economic benefits to local communities mainly women. The cross-border trade and river tourism on smaller stretches can lead to inclusive and sustainable development in both countries as networking links relies heavily on local agriculture goods products, natural resources, culture, cuisine, art, and history. This can enhance economic opportunities for local communities including employment generation in the form of cruise crew, jetty operators, local tourist guides, and small boat operators and benefit the local markets to some extent.

A significant way to improve local transportation is the use of local country boats that can carry goods through smaller stretches. At present, the number of rivers and their tributaries are on the route of PIWTT. There is a strong need to connect and acknowledge the inland waterway routes and rivers for small scale trade. For example, Hatsingimari and Dhubri in Assam can be connected to Kurigram in Bangladesh so that nearby towns and villages can also utilise the increased gains from cross-border navigation. In 2019-20 CUTS efforts resulted in including the Dhuri-Chilmari route as part of PIWTT. But these smaller steps did not create enough momentum for the cross-border trade and tourism between both countries.

Given this backdrop, CUTS International in collaboration with Oxfam and the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) is organising this public-private dialogue in Guwahati, India with an aim of “emphasising the importance of cross-border tourism, and cruise operations and adopting more inclusive approach through the trans-boundary waterways”.

This dialogue is being organised under a regional project titled “Trans-boundary Rivers of South Asia (TROSA), which is supported by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) and managed by Oxfam. The ultimate goal of the project is to reduce the poverty

of marginalised and vulnerable river basin communities through increased access to and control over water resources. The details of the project can be accessed [here](#)

Objectives of the dialogue:

1. To increase awareness and create consensus among relevant stakeholders about potential benefits and challenges of cross-border tourism and cruise operations between India and Bangladesh;
2. To bring together the voices of the local communities, and women from India and Bangladesh to adopt an inclusive and sustainable approach to cross-border tourism and cruise operations.

Expected outcome of the dialogue:

1. Make government policies and practices in water resources management more inclusive of community concerns and meet national and international standards;
2. Achieve sustainable use of trans-boundary water resources and secure local communities access and control over their water resources.