

**Bangladesh National Reference Group (NRG) Meeting**  
**Enabling a Political Economy Discourse for Multi-modal Connectivity in the**  
**Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal (BBIN) Sub-region**  
**(M-Connect Project)**

**Tuesday, 17 August 2021**

**Background Note**

Seamless transport connectivity in BBIN sub-region is the best option for regional integration and boosting up the local economy. Particularly in the context of resilience and robustness of post COVID-19 pandemic recovery, it is imperative to establish multi-modal connectivity in the region to reduce logistics cost and improve modal mix. This can be achieved through a participatory approach, which can help address broader development issues of poverty, growth and development.

Informed political economy discussion is necessary before initiating such large-scale multi-modal connectivity schemes. Due to this unique feature, it is critical to understand the current discourse on political will and identification of gaps in infrastructure, policy and regulations, which can pose hurdles to multi-modal connectivity in the sub-region.

In this context, since January 2020, CUTS International with support from the United Kingdom's Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office is implementing a project titled 'Enabling a Political Economy Discourse for Multi-modal Connectivity in the Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal Sub-region (M-Connect)' in partnership with Unnayan Shamannay, Bangladesh, Bhutan Media and Communications Institute, and Nepal Economic Forum. The Asian Development Bank is a knowledge partner in the initiative.

As part of the project, CUTS and its partners have identified four critical transport corridors in the BBIN sub-region and have conducted primary and secondary research in more than 50 strategic locations. In Bangladesh, we visited 13 critical connectivity infrastructure locations. A number of research outputs have been published already and several webinars have been organised over this period as per project goals and objectives. These research works provide critical information on current status of infrastructure and connectivity on the four corridors, existing gaps and also ways to mitigate infrastructure and other gaps in the BBIN sub-region with respect to taking multimodal connectivity discourse forward.

The project has now reached an important phase of dissemination and outreach for stakeholders' buy-in and policy push. Keeping this in mind, Bangladesh's National Reference Group (NRG) meeting is scheduled to be held on Tuesday, 17 August 2021. The specific purpose of the meeting is to update the NRG members on the progress of the project, outputs produced, and to gather feedback, inputs and recommendations from the concerned stakeholders, particularly policy-making bodies at the national and sub-national levels, and civil society organisations regarding the project findings.