

BANGLADESH-BHUTAN-INDIA-NEPAL MULTI-MODAL CONNECTIVITY IN THE SUB-REGION (M-CONNECT)



Joining Dots • Connecting People • Shared Prosperity

Field Diary – Petrapole-Gede-Durgapur Triangle

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Under the project titled '[Enabling a political economy discourse for multimodal connectivity in the BBIN sub-region \(M-Connect\)](#)', a team from [CUTS International](#), was sent to West Bengal to assess and investigate the India-Bangladesh trade logistics, infrastructure, policy frameworks and further explore opportunities for encouraging and promoting multimodal connectivity between these two countries and eventually in the entire BBIN sub-region. The team consisted of Srijata Deb from Jaipur, Sumanta Biswas and Shaswata Mukherjee from Kolkata. The designated locations for fulfilling the above objectives include Petrapole ICP, Ranaghat LCS, Gede LCS and Durgapur ICD.

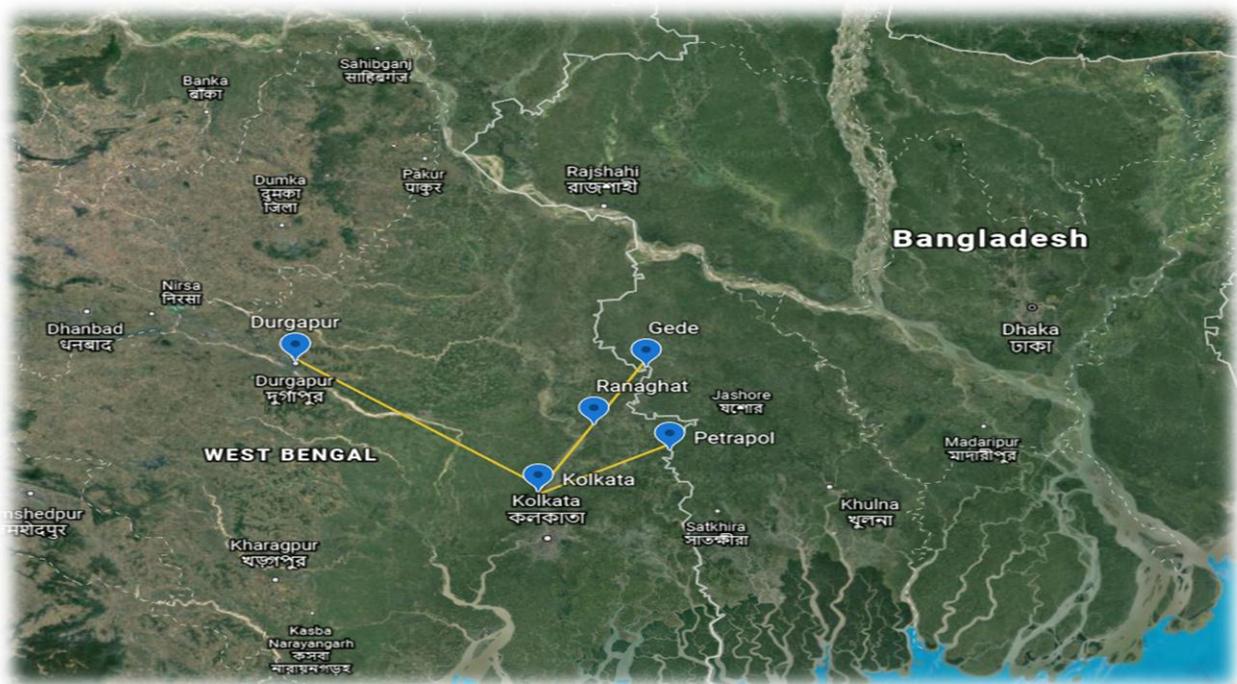


Figure 1: Locations Visited

Following this, the team moved ahead to visit the Land Port Authority of India (LPAI). The premise is well-equipped with adequate infrastructure catering to major needs of the workers there and for fulfilling the procedures.

The first meeting was with the Data Entry Operator at LPAI. He explained the entire internal functioning of the LPAI at Petrapole ICP and suitably answered all our questions. While he was proficient in explaining the procedures of the LPAI and the associated authorities in the premises, he seemed doubtful of the multimodal prospects in the region. Hence, he suggested having a conversation with the manager of Central Warehousing Corporation (CWC). The manager expressed that he feels multimodal connectivity in BBIN is tough owing to the language differences between the countries. He explained that even now migrant workers from Bihar, India, who are working as truck drivers face issues because they cannot speak *Bangla*. However, he expressed that utilising the waterways is needed for boosting trade in the region.

The team roamed around in the LPAI and ICP to explore the ground realities and gaps in the actual implementation of the policies. The visit revealed that the precautionary requirements for COVID were not adequate. Only the truck drivers were mandated to wear PPE kits only during their travel. While stuck in procedural processes, labourers did not bother to wear a mask, use sanitisers or even maintain social distancing protocols.



Figure 3: Truck Drivers at Petrapole ICP

However, the LPAI premises seemed to have other necessary infrastructural facilities like warehouses, animal and plant quarantine and restrooms for workers and/or truck drivers. All of these facilities seemed in good working condition.



Figure 4: Warehouse Facility at Petrapole ICP



Figure 5: Plant Quarantine Station at Petrapole ICP



Figure 6: Animal Shed at Petrapole ICP



Figure 7: Crane for Loading/Unloading at Petrapole ICP

Additionally, there was a decent amount of digitisation inside the ICP. There were several high functioning cranes inside the premises. The officials employed in the working spaces were comprehensively using digital technologies to carry out their duties. However, the scenario was not completely paperless and the scope for intervention to implement complete digitalisation is there.

There was no involvement of women either in the office or in the procedural processes as a Customs House Agent (CHA) officer at Petrapole ICP. The officials mentioned that women lack the interest to be involved in the sector, but failed to justify their reasons for the claim. The absence of women in the procedures at Petrapole was a matter of concern.

The last meeting was with an influential person in Petrapole who actively participates in every trade decision on trade operations through the ICP. He coordinates with the customs officials, security agency, immigration department, local related administration, etc., for smooth trade operations from Petrapole.

The team could not visit the Petrapole rail station due to logistical reasons; however, it was told that the rail station is not connected to the Petrapole ICP. There is little movement through the rail station. However, given the COVID scenario, the rail movement is almost at standstill. The customs procedures and formalities for trade via rail usually take place at the Ranaghat and Gede rail Customs stations. These were our decided locations for the following day.

India-Bangladesh Rail Link and Related Procedures

The next morning's journey started early from Kolkata. The first stop was Ranaghat LCS. Ranaghat is a very congested area and it took several hours to traverse through the crowd and reach the main office. When the team finally reached, it was greeted by the Customs Superintendent.



Figure 8: Congested Roads (en-route Ranaghat Rail Customs Station)



Figure 9: Office of Superintendent of Customs, Ranaghat

One striking feature of Ranaghat LCS was the participation of women in offices. The team was informed that the office had at least three women employees. The superintendent's office was situated in a deficient building with no proper washroom facilities. It was evident that the office infrastructure is poor and lacks space. She and her assistant were sharing one small room, leaving little scope to follow the social distancing protocols. Additionally, this room was filled with innumerable piles of official papers.



Figure 10: Combined Platform for Goods and Passengers at Ranaghat LCS

Our next stop of the day was Gede LCS. It took the team about three hours to reach Gede from Ranaghat. The office space at Gede LCS was not very different from the Ranaghat Customs office. The building was in a bad position and lacked basic necessities, similar to the one visited previously. Both the LCS lacked the proper infrastructure for loading/unloading and had poor working conditions for employers.



Figure 11: Piles of official papers in Customs Superintendent's office



Figure 12: Office infrastructure at Gede LCS

The team also saw one returning train from Bangladesh post-delivery and one train that had just arrived for vehicle clearance at Gede. Additionally, the team accompanied the duty inspector on his inspection of the particular vehicle. He explained the COVID protocols and the mandatory sanitising of vehicles crossing the border and further clearance procedures that are required to be followed.



Figure 13: Duty Inspector Ensuring Intact Seal on a Goods Train at Gede LCS



Figure 14: Compulsory Sanitisation of Indian Trains

Private Enterprise in Trade Procedures and its Implications

The team visited the Durgapur ICD. The journey to Durgapur was simpler, as compared to the travel on other days. A stakeholder meeting was organised with the Director and CEO of a private ICD service provider. The private enterprise providing customers using ICD Durgapur with facilities like seamless, integrated logistics solutions. Various logistic services such as customs clearance, warehousing, shipping plot operations, container weighing, freight forwarding and transportation are available under a single roof here. This ensures swift turnaround time and reduced transaction costs.

After completing the interviews, the team visited the premises to assess the operations on the ground. The premises were well-equipped with adequate washrooms, water facility and proper office spaces. The infrastructure and manpower seemed adequate for the facilities that need to be provided to the customers. There were designated spaces for various functions and operations. The workers had separate washrooms and restrooms.



Figure 15: Containers and Machinery at Durgapur ICD

The team saw several high-tech cranes and vehicles in action and understood all the operations of the company in detail. The team was told that most of the loading/unloading happens through machines. The environmental implications of the same were evident. Once again there was no female participation in the premises, including the offices.

There was a stark difference between the Durgapur visit and the Ranaghat and Gede visits. The former location, i.e. the Durgapur ICD, seemed to have all the facilities readily available and was efficiently ensuring fulfilment of the customers' requirements along with maintaining proper workspace infrastructure and environment.



Figure 16: Cranes at Work at Durgapur ICD

The field visits came to a close with the visit to Durgapur. It is hoped that this project, which aims to enable seamless connectivity, trade and regional cooperation in the sub-region, contributes extensively to the livelihoods of the local communities.

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