

Knowledge sharing for inter-modal connectivity for the BBIN Sub-region

Evidences from Central Asia, South Asia and Southeast Asia

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1. Introduction

- 1.1. The Bangladesh, Bhutan, India and Nepal (BBIN) sub-region is progressing towards several national and multilateral transport and connectivity initiatives. The sub-region can draw lessons from its neighbourhood regional groups with respect to the similar successful multimodal connectivity initiatives, such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations Framework, Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation Program Corridors and Greater Mekong Sub-region.
- 1.2. The India-Bangladesh Coastal Shipping Agreement can be a game-changer for the development of the BBIN sub-region. The initiative impacts India and Bangladesh and their neighbourhood landlocked countries, such as Bhutan and Nepal.
- 1.3. The Coastal Shipping Agreement should not be looked at in isolation; its linkage with the inland waterways system of the sub-region should be examined. An alignment between the inland waterways of Bangladesh and India and the coastal shipping can serve immensely to the multimodal transport connectivity of the BBIN sub-region.
- 1.4. One of the most important key learnings from other regional transport initiatives is that these should not be looked at in isolation but in relation to each other and alignment of multimodal plan/policies of other countries in the sub-region. The connectivity corridors could be linked with existing and potential production centers. This could help in reducing the logistics cost of the whole sub-region.

- 1.5. Given this context, this webinar deliberates upon four initiatives taken in the Asia and CUTS working note. It discusses the key takeaways from these initiatives for the BBIN sub-region:
- (i) [Multimodal Connectivity in BBIN sub-region: Lessons from the ASEAN Framework](#)
 - (ii) [Learning from CAREC Corridors and Connectivity Prospects for BBIN Sub-region](#)
 - (iii) [Multi-Modal Transport Connectivity in Greater Mekong Sub-region through Railways Network](#)
 - (iv) [India-Bangladesh Coastal Shipping Agreement](#)

2. Key Takeaways

- 2.1. Increasing transport connectivity is the key for the regional integration and boosting of intra-regional trade. Established transport connectivity network, will help in promotion of trade and investment and progress in other areas, such as tourism, people-to-people connectivity, and cultural exchange.
- 2.2. Initiatives such as India's upcoming national multi-modal connectivity plan will be very crucial in boosting the competitiveness of the sub-region in terms of logistics performance. These initiatives should be looked at along with the larger picture of the sub-region and initiatives such as the BIMSTEC master plan on transport connectivity. The BBIN sub-region is currently one of the least integrated sub-regions in the world and the intra-regional trade is [very low](#), standing at mere four percent.
- 2.3. The vision of the BIMSTEC transport master plan is a seamlessly connected Bay of Bengal region for peace, prosperity and sustainability. The mission of the master plan is to strengthen connectivity in the region through improved multimodal or intermodal transport. The master plan built on the BIMSTEC transport and logistics study is comprehensive and forward-looking, which presents a holistic 10-year strategy and action plan for improving the region's transport linkages covering road, railways, ports, inland waterways, airports and multimodal transport.
- 2.4. It also delves into providing soft infrastructure, including international transport service, capacity building, transport access agreement and harmonisation of rules and policies between and among BIMSTEC countries to facilitate cross-border trade in support of the proposed BIMSTEC Free Trade Agreement. The master plan includes major strategies in various modes of transportation. Strong political will along with development of a regional framework to harmonise the policy, procedures and practices of all the member countries is required for the successful implementation of the master plan.

- 2.5. One major idea of enabling multimodal connectivity is to provide alternatives and sustainability to the value chains. Road transportation has become the dominant mode of transportation in the BBIN sub-region's transportation modal mix. Waterways offer a tremendous opportunity for the transport sector of all the countries in the BBIN sub-region. Integrated development of the inland waterways system of India and Bangladesh can prove to be highly beneficial for the transport and logistics sector of the BBIN sub-region.
- 2.6. Blessed with large river systems such as the Brahmaputra and Ganges, realising the full potential of inland waterways will be significant for developing seamless connectivity in the BBIN sub-region. Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority and Inland Waterways Authority of India should work together to facilitate a well-connected inland water transport system in the BBIN sub-region. Along with serving the commercial interests of Bangladesh and India, it will also help the landlocked partners Bhutan and Nepal to do trade within and outside the sub-region at a much lower cost.

3. Conclusion

- 3.1. The main challenge in implementing multimodal connectivity projects arises at the local level. The issues are more concrete there and hence, there is a need to enhance soft infrastructure. Multilateral and international development institutions should contribute more to the soft infrastructure development, including regulatory reforms and capacity building in the sub-region, along with their significant and remarkable contribution to the hard infrastructure development.
- 3.2. The multi-level governments of all the countries in the sub-region need to work in unison to reap the maximum benefit of the transport and connectivity initiatives. Strong political will and the development of a regional framework to harmonise the policy, procedures, and practices of all member countries must implement programmes and initiatives successfully. Creating sustainable infrastructure projects and addressing the socio-environmental impacts of the projects through proper evaluation and monitoring plans is important.

Press Release: <https://cuts-citee.org/bbin-sub-region-needs-a-cooperative-approach-for-multi-modal-connectivity-cuts-international/>

Media Coverage: <https://www.indianarrative.com/economy-news/bbin-quad-must-step-up-economic-integration-think-tank-112197.html>

YouTube Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vp7GA9JliXw>