

Regional Policy Dialogue

on

Connectivity Imperatives in the Bay of Bengal Region

New Delhi, India, May 2-3, 2018

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Summary of discussions

CUTS International organized a Regional Policy Dialogue on 2nd May at New Delhi. The two day dialogue witnessed participation from a cross-section of government representatives, private players, multi-lateral agencies, academia, think-tanks and media of all the five member countries viz. Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal and Myanmar.

The first day of the deliberations stressed on the importance of connectivity in the BBIN region and what roles can multilateral agencies and international allies including USA and UK play in this regard. The major observations of the first day of deliberations include

- The gains from regional connectivity emanating from connectivity initiatives should be inclusive of the women and other marginal vulnerable communities in the region.
- The outcome of the BBIN+M initiative is expected to contribute in identifying value chains in the region and help in more enhanced trade facilitation.
- Such connectivity initiatives should be based on the region's commitment to international laws and a rule-based system for trade and connectivity.

The deliberations on the second day were based on a detailed study undertaken by CUTS International on the issue of connectivity in the Bay of Bengal region. Some of the key observations that came out of the discussions include

A. Impact of connectivity initiatives on livelihood and gender

- Any connectivity initiative in the region would have different impacts on livelihoods of different groups of stakeholders due to heterogeneity in their nature.
- Government ought to find alternative jobs and vocational training for those who may lose their livelihood due to connectivity initiatives to ensure that the gains of trade are fairly distributed.
- In several cases, the truckers and labourers in one country are apprehensive about the rules and regulations in the other country which necessitates proper sharing of information regarding the rules and regulations between the member countries.
- Poverty, lack of education and increasing migration in the border states may lead to increase in communicable diseases. The respective governments and civil societies must take measures to address these issues.
- Policy makers must also look into issues of concentration of wealth in large cities due to increased connectivity and stagnancy in the growth of small towns located at the borders.
- While women participation in the corridors is generally low, limited to certain kinds of work and support service providers, there are few instances of successful women entrepreneurs at the borders in all the five countries.
- To encourage more women participation, the connectivity initiatives should emphasize on security and safety along the corridors

B. Infrastructural connectivity

- Some of the major infrastructural issues in the borders regions of the five countries include poor roads, lack of testing laboratories and customs offices, poor electricity and internet

connections, low cross border agency coordination and complex regulatory procedures. Recommendations must address these concerns.

- Industrial infrastructure and trade infrastructure have a symbiotic relationship. Revenue generated from taxing industry can help maintain roads say in the North East India which is prone to rain and land slide damages.
- Trade procedural reforms and transport infrastructure need to complement each other. Paperless trade could be envisioned and such reforms will not necessitate the infrastructure that is being planned now.
- BBIN needs to have headquarter or an institutional arrangement. Also economic zones can be put in place along the border regions to create more livelihood opportunities.

C. Software connectivity

- Basic impediments in this regard include procedural complexities, cumbersome clearance procedures, ineffective transit agreements, lack of insurance guarantee mechanisms and asymmetries in information sharing within the member countries.
- Implementation of TIR convention will provide higher security to cargo vehicles and create a unified regional market access to other TIR members like China and Central Asian countries. The convention has been already ratified by India. Other countries should also work towards this.
- There needs to be efficient circulation of information and higher quality of risk management. The governments must ensure effective cross border coordination.
- Harmonisation of standards, documents and processes across the member countries is imperative for proper implementation of any connectivity initiative. Mutual recognition of standards between the member countries is also important.

D. Role of private sector in leveraging connectivity

- Role of private partnerships become significant in areas where government remains less effective.
- Private interventions may be needed in areas including Digitisation, infrastructural upgradation, capacity building of stakeholders and identification and removal of certain handicaps in the process of expediting trade connectivity.

The panelists finally agreed that while any connectivity initiatives in the BBIN+M region is very important for regional integration, their successful implementation depends on the political will of the various governments.

Discussion points in detail

Day 1: Wednesday, May 2, 2018

Opening Session: Emerging Trends in Regionalism and Strategic Issues for Better Connectivity in the Bay of Bengal Region

At the opening session it was clarified that CUTS endeavour across this regional policy dialogue was to find the way forward for better connectivity in the Bay of Bengal region.

Speakers:

1. Mr. Pradeep Singh Mehta, Secretary General, CUTS International

South Asian nations are unable to take benefits of intra-regional trade because of feeble connectivity. The relevance of the BBIN + M initiative cannot be overemphasized, and the urgency to contemplate measures to sort out differences and disputes among concerned countries is important to appreciate. **Addressing challenges to effective implementation of the initiative is imperative. Including women in the story of growth emanating from trade facilitation and creating livelihood opportunities for possible losers** are some of the major concerns.

2. Ms. Jaya Singh Verma, Programme Manager Asia Regional Team, Department for International Development, British High Commission

Given the recent developments taking place in the BBIN countries, this regional policy dialogue is a very timely initiative. She discussed the other programmes that are run by British High Commission in the BBIN region. The objectives of these programmes are resting on the needs to **highlight the evidence about possible transformative results**, so that we can **identify regional norms**. Expected outcomes include identification of value chains and ensuring trade facilitation.

- **Identify infrastructure investment gaps – 2.5 trillion dollars – in competing corridors.**
- Transform regional dynamics.
- Low levels of infrastructure in remote border areas need to be looked into to improve conditions of women.
- Promote regional integration.
- Wide range of partnerships to resolve regional issues.
- People – to – people contact.
- Multi – modal connectivity will be a win – win situation for all the countries.
- Generate a body of technical knowledge around connectivity.
- Simplify procedures and trade processes.
- Create an enabling environment for informal dialogue to supplement formal dialogues.

3. Mr. Robert Garverick, Minister Counsellor for Economic, Environmental, Science and Technology Affairs, US Embassy in New Delhi

The US envisions a peaceful and prosperous Asia-Pacific region, which includes more than half of the world population, hence, the urge for better connectivity in the region. South Asia unfortunately lags behind Southeast Asia – one of the least integrated regions of the world. Connectivity initiatives are based on commitment to international law and steps towards economic growth. Infrastructure therefore comes to be the focus of the endeavour for sustainable growth for people of the region – ranging from road maintenance to electricity generation. Such infrastructural development and capacity enhancement in countries across the region will have multiplier effects. Sovereignty is respected and a rule – based system underlines the entire vision of the US.

4. Mr. Amitava Chakraborty, Director, Bangladesh Foreign Trade Institute

Mr. Chakraborty explained how Bangladesh economy benefitted from enhancement of regional trade – by almost 6%. **Despite various agreements, intra-regional trade is still struggling. So it is important to consider diversification of products of trade, harmonisation of standards and simplification of trade procedures, connecting regional value chains.** It is costlier to trade within the region than with the countries of rest of the world. BBIN MVA will facilitate cross border trade from which Bangladesh stands to benefit immensely. Geo-strategic position of Bangladesh will allow it to derive immense mileage from such connectivity initiatives as BBIN – MVA and function as a transit point between India and China. Bangladesh will also seek to mainstreaming women and marginalised sections in the trade that will be facilitated by such measures as the MVA. **The key would be to ensure better coordination in the region for enhancement of trade.**

5. Mr. Dasho Kinley Dorji, Former Secretary, Ministry of Information and Communication, Royal Government of Bhutan

Mr. Dorji shared his thoughts on regional cooperation – SAARC, BIMSTEC etc. Nothing much has changed over the decades, despite dramatic developments. On a **paradoxical** to be addressed – ‘goondas’ creating problems for cross-country truck drivers – which can hardly be encapsulated by diplomatic and high level negotiations, agreements and dialogues. This study will highlight ‘real’ problems that retard connectivity and note that man is launching satellites into space, but is finding it difficult to roll trucks across the border. Political will is also lacking because of differences among countries. There are real problems on the ground which needs to be addressed. He reiterated difficulties faced in intra – regional trade, and highlighted the **need to disseminate information about the MVA across the stakeholders.**

6. Mr. Toe Aung Myint, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Commerce, Government of Myanmar

Existing level of trade has not met its economic potential – external trade of Myanmar over 85% is with Asia (1917) – yet only 5% of that is with South Asia. Being appreciative of India’s initiative in promoting infrastructural development in Myanmar, he stated that these initiatives will lead to better connectivity with South and Southeast Asia. **Coordinated effort is indispensable to better connectivity. Only symbolic agreements will not yield results.**

There is need for changes on the ground by way of transformative innovations in trade norms and practices.

Purushottam Ojha, Former Commerce Secretary of Nepal

Mr. Purushottam Ojha harped on the fact that **connectivity is a means to an end** – which is poverty reduction, integration of the economy, welfare of the people, enhancing livelihood opportunities of the people, gender aspects. He recommended connectivity at multiple levels with four B's:

- *Bilateral level*
- *BBIN-level (multilateral)*
- *BIMSTEC level (regional)*
- *BCIM-level- (extra-regional)*

The drive includes physical connectivity; customs procedures need to be harmonised and simplified & creative adoption of technology in trade facilitation - particularly in the information and communication technology.

He also harped on **multilateral connectivity** referring to recent initiatives between India and Nepal: rail, road & inland waterways connectivity. Political economy questions will have to be resolved; cross border terrorism, criminal activities that pose difficulties in movement across the region - the whole issue of connectivity must incorporate these myriad concerns.

Mr. Sandeep Kumar, Commissioner (Customs & Export Promotion), Department of Revenue, Ministry of Finance, Government of India (VIDEO TAPE)

The region harbours 1.6 billion - 1/6th of the global population. Earnest efforts of the regional countries will upgrade connectivity across the region. People of these countries had indulged in seamless cross-border movements down the ages - the present drive aspires to restore and strengthen intra-regional connectivity to enhance trade and ensure benefits for people of the region. **The activities of Reliance, Pran, Lafarge among others, are pointers to that trend. The border-haats between India and Bangladesh bear testimony to the people-to-people connect that has cemented ties between the two countries.** But issues remain to be addressed to catapult the region to a high growth trajectory, lack of infrastructure, lack of coordination mechanisms and complicated & convoluted customs procedures that clog border clearance systems. Planned improvements are under way and so there is no room for pessimism.

Taking a clue from the discussions, Mr Mustafizur Rahman, while stressing on the need of having a single window system for clearance, cited the example of the single ASEAN window which, according to him, could be adopted as a model for ensuring better inter-operability of the system across borders. Mr. Pradeep Singh Mehta stressed on the need on a wider dissemination of the protocols beyond the border checkpoints. Mr. Purushottam Ojha emphasised on the need of having a system that ensures simplified and harmonised paperwork across the Region. The discussion touched upon the issue of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) of China, and the participants agreed to the point made by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) that this initiative will create a group of deeply indebted countries. Mr Dorji made a point by stating that there is a need for strong regional institutions and an empowered committee at the regional level to make connectivity real and to deal with the manifold issues that are likely to be thrown up.

Day 2: Thursday, May 3, 2018

Session 1: Linking Connectivity to Livelihoods

Chair: Prof. Atiur Rehman, Chairman, Unnayan Shamannay and Former Governor, Bangladesh Bank

Prof. Rehman set the ball rolling by drawing attention to regional initiatives for better connectivity- **the focus is ultimately on the human dimension and people ought to benefit; without this the entire endeavour will remain vacuous.** So it is important to gauge people's levels of awareness. We were mentally connected already; with greater popular endorsement and support, there will be greater buy-in. Level of skills and capacities of people ought to be complemented and for this purpose sharing of information by and among the concerned countries is imperative and there is great potential for cooperation.

Presentation: Ms. Debolina Mukherjee, Policy Analyst, CUTS International

Ms. Mukherjee talked about impact of connectivity initiatives on **livelihood opportunities**. People on the ground are heterogeneous and so the initiative will impact different categories of stakeholders differently. **Numerous livelihood opportunities have cropped up at nodes along the corridor but some like labourers and support service providers fear loss or reduction of jobs. Small farmers are operating already through middlemen are unsure of how the MVA will benefit them.** Exporters and importers will be benefited and so will be the tourists. But lack of information among various stakeholders across countries is a serious challenge and needs to be addressed. Women participation is generally low, limited to certain kinds of laborious work and support service providers. The Government ought to find alternative jobs, vocational training and information sharing to ensure sustainable livelihood. Security needs to be beefed up to encourage more women participation and government is to provide technical training to male and female residents.

Panellists:

1. Mustafizur Rahman Distinguished Fellow, Centre for Policy Dialogue, Bangladesh

Complementing the study on the MVA, he expressed that small losers cannot really make hurdles but these are the big guys who **need to be identified. Not only transport corridors but economic corridors should be highlighted and this perspective must be adopted by policy makers across countries to come up with additional inputs.** They need to be looked at not as control points but as crossing points. Additional steps to be taken for potential losers to be absorbed into jobs because some changes will be inevitable.

Agreements like the MVA for effective implementation requires smooth political climate across the countries because tensions at the border can always dampen such initiatives.

Dr. Atiur Rahman (the chair) added that it is not politicians alone, but, society as well must play a responsible role, particularly the media which often creates hype and escalates tensions. Corporate social responsibility is also important here.

2. Ms Pushpa Chhetri, Director, BMCI, Bhutan

Ms. Chhetri agrees that there is a **general lack of awareness about the crux of the matter and how the MVA impacts various stakeholders**. It will be up to the policy makers to derive the right inputs from the perceptions of various stakeholders that the study tables. **Bhutanese truckers feel threatened and unsafe about plying across other countries. They deal with endless documentation and their stories and apprehensions percolate among other categories**. Hence rules and regulations need to be clarified and disseminated. With thin borders, a problem on one side will also create ripples on the other side.

Many women are engaged as Support Service providers but there is no 24x7 restaurant along the highways and this inconveniences truckers travelling for long durations. **Information sharing will be the safety net for those who have to move across borders and corridors**. Farmers and entrepreneurs often have to depend on middlemen because of a lack of information. Also infrastructural inadequacies like the lack of storage facilities provide negative feelings among stakeholders.

Dr. Atiur Rahman (the chair) commented that such information gaps only magnify the relevance of the project undertaken by CUTS. **Informed decisions** by policy makers are the need of the hour.

3. Dr. Anusua Basu R Choudhury, Observer Research Foundation, Kolkata

Dr. Basu R Choudhury drew attention to public health hazards in border areas as these could also impact livelihood concerns. The borders are porous in this part of the world and migration is a continuous flow. **Causes of HIV aids has risen to 2.17 million (1917) - particularly in border states between India and Myanmar. Poverty and lack of education is leading to increases in communicable diseases**. Inability of host countries to respond to migrants' behaviour and inability of migrants to seek help at medical centres of host country is also compounding the problem. So impact of migration on border residents needs to be factored into the entire story of connectivity. It is important to have a **synergy between various agencies across borders** and to have civil society initiatives to address the problem.

In this regard, Dr. Atiur Rahman intervened that this is not a law and order problem but a serious health problem which needs to be addressed.

4. Mr. Sagar Prasai, India Country Representative, The Asia Foundation

Connectivity boils down to connecting sites of production and consumption to each other. Roads and waterways have increased but diversity of economic activity has not happened. The economy of several small towns has not grown. We have not looked into issues of concentration of wealth; economy of Siliguri (West Bengal, India) has not grown at all for instance. Therefore

- We need to look at differential impacts of connectivity initiatives
- Access to finance, telecommunication need to be looked into- multisectoral coordination across highways need to be combined with other support systems
- Everything weakens as we go to the borders education, health etc and this process could well be reversed

5. Mr. SwanPyae Oo, Project Manager, MMRD, Myanmar

Highlighted that their study of corridors between Myanmar and Bangladesh and India revealed a lack of awareness and varied perceptions across stakeholders, Support Service providers feel they will benefit but major concern is loss of jobs for local labour in the border areas due to the seamless movement across borders. Local traders are likely to be left behind and local transporters from other countries are worried that their work will be swallowed up by competition from other countries. Implementation of the MVA must provide sustainable livelihood opportunities for the losers. Banks will have to take steps to facilitate payment systems and trade transactions. Myanmar's ethos is one of masculine culture and the government is addressing the issue by discouraging gender discrimination. Weaker physical strength seems to be the main reason for fewer women being employed in jobs pertaining to the trade process. Governments must commit themselves to the improvement of regional ties. The right amount of investment must be encouraged in the border areas.

Session 2: Leveraging infrastructure for better physical connectivity

Chair: Mr. Anil Bamba, Member (Planning & Development), Land Ports Authority of India, Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India

Mr. Bamba began by drawing attention to bottlenecks and queues at the border at Birganj (Nepal) and Raxaul (India), the biggest LCS on the Indo-Nepal border, and the **need for Integrated Check Posts to facilitate connectivity and trade between countries**. Further, he added that there is also the need to have facilities installed at the zero point.

Presentation: Dr. Sarbjit Singh, Policy Analyst, CUTS International

Infrastructure includes those that lie on the border and those that lie beyond the border. He highlighted that:

- International roads are not in good conditions
- Conditions of approach roads cause delay in trade
- Lack of testing labs at the customs stations
- Non availability of power backup systems
- Intermittent internet availability
- Manual inspections cause delay
- Complex regulatory procedures
- Lack of within and cross border agencies' coordination

He added that recommendations must address these concerns by providing better roads, Integrated Check Posts and Inland Container Depots, among others.

Panellists:

1. Mr. Monoj Kumar Roy, Former Additional Secretary (FTA), Ministry of Commerce, Bangladesh

Mr. Roy indicated **how bridges can benefit people living in these two countries. Physical connectivity is imperative for improved trade.** MVA is only a tool for connectivity for attaining economic development. Governments need to invest in infrastructure development to derive optimum mileage out of this tool, cross border transshipment agreements ought to materialise. **No institutional arrangements are in place.** SAARC has its secretariat and this kind of institutional edifice is important.

2. Karma Pemba, Chief Transport Officer, Road Safety & Transport Authority, Royal Government of Bhutan

People are confused about the contents of this agreement. Bhutan has various trade agreements with other countries in the region but regional connectivity demands infrastructure. Possibility of rail connections with India is being explored but various land issues stand in the way. **Transportation costs in Bhutan are 3 times higher than in India.** Infrastructural facilities must approximate international standards. Major focus of Bhutan ought to be on the improvement of road conditions and development of dry ports and airports.

3. Mr. Joseph George, Consultant, United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific

Industrial infrastructure and trade infrastructure have a symbiotic relationship. Trade procedural reforms and transport infrastructure need to complement each other. **Paperless trade could be envisioned and such reforms will not necessitate the infrastructure that we may be planning right now.** The space now devoted to parking lots, for instance, can be converted to industrial infrastructure. The reverse connection is also there – trade infrastructure also depends on industry infrastructure. **Revenue generated from taxing industry can help maintain roads say in the North East India which is prone to rain and land slide damages.** People cannot be ignored, losers can be rehabilitated by industrial infrastructure. If procedures at the border can be moved into the territory, then space could be availed for industrial infrastructure.

4. Mr. Soumya Chattopadhyay, Consultant, Regional Cooperation, Asian Development Bank

Economic corridor development is also focussed along with connectivity and trade facilitation by the Asian Development Bank. This will enable participating countries to connect to value chains; particularly land locked countries to connect with each other. India has taken a loan from ADB to build a bridge cross to Nepal, which will benefit Nepal too, and such instances of regional cooperation can be exemplary in strengthening regional connectivity. This also highlights the need for better coordination among the countries. **Passenger protocol has been signed by Bangladesh, India and Nepal. BBIN MVA will neither hamper nor override existing bilateral arrangements among the countries. Logistics (transport and related) is also an important consideration.**

5. Mr. Thet Zawwin, Myanmar

Passenger travel has increased in Myanmar and **there is need for infrastructure upgradation, particularly land transport.** Road networks are being increased by the present ministry along with regional development – attain ASEAN class II standard by 2030. Public private partnerships are encouraged to attain these type of projects.

6. Mr. Ranjan Sharma, Oriental Freight Service and Former President, Nepal Freight Forwarders Association

He was **optimistic that such initiatives will entail advantages like speeding up procedures and reducing costs and dealing with other threats like resistance to change and illegal trade, among others.** Along with infrastructure, there must be laboratory and quarantine facilities and the like and the right types of equipments. Governments must not use integrated check posts as money earning centres. **Authorized economic operators** must be thought of as a tool for use. Soft and hard infrastructure needs to go hand in hand and Government and private players have to cooperate.

Session 3: Software of Connectivity: Connectivity: The BBIN Motor Vehicles Agreement and Other Initiatives

Chair: Prof. Mustafizur Rahman

Presentation: Dr. Surendar Singh, Fellow, CUTS International

Operational instruments are needed to implement frameworks like the MVA. TIR Convention has been ratified by India and it can serve as an important tool in this regard. Basic impediments in respect of software connectivity include:

- Procedural complexities
- Cumbersome and divergent clearance procedures
- Ineffective transit agreements
- Transport, regulations and transit issues.
- Lack of insurance guarantee mechanisms.
- Asymmetries in information sharing

Implementation of TIR convention will provide higher security of cargo vehicles and will create a unified regional market access to other TIR members like China and Central Asian countries, over and above providing a higher degree of simplified procedures. There will be efficient circulation of information and higher quality of risk management. There are other regional connectivity initiatives from which leverage can be taken through identification of areas of convergence.

Panellists:

1. Dr. Abdul Mutlub Ahmad, President, India – Bangladesh Chamber of Commerce

There have been sustained efforts to enhance regional cooperation by bringing India & Bangladesh closer to each other. BBIN MVA can go a long way in that direction. **If bilateral**

harmonisation is possible, then, same is applicable to regional harmonization. Tracker systems today can address problems like theft of cargo in transshipment. But BBIN- MVA needs to have a body/ an institutional arrangement and also, economic zones can be put in place. Bangladesh can offer to be a headquarter to serve as the institutional base for effective implementation of the MVA. **The Rahamutalla connectivity award for the media** was suggested for effective contribution in this regard.

2. Mr. Rash Bihari Rauniar, Department of Agriculture, Guwahati, Assam, India

Mr. Rauniar reiterated the similar views and reminded that there is still a long way to go. Traffic volumes between two countries, if they do not match, means transport cost on one side is very high. There will be resistance from local transporters, therefore, harmonization of documents will become difficult. Hindrances also lie in the lack of harmony between signs in two countries and varying costs of equipment across countries. He suggested a common hub in Siliguri for harbouring vehicles from all countries. He ended by stating that **Harmonised documentation is something that is imperative.**

3. Mr. Sanunarul Kabir, Assistant Commissioner, NBR, Government of Bangladesh

Mr. Kabir clarified that portals at present are available, accessible and most notifications are available in English. Bangladesh is moving towards simplified documentation and integrated check posts can strengthen trade and connectivity. Electronic data interchange across customs stations can help to reduce paper work and documentation. **The chair clarified that what we should not fail to notice is that every country in its own way is upgrading its systems so harmonisation is not a long way.**

4. Ms. Hla Hla Yee, General Secretary, MIFFA

Ms. Yee clarified that nascent states like Myanmar need to learn from such practices across the region. **Myanmar has challenges by way of lack of internet connectivity in several areas and lack of single windows systems,** among others. Since 2017, Japanese systems in clearance have begun to be used along with GPS in trucks (Automated Cargo Clearance Systems). Myanmar also remains concerned with loss of jobs created by systematic change-overs, nonetheless efforts to improve and upgrade trade procedures are under way which will reduce trade costs and informal trade. Multimodal transportation is also being contemplated.

5. Mr. Satish Reddy, Consultant, Asian Development Bank

He clarified discussed the BBIN MVA text. He further added that, among others, one pillar of this MVA is mutual recognition of transport documentation. The means of transport and cargo-in-transit will be free from payment of duties. Countries agree on passenger protocols, but cargo protocols are under consideration. There has to be multi country insurance and issuance of permits since the whole idea is to reduce documentation. From the perspective of trade, borders are to become invisible to the extent possible. There is a lack of inland clearance facilities in all the countries and development of dry ports is necessary. Information gap is a major hindrance

to trade.

Session 4: Private Sector Perspectives on Leveraging Connectivity

Chair: Mr. M.P.Bezbaruah, Former Member, North Eastern Council, MDoNER, India

He started the session by stressing that connectivity initiatives need to be pushed by private players. Livelihood and development issues have unfortunately got hijacked by security and other issues and what is needed is a holistic approach, an integrated view on connectivity to even include Myanmar, Thailand and Southeast Asia. In this regard, the private sector has to be a **key mover** to address timely completion of projects that are underway.

Presentation: Mr. Prithviraj Nath, Associate Director, CUTS International

WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement entered into force from 7th Feb 2018, conflicts and climate change, new governments in countries like Nepal, while some are opening up (Myanmar). South Asian growth projection is going to infuse private players with a healthy dose of optimism. There is a technological revolution underway which is going to impact trade processes. There are challenges on the ground like financial connectivity, transfer of money across countries in the region, creating job opportunities, enabling gender, reconciling nationalistic and ethnic conflicts and all these make our task daunting.

There are various sectors with possibilities, where people are found to be engaged and trust needs to be built mutually. In all this, private participation and partnerships seem indispensable.

Panellists:

1. Ms. Damache Dem, Founder, Bhutan Association of Women Entrepreneurs

Let us look at '*people*' in all our countries in the region. Policies enunciated at supra-state levels must not turn a deaf ear to the needs of small land-locked countries which harbour proportionately small populations. Small communities within these small countries must be secure, lest they get washed by larger formations and edifices that seem to rock the entire region. Three things that will help all:

- Digitalisation will help to reach out to markets
- Bhutan has 73% forest coverage so environmental concerns are important
- 3) Cooperation among three countries is important and needs to be secured.

Indeed all issues of development and growth become empty if a country's unique elements, material and non-material, get washed away.

2. Mr. Sudhir Chandra Nath, ACI Limited, Bangladesh

Almost 47% of total population of Bangladesh is involved in agriculture. Connectivity does not directly address food security but it certainly impacts economic development. Often perishable

goods (as with Hybrid rice seeds) get detained at the border and also, loss of quality of seeds impacts farmers adversely.

What better way to demonstrate the linkage between Connectivity and Food Security and prosperity of farmers. Private initiatives are crucial to make up for governmental paralysis on many occasions as in Bangladesh. He recommended:

- Capacity building of stakeholders
- Infrastructural upgradation
- Harmonisation of procedures and their simplification
- Removal of handicaps in the process of expediting trade connectivity

3. Mr. Myo Thant, Managing Director, Zar and Zar Co. Ltd., Myanmar

Mr. Thant, a private sector representative, expressed hope in India's Act East Policy. Trade volume in Myanmar is on the rise. This year Myanmar's farmers are suffering because of lack of exports in pulses and beans which are generally grown by Myanmar farmers for Indian markets. He suggested if visas can be done away with for free movement of people across these countries. Bodhgaya is a popular destination for Myanmar tourists and pilgrims. Promotion of sea transport between India and Myanmar can also boost trade between the two countries.

4. Mr. Kailash Bajimaga, Nepal Chamber of Commerce

Mr. Bajimaga reiterated the need for boosting trade in the region through improved connectivity rather than mere tariff reduction. Business community will have a growing role and responsibility in this regard.

Closing Session: Key Policy Recommendations and An Action Agenda

Chair: Mr Bratindra Bhattacharya, Director and Centre Head, CUTS Calcutta Resource Centre

In his opening remarks, Mr. Bhattacharya mentioned that the South Asian Region has a long history of regional integration which has been mired by political issues. However, initiatives such as the BBIN MVA are important steps towards greater integration in the South Asian region. He further mentioned that while hard infrastructure, soft infrastructure and digital infrastructure are considered the key pillars of connectivity, livelihood has emerged as another important factor of the BBIN connectivity initiatives during the course of discussion.

He then invited Dr. Indranil Bose, Professor at St. Xavier's College, Kolkata and Dr. Enamul Haque, Professor, East West University, Dhaka to make the rapporteur's presentation.

Rapporteur's Presentation

Dr. Bose made a very comprehensive presentation summarising the key points of discussion and recommendations made during the one and a half day conference. The most important

recommendations as suggested by Abdul Matlub Rnehmanthat was highlighted during the survey included

- 1) Need for an institutional body to head BBIN. Dhaka can be the headquarter in that case
- 2) Promoting Rahmatulla Connectivity Awards for media such that they can also work on better stakeholder awareness in the BBIN border regions

Panellists:

Mr. Badrul Hassan Babul, Ministry of Commerce, Bangladesh

Mr. Babul stated that higher economic integration is necessary to overcome the economic hurdles existing in the sub-region. For this, initiatives such as the BBIN-MVA are very important. He further mentioned that the BBIN member countries understand the significance of this and have already started implementing various connectivity strategies. For instance, in January 2018, a protocol route on passenger vehicle movement was finalised. Similarly a protocol on the cargo movements is also under process and is expected to be completed by June, 2018. He stated that once these protocol routes are finalised, it will make the implementation of the MVA smoother. His major recommendations included

- While India has already acceded to the TIR convention, the other three countries in the BBIN region also have accede to TIR for better implementation of the BBIN MVA. In this regard, he requested IRU to work with CUTS to convince the governments of Bangladesh, Nepal and Bhutan to adopt TIR.
- The member countries should facilitate and promote usage of electronic clearance in all the borders to address corruption and law & order issues
- Establishment of economic zones in or around the border regions is necessary to address livelihood issues arising out of the MVA
- Countries should not panic at the thought of the MVA. Rather they should prioritize their problems and try to address it one by one for smoother implementation of the MVA and greater economic integrity in the region.

Ms. Giyem Bidha, Bhutan Agriculture and Food Regulatory Authority

Ms. Bidha stressed that while Bhutan is a landlocked country and connectivity is important for it, Bhutan's commitment towards preservation and conservation of culture and environment, low impact high value tourism and maintaining 60% of forest cover in the country are also equally important in their policy making. She also pointed out that inadequate infrastructure, high transport cost (highest in the region), lack of border infrastructure including laboratories are some of the local challenges faced by the traders in Bhutan and these need to be immediately addressed in order to implement the MVA. Her major recommendations included

- Increasing coordination between the neighbouring nations at all levels including at the government levels and at middle level including technical institutes, customs, etc. Better coordination at this level is very important to establish further people to people connect

including labourers and porters. This will help to build trust and confidence among the local populace about each other's systems

- Strengthening institutions including testing agencies and laboratories
- Harmonization of standards across the member countries and most importantly mutual recognition of standards between the member countries
- Finally, it is very important to create awareness among the local population, especially those staying near the borders, about the various benefits of the MVA.

Mr. Sujeev Shakya, Nepal Economic Forum

Mr Shakya stated that the region has a huge incidence of informal trade hence it is important to understand how these informal transactions can be moved to formal ones. He suggested in

- Finding ways to increase maximum people to people contact between the member countries
- Addressing the perception issue that BBIN initiative is not only about the MVA, other aspects should also be considered
- Need to benchmark best practices of other industries as well as other regions
- Need to have visible efforts in trust building among the countries for smoother people to people movement

Mr. U Aung Min Thyke, Department of Trade, Government of Myanmar

Mr. Thyke in his address suggested the following steps for smoother implementation of the MVA

- More information sharing with the local populace especially those staying near the border
- Since the member countries may vary greatly in terms of their rules and regulations, some common principles must be set to determine the rules for the BBIN MVA
- Creation of equitable and sustainable employment opportunities at the border.
- Political will of the various governments.

Vote of Thanks: Mr Bratindra Bhattacharya, Director and Centre Head, CUTS Calcutta Resource Centre

The session ended with Mr. Bhattacharya thanking all the panellists for gracing the event and sharing their thoughts and recommendations on such an important topic. He thanked the funding agencies including DFID and US State Department for extending their help to conduct studies that are significant for greater regional integration in the BBIN region. He also thanked the country partners, consultants and CUTS colleagues for successfully completing the survey and compiling the draft report. He finished his Vote of Thanks by stressing on the huge scope of the BBIN integration, of which the MVA is only a part and hoping for more such deliberations in the future for greater integration in the Bay of Bengal region.

Annexure I: Background note



Regional Policy Dialogue

Connectivity Imperatives in the Bay of Bengal Region

May 2-3, 2018, Hotel Metropolitan, New Delhi

Objective

An effective public-private dialogue between and among countries of the Bay of Bengal region is essential to highlight the hurdles that must be overcome to ensure the operationalisation of one of the most talked about regional cooperation agreements in the recent times, viz. the BBIN Motor Vehicles Agreement. With this backdrop, the objective of this Regional Policy Dialogue is to discuss, disseminate and validate the research findings and key advocacy points that have emerged from our study in order to chart out a forward-looking action agenda for enhanced regional cooperation in the Bay of Bengal region.

Background and Context

Slow growth of trade within South Asia can be explained by the inadequate attention paid to the trade facilitation requirements, particularly for trade via land routes. Sub-optimal regional connectivity and integration further contributes to the under-utilisation of the region's economic potential. Bridging this gap between the potential and current situation will improve the economic status of the millions of inhabitants on this sub-continent, which accounts for the largest concentration of poor and marginalised population in the world. Though the countries in the region have been negotiating amongst themselves through the SAARC (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation) platform to reduce current physical and non-physical barriers to transportation and transit, the progress has been rather slow and the costs of intra-regional movement of goods are increasingly becoming noncompetitive, notwithstanding the high potential of the emerging economies of this region.

Faced with the challenge of slow progress in integration efforts in South Asia, and a changing economic landscape, where the world seems to be increasingly turning towards South Asia and Southeast Asia to drive tomorrow's engines of growth and economic prosperity, in June 2015, the Governments of Bangladesh, Bhutan, India and Nepal signed the Motor Vehicles Agreement to facilitate easy movement of cargo and passenger vehicles in the region, with an ultimate aim to ease and enable trade and economic flows. Implementation of this Agreement, however, faces many challenges on socio-economic, political, geographical and environmental grounds and hence positive results are yet to be realised.

Therefore, with the motive to generate momentum and discussions towards an effective operationalisation of this Agreement, CUTS, along with its country partners, conducted a study that aims to create an enabling environment and inclusive policy discourse, to facilitate trade, transport and transit connectivity between and among the BBIN group of countries and Myanmar.

The study has attempted to estimate gains from acceding to international conventions on transit facilitation; focused on identifying infrastructural, political, policy-related, and social challenges, which result in wastage of time, money, and resources; and thus, suggest possible solutions towards effective implementation of the BBIN MVA.

Annexure II: Agenda



Regional Policy Dialogue

Connectivity Imperatives in the Bay of Bengal Region

May 2-3, 2018, Hotel Metropolitan, New Delhi

Agenda

Day 1: Wednesday, May 2, 2018

1600 - 1630 Registration

1630 - 1830 Opening: Emerging Trends in Regionalism and Strategic Issues for Better Connectivity in the Bay of Bengal Region

This will be a high-level plenary with speakers sharing their insights on emerging strategic and geopolitical issues impacting connectivity in the Bay of Bengal region. This will also highlight how countries in the Bay of Bengal region are looking at regionalism at present and what priorities define their approach to the region.

- Welcome Remarks by Pradeep S Mehta, Secretary General, CUTS International
- Introductory Remark by Jaya Singh Verma, Programme Manager Asia Regional Team, Department for International Development, British High Commission
- Introductory Remark by Robert Garverick, Minister Counsellor for Economic, Environmental, Science and Technology Affairs, US Embassy in New Delhi
- Special Address by Amitava Chakraborty, Director, Bangladesh Foreign Trade Institute
- Special Address by Dasho Kinley Dorji, Former Secretary, Ministry of Information and Communication, Royal Government of Bhutan
- Special Address by Sandeep Kumar, Commissioner (Customs & Export Promotion), Department of Revenue, Ministry of Finance, Government of India
- Special Address by Toe Aung Myint, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Commerce, Government of Myanmar
- Special Address by Purushottam Ojha, Former Commerce Secretary of Nepal
- Vote of Thanks by Prithviraj Nath, Associate Director, CUTS International

1900 - 2030 Book Release: Putting Consumer's First – Essays in honour of Pradeep Mehta

2030 Reception & Dinner

Day 2: Thursday, May 3, 2018

0900 - 1030 Session 1: Linking Connectivity to Livelihoods

This session will deliberate on how better connectivity between and among countries in the Bay of Bengal region will impact job creation and sustainable livelihoods. It will look at evidence presented from the recent relevant studies to discuss trends and come up with recommendations for the promotion of sustainable livelihoods, with a particular focus on women's entrepreneurship.

Chair

Atiur Rahman, Chairman, Unnayan Shamannay and Former Governor, Bangladesh Bank

Presentation

Debolina Mukherjee, Policy Analyst, CUTS International

Panellists

- Mustafizur Rahman Distinguished Fellow, Centre for Policy Dialogue, Bangladesh
- Pushpa Chhetri, Director, Bhutan Media and Communication Institute, Bhutan
- Anasua Basu Roychaudhury, Fellow, Observer Research Foundation
- Sagar Prasai, India Country Representative, The Asia Foundation
- SwanPyae Oo, Project Manager, Myanmar Marketing Research & Development

1030 - 1100 Networking Break

1100 - 1300 Session 2: Leveraging Infrastructure for Better Physical Connectivity

This session will look at the status of existing infrastructure and the gaps, how on-going and planned infrastructure development can be leveraged for optimum outcomes from enhanced connectivity and what more needs to be done at the national and regional levels in terms of physical infrastructure, to come up with specific and prioritised infrastructure related recommendations. The session will also spend some time on how to look at infrastructure from a gender lens.

Chair

Anil Bamba, Member (Planning & Development), Land Ports Authority of India, Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India

Presentation

Sarbjit Singh, Policy Analyst, CUTS International

Panellists

- Monoj Kumar Roy, Former Additional Secretary (FTA), Ministry of Commerce, Bangladesh
- Karma Pemba, Chief Transport Officer, Road Safety & Transport Authority, Royal Government of Bhutan
- Joseph George, Consultant, United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
- Soumya Chattopadhyay, Consultant, Regional Cooperation, Asian Development Bank
- Thet Zaw Win, Director Ministry of Construction, Government of Myanmar
- Rajan Sharma, Oriental Freight Service and Former President, Nepal Freight Forwarders Association

1300-1400 Lunch

1400 - 1530 Session 3: Software of Connectivity: The BBIN Motor Vehicles Agreement and Other Initiatives

This session will focus on the current status and possible challenges to the implementation of the BBIN Motor Vehicles Agreement and examine how tools like the TIR Convention can enable and facilitate the implementation of such connectivity initiatives. It will also discuss the implications of a successful implementation of the BBIN MVA for other connectivity initiatives in the region.

Chair

Mustafizur Rahman Distinguished Fellow, Centre for Policy Dialogue, Bangladesh

Presentation

Surendar Singh, Fellow, CUTS International

Panellists

- Abdul Matlub Ahmad, President, India-Bangladesh Chamber of Commerce
- Md. Sanuwarul Kabir, Assistant Commissioner, National Board of Revenue, Government of Bangladesh
- Satish K. Reddy, Consultant, Asian Development Bank
- Hla Hla Yee, General Secretary, Myanmar International Freight Forwarders Association
- Rash Bihari Rauniar, Managing Director, Interstate Multimodal Transport Pvt. Ltd., Nepal

1530 - 1600 Networking Break

1600 - 1730 Session 4: Private Sector Perspectives on Leveraging Connectivity

This session will discuss the envisaged and desired outcomes of connectivity initiatives in the region as perceived by private sector players. It will collate private sector inputs on the sectors, projects and dialogues, which are to be prioritised and at what levels. The idea is to come up with a prioritised action agenda to enable the private sector to leverage various connectivity initiatives in the region.

Chair

M P Bezbaruah, Former Member, North Eastern Council, Ministry of the Development of North East Region, Government of India

Presentation

Prithviraj Nath, Associate Director, CUTS International

Panellists

- Damchae Dem, Founder, Bhutan Association of Women Entrepreneurs
- Sudhir Chandra Nath, Head of Business, Advance Chemical Industries Ltd, Bangladesh
- Myo Thant, Managing Director, Zar & Zar Co. Ltd., Myanmar
- Kailash Bajimaya, Nepal Chamber of Commerce

1730 - 1830 Closing: Key Policy Recommendations and An Action Agenda

This session will focus on bringing together the suggestions in the form of either policy and/or practice changes or specific business/investment opportunities/ideas that emerged from all the different sessions. A compilation of the key recommendations will be presented by CUTS

International followed by reflections from government officials and experts to sum-up the key takeaways from this dialogue.

Chair

Bratindra Bhattacharya, Director, CUTS International

Rapporteur's Presentation

- Indranil Bose, Professor, St. Xavier's College, Kolkata
- Enamul Haque, Professor, East West University, and Emeritus Fellow, Unnayan Shamannay, Dhaka

Speakers

- Badrul Hassan Babul, Trade Consultant (Joint Secretary), FTA Wing, Ministry of Commerce, Bangladesh
- Gyem Bidha, Deputy Chief Laboratory Officer, Bhutan Agriculture & Food Regulatory Authority, Royal Government of Bhutan
- Aung Min Thyke, Director, Department of Trade, Ministry of Commerce, Myanmar
- Sujeev Shakya, Chairman, Nepal Economic Forum

Annexure III:

List of speakers and participants



Regional Policy Dialogue

Connectivity Imperatives in the Bay of Bengal Region May 2-3, 2018, Hotel Metropolitan, New Delhi, India

List of Speakers Bangladesh

Mr Amitava Chakraborty

Director
Bangladesh Foreign Trade Institute
Dhaka, Bangladesh

Dr Atiur Rahman

Former Governor, Bangladesh Bank
&
Honorary Professor
Department of Development Studies
University of Dhaka
Dhaka, Bangladesh

Dr Mustafizur Rahman

Distinguished Fellow
Centre for Policy Dialogue
Dhaka Bangladesh

Mr Monoj Kumar Roy

Former Additional Secretary (FTA)
Ministry of Commerce
Government of Bangladesh
Dhaka, Bangladesh

Mr Abdul Matlub Ahmad

President
India-Bangladesh Chamber of

Commerce and Industry &
Chairman, Nitol Motors Limited
Dhaka, Bangladesh

Mr Md. Sanuwarul Kabir

Assistant Commissioner
National Board of Revenue
Government of Bangladesh
Bangladesh

Mr Sudhir Chandra Nath

Head of Business
ACI Ltd
Dhaka, Bangladesh

Mr Kailash Bajimaya

CEO, Nepal Chamber of Commerce
Kathmandu, Nepal

Dr A K Enamul Haque

Professor
East West University
Dhaka, Bangladesh

Mr Md. Badrul Hassan Babul

Trade Consultant (Joint Secretary)
FTA Wing
Ministry of Commerce
Dhaka, Bangladesh

List of Speakers

Bhutan

Mr Dasho Kinley Dorji

Former Secretary
Ministry of Information &
Communications
Royal Government of Bhutan

Ms Pushpa Chhetri

Director
Bhutan Media and Communications
Institute
Bhutan

Mr Karma Pemba

Chief Transport Officer

Road Safety & Transport Authority
Royal Government of Bhutan

Ms Damchae Dem

Founder/CEO, Bhutan Association
of Women Entrepreneurs, Bhutan

Ms Gyem Bidha

Deputy Chief Laboratory Officer
Bhutan Agriculture & Food
Regulatory Authority
Royal Government of Bhutan
Thimpu, Bhutan

List of Speakers

India

Mr Pradeep S Mehta

Secretary General
CUTS International
Jaipur, India

Mr Robert Garverick

Minister Counselor for
Economic, Environment, Science
and Technology Affairs
Embassy of the United States of
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Ms Jaya Singh Verma

Programme Manager
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Department for International
Development
British High Commission
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Dr Anusua Basu Roy Choudhury

Fellow
Observer Research Foundation
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Mr Sagar Prasai

Country Representative
The Asia Foundation
New Delhi, India

Mr Anil K Bamba

Member (Planning & Development)
Land Ports Authority of India
Ministry of Home Affairs,
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Mr Joseph George

Consultant
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ESCAP Sub-regional Office for South
and South-West Asia
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Mr Soumya Chattopadhyay

Consultant
Regional Cooperation
Asian Development Bank
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Mr Sathish Reddy

Regional Cooperation Specialist

Asian Development Bank
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Mr M P Bezbaruah
Former Member

North Eastern Council
Ministry of the Development of
North East Region,
Government of India

List of Speakers Nepal

Mr Purushottam Ojha
Former Secretary
Minister of Commerce
Government of Nepal

Mr Rajan Sharma
Oriental Freight service &
Former President, Nepal Freight
Forwarders Association
Nepal

Mr R.B Rauniar
Managing Director
Interstate Multimodal Transport
Pvt. Ltd.
Kathmandu, Nepal

Mr Sujeev Shakya
Chairman
Nepal Economic Forum
Kathmandu, Nepal

List of Speakers Myanmar

Mr Toe Aung Myint
Permanent Secretary
Ministry of Commerce
Government of Myanmar

Mr Swan Pyae Oo
Project Manager
Business Insights Department
MMRD Co. Ltd, Myanmar

Mr Thet Zaw Win
Director
Department of Highways
Ministry of Construction
Government of Myanmar

Ms Hla Hla Yee
General Secretary
Myanmar International Freight
Forwarders Association
Myanmar

Dr Myo Thant
Managing Director
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Mr Aung Min Thyke
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Mr Md. Mahabub Hasan
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Mr Raju Tuladhar

Nepal Economic Forum
Nepal

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Nepal Economic Forum
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Mr Kshitiz Dahal
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