



Event Report on

National Policy Dialogue

"Sharing Field Findings of Bangladesh and Documenting the Current Policy Discourse"

Name of the Project

Creating an Enabling and Inclusive Policy and Political Economy Discourse for Trade, Transport and Transit Facilitation in and among Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal (BBIN) and Myanmar-Facilitating implementation and stakeholder buy-in in the BBIN+M sub-region (EPTAF)



Date: 20th February 2018

Venue

Unnayan Shamannay, Conference Room, Dhaka, Bangladesh

Organizer by







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Contextual Dynamics

Unnayan Shamannay (US) is a home-grown Bangladeshi non-profit and nongovernmental research organization. The ultimate vision of Unnayan Shamannay is to transform the Bangladeshi society into a knowledge based society. Promoting cultural learning as research doctrine and strengthening the disciplinary stances of social science are Unnayan Shamannay's missions as an organization. The members of Unnayan Shamannay have been striving to invigorate and further strengthen private sector initiatives for socioeconomic and cultural development of Bangladesh through a concerted grassroots approach. It is under this context that Unnayan Shamannay has been a proud partner from Bangladesh in a project named "Creating an Enabling and Inclusive Policy and Political Economy Discourse for Trade, Transport and Transit Facilitation in and among Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal (BBIN) and Myanmar-Facilitating implementation and stakeholder buy-in in the BBIN+M sub-region" with heartiest support and cooperation from CUTS International (Consumer Unity and trust Society). The overall objective of this project is to understand the policy, procedural and politicaleconomy hurdles to trade, transport and transit facilitation regime between Eastern South Asia (comprising of the BBIN group of countries, viz. Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, and Nepal and Myanmar), hinging on how facilitating such connectivity will have a direct/indirect impact on development parameters such as livelihoods, poverty and gender. It also aims to facilitate trade and transit among the five countries, viz. Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal (BBIN) and Myanmar by enabling the implementation of the BBIN Motor Vehicles Agreement (MVA) and such other enabling framework agreements and policy inittaives through evidence-based advocacy, facilitative dialogues, and capacity building. The National Policy Dialogue was arranged to document the current Bangladeshi discourse on the field findings from Bangladesh part.





Background

South Asia is one of the least integrated and connected regions of the world. Intra-regional trade is around five per cent of the total trade of South Asian countries. This lack of connectivity and integration has long been accepted as one of the biggest contributors to the sub-optimal utilization of the region's economic potential. The goal of the project is to facilitate trade and transit among the five countries – Bangladesh, Bhutan, India and Nepal (BBIN) and Myanmar – by enabling the implementation of the BBIN Motor Vehicles Agreement (MVA) and such other enabling regional framework agreements and policy inittaives through evidence-based advocacy, facilitative dialogues, and capacity building. Based on corridor-specific data, the project has estimated gains from acceding to international conventions on transit facilitation through appropriate econometric modeling, identifying challenges, and suggesting possible solutions towards implementing the BBIN MVA.

Objectives of the Event

The objective of this dialogue is to share the field findings with national experts and to consult their valued opinion regarding the past, present and future of BBIN.

The specific objectives of this National Policy Dialogue were:

- ✓ Understanding the policy, procedural and political-economic hurdles to trade, transport and transit facilitation within BBIN+M sub-region
- ✓ Whether trade facilitation has direct or indirect impact on livelihoods, poverty and gender parameters





Participants

A total number of 28 participants ushering from various segments of academia, government, civil society organizations, research organizations and NGOs contributed and participated in the dialogue. This varied presence of distinguished experts from their relevant fields made the dialogue enriched with several new epistemological contributions. Both positive and negative dynamics of BBIN were discussed in the dialogue.

Table 1: Honorable Contributors of the Dialogue (see annex for detail)

	Categories of Member	No. of participants
1)	Academics	3
2)	Researchers from Think Tanks	4
3)	Representatives from Business organizations	8
4)	Media	1
5)	Intra-Regional Trade Related Organizations	2
	Government Organizations	3
6)	Unnayan Shamannay	7
	Total	28





Event Proceedings

At 11:00 a.m., 20th February, Tuesday, the National Policy Dialogue was conducted In the conference room of Unnayan Shamannay. The dialogue continued till 2:00 p.m. Dr. Atiur Rahman inaugurated the dialogue with a welcome speech and then invited Dr. A.K. Enamul Haque to share the field findings with the participants. After the completion of Dr. A.K. Enamul Haque's presentation, Dr. Atiur Rahman invited the participants to freely contribute to the dialogue. The participants first commented on the presented field findings and related their own ideas and epistemological worldviews to the dialogue. From BBIN's current status to the future prospects of Eurozone alike regional integration – every aspect was critically analyzed during the dialogue. While some participants agreed on the presented concepts and field facts , some other participants conquered and presented their differences in opinion. All in all, the whole dialogue presented both a bird's eye view and a microscopic view on BBIN at the same time. Challenges and possibilities were comparatively discussed and countered during the dialogue. At the end, Dr. Enamul Haque thanked all the participants for their presence and valuable opinions and concluded the dialogue.





Inauguration Speech By The Event's Chairman



Dr. Atiur Rahman, Chairman of Unnayan Shamannay and former Governor of Bangladesh Bank, delivered the inauguration speech. In the beginning, Dr. Atiur Rahman welcomed everyone to the National Policy Dialogue under the BBIN-EPTAF Project. Despite tremendous traffic jam, everyone was present at the dialogue in due time – Dr. Atiur Rahman acknowledged this and expressed his thanks and gratitude. Then he noted the recent status of Bhutan in the BBIN agreement and explained that

Bhutan's upper house Parliament has agreed to BBIN but the lower house has not. But he argued that India is very pro-active and eager in implementation of BBIN-MVA agreement. For example, he mentioned that in Petrapole, Agartala, there are a lot of warehouses which are crucial to the infrastructural establishment for BBIN. Further, he emphasized the importance of proper infrastructural establishment for Bangladesh. Moreover, he reasoned that it is high time we identify the probable challenges and construct their reasonable solutions for Bangladesh's role in BBIN. He distinguishably identified in which areas the hurdles can be situated - regulations, policy and infrastructure. By sharing his experience as a former governor of Bangladesh Bank, he argued that preparedness and proper policy implication will carry Bangladesh a long way on the BBIN front. He drew a specific example of Automated Cheque Clearance in public banks and stated that in his early times of being a governor, he observed that public banks cleared their checks manually and that would take a long time and created hazardous experiences for the clients. He advised the public banks to adopt Automated Cheque Clearance but they were very reluctant to do so. Dr. Atiur Rahman ordered the banks to adopt the automated cheque clearance process within one month and he also added that if they were failed to do so, they would have to pay a 10,000 Taka fine for each cheque. The public banks soon adopted the Automated Cheque Clearance system. He concluded his speech by anticipating that if a small country like Bangladesh faces so much challenges to adopt an advanced business model, then the other countries in BBIN will face bigger challenges and hurdles. Then the main presentation for the dialogue was presented by Dr. Enamul Hague.





Field Findings Sharing by Dr. A.K. Enamul Haque

Dr. Enamul Haque first briefly explained and analyzed the project objectives and expected outcomes of BBIN. Then he described the initiatives taken so far on behalf of Bangladesh regarding BBIN. Export-import volume by land ports of Bangladesh were showed by Dr. Enamul Haque later. Then he specifically noted that in general, experts believe the volume of



trade in Benapole is to be very high. But according to the research conducted by Unnayan Shamannay, volume of trade in Benapole is 52% in comparison with other four land ports. He argued that Burimari is the rising land port for import side of the trade for Bangladesh in comparison with other BBIN routes. He regretted the fact that Unnayan Shamannay research team could not obtain any trade related data of Tamabil. He discussed the current infrastructure related development projects in Bangladesh on the BBIN routes. Then he mentioned names of the BBIN trade routes. He showed the monthly average income stake holder-wise and route- wise. Regarding the labor income data in Tamabil, some participants argued that there was a strong syndicate in Tamabil and hence no fair competition among the laborers. So, the wage rate for laborers in Tamabil is very high. Another reason behind the high wage rate in Tamabil is the existence of contract basis labor appointment. In Banglabandha, the scenario was same for the laborers' income. The scenario in Benapole is quite different as strong competition among the laborers. Dr. Enamul Haque further noted that the truckers' income in Burimari is significantly high. He noted that the elements which are affecting laborers' income need to be examined further. Then Dr. Enamul Haque moved on to the gender aspects of BBIN. He explained the inherent reasons behind the low involvement of women in the land port activities – less flexible time for work and distance from home, lack of residential and sanitation facility, lack of safety and security, etc. The participants of the dialogue suggested that the "work nature" and "security issues" as principle reasons for low participation rate of women. Then Dr. Enamul Haque moved on to the situation of infrastructural facilities. In addition, he illustrated the prioritized facilities identified by the stakeholders established to be on the BBIN routes.





Dialogue Session

Dr. Atiur Rahman

Chairman, Unnayan Shamannay

Dr. Atiur Rahman thanked Dr. Enamul Haque for his presentation. Then he praised the Unnayan Shamannay members who conducted the research. He illustrated the complex environment a government of a developing country has to work in. In his opinion, this research will assist the government of Bangladesh to deal with such complexities

regarding BBIN. However, he noted that some observations need to be cross-checked and some data need to be further explained. Then he urged the participants to explain their comments freely and independently.



Mr. Motiar Rahman

Chairman, Import-export Sub-committee, India-Bangladesh Chamber of Commerce and Industry

Mr. Motiar Rahman congratulated Dr. Enamul Haque for his informative presentation. Then Mr. Rahman stated that the land port authority is not strong enough in Bangladesh. He also emphasized on finding out a formidable policy for carrying our products through India. He brought out the fact

that infrastructure level is different in different countries. According to Mr. Motiar Rahman, virtual gap is more important. Moreover, policy support is also crucial in making the BBIN process sustainable. Electronic paper transfer, a most necessary procedure for Bangladesh, should be initiated. Integrated Software System will also have to be established in the land ports. He further added that 88 items are exported from Bangladesh to Nepal. According to him, there is a green factory which has been established in Jessore. He also stated that Dhaka based office of the land port authority is not quite active. There is no testing lab in Benapole. For customer clearance, at least three or four days are needed. To ease the export clearance process, decentralizing is the only solution. Mr. hyRahman pressed on two issues with utmost importance – overcoming the administrative failure and creating an open tender system. At this point, Mr. Motiar Rahman concluded his speech by thanking the Unnayan Shamannay research team and the presenter Dr. Enamul Haque.





Mr. Manzur Ahmed Advisor, FBCCI

Mr. Manzur Ahmed emphasized the fact that there is no chapter regarding trade facilitation in BBIN. According to him, the whole BBIN process should be concerned with two specific kind of vehicle – passenger with carried vehicle and cargo. But more importantly, Mr. Ahmed noted that there is no mention of "business to business" route in BBIN. He also stated that there are routing points across the countries of



BBIN which can be used. Moreover, he said that the issue of "returning empty trucks" will be a very crucial hurdle in the way of implementing BBIN. He also opined that the transit routes should be defined. In this vein, he added that the purpose of BBIN is very asymmetric regarding the BBIN countries. India is trying to connect the Eastern port and Western port. At the same time, Bangladesh wants to bring the imported products through a direct route from Nepal. He strongly emphasized that BBIN is neither a transit document nor a transit agreement. Another neglected aspect in the BBIN, according to Mr. Manzur Ahmed, is the energy sector. He opined that energy prospects should be added in the BBIN agenda.

Asjadul Kibria

Plan Editor, The Financial Express



Asjadul Kibria shared his experience of communicating with Landport authority regarding the complaint made by Nepalese Ambassador in doing business in Bangladesh. He stated that the Banglabandha Land Port Authority did not agree to talk to him rather they asked to contact Public Relations Officer. However, PRO himself did not understand his queries. He identified warehouse facility and road quality of the land ports as the two-principal concern two be

addressed for implementation of BBIN-MVA. In his opinion, these were very crucial problems for the land ports.





Mr. Hossain Ahmed Mojumder

Assistant General Secretary, Bangladesh Tuck Owner Association, Tejgaon, Dhaka

Mr. Hossain Ahmed Mojumder first thanked the Unnayan Shamannay research team for conducting this research. He then opined that BBIN relevant infrastructure in Bangladesh is very weak and scarce. He identified unavailability of proper



restroom facilities for drivers in the BBIN routes or even in the land ports as crucial factor for trade facilitation. In this context, he mentioned that drivers need to sleep during very long trips. Mr. Mojumder emphasized on the fact that there should be a nationally formed training system for the drivers. He further added that helpers should be trained too. A very critical trade condition in BBIN is the returning of empty trucks, he added. Returning empty after ending a trip would be a great loss for both the owners and drivers, Mr. Mojumder explained. He also expressed concern about the heavy Indian trucks passing through Bangladeshi roads. According to him, roads and highways in Bangladesh are not strong enough for the whole BBIN procedure.

Dr. Selim Raihan

Executive Director, SANEM



Dr. Selim Raihan argued that an integrated South Asia is significant for many reasons. The region holds a shared history, shared culture, and hundreds of years of a common civilisation which ran through different corners of this region. He also stated that deeper integration is necessary for generating and sustaining economic growth in a region that is home to a significant share,

and the highest density, of poor people in the world. According to Dr. Selim Raihan, deeper regional integration through trade in goods and services and better transport facilities will improve the competitiveness of these countries to better participate in global trade. He pointed that the shown data on "Infrastructure Quality" should be land ports specific rather than ports, which can give us exact ideas about the current situation of land ports.





Dr. Mahbuba Nasreen Gender Expert, Professor & Director, Institute of Disaster Management and Vulnerability Studies (IDMVS), Dhaka University



Dr. Mahbuba Nasreen expressed her concerns about the extremely low involvement of women in land ports. She said that in Malaysia and some other countries, women work in late hours and night shifts even in land ports. According to her, upon ensuring proper safety and security, women can work in land ports of Bangladesh too. She stated that physical infrastructure is quite important for the BBIN, but at the same time Bangladesh and other participant

countries have to ensure building health centers on or nearby BBIN routes. She argued that on BBIN routes accidents can happen any time and that's why the health centers are necessary. In addition she reasoned that while constructing roads for BBIN, the concerned authority will have to be careful so that any trees or other plantations are not hampered.

Mr. S.M. Nazmul Hasan

Director (Bangladesh), BIMSTEC Secretariat

Mr. S.M. Nazmul Hasan argued that in BBIN, nobody is anybody's opponent. Rather every country has to work out its benefit through combined planning and discussion. He reasoned that connectivity, if it is really established, will benefit each and every country engaged in BBIN. He also warned that BIMSTEC will not



substitute BBIN. Instead BIMSTEC will enhance the stated features of BBIN. Rohingya issue has cause ambiguity in Bangladesh's diplomatic relationship with Myanmar. As a result, Bangladesh has to proceed with great care in any kind of trade related negotiations with Myanmar. He also added that, in 2018, there will be energy grid interconnection among the BBIN countries. Without Myanmar, constructing BIMSTEC into a well-operational mode will not be possible, Mr. Hasan opined. He also mentioned a Customs Co-operation Agreement being drafted recently.





Sudhir Chandra Nath Head of Business, ACI Seed Business, ACI Limited, Bangladesh



Sudhir Chandra Nath argued that the trucks which are coming through the border should be digitally identified, sealed and insured. It is in this vein he suggested using GPS trackers on the trucks. He said that in today's digital construct, digital licensing or identification is not very costly. Digitalization will reduce a great deal of complexity in the checking and other procedural examinations in the land ports.

Marufa Ismat

Chief transport Economist, RHD, Ministry of Roads and High Way, Govt. of Bangladesh

Marufa Ismat identified the overloading trucks as the major reason behind deteriorating status of road condition. She also emphasized that gender equity is quite neglected in the BBIN protocols and procedures. It is high time we add more importance to this issue.



Mohammad Ehteshamul Hoque

First Secretary (Customs), NBR, Govt. of Bangadesh



Mohammad Ehteshamul Hoque stated that two kinds of vehicles with passengers can pass through the BBIN routes – "passenger with carried vehicle" and "cargo vehicle". Bhutan has only agreed to the "passenger with carried vehicle agreement" not with the latter one. Due to Bhutan's disagreement, the protocol has not yet been signed, he mentioned. He also mentioned that Bhutan is extremely concerned with the environmental hazards. Nepal

seemed not so interested in BBIN agreement at the last meeting held in Bangalore, he further added. Mr. Hoque suggested that Land Port Authority should focus on Burimari and Banglabandha land ports.

Dr. Syed Humayun Kabir Former DG, SARSO





Dr. Syed Humayun Kabir said that in every major land port, there should be testing laboratories. According to him, there have to be sample testing laboratories at the both end to facilitate trade. And in Indian land ports, there have to be both Bangladeshi and Indian sample testing laboratories. But India did not accept SARSO's suggestion regarding this issue.



Dr. Anup Kumar Saha

Assistant Professor, University of Dhaka



Dr. Anup Kumar Saha said that Burimari and Banglabandha should be given utmost importance in the BBIN. At the same time, Bangladesh has to ensure whether it will receive the political co-operation from the partner countries. Moreover, he added that despite Rohingya issue, there are some more pressing issues regarding Myanmar which have to be dealt by Bangladesh. The problem of Drug trafficking is such an issue

which need to be looked into especially during BBIN implementation.

Professor Dr. Mustafizur Rahman

Distinguished Fellow, Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD), Bangladesh



Dr. Mustafizur Rahman drew out the importance of believing on the BBIN as a step in the development ladder for Bangladesh. In his opinion, Bangladeshi experts are worried too much about the low rate of export to India. According to his line of thought, if Bangladesh can import her necessary goods at a lower price, then there is no problem in BBIN or other similar agreements. He remarked that "a dollar sold is a dollar

earned". Dr. Mustafizur Rahman identified returning of the empty trucks as an investment risk for the Bangladeshi traders, truckers and businessmen. He suggested that some joint companies should be established to avoid this problem. But a truck driver alone cannot seek orders or consignments after crossing the border. He further suggested that BIMSTEC will later revisit and redefine the MVA agreement. Without accepting the inevitable nature of globalization, Bangladesh has nothing to do in this aspect. He presented an alternative argument about the India-Bangladesh trade relation. In his





opinion, India is going to be a major and dominant economic power in the coming decades. He advised that Bangladesh should adapt herself to benefit from being the neighbor of such an enigmatic economic power. Cheap imports and transit fees can be great sources of such benefits. According to him, providing transit can be one kind of service. He envisioned a multi-modal approach for the BBIN. Understanding Bangladesh's primary responsibilities for the BBIN establishment is also crucial. In Dr. Mustafizur Rahman's expression – "we have to understand whether we are doing our homework properly". The border points have to be poised as "crossing points", not "control points". Dr. Mustafizur Rahman also emphasized on the revision process of Hardware and Software strengths of the land ports. Both the strengths have to be established within a harmonious balance.

Abdul Motlub Ahmed

Chairman, NITOL-NILOY Group, Bangladesh

Abdul Motlub Ahmed stated that trust build-up is the most important factor in ventures like BBIN. Bangladesh has to gain the trust of India. According to him, the spirit of BBIN will not be achieved if all the countries don't get equal access to all of the land ports under the BBIN agreements. He declared that unless the Indian visa process is totally liberalized for



Bangladesh, trust building through BBIN will not be possible. He also suggested that the duty on multi-axle truck should be zero. Moreover, he said that think tanks of all the BBIN countries have a crucial role to play in this venture. Think tanks can clear the policy level puzzles and thus pave the smooth way for trust build-up. At the end, he invited everyone present at the meeting by saying – "Let us try to make BBIN a success story".

Concluding Remarks

To draw the conclusion of the dialogue, Dr. A. K. Enamul Haque expressed the importance of this National Policy Dialogue. He said that distinguished experts from all over the country came to this dialogue and provided their most precious opinions. From this dialogue, political-economic hurdles to trade, transport and transit facilitation have been prudently identified. To advance in the BBIN venture, Bangladesh has to provide significance to the discussed issues in the dialogue. Dr. A. K. Enamul Haque thanked everyone again for their presence and participation in the dialogue. Then he concluded the event.





Key Findings of the Event

- ✓ Creation of one window integrated check posts is necessary to implement BBIN. This will reduce the time and cost of the trading process.
- ✓ Inland Container Depot has to be established for trade facilitation and easing the border crossing process.
- ✓ A single operating software has to be maintained under BBIN MVA agreement. This will create harmony in the whole process. At the same time it will include aligned services on both sides.
- ✓ Electronic transfer of papers through Electronic Data Interface (EDI) should also be initiated.
- ✓ Bangladesh has to utilize India's major economic power. Providing transit can be a great way to do that.





Annexure- 1

List of Participants, Designation and Organization

Sl. No.	Name	Designation and Organization	Gender
1.	Dr. Atiur Rahman	Chairman, Unnayan Shamannay	М
2.	Dr. Mustafizur Rahman	Distinguished Fellow, Centre for Policy Dialogue	М
3.	Dr. A.K. Enamul Haque	Professor, East West University	Μ
4.	Mr. Motiar Rahman	Chairman, Import-export Sub-Committee, India-Bangladesh Chamber of Commerce & Industry (IBCCI)	М
5.	Dr. Selim Raihan	Executive Director, SANEM	Μ
6.	Dr. Mahbuba Nasreen	Gender Expert, Professor & Director, Institute of Disaster Management and Vulnerability Studies	F
7.	Ms. Marufa Ismat	Chief Transport Economist, RHD	\mathbf{F}
8.	Mr. Sudhir Chandra Nath	Head of Business, ACI Seed Business	Μ
9.	Dr. Syed Humayun Kabir	Former DG, SARSO	Μ
10.	Mr. Nazmul Hasan	Director, BIMSTEC Secretariat	Μ
11.	Mr. Ashit Kumar Kundu	PRAN Export	M
12.	Mr. Mohammad Yunus	Senior Research Fellow, BIDS	M
13.	Mr. Monoj Kumar Roy	Former Additional Secretary, Ministry of Commerce, Bangladesh Secretariat	М
14.	Mr. Manzur Ahmed	Advisor, FBCCI	Μ
15.	Mr. Syed Md. Bakhtiar	Director, Bangladesh Freight Forwarders Association	М
16.	Mr. Hossain Ahmed Majumdar	Bangladesh Truck-Cavard Van Malik Samity	Μ
17.	Mr. Mohammad Ehteshamul Haque	First Secretary, Customs, NBR	М
18.	Mr. Mohammad Saeed Islam	Research Officer, BIISS	Μ
19.	Mr. Asjadul Kibria	Plan Editor, The Financial Express	Μ
20.	Mr. Zahid Raihan	Project Co-ordinator, Unnayan Shamannay	Μ
21.	Mr. Shaheen Ul Alam	Project Co-Ordinator, Unnayan Shamannay	Μ
22.	Mr. Abdul Motlub Ahmed	Chairman, NITOL-NILOY Group	Μ
23.	Mr. Shaquib Quoreshi	Secretary, Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce and Industry	Μ
24.	Dr. Anup Kumar Saha	Assistant Professor, University of Dhaka	Μ
25.	Mr. Md. Mahabub Hasan	SRA, Unnayan Shamannay	Μ
26.	Ms. Ayesha Noor	RA, Unnayan Shamannay	\mathbf{F}
27.	Mr. Kazi Newaz Mostofa	RO, Unnayan Shamannay	Μ
28. M=N	Mr. Robert Shuvro Guda Iale, F=Female	SRA, Unnayan Shamannay	М





Annexure -2 Registration Sheet





Registration Sheet

Project Advisory Committee (PAC) Meeting on Project title

"Bangladesh-Bhutan-India-Nepal Motor Vehicles Agreement Facilitating implementation and stakeholder buy-in in the BBIN sub-region"

> Conference Hall, Unnayan Shamannay (UnSy), Dhaka-1000 Tuesday, 20 February 2018 Organized by **Unnayan Shamannay**

> > Organized by

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