



The Asia Foundation Unnayan Shamannay

Brahmaputra Basin Policy Dialogue

Expanding Tradable Benefits of Trans-boundary Water: Promoting Navigational Usage of Inland Waterways in Ganga and Brahmaputra Basins

Dhaka, Bangladesh on Thursday, 10th August, 2017

Background Note

Objectives:

1. To present findings from the country specific diagnostic studies conducted in Brahmaputra Basin and facilitate knowledge sharing on waterways governance within and across borders
2. To promote alternative policy discourses for bringing in the upper and lower riparian (including trans-boundary) concerns for enabling reform measures on management and governance of inland waterways

Expected Outcome:

- Bring in the lower and upper riparian basin-level discourses and create an enabling environment for advocating a better regulatory regime for management of inland waterways

Background and Context:

As part of the Civil Society Fund by The Asia Foundation, CUTS International and its strategic partners are implementing the project titled 'Expanding Tradable Benefits of Trans-boundary Water: Promoting Navigational Usage of Inland Waterways in Ganga and Brahmaputra Basins'. CUTS is implementing the project in partnership with Unnayan Shamannay, Bangladesh; Royal Society for the Protection of Nature (RSPN), Bhutan; and South Asia Watch on Trade, Economics and Environment (SAWTEE), Nepal.

The goal of the project is to contribute to improving policies, laws and regulations for inland waterways governance with particular emphasis on transport connectivity and livelihood in the Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal (BBIN) region. We envision achieving this goal by promoting an alternative policy discourse for enabling reform measures

between policy-makers, civil society, and communities. More details about the project is available here: <http://www.cuts-citee.org/IW/>

Synthesizing the findings from the field-based diagnostic study, national reference group meetings, sub-national and national policy dialogues across 11 locations in four countries, the basin policy dialogue (BPD) will present the diagnostic study report from the project. For the BPD of the Brahmaputra basin, relevant stakeholders are from Bangladesh, Bhutan and India. The dialogue will be organised with government officials, policy makers, private players, media, organisations working on gender issues and CSO representatives at Bangladesh for the Brahmaputra basin.

Taking forward the inputs from the basin policy dialogues, CUTS will strengthen its work on inclusive policy discourse for its regional level dialogue as well as future work on this subject.

Key Discussions:

- Challenges in maintaining navigability due to shifting channels and high rate of sedimentation
- Significantly low volume of trade happening in Brahmaputra through protocol routes
- High potential of trade in small mechanized vessels in smaller stretches within states and between states (Assam and Meghalaya)
- Environmental concerns due to dredging, pollution and environmental flow
- Coordination between relevant ministries at state, national and regional levels
- Conflicts with other sectors (like agriculture, industry, drinking, fisheries etc.) in maintaining minimum depth between upper and lower riparian
- Poor governance at local level in India and Bangladesh
- Livelihood creation at local levels
- New opportunities as well as concerns of tour operators in cross border tourism between India and Bangladesh
- Green protocols for sustainable tourism
- Potential benefits for Bhutan for its access to sea using waterways