

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

Background and Rationale

Eastern South Asia, consisting of Bangladesh, Bhutan, India and Nepal (BBIN region), is fed by two of the mightiest Himalayan rivers, viz. the Ganga and the Brahmaputra. Historically, the inland waterways created by these river systems have helped thriving human activities over the centuries; be it livelihood, culture or transport.

In the more modern times, however, new political boundaries divided the region and with that came decades-long tussles over water resources resulting in mistrust and non-congruent/standalone planning and management of these rivers and associated inland waterways. Over time, the management of these rivers and associated inland waterways became highly politicised and the discourse for cross-border cooperation dwindled as national organisations and agencies tried to maximum national interest at the cost of regional interest.

However, there have been palpable shifts in political will towards higher cooperation among the countries of this region. This is apparent in some of the bilateral and regional agreements that were renewed and/or signed, such as the India-Bangladesh Protocol on Inland Water Transit & Trade and the BBIN Motor Vehicles Agreement.

Along with these developments, the Government of India has decided to make huge investment to improve navigation and associated infrastructure along the National Waterways 1 over the Ganga and the National Waterways 2 over the Brahmaputra.

Similarly, Bangladesh is making investments to improve its domestic connectivity via inland waterways. Bhutan is interested to revive its connectivity with India and Bangladesh via inland waterways in the Brahmaputra basin. Nepal is taking steps to develop navigation along the Kosi and the Gandak rivers, which are part of the Ganga basin.

Therefore, the present time is just right to push the agenda for cooperation on inland waterways among the countries of this region and making this discourse more participatory with the involvement of civil society organisations, communities and their engagement with policy-makers. CUTS will conduct a 13 month

intervention under the Civil Society Fund of the South Asia Water Governance Program granted by The Asia Foundation.

Goal & Objectives

Given this background, the project aims to *contribute to improving institutions (i.e. policies, laws, and regulations) for inland waterways governance with particular emphasis on transport connectivity and livelihood in the BBIN region.*

In order to achieve the overall goal, the project will:

- create of an alternative policy discourse between policy-makers, civil society, and communities for enabling reform measures and better governance of inland waterways; and
- share knowledge between governments and CSOs on governance of inland waterways.

The project follows that *if* CUTS and its country partners conduct institutional analysis on the management of policies, laws and regulations with respect to the management of inland waterways in the Ganga and Brahmaputra basins, and organise small discussions and participatory meetings with key stakeholders engaged in/with inland waterways, *then* it will be able to propose an alternative policy discourse for enabling reform measures between governments and civil society and share knowledge that will contribute to improving institutions for inland waterways governance in the BBIN region.

Methodology

CUTS and its country partners will conduct a diagnostic study on the policies, laws, and regulations of inland waterways and the factors enabling or impeding their effective governance in the Ganga and Brahmaputra basins as well as organise targeted policy dialogues and participatory discussions with key stakeholders engaged in/with inland waterways.

Based on the insights from these dialogues, it is likely to support an

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alternative and inclusive policy discourse where CSOs are better represented and engaged in the governance of inland waterways and governments are more responsive to CSO inputs. Furthermore, this can connect the policy discourse between upper riparian and lower riparian along the main river systems and associated inland waterways.

1) Field-based research and diagnostic studies

- In each of the BBIN countries, an institutional analysis reviewing secondary and available evidence on inland waterways, their institutional governance structures, existing policies, and their linkages with communities and livelihoods to gather and consolidate available knowledge on these issues.
- Map the regulatory environment and provide targeted understandings on inland waterways policies, laws, and regulations, including engagement with community and gender issues, and the current state of policy discourse.
- Key Informant Interviews and Focussed Group Discussions with key stakeholders in 13 locations across the basins of Ganga and Brahmaputra in BBIN: three in Bangladesh, two in Bhutan, six in India, and two in Nepal. This will inform the alternative policy discourse for enabling reforms in institutions managing inland waterways.

2) Participatory policy dialogues

CUTS and its partners will present findings in targeted discussions bringing together relevant policy makers, government bodies, CSOs, private actors, organisations working on gender issues, media and other stakeholders. With support from experts formed in National Reference Groups in each BBIN country, deliberations on inland waterway institutions will build support for an inclusive alternative policy discourse for enabling reform measures.

- **Sub-national dialogues** will deliberate on improving institutions and governance of inland waterways with actors at the local level and share knowledge within and across borders on waterways governance. We will also weave in trans-boundary aspects of governance of waterways in the BBIN region and create local/state/basin level discourses on such aspects.
- **National level advocacy meetings** in the capital city of each of the BBIN countries will promote

an agenda for an alternative policy discourse for enabling reform measures on better governance of inland waterways in these countries. The focus will be on sharing diagnostic study results on national institutions and governance of inland waterways.

- **Basin level dialogues** will be set in two locations covering the Ganga and Brahmaputra basins to bring in the upper and lower riparian (including trans-boundary) concerns on management and governance of inland waterways.
- **Regional advocacy meeting** will present a synthesis report of all four diagnostic studies and inputs from preceding dialogues to help in the creation of a regional discourse for deliberations on the need for cooperation for enabling reform measures among the BBIN countries for better management of inland waterways.

Expected Outcomes

The methodology is expected to result in new opportunities for government officials, policy-makers, civil society, communities, media and other stakeholders to come together, learn, and discuss important issues on key policies, laws and regulations on inland waterways. Specifically, it is expected to:

- Deeper and clear understanding of the current policy discourse and institutions of policies, laws and regulations governing the management of inland waterways in the BBIN countries
- Capture the interaction and implications of inland waterway institutions on gender dynamics and women livelihood
- Deliberation and gauging receptiveness on the findings of research and creation of an inclusive alternative policy discourse at the sub-national, national, basin, and regional level
- Bring in the lower and upper riparian basin-level concerns into the policy discourse and create an enabling environment for advocating on management of inland waterways
- Dissemination of knowledge among policy makers and CSOs as well as creation of a regional discourse for deliberations on the need for cooperation for enabling reform measures among the BBIN countries for better management of inland waterways

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