

CUTS CRC Activity Report

April-June 2017

ONGOING PROJECTS



Green Growth and Energy Transformation

CUTS have entered into a contract with Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (FES) for one year to undertake a project titled 'Grow GET'. The project aims to create a platform for interaction and engagement between various stakeholders (policymakers, think tanks, subject experts, industry, media, academia, consumers, etc.) and create a knowledge base on issues pertaining to energy security and green growth in Indian context. The idea is to provide technically sound and politically viable policy recommendations.

CUTS Centre for Competition, Investment & Economic Regulation (CCIER) and Calcutta Resource Centre (CRC) are to work on the project respectively in the states of Rajasthan and West Bengal. This project tenure is initially for one year but is now extended till October 2017. The project is presently in its second phase and the overall theme is "Solar for Education". The overall objective of this phase is to identify the key factors and policy recommendations that are essential for popularising solar among educational institutions. An informal multi-stakeholder platform called the Seed Community was formed with subject experts, and representatives from solar equipment manufacturers, solar project developers, media, and civil society organisations.

Activities

- A consultation meeting entitled 'Forum of Grassroots: Solar for Education' was held with select educational institutions, solar project developers, utility service providers, CSOs and seed community members in Kolkata on May 02, 2017 to deliberate and come up with recommendations to promote rooftop solar solution among educational institutions in West Bengal.
- A consultation meeting entitled 'Forum of Jobs and Finance' will be held in Kolkata during July 2017.

Indo-Asia Connectivity for Shared Prosperity

CUTS in partnership with the East-West Centre (EWC) is implementing a project entitled, 'Emerging Markets Summit to Promote Trade Connectivity' which is being supported by The US Consulate. The Project has been renamed as "Indo Asia Connectivity for Shared Prosperity."

The project aims to strengthen the connections between US and the South and Southeast Asian countries in the Indo-Pacific region to enhance trade and other forms of connectivity between South and Southeast Asian countries, particularly between BBIN and BIMSTEC, while including other critical players such as Australia, Japan, South Korea in the discourse.

The project goal is to bring together compelling evidence, rationale and expertise towards enhancing trade, investment, knowledge-sharing and people-to-people linkages between South and Southeast Asian countries of the Indo-Pacific region, come up with concrete policy recommendations to that end and foster organic

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networks to facilitate that. It aims to contribute positively towards political and commercial convergence on issues surrounding Indo-Pacific connectivity by creating a multi-stakeholder, multi-country platform for exchange, discussions and deliberations amongst key stakeholders (public and private, including the youth in each country).

Activities

- A conference was held in Dhaka, Bangladesh on April 11, 2017 which reflected on issues pertinent to connectivity in the Bay of Bengal region with particular emphasis on physical, energy and investment connectivity. It brought together policymakers, experts, private sector, academia, think-tanks and media representatives from the region to discuss key issues and come up with a forward-looking roadmap for overall connectivity in the Bay of Bengal region.

Bangladesh-India *Border Haats* and their Impacts on Poverty Reduction

CUTS with support from The World Bank undertook a project entitled, ‘Impacts of *Border Haats* on Poverty Reduction and Possible Future Benefits from their Replication and Up-Scaling along the India-Bangladesh Border’. Four *Border Haats* are to be studied under the scope of the project, two each along the Meghalaya-Bangladesh and the Tripura-Bangladesh Border.

The purpose of the project is to understand impacts of existing *Border Haats* on poverty reduction through income, their impacts on informal trade, gender implications, and economic, social and political feasibility and employment generation. The project will also estimate the level of efficiency of the existing *Border Haats* and understand their long-term sustainability if there are no trade restrictions along the India-Bangladesh border.

Activities

- Based on the findings from the field survey and the policy dialogues organised under the project, CUTS has come out with a set of practical policy recommendations which was submitted to select ministries and government departments in India and Bangladesh. Some of the policy recommendations made by CUTS were accepted by the Government of India and will be included in the MoU to be signed between the countries for opening new *border haats*.

Creating an Enabling and Inclusive Policy and Political Economy Discourse for Trade, Transport and Transit Facilitation

The project is a comprehensive study to look at various macro and micro enabling factors that will help to enable a Motor Vehicles Agreement (MVA) within and amongst five countries (Bhutan, Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Myanmar). This would be a three-year study and is being supported by the US State Department and DfID. This study will deepen and further the work done under the IBTA II study.

Under the project, CUTS will undertake extensive field study across eleven trade corridors among these countries to understand the infrastructural and political economy



challenges that can adversely affect effective implementation of the MVA and to identify probable policy interventions to overcome the challenges. To facilitate effective implementation of the project, CUTS International have partnered Policy Advocacy Groups/CSOs in each of the five countries.

Based on the recommendations, CUTS will be organising a series of stakeholder consultations in the select countries along corridors.

Activities

- A Project Advisory Committee (PAC) has been constituted with subject experts from each of the countries to steer implementation of the project. The PAC would not only help in planning various project interventions but would also review various outputs and activities and suggest whether any mid-term course correction is required.
- A Partners' Workshop was organised on May 19-20, 2017, in Kolkata, India to discuss and finalise the methodology, questionnaire, approach and strategies to conduct field survey for five countries.
- Stakeholder specific questionnaires were designed and field survey under has been initiated along the Kolkata-Siliguri-Kakarvitta, and Kolkata-Raxaul/Birganj-Kathmandu corridors. In addition, surveys were also undertaken in Myanmar.

Building Capacity of Grassroots Consumers on Energy Conservation

CUTS and West Bengal Electricity Regulatory Commission (WBERC) are jointly implementing a project to build the capacity of the grassroots consumers and increase their awareness about the existing regulations of the state electricity regulatory commission in the districts of Jalpaiguri and South 24 Parganas. This is aimed towards building the consumer capacity on their rights and responsibilities, educate the consumers about the frequently applicable and used parameters of the Standard of Performance (SoP) regulations of the commission, including the complaint mechanism, new connections, metering and other relevant issues. Focus will also be on building capacity of common consumers on energy conservation and renewable energy systems, especially rooftop solar systems.





Activities

- A Training of Trainers programme was held at WBERC office during April 06-08, 2017.
- 103 consumer interface meetings were conducted at Jalpaiguri and South 24 Pargana districts.
- CRC is developing a Quick consumer guide booklet for electricity consumers and will be finalising and distributing the same by August, 2017.
- CRC is preparing a consolidated list of all complains received from consumers during the consumer interface meetings which will be submitted to WBERC to help them undertake informed interventions.

Promoting Consumer and Producer Gains from Trade between Bangladesh and Tripura in Specific Agricultural Commodities

CUTS is implementing a project titled, 'Promoting Consumer and Producer Gains from Trade between Bangladesh and Tripura in Specific Agri-Horticultural Commodities' with support from The Asia Foundation (TAF). The project aims at identifying specific agricultural/horticultural commodities (which can be imported from Bangladesh to Tripura) that are high in demand across borders and stand to generate substantial consumer and producer gains across borders if trade in such items is facilitated.

The project also looks at generation of knowledge and understanding on the legal and regulatory framework for facilitating cross-border trade in such commodities, identification of solutions to promote market access for the identified agricultural commodities across borders, ultimately leading to consumer and producer gains and undertaking of appropriate advocacy through public-private dialogues to build understanding and consensus on the need to facilitate market access on the identified commodities and the consumer and producer gains that will be generated. The project has commenced from April 2016 and is expected to get over by September 2016.

Activities

- The Final Report has been shared with the Asia Foundation. A Discussion Paper based on this study has been prepared and shared widely.

Intra-BBIN Trade via Inland Waterways

CUTS along with its partners in Bangladesh, Bhutan, India and Nepal with support from The Asia Foundation, India is implementing the Project Launch Meeting on 'Expanding Tradable Benefits of Trans-boundary Water: Promoting Navigational Usage of Inland Waterways in Ganga and Brahmaputra Basins' at Guwahati on October 24, 2016 with the aim 'to contribute to improving institutions for inland waterways governance with particular emphasis on transport connectivity and livelihood in the Bangladesh, Bhutan, India and Nepal (BBIN) region'.

The project will create an alternative policy discourse between policymakers, civil society, and communities for enabling reform measures and better governance of inland waterways; and share knowledge between governments and civil society on



governance of inland waterways. The purpose of this meeting was to discuss and validate activities, outputs and desired/expected outcomes of the project and explore possible collaborations with other partners of the Civil Society Fund (CSF) of the South Asia Water Governance Programme (SAWGP).

Activities

- Sub National Dialogue (West Bengal) was organised on April 17, 2017 to present the state diagnostic study from West Bengal and to have discussion among experts on findings in the diagnostic study. The report of the same has been circulated.

Linkages and Impacts of Cross-Border Informal Trade in Agricultural Inputs in Eastern South Asia

With an objective to understand the dynamics of informal trade in agricultural inputs across the border of India-Bangladesh and India-Nepal, and its impact on livelihoods of farmers, including the gender dimension of those impacts, CUTS International has undertaken a project entitled 'Linkages and Impacts of Cross-Border Informal Trade in Agricultural Inputs in Eastern South Asia', with support from Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research (ACIAR). The project commenced from July 2016 and will continue till June 2017.

Activities

- Arnab Ganguly participated in the National Policy Advocacy Dialogue organised by Unnayan Shamannay in Dhaka on May 16, 2017. Representatives from various ministries and departments, subject experts, think tanks, regional bodies (viz. BIMSTEC Secretariat, SAARC Seed Bank), CSOs and media participated. A joint presentation was made by Arnab Ganguly and Abdullah Nadvi to share key findings from the field survey undertaken at select locations along the India Bangladesh border.



Consumer Broadband Labels:

For Greater Transparency & Informed Consumers

CUTS is implementing a project entitled 'Consumer Broadband Labels: For Greater Transparency & Informed Consumers' with support from Ford Foundation. The objective is to create a discourse among various stakeholders on why there is a need for introducing a label for broadband services in India and also how the same could be done. Under the project, a series of capacity building programmes and focussed group discussion are to be conducted with key stakeholders across 10 locations in India.

Activities

- The Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) recently published a consultation paper entitled 'Data Speed Under Wireless Broadband Plans', seeking comments from the general public. To this end, CRC organised a stakeholder consultation in Kolkata on June 27, 2017. Representatives from CSOs and internet service providers participated and provided their inputs on the consultation paper which were collated and submitted to TRAI.

Institutional and legislative Assessment of Road Safety in States

CUTS Centre for Consumer Action, Research & Training (CART) is implementing a three-month assignment that entails institutional and legislative assessment on Road Safety in select states in India. CRC is partnering CART for implementing the work in West Bengal.

Activities

- A focused group discussion was organised on July 08, 2017 with representatives from the Judiciary, CSO, Department of Traffic, independent lawyers etc. to discuss the key issues pertaining to the legislative provisions pertaining to road safety.

Global Road Safety Partnership

The Project aims to generate awareness about the Motor Vehicles (Amendment) Bill, 2016 and its key highlights among all stakeholders including common public and making a strong base for urgent enactment of the Bill in India, so as to address the burning issues of common road users related to road safety through strong advocacy. Recognising the need of bringing amendments in the present Act, CUTS conceived and designed the Road Safety Advocacy (RoSA) Project in partnership with Global Road Safety Partnership (GRSP).

The project is being implemented at the national level by CART which has been organising a number of regional advocacy dialogues across India. In West Bengal one such regional advocacy dialogue will be organised in August 2017.

Facilitating Bangladesh-India Bilateral Trade in select Agricultural Commodities

CUTS with the support from Chemonics International is implementing a project in India and Bangladesh that aims at understanding various non-tariff barriers that deter trade in select agricultural commodities (viz. Potato, Green Chilly, Tomato and Brinjal) between India and Bangladesh.

The project also aims at facilitating bilateral dialogue between relevant policymakers in both the countries and chalk out an effective action plan to remove such barriers. To this end, CRC will be undertaking a field survey in select North Eastern States in India coupled with an analysis of various regulations pertaining to import of vegetables from Bangladesh. This will be followed by two national level policy advocacy dialogues – one in Bangladesh and the other in India. The duration of the project is three months, i.e. June-September 2017.

Activities

- CRC is presently conducting the field survey in Assam, Meghalaya and Tripura to understand the demand for potato, green chilly, tomato and brinjal in these states and also identify the key bottlenecks at the grassroots that need to be addressed to facilitate import of these vegetables from Bangladesh.
- CRC and CITEE are presently working on preparing product specific fact sheets to highlight relevant clauses in various government regulations pertaining to international trade and food safety that needs to be addressed to facilitate greater bilateral trade in vegetables between India and Bangladesh.

- Arnab Ganguly made a presentation on '*Prospects and Challenges for facilitating Cross Border Electricity Trade among BBIN countries*' organised by Institute for Strategic and Socio-Economic Research in Kathmandu, Nepal during April 17-18, 2017.
- Prithviraj Nath participated at the third meeting of the BIMSTEC Network of Policy Think Tank at Dhaka, Bangladesh on April 22-23, 2017. The meeting aimed to look at possibilities of taking ahead the BIMSTEC agenda and giving it more visibility and how the participating think tanks can contribute to such an agenda.
- Bijaya Roy along with Veena Vidyadharan participated in 'Second Bangladesh-India Joint Consultation on the Roadmap for Sustainable Management of Inland Navigation and Fisheries Resources' organised by International Union for Conservation of Nature at Kolkata on May 30-31, 2017.
- Rupamoy Bhattacharya along with Sayantan Sengupta attended a dialogue meet entitled 'Robots, Jobless Growth: How can India create livelihood in the Digital Age' organised by Bengal Chamber of Commerce on June 05, 2017.

REPRESENTATION

