

CUTS CRC Activity Report

October-December 2015

ONGOING PROJECTS

Enhancing Trade and Regional Economic Integration between India and Bangladesh (IBTA II)

With support of US Consulate, CUTS Calcutta Resource Centre (CUTS CRC) along with CUTS Centre for International Trade, Economics & Environment (CUTS CITEE) undertook a study to examine the key issues which affect bilateral trade through land routes along the border between the state of West Bengal and Bangladesh and explore trade opportunities that can be realised by addressing such issues.

After completing the Phase I of this project and submitting the final report of the same, CRC undertook the Phase II of the study. The overall objective of the study is to frame policy recommendations for: a) signing and operationalising of the Motor Vehicles Agreement and drafting/signing of a Sanitary and Phytosanitary Agreement between India and Bangladesh, hence to benefit and ease the efforts of the traders; and b) replicating Border *Haats* along the India-Bangladesh border towards leveraging the economic and social benefits accruing out of it. The project commenced from September 30, 2013.

An Inter-ministerial meeting was organised by CUTS in March 2015. The final report has been shared with publications for final editing and publishing. The report is expected to be published in January 2016.

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

CUTS with support from The World Bank has undertaken 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'. Under the scope of this project, four Border *Haats* are being studied, two each along the Meghalaya-Bangladesh border and the Tripura-Bangladesh Border.

The purpose of the project is to understand the 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. The project commenced during September 2015 and is slated to be completed by August 2016.

The first phase of the field survey involving all four Border *Haats* has been completed by the CRC team. Data have been collected through questionnaire-based surveys involving both personal interviews and focus group discussions. A few case studies and interviews have also been documented through videography. The team might need to visit *Haats* for a second time for a few more video documentations and field survey.

Sustainable Development Investment Portfolio (SDIP)

The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), Australian Government has developed Sustainable Development Investment Portfolio targeting the South Asian economy to promote water, food and energy security by enhancing the cooperation on and access to the trans-boundary resource base and knowledge sharing. The implementation time for this project is 12 years in three phases of four years each.

CUTS International has been chosen as one of the portfolio partners for carrying forward a defined set of activities in this regard. On the given background and rationale, the overall goal for CUTS is enhancing the value of DFAT is SDIP by linking its interventions with key actors and stakeholders through local and regional networks through policy research and advocacy. CRC jointly with CITEE team adopted the following objectives in the context of SDIP:

- To have a thorough understanding of issues related to SDIP and stakeholders perceptions on the same;
- To strengthen the networking capacity and engagement in more advocacies and dialogues; and
- To engage in policy research, media and CSO mapping.

CRC team members are actively involved in implementing the project activities in the river basins of Ganges and Brahmaputra. The detailed perception survey has been completed in the districts of Murshidabad and North Bengal (comprising of Jalpaiguri, Darjeeling and Coochbehar districts) in West Bengal by the team. The Centre is also undertaking a study entitled *Deployment of Small Scale Renewable Energy in Eastern South Asia: The Present Status, Success stories and possibilities of Knowledge Exchange between Countries in South Asia*, under the project. The Field survey on Renewable Energy (RE) study has been undertaken by the team in December 2015.

The RE policy message document has been shared with the SDIP team in December 2015 and the data obtained from field studies have also been collated and entered in the prescribed data entry format and shared with the team. Prithviraj Nath and Sayantan Sengupta attended an internal team meeting in New Delhi on December 11, 2015 to finalise the policy messages and prepare a guideline for drafting the perception survey report.

Advocacy & Networking

CRC organised a Media Conference at the Agartala Press Club on December 20, 2015. Prithviraj Nath made a presentation and discussed in detail about the relevance of Food Security, the importance of having regional cooperation on the issue and the leading role that the state can play to this end. Leading national as well as Regional Media houses, such as *Doordarshan*, *The Telegraph*, *Dainik Sangbad*, *24 Ghanta*, *Tripura Darpan*, *Tripura Observer*, *Ajker Fariyad*, *Tripura Infoway* and many others participated in the conference. Sumanta Biswas, Sayantan Sengupta and Sayandeep Chattopadhyay from CRC also attended the conference.



Prithviraj Nath presenting at the Media Conference

Bureau of Indian Standards Programme (BIS)

CRC has been organising awareness programmes on Consumer Safety, ISI marks and Hall marking in association with the Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS) in West Bengal and other Eastern and North Eastern states of India. A few such awareness programmes have been conducted in West Bengal, Tripura, Assam and Bihar. BIS has included CUTS into their Regional Publicity Committee where CRC advises on its publicity strategies and activities. CUTS has also been empanelled with BIS as an organisation working towards consumer empowerment and welfare in the state of West Bengal.

CRC has organised a consumer awareness programme in partnership with BIS at Chandannagar, West Bengal on December 19, 2015. Nishi Kant Sinha participated in the programme.

Reducing Barriers to Food Trade in India

CUTS, with support from The Asia Foundation has undertaken a project entitled, 'Reducing Barriers to Food Trade in India'. The purpose of this project is to identify product and port specific Non-Tariff Measures (NTMs) to import of select agricultural food and processed food items from a select group of countries to India. High potential India's export products in similar category are also being looked at to assess NTMs imposed by partner countries. The objective is to help provide policymakers/government officials and other relevant stakeholders with a practical set of recommendations to remove/harmonise identified NTMs at their respective levels.

The field survey and the stakeholder's meet under this project has been completed and Prithviraj Nath attended the Importers' meet in New Delhi on December 10, 2015. The final draft report of Petrapole, Agartala and Panitanki field study has been shared with the project team by CRC.

OUTREACH

- Prithviraj Nath and Sayantan Sengupta attended the meeting of the Advisory Committee of the West Bengal Electricity Regulatory Commission (WBERC) on November 05, 2015. CUTS is also a member of the Advisory sub-committee group on SOP & Consumer Awareness of the Commission and attended the first meeting of the group on October 30, 2015.
- Udai S Mehta and Prithviraj Nath met Ray Sudweeks, First Secretary, Energy Affairs and Stewart Davis, Economic Officer, US Embassy, New Delhi, on December 1, 2015. This was to explore possible new collaborations with the Department. Prithviraj also attended a Roundtable Meeting on the theme entitled, 'Act East' organised by the US State Department in New Delhi.
- Prithviraj Nath and Sumanta Biswas met Heather N. Jacobsen, Foreign Affairs Officer, US Department of State (SCA Region Affairs & Peter D. Thorin, Senior Economic Officer, US Department of State (Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs) at the US Consulate in Kolkata in November 2015 to discuss on the BBIN project.

REPRESENTATION

- Sumanta Biswas attended the Green Fair co-organised by the US Consulate and the Bengal Chamber of Commerce and Industry (BCC&I) on November 20, 2015 at The American Centre. Senior representatives from the Industries as well as US Consulate also participated in the meeting.