

Recommendations:

To upscale the tangible and intangible benefits of Border Haats

Background and Context

CUTS International in partnership with Unnayan Shamannay and with support of the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Organisation (FCDO) of the United Kingdom implemented a project titled “Border Haats between India and Bangladesh as a Tool to Reduce Informal Cross Border Trade”.

The study was conducted in locations where border haats are operational, sanctioned and proposed. The study observed that border haats has been largely successful in increasing local livelihood, fostering better cross-border micro-trade, facilitating people-to-people contact, reducing informal trade, empowering women, enhancing border security, strengthening bilateral relationship and nurturing relationship at local level. However, there are certain issues those need to be addressed to consolidate and further deepen the socio-economic benefits of the border haats. Therefore, to address the issues and upscale the tangible and intangible benefits, we forth following recommendations and areas of further interventions.

Recommendations

Regulatory Interventions

- The 5 Km restriction should be removed to allow vendees from key urban centers to participate at the haats. This will provide the much-needed boost to incomes and business at the border haats.

- There is an urgent need to reconsider the list of commodities allowed to be traded through the border haats. One of the reasons for informal trade is the demand-supply gap for the commodities traded through the informal channels. However as per government norms live fish, poultry products and agricultural seeds are not allowed to be traded through the border haats. However, this is not able to restrict trade in these commodities – rather it is resulting in trade through informal channels so far as these products are concerned. One can rather think of putting quantitative restrictions on the trade of these items – for example, instead of completely prohibiting trade in Hilsa, one can allow one vendee to purchase one hilsa fish. Since the security personnel fear trade in drugs through live animals, one can always ask vendees to cut the fish or meat before carrying it outside the haat premises.

- To promote women’s participation at the haats as vendors, there is a need to introduce a mandatory reservation for women vendors. This will address some of the apprehensions of women in the sanctioned and proposed locations, on whether they will be allowed to participate at the haats.

- There is need to promote sale of local handicrafts in the border haat.. In this regard, the border haat management committee would need to have representatives from local SHG Federations who will be able to identify products manufactured by women SHGs in the region. For this to happen, in some places the 5 Km restriction needs to be removed. This will help enhance the benefits of the border haats accruing to the women in each of the countries.

Infrastructural interventions

- There is an urgent need to ensure that the washrooms at the border haats remain clean and are provided with running water facilities. There is also need to look into gender-sensitive infrastructure, like separate washrooms for women. This has been a major lacuna of border haats along the Indo-Bangladesh border and a major deterrent to participation by women. In addition, drinking water facilities would need to be provided at the haats and shelters should be built for people to rest, especially during summer.

- BGB would need to recruit women security personnel who would carry out security-check of women vendors and vendees entering and/or leaving the haats.

- One of the reasons why the BSF and BGB personnel are reluctant to allow too many vendees inside the haat premises at the same time, is because the haats lack basic security infrastructure like CCTV cameras, scanners, and metal detectors. Governments should provide necessary equipment to help the BSF/BGB in better monitoring and effective security management of the haats.

Awareness Generation

- There is a need to generate awareness about border haats among various stakeholders especially in the sanctioned locations. Such programmes should highlight issues like - the purpose of border haats, their mode of operation and the benefits that can accrue to the local communities. These will not only address apprehensions related to safety of women at the border haats, but will also help the local communities rationalise their expectations from the haats. Most importantly, it will provide a platform where the existing and prospective vendors, vendees, labourers, helpers can interact directly with members of the border haat management committee.
- In addition, during the key informant interviews it appeared that many of the members of the border haat management committees lack clarity in respect of several issues. For example, some of them asked whether the 5 Km restriction is based on aerial estimates, what is the permissible limit for vendors i.e. how much worth of goods can they carry inside the haat etc. These gaps in understanding lead to differences in rules set by the border haat management committees as well in the application of such rules. Such discrepancies need to be removed through appropriate capacity building of all haat administrators.

Areas of further intervention

- Identify agri-horti products those have potential for creating cross border value chains;
- Enhancing of women's participation at the border haats;
- Mapping prospective women dominated handicraft clusters vis-à-vis the existing, sanctioned and proposed border haats;
- Generating awareness among stakeholders in the proposed border haat locations and creating a demand for border haats at the grassroots; and in this context, suggest locations where establishment of border haats will be more beneficial compared to others.
- Exploring prospects for establishing border haats along the Indo-Myanmar border.