



SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT INVESTMENT PORTFOLIO (SDIP)

Roundtable Discussion “Development of Inland Waterways for Trade and Transit”

Monday, 13th June, 2016
Hotel Patliputra Ashok, Patna, Bihar

Background:

1.1 CUTS International (Consumer Unity & Trust Society) with the support of Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), Government of Australia organised a roundtable discussion titled “Development of inland waterways for trade and transit” under the Sustainable Development Investment Portfolio (SDIP) programme for South Asia in Patna at Hotel Pataliputra Ashok on 13th July, 2016.

1.2 The workshop aimed to create a base of discussion for the SDIP Advocacy brief no. 4 titled, “Development of Inland Waterways (IWWs) for Trade and Transit in BBIN”. The brief is available here:

http://www.cuts-citee.org/SDIP/pdf/Advocacy-Development_of_Inland_Waterways_for_Trade_and_Transit_in_BBIN.pdf

1.3 Objectives of the Workshop:

- ✓ To discuss the recent developments and issues in National Waterway – 1
- ✓ To discuss the possibilities to boost trade through greater public-private dialogues

Highlights and Proceedings:

2.1 The event was opened with a welcome address by Mr. H. P. Singh, IGS (BASIX) and Mr. Prithviraj Nath, CUTS International. Mr. Singh voiced his concern on the degrading state of the Ganges tributaries near Patna and its impact on farmers and local livelihoods. Mr. Nath set the stage for the roundtable discussion by pointing out the importance of trade and transit for greater connectivity and economic spin-offs.

2.2 The discussions benefitted from the opinions of Padma Shri Mr. Ravindra Kumar Sinha (Patna University), Mr. Arun Kumar Sinha (Ganga Flood Control Commission, Patna), Mr. Bipin Singh and Mr. Aloysius Osta (Bihar Water Development Society), Mr. Dharmendra Sriwastawa and Mr. Sunil Kumar Sinha IGS, Patna) and Mr. Neeraj Kumar (Dainik Jagran, Patna).

2.3 The discussions started with a brief self-introduction by the participants. The discussion panel was a mix of academic, government representatives, activists, CSOs/NGOs and media personnel.

2.4 Ms. Susan Mathew (CUTS International) made a brief presentation titled “Scenario of NW-1 and CUTS footprint in South Asia”. In the presentation, she talked about the recent developments, issues and possibilities in National Waterway – 1. She also described about CUTS work to promote greater trade and transit, specifically in the eastern part of India by connectivity of IWWs in the context of sustainable development investment portfolio in South Asia.

2.5 The first set of discussion was about the importance¹ and environmental issues connected to the Ganges river, especially closer to Patna. The primary concern was about the impact of low water flow in Ganges on the flora and fauna diversity in and around the banks of Patna. Despite Ganga being the national river and the Ganges river dolphin being the national aquatic animal, the government has not been able to create an active policy to conserve the two interconnected entities. The low water flow issues were primarily attributed to climate change reactions and human interferences in natural river course. Suggestions were made that to preserve the water flow in the Ganges; water reservoirs in the upper riparian side should be maintained. Communities on either side of the Indo-Nepal Ganges tributaries should also be involved in maintaining the natural river flow and courses since the river directly provides for local livelihood options like fisheries, agriculture and river tourism.

2.6 The second set of discussions involved the recent development and success stories in IWWs. All the participants unanimously agreed that NW-1 was the oldest trade route in India even before the roads in the mainland were developed. In recent times, movement of coal, fertilizers etc. have gained momentum due to high costs of roadways and traffic concerns. This was also supported by discussions on the low transport cost of waterways and creating a carbon friendly emission free economy.

2.7 The third set of discussions revolved around the issues in the NW-1 navigation maintenance and coordination. The nodal agency for navigation maintenance and coordination of inland waterways is the Inland Waterway Authority of India (IWAI). A strong perception about IWAI is that instead of assuming monopoly over NW-1, IWAI should coordinate with other government and non-governmental bodies for navigation and sustainability aspects of IWWs across the country. Some of the navigation institutes functioning out of Bihar have not shown success since a holistic national standard was not being applied for maintaining them. The technical aspects of navigation in NW-1 were also discussed. Since NW-1 is composed of alluvial soil river and its tributaries, sand siltation and debris sedimentation is a key issue in and around Patna. The dredging machines at Patna are scheduled to dredge at regular intervals, but doubts about their success were expressed. Also, the noise pollution and disturbing the river beds while dredging has caused decrease in the number of birds and aquatic life in the area, which has also adversely affected the rural river tourism and bird watching club activities. It was pointed out that undue construction of barrages has been discourages since the water flow of the meandering river could not suffice the requirement for all the religious, cultural, economic and livelihood purposes. Another key issue that was highlighted was that the lack of sharing information among relevant stakeholders about the water characteristics and river navigation details. It was

¹ A participant remarked that for some people, life starts at the banks of the Ganges with *Mundan* (First head shaving ceremony for a child) and ends with *Shav Dahan* (Final funeral rites), so the discussions should also consider the cultural and religious importance of maintaining water flow in the Ganges.

2.8 The fourth set of discussion included solutions to the above mentioned issues. For the environmental aspect, it was suggested that complete navigation shutdown should be encouraged during the mating season and the monsoon season. The water flow can be maintained throughout the year if river water management is carried out during the peak season by using water reservoirs for the lean season. Concerns about the irregularities were addressed as an open knowledge wherein it has been observed that scheduled dredging occurs at the Farakka barrage but not at the Patna banks. In Farakka, the dredged material is disposed-off in a sustainable manner, but at the Patna banks, the dredged material is transferred near to the banks, which caused more sedimentation when the next monsoon season floods arrive. Another primary solution highlighted was that the IWWs navigation channels need to maintain a standard dimension of Least Available Depth (LAD) of 3 m and width (LAW) of 50 m for fairway development across the length and breadth of NW-1. If this minimum dimensions were maintained, water flow and dredging activities can be carried out smoothly. With respect to information sharing among states, it was noted that civil society voice and citizen's participation was essential to attain more transparent information from government bodies. One example was that the Water and Power Consultancy Services Limited (WAPCOS) under the Ministry of Water Resources of the Government of India has been successful in facilitating knowledge sharing among key stakeholders. Since the livelihoods of fishermen and farmers are directly dependent on the water issues related to the river, open and transparent systems of advocacy and knowledge sharing need to be encouraged.

Way Forward:

3.1 Based on the discussions the following learnings have been put forward:

- ✓ Cooperation among IWWs related government bodies and other relevant stakeholders
- ✓ Maintaining the minimum dimensions of length by depth of 50m x 3m for fairway development
- ✓ Minimal navigation during mating season and monsoon season
- ✓ Knowledge sharing on public platforms with involvement from CSOs, NGOS, private organisations etc.

3.2 Based on these discussions, CUTS will encourage and disseminate future policy discussions. Relevant advocacy modules will be adapted to ensure maximum coverage. In future, CUTS can also plan to hold similar closed-door roundtable discussions at the juncture of key National Waterways (NWs) in India and specifically Eastern part of India.

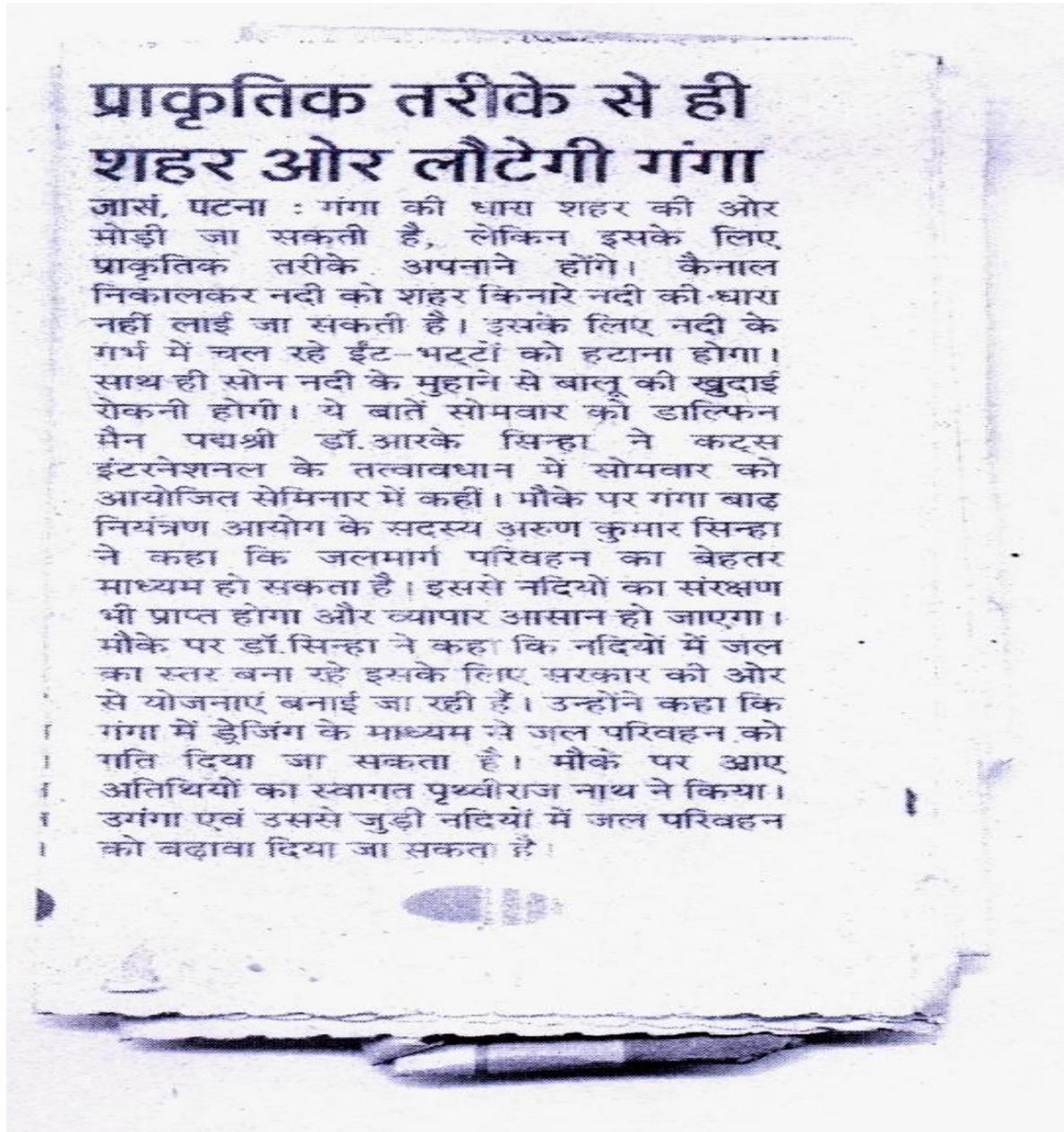
Figure 1: Roundtable discussion on IWWs at Patna on 13th July, 2016



Figure 2: Roundtable discussion on IWWs at Patna on 13th July, 2016



Figure 3: News article on the event in Dainik Jagran dt. 14th June, 2016



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