

Civil Society Forum

Regional Connectivity: BIMSTEC Master Plan for Transport Connectivity

South Asia Watch on Trade, Economics and Environment

23 September, 2022

Background Note

Civil society organizations (CSOs) can play a constructive role in shaping policy discourse and actual policies through dialogue and advocacy. CSOs' reach and engagement are not confined to political and diplomatic boundaries. CSOs have proven to be effective in improving cross-border communication and bridging the trust deficit between countries. Cross-border coalition of CSOs can have a positive impact in areas such as managing transboundary resources, formalizing informal channels of trade, and disaster risk reduction, among others. Cross-border regional CSO communication and advocacy platforms complement bilateral engagements as well as formal regional platforms such as the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) and the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC). Cross-border CSO dialogue could be instrumental in bringing grassroots concerns out in bilateral and regional forums. These formal regional initiatives also seek to engage CSOs on a regular basis to receive feedback on their policy approaches.

Against this background, South Asia Watch on Trade, Economics and Environment (SAWTEE), with the support of The Asia Foundation, is organizing a series of civil society forums to raise awareness and deepen dialogue among CSOs in South Asia and the Bay of Bengal region so that they can understand and effectively contribute to deliberations and decisions in formal, official cooperation platforms.

The objective of the forums is to maintain and serve as a platform for connecting CSOs to build constructive engagement processes for civil society participation through a regional consultation forum. The specific objectives are:

- a) To mobilize and promote partnership and networking among CSOs in the region that work on similar and diverse issues in their respective countries;
- b) To demystify regional cooperation initiatives for the benefit of the wider civil society, and discuss regional cooperation agenda through the lens of diverse CSOs;
- c) To provide key policy proposals and pathways.

A topic that is pertinent to be discussed among CSOs is the recently published BIMSTEC Master Plan for Transport Connectivity. The master plan highlights the importance of integrated regional connectivity through transportation. The master plan has come up with strategies to enhance connectivity among BIMSTEC nations. It covers both hard and soft infrastructures including services to achieve enhanced connectivity and sustainable development in the BIMSTEC region. Thus the focus of the first forum is “**Regional Connectivity: BIMSTEC Master Plan for Transport Connectivity**”.

Date: Friday 23.09.2022

Time: 3:00-5:00 PM (Nepal Standard Time UTC +5:45)

Proposed Agenda

Moderator: Dr. Posh Raj Pandey, Chairperson, SAWTEE

Special Remarks: Mr. Thiam Hee Ng, Director, Asian Development Bank (ADB)

Trigger Presentations:

Professor Prabir De, Research and Information System for Developing Countries (RIS), New Delhi

Mr. Rabi Shanker Sainju, Trade Facilitation Expert, Kathmandu

Discussants:

1. Mr. Veerasakdi Prem-Aree, Director (Connectivity), BIMSTEC (TBC)
2. Dr. Fahmida Khatun, Executive Director, Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD), Dhaka
3. Mr. Achyut Bhandari, Co-founder, Centre for Research on Bhutanese Society, Former Diplomat and Director-General of Trade, Thimphu
4. Mr. Rohan Masakorala, CEO/Founder, Shippers' Academy International

Q&A