



Concept Note on Policy Dialogue on Trans-boundary Inland Navigation: A Way Forward

Guwahati, India
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Ecosystems for Life: A Bangladesh-India Initiative IUCN (International Union for Conservation of Nature)

Background

Ecosystems for Life: A Bangladesh-India Initiative is a multi-stakeholder research and dialogue process led by IUCN (International Union for Conservation of Nature) to promote insights into trans-boundary issues across three major river systems: the Ganges, the Brahmaputra and the Meghna. The project is being implemented in Bangladesh and India by IUCN Country Offices and managed by the IUCN Asia Regional Office, Bangkok, Thailand. The project focuses on five themes: a) food security, water productivity and poverty; b) impacts of climate change; c) convergence of inland navigation and integrated water resources management goals; d) environmental security; and e) biodiversity conservation. The key components of the project within which most activities are designed are research, dialogue and capacity building. This approach is envisaged to bring about a scientific understanding of trans-boundary issues in both countries and for disseminating the knowledge generated.

A joint research was carried out focusing on sustainable international navigation route between Ashuganj and Karimganj in the north-eastern part of Bangladesh and India. The main objectives of this research were to identify the causes of deteriorating conditions of the rivers and water traffic as well as approaches for improving and maintaining navigability in line with the principles of Integrated Water Resource Management (IWRM) and sustainable navigation. The literature review focused on the history of navigation and morphological behaviour of the route. Discharge, water level, hydro-graphic survey charts, satellite images, historical maps and traffic data were analyzed to understand the prevailing morphological processes and water traffic on the river. A conceptual model was developed to demonstrate the river evolution processes in the depressed Sylhet Basin. Based on the analysis, a set of recommendations are made to maintain sustainable navigation in the Ashuganj-Karimganj route. (Please see attached annex)

With the aim of disseminating research findings, a day-long workshop was held on 22 March 2012 in Savar, Bangladesh. Participants from both Bangladesh and India discussed various issues pertaining to trans-boundary inland navigation. They identified a number of policy options and actions for trans-boundary navigation routes. (Please see annex for summary recommendations)

Way forward

It has revealed that the issues of inland navigation are quite clear and that there is an urgent need to address the same through collaboration between the governments in both countries. As a next step





a policy dialogue on trans-boundary inland navigation is being organized to disseminate the findings and to explore joint policy options. This will also enhance a shared vision on issues pertaining to trans-boundary inland navigation.

The policy dialogue will be held on 10 January 2013 in Guwahati, India. The dialogue will aim to bring together policy makers, researchers, journalists, academicians, NGOs and private sector representatives involved in working on inland navigation.

ANNEX

Recommendations of the joint research

Improving the Navigability

- The constraints of navigation as identified downstream of Ajmiriganj should be removed, mainly through dredging. Recurrent maintenance dredging should be done at a limited scale upstream of Ajmiriganj to maintain perennial navigation in the river.
- All the physical interventions to improve and maintain navigability should be within the IWRM framework.
- Monitoring of the morphological processes and assessment of the LAD through hydrographic surveys should be carried out regularly. Stabilization and rectification of the river by appropriate river training works should also be taken up as a parallel action.
- A study should be taken up to define the recurrent dredging procedure and for managing dredge spoil.

Amendment of the Provisions of the Protocol

- The protocol routes should be extended from Karimganj to Silchar. A mandatory provision should be made for both countries to install night navigation facilities along the protocol routes
- Article 11 should be replaced by the following: One country will provide customs services to the vessels in operation under the Protocol at or near points of entry and exit of the country and the vessels shall be allowed to load or unload at any place along the protocol route
- Prohibition on vessels carrying transit cargo should be repealed from Article 17. Instead, provision for engaging vessels of the other country in domestic trade should be incorporated
- In order to provide a long-term assurance of return on investment to the private sector, the renewal of protocol may be made every 5 years instead of the existing 2-year period

Improving the Navigation Aids and Safety

- Marking of the channel with lighted buoys for day and night navigation
- Regular river charts and river notices





- Protocol clearances and customs formalities with minimum time loss
- GPS/DGPS with electronic charts and upgradation of crew standards
- Provision of terminals with adequate loading/unloading facilities
- Upgradation and augmentation of fleet

Private Sector Participation

- Vessel building subsidy
- Government participation with the private sector for joint ventures
- Foreign Direct Investment
- Vessel leasing companies

Summary recommendations of the workshop

- Navigability of inland waters needs improvement, e.g. through installation of night navigation equipment and dredging;
- All physical interventions to improve and maintain navigability should be within an Integrated Water Resource Management (IWRM) framework;
- Dredging operations need proper, integrated, preparatory studies, taking into account *i.e.* river morphology, ecosystems and the management of the dredged material;
- Enhance private sector participation in policy formulation and establish linkages between Northeast India and Bangladesh;
- Improvements and updates of the Bangladesh-India Protocol are suggested, including efficiency measures and prolonging its term to five years to provide more security to private sector investments; and
- Exchange of technologies of navigation route maintenance between two countries both at govt. and nongovernmental level.