



CPD Pursuing regional economic cooperation

Research and advocacy efforts by the *Centre for Policy Dialogue* (CPD) in Bangladesh put economic integration on the policy agenda.

SETTING THE SCENE —The potential benefits of economic cooperation among nations are widely recognized; regional integration can, for example, create new trade, transport, and investment opportunities. It can also lead to new supply and value chains, enhance the competitiveness of firms, and lead to resource sharing such as common offshore areas. As a result, there are many reasons why countries decide to develop cooperative arrangements. However, it took time and perseverance for this vision to become a reality for four Asian countries. The Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD), a civil society think tank working to foster a more participatory and accountable development process in Bangladesh, used evidence-based research and advocacy to promote its vision of economic cooperation between Bangladesh, China, India and Myanmar (BCIM).

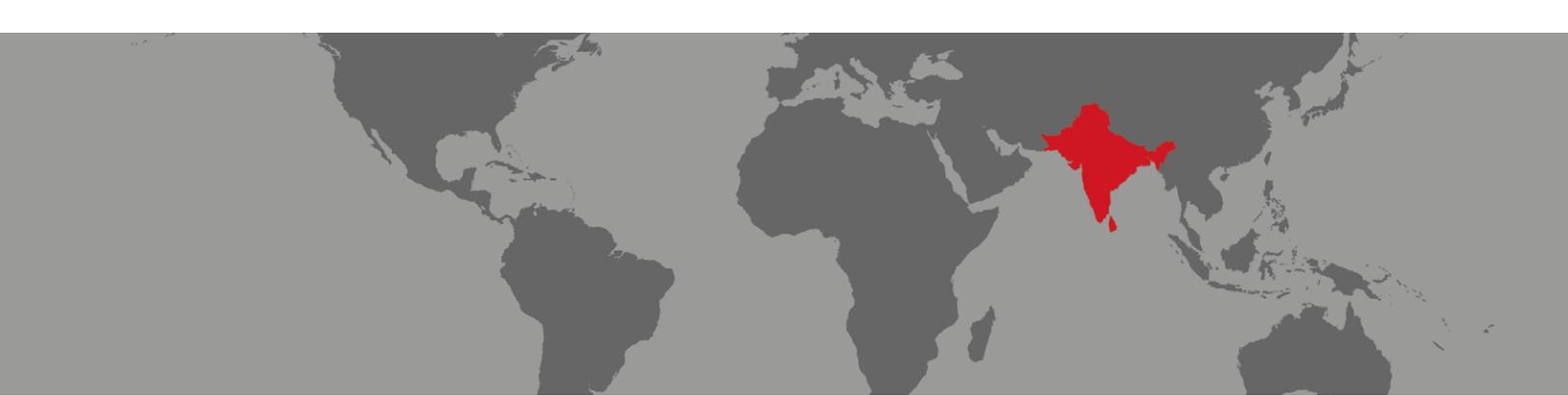
an initiative aimed at closer integration among these nations. This came to be known as the *BCIM Forum*. A major focus of the initiative, from its very inception, was influencing policymakers in order to establish closer transport connectivity (such as cross-country vehicular movement), cooperation and integration among the four Forum countries. Unfortunately, the political context at the time was unfriendly and, as a result, the idea could have easily fallen off the radar. Instead, CPD and its partners took up the challenge to pursue economic cooperation and bring their vision to life.

WHAT CPD DID —Following the 1999 Forum, CPD undertook rigorous research and advocacy work in order to keep the issue on the policy agenda. In order to produce the necessary evidence on the benefits of economic cooperation, the think tank conducted research on the potential of trade, investment and energy cooperation to foster closer connectivity in the region. CPD also engaged in advocacy work, organizing a confluence of activities along with its partners. The think tank hosted forums and events aimed at

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MINISTER OF
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DR. DIPU MONI

In 1999, in association with partners from the four countries, CPD created



influencing policy and raising awareness, including successful BCIM Forums in Dhaka in 2002, 2007 and 2013. Throughout all of these activities, CPD worked with variety of stakeholders, including high level policymakers, Ministers, business leaders, investors, entrepreneurs, academics and civil society actors.

CPD's activities attained a new momentum due to the Think Tank Initiative (TTI)'s financial and capacity building support in 2010, which allowed the think tank and its partners to take on new activities. One of these events was a car rally between Kunming in China to Kolkata in India, known as the K2K. This was a highly prominent flagship event, as governments in all four countries were involved and other major stakeholders including business chamber representatives and high-level policymakers participated. This K2K car rally was designed to coincide with the 11th BCIM Forum hosted by CPD in Dhaka in February 2013. CPD organized a grand reception for the rally participants, which was attended by high level policymakers including the Minister for Communication of Bangladesh.

Overall, the Forum and the car rally were of key importance in highlighting the relevance of closer connectivity and cooperation in the BCIM region. These events received wide coverage in print and

electronic media in Bangladesh and CPD's role was widely recognized as a change agent in this context.

THE OUTCOME —CPD's advocacy work was key to putting the issue of economic cooperation on the policy agenda of Bangladesh. Despite the criticisms of detractors who thought the idea was not politically feasible, the think tank persevered with conviction, backed by evidence-based quality research, regular discussions with policymakers and concrete actions. CPD demonstrated that concerted efforts can serve to change perceptions and influence policymakers to undertake important initiatives.

These activities contributed to a decision by the four governments to establish a *BCIM Economic Corridor* along the route from Kunming to Kolkata. Very recently, the four countries have agreed, in principle, to sign a Memorandum of Understanding to give shape to the idea. The *BCIM Economic Corridor* idea, with which CPD has been associated for many years, has now been put on the intergovernmental policy agenda of the BCIM countries. The Government of Bangladesh, along with broader civil society and other stakeholders in the country, has recognized CPD's contribution in championing this idea and acting as a key driving force behind it.

For more information on CPD, go to <http://cpd.org.bd>

TTI's Stories of Influence Series

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