Interpreting SDGs for South Asia: In Search of a Regional Framework

An Overview

Presented at
Research-Policy meeting on
Interpreting SDGs for South Asia: In Search of a Regional Framework

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Dhaka: 20 November 2018

The Context

▪ There is wide recognition that the **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)** have benefitted from the delivery of the **Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)** during the 2000-15 period.

▪ Compared to the MDGs, the SDGs are more **inclusive**, **transformative**, **integrated** and **universal**. The **goals** and **targets** are **inter-related** and cannot be implemented in **isolation**.

▪ The *MDG framework* has been **criticised** for not properly recognising the role of **regional monitoring** and **review mechanisms** (RMRMs). Indeed, **this was one of the missing links between global and national processes in view of delivering the MDGs**.

▪ South Asia did little to develop a **regional cooperation** plan to accelerate the **process of implementation** of MDGs in the **regional countries**. Will the same happen for SDGs?

The present presentation thus looks at the following:

❑ Regional Dimensions of SDGs Paradigm

❑ State of SAARC and SDGs Implementation

❑ Benchmarking South Asia from SDG Perspective
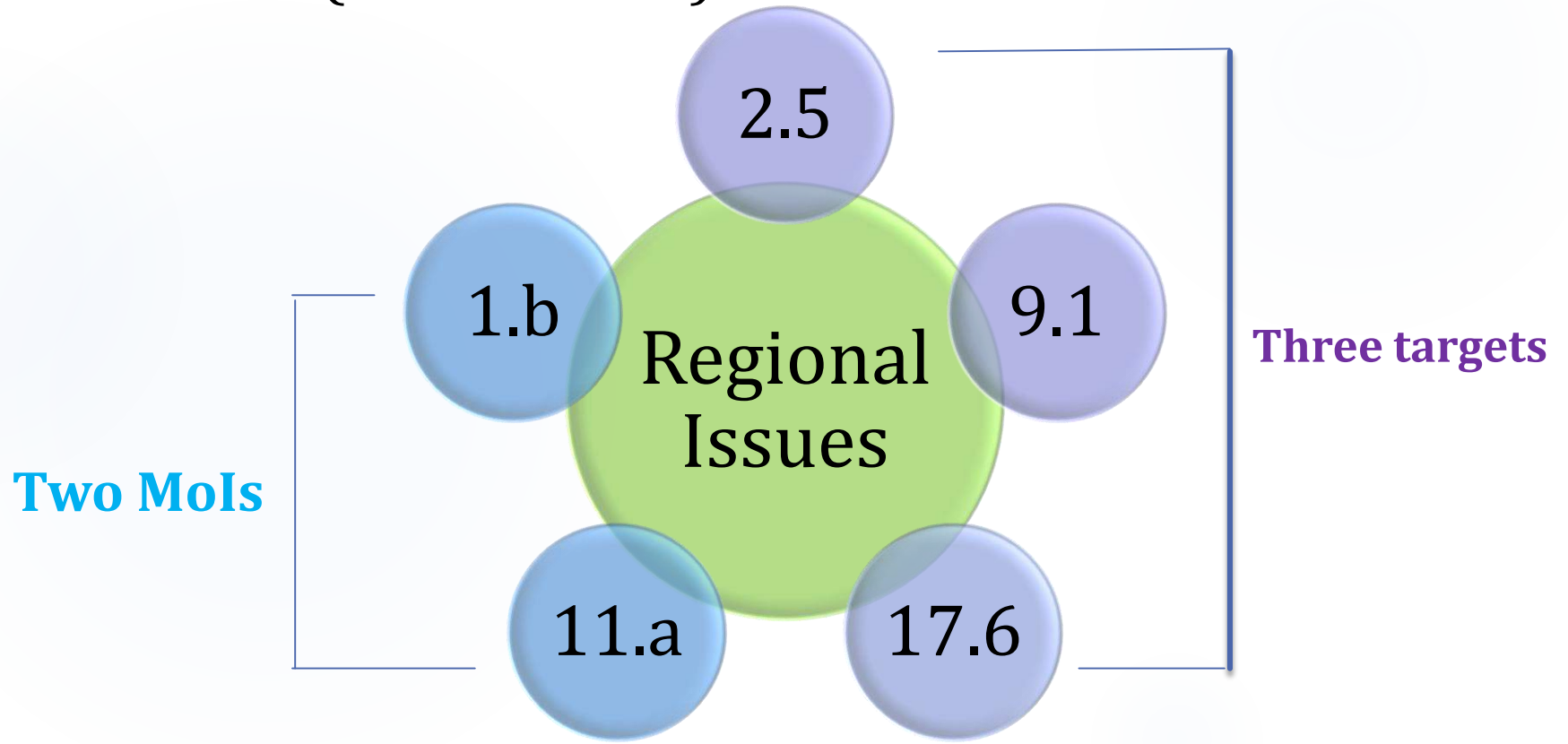
❑ Elements of an SDG-oriented Regional Framework

Regional Dimensions of SDGs Paradigm

❑ The **regional approach** towards assessing development outcomes did not figure prominently during the phase of **Millennium Development Goals** (MDGs). Thus, there is **little experience** in this regard to build on.

❑ The 2030 Agenda not only highlights the role of **regional approach** towards **implementing the SDGs**, but also emphasises the importance of **regional contributions** in assessing the progress in delivery of the Agenda.

❑ While outlining the nature of such **regional frameworks** for SDGs, the Agenda points out that such frameworks will **largely depend** on the **contextual attributes** of the concerned geographical area.

❑ The ownership of the **framework** will largely lie with the **national governments**.

Regional Dimensions of SDGs Paradigm *(contd…)*

Regional Issues in 2030 Agenda - Direct Mention

❑ Three targets (2.5, 9.1 and 17.6) and
❑ Two MoIs (1.b and 11.a)

	The SDG targets
2.5	By 2020, maintain the **genetic diversity of seeds**, **cultivated plants** and **farmed** and **domesticated animals** and their related **wild species**, including through soundly managed and diversified seed and plant banks at the national, **regional** and international levels, and promote access to and fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising from the utilization of genetic resources and associated traditional knowledge, as internationally agreed.
9.1	**Develop quality, reliable, sustainable and resilient infrastructure, including regional and trans-border infrastructure, to support economic development and human well-being, with a focus on affordable and equitable access for all.**

The SDG targets (Contd...)

17.6	**Enhance North-South, South-South and triangular regional and international cooperation on and access to science, technology and innovation and enhance knowledge-sharing on mutually agreed terms, including through improved coordination among existing mechanisms, in particular at the United Nations level, and through a global technology facilitation mechanism.**

	The MoIs
1.b	**Create sound policy frameworks at the national, regional and international levels, based on pro-poor and gender-sensitive development strategies, to support accelerated investment in poverty eradication actions.**
11.a	**Support positive economic, social and environmental links between urban, peri-urban and rural areas by strengthening national and *regional development planning.***

Regional Dimensions of SDGs Paradigm *(contd...)*

Additionally, there are **other goals** that impinge on regional coordination; such as,

- Climate action
- Clean water
- Human trafficking, etc.

Integrated and holistic nature of the agenda

Regional Dimensions of SDGs Paradigm *(contd...)*

Role of Regional Connectivity

- Regional integration efforts toward initial **trade growth**
- Emergence of **regional production networks** and **value chains**
- **ICT connectivity** as an enabler and driver of growth
- **Energy connectivity** and security
- Transitioning to **knowledge-based economies**
- Enhancing cooperation at **border crossings**

Other Regional Experiences

✓ To **contextualise** and **accelerate** the implementation of the SDGs, the Sustainable Development Agenda for 2030 recognizes the importance of action at the **regional and sub-regional levels**. This will ensure **effective monitoring** of the progress.

✓ **Regional commissions** support **peer-learning among countries and stakeholders**, **capacity-building** and the development of integrated solutions to address trans-boundary challenges.

✓ In this context, the **regional level** serves as important nexus to strengthen feedback loops from the **national to the global levels, and vice versa**.

Regional Dimensions of SDGs Paradigm *(contd...)*

Other Reginal Experiences: ECLAC

❖ *The Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean* (ECLAC) has constituted a Forum of the Countries of **Latin America** and the **Caribbean** on Sustainable Development.

❖ The Forum and the other subsidiary bodies of ECLAC is also offering a **regional space** and creating space for **multi-stakeholder dialogue** related to the implementation and follow-up of the 2030 Agenda.

❖ This is serving as a **bridge** between the **national and global spheres**, facilitating discussions to identify best practices and engage in **peer-to-peer learning**.

Regional Dimensions of SDGs Paradigm *(contd...)*

Other Reginal Experiences: ECA

➢ *The Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development convened by the Economic Commission of Africa* (ECA) serves as the body to **follow-up and review** the implementation of SDGs at **regional level**.

➢ Participants at the HLPF emphasised the significance of **inclusive regional, sub-regional**, **national and subnational follow-up mechanisms** that are **country-led** and voluntary to foster effective inclusive review.

➢ The African CSOs Working Group has been making efforts to fill the **gap** from the lack of **regional CSOs platform** to **synchronise and strengthen** African CSOs voices on sustainable development issues in **national**, **regional** and **global platforms**.

➢ However, *creating dual reporting obligations and duplicated implementation tracks remains as potential challenges, as it can mean burden for Member States and partners.*

Regional Dimensions of SDGs Paradigm *(contd...)*

Other Reginal Experiences: ESCAP

- The UN-ESCAP has created the APFSD. ESCAP convened a session of the APFSD on 3-5 April 2016.
- This was the **first regional forum** on sustainable development to take place after the adoption of the 2030 Agenda.
- The implementation of the 2030 Agenda in **Asia and the Pacific** needed a broader discussion on the mandates of ESCAP for an effective **follow-up and review**.
- As a result, the forum made sure Member States of the United Nations institutions and other institutions, major groups and other stakeholders were engaged to make **informed recommendations** on **regional priorities**.
- A number of recommendations were made on **scientific and technological innovation** for sustainable development and on making cities inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable.

Regional Dimensions of SDGs Paradigm *(contd...)*

The African Union Commission: Agenda 2063

- The African Union prepared a commonality profile between Agenda 2063 and the SDGs: **all goals of Agenda 2063 were aligned with at least one SDG**

Institutional arrangement of Agenda 2063:

- The First Ten Year Plan (FTYP) of Agenda 2063 assign key roles to the **AUC (African Union Commission)** and **RECs (Regional Economic Communities)**

  - ➤ The RECs serve as **link** between AUC and Member States

- The Ministerial Committee on Agenda 2063, who represent the Chairs of RECs, ensures that AUC and RECs **work harmoniously** in the implementation of FTYP

- The committee as representative of the Chairs of the RECs also exercises **oversight functions** on the AUC and ensures both work in harmony

The African Union Commission: Agenda 2063

Financial institutional arrangement of Agenda 2063:

- <u>AfDB</u> will be **lead institution** in facilitating, coordinating, monitoring and evaluation of Agenda 2063 resource mobilisation strategy

- Other **key stakeholders** include UN-ECA at continental level; RECs, regional Development Finance Institutions and regional stock exchanges at regional level

  - Regional associations such as the African Development Finance Institution, the African Venture Capital Association (AVCA) will also play **significant roles**

- At the national level, governments and financial sector organizations (stock exchange association, banking association, microfinance association, etc.) will be **assigned appropriate roles**

State of SAARC and SDGs Implementation

Recalling SAARC's Position on MDG

❖ SAARC is a platform of cooperation for South Asian people and **aims to promote and improve the quality of their lives**.

➤ Following the adoption of the MDGs, SAARC attempted to **localise** the goals for the **region**. Despite attempts it did not play a role in advancing a **regional approach** to the MDGs.

➤ **The 13th (2005) Summit declaration** details intentions to achieve the **22 SAARC Development Goals** because these were correlated to the MDGs. **It stated their full support for a comprehensive approach to facilitating the MDGs**

➤ **The 14th Summit (2007) declaration** reflected the **regional determination** to make faster progress towards attaining the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

➤ **No reference** found in the **15th** (2008); **16th** (2010) and **17th** (2011) SAARC Summit.

State of SAARC and SDGs Implementation *(contd...)*

Role of SAARC in SDG Delivery

❖ In the **18th Summit (2014) declaration**, the **Post-2015 Development Agenda was addressed in terms of:**

➤ **Poverty Alleviation:** reiterated their strong commitment to alleviate South Asia from poverty and to review the progress and revisit the **SAARC Plan** of Action and its implementation, **also taking into account the Post-2015 Development Agenda.**

➤ **Post-2015 Development Goals:** recognised **the Post-2015 Development Agenda, following its adoption at the UN**, would present opportunities to compliment national and **regional efforts** on sustainable development. The leaders directed to initiate a process to contextualise the SDGs.

State of SAARC and SDGs Implementation *(contd...)*

Role of SAARC in SDG Delivery

❖ **Expert group created to initiate an Inter-Governmental process to appropriately contextualise the SDGs at the regional level.**

❖ **Given its inability to collectively promote the MDGs in the region and indefinite postponement of SAARC Summit since 2016, any inter-governmental move in the region concerning SDG is stalled.**

❖ **Indeed the Expert Group of SAARC is yet to meet since ?? due to lack of quorum.**

Regional cooperation as mentioned in the Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) of the South Asian Countries

Summary:

No South Asian countries presented their VNRs in 2016.

- In **2017**, **five South Asian countries** presented their VNRs (**Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Maldives and Nepal**).

- All of them acknowledged the importance of **regional cooperation** in achieving the SDGs. In particular,

  - **India** highlighted its **participation in regional initiatives** and workshops and reiterated its commitment to greater **regional cooperation**.

  - **Bangladesh** asserted the importance of **regional cooperation** in addressing the **challenges of data collection and management**. It also highlighted its collaboration with **Nepal, Bhutan and India** in establishing a **regional information** highway through **South-Asian Sub-regional Economic Cooperation (SASEC)** to ensure access to ICT in inaccessible areas.

  - **Maldives** mentioned its continued **regional engagement** in making fishing in the Indian Ocean more sustainable. **Nepal** spoke of organising the **Infrastructure Summit** which explored the opportunities of **regional and international partnerships** for **infrastructure development**.

State of SAARC and SDGs Implementation (Contd...)

Regional cooperation as mentioned in the Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) of the South Asian Countries

Summary:

- In **2018**, two South Asian countries presented their VNRs (Bhutan and Sri Lanka). Both acknowledged the importance of **regional cooperation** in achieving the SDGs.

  - **Bhutan** mentioned that a *trilateral cooperation among Bhutan, Bangladesh and India* is being initiated for investment in hydropower projects.

  - While **Sri Lanka** did not mention any **specific sectors** for **regional cooperation**, it spoke of the formation of the **Select Committee of Parliament** on the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development that aims to make recommendations on "*sharing expertise and experiences among countries at the regional level*."

Regional cooperation as mentioned in the Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) of the South Asian Countries

Country	Year	Excerpt
Afghanistan	2017	Considering the tenuous nature of **socio-economic development** in **Afghanistan**, the nation needs the continuous support of **international partners**, **civil society organizations**, **private sector** and **regional cooperation** to fulfil SDGs' commitments for 2030.
Bangladesh	2017	We are mindful of the fact that our success in **realizing SDGs goals and targets** would largely depend on our ability to overcome sector-specific challenges, performance of our public and private sectors and above all **regional and international cooperation**. **Data:** There are enormous challenges in **collection, analysis, disaggregation, and dissemination of data**. We need to build collaboration at **bilateral**, **regional** and **global levels** for capacity building and sharing of best practices. **Technology:** We have collaborated with **Nepal, Bhutan and India** to establish a **regional information** highway through **South Asian Sub-regional Economic Cooperation (SASEC)** in order to ensure broadband information communication, information related knowledge exchange and access to **ICT** in inaccessible areas.

Regional cooperation in South Asian Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) (cont'd)

Country	Year	Excerpt
India	2017	**South-South Cooperation** is particularly beneficial on sharing of best practices, sustainable use of **resources available regionally** and joint development projects on **common challenges**.
		Apart from integrating the SDGs into its on-going national and sub-national policies and programs, India will continue to focus on nurturing partnerships at the **regional** and global levels.
		India also benefited from participating in preparatory workshops conducted by the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs at the global and **regional levels** (Expert Group Meeting held in December 2016, Regional VNR Workshop in March 2017).
		India is a part of the **regional initiative** '*Mangroves for the Future*', being coordinated by the United Nations Development Programe and the International Union for Conservation of Nature.

State of SAARC and SDGs Implementation (Contd...)

Regional cooperation as mentioned in the Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) of the South Asian Countries (cont'd)

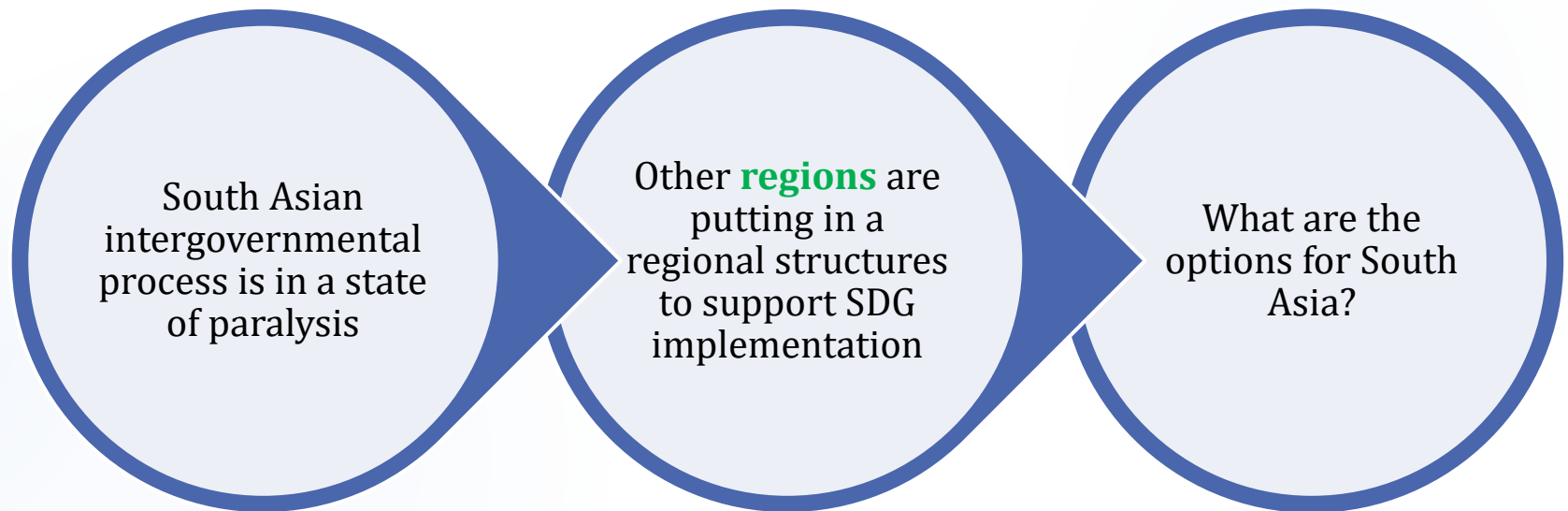| Country	Year	Excerpt
Maldives	2017	In the fisheries sector, the Maldives is continuing its engagement with **regional and international partners** in making fisheries in the Indian Ocean more sustainable.
Nepal	2017	The second infrastructure summit in 2017 explored **public-private partnerships**, successful **regional and international partnerships** for infrastructure development, the state of infrastructure development, the environment needed for investment growth, flexible financial systems and green infrastructure.
Bhutan	2018	Bhutan also remains **positively positioned** in strengthening cooperation in areas of mutually beneficial technical and **socio-economic cooperation** with other development partners. Of particular significance to the future of our development will be to strengthen **regional cooperation**. At the **regional level**, being cognizant of the benefits of optimal sharing of the limited energy resources, especially in the field of hydropower energy that will further contribute towards combating global warming and climate change, a **trilateral cooperation among Bhutan, Bangladesh, and India** for investment in hydropower project is being initiated.

Regional cooperation as mentioned in the Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) of the South Asian Countries

Country	Year	Excerpt
Bhutan (cont'd)	2018	Bhutan also remains positively positioned in strengthening cooperation in areas of mutually beneficial technical and socio-economic areas with other **development partners**. Of particular significance to the future of our development will be strengthening **regional cooperation**, particularly in the context of trade, transit, and energy cooperation in **South Asia**.
Sri Lanka	2018	*The Select Committee of Parliament* on the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development has been established with the objectives of facilitating the implementation of SDGs ... sharing expertise and experiences among countries at **regional** and international levels.
Pakistan		To come in 2019.

South Asian intergovernmental process is in a state of paralysis

Other **regions** are putting in a regional structures to support SDG implementation

What are the options for South Asia?

Benchmarking South Asia from SDG Perspective

South Asia's (incl. Myanmar) share of total population in world

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
World (Billion)	6.93	7.01	7.10	7.19	7.27	7.36	7.44	7.53
South Asia (Billion)	1.68	1.70	1.73	1.75	1.77	1.80	1.82	1.84
Percentage of total population (%)	24.24%	24.30%	24.33%	24.37%	24.39%	24.42%	24.44%	24.46%

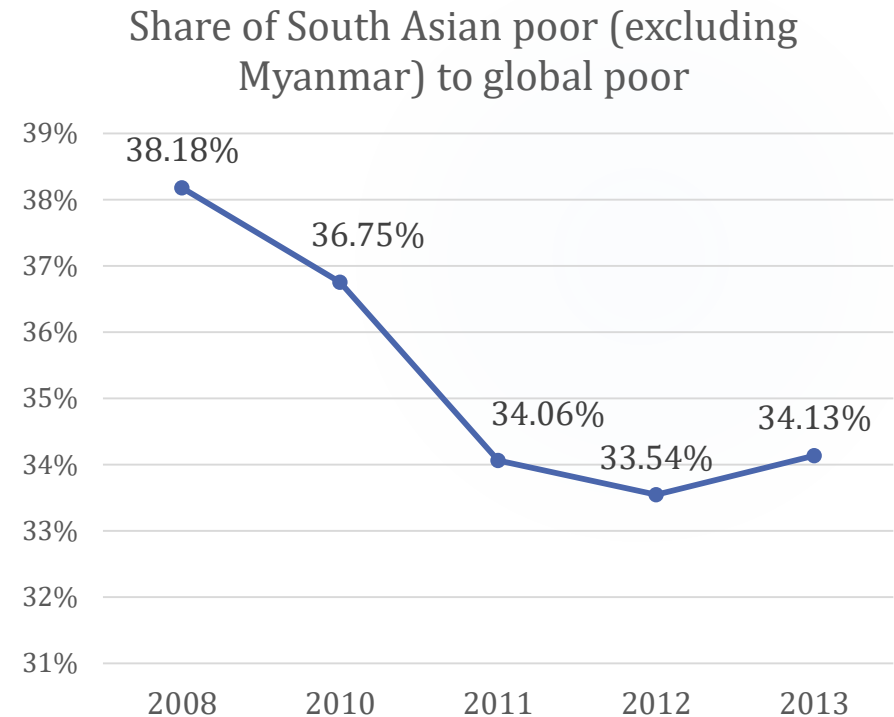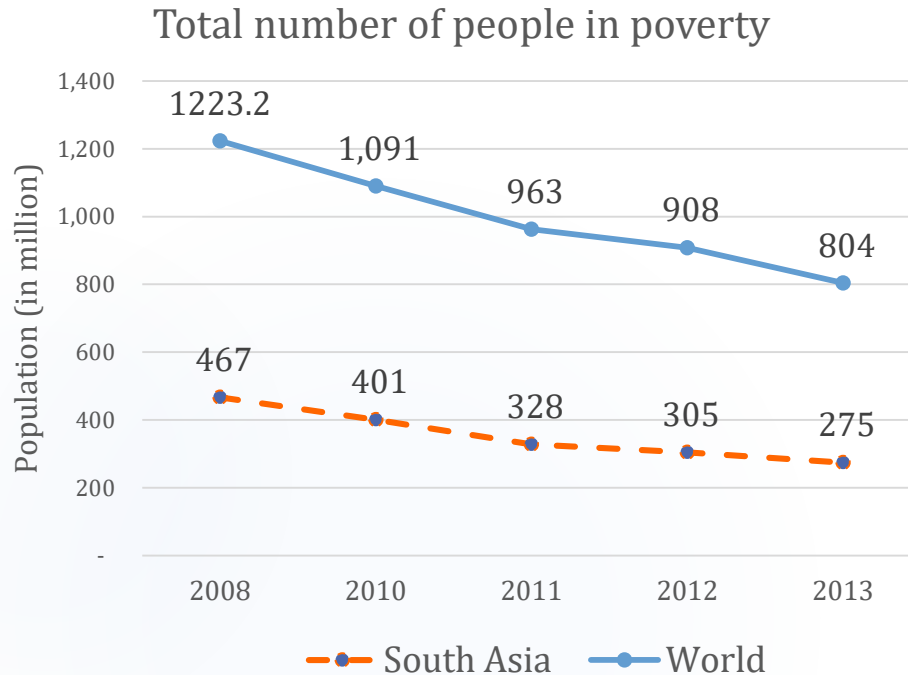Source: World Development Indicators (2018)

Benchmarking South Asia from SDG Perspective *(contd...)*

Economic

Trends in Poverty Statistics in South Asia

Total number of people in poverty

1223.2
1,091
963
908
804
467
401
328
305
275

2008 2010 2011 2012 2013

- - - South Asia   — World

Share of South Asian poor (excluding Myanmar) to global poor

38.18%
36.75%
34.06%
33.54%
34.13%

2008 2010 2011 2012 2013

Source: Both figures based on World Development Indicators (2018)

- The rate of change for poverty reduction was **faster** for **South Asia** than the world for the periods: 2008-2010, 2010-2011 and 2011-2012

- However, in **2012-2013**, the rate of change for poverty reduction was **slower** for South Asia than the world

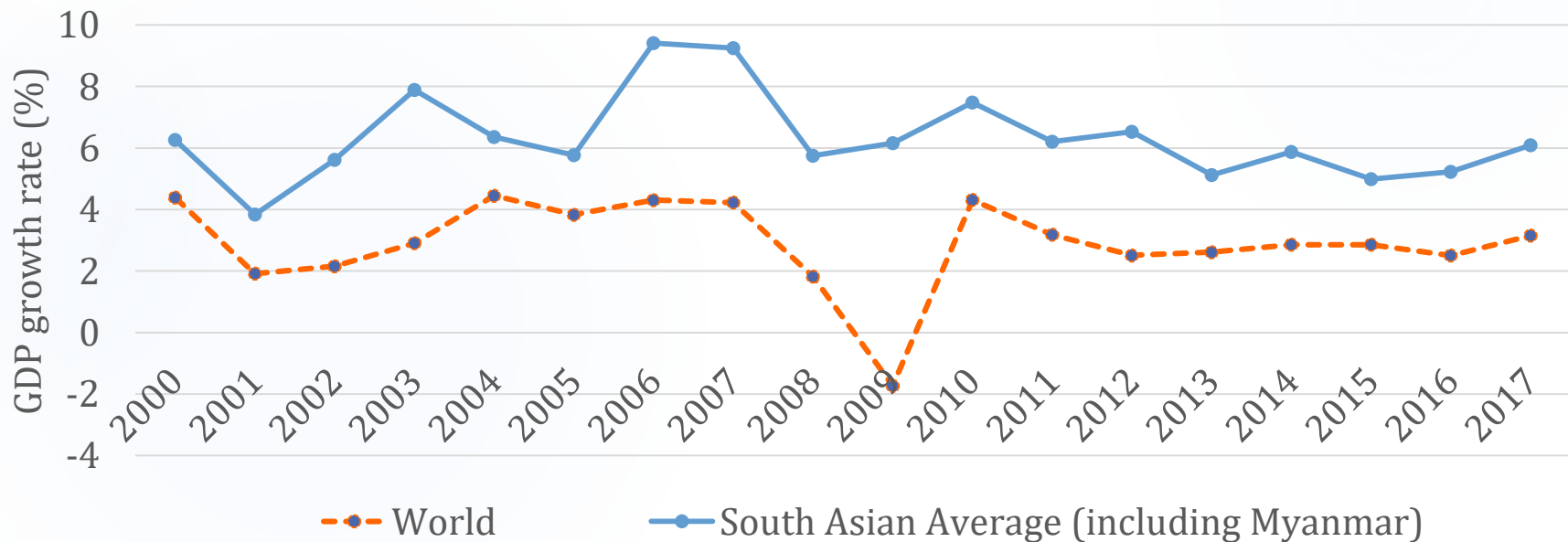- Number of poor people in **Myanmar** in 2015 was approximately 3 million

Benchmarking South Asia from SDG Perspective *(contd...)*

Economic

Trends in Economic Growth

Compared with other sub-regions, **South** and South-West Asia **has been slow** in leveraging regional economic integration. Full potential of sub-regional cooperation arrangements Such as ECO, SAARC, BIMSTEC remains untapped (ESCAP 2013)

Figure: GDP Growth

Source: World Development Indicators (2018)

- GDP growth rate of South Asia is **fluctuating**

Benchmarking South Asia from SDG Perspective *(contd...)*

Economic

Region	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Share of Global Exports in Global GDP (Constant 2010 prices)								
South Asia	3.17%	3.27%	3.36%	3.48%	3.62%	3.79%	3.95%	4.07%
South Asia (Excluding India)	0.66%	0.67%	0.69%	0.71%	0.73%	0.75%	0.77%	0.79%
Share of Global Exports in Goods and Services								
South Asia	2.24%	2.39%	2.35%	2.41%	2.46%	2.50%	2.57%	2.56%
South Asia (Excluding India)	0.40%	0.40%	0.39%	0.41%	0.43%	0.48%	0.49%	0.41%

Source: UNCTAD Stat (2018)

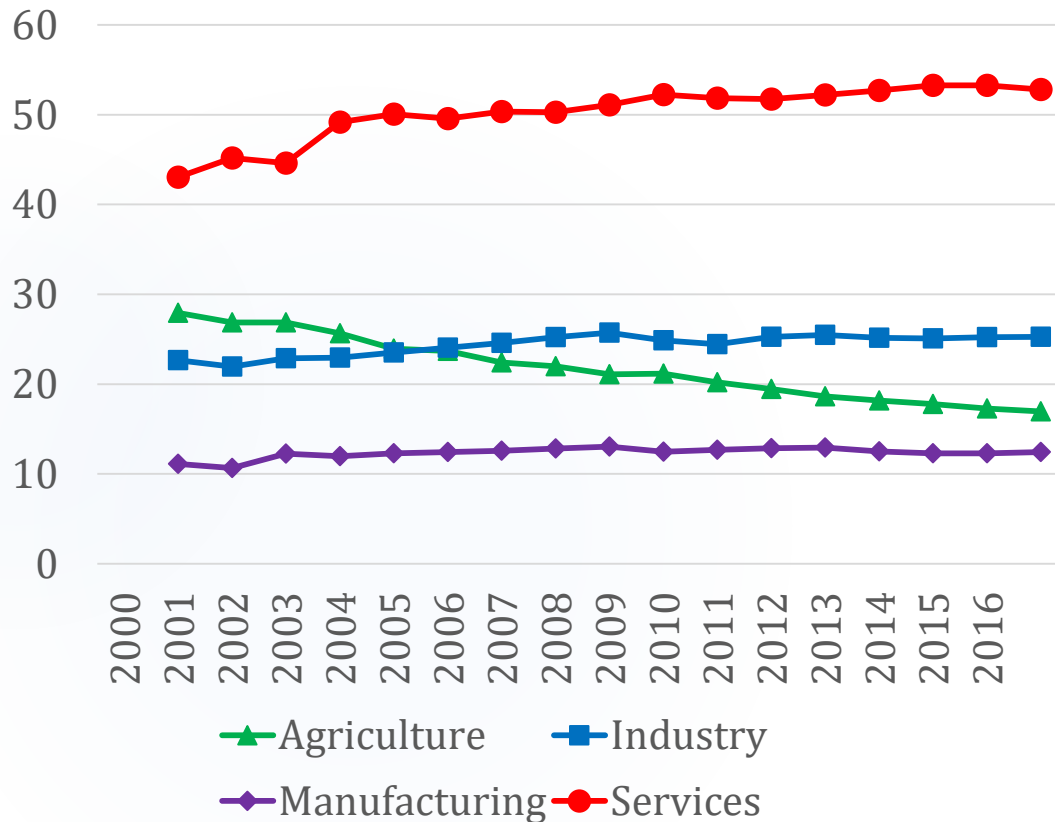- Excluding India, South Asia's contribution to both World GDP and World exports have been marginal and stagnant.

Benchmarking South Asia from SDG Perspective *(contd...)*

Economic

Agriculture, Industry, Manufacturing and Services Value Added (% of GDP)

Services: Upward moving
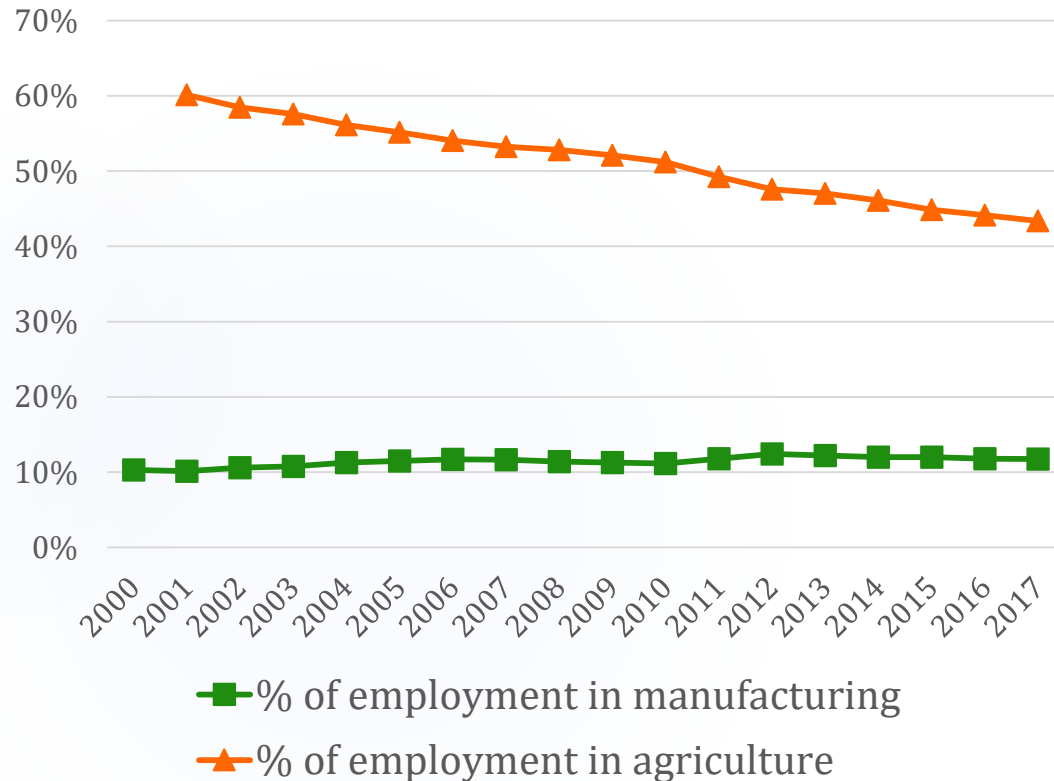**Industry:** Downward moving
Manufacturing: Stagnant
Agriculture: Downward moving

Source: World Development Indicators (2018)

Benchmarking South Asia from SDG Perspective *(contd...)*
Economic

Percentage of Total Employment by Economic Activity

Legend:
- ■ % of employment in manufacturing
- ▲ % of employment in agriculture

Source: Based on ILO modelled estimates-May 2018 (ILOSTAT, 2018)

- Share of **agriculture** in total employment :
  - Declining
  - Still generates about half of the total employment
  - More than corresponding GDP share

- Share of **manufacturing** in total employment:
  - Stagnant
  - Less than corresponding GDP share

Benchmarking South Asia from SDG Perspective *(contd...)*

Social

Employment by Gender

- Unemployment as a percentage of total labour force has been on **a declining trend** since 2000, from 4.45 in 2000 then 3.46 at 2010 and then increased in 2017 as 3.98. This is **lower** than the world average of 5.49 per cent.

- Share of women in wage employment in the nonagricultural sector (% of total nonagricultural employment) varies among the South Asian countries. Due to a lack of consistent relevant data it is difficult to assume any trend.

Share of women in wage employment in the Nonagricultural Sector (% of total Non-agricultural employment) in South Asia

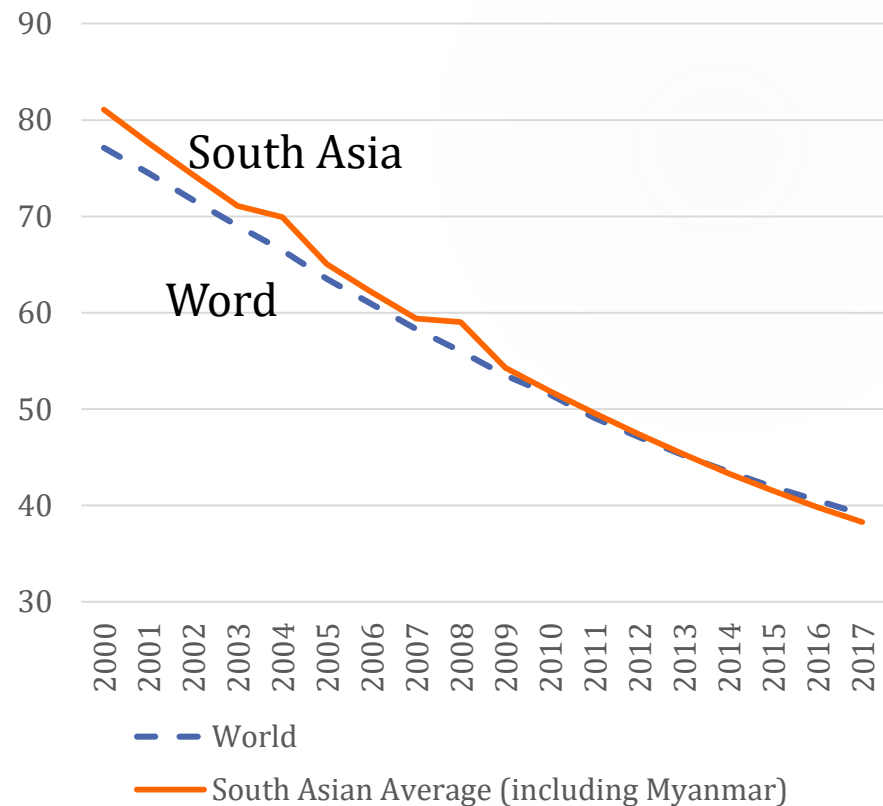|	2005	2010	2015
South Asia	16.94	17.33	17.48
Afghanistan	2.07	2.07	2.07
Bangladesh	11.18	11.08	10.98
Bhutan	69.67	70.97	72.28
India	22.77	23.47	23.77
Maldives	3.33	3.33	3.33
Myanmar	-	-	-
Nepal	25.36	25.36	25.36
Pakistan	2.47	2.19	1.91
Sri Lanka	33.77	33.54	33.01

Source: World Development Indicators (2018)

Benchmarking South Asia from SDG Perspective *(contd...)*

Social

- **Literacy rate** among the youth total (% of people age 15-24) in South Asia is **increasing** (82.15 in 2010 to 88.25 in 2017) .

- **Maternal mortality rates** in South Asia are **declining** towards 200 in 100,000 live births, it was 228 in 2010 while 182 in 2015; closer to the World's below 200 ratio.

- **Child mortality rates** are also gradually **declining** in South Asia.

Child mortality rate: under-5 (per 1,000 live births)

Legend:
- – – World
- —— South Asian Average (including Myanmar)

Source: World Development Indicators (2018)

Benchmarking South Asia from SDG Perspective *(contd...)*
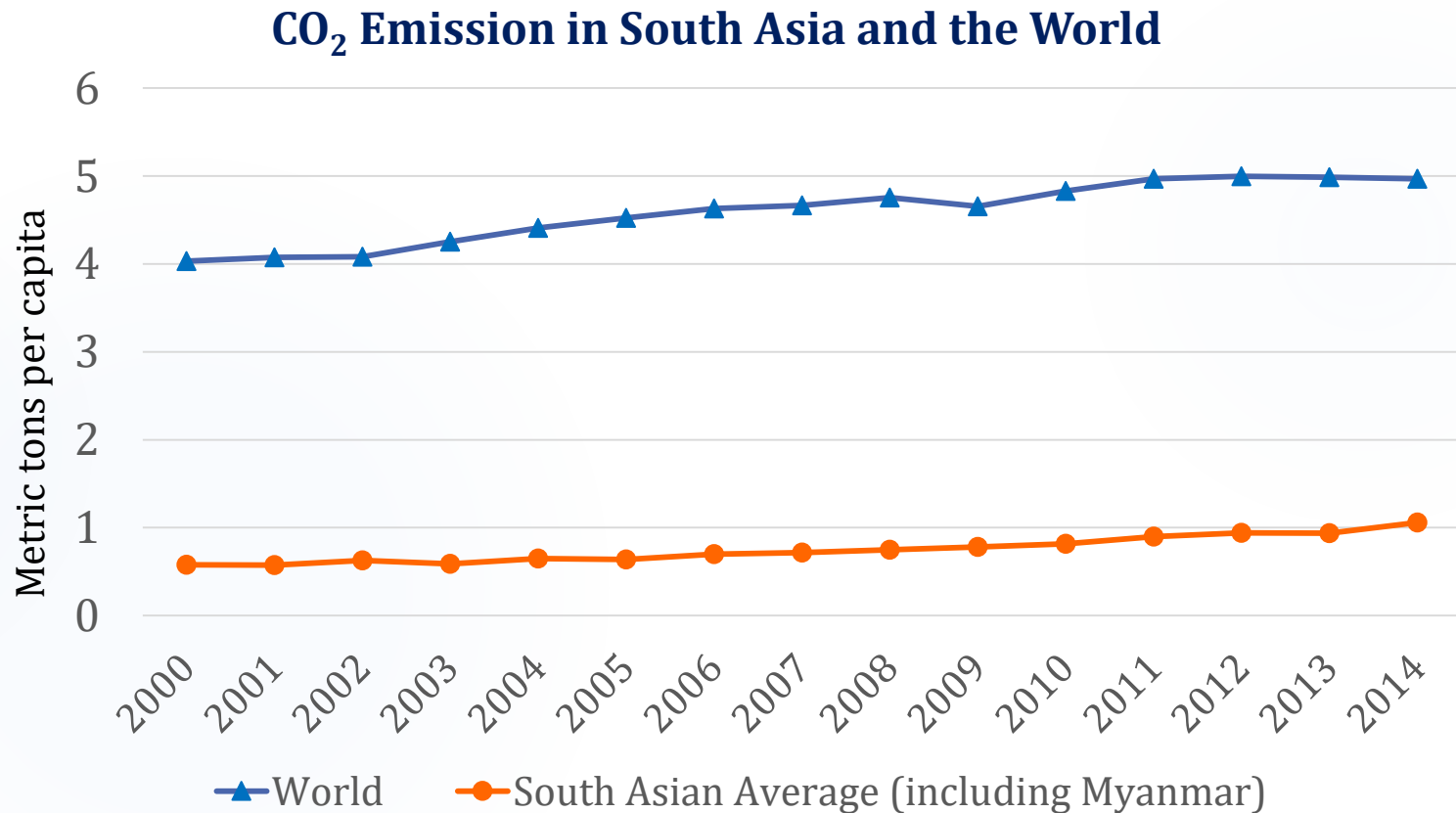
Environment

Forest area (% of land area)

Country Name	2005	2010	2015
South Asia (including Myanmar)	24.62	24.52	24.13
Afghanistan	2.07	2.07	2.07
Bangladesh	11.18	11.08	10.98
Bhutan	69.67	70.97	72.27
India	22.77	23.47	23.77
Maldives	3.33	3.33	3.33
Myanmar	50.99	48.64	44.47
Nepal	25.36	25.36	25.36
Pakistan	2.47	2.19	1.91
Sri Lanka	33.77	33.54	33

Source: World Development Indicators (2018)

- South Asia as region has remained stagnant in improving its forest area coverage (as % of land area)

Benchmarking South Asia from SDG Perspective *(contd...)*
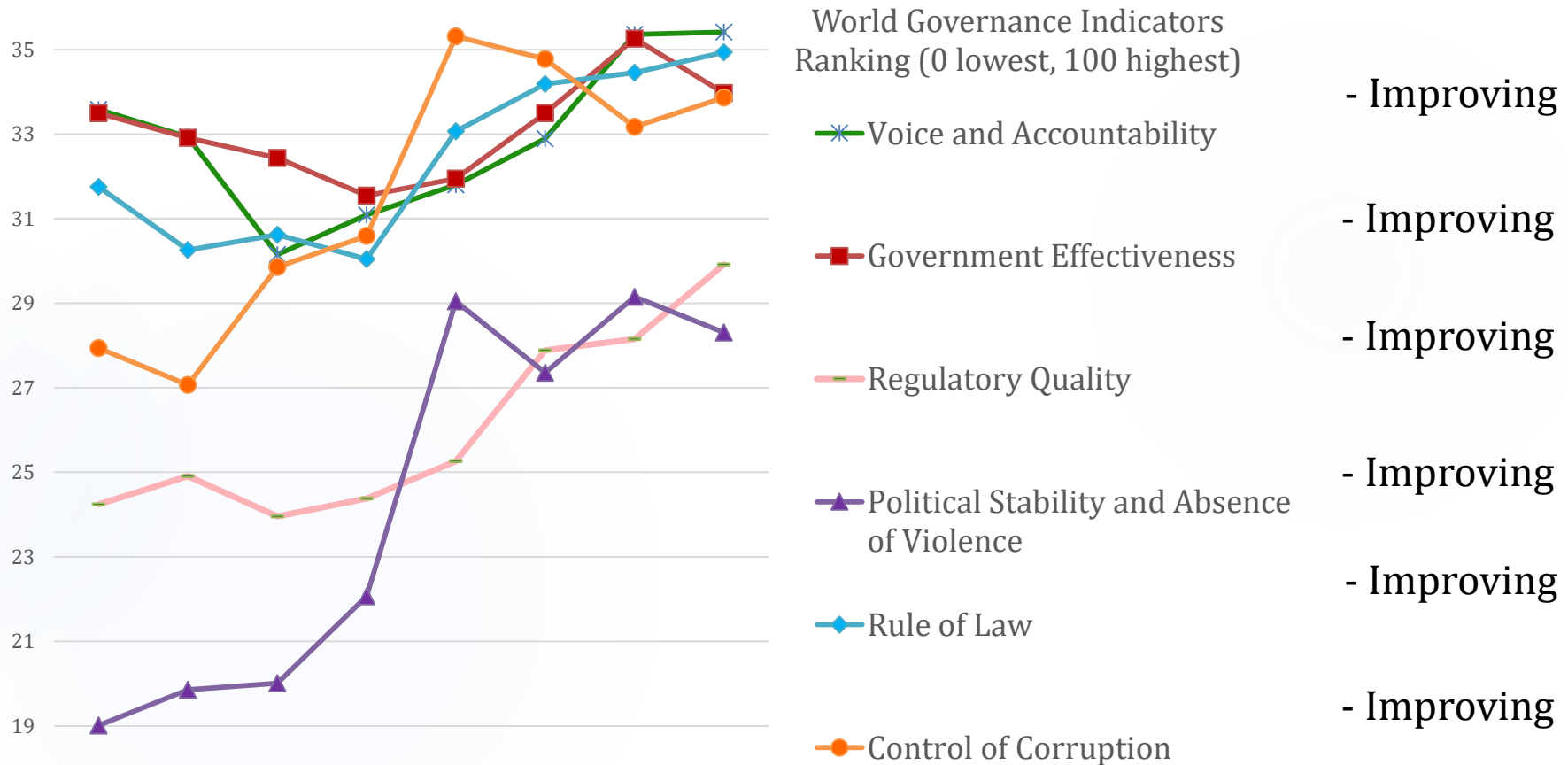
Environment

CO_2 Emission in South Asia and the World

Source: World Development Indicators (2018)

- CO_2 Emission in South Asia is comparatively lower than that of and the world

Benchmarking South Asia from SDG Perspective *(contd...)*

Governance

World Governance Indicators Ranking (0 lowest, 100 highest)

✳ Voice and Accountability — Improving

🟥 Government Effectiveness — Improving

▬ Regulatory Quality — Improving

▲ Political Stability and Absence of Violence — Improving

◆ Rule of Law — Improving

🟠 Control of Corruption — Improving

Source: World Governance Indicators (2018)

❖ **Since 2010, ranking for all indicators have improved but still on or below 35th percentile**

Benchmarking South Asia from SDG Perspective *(contd...)*

Ranking South Asia by SDGs Pillars

❖ **Social**
- In terms of social indicators, South Asia has been improving and converging with global averages.

❖ **Environmental**
- The performance in terms of environmental indicators are mixed compared to global averages.
- While South Asia fares well in terms of its carbon footprint, it does poorly in maintaining a healthy proportion of forestry.

❖ **Governance**
- Although governance situation has been improving in South Asia since 2010, most indicators still rank below the 35th percentile

❖ **Economic**
- Compared to global averages, South Asia is lagging behind in terms of major economic indicators especially those related to international trade and structural transformation

Elements of an SDG-oriented Regional Framework

A. Identification of Southern priorities from SDG perspectives challenges

- Diversity in terms of land area, population size, level of development, geo-political attributes, quality of institutions, social cohesion etc. It seems the priority focus should be on the economic pillar – development of productive capacity (particularly of women), structural transformation and decreasing inequality.

- Prioritising the "Locked-in Issues" from "Flexible Issues"

  - Locked-in issues – implementation of SDGs that demands regional cooperation

  - Flexible issues - implementation of SDGs that demands cross-border cooperation

Elements of an SDG-oriented Regional Framework *(contd...)*

B. Regional Means and Instruments for Supporting SDGs

Intra-South Asia (SA) trade statistics and financial flows

	Intra-SA exports (as % of total exports from SA)	Intra-SA imports (as % of total imports by SA)
2015	7.16%	4.55%
2010	6.17%	3.84%
2005	6.42%	3.35%

Source: World Bank World Integrated Trade Solutions (WITS), 2018

	Intra-SA remittance outflow (as a % of total outflow from SA)	Intra-SA remittance inflow (as a % of total inflow to SA)
2017	97.99%	9.50%
2015	82.25%	9.47%
2010	97.01%	18.02%

Source: World Bank, 2018

Similar figures for intra-regional investment shows modest measures

Elements of an SDG-oriented Regional Framework *(contd...)*

➢ Human development including health and education

➢ Exchange of good practices in social innovation

➢ Actions in the areas of climate change and protection of environmental resources

Elements of an SDG-oriented Regional Framework *(contd...)*

C. Institutional set-up for pursuing SDGs regionally

- Can SAARC be fit for the purpose?

- What about other regional initiatives in "Southern Asia" (BCIM, BIMSTEC, BRI and TAPI)?

- Look for sub-regional groupings with variable geometry of countries?

Elements of an SDG-oriented Regional Framework *(contd...)*

D. Think Tanks in the region has a role to play?

- Providing knowledge-inputs for conceptualising, clarifying and consolidation A, B & C.

- Setting up a mechanism to review and follow-up the state of implementation of SDGs in South Asia.

Thank You

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http://cpd.org.bd/