

NASPAA South Asia Virtual Conference
**Preparing Public Leaders in South Asia for a
Post-Pandemic World**

Organised by
Network of Schools of Public Policy, Affairs, and Administration (NASPAA)
South Asian Institute of Policy and Governance, North South University, Dhaka
and
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***Post-Pandemic South Asia:
Six Lessons for the Policy Actors***

Inaugural Speech

by

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Scene Setting

Incidence of Infection and Vaccine Coverage from 3rd January 2020 to 3rd November 2020

Incidence of infection in South Asia

Country	Incidence Rate	Deaths (per 100,000) population
Afghanistan	4.0	18.7
Bangladesh	1.0	16.9
Bhutan	0.3	0.4
India	0.2	33.3
Maldives	16.3	45.0
Nepal	2.8	39.2
Pakistan	0.6	12.9
Sri Lanka	2.5	64.3

Source: World Health Organization, 2021

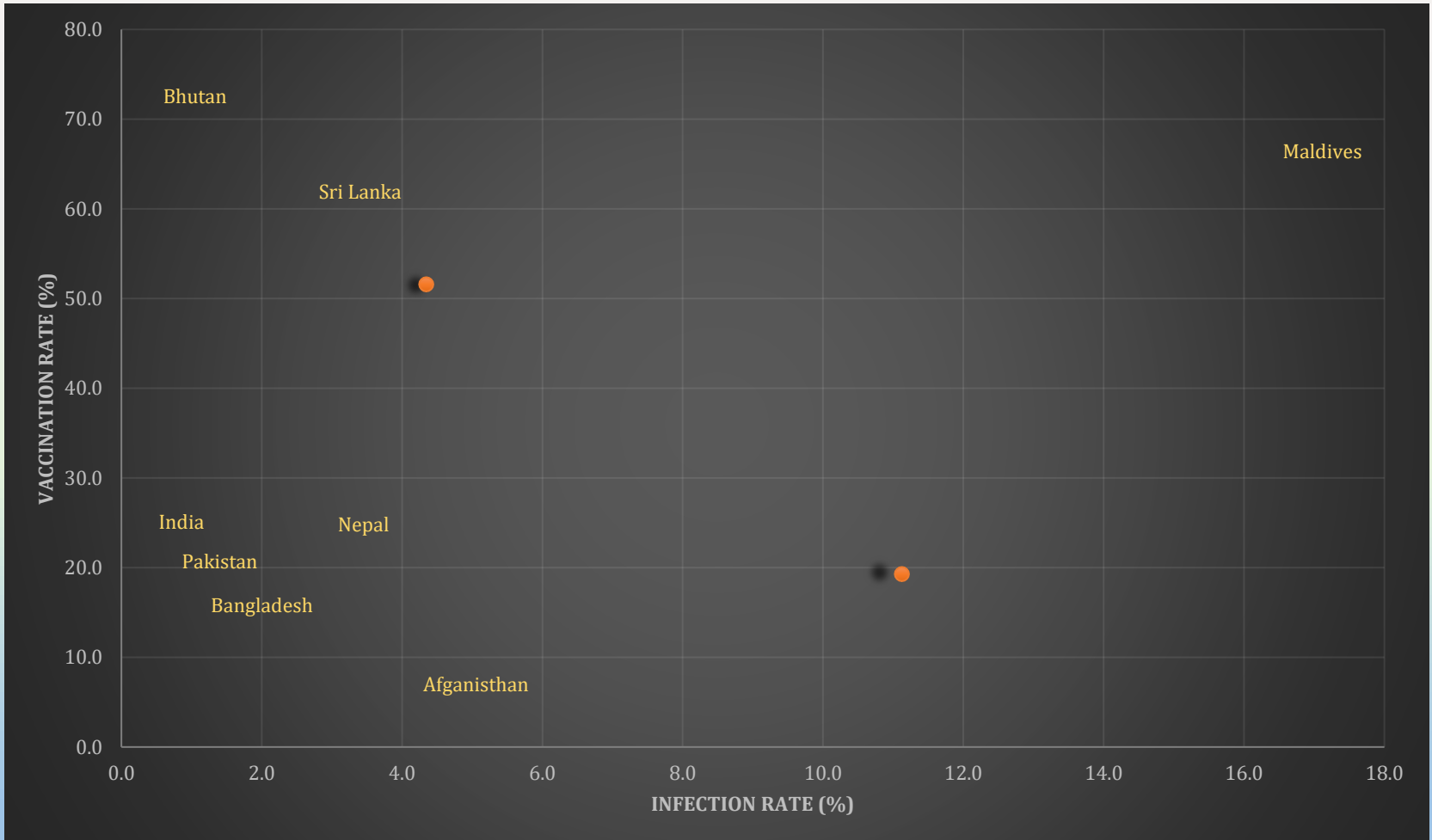
Vaccination coverage in South Asia

Country	Percentage of population fully vaccinated
Afghanistan	7.1
Bangladesh	19.2
Bhutan	72.6
India	25.2
Maldives	66.5
Nepal	24.9
Pakistan	20.8
Sri Lanka	62.0

Source: Our World in Data, 2021

Scene Setting

Incidence of Infection and vaccine coverage from 3rd January 2020 to 3rd November 2020 (contd...)



Lesson One: Public Policy Actors need to remember that all national issues are global nowadays

Cross-border dimensions of Covid-19:

- 1) Virus spread and infection
- 2) Access to vaccines-gifts, purchase, COVAX
- 3) Global travel shutdown-movement of people
- 4) Global supply chain disruption-movement of food and services
- 5) Closure of markets-labour market for migrant workers

Lesson Two: Socio-economic impact of the pandemic disproportionately fell on the left behind people -some were 'pushed behind'...

Vulnerability criteria



Source: Bhattacharya et al, Who Not to be left behind, Centre for Policy Dialogue, 2017

Lesson Three : Public policy for delivering direct cash transfer and food support was constrained by lack of fiscal space and institutionally handicapped

Public Expenditure in South Asia as % of GDP (2019)

Country	Expenditure	Revenue	Fiscal Deficit
Afghanistan	26.9	26.8	0.1
Bangladesh	15.4	10.4	-5.5
Bhutan	27.4	17.9	-2.9
India	13.2	8.6	-3.8
Maldives	33.1	25.4	-5.7
Pakistan	21.6	12.7	-8.9
Sri Lanka	18.7	12.6	-6.5

Source: (ADB, 2020)

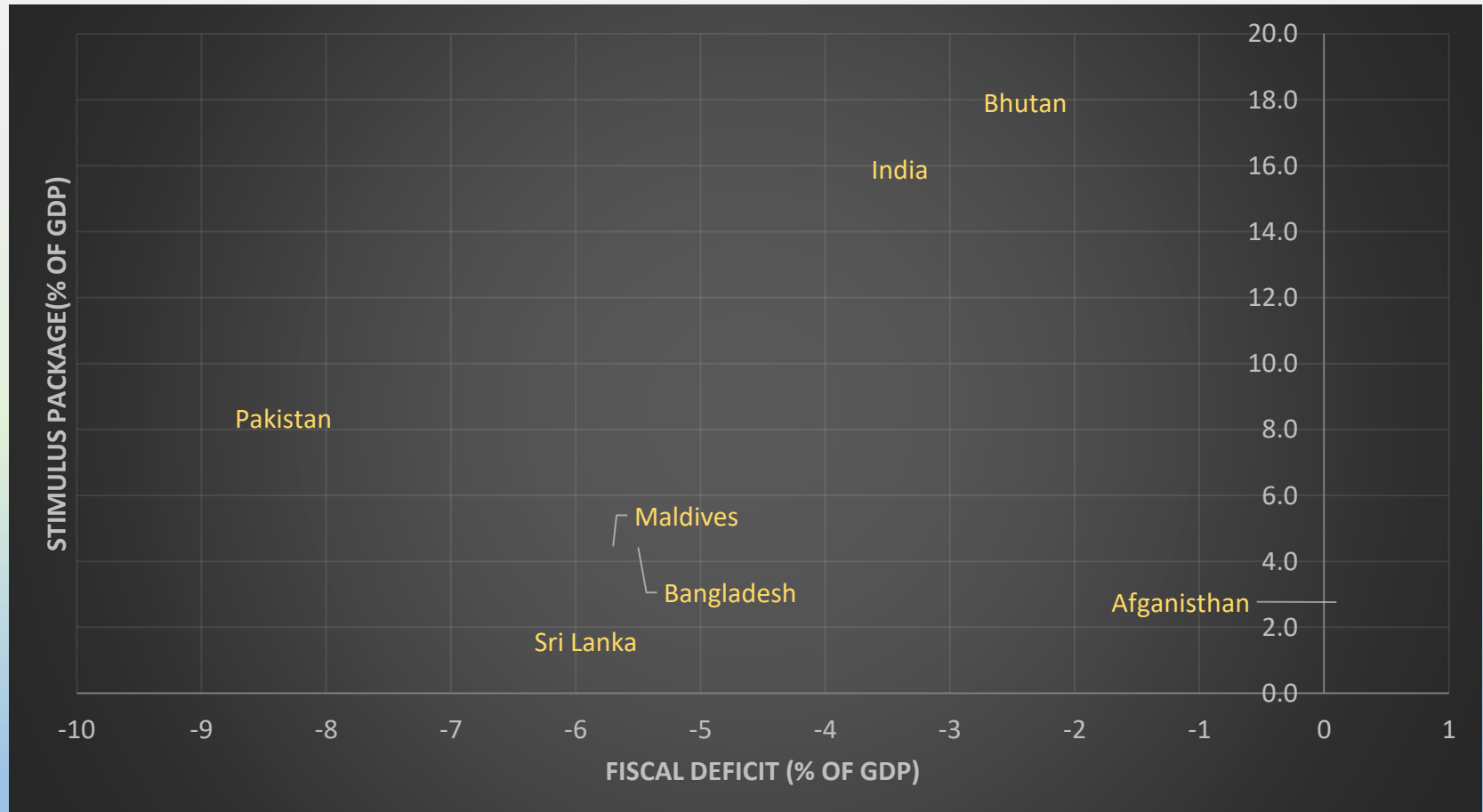
Size of Stimulus Package Rolled-Out % of GDP by Governments in South Asia, May 2020

Country	Stimulus Package by Government (as percentage of GDP)
Afghanistan	2.77
Bangladesh	4.42
Bhutan	17.94
India	15.91
Maldives	4.46
Nepal	11.18
Pakistan	8.35
Sri Lanka	1.59

Source: (ADB, 2020)

- Countries with lower fiscal deficit had larger stimulus package

Lesson Three : Public policy for delivering direct cash transfer and food support was constrained by lack of fiscal space and institutionally handicapped (contd...)



Lesson Four : Absence of a universal social protection scheme, which left citizens vulnerable to the pandemic

Comparison of social protection coverage in South Asia

Country	Effective Coverage (%)
Bangladesh	28.4
Bhutan	8.8
India	24.4
Nepal	17.0
Maldives	21.2
Sri Lanka	36.4

Source: (ILO, 2021)

Percentage of the population covered by social protection floors (%)

Country	Children	Maternity	Unemployment	Work Injury	Disability	Old Age	Contribution to Pensions	Vulnerability
Bangladesh	29.4	20.9	0.0	12.5	18.3	39.0	0.8	14.9
Bhutan	13.5	10.4	0.0	28.4	NA	NA	13.6	5.0
India	24.1	41.5	0.0	3.7	5.6	42.5	31.5	16.4
Maldives	8.2	26.2	0.0	NA	42.7	100.0	28.1	8.1
Nepal	22.9	9.8	0.0	4.5	13.7	84.2	4.4	14.8
Pakistan	5.4	NA	0.0	2.7	1.7	5.8	10.9	5.0
Sri Lanka	32.0	29.4	0.0	58.0	18.0	35.7	44.6	16.0

Source: (ILO, 2021)

Lesson Four : Absence of a universal social protection scheme, which left citizens vulnerable to the pandemic (contd...)

Problems of the Stimulus Packages:

- 1) Low total allocation
- 2) Credit bias/ less cash transfer and food assistance
- 3) Missing the new poor
- 4) Exclusion and duplication of targets
- 5) Inadequate data support
- 6) Low attention during second wave

Lesson Five: The pandemic spurred data innovation and digital initiatives in the countries

Data-driven vaccination in South-Asia

Country	Initiative	Description
Bangladesh	<i>Surokkha</i>	The portal contains data on the number of doses administered, number of doses required, and generates real-time data
Bhutan	Bhutan Vaccine System (BVS)	The system includes stock monitoring, provides pre-registration, generates vaccination schedules, produces vaccine certificates, and generates real-time reports
India	Covid Vaccine Intelligent Work (CoWin)	A cloud based digital platform which ensures that people who are pre-registered get vaccinated in line with prioritisation
Pakistan	National Immunization Management System (NIMS)	NIMS keeps records of all vaccinations and registrations
Sri Lanka	District Health Information Software 2 (DHIS2)	DHIS2 is used to track immunisations and produce vaccination certificates

Source: Compiled from different websites

Lesson Five: The pandemic spurred data innovation and digital initiatives in the countries *(contd...)*

Data-driven stimulus delivery:

Bangladesh

- The BDT 2500 Cash support programme was driven by use of data.
- Initially the list of beneficiaries was prepared, verified and modified by BBS, local administrations, district administrations and local government representatives
- The list was cross-checked with other databases through Finance Division and Ministry of Relief
- Lastly, money was distributed among beneficiaries through Mobile Financial Services (MFS) or bank accounts.

India

- India launched *Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana* (PMGKY) which constitutes of in-kind food distribution and cash transfers
- The Government was able to implement the (PMGKY) because most of the people were included in *Jan Dhan Aadhar Mobile* (JAM), which is the Government of India's initiative to connect mobile numbers, Aadhar cards and *Jan Dhan* accounts.

Lesson Six: Regional cooperation playing supportive role in dealing with national issues

- South Asian leaders joined a virtual meet to discuss the ongoing pandemic on the 15th of March 2020, which was hosted by Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The video conference was attended by Prime Minister of Bangladesh, Bhutan and Nepal. Maldivian President, Sri Lankan President and State Minister of Pakistan also took part in the meeting.

Regional Initiatives by SAARC Countries

Initiative	Amount	Description
SAARC Finance Framework (April 2020)	USD 2 billion	The Reserve Bank of India has a currency swap of \$ 2 billion to solve liquidity problems. From this amount, India approved currency swap of \$150 million and \$ 400 million to help Maldives and Sri Lanka
SAARC Covid-19 Emergency Fund (March 2020)	USD 21.8 million	India was the first one to contribute \$10 million to the Emergency Fund, followed by other SAARC countries.
SAARC Development Fund (April 2020)	USD 5 million	SAARC Development Fund allocated \$ 5 million to support Covid-related projects in its member countries

Source: Covid 19 and South Asia, UNESCAP, 2020

Bilateral Initiatives among SAARC countries

Initiative	Description
Regional currency swap from Bangladesh to Sri Lanka	The currency swap of \$200 billion was approved by Bangladesh to help Sri Lanka overcome its foreign exchange crisis
Medical aid from India to Bangladesh	Medical aid from India included surgical masks, covid-19 testing kits, headcovers, hydro chloroquine, liquid oxygen, ambulance
Medical aid from Pakistan to Bangladesh	Medical aid from Pakistan included ventilators and breathing-aid machines
Medical aid from Bangladesh to India	Bangladesh provided antibiotics, vials of Remdesivir, paracetamols, PPE, injections and other covid-related medicines

Source: Compiled from different websites

Lesson Six: Regional cooperation playing supportive role in dealing with national issues (contd..)

Vaccine Supplies from India (in millions) as of May 2021

Country	Grant	Commercial	COVAX	Total Supply
Afghanistan	0.5	NA	0.47	0.97
Bangladesh	3.3	7	NA	10.3
Bhutan	0.5	NA	NA	0.55
Maldives	0.2	0.1	0.01	NA
Nepal	1.1	1	0.34	2.5
Sri Lanka	0.5	0.5	0.26	1.26

Source: (Ministry of External Affairs of India, 2021)

Lesson Six: Regional cooperation playing supportive role in dealing with national issues (contd...)

Regional Initiatives Elsewhere during Covid

Initiative	Amount
African Development Bank 1.Covid-19 Response Facility 2.Bond Social loan 3.Emergency Assistance for WHO	USD 10 billion USD 3 billion USD 2 million
African Union 1.Joint Continental Strategy for covid outbreak	NA
Development Bank of Central African States (BDEAC)	USD 4.9 million
Development Bank of Latin America (CAF) 1.Regional emergency credit line 2.Technical cooperation resources 3.Credit line	USD 2.5 billion USD 400 thousand (per country) USD 50 million (per country)
Inter-American Development Bank	USD 2.8 billion
South African Development Community (SADC) 1.Regional Resource Mobilization Initiative 2.SADC Pooled Procurement Services for pharmaceuticals and medical supplies	NA
West African Development Bank (BOAD)	USD 196.7 million

Source: Compiled from different websites

Closing Observations

Three issues

- South Asian countries found themselves in the midst of a pandemic with gaps in **public health infrastructure** and **access to basic needs** such as **social protection** was **inadequate**. Post covid South Asian countries should focus on closing the gaps in public health infrastructure and work on explaining social safety net programmes and **universal social protection system** or **basic minimum income**
- South Asian countries should work together in strengthening regional cooperation framework and modalities in delivering **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**.
- South Asian countries needs to mobilise funds for addressing the “**locked-in**” **regional issues** which include *public health, climate action, migration, connectivity and finance*

Thank You

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