

# ACCESSING THE FUTURE OF REGIONAL COOPERATION IN SOUTH ASIA THROUGH COVID-19 DIPLOMACY

Monica Verma & Karnika Jain



*About the Authors*

Monica Verma is Doctoral Fellow at Department of International Relations, South Asian University, India.

Karnika Jain is Doctoral Fellow at Centre for South Asian Studies, School of International Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, India.

*Recommended Citation*

Verma, Monica & Jain, Karnika, “Assessing the Future of Regional Cooperation in South Asia through COVID-19 Diplomacy”, *NIICE Special Report 1004*, June 2020, Kathmandu: Nepal Institute for International Cooperation and Engagement.

Published by Nepal Institute for International Cooperation and Engagement. Sharing and Publishing with proper credit to NIICE is permissible. Views expressed are those of the authors.

NIICE Special Report, June 2020

© All Rights Reserved by NIICE.

**ACCESSING THE FUTURE OF REGIONAL  
COOPERATION IN SOUTH ASIA THROUGH  
COVID-19 DIPLOMACY**

**Monica Verma & Karnika Jain**

## **Introduction**

The modern region of South Asia consisting of eight countries - Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Pakistan, Maldives, Nepal and Maldives is an oft-discussed and debated region in the world politics. It is home to the largest population in the world with 1.9 billion people. The region has been at the center of attention of the scholarly community due to a rising and resurgent India, growth story of Bangladesh, withdrawal of United States from Afghanistan etc. While many questions are framed on the future of South Asian politics, a question that continues to be engaged with despite South Asia's dismal record is the question of regional cooperation. On one hand, there are many challenges that plague effective cooperation between member countries. On the other hand, South Asian countries due to the very nature of the challenges such as climate change, migration, economic development need to pool in their common synergies and deal with them on a regional basis. In such a scenario, the unprecedented COVID-19 crisis has led to a surprisingly effective cooperation between the South Asian countries. This paper seeks to assess the COVID-19 diplomacy in the region in order to understand its implications for the ongoing project of regional cooperation.

## **Regional Cooperation in South Asia: An Overview**

As the domain of security has gone beyond domain of nation-state system, states have also acknowledged their lack of adequate equipment to deal with today's threats individually. The fear of insecurities like climate change, terrorism, migration, food security, ethnic clashes, natural disasters, economic interests and global pandemics have blurred the territorial boundaries and led to the growth of interconnections among states and societies. There are different objectives and interests of every state to enter into the regional cooperation but in specific to South Asia, it can be broadly listed as economic development, territorial integrity and consolidating national sovereignty. The most striking feature of South Asian cooperation has been the primacy and domination of their popular domestic issues which has been the point of contestation between the countries within the region. The superimposition of state sovereignty on regional issues has made regional cooperation a difficult task.

South Asia formed its only pan-regional organization named South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) in 1985. The region comprises of the countries of Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. SAARC designed to strengthen and promote socio-economic and cultural engagements between the countries. But, even after completion of three decades of its existence, little has been done to uphold its institutional mechanism for considerable cooperation in the region.

The formal institutional foundation of SAARC raised hopes among the countries but unfortunately many obstacles have made the cooperation process stagnant. The region has a distinct feature with regards to India's geographical position and size. India is the only country which shares boundaries with every state of South Asia. This makes the region Indo-centric not only in terms of geography, but also in its asymmetrical capabilities in terms of economic dominance, population and territory (Harshe 1999). India had been reluctant in actively participating in SAARC, since its formation. India, for a long time did not have confidence on the economic prospects of the region and looked for the cooperation outside the region (Muni & Jetly 2011). The fear of the neighboring countries on India's dominance had also added in keeping India's interest aside.

Not surprisingly, the dispute between India and Pakistan has played a critical and decisive role in SAARC. It has acted as the biggest hindrance in the way of regional cooperation. The contention over the Kashmir issue and Pakistan's continuous harboring of terrorists on its soil has increased distrust between the countries which has in turn crippled the process of cooperation in South Asia. The regional cooperation within states can increase dramatically with the improved bilateral relations of India and Pakistan. But, because of the lack of political will in both the countries, the region has witnessed slow pace of cooperation. The frequent cancellations of SAARC summits have derailed the significance of the SAARC platform. The last SAARC summit was held in 2014 hoisted by Nepal and after which, it took a gap of six long years to bring all SAARC members together on a virtual conference call in 2020. Though, the nineteenth SAARC summit was supposed to be hoisted by Pakistan in 2016 but because of the Uri attack, India withdrew its participation, condemning terrorist attack and alleging the country to be involved in the terror attack. India's move to boycott the summit was followed by other countries as well leading to the cancellation of summit altogether.

The lack of intra-regional trade is another failure of SAARC. Regardless of the steps taken, there has not been an adequate progress in intra-regional trade in the region. The South Asia Free Trade Agreement (SAFTA) came into existence in 2006 with an objective of enhancing trade and economic cooperation. But, it remains ineffective in its implementation. According to the report of the World Bank, the intraregional trade in South Asia remains one third of its actual potential (World Bank 2018). There have been many impediments to intraregional trade including complex Non-Tariff barriers, corruption, long bureaucratic procedures, lack of adequate connectivity and weak infrastructure (Jayaram 2016). The total intraregional trade in South Asia accounts for less than 5 percent of region's total trade which is much lesser in comparing to ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations), which accounts for 25 percent and East Asia with 35 percent (World Bank 2016).

The failure of the countries in being able to use SAARC productively as a forum to promote regional cooperation has led to a preference in South Asia to cooperate at the sub-regional level. These subregional initiatives include the BBIN with countries including Bangladesh, Bhutan, India and China; the BCIM with Bangladesh, China, India and Myanmar; and the BIMSTEC with Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Myanmar, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Thailand (Batra 2015).

Even if we look at the migration problem, no consolidate regional policy has emerged till date. The issue of poverty, political uncertainties and migration, both within and across boundaries, has been directly interrelated and has caused difficulties in the region in different ways. Several factors like borders demarcated by colonial rulers, ethno-linguistic ties among people, sharing of porous land borders, socio-political and economic conditions and security concerns among people have been responsible for irregular and multiple forms of cross-border migration. It has been a causal factor in intensifying and escalating transnational crimes, such as human trafficking, corruption, violence, arms smuggling, drug trafficking and terrorism. However, regulated migration in South Asia has potential of bringing positive impact in the region in terms of growth, human capital and poverty mitigation programs. But, because of the lack of political commitment towards regional initiatives, the region has remarkably failed in solving the issue. The countries lack the trust filled platform through which there could be exchange of information on migration patterns .

Combined with absence of adequate transparent check on the flow of illegal migration occurring across borders.

Also, China pose another challenge to regional cooperation. Its rising strategic engagement to counter Indian hegemony in the region has deepened the problems of regional cooperation. China's aspiration of becoming a full member state from an observer state has been consistently rejected by India. It has been involved in the region with many of its economic development projects and its latest 'First China-South Asia Cooperation Forum' (CSACF) in 2018 could be seen as an additional challenge to the SAARC. China-India political relations have been an instrumental factor in restricting SAARC's capability and its effectiveness (Madan 2014). Overall, the regional cooperation process within South Asia is fraught with several problems wherein, the adaptive strategies have so far remained fragmented and lack trust and connection between countries.

### **Impact of COVID-19 in South Asia**

Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic has badly hit the world economy, paralyzed health system and shaken off the socio-economic positions of the countries. Today, the governments around the globe are looking inwards and are completely relying on domestic approaches to fight the pandemic. But meanwhile, the South Asian region which has always showed a gloomy picture has shown some hope of revival with India's initiative of coming forward with an idea of virtual meetings. South Asia is home to 1.9 billion people making it one of the most populous regions of the world. This makes it more vulnerable to the COVID-19 pandemic because of the overuse of limited resources with inadequate development of political and economic scenario of the region. Shockingly, as per the assessments of World Bank, the region's population is projected to increase to 2.3 billion by 2050 (World Bank Group 2018).

By 15 May, 153,110 people have been affected by COVID-19 in the region, with a total of 4,050 deaths and 42,340 cases recovered (SDMC 2020). Due to COVID-19, World Bank has anticipated an overall decline in the regional growth of South Asia ranging between 1.8 and 2.8 percent in 2020, coming down from an estimated 6.3 percent with merely six months gap. This has also

been projected as the region's worst economic performance in the last 40 years (World Bank 2020). South Asia's labour productivity is among the lowest in the world and informal sector dominates employment in the region (United Nations 2020). In 2016, in comparison to other regions like East Asia, South Asia comprised of higher shares of informal employment, while the former accounted for 50.7 percent, the latter had 87.8 percent of informal employment among the total workforce (ILO 2020). COVID-19 and the lockdown imposed by member countries has intensified the concern towards the informal workers as the pandemic will further aggravate the problem of economic inequality in the region. Without any social security, it would lead to deprivation of their livelihoods, would affect the income of the poor with regard to employment and would generate food insecurities among the large sectors of the region.

In addition, COVID-19 pandemic is deteriorating the health systems and routine healthcare accessibility in the region. According to UNICEF, 2,400 children may die every day in South Asia in next six months (UNICEF, 2020). India is going to be worst-hit over the next six months with estimate of 3 lakh children dying in India, followed by Pakistan with 95,000 children, Bangladesh with 28,000, Afghanistan with 13,000 and Nepal with 4,000 children (Ibid). Data also reveals that because of COVID-19, 16 million people in South Asia are projected to be pushed into poverty (World Economic Forum, 2020). The South Asian region already in comparison to other regional blocks is counted as one of the least integrated regions and a lesser developed one and at such a juncture, global pandemic might have a devastating impact on public health institutions of the region which might lead to inefficiency of these healthcare systems in providing decent quality of life.

If we look at the ranking of Healthcare Access and Quality (HAQ) Index generated by Global Burden of Disease study of 2016, published in the Lancet, there has been poor performance of individual countries of South Asia in maintaining and providing better health systems to its people across the region (Global Burden of Disease, 2018). Out of total 195 countries measured for HAQ Index Rank, India stood at number 145, followed by Nepal at rank number 149, Pakistan at 154 and Afghanistan at 191. The performances of Bangladesh and Bhutan were better than other member-states of the region with ranking of 132 and 134, respectively. Sri Lanka and Maldives were the



only countries in the region that were ranked below 100 with rankings of 71 and 72, respectively (Ibid).

In 2018, South Asia's mortality rate, under-5 was 42.1 percent, compared to the world's mortality rate of 38.6 percent (World Bank, 2019). Mortality rate are among the indicators that are used in comparing socioeconomic development with health status across countries. Despite improvements in health system across South Asia, the region is still counted as having fragile health systems. And as COVID-19 is disrupting medical supply chains, shortages of vaccines and routine immunizations, UNICEF has estimated; if effective proper actions are not been taken then over four lakh forty thousand additional children may die over the next six months in the region (UNICEF, 2020).

The impact of COVID-19 crisis is also seen among children and young people where because of schools lockdown, around 430 million children are at the risk of becoming school-dropouts (UNICEF, 2020). The region already has a weak education system with around 95 million children of school going age have been left out from the formal education system (Ibid). It has also been reported that even before the pandemic crisis, the government spending on education to GDP in South Asia was 2.112 percent in 2018, which was almost half of the world rate of 4.487 percent (World Bank, 2019). Thus, COVID-19 is set to affect the economic growth in these countries, the expenditure on education is likely to come down further.

The countries of the region have also experienced losses in the field of tourism which have been a contributing factor in the growing economic sectors of the countries of Maldives, Sri Lanka, Nepal, and Bhutan (Samaranayake, 2020). Human development deals with people's security and their priorities. Currently, millions of people are engulfed with COVID-19 pandemic; affecting the overall human development growth of which South Asian region is no exception. Therefore, at this period of time, the hope of revival of South Asian cooperation becomes a significant step towards combating COVID-19. At regional level, we need policies which can undertake effective measures of maintaining institutional strength in dealing with the COVID-19 havoc. The next section discusses the strategies that South Asia as a region has undertaken in fighting this global pandemic.

## **SAARC and the COVID-19 Response in South Asia**

COVID-19 has provided a good opportunity to South Asia to revive its Regional Cooperation through SAARC. As soon as the first cases of COVID-19 were found in South Asia, India took a lead in getting region's act together in dealing with the crisis. Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi immediately called for a video conference of SAARC leaders through a tweet posted on 13 March 2020. The video conference of SAARC leaders was held on 15 March 2020. This was for the first time after the 2014 SAARC summit that leaders of all the SAARC countries were meeting although on a virtual platform. The last SAARC summit in 2016 was postponed due to India Pakistan tensions after Uri attacks. In 2014 all the SAARC leaders had met for the last time in Kathmandu Nepal for the 24th Summit. In view of the 6 years long log jam in holding a SAARC Summit, the call given by Narendra Modi for a virtual SAARC Leaders meet became even more important. The video conference of SAARC leaders got a tremendous response from all the countries.

The only exception was Pakistan that sent its state minister for health Zafar Mirza instead of the leader of the country. The meeting was very successful in terms of the outcomes that it produced. One of the most important outcome of this video conference was creation of a SAARC COVID-19 Emergency Fund. The COVID-19 emergency fund created under SAARC was announced by Prime Minister Narendra Modi during the video conference itself. This fund is voluntary in nature and is designed as an emergency response mechanism aiming to fulfil needs of the SAARC countries in dealing with COVID-19. India contributed USD 10 million immediately to the fund which was followed by USD 1 million each by Afghanistan and Nepal, USD 1.5 million by Bangladesh, USD 0.1 million by Bhutan, USD 0.2 by Maldives, USD 5 million by Sri Lanka and USD 3 million by Pakistan (Business Standard, 2020).

Except Pakistan, all the countries contributed to the fund on an unconditional basis. But Pakistan demanded that the administration of the fund should be done through the SAARC Secretariat in accordance with the SAARC charter. Not just this, Pakistan also raised the Kashmir issue during the SAARC leaders conference when the Pakistani representative suggested removal of restrictions from Kashmir to fight Coronavirus outbreak. Thus, unlike other countries that sent their leaders on Narendra Modi's call for a virtual meet, Pakistan not only

sent a junior level representative but also try to politicise the entire issue by raising the Kashmir question. Besides the COVID-19 fund SAARC leaders virtual conference also led to an important outcome with respect to trade in the SAARC region. During the SAARC leaders conference it was decided that a meet of trade representative from all the countries should also be called.

As a response to this demand a trade meet was called on 8 April 2020. Pakistan again boycotted this trade meet although representatives from all the other SAARC states were present. In the SAARC trade meet two kinds of decisions were taken - first kind of decisions focused on the short-term COVID-19-specific measures. Along with this, long-term decisions were also taken that focussed on the impact of COVID-19 crisis on economic development of South Asian countries. The COVID-19 specific measures included provisional import clearance at preferential duties, provisional acceptance of digital certificates of origin, scanned copy of documents for custom clearance and Bank payment clearance resolution of Exim issues on land custom stations. Besides this, it was also decided that South Asian countries should now work forward to increase quantum of intra-regional trade so that they are able to sustain and expand this trade to offset long-term economic loss due to COVID-19.

At the SAARC leaders virtual conference it was decided that a conference of health professionals should also be called. Hence a conference of health professionals was also called on 27 March 2020. This conference was chaired by India's director general of health services. It was decided that an information exchange platform will be created for which preliminary work has been already done by India. At this conference, many other decisions such as the online training of emergency response personnel, knowledge partnership, sharing of expertise on surveillance and joint research of diagnostic and therapeutic aspect of epidemics were also taken. The SAARC leaders virtual conference led to many other important outcomes. It was proposed at this conference that a rapid response team should be created. It was also decided that common SAARC pandemic protocols should be framed applicable at borders during all the future pandemics such as the COVID-19 crisis.

A meeting of health ministers of SAARC region was also organised by Pakistan on 22 April 2020. India was represented by the Director General of Health Services, Rajiv Garg. Pakistan publically claimed that Sri Lanka was represented

by its health minister but there was a counterclaim that it wasn't the health minister of the country but Director General of Public Health that represented Sri Lanka at this conference (Hindustan Times 2020). This meeting was also attended by Secretary General of SAARC, Esala Ruwan Weerakoon. A dedicated website has also been developed to provide information on COVID-19 crisis in the South Asian region by SAARC Disaster Management Centre (SDMC 2020). This website provides real-time information on the crisis and its response including the total number of cases and casualties.

### **Future of SAARC**

After a long gap of six years steps undertaken by SAARC countries to jointly manage the COVID-19 crisis shows that SAARC has matured into an organisation which can be trusted with emergency situation such as a pandemic. This was after a long time that such countries came on a common platform and discussed ways to tackle economic impact of the crisis as well as the need to pool in their synergies. Obviously, it raised a number of questions regarding SAARC's future in the long run. If we analyse the COVID-19 diplomacy under SAARC in detail, we can actually understand the long-term trends that will determine the future of SAARC.

The most important aspect of COVID-19 Diplomacy in South Asian region is the proactive role played by India in taking all the other countries together. The answer behind India's enthusiasm in reviving SAARC to handle the COVID-19 crisis lies in India's ambition to be taken seriously as a regional power. Since the beginning of the 1990s, there has been a serious change in India's approach towards its neighbourhood. During 1985, when SAARC was initially created, India was apprehensive about the organisation's role in intimidating India with the collective power of other regional countries. A serious change came after India implemented a series of economic reforms under PM PV Narsimha Rao.

However, it was under Indian Prime Minister IK Gujral that India decided a policy of unilateral concession should be followed in South Asia. The policy was motivated by India's recognition of its asymmetrical capabilities in the region. India is not just the largest territory but also the largest economy in the South Asian region. This policy of making unilateral concessions to its neighbours was

followed by Dr. Manmohan Singh's vision of shared prosperity. Prime Minister Singh was of the view that any economic gain that India is making is futile if the fruits of this economic gains are not shared with its neighbours. The key understanding behind such a vision was that India can rise economically and politically only if it helps its neighbours also grow so that India gets a conducive environment for its own geopolitical ambitions.

The ideas shared by former Prime Minister's IK Gujral and Dr. Manmohan Singh were taken a step forward by Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision of following a 'Neighbourhood First Policy'. This Neighbourhood First Policy is based on the premise that India's foreign policy should be designed in such a manner that its neighbours always get a position of priority. As a result, even during the COVID-19 crisis, SAARC was one of the first organisations that India utilised to implement its policies followed by the G20 platform. The motive behind India's changed approach towards its neighbourhood are two-fold. On one hand, it is the role played by China as a catalyst that motivates India to take its leadership in the SAARC region seriously. While on the other hand it is India's own geopolitical ambition to be taken seriously on the global platform that encourages India to showcase its regional diplomacy. Even during the COVID-19 crisis, India received a lot of praises internationally from actors such as the United States and Russia for its efforts in the South Asian region.

In the words of the Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, "Our neighbourhood collaboration should be a model for the world". Here India was also taking its legacy of being the first responder to regional crisis forward. In the past, India has been the first country to respond to regional crisis such as the earthquake in Nepal and the cyclones in Sri Lanka and Bangladesh. In the last decade and a half, China has made serious inroads in the South Asian region. It has not only outpaced India's trade with the South Asian countries, but it has also invested in infrastructure initiatives in the region. COVID-19 crisis has also become an opportunity for China to increase its influence in the region where China is undertaking a charm offensive by sending medical aid and equipment to SAARC countries. It was in response to this increasing role of China in India's own neighbourhood that India took its responsibility during the COVID-19 crisis seriously.

Many analysts have also questioned India's role in reviving SAARC during the crisis when India had shifted its attention to sub regional forums such as BIMSTEC and BBIN before the crisis. According to Yhome (2020), the reason why India did not use the BIMSTEC forum and instead chose SAARC is because till that time India's own Northeast region and Myanmar did not have a single case of COVID-19. But this cannot be the only reason why India chose to revive SAARC. Of late, there have been allegations against India that it is ignoring SAARC forum and instead directing all its attention to sub regional forum such as BIMSTEC and BBIN. However, it is necessary to remember that during the last SAARC summit a number of initiatives proposed by India were vetoed by Pakistan. The most important of them was the Motor Vehicles Agreement where Pakistan refused to sign it citing a number of issues. It was due to this obstructionist attitude of Pakistan that India was forced to take its regional initiatives to forums such as BBIN and BIMSTEC. However, the public memory of Pakistan's obstructionist behaviour has now weakened and it was necessary to remind the world that Pakistan's consistent raising of the Kashmir issue and use of terrorism as a proxy has led to a stalemate in SAARC. Moreover, India wants to send a message that SAARC and BBIN are not an either-or question, instead it is willing to use the forum according to its diplomatic needs at that hour.

The COVID-19 diplomacy ended up helping India in demonstrating Pakistan's obstructionist character to the world. During the very SAARC leaders virtual conference, every SAARC country sent its leader to the conference but it was only Pakistan that sent its state minister for health, Zaffer Mirza. In fact, instead of focusing on the matter at hand, Pakistani representative raise the Kashmir question and suggested that restrictions should be removed from Kashmir in order to help Kashmiris fight corona virus outbreak. This was really uncalled for at a meet which was organised to deal with a health emergency such as the COVID-19 crisis. Pakistan again demonstrated its lack of responsibility by not participating in the SAARC trade meet. Intra- regional trade in SAARC is just 5 percent where COVID-19 crisis is further going to affect the economic development of the South Asian countries. Pakistan's absence at this important trade meet again shows its callous attitude towards development in the region. One of the reason why India took a lead in organising virtual meets to deal with the COVID-19 crisis at the South Asian level was due to its nature that called

for emergency measures. By asking SAARC countries that all these meets should instead be coordinated by the SAARC Secretariat, Pakistan again tried to complicate the matter. It also conditioned its contribution to the emergency fund and demanded that it should be administered through the SAARC Secretariat in accordance with the SAARC charter. Not just that, Pakistan also boycotted the training of SAARC healthcare professionals which was organised by All India Institute of Medical Sciences, Raipur.

If we closely analyse the interest shown by India in taking SAARC countries together to deal with the COVID-19 crisis, we see a recognition of its asymmetrical responsibility by India. On the other hand, we also see that Pakistan is still not comfortable with India's natural leadership in the SAARC forum. This signals that SAARC is still suffering from the problem of a conflictual India-Pakistan equation that leads to failure of many SAARC initiative. However, when it comes to capacity building and interest of the smaller South Asian countries, COVID-19 diplomacy shows that SAARC still has a lot of untapped potential. And this can be utilised only with regular resource sharing and pooling of synergies by the SAARC countries during a pandemic or otherwise. COVID-19 crisis will accelerate trends such as reduction of foreign remittances to the region, trend of protectionism in existing traditional export markets of South Asian countries and it will also hit the economies of South Asian countries hard. In such a scenario, the demography and under-utilised trade potential of SAARC countries can be an excellent saving grace. Hence, the future of SAARC as a successful example of regional cooperation is contingent on India continuing to take a lead in all the initiatives and Pakistan prioritising development over its geopolitical insecurities.

## References

- ADB. 2018. "Annual Report 2017." Asian Development Bank, ADB. Accessed May 7, 2020. <https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/institutional-document/411996/adb-annual-report-2017.pdf>.
- Batra, Amita. 2015. "IPCS Forecast: South Asian Regional Integration." Institute of Peace and Conflict studies.
- Business Standard.2020. "PM Modi thanks SAARC leaders for contributing to COVID-19 emergency fund." March. [https://www.business-standard.com/article/news-ani/pm-modi-thanks-saarc-leaders-for-contributing-to-covid-19-emergency-fund-120032301042\\_1.html](https://www.business-standard.com/article/news-ani/pm-modi-thanks-saarc-leaders-for-contributing-to-covid-19-emergency-fund-120032301042_1.html).
- Global Burden of Disease. 2018. "Measuring performance on the Healthcare Access and Quality Index for 195 countries and territories and selected subnational locations: a systematic analysis from the Global

- Burden of Disease Study 2016.” The Lancet 391: 2236-71. Accessed May 16, 2020. <https://www.thelancet.com/action/showPdf?pii=S0140-6736%2818%2930994-2>.
- Harshe, Rajen. 1999. “South Asian Regional Co-operation: Problems and Prospects.” *Economic and Political Weekly* 34 (19): 1100-1105.
- Hindustan Times. 2020. “Pakistan organises Saarc video conference on Covid-19.” April. <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/pakistan-organises-saarc-video-conference-on-covid-19/story-b0OptkIsDuVgY0I69fguqI.html>.
- ILO. 2020. “Informal economy.” International Labour Organization. Accessed May 15, 2020. [http://www.oit.org/asia/media-centre/news/WCMS\\_627585/lang--en/index.htm](http://www.oit.org/asia/media-centre/news/WCMS_627585/lang--en/index.htm).
- Jayaram, Nivedita. 2016. “Failure of Institutionalised Cooperation in South Asia.” *Mantraya Analysis* . 5 September. Accessed May 15, 2020. <http://mantraya.org/failure-of-institutionalised-cooperation-in-south-asia/>.
- Madan, Tanvi. 2014. *China’s Role in SAARC*. Brookings.
- Muni, S.D., and Rajshree Jetly. 2011. “SAARC Prospects.” In *The Emerging Dimesions of SAARC*, by S.D. Muni, 1-31. Foundation Books.
- Samaranayake, Nilanthi. 2020. “Covid-19 and Competition for Influence in South Asia.” *The National Bureau of Asian Research* . 15 April. Accessed May 6, 2020. <https://www.nbr.org/publication/covid-19-and-competition-for-influence-in-south-asia/>.
- SDMC. 2020. “Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) - SAARC Region.” SAARC Disaster Management Centre. 15 May. Accessed May 15, 2020. <http://www.covid19-sdmc.org/>.
- . 2019. “Government expenditure on education, total (% of GDP) - South Asia, World.” The World Bank. Accessed May 15, 2020. <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SE.XPD.TOTL.GD.ZS?locations=8S-1W>.
- SDMC. 2020. “Covid19-SAARC Region.” <http://www.covid19-sdmc.org/>.
- UNICEF. 2020. “UNICEF: Urgent need to secure learning for children across South Asia.” UNICEF. 6 April. Accessed May 16, 2020. <https://www.unicef.org/rosa/press-releases/unicef-urgent-need-secure-learning-children-across-south-asia>.
- UNICEF. 2020. “As COVID-19 devastates already fragile health systems, over 440,000 additional children under five could die in the next six months in South Asia, without urgent action.” UNICEF. 12 May. Accessed May 16, 2020. <https://www.unicef.org/rosa/press-releases/covid-19-devastates-already-fragile-health-systems-over-440000-additional-children>.
- United Nations. 2020. “World Economic Situation and Prospects .” United Nations. Accessed May 15, 2020. [https://unctad.org/en/PublicationsLibrary/wesp2020\\_en.pdf](https://unctad.org/en/PublicationsLibrary/wesp2020_en.pdf).
- World Bank. 2020. “One South Asia.” The World Bank. Accessed May 5, 2020. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/programs/south-asia-regional-integration/trade>.
- . 2018. “Realizing the Promise of Regional Trade in South Asia.” The World Bank. 9 October. Accessed May 4, 2020. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2018/10/09/realizing-the-promise-of-regional-trade-in-south-asia>.
- . 2018. “South Asia can Triple Regional Trade by Removing Trade Barriers.” The World Bank. 19 September. Accessed May 4, 2020. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2018/09/19/south-asia-can-triple-regional-trade-by-removing-trade-barriers>.
- . 2018. “South Asia's Hotspots.” The World Bank. 28 June. Accessed May 3, 2020. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/region/sar/publication/south-asias-hotspots>.
- World Bank. 2020. “South Asia Must Ramp Up COVID-19 Action to Protect People, Revive Economies.” The World Bank. 12 April. Accessed May 6, 2020. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2020/04/12/south-asia-must-act-now-to-lesser-covid-19-health-impacts>.



- World Bank Group. 2018. "GROUNDSWELL- Preparing for Internal Climate Migration." World Bank Group. Accessed May 4, 2020. file:///C:/Users/hp/Downloads/WBG\_ClimateChange\_Final.pdf.
- World Bank. 2019. "Mortality rate, under-5 (per 1,000 live births) - South Asia, World." The World Bank. Accessed May 16, 2020. <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SH.DYN.MORT?locations=8S-1W>.
- World Bank. 2016. "The Potential of Intra-regional Trade for South Asia." The World Bank. 24 May. Accessed May 16, 2020. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/infographic/2016/05/24/the-potential-of-intra-regional-trade-for-south-asia>.
- World Economic Forum. 2020. "This is the effect COVID-19 will have on global poverty, according to the World Bank." World Economic Forum. 11 May. Accessed May 16, 2020. <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/05/impact-of-covid19-coronavirus-economic-global-poverty/>.
- World Economic Forum. 2020. "This is the effect COVID-19 will have on global poverty, according to the World Bank." World Economic Forum. 11 May. Accessed May 16, 2020. <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/05/impact-of-covid19-coronavirus-economic-global-poverty/>.



**NIICE**  
NEPAL INSTITUTE FOR  
INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION AND ENGAGEMENT

Nepal Institute for International Cooperation and Engagement is a research think tank, registered under the Companies Act-2006 of Nepal, working towards bringing research excellence in the field of international relations, security and development and looking for greater approaches for enhanced international cooperation and relations for a better, peaceful and stable world. NIICE aims at advancing the cause of peace and harmony through discourse on fresh policy ideas, cooperation with global institutes and think tanks and through collaboration with decision makers at the government, corporate and civil society levels. It focuses on the region with special attention to India and China.



[www.niice.org.np](http://www.niice.org.np)



[@contactniice](https://twitter.com/contactniice)



[Niice Nepal](https://www.linkedin.com/company/niice-nepal)



[Nepal Institute for International Cooperation and Engagement](https://www.facebook.com/NepalInstituteforInternationalCooperationandEngagement)