

COVID-19 Vaccines: Access and Accountability

A South Asia Media Dialogue on Vaccine Equity
Supported by the Sabin Vaccine Institute

Date: Friday 4th February 2022

Time: 4.00 to 5.30PM IST

To register: <https://bit.ly/internews-accountability-lab>

Hundreds of thousands of COVID-19 deaths caused by vaccine shortages and low uptake; vaccines dumped in landfills because health systems – after months of waiting – were overwhelmed with supplies of vaccines so close to the expiry date that they had neither the time or the means to deploy them quickly enough; vaccine nationalism on parade as higher income countries rushed to corner scarce vaccine supplies to boost immunity among their populations in the wake of an Omicron surge, even while millions elsewhere awaited their first dose... 2021 brought us these several news reports, but they essentially told the same story: the story of inequitable access to vaccines.

In October, the World Health Organization (WHO) set a global target for countries to immunize 70% of their populations by mid 2022 and G20 nations endorsed an interim target for countries to vaccinate 40% of their populations by the end of December 2021. More than 70 countries --including all the South Asian ones-- save India and Sri Lanka, have missed that mark.

The WHO estimates that if 11 wealthy nations were to administer boosters to everyone over the age of 50 years old, they would use up to 440 million doses of the global vaccine supply. Many, including the WHO, maintain that those doses are better directed to vaccinate communities in low- and lower-middle-income countries where more than 85% of people, or 3.5 billion, haven't yet received a single dose. In contrast, 65% of people in high-income countries have received at least one dose. Doing so would not only reduce hospitalizations and deaths among the vast majority of people in the global South, it would also lower the risk of emergence of new and potentially dangerous variants.

By tracking the reasons behind inequities in vaccine supplies and distribution and holding those responsible to account, journalists can help improve access to vaccines for all. In 2021, it was mainly vaccine makers who controlled global supplies and their distribution. Global and even regional arrangements to improve access to vaccines for all failed as countries prioritised local needs. What needs to change?

The new year brings tidings that vaccine supply is beginning to boom and as vaccine makers gear up to produce over a billion doses a month, concerns about vaccine supplies are being replaced by concerns about equitable allocation. Should a new variant of concern emerge, will middle and lower income countries in South Asia be deprived of vaccines yet again?

Health officials from developing countries had earlier voiced concerns to the COVID-19 Vaccines Global Access mechanism (COVAX) that Intellectual Property Rights over COVID-19 vaccines needed to be shared, to help produce sufficient vaccines for all. But are vaccine originators willing to share their technology or patents to meet the demand for vaccines? How empowered are global facilities to negotiate with vaccine manufacturers?

Ensuring vaccine equity begins with an ethical approach to framing policies and programs and equipping them with the resources they need to succeed. What are governments doing to reduce dependence on global supply chains and instead strengthen indigenous capacities to produce their own vaccines for local use? And more importantly, can the regions overstretched and under-resourced health systems deploy the vaccines when they become available or will fitful supplies lead to vaccine dumping yet again?

Please join us for an online media dialogue that will debate what journalists can do to bring more transparency into the global imperative to promote equitable access to vaccines with a focus on tracking accountability at the global, national, and local levels.

Speakers



Auditing the ethics of vaccine policies and programs

Dr. Anant Bhan

Adjunct Professor, Yenepoya University, Mangalore

Dr. Anant Bhan is a medical graduate with a master's degree in Bioethics from the University of Toronto in Canada. He is a researcher in global health, health policy and bioethics with over 18 years of experience and numerous publications to his name. Dr. Bhan is currently one of the leading voices on issues related to medical ethics and social justice in India. He is also the immediate past president of the International Association of Bioethics (2017-19), serves as an Adjunct Professor in Yenepoya University, besides leading several projects that promote health equity including TransCare a participatory research and advocacy initiative focused on transgender-related aspects of access to health.

<https://sangath.in/our-people/dr-anant-bhan/>

Narayan Adhikari

Director, Accountability Lab Nepal

Narayan Adhikari is a social entrepreneur, innovative governance leader, and social transformation advocate. He is a co-founder and the Country Director of Accountability Lab Nepal and runs the Coronavirus CivActs Campaign (CCC) that produces verified information and gathers feedback from communities on the coronavirus response. CivActs has also built an evidence-base to strengthen public service delivery during the crises and contribute to more open and fair governance in the long run. AL Nepal is the founding office of Accountability Lab globally and Narayan has helped develop AL Nepal's programs into innovative tools for accountability and open government.



*Tracking accountability
in vaccine roll out*



Leena Menghaney

*Global IP Advisor,
Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF)*

Leena Menghaney is a lawyer and the Global Intellectual Property Rights Advisor with the Access Campaign in Médecins Sans Frontières/Doctors Without Borders. She works with other experts and in partnership with patient groups and civil society to increase access to affordable vaccines, medicines, and tests in low and middle-income countries for diseases like HIV, drug-resistant TB, Hepatitis, cancer, and COVID-19.

The politics of inequitable access to vaccines and therapeutics in a pandemic

Ranjit Devraj

*Consulting Editor,
SciDev, South Asia*

Ranjit Devraj is a consulting editor for South Asia with Scidev.net. He was previously Inter Press Service's Asia-Pacific editor. At IPS he wrote extensively on the World Trade Organization, covering intellectual property issues and issues related to TRIPS.

*Reporting on TRIPS related aspects of
access to vaccines*





*Lives and costs saved
by expanding and
expediting COVID-19
vaccination*

Dr Maria Elena Bottazzi

Associate Dean,

*National School of Tropical Medicine, Baylor College of
Medicine, Houston, Texas United States*

Maria Elena Bottazzi, is Associate Dean of the National School of Tropical Medicine, Professor of Pediatrics, Molecular Virology & Microbiology and Co-director of Texas Children's Center for Vaccine Development at Baylor College of Medicine in Houston and Distinguished Professor in Biology at Baylor University in Waco. She is an internationally recognized tropical and emerging disease vaccinologist, global health advocate and co-creator of a patent-free COVID-19 vaccine for the world. As a global thought-leader she has received national and international highly regarded awards, has more than 180 scientific papers and participated in more than 250 conferences worldwide. She is Member of the National Academy of Science of Honduras and Emerging Leader in Health and Medicine of the National Academy of Medicine in the US and currently a member of the National Academies Ad-hoc Committee on Vaccine Research and Development Recommendations for Advancing Pandemic and Seasonal Influenza Preparedness and Response. Dr. Bottazzi also serves as Co-chair of the Vaccines and Therapeutics Taskforce of the Lancet Commission on COVID-19.

Moderator



Dr Jaya Shreedhar

*Sr. Health Media Advisor,
Internews*

Discussants



Lalitha Kumaramangalam

Director, India Foundation

*Former Chairperson,
National Commission for Women, India*

<https://indiafoundation.in/>

Prithvi Shreshtha

*Political Reporter,
Kathmandu Post, Nepal*

<https://kathmandupost.com/author/prithvi-man-shrestha>



Jacob Koshy

Deputy Science Editor, The Hindu, India

<https://falling-walls.com/fellowships/winners/jacob-koshy/>

Dilrukshi Handunetti

*Lawyer, journalist and Director,
Centre for Investigative Reporting, Sri Lanka*

<https://cir.lk/about-us/>



Patralekha Chatterjee

*Award-winning health and development
journalist-columnist and contributor to
the BMJ and the Lancet, India*

<https://law.yale.edu/patralekha-chatterjee>

Megha Kaveri

*Global Health and Migration student,
Global Health Centre, Graduate Institute and
journalist, formerly with the News Minute, India*

