

The COVID -19 Pandemic in South Asia: An Analysis of China's Medical Assistance

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South Asia is experiencing a severe health crisis due to the COVID-19 pandemic, with the new variants of the virus destabilising existing healthcare systems that are exhausted. This has resulted in medical attention being inaccessible to communities, causing untimely deaths. Some countries are in debt accessing basic amenities and repaying loans, whilst others have not gained access to medical equipment and vaccines on their own. This has caused a reliance on donations from intergovernmental organisations and friendly nations. In 2020, South Asian states received significant medical assistance from China and the United States. However, there are limitations in obtaining vaccines as India abruptly halted its distribution and developed countries accumulated them. In this context, China has increased the distribution of vaccines internationally, whilst inoculating its nationals. Therefore, this research examines how vaccine diplomacy benefits China, and whether South Asian states have an alternative to obtain medical assistance. This research follows the case methodology and thematically analyses the data collected to answer the research problem. Accordingly, the research identified that China is boosting its soft power by donating medical assistance to countries that do not have access to it, indicating that it is sympathetic to the region's interests. Furthermore, as the world's top vaccine exporter, China has called for more inoculation to increase herd immunity. Even though China's behaviour is being criticised as exerting its influence in South Asia, this research identified that South Asian countries are benefiting from China's behaviour, particularly in the absence of alternatives. In conclusion, whilst China boosts its soft power by donating large quantities of vaccines, South Asian states benefit as they now have more options to access medical supplies.

Keywords: *China, COVID-19, medical diplomacy, South Asia*