

Equitable communication for all: South Asia's contribution

Rohan Samarajiva

www.LIRNEasia.net; rohan [at] lirneasia.net

ITU-APT Foundation of India Annual Convention

New Delhi, 22 March 2010

10,000-sample, 6-country Teleuse@BOP survey in 2008 found most poor people in our region had . . .

Used a phone in the last 3 months

	Bangladesh	Pakistan	India	Sri Lanka	Philippines	Thailand
% of BOP (outer sample)	95%	96%	86%	88%	79%	77%

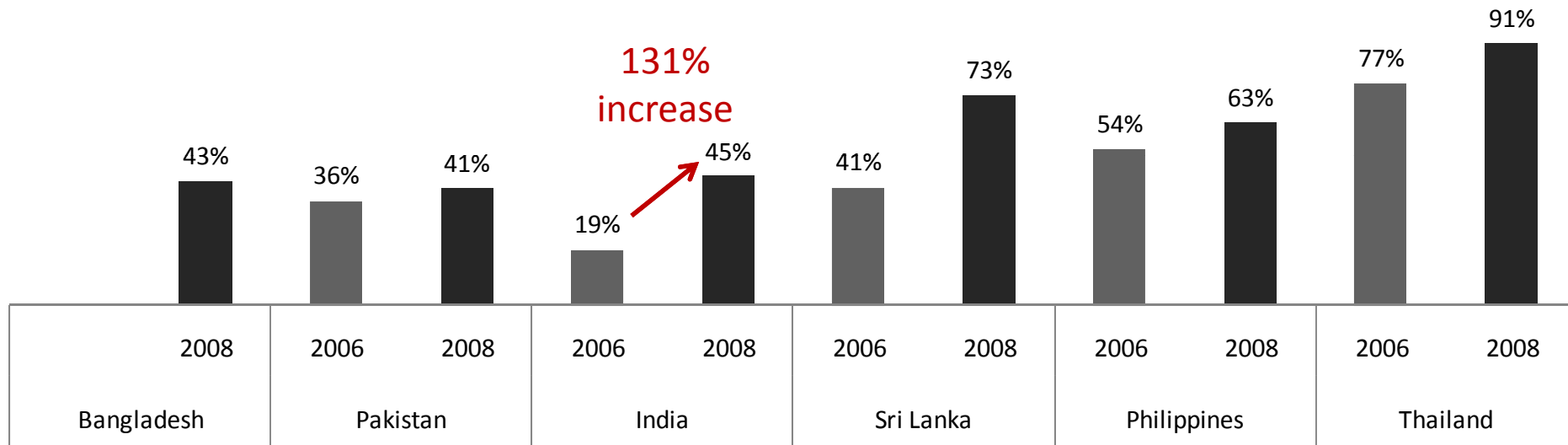
Used a phone in the last week

	Bangladesh	Pakistan	India	Sri Lanka	Philippines	Thailand
% of BOP (outer sample)	82%	66%	65%	77%	38%	72%

Caused by reliance on SMS

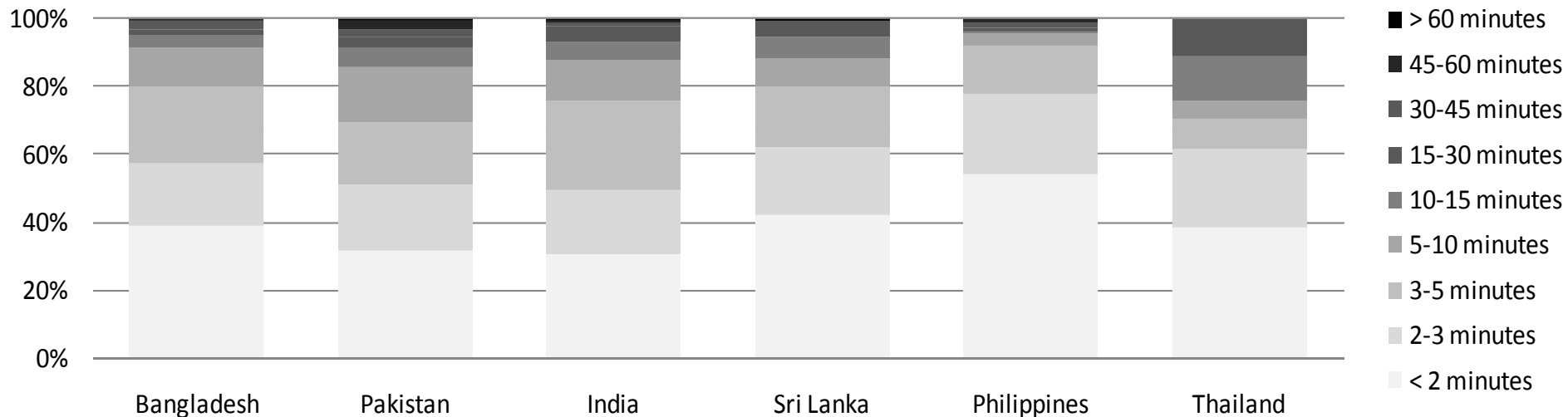
Largest % growth in Indian total BOP phone ownership at household level to 2008; now probably higher

Total BOP phone ownership: 2006 vs 2008 (% of BOP teleusers)



Among non-owners, ~80% could get to a phone in under 5 minutes in 2008; now higher

Time to reach the nearest phone (% of BOP non-owner teleusers)



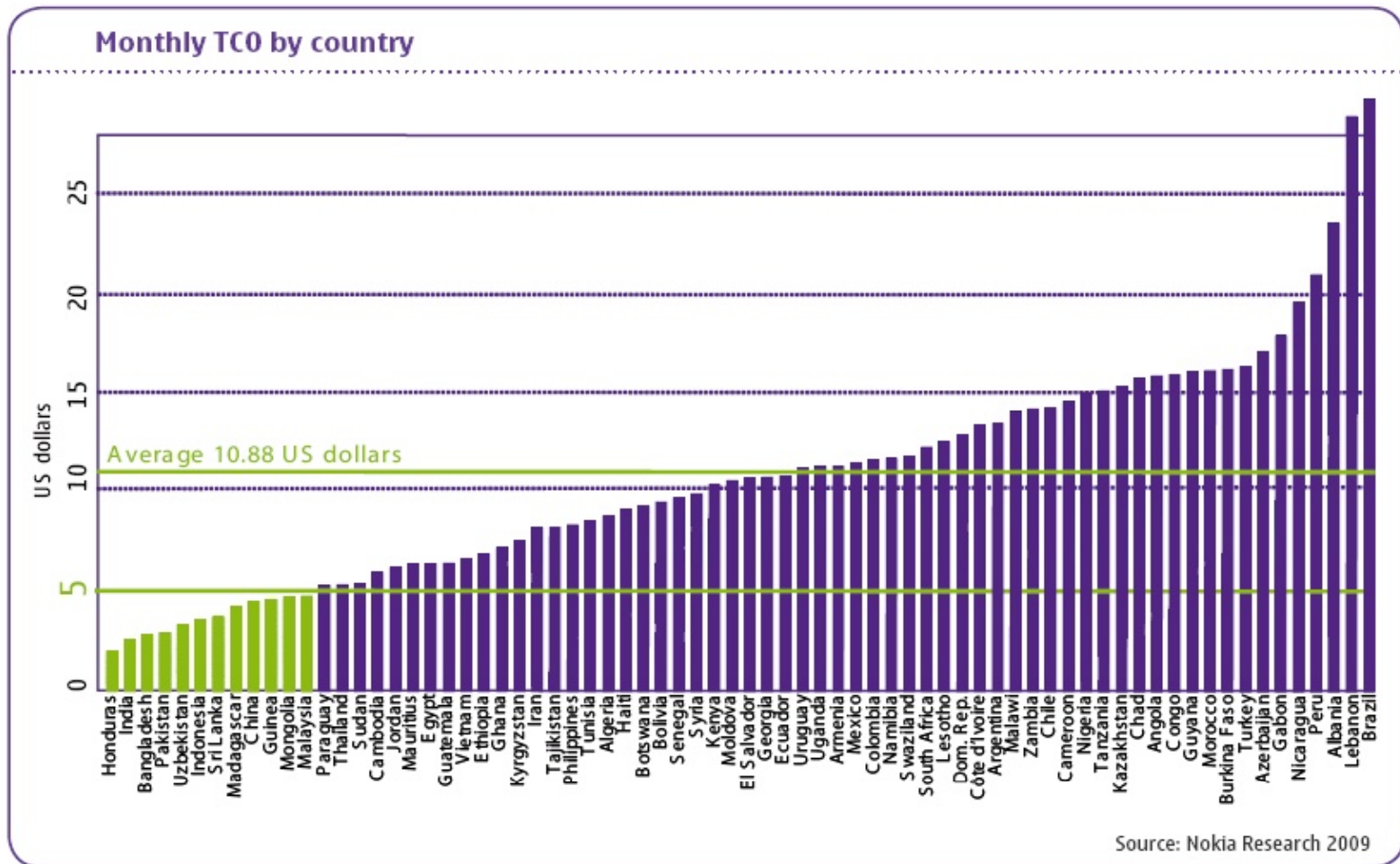
Most non-owners walk to the nearest phone

A great public policy success

Kofi Annan at the 1999 ITU Telecom Opening Ceremony: “A quarter of all countries have not yet achieved even a basic level of access to telecommunications -- a teledensity of 1, or 1 telephone for every 100 people. Half the world's people have never made or received a telephone call.”

How far we have come, how fast (even if this was not quite true even then).

The cause: Budget Telecom Network Model, pioneered in South Asia



India, Bangladesh, Pakistan and Sri Lanka were original members of the under 5 dollars club



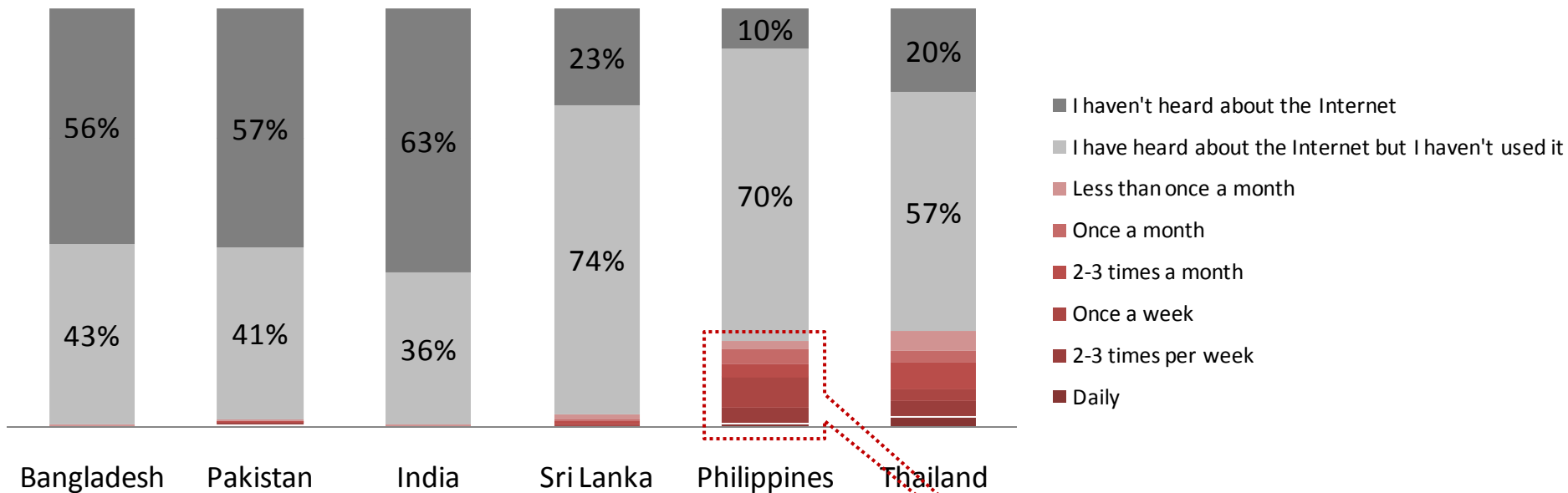
How were this many poor people connected for voice communication so quickly?

- “Budget Telecom Network Model” that allowed South Asian telcos since 2005-06 to make excellent (if highly volatile) returns by serving “long-tail” markets of poor people by
 - Dramatically reducing transaction costs primarily through prepaid
 - Allowing poor people to pay for services when they need it and when they have money (as opposed to fixed monthly payments)
 - Controlling operating expenses through business-process innovation
 - Focusing on revenue-yielding minutes rather than ARPUs
- Akin to Budget Airline Model that allows Air Asia to make profits while conventional airlines flounder
- Downsides
 - Patchy quality of service for consumers
 - Volatile returns; increased risks for suppliers

But the battle is not over

After all these years: Internet use & awareness among the poor in Indo-Gangetic Plain in 2008 negligible

Internet use (% of BOP teleusers)



	Bangladesh	Pakistan	India	Sri Lanka	Philippines	Thailand
Use the Internet	0.6%	2.2%	0.8%	3.2%	20.7%	23.0%

Clearly, success has been achieved with mobile voice in South Asia

- How has this region which has a large concentration of poor people (world's largest is in the Indo-Gangetic Plain), achieved this?
 - Despite or because of policy and regulatory actions?
- How can the lessons be applied to Internet access?

What role for policy and regulation?

- Restating the key point made by Levy & Spiller back in 1994: solutions must fit institutional conditions
- Institutional conditions include the operative business model → policy and regulation must support and leverage the business model, not work at cross purposes to it
- The question then is what can policy and regulation do to leverage the “Budget Telecom Network Model”?

**More research at www.lirneasia.net,
use the search function**

This work was carried out with the aid of a grant from the International Development Research Centre, Canada and the Department for International Development, UK, with contributions from Telenor Research & Development Centre Sdn. Bhd., Malaysia.

