This article argues that a detailed examination of factors contributing to the development of complex structures and strategies for smallpox eradication in South Asia in the 1970s can provide fruitful indications for the reformulation of the national chapters of the global polio eradication programme in this region. There is a magnificent archive in the WHO's Geneva offices, which details how smallpox eradication outbreaks were located and then contained in cities, small towns and remote rural areas in this region, by teams of international workers working closely with local officials. A systematic assessment of the global smallpox eradication efforts indicates parallels between the early stages of the global smallpox eradication programme and the present situation of the polio campaign; as we will see here, it can also provide useful indicators for future action in South Asia and beyond.

Keywords
Global health history, Smallpox eradication, Polio eradication, Indian public health, Vaccines.