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SANEM

Thinking Aloud

Editor's Desk

The February 2024 issue of Thinking Aloud is a special issue, showcasing the discussion of the SANEM-IHD joint panel session on "Rethinking Ways to Attain SDGs in South Asian Countries in the Context of the Ongoing Global Challenges", held in the "IHD Global Conclave on Advancing Human Development in the Global South" in New Delhi, India on 13 January 2024. The first-page article, "Rethinking ways to attain SDGs in Bangladesh", points out the limited progress Bangladesh has made so far in attaining the SDGs. Discussing the shortcomings of the business-as-usual approach in attaining the SDGs, the article highlights the challenges stemming from the ongoing macroeconomic crisis and Bangladesh's upcoming graduation from the LDC category. The article recommends establishing an effective regulatory environment, instituting a robust coordination mechanism among wider stakeholders, and developing institutional capacity to overcome the barriers to achieving the SDGs. The second article, "Sustainable development and the inclusion question: A look at the Indian situation", identifies labour redundancy as a major factor behind relatively high poverty in India, and explores the lack of public investment in the health and education sector. Along with increased level of expenditure in these sectors, the article recommends the promotion of decentralised and labour-intensive industrialisation. The third article, "De-industrialization stares at Nepal's SDG quest", looks into the structural challenges Nepal faces in realizing its aspiration to become an upper-middle-income country by 2030. Discussing the huge resource gap in financing SDGs, the article recommends the adoption of a well-designed industrial development strategy. The fourth article, "Attaining SDGs amidst multiple crises in Sri Lanka", explores how the COVID-19 pandemic and the recent economic turmoil have affected efforts to reduce poverty.The article identifies financing SDGs, data deficits, policy inconsistency, and issues related to institutional capacities as the major impediments to achieving the SDGs in Sri Lanka.The article emphasises enhancing global/regional partnerships and mobilizing resources through traditional and non-traditional ways for accelerating SDG achievement. The fourth page covers the events in January 2024.

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Rethinking ways to attain SDGs in Bangladesh

Selim Raihan

Can Bangladesh achieve SDGs through the business-as-usual process? What is the progress in attaining SDGs so far? Why is there a need for a rethinking of the ways to attain SDGs in Bangladesh?

According to the Sustainable Development Report 2023 (https://dashboards.sdgindex.org/), Bangladesh has an SDG Index of 65.9, ranking 101st out of 166 countries. This is better than India (63.5) and Pakistan (58.9), but worse than Thailand, Vietnam, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Sri Lanka.

The report, however, shows that despite moderate performance in several SDGs, Bangladesh faces major challenges in achieving them. These include SDG 1 (no poverty), SDG 2 (zero hunger), SDG 3 (health), SDG 6 (water and sanitation), SDG 7 (energy), and SDG 9 (industry, innovation, and infrastructure). Moreover, there seems to be no progress in SDG 5 (gender equality), SDG 8 (decent work and economic growth), SDG 11 (sustainable cities and communities), and SDG 13 (climate action), indicating significant difficulties in attaining them by 2030. Furthermore, the progress in SDGs 14-16 regressed. Only SDG 4 (education) and SDG 12 (responsible consumption and production) are on track; but there are valid concerns about the attainment of universal education, skill development, and the quality of education in Bangladesh.

The report also reveals that among all SDG targets, only 30.9% of targets are on track, 41.2% have limited progress, and 27.9% are worsening. It is clear that the business-as-usual approach will not help Bangladesh to achieve most of the SDGs. Therefore, there is a need to rethink the strategies and actions to attain the SDGs in Bangladesh.

It should also be kept in mind that despite some notable progress on economic and social fronts over the past few decades, the country is facing the worst macroeconomic challenges in recent times. The ongoing macroeconomic crisis has been manifested through persistent high inflationary pressure, depleting foreign exchange reserves, low growth in exports and remittances, a growing debt-GDP ratio, and a foreign exchange crisis. Also, the graduation from the LDC status by 2026 will add additional pressure on the economy.

In the rethinking process of attaining SDGs, critical institutional and political economy challenges need to be addressed in Bangladesh. These are related to weak state capacity, ineffective regulation, and weak formal institutions.

The SDGs entail a huge financial gap for Bangladesh. This requires mobilizing and leveraging various sources of financing, such as domestic revenue, foreign aid, private-sector investment, and public-private partnerships. However, the weak state capacity in the domestic mobilisation of resources is manifested through a very low tax-to-GDP ratio which results in the growing high dependency on external assistance for development projects. In contrast, there is inadequate private sector participation in SDG activities and limited public-private partnerships. Critical reforms in domestic resource mobilisation have remained overdue and thus imperative. One obvious effect of the very low tax-to-GDP ratio in Bangladesh is that it limits the fiscal space of the country for public spending on social sectors like health and education. Public spending on health and education in Bangladesh is very low compared to other countries in the world. Bangladesh spent only 0.5% of its GDP on public health and less than 2% of its GDP on public education in 2020. These figures are below the lower-middle-income countries' averages of 1.5% and 3.9%, respectively, and the global averages of 6.9% and 4.5%, respectively. Moreover, public spending on health and education in Bangladesh has not increased significantly over the years, despite the country's strong economic growth.

Implementation of SDGs would require an effective regulatory environment, which means that the government has the capacity and authority to design and enforce rules and regulations that promote the public interest and the common good. However, the country's ineffective regulation is manifested through various aspects of its economic, social, and environmental sectors, such as the vulnerable banking system, ineffective tax system, poor monitoring of labour conditions, poor enforcement of environmental regulations, and inadequate laws and administrative organization. These issues hinder the development and sustainability of the country, as they create instability, inefficiency, inequality, and injustice. For example, the vulnerable banking system exposes the country to financial risks and crises, the ineffective tax system reduces the fiscal space and resources for public spending and investment, the poor monitoring of labour conditions violates the rights and dignity of workers and affects their productivity and well-being, the poor enforcement of environmental regulations leads to pollution and degradation of natural resources, and the inadequate laws and administrative organization create loopholes and obstacles for the implementation and coordination of the SDGs. Therefore, the country needs to improve its regulatory environment to ensure the effective and efficient implementation of the SDGs.

Implementation of SDGs involves multiple actors and sectors, both at the national and sub-national levels, such as the government, civil society, private sector, academia, media, and other stakeholders. This means, achieving SDGs demands a whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach. This requires a strong coordination mechanism to ensure coherence, alignment, and accountability of the SDG implementation, which means that all the actors and sectors need to work together in a coordinated and coherent manner, following a common vision, strategy, and plan, and reporting on their progress and performance. However, such a mechanism is weak in Bangladesh, which results in the lack of a clear institutional framework for overseeing and monitoring the SDG progress. Therefore, the country needs to strengthen its coordination mechanism and establish a clear institutional framework for overseeing and monitoring the SDG progress.

Finally, the country's weak institutional capacity, bureaucratic inefficiency, and corruption undermine the quality and delivery of public services and policies. These issues hamper the implementation and monitoring of the SDGs, as well as the accountability and transparency of the public institutions and officials. They also erode the trust and confidence of the people and the partners in the government's commitment and ability to achieve the SDGs. Therefore, undertaking critical institutional reforms is essential to make a significant departure from the business-as-usual process.

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Sustainable development and the inclusion question: A look at the Indian situation

Sarthi Acharya

India aims to achieve US$5 trillion in GDP soon. Yet, there is an active debate on people's standards of living, inequality and lack of employment in the country. The question is, whether the quest for high growth is sustainable when large numbers in the population are not partners in this growth process?

The poverty rate seen through the Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) measure in the country was about 14.9% in 2019-21. There were large variations seen though: Bihar and Jharkhand show numbers near 30%, while some states in the Northeast, the South, Punjab, Delhi, and UTs showed a poverty rate below 5%. The Coefficient of Variation in poverty rates across states is about 60% – a figure too high, seen both from economic and political points of view. Also, it does not stand forth with SDG 1 and SDG 10.

A close association is also seen between the poverty rate and the Total Fertility Rate (TFR), which implies that low poverty and mass education and health are coterminous; educated and healthy parents would prefer small families.

A recent report on the Global Gridded Relative Deprivation Index combines the various components of MPI with satellite-image-derived data. These data show that compared to global standards, the standards of living are rather low in India. The only consolations are the small specs of low deprivation seen in Delhi, Mumbai and Chandigarh; elsewhere, the deprivation numbers are well above 50%.

Trends in inequality in incomes at the all-India level through the last 70 years show that the top 10% rich have become richer since about the mid/late 1980s. The economic liberalisation has helped them. The bottom 50% have lost their share. Have those at the bottom lost on absolute incomes? The real wage rates in agriculture or factory workers show that there has been some marginal increase in the wage rates in some states and no real decrease anywhere. The rich have become richer but the poor have just about maintained their standards of living.

The widening inequality in incomes is also reflected in the widening of asset distribution. The share of the bottom 50% households has fallen from 12.3% in 1960-61 to 6.1% in 2019-20, a reduction by half. At the same time the share of wealth owned by the top 10% rose from 43.2% to 63.2%.

Incomes data for 2019-20 show that Telangana and Jammu and Kashmir had an average monthly income more than 40% above the all-India average while at the other end, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh and Bihar showed monthly incomes close to 40% below the average. Among the Northeast states, Sikkim's income was twice the all-India level.

Among the reasons for relatively high poverty is the labour situation. There has been labour redundancy: The population in the age-group above 15 grew at 1.4-1.6% per annum in the 15-year period from 2004-05 to 2019-20, but the workforce grew at about 0.6% annually. This implies that instead of economic growth pulling-in more workers it has pushed them out. Labour redundancy is estimated to be in the range 120-125 million, which is also reflected in the large number of young people who are neither in the labour force nor in education or training.

Some 39 million workers left agriculture between 2004-05 and 2019-20, and most joined low paying jobs in the construction sector. The main push-out of workers has happened among women workers: there were some 18.2 million fewer workers in 2018-19 compared to 2004-05, i.e. almost 16% less. This is in contravention to to SDG 5.

The economic liberalisation in the mid-1980s and beyond was not accompanied by significant investments in human development and skills resulting in stagnation or slow growth of many labour-intensive industries. Labour redundancy/rejection is among the worst forms of exclusion and is in contravention to SDGs 5, 8 and 10.

There are multiple types of schools in India. They offer education that differs in quality, content and even access. They teach in varied languages of instruction, analysis and orientation. Some do not have playgrounds, many are under-staffed, yet others are poorly staffed, a few do not have adequate buildings, teaching facilities, or extra-curricular activities. In contrast, some schools offer a wide range of activities like horse-riding, sports facilities, etc. Unicef finds that many children are not learning the basics of literacy and numeracy. The outcomes are evident in the job markets.

Out of the total number of schools, some 4/5th are only up to the primary level. Which means that, as one moves beyond the primary level, the number of schools reduces. The dropout in successive classes as children move up beyond the primary levels is also because of increased out-of-pocket expenses in classes beyond the primary school. The poor are de facto denied education – an indication of the perpetuation of inequality.

The government expenditures on the Health Sector are about 1% of the GDP – in developed countries this is 6-8%. Also, the large proportion of Health Services is in the private sector, which is expensive. Out of pocket expenses constitute some 70% of the total expenses that households incur on Health.

The lack of inclusion and access to adequate nutrition in the presence of surplus food, points to systemic issues that go beyond mere food availability. India's score in the Global Hunger Index (scale is 0-100) is 29.1, which is serious. As in 2019-21, more people in the eastern states fell short of adequate nutrition. Infant and under-5 mortality fall as one moves up the wealth class and the proportion of women suffering from low BMI also reduce. These are indications of location/wealth/income inequality affecting health.

In conclusion, India needs to climb up the path of human development with increased expenditure on education and health and cheapening of services. Promotion of decentralised and labour-intensive industrialisation is also the need of the hour.

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De-industrialization stares at Nepal's SDG quest

Paras Kharel

While Nepal made substantial progress in poverty reduction and several other development outcomes, such as those related to health and education, as part of the Millennium Development Goals and has been making further progress since the launch of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2016, it faces a challenging road ahead to meet its development aspirations, notably to become an upper middle-income country by 2030. Nepal's per capita gross national income (GNI) was US$1,340 in 2022 (current dollars, Atlas method, World Bank). The country is graduating from the least development country (LDC) category in 2026 without meeting the income criterion. It has the lowest per capita income among the dozen LDCs on track towards graduation. This reflects a key structural challenge faced by the Nepali economy masked by other, more positive, development outcomes, especially in the social sector. The challenge pertains to de-industrialization, low productive capacity and a poor rate of creation of decent jobs.

The structure of its economy has transformed significantly in the last three decades, with agriculture's share in GDP falling and services' share increasing. The value added of agriculture, forestry and fisheries as a share of total value added in the economy has declined, from 40.8% in 2000 to 24.6% in 2022; so has the share of value added of industry (including mining; electricity, gas and water; manufacturing; construction), from 21.1% to 14.1%; while the share of value added of services has increased, from 37% to 61.2%. Manufacturing value added as a share of GDP has been in decline since the late 1990s; the peak share was 9%. Thus, manufacturing-led industrialization has bypassed the economy, while the booming services sector, largely of the non-tradable variety, has not generated enough decent jobs to an expanding labour force. Exports of goods and services as a share of GDP has seen a steady decline. As a share of GDP, exports of goods and services fell from 26.3% in 1997 to 6.8% in 2022, lower than the average for the LDCs, low-income countries and lower middle-income countries. On the other hand, imports have surged, leading to a huge combined goods and services trade deficit amounting to 35.8% of GDP in 2022. Nepal's graduation from the LDC status in 2026 will pose additional challenges to its merchandise export sector.

The growth-enhancing effect of this structural change has been limited. During 2008-2018, the growth in per capita gross value added, just 2% , was driven by labour moving from low-productivity sectors to high-productivity sectors (static reallocation) and demographic change (an increase in the share of working-age people in the population), whereas the contribution of within-productivity growth was negative and that of dynamic reallocation of labour was also negative, the latter implying that sectors absorbing labour exhibited negative productivity growth in the aggregate.

Dearth of decent jobs has led to massive temporary work-related outmigration, with remittances emerging as the mainstay of the economy (amounting to 22% of the GDP in 2022) and contributing to the progress towards social development goals. As estimated 2.8 million Nepalis, out of a population of some 30 million, are working abroad.

Worryingly, during 2016-2019, the latest period for which an authoritative review of progress on SDGs is available, there was "slow" progress in SDG 8 (decent work and economic growth) and "no progress" in SDG 9 (industry, innovation and infrastructure). These are goals that were not part of MDGs, are critically associated with industrial growth, productivity, output and employment, and hence are significant determinants of structural transformation prospects.

Finding the resources to meet development goals was always a challenge. A huge resource gap was already staring at policymakers as the government embraced the SDGs. The lingering effects of the pandemic, the global economic slowdown and uncertainty, the economic shocks in the wake of the Russia-Ukraine war, and LDC graduation present additional challenges, have reversed or threatened to reverse progress on SDGs, and trigger additional resource demands while making resource mobilization more difficult, for both public and private sectors. The average real GNI per capita growth during fiscal years 2018/19 through 2022/23 has been about 2.3%, a far cry from the about 7.8% required during 2019-2030 to meet the SDG income target for 2030 in real terms. While economic growth has been modest, public debt has surged since 2017 such that the public debt-to-GDP ratio is now higher than the target for 2030. Sweeping import restrictions in 2022 led to a decline in tax collections in fiscal year 2022/23, bringing into sharp relief the government's dependence on import-based taxes, which constitute about half of total tax revenue.

Soon after the launch of the SDGs, the total investment needs for attaining them were estimated at 47.8% of GDP in 2015 prices. The total financing cap was estimated at 12.8% of GDP. Investment requirements and resource gap are especially high for SDGs 8 and 9. An assumption underlying the resource mobilization target is an average GDP growth of 8.67% during the SDG implementation period. If GDP growth is 5%, the public sector financing gap as proportion of public sector investment needs will be 30% instead of 19.6%. Coming to reality: the actual average growth rate during 2015/16-2022/23 was 4% at basic prices and 4.2% at purchasers' prices.

It's high time Nepal wrote down and implemented an industrial development strategy (currently it has none) that is focused and results-oriented and can deliver sustained high economic growth and decent jobs. Otherwise, the sustained growth-effecting and decent jobs-creating structural transformation that eluded the MDG implementation period may elude the SDG period as well. The government is, apparently, looking elsewhere. In Nepal's revised national-level indicators for SDGs, released in mid-2023, gross national disposable income (GNDI) per capita has replaced GNI per capita, while the target value remains the same. As GNDI, which includes remittances, exceeds GNI by 24%, the new target is easier to achieve, but this would imply that the government is, again, banking on remittances to save the day.

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Attaining SDGs amidst multiple crises in Sri Lanka

Ganga Tilakaratna

Since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda, the government of Sri Lanka has taken various initiatives to implement Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and has made much progress in achieving several goals. Yet, the Covid-19 pandemic adversely affected several SDGs, particularly those related to poverty, inequality, employment, and health. Aggravating the prevailing conditions, in 2022, Sri Lanka was hit by the worst-ever economic crisis since its independence. It was caused by a combination of factors including a lack of foreign reserves, disruptions to the tourism industry, the decline in government revenue due to huge tax cuts in 2019, and rising crude oil prices. The economic crisis led to a series of negative consequences such as rising inflation, shortage of essential goods including medicine and fuel, and daily power cuts, affecting people's lives and livelihoods and adversely impacting the progress of many SDGs.

Despite the multiple crises in recent years, the SDG Index for Sri Lanka shows an overall improvement in SDG performance since 2016. With an SDG Index of 69.4, Sri Lanka ranked 83 out of 166 countries in the world in 2023- ahead of many South Asian countries. However, the progress of many SDGs indicates major challenges to achieving them, including SDG 2 (zero hunger), SDG 5 (Gender), SDG 6 (water and sanitation), and SDGs 14-17, with some goals like SDG 1 on poverty indicating a reversal in progress in recent years.

Sri Lanka made much progress in poverty reduction over the decades, but the progress has reversed in recent years due to the pandemic and the economic crisis. The extreme poverty rate (measured by $2.15 a day) which was around 1% in 2019, increased slightly during the pandemic and then increased sharply to around 6% in 2022 due to the economic crisis. Similarly, the $3.65-a-day poverty rate has more than doubled from 11% in 2019 to over 25% indicating a reversal in the much-achieved progress in poverty reduction over the years. Income inequality also has increased in 2022 from its already high levels. The Gini coefficient for Sri Lanka was 39.8 in 2022 – the highest among the South Asian countries. These setbacks indicate significant challenges to achieving SDG 1 and SDG 10 by 2030.

As per the Sustainable Development Report 2023, Sri Lanka has already achieved SDG 4 on Education and some targets under SDG 3 including those related to mortality rates. For example, the maternal mortality ratio (MMR) for Sri Lanka was 28.8 per 100,000 live births in 2020 and Sri Lanka had met the target of reducing the MMR to less than 70 per 100,000 live births (SDG 3.1) more than three decades ago. Moreover, with an Under-5 child mortality rate of 6.7 and neonatal mortality of 3.9 per 1000 live births (in 2021), Sri Lanka had met the targets given in SDG 3.2 over 25 years ago. Additionally, life expectancy at birth in Sri Lanka is around 76– one of the highest in South Asia, while nearly 100% of births are attended by skilled health professionals. The early achievements in health and education indicators are primarily a result of Sri Lanka's 'Universal Free Health Policy' and 'Universal Free Education Policy' implemented in the late 1940s coupled with heavy investments in education and health sectors several decades ago.

Yet, there are many challenges to achieving SDG 3. For example, the Universal Health Coverage Index for Sri Lanka is only 67. Although ahead of other South Asian countries, Sri Lanka has significant challenges in achieving the target considering the country's declining government spending and increasing out-of-pocket expenditure on health. In addition, there are new challenges created by the economic crisis, such as a shortage of medical supplies and a shortage of health professionals due to increasing outmigration–which could affect the quality of health services and widen disparities, adversely affecting the achievement of SDG 3. Declining government spending on education (which is below 2% of GDP at present) is also a constraint to maintaining Sri Lanka's early achievements in education such as school enrolments and literacy rates.

There are several challenges and impediments to achieving SDGs in Sri Lanka. These include financing SDGs, data deficits (lack of up-to-date and disaggregated data at regular intervals), policy inconsistency, and issues related to institutional capacities.

Financing SDGs has become the biggest challenge for Sri Lanka at present. On the domestic front, government expenses increased during the pandemic while revenues dropped, primarily due to tax cuts introduced in 2019. On the external front, foreign income earnings from tourism dropped sharply following the Easter Sunday Bomb Attack in 2019 and the pandemic, while remittances started to fall from 2021—which, however, started to show signs of improvement in 2023. Other inflows, such as FDI into the country, have also reduced post-COVID-19 as the economic uncertainties have mounted. Financing has become even tighter following Sri Lanka's inability to access international bond markets after the selective default of foreign debt payments in April 2022. All these issues have widened the financing gap to achieve SDGs.

Mobilizing adequate resources for SDGs through traditional and non-traditional sources is key to SDG achievement. Regarding traditional financing, tax reforms are needed to improve tax revenue while ensuring that tax measures are progressive to address inequality. Attracting private investment including through private-public partnerships is also important. Moreover, measures are needed to improve exports, remittances, FDI, and earnings from tourism. In addition to traditional financing, the Roadmap for Sustainable Finance in Sri Lanka, developed by the Central Bank of Sri Lanka, highlights some non-traditional instruments in SDG financing such as green bonds and Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) bonds.

Enhancing global /regional partnerships to mobilize and share knowledge, expertise, technology, and financial resources is crucial to accelerate the progress and achievement of SDGs. South-South cooperation is also an avenue that needs to be further explored by Sri Lanka. Regional cooperation can also help accelerate the progress of several SDGs, in particular, SDGs related to hunger (SDG 2), health (SDG 3), energy (SDG 7), decent work (SDG 8), and climate action (SDG 13) (For a detailed analysis, refer to Tilakaratna, G., & Sooriyamudali, C. (2019). Interpreting SDGs for South Asia: In Search of a Regional Framework -The Case of Sri Lanka. Bangkok: UNESCAP-SSWA.). Further, partnerships including regional corporations can also help address data deficits through improved resources and capacity building.

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Bangladesh triumphant at the 19th SAESM

Ten students from the Department of Economics, University of Dhaka participated in the 19th South Asian Economics Students Meet (SAESM) held in Colombo on 22-25 January 2024. The students are Abrar Ahammed Bhuiyan, Sudeepto Roy, Faisal Quaiyyum, Shadique Mahbub Islam, Shadman Saquib Rahman, Sarara Jafrin, Mahjabin Rashid Lamisha, Lubaba Mahjabin Prima, Sami Mohammed and Chowdhury Nabila Tasnim. Md. Abdul Aahad, a Research Associate of SANEM, also participated as a co-country coordinator. Around seventy students from South Asia participated in the event. There were ten themes under which students submitted and presented their papers. The Bangladesh team won two best-paper awards. Sami Mohammed, a student of the Department of Economics, University of Dhaka, received the best prize for his paper on "Unraveling Internal Migration Dynamics in Response to Flood Vulnerability: A Difference-in-Differences Approach in the Context of Bangladesh", also winning the best of the best-papers award known as the Amartya Sen - Mahbub ul Haq award. Sudeepto Roy, a student of the same department and university, received the best prize for his paper on "Bridging Growth and Sustainability: Biomass Energy in South Asia's Circular Economy". The Bangladesh team also won the second runners-up prize in the quiz competition (Abrar Ahammed Bhuiyan, Mahjabin Rashid Lamisha, Shadique Mahbub Isam, and Sudeepto Roy). Shadman Saquib Rahman was among the top five of the Budding Economist Competition. As resource persons were present Dr Selim Raihan, Professor, Department of Economics, University of Dhaka and Executive Director, SANEM, and Dr Sayema Haque Bidisha, Professor, Department of Economics, University of Dhaka and Research Director, SANEM.

The SAESM serves as a platform that unites undergraduate students of Economics across South Asia. It is an initiative that transcends borders, fostering an environment that promotes academic exchange, which in turn strengthens regional cooperation. The theme for this year's SAESM was "Building Resilient Economies: South Asia's Green Transition to a Sustainable Tomorrow".

SANEM-IHD Panel Session held at IHD Global Conclave

A Panel Session on "Rethinking Ways to Attain SDGs in South Asian Countries in the Context of the Ongoing Global Challenges" was organized by SANEM and the Institute for Human Development at the "IHD Global Conclave on Advancing Human Development in the Global South" in New Delhi, India on 13 January 2024. Dr Selim Raihan, Executive Director of SANEM and Professor of Economics, University of Dhaka joined a distinguished panel of experts from Sri Lanka, Nepal, and India. The panelists were: Dr Ganga Tilakratna, Research Fellow and Head of Poverty and Social Welfare Policy Research at the Institute of Policy Studies, Colombo, Sir Lanka; Dr Paras Kharel, Executive Director, South Asia Watch on Trade, Economics and Environment (SAWTEE), Kathmandu, Nepal and Dr Sarthi Acharya, Delhi Government Chair Professor on Human Development, Institute for Human Development (IHD), New Delhi, and Former Chief Technical Adviser, UNDP (Cambodia and Laos). The session was chaired by Dr Dan Banik, Professor of Political Science and director of the Oslo SDG Initiative, Centre for Development and the Environment, University of Oslo, Norway. Dr Sabyasachi Saha, Associate Professor, Research and Information System for Developing Countries (RIS), New Delhi was the discussant of the session.

Dr Selim Raihan moderated a webinar on women's financial inclusion

Dr Selim Raihan, Professor at the Department of Economics, University of Dhaka and Executive Director of SANEM moderated the webinar on "Accelerating Women's Financial Inclusion: Strategies to Foster an Inclusive and Equitable Financial Landscape for Women", on 25 January 2024. The keynote presenter of the session was Ms Nahid Sharmin, Gender Analyst, Aspire to Innovate-a2i. As panellists were present: Ms Marina Dimova, Director, Global Head, Financial Industry & Network Advocacy, Women's World Banking; Ms Nurun Nahar, Deputy Governor, Bangladesh Bank, and Ms Snigdha Ali, Bangladesh Country Lead, Financial Services for the Poor, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

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Dr Sayema Haque Bidisha was a panellist at IHD Global Conclave

Dr Sayema Haque Bidisha, Professor, Department of Economics, University of Dhaka and Research Director, SANEM, was a panellist at a thematic panel on "Gender Responsive Budgeting in Public FinancialManagement: Bridging the Gender Gap", held in the "IHD Global Conclave on Advancing Human Development in the Global South" in New Delhi, on 12 January 2024. The panel was jointly organized by UN Women India and the Institute for Human Development, New Delhi. The panel was chaired by Shri Dhrijesh Kumar Tiwari, Statistical Advisor, Ministry of Women and Child Development, Government of India. The Co-Chair was Susan Jane Ferguson, Country Representative, UN Women India, New Delhi. As panelists were also present Qurrota A'yun, Director, a.i., Populations, Women's Empowerment, Child Protection,Youth and Sport, Ministry of Planning, Government of Indonesia; Dwi Yuliawati Faiz, Deputy Representative, UN Women Indonesia; Scherie Nicol, Lead Gender Budgeting, Organisation for Economic Cooperation & Development (OECD), Paris; Maja Bosnic, Independent Public Finance & Gender Budgeting Expert, University of Sarajevo, Bosnia; Ermira-Lubani, Regional Programme Specialist - Gender Responsive Budgeting UN, Women Europe & Central Asia Regional Office, Istanbul, Turkey; Sharmind Neelormi, Professor, Department of Economics, Jahangirnagar University, Bangladesh; Aasha Kapur Mehta, Chairperson, Centre for Gender Studies and Visiting Professor, IHD, New Delhi, and Abhilasha Sood, Programme Analyst- Gender Responsive Budgeting, UN Women India.

Israt Hossain was a panellist at ActionAid webinar on green energy transition

Ms Israt Hossain, Senior Research Associate at SANEM was a panellist at a webinar on "Citizens' Demand for the Just and Green Energy Transition in Bangladesh", organized by ActionAid Bangladesh, held on 22 January 2024. Responses from civil society organizations and energy experts regarding just and green energy transition in Bangladesh were compiled within thirteen citizen demands. The demand paper was presented by Mr M Zakir Hossain Khan, Chief Executive of Change Initiative. As panellists were also present Mr Dipal Chandra Barua, Chief Adviser, Bangladesh Solar and Renewable Energy Association; Anjum Noor Choudhury, Research Lead, Youth Policy Forum, and Dr Mohammad Tanzimuddin Khan, Researcher and Professor, University of Dhaka. The panel discussion was moderated by Mr Abul Kalam Azad, Manager, Just Energy Transition, ActionAid Bangladesh. The closing remarks were delivered by Barrister Jyotirmoy Barua, Advocate, Supreme Court and Human Rights Worker.

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SANEM is a non-profit research organization registered with the Registrar of Joint Stock Companies and Firms in Bangladesh. Launched in January 2007 in Dhaka, it is a network of economists and policy makers in South Asia with a special emphasis on economic modeling. The organization seeks to produce objective, high quality, country- and South Asian region-specific policy and thematic research. SANEM contributes in governments' policy-making by providing research supports both at individual and organizational capacities. SANEM has maintained strong research collaboration with global, regional and local think-tanks, research and development organizations, universities and individual researchers.

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