

Editor's Desk

The June 2020 issue of *Thinking Aloud* focuses on "COVID-19 Crisis: Economic and Social Challenges". The first page article titled "COVID-19's Effect on Poverty and Policy Response in Bangladesh" emphasizes that though Bangladesh experienced significant achievement in poverty reduction over the past decades, success remained to be very fragile to external and internal shocks. Therefore, the ongoing crisis can give the policy makers an opportunity to rethink country's development and poverty reduction strategies. The second and third pages of this issue present three more articles. The article titled "Challenges of Youths during COVID-19" discusses the additional burdens of the pandemic for the youths who were already suffering due to a low level of education, skill, and employment opportunities. The article suggested formalization of the labor market while upskilling and reskilling the labor force to cope with the short term and long term impacts of this pandemic. The article on "India amid COVID-19: A SWOC Analytic Review" presents a synoptic review of India's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and challenges (SWOC) in the backdrop of the struggle for life versus livelihood. The article titled "How Would the COVID-19 Pandemic Affect the Education Sector in Bangladesh?" discusses the far-reaching impacts of educational institution closures due to the lockdown. Strict healthcare protocols, active public policy to minimize dropouts, strengthened supplementary nutrition programmes, increased ICT access and allocation in education should be prioritized as policy measurements to mitigate the probable impacts of the pandemic. The fourth page writes about the events organized by SANEM in May 2020.

Inside this issue

COVID-19's effect on poverty and policy response in Bangladesh

Challenges of youths during COVID-19

India amid COVID-19: A SWOC analytic review

How would the COVID-19 pandemic affect the education sector in Bangladesh?

SANEM events

Editor:

Selim Raihan

Associate Editors:

Zubayer Hossen

Eshrat Sharmin

Omar Raad Chowdhury

Coordinator:

Sk. Ashibur Rahman

COVID-19's effect on poverty and policy response in Bangladesh

Selim Raihan

Bangladesh's success in poverty reduction over the last two decades is noteworthy. From as high as 48.9% in 2000, the poverty rate, using the national upper poverty line income, came down to around 24.3% in 2016 (as per the Household Income and Expenditure Survey of 2016) and further to 20.5% in 2019 (as per the projected estimate by the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics).

The current health and economic crisis brought by COVID-19 is feared to have a devastating impact on the poverty status of the country. The transmission mechanisms of the impact of COVID-19 on poverty in Bangladesh involve both the supply-side and demand-side shocks. The supply-side shock emanates from the shutdown of economic activities, whereas the demand-side shock comes from falling exports and remittances.

In the labour market, we are fearing a large scale job loss. As more than 85% of our labour force is in the informal sector, this job loss will have important implications for the persistence of the aggravated poverty situation in the future. Also, households, highly dependent on external remittances, are facing a new challenge because of the sudden fall in remittance income. Compared to the non-remittance recipient households, the remittance-dependent households appeared to be more vulnerable to cope up with the current crisis.

How do we understand the poverty impacts of COVID-19 in Bangladesh? There can be two ways. First, through a country-wide primary survey of representative households, and probably this is the best method to understand the poverty impact. However, it is very difficult to conduct any nationally representative household survey under the current situation. Therefore, so far what we have seen concerning some primary surveys in Bangladesh, using mobile phones, have not been nationally representative. Also, another challenge is that questions in these phone-based surveys are related to what is happening on income, whereas the convention of estimating poverty in Bangladesh is to use the household expenditure data as a better proxy indicator of understanding households' economic status. The income data is also not very reliable for poverty estimation, as, in normal time, people tend to understate their income, and in the crisis time, people tend to overstate their income losses.

From SANEM, we did some model simulations using the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics' nationally representative Household Income and Expenditure Survey data of around 46,000 households conducted in 2016 by considering the above-mentioned supply and demand-side shocks. It appears that a 25% negative shock on households' expenditure leads to a rise in the poverty rate in Bangladesh from 20.5% in 2019 to around 41% now.

This aforementioned rise in the poverty rate has three important implications. First, the success of reduction in poverty over the past one and a half-decades in Bangladesh is under threat now. In 2005, the poverty rate in Bangladesh was around 40% and now in 2020, because of this crisis, the poverty rate goes up to 41%. If the crisis continues, the poverty rate will increase further. Second, a large new set of poor people, who were vulnerable non-poor before the crisis, are now added to this poor population. Third, there is a high risk

that a large part of this new poor will fall into long term poverty, and the aggravated poverty situation will persist for some considerable time in the future.

Given the aforementioned scenario, what have been the policy responses so far from the government? There have been three types of responses. The first one is the stimulus package which has been announced for the readymade garments, the agricultural sector, and other affected sectors. A large part of the stimulus package is credit-based, through the banking system and at the subsidized interest rate. Effective implementation of the stimulus package is important to energise the private sector investment, revive economic activities and get the economy back on the high growth path. This will also help to reduce the magnitude of job losses and assist people to escape from the poverty trap. One important concern here is that the stimulus package is placing additional pressure on the banking sector, which is already very vulnerable because of high non-performing loans, mismanagement, and weak institutions.

The second policy response has been related to expanding social protection coverage through food distribution and cash transfer. However, there is a huge political-economy issue of management of this expansion of the social protection programmes, given the fact that the country spends very low on social protection as a percentage of GDP - one of the lowest in the world. Also, there are huge loopholes in social protection programmes in the forms of leakage, corruption, wrong targeting and mismanagement. During the crisis time, these problems also get worse. Therefore, there is a need for strong effort, especially for making the social protection programmes effective, in terms of identifying the poor and vulnerable population, and ensuring that the support actually reaches the poor people. The financing of the stimulus package and the expansion of social protection programmes is also a challenge. The country's tax-GDP ratio is less than 9% - one of the lowest in the world, and in this fiscal year, this may be as low as around 8%.

The third response is related to the opening up of the economy from the lockdown situation as the choice of starting economic activities is now preferred to the choice of health safety for people amid the rapidly growing infection number and number of deaths from COVID-19. To begin with, the way the lockdown was imposed in Bangladesh was wrong. It was declared as a public holiday, which gave a completely wrong message to the people. Given the poor public health system in Bangladesh - as the country spends less than 1% of GDP as public health expenditure—it has been a very difficult task to handle this health crisis from the very beginning. Therefore, it is necessary to open up economic activities through proper planning and by phases, considering the health risks and following the health rules. However, unfortunately, without any such visible planning, economic activities have been opened up since May 31, which can significantly increase the level of health risks, and ultimately lead to a large-scale shutdown of economic activities again. This decision, therefore, needs urgent reassessment. The victims of such a policy of attaining the so-called 'herd immunity' would mostly be poor people.

Finally, the lesson we learn from the current crisis is that though the country experienced significant achievement in poverty reduction over the past decades, success remained to be very fragile to external and internal shocks. Therefore, the ongoing crisis can give us an opportunity to rethink our development and poverty reduction strategies.

Dr. Selim Raihan, Executive Director, SANEM.

Email: selim.raihan@gmail.com

Challenges of youths during COVID-19

Sayema Haque Bidisha

With the first case of COVID-19 detected on March 8, 2020, the country initiated a general holiday/lockdown since March 26, 2020 to contain the spread of COVID-19 induced infection. This lockdown has negative consequences on people from different branches irrespective of age, sex, economic status, with youths being no exception. Also, among the youths, depending on economic profile, gender, or area of residence the nature of the challenges that they face might differ as well.

Bangladesh is going through a demographic transition as its proportion of working age population is greater than that of the dependents-within 15 to 29 years, there were 28.1% of the population in 2017 (UN Population Division). According to the labor force survey of 2016/17, youth working age population was as high as 41.3 million with the youth labor force comprising of 31.6% of the total labor force. However, the youths are confronted with several challenges including, on one hand, low level of education and skill and the other hand lack of employment opportunities. COVID-19 in this context has made the scenario even more challenging.

The most crucial area of concern for the youths perhaps is the labor market- with around 89.2% of youth employment being in the informal sector and 29.8% youths being NEET (not in employment, education or training), COVID-19 has resulted in a loss of job and income for a large number of this youths. With the youth unemployment rate (10.6%) being more than double that of the national average (4.2%), this general holiday has exposed the youths to the greater challenge of securing a new job. Depending on the length of the crisis as well as the capacity of the government to restore economic activities, the resulting impact on the youths would differ. Slowing down of domestic demand and limited production level due to this lockdown might result in: (i) temporary job loss until the economy revives; (ii) permanent job loss/ destruction of business at least for medium term; (iii) change in job, presumably to inferior ones; (iv) shrinking of businesses and reduction in the level of profit/wages/salary. Even in the long run, with economic activities returning to a new normal state, private investors might be reluctant to take new investment activities, as a result, the rate of job creation might slow down. Besides, the increased importance of social distancing of COVID-19 might result in quicker adoption of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) of the developed countries, leaving developing countries like Bangladesh with little or no time to prepare. In the medium to long term, this can pose a threat to labor market opportunities of the low skilled youths in particular. Youths in the agriculture sector are also facing obstacles due to difficulties in harvesting and marketing of products and especially those in small scale agricultural activities e.g. poultry and livestock rearing, vegetable and fruit cultivation, as well as fishing, are facing loss in production and income. On the other hand, many of the youths engaged in start-ups and freelancing activities are finding it difficult to sustain their businesses due to this lockdown situation. In addition, due to the global recession and fall in oil prices, two key drivers of Bangladesh's growth, namely RMG and foreign remittances, both of which absorb a significant proportion of the youth labor force are expected to have hard times ahead.

It is not only employment opportunities, but also the education profile of the youths that is being hampered by COVID-19. Session jam, delay in entering the labor market, uncertainty regarding higher studies, compromised quality of education are one side of the coin. On the other side, with the income level of the households being affected, some of the households might be compelled to withdraw their children from education- affecting the human capital of the students. As for youth females, discontinuation of education might lead to early marriages and complete withdrawal from education in certain cases.

Youth females are likely to be exposed to some additional challenges due to COVID-19. Due to limited health care and maternal care facilities, essential health facilities during childbirth can often be absent, especially in remote areas. In addition, inadequate supply of family planning materials can result in unplanned pregnancy-according to a study of UNICEF around 2.4 million babies might be born during COVID-19 and some of these mothers might not be able to access health care facilities and eventually might not get access to vaccination services as well.

As for the youths, an overlooked area is that of mental health. Due to ambiguity in future employment/education along with financial strain and uncertainty at both household as well as individual level, youths are likely to suffer from anxiety and depression. Such COVID-19 induced mental stress, in extreme cases might even lead the youths to drug addiction and involvement in anti-social activities.

There is no denying the fact that, given the years remaining to utilize the demographic dividend for Bangladesh are few, necessary steps must be taken without making any delay. With the multi-faced challenges faced by the youths during COVID-19, the government must incorporate the needs of the youths in both its short term as well as long term plans. One such step would be to specify and allocate funds for youths in national budget 2020-21- South Asian Network on Economic Modelling in this regard has proposed for a youth budget. In addition, tax rebate, provision of loans with flexible terms and low interest rate for small enterprises along with block allocation of separate funds for youths engaged in different types of small scale self-employment activities can turn out to be beneficial. In the short term, the incentive packages announced by the government should incorporate the needs of the youths. In this regard, to identify the financially affected youths engaged in low paid informal employment without proper documentation, it is important to relax the requirement of submission of formal documentation at least for the time being while introducing a self-claimant system. Furthermore, to create newer jobs and to revert job loss for the youths, policies should be directed towards stimulating private investment and incentivizing promising labor-intensive sectors. For the youths engaged in agriculture, the provision of credit at a very low interest rate and maintaining the smooth operation of the supply chain are crucial. As for the female youths, despite the additional burden of COVID-19, essential health care facilities related to childbirth and vaccination must not be compromised. Finally, in the long term, policy direction should be focused on the formalization of the labor market while upskilling and reskilling the labor force.

Dr. Sayema Haque Bidisha, Professor, Department of Economics, University of Dhaka and Research Director, SANEM. Email: sayemabidisha@gmail.com

India amid COVID-19: A SWOC analytic review

Sovik Mukherjee

With the number of coronavirus affected crossing the 90,000 mark and showing no immediate signs of slowing down, India's fight with this pandemic amid the struggle for life vs. livelihood continues. In this background, this article presents a synoptic review of India's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and challenges (SWOC) in such troubled times.

Strengths

Adding up to roughly 10% of India's GDP, a whopping INR 20,00,000 crore (including liquidity infusion and other measures by the Reserve Bank of India amounting to INR 8,01,603 crore) coined as "Atma Nirbhar Bharat Abhiyan", this package is the biggest ever economic stimulus that any country has announced to fight COVID-19 among the developing nations and globally, third in line after Japan and USA.

India has played a historic role in international diplomacy by easing out the rules for the export of hydroxychloroquine in such difficult times to the countries that requested, starting with the SAARC countries first. Also, India's proactive amendment to her FDI policy in a bid to protect her sensitive sectors like banking, digital infrastructure, pharmaceuticals, etc. from the "opportunistic" Chinese takeovers is being appreciated.

From economy to demographics, it is evident from the experience across the world that countries having a larger share of ageing population are struggling in their fight against COVID-19. Having only 6.2% in the age group of 65 years and above, India is in a relatively comfortable position in her fight against COVID-19 as compared to the countries such as, USA, Italy, Spain and Japan.

In the context of climate change, as per the Central Pollution Control Board data, five Indian cities namely, Delhi, Gurgaon, Ghaziabad, Noida and Greater Noida ranked among the top 10 cities in the world in terms of PM 2.5 concentrations have registered an amazing air quality index (AQI) upturn, clocking an average of 115 falling from the 180-200 mark coupled with significant fall in the noise pollution levels.

Weaknesses

For the 467 million belonging to the self-employed and the non-salaried category (including contractual and non-contractual and especially, the migrant labourers), the prolonged lockdown is becoming far more life threatening than the danger of being affected with COVID-19 and many might die from hunger, fatigue, suicide etc. – a question of life vs. livelihood as the possibility of layoff looms large. In a country going through a massive employment crisis, in-kind transfers/structural reforms are not enough to generate demand. There is nothing by way of a direct cash transfer (consistent with the concept of universal basic income) to the bottom half of the population as is being emphasised by noted economists like Prof. Abhijit Banerjee, Prof. Kaushik Basu, among others.

Moreover, there is no foolproof mechanism to ensure that a uniform drop of relief is ensured for all the poor households from these relief packages. And it seems there will be none in the near future. Already existing schemes like MNREGS (Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme) by and large bypasses the class of urban poor, the MSME (micro, small and medium enterprises) workers and the self-employed whereas PM - KISAN (Pradhan Mantri

Kisan Samman Nidhi) misses out on landless labourers and so on.

Opportunities

Countries are in the process of shifting their manufacturing roots from China, like Japan. Mr. Modi, Hon'ble Prime Minister of India, has vocally emphasised on 'going local'; this can give a momentous boost to India's manufacturing sector and the 'Make in India' campaign that has fallen prey to the Chinese predatory pricing strategies.

Moving from manufacturing to capital markets, another crucial aspect is the fact that US bonds are losing their steam and Indian equity can become a favourable destination for capital inflow. Stock markets have also pulled up. The SENSEX index skyrocketed 14 per cent in April, posting its best monthly return in 11 years, as the equity markets tracked gains amid the pandemic and continues to grow at a rate of 4% since April 2020.

Challenges

At present, the primary challenge is in limiting the number of infected cases. Measures like — going in i) for a "pool test" in the containment zones as recommended by WHO, and ii) for plasma therapy, where blood transfusion of patients who have effectively fought the virus can be infused back into new COVID-19 affected patients — are to be implemented. The focus now shifts to the economy.

In addition to the supply side bottlenecks, the corrupt practices of hoarding that exists in the public distribution system may contribute in an inflation spiral from the essential commodities side. Herein, the challenge for the government is building a farming model in terms of buying the agricultural produce from the farmers against a higher minimum support price; this would not only ensure enough supply in the post-corona phase but also save the farmers from incurring further losses on account of their crops going rotten. Maybe, in a way this can reduce farmer suicides. Other policy options can be: giving interest free loans to farmers and loan refinancing schemes through NABARD.

Shifting focus from agriculture to MSME, there has to be some sort of a big relief package (apart from the INR 4 lakh crore already announced) for the MSME sector covering nearly 500 million workers accounting for approximately 50% of India's GDP. At present, the government's package targets the large MSMEs covering only 7.5% of the roughly 6.4 crore MSMEs that we have.

Moving to a new normal in the services sector, almost two-thirds of the 4.3 million ITBPO workforce across the country have moved to a work-from-home model to keep services uninterrupted during the lockdown period. Working from home presents new challenges, particularly when it comes to cyber security. Moreover, bandwidth and connectivity provisions might pose a challenge in this context. Last but not the least, pulling the economy back to her growth path is a huge challenge. The idea is to take up a convex combination of short term "fiscal-monetary mix" i.e. monetary easing combined with "big push" fiscal stimulus but monitoring the consequential rise in the inflation rate over a 6 months period.

For these reasons, the policy imperative needs to evolve over a period of time. Flexibility in terms of implementation of policies has to be the key in line with the challenges that crop up.

Sovik Mukherjee, Assistant Professor, Department of Economics, St. Xavier's University, Kolkata. India.
Email: sovik1992@gmail.com

How would the COVID-19 pandemic affect the education sector in Bangladesh?

Mahtab Uddin

As of May 20, 2020, globally, 1.2 billion learners (69.3% of the world's total students) are affected due to the education institute closure in 156 countries. Bangladesh is no different. Since March 17, all the educational institutes in the country have remained closed. Undeniably, the direct and most immediate impact of the COVID-19 on the education sector is the loss of learning opportunities. More than 36 million students (including 17 million in the primary) are now out of school. However, the loss in schooling hours is not the only impact looming out from the COVID-19 crisis. On top of learnings, schools are also a vital source of social protection, nutrition, health as well as psychosocial supports to children and young adults. Therefore, on top of loss in learning, school closures have far-reaching impacts on social and economic issues such as school dropouts, digital divide, food insecurity and malnutrition, childcare, as well as disability services. A larger and deeper consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic on the education sector might emerge from the economic downturns being ignited by the pandemic control measures. Our estimates based on the latest Household Income Expenditure Survey (HIES) shows that — before the crisis, 23.9% (or 8.4 million) of the students' families were below the poverty line. As the crisis prolongs, assuming a three months long lockdown since March 25, therefore a 25% fall in annual per capita income, we find that as many as 43.9% of the students' families could fall below the poverty line (for primary: 51.7%; secondary: 42.4%; and University: 19%). Hence, there could be as many as 7.7 million additional students' families falling below the poverty line during this crisis, taking the total number of students below the poverty line to 16 million.

Such a fallout in poverty from economic crises has long-term impacts. Emanating from the economic crisis there is a good chance that the country might see a resurface of higher rates of child-labors, child marriages, or even transactional sex for children and adolescents — all phenomenon leading to higher dropout rates. As a result, out of the 16 million students from poor families - many might never come to schools ever again. Noteworthy, the dropout rates in Bangladesh are still too high for secondary (37.6%) and post-secondary education (19.6%) (source: BANBEIS). Nevertheless, the impact would be disproportionately higher for female students.

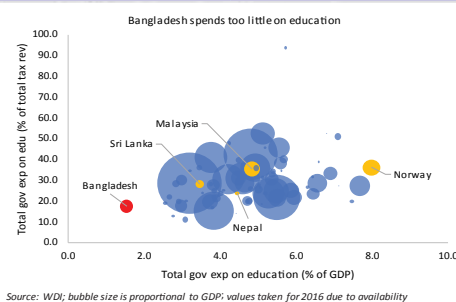
The crisis could also be more threatening for students with special needs (around 39,000; source: BANBEIS). Estimates from HIES data suggests that almost 24.5% of the students with special needs are from poor families. Due to the pandemic, more than 45 percent of such students' families might fall below the poverty line. However, irrespective of their income status, with school closures, these children, might face additional challenges than like no others. When deciding on the continuation of education, they could be the first to be left out of the school system.

Nonetheless, there is also a nutrition aspect where this COVID-19 pandemic might hinder the progress. The economic impact of malnutrition in Bangladesh sums up to \$1 billion each year (WFP, 2020). To combat the challenge, the Government of Bangladesh with technical assistance from the WFP runs a School Feeding Programme in 104 most poverty prone Upazilas in the country reaching nearly 3 million children. Since the beginning of the crisis in March, the GoB has managed to deliver the micronutrient enriched 'biscuits' to all recipients in bulk amount. However, as this support does not reach to the children out of school, if the dropout rates in the poverty-stricken areas increase due to the pandemic, this effort might fall short then.

After the pandemic, the crisis won't be any easy for the students remaining at school either. Due to fall in income at large, overall out-of-pocket expenditure in education will inevitably fall, particularly for the families from the lower-income deciles. The quality of teaching might also fall. Many students might shift from low-cost private schools to already over-burdened public schools. The low-cost private schools that serve the lower-middle-class families, and run on small margins, might face an existential crisis. Moreover, with a fall in pays, it could be the best teachers in schools who might switch jobs first. In combating the loss in learning, one frequently suggested option is online teaching. However, going online for learning is not a feasible option for Bangladesh yet. There are around 5% of the households who do not have a mobile phone (MICS,

2019). In the case of computer/tablet: only 5.6% of the households have one. However, having the device is not sufficient: only 37.6% of households have internet access at home. With such a digital divide, going online for all would only widen the existing gap in learning inequality.

Impacts stemming from COVID-19 on education will have long-term consequences if the government does not step in with bolstered short-term and long-term policies. First, while opening the schools, healthcare protocols should be strictly followed. The government must ensure proper hygiene facilities in all schools. Second, minimizing dropouts with active public policies such as increasing stipends, active campaigning, engaging with families in distress, etc. Third, strengthening the supplementary nutrition programmes (such as the school feeding programme) and rolling them out nationally. Fourth, taking measures to reduce inequality in ICT access. Last, but most importantly, the government must increase allocation in education. Bangladesh's expenditure in education, both as % of GDP and as % of total tax revenue is one of the lowest in the world. With so little to spare, the country might face more chronic consequences in this sector as an aftermath of the pandemic than the comparators. Combating the challenges would require a stronger collaboration between the government, NGOs, and development partners. However, it is the GoB who needs to take the lead in steering up from this crisis. If adequate actions are not taken now, it will be too late to correct it later. Mahtab Uddin, Lecturer, Department of Economics, University of Dhaka and Research Fellow, SANEM.
Email: mahtab.ud@du.ac.bd



Source: WDI; bubble size is proportional to GDP; values taken for 2016 due to availability

SANEM Netizen Forum: Episode 5

With 35 participants, the fifth episode of SANEM Netizen Forum on COVID-19 Pandemic took place on May 2, 2020, at 2 PM. The forum called for strict directives from the government on enforcing health protocols in the manufacturing sector. Members of the forum also strongly argued against laying-off workers and opined that the Government should share the burden of salaries for workers. The spread of infection in factories can result in Bangladesh losing its international market. While rethinking the presently employed lockdown model is necessary, Bangladesh must increase the number of tests before easing lockdown. Since, Bangladesh has an advantage in debt GDP ratio and foreign reserve, it should cautiously explore the option of issuing sovereign bonds. Printing money to avert the liquidity crisis should be the last resort. The government must increase the spending on health care and social safety net programmes, even if it needs to concede a deficit wider than usual. On one hand, the plummeting oil price can cause a decline in remittance inflow from gulf countries. On the other hand, the BPC can profit from this decreased price and the surplus earning can be channeled to social transfer programmes.

SANEM Netizen Forum: Episode 6

Attended by 50 participants, the sixth episode of SANEM Netizen Forum on COVID-19 Pandemic took place on May 11, 2020, at 2 PM. Moderator Dr. Selim Raihan addressed the discourse on lives vs. livelihood and explained the necessity of prioritizing health in the policy actions as the resumption of full fledge economic activities can fuel the spread of the pandemic and cause a subsequent crisis in public health. The forum recommended that the upcoming budget should include a "COVID-19 Response Budget" for all the ministries so that the ministries can give attention to anti-pandemic measures as well while continuing their usual activities. Also, austerity measures in terms of cutting off unnecessary costs along with bonus and benefits of high-level employees should be undertaken by both the Government and the private sector to support welfare programmes for workers, emergency relief programmes and financial schemes for SMEs. The participants opined that the government should support only small and medium-sized businesses, rather than big businesses. UGC and the public universities must start working on academic plans like a rearrangement of courses, extra classes, and utilization of internet technologies, for smooth and fast completion of the semesters once universities open. The COVID-19 crisis is a wake-up call for the strengthening of institutions.

SANEM Shongjog: Agriculture of Bangladesh in the context of COVID-19

SANEM has launched SANEM Shongjog, a platform to foster meaningful academic discussions on domestic and global socio-economic issues by engaging experts hailing from diverse disciplines. The first webinar of SANEM Shongjog, titled "Tackling the Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on the Agriculture of Bangladesh" was held on May 4, 2020, at 11 AM. Dr. Raihan opined that farmers should be provided with interest-free loans. Dr. Sayema Haque Bidisha stressed on giving special attention to sharecroppers and landless people. She also remarked that the Government must increase its crop purchase target and ensure that farmers get a fair price. Dr. Tuhin Wadud, director of the Riverine People and associate professor at the Begum Rokeya University, shed light on the agricultural supply chain. Assistant Professor of the Department of Economics at Khulna University, Mr. Shariful Islam pointed out that the crisis in agriculture has three aspects—input, output, and credit. Md. Gias Uddin, Assistant Professor of the Department of Economics at the Shahjalal University of Science and Technology, explained the crisis in supply chain faced by poultry farmers. Dr. M. Nahid Sattar, Associate Professor of the Department of Agricultural Economics at the Bangladesh Agricultural University, discussed the agricultural situation in Mymensingh.

SANEM Shongjog: Education of Bangladesh in the context of COVID-19

The second webinar of SANEM Shongjog, "Tackling the Impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic on the Education Sector of Bangladesh", was conducted on May 18, 2020, at 11.30 AM. Dr. Selim Raihan, the moderator of the webinar hosted a panel discussion which was attended by Dr. Syed Manzoorul Islam, Professor, Department of English, University of Dhaka, Ms. Rasheda K. Choudhury, Executive Director, Campaign for Popular Education (CAMPE), Md. Fashiullah, Director General, Directorate of Primary Education, Government of People's Republic of Bangladesh and Dr. Md. Ahsan Habib, Associate Professor, Institute of Education and Research, University of Dhaka. Around seventy educators, students, development practitioners, researchers, and journalists joined the webinar. The panelists stressed on increasing the budget allocation for education in the upcoming budget and made recommendations for speedy completion of post-pandemic education years. The panelists suggested that the government should increase the salary and status of primary school teachers. Educators, guardians, and students reflected on their personal experiences and shared their views and opinion.

e-version: <http://sanemnet.org/thinking-aloud/>

SANEM-ActionAid webinar: Youth perspective on COVID-19 crisis in Bangladesh

A webinar titled "Youth Perspective on COVID-19 Crisis in Bangladesh: Response through National Budget and Planning", jointly organized by SANEM and ActionAid was held on May 9, 2020, at 11 AM. Chaired by Ms. Farah Kabir, Country Director, ActionAid Bangladesh, and moderated by Dr. Selim Raihan, the webinar was joined by around 65 participants. The panel discussants from SANEM team were Dr. Sayema Haque Bidisha, Mr. Mahtab Uddin and Mr. Zubayer Hossen while ActionAid Bangladesh was represented by its Manager-Young People, Mr. Nazmul Ahsan. Dr. Raihan presented a keynote presentation prepared by SANEM that identified six transmission mechanisms through which the youth are being affected due to the pandemic. He also made recommendations to address the challenges faced by the youth. Panel discussants discussed issues of mental health of the youth, institutional incapacities to respond to the youth's needs, their economic situation, and impacts of the pandemic on achieving the SDGs related to the youth.

SANEM-ASIAN CONFLUENCE webinar: Bangladesh-India cooperation in trade and agriculture

A webinar titled "Regional Cooperation in Trade and Development of Agriculture: Perspectives from Bangladesh and India", jointly organized by SANEM and Asian Confluence was conducted on May 11, 2020, at 11 AM. Conducted by Dr. Selim Raihan, the webinar was attended by around 50 participants. Special remarks were delivered by Mr. Sabyasachi Dutta, Executive Director, Asian Confluence, India. The panelists present were Mr. Abdus Salam, Managing Director, Organic Bangladesh Limited, Dr. M. Nahid Sattar, Associate Professor, Department of Agricultural Economics, Bangladesh Agricultural University, Mr. Mahtab Uddin, Lecturer, Department of Economics, University of Dhaka and Mr. Mahadi Faisal, Team Leader - Business Strategy & Consumer Engagement, ACI Logistics Limited. Panelists stressed the necessity of cooperation between India and Bangladesh in the agricultural sector. Specific areas for cooperation between India and Bangladesh in agriculture were identified as well. Experts opined that to tackle the challenges of COVID-19, India-Bangladesh cooperation in agriculture has become very important. It was recommended that agricultural universities and research organizations of both countries collaborate on organizational levels to address the common agricultural issues of the region. It was pointed out that through regional cooperation, farmers of both countries can benefit. The overall bilateral trade scenario and future trade potential were discussed in detail by the panelists.