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SANEM, launched in January 2007 in Dhaka, is a non-profit research organization registered with the Registrar of Joint Stock Companies and Firms in Bangladesh. It is also a network of economists and policy makers in South Asia with a special emphasis on economic modeling.

SANEM aims to promote the production, exchange and dissemination of basic research knowledge in the areas of international trade, macro economy, poverty, labor market, environment, political economy and economic modeling. It 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. SANEM promotes young researchers from Economics, Business and Social Sciences to undertake independent research works on contemporary issues. SANEM has an internship program in place for fresh university graduates. SANEM arranges regular training programs on economic modeling and contemporary economic issues for both Bangladeshi and other South Asian participants.

--- About SANEM

Summary Discussion:

SANEM-ActionAid Webinar on Youth Budget Framework

Saturday, 25 July 2020

Youth Budget Framework: An Appraisal

Context

The first phase of the demographic dividend of Bangladesh, which started in the early nineties, will close around 2031. To reap the full benefits of its demographic dividend, the country must invest in the youth.

The ongoing Covid-19 Pandemic has created additional demand for investment on the youth as they are burdened with socio-economic risks, as well as mental health issues. Therefore, it is high time that Bangladesh initiated a youth-centric budget. A youth-centric budget is a framework of objectives and visions to empower youths economically and socially. The designated monetary allocations in the budget will be analyzed through a youth-centric lens to equip evidence-based policymaking. In short, the youth budget will serve to represent the commitments of the Government of Bangladesh to invest holistically in youth development, mitigate challenges and bottlenecks which uniquely affect youths through various channels, and in the process involve youths in attaining national goals.

Hence, to introduce the concept of youth budget framework to the country's policymakers, researchers, academicians, ministry personnel and relevant stakeholders, South Asian Network on Economic Modeling (SANEM) in partnership with ActionAid Bangladesh held a webinar titled "Youth Budget Framework: An Appraisal", on 25 July, at 11 am.

Presentation Summary

At the onset, the presentation has aptly manifested the necessity of youth-centric programs. It has briefly delineated the concept of the youth budget framework. A detailed evaluation of the budget of FY 2020-21's in response to the youth's needs has pointed out the insufficiency of budgetary allocation in youth-centric projects. The budget lacks sufficient discussion over how to reach out to the poor who lack digital access and the unemployed in the informal sector. Apart from that, the allocation for the education sector remains still insufficient. A sensitivity analysis conducted for 22 ministries and divisions which have youth-focused programs in their ADP allocations reveals that more than half of the total budget is not youth-focused. To be specific, only 9 percent of the allocations in the revised ADP for FY2019-20 could be termed as directly youth-oriented.

The formulation of the framework requires identification of transmission channels, introduction of the budget template among relevant ministries, calculation and analysis of youth sensitivity of ADP and operating budget. Also, the presentation exhibited a youth sensitivity matrix for development budget and key performance indicators for the operating budget, such as, percentage of hospitals with family planning and reproductive care units, the number of beneficiaries in E-Service provided by different

ministries, number of young migrants given training for foreign employment at upazila level etc. A representative template has also been presented, where examples of such indicators for each of the 22 divisions/ministries were provided. To go forward with this framework, the presentation has further discussed the major challenges, such as, the eligibility criteria, accuracy of the information, overlapping focus areas, institutional barriers, inter-ministry coordination, utilization of resources etc. For instance, design, approval, implementation stages of budgeting process and associated procurement work involve several agencies. Successful implementation of the budget requires cooperative agreements among government bodies, policy makers, employers' organizations, trade unions, educational institutions, youths from all backgrounds, training centers and non-government organizations. Coordination failure leads to time lags and inefficiency. The successful implementation of the framework will require properly addressing the challenges in the pathway. Having said that, popularization of the proposed youth budget framework is also required. A participatory approach is essential to ensure the best outcome.

There are three phases of the youth budgeting process: Preparation phase, Approval phase, and Implementation phase. Each face is germane because of its implications. In the end, the presentation has concluded by showcasing the dissemination of the concept of the framework among the relevant stakeholders and engaging them in preparing a youth-centric budget.

Discussion Summary

The webinar has put a whopping emphasis on the development of the youth and the necessity of exploiting the maximum potential of the demographic dividend who faces paramount challenges due to the pandemic. Achieving demographic dividend in the backdrop of the pandemic requires firm efforts and drastic measures. However, the budget of FY2020-2021 has not allocated enough for the new poor and the unemployed youth in the COVID context. Regrettably, only 9 percent of the allocations in the revised ADP for FY 2019-20 can be deemed as youth-focused. Also, there have not been enough enhancements in youth-centric projects or any concern for the psychological well-being of youths. And the budget does not include enough discussion over how to reach out to the poor who lack digital access and the unemployed in the informal sector. Moreover, the allocation for the education sector which is deeply imperative for youth development is still meagre.

Hence, the discussion has divulged the significance of employing the youth budget framework which has the potential to engender data-driven informed policy-making. Furthermore, the discussion has reflected the need of developing a database on youth which should cover information of the unemployed and the youth in NEET (Not in Employment, Education, and Training) to devise specific strategies for youth development. Rather than traditional education system, technology-based market relevant education needs to be given priority for youths. Though sufficient resources need to be mobilized in these types of specific programs; however, an overnight increase of resources might not be useful, as the question of utilization of resources is there. Also, immense bureaucratic complexities hinder the potential of well-intended policies which is needed to be addressed cautiously. However, a well-designed coordination cell can resolve to ensure smooth execution of collaborative efforts by relevant ministries. Although, in the webinar, representatives of the government have shown a keen interest in adopting a youth budget framework, the implementation of the framework still may have to face a difficult situation.

Policy Recommendations

- Rigorous evidence-based policy assessment is imperative for setting priorities for youth development and attaining the objectives thereby.
- Need to develop a specific database on youth to make informed policy decisions.
- Sufficient funds are needed to be mobilized to pique youth development.
- Project Implementation capacity of the bureaucracy needs to be enhanced.
- Publicity of the proposed youth budget framework is required.
- Significant improvement in coordinating government projects is crucial.

Panelists



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