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Behind

Citizen's Platform

**Virtual Dialogue**

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**Upcoming National Budget 2022-2023**

*Perspectives of the Disadvantaged Groups*



Citizen's Platform for SDGs, Bangladesh

এসডিজি বাস্তবায়নে নাগরিক প্ল্যাটফর্ম, বাংলাদেশ



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## **Context**

The national budget of Bangladesh for FY2023 is going to be proposed before the parliament amidst several emergent challenges. The country has been battling the intertwining impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic for more than two years. When the country is still recovering from the COVID-induced adverse implications, the global challenges, including uneven recovery, rising commodity prices and the crisis in Ukraine, have emerged as additional plights.

A number of research studies conducted by the Citizen's Platform for SDGs, Bangladesh and other organisations evinced that the vulnerable and disadvantaged population groups were disproportionately affected in the face of the economic downturn caused by the pandemic. Indeed, the pandemic caused disruptions in economic activities, increased unemployment and underemployment, loss of income and a decline in consumption among the marginalised households. These households also lost savings and assets while their indebtedness increased. Their progress in terms of social indicators, including those related to education and health, was also negatively affected. Regrettably, the policy support in the forms of social safety net programmes and stimulus packages was also inadequate to cover such a large section of the population owing to lower fiscal space, lack of intuitional capacity, and structural weaknesses. The disruption in the supply chain and spike in prices global market have led to the abrupt increase in prices of necessary commodities. As a result, the daily necessities have gone out of the reach of the fixed income earning lower-middle-class, let alone the low-income population group.

The national budget for FY2022-23 needs to cushion the purchasing power of the low-income and middle-income population in the prevailing context of escalated prices of essential commodities. In light of the recovery from the pandemic when the aggregate demand requires to be stimulated, and in view of the current spiralling inflation situation, inclusiveness is a big concern. In this regard, increasing purchasing power of and protecting the most marginalised and disadvantaged population groups would be the most critical point for the government. Moreover, Bangladesh must keep up with its commitment to deliver and meet the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and prepare for its graduation from the Least Developed Country (LDC) group.

The present document focuses on the needs and perspectives of the most disadvantaged population groups in Bangladesh. These population groups are mostly underrepresented in the national budget consultation process. The present document seeks to bridge this gap and uphold the perspectives of the disadvantaged population groups in the national budget discussions. The document is prepared from the inputs of the Partner Organisations of the Citizen's Platform.

## **Recommendations for the National Budget FY2022-23**

The budget for FY2022-23 needs to prioritise the disadvantaged population groups of the country. These population groups often bear the disproportionate adverse impact of shortfall in the public programmes. There have been concerns as regards resource availability (i.e. lack of fiscal space), while a lack of capacity to implement the programmed national budget has also become the binding constraint. The national budget should protect the disadvantaged population

groups through the extension of social protection programmes, targeted tax incentives and dedicated stimulus packages. The taxes and tariffs on essential commodities should be withdrawn at both import and domestic levels. There is an urgent call to create an integrated database of potential recipients of public support, including SSNPs. To improve the quality of the public expenditures, the involvement of stakeholders at different levels will be required. Apart from these overall and far-reaching recommendations, the following specific proposals for specific disadvantaged population groups are put forward.

### ***Children***

- Increase education budget from 2 per cent of GDP to at least 4 per cent of GDP.
- Enhance the allocation for marginalised and excluded communities from around Tk. 4,000 crore to at least Tk. 20,000 crore.
- Introduce more education stipends, incentives and school feeding programmes to restrain drop-out students and prevent child marriage, particularly those who departed during the COVID period, with special attention to girls or adolescents.
- Ensure budget allocation for the ministries directly associated with children's interests, such as education, health and protection.
- Develop dedicated SSNPs for poor and floating children.
- Earmark a dedicated share of the total allocated budget (e.g. 10 per cent) to the children in proportion to the population at the union parishad, upazila and municipality levels.
- Withdraw all taxes and duties on low-cost smartphones, tabs and laptops to facilitate the digitalisation of the education system and reduce the digital divide.
- Allocate subsidies to the educational institutions for the expenditure on low-cost smartphones, tabs and laptops for students and digitalising the education system in order to reduce corruption.

### ***Climate vulnerable people***

- Earmark budget allocation for the climate resilience livelihood of the people living in geographically vulnerable areas, such as in riverine, haor, and coastal regions.
- Specific measures and corresponding budgetary allocation are essential for the riverine regions to protect the livelihood of flood victims. A similar initiative needs to be undertaken in salinity affected lands to control and prevent soil salinity.
- Take necessary measures to control the overflow of rivers and wave attacks in haor region.
- All projects which involve anti-environment activities and do not align with the notion of a green economy should be stopped.

### ***Dalits***

- Allocate more budget for the ethnic minority and Dalits regarding their education, health, economic development and social protection schemes.

- The budgetary allocation should be increased substantially following a comprehensive development plan based on authentic information about the number of populations belonging to these communities and their major livelihood challenges.
- Allocate budget for distinct land commissions for plain land indigenous communities to ensure the livelihood of these people.
- Increase budgetary allocation for the salary and benefits of Dalits engaged in cleaning jobs.
- Allocate budget for infrastructure regarding cultural academy for each sub-district, home, shelter etc., an agricultural loan with low interest, subsidised loans to ethnic minority women entrepreneurs.
- Currently, budgetary allocations for Dalits are primarily focused on urban areas. An equal focus should be given to Dalits living in rural areas.
- More specifically, the budgetary allocation should be increased in the following areas: expansion of safety net support; long-term social security schemes; broadening of education support by providing scholarships to Dalit students; establishing schools in Dalit concentrated areas; establishing water supply facilities in the coastal belt and tea garden areas; and increasing allocation for housing.
- New programmes/projects should be introduced to enhance the skills of the Dalits so that they can increase the level of their income through alternative income-generating activities.

### ***Person with disabilities***

- The number of beneficiaries under the coverage of the government stipend programmes for children with disabilities should be tripled in the forthcoming budget.
- Introduce separate stipends for students with disabilities in technical education institutions.
- Increased allocation is required for the physical infrastructure (ramps, elevators, wide doors, etc.) of educational institutions and technical education institutions and for ensuring access to information to increase the participation of students with disabilities in education.
- Allocate budget to provide specialised health services for persons with disabilities. Consider establishing dedicated hospitals and special services for persons with disability to support their special needs.
- Withdraw duty on traders for importing and manufacturing buses with power ramps or manual ramps suitable for persons with disabilities.
- Withdraw VAT and tax on deposits, Fixed Deposit Receipt (FDR) and Deposit Pension Scheme (DPS) for persons with disabilities.
- Allocation for infrastructural and informational accessibility to enable all websites, government e-services, union information centres, etc. should be fully utilised to include persons with disabilities under the Digital Bangladesh initiative.
- Allocate adequate budget to make teaching and assessment system suitable for students with disabilities, for instance, for teaching aids to suit persons with disabilities, such as braille books, accessible e-books, the inclusion of sign language and braille system in the teacher training curriculum for implementation of integrated education activities.

- Allowances for all types of persons with disabilities need to be determined on the basis of the level of disability. For example, the allowances for people with severe, moderate and mild disabilities should be different.
- Increase allocation for disability allowances and increase the number of beneficiaries.
- Budget allocation for special projects to encourage the small entrepreneurs with disabilities.
- Prior to the formulation of the budget, separate discussions will be held with persons with disabilities, their associations and organisations working for the development of persons with disabilities, which will help in formulating a suitable budget for persons with disabilities.
- Earmark adequate budgetary allocation to establish an increased number of disability service centres (currently, only 103 are functioning) with appropriate service providers and skilled human resources. This should expand to the sub-district level.
- Special allocation to make disability rights committees at the district/sub-district/municipality level more functional. Allocation for the expansion of cultural activities and sports development of persons with disabilities is also needed.
- Facilitate safe and accessible transportation across the board for easy mobility of persons with disability.
- A national household survey on persons with disabilities in Bangladesh needs to be conducted at the earliest, and needed budgetary allocation should be made accordingly.

### ***Indigenous communities***

- Enhance budgetary allocations for the Ministry of Chittagong Hill Tracts Affairs and three zila parishads.
- Allocate a dedicated share of the total budget for all existing government services and SSNPs to the indigenous population groups at the sub-district and union levels.
- Make budgetary allocations to ensure the education of indigenous population groups in their mother tongue.

### ***Senior Citizens***

- Old age allowance should be increased to Tk. 1000 per month.
- Exempt taxes on necessity commodities and medicines consumed by elderly people.
- Specific allocation to be made to increase the health benefits for the elderly people.
- Provision of allocation to establish Old People's Association (OPA) in cities and villages under the Ministry of Social Welfare (MoSW).

### ***Transgender***

- Establish dedicated programmes for skills development of transgender and their job placements.
- Include unemployed transgender under the SSNPs.

### **Women**

- The gender budget must be formulated and implemented separately to ensure gender equality, women's empowerment and rights. In order to bridge the gender gap, gender-segregated information and data must be used.
- Health coverage for pregnant women and adolescents needs to be increased. The budget needs to be increased for awareness-raising activities aimed at improving women's sexual health and reproductive health.
- Budget allocation is required for providing quality training to migrant women in specific areas of their choice. Allocation needs to be provided and increased to the travel facilities, hostels, and daycare centres for working women.
- Evaluation of undeclared (domestic) work of women should be recognised, and separate allocation should be made in the budget for the purpose of turning them into more professional work through training.
- Proper safety net programmes should be introduced to the women victims of violence.
- The needed budget should be allocated for the purpose of law reform to prevent violence against women and for the construction of shelter homes for women with disabilities and women victims of violence.

### **Youth**

- Budget allocation for the education sector should be increased for the development of youth. More should be allocated to improving the quality of technical education and the education system in madrasas.
- Budgetary allocations for technical education activities through the youth department and other government agencies need to be increased by taking cognisance of the local market demand in the region.
- Stimulus packages should be redesigned and should be made easily accessible to youth-led small and medium enterprises (SMEs). While redesigning stimulus packages, priority should be given to rural youth who wish to set up their own SMEs.
- Funds for start-up need to be doubled in the fiscal budget.
- In order to facilitate businesses on online and social media platforms, formulate appropriate policies and determine acceptable taxes and duties with the involvement of and consultation among all parties.
- Establish and make necessary budgetary allocation for a non-partisan, diverse and strong National Youth Council (NYC).

Monitoring the implementation of the budget for the disadvantaged population groups will be critical so that the public money is not wasted. To this end, ensuring transparency in the utilisation of budgetary allocations and accountability of public service providers will be critical. GO-NGO consultation processes on the challenges faced by disadvantaged population groups should be initiated at both national and sub-national levels so that the voices of these people can be heard by the policymakers.



Secretariat at: **Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD), Dhaka**

Telephone: (+88 02) 55001185, 48118090

Web: [www.bdplatform4sdgs.net](http://www.bdplatform4sdgs.net)

E-mail: [coordinator@bdplatform4sdgs.net](mailto:coordinator@bdplatform4sdgs.net)



[www.bdplatform4sdgs.net](http://www.bdplatform4sdgs.net)



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