

PRESS RELEASE

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Brac University's Centre for Peace and Justice conducted a survey and launched a report on the impact of Covid-19 on low-income groups in Bangladesh

Today: Centre for Peace and Justice (CPJ), Brac University held a virtual event to launch and present the findings of the report "**Covid-19 - Livelihood Crisis, Social Cohesion Challenges and Mitigation Options: An Empirical Study**". The programme was attended by various policy-makers, academics, researchers, NGO workers and representatives of print and electronic media.

The study targeted three groups of survey population: a) Ready-made garment workers b) Migrant workers who returned to Bangladesh during the pandemic, and c) urban low-income groups, mostly informal workers. The study applied quantitative research methods, which was complemented by qualitative ones. A survey was conducted in urban areas of greater Dhaka region between November to December 2020.

The findings of the study, presented at the webinar by **Dr Sanaul Mostafa** and **Dr Shahidul Islam**, the lead researchers of this report, suggested that urban informal workers and returnee migrants suffered the most during the pandemic. Low-income people accumulated debt, borrowed overwhelmingly from informal sources, given the fact that these groups lost, on average, one-third of their income compared to pre-pandemic period. Food security has been greatly compromised as 40% households had difficulties to have 3 meals a day, 70% consumed less quantity of food and 87% reduced their protein consumption. Female respondents' work burden increased from 18% at the end of 2019 to 53% during the pandemic. The majority of the survey respondents felt that social bonding and unity had deteriorated during the pandemic. Low-income workers graded the government favourably for managing the pandemic but doubted its ability to control the virus in the future. 70% of the pandemic affected workers expected the government to help them recover from their economic loss. Only 16% of the respondents felt that they would be able to cope with the adverse impacts of the pandemic in the future.

Farah Kabir, Country Director of ActionAid, **Dr Yameen Mazumder**, Senior Programme Specialist of James P Grant School of Public Health, Brac University, **Dr Nazneen Ahmed**, Senior Research Fellow of Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies, and **Monjoor Morshed**, Head of Strategy and Planning of Bidyanondo Foundation were the panelists of event. The event was moderated by **Manzoor Hasan**, Executive Director of Centre for Peace and Justice, Brac University.

Farah Kabir said, "*Amidst the pandemic one noticed different dimensions of gender-based violence (GBV) - women who were not subjected to GBV earlier, have become the new victims, and child marriages have spiked*". She stressed that "*NGOs' role amidst the pandemic should be analysed considering their specific mandates*". Ms Kabir suggested that "*the report could best be broken into separate policy briefs based on themes, mandates of targeted actors, and scope of work for the policy-makers.*"

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Dr Yameen Mazumder noted that the management of the lockdown is perhaps the most important question that arises in the context of the pandemic. *“The balancing act of enforcing lockdown measured against the needs of the individuals needs to be better understood.” Given the protracted nature of the pandemic, CPJ researchers can continue to monitor some indicators to bring forth a better understanding of that balance.”*

Dr Nazneen Ahmed said, *“while a majority of the recommendations on RMG sector made were targeting towards the government, there could be a few simple recommendations made in terms of what could be asked of the civil society organisations or other private actors.” She stressed that “for the sake of social justice, the retrenched workers should be given access to underutilised donor funds.”*

Monjoor Morshed discussed how community organisations, particularly Bidyanondo Foundation, has focused on what was needed by the people and raised funds to ensure that financial support was directly channelled to those who needed it most minimising overhead cost. He urged organisations to develop and follow similar models.

Guest Speaker, **Dr Hossain Zillur Rahman**, Chairperson of BRAC and Chairman of Power and Participation Research Centre, said *“The study and the discussions today certainly points to the myriad of ways in which we can continue exploring to develop our understanding of the gaps in policy. He stressed that credible research is one of the ways to inform policymakers the voice of vulnerable groups, including the “new poor”, which has emerged during the pandemic.”* He further mentioned that CPJ has a particular responsibility and mandate to explore the issue of access to social justice and find institutional pathways to remedy.

Sudipto Mukerjee, Resident Representative of United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), also a Guest Speaker, mentioned that *“the CPJ report is published at a time when the national budget discussion is underway. Current discussion could be informed by the findings of CPJ research and certainly assist the policymakers on future course of action.”* He stressed that *“development agencies, state, private sector and academic institutions, amongst others, can work together to find appropriate solutions amidst the pandemic.”*

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