

One-third of female employed youths are jobless as Covid-19 impacts

More women lost jobs, had a harder time finding another job, and had a much slower income recovery amid Covid-19 in Bangladesh. A third of the young women employed before the pandemic in the country were out of jobs in January 2021. The rate is three times higher in women (29%) than that of young men (11%).

The female youths who again found a job later, income recovery has dropped only 10% for male youths while it is 21% for female youths in January 2021.

The data mentioned above was presented by Dr Imran Matin, executive director of BRAC Institute of Governance and Development (BIGD), in a webinar organised today on Sunday, (11 July 2021).

Respondents in the study pointed out that private tutoring, handicrafts, factory jobs, tailoring and light engineering are among the areas in which more young women used to find employment conventionally, but again these are among the hardest hit economic areas in the pandemic. The respondents also think that recovery of these particular areas will be tough and take time even when the pandemic is over, making it difficult for female youths to come back to paid employment.

The BRAC Institute of Governance and Development (BIGD) and BRAC's skills development programme (SDP) hosted the webinar titled 'Building a resilient ecosystem for women in the skills sector: challenges and prospects' to celebrate World Youth Skills Day (July 15).

Highlighting the survey findings, Dr Matin said so many working women remaining out of paid work for such a long period may cause many to permanently leave the job market, which may further reduce the already low rate of women's labour market participation.

Covid shock may threaten to undo much of the progress made around women's empowerment unless corrective measures are taken, he said.

Speaking at the webinar, speakers emphasised on greater awareness on the importance of technical and vocational education, and training and development of other skills relevant to both local and global economies.

BIGD in collaboration with SDP has conducted a number of studies identifying the sustained beneficial impact of skills training on women's economic independence. Speaking on the possible interventions, a panel of development professionals shared their insights, highlighted the importance of adopting proper implementation strategies, and stressed that the evidence-based findings from different relevant studies need to be taken into view in building a resilient ecosystem for women in the area of skills development.

Joydeep Sinha Roy, head of operations of BRAC SDP, presented findings from SDP's implementation experiences over the years at the event.

The presentation pointed out that culture and traditional gender roles, gender stereotyping, lack of career guidance, safety concerns particularly fear of gender-based violence and sexual



harassment, family responsibilities, and availability of quality apprenticeship occupations are the major barriers for adolescent girls' and young women's access to skills learning.

To bring change in the sector, Joydeep presented SDP's incremental approaches - enterprise development training, entrepreneurship training, employability training, classroom training and apprenticeship training

The presentation recommended more awareness about skills training both at the individual and household level, access to the labour market through skills training, raising awareness to change perception towards women, enabling a women-friendly environment in the labour market, and access to jobs and retention to improve the scenario.

Following the presentation, Tasmiah Tabassum Rahman, current in-charge of BRAC Skills Development Programme moderated a discussion also attended by BRAC's Gender, Justice and Diversity Programme director Nobonita Chowdhury, International Labour Organization's programme officer (M&E) for Skills 21 Project Tahmid Arif, and Natore-based Neda Society's executive director Jahanara Beauty.

BRAC's Gender, Justice and Diversity Programme director Nobonita Chowdhury emphasised bringing change in designing proper interventions. "Instead of designing interventions separately, we need to focus on making integrated interventions in line with mainstreaming women empowerment in different sectors."

ILO programme officer (M&E) for Skills 21 Project Tahmid Arif said, "Changing mindset is crucial not only for skills training of female youths, but also for their employment. Conducting training is not enough. We also need to make sure those who receive training also get an employment opportunity and the opportunity has to be sustainable."

Highlighting the harsh impact of Covid-19 on the female workforce, Neda Society ED Jahanara Beauty said, "During the pandemic many employers opted to keep male ones instead of female youths in informal sectors. As many women had to leave their job, it impacted not only their income or employment but also their surrounding situations. There was sharp decline in their savings, while violence against women increased and incidents of child marriage rose drastically."

Thanks
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