

## Experts for giving top priority to health sector with allocation raised to 2.0pc in upcoming budget

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Health sector should get utmost priority in the upcoming budget for the 2020-2021 fiscal in a bid to reduce COVID-19 effects and provide basic health security for vulnerable population, speakers said at a webinar on Monday.

Allocation for health sector should be increased to 2.0 per cent of the country's GDP in the next budget from existing less than 1.0 per cent, they suggested.

They also said bottom of the pyramid (BOP) population (poorest two-thirds of the economic human pyramid) should get extra focus in the budget as they are the worst sufferers of the pandemic.

The suggestions came at the webinar titled 'COVID-19 and National Budget 2020-2021: Rethinking Strategy for BoP' jointly hosted by BRAC, DataSense and Unnayan Shamannay.

Former Governor of Bangladesh Bank (BB) Dr. Atiur Rahman addressed the event as the chief guest and Dr Hossain Zillur Rahman, Chairperson of BRAC and Power and Participation Research Centre (PPRC) was in chair.

Senior Director of BRAC KAM Morshed moderated the virtual programme while CEO of iSocial Dr. Ananya Raihan presented the keynote paper.

Terming differentiation of life and livelihood a false paradigm, Dr Atiur said the next budget should be a budget for survival as people are very much afraid in terms of health and food security.

Health should be in the centre of the budget getting double allocation comparing to the outgoing fiscal, he said adding: “The sector must get allocation about 2.0per cent of the GDP from existing less than 1.0 per cent.”

In compliance with the World Health Organization (WHO) guidelines, Bangladesh needs to raise its health budget gradually to 4.0 per cent to ensure universal health coverage, he said.

The former BB governor also said the government can discuss the idea of introducing health insurance in the next budget to raise confidence among people.

Chairperson of BRAC Dr Zillur said the people living below the poverty line may reach up to 43 per cent of which about 22.5 per cent would be new poor, due to the pandemic.

He said the government is currently providing cash and food assistance to the people listed as poor in pre-pandemic era while the huge number of new poor is now in more vulnerable situation.

He also said the upcoming budget should be health-friendly, poor-friendly, skill-friendly and executable.

BIDS Senior Research Fellow Dr. Nazneen Ahmed and BIGD Executive Director Dr. Imran Matin spoke as the panellists at the programme.

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