

Local Foreign Categories

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Data Science Engineer / Lead Data Science Engineer / Data Engineer / Nov 09, 2021

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IPS' 'Sri Lanka: State of the Economy 2021' third report **'Greater use of e-commerce, key for resilient food system'**



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24 October, 2021

The pandemic has not significantly affected food production but has affected the micro-level dynamics of food production leading to food security concerns and rising food prices, Dr. Manoj Thibbotuwawa of the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) said.

He was addressing the webinar on 'Equity in Recovery: Addressing Sri Lanka's Social Protection and Food Security Needs' last week.

He said that labour mobility, restriction on certain inputs, and problems in the food value chain during the various lockdowns are to be blamed for this. The way forward to creating a resilient food system was to address structural issues. These include setting up proper farm-market links, greater use of e-commerce, effective information dissemination, continuous monitoring, ensuring the quality of products, establishing efficient procurement systems and implementing food-related social security programs, Dr. Thibbotuwawa said. The Institute of Policy Studies of Sri Lanka (IPS) hosted the final of a three-part webinar series to launch its annual flagship report 'Sri Lanka: State of the Economy 2021'.

The event featured presentations by Dr. Ganga Tilakaratna and Dr. Manoj Thibbotuwawa from the IPS with commentaries from Prof Udith Jayasinghe, Secretary, Ministry of Agriculture, and Prof Dileni Gunewardena, Professor of Economics, University of Peradeniya. Lakshila Wanigasinghe of IPS moderated the discussion.

Dr. Tilakaratna said that according to World Bank estimates, approximately 500,000 Sri Lankans fell into poverty due to Covid-19, and the poverty rate (USD 3.20 a day) went up to 11.7% in 2020 from 9.2% in 2019.

The Government provided relief in the form of cash and in-kind transfers to the most affected that fell into the Samurdhi, Elder's Assistance, Disability Assistance, Assistance for kidney patients, and farmers and fishermen's pension programs.

According to a recent IPS survey, more than 70% of the recipients of these transfers fell into the less-than Rs. 25,000 monthly income category. Although there were changes in the coverage and amounts, these transfers were efficient and useful for the most part, with only a few negative comments. However, there were implementation gaps as people had to stand in long queues and some experienced delays in cash distribution. Dr. Tilakaratna said that the root causes for such gaps were mainly due to the fragmented system that the country adopts, along with inefficient delivery mechanisms, lack of integrated beneficiary database, and lack of preparedness to cover many new beneficiaries.

Prof. Udith Jayasinghe said that sharp price rises in food, occur, not because of low production, but because of the many agents that handle the logistics. No one authority monitors the production process of rice giving way to disruptions in information flow and inefficiencies.

He said that a similar scenario can be explained with the issue of organic fertiliser as there is no such thing as 'organic'. 'Environmental-friendly, non-hazardous and non-poisonous' fertiliser is what the government should encourage farmers to use.



Prof. Dileni Gunewardena reflected on the IPS survey on the impact of Covid-19 on households. The survey shows that beneficiaries were generally pleased with arrangements to receive the cash transfer, targeting appears to be effective, the cash transfer was mainly used for food purchases, and a reduction in consumption (20%) was the main additional measure taken. The survey made it possible to identify the monthly income levels of the individuals that were affected by the waves of the Covid outbreak.

Greater social protection coverage, a broader range of benefits (including transformative social protection such as childcare and school feeding programs), better macroeconomic policies to manage fiscal space and better delivery systems are some of the steps to be taken to build back better, she said in conclusion.

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