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Seasonal migration useful in some places

Yale University economics professor says



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Encouraging seasonal migration is a useful strategy under some conditions, but not everywhere, said a professor of economics at Yale University while delivering a public lecture at the University of Dhaka yesterday.

"We often think of poverty as a chronic, binary phenomenon—people are either poor or not—but many are seasonally deprived. Seasonal poverty is widespread in agrarian societies," said the academic, Ahmed Mushfiq Mobarak.

However, hundreds of millions of the world's poor live nominally

The public lecture on "Innovations to Address Seasonal Poverty: A research programme in Bangladesh, Nepal and Indonesia" was organised by Economics Study Center of the University of Dhaka.

Mobarak said the seasonal poverty was particularly severe for the rural poor, who typically suffer a so-called lean season in the time leading up to harvests.

During these periods, savings from the previous harvest dwindle and the price of staple crops rise, sometimes by as much as 100 per cent in remote areas, he said.

He said seasonal poverty was one of the most pressing problems faced by the global poor. It is widespread, some 80 per cent of the world's poor rely on agriculture for their livelihoods, he said.

In addition, despite its temporary nature, seasonal poverty contributes to chronic poverty in lasting ways such as reducing agricultural productivity and permanently harming child health and learning, said Mobarak.

These persistent damages may contribute to cyclical poverty, he pointed out.

Mobarak said failure to ensure essential diets has long-term effects on children that affect their future productivity.

Policies may need to address failures in savings markets, in credit markets, in remittance technology, or in spatial market integration, he added.

Climate change may exacerbate the problem, he believes.

Despite its pressing nature, seasonal poverty is a difficult problem to solve. The most promising approaches use the fact that the

The same household may be wealthy at harvest and hungry nine months later. Lean-season wages may fall in rural areas but remain constant in urban areas. The price of staple crops may rise in one region as it is falling in another due to an earlier harvest, he said.

"We can imagine interventions that bridge these gaps -- between the same household over time and between markets in different locations -- could serve as promising solutions," he said.

Indeed, a growing amount of literature suggests that interventions such as savings, credit, migration subsidies and infrastructure are effective at reducing seasonal poverty, he added.

However, scaling these interventions is not always straightforward. The root causes of seasonal poverty vary from location to location and the cost of sustaining different interventions depends on contextual factors, said Mobarak.

Equilibrium market adjustments or political reactions can enhance or undermine the benefits of these interventions, he added.



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