

## Allocate more funds for agriculture, education

FROM PAGE B1

The allotment is much lower than in public administration, education and IT and debt repayment.

The amount for the health sector should be at least 10 percent of the upcoming budget, said SUPRO.

The NGO network also criticised the government for providing pensions to former public officials from the fund earmarked for social safety net programmes.

In the current fiscal year, 54.6 percent of the Tk 8,482 crore set aside for safety net projects is going to the retired public servants and their beneficiaries.

There should be a separate allocation for the pensioners and their beneficiaries, and the allocation earmarked for the safety net projects should go to the intended beneficiaries, SUPRO said.

SUPRO prepared the recommendations after organising pre-budget discussions in 45 districts across the country, to provide input to the next budget to be announced in June this year.

It said the district budget should reflect the hopes of the people; otherwise, it will just remain as an outline for spending.

A draft of the budget should be made public at least three months before it is passed, so people can give their opinion, the organisation said, adding that the budget should be prepared by the elected representatives, not by bureaucrats.

Speaking at the event, Lawmaker Fazle Hossain Badshah said lawmakers have little role in formulating the budget. "The decision of the finance minis-

ter is final."

He demanded increased allocation for the agriculture sector from the current budget; an agriculture court should also be introduced at upazila levels so farmers can lodge complaints against any fraudulent practices.

The lawmaker also said agriculture insurance as well as market-based cooperatives should be introduced.

Badshah, also general secretary of Workers' Party, called for narrowing down the wealth disparity by curbing corruption through strengthening the Anti-Corruption Commission.

"We can't get rid of wealth inequality by raising taxes, as developed countries have tried the same tool but it did not work," he said.

Mir Showkat Ali Badsha, vice-president of the parliamentary caucus committee on budget and planning, said it would take lawmakers a lot of time to formulate the national budget.

"It is true that if we can contribute significantly to formulating the budget, it will reflect the aspirations of the people. But we have to be realistic. There is the question of the qualification and expertise of the lawmakers," he said.

He however supported SUPRO's demand to exclude the allocation for the pensioners from the allocation for the social safety net.

Lawmaker Selina Begum Sapna said there is a need to put further emphasis on the empowerment of women.

Alison Subrata Baroi, director of SUPRO, moderated the discussion, which was attended by SUPRO secretaries from 40 districts.