



SAMN
South Asia Micro-entrepreneurs Network

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

FINANCIAL INCLUSION &
MICROFINANCE UPDATES
FROM THE REGION

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MembersBangladesh

Bangladesh Bank hands over digital bank's Lol to Nagad

The Bangladesh Bank on Wednesday handed over a letter of intent to Nagad Digital Bank Ltd for launching a full-fledged digital bank, said a press release

BB governor Abdur Rouf Talukdar handed over the Lol to Nagad Ltd founder and managing director Tanvir A Mishuk at the former's office in the capital Dhaka on the day.

BB deputy governor Abu Farah Md Nasser, BB banking regulation and policy department director Mohammad Shahriar Siddiqui, BRPD additional director Md Monirul Islam and Nagad Ltd executive director Niaz Morshed Elite, among others, were present.

Tanvir A Mishuk said, 'Today, we have received approval from the Bangladesh Bank to establish the country's first digital bank.'

Read more at: <https://www.newagebd.net/article/215912/bangladesh-bank-hands-over-digital-banks-loi-to-nagad>

City Bank, Meghna Bank ink deal for digital transactions

City Bank and Meghna Bank recently signed an agreement to enable digital transactions between Citytouch App and MeghnaPay Wallet at City Bank Head Office.

Under this agreement, Citytouch customers will be able to avail fund transfer service to MeghnaPay Wallet from Citytouch and vice-versa.

On top of that, MeghnaPay customers will have the ability to do 'add money' from American Express, MasterCard and VISA cards using City Bank Payment Gateway to their MeghnaPay accounts.

Mashrur Arefin, managing director & CEO of City Bank, and Sohail RK Hussain, managing director & CEO of Meghna Bank, signed the agreement on behalf of their respective Banks.

Read more at: <https://www.dhakatribune.com/business/banks/328353/city-bank-meghna-bank-ink-deal-for-digital>

BIBM Honors BRAC Bank's Sustainability Initiatives

BRAC Bank was honoured by the Bangladesh Institute of Bank Management (BIBM) for its exemplary contributions to sustainable banking in 2022.

The annual event by BIBM acknowledges top sustainable banks and financial institutions that have showcased extraordinary performance in areas like sustainable financing, environmental protection, social transformation, climate change, and their contributions to the sustainable development goals (SDGs).

Md. Sabbir Hossain, BRAC Bank's deputy managing director and chief operating officer, received the award at the annual sustainable banking & finance conference held in Dhaka on September 30.

The occasion was graced by notable personalities including former governor of Bangladesh Bank Fazle Kabir, Secretary of Economic Relations Division Sharifa Khan, and BIBM's Dr. Shah Md. Ahsan Habib.

Reflecting on the recognition, Md. Sabbir Hossain expressed: "We are honored to have been recognized by BIBM. This prestigious recognition will inspire us to expand our sustainability initiatives further. Our values-based business model, centered around governance, transparency, ethics, and compliance, has laid the strong foundation to excel in green financing, sustainable CMSME and agriculture financing, and socially responsible initiatives."

Read more at: <https://www.dhakatribune.com/business/banks/328075/bibm-honours-brac-bank%E2%80%99s-sustainability>

India

Google Plans to Join India's BFSI to Fuel Financial Digital Journey

Google has announced a slew of new efforts for India, partnering with Indian firms across banking, finance, and cyber safety organizations and supporting national efforts like Bhashini and ONDC at its annual flagship event, 'Google for India'.

It also announced its plans to manufacture Pixel smartphones in India, strengthening its commitment to bringing the best hardware and underlying built-in software capabilities to people across the country.

This partnership in India's digital financial journey encompasses AI integration, SME solutions, enhancing online safety, fostering local collaborations, and more. Google Pay's introduction in response to the government's invitation strengthened financial inclusion.

Read more at: <https://ibsintelligence.com/ibsi-news/google-plans-to-join-indias-bfsi-to-fuel-financial-digital-journey/>

AISECT's Financial Inclusion Division Partners with Major Banks Including SBI

AISECT Financial Inclusion, recognized as industry leaders in driving financial empowerment, have strategically partnered with major banks including State Bank of India, Bank of India, Punjab National Bank, Central Bank, and Canara Bank. Through this partnership, a total of new 666 SBI banking kiosks have been established, each one placed to strategically provide accessible banking services to underserved regions across India.

With an extensive network featuring over 3200 SBI banking kiosks and a remarkable total of 7000 banking kiosks nationwide, AISECT Financial Inclusion remains at the forefront of bridging the financial divide. The recent expansion of SBI's banking kiosks reinforces AISECT FI's unwavering commitment to empowering every corner of India with easy access to crucial banking services.

Read more at: <https://www.apnnews.com/aisects-financial-inclusion-division-partners-with-major-banks-including-sbi/>

Pakistan

MoU Signed: Mobilink Bank to Extend Financial Services to HRSG Employees

Mobilink Bank here on Monday signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with HRSG, a globally renowned service provider.

This collaborative agreement strives to extend financial services to HRSG employees, showcasing the Bank's dedication to improving the economic well-being of these individuals and supporting their financial aspirations. This partnership also highlights Mobilink Bank's broader commitment to working with organizations across Pakistan to contribute to the nation's economic growth. By fostering strategic partnerships with like-minded entities, the Bank actively participates in the global initiative to strengthen Pakistan's economic standing.

Mobilink Bank is part of the VEON Group, a global digital operator that provides converged connectivity and online services across seven countries. As part of its digital operator strategy, the VEON is transforming people's lives by creating opportunities for increased digital inclusion and by driving economic growth across countries that are home to more than 8% of the world's population.

Read more at: <https://www.brecorder.com/news/40270767/mou-signed-mobilink-bank-to-extend-financial-services-to-hrsg-employees>

'SadaBiz users able to receive payments via Apple Pay, Google Pay'

SadaPay, the fintech that launched a business account (SadaBiz) tailored for freelancers earlier this year, has announced that SadaBiz users will now be able to receive payments via Apple Pay and Google Pay.

SadaPay also announced that SadaBiz will accept payments via Google Pay, which is on a similar trajectory in terms of user adoption globally.

SadaPay has stepped in to address the gap left by international payment companies, which have long ignored the Pakistani market. Taken together, SadaPay has connected Pakistani freelancers with 700 million plus devices worldwide having Apple Pay and Google Pay access.

Read more at: <https://www.brecorder.com/news/40269009/sadabiz-users-able-to-receive-payments-via-apple-pay-google-pay>

The State Bank of Pakistan Awards In-Principle Approval to 5 Digital Retail Banks

The State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) awarded in-principle approval (IPA) to five digital retail banks including HugoBank Limited, KT Bank Pakistan Limited, Mashreq Bank Pakistan Limited, Raqami Islamic Digital Bank Limited and Telenor Microfinance Bank Limited.

"These entities are now ready to enter the next phase, which is preparing themselves for the launch of the pilot project. The SBP will work closely with each one of them to support their successful launch and ultimately towards

full operations," said SBP Governor Jameel Ahmed while addressing a ceremony on Wednesday. Ahmad said digital banking promises revolutionizing the way for customers to access financial services.

Read more at: <https://www.brecorder.com/news/40264192>

Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka drafts law for Micro Finance and Loan Regulation Authority

Sri Lanka's cabinet of ministers have given approval to publish a draft law on Micro-Finance and Loan Regulation Authority, a government statement said.

An existing Micro-finance and Loan Regulation Act No. 6 of 2016 is to be repealed. The attorney general has cleared the draft bills for Micro-Finance and Loan Regulation Authority.

Cabinet has given approval for the President as Finance Minister to gazette the bill and present it to parliament.

Read more at: <https://economynext.com/sri-lanka-drafts-law-for-micro-finance-and-loan-regulation-authority-134980/>

The Central Bank of Sri Lanka Further Reduces Policy Interest Rates

The first monetary policy review by the Monetary Policy Board under the Central Bank of Sri Lanka Act, No. 16 of 2023 (CBA) was held on 04 October 2023. In this review, the Board decided to reduce the Standing Deposit Facility Rate (SDFR) and the Standing Lending Facility Rate (SLFR) of the Central Bank by 100 basis points (bps) to 10.00 per cent and 11.00 per cent, respectively. The Board arrived at this decision following a careful analysis of the current and expected developments, including low inflation and benign inflation expectations in the domestic economy, with the aim of stabilizing inflation at the envisaged 5 per cent level in the medium term, thereby enabling the economy to reach its potential growth. The Board expects that this reduction of policy interest rates, along with the significant easing of monetary policy effected previously, including the directions issued by the Central Bank to licensed banks to reduce interest rates, and the significant reduction of risk premia on government securities, would accelerate the downward adjustment in market interest rates, particularly lending rates, in the period ahead. The financial sector is urged to pass on the benefits of the continued easing of monetary conditions to individuals and businesses adequately and swiftly, thereby supporting the envisaged rebound of the economy.

Read more at: <https://www.cbsl.gov.lk/en/news/monetary-policy-review-no-7-of-2023>

Updates from the SAMN

SAMN Holds its First Ever International Conference in London in collaboration with Financial Inclusion Forum (FIF-UK) and SOAS

In collaboration with the Financial Inclusion Forum (FIF-UK) and the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), the South Asia Microfinance Network (SAMN) orchestrated a two-day conference titled "Financial Inclusion in the Post Pandemic Era: Is Digitization and Managing Climate Change a Pathway to Success?". This assembly convened financial inclusion practitioners, regulators, and investors from across the world, facilitating a deliberate exchange of ideas and insights.

The conference provided a structured platform for essential stakeholders operating at local, regional, and global levels to engage in discourse. Participants seized the occasion to deliberate over challenges prevalent in the region, sharing experiences pertaining to initiatives designed to confront these challenges. The forum allowed for a knowledge-sharing mechanism, enabling the pooling of expertise from diverse countries. Through this collaboration, innovative products and technological solutions were jointly conceived, geared towards minimizing costs and enhancing affordability of financial services for the economically marginalized despite the persistent depth of poverty.

The conference was built around following tracks:

- Support from governments donors, especially FCDO to the civil society and private sector in increasing financial inclusion through Microfinance Organizations in South Asia.
- Examination of the pandemic's influence on the financial inclusion ecosystem, impacting both Microfinance Organizations and their clientele.
- Elephant in the room Climate Change.
- Strategies for mobilizing private capital to support financial inclusion endeavors.

The conference spotlighted and addressed the intricate challenges, innovative solutions, and opportunities within South Asia's financial inclusion landscape, specifically targeting the lower-income demographic. The overarching objective was to foster regional dialogue and amplify investment inflows into the region. Furthermore, the event explored the transformative role enhanced access to finance can play in unlocking the economic potential of the region. This encompasses contributions to job creation, with a deliberate emphasis on nurturing entrepreneurship among youth and women. The conference served as a platform for prominent thought leaders hailing from South Asia and beyond, fostering interaction and assessment of prospects for regional integration and mutual learning within the financial inclusion realm.

Eminent speakers representing preeminent microfinance organizations and the development sector engaged in enriching discussions across various sessions, sharing their strategies and grappling with a diverse array of challenges. The event witnessed participation from a diverse array of stakeholders, including Technical Assistance providers, Networks, Researchers, Microfinance Providers, Technology institutions, Regulators, Policy makers, Apex bodies, Donors, Investors, Banking professionals, Telecom entities, and Insurance firms.

The conference culminated with addresses from distinguished figures, including Mr. Bob Annibale, Senior Fellow at SOAS University of London, and Ms. Ase Bergstedt, Chairperson of the Financial Inclusion Forum (FIF-UK). In the closing session, Syed Mohsin Ahmed, Honorary CEO of SAMN, warmly expressed gratitude for the invaluable support from FIF and SOAS. He extended appreciation to all speakers, dignitaries, participants, and event sponsors, namely CreditAccess Grameen, IIFL Samastha Finance, U Microfinance Bank, Satya MicroCapital, Muthoot MicroFin, and Future Life Investments, for their gracious contributions.

Pakistan Microfinance Network (PMN) hold its 7th Edition of the Annual Microfinance Conference (AMC) titled, 'Towards Sustainable & Inclusive Finance; Microfinance @ Center'

Microfinance has emerged as a linchpin in advancing financial inclusion and addressing socio-economic challenges, making it a crucial driver of sustainable development. The recent AMC-7 conference, held on October 18th and 19th, 2023, at Serena Hotel Islamabad, convened thought leaders, industry experts, and policymakers to explore innovative pathways for embedding microfinance at the core of initiatives aligned with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Conference Overview:

The conference theme, "Towards Sustainable & Inclusive Finance; Microfinance @ Center," underscored the diverse dimensions of microfinance's impact. Distinguished speakers, including Mr. Kabeer Naqvi and Mr. Najy Benhassine, delved into critical aspects such as climate change adaptation, ESG principles, responsible finance, food security, gender equality, digital finance, education, and low-cost housing finance.

Objectives:

AMC-7 aimed to spotlight opportunities and challenges within the microfinance sector, particularly in the context of a post-pandemic world and ongoing rehabilitation efforts. The conference sought to unite stakeholders in addressing climate-related vulnerabilities, promoting responsible finance, enhancing food security, empowering women, advancing digital finance, supporting education, and providing low-cost housing solutions.

Microfinance's Holistic Impact:

Microfinance, recognized as a transformative instrument for development, extends its reach to marginalized segments of society, including rural, semi-urban, women, disabled, transgender, and economically disadvantaged populations. By offering tailored financial solutions, microfinance bridges gaps left by traditional institutions, positioning itself as a powerful tool against poverty and contributing to unbiased socio-economic progress.

Conference Highlights:

Keynote addresses by industry leaders and international representatives, expert panels, best practice showcases, an innovation expo, networking opportunities, and policy dialogues enriched the conference. The event brought together microfinance practitioners, government representatives, researchers, impact investors, climate change experts, gender equality advocates, education and housing professionals, and digital finance pioneers.

Target Audience:

AMC-7 welcomed a diverse array of stakeholders, including microfinance practitioners, government officials, researchers, international organizations, impact investors, climate change and sustainability experts, gender equality

advocates, education and housing professionals, commercial banks, insurance companies, and digital finance pioneers.

Conclusion:

The conference aimed to create a collaborative ecosystem for sustainable development, economic empowerment, and positive social and environmental outcomes. By emphasizing the role of microfinance in these efforts, AMC-7 sought to propel Pakistan toward a more inclusive, resilient, and prosperous future. The event provided a platform for meaningful discourse, knowledge exchange, and collaboration, reaffirming microfinance's central role in driving holistic socio-economic advancement.

Pakistan Fintech Network signed a partnership with Dubai World Trade Centre (DWTC) for the Fintech Surge 2023 "WHERE FINANCE + TECHNOLOGY CREATE LIMITLESS OPPORTUNITIES"

Pakistan Fintech Network signed a partnership with Dubai World Trade Centre (DWTC) for the Fintech Surge 2023 "WHERE FINANCE + TECHNOLOGY CREATE LIMITLESS OPPORTUNITIES" that was held on 15-18 of October 2023 in Dubai Harbour.

Fintech Surge is the premier hub for Fintech entrepreneurs, innovators, investors, regulators and institutions as they leverage the vast growth of PayTech, WealthTech, InsureTech and RegTech in the MENA region.

Taking place at the iconic Dubai Harbour and co-located with North Star, the largest dedicated startup event in the world, with 1000+ startup exhibitors and 700 VCs and Future Blockchain Summit, the only government back event will bring together the region's largest gathering of thought leaders, Blockchain projects, game-changing startups and powerful investors including more than 200 speakers and 1000+ investors who will converge for four days of networking and education centered around disruptive technologies of the future.

To bring best practices to Pakistan's fintech landscape through international collaboration with fintech associations around the world, aims to bring successful practices in Pakistan. PFN formed a collaboration with MENA fintech association & Dubai World Trade Centre (Fintech Surge 2023) where PFN created Pakistan Pavilion to promote Pakistan's startups to show case their product and services in the Middle east region.



In Focus

Innovative Gender Bond Series Uplifts Rural Women to Drive Climate Action in Asia

While women farmers are disproportionately affected by the adverse impacts of climate change compared with their male counterparts, they are also uniquely placed to promote meaningful change. Research shows that if all women smallholder farmers received equal access to productive resources, their farm yields would rise by 20 to 30 per cent, and 100 to 150 million people would no longer go hungry. Moreover, it is estimated that by improving the productivity of women smallholder farmers, we could reduce carbon emissions by up to 2 billion tons by 2050.

To unlock this potential, the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) and the United Nations Capital Development Fund (UNCDF) partnered with Impact Investment Exchange (IIX) to support rural women entrepreneurs across the region to access affordable and well-regulated financial services through the IIX Women's Livelihood Bond™ (WLB™) Series.

Read Full Article: <https://www.uncdf.org/article/8462/gender-bonds-driving-climate-action-asia>

Mastercard and FinTech Pemo team up to boost UAE's SME sector

Mastercard and Pemo, a UAE-based FinTech startup that supports businesses across the Middle East, North Africa and Pakistan (MENAP), have partnered to promote cashless, flexible expense management for small and medium-sized businesses (SMEs) in the UAE.

The partnership will provide Pemo Mastercard Corporate cardholders with access to a range of features that enable them to boost productivity, save on business and leisure expenses and unleash business growth. The program will also connect SME cardholders to over 150 merchant discounts through the Easy Saving Specials (ESS) platform, an SME-exclusive global redemption-based program with time-limited merchant offers redeemed at checkout.

"We are thrilled to partner with Mastercard, who shares our vision to promote cashless spend management solutions for businesses in the UAE. We are specifically geared and catered towards SMEs, and we are well aware of their pain points. For all too long, SMEs have faced challenges when it comes to keeping a tight rein on their finances and expense management processes," said Valerie Konde, Co-Founder of Pemo.

Combining digital and contactless payment technology, Pemo's physical and virtual corporate cards allow businesses to digitize and automate the spend management process, including one-click invoice payments and real-time cash flow monitoring for full visibility over spending habits.

"At Mastercard, we are dedicated to connecting businesses big and small with better ways to make payments and manage expenses. Our innovative payment solutions empower businesses with enhanced efficiency, transparency, and control. We are delighted to partner with Pemo as we continue to work towards our commitment of bringing 50 million micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) worldwide into the digital economy by 2025," said Gina Petersen-Skyrme, Vice President and Country Business Development Lead, UAE & Oman, Mastercard, Mastercard.

Symbiotics Unveils 2022 Impact Report: Promoting Sustainable Development Through Financial Inclusion

We are excited to share the release of Symbiotics second Impact Report. This report reaffirms their commitment to promote sustainable development in emerging and frontier economies by outlining the three-core pillar of its Impact Promise: a focus on emerging economies, responsible investments, and sustainable objectives.

The report shows how, in 2022, the company empowered 2.8 million individuals. Of these, 70% were women and nearly half came from rural areas. Through diverse financial offerings, we have improved lives and supported over 10 million jobs across various sectors, with a median loan amount of USD 2,700.

This publication also shows our commitment to aligning with the Sustainable Development Goals framework. Through measurable key performance indicators, we track and report on the sustainable objectives of each of our investments. From redirecting capital to underserved markets to integrating Environmental, Social, and Governance considerations in their investment process, we continue to set its high standards for responsible finance.

Dive deeper into Symbiotics journey and the insights from their latest report.

Read Full Report: <https://symbioticsgroup.com/impact-report-2022/>

About SAMN

The South Asian Micro-Entrepreneurs Network (SAMN) is a regional microfinance industry association working to enhance financial inclusion among low-income population in South Asia. SAMN achieves this by improving knowledge, business environment and capital flows for the microfinance industry. SAMN, through its members, who national networks from the countries of the region, is the representative and collective voice of the industry reaching more than 50 million low-income customers in the region.

SAMN was established in late 2008 with a vision to improve quality and scale of financial services among low-income population in the countries of South Asia. The early foundation of SAMN was laid by ACTED, a French INGO along with a number of regional and global microfinance stakeholders.

Today, SAMN membership consists of the leading national networks in six countries of the region representing over thousand microfinance providers and other industry players. The current SAMN members, each represented by Executive Head on the Board of Directors, are:

- **In Afghanistan:** Afghanistan Microfinance Association (AMA)
- **In Bangladesh:** Credit and Development Forum (CDF)
- **In India:** Microfinance Institutions Network (MFIN)
- **In Nepal:** Centre for Microfinance (CMF)
- **In Pakistan:** Pakistan Microfinance Network (PMN)
- **In Sri Lanka:** Lanka Microfinance Practitioner's Association (LMFPA)

