

YOUNG PEOPLE IGNITING TRANSFORMATION – YOUTH INNOVATION CHALLENGE 2020

A competition was launched jointly by The Daily Star and ActionAid Bangladesh in October 2020 and in the span of over a month, a large number of ideas have been submitted. Among them, five teams were chosen who presented their projects before an esteemed panel of experts and policy makers in a programme titled Young People Igniting Transformation which was held on November 21, 2020. The distinguished panellists made important observations and gave various recommendations on the respective projects to carry forward while focusing on the issue of sustainability and effective planning. Here we publish a summary of the discussion.



Farah Kabir,
Country Director,
ActionAid Bangladesh

ActionAid has been working in the field of the development of the youth for decades through its multiple programmes. ActionAid has dedicated programmes for youth development which includes leadership skills that encourages them to make contributions to society and solve problems in innovative ways.

The core belief of ActionAid has always been that young people are more than capable of achieving great things if they are provided with the right platform to express their ideas. We also believe that young people require continuous mentoring and support from government and non-government institutions to realise their dreams.

The focus of today's innovation challenge is: how can the youth navigate this pandemic-ridden world? The young people of our country in this backdrop must develop certain attributes such as critical thinking, problem-solving, leadership skills, and cooperation.

Today's challenge will be highlighting these attributes of the five teams who are going to be presenting their ideas in the competition. I really hope the proposed solution will be effective to address some of our social, political, environmental, and economical challenges in the country.



Nazmul Ahsan,
Manager-Young
People, ActionAid
Bangladesh

Our goal is to empower the youths of our country. This empowerment can only be achieved if they are provided proper platforms to share their innovative ideas and have the necessary tools to scale-up their ideas and bring them to fruition. "Young People Igniting Transformation - Youth Innovation Challenge 2020" aims to do just that. This project was initiated in collaboration with the Daily Star in May 2020 and consisted of two distinctive phases. The first phase was advocacy on the various issues of young people which ended in September 2020 and then we started the activation phase. The activation phase aims to provide a space for the young people to showcase their innovative ideas to everyone so that they can receive the necessary support from both the public and private sectors.

Since we launched this competition, we have received more than 170 submissions and from these submissions, a committee has chosen five finalists to present their ideas in today's event. The main objective of the challenge is to come to the realisation that these young people require both recognition and proper policy support to take their small initiatives to the next level. Furthermore, building up a connection with the private and public sector and financing is just as important.

The three winners will be picked at the end of the discussion.

Ideas



Ashreen Mridha,
Deshi Ballers

Deshi Ballers is primarily working in the field of women in sports with particular focus on basketball. Our work is divided into two pillars. Firstly, we try to develop the participation of women in basketball through youth camps, annual tournaments, and outreach programmes for girls. The other pillar consists of carrying out a lot of women empowerment activities which include advocating for girls' rights to participate in sports. We are also preparing senior athletes to become female coaches, mentors, and referees for the future.

Our big idea is to conduct sports parenting workshops which would help female athletes and their parents embrace sports as a positive tool for success. The objective of Deshi Ballers is to stand as a bridge between these female athletes and their parents so that they do not see each other as enemies but rather embrace sports together. Our target audience includes high school and college athletes aged between 15-25 years old who are active participants in sports and the parents of these athletes. We plan on conducting two workshops with the first one being directed towards the young female athletes and helping them attain mindfulness. The second workshop will be for the parents so that they can support their daughters' athletic career and build a positive home environment. The workshops are going to be held virtually due to the ongoing pandemic. We believe parental support is crucial for the participation and success of female athletes.



Md Momin Sarkar,
e-Krishi Clinic

e-Krishi is a non-profit organisation which is focused on providing a digital platform for crop disease management and agricultural services. We are made up of a team of agricultural background students and we dream of creating a smart agro management system for farmers via technology. We believe a sustainable agricultural system and organic farming can foster economic growth.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, we noticed that many farmers were unable to get proper information about crop cultivation. Furthermore, in Dhaka city, five lakh rooftops have space for rooftop farming and this can prove to be a potential source of income for many as well as being an outlet for recreation

Team name	
SakibNasir, Circular	Winner
AninditaAtoshi and OrobiBakhtiar, Prarombho	1st Runner up
Md MominSarkar, e-Krishi Clinic	2nd Runner up

among the city dwellers. This pandemic has had a negative impact on the employment sector. During this crisis, farming can be a great option for youths in search of jobs.

We have noticed that many youths have gotten involved in agriculture but many seem to lack proper knowledge about this sector. There is also no scope of internships for agricultural science students. This led to the beginning of our journey.

On the basis of demand and opportunity, on August 22, 2020, we started a pilot project called Tele Krishi Consultancy by e-Krishi Clinic which provides services and training programmes to students under our "connecting farmers" programme. Our mission is to create a smart agricultural system and provide knowledge transfer and skill development programmes.



Fardin Khan,
Tutors Home

We are aware that tuition services play a vital role in our country. Around 92 percent students avail home-tuition services in our country. For many students and bachelors, providing tuition services is an essential source of income. Unfortunately, there is a huge loophole present in the whole system. The core issues include lack of secure and reliable platforms for tuition services along with an imbalanced payment system. The search for the right tutor is also time-consuming.

The Tutors Home application aims to provide a secure, customisable, and convenient way of providing online and offline tuition. We have an equal basis payment system and provide a secure platform with NID registration and tracking.

Our target audience includes students from both rural and urban areas who are in search of tutors and tutors who are willing to provide academic and extracurricular tuition services.



Anindita Atoshi and Orobi Bakhtiar,
Prarombho

We often see a particular group of people ostracised from our society. Our "Hijra" or transgender community is a vulnerable group and they are often denied social, economic, and political rights because they are deemed different and cannot be included in categories.

Currently, there are over 100,000 of them marginalised and associated with illegal professions. Government initiatives such as job opportunities, medical care, or political inclusion have been unable to pull them out of the dark chasm of social stigma. The problem here is that although there are opportunities, aid, and scope, the transgender community faces major discrimination which stands in their way of entering the job market. As they are unable to contribute to the economy of the country, they are often labelled as a burden to our country.

Our organisation works towards raising awareness to remove the social stigmas against the transgender community. Prarombho is an organisation dedicated to the socio-economic development of the transgender community by training them in ready-made garments making and outsourcing for SMEs. This will generate employment and help them become

independent. In the future, we also plan on developing their computer skills and educating them following the national curriculum so that they can join their desired professions.



Sakib Nasir,
Circular

Circular is an early-stage social business start-up working in the plastic waste management space. We have been working on innovative models to recover and recycle plastic. Due to COVID-19, plastic consumption has risen. Our campaign idea is to create responsible disposal of protective gears used to prevent against COVID-19, along with other streams of plastics.

Bangladesh has recently become the fifth-largest contributor to ocean plastic pollution. Waste Concern stated that 92 percent of the plastic masks we have been using end up in the rivers. As a solution to the plastic pollution problem in Bangladesh, we have been raising awareness among people, going door-to-door to collect plastics from households, and ensuring responsible disposal and recycling of the plastics. Waste pickers are essential stakeholders in this process, and so we plan to educate them, build their capacity, and provide them with protective gears.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- » Ensure transparency of the financial aspect of businesses
- » Come up with business ideas and initiatives that are scalable and can reach the masses
- » Plan a sustainable revenue model
- » Conduct training programmes for soft skill development of youths
- » Conduct a full-fledged risk analysis and determine risk mitigation strategies during the planning phase of the business
- » Assist entrepreneurs in the legal processes of establishing a business

Panel Discussion



Dr Khondaker Golam Moazzem,
Research Director,
Centre for Policy
Dialogue (CPD)

It is difficult for young entrepreneurs to interact in the public process since contacting government offices is now a networking issue. The financial aspects of businesses should be kept transparent. They have to figure out how to finance their start-ups through commercial ventures. They also need to consider whether scaling up the business is possible. User and supplier linkage should be ensured.

Deshi Ballers' idea of developing young girls into athletes is excellent, but they should also help out the participants in terms of linkages. Tutors Home should create distinctions between rural and urban areas, due to there being differences in income structures. They could even consider providing free online lectures before exams. Prarombho must work on their marketing. Circular should keep in mind that people are used to the existing model of plastic management, and so they have to find a way to incentivise people to switch to their new management method.



Dr Atiur Rahman,
Professor,
Development Studies,
University of Dhaka

The results-based initiatives by our youths show that they care about solutions to grassroots issues. Deshi Ballers has a fantastic initiative of trying to connect directly with parents. Parents usually do not allow girls to play sports due to social stigma and so including parents in the process is a great idea. The fact that their initiative is for all ages is also excellent.

Each of the start-ups needs to think about their business solutions, but just starting the work is also essential, regardless of whether they achieve success or not.

e-Krishi clinic can do well if it can be connected with urban rooftop gardening. Due to the pandemic, many people are stuck at home and are looking for work. Therefore, this initiative can play a significant role in generating work for these people.

Prarombho is an excellent initiative in promoting transgender rights. Circular can be important for the economy, but there remain questions about financing. Business entrepreneurs must manage their initial capital from family or friends. Once the business kicks off and becomes more successful, many financing opportunities will open up from organisations like IPDC Finance or IDLC Finance Limited.

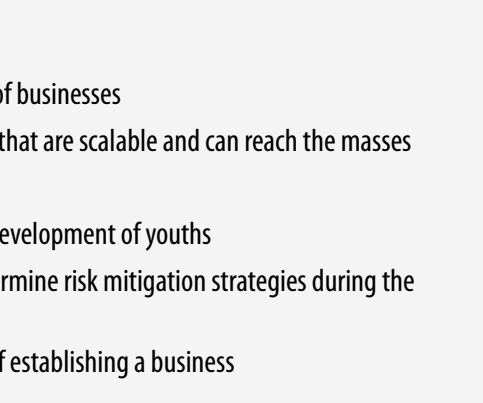


Fahim Ahmed,
President & CFO,
Pathao

Igniting transformation is a vast topic. You have to identify and tackle problems that exist at scale today. The solution to these problems has to be scalable. Since we are dealing with issues that affect the masses, we cannot create solutions for only a handful of people. The initial approach of a business is different from the subsequent scaling approach. We might opt for a community-based approach initially, but we have to gradually implement the solution nationwide. Deshi Ballers and Tutors Home should think about what kind of platform they can use to implement their initiatives across the country.

If a solution does not have an adequate financial foundation, it is usually not viable. Many different approaches can be explored, such as not-for-profits or social businesses, or commercial businesses. However, in all cases, initial funding is required. You need to carefully think about how much funding is necessary to scale up your business. The business also needs to be made viable so that it is continually growing.

You cannot operate these initiatives alone. You need to find other people who share



Tahsinah Ahmed,
Executive Director,
Underprivileged
Children's
Educational
Programmes (UCEP)
Bangladesh

Sustainability is the most crucial factor when it comes to revenue models. Entrepreneurs should hold training sessions for their team members so that they are aware of what it means to have a sustainable revenue model. Business veterans should act as mentors for youth entrepreneurs.

When establishing businesses, people struggle the most with soft skills. Market analysis, negotiation, communication, and marketing are skills that do not come naturally – they need to be developed and strengthened through training. The training programmes should also have proper assessment and accreditation. Accreditation can be from both the public and private sector.

Contact with regulatory bodies should be maintained. Entrepreneurs must figure out what legal and formal processes exist to register and run their businesses. Conducting a full-fledged risk analysis and determining risk mitigation strategies is essential during the planning phase of any business.

Young people tend to focus on social media marketing. However, social media is not the only marketing tool. There are many more traditional marketing tools which are equally effective. You must find out what age-old successful marketing strategies you can incorporate in your business model.

Prarombho's work is entirely focused on social inclusion, but all other initiatives should also work on including women and people who have been left behind.



Shuvashish Roy,
Digital Marketing
Manager, The Daily
Star

If we do not utilise our demographic dividend properly, it can turn into a demographic liability. We need to take action to engage our youths. The youths can come up with initiatives that can solve the issues we face today.

What you need to achieve innovation is divergent thinking. All innovation models have two common aspects: ideation and validation. Our youths can be expected to come up with these out-of-the-box ideas that will support innovation. For example, we learned about mindfulness from Deshi Ballers.



Sarah Kamal,
National President,
JCI Bangladesh

Social initiatives should include the government, businesses and civil society to make their businesses more relevant and successful. Collaborations with other sectors of society make businesses more meaningful and increase reach.

Even though all five of the start-ups might not achieve success, the fact that these initiatives were taken up is applause-worthy. I believe the youth of today are the future and light of tomorrow.



Ismat Jerin Khan,
Managing Director,
JERMAITZ LTD
and Director, SME
Foundation

We have noticed that agriculture has given us great support during this pandemic. We should focus on motivating the youths to work in the agricultural sector and create more relevant opportunities for them.

Mentorship or five-year incubation programmes should be established to nurture the ventures of the youths. We could also create a linkage between financiers and young entrepreneurs.

The entrepreneurs should be introduced to angel funds since many of the businesses are struggling to create a proper marketing plan. They should also be assisted in the legal processes of establishing a business. The innovation ideas must be given access to the marketplace as well.

Plastic waste management, which Circular is working on, can be scaled up to be a significant initiative where youth volunteers can be involved. The initiative can be merged with other organisations working on creating a more eco-friendly environment. Long-term planning is needed in this regard.



Robert Stoelman,
Project Manager,
Partnership for
a Tolerant and
Inclusive Bangladesh
(PTIB), United
Nations Development
Programme (UNDP)

At the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic we saw the social media space in Bangladesh being flooded with disinformation and propaganda. However, over time, right information has prevailed. In October 2020, we did not find any disinformation regarding Covid-19 in Bangladeshi social media. Young people can play a big role in countering such menace. We all need to discuss more and understand better social media ethics. Social media should be seen as a public good like streets and parks. We must know how to behave in this public space.



Nahim Razzaq,
MP, Member of
Parliamentary
Standing Committee,
Foreign Affairs and
Co-chair, UNYSAB
Trustee Board

This is really an inspiring initiative. The two most important things to focus on are mentorship and leadership. We have to provide proper mentorship to our brilliant young people to make them inspiring leaders of the future.

Youths are the driving force of new initiatives. The government also has to play the supporting role to make these initiatives successful. The government has many good policies for the young people but there is huge gap in implementing these policies properly. I have a feeling that the corporate sector in Bangladesh has not done enough to support new initiatives undertaken by the youth. Bangladesh is moving forward with a positive mindset. We all have to work together to keep up the momentum.

Farah Kabir

I want to congratulate all the participants and winners of this competition. All the ideas presented were brilliant. We, from ActionAid, will continue to support these ideas.

I urge the policy makers to include research and innovations in long-term policy and planning initiatives. I would also like to request both the public and private sectors to come forward to provide mentorship and support the young talents with their innovative enterprises.