

Start-ups that create employment

KAZI AKIB BIN ASAD

Employment, many assume, refers to job done by a person under the supervision of another. In all honesty, employment is but a relationship. It is a contract – an agreement – for exchanges of service and rewards.

In Bangladesh, the service industry has reached new heights in recent years. This industry doesn't produce goods or tangible items, but creates and provides services for all. One start-up that works to provide such services, and more, is BD Assistant.

"I was working as a volunteer for organisations in 2016, when I realised our country is Dhaka-centric. People move to Dhaka for employment or better standards of living. As I was born in a remote village in Rangpur, I was always looking for solutions for such issues. We started BD Assistant (Bangladesh Assistant) to assist local people with living facilities that were not available before," explains Abu Sayed Al Sagor, CEO of BD Assistant.

BD Assistant looks to help families with a digitalised web platform where services such as technicians, daily grocery and medicine delivery are available at a click. "Our aim is very clear. We want to be a digital assistant for every small family in every small city, especially those facing difficulties managing their daily necessary services," states Sagor. "Our vision is to work for the decentralisation



of opportunities and facilities across the country."

Likewise in rural areas of Bangladesh, the start-up iFarmer is working to improve the lives of those who put food on our tables. Co-founded by CEO Fahad Ifaz and COO Jamil M Akbar, iFarmer started as a project in 2018 from an idea to create an Uber for urban farming.

Later, the idea evolved to enable farmers to make the most of their agricultural businesses. Who would've imagined farmers to have direct access to financing

and investment opportunities? iFarmer breaks the chain of middlemen between farmers and consumers. In addition, with the use of technology and data, it empowers farmers to gain high-quality inputs for their land.

"We ensure secure investment options for urban middle-income populations. With that, we provide access to capital, advisory support and a better market for the farmers," says Tahmid Hasan, Head of Growth and Partnership.

It was a challenge for both the start-up and the farmers; iFarmer had to pitch to a technologically disadvantaged community, and the latter had to trust themselves into introducing new products. It is a success story now, with iFarmer even launching insurance options for the initiatives.

A similar noble initiative, to foster community development and generate employment, is carried out by Avijatrik. Leveraging the potential of tourism and the lack of job opportunities in rural Bangladesh, this start-up is an online community-based travel platform that empowers underdeveloped local communities.

"Bangladesh is a potential destination for eco-tourism with its diversified culture. But our rural economy is lagging behind with very few job opportunities. So, we designed a business model to benefit local communities with tourism as well as provide unique and authentic

experiences to travel enthusiasts," shares Nazmul Islam, CEO.

Avijatrik helps the local tourism entrepreneurs with their "community-based tourism", providing travellers with meaningful experiences and contributing to the preservation of culture and conservation of nature while bringing economic opportunities for sustainable livelihoods.

Nazmul adds, "A social enterprise faces many challenges in funding, marketing, and technology. Finding the perfect mentor is one of the biggest challenges. UNDP's Youth Co:Lab is the perfect platform for social enterprises, helping us with knowledge sharing within and beyond Bangladesh."

The start-ups unanimously agree on the pivotal role played by UNDP and Youth Co:Lab in their efforts. Introducing them with subject matter specialists, connecting the founders with international investor networks, and organising month-long mentorship programmes are how UNDP and Youth Co:Lab expedite the growth of the start-ups, creating sustainable impacts.

An extended version of this article is available online. Read it on The Daily Star website, or on SHOUT on Facebook and @shoutds on Instagram.

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TALK TO YOUR PROFESSORS

Not all of them are scary

MASHIAT LAMISA

In an all girl's public school in Dhaka, my class always had 90+ students and it was always difficult for the teachers to retain the attention of everyone. I can perhaps count the times I have had a proper conversation with teachers about anything outside the syllabus. Now, at a university in Hong Kong, I took classes by different types of professors from around the world, and my interaction with them has completely changed from what it used to be in Bangladesh.

Before I had declared a major, I was taking general requirements like Math and Physics. These were classes held in big auditoriums with hundreds of freshmen. I was a shy foreigner and would never interact in these classes, ending up never even going down to the professor and asking them questions if I had any.

In second year, I remember meeting my department head and talking to him about my aspirations as an engineer, and him spilling out stories about his university life. I was surprised that there could be such friendly, up close and personal conversations while being respectful to the professor. With this group of engineering professors, my batchmates and I have had game nights, pizza parties, and heated arguments about studies. While we are extremely professional during class hours, we can also joke around as long as it is appropriate and I think that's something that really motivated me to study bet-



ter and pay more attention in class.

If you are a high schooler both intimidated by and excited about how to build and foster relationships with your professors in university, I have a few tips for you.

ASK GOOD QUESTIONS

In both large and small classes, the best way to grab professors' attention is to ask them good questions - within and outside the curriculum. I think that really helped me stand out among a lot of students in a classroom.

BE PROFESSIONAL BUT ALSO FRIENDLY

Like any healthy relationship, boundaries are extremely

important especially in terms of approaching professors. I would recommend not asking about their personal lives if they don't bring it up themselves, but I would also recommend following up if they do mention anything about their personal lives to not seem ignorant and unempathetic.

UPDATE THEM ON YOUR WORK

This is a good way to not just improve your relationship with the professors but also to let them know you value their advice and remind them about opportunities suitable for you. I usually send them emails if I have any awards I won, or found a good research paper they might like.

I think the takeaway from this would be to remember that while there are so many variables about how your relationship with your teachers might be, it all does depend on you and them as people in general.

If you can't get through to a professor, that's okay; we are only human. Piggybacking on the same point about being human, it's also good to note that professors are super busy humans too and just asking them about their wellbeing might be a great way to start up a conversation that might lead to an amazing teacher-student relationship.

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