

harm to our country, increasingly in their roles as social entrepreneurs.

Even though NGOs like Brac and other community groups like the Grameen Bank are well recognised as massive social entrepreneurs, each with millions of stakeholders, there is a multitude of smaller initiatives throughout the country that are much lower profile and with smaller budgets, but that are doing equally important work. For example, since the 1990s, the Dhaka based organisation, Phulki, has been active in the protection of the rights of female migrant workers, predominantly those employed by the garments industry. Among its many accomplishments has been the development of community-based daycares for the children of working women. Parallel to its advocacy and social work, Phulki provides paid services such as monitoring services for the Fair Labour Association, and consulting for management of factory-based childcare services. It is safe to say that Phulki, as a lower profile organisation, has done well, certainly achieving the dual objectives of profit and social development that define a social enterprise.

However, there are countless other small social enterprises in Bangladesh that have not been able to grow as much as Brac, Grameen, or even Phulki. One commonly occurring constraint to their growth has been a lack of access to commercial sources of finance. Recognising social entrepreneurs as valuable partners in sustainable development, and aware of their financial needs, private organisations are, in turn, responding. One such organisation, Drishtipat -- a non-profit organisation of primarily expatriate Bangladeshis -- sponsors an annual program called the Drishtipat Challenge (http:// drishtipat.org/ dpchallenge) that aims to fund or supplement the funding of budding social entrepreneurs. The Challenge, soon to enter its second year, invites the general public to submit innovative proposals for social enterprises. After an initial screening, the successful proposals receive seed financing loans of up to $5,000. While it may seem a modest amount, small injections of funds like this are all that are needed to kick-start the next great idea.

Social enterprises are by no means a silver bullet for the myriad developmental challenges that a country may face. However, in Bangladesh, where the institutional framework is not robust enough to provide the necessary social services needed for balanced socio-economic growth, the power of the free market can be an important ally in the struggle for sustainable development, providing positive benefits to the rest of society through advocacy, training, education, empowerment, and conservation among other things. Our country cannot afford to turn down any help it can get.

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