ing regarding access to finance and speeding up regulatory reforms.

Recently, the president of BEI was invited as a social entrepreneur to attend the 8th Annual Global Philanthropy Forum Conference held in Washington D.C. The forum provided a platform where donors, social investors and emblematic agents of change from around the world gathered to strengthen and build cross-sector alliances necessary to resolve global challenges. 18 social entrepreneurs from all around the world attended the conference, where each presented a new approach to the concept of social entrepreneurship. The underlying theme of the forum was to encourage philanthropic organisations in engaging in social businesses. The concluding speech at the conference was given by Dr. Muhammad Yunus, who outlined his ideas and thoughts on social business and its effectiveness in addressing social problems.

Bangladesh Enterprise Institute (BEI) in April this year initiated a project on social entrepreneurship, "Bangladesh Social Enterprise Project," to identify and build innovative partnerships involving the private sector, public sector and NGOs in projects and programs which are commercially viable and directly benefit the poor in alleviating poverty and, at the same time, meet the development objectives of Bangladesh.

Through the course of the project BEI will be organising three workshops with the participation of members from the public sector, private sector and NGOs. These workshops will be essential in information and perspective sharing, identifying key partners and developing action plans for possible business initiatives. The workshops will be designed and moderated by experts on this evolving subject of social business and social entrepreneurship. The first in the series of workshops took place in April, with Mr. Dilip Barua, the minister of industries and Dr. Fazle Hasan Abed, founder and chairperson of Brac, as the chief guests on day one and day two of the workshop. The workshop identified the strengths and opportunities of companies in doing business with the poor, and ways to address the challenges and threats. In addition, it provided an opportunity to identify profitable cooperation with NGOs and the government, and bring to the forefront key gaps in the government's priority for development.

Youth organisations and programs can promote these efforts through a variety of incentives to young people, and encourage them to undertake social businesses and become entrepreneurs.

At the end of the project at least five private sector sponsored programs would be initiated, such as promoting business linkages through sub-contracting in specific industries, providing skills training in rural areas to promote job creation, management and supervisory training for women or expanding markets in the rural areas.

This initiative, we hope will serve to encourage and promote social entrepreneurship through partnerships involving the private sector, the public sector and NGOs; such partnerships can bring about a significant impact in alleviating poverty in the rural areas, creating jobs in the hundreds of thousands and arresting or at least slowing down the massive exodus from the villages to Dhaka and other urban centres in the country.

The key to these partnerships will be developing value chains that extend from Dhaka all the way to the villages. The many drawbacks and challenges that small businesses face when operating in isolation can only be overcome when they work as partners of large companies, specially in obtaining their help in producing components for them or in obtaining their assistance in reaching the market in urban centres or overseas. Product development, obtaining certification, meeting standards, etc., require more and more partnerships between big and small companies. This would not only contribute to private sector development but also help promote sustainable and socially balanced economic growth of the country.

Moreover, if Bangladesh is to face the biggest challenge confronting it, which is climate change and global warming, it must, on a top-priority basis, address the key challenge of creating environmentally friendly jobs in the rural areas and halt the endless flow of migrant workers to Dhaka, which is rapidly becoming an urban nightmare.

Social entrepreneurship, being a relatively new concept, is facing a lot of hurdles at the onset of its journey, but with time and proper initiatives this will prove to be a concept that will to a great extent help mitigate the social problems of the present materialistic world.

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