

KNOWLEDGE IS POWER:

Measuring knowledge to assess adaptive capacity

SALEEMUL HUQ and CASEY WILLIAMS

CLIMATE change and its effects – swollen seas, stronger storms, saltier soil – have already disrupted thousands of lives across Bangladesh. Preventing widespread and lasting damage remains a top priority, but significant changes to the country's climate and geography may be inevitable. Our ability to adapt to those changes – to ready ourselves for the darkest possibilities and respond to the deadliest catastrophes – will determine whether or not we can protect the health, dignity and prosperity of Bangladesh and its people in the coming decades.

When it comes to adapting to climate change, knowledge is power. If we understand how climate change will affect our communities, we can anticipate its effects, draw up plans to deal with it, and feel confident in our ability to carry those plans out. To be sure, things like money and technology are necessary weapons in the fight against climate change. But those things are worth very little if we don't know what dangers our money will need to dispatch or what problems our technology will have to solve. Knowledge lets us predict change. And when we can predict change, we can channel our energy, time, and resources into ensuring that that change makes our lives better, not worse.

Climate change is a complex and varied process, and many factors determine how well communities can adapt to its effects. Some of these factors, like geographic location and climatological vulnerability, are nearly impossible to alter. Others, like access to resources and

technology, can be improved, but only with much effort. Knowledge, however, is something we have considerable control over. Even when we can't swell our funding or invent new technologies, we can help people learn, give them access to information, and work with them to find opportunities to learn for themselves.

But what exactly is "knowledge"? In our view, knowledge is not the possession of raw facts and unfiltered data; rather, it's the ability to use information to solve specific problems. Knowledge is only powerful when we know how to apply it. And, in order to apply knowledge, we need to understand what effects our actions are likely to have, and we need to feel confident in our own ability to do good work. We think that, if a person or group has a comprehensive understanding of climate change and adaptation, they'll not only have the know-how needed to adapt, but they'll also have confidence in their ability to do so.

Since knowledge is so important for adaptation, we think there should be some way to measure it. So, we're designing a study to assess a person's knowledge of climate change and adaptation. We're developing a questionnaire and interview guide to gather information about six factors: (1) a respondent's access to information related to climate change, (2) their knowledge of basic climate change facts, (3) climate change's relevance to their lives, (4) their opportunities for studying adaptation, (5) their opportunities for learning by doing, and (6) they're ability to share their knowledge.

With that information, we'll give people a "knowledge score" on a scale from least comprehensive to

most comprehensive. Using that measurement as an indicator, we hope to get a rough idea of a person's ability to adapt – their "adaptive capacity." And, once we can compare knowledge scores across people and groups, we can figure out how to fill gaps in knowledge, share information between groups, and identify people who can serve as models and mentors for others. Doing so will allow us to build each other's adaptive capacity.

Climate change adaptation involves a huge range of activities, and knowledge doesn't give people everything they need to adapt. But improving people's understanding of climate change may help them focus on long-term solutions; invest in adaptation technologies; become more willing to learn about adaptation; innovate new solutions; and, in general, adopt a more proactive approach to dealing with climate change. Knowledge will not only help people anticipate change, but it will also give them the information and confidence needed to confront it.

Knowledge can be a slippery and elusive thing. Measuring it is difficult, and putting too much stock in a single "knowledge score" as an indicator of adaptive capacity would be unwise. But we believe that having even a rough measurement can help us better assess adaptive capacity, identify areas for future research, and give us a better sense of the projects and interventions that might help people in Bangladesh deal swiftly and effectively with the effects of climate change.

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Extreme poverty in the CHT context

SHAZIA OMAR

TO gaze upon a case study of redistribution of wealth in the wrong direction – from the poorest to the richest – one has only to drive through the hills of Bandarban. Hills that were once covered in a multitude of life-sustaining vegetation now bear privately-owned, commercially profitable teak trees or tobacco. These hills were previously cultivated by nomadic hill people through jhum. Jhum is a process that involves growing consumable vegetables (40-50 varieties) for a year and then burning all the plants on the hill and leaving it for five years to regenerate. The variety of greens ensured a range of micro nutrients for the people, and the regeneration process allowed the land to remain fertile. People and Mother Earth co-existed in harmony.

After independence, private settlers 'purchased' these hills and the flat stretches in between. (I don't know who they paid but it was certainly not Mother Earth nor the indigenous people who lived there.) These profiteers began growing teak and tobacco for quick economic returns. Of course, no consideration was given to the social or environmental impact of this endeavor. As it turns out, teak and tobacco do not allow for the biodiversity of multi-layered foliage that a natural forest allows.

The tribal people found fewer and fewer hills to do their jhum cultivation on and began replanting seeds on hills that had only regenerated for a year or two. The yield was naturally lower and the soil depleted. The hill people began to suffer from under-nutrition as the variety and quantity of their food began to dwindle. They began to retreat to more remote areas to survive.

Now a large portion of the tribal people are extremely poor. The government allowed their land to be grabbed by private individuals and provided no adequate compensation or skills to enable the people to find alternative livelihoods. This redistribution of wealth, from the poor to the rich, seems to be the pathetic yet popular trend in other parts of Bangladesh too.

Land grabbing is only one cause of extreme poverty in the hills. Another major problem is the lack of public services available here. The hospitals and schools are few and far between and difficult for many hill people to reach. Their homes are remote and the roads are inadequate. Even if they reach a hospital, most of them are meagerly staffed. Many hospitals here have no doctors on a permanent basis, only ones that visit weekly. These doctors, it turns out, often speak only Bengali, making it even more difficult for adivasis to access health services.

Those hill people who have some money to buy



PHOTO: ANURUP KANTI DAS

vegetable seeds etc and are able to speak to a community leader for permission to cultivate the few hills that still belong to the people, face several challenges. First of all, the hills they have access to are usually of poor soil quality. Secondly, little research has been done on which seeds will work best in these conditions. These hill people know little about the proper care needed to grow crops on these hills and rarely can get hold of an agricultural extension officer to help them. Finally, the markets are controlled by syndicates of Bengalis. They are denied easy access to these markets and they cannot negotiate for fair prices as language and cultural attitudes act as barriers.

Many of the hill people do receive government support in the form of VGF however, much of the rice meant for VGF is often sold off at subsidized rates at markets as the government finds it challenging to deliver the rice to more remote areas in the CHT. Widows allowance is given to women who lose their husbands, but divorced women or abandoned women receive no support though most of them must support their family alone, and are in effect female headed households for their entire lives, though this is a problem across the nation, not in the hills alone.

Finally, there are no economic opportunities for the people in the hills. There are hardly any factories, no manufacturing, only a few service related ventures and almost no jobs! I met at least five children on my short trip whose parents had worked hard to take them through class 10, but even after

that, there were no jobs for them to try for. What is the point of sending kids to school if there is nothing for them to do with their education? Adolescent girls are expected to look after younger children in the household, till they get married, and adolescent boys are expected to work as day laborers. So the intergenerational transfer of poverty continues.

When I asked the families who their role models were, they had none. When I asked whom they aspired to be like, they could not think of anyone. On further probing, I discovered that the most successful people they knew were the Members (local government officials). These poor have no social capital or networks in any other echelons of society. Their wants are minimal and their aspirations non-existent.

As citizens of Bangladesh, we can dream of a nation where people are treated equally, where everyone has access to skills and education and a means to earn a living. This dream is not far-fetched. Bangladesh is a leader in poverty innovation. We invented micro finance. We invented ORS. We have shown the world how to achieve high scores on social indicators, maternal mortality, family planning, women's empowerment. Now it is time for us to lead the way again. Our Finance Minister has promised in this year's budget speech, to eradicate extreme poverty by 2018. Let us build a fully inclusive nation that we can be proud of!

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The dumbing down of art

SHIFTING IMAGES



MILIA ALI

THERE was a time when one could visit a close friend in the evenings unannounced. That's no longer true. Indian TV serials have now gripped the attention of most households to the extent that weeknights are literally off limits for social interactions.

For quite some time I have been agonizing over the negative impact of the "mini cultural revolution of TV serials" in the lives of people in South Asia. Whatever one may think of these ersatz dramas, one must concede that they are the creations of fertile brains that possess the unfettered capacity for weaving the most preposterous tales of base human emotions: hate, lust, greed, jealousy, vengeance. Whether it's an obsessed mother-in-law plotting to separate her son from his wife or a thwarted lover conspiring to seek revenge, the intrigues are hatched with an air of nonchalance, creating the impression that malice and wickedness are a normal part of human behavior.

In my view tele-serials represent the lowest common denominator of entertainment or what some call "mass art". But the truth is, they have permeated deep into our national fabric with damaging consequences to our tradition and culture. They have even elbowed out live performances partly because in today's hectic life people prefer the convenience of viewing TV rather than making an arduous journey to a downtown theater. As for classic Television dramas and music performances — these cannot compete with the heady pleasure of watching hip-swinging females feigning obedience to the macho male with the "I will conquer all" look in his eyes. Consequently, "programs of substance" have retreated into oblivion.

I may be in danger of being accused of romanticizing the mostly mediocre TV productions of the pre-serial era. But I would like to remind readers of the contributions that these programs made in entertaining art lovers and educating viewers on their ethnic culture and heritage. Serial watching on the other hand has produced a cohort of couch potatoes replacing the erstwhile reflective and sometimes interactive TV audience. Human communications, too, have suffered since one cannot have a meaningful conversation with a serial-addict for a full 3-hour time slot each evening. An added problem is that non serial-addicts are at a social disadvantage in conversations at dinner parties since they cannot speculate on the hidden reasons for "Saraswati Chandra's amnesia" or express outrage at "Sakshi Goenka's unscrupulous character".

The proliferation of this kitsch art is clearly driven by the symbiotic relationship between entertainment and big business, since prime time serials generate enormous advertisement revenues. In the context of the art-business nexus I recall the cynical words of Rhett Butler in "Gone With The Wind": "what most people don't seem to realize is that there is just as much money to be made out of wreckage of a civilization as from rebuilding of one.....I am making my fortune out of the wreckage". The serial business is garnering commercial profits through the "wreckage" of art and culture.

Today TV soaps have become an immense industry, and are fast becoming what Marx termed as "opium of the people". The characters depicted with their flashy lifestyles are the gilded superstars of this age. True art, by contrast, has declined in status to the level of a pastime and that too for only those who are still interested in the pursuit of the aesthetics. History may not forgive us for allowing this to happen but all we can do now is ask: why did this transformation take place?

One reason may be that the world of soaps is extremely attractive because of its blatant display of intrigue and glitzy glamor. Propagators of true art pay very little attention to catering to the masses through exhibitionism, thus creating a distance between the artist and the audience. Again, for obvious as well as obscure reasons people love to immerse themselves in a fantasy world where bejeweled women decked in sequenced saris cook "dal and roti" in ornately decorated kitchens or the daring policewoman dons her mangalsutra and transforms into a "gharelu bahu" the moment she enters her home. A world where the "real" seamlessly merges with the "surreal" and viewers can escape from the harsh challenges of life.

Serials may offer people the opportunity to escape life's trials and tribulations but this temporary "fix" dulls perception, blunts consciousness and nurtures decadence! It could have long-term repercussions in social attitudes and behavior since with time we may start believing that the "serial characters" really exist and their actions are all kosher....

Advertisements that display dangerous acrobatics are required to warn viewers: "these acts are performed by experts/professionals, please don't try them...." Perhaps serial producers should also issue statutory warnings stipulating that "these acts are performed by fictional characters, please don't try them...." At least that would give audiences a crucial reality check!

The writer is a renowned Rabindra Sangeet exponent and a former employee of the World Bank.

BEETLE BAILEY by Mort Walker

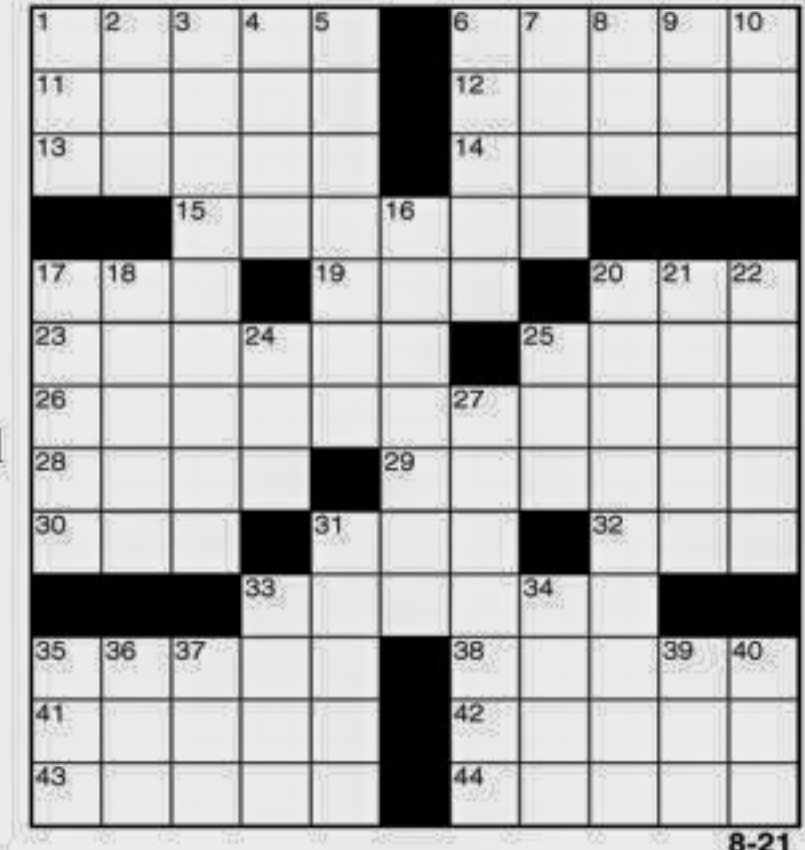


HENRY by Don Trachte



CROSSWORD by Thomas Joseph

- ACROSS
- DOWN
- 1 Inferno describer
 - 6 Milk buy
 - 11 Honolulu hello
 - 12 City-based
 - 13 Frugal fellow
 - 14 Bumbling
 - 15 Makes law
 - 17 Buddy
 - 19 Dove's cry
 - 20 "The Bells" writer
 - 23 Dress
 - 25 Waiting rewards
 - 26 Volcanic vent surrounds
 - 28 Wallet bills
 - 29 Phone feature
 - 30 "You bet!"
 - 31 Vigor
 - 32 Coral island
 - 33 Coped
 - 35 "Enigma Variations" composer
 - 38 Distrustful sort
 - 41 Bandage material
 - 42 Tipped
 - 43 Made a choice
 - 44 Cubicle fixtures
 - 1 Reservoir maker
 - 2 Boxing great
 - 3 Rocket parts
 - 4 Subse-quently
 - 5 Otologist's case
 - 6 South American capital
 - 7 Coffee dispensers
 - 8 Tad's dad
 - 9 Jay-Z's genre
 - 10 Blasting stuff
 - 16 Arm-twisted
 - 17 Enterprise doc
 - 18 In - (straight)
 - 20 They're found among needles
 - 21 Met show
 - 22 School paper
 - 24 Six-pt. scores
 - 25 Huck's pal
 - 27 New England resort
 - 31 Did a KP chore
 - 33 Rat's test
 - 34 Unit of force
 - 35 Sense of self
 - 36 Track trip
 - 37 Belly
 - 39 Pen fill
 - 40 Music buys



Yesterday's answer



CRYPTOQUOTE
QS HFS KVSP KL KGS LJSZH. HZP QGSZ QS EL OHJB KL KGS DSH, QGSKGSF VK VD KL DHVW LF KL QHKJG - QS HFS ELVZE OHJB UFLR QGSZJS QS JHRS. - YLGZ U. BSZZSPI

Yesterday's CRYPTOQUOTE:
THREE ARE THREE TYPES OF BASEBALL PLAYERS: THOSE WHO MAKE IT HAPPEN, THOSE WHO WATCH IT HAPPEN AND THOSE WHO WONDER WHAT HAPPENS. - TOMMY LASORDA

A XYDLBAAXR is LONGFELLOW
One letter stands for another. In this sample, A is used for the three L's, X for the two O's, etc. Single letters, apostrophes, the length and formation of the words are all hints. Each day the code letters are different.

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QUOTEABLE Quote

"Sometimes when you innovate, you make mistakes. It is best to admit them quickly, and get on with improving your other innovations."

Steve Jobs