SUSTAINABLE BUSINESSES FOR A SUSTAINABLE WORLD

TAUFIQUR RAHMAN MOLLICK

THE ratification of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals that will be the world's roadmap for development over the next 15 years is an important achievement in itself. The years of negotiations that it took to produce the 15,000 words and 69 development targets that constitute "The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development" -- the document that underpins the SDGs -- have culminated into a global consensus. But now comes the hard part.

The general success of the MDGs has led to some ambitious targets in this round of the development agenda. Indeed, achieving some, such as the goal to ensure "full and productive employment and decent work for all women and men, including for young people and persons with disabilities," will be difficult, to say the least.

Our attention must now turn towards the means to attain these goals. There can be no underestimating the enormity of the task we have set for ourselves. To put it in perspective, the international community is set to spend USD 2.5 trillion on development between now and 2030, while according to the UN, realising the SDGs will cost upwards of USD 170 trillion.

Of course, a large percentage of the balance will come from individual national budgets. But another force will play an increasingly important role in the development agenda. Unlike the MDGs, the current global goals have been set with active involvement of businesses and the private sector. In fact, for the first time, the role that businesses are expected to play has been built into the SDGs themselves, with goals targeting full employment, protection of labour rights and sustainable industrialisation.

Businesses are already an important engine of development, accounting for 60 percent of GDP, 80 percent of capital flows and 90 percent of jobs on average in the developing world. With growing recognition of the transformative power of businesses within development circles, the question now becomes whether businesses themselves can fully embrace this potential.

A growing body of evidence suggests that they already are. Over the last few decades, we have seen the evolution of an entirely new breed of business models, ones with far more social impact and far smaller environmental footprints. These 'social' businesses are being spurred by investors who have started seeking not just financial returns, but positive social and environmental impact as well, through what is being referred to as impact investment. To put the scale of impact investment in context, impact funds currently control an estimated USD 50 billion in assets, and before the decade is out, it is expected that this will grow to USD 500 billion.

The point of these social businesses – or social enterprises, whichever term is used – is straightforward and intuitive: the return on investment for a firm is not just the financial return, it includes the social and environmental returns as well. Like costs such as depreciation and amortisation, both positive and negative externalities must be tallied and reflected in the balance sheets and profit and loss statements. The prime motive is not just profit, but also transformation.

That this model can and does work has been proved many times over all across the world. In fact, some of the earliest examples of successful social enterprises can be found right here in Bangladesh.

Take the story of BRAC Dairy, a BRAC social enterprise, for example.

The germs of its inception can be traced back to 1984, when BRAC realised that between 15 to 20 percent of the clients of its Rural Development Programme were investing in livestock. Yet challenges such as poor breeds, extremely limited veterinary services and shortage of fodder were posing serious risks to these investments.

Since then, BRAC's animal husbandry training programme has trained thousands of paravets, and its Artificial Insemination programme has raised average milk production to six to seven litres per day per cow from less than a quarter of that amount. BRAC Dairy has established more than a hundred chilling centres across western Bangladesh, setting up a means for milk produced by small-scale dairy farmers to travel the urban centres, where fair prices for their honest labours could be ensured.

Today, BRAC Dairy collects around 120,000 litres of milk every day from around 54,000 marginal and homestead farmers, and markets its products around the country under its Aarong Dairy brand.

When the SDGs call for doubling "the agricultural productivity and incomes of small-scale food producers," increasing investment in "rural infrastructure, agricultural research and extension services" or halving per capita global food waste "including post-harvest losses," it calls for addressing the same challenges BRAC Dairy continues to tackle.

Obviously, this is only one way of addressing some of the challenges that lie in front of us. There are other challenges, and other ways of going about it. But the nature and scale of the challenges are such that we simply cannot afford not to utilise all the means available to us.

Fighting poverty, ending hunger, safeguarding the planet, ensuring justice, building global partnerships: these are global challenges, and they require global solutions. Businesses and the private sector can no longer skirt this responsibility. Just as they are a part of the problem, they must also be a part of the solution.

The writer is Director, BRAC Dairy and Food Enterprises.

China's Foray Into Aviation

The sky is the limit

NO OFFENC

NAHELA NOWSHIN

THE Commercial Aircraft Corp of China (Comac) rolled out its first domestically built large passenger aircraft on November 2. Called the Comac C919, the airliner will have to undergo tests before its first flight takes off next year.

Experts see the rollout as China's attempt to enter the booming global aviation industry and reduce dependence on Airbus and Boeing. Li Jiaxiang, the country's civil aviation chief, said, "China's air transport industry cannot completely rely on imports. A great nation must have its own large commercial aircraft."

Air&Space magazine reports that the airliner boasts the most up-to-date technology and even its engines are the same as the ones used in Airbus' and Boeing's latest airplanes. Comac claims that they have already received an impressive order of more than 500 aircrafts from around 20 companies.

This is undoubtedly a remarkable achievement for China. With the successful completion of the C919, the economic powerhouse continues to expand its high-end manufacturing sector and cut down its reliance on the production of cheap products as part of its economic restructuring. The Chinese government reportedly aims to make "strategic emerging industries" -- which include high-end equipment manufacturing -- account for 15 percent of the GDP by the year 2020. The C919 initiative, since its launch in 2008, has created 16 joint ventures in order to supply the different parts and systems for the airliner. For instance, Honeywell Aerospace, one of the world's largest manufacturers of aircraft engines and avionics, has two joint ventures in China with the aim to build the airliner's flight-control system, wheels and braking system. (Of course the C919 has had to rely on foreign companies as well). Ventures that were created specifically for the C919 are also catering to aircraft companies outside China.

Statistics show fast-growing markets for the aviation industry in the coming future and China is leading the pack in the projections. International Air Transport Association (IATA), the trade association for the world's airlines, released a 20-year passenger growth forecast. It revealed that China is set to overtake the US as the fastest-increasing market by 2034. According to the passenger forecast, the top five fastest-growing markets by 2034 will be: China (856 million new passengers), the US (559 million), India (266 million), Indonesia (183 million) and Brazil (170 million). In this regard, Comac can hope to capitalise on the rising passenger market with ease. With such a massive domestic market, Comac probably doesn't even have to eye the international market in order to make profit.

Although China has limited know-how in commercial aviation and nearly all of its experience lies within military aviation, the C919, which plans to enter airline service in 2018, could prove to be a much needed learning process that could boost China's confidence and ambitions in the airspace. China's Comac and Russia's United Aircraft Corp are already planning to work on a wide-body aircraft and are said to sign an accord by the end of this year (currently, Airbus and Boeing have a duopoly on the production of such aircrafts). According to Boeing estimates, in the next two decades there will be a need for more than 8,000 wide-body aircrafts worldwide, out of which demand in China alone will be around 1,500. Russia, with decades of experience in the aviation industry, can be a great partner in this regard. Furthermore, Russia and China plan to compete with Airbus and Boeing separately in the market for 100-seat-plus jetliners, the largest segment in the industry.

Especially in light of the development of the C919, the role of aviation within China's One Belt One Road (OBOR) strategy should not be overlooked as it probably won't be too long before aviation slowly enters the picture. Aviation will greatly help facilitate trade among nations in the OBOR region and boost the country's economic capacity. China plans to invest around 200 billion yuan ($32 billion) in civil aviation projects linked to OBOR, which is based on the land-based "Silk Road Economic Belt" (SREB) and ocean-going "Maritime Silk Road" (MSR). Just in the last two years, China built 15 new airports and expanded 28 existing ones. 24 of the 83 new air routes planned to be opened will also link cities within the country. President Xi Jinping admitted that aviation can be crucial in terms of speeding up the formation of OBOR as the infrastructure needed for aviation can be built faster and at a lower cost.

Despite concerns of associated risks, China shows no signs of stopping. China's foray into aviation is ambitious and holds enormous potential to generate economic, cultural and employment opportunities. By banking on the increasing profitability of the aerospace industry, China seems all set to expand its global footprint and geostrategic influence in the region.

The writer is a member of the editorial team, The Daily Star.

The Comac C919, the first plane produced by a Chinese government initiative to compete in the market for large passenger jetliners, being unveiled in Shanghai on November 2.

OF PENS AND MACHETES

When Silence Kills

C. RASHAAD SHABAB

WITHIN fifty seconds of the clock striking 8:49 am, on July 7, 2005 three bombs exploded at different points of the London underground network. At 9:47 am, another bomb was detonated aboard one of the capital's signature double-decker buses. Bus and tube service in central London was immediately suspended. But incredibly, buses within the heart of the capital resumed service by 4 pm that very day, and the tube was operational by the very next morning. From experience London had come to understand: if we allow ourselves to be terrified, we hand the terrorists their victory.

Compared to the Londoner, the Bangladeshi may appear to be at a disadvantage. Londoners can be brave because they are protected by the professionalism of the Metropolitan Police, the intelligence of Mi5 and the commitment of politicians who understand the imperative of eliminating terror from their streets. This is all in stark contrast to the Bangladeshi.

The Bangladeshi is faced with a home minister who is in denial over the existence of any terrorist threat, with other leaders busy pinning blame on their rivals instead of rooting out the real threat, and intelligence and police being unable to nab the masterminds.

Yet, it is precisely because of these obstacles that the Bangladeshi must speak out. Where the Londoner can be passive, and depend on the system to address the problem, the Bangladeshi must make the system first acknowledge that a problem even exists, and then work towards its resolution. If we fail in this, and allow our leaders to continue with their myopic political obfuscation, the cancer of terrorism will secure a foothold in our country, to disastrous consequence.

And no reasonable person can any longer deny the fact that terrorism has come to Bangladesh. Nothing less than the future of our nation depends on how we greet it. Will we be cowed by these machete-wielding spectres, rewarding their assaults against Bangladesh, her people, and her founding principles with the silence they demand? Or do we hold our own and skewer their bigotry with the very pens they so rightly fear?

Sadly, by and large, the response of Bangladesh's intelligentsia seems to have been the former (though there are a handful of exceptions, including this paper). This self-inflicted gag on our collective response to the sprouting of terrorism in our homeland is ill-advised.

When people murder to silence opposition, staying quiet may appear to be the sensible thing to do. But by muzzling ourselves with fear, we fulfil the terrorist's objectives. And we create an incentive for them to kill again, because we will have taught them that we are cowards who will be silenced by their machetes.

At this critical time, no Bangladeshi can be both silent and blameless. Every citizen who chooses selfish silence in the wake of these heinous crimes, not only withholds their service from their nation in its hour of need, but also increases the bounty on the heads of those who do dare to speak out for our continued, collective freedom. In this sorry state of affairs, even silence kills.

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QUOTABLE Quote

NGŨGĨ WA THIONG'O

A Grain Of Wheat

Do you know the biggest weapon unleashed by the enemy against them? It was not the gun. It was division among them. Why? Because a people united are stronger than the bomb.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

1 Unyielding
5 Church service
9 Mint output
10 Cuzco people
12 TV grouch
13 Flapjack topping
14 Employ
16 Courtroom oath
17 Seine, e.g.
18 Like some exercise
20 Market movements
22 Cubicle fixture
23 Cartoon dog
25 Racket
28 Faked a signature
32 Lunch counter cry
34 Swiss canton
35 Zodiac animal
36 Sophocles play
38 "Don't Cry for Me" singer
40 Mr. Scratch
41 Less well-done
42 Dancer Castle
43 Abound
44 Bully's target

DOWN

1 Encourage
2 Encourage
3 Genuine
4 Great numbers
5 Frugal fellow
6 Some amount of
7 Manuscript copier
8 Mecca men
9 Camera support
11 Science officer of TV
15 Piquant
19 Sneaker problem
21 Newborn's need
24 Inveigles
25 More tender
26 Tie
27 Look up to
29 Rain runoff site
30 Gofer's work
31 Lane of film
33 Violate a treaty, maybe
37 Give a hoot
39 Kickoff aid

YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

G	A	P	E			N	O	M	E	
A	L	A	M	O		O	P	A	R	T
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P	O	T		E	L	E	C	T	O	R
S	T	I	R	R	E	D		I	R	T
	T	A	H	O	E		B	A	S	S
		L	O	N		C	A	L		
A	B	C	S		G	A	L	A	S	
M	A	R		S	E	V	E	R	E	D
A	G	E	M	A	T	E		T	E	A
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BEETLE BAILEY by Mort Walker

BABY BLUES by Kirkman & Scott