



# ON HIGH ROAD TO PROGRESS

CLIMATE, WOMEN AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

SILVER JUBILEE SPECIAL

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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## The dark horse, not the black sheep

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Sustainable development goal 2, is a call to action for leaders in agriculture. As a green nation, Bangladesh has no reason, or excuse, not to step up and lead the global, intelligent effort to deliver this goal. An international consensus drives the change, so it is at best surprising and at worst a huge waste, that more young Bangladeshis, do not dream of being a 21st century farmer. It is a missed opportunity unless more of our engineers, technicians and business graduates to the challenge of commercialising and finding sustainable business models, for an industry where we have an unfair advantage. It is also a shame that our policy makers and partners, see small hold farmers

and their communities too simplistically through the lense of poverty and aid. Instead we could appreciate the massive potential to use technology to network and combine their best efforts to even greater effect, engaging them as leaders in their own right.

Bangladesh is a farming nation. We do not need to lose sight of this as we modernise, because the world needs modern agriculture. Agriculture is not just about bone busting field labour. Seed science, for example, has been in the hands of women for centuries, at village level and in our universities and biotech companies. They develop and transfer this knowledge from generation to generation. 48% of the workforce in Bangladesh is employed in agriculture, and the majority are women. As a farming nation, we are

well placed to teach the world about what this really means.

On these strong foundations, there is a lot of development needed. Bangladesh has one of the highest rates of undernutrition. Access to agricultural land is reducing and becoming less equal. Supply is reducing by 1% per annum. Stunted child growth remains at a stubborn 41%. Innovation in farming and agriculture will deliver almost immediate social impact which is why it is a hot sector for impact investment and international development aid. The domestic market is strong and growing. Therefore agriculture is one of few sectors which can be part of the Bangladesh development story on economic, social and environmental terms equally. Innovation in this sector can be summarised in three areas; genetics, pro-

cesses and automation.

Genetics does not always need to mean genetic modification. It means biodiversity. It means sustainable, quality, local inputs, such as seeds. It means very good animal welfare and breeding practices. Process design and development offers significant opportunities to learn from abroad to develop more effective and creative practices domestically so that we don't have to import as much. Automation, is something that Bangladesh needs to take very seriously, not least because agriculture is currently so labour intensive. Through too simplistic a view, this may be seen as just an opportunity to save costs. On the contrary,

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