

## Youth as social changemakers

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• **Stakeholder gap:** While many institution and organisations are keen on supporting social innovations, they often operate in silos; the lack of a cohesive platform to bring these resources together is missing.

• **Leadership and cultural gap:** The lack of empathetic role models and a cultural mindset that leans heavily towards conventional, risk-averse careers discourage youth to pursue social entrepreneurship. Young innovators in Bangladesh do not have the exposure, access, and opportunities to international ecosystems.

In order to fill these gaps in the ecosystem and allow innovations, entrepreneurs, and their enterprises to grow, programmes need to go beyond one-off events and evolve according to the needs of potential entrepreneurs. Scaling

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talent and innovations cannot become a three-month crash course. Growing early stage enterprises means providing individual attention to build foundation

and approaching growth through a holistic lens of support.

There is a dire need to revitalise the local ecosystem to inspire, incubate and celebrate social entrepreneurs who will become the changemakers of tomorrow—shifting policies and mindsets. In addition to frameworks of knowledge and skill-based support, growth requires collective effort. Cross-sector partnerships amongst the public, private and non-profit sectors, impact investors, philanthropic organisations and academia, can assist in boosting the arenas of opportunities for potential social innovators and entrepreneurs to enhance their skills and ideas.

To mobilise the ecosystem, it is necessary that we understand the role of key stakeholders. Each stakeholder possesses a plethora of knowledge and resources to contribute in enabling the entrepreneur through the murky terrains of growth, ensuring support from product development to investment.

**Leaders, not just entrepreneurs** Bangladesh's economic trajectory is taking its course towards becoming a middle-income country. Despite home-grown successes, the mantle of social progress has been dependent on government, donor-funded and international NGO-led projects in a major way. With the depletion of donor funds in the near future, it is necessary to create the understanding that the path of imported social entrepreneurs, donor funds and accelerator programmes is unsustainable.

Bangladesh stands on a tightrope between progress and threat, with hundreds of challenges emerging as a result of the effects of climate change. It is necessary to enable the next generation of leaders who devote their talents and skills to creating inclusive communities and addressing our most immediate vulnerabilities.

Approximately 62 percent of Bangladesh's population is under the age of 30, a population of over 100 million who hold the potential to create



social change. The idea behind equipping the 100 million should be to change systems of inequity. The entrepreneurial approach towards development provides a pathway to sustainability through the development of our own sources of income and the impact of home-grown local entrepreneurs. While the possibility exists, aspiring social entrepreneurs require access to customised support that would optimise their potential and address critical social problems. It is crucial to tap into the potential of the youth to unleash social impact—not only to help them develop into the leaders of tomorrow, but also to increase Bangladesh's participation in the global economy and lower dependency on unsustainable and standardised NGO solutions.

Social enterprises are for-profit businesses that address crucial challenges that society faces. It is not just a newer model towards inclusive growth that we need, but globally responsible leadership. These entrepreneurs of the future possess the potential to become leaders who

impact policy and role models. We need to nurture them as entrepreneurs who are driven by values and not just profits.

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The notion of "someone else will fix this" needs to change among the youth, they need to view social problems not as limits, but as opportunities to create a better way of life. Before we provide support in the form of funds, mentors, accelerators or incubators, we need to educate our children that it is unacceptable to tolerate social exclusion, that the presence of disparities and unemployment are issues that need immediate attention.

We need to instil in them the belief that ideas, solutions or services have the power to be transformative when they come from a place of empathy and of respect for others' identities, dignity and

rights to opportunity.

The next wave of developmental progress will ideally come from the creation of transformative leaders. This possibility lies in the innovators, disruptors, and rebels who question the status quo and drive positive social change, whose potential is not limited to their innovations, but extends to their capability of being and becoming empathetic individuals, who with their innovative solutions to social challenges are driven to create sustainable enterprises that ensure inclusion in Bangladesh.

Our efforts should be focussed on the creation of a culture of possibility, where ideas do not die in the silence of inaccessibility. A future where local entrepreneurs are celebrated role models in the society and generations follow their path of inclusive growth. An ecosystem that is organically built to support the best minds of the generation. It is not important to produce a bulk of social entrepreneurs, but it is important to ensure access to those who chose to become one. There is a transformative force behind empowering a handful of empathetic leaders termed as the "force multiplier" whose enterprises will go on to impact lives of millions locally and billions globally.

The stories that shape the context of social entrepreneurship in the developing world need remodelling. The incoherent and lonely narrative of the lost entrepreneur needs to be replaced by a narrative of possibility. Thus, it is necessary to ask now more than ever: Do we let an innovation, which can change the lives of millions, die just because it was born in Bangladesh?

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