



From left, Md Nazibul Islam Sharker, Bushra Adel, Abu Syed, Md Masudul Islam, Navil Mostafa, and Salman Sabbab.

PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA

BETTER SOLUTIONS FOR A BETTER CITY

In conversation with BRAC Urban Innovation Challenge winners

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A significant stage of an even more significant campaign saw its conclusion on May 7, 2017, when the winners of the BRAC Urban Innovation Challenge were announced. Bringing new ideas for the transportation, health, and employment sectors of the economy – teams AmarBike, Driver Mela, Bhumijo, Bloodman, Servicing Campus, and special mention Identity Inclusion – are now ready for the next stages of incubation and implementation.

Navil Mostafa from AmarBike, Md Masudul Islam from Bhumijo, Abu Syed from Servicing Campus, and Bushra Adel from Identity Inclusion, along with Salman Sabbab and Md Nazibul Islam Sharker of BRAC Social Innovation Lab, conversed with SHOUT to discuss how they envisioned a Dhaka city for the generations to come.

Dhaka is not new to the idea of app and location-based on-demand transportation services anymore. AmarBike, a tech-enabled rapid motorcycle transportation start-up, claims to be the country's first.

"We are the pioneers of the service in Dhaka, and we're still improving. In combating the transportation crisis, we've faced new challenges within our own venture, and so now we'll be focusing on how to make the process smoother and customer-oriented; we've already started working on developing our app," said

Navil Mostafa.

The idea for Servicing Campus was conceived by Abu Syed, resident of Rangpur, who established a servicing company to provide technical skills and training to high school and college drop-outs. He reminisced on a special incident which made him pursue this path, "I stumbled upon an old classmate working at a restaurant. I realised he had dropped out of college, and it stirred inside me – what could I do so that they can become self-dependent?"

Bhumijo, on the other hand, looks forward to public-private partnerships. While there are government-installed public and mobile toilets around the city, they are not all accessible, some downright unhygienic. As Masudul Islam explained, "We want private businesses, for example restaurants and offices, to partner up in order to let the public use their washroom. It is a popular concept in the developed world, and we see no reason why it can't be realised here when sanitation is a real issue."

Awarded "Special Mention" by the jury in the same category, Identity Inclusion focuses on creating a youth network of social workers to provide psychosocial services. "People with a past of mental health issues continue to face the stigma even after they go back to their normal lives. We not only help them overcome that by linking them up with possible internships and employment opportuni-

ties, but train them to further counsel the future users of our service," described Bushra Adel.

The winners agree that the primary ideas were very raw to begin with, and it was BRAC Social Innovation Lab's guidance and training that presented a real roadmap for success. Throughout the course of a few months, selected teams attended workshops and discussions before they presented their ideas to a panel of juries. The experience of the Urban Innovation Challenge was a huge addition to their individual learning curves.

"As an architect, it was easy for me to 'design' my idea. However, it were the workshops at BRAC Social Innovation Lab that taught me how to turn it into an entrepreneurial venture," shares Masudul, and Abu Syed joined in, saying, "It wasn't a cakewalk for us - a small team from Rangpur with big dreams. The trainers and coordinators at BRAC boosted our confidence at each step of the way, so now we can move forward to implementing the ideas."

Similarly, the crew from the Social Innovation Lab had nothing but praise and well wishes for the teams. "The ideas have come a long way and BRAC will continue to support them till they find investors and even beyond. Also, we keep contact with teams that haven't made it to the top five and plan to help them formulate their ideas as well," mentioned

Salman and Nazibul.

The other two teams, Driver Mela and Bloodman, were contacted over the phone. Driver Mela – Taifur Azam Mojumder, Abdul Monayem Asif, and Priyanka Chakraborty - is a team from Department of Marketing, University of Chittagong that helps drivers find employers and vice versa, whilst providing soft-skill training to the drivers. Team Bloodman – Sahariar Hasan Jisun, Mehedi Hasan Nayem, Nusrat Jahan Jitu, and Shadman Sadab – started with their database and mobile app for people who are seeking blood donors. The teams won accolades in the employment and health categories, respectively.

The ideas are currently in their incubation stage and later on will be presented to funding organisations for potential investments. The teams are excited for the next journey, and not only because the future looks better for the city. In their own words, "Every idea that has been presented in this Urban Innovation Challenge is a winner, because they all serve for the development of Dhaka."

To know more about the BRAC Urban Innovation Challenge, visit <http://uic.brac.net>

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