

Is innovation in education oversold?



INNOVATION and technology are seen as the solutions to the educational deprivation of millions of children in the developing world. How does the technology-based model of innovation relate to the real world of learners, teachers, schools, families and the communities that we live in?

Focusing on scaling up quality education, BRAC hosted an international conference titled "Frugal Innovation Forum 2017," on November 9-11, 2017 at BRAC's conference centre in Savar. Some 200 educationists and innovators from Bangladesh, Australia, India, Nepal and South Africa presented projects based on innovative solutions for improving quality in education.

Only 25 percent of the 5th grade children could read at minimum grade level in Bangladesh, which means three quarters could not quite read, write and do their sums after completing primary education. This was the finding of a rigorous sample survey under Primary Education Directorate auspices in 2013. The same survey in 2015 showed no improvement.

Yet students have to sit for four high-stake public examinations at grades 5, 8, 10 and 12 before tertiary education. Test-taking—model tests, mock tests, private coaching, memorising test guides, guessing test items—is the total concern of pupils, teachers and parents. Test papers are being leaked in advance and sold to examinees—a sign of desperation for high scores in the exams.

Teaching is the last occupational choice for university graduates in Bangladesh and many young teachers keep looking for ways to move out of it.

Meeting a necessary teacher-to-student ratio of no more than 30 students per primary school teacher, with enough learning hours in a school day, would require doubling the number of primary teachers in Bangladesh.

At secondary level, qualified and subject-trained teachers lack in core subjects such as languages, math, science and computer. For



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PHOTO: STAR

100 secondary schools, there are 50 Bangla, 57 English and 138 qualified teachers for all sciences and math, according to a 2015 survey. It is of course not just a matter of numbers.

There is no pre-service professional training or certification for school teaching. There is no career path for teachers; most school teachers begin their career as assistant teacher and retire as assistant teacher.

Two recent reports on the world education scene, the *Global Education Monitoring Report 2017/18* of UNESCO and the *2018 World Development Report* of the World Bank, focusing on education, draw attention to the realities in poor countries.

In 1,297 sample villages in rural India, 24 percent of the teachers were found to be absent in primary schools on unannounced visits.

High-stake tests on narrow measures lead to efforts to "game the system", which punish the marginalised, according to the UNESCO

report. India's National Crime Records Bureau reported 2,672 students committing suicide in 2015 due to failing exams.

Young students who were already disadvantaged by poverty, conflict, gender or disability reach adulthood without even the most basic life skills. "This learning crisis is a moral and economic crisis," says Jim Y Kim, President of the World Bank.

The innovations described or proposed in the conference concerned pedagogy: making teaching and learning more exciting and joyful; using digital technologies to help learners and teachers; and finding new ways of mobilising funding for education and using it better. Partnerships, decentralisation and devolution, accountability, and inspired and dedicated teachers figured in the discussion.

The promises of innovation and technology still beg the question how these are made to work in the public education system which has to serve the large majority

of children ensuring equity and acceptable quality.

Some of the ideas presented were: a greater role of the private sector in education; low-cost private schools; and even public funds provided for schools managed by entrepreneurs. The argument given is that the education task is too large for the government alone to handle. Moreover, greater diversity and choices must exist in services available.

A radical suggestion advocated by Dr James Tooley, professor of education policy at the University of Newcastle in UK, was to keep the government out of education and hand over schooling to the private sector. "The market gives the choice to parents, ensures best use of the resources, and eliminates corruption and waste of the public schools," argued the professor.

Tooley's aggressively utilitarian worldview seems to ignore the moral and ethical dimension of rights, obligations of the state and society, and the fact that the market has

not served the poor and the disadvantaged well. Nor have the public schools. But an absolute faith in "market fundamentalism" cannot be the magic bullet, however much one wishes for it.

The main conclusion of the lively exchange points to a pragmatic and practical approach, rather than a magic solution. As Mohammed Musa, executive director of BRAC, summed it up, "For education to be able to serve the future of our communities, we need to empower teachers, methodologies, practitioners and more importantly [change] mindsets... to solve real problems with simple, frugal solutions, that include the under-privileged communities of the present world."

Horace Mann (1796-1859), a visionary US educator, said, "A teacher who is attempting to teach without inspiring the pupil with a desire to learn is hammering on cold iron." Bill Gates, summing up ten years of experience with the Effective Teaching Project in large cities in the US supported by his foundation, recently said, "Over time, we realised that what made the most successful schools successful—large or small—were their teachers, their relationships with students, and their high expectations of students' achievement."

Turning to Bangladesh, a ten-year plan for a national initiative to bring in and keep talented young people in teaching is needed. This plan needs to have four key elements: (i) education should be a major area in the four-year general undergraduate degree; (ii) talented students should be recruited competitively with the incentive of stipends; (iii) a high-quality education course in a hundred degree colleges should be introduced and essential standards and teaching facilities ensured in these colleges; and (iv) a national teaching service corps should be established where the option of suitable position and attractive rewards for graduates of the new course is available.

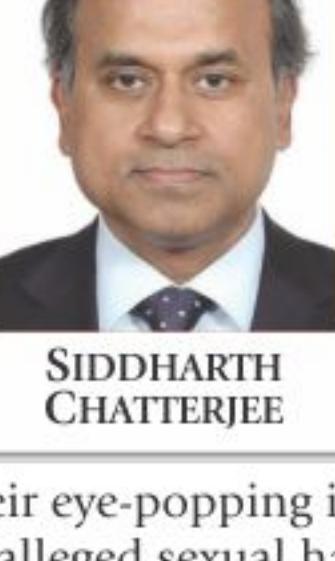
Thus, in 10 years, a nucleus of talented and inspired teachers can be created in each school. And the environment for innovations to work in these schools will be built.

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Manzoor Ahmed is professor emeritus at BRAC University.

The Weinstein effect

The global scourge of sexual harassment and exploitation



WHEN the United Nations Population Fund's (UNFPA) Goodwill Ambassador Ashley Judd, detailed an incident involving the Hollywood mogul Harvey Weinstein for *The New York Times* in their eye-popping investigation into decades of alleged sexual harassment, it came as a shock to many. So now we know.

What started as a Hollywood scandal featuring a powerful man and a string of young women whose lives he had the power to shape has turned into a global shockwave revealing a staggering scale of harassment, misogyny and violence.

Frankly, though, the fact that this problem is too big to sweep under the frayed edges of the world's carpet has come as a surprise to only half the population. The other half knows what it is to have to fend off inappropriate remarks and unwelcome advances while fearing that doing so may jeopardise their careers.

Consider this. One in three women has experienced sexual harassment, violence, assault or rape in their lifetime. These statistics have been out there for years, but it took the Weinstein story to bring them into public consciousness.

The United Nations Commission on the Status of Women estimates that 35 percent of women worldwide have experienced either physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence by a non-partner at some point in their lives, with some national studies suggesting the figure may be as high as 70 percent.

Around 120 million girls worldwide have experienced forced intercourse or other forced



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sexual acts with current or former husbands, partners or boyfriends being the most common perpetrators. Around 700 million women alive today were married as children. Of those women, more than one in three—or some 250 million—were married before the age of 15.

Misogyny is deeply ingrained across the world. It feeds into a sense of entitlement by men that legitimises sexual harassment and sometimes violence. In some parts of the developing world the culture of entitlement and gender inequality is so pervasive that women themselves buy into it. The World Bank Gender Data Portal shows that 76.3 percent of women in Mali and 92.1 percent in Guinea believe a man is justified in beating his wife if she goes out without telling him, neglects the children, refuses sex, burns the food or argues with him.

From Hollywood via the corridors of power in Westminster to New Delhi and

Nairobi, we face a gender inequality crisis on an epic scale. Sexual and gender-based exploitation, harassment and violence is a global issue. Sometimes the sheer size of a problem may engender a sense of hopelessness. Many people feel that climate change or poverty, for example, are just too big to solve; that the individual is powerless in the face of such scale and complexity.

But this is not the case here. There are things we can and must do. After all, while much of gender inequality is institutionalised in social, economic and political structures, it is individual men and boys who exploit, intimidate, harass and assault women and girls.

How?

There are five key frontiers for behaviour change.

The first is home. In too many families across the world boys are more valued than girls, and an attitude of "boys will be boys"

excuses much aggression, exploitation and injustice. Husbands must set an example of respect for their wives. Parents must raise their sons to value girls and to respect their rights and autonomy. A girl's body is her own. A boy has no right to comment on it or touch it uninvited, no matter what a girl might be wearing, or where she is.

The second front for action is education. Schools must teach respect and gender equality to both sexes. An organisation that does just this is No Means No Worldwide, which partners with local organisations in Kenya and Malawi to work in schools. Girls are taught assertiveness and boundary setting, which is backed up with physical self-defence training. But boys are a crucial part of the scheme too. Dramatic changes in boys' attitudes to girls and sex have been seen after only six sessions, and rape cases have fallen by 50 percent in some areas of Nairobi after the training.

The workplace is the third area for action. Victims of harassment or assault must be able to report their experiences without fear of retaliation on their careers. Workplace expectations and procedures must be clear and transparent, and action following a report of inappropriate behaviour must be equally clear and transparent. Impunity that has lingered too long, aided and abetted by patriarchy, must no longer prevail.

Fourth, when inappropriate behaviour becomes criminal behaviour, women must feel confident that reporting sexual crime will not add to their trauma. Police forces in many parts of the world have no special training in dealing with victims of sexual abuse and assault, and many do not take it seriously. They deserve to be treated with sensitivity and respect, and need to know that police will investigate their cases and arrest perpetrators.

Finally, justice must be unrelenting and exemplary, in pursuit of individuals who commit such acts, regardless of their rank or station.

Most survivors of sexual harassment, violence and exploitation are far from the glitz of Hollywood. Many are poor and ill-educated. Countless are growing up in cultures where their life chances are severely diminished simply by virtue of their gender and circumstance.

If the Weinstein story and its aftermath have shown us anything, it is that sexual exploitation and harassment is part of everyday experience for girls and women no matter where they live in the world.

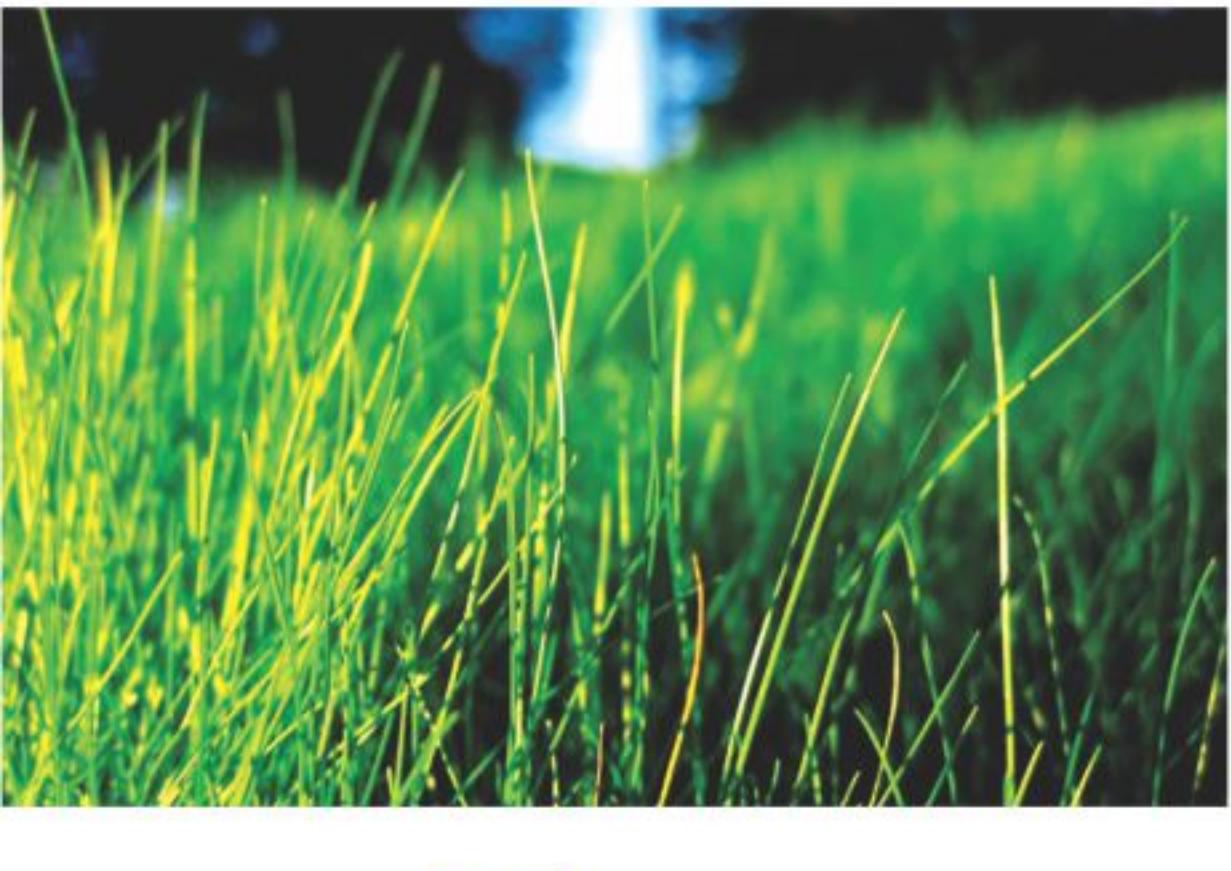
This has to stop and we as men have to be at the vanguard of change. #HeForShe

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Siddharth Chatterjee is the United Nations Resident Coordinator in Kenya.

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A WORD A DAY



FESCUCE
NOUN

Any of a number of narrow-leaved grasses

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

- High-stepping aids
- Herring's kin
- Dawn goddess
- Start for vision or port
- Decelerated
- Final, e.g.
- Pointers
- Heat setting
- Vaulted area
- Lively dances
- Chilled
- Lyric poem
- "The Duke"
- Dapper guy
- "Orinoco Flow" singer
- Last letters
- Art supporter
- Fling
- Spot
- Zen
- Chilled desserts
- Early primates
- Scruff
- Lebanon trees
- Beer mug
- Honey-comb shape
- Stylish
- Extinction
- Kuala Lumpur native
- Map dots
- Cager Shaquille
- Reggae's birthplace
- Easy dance
- Took a pleasure excursion
- Slays
- Gaggle group
- Bakery output
- More ticked off
- Minnesota team
- Packing need
- Bodily pouch

DOWN

- One of the Obama daughters
- Colorful flower
- Golf bag group
- Simple, in a way
- bien!"
- Blue



YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

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BEETLE BAILEY



BABY BLUES



BY MORT WALKER



BY KIRKMAN & SCOTT

