

ENTREPRENEURSHIP AS A KEY TO YOUTH EMPLOYMENT

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Role of education in shaping employees of the future



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Education today will fast become obsolete if it fails to address the challenges of creating 21st century competencies which range from advanced cognitive thinking and social and managerial skills to negotiating a technology driven world. A country like Bangladesh, which has to maintain high end growth in agriculture, manufacturing and services throughout the next several decades if it expects to be globally competitive and find a seat in the developed nations' club, has to substantially overhaul its faulty education system and redefine the role of education in creating talented and highly skilled human resources.

Public policy planners in the west believe that "the idea of a simple education followed by a single career, finishing with a single pension is over." Our education has followed this line of thinking for ages, denying learners a broader set of skills and knowledge that are essential to unlock their potentials. Our universities provide subject specialisation to students with the aim of turning them into experts in their chosen fields, without developing any expertise in other related fields. What is missing in our learners thus is a set of cross disciplinary skills that are essential in an age witnessing an escalating convergence of discipline and technology. Our education lacks vision and a clear focus on the competencies that are needed for us to prosper not simply within our borders but also in the global scene.

The government has recently initiated a conversation on what it calls the "Delta Plan 2100" and has already prepared a comprehensive draft that addresses key issues of our development needs, particularly in the water resources and agricultural sectors, and shows ways of materialising them. The plan discusses the challenges as well as opportunities that lie ahead, and provides details of how it can be implemented in its entirety within 2100. Some experts have described the plan

as ambitious in terms of the funding it would require, but admit that such a phase wise, doable plan is necessary for us to effectively manage climate change and other vulnerabilities. We also need something like the Delta Plan for our education which will be future focused and take into account the changing landscapes of both teaching-learning and the world of work. We have a reasonably up to date National Education Policy (2010) and a Strategic Plan for Higher Education 2018-2030 which spell out both policies and activities to take our higher education to the global level by 2030. Both however await implementation, as the government seems to be in no hurry to take the first steps, probably because with the current level of budgetary allocation to education, most of the recommenda-

tions the documents propose will be nearly impossible to implement.

The government however has committed to implement the global education goal of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030. The 2018 election manifesto of the Awami League also spelled out the party's (now government's) commitment to improve the quality of education and increase budgetary allocation to education. It is time therefore that the government began implementing the key recommendations of both the documents mentioned above.

Redefining the role of education in shaping employees of the future should begin now, not though in bits and pieces—as we are used to doing in most of our public projects—but in a holistic, concerted manner. A redefinition

will only be meaningful if the key following areas undergo a sea change: i) Funding; ii) Curriculum; iii) Focus; iv) Teacher recruitment; and v) Infrastructure

FUTURE OF WORK

If education has to prepare the right human resources for the future, it should first consider in how many ways this can be done. For that we have to develop a clear understanding of the diverse ways education becomes meaningful to an individual. Usually, when talking about future education we fall back on our single-track thinking and assume that the aim of that education will be to produce human resources ready for a globally competitive market. However, there is an ambiguity in defining the term human resources. Are these resources considered only in

terms of the market? Or are human resources market-neutral assets which can equally add value to our society, culture, politics and other areas of human engagement as well as to our economic and production-oriented activities?

The latter is obviously what the term should imply. The primary focus of education, present or future, should be to create perceptive and enlightened individuals with rich cognitive, analytical and aesthetic skills. Even humanities students should be able to pick up such soft skills as communication and networking. Liberal arts education, in fact, envisages an inter-disciplinary aptitude among learners which is not shaped with an eye to market demands. Human resources, among others, thus should include both humanities graduates who have the knowledge, values, skills and aptitude to survive on their own (or do well in the job market) and graduates from science, business and other practical fields who can bring a sense of culture and values to the workplace.

Future teachers, whose workplace will be the institutions of teaching and learning, will also see a quality shift in the way their work is done and will have to be responsive to changes that are inevitable in any education eco-system in the world. Education today, at least in our country, is failing to understand the future of work which will necessitate both radical curriculum changes and adjustments and quality shifts in teaching-learning practices for us to be really competitive. As we visualise the evolution of work, say, twenty years into the future, these are what some of the changes we will be greeted with.

- Greater automation, and the use of robotics in industry, communication, and specialised areas of work, leading to loss of many jobs, but creating many more that need highly skilled workers, along with a widespread automation anxiety among those who fail to acquire the necessary skills.



THE LIGHTHOUSE: ILLUSTRATION BY JUNGHOO LEE