

Stuart L. Hart

Iqbal Quadir on Sustainable Entrepreneurship: Getting to the Root of the Problem

The story of Iqbal Quadir shows that the apparent courage and stamina of an entrepreneur can be a consequence, at least partially, of insights gained from experience as well as a predisposition to understand—and act upon—root causes.

In a 2015 report on potential consumer markets in Bangladesh, Boston Consulting Group (BCG) seems to have concluded that the country might be at a crossroad: “To much of the outside world, Bangladesh remains synonymous with poverty. It is time to take a new look at this land of 160 million: this rapidly developing economy is one of the world’s next great growth markets for discretionary consumption.”¹

The report, as evidenced by its title, “Bangladesh: The Surging Consumer Market that Nobody Saw Coming,” finds this market somewhat unexpected. To emphasize the apparent emerging prosperity, it starts with the following:

You feel the energy soon after disembarking at Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport in Dhaka. All of Dhaka, the capital of Bangladesh, seems to throb with bustling masses of people. Bridges, expressway overpasses, and major new neighborhoods are continually under construction. Evidence of the country’s rising disposable income is on display at crowded shopping malls such as Jamuna Future Park, the largest in South Asia, and new billboards, which seem to cover every available space, advertise products as varied as packaged foods and smartphones.²

While “Bangladesh remains synonymous with poverty” may now be subject to question, that reality—in a more acute form—is what mobilized Iqbal Quadir to dream about and formulate a practical strategy to spread cell phones throughout his native country in the early 1990s. In 2014, a report by GSMA (an association representing the interests of cell-phone operators worldwide) cited Quadir’s work as that which has put Bangladesh “in many ways ahead of its time” in terms of cell-phone coverage and usage.³ The report

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