The creative edge: Revolutionising development through innovation

By Hindustan Times

Apr 21, 2023 05:54 PM IST

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While citizens and organisations in more than 50 countries around the world already recognise April 21 for the interdisciplinary linkages between sustainable development, human creativity and innovation since 2002, the United Nations officially designated it as World Creativity and Innovation Day in April 2017. The sustainable development goals also recognise the inalienable importance of supporting entrepreneurship, creativity and innovation, for they ultimately create a new momentum for economic growth and expand opportunities for all.
Creativity and innovation are crucial drivers of human development that surmount geographical and cultural constraints. These two concepts embody the capability to devise novel ideas and solutions, and the aptitude to adjust and advance amidst adversities. Creativity and innovation play an integral role in all facets of human development, ranging from cognitive augmentation to societal advancement, and from financial prosperity to individual satisfaction. In a progressively competitive global economy, countries that prioritise creativity and innovation stand to reap substantial benefits.

The Israeli government, for instance, offers tax incentives and substantial financial support to incentivise risk-taking among innovators, thereby enabling the country to emerge as a world leader in technology and innovation. The advancement of new technologies, commodities, and amenities can engender job prospects, heighten productivity, and ultimately stimulate economic progress. By allocating resources towards research and development, nations can foster a culture of innovation that attracts top talent and businesses, thus creating a cycle of advancement.
An excellent example of creativity and innovation fostering development is of Kamlesh Nanasaheb Ghumare, a rural entrepreneur made popular as ‘Jugaadu Kamlesh’ on Shark Tank India. Lenskart founder Peyush Bansal invested in Ghumare's pesticide spraying machine prototype, which he had developed over a seven-year period and is now ready to launch in 2023 as ‘Bharat-K2’. During his pitch on the show, Ghumare spoke extensively of a low-cost drip irrigation system that he had developed using discarded plastic bottles to deliver water to plants at a slow and steady rate. Ghumare's innovation has had a significant impact on the lives of farmers in his region, helping them conserve water, increase crop yields, and generate income. Furthermore, Ghumare's solution has created a ripple effect that has led to economic growth and development in the area, particularly in underserved communities.

Creativity and innovation play a vital role in facilitating cultural exchanges, shaping cultural identities, fostering empathy, enriching our collective comprehension of the human experience, and ultimately resulting in a more inclusive, diverse global community. Engaging in creative pursuits can cultivate a sense of direction, and by embracing an innovative mindset, individuals can develop the ability to adjust and flourish in the face of hardship.
Bengaluru serves as an example of an urban centre which is a melting pot of culture, creativity and innovation. With its thriving ecosystem of entrepreneurs, investors, and researchers, Bengaluru has become a home to startups and technology companies that are at the forefront of innovation.

Bengaluru's vibrant and creative cultural heritage has catalysed the emergence of a flourishing cluster of creative industries, including design, fashion, and entertainment. The city is home to some of the best educational institutions in the country, including the Indian Institute of Science and the Indian Institute of Management, which houses the Centre for Innovation, Incubation & Entrepreneurship, one of India’s oldest incubation centres. World-class infrastructure, facilitated by smart technologies, public-private partnerships, and green initiatives support the city's relentless development, growing population, and booming economy.

Unprecedented development, however, comes with its caveats. Bengaluru is one missed rainfall season away from a potable water crisis of epic proportions. According to a report published by the Boston Consulting Group in 2019, Bengaluru's traffic congestion is among the worst in the world, with Ola Mobility Institute noting that commuters in Bengaluru spend an average of 7.2 days a year stuck in traffic and suffer an average daily commute time of 1 hour and 47 minutes. A study by the Indian Institute of Science has indicated that Bengaluru has lost approximately 78% of its green cover between 1973 and 2016. Creativity and innovation have the potential to play a transformative role in solving problems in urban development. By fostering an environment of experimentation, exploration, and risk-taking, creativity and innovation can drive the development of new technologies, business models, and social practices that can help address the challenges that cities now face. For instance, to deal with the issue of inconsistency in house numbering, New Delhi Municipal Corporation has introduced Digital Door Numbering for almost 51,000 homes under its jurisdiction. This has simplified the delivery of urban municipal services such as ambulance, fire tender, and police response, apart from standardising the collection of all municipal dues (electricity, gas, water and property) through a single ID. Most importantly, this measure is both scalable and replicable across Indian cities.
Along these lines, the National Institute of Urban Affairs hosts several innovation initiatives aimed at improving urban development and its management in India. For instance, a recently established Innovation Unit at the Institute is focused on creating and disseminating knowledge pertaining to the innovation ecosystem. Also, the City Investments to Innovate, Integrate and Sustain (CITIIS) Programme provides financial and technical assistance to urban local bodies for implementing innovative projects in the areas of sustainable mobility, public open spaces, urban e-governance, and social innovation. The Institute's Climate Centre for Cities (C-Cube) provides knowledge resources, tools, and capacity-building initiatives to help cities develop climate-resilient strategies and adopt low-carbon pathways.

Creativity and innovation are essential for the development of knowledge-based economies, are necessary conditions for progress, and are important factors in economic development. Cities and communities that embrace innovation and creativity can enhance their competitiveness, improve the quality of life for their citizens, and become models for sustainable urban development. The fundamental application of innovation in cities, however, is best explained by American economist Joseph Stiglitz, when he urged that innovation needs to focus on broader societal goals, remarking, "Innovation is key to everything, but it is not an end in itself. It is only useful if it leads to greater prosperity, equality, and sustainability."
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