

Master's closing ceremony keynote, June 2021: Shyama V. Ramani – UNU MERIT Blog

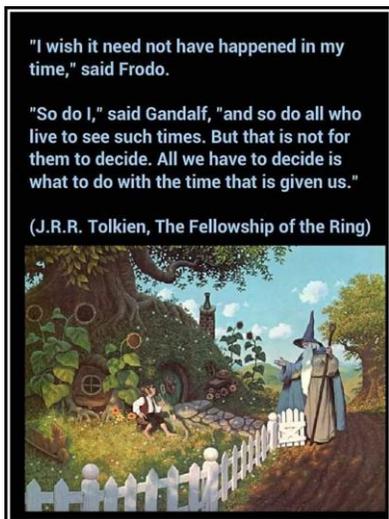
Hello every one. First of all, I'd like to thank Julieta for having invited me to deliver this keynote and the MPP team for organizing this wonderful event. I'm honoured and delighted.

Recent events have given credence to a buzzword used to describe certain markets – VUCA – volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous. This term now captures the essence of our entire world.

Who would have imagined that a virus infestation would implode in China as an endogenous shock and be carried so fast by travellers to hit nearly every corner of the world as exogenous shocks, causing millions of deaths, inflicting visible as well as invisible suffering, and finally, making us change our very way of life?

So let us observe a minute of silence to commiserate with those who have experienced personal losses and send our positive vibrations to those who are recovering or helping others to recover.

Thank you.



Let me share a story. Some months back, an MPP student of last year sent me a friendly text message – ‘How are you Prof?’. And I texted back – “Feeling lousy with a capital L”. So he sent me these photos and told me “to hang in there”.

At some point during the last academic year, you may have thought like Frodo: “I wish it need not have happened in my time”. I certainly hope you had a Gandalf to tell you: “ And so do all who live to see such times. But that is not for them to decide. All we have to decide is what to do with the time given us.”

The empathy and wisdom shared by the student carried me through the week.

This make me confident that our shared experiences of this academic year – so delightfully replete with zoom marathons - have created strong bonds which will last over time.

While cultivating our intellects – we have enhanced our grit and resilience.

So heartiest Congratulations! You have made it! You are going to graduate with a Master of Science degree in Public Policy and Human Development! Well done indeed!

You are now equipped to make a positive difference wherever you may be tomorrow

Let’s take Public policy, which has been guiding politicians. Under the COVID pandemic, some leaders led well, especially under the first wave, when it was so important to build a shared vision and gain community cooperation for social distancing. I am sure after a year of analysing data - you will be able to spot the common feature of the leaders in my sample set!



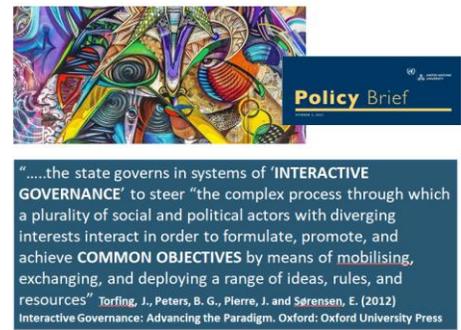


Some leaders were over confident....

On the other hand, some other leaders made some deadly mistakes – despite their smart public policy teams. And here I refer to my own country, India. After doing well initially, overconfidence led to the lifting of restrictions. Elections which could have been postponed were held. Communal celebrations of religious festivals, which could have been avoided, were encouraged. Who suffered most? Citizens, especially the poor, some of whom will take years to recover.

But can we just blame the leaders? No, we cannot.

As my colleague, Professor Rene Kemp pointed out to me, a government does not operate in a vacuum, but governs with the cooperation of various actors. And when governments make mistakes, it is with the support coming from diverse quarters that form the dominant regimes. Similarly, when it does well – it is with the cooperation of many economic actors – both within and outside of the dominant regimes. So always remember that you have a role to play in shaping our world and building back a better future.



Now coming to Human Development. Thanks to COVID and zoom and youtube – I have never participated in so many international conferences as during last year and for free – and without travelling. Recently I had an opportunity to join a webinar on building back better featuring 6 Nobel Laureates – all economists. They were divided into two camps. One group seemed to be of the view that if more resources could be obtained for data collection and if they and the policy makers could be given executive powers and everyone could be made to comply – then all problems could be solved or at least greatly reduced.

Now, the other camp (in photo here) pointed out that: (a) it is politicians who rule not policy makers; (b) it is impossible to gather complete and perfect data for policy use on most problems; (c) it is difficult to make everyone comply on practically anything including those impacting security – as the vaccination naysayers have proved.



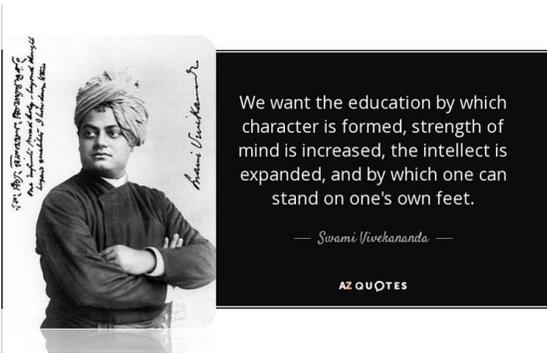
EDUCATION is the basic key to reduce social and economic inequalities. This has to be understood as the main "challenge" for future national AND international policy.
somebody wrote in the 'chat'....POWER OF THE CROWD!

Sen and Deaton advocated that to build a better future – it is necessary to focus on human development by empowering people to dialogue with hierarchy and also make hierarchy engage with the people. Co-design and cooperation are key.

Interestingly while the Nobel Laureates were discussing how exactly to make it happen, another lively and animated

conversation was being carried on in the chatbox by the ordinary mortals in the audience. Here's something that struck me – what we really need to focus on to build back better is to reduce inequalities through education.

I was very impressed with this idea till I showed it to our Philosopher in residence, Dr. Serdar Turkeli – whom some of you may know. He pointed that education needs to have a larger purpose – to build citizens who are reflective of themselves, critical of the values which are imposed on them and dynamic enough to take action.



Then, it came to my mind that the purpose of education has not changed. The words of Swami Vivekananda, an Indian philosopher of the 19th century echoes with the views of Dr. Turkeli today. The challenge then is to deliver education that fits the needs of the times as our complex world continuously evolves.

So to conclude we have done our best to give you the best possible education! We are confident, that you will apply it well. To quote Mahatma Gandhi – you can be the change you want to see. Who knows may be with a flutter of your butterfly wings – as you emerge out of the cocoon of the MPP program – you will trigger a tsunami of positive change. We wish you fair winds in your sails and happy adventures as you navigate through the next chapters of your life.

