Women’s entrepreneurship has been a key strategy in international development and poverty alleviation initiatives for decades. Increasingly reorganised using models influenced by Silicon Valley-style notions of ‘disruptive innovation’, such projects require reformattting women into a specific style of entrepreneur with particular market-aligned skills, habits, and attitudes. Yet rather than providing game-changing business models that transform the ways in which the poor interact with markets and thereby improve their circumstances, these initiatives ‘disrupt’ women’s lives in ways that dislocate them from important social relationships and generate new and unsustainable forms of dependency. Focusing on Bangladesh – a country at the forefront of inventing market-based development models that hinge on the efforts of women – this talk will explore the meanings and experiences of disruptive entrepreneurship and compare them with the experiences of women who pursue income-generating activities more aligned with their own priorities of gaining self-reliance and renewing social ties.

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