

## How Canada's support has been transforming Bangladesh, and making a global impact: A brief on the Strategic Partnership Agreement

Canada has been partnering with BRAC for the last three decades, a relationship that has been integral to Bangladesh's development journey.

Looking just at education, an area that Canada has consistently supported throughout these three decades, **over 14 million children - or two and half times the total number of school-going children in Canada - have graduated from BRAC's pre-primary and primary schools.** Of these, over half were girls. In another example, Canada's investment in the education and skill development of indigenous girls and women in the Chittagong Hill Tracts resulted in a 50% rise in learning outcomes, including improved academic performance in core subjects and school attendance.

In 2021, Canada joined Australia and BRAC in the strategic partnership agreement - a long-term and flexible initiative to support Bangladesh to achieve the global goals. **The partnership pooled the resources of the three organisations to multiply their impact, leveraged BRAC's half a century of experience, social capital, networks and infrastructure on the ground, and invested in BRAC to be able to deliver even more effectively - ensuring people did not just improve their lives, but progressed on a path towards economic empowerment and self-reliance.**

**The partnership has been transformational.** Over the last four years, the depth, speed and efficiency of BRAC's programming have all significantly improved, so we have been able to achieve far more with far less. The impact of this has been that millions of people have received higher quality, deeper and more relevant support, and are now in a significantly stronger position to contribute to the prosperity that supports regional and global stability.

### 1. 68 million people received access to services, awareness and support, and millions made progress towards economic empowerment and self-reliance

In just over 4 years, **68 million people received services, awareness and support,** particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Within this, 5 million people directly received essential health services. **570,000 households in climate-vulnerable areas were equipped with** a combination of access to critical services, climate-resilient infrastructure,

climate-adaptive livelihoods and disaster preparedness and response support. **500,000 students graduated** from schools operated by BRAC and its partners. **150,000 people were equipped with skills** to improve their employability and entrepreneurship skills.

### 2. Canada's investment has strengthened the depth, speed, and efficiency of BRAC's service delivery

Long-term core support has equipped BRAC to strengthen its organisational abilities across multiple areas, particularly technology, safeguarding, enterprise systems, innovation, and monitoring.

Looking at technology as a snapshot

- staff supporting people to lift themselves out of extreme poverty are able to spend more time with their clients because their work is now supported by an app that enables them to make real-time data-driven decisions, saving them more than **27,000 workdays annually.** BRAC's community health workers, who deliver **one in five safe deliveries in Bangladesh,** often in hard to reach areas and frequently in the middle of the night, now use a digital tool to get life-saving information at their fingertips whenever and wherever they need it. A new pilot has almost **tripled the control rate of hypertension and doubled the control rate of diabetes** through combining door to door visits with a tailored mobile app to detect non-communicable

diseases and refer people to government facilities.

### 3. Women and girls have been at the centre of all of the change

Women and girls have been at the centre of the agreement, as participants, as staff, and - in both of those - as drivers of broader change in communities.

In one example of a significant outcome, CAD 65.3 million worth of entitlements, assets, and compensation has been recovered in legal aid on behalf of women and children from 2021 until August 2025.

In an example of a significant impact, 250,000 women lifted themselves and their households out of poverty through the Graduation programme between 2020-2023 – and 67% reported having control over their own income and family resources in 2023.

In one particularly impactful new initiative, **60,500 adolescent girls formed local brigades to prevent child marriage - and these brigades successfully stopped 27% of reported child marriages in 2024 alone.**

### 4. People supported through the partnership report consistently higher incomes

A study of six income generating activity-based programmes supported by the partnership showed that participants in BRAC programmes **increased their per capita incomes approximately 11 times more than people who did not receive support.**

Households in BRAC programmes consistently saw their incomes rise, while households not in BRAC programmes saw their incomes decline. Participants in BRAC programmes saw a 40% rise in

income, bringing them 30% closer to the national average income.

### 5. From COVID-19 to climate, Canada's flexible support has ensured BRAC can prioritise the issues that matter most

In an increasingly volatile and unpredictable world, core support is vital in order to pivot rapidly to meet changing needs.

During COVID-19, **Canada's support enabled BRAC to transform its workforce within days to become the largest non-government responder to the pandemic**, administering one in every seven vaccines and distributing 5 million vaccine doses across the country.

In 2024, **Canada's support allowed BRAC not only to respond to unprecedented flooding but also to coordinate civil society's response in the worst-hit regions.** With Bangladesh struck by five major disasters in 2024 alone, Canada's flexible support ensured timely support to flood-affected communities.

### 6. Canada's efforts are making an impact at a national level

**1 in every 7 households who lifted themselves out of extreme poverty in Bangladesh in the last 4 years did so with Canada's support.** Approximately 250,000 households lifted themselves out of extreme poverty through BRAC's Graduation approach, which Canada supported to scale.

### 7. Investing in government and a vibrant civil society for impact at a landscape level

BRAC takes a landscape-level approach to challenges, delivering services but also strengthening the ability of other actors to ensure a robust ecosystem for social development. As a result, in addition to the snapshots above,

**Canada's support also has ripple effects in terms of ensuring Bangladesh continues to have a strong civil society.**

### 8. Canada's leadership created a localisation model for protracted crises

Eight years on from one of the world's biggest humanitarian crises, over a million Rohingya are still living in the world's biggest refugee camp in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh – and funding and attention has dramatically shrunk since the crisis began. Canada and BRAC anticipated this trend, and developed the Humanitarian Pooled Fund in 2022 to channel funding directly to local organisations and strengthen their capacity.

In just three years, **23 local organisations** have strengthened their organisational capacity enough to secure funding, and CAD 8 million has been disbursed directly to them. **One out of three of these organisations are led by women.**

Evaluations of the pooled fund model by the Inter-Sector Coordination Group found that it is **40% more efficient and 41% cheaper than the UN's service delivery models, specifically in the WASH sector, and nearly 25% more cost-effective than international NGOs.**

### 9. Development models pioneered in Bangladesh are making an impact globally

- The **Graduation approach** to ending extreme poverty, pioneered in Bangladesh, is being adopted in more than 100 countries, including the Philippines, Indonesia, and India.
- The **adolescent development programme**, developed in Bangladesh, has evolved to become the Mastercard Foundation Accelerating Impact for Young Women programme, which has equipped

almost 400,000 adolescent girls and young women with entrepreneurship, employability and life skills across five countries in Africa. 70% of these women and girls reported more job opportunities after the programme.

- **Play Labs**, piloted in Bangladesh, Tanzania and Uganda, have also now been implemented in Sierra Leone and the Philippines. Research by Cambridge University shows that the Play Lab model achieves the ultimate goal in early childhood development - parity. Over

two years, the children in Play Labs with the lowest physical, intellectual, and socio-emotional development scores almost catch up with the children with highest scores, with a gap of just 4 points at the end of the two years.

---

**Bangladesh is currently battling headwinds from a lot of directions.** Unemployment is at a record high, with half of university graduates currently unable to secure jobs; political instability is continuing, as well as significant reforms ongoing in multiple sectors; and both fast and slow onset climate impacts - like cyclones and heat waves, but also salinity - are severely threatening development gains.

**At the same time, long-term and flexible programming, such as the strategic partnership agreement, is delivering incredible returns on investment** - not only in Bangladesh, but it is creating global public goods that support people to change their lives across the world.

**Going forward, the focus of the partnership will continue to be on programming that promotes economic empowerment and supports people to move towards self-reliance, but also directly helps people navigate the current and upcoming headwinds.** Programming will particularly focus on job creation, supporting entrepreneurship, innovation and stimulating trade in the agricultural sector, and creating safe migration opportunities. There will also be a renewed focus on promoting gender equality, ensuring young people can access sports and cultural opportunities, and civic engagement.

**In terms of global public goods, upcoming initiatives include** an integrated climate adaptation programme, currently being piloted with Canada's support, which we hope will become a blueprint for slowing migration by putting the conditions in place for communities to be able to effectively adapt to climate impacts. Plans are already in place to scale up the insights from this initiative through a big bet for climate adaptation with 2 million women smallholder farmers across Uganda, Tanzania, Liberia and Bangladesh.

**Bangladesh is brimming with potential.** It is the 35th fastest growing economy in the world and will soon graduate into lower middle income country status. Realising this potential amidst increasing headwinds will depend on many factors, however, a significant one of those being the partnership of strong, reliable and long-term actors like Canada. In an era of shrinking aid budgets, investing in Bangladesh, through leveraging BRAC's experience, social capital, networks and infrastructure on the ground, provides a way to deliver programming with extraordinary impact, broader ripple effects and global benefit. There are also myriad untapped trade benefits to explore, with bilateral trade between Canada and Bangladesh reaching just CAD 3.5 billion/year in 2023. Recent successes in sending skilled workers from Bangladesh to Japan and Singapore also highlight the potential of skilled migration in meeting the global skill gaps emerging in a rapidly changing world. Most importantly, however, **in an increasingly uncertain world, Canada's core support is a crucial investment in large-scale, long-term sustainable development, which we know leads to prosperity – which is key to stability, security and peace.**

---

*Founded in 1972, BRAC is an international development organisation delivering programmes in 16 countries across Asia and Africa. Our initiatives have reached over 145 million people living in poverty and inequality to date. Our broader solutions ecosystem spans social development, large-scale social enterprises, humanitarian response, BRAC University, and multiple investments, including BRAC Bank and bKash. With almost 194,000 staff and volunteers, and an annual budget of around USD 1.6 billion in Bangladesh alone, we do development differently, combining deep community insights and business acumen to scale up locally-led initiatives globally.*

