

# dBRIEF

A bi-annual publication of BRAC  
on development



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**Disability inclusion**

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**Humanitarian crisis response**

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# Foreword

**T**he story of BRAC is inseparable from the story of Bangladesh's war of liberation, of the glorious freedom and of her journey towards socio-economic emancipation. In complementarity with the government, we have been delivering largescale interventions directly at the community and institutional level. As the country is set to graduate from the least developed countries (LDC) list by 2024 and on its way to becoming a developed country by 2042, we are adjusting our programmatic approach too. Pursuant to BRAC Strategic Plan 2016-2020, we are proactively looking outwards to scale up our innovations and interventions through partnerships with other development actors, especially with the government. The BRAC dBRIEF, or Development Brief, primarily aims to spread our innovations and learning widely and to reach out to new partners. This issue's cover is 'Disability Inclusion' - I would say a very timely topic.

***“Inclusiveness, specially partnering with persons with disability, is one of BRAC's four core values and a top priority reflected in our interventions.”***

Inclusiveness, specially partnering with persons with disability, is one of BRAC's four core values and a top priority reflected in our interventions. As of last year, for example, our education programme reached out to 43,850 students with disabilities, the scope of which is set to expand in the coming days. Our micro-finance programme, skills development programme have specific targets to reach and work with persons with disabilities. This year, we are initiating a pilot to integrate the Washington Group (WG) questions on disability within our programme's M&E framework to learn and eventually adopt it more widely.

Additionally, we will continue our policy advocacy through evidence-based research and engage with organisations of differently abled persons and relevant government authorities. At the programmatic level, we strengthen our capacity for disability inclusion. We are also upgrading our policies, procedures and guidelines to promote accessibility and inclusiveness of persons with disabilities in BRAC. We hope to share our learnings with other peer organizations too.

Finally, I hope that our development partners, peers, and government agencies, who have the primary responsibility and much greater means of ensuring basic rights and needs of differently abled people, would welcome this document.

**Dr Muhammad Musa**  
Executive Director, BRAC



# Introduction



**I** am happy to introduce the first issue of Development Brief, in short dBRIEF. It is a bi-annual publication brought out by BRAC Advocacy for Social Change in close partnership with BRAC Communications - both of them are part of the Strategy, Communication and Empowerment cluster.

dBRIEF brings everyday BRAC stories to the larger audience with a purpose and a difference. Stories of BRAC's army of frontline staff working from day break to deep into the night are familiar to many, but how BRAC turns a promising idea into a development initiative and scale are less told and much less documented. Hence, in addition to focusing on a development challenge, dBRIEF, will offer a guided tour inside the BRAC machine- its inner workings and how it promotes learning and innovation. Some are just teasers while others are more elaborate narratives.

dBRIEF has a section to highlight the new research conducted by BRAC Research and Evaluation Division (RED), which is an independent think-tank and quality assurance body housed inside BRAC. From the next issue, this section will have wider coverage of the research/studies conducted by the extended BRAC family including BRAC University and its many institutions.

***“dBRIEF is a vehicle to bring the everyday BRAC story to the larger audience with a purpose and a difference.”***

The initial focus of dBRIEF is Bangladesh as the surprising case of Bangladesh's development success is gaining currency. The focus, however, can be adjusted for the future issues.

The articles are written by BRAC staff and consultants, and reflect their personal opinion. The integrity of the original content was maintained through the editorial process to preserve the richness and diversity of ideas. Hence, some opinions expressed in the articles may not be fully aligned with BRAC's own views.

Finally, let me thank the Advocacy for Social Change team and the Communications team for bringing out this issue of dBRIEF. Bringing out the first issue is always a challenge, there are teething pains and hiccups along the way. We welcome your ideas to make dBRIEF a must-read for any development professional.

**Asif Saleh**  
Senior Director, Strategy, Communication and Empowerment  
BRAC and BRAC International



# Editorial

Millions of people with disabilities are likely to spend a lifetime of unemployment and dependency. According to World Health Organization (WHO), about 15 per cent of the world's population, or more than 1 billion people, live with some form of disability, of whom 2-4 per cent experience significant difficulties in functioning. The WHO also suggests that this proportion is growing due to population ageing and the rapid spread of chronic diseases. Now the question is, were we successful to ensure inclusion of this growing population in our development journey?

Certainly not. On the contrary, our failures are glaring and our performance shameful. Globally, a staggering 80 per cent of persons with disabilities live in poverty. Hence, this is not a surprise that BRAC, one of the world's largest development organisation, chooses disability inclusion as the cover story of the first issue of dBRIEF to highlight some of the persistent challenges, development prerogatives, and bring the spotlight on everything that we are doing about it.

Disability is not just a health issue. It is also a social development issue. Disability inclusion, hence, requires the removal of social barriers. Evidence suggests, for example, that the medical condition does not lead to poverty and under-participation. Rather, the environment and lack of capacity provided by governments put Persons With Disabilities at a clear disadvantage. Disability is often a consequence of inequity too. Every minute, more than 30 women are seriously injured during childbirth. Many eventually develop disability, often due to poor access to health services. Traffic accidents and lack of access to timely care enforces disability in many, and the list goes on.

Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), which is ratified by Bangladesh, makes the state responsible to ensure inclusion and access, and gives a set of inalienable, universal, and egalitarian rights to

the persons with disabilities. The state is obliged to ensure accessibility, independent living and inclusion in the community, personal mobility, inclusive education, health, habitation and rehabilitation, work, etc. These rights are widely recognised by the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The agenda, a central tenet of Bangladesh's development approach that strives to leave no one behind, mentions 'persons with disabilities' or 'disability' 11 times. Specific indicators are present in Goals 4, 8, 10, 11 and 17.

The civil society and NGOs have an obligation to support the state. Breaking through the stigma to access education, healthcare, economic opportunities, etc is just one of the critical challenges that persons with disabilities face. The non-state actors, who are present at the grassroots, should promote awareness and capacity of the Persons with disabilities to access services. They can facilitate and promote the participation of persons with disabilities in public policy discourses. Conscientisation of the rest of the community is critical to promoting social accommodation. Working with state actors to improve accessibility can go a long way to promote inclusion too. Additionally, the civil society and NGOs can help monitor and report back on the impact of various government interventions to the relevant authorities. Finally, as service providers, NGOs must invest in innovative inclusion models for persons with disabilities and work with the government for eventual nationwide scaling.

We hope this issue of dBRIEF will help to start conversations both within BRAC and among our peers in the development sector, and bring to light the many issues surrounding disability that have been ignored for too long.

Finally, we would like to thank all the contributors of this issue for their prolific efforts beyond their formal call of duty. We welcome your suggestions and feedback at [dbrief@brac.net](mailto:dbrief@brac.net).

## Development update

K A M Morshed

### FY18-The year that was

The fiscal year 2017-18 (FY18) was overall a good year for Bangladesh's economy- decreasing consumer price inflation, general political stability, stronger performance of the external sector, robust private consumption and heavy investment in infrastructure all contributed to the growth in gross domestic product (GDP). Notably, according to estimates by the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, the GDP growth is likely to exceed 7.4 per cent in FY18<sup>1</sup>.

The most anticipated development news this year was the beginning of Bangladesh's journey towards graduation from the LDC list in May 2018. Bangladesh met the three criteria for graduation at the Committee for Development Policy (CDP) triennial review for the first time. This paved the way for Bangladesh to graduate out of the LDC category by 2024 and to be fully recognised as a non-LDC country by 2027. It needs to be noted that Bangladesh had exceeded the threshold set for the gross national income (GNI) per capita and economic vulnerability indicators a couple of years back and crossed the threshold for Human Capital Index for the first time in 2016.

*Following are some of the highlights of the FY18 that ended on June 30, 2018.*

### Extraordinary external sector

The country's overall exports grew by 5.81 per cent in FY18 to USD 36.67 billion while riding on the higher shipment of garment products. Export of garments products registered an 8.76-point growth to USD 30.61 billion. Agricultural export rose sharply while the growth of jute and jute products was also encouraging. Among the key export sectors, the leather and leather goods sector fetched USD 1.09 billion, down USD 0.14 billion from FY17's USD 1.23 billion.

Notably, despite the slow growth of ready-made garment sector, the relative share of the sector in the total export actually improved in FY18. However, given the reduction of labour intensity and profit margin of the sector, Bangladesh urgently needs to diversify its export. In the meantime, initiatives to climb the value chain by upgrading skills may be prioritised. Simultaneously though, exploring new sectors of export and revitalising old sectors, such as jute, should remain equally important targets.

FY18's flow of inward remittance rose to USD 14.98 from USD 12.77 billion. Increasing fuel price might have increased income and reduced uncertainty among Bangladeshis working in the Middle East to ultimately contribute to the rise. It can also be the result of increase in the number of

External sector performance (in billion USD)			
Growth %	FY17	FY18	+/- (%)
<b>Export growth</b>			
Overall	34.65	36.67	5.8%
Garments	28.15	30.61	8.7%
-Knitwear	13.75	15.18	10.4%
-Woven	14.39	15.43	7.2%
Agricultural products	0.55	0.67	21.8%
Jute and jute products	0.97	1.03	6.6%
Leather and leather goods	1.23	1.09	-11.4%
<b>Remittance growth</b>			
Inward remittance	12.77	14.98	17.3%
-Middle East	7.31	8.57	17.2%
--KSA	2.27	2.59	14.3%
--UAE	2.09	2.43	16.0%
-Other countries	5.46	6.41	17.4%
--USA	1.69	2.00	18.3%
<b>Commitment &amp; disbursement of foreign funds</b>			
Commitment	17.96	14.86	-17.3%
(except) Rooppur NPP	6.58	14.86	125.8%
Disbursement	3.68	6.1	65.8%

Source: Bangladesh Bank and External Relations Division. June 2018 figure is provisional.

<sup>1</sup>The World Bank 'Global Economic Prospects (GEP)' published in June 2018 projected 6.7 percentage point GDP growth for Bangladesh, which is significantly lower than the official projection.

Bangladeshi expatriates abroad. Notably, during the 2017 calendar year, more than a million Bangladeshis crossed the border for employment - an all-time record for Bangladesh. However, considering the Perspective Plan target of USD 38.5 billion remittances in 2021 or even the 7th Five Year Plan target of USD 25.4 billion by 2020, the growth is insufficient.

During FY18, Bangladesh received commitment of USD 14.86 billion in grant/loan. Of the sum, China committed USD 4.35 billion and India USD 4.5 billion. The figure was less than the FY17 commitment of USD 17.96 billion of which USD 11.38 billion was by Russia for the Rooppur nuclear power plant project. The foreign fund disbursement during FY18 was also a record.

During the July-May period of FY18, the disbursement stood at USD 4.69 billion (including USD 0.309 grants) against a target of USD 6.311 billion. The June 2018 provisional figure indicates that the final tally of disbursement can reach the highest at USD 6.1 billion, which is a new record. However, this was not enough to address the worry of growing pipeline. It was expected that at the end of FY18, Bangladesh's pipeline will cross USD 40 billion from the FY17 balance of USD 35.75 billion.

### Natural disasters to threaten food security

FY18 had seen a significant increase in the number of landslides. Starting on 13 June 2018, only two weeks after tropical cyclone Mora hit Bangladesh, several incidents killed 160 people and injured 187. About 80,000 people across five districts (Bandarban, Chattagram, Cox's Bazar, Khagrachari, and Rangamati) were affected. From them, 34,000 lost their houses, livelihoods and food stocks. The number of such incidents and the extent of damage caused by landslides in FY18 was the worst landslide related disaster since 2007

Bangladesh has experienced three consecutive floods in 2017. The flash flood in the haor region was the first to hit Bangladesh on 28 March. The flood was triggered by heavy rainfall that breached parts of embankments, resulting in huge loss of assets and income for people living in haors. The flood did not only damaged Boro crop, the only seasonal rice crop that farmers in the particular region grow annually, but also affected the livelihoods of people living in *haors*.

### Haor flash flood-2017

- This flash flood started on 28 March affecting six districts in the north-eastern region. Extended rainfall till September 2017 meant that the flood lingered for a comparatively longer period.
- Water overflowed and breached embankments in many places and inundated vast areas of croplands ultimately damaging around 1.58 million metric tonnes of Boro rice.
- A study by BRAC estimates loss of around Tk 30 billion only in agriculture sector and approximately Tk 240 million in health sector, which compelled 47.5 per cent and 24.8 per cent farmers respectively to borrow from their relatives and NGOs. Proportion of jobless people increased by 20 per cent during flood.
- The impact on loss of agriculture was sorely felt, especially among little to do households. The food and non-food inflation in April 2018 were 7.3 per cent and 3.5 per cent respectively pushing the average to 5.8 per cent.
- System failures, inefficiencies and corruption were identified as key causes behind the extensive damage. While a long list of steps was identified to prevent future recurrence, only some of the steps were implemented.



The second bout of flooding, which was really a regional disaster that affected India, Bangladesh and Nepal, started with heavy rainfall in May. The actual disaster in Bangladesh began in late May/early June in northern Bangladesh, which subsided after affecting 10 districts and a million people in early August 2017. Finally, Since 12 August 2017, heavy monsoon rains caused intense flooding across more than one-third of Bangladesh and emerged to be the ugliest one affecting as many as eight million people in 32 districts in FY18. These calamities claimed 145 lives, destroyed 103,855 houses, and damaged 4,636 education infrastructure<sup>2</sup>. The floods caused severe damage to the agriculture sector, including loss of paddy, with most of the damage concentrated in the economically-disadvantaged northern districts.

Prices of rice reached record levels in September and remained 30-points above the levels during corresponding period of previous year. This severely compromised the livelihoods of the affected households. In fact, it is due to this series of floods that Bangladesh faced a food shortage for the first time in the past two decades.

## Fastest growing humanitarian crisis

The influx of thousands of forcibly displaced Myanmar nationals (FDMN) into Bangladesh caught most of the relevant agencies by surprise. The speed and scale of the influx since 25 August 2017 made it the world's fastest-growing refugee crisis and a humanitarian emergency of epic proportions. People living in Cox's Bazar, one of the economically backward districts of Bangladesh, were the first to respond with whatever they could manage. The rest of the country joined soon after. The international development community with assistance from national and international NGOs joined last in the response. Bangladesh government and its functionaries played a very proactive, supportive and effective role to transform the initial chaos into a situation that is well managed and improving.

So far, two joint response plans (JRP) were developed for funding. In the first plan for October 2017-March

2018, an outlay of USD 434 million was envisioned. The second plan for April 2018-December 2018 budgeted the need for USD 951 million, 25 per cent of which was proposed for the host community services. Until the end of June 2018, only USD 247 million was received (26 per cent of the total) against the latest JRP. Additionally, the World Bank committed nearly half a billion dollars and the ADB USD 200 million for Rohingya, but the details including disbursement schedule were not laid out yet.

While there is no dispute about the negative economic impact of the crisis on Bangladesh, a clear picture of



nature and extent is not very clear as yet. During the FY19 budget, the finance minister mentioned that the financial burden may not be very high at present but is likely to increase significantly in future. However, as of today, no data is available on how much the government has spent directly to provide food, shelter and security of Rohingya or indirectly for the government functionaries supporting the Rohingya.

## Economic outlook

A healthy global economy boasting remittance inflows and more generous government transfer programmes will support private consumption growth by around 8 percentage point during the ongoing fiscal year. Infrastructure projects already underway are also expected to be implemented without much trouble pushing government consumption by 12 per cent. In other words, both drivers of last year's GDP growth are expected to be equally, if not more, active, resulting in more than seven per cent+ real GDP growth.

The manufacturing sector, which is responsible for 52 per cent of Bangladesh's GDP growth is expected to continue at a faster rate. On the upside, export demand and remittances could surprise due to stronger demand from North America, Europe or the GCC economies.

However, sluggish growth in domestic investment, as much as 33-point increase in crude oil price in the world market, bill for the large imports of LNGs for the very first time, payment for the infrastructure projects will all contribute towards keeping the present trade deficit wide. This will further weaken the Taka against USD and sustain high rate of inflation. Estimates show a slow 5 percentage point growth of real export, fuelled by high global demand when the Chinese economy is cooling down and a high real growth of import by about 10 percentage point.

Higher than expected production of rice in India and other Asian countries may push down the bill for importing food grains and may result in lower food price inflation than

*\*Budget speech for FY19, an author's estimate...rest of the estimates are from Economist Intelligence Unit Country Report, June, 2018*

Headline growth projections				
Growth %	FY16	FY17	FY18	FY19
Gross Domestic Product				
GDP (real)	7.1	7.3	7.4*	7.8*
GDP per head (Real/\$)	6	6.2	6.6	6.7
GDP per head (PPP/\$)	7.31 a	8.07 a	8.99 a	8.68 a
Expenditure on GDP (% real change)				
Private consumption	3	7.4	9	7.9
Government consumption	8.4	7.8	15.1	12
Gross fixed investment	8.9	10.1	11.6	10
Exports of goods & services	2.2	(2.3)	4.5	5.2
Imports of goods & services	(7.1)	2.9	20.6	10.5
Source of GDP (% real change)				
Agriculture	2.8	3	3.1	3.5
Industry	11.1	10.2	12	11.6
Services	6.2	6.7	6.3	6.1
Public financing (% of GDP)				
General government revenue	10.1	11.3	11.1	11.2
General government debt	26.3	28.2	29.7	30.4
Total external debt	18.6	19.8	19.5	19.3
Inflation and wages %				
Consumer Price Inflation (avg.)	5.5	5.7	5.7	5.6
Average real wage	3.4	3.1	2.6	3.6
Other indicators				
Export market growth (%)	2.6	5.0	3.9	3.6
Industrial production growth (%)	9.1	9.1	9.2	9.3
Net FDI growth (%)	(17)	(13)	12	4
Stock of FDI (% of GDP)	6.6	5.9	6.0	6.2

### Did you know?

Bangladesh's population of 160 million is as big as France, Germany, and the Netherlands combined. PricewaterhouseCoopers, a global consulting house, predicts that Bangladesh can become the world's 23rd largest economy by 2050, overtaking countries such as Netherlands, Australia, Spain, Thailand and Malaysia. By 2030, Bangladesh will be among the top three fastest growing economies in the world. At the present rate, Bangladesh could top India's per capita income by 2020.

<sup>2</sup>Humanitarian Coordination Task Team (HCTT) - Situation Report No. 4, Dated September 18, 2017

# Risks and challenges

The downside risks to the outlook include a resurgence of political unrest, a historically unfortunate election year feature in Bangladesh. The other risk stems from not being able to bring back corporate governance in the banking industry especially in a year which may see extensive growth of private credit.

Despite having a comfortable foreign exchange reserve, Bangladesh is not out of danger from external sector shocks especially from a potential trade-war between the country's largest trading partners. Global commodity price spikes and large lumpy imports could reduce the 'foreign exchange reserve's coverage' considerably, especially if the trade-war also affects the projected remittances and export growth negatively.

One of the key weakness of Bangladesh's growth trajectory is the dismal Tax-GDP ratio. While the ratio has shown a small 1.5 percentage point progress over the last 10 years, even the present ratio of 11 is among the lowest in the world. Such low Tax-GDP ratio along with limited financial instruments, fluctuating flow of foreign direct investment, very low GDP-stock FDI ratio, and low capacity to implement foreign-funded projects, eventually could force the government to borrow internally at a very high rate. Such internal borrowing not only crowds out resources for private investment but also needlessly burdens the debt-servicing obligation.

Bangladesh GDP growth rate and election year dips



# The trade-war and Bangladesh

Experts have predicted that in the long term, the economic impact of the ensuing trade war being waged by the most powerful economies of the world will disproportionately impact the poorer countries. UNCTAD research showed that average tariffs could rise from negligible levels to as high as 30 percentage point for US exporters and 35-point and 40-per cent for EU and Chinese exporters, respectively. For countries such as Bangladesh, the impact could be similarly dire and most certainly will affect the hope of doubling "least developed countries' share of global exports" by 2020 under the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It would compromise the fragile economic recovery since the global financial crisis a

decade ago, thus undercutting growth and development around the world.

In the immediate term though, the potential impact is not clear. Bangladesh, the second largest exporter of RMG to the US with a market share of USD 5.06 billion could stand to gain a chunk of China's USD 27.03 billion market share. The decline in cotton price in the US market could also benefit the local textile mills. Though, the local manufacturers need time to adjust their present supply-chain of cotton, mostly from India and China. Bangladesh, a net importer of Soybean and Maize, could also gain from the reduction of the price of the US export.

### Did you know?

The United States is the number one export destination for Bangladeshi products. In 2016, Bangladesh was the United States' 50th largest goods trading partner with \$6.8 billion in total trade. More than 90% of Bangladesh's export is textile. However, plastics and plastic articles were the fastest-growing among the top 10 export categories up by 8.6% from 2016 to 2017. The total value of Bangladesh's export grew 61.2% since 2013.

## National budget 2018-19

The National budget for FY19 with a proposed outlay of BDT 4645.73 billion, equivalent to USD 55.68 billion, was presented on 7 June 2018. After some deliberation inside the parliament and more enthusiastic debate outside the parliament, the budget was adopted. Though this was the biggest budget adopted by Bangladesh, given the consistently low rate of budget implementation for the last consecutive seven fiscal years, an even bigger revision at the end of the year compared to FY18 can be expected.

## Proposed outlays

The budget proposed increased, at least in nominal term, all social sector expenditures such as education, health, social safety nets, etc. In the development budget, the education and technology, as well as transport and communication sectors, received highest priority.

Given the promise of foreign assistance, the budget proposed to continue investment in public infrastructure. As much as 31 per cent of the outlay was allocated for physical infrastructure sector. Social infrastructure is expected to receive 27.3 per cent of total funds as the second most important sector including 24.4 per cent for human resource development in areas such as education and health.

However, interestingly, in terms of relative share, the total allocation for both physical and social infrastructure was lower compared to their respective share in the FY18 budget, although in nominal terms, the FY19 allocation is higher. The budget allocated 11 per cent for payment of interest, which by any standard was moderate and manageable.



Source: Budget FY 2018-19 document

Sectoral allocation in crore (BDT)		
Sector	Allocation	% of Total
Industrial and economic services	3466	0.75
Recreation, culture, religion	4341	0.93
Housing	4963	1.07
Health	23390	5.03
Energy and power	24920	5.36
Agriculture	26259	5.65
Social security and welfare	27525	5.92
Local government & rural development	32670	7.03
Transport and communication	56475	12.16
Education and technology	67944	14.63
Public order and safety	26629	5.73
Defense	29101	6.26
Interest	51315	11.05
Public administration	85572	18.42



## Sources of revenue

Like past budgets, National Board of Revenue (NBR) is expected to be the key source of revenue from the internal sources with a collection target of around USD 35 billion. Non-tax revenues and non-NBR taxes are the second and third most important sources of public revenue with USD 4 and 1.1 billion respectively. This projection leaves a financing gap of around USD 15 billion, of which USD 6.4 billion is projected to come from external sources and the rest USD 8.6 billion will be borrowed from the local banks.

The budget proposed a general rise in tax rates. FY19 budget retained the existing personal income tax brackets and exemption threshold of BDT 250,000 (USD 2,990) for the fourth consecutive fiscal year. In other words, the disposable income of the lowest socio-economic group would continue to erode as consumer prices continue to rise. Some tax changes seem to be regressive in nature. For example, the value-added tax (VAT) on apartments up to 102 square metres was raised and on apartments, up to 250 square metres were reduced to be at the same level. The budget also increased VAT on several items such as furniture and clothes and the duty on rice imports reinstated from its present two per cent to the pre-2017 level of 28 per cent.

On the other hand, there are some respites proposed for the ailing financial sector. The budget left most corporate tax rates, such as the 25 per cent rate for publicly traded companies, unchanged. However, it reduced the rate for publicly-listed banks, insurance and non-banking financial institutions, though the much-needed structural reforms of the state-owned banks remained outside the purview.

Rather, it is expected like in the past, the government may recapitalise the banks from public exchequers.

Overall, the expectation of 30.7 per cent growth in revenue can be termed as highly-ambitious. The requirement that the NBR mobilise 90 per cent of the increase can be too much to expect in the context of present structure and capacity of the agency. However, the budget has estimated a fiscal deficit equivalent to 4.7 per cent of GDP in 2018-19, almost the same as the revised shortfall of 4.8 per cent for 2017-18. Notably, over the past few years, the government was able to meet its deficit targets, mostly by scaling down expenditure while missing revenue goals.

## Social safety net

One of the key features of the FY19 budget was the expansion of the social safety net and large-scale implementation of electronic money transfer to safety net recipients. In the last budget, 23 ministries were entrusted with over 100 social safety net programmes (SSNP) with higher allocation. The allocation for them in the next fiscal year is around USD 7.6 billion or BDT 641.77 billion, which is 2.53 per cent of the GDP. In the last fiscal year's revised budget, the allocation was USD 5.8 billion or 2.17 per cent of the GDP. According to this plan, an additional 1.2 million people will benefit from SSNPs. It should be noted that though the finance minister rightly mentioned the importance of implementing the life-cycle based National Social Security Strategy (NSSS), the allocation to multiple programmes did not reflect the seriousness of implementation of the strategy.

## Sustainable development goal: poverty reduction

As many as 1.1 billion people freed themselves from the indignity of poverty across the world under the MDG regime. The first Sustainable Development Goal aims to free around 900 million people by 2030. An ODI study suggested that in order to attain the goal by 2030, at least 90 people must graduate out of poverty every minute. Against this ambitious target, only 72 people were graduating every minute in 2017. In case more effective measures are not taken, the rate is further set to decline to 54 and 30 by 2019 and 2022 respectively owing to the rising poverty in fragile states.

Fortunately for Bangladesh, the outlook is much better. Over the past few decades, the incidence and depth of poverty in Bangladesh have been decreasing gradually. Measured against the international extreme poverty line, poverty fell by 18.5 percentage point in 2010 to 13.8-point in 2016. Between 2010 and 2016, eight million Bangladeshis moved out of poverty. If the present trend continues, Bangladesh will be on track to achieve the first Sustainable Development Goal by 2030.

However, there are risks. Firstly, like in most countries, the rate of poverty reduction in Bangladesh is also slowing. Despite noticeable increase in the GDP growth rate, the national poverty rate fell by 1.2-point annually from 2010 to 2016 compared to 1.7 percentage point from 2005 to 2010.

Secondly, while income per head is increasing, most economic measures suggest growing disparity. Between 2010 and 2016 the income GINI co-efficient deteriorated from 0.41 to 0.48. The income share of the lowest 10 per cent households decreased from 2-point in 2010 to only 1.01-point in 2016, whereas the income share of the top 10-point households increased from 35.85 percentage point to 38.16 per cent. Estimates suggest that Bangladesh could reduce poverty by another percentage point if the growth was equal.

Thirdly, another form of entrenched disparity is also a source of risk. The 2005-10 development trajectory challenged the persistent East-West divide of the past. But analysis of the latest Household Income and Expenditure Survey (HIES) has suggested a new worrying trend. It seems that incidence of poverty in the north-western regions of Rangpur has increased during 2010-16, while it remained stagnant in Rajshahi and Khulna division in the west. The major gainers were the eastern regions of Sylhet, Dhaka and Barisal Division.

Fourthly, urban poverty is fast becoming a challenge for Bangladesh. Between 2010 and 2016, 90 per cent of the

**“ access to financial services, and social stigma make it doubly difficult for a person with disability to graduate out of the income and non-income poverty. ”**



poverty reduction took place in the rural areas leaving the poverty rate in urban areas virtually unchanged. In the face of rapid urbanisation, the issue of urban poverty reduction will continue to dominate the discussion.

Fifthly, our growth is not creating adequate jobs. According to Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, only around seven million new jobs were created between 2010 and 2016-17 against nearly 13 million new entrants to the market.

Finally, addressing systematic challenges such as poverty reduction initiatives for people with disability historically has not produced very encouraging results. The much used tool of targeted social safety net programmes for people with disability have had limited success and is often criticised for its tokenistic approach. Data from 2010 HIES suggest that only 8.81% female and 16.91% male with disability are covered by social safety net programmes. Systematic

SSNP allocation for targeted programme for persons with disabilities				
Social Safety Net Programme	Coverage ('000/MM)		Allocation (Million USD)	
	FY18 Budget*	FY19 Budget	FY18 Budget*	FY19 Budget
Allowances for the financially insolvent disabled people				
Stipend for disabled students	825	1000	81.58	98.88
Grants for the schools for disabled	80	90	6.42	9.46
Fund for the welfare of burnt and disabled	35	35	2.70	2.71
Service and assistance centre for disabled people	30	30	0.18	0.18
Construction of vocational training and rehabilitation centre for the disabled at CRP, Manikganj	307	376	7.65	7.65

The manufacturing sector, the major source of growth, could generate only 0.3 million new jobs during this time. Traditional sectors like RMG's total employment, according to some estimates, has actually reduced marginally due to wide-spread automation. This phenomenon, generally known as jobless growth, remains a serious concern for the sustainability of Bangladesh's poverty reduction success. However, the situation seems to be impacted by the jobs created in the large infrastructure projects.

discrimination for access to public services, access to financial services, and social stigma make it doubly difficult for a person with disability to graduate out of the income and non-income poverty. Unless we cannot do enough to help the large proportion of people who are living with disability, attaining SDG 1 would be impossible.

*K A M Morshed is the director of Advocacy, Technology, and Partnership, BRAC.*

## Making of an epic

Shekh Farid

Hephaestus, the Greek God of fire, metal and stonework, was born lame, according to Greek mythology. His mother Hera, the queen of the Gods, threw him out of paradise in shame. Despite all odds, however, Hephaestus grew up to become the finest craftsman in all of Greece. He made new weapons for all Gods and demi-Gods whose tales are intricately weaved in Greek mythology. The story of Rabbi, whose photograph adorns the cover page, is already looking a lot like the Hephaestus story- for his is a story of courage and determination to overcome physical constraints and continue to shine in his own light.

Rabbi Mia, son of Abdur Rahman and Helena Begum, is a second-year BBA student at Kolatia Degree College. He was born with one leg in a not so well-to-do family. He studied his primary classes in a BRAC school. "My teachers were always supportive and encouraged me to take part in extra-curricular activities," Rabbi recalls. "I was in class three when I participated in a competition in Dhaka and secured the first position in racing, swimming and badminton. That was my beginning," Rabbi continues.

However, when Rabbi was a student of class six, the growing economic constraints started to threaten Rabbi's dream. He was not one to be defeated. He sought help from BRAC and received four goats to support his education.

## Cover Story

**“Acting was not an easy task for us. You will see that I had a role of walking in that play, which was difficult for me. Some of us were hearing impaired but had to keep pace with the music. In fact, we made it possible”**

"I was successful in rearing goats and had my educational expenses from it. I used to earn about BDT 30,000 annually from goat rearing. After bearing my educational expenses, I also supported my family from the earning," says Rabbi. He obtained his secondary and higher secondary certificates with respectable grades.

After completing a six-month training on computer operation from CRP, Rabbi is now a part-time computer operator at a school and also tutors school children. While these jobs earn him enough to continue his education, Rabbi feels passionate about acting. He started acting as a ninth grader and first appeared on a formal stage in a BRAC arranged programme in Cox's Bazar. He then participated in British Council training on acting. "At the beginning, I was unsure whether I could learn acting. But when I saw that the trainer herself was hearing-impaired, I felt motivated," says Rabbi.

**“I think every person with a disability should have courage and determination to do something for the society. They can achieve everything they want if they get support and motivation from those around them. We can all make a meaningful contribution to the world”**

He received praises for his role as Romeo in the play 'A Different Romeo and Juliet', staged at the Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy in March 2016. The filmed version was screened in six divisional towns as well. "Acting was not an easy task for us. You will see that I had a part where I had to walk, which was difficult for me. Some of the actors were hearing impaired but still managed to keep pace with the music. In fact, we all made it possible."

His determination to overcome odds and his performance in the act made him a well-known face among many organisations. He is regularly invited to join various programmes. Rabbi also takes interest in events where he can talk to people with disabilities and motivate them. "I think every person with a disability should have courage and determination to do something for the society. They can achieve everything they want if they get the right support. We can all make a meaningful contribution to the world," is Rabbi's key message to his listeners.

With his persistence and whatever little support that he got, we hope, this is the beginning of yet another Hephaestus story to inspire generations of persons with disabilities to overcome the odds and shine in their own light. We wish him all the best!

*Shekh Farid works as a social investigator for Advocacy for Social Change, BRAC.*

Photo Courtesy: British council

Photo Courtesy: British council

# Disability inclusion in Bangladesh: Some pertinent thoughts

## Moon Moon Hossain

Globally, persons with disabilities still face multiple barriers to equal participation in every society - the difference is, some countries are taking more active strides to remove these barriers than others. Barriers such as lack of accessibility of physical and virtual environments, discrimination, stigma and negative attitudes are rather common concerns to promote inclusion.

One of the key challenges of addressing the persistent exclusion is adequate and disaggregated data on disability and persons with disabilities. Notably, the Household Income and Expenditure Survey (HIES) data for 2010 indicates that about 9.07 per cent of Bangladesh population lives with disability. The survey used the short set of Washington Group Questions<sup>1</sup>. The next year, the National Population Census used their own tool to come up with a much lower proportion of persons with disability level, which was only 1.4 per cent. What is more surprising, these two figures were reported by two wings of the same institution. Lastly, in March 2018, the Dhaka Tribune quoted the Secretary for the Ministry of Social Welfare informed of a government mapping which has identified 1.51 million people living in Bangladesh as persons with disability<sup>2</sup>. Since this figure should dictate the allocation of social safety net budget and special allocation for persons with disability, such variation is surely unhelpful at best.

This variation in statistics may be partially caused by the use of different instruments and approaches of defining 'disability'. As Dr Sen and Dr Hoque suggested this low figure "could also reflect widespread micro household behaviour"<sup>3</sup>. The authors further highlighted that this widespread stigma that led to families who have members with disabilities can actually seek to hide the members from social discourse. They wrote, "The hide-and-seek behaviors with respect to disabled populations in this setting could be an exteriorization of widespread denial and/ or silence over the persistence of disability." Indeed, such stigma is not present in our society, rather there are abundant empirical evidences that people with physical and mental impairments remain stigmatised and discriminated against around the world.

But stigma is not the only reason why persons with disability is excluded from public services. Physical barriers not only create additional barriers, but sometimes also contribute in persisting the stigma. Bangladesh's public service delivery is predominantly based on a face-to-face model. The service seeker (citizen) needs to meet a service agent (government official) at a designated place and time to receive services. A person with disability, who might have functional limitations to travel and often the place (often the government office) is not friendly for the person to access. Such a model imposes severe restrictions and economic burden on the citizen. The good news is that as part of the Digital Bangladesh agenda, the government has introduced a large number of online services which reduces the number of travel required to



access a service. The government has also introduced probably the world's largest public web portal to improve access to information. However, despite several attempts, there is no national standard to make these websites and online services accessible, and most of these remain inaccessible for persons with disabilities.

Making the matter even worse is the legal barriers. Most laws and statutes of Bangladesh identifies individuals for the purpose of property rights by his/her signature or thumb impression. The Bangladesh Evidence Act 18 72, for example, rely on signature or handwriting to identify a document with a person. Although the Information and Communication Technology Act 2006 introduced digital signature as an alternative, the required infrastructure is largely absent in Bangladesh. Similarly, though Rights and Protection of Persons with Disabilities Act 2013 guaranteed equal treatment, there is still no effective provisions for a person with speech disability, for example, to submit evidence in a legal proceeding. In fact, most legal protection for persons with disabilities require that the person avail such protection through his/her parents or legal guardian. Such restriction severely limits the accessibility and dignity of the person.

One example of such limitation is evident in case of financial inclusion. Even though Bangladesh Bank asked all scheduled banks to take special steps including nominating a focal person in each branch to helping persons with disabilities to conduct banking, enabling banking using thumb impression, and issuing special PIN codes, not much progress has happened on the ground. In reality, persons with disabilities actually face difficulties and indignity even to withdraw their disability allowances that is paid through commercial banks.

Many microfinance institutions (MFI) serve persons with disabilities, but often in a tokenistic way. A 2015 study finds that Bangladeshi MFIs "are not that much concerned

about the financial inclusion of disabled people<sup>4</sup>." BRAC seems to be the most notable exception with specific programmes specifically targeting people with disability<sup>5</sup>. A new initiative, known as Agent Banking, is also showing early positive signs to be a viable model in serving persons with disabilities as well.

The lack of capacity to accommodate persons with disabilities into our society is yet another barrier to inclusion. The capacity of our teachers, doctors, nurses, social workers, law enforcement officials to address the specific needs of the persons with disabilities plays a significant role in lower quality and effectiveness of the services that are offered to persons with disabilities. Similarly, capacity of our public policy platforms to integrate views and preferences of persons with disabilities is probably most direct cause of disability-blind development initiatives and budgeting often pointed out by disabled people's organisations (DPOs).

While the above paragraphs paint a rather dismal picture of the state of disability inclusion in Bangladesh, there are notable progresses in multiple areas. The strengthening of the National Disability Foundations, remarkable progress in identification and provisions of services to children with disabilities, especially neurodevelopmental disorders, political leadership from the top are pre-conditions to break free from the mutually reinforcing cycle of inequity and disability. Additionally, more interventions are required in creating cognizance in society from local to national level, including all the state and non-state actors through dissemination of Rights and Protection of Persons with Disabilities Act 2013. Media can play a vital role in raising awareness in this arena.

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<sup>1</sup>The Washington Group (WG) Short Set is a set of questions designed to identify (in a census or survey format) people with a disability.

<sup>2</sup>See <http://www.washingtongroup-disability.com/washington-group-question-sets/short-set-of-disability-questions/> See <https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/law-rights/2018/02/28/allowance-disabled-people-next-year/> (accessed 30 June, 2018)

<sup>3</sup>Binayak Sen, Mainul Hoque (2017) *Unpacking Disability-Extreme Poverty Links in Bangladesh through Household Income and Expenditure Survey: A Quantitative Exercise*, CPAN Challenge Paper, September

<sup>4</sup>Sarker D (2015), "Inclusion of Disabled People in Microfinance Institutions: Where Does Bangladesh Stand?", *International Journal of Innovation and Economic Development*, Volume 1, Issue 1, April 2015, 70-82

<sup>5</sup>See more at <http://blog.brac.net/inclusive-microfinance-putting-the-ability-into-disability/>. BRAC Micro-finance has more than 10,000 disabled clients including some large borrowers under the Progati programme.

# Ending inequality through disability inclusion

Shamsin Ahmed

"The denial of merit is a form of social injustice that can hurt not only the individuals directly concerned but ultimately the entire society. The motive for the original denial may be tribal discrimination, but it may also come from sexism, from political, religious, or some other partisan consideration, or from corruption and bribery. It is unnecessary to examine these various motives separately; it is sufficient to state that whenever merit is set aside by prejudice of whatever origin, individual citizens as well as a nation itself are victimised." - Chinua Achebe

Exclusion of people with disabilities is not just a form of social injustice, it is a denial of merit that has continued for ages even in development agendas because it is not viewed as a 'denial of merit'. Today there are approximately one billion people living with disabilities in the world. Through years of advocacy efforts of disabled people, their families and allies, disability inclusion has been brought to the forefront of development. Including disabled people in development is a key consideration as the Sustainable Development Goals brought forward the 'leave no one behind' agenda. At least six of the 17 SDG goals directly address social inclusion of disabled people.

Even while looking into conventional economic standards of poverty eradication for example, the high price we pay

for excluding people with disabilities, is hardly taken into consideration. In a study conducted by the Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS) on the Economics of Disability and Children at Risk in Bangladesh, disability is underlined as both a cause and consequence of poverty. The paper identifies that in Bangladesh, the economic cost of disability is comprised of children with disabilities losing out on school; lack of employment of people with disability; adults missing out on many employment opportunities so that they can take care of people with disabilities in their families; and children missing out on education while helping family members with disabilities<sup>1</sup>. These costs amount to US USD 1.18 billion annually, which is 1.74 per cent of GDP, a high price indeed for a country like Bangladesh.



<sup>1</sup>Bangladesh Development Studies, Vol. XXXVII, December 2014, No. 4 Economic Costs of Disability in Bangladesh, ZULFIQAR ALI, [http://bids.org.bd/uploads/publication/BDS/37/37-4/2\\_Economics%20of%20Disability%20in%20Bangladesh.pdf](http://bids.org.bd/uploads/publication/BDS/37/37-4/2_Economics%20of%20Disability%20in%20Bangladesh.pdf)

“education is an equaliser that can break the cycle of discrimination and poverty.”

## Support gaps and barriers

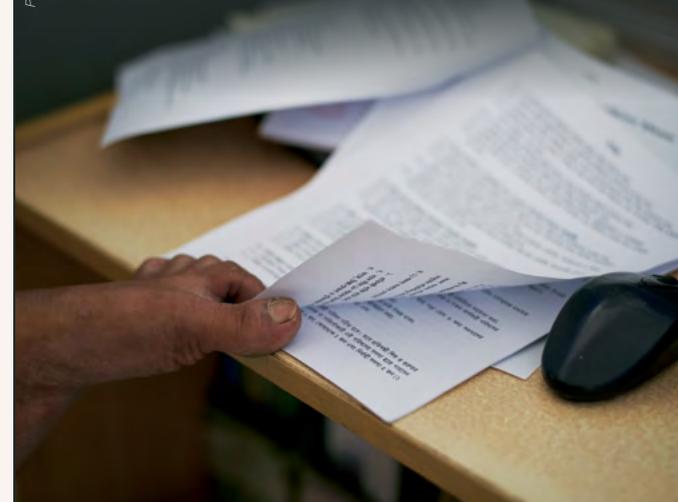
In Bangladesh, the government's disaster response strategy has focussed, increasingly and perhaps effectively, on the physical needs of survivors through the provision of shelter, food and physical medical care. As there has been no policy provision, compensation or support for those with disabilities, people with physical disabilities struggle during evacuation, getting relief and are more susceptible to accidents caused by natural disasters.

Despite disabled people being a heterogeneous group with different people having different kinds of accommodation needs, the needs are no more different in terms of development initiatives. Economic empowerment initiatives, enabling access to education, health and financial services as is provided by many development organisations can help empower disabled people in just the same way. According to a study by UNICEF, 90 per cent children with disabilities are not in school<sup>2</sup>. The main struggle here are more attitudinal misconceptions that disability inclusion incurs high costs in the form of infrastructure accommodations and limitations in their capacity to work or be involved in businesses.

The United Nation's Convention of the Rights of Persons' with Disability (UNCRPD) defines persons with disabilities as Persons with Disabilities (PWD). They include “those with long term **physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairment** which in interaction with various **barriers** may hinder their full and effective participation in **society as equals**.”<sup>3</sup>

The emphasis on barriers that hinder effective participation is to acknowledge that disability is less an attribute of a person but the barriers they face in participating in society as equals.

Photo Courtesy: Disability and sexuality study team



<sup>2</sup> Progress in measuring global school enrollment gaps for children with disabilities By Suguru Mizunoya, 21 March 2018, UNICEF

<sup>3</sup>UNCRPD, United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. 2006. [http://www2.ohchr.org/english/law/disabilities\\_convention.htm](http://www2.ohchr.org/english/law/disabilities_convention.htm)



## Legal and policy framework on the rights of persons with disabilities: Gaps and ways forward

Muhammad Mahdy Hassan

About 15 per cent of the world's population lives with some form of disability. From this, two to four per cent experience significant difficulties in functioning.<sup>1</sup> The trend is no different for Bangladesh as according to WHO's 'World Report on Disability'<sup>2</sup>, 10 per cent of the total population in the country is living with disabilities. The recent Household Income and Expenditure Survey (HIES) 2016 observed that the percentage of persons with disabilities is 9.79 (Some disabilities), 2.17 (severe disability) and 1.13 (fully disabled). In rural areas, the percentage of population who suffered from any sorts of disability is 7.27 for both sexes while 6.04 per cent suffered from any sort of disability for both sexes in urban areas.<sup>3</sup>

The table shows detailed percentage distribution of population (all ages) having any difficulty (disability) even with an aid by types and intensity of difficulty to ensure the rights and protection of persons with disabilities, special

Types of difficulty	Intensity of difficulty		
	Some	Severe	Full disability
Eye sight	3.89	0.42	0.08
Hearing	1.75	0.28	0.09
Walking and climbing	1.40	0.46	0.17
Remembering and concentrating	1.07	0.33	0.19
Self-care	0.88	0.36	0.29
Speaking and communicating	0.8	0.32	0.31
Total	9.79	2.17	1.13

Source: Report of the Household Income & Expenditure Survey (HIES) in 2016

inclusion measures need to be taken by the state including policies, laws and programmes that remove barriers and guarantees the exercise of civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights of persons with disabilities.

## Road maps for inclusion

After winning the title of being the world's number one organisation for the third time in a row, BRAC has always taken the right measures towards inclusive development. BRAC initiated a programme for children with special needs in 2003 and till date the programme has facilitated access to education to 2.5 lac children and adolescents with disabilities.<sup>4</sup> This is important because education is an equaliser that can break the cycle of discrimination and poverty. BRAC also has a loan product specifically for people with disabilities. Launched in 2012, this caters to the financial needs of people with disabilities.

One of the most empowering forms of long term development is facilitating employment. According to the International Labor Organization (ILO), nearly 80 per cent people living with disabilities in developing countries are unemployed. Having a job is crucial not only for one's survival in Bangladesh, but also to alleviate social stigma. BRAC's Skill Development Programme (SDP) provides skills training and job placement services to over 28,345 youths in 43 districts of Bangladesh. Till date, the programme has ensured that persons with disabilities have accessible workplaces. Also, 2,453 people with disabilities have already graduated through the apprenticeship model of the programme.

## Access to Employment

Typical approach to disability inclusion has been based on charity, which as it has a feel good factor, is done incidentally or deliberately through what is called 'positive discrimination'. The surest way to ensure accountable and inclusive development requires including disabled people in the process of development.

To be truly inclusive is to make disabled people part of governing systems of institutions and the state, enable them to become policymakers and institution leaders. Actively and consciously hiring disabled people is almost an autonomous way of ensuring inclusion. Such steps can mandate that people have an opportunity to work, that their employer accommodates them and in turn, the workplace becomes inclusive.

*Shamsin Ahmed is the founder and director of Identity Inclusion, and in-country coordinator of BlueLaw International in Bangladesh.*

<sup>4</sup>BRAC Roles in Non-Formal Education: A Study on BRAC Education for Ethnic Children program in Bangladesh, md. isahaque ali, BRAC Institute of Governance and Development (BIGD), 2016, p-43

## Legal and policy framework

Bangladesh signed and ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) in 2007, as well as its Optional Protocol in 2008. The CRPD is the first international, legally binding treaty aimed at protecting the rights of persons with disabilities. The Optional Protocol also allows persons with disabilities whose rights have been violated, to bring complaints to the committee on the rights of people with disabilities. Bangladesh also signed the Proclamation on the Full

Participation and Equality of People with Disabilities in the Asia Pacific Region and the Biwako Millennium Framework for Action towards an Inclusive, Barrier Free and Rights Based Society for Persons with Disability.

In addition, Bangladesh signed and ratified other UN human rights treaties that advance the rights of disabled people, including the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

<sup>1</sup>World Health Organization website: <[http://www.who.int/disabilities/world\\_report/2011/report/en/](http://www.who.int/disabilities/world_report/2011/report/en/)> <sup>2</sup>World Report on Disability, World Health Organization, 2011, P. 271 <sup>3</sup>Report of the Household Income & Expenditure Survey (HIES) in 2016, Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, Statistics Division, Ministry of Planning, P.91

## National laws and policies

In terms of national laws and policies, the following have the most direct bearing on the rights of persons with disabilities:

### Constitution of Bangladesh:

The Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh 1972 guarantees the basic human rights of every citizen of the country and prohibits any form of discrimination between social groups, including persons with disabilities. For example, article 15(d) specifically mentions the right to social security for persons with disabilities.<sup>4</sup> The Constitution also guarantees fundamental rights relevant to access to justice.<sup>5</sup>

### The Rights and Protection of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2013:

The Rights and Protection of Persons with Disabilities Act 2013 came into force on 9 October 2013, repealing and replacing the Disability Welfare Act of 2001. Section 3 of the act identifies and covers a wider range of disabilities in its definition of 'persons with disabilities'.<sup>6</sup> It also provides remedies for discrimination by both public and private actors. The act establishes committees at different levels with the responsibilities to ensure development and protection of rights of persons with disabilities.<sup>7</sup> It also set up a National Advisory Committee headed by the prime minister, which aims to ensure implementation of legislation and policies related to persons with disabilities. The Ministry of Social Welfare (MoSW) is responsible for coordinating and implementing the act.

Section 16 of the act sets out the rights of persons with disabilities and Section 16 (1) (b) specifies that persons with disabilities will have equal recognition before the law and have the right to have access to justice. Other sections of the act cover freedom from violence, access to justice and legal aid, obligating the state to make the justice system accessible for all persons with disabilities. More sections require public transport to reserve 5 per cent of seats for persons with disabilities and further prohibits any form of discrimination in employment against them as long as that person meets the eligibility criteria.

## Other national laws addressing the rights of the persons with disabilities:

- In 2013, the Neuro-Developmental Disability Protection Trust Act was passed by Parliament, providing for the care, security and rehabilitation of persons with autism.
- Section 2 (a) of the Legal Aid and Services Act 2000 further secures the right to access legal aid and services for persons who are "poor, insolvent, destitute, and otherwise incapacitated for socio-economic reasons".<sup>8</sup>
- The Rules adopted under the 2000 Act include persons with disabilities as eligible for receiving legal aid.
- Section 119 of the Evidence Act 1872 allows persons with speech impairments to provide evidence in court in any manner that is convenient for them whether it is by writing or through the use of sign language.
- Section 119 of the Evidence Act 1872 allows for a witness with speech impairments to provide evidence in any way that is possible whether it is done in writing or otherwise.<sup>9</sup>



## National policies

- The National Child Policy of 2011 recognises the equal rights of all children, including those with disabilities. It provides for the dignified treatment of children with disabilities, their inclusion and participation in all aspects of society, including education while underlining that special education be provided to children with disabilities who are unable to attend mainstream schools.
- The Information and Technology Policy of 2010 and the Women Development Advancement Policy of 2011 also specifically refer to improving access and opportunities for persons with disabilities.
- National Women Development Policy 2008 was updated in 2011 and now puts further stress for better development of women with disabilities.
- Dhaka Declaration 2015+1 was adopted at the Dhaka Conference 2018 on Disability and Disaster Risk Management Dhaka, Bangladesh in May 15-17, 2018.

## Ways forward

1. Implement existing laws and policies addressing the rights of persons with disabilities and engage with multi-levels of stakeholders; reduce gaps in laws, policies and their implementation so that persons with disabilities can enjoy their rights and protection.
2. Remove physical barriers and ensure disabled-friendly washrooms/toilets in all public and private places, with special focus on court environments through implementation of schedule five (accessibility); six (mobility) and 12 (freedom from violence, access to justice and legal aid) of the 2013 act to make all public places accessible.
3. Protect persons with disabilities victims by reinforcing schedule 12 of act 2013 with special focus in line with section 31 of the suppression of violence against women and children act 2000.
4. Address lack of knowledge among persons with disabilities about their rights and protection, and raise awareness in line with the act of 2013 through state and non-state actors.

The current government interventions seem respectful about the rights and protection of the persons with disabilities. Still implementation gaps between policies and practice remain mostly untouched. Therefore, it is time to realise the full potential of ensuring the rights and protection of persons with disabilities in the country and implement the existing laws and policies immediately to keep the commitment of Bangladesh to the international community. The 2013 Act is a big leap forward as a first step and now it is required to fulfil the ultimate objective of the Act and materialise the aspirations of creating an inclusive society.

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<sup>4</sup> Article 15 (4), the Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh. <sup>5</sup> See, for details, article 27 (equality before the law), article 28 (freedom from discrimination on grounds of sex, race, religion, caste and place of birth, as well as affirmative action provisions for any 'backward section of citizens'), article 31 (right to protection of the law), article 32 (right to life and personal liberty) and article 35 (right to speedy trial and prohibition of torture and cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment or punishment) as well as article 39 (freedom of expression). These rights are also equally applicable for the persons with disabilities. <sup>6</sup> See for details, Section 2, the Rights and Protection of the Persons with Disabilities, Act, 2013. <sup>7</sup> See, for details, Sections 17-28, the Rights and Protection of the Persons with Disabilities, Act, 2013. <sup>8</sup> See, Section 2 (a), the Legal Aid and Services Act, 2000. <sup>9</sup> See, Section 19, the Evidence Act, 1872

## Universal health coverage and disability

Disability, as described in a 'bio-psychosocial' model, is an umbrella term for impairments, activity limitations and participation restrictions, referring to the negative aspects of the interaction between an individual (with a health condition) and that individual's contextual factors (environmental and personal factors).<sup>1</sup> A person suffering from disability is termed 'person with disability' (PWD). According to WHO (2011), around 15 per cent of the global population (some 978 million people of the estimated 6.4 billion) suffers from some form of disability, and 2.9 per cent or about 185 million experience severe disability.<sup>2</sup> The World Health Survey (2004) estimates that female prevalence of overall disability is nearly 60 per cent higher than that for males; it also reports disability rates to be ranging from 11.8 per cent in higher income countries to 18.0 per cent in lower income countries.<sup>3</sup> In Bangladesh, the official prevalence of disability estimated is 1.41 per cent (BBS, 2012).<sup>4</sup> However World Bank data reported prevalence to be 14 per cent among population aged > 18 (World Bank, 2004) and, prevalence based on gender was reported to be 8.83 per cent among males and 10.76 per cent among females.<sup>5</sup>

It is obvious that the disabled population occupies a significant proportion globally and nationally, and their needs and rights need to be inclusive in any development goal as set by global and national leaders. But unfortunately, the growing body of global research on disabled population suggests that this marginalised group is at a gross disadvantage compared to the rest of the population. Majority of studies have found that persons with disabilities have lower employment rates, lower educational attainment, as well as less healthcare utilisation than persons without disability.<sup>6</sup> In Bangladesh, healthcare facilities including community clinics, upazila health complexes and district hospitals, generally lack provisions for accessibility and providers' expertise required for the healthcare of persons with disabilities, especially to provide services to women

with disabilities when they become pregnant, including pre-natal, natal and post-natal care<sup>7</sup> (BLAST, 2015; World Bank and PROB, 2015). Plenty of research work has found the high rate of sexual violence and violence from intimate partner faced by disabled women. The Persons with Disability Welfare Act 2001 and its amendment- Rights and Protection of Persons with Disabilities Act, Act no 39 of 2013 of the Government of Bangladesh listed 10 specific priority areas. However, there is no inclusion of sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) among them.

Under such circumstances, BRAC's James P Grant School of Public Health has undertaken two research studies in order to further explore the problem areas and add value to knowledge to drive advocacy. One is a scoping study that brought out photo-narratives of disabled individuals between the ages of 20 and 40 years, about their perceptions of desire, intimacy, love and romance. By taking pictures and sharing narratives, disabled individuals expressed stories of expectations, hurt, excitement and joy when it came to matters of sexuality.

The second study looked into the various barriers that hamper accessibility to and provision of healthcare for persons with disabilities in Bangladesh.



<sup>1</sup>Leonardi, M., Bickenbach, J., Ustun, T. B., Kostanjsek, N., Chatterji, S., & MHADIE Consortium. (2006). The definition of disability: what is in a name?. *The Lancet*, 368(9543), 1219-1221. <sup>2</sup>WHO (2011). World Health Organization Data Repository. Retrieved from [http://www.who.int/disabilities/world\\_report/2011/report.pdf](http://www.who.int/disabilities/world_report/2011/report.pdf). <sup>3</sup>World Health Survey (2004). World Health Organisation, Geneva. Retrieved from <http://www.who.int/healthinfo/survey/en/> <sup>4</sup>BBS (2012). Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, Government of Peoples' Republic of Bangladesh <sup>5</sup>Tareque, M. I., Begum, S., & Saito, Y. (2014). Inequality in disability in Bangladesh. *PLoS One*, 9(7), e103681. <sup>6</sup>Trani, J. F., & Loeb, M. (2012). Poverty and disability: a vicious circle? Evidence from Afghanistan and Zambia. *Journal of International Development*, 24(S1). Mitra, S., Posarac, A., & Vick, B. C. (2011). Disability and poverty in developing countries: A snapshot from the World Health Survey. Eide, A. H., & Kamaleri, Y. (2009). Living conditions among people with disabilities in Mozambique: a national representative study. Oslo, SINTEF. <sup>7</sup>BLAST (2015). Current status of Rights of Persons with Disabilities in Bangladesh: Legal and Grassroots perspectives. Retrieved from <https://www.blast.org.bd/content/publications/crpdreport.pdf>. World Bank and PROB (2015). Disability in Bangladesh: A situation analysis. Retrieved from [http://siteresources.worldbank.org/DISABILITY/Resources/Regions/South%20Asia/Disability inBangladesh.pdf](http://siteresources.worldbank.org/DISABILITY/Resources/Regions/South%20Asia/Disability%20in%20Bangladesh.pdf)

## Untold desires of persons with physical disability

Undertaken by Saad Khan and Farhana Alam Bhuiyan, and funded by Share-Net International, the study found that aspects of disability, body and sexuality can be multifaceted. For instance 23-year-old Hosna has a spinal cord injury, but she has extra-sensitive erogenous zones in her upper body and thinks she does not need sexual intercourse to be pleased. Or 40-year-old Romel, who masturbated with his feet in his adolescence, because he was born without arms. Or 40-year-old Ayesha with post-polio syndrome, who thinks that men in general need to understand more about sexual intimacy and believes that a disabled woman should never go the extra mile to please a man.

In case of physically-disabled males, there is a perception that they are not 'man enough' or 'worthy' to be with an able-bodied woman. This perception is enforced by the same opinion the community around them holds. Twenty-four-year-old Nayeem, a private university student, has a spinal cord injury. He often talks about his girlfriend, whom he has been dating for more than a year now. They study at the same university. He has shared his physical limitations with her. He has to wear a catheter all the time, he is unable to have an erection, will not be able to move freely in bed and will need support during sexual intercourse. He tells her of his fear that he might never make her sexually happy. Nayeem mentioned that people are often surprised by his girlfriend being in a relationship with a disabled man.

A physically-disabled woman do not match with the concept of the "proper" feminine look. A bent leg, a bent body or a bent back is seen as unattractive and renders the woman ineligible for dating or marriage. Due to the patriarchal realities in Bangladesh, a disabled woman is also far more likely than a disabled man to experience socio-cultural barriers when it comes to exploring dating options or simply expressing herself on her own terms. On the other side, disabled men experience oppression and exclusion in terms of social and individual expectations of masculinity. Expectations to earn, take care and protect one's family and sexually perform are all believed to be markers of masculinity. Men's sexual prowess is expressed either through their bodily strength, or their erections. Often times, disabled men are not able to live up to these ideals and are consequently seen as "less of a man".



Photo Courtesy: Barriers to health care faced by PWD study team

# Existing barriers to availing healthcare by the persons with disabilities in Bangladesh

The study is being undertaken by Raia Azmi, Bithun Tasnuva Mazid, Fatema Akter Bonny, and Samiha Ali, and funded by BRAC.

The study identified multiple barriers to accessibility and utilisation of health care, which are persistent due to existing challenges in the health system. Absence of appropriate infrastructure in health facilities is found to be a major barrier to accessibility. Most health facilities, especially at primary and secondary levels, do not have ramps, wide doors or spacious elevators to facilitate access by wheelchair. Many of the tertiary care facilities are multi-storied, with the doctors sitting above the ground floor, making it really difficult for persons with disabilities to get treatment. In cases where the ramps are found to exist, they are often not built according to the measurements that would allow wheelchairs to move up the slope, and result in accidents. These facilities also do not have special toilets for persons with disabilities and the door to access the toilets are often too narrow. Apart from physical infrastructures, the facilities have really long queues for getting an appointment with the doctor, which again poses problems for persons with disabilities, as standing for long hours in line is very difficult for them. Also, it is reported that upon entry, although a person with disabilities should be provided with assistance by someone and/or with a wheelchair, it is almost never available. A respondent shared from her own experience, 'I could see that she (a person with disabilities with paralysed legs) cannot stand and was sitting in the line helplessly while people were passing her by, but no one from the hospital came forward to offer her a hand or a wheelchair'

Lack of provider skills and knowledge in treating persons with disabilities was reported as an important barrier towards provision of quality care. The

*"Why did you get pregnant?" The nurse had asked the girl (a person with disabilities beneficiary of the NGO). "Don't you understand you are disabled? You are only creating more problems for everyone," said the nurse.*

- NGO stakeholder

study also found that healthcare providers lack sensitivity while dealing with patients with physical disability. Many respondents reported, the providers have a stigma against them and often try to make it sound like the disease is their fault, as they should have prevented it somehow. The NGO stakeholders who work with females with physical disability reported that when these women go to the providers for check-up or healthcare during pregnancy and delivery, they quite often face negative remarks and questions.

It was reported that lack of special facilities in public transportation for persons with disabilities, such as reserved seats and ramp and space for wheelchairs, add a level of barrier in the path of accessing healthcare. Lack of provisions in public transports meant higher costs incurred by persons with disabilities while seeking care, as they need to avail private transports in most cases. This extra cost only adds to the inability to afford healthcare by persons with disabilities and demotivates their efforts at getting healthcare until there is an emergency.

Persons with disabilities from higher socio-economic background or who come from an influential family, often have better affordability and scope of hiring assistance. They would be more often treated with respect than persons with disabilities who do not have this background. persons with disabilities who are rich themselves also have better accessibility and less dependency for seeking care. However, majority of persons with disabilities are often neglected and stigmatised by their family and society. Physically-disabled women, being more dependent in terms of money, assistance and even decision-making, are often neglected more by family members and seek healthcare less. Without adequate support and encouragement from the family, no persons with disabilities can progress much in terms of education, earning, even freedom in seeking care.

The study found that there are significant challenges within the health system and its functioning that contributed to and perpetuated existence of the discussed barriers

to healthcare. One of the major challenges is lack of adequate budget allocation. Another nuance identified by different stakeholders is, all issues and policies regarding disability is placed under the jurisdiction of Ministry of Social Welfare. This results in taking less ownership and discourages active participation in policymaking and implementation by the other ministries and the government and other stakeholders. There are policies and laws that are protecting the rights of persons with disabilities. But these policies were not properly implemented. An overall lack of monitoring by the Ministries as well as the law enforcement agencies to ensure implementation of the policies complicate the situation. The Ministries lack coordination between them for various reasons. One of the reasons identified is not ensuring participation nor taking into account the capacities of different Ministries while laying down policies. Other reasons are high staff turnover due to transfers in different positions, which hinders implementation of policies/decisions. Also, a major problem in implementing actions and decisions is the bureaucratic delays.

The system is also hindered by corruption and practice of taking bribes. Another practice within Ministries is to place politically-affiliated personnel in responsible positions of action, and not personnel who actually have expertise on disability issues. This leads to a lack of sensitivity and interest as well as expertise when it comes to decisions, implementation and monitoring of service provision for persons with disabilities.

The healthcare system currently lacks monitoring, system of accountability and good governance. Without these, there is abundant usurping of allocated resources, and, lack of collaborative efforts producing duplicity of efforts in smaller scales without bringing about any actual change.

## Conclusion

Health and well-being are rights of persons with physical disability just as much as the next person. The government needs to be attentive about the challenges in the health system by establishing good governance, in order to ensure adequate health service provision in the community level. Raising awareness and ensuring proper implementation of existing laws-regulations can help preserve the rights of persons with disabilities and enable them to get quality health services that they require.

Good sexual health is central to a person's physical and mental wellbeing as well. Knowing about SRHR and experiencing sexual agency is of paramount importance when it comes to ensuring rights of disabled people so that they can make informed choices and better decisions about their body and sexuality.

It can be hoped that the researches by teams at BRAC University will help provide solid evidence for policy advocacy in issues of sexual and reproductive health, and access to quality healthcare, for persons with disabilities.

*\*The Centre for Gender, Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (CGSRHR), BRAC James P. Grant School of Public Health, BRAC University. The Centre and research studies undertaken at the Centre are overseen by Dean and Professor Sabina Faiz Rashid. Summarised by Raiya Azmi, a research fellow at James P Grant School of Public Health, BRAC University.*

Photo Courtesy: Barriers to health care faced by PWD study team



## Still left behind: BRAC's approach to Inclusive education for persons with disabilities

Shekh Farid

Bangladesh was one of the first countries to ratify the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and its Optional Protocol, which recognises, among all other rights, the right of all children with disabilities to be included in the general education system. The UN Sustainable Development Goal 4 also calls for inclusive and equitable quality education, emphasising on equal access for persons with disabilities to all levels of education and vocational training. Given that inclusive quality education is both global development goal (SDG 4) and a means for achieving all other SDGs, it is expected that every country would ensure inclusion and equity for persons with disabilities in and through its education system and programmes.

Bangladesh has made remarkable progress in protecting the rights of persons with disabilities through a number of legislative and policy actions. But persons with disabilities are still among the most marginalised groups in our country within the education system, and the society. Despite our significant achievement in overall school enrolment, most persons with disabilities do not get enrolled in school, and those who do, drop out very soon due to absence of disability-friendly approaches in education, lack of awareness about their rights and capacity, and overall inaccessible school infrastructure. Having poor access to education, these people cannot actively participate in the community, and contribute to the society in general. If we exclude these people from mainstream development and cannot protect their rights, the main objective of SDGs will remain unfulfilled.

In response to this, BRAC established a persons with disabilities unit in 2003 under BRAC Education Programme (BEP). Since its establishment, the unit has been working to integrate children with disabilities, especially those who dropped out and are from marginalised families, into BRAC's education system and ensure their participation in mainstream education and society in general.

*“Despite our significant achievement in overall school enrolment, most persons with disabilities do not get enrolled in school, and those who do, drop out very soon”*



## BRAC's inclusive approach to education

- Enrolment of at least one person with disability in each BRAC School and other BEP components
- Sensitising teachers and staffs
- Sensitizing parents and community people
- Disability specialists for technical support and training
- Disability-friendly school environment
- Disability-sensitive curriculum
- Treatment and assistive devices
- Engaging persons with disabilities in cultural and other extra-curricular activities
- Engaging persons with disabilities in income generating activities
- Neuro Developmental Disability (NDD) centres
- Extended support even after graduating from BRAC School



## The BRAC approach

Disability inclusion has been a strategic priority of BRAC, having separate disability inclusion targets in its major programmes. According to the BRAC strategy 2016-2020, persons with disabilities will constitute five per cent of total target population of BEP and Health Nutrition and Population Programme (HNPP), and seven per cent of the total target population of Disaster Management and Climate Change (DMCC) programme. Moreover, 10 per cent of the target group for Skills Development Programme (SDP) will be from persons with disabilities and from ethnic minority groups. The programmes have their separate targets for disability inclusion in their services.

Since its establishment in 2003, BRAC's persons with disabilities unit with its multi-dimensional interventions, have been working towards ensuring the rights of persons with disabilities to education through its inclusive approach.

Initially, it was instructed that 10 per cent of BRAC students should be from persons with disabilities, ie, three in a cohort of 30-33 students. If not possible, there

should be at least one student with disability.<sup>1</sup> Children with disabilities are identified through community survey and then enrolled in BRAC school and in other components of BRAC, ie, Adolescent Development Club and Education Support Programme. The unit has sector specialists (SS) on disabilities who oversee disability inclusive education in BEP components - from identification of disability, to providing training of staff members and ensuring quality education for persons with disabilities.

BRAC sensitises its staff and teachers about the rights and needs of persons with disabilities through trainings, workshops, orientations, seminars, and meetings. It also developed a manual for teachers and staff about the process of disability inclusion. While these are continuous processes, the sector specialists are the technical professionals of this programme who also provide technical training on rapid neuro developmental assessment (RNDA), speech therapy, occupational therapy, physiotherapy and training on identification of types and degree of disability.

<sup>1</sup>Nath, S. M. (2016). *Realising potential: Bangladesh's experiences in education*. Dhaka: Academic Press and Publishers Library



Horibol Banarjee, a visually impaired boy from Srimangal, dropped out of primary school after his parents decided it was too difficult for him to continue. Both his parents are tea workers at Huglichara tea estate. BRAC convinced his parents to enrol him in the education programme and that paved the way for him to move forward. With support from BRAC's inclusive education initiative and the disability technical team, he completed his primary education by using braille method and secured a GPA score of 4.83 with general scholarship in his PEC examination in 2016.

Since 2010, BRAC began to involve community leaders in its approach through community level workshop. BRAC also creates awareness among students, parents and community people through discussion in parent meetings, videos, posters, leaflets, flash cards, published articles in the newspaper along with awareness generating campaigns.

BRAC also makes its schools disabled-friendly by constructing ramps. Classroom policies for students with disabilities, like sitting in the front, studying in pairs, inclusion of disability issues in textbooks, awareness building among classmates, and other measures convenient for them based on their types of disability are mandatory. The round of blackboard and slate, which is a medium for writing, are coloured yellow for the convenience of visually impaired children. In 2012, BRAC also introduced braille method for visually-impaired children in its schools.

In addition, BRAC provides medical aid, including surgery and assistive devices, to persons with disabilities. Treatment includes cleft lip and palate surgery, eye operation, eye treatment, hearing operation, hearing treatment, and other possible treatments. It also supports them with assistive devices like wheelchair, crutch, walking stick, artificial leg, hearing aid, spectacles and special lamp for the visually-impaired, braille books, stylus, letter cube, white cane, braille paper, among other assistive devices.

Probably, what makes the approach unique is that BRAC also emphasises on engaging persons with disabilities in cultural and other extra-curricular activities eg, dancing, singing, theatre, sports and scout. Born with hearing and speech impairment, Sangita Ghosh, a BRAC primary school graduate from Manikganj, presently earns through her expertise in fine arts. Now she is a student of class eight who teaches drawing and dancing to other children

of the village to bear her educational expenses. Many persons with disabilities regularly participate in cultural events in both national and local levels. The unit also provides training on being a scout to students with disabilities. In 2016, BRAC formed football and cricket teams with persons with disabilities who participated in various tournaments.

BRAC extends its support even after the persons with disabilities graduate from BRAC schools. It keeps them under its umbrella through its scholarship and continuous follow-up so that they can smoothly complete their education. Those who find it difficult to bear their educational expenses with the income of their families, are engaged in income-generating activities, such as small grocery stores or livestock rearing.

BRAC also operates Neuro-Developmental Disability (NDD) centres to reach out to those with intellectual disability (ID), autism spectrum disorder (ASD), cerebral palsy (CP) and Down's syndrome. Since 2014, BRAC has established eight NDD centres throughout the country to promote their educational and social rights through socialisation, behaviour modification, and supporting to perform activities of daily living (ADL).

## Lessons learned: Challenges and ways forward

The concept of inclusive education and its practice is still at an emerging stage in Bangladesh. BRAC's lessons from working on the issue suggest that having a separate unit in education programme works well for disability inclusive education. BRAC has already showed its success in inclusive education approach, where disability-sensitive teachers and staffs has been the key driving force. Most of the students who got enrolled completed their PEC from BRAC School successfully, and continue their educations in general schools, colleges and universities.

However, our general education system is not properly equipped to meet the needs of the persons with disabilities. Chaiti Rani Das, a visually-impaired PEC graduate from BRAC School, expressed her apprehension whether she will get similar support from mainstream schools that she

received from BRAC's inclusive school. The understanding of inclusive education among mainstream school teachers is limited. Our society is not yet sensitised about the rights and capacities of persons with disabilities while roads and infrastructures are still not disabled-friendly.

The performance evaluation process of students with disabilities is also questionable. The syllabus, time in the exam hall, and assessment process for them, especially for those with learning disability, Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) or cerebral palsy, should be reconsidered and customized based on their needs. The provision of vocational and skill development training for them should also be widened. Since most persons with disabilities excluded from education are from poor and marginalised families, they need continuous support in their education and gradual involvement in income generation activities. Inclusive and quality education for persons with disabilities can only be realised if teachers are provided with adequate training and schools are equipped with resources to address their needs.

**BRAC has already showed its success in inclusive education approach, where disability-sensitive teachers and staffs has been the key driving force**

*Shekh Farid is a social investigator for Advocacy for Social Change, BRAC.*

### Did you know?

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development states that disability cannot be a reason or criteria for lack of access to development programming and the realisation of human rights. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) framework includes seven targets, which explicitly refer to persons with disabilities, and six further targets on persons in vulnerable situations, which include persons with disabilities. The New Urban Agenda specifically commits to promoting measures to facilitate equal access to public spaces, facilities, technology, systems, and services for persons with disabilities in urban and rural areas.

# Neurodevelopmental Disability (NDD): What have we learned so far?

## Utpal Mallick

Education for all children, including children with disabilities, remains a responsibility of the state according to the constitution of Bangladesh. Where the state lacked in developing necessary mechanisms and in delivering needful services for this special group of children, a number of NGOs have played a role in supporting such initiatives. Since its inception in 1984, BRAC Education Programme (BEP) has placed children with disabilities at the forefront of their many educational interventions, bringing thousands of them under early childhood development centres, primary schools and adolescents clubs.

BEP launched dedicated Neurodevelopmental Disability (NDD) centres in 2014 for four types of children who are facing– (a) autism, (b) intellectual disability, (c) down syndrome, and (d) cerebral palsy. Children with hearing impairment are also welcomed in these centres though they do not directly fall under the neuro developmental disability category. Each centre accommodates 15-20 children aged between 03-18 years under the mentioned

categories of disability. BRAC Research and Evaluation Division did a qualitative investigation on these NDD centres at the end of 2015 to document the provisions available, problems to service delivery, and their achievements so far.

While selecting location of centre, BRAC had considered that children living within two kilometres distance of their catchment area might come, with help from their parents/guardians. Apart from that, density of population, number of disability cases in the villages and availability of BRAC branch offices were taken into consideration prior to setting up NDD centres. Children with moderate to profound degree of disability, who otherwise were not received by mainstream schools, were enrolled to these centres. When BRAC staff approached some potential enrolees, some families refrained from sending them due to the cultural tendency of hiding such children. Ultimately, mobilising demotivated parents and activities in the centres for the enrolled went simultaneously and there was provision that children can join at anytime of the year. Two female

teachers were deployed in each centre from the same community, their education ranging from higher secondary to bachelor level. Preference was given to those teachers who were previously involved with BRAC pre-primary or primary schools. On top of that, mothers and elder sisters who had a child with disability were given preference. There was one female caregiver in each centre with junior secondary level education; previous experience was not expected from them as well.

Teaching-learning materials included BRAC pre-primary books, some storybooks, flash cards for socialisation and communication training, picture cards of daily living activities, picture-word cards, colour matching cards, number cards, letter cards and so on. Different types of plastic cars, boats, motorcycle, carom board, balls, building blocks, cube, plastic whistles, old-unused calculators, telephone, keyboards and more were used as toys. Different picture cards, pocket cards, communication board, rubber ball, dotted ball, hand punch, sticky roll, ring puzzle, animal puzzle, Velcro board, dummy “lock-key” board and parallel bar were used for therapy. Based on their special needs, Individualised Education Plan (IEP) were made with a target for a year or six months. Parental expectation and current ability of children helped to determine IEPs. While following a weekly plan, several curricular and co-curricular activities were held in and outside the centres. Apart from monthly parental meeting, teachers and other BRAC staff visited households to bring them on board. They were guided about how to take care of their children while they stayed at home. Most children were brought to the nearest specialized medical college/institute, general hospital or



other private or NGO run centres for assessment and treatment of their vision, hearing or other needs that they had. Some children from each NDD centres were given the opportunity to participate in annual sports and cultural programmes in different venues at regional and national levels, organised by BRAC and other organisations. Connections were also made between children and other government departments.

After a one-and-half-year journey with these centres, some parents and staff noticed improvement of the children in some of the areas. One teacher from Pabna centre said, “All children progressed in a way or other; if one child showed improvement in speech communication, other did so in learning alphabets”. It should be noted that some changes were very minor if compared with the high expectations of different stakeholders. Also, it was understandable that pre-set expectations might demotivate anyone to report on minor changes or success when they were asked about them. Certain problems were also voiced. Some concerns were expressed over limited resources in the centres, problem with transportation of children, inadequate medical support including therapies, lack of intrinsic motivation of teachers and caregivers for poor honorarium and so on. Major areas of expressed concern was the need for intensive training of teachers and other staff members and the need for a more structured approach. Curricular and other activities for children can be improved if appropriate



activities were implemented by teachers even under such resource constraint situations.

Few Learners with Visual Impairments (LVI) were also brought to regular BRAC Primary School (BPS). Another qualitative study was conducted from 2016 to 2017 to investigate what strategies BRAC was taking to bring LVIs to schools and how they were retained, capacitated and graduated from primary cycle.

Findings revealed that bringing these children to BPS was not that easy and did not happen through one sitting with their parents/guardians. It was reported that majority of the parents did not want to send their special children to schools because neither did they know how those children could be educated nor did they have proper idea what benefits schooling would bring to them. BEP staffs communicated with them over and over and explained what long-term benefits schooling can contribute. They clarified what BPS can offer up to grade five and how they will be supported beyond that for further education. After these series of talks and motivational efforts, most parents showed interest to send their children to the schools. It was also reported that there were some parents who wished for

years to get a school for these children and did not get any positive response from any school, government or private, in their locality. They did not think twice when BRAC invited them.

Initially, family members helped these children on their way to school. As soon as they became regular and new friendships were formed, unknown peers became very familiar and close partners who held hands on their way to and from school. To facilitate their learning, one additional resource teacher was given in each school. However, junior sector specialists/ technical assistants were instrumental in providing necessary supports both to the LVIs and to their resource teachers. Regarding teaching-learning, it was mentioned that none of the LVIs received pre-primary education before getting admission to grade one in BPS. Most other students of the same class got pre-primary education of at least a year and thus they already achieved basic competencies for grade one. For LVIs, teachers had to start from the very beginning- teaching alphabets and numbers. Using braille, they were taught to read first and then they were asked to write. Initially they were scared of learning from braille because they found the method very difficult and different. Within a year or two, most of

them had mastered braille in a way that they even could help their regular and resource teachers learn braille by correcting their readings and writings. During classroom observations, most of them were seen in the top list and were literally leading their classes by participating in all curricular and co-curricular activities. Resource teachers spent an hour or more each day at students' home, usually in the afternoon, to help them with their studies. They prepared them for tasks given for classes of next days. They continued this support until the end of Primary Education Completion Examination (PECE). Parents did not have to pay for this extra support. One scribe (paper writer) was managed by BRAC to help LVIs to answer questions during PECE.

All the LVIs passed the PECE in last few years. Some of them scored better than their peers without disability. One of them said, "My teachers and fellow students were very helpful and I enjoyed going to school at all grade levels."With direct support from BRAC, most graduates were taken away from home during the beginning of the academic year to get them enrolled to secondary schools in different locations in their area. This initiative gave a renewed hope to those LVIs though there is still ample room for further improvement in delivery of educational and support services for them. Moreover, based on the experience so far, BRAC should find funds and ways to bring more LVIs in their existing setups and provide them with more effective learning journey.

Findings from these two studies can be considered as encouraging examples of inclusions. The studies also provided useful guidance to BEP to modify, reorganise and develop their approaches where necessary to enhance the experiences of children with disabilities and their families. However, by having connections with a number of development partners and a very well-functioning nationwide system, BRAC can expand its disability inclusion efforts more effectively by reaching out to millions of such children all over Bangladesh. Also the BRAC model can be adopted by the government and other NGOs working with disability and education sector.

*Utpal Mallick is a senior research associate at Research and Evaluation Division, BRAC.*



## In focus

# Understanding the Rohingya refugee crisis: A summary of BRAC studies on the Rohingya camps in Bangladesh

K A M Morshed



## Summary

Over the course of 2017 and 2018, BRAC conducted qualitative and quantitative analyses to measure the changing perceptions of Forcibly Displaced Myanmar Nationals (henceforth, the Rohingya) living in Bangladesh, as well as the host community in Cox's Bazar. The studies' results underline the widespread violence and trauma endured by the Rohingya population prior to seeking refuge in Bangladesh, as well as a long-term pattern of persecution and marginalisation inflicted by the Myanmar authorities. While lacking a formal leadership structure, the majority of Rohingya reported a desire to return to Myanmar if and when their demands for citizenship, security, compensation and justice were met. The studies also point to a worrying trend of growing friction between the Rohingya and host communities, with an already impoverished host community buckling under the strain of a growing Rohingya population.

### Toll of the Rohingya crisis

#### Property loss

Value of property Loss	USD 37,795*
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#### Death in households

One family member	10.6%
Two family members	2.5%
Three family members	1.2%

#### Violence

Families with members tortured	66,624*
Families with members raped	12,492*

#### Profile of deceased

Average age	38.7
Male	64.1%

Data collected in Nov. 2017\*

## Persecution in Myanmar

To escape state-sanctioned persecution and communal violence in Myanmar, the Rohingya fled to Bangladesh in four waves: 1992, 2012, 2016 and 2017. The largest number of Rohingya (693,000) arrived during the summer of 2017, bringing the total Rohingya population in Bangladesh to one million. On arrival, these people expressed symptoms of intense trauma and grief. Respondents described mass murders carried out with extreme brutality, gang rapes and other forms of gender-based violence, the targeted killing of youth and community leaders, the razing of villages with arson and a coordinated campaign to terrorise the population. Respondents also spoke about a pattern of systemic oppression since the communal violence experienced in 2012, including mobility restrictions, disenfranchisement, denial of basic rights, and other sanctions. This oppression was exacerbated by a systematic effort by the government to annihilate leadership among the Rohingya. Of the Rohingya who arrived before November 2017, almost 20 per cent of households surveyed had at least one member of their household killed, almost 50 per cent had at least one member of their household tortured, and almost 10 per cent had at least one female household member raped.

### Profiles of Rohingya & host population

Health	Rohingya	host
Never vaccinated	62%	1%*
Education		
Without any schooling	76%	40%
Completed primary school	15%	28%
Illiterate	76%	43%
Madrassa educated	2.4%	4.2%
Demographics		
Average household size	4 members	5 members
Female-headed household	28%	14%
Average age	20 years	24 years
Income prior to 2017	BDT 12,151	BDT 14,015
Religion		
Muslim	99.99%	82.8%
Buddhist	-	9.8%
Hindu	-	7.2%

\*96% of children 0-23 months children fully vaccinated



# Rohingya profiles

The Rohingya population in Bangladesh stems from three districts in Myanmar- Muangdaw, Butthiguan and Ratheduang. Their primary occupations were in agriculture, fishing, day labour, and small business. The comparatively high rate of literacy in Myanmar (93.1 per cent) and very high rate of illiteracy among the Rohingya suggests that the Rohingya have been deliberately denied access to education. The same is evident from the low vaccination rates among the Rohingya.

## Host community profile

Most of the Rohingya population in Bangladesh reside in makeshift camps inside Cox's Bazar. Cox's Bazar is one of the poorest and most vulnerable communities in Bangladesh, with high levels of illiteracy. The average income per household in the communities around the camps is similar to the pre-influx household income of the Rohingya. However, unlike the Rohingya, Cox's Bazar has a vibrant Buddhist community. There are as many as 76 pagodas, of which roughly half (36) are in the two sub-districts where the Rohingya are settled (Ukhiya and Teknaf). Average family size in the host community is slightly larger than the Rohingya, and there are fewer female-headed households. Additionally, there are more Madrasa-educated youth in the host community, compared to the Rohingya population.

## Host-refugee dynamics

There are currently roughly one million Rohingya located in Bangladesh, primarily spread across 35 camps in the Ukhiya and Teknaf sub-districts of Cox's Bazar. The camps in Cox's Bazaar are heavily populated. In Ukhiya, Rohingya now outnumber the host population by a margin of three to one (734,655 compared to 255,100). In addition to the fear and anxiety associated with the sudden increase of 'foreigners' in these sub-districts, the massive increase in population has led to heightened competition for resources, expedited environmental degradation, and rising tensions between the host and Rohingya communities.

While the average income of the host community has declined, the income of the top decile has increased - suggesting growing inequality within the host community in recent months. Around 80 per cent of the Rohingya population reported

Post-influx situation	
Ratio of Rohingya to host	
Ukhiya	3 Rohingya: 1 Host
Teknaf	1 Rohingya: 1 Host
Reduction of income reported	
Host	49.5%
Rohingya	93%
New average income reported	
Host	BDT 12,955
Rohingya	BDT 6,483
Other impact on hosts	
Forest destruction	5,650 acres
Food shortages reported	
Host	40%
Rohingya	58%
Difficulty accessing healthcare	
Host	32.7%
Rohingya	14.2%

no current regular income other than wages from casual labour and proceeds from the sale of relief items.

To date, Rohingya respondents remain largely positive about their experiences in Bangladesh. By contrast, the host communities report having a harder time accessing healthcare and more unmet needs than their Rohingya counterparts. Over 90 per cent of Rohingya respondents said they felt safe and 90 per cent expressed trust in the Bangladeshi police- though just 20 per cent feel comfortable taking a grievance to the police. Additionally, a majority of Rohingya women expressed fear of sexual assault, a fear which is heightened by the lack of lighting in the camps.



### Challenges during monsoon

#### Rohingya population affected

Vulnerable	215,000
At high risk	42,000

#### Other facilities at risk

Community facilities	883
Shelters	211,000

#### Funding situation

Required as per JRP	US\$202M
Received	21%

### Host community views of Rohingya

	Dec. 2017	April 2018
"Welcome" Rohingya population		
Bangladeshi population	66%	55%
Host community in Cox's Bazaar	72%	30%

## Future challenges Monsoon

The most pressing challenge confronting the Rohingya population is the monsoon rains, which have the potential to destroy one-third of the land in the camps. Camp construction and increased firewood collection have led to massive deforestation, leaving camp land susceptible to floods, landslides, and erosion. It is estimated that 70 per cent of the water and hygiene infrastructure, including latrines, will be destroyed or damaged by the rains, which will likely result in disease outbreaks, as the sewage contaminates surrounding areas and water sources. Because Bangladeshi authorities prohibit the construction of permanent structures, NGOs and humanitarian actors are struggling to create monsoon-safe buildings. Urgent remedial measures are unlikely to be completed until July. A major challenge in this sector is a lack of funding; only nine per cent of required funding was received by sector participants.





## Rohingya-host relations

Support for the Rohingya population is declining among Bangladeshis, and particularly among those in the host community of Cox's Bazar. Just 30 per cent of the host community in Cox's Bazar welcome the Rohingya now. Among opponents, more than half (51.7 per cent) complain about the economic impact of the Rohingya. The economic strain, combined with a sentiment amongst the host community that they have been 'left out' of the international humanitarian agencies' response, appears to be the root cause of the dramatic decline in support. Mindful of the host community's sentiments, the Bangladeshi government has made clear it will remain 'hands-off' in discussions about long-term solutions. As Bangladesh prepares for parliamentary elections, there is a concern that the growing antipathy towards the Rohingya community will result in violence, potentially discrediting the government and carving out a new space for the Bangladeshi armed forces and the far-right.

Rohingya views on return	
Repatriation	
Plan to return to Myanmar soon	3.7%
Plan to return when conditions are right	64.2%
Do not plan to return	17.8
Conditions listed for repatriation	
Granting of citizenship	87%
Security and Protection	54%
Compensation for loss	52%
Assurance of justice	37%
Free movement and passport	33%
Livelihood support	14%
Definition of citizenship	
Freedom of movement	
Access to market	
Decriminalisation of displacement	

## Repatriation

When surveyed in November 2017, 43 per cent of the Rohingya respondents reported that they did not discuss the issue of repatriation among themselves. Those who did were mostly negative about the prospect of return. Yet during a subsequent series of focus group discussions in April 2018, a growing number of Rohingya expressed keen interest to return to Myanmar.

In both cases, however, their first condition for repatriation was citizenship. Citizenship tends to be defined less in political terms (such as voting rights, etc) and more in terms of freedom of movement (owning a passport), access to markets, and decriminalisation of return (many displaced Rohingya worry they will be arrested upon return to Myanmar and face charges for seeking refuge in Bangladesh). With respect to conditions for return, men are more likely to emphasise citizenship, job opportunities, justice and compensation as their conditions for return. Women are more likely to emphasise safeguards and external supervision of the repatriation process. Rohingya with greater financial means / assets in Myanmar are more likely to return.

Who households consult on repatriation	
Majhi	53.9%
Family/friends in the camp	37.6%
Family/friends in Myanmar	5.9%
Imam	4.2%
Rohingya leaders	15.1%
Aid workers	6.8%
Others	19.0%

## Representation

Representation is highly fragmented. About half of all the Rohingya consult their majhi about repatriation. Most Rohingya do not receive information from traditional written sources. Instead, they rely on information from their family and friends still inside Myanmar by using mobile phones. They also turn to Rohingya Vision, a YouTube-based television and social media (particularly Facebook and YouTube). In addition to the majhis, who were selected by the Bangladeshi Army to distribute relief goods, there were other groups such as the imams, Rohingya (leaders) who arrived in Bangladesh in the past, Internet-based evangelists, etc. who are gaining influence in the community.

## Methodology

The aforementioned results were generated on the basis of mixed methodology studies, combining survey research and participant observation to generate both qualitative



and quantitative data. The survey data relied on a sample size of 410 Rohingya households surveyed in five camps in December 2017 and March 2018. Around 86 per cent of those surveyed had arrived in Bangladesh in 2017, 6 per cent in 2016, five per cent in 2012 and five per cent in 1992. A second set of research was conducted through an ethnographic mode of engagement, commonly known as participant observation. Over the course of a one-week period, a senior anthropologist and three ethnographers visited three Rohingya camps to capture micro-narratives and record observations, which were subsequently catalogued using inclusive indexing and domain analysis.

## (Appendix: Studies conducted by BRAC and research pipeline (as of June 2018)

Studies already conducted by BRAC and partners

Sl.	Name	Period	Conducted By	Methodologies
1	Need assessment of the forcefully displaced Myanmar nationals	10/17	BRAC	FGDs & in-depth interviews (IDI)
2	Impact of FDMN influx on host community	11/17	BRAC	FGDs, IDIs, KIs, survey
3	Nation-wide perception survey of the FDMN 1	11/17	BRAC	survey, purposive sampling
4	Use of idle time: adolescents members of FDMN community	11/17	BRAC	FGDs, IDIs, group discussion
5	Survey on FDMN aspirations, perception, and influence agents	12/17	Amnesty International-BRAC	Survey, purposive sampling
6	Study on FDMN aspirations, perception, and influence agents	01/18	BRAC	IDI, micronarratives
7	Rapid needs assessment among the Rohingya and host communities	03/18	FXB Centre, Harvard -BRAC	Survey, randomised sampling
8	Nationwide perception survey of the FDMN 2	04/18	BRAC	Survey, purposive sampling

## Current Research Interest of BRAC (Updated June 2018)

Sl.	Name	Planned
1	The experience of recently-arrived Rohingya in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh and their future fears and aspirations: a qualitative study (on-going in partnership with FXB Centre, Harvard University)	May 2018
2	a. Health impact of monsoon/host-refugee contact/living conditions/etc. b. Community-driven early warning (multiple indicator) system c. Long-Term Mental Health Impact of past trauma on Refugees d. Coping with trauma and uncertainty	TBD
3	a. Learning from the humanitarian response in Cox's Bazar and its implication b. Impact of BCC interventions on good health behaviour, and on positive worldview c. Efficacy of capacity development interventions on refugee community	TBD
4	a. Leadership, empowerment, and network analysis b. Indigenous governance system after a complete meltdown c. Influence of Cox's Bazar's local government over the refugee community d. Community narratives formation and impact	TBD
5	a. Carrying capacity of Cox's Bazar and ways to enlarge it b. City regeneration after the catastrophic change	TBD
6	a. Impact of internet connectivity on the Rohingya community b. Social connectivity with the host community and its effect on Rohingya aspiration c. Inter-community dialogue in the context of trust deficit	TBD

*K A M Morshed is the director of Advocacy, Technology and Partnership, BRAC.*

### Did you know?

British East India Company Officer Captain Hiram Cox, the then superintendent of Palongkee outpost was, asked to find a suitable place to resettle the Arakanese refugees in the area in the 1790s. Captain decided to resettle these people in 12 small valleys or palongs which is now known as the Cox's Bazar. Cox's description of the situation was haunting, "Such a multitude flying through the forests and deserts without a pre-contracted plan, numbers must have perished from want, sickness and fatigue, I have been informed that the road to the Naaf is strewn with bodies of the decrepit, the aged mothers with their infants at the breasts". Capt. Cox's died in 1799 before the work is finished. (source: Captain Herman Cox, to G. H. Barlow Secretary to the Government, Board's Collection F/4/71 / 1583, IOR/ OIOC, British Library (BL), London.)

### Did you know?

"When their number was but small and the cause of their emigration not sufficiently understood, it was certainly prudent on your part to discourage the settling themselves in the Company's territories... But when impelled by the acts of oppression and the cruelty in their own country from twenty to thirty thousand of these unfortunate people claimed the protection of the Company both policy and humanity required that they should not be compelled to return to Arracan..."-on the justification for Arakanese settlement in Cox's Bazaar (source: Extract Revenue Letter to Bengal 26th March 1801, Board's Collection, F/4/128/2381, IOR/OIOC, BL.). Interestingly after about two centuries, the same consideration seems to play a role in Bangladesh's decision to give shelter to Rohingya Refugees.

# Responding to the biggest humanitarian crisis in Bangladesh: Lessons from BRAC



## Sarah-Jane Saltmarsh

I was hiking through Teknaf Wildlife Sanctuary on August 25 last year. Located on the banks of the Naf River, the 11,500 hectares sanctuary was one of five protected areas where the forest department had put into place a co-management approach to eco-tourism, and it was home to herds of wild elephants, abundant medicinal plants and a cave full of bats. The entire sub-district had an estimated population of 263,389 people. It was right next to Cox's Bazar, which with just 522,435 people and the world's longest unbroken sea beach, was Bangladesh's favourite holiday destination.

Spending the better part of that week there, we were some of the first people who saw the usually calm sea alive with the reflections of a burning coastline. No one knew what was happening. Then they started coming. Slowly at first. Then hundreds, thousands, hundreds of thousands of tiny, tired feet. Wide eyes staring upwards out of boats in confusion, fear and desperation.

Some had mothers, others just blindly followed the person in front of them. Almost no one had fathers. The new arrivals had lost their houses, businesses, farmlands, and most families were missing at least one person. At the height of the crisis, up to 10,000 people were crossing the border daily. A border which is made up on both sides of forest, beach and muddy rice-paddies, with absolutely no facilities.

The people on the land gave everything they could to the little hands. Homemade lemonade, dates, clothes, little piles of money, shoes, later - land. The people coming in the boats had nothing and needed everything. They were welcomed like cold, wet and lost family members.

There is a particular memory of one rainy morning at Shah Porir Dwip, which will never fade. Water pouring down, and hundreds of people volunteering. No names, no banners, just smiles. No one saw the sky. Some just had water, or some cash in small notes, to give. So many people did not have any money at all, let alone Bangladeshi taka. They needed BDT 100 just to get anywhere.



A perception mapping study conducted by BRAC in November 2017 showed that 70 per cent of people surveyed in Cox's Bazar, and 67 per cent of people surveyed in Bangladesh welcomed the Rohingya community.

Then came the difficult part- managing the crisis inside Bangladesh. The sheer size was impossible to comprehend. It quickly became the world's fastest-growing humanitarian crisis. The first challenge was just not to get lost. The needs grew and grew; not one hospital but 10. Hundreds of spaces for children. Thousands of schools. Millions of food packages. Supplies were carried in, driven in and flown in. Roads were blocked for hours. Local, national and international markets were emptied. The wrong items were delivered, systems broke and frustration flared. But the building continued, and while everyone struggled, lined up for hours and slipped down hills, a city was built. It did not have streets, or signs, or traffic lights, but it was safe. And while the fires continued over the border, a community rose from the ashes.

The Government of Bangladesh (GoB) welcomed over 700,000 people since August 25, and we are still accepting them today. Over 10,000 people have entered in the last six months. The challenges were impossible to comprehend. It was Bangladesh in 1971, all over again. When a humanitarian crisis of this scale hits, it can be easy to overlook the local players- especially as large, international aid groups step in to respond. But on the border of Bangladesh and Myanmar, where a population larger than the city of New Orleans was seeking shelter, the role of a local organisation in a crisis was redefined. Our vision is to stand by those who need the most, and these needs were unprecedented.

In the four weeks after the crisis began, an army was mobilised. Around 200 people were being interviewed per day. They signed, went to the field and started working. If they did not have the skills they needed, they worked for half of the day and pink buses collected them and took them to training for the second half of the day. We had 1,000 people on the ground almost immediately. While half of them worked (and trained), the other half - the majority of them women who spoke a very similar dialect - went door-to-door on foot to find out what people needed and connected them with services.

## Water

People were drinking from rice paddies and roadside puddles. The sun was scorching and the water containers quickly contaminated. Thousands of water points- tube wells and surface water filtration systems- were needed in weeks. The pink vests were getting 75 in the ground every day.

## Food

I remember one scene in Thaingkali makeshift settlement- nearly 20,000 people, most of them children, competing every day in an obstacle course of bamboo fences, tents and other people. The daal and rice in their plastic bowls was the only meal that many would have, and they would share it with their whole family. With an average estimated family size of five people, everyone would be hungry again by the evening and competing again tomorrow. Thaingkali was one of the smallest settlements.

The relief lines stretched for as long as you could see, if you could actually get to them, if you were not a mother single-handedly caring for young children, had been assigned a shelter on top of a muddy, slippery hill, or were an older person not strong enough to carry what was sometimes a 50 kilograms



## Sanitation

There were no bathrooms on the hills. Half a million people defecating in the open. Thousands of toilets were needed, yesterday. We were installing 500 latrines every day. Every office in southern Bangladesh was engaged. A cholera outbreak among half a million people was narrowly avoided.

I remember one story of a WASH team member. He had signed and started the same day. He worked the entire day and then in the evening realised he had nowhere to sleep.

Exhausted, he asked a family in the local community if they could give him shelter. They were already housing a family who had arrived. He put his bag down on the floor next to the kitchen table, next to them, and slept on the floor. Over the next week five colleagues joined him. Eventually they all arranged accommodation, but that was weeks later. A bed could wait, saving people's lives could not.

## Health

How do you get health services to half a million people, who have just arrived, in a place that is not on a map, and

does not have any roads? You set up a clinic, using an umbrella. When the line gets long, you copy it. 50 times. You move the umbrellas each day. When people start recognising you, you set up a centre that does not move. When it starts filling up, you copy that too. 10 times. The 50 umbrellas concentrate on basic needs. The 10 fixed centres provide more complex services. However, not everyone can move, so you start walking, house to house. Two hundred health workers, doctors, midwives and paramedics, helping people wherever they are.

Our doctors and health workers were seeing 7,000 people a day. There was no lunch breaks. The needs were not complicated, but they were urgent. The lines were babies, small children, mothers and grandparents. And door-to-door was a must as so many people could not leave their houses.

## Child protection

One of our first priorities was to keep the smallest people safe. More than half of the arrivals were children. Many of them came alone. Their tiny feet had spent weeks traversing jungles, rivers and sea. They had seen more violence in two weeks than most will see in a lifetime.

Small, cold and crying. They were at the most risk. Hundreds of colourful little centres of happiness were created. They drew pictures, sung and made new friends. Things that all children should be doing.

Save the Children reported that at least 1,100 of the children who have come across the border have either been separated from their parents or orphaned. At one point it was estimated that 400 children had gone missing. We were welcoming thousands of little hands into our child-friendly spaces every day, and building new spaces every single day. They were provided with a midday meal and reunited with their families.

## Shelter

They arrived this morning and must build their shelter before the end of the day. Tonight will be the first time they have slept under a roof in 16 days.

Everyone sacrificed. One of the stories that I remember touching me the most was Rakib Ahmed's. We met him on the



first day of his annual leave. Bangladesh Army officers like him work for 10 months straight per year and get two months off. They wait all year for that time with their families. Rakib had chosen to sacrifice this year because of the crisis.

He showed us a picture stored on his mobile of his one-month old baby boy, which he would now not see for months. A tear came to his eye when he looked at it, but he quickly straightened his back.

"We have to sacrifice a lot, but this is what we choose. I chose to work for the Army. I chose the security of my family and their future. I never have to think about them. Everything is taken care of. I can care for other people," he said.

It was the same in all of Ukhiya and Teknaf. Half a million new people in one of the world's most densely populated countries - there was no option but to share.

Schools running two classes in one room. Houses surrounding the settlements giving away plots of farmland. Women cutting their sarees in half and giving half to their

new neighbours. Men giving the shirts off their backs. No one ate more than one meal of the qurbani beef they waited all year for.

All that work, for almost a year now, has resulted in something incredible. You can see it in people's eyes. While some eyes are still cold and numb, there are thousands that have sparks in them again.

*What happens now is up to all of us.*

The camps are buzzing. Market vendors yell and people bargain, the World Cup was celebrated with a similar fervour as you would see in Argentina, and pride is growing. Vegetable gardens are flourishing, people are building their own piping systems to get water into their houses and the community kitchens are alive with delicious smells and the laughter of hundreds of women.

A new challenge exists now, outside the camps - a perception mapping study conducted by BRAC in March 2018 showed that 30 per cent of people surveyed in Cox's Bazar, and 50 per cent of people surveyed in Bangladesh welcomed the Rohingya community.



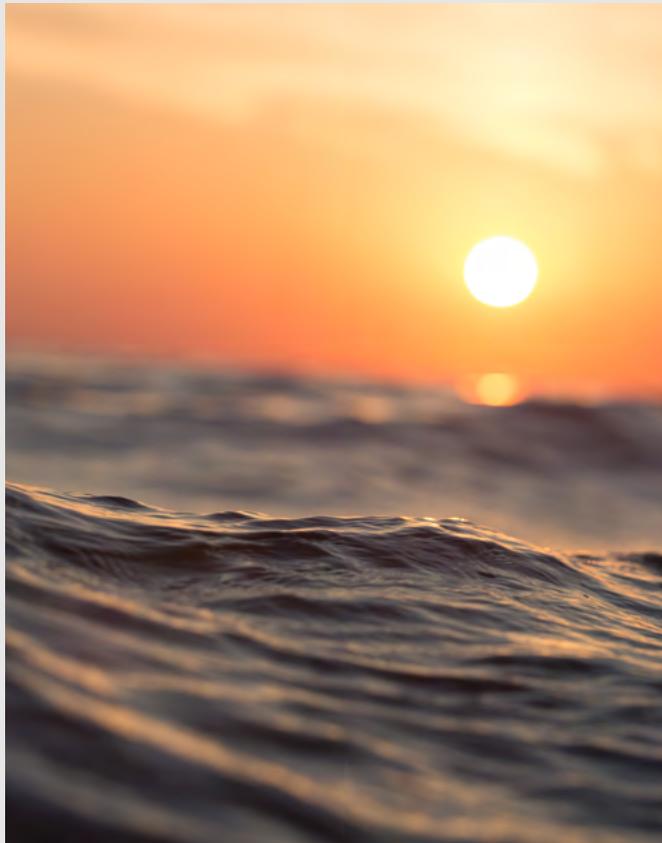
# Impossible is nothing new

BRAC is from a country which is the eighth largest on earth by population, and which has seen some of the fastest improvements in living conditions in history.

Thousands of sets of clothes for babies are needed. Many children are sick, coughing heavily, and they have nothing to wear. Bangladesh is the second-largest exporter of ready-made garment. Could the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association assist? Already, four factories have put 26,000 sets of clothing for children aged 0-3 on trucks. Distribution will start in the morning.

Toilets are urgently needed, but teams are quickly running out of the materials that they need to build more. So the staff call the district offices in Comilla, Feni and Noakhali in order to find materials. They will arrive in the evening. But there is more to do.

The Lancet, the British medical journal, called it “the Bangladesh paradox.” How could a country so poor achieve such significant gains in development? BRAC is credited with having “probably done more than any single body to upend the traditions of misery and poverty in Bangladesh.” A simple maxim often stated by BRAC’s founder, Sir Fazle Hasan Abed, illustrates his vision for BRAC: small is beautiful, but scale is necessary.



the trust it gains from its history and permanency is undoubtedly one of the reasons why it is able to move so fast.

With the nature of civil wars changing and disputes becoming more protracted across the world, the lines between humanitarian and development work will continue to blur. The need for livelihood support, to foster economic development, will grow as emergency relief turns into protracted crises - and the need for organisations who can quickly respond, deliver, and stay for the long-term will increase. Hopefully, this will see more recognition of the unique role that national NGOs can play in emergency responses.

We have not seen 1971. We heard about it - 20 million refugees. Our generation: We have not seen the war of independence. How many thousands of people went to India? At what point do people leave their houses? Until they see death coming, nobody is going to leave their houses. Never.

Everyone is seeing the same thing. It feels that we are on the side of receiving. We can tell our next generation that we gave them back the same shelter that we received. Though we have nothing,

we are easy to share that nothing.

We Bangladeshis are flooded with undesirable news all the time. And when efforts are poured towards goodness, the belief takes time to flutter. Good things are better late than never but why not accept positivity straight up?

*Sarah-Jane Saltmarsh is the head of content at BRAC Communications. Additional stories were collected from Kamrul Hasan, lead audio-visual storyteller, BRAC Communications.*

## Aid and development - a grey area

With major operations in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Nepal, South Sudan and Liberia, most of BRAC’s work has been at the intersection of development and aid - and

## BRAC’s humanitarian response in Cox’s Bazar

Nasif Rashad Khan



## Strategy for 2018

Since 25 August 2017, Bangladesh has welcomed over 702,160 forcibly-displaced Rohingya<sup>1</sup> from Myanmar. The Rohingyas require immediate, ongoing humanitarian services to address their basic needs. During the world’s largest humanitarian crisis in over 20 years (since Rwandan genocide) and Cox’s Bazar now being the densest district in the world, comprehensive services and support are required for roughly 1.3 million people<sup>2</sup>.

### Breakdown of 1.3 million people in need of humanitarian support<sup>3</sup>

- 693,000 new arrivals as of 26 April 2018
- 212,500 Rohingya in Cox’s Bazar before the August influx.
- 335,500 Bangladeshi host community members.

With the crisis now entering its 10th month, the dynamics of the situation have shifted from ongoing, massive influx to ensuring the day-to-day living needs of the Rohingya and host communities in the context of a more stable, but still quite fluid and dynamic environment. While political discussions for ensuring secure and dignified repatriation continue, ongoing interventions should offer Rohingyas with opportunities to build skills and resilience that are long-lasting and applicable in multiple contexts. These can include learning opportunities for children, life skills for adolescents and cash for work programmes for adults. Meanwhile, camp structure and programming must also strengthen prevention and response planning for fires, potential disease outbreaks, and natural disasters.

BRAC, present for more than 35 years in Cox’s Bazar, has in place the largest civil society response for newly-arrived Rohingya. With a team of more than 3,200 people already in place, including over 1,600 from the host and close to 1,200 from the Rohingya community, BRAC is actively implementing comprehensive interventions designed to meet the immediate needs of vulnerable

<sup>1</sup>Situation report: Rohingya Refugee Crisis, 7 June 2018

<sup>2</sup>Joint response plan: Rohingya refugee crisis

<sup>3</sup>Population target also includes 97,000 contingencies for additional influx whose needs are yet to be assessed



people while building skills, resilience, and awareness that is likely to facilitate their long-term wellbeing as the situation evolves. With global experience in humanitarian and development programming, BRAC has a proven ability to rapidly design, implement and adapt programmes with high levels of value-for-money and sustainable impact.

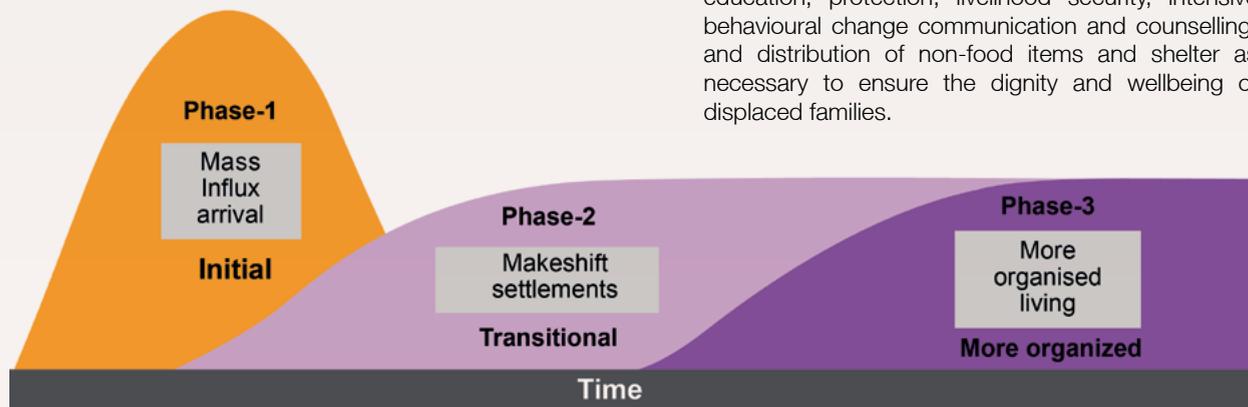
Since launching its response activities on 10 September, BRAC has been providing over 701,320 people with at least one form of critical support. In recognition of its ability to play a leading role in the overall sector response, BRAC has taken a number of leadership positions within the coordinating bodies and strategic groups in Cox's Bazar. It is also working closely with local government and relevant ministries in adjusting its activities as necessary to align with their priorities.

## BRAC's humanitarian strategy

As the situation and needs of the people are evolving rapidly, BRAC is pursuing an adaptive, phase-wise strategy that sequences its aid services and interventions to maximise its responsiveness and impact, with the aim of providing key, integrated services to at least displaced people and affected Bangladeshis.

This includes an 'initial phase' of focused services to address the most urgent needs, a 'transition phase' of incorporating additional critical services, and a 'more organised' phase with comprehensive, tailored solutions. Its integrated approach includes attention to sanitation and hygiene infrastructure, healthcare, education, protection, livelihood security, intensive behavioural change communication and counselling, and distribution of non-food items and shelter as necessary to ensure the dignity and wellbeing of displaced families.

### BRAC's Strategy: a phase-wise approach



## BRAC's strategy for the organised phase

In alignment with the joint response plan<sup>4</sup> developed collectively by all agencies, BRAC has devised the response plan for March through December 2018. In short, it is transitioning from emergency programming to a humanitarian development approach.

Following are four key areas that BRAC has identified where significant shifts can maximise impact.

### From relief to self-reliance

During the early stages of the emergency, Rohingya were highly dependent on food, shelter, clothes and other non-food items. Now, however, they increasingly assert a desire to transition from being passive recipients to active earners. Within the policy frameworks established by the Government of Bangladesh, the sector must find opportunities for Rohingya to work within the community, act as service providers, interact with markets, and provide necessary support.

natural disasters, environmental degradation, and other risks. Efforts should also be made to ensure social cohesion with the local host community.

### From immediate needs to resilience

With intense efforts underway to ensure safe and voluntary repatriation to Myanmar, the refugees need access to skills and resources that will enable their successful return. Investments in human capital, particularly in learning opportunities for young children, emphasis on life skills, access to information and increased public health knowledge are examples of support that have lasting benefits. Given the prevalence of trauma, appropriate psychosocial support and community building should be integrated across all service delivery activities, with strengthened referrals for those who need them.

### From shelters to communities

With people now relocating to the allocated camp areas under the Government of Bangladesh's instructions, community building is occurring naturally. In tandem, there is a need to ensure that the local governance mechanisms are structured to enable participation of all and ensure accountability of community leaders. To promote strong communities, in addition to the obvious technical requirements, the new site designs also need to take into account the social needs of the population, and include considerations for the possibilities of

### From speed to sustainability

The early days of the response were characterised by rapid, immediate interventions. Increasingly programmatic decisions should facilitate long-term use and appropriateness of interventions. Attention should also be given to how to ensure that the target population can continue to benefit from an intervention (such as skills or information) when secure and dignified repatriation begins.

<sup>4</sup> Joint response plan: Rohingya refugee crisis

## Key details on BRAC's programming

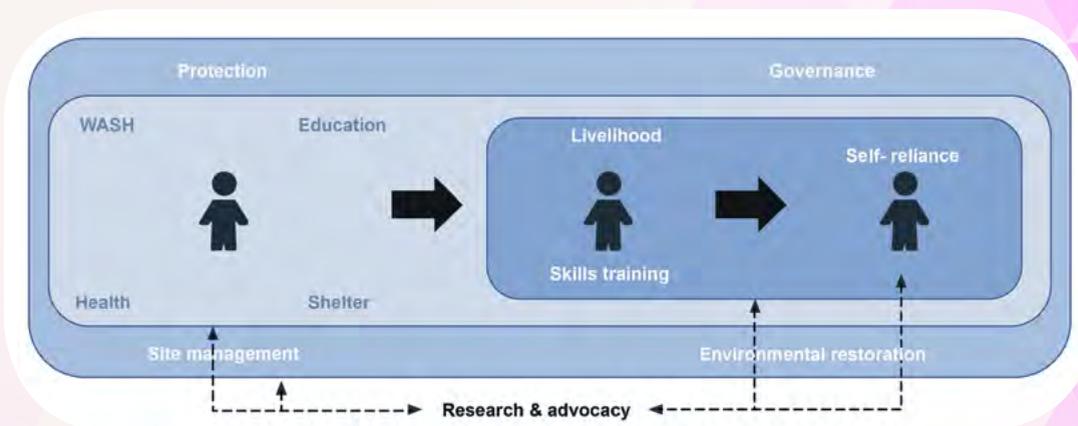
### Desired impact

500,000 Rohingya and 335,000 members of the host community live with dignity, security, and opportunity, in social and economic harmony, until acceptable repatriation opportunities become possible.

For the Rohingya community, as the humanitarian response enters the next phase, BRAC aims to continue providing support that enables over 500,000 people to live their lives with security and dignity. As such, it will provide critical services, such as water, sanitation, health, and child protection, at scale in the sectors where it is currently a leading provider. Recently, BRAC has initiated activities in protection, site management, shelter, and nutrition that it will strengthen and scale. Self-reliance, education, environmental restoration and governance will also become key areas of focus in 2018, besides preparedness for the monsoon and cyclone season.

BRAC is also active in all four sub-districts of Cox's Bazar. Through its intensified interventions, BRAC will expand its service provisions in the sub-district of Teknaf and Ukhiya, and it plans to provide at least one critical service to all 335,000 host community members identified as in need of humanitarian support.

Its focus areas will include health, water and sanitation, education, livelihoods, financial inclusion, community empowerment and environmental restoration.



### Global engagement

In addition to its implementation, BRAC will engage itself in a number of additional activities to contribute to key discussions and efforts taking place at the local, national and global levels. In particular, BRAC will focus on areas where it can provide new knowledge, evidence, or unrepresented voices and also strive to strengthen key partnerships to enable better implementation and coordination.

BRAC will also bring local perspectives to the international community to benefit all stakeholders and enable inclusive decision making. Simultaneously, it will work to strengthen the sense of accountability and ownership among the broader Bangladeshi and internal stakeholders, with the hopes of motivating key actors whose participation would help shift dialogues and decisions in positive directions.

To date, BRAC has conducted several internal assessments and participated in the joint livelihood assessment along with Save the Children and World Vision. BRAC is also conducting research in collaboration with Harvard University, London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE), among others.

*Nasif Rashad Khan is working as a senior manager for Partnership Development, Resource Mobilisation and Learning, BRAC.*

## Interview

### Aarong and BRAC's other social enterprises: An interview with Tamara Hasan Abed, Senior Director, BRAC



**Tamara Hasan Abed** joined Aarong as a general manager of design and product development in 2002. Her role has grown over the years and she is now a senior director at BRAC where she heads all of BRAC's 13 social enterprises including Aarong and sits on the board of BRAC University and other BRAC ventures and investments.

### Future Startup: Please give us an overview of Aarong.

**Tamara Hasan Abed:** Aarong is BRAC's flagship social enterprise, and Bangladesh's most popular lifestyle retail brand. It consists of 19 outlets (18 physical and one online store) and sells handcrafted products made by more than 65,000 artisans located all over the country. The Aarong team consists of over 3800 women and men who work together to make possible what you see and experience.

Aarong was born out of the need to create livelihoods for rural women in the mid-1970s. In 1976, BRAC organised groups of women in Manikganj and Jamalpur, trained them in sericulture and making handmade products such as block printed and embroidered cushion covers, bed covers, etc and started to supply these products to shops in Dhaka.

BRAC quickly realised that these shops paid for these products not when they were delivered, but in fact, once they were sold. It took months for these women to get paid for the goods. This is when BRAC decided to open its own retail outlet and the first Aarong shop opened on Mirpur Road in Dhanmondi in 1978. From the very first day, Aarong maintained the policy of paying its artisans and producers when products were delivered and Aarong took on the risk and responsibility of financing and selling the inventory.

Over the past few decades, Aarong has grown manifold and become a household name among urban consumers in Bangladesh. While we started with a few product lines initially, we now offer a vast range of products and are adding more categories regularly.

### Future Startup: How does Aarong collaborate with the artisans?

**Tamara Hasan Abed:** Aarong works with artisans in two ways. The first is through Ayesha Abed Foundation ("AAF"), which is a hub and spoke model with a main production centre linked to many small sub-centres. The main centre receives orders from Aarong and prepares and distributes the order and raw materials to the artisans in the sub-centre who mainly do the embroidery work.

The main centre not only supervises the sub-centres but does all the preparatory and finishing work, which is, tailoring, dyeing and printing, washing, ironing and quality control. AAF has 13 main centres linked to more than 600 sub-centres. In 2018, we plan to establish two more main centres, which will have many more sub-centres under them and provide employment to 1500 more artisans.

We also work with independent master craftsmen and small and micro entrepreneurs from different parts of the country whom we call independent producers. They directly take orders from Aarong and produce goods in their own workshop or cottage industry and deliver it to us. They employ groups of artisans under them. We audit our independent producers on 39 metrics under what we call our Social Compliance Audit, to make sure that our producers look after the artisans who work under them. We have over 800 independent producers working with us.

**Future Startup: You maintain a contractual relationship with the majority of your artisans. You compete with**

**private labels and earn profits. As a social enterprise, how are you different from other for-profit entities?**

**Tamara Hasan Abed:** Our mission and purpose is different from for-profit enterprises. Our raison d'être is to provide livelihoods for women and artisans and create market linkages for them, thereby contributing to the alleviation of poverty and financial empowerment.

Also, as a social enterprise of BRAC, we do not have any shareholders and the surpluses we make goes to fund BRAC's development interventions, such as schools and programmes for the extremely poor.

Although we maintain a contractual relationship with our artisans and producers, our artisans not only receive holistic development support from BRAC, they also receive annual eye and health checkup, health insurance, retirement benefits, etc. Our producers receive collateral-free loans from Aarong to conduct and expand their business.

Most importantly, we try to ensure that our artisans and producers receive orders from us regularly throughout the year. Since we are vertically integrated in terms of production and retail, we can forecast sales and plan our production a year in advance. For example, Eid is one of the biggest selling seasons in our country. Instead of putting pressure on our producers and artisans in one month, we manage the production of Eid throughout the year in order to ensure regular work for our artisans, although it is not necessarily financially optimal for Aarong to produce and hold Eid inventories throughout the year. The key difference is that, unlike other for-profit enterprises, our decisions are not based on profit maximisation. Let



me give you another example. Most for-profit retailers would think about stocking the most profitable and fastest selling products on their shelves. They would try to maximize returns from each square foot of retail space. As a social enterprise, this is not the most important consideration for Aarong. For example, we dedicate a lot of space to clay, cane and bamboo products which are low in value but take up a lot of retail space. We think of the best way to support all categories of artisans who are within our fold.

Similarly, the Ayesha Abed Foundation's production centres are spread out all across the country instead of in a big factory near Dhaka. This is an administrative nightmare but we do this to take work to the artisans where they live so that they are able to access employment opportunities from where they are based, rather than having to migrate to big cities. These decisions are taken to maximise our social goals.

Our mission and purpose is different from for-profit enterprises. Our raison d'être is to provide livelihoods for women and artisans and create market linkages for them, thereby contributing to the alleviation of poverty and financial empowerment. Also, as a social enterprise of BRAC, we do not have any shareholders and the surpluses we make goes to fund BRAC's development interventions, such as schools and programmes for the extreme poor.

### Future Startup: You joined Aarong in 2002. How much has Aarong evolved over the past years?

**Tamara Hasan Abed:** One significant change is of course scale. We have grown significantly in almost every metric, in terms of volume and value, the number of outlets as well as the average standard of living of our producers and artisans. We have introduced technology in almost all aspects of the operation starting from design to sales to management and customer feedback and engagement. Before our designers used to draw on paper but now designs are done digitally.

We have launched a host of new product lines, categories, and brands, including Taaga and Herstory. In 2018, we will be launching Taaga Man, a brand exclusively for young men. Design and experience of our outlets have improved. We have introduced customer loyalty programmes. We have also launched our eCommerce platform where you can buy Aarong products and get it delivered to your doorstep.

**Future Startup: Aarong is a very successful organisation. It is the biggest lifestyle store in the country and growing very fast. Compared to any other social enterprise of its kind in the country, Aarong is an**



**anomaly and has been doing exceedingly well. How did that happen? What has contributed to this success?**

**Tamara Hasan Abed:** The ambition of Aarong from the very beginning was to become a mainstream brand rather than a small craft outlet. We always wanted to compete with every other brand on a level playing field. We never tried to appeal to our consumers as an altruistic organisation: we are doing social good so buy our products. Therefore, although internally we hold ourselves responsible for the wellbeing of our artisans, we never try to 'sell' this aspect of the brand. That is why in our marketing and communications, we never communicate that perspective. We want our customers to buy our products because they love it and want it, not because they want to do a social service, although by buying from us they are contributing to our society even if they may not know it.

This philosophy of the brand pushes us to work hard and keeps us on our toes. Instead of looking for easier ways, we put our efforts in innovating on product design and work hard to provide the best-in-class quality and shopping experience for our customers. This mentality has helped us scale our impact over the years.

### Future Startup: You have recently launched an eCommerce operation, what are the plans for eCommerce?

**Tamara Hasan Abed:** Our e-commerce store currently delivers products anywhere in Bangladesh. In 2018, we will be launching our global e-commerce platform to cater to customers living abroad. Aarong has a strong following among NRBs. We regularly receive requests from our customers regarding international delivery. We want to build a seamless experience for our customers between our physical and online store.

**Future Startup: How do you design and ensure a great retail experience?**

**Tamara Hasan Abed:** We try to be meticulous about everything from the design of our stores to how customers are going to experience and buy our products to the training of our sales associates to visual merchandising and ambiance. Also, customers now not only experience Aarong in our physical and online store, they also engage with us on social media. We try to keep the excitement going in all of our touch points. That said, I think we have a long way to go.

**Future Startup: What do you think about the future of retail in Bangladesh? What are the major challenges for the industry?**

**Tamara Hasan Abed:** The industry will flourish in the next 10 years. If you look at the important indicators, our disposable income is growing. We are seeing the rise of a stable middle class with greater purchasing power and rapid urbanisation across the country. The fashion savvy youth population is looking for options to suit their daily needs. All of these will contribute to the growth of retail.

However, there are challenges as well. Traffic jam remains a key challenge and is now becoming a problem even in cities other than Dhaka. Real estate remains a formidable challenge. The problem is not only finding the right space for rent that makes sense for the brand, but also finding adequate parking space. Moreover, finding the quality human resource for things like retail management, visual merchandising, etc is difficult. The competition will, of course, continue to grow and foreign brands will eventually enter the market.

**Future Startup: What are the challenges for Aarong now? If you look down the line 5-6 years, what challenges do you anticipate?**

**Tamara Hasan Abed:** One of the challenges will be competing with the brands that have a high degree of mechanisation. They have readymade garments at the back end and are moving towards computerised production systems and use of technology in many aspects of the value addition. We are a crafts brand. Our products are made by artisans and mostly handmade. While this offers us a unique advantage, it is also a challenge. Our production method is expensive and comparatively less efficient. This is a challenge we will have to address in the coming years – how we can improve our efficiency and cost while staying true to our core.

The most critical challenge for us now is finding great people who can work at the intersection of social good and business... we need people who are good at doing business as well as understands and are excited about the impact side of our work.

Another challenge comes from a gradual decline of craft as a profession. Unfortunately, interest in the craft profession is in decline among the children of artisans. They are going for higher education and are not necessarily interested in pursuing a career in crafts.

**Future Startup: Please tell us about the culture at Aarong. How do people work and collaborate at Aarong?**

**Tamara Hasan Abed:** Being a social enterprise, we enjoy certain advantages. While finding great people who can work at the intersection of social good and business is hard for us, but when we do find them, they tend to become very passionate about their work.

We maintain a very open culture. Teams are emotionally connected and work like a big family. We put enormous importance on working as a team. We devise a strategic plan every three years and also have an annual plan. Each and every part of our operations works to deliver on that plan. If you are not working as a team, this would be extremely difficult to execute.

One of our core values is integrity. We promote transparency and accountability in how we work as a team as well as how we operate as an organisation. We work hard to meet the claims that we make.

**Future Startup: You look after BRAC enterprises, can you give us an overview of BRAC's social enterprise efforts? What is the overall strategy and focus going forward?**

**Tamara Hasan Abed:** BRAC's social enterprises fulfill two broad purposes. Firstly, it addresses market failures in creating and promoting livelihoods for poor people, in order to increase their incomes and the productivity of their assets. Secondly, it helps the future sustainability of the broader organisation.

Philosophically, BRAC sees people at the bottom of the pyramid as producers instead of mere consumers, which is different from how many commercial brands view them. We introduce new economic activities for this segment, build their capacity and provide all necessary support so that they can be successful in ensuring a decent living for themselves and their families.

The organisational philosophy is that everybody has potential but because of existing systems and power structures, they are unable to realize this potential. Our goal is to give people the tools to shape their own destiny.

BRAC has 13 social enterprises in areas like crafts, dairy, artificial insemination to improve the breed and productivity of cattle, seed and agro for high yielding and hybrid varieties of seed, chicken, sericulture, fisheries, nursery, recycled and handmade paper, sanitary napkin for rural women, printing pack among others. We also have an enterprise that sells low price iodized salt and a cold storage for potato farmers.

BRAC is now looking at new social enterprises in areas such as education, health, skills, etc. as a means to have a sustainable intervention in priority areas for national development which is not dependent on foreign grants.

For example, we have been working in providing free



education for many years at the primary level. BRAC runs thousands of free schools across the country for students who have dropped out of the mainstream system with phenomenal success.

We are globally recognized for running a large low-cost school system with excellent learning outcomes. However, now that access to primary education is more or less ensured for all children of school-going age in Bangladesh, there is a growing need and demand to focus on quality and relevant education.

At the same time, foreign grants for education is reducing as Bangladesh approaches middle-income status and people's ability to pay for these services has also increased. BRAC is now looking to harness its years of experience and expertise in running schools to develop fee-paying schools, which will deliver better quality education than competitors in rural, semi-urban and urban areas to children of low-income households. So we have started new models of fee-paying schools both at the primary and secondary level. We will, of course, continue to serve the extreme poor through targeted strategies for them, which will remain free.

BRAC started its first social enterprise 40 years ago, much before it became a buzzword. It will remain a key part of the organisation's strategy going forward.

BRAC has 13 social enterprises in areas like crafts, dairy, artificial insemination to improve the breed and productivity of cattle, seed and agro for high yielding and hybrid varieties of seed, chicken, sericulture, fisheries, nursery, recycled and handmade paper, sanitary napkin for rural women, printing pack among others. We also have an enterprise

that sells low price iodised salt and a cold storage for potato farmers. BRAC is now looking at new social enterprises in areas such as education, health, skills, etc as a means to have a sustainable intervention in priority areas for national development which is not dependent on foreign grants.

**Future Startup: What does it take to build a successful social enterprise?**

**Tamara Hasan Abed:** Identifying a problem. Designing the right intervention to address that problem. And ultimately, people. Finding competent people with the right mindset will significantly improve your chance of success as a social enterprise.

Other than your social mission, a social enterprise is no different from any other business. You need the same set of skills in running a business. On top of that, you need people with the motivation to make social impact. The idea is that they should be able to take decisions, which will maximise social impact while ensuring the enterprise's sustainability.

Thinking in just financial terms is actually easier. You just need to estimate what is going to maximise your profit. But in a social enterprise, you have to balance between making a profit and making an impact on the people's lives whom you are trying to serve.

***\*This is an abridged version of Tamara Hasan Abed's interview with Future Startup from January 2018. Interview taken by Ruhul Kader, transcription by Md Tashnim and photo by Aarong***

## BRAC Africa strategy 2017-2021: Transforming for sustainable impact at scale

Across the continent, Africa has experienced significant economic growth and improvement in human development indicators. However, weak institutions, structural problems such as primary commodity dependence and broad governance failures have led to growth that has been neither inclusive nor equitable. As a result, disparities remain in human rights, access to resources, and control of assets, especially for women

and adolescent girls. Although Africa is rising, many people are being left behind.

To address the needs and rights of Africa's most marginalised and disadvantaged, particularly women and girls, BRAC must consider increasingly complex, interrelated, and rapidly evolving regional trends that create unique development challenges and opportunities.



These trends include the demographic bulge of youth; unemployment; food insecurity; climate change; political instability; rise of middle classes and civil societies; and increasing role of the private sector.

With its vision of a world free from all forms of exploitation and discrimination, BRAC is committed to supporting

the poor in Africa to tackle social exclusion and injustice and gain greater access to—and control of—basic assets and resources. BRAC is distinctively positioned to achieve sustainable impact in Africa as a Southern NGO known for: developing innovative solutions through iterative learning; a focus on empowering women and disadvantaged populations at the grass roots; and



effectively implementing at scale in resource-constrained environments. BRAC has had a number of successes in its first ten years of operating programmes in Africa and has learned lessons that will inform the next phase of work. Donors and other development actors view BRAC positively and suggest the potential for a more significant role in Africa.

To achieve BRAC's mission of empowering people and communities, the organisation will shift beyond business as usual. One significant shift will be the focus on partnering with and supporting the capacity of local NGOs, as well as governments. This is a departure from BRAC's focus to date on direct service delivery, and is in recognition of the shift in the funding scenario in Africa towards greater support for local organisations, with whom BRAC intends to partner. A second shift relates to the recognition that the self-sustainability and surplus-generation of microfinance programmes not only support financial inclusion of the poor, but more fundamentally, they enable BRAC's multidimensional poverty reduction approach with sustainable platforms for the poor to access other services and for the development of enterprises that help the poor to increase incomes. As such, microfinance will lead the way for the expansion of much of BRAC's other work in Africa.



BRAC has articulated five strategic directions, which together represent a transformational—not incremental—change for the organisation’s work, as reflected in the table below.

BRAC will pursue these strategic directions through a well-coordinated and adequately resourced planning and implementation process starting in 2017.

Vision	A world free from all forms of exploitation and discrimination where everyone has the opportunity to realise their potential
Mission	To empower people and communities in situations of poverty, illiteracy, disease and social injustice
Goal: 2017-2021	To contribute to the reduction of poverty and social exclusion for women and girls at scale across diverse contexts in Africa
Strategic Directions	Key Milestones for Progress
1. Adapt and extend proven approaches Adapting and extending microfinance and basic services for greater inclusion, and spreading breakthrough approaches in Targeting the Ultra-Poor, Empowerment and Livelihoods for Adolescents, and enhanced nutrition and resilient livelihoods through market-linked agriculture development.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Comprehensive plans and tools for expanding microfinance are developed and implemented</li> <li>• Comprehensive plans and tools for expanding breakthrough approaches are developed and regularly updated and adapted</li> </ul>
2. Advocate and partner for impact Broaden work beyond service delivery to include advocacy, capacity building, and convening.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Every programme in each country has a credible action plan—including resourcing and internal capacity-building—to integrate new operating models into the work</li> <li>• TUP advocacy and technical assistance initiative is implemented, along with selected other high-visibility advocacy initiative(s) modeled with analogous human and financial resource structures</li> <li>• BRAC works in mutually beneficial partnerships in the majority of countries where it operates</li> <li>• New country expansion plans are determined and executed</li> <li>• Hubs for the ‘hub-and-spoke’ model are identified and launched, building on lessons from an initial ‘hub-and-spoke’ experience</li> <li>• Each ‘hub’ country action plan includes analysis and integration of response to the consequences of natural disasters or humanitarian crises</li> </ul>

Strengthen country organisations and devolve decision-making Build empowered and “locally owned” country organisations with significant African and female leadership, supported by high functioning human resource processes and strong channels between BRAC in Africa and BRAC headquarters.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A cadre of African leadership is developed with at least 50% Africans and 50% women in leadership positions in the top 2 tiers</li> <li>• Hubs and spokes operate as part of a global network of organisations in the BRAC family</li> <li>• Change management and succession planning processes are executed, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Integrating new competence and mindset expectations into professional development process</li> <li>o Institutionalising compelling career pathways for staff in all new operating models</li> <li>o Integrating behaviours and outcomes related with inclusiveness, empowering others, and learning orientation into professional development processes and leadership KPIs</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
4. Invest in communications and knowledge management Improve BRAC’s visibility and positioning among external and internal audiences- and systematically create and capture information to inform both decision-making within BRAC and solutions for BRAC and the wider development sector.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Complete Africa communications plan and execute with initial pilot in Uganda, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Hiring communications capacity in Uganda and at headquarters to support the region</li> <li>o Adapting the headquarters communications strategy</li> <li>o Pursuing internal and external communications priorities and assess progress</li> <li>o Applying lessons from Uganda/headquarters teams to develop a variety of in-country marketing and communications resources the region</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Develop the research and evaluation cell in Uganda as a regional learning hub to catalyse and coordinate knowledge management efforts in the region</li> </ul>
5. Build more effective affiliate and funder partnerships Expand and diversify resources to support programmatic and organisational goals.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• BRAC International prepares annual country programme plans and allocates costs to support/sustain core country operations/initiatives accordingly</li> <li>• BRAC International identifies and sequences investments for the first two years to implement the strategic directions</li> <li>• BRAC International prepares regional plans and allocates costs to support/sustain core regional operations/initiatives accordingly</li> <li>• BRAC, BRAC International, BRAC USA, and BRAC UK(iii) develop a multi-year resource mobilisation and financing plan to support implementation of the Africa strategy</li> <li>• BRAC, BRAC International, BRAC USA, and BRAC UK develop annual joint resource mobilisation plans for each country of operation/ initiative and reach targets set</li> <li>• BRAC, BRAC International, BRAC USA, and BRAC UK coordinate outreach to partners/ donors following Africa strategy</li> </ul>

## Inside story

### Fostering the learning culture at BRAC

#### Mrityunjoy Das

Harvard professor David C. Korten first referred to BRAC as a “learning organization” in 1980, when the organization was barely 8 years old. He noted an “unusual capacity for rapid learning through the constant identification, acknowledgement, and correction of its own errors.”<sup>1</sup> Later Catherine Lovell<sup>2</sup>, Ian Smillie and John Hailey<sup>3</sup> and Ian Smillie<sup>4</sup> expanded on the theme and demonstrated BRAC’s extra-ordinary capacity to innovate and adapt based on learning about what works.

Prof. Korten was particularly impressed about the combination of integrity with a sense of vitality and purpose in BRAC’s work that made, as he wrote, “near to a pure example of a learning organisation as one is likely to find”. Most observers of this unusual attribute talked about a mechanism that Prof. Korten termed as ‘error feedback’. He has observed how BRAC has learned from errors and mistakes and built on what worked. Though BRAC’s scope and work expanded, that ‘error feedback’, also known as ‘learning cycle’ is still in play today as prominently as it was in 80s and 90s.

### The learning cycle

Reflective sessions of BRAC’s Annual Operating Plan (AOP) usually involves a learning cycle. This ideally starts with the design of a project followed by a start-up workshop to finalise design and outcomes. The AOPs of all programmes include detailed activity and output plan divided in quarters and some even include an outcome plan to inform the overall monitoring and evaluation plan of the project.

This learning culture is built through a cycle of review and adjustments based on periodical (monthly and quarterly) field data reflection at multiple levels, such as, district, divisional, regional and programme level where both the qualitative and quantitative targets are distributed among different levels and individuals in order to form the learning loop. At programme level (Head Office), AOP reviews,

based on data, analysis and synthesis from reflections at the various levels, occur every six months. This bottom-up process ensures that the data accumulated in the field and at different levels will inform strategy.

### The research and evaluation

Historically, BRAC is often its own fiercest critic. More than 1,500 research reports and a large number of journal articles, books, book chapters, monographs, working papers, etc. has placed every facet of BRAC and its work under the microscope with the single track determination to gather and organize evidence for decision-making



### BRAC's response till February 2018

- ▶ After launching humanitarian intervention on 10 September 2017 BRAC has implemented the largest civil society response for the newly-arrived Rohingyas. It has provided over 600,000 people with at least one form of critical support in areas of water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH), health, protection (GBV and child protection), education, shelter and non-food items, disaster risk reduction, communication for development, agriculture and environment and site management services.
- ▶ BRAC also intensified its existing programmes in the host communities by expanding its focus on livelihoods; introducing its flagship graduation approach to ultra poverty; increasing provision of financial services, environmental restoration and disaster preparedness and initiating skills trainings for services with high market demand.

and learning. The BRAC’s logical framework (log-frame) is divided into project and programme level log frames and monitoring plans. Each programme also required to conduct impact level assessments by design. These assessment not only help BRAC attain a high value for money, but also considered as a learning tool for managers at various levels of the organization.

### The Humanitarian Crisis Management Programme and After Action Review

Since 25 August 2017, Bangladesh has welcomed an estimated 700,000 forcibly displaced Myanmar nationals (FDMNs) till June, 2018, who fled violence and persecution in Rakhine State of the country. The concentration of displaced people in Cox’s Bazar district is now among the densest in the world. This influx has placed enormous pressure on a region already overwhelmed with earlier arrivals of FDMNs and hit by frequent natural disasters like cyclone and landslide and perpetual resource constraint to sustain the livelihoods of the host community itself. Taking into account the pre-existing 300,000 Rohingya

population and affected members of the host community, roughly 1.3 million people are in need of comprehensive humanitarian services and support.

On 12 September 2018, the Honourable Prime Minister of Bangladesh, Sheikh Hasina not only graciously permitted temporary shelter to the forcibly displaced people of Myanmar but also called on all national and international organization to extend their support the community. Soon afterwards, BRAC launched the ‘Humanitarian Crisis Management Programme’ (HCMP) on 20 September 2017. As of 30th June, 2018, HCMP is the largest and most diverse civil society response for the Rohingya. HCMP has provided over 600,000 people with at least one form of critical support in areas of water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH), health, protection (GBV and child protection), education, shelter and non-food items, disaster risk reduction, communication for development, agriculture and environment and site management services.

BRAC also intensified its existing programmes in the host communities by expanding its focus on livelihoods; introducing its flagship graduation approach to ultra poverty; increasing provision of financial services, environmental restoration and disaster preparedness and initiating skills trainings for services with high market demand.

<sup>1</sup>Korten, D.C. (1980) ‘Community Organization and Rural Development: A Learning Process Approach’, *Public Administration Review* 40.5: 480-511

<sup>2</sup>Lovell, C. (1992) *Breaking the Cycle of Poverty: The BRAC Strategy*, West Hartford, Conn: Kumarian Press

<sup>3</sup>Smillie, I. and Hailey, I. (2001) *Managing for Change: Leadership, Strategy and Management in Asian NGOs*, London: Earthscan

<sup>4</sup>Smillie, I. (2009) *Freedom From Want: The Remarkable Success Story of BRAC, the Global Grassroots Organization That’s*

<sup>4</sup>Winning the Fight Against Poverty, Sterling, VA: Kumarian Press

## A special learning tool for a special programme

HCMP programme was launched and implemented in response to a humanitarian crisis which was not, for obvious reason, part of BRAC's existing log frame. Additionally, the challenge, which is often dubbed as the worlds fastest growing refugee problem, offered many new opportunities for experimenting and learning. Hence, a dedicated learning framework was necessary to ensure the 'error feedback'/learning cycle' to work. A two pronged approach was adopted.

Omnispace, a specialized outfit run by media journalists spent couple of months to interview a cross-section of stakeholders from government, UN, media, and peer organizations as well as our field staffs to reflect on what worked and what did not. Then an independent consultant, Ms. Caroline Saint-Mleux who has years of experience with international development organizations including the UN conducted a thorough desk research and sample survey to identify the lessons with greater precisions. Finally she run a two-day workshop in Dhaka participated by BRAC staffs from the field and head office as well as UN partners and peer organization representatives.

The AAR exercise analysed and assessed the HCMP activities and results against speed, scale, visibility, timeliness and effectiveness within the framework of Core Humanitarian Standard (CHS). The exercise focused at identifying what went well, so that BRAC can build on these practices and what could have been done differently and how. Threadbare discussions on the observed lessons as well as cross-cutting issues of leadership, coordination, and communication were held. Discussion on global advocacy, organizational alignment, and future direction followed.

The final AAR document is now being finalized after a second round of review of the draft by the stakeholders, many of whom participated the review itself. The report will be shared widely among the stakeholders once finalized.

The After Action Review, is just the continuation of BRAC's long standing culture of self-criticism, its 'error feedback' mechanism to ultimately promote learning. As we are approaching the anniversary of this humanitarian crisis, the situation on the ground is evolving every day. Thanks to the learning culture at BRAC, we are ready to adopt the change and respond to such unfortunate crisis in Bangladesh or beyond.

*Mrityunjoy Das is a senior programme manager for Disaster Management and Climate Change, BRAC.*

### Quotes from participants:

“ I applaud BRAC's senior leadership's courage to organise such a review involving donors, partners and field level staff... UN and other organisations can learn from BRAC how institutions can overcome all silos and serve bigger cause as one. ”

- Dr Md Khairul Islam, Country Director, WaterAid, Bangladesh

“ I really appreciate that views and reflections of the implementing team is being given so much importance... it ensures community's concerns are included in future programming as we also represent the community. ”

- Hillol Amin Hira, Branch Manager, BRAC's Humanitarian Crisis Management Programme, Cox's Bazar



## Future of development partnership: Time to harness strength within

### Zeenath Sultana

Bangladesh, born through a glorious war of independence in 1971, is a fascinating story of a small child growing up trying to find its footing on the ground and identity established in the world. From baby steps Bangladesh is now taking gallant-strides, driven by the core founding values, to take us forward. It is an epic journey of diligence and grit- and with each milestones we are going from strength to strength.



## From dominated to self-assured: Inception of Bangladesh development forum (BDF)

The war of Independence left a deep scar on our infrastructure. In 1972, UN estimated that around 78% of Bangladeshi lived below the absolute poverty line<sup>1</sup>--there were simply not enough internal resources to go around. Foreign aid was the answer as 88% of the development projects had to be funded with foreign funds. Obviously, the economic prospect looked bleak.

Noted Norwegian political economist, Mr Faaland's narration of how Bangladesh was obligated to attend the yearly Aid Group Meetings in Washington or Paris is also a testimony of the level of dependency<sup>2</sup> on aid. This is when

we were pigeonholed as a 'bottomless basket'. Probably that wounded self-esteem and of course, economic development of Bangladesh that took place in the meantime was the key motivating factor which made it possible to change the Bangladesh Aid Group into Bangladesh Development Forum in 2001. The meeting venue changed from Paris or Washington to Dhaka, the chairpersonship changed to Bangladesh, and the secretariat is also now shifted to Ministry of Finance<sup>3</sup>. This seemingly simple transformation truly signified a milestone of Bangladesh's effort to economic emancipation and a bold example of the government's determination and leadership.

<sup>1</sup>Meaning their daily intake of food was less than 90 percent of the minimum requirement needed to get through the day <sup>2</sup>See Faaland, J. (Ed.). (1980). *Aid and Influence: the case of Bangladesh*. Springer. <sup>3</sup>Honourable Finance Minister Mr. A. M. A. Muhith articulated the significance of this change in his opening remark of the 2010 Bangladesh Development Forum. See [https://erd.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/erd.portal.gov.bd/page/96370029\\_e1cd\\_4bb7\\_8a76\\_ad300024bdb7/Speech\\_Finance%20Minister.pdf](https://erd.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/erd.portal.gov.bd/page/96370029_e1cd_4bb7_8a76_ad300024bdb7/Speech_Finance%20Minister.pdf) (accessed 29 June, 2018)

“ In order to upgrade Bangladesh to a developed and prosperous country by 2041, we have to achieve the target of our five-year plan, Vision-2021 and the United Nations-declared sustainable development goals-2030.”

-Honourable Prime Minister,  
Sheikh Hasina

## A story of coming of age: Bangladesh Development Forum 2018

Though BDFs were led by economic relations division (ERD), multilateral development partners played the critical role of funding, setting of agenda, and even organizing the event. But these roles started to change from 2015 BDF when the ERD started to assume greater responsibilities. This time, in 2018, the ERD fully took leadership of the forum—from funding to deciding the agenda. As if to complete this transformation, ERD also invited, for the first time, a local development agency, BRAC, to be part of the organization of the event.

BRAC embraced this opportunity with open arms. A dedicated team was actively involved from the planning stage to the post-event digital media communication and event management support. BRAC Leadership shared the stage with high-level government and non-government panels in 4 out of 9 sessions. This was an occasion to prove BRAC's readiness and competence in upholding the Bangladesh government's ambition.

While inaugurating the BDF, Honourable Prime Minister, Sheikh Hasina said, “In order to upgrade Bangladesh to a developed and prosperous country by 2041, we have to achieve the target of our five-year plan, Vision-2021 and the United Nations-declared sustainable development goals-2030.” It is important to note, how Bangladesh has subsumed the SDGs within her own 2041 goals—this is yet another indication of audaciousness of Bangladesh's aspiration and inclination to take control of her development destination and journey. A coveted goal since independence.

### Did you know?

It was estimated that right after independence there were only 300 gasoline pumps, 20,000 private cars and 5,000 buses. Our total consumption of fuel oil in 1971 was 14,000 barrel/day! Currently, Bangladesh has around 350,000 registered private cars and consumes 146,000 barrel/day!

## Sir Fazle Hasan Abed on Bangladesh Development Priorities

‘Our focus must now shift from just the provision of basic services to ensuring the quality of those services’- remarked Sir Fazle Hasan Abed, Founder and Chairperson of BRAC, who took part in the opening plenary of BDF 2018 as a distinguished panelist. He began by thanking the Finance Minister and the government for inviting him as a representative of the civil society. In his address he talked about the development priorities of Bangladesh. He particularly emphasized four priorities for Bangladesh.

First, he stressed on the importance of sharing the lessons and cultivating close cooperation between successful poverty reduction initiatives such as between the Government's “Ekti Bari Ekti Khamar” and BRAC's “Targeting Ultra Poverty” Programme to realise the 2030 agenda.

Second, he opined that health care in SDG era needs closer collaboration. To illustrate this point, Sir Abed, highlighted the low availability of Misoprostol, an effective medication to stop postpartum hemorrhage, which cause 31% of maternal deaths. The availability can be improved by working together.

Third, he suggested redoubling our effort to improve the quality of education. Especially, the pre-primary education needs to be prioritized, Sir Abed remarked.

Fourth, the necessity to attain SDG 16 as an overarching objective needs to be focused. He suggested, the NGOs and civil society partners can be called up to work alongside the government to accomplish this goal.

Finally, Sir Abed expressed his firm conviction that, like in the case of MDGs, the NGOs and Civil Society organization is ready to play a complimentary role in the Bangladesh Government's pursuits of attaining the SDG agenda.



## Building on the confidence

Now, after achieving the lower-middle income country status in 2015, we are on our way to enter the developing country club and are already looking forward to our journey to become a developed country by 2041. In this context, I feel that it is time that the scope for meaningful engagement of local development agencies expanded further. For example, it is the right time to bring in the local development agencies such as NGOs and civil society organization under the fold of local consultative groups—a move that is aligned with the ‘Development Effectiveness’ discourse. BRAC has already expressed interest to join the Local-consultative groups (LCG), which is coordinated by the Economic Relations Division.

Moreover, considering Bangladesh's commitment towards attaining the 2030 agenda, it is also reasonable that NGO's are included in the existing sector-specific coordination mechanism of the government. It will be an effective way to integrate their contribution in national development, promote overall alignment, harmonisation and accountability among all the actors. Such a move would eventually fast-track Bangladesh's development on her own term!

*Zeenath Sultana is working as a partnership analyst for Advocacy for Social Change, BRAC.*



## BRAC Day 2018

### Zeenath Sultana

Every year on BRAC Day, staff members from across the globe gather to celebrate the values, mission, and history of the number one NGO in the world with exemplary commitment towards innovation, impact and governance. BRAC Day is a celebration of yesteryear's achievements and rewarding the diligence and dedication of the people behind BRAC's story of success. It is also a time for reflection upon failures and renewal of the commitment for a brand new year.

To mark BRAC's 46th year anniversary and rejoice the announcement of BRAC becoming the number one NGO in the world for the third time, a day-long event was organised on 27 March 2018. Along with the staff from the head office, 63,000 field employees observed the day of celebration across 492 upazila

offices in Bangladesh. Three special panel sessions were held at BRAC Centre in Dhaka where the panelists and BRAC colleagues took part in open discussions. The panel sessions were led by key members of BRAC's leadership who narrated their experiences, attesting that success does not come easily and being consistent, thorough and always on the lookout for a frugal, sustainable and scalable solution helps. Two separate exhibitions were organised in the head office premises to showcase the organisation's developmental programme interventions all over Bangladesh and what BRAC is doing to address the basic needs of forcibly displaced Myanmar nationals (FDMN) in Cox's Bazar.

The main attraction of any BRAC day celebration is when Sir Fazle Hasan Abed, BRAC's founder and



chairperson, who we fondly call Abed Bhai, delivers his address to the BRAC family, providing direction for the upcoming days vis-à-vis BRAC's focus and future strategy. This year, in his speech, he emphasised that we have to be futuristic in our mindset and cutting-edge in our endeavours. He added, for example, the future of microfinance will be driven by technology-based mediums like mobile banking. For the last 46 years, BRAC has been working predominantly as a development organisation with exceptional track record for scale and effectiveness. This year, for the first time after 1972, BRAC took a giant leap by taking up a new role as a humanitarian organisation when the influx of forcibly-displaced Myanmar nationals entered Bangladesh. So, he stressed upon the need for leveraging on our experience in humanitarian response at Cox's Bazaar and be well-prepared to work at a global level. During the main event, staff members from all over Bangladesh and 11 countries, where BRAC operates, also joined through Skype.

BRAC day is also the occasion when we recognise the best of us, who uphold organisational values (Integrity, Innovation, Inclusiveness and Effectiveness) in their professional lives by setting example of finesse and fairness. So, keeping up with the tradition, 16 staff

members who has had commendable work ethic and contributed to the organisation, were awarded with BRAC Values Award. All of the awardees were chosen from hundreds of nominations from all over Bangladesh and 11 country offices outside Bangladesh who had to go through a rigorous eight-tier selection process.

This year for the first time, five female staff were awarded for their extraordinary stories of inspiration, grit and perseverance at breaking barriers in its truest sense. On last year's BRAC day "I am BRAC", a campaign was launched inviting all BRAC staff members to send their stories. From 453 submissions, Abed Bhai himself picked the winning entries. Apparently, all five winners have different contexts, different struggles yet one thing is common - their unwavering spirit. While they are working in different BRAC programmes for social or economic empowerment, they are simply not preaching or proclaiming but they actually have lived the experience of swimming against the stream and eventually proving themselves in going beyond their limitations.

*Zeenath Sultana is working as a partnership analyst for Advocacy for Social Change, BRAC.*

# The DNA of innovation

Asifur Rahman Khan, Anjali Sarker

BRAC is hardly synonymous to innovation. Why would it be, when images and videos of humanitarian efforts have populated the media space for as long as the memory can serve?

And that is just on the media front. When you look at the rural level - more precisely, outside the strictly urban space - BRAC is known for its microfinance efforts. Microfinance, despite being a revolutionary approach to empowering individuals and communities, is hardly labelled as an innovation, even though it should be.

BRAC has never bragged about its innovations that are literally littered across BRAC's 46 years of existence. There is a reason for this too. With the philosophy of helping people at its core, "advertising" the good deeds of BRAC was never its top priority. Had it been a top priority, there would not be any space on any media for telecom giants to advertise, or any other organisations for that matter.

For instance, BRAC was responsible for bringing innovation to the educational system for dropout and non-entrant children in the 1980s. They implemented low-cost primary schools that helped disadvantaged children make successful transitions to formal school, with around 11 million students having graduated from BRAC schools so far. Just the last sentence does not do justice to the amount of activities undertaken, from a policy level to its implementation level across Bangladesh.

BRAC was also behind the innovative approach of dissemination that was instrumental for making the oral saline to be adopted throughout the country. The approach saved millions of lives from diarrhoea. The campaign itself taught 13 million households in Bangladesh how to make the solution at home. Thirteen million households translates to roughly 65 million people, which does not sound a lot in a country that houses 170 million people, but this roughly 65 million people happened in 1980 when the population was merely around 81 million. To quote the famous saying "He who saves one life saves the world entire", BRAC has saved more than just 65 million people.

Although unknown to many, BRAC was behind the creation of the hybrid maize. The innovation motivated farmers to shift from the traditional single crop farming



to multiple cropping to maximise land usage during idle seasons. The list of innovations are endless - from initiating a range of activities designed to empower adolescents with skills to transform their lives, to creating an integrated network of development programmes, enterprises and investments that support BRAC's holistic approach for alleviating poverty, to instilling the use of theatre to advocate social causes in rural Bangladesh.

Speaking of rural Bangladesh, BRAC also initiated the ultra poor graduation model in 2002, which was a pioneering initiative and has already been adapted by numerous

organisations and scaled in some of the poorest regions of the world through BRAC International. The Graduation approach has gained international recognition, and continues to gather momentum as a means of enabling participants and their families to build secure, sustainable and resilient livelihoods while gaining the skills and confidence to move forward with hope. The Graduation approach combines support to address immediate needs of participants with longer term investments in life skills and technical skills training, asset transfers, enterprise development, savings and planning for the future to transition ultra poor families into sustainable livelihoods.

By addressing the social, economic and health needs of families simultaneously, these programmes provide holistic support to participants as they climb the ladder of economic self-reliance towards a sustainable future.

In keeping with this tradition to innovate, BRAC has stepped up its role as an innovator, now more so to the public eye not to "advertise", but to recruit and model the next wave of entrepreneurs and innovators. In recent years, BRAC launched the Urban Innovation Challenge (UIC) to attract the brightest minds across the cities in Bangladesh to rise up to the challenge of solving urban problems. Knowing that it's not enough to merely identify the minds capable of solving the hardest of urban problems, BRAC has developed an ecosystem of supporters, mentors and funders to help them sustain.

Looking beyond Bangladesh into the innovation ecosystem is the Frugal Innovation Forum (FIF), which connects similar minds across South Asia on attempting to do more with less. Better put: do much, much more with much, much less, considering the rapid increase of resource constraints especially in South Asian countries. With the motto of "necessity is the mother of invention", FIF brings together South Asian innovators on one platform in Bangladesh to talk shop, share what is working and what is not.

Lastly, but not the least, BRAC utilises the minds already at work for BRAC: its employees. Through the initiative of brax, BRAC has created a platform to unleash the potential of its own employees in identifying and solving problems, from the micro to the macro. In keeping with what Goggles and Apples of the world do, BRAC refers to these employees as "intrapreneurs"; internal entrepreneurs who are completely in touch with the ground realities of Bangladesh, and thus are potentially in the best position to identify suitable solutions.

So as mentioned before, BRAC is hardly synonymous to innovation, which is actually completely untrue considering the reality of its history and activities. Since the very beginning, BRAC has led and paved the way for innovation and innovators, to transform the lives of millions of people, not just in Bangladesh but across the globe. It is this practice for the last 46 years that has truly made innovation a part of BRAC's DNA.



## Research, evidence and learning

### Highlights from recent research

## Effectiveness of low dose calcium tablets at reducing pregnancy-induced hypertension in Bangladesh

**Fouzia Khanam, Md Belal Hossain and Sabuj Kanti Mistry**

For pregnant women, the World Health Organization (WHO) recommends routine prenatal calcium supplementation of 1,500 to 2,000 mg daily, starting from the 20th week until delivery. The recommendation is especially applicable for pregnant women from high-risk groups residing in low-calcium intake areas. While this regimen has been endorsed by the Government of Bangladesh, its adoption rate has been less than ideal due to practical impediments to implementation including poor compliance of high daily dose of calcium tablets. But, the evidence of the impact of low-dose calcium supplementation on Pregnancy-Induced Hypertension (PIH) is scarce. So, developing an evidence-based low dose recommendation for antenatal calcium intake can exert a tremendous impact in developing countries.

In this context, BRAC's research and evaluation division (RED) has conducted a study to assess the effects of different duration of low-dose calcium supplementation (500 mg daily) during pregnancy on the incidence of PIH, covering 11,387 pregnant women from 10 rural sub-districts of Bangladesh, where maternal nutrition intervention (MNI) of BRAC has already been going on.

Only 14 per cent women were found to consume 180 or more calcium tablets during the whole pregnancy period and only about 22 per cent women consumed calcium continuously for six months. Pregnant women who consumed 500 mg of calcium tablet continuously for at least six months were found to be at 40 per cent less risk of being hypertensive than those who consumed less or discontinued. The prevalence of pregnancy-induced hypertension among women was found to be around 2.2 per cent. The prevalence was 2.3 per cent and 1.4 per cent among women who consumed <180 and 180+ calcium tablets during pregnancy period, respectively. Moreover, the prevalence of hypertension among women who took calcium continuously for six months was 2.4 per cent whereas the prevalence among women who did not

take calcium continuously was 1.4 per cent. The data also showed that for both systolic and diastolic BP, there was a slower increase over time for those who consumed 180+ calcium tablets during the pregnancy period than those who consumed less.

Hence, the study highlighted that daily supplementation of 500 mg calcium during pregnancy considerably reduces the risk of PIH. Currently, the high cost of implementing the WHO recommended daily dose of calcium is regarded as prohibitive in low income settings. Therefore, the dilemma facing health policy-makers in these settings is whether supplementation with a lower-dose would be better than no supplementation at all. While the findings of this research is a step towards addressing the issue, a more robust experimental research is warranted.



The world's most innovative companies encourage all of its employees to think and act like entrepreneurs. Not surprisingly, about half of Google's products, including Gmail and News, started out as 20 per cent projects - employees spending 20 per cent of their time to work on something out of passion. These intrepeneurs - the risk taking employees within an organisation - are at the forefront of driving innovation and change within the internal ecosystem.

So earlier in 2018, BRAC initiated bracX, its first employee innovation platform that offers seed funding to the ideas developed by BRAC employees. Here, solutions that meet at least one of the criteria below are sought:

1. Ideas which are bold, ambitious, future-centric, yet not impossible.
2. High-impact initiatives that can be done better or have never been done before within BRAC.
3. Innovations that bring significant improvement to existing BRAC projects, products, processes or services.

It is not uncommon to see employees who are overworked, yet feel underutilised. bracX gives them an opportunity to step out of their cubicles and look around for bigger things that the organisation probably is missing out on.

During this competition, at each stage, employees will receive support from Social Innovation Lab to ensure that they turn in the best version of their ideas. The seed funding (of minimum BDT 200,000) will be provided before the final round to test the ideas on the ground.

bracX provides a unique opportunity to test an idea on the ground and fail, yet still win the competition. Through the platform, BRAC looks forward to finding the 'intrapreneurs' and support them in their pursuit to make BRAC more agile, innovative and ready for the future.

**Only those people who are well aware of BRAC knows this. The time has come for the world to know. Let's make it happen.**

*Asifur Rahman Khan is the head of campaign and channel management, Communications. Anjali Sarker is a manager of BRAC Social Innovation Lab.*

# Leveraging Agriculture for Nutrition in South Asia: Bangladesh

Leveraging Agriculture for Nutrition in South Asia (LANSA) is a research programme consortium of six research and development organisations led by M S Swaminathan Research Foundation in India and funded by the UK Government (UKaid). Other partners include BRAC in Bangladesh, Collective for Social Science Research in Pakistan, Institute of Development Studies (UK), International Food Policy Research Institute (USA) and Leverhulme Centre for Integrative Research on Agriculture and Health (UK). The key aim of this programme is to explore how agriculture and agri-food systems can be better designed to advance nutrition in South Asia particularly in India, Bangladesh, Pakistan and Afghanistan. BRAC has been leading and collaborating for Bangladesh under three thematic pillars of LANSA including enabling environments for nutrition, agri-food value chains and nutrition sensitive farming approaches. Some key findings based on the studies done in Bangladesh are under the following sub-sections.

## Enabling environment

Findings from a systematic evidence review<sup>1</sup>, conducted by IFPRI and BRAC to assess the emphasis of the literature on different agriculture–nutrition pathways in Bangladesh, highlighted the gaps in knowledge especially in the areas of agriculture as a source of livelihoods, and women’s role as intermediaries between agriculture, good nutrition and health within their household. BRAC conducted a study using the data of the Food Security Nutrition Surveillance Project<sup>2</sup> (FSNSP) to understand the variation in maternal and childhood under-nutrition in Bangladesh across regions and seasons. The findings indicated the importance of identifying context-specific risk factors for under-nutrition in vulnerable settings, particularly in wetland areas (haor) in the north-east and in coastal areas, for conducting appropriate interventions.

## Agri-food value chains

The nutrition focus of food value chains beyond the farm were analysed in three case studies, following up from a country review of interventions in the categories of

naturally nutrient dense foods, fortified foods and food distribution chains. The analysis of the case studies gives careful consideration on how particular initiatives like the school meal programme reach, or fail to reach, women and adolescent girls.

## Nutrition sensitive farming approaches

A formative study<sup>3</sup> conducted to understand the needs of local farming communities using the existing programmatic framework of BRAC indicates that meaning and significance of nutrition sensitive farming approach are not yet well understood by the farming communities despite huge potential of their farming for nutrition. The findings highlighted the importance of conveying nutrition sensitive agricultural messages that will sensitise the communities to realise the potential of agriculture in achieving better nutritional outcomes.



# Flash flood ‘17: Perspective from the haors of Bangladesh

**Nepal Dey, Ratnajit Saha, Mahmood Parvez, Raihanul Islam, PolinK. Saha, SifatE Rabbi, Kaniz Ferdouse, Akramul Islam, and Shyam Saha**

The aim of the study was to investigate the impact of the flash floods of 2017 on livelihoods of people living in haor in north-east Bangladesh. The study covered 70 villages of 31 unions under six districts (Maulvibazar, Sunamganj, Sylhet, Habiganj, Netrakona and Kishoreganj) with a total of 1,845 households.

Both primary (quantitative and qualitative) and secondary data were used in this study. Heavy rainfall within a short period of time was identified as the main reason for early flash flood in haor areas. Local communities reported that sudden large volume of water coming from cross border (Indian) catchment area, insufficient protective measures including repair and maintenance of embankments, incomplete project work within the estimated time were some of the reasons for the huge loss. Results showed that agriculture was the main occupation of people living in haors (52 per cent households) in the normal period. But only 13 per cent were found engaged in agriculture during

flood and 24 per cent in fishery. During the flood, a large proportion of people (21 per cent) could not work in their usual jobs.

Respondents reported having to change their usual food habits; approximately one-third of the population were found facing dearth of food immediately after the flash flood. They had to consume two meals instead of three meals per day – 53 per cent consumed less food and 16 per cent had less nutritious food due to food scarcity.

As for school attendance, 92 per cent students reported attending school six days a week before the flood. This dropped to 63 per cent during the floods. The highest number of absentees were found in Maulvibazar district as they were not accustomed to flash floods. Due to poor access to market (eg, disruption in transportation, no road connectivity, longer distance from house, etc), household members were not able to sell their products timely and get



the right prices. To maintain livelihoods, about half of the households took loan from their relatives (47.5 per cent) and a quarter took loan from NGOs (24.8 per cent).

No significant change was observed in accessibility of tube well water and sanitation condition, however, the prevalence of water-borne diseases increased after the flood. The estimated total loss was BDT 29,180 million including agricultural crop damage, poultry and dairy loss and loss of day labour through flood and health-related expenditure (because of water-borne diseases). Almost, 48 per cent and 28 per cent of the households received relief from BRAC and government respectively, within three weeks after the flood. Overall, 76 per cent and 22

per cent affected households received aid from government and BRAC, respectively within the four weeks.

Improving drainage system through re-excavation of rivers/canals can be a preventive measure against flash floods. Seeding and transplantation time can be changed and short duration variety can be cultivated to minimise the loss in flash flood. Preparing local population for availing alternative employment opportunities (eg, driving, electrical, tailoring and garments) by providing skills training for youth can also be crucial for sustaining livelihoods.

*The authors are from Research and Evaluation Division and Integrated Development Programme, BRAC.*

<sup>1</sup>Yosef, S., Jones, A. D., Chakraborty, B., and Gillespie, S. (2015). *Agriculture and Nutrition in Bangladesh: Mapping Evidence to Pathways*. *Food and Nutrition Bulletin* 1-18. <sup>2</sup>Mohsena, M., Chakraborty, B., Hossain, M. (2017). *Fragile Environment, Seasonality, and Maternal and Childhood Undernutrition in Bangladesh*, *Journal of Biosocial Science*. <sup>3</sup>Chakraborty, B., Akter, F., Mukta, U. S., and Hossain, M. (2017). *Farming Systems for Improved Nutrition: a Formative Study*. LANSA Working Paper

# Are impacts of vocational training sustainable?

By Atiya Rahman, Anindita Bhattacharjee, Rehnuma Rahman, Zion Rabbi Samadder

Lack of skills is considered as one of the key determinants of unemployment and poverty. Hence, programmes that reduce the costs of education have been key policies for poor countries. Despite such policies, school dropout rate in poor countries is very high. In Bangladesh, dropout rate at the primary and secondary levels are about 20 per cent and 43 per cent, respectively. Evidently, majority of these children who dropped out from school end up unemployed or in low quality jobs.

Training programmes can be a potential solution to addressing rising unemployment among young people in Bangladesh. In 2012, BRAC piloted a programme called 'skills training for advancing resources (STAR)' in five divisional cities of Bangladesh, in partnership with the

Bureau of Non-formal Education (BNFE). During the pilot phase, the programme provided livelihood skills training to a pool of 1,000 urban adolescents aged 14-18 years who completed class five under BEHTRUWC project of BNFE.

A study has been conducted by RED using three rounds of quantitative data (collected in 2012, 2013 and 2015) to estimate the short and long-term impacts of the pilot phase of the STAR programme. Specifically, this study estimated the impacts on employment, earnings, savings, early marriage, etc of adolescents (with gender-disaggregation in particular cases) and household welfare. Findings show that the programme significantly increased the adolescents' labour market participation as well as monthly income. During 2012-2015, employment rate among participants increased from 27 per cent to 81 per cent while for non-participants it increased from 28 per cent to 51 per cent. Moreover, the amount of savings increased from BDT 464 to BDT 2,939 among the participants while it increased from BDT 368 to BDT 1,626 for non-participants.

It needs to be noted that the impact on employment and savings were found to be stronger for female participants compared to their male counterparts. Among non-participant girls who were unmarried at baseline, 13 per cent got married before the age of 18 after intervention. Among participant girls, the corresponding proportion is only 5 per cent. Positive impact of the intervention was also found in empowerment, self-confidence, job satisfaction and workplace environment of the adolescents, more for girls than for boys.

The qualitative part of this study recommends - keeping the profile of trades consistent with market demands and the participants' age as well as their individual interests, and ensuring post-training follow up by programme staff, among others, to make the programme even more effective.

**Compiled by Anindita Bhattacharjee,** research fellow at Research and Evaluation Division, BRAC.



## Sneak peak

# Frugal Innovation Forum 2018 around the corner

## Masrura Oishi

BRAC Social Innovation Lab (SIL) will be hosting the sixth Frugal Innovation Forum (FIF) this year, from 6-8 November at Savar BCDM. FIF is a platform for leaders from the global South to connect and explore solutions to the world's toughest challenges. Development practitioners, social entrepreneurs, activists, policy-makers, academics, tech experts and changemakers will meet to discuss about low-cost innovations that can work at scale. By setting up a space for discourse on existing best practices, the conference will kickstart with a day-long field visit, followed by two days of intense debates, workshops and plenaries on disruptive models and solutions.

Every year since 2013, FIF has focused on a different theme that resonates the questions that need to be answered for the global South. This year, the spotlight is on 'Youth'.

The conference will be designed to inspire more effective and impactful actions through discussions and debate about youth empowerment in the global South.

Today, 85 per cent of the world's youth are living in the global South, many struggling in vulnerable situations involving poverty, illiteracy and social injustice. It has become imperative, therefore, for a renewed focus on

harnessing their potential and prepare them for the future. They are the changemakers we must engage with for a better, brighter tomorrow to bring sustainable solutions to the complex issues faced by the global South every day.

FIF 2018 will provide the opportunity for prospective participants to meet and collaborate on a variety of issues faced by the youth and like previous times, the focus will be on how the global South has an innate predisposition to what we call 'jugaad', or 'frugal innovation', which allows adaptation and large-scale change with limited resources.

FIF exclusively is known to feature grassroots initiatives that are hardly highlighted elsewhere. With the presence of diverse local and global experts, researchers and practitioners, FIF serves as a platform for potential south-south collaboration.

As we gear up for the next FIF, we look forward to your support and cooperation for making our event highly successful. If you want to suggest a session or nominate a speaker/youth organisation, or write about your work/opinion, please drop us an email at [frugalinnovation@brac.net](mailto:frugalinnovation@brac.net).

**Masrura Oishi** is an assistant manager at Social Innovation Lab, BRAC.



# BRAC in voluntary national review of SDGs

## Syed Mahmud Mominul Huq

Extensive negotiation among countries combined with the rich experience of international NGOs and heavy involvement of civil society culminated in the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015. The 2030 Agenda urges “regular and inclusive reviews of progress at the national and sub-national levels, which are country-led and country-driven”.<sup>1</sup> This led to the governments presenting periodic Voluntary National Reviews (VNR) to the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) to share experiences, successes, challenges and lessons learned for faster progress through combined knowledge.

But as national NGOs are yet to embrace the SDGs to reinforce both national and its own development activities, their scattered activities without cohesion are unaccounted for in the national indicators.



## BRAC's role

This April, the NGO Affairs Bureau (NGOAB) initiated the process of formulating a method to attribute the achievements of NGOs for national progress in SDGs. BRAC, ranked the top global NGO for third straight year in 2018, promptly mobilised resources aimed at summing up its SDGs contributions from three years into the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Nearly 40 other NGOs are participating in the exercise. BRAC maintains programme with major activities relating to at least 11 SDGs. Poverty elimination, hunger alleviation, health coverage, ensuring quality education and entrenching gender equality are among the prominent areas for BRAC.

The NGO reporting for contribution in SDGs, called the Voluntary Local Review (VLR), is challenging, even more so for BRAC due to its sheer variety of development coverage. It will be taxing to formulate a method where organisation's numeric indicators can be interpreted and nationally attributed to the SDGs' proportional indices while keeping with practicality and discarding any notional sense of superficiality. For instance, BRAC aims to raise 2 million ultra poor population from below the national poverty line by 2020. But it is tricky to fit that into addressing the proportion of population below the international poverty line, by sex, age, employment status & geographical location (urban/rural)<sup>2</sup> by 2030.

Additionally, BRAC experts say that many of the SDG indicators are still unrefined, possibly untested and include key concepts that are not yet operationally defined. Hence enhancing the consistency and comparative value of measurements assessed at different times and across different organisations is necessary.

An NGO sub-committee of six, including BRAC, are working on a versatile reporting framework. The drafted alignment table draws SDG relations at either programme-level or project-level, if possible even at activity-level depending on the mode of a particular NGO's work in a given area. The table contains budget, achievement and target to assess viability of finance, progress and projection.

BRAC has also been working on an alignment framework tailored to suit its methods. Produced in light of the programmes 'Five-year work plan (2016-2020)', these detailed tables contain indicators mapped with SDG targets to the slimmest acceptable relevance to leave space for as much programme data as possible.

The SDGs itself encourage advocating policies for effective public, public-private and civil society partnerships, building on the experience and resourcing strategies of partnerships<sup>3</sup> to ease collection of data, establish monitoring mechanism and maintain accountability as part of establishing institutional coherence.

<sup>1</sup>Paragraph 79 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development <sup>2</sup>SDG indicator 1.1.1 <sup>3</sup>SDG 17.17

## A good practice for NGOs

NGOs are actors of change. The push to integrate the SDGs into NGO projects and accumulate their contributions toward national achievement came in late February of 2018. The call was made at a seminar of SDG experts and economists at PKSF, voiced by top-tier development associates from the government, including PMO SDG Affairs Chief Coordinator Abul Kalam Azad.

The virtue of the initiative extends beyond measuring collective national achievement. With the government spearheading the SDG efforts, NGOs are capable of piloting, effectively implementing and monitoring these activities in different capacities. The potential for concentrated efforts in a coordinated manner backed by a collective force can assure desired impact while solving any given issue. On the flip side, SDGs hold the

government accountable and provides policy advocacy windows to address issues obstructing achievement of anything involving the 169 targets.

SDGs also allow NGOs to form coalition and alliance. Joint efforts can reduce risks and help address double counting of the population being served. On the other hand, partnership formed beyond the borders will enrich NGOs through sharing of knowledge and experiences, which in turn can make them stronger on both the national and international development scenes.

**Syed Mahmud Mominul Huq** is a documentation officer for Advocacy for Social Change, BRAC.



## Next issue of dBRIEF

Our next issue of dBRIEF will be on 'Youth'. We expect to cover interesting stories, national/international/organisational level initiatives/events, ground-breaking researches, and other important topics around 'Youth' thematic area.

Moreover, we are planning to introduce a new section- 'Dear editor', from the next issue of dBRIEF. The section would contain readers' analytical reviews and constructive feedbacks on the current issue. In this regard, we are calling for your thoughtful insights, reviews and comments on the current issue. Please submit your suggestions to [dbrief@brac.net](mailto:dbrief@brac.net) before 30 November 2018.