

Special Supplement

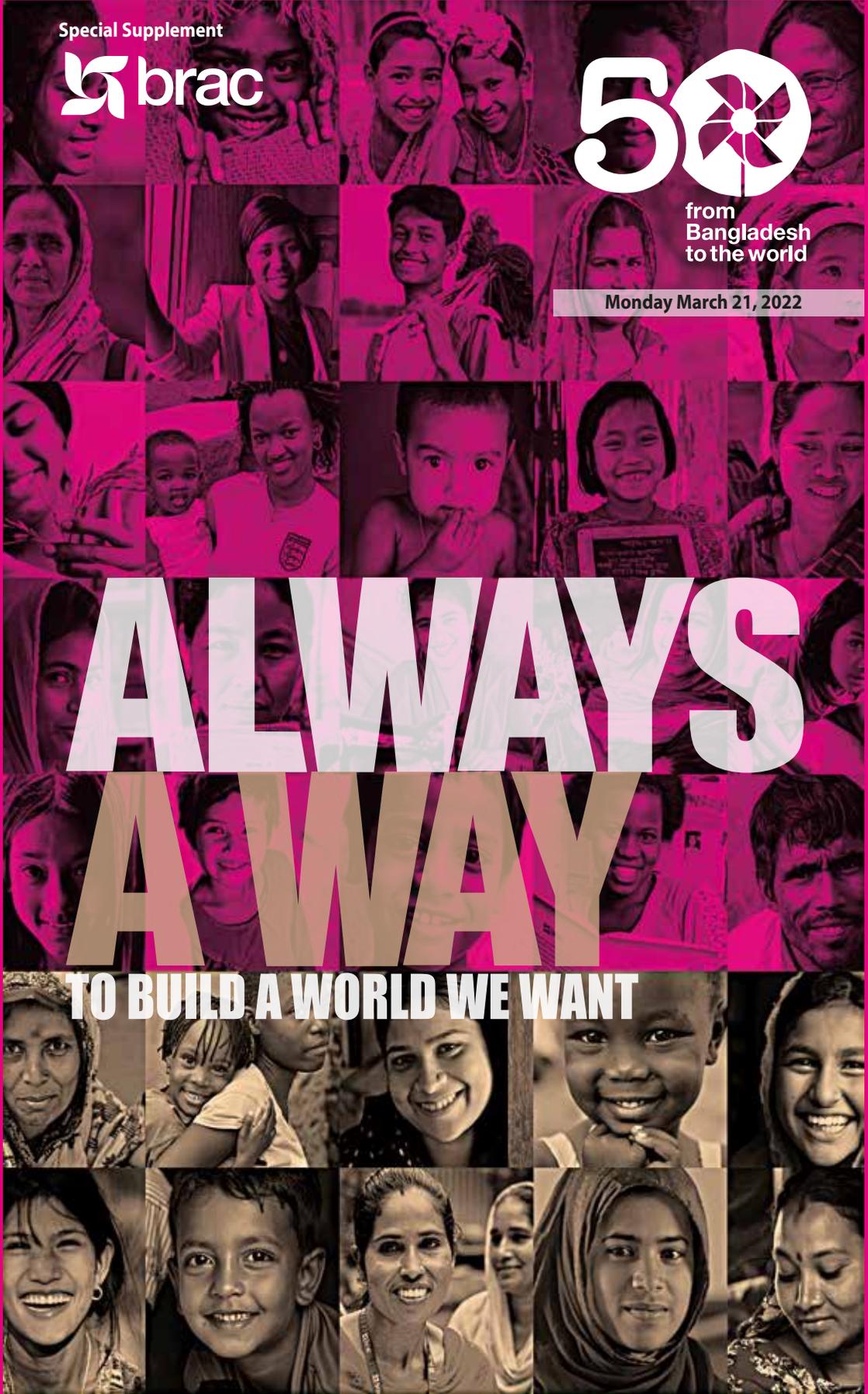


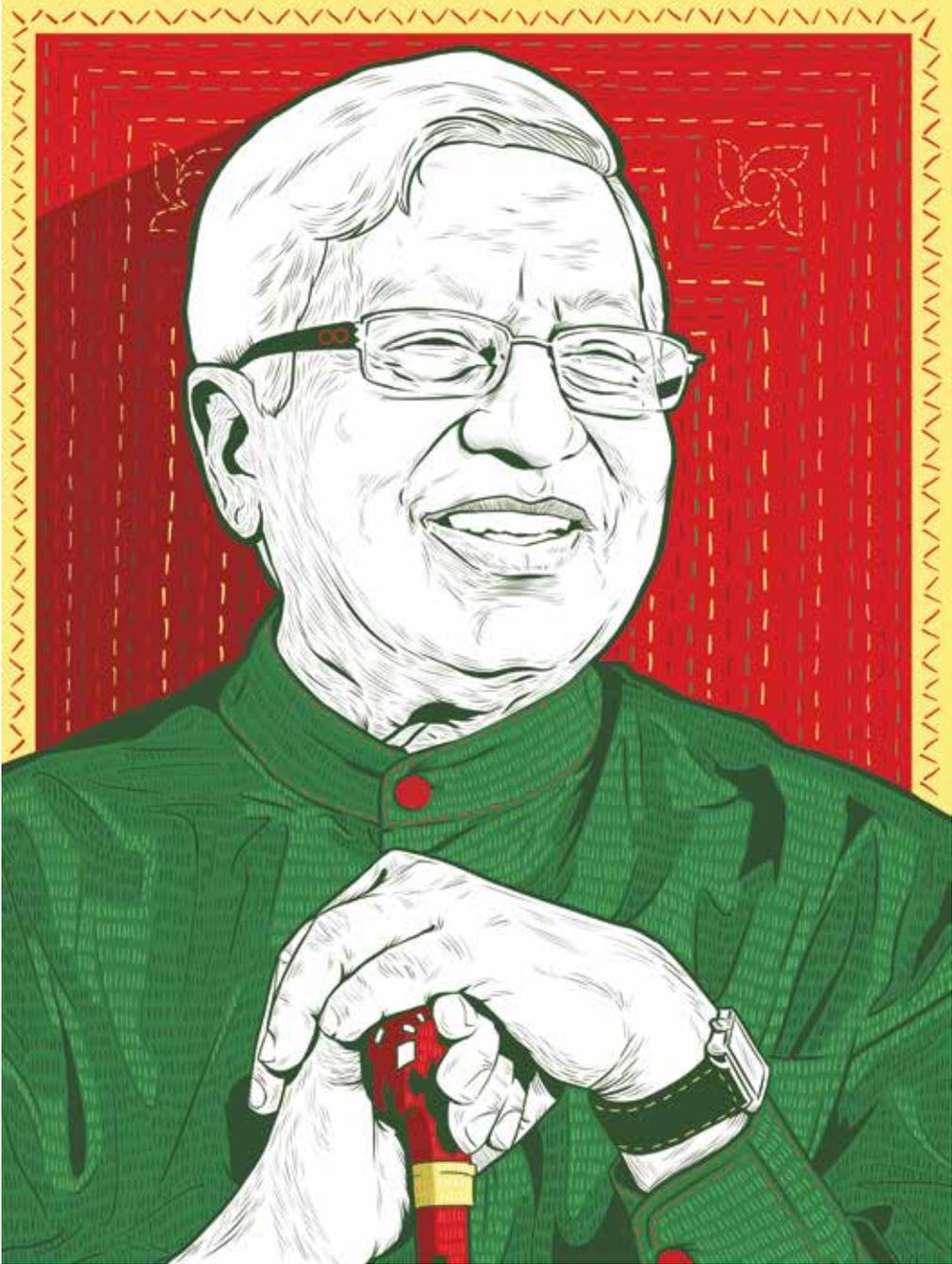
from
Bangladesh
to the world

Monday March 21, 2022

ALWAYS AWAY

TO BUILD A WORLD WE WANT





“People trapped in a cycle of destitution often do not realise their lives can be changed for the better through their own activities. Once they understand that, it is like a light gets turned on.”

Sir Fazle Hasan Abed
Founder, BRAC

POVERTY AND INEQUALITY ARE HUMAN-MADE, SO THEY CAN BE UNMADE.
 BIRTH NEED NOT BE DESTINY.

WE BELIEVE EVERYONE HAS POTENTIAL.
 ALL PEOPLE NEED IS THE OPPORTUNITY TO REALISE IT.

BUT JUST KNOWING THIS IS NOT ENOUGH.
 CHANGE HAPPENS ONLY WHEN VISION MEETS ACTION.

THE WORLD'S MOST URGENT CHALLENGES DESERVE THE WORLD'S MOST EFFECTIVE SOLUTIONS.
 THE MOST AUDACIOUS GOALS DEMAND THE MOST PRACTICAL DELIVERY.

THERE IS NO INJUSTICE ON EARTH THAT CANNOT BE SOLVED BY COMPASSION AND COURAGE.

WE BELIEVE THERE IS ALWAYS A WAY, IF WE WORK TOGETHER, NO MATTER HOW DIFFICULT THINGS ARE.

WE DO NOT KNOW EVERY SOLUTION, BUT WE ARE ALWAYS ON THE GROUND,
 LISTENING, LEARNING, DOING AND EVOLVING.

WE ARE NOT JUST DREAMING OF A BETTER WORLD, WE ARE BUILDING IT.

TOGETHER, THE **8 ELEMENTS** OF OUR DNA EXPLAIN HOW WE MAKE CHANGE HAPPEN:



UNLOCKING THE POTENTIAL OF PEOPLE AND COMMUNITIES



HOLISTIC APPROACH



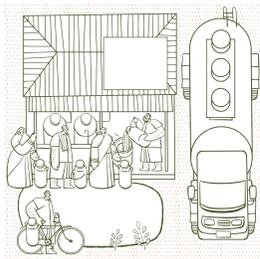
SCALING UP FOR IMPACT



FRONTLINE PRAGMATISM



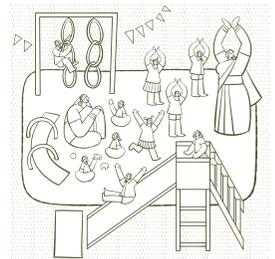
DELIVERING WITH SPEED AND RIGOUR



LEARNING BY DOING



WOMEN AS THE CATALYSTS OF CHANGE



FRUGAL INNOVATION

More details see page 16



بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ



রাষ্ট্রপতি
গণপ্রজাতন্ত্রী বাংলাদেশ
বঙ্গভবন, ঢাকা।

০৭ চৈত্র ১৪২৮
২১ মার্চ ২০২২

বাণী

বেসরকারি উন্নয়ন সংস্থা ব্র্যাকের ৫০ বছর পূর্তি উপলক্ষে আমি সংস্থার কর্মকর্তা-কর্মচারী, গ্রাহক, অংশীজনসহ সংশ্লিষ্ট সকলকে জানাই আন্তরিক শুভেচ্ছা ও অভিনন্দন।

দেশের উন্নয়ন সহযোগী হিসেবে ব্র্যাক বিগত ৫০ বছর ধরে গ্রামীণ দরিদ্র জনগোষ্ঠীর জীবনমান উন্নয়নে গুরুত্বপূর্ণ ভূমিকা পালন করেছে। উন্নয়নের অগ্রযাত্রায় ব্র্যাক শিক্ষা, স্বাস্থ্যসেবা, মানবাধিকার, ক্ষুদ্রঋণ, নারী ও দরিদ্র জনগোষ্ঠীর ক্ষমতায়নসহ বিভিন্ন কার্যক্রমের মাধ্যমে দরিদ্র মানুষের জীবনমান পরিবর্তনে নিরলস ভূমিকা পালন করে চলেছে। দেশের সীমানা ছাড়িয়ে আন্তর্জাতিক পরিমণ্ডলেও ব্র্যাকের কার্যক্রম দেশের ভাবমূর্তিকে উজ্জ্বল করেছে। বর্তমানে ব্র্যাকের এক লাখ কর্মী বিশ্বব্যাপী ১১টি দেশে ১৩ কোটি ৮ লক্ষ মানুষের জীবনসংগ্রামে সহায়ক ভূমিকা পালন করছে। বিশ্বের ৪৩টি দেশে বিভিন্ন মাত্রায় বাস্তবায়িত হচ্ছে ব্র্যাকের বিভিন্ন মডেল, কর্মসূচি ও উদ্যোগ। উদ্ভাবনী কর্মসূচি ও উদ্যোগের ফলে মানুষের জীবনমান উন্নয়নে টেকসই এবং সুদূরপ্রসারী ভূমিকা পালনকারী সংস্থা হিসেবে আন্তর্জাতিক ব্যাংকিংয়ে বিশ্বের ৫০০ এনজিও-র মধ্যে ব্র্যাক পর পর ৫ বছর বিশ্বসেরা এনজিও-র স্বীকৃতি পেয়েছে, যা একটি অনন্য অর্জন।

২০২১ সালে আমরা স্বাধীনতার সুবর্ণজয়ন্তী ও জাতির পিতা বঙ্গবন্ধু শেখ মুজিবুর রহমানের জন্মশতবার্ষিকী উদযাপন করেছি। স্বাধীনতার ৫০ বছর পার করে বাংলাদেশ আজ স্বল্পোন্নত দেশ থেকে উন্নয়নশীল দেশে উন্নীত হয়েছে। ২০৪১ সালের মধ্যে দেশকে উন্নত-সমৃদ্ধ দেশে পরিণত করতে সরকার ব্যাপক উন্নয়ন পরিকল্পনা গ্রহণ ও বাস্তবায়ন করছে। এ লক্ষ্য অর্জনে সহযোগী শক্তি হিসেবে ব্র্যাকসহ বেসরকারি উন্নয়ন সংস্থাগুলোকে সমন্বিত ও টেকসই পরিকল্পনা নিয়ে এগিয়ে আসতে হবে। একটি সুখী-সমৃদ্ধ বাংলাদেশ গড়ে তুলতে ব্র্যাক তার কার্যক্রম আরো বিস্তৃত ও জোরদার করবে – এ প্রত্যাশা করি।

আমি ব্র্যাকের উত্তরোত্তর সাফল্য কামনা করছি।

জয় বাংলা।

খোদা হাফেজ, বাংলাদেশ চিরজীবী হোক।



মোঃ আবদুল হামিদ



بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ



প্রধানমন্ত্রী



প্রধানমন্ত্রী

গণপ্রজাতন্ত্রী বাংলাদেশ সরকার

০৭ চৈত্র ১৪২৮

২১ মার্চ ২০২২

বাণী

বাংলাদেশের অন্যতম বৃহত্তম বেসরকারি উন্নয়ন সংস্থা ব্র্যাক-এর সুবর্ণজয়ন্তী উপলক্ষে আমি সংস্থাটির প্রতিটি কর্মী, সুবিধাভোগী এবং এই মহৎ উদ্যোগের সঙ্গে সংশ্লিষ্ট সকলকে আন্তরিক শুভেচ্ছা জানাচ্ছি। প্রতিষ্ঠানটির ৫০ বছর পূর্তির এই মাহেন্দ্রক্ষণে স্মরণ করছি এর প্রতিষ্ঠাতা স্যার ফজলে হাসান আবেদকে, যাঁর আন্তরিক প্রচেষ্টা ও দূরদর্শী নেতৃত্বের কারণেই এমন একটি প্রতিষ্ঠান গড়ে উঠেছে। আজ ব্র্যাক শুধু দেশেই নয়, বিদেশের মাটিতেও বাংলাদেশের ভাবমূর্তি উজ্জ্বল করেছে।

সর্বকালের সর্বশ্রেষ্ঠ বাঙালি, জাতির পিতা বঙ্গবন্ধু শেখ মুজিবুর রহমান এর সারা জীবনের সংগ্রাম ও দূরদর্শী নেতৃত্বের ফসল আমাদের স্বাধীন ও সার্বভৌম বাংলাদেশ। মহান মুক্তিযুদ্ধের ৩০ লাখ বীর শহীদের রক্ত, ২ লাখ মা-বোনের সন্তান এবং লাখ-লাখ বীর মুক্তিযোদ্ধাদের চরম আত্মত্যাগের বিনিময়ে অর্জিত এই স্বাধীনতা। জাতির পিতা মুক্তিযুদ্ধে বিজয় অর্জনের পর যুদ্ধবিক্ষণ্ড বাংলাদেশকে পুনর্গঠন এবং সহায়-সম্বলহীন মানুষকে পুনর্বাসনে আত্মনিয়োগ করেন। মাত্র সাড়ে তিন বছরেই তিনি বাংলাদেশকে স্বল্পোন্নত দেশে উন্নীত করেন। আমাদের দুর্ভাগ্য, স্বাধীনতা বিরোধী শক্তি '৭৫-এর ১৫ই আগস্ট জাতির পিতাকে সপরিবারে নির্মমভাবে হত্যা করে এবং দেশে যৈরশাসন চালু করে। বাংলাদেশের উন্নয়ন অগ্রযাত্রা থেমে যায়।

দীর্ঘ ২১ বছর আন্দোলন সংগ্রামের মধ্য দিয়ে আমরা দেশে গণতন্ত্র প্রতিষ্ঠা করি। ১৯৯৬ সালে সরকার গঠনের পর দেশকে খান্দে স্বয়ংসম্পূর্ণ করি। পিছিয়েপড়া নাগরিকদের জন্য সামাজিক নিরাপত্তা জোরদার করি। শিক্ষা, স্বাস্থ্য, কৃষি, শিল্প, ব্যবসা-বাণিজ্য এবং অবকাঠামো উন্নয়নের ক্ষেত্রে অভূতপূর্ব উন্নয়ন সাধন করি। আওয়ামী লীগ সরকারের ১৯৯৬-২০০১ সময়কাল ছিল বাংলাদেশের উন্নয়নের স্বর্ণযুগ। গত ১৩ বছরে আমরা উন্নয়নের সকল সূচকে অভূতপূর্ব অগ্রগতি সাধন করেছি। আমাদের সরকারের নিরলস প্রচেষ্টায় বাংলাদেশ স্বল্পোন্নত দেশ থেকে উন্নয়নশীল দেশে উন্নীত হয়েছে এবং 'এসডিজি প্রোগ্রেস অ্যাওয়ার্ড' লাভ করেছে। আমরা দারিদ্র্যের হার ২০.৫ শতাংশের নিচে নামিয়ে এনেছি। মাথাপিছু আয় ২ হাজার ৫৯১ মার্কিন ডলারে উন্নীত করেছি। প্রায় শতভাগ মানুষকে বিদ্যুৎ সুবিধা দিচ্ছি, গৃহহীনদের ঘর দিচ্ছি এবং কমিউনিটি ক্লিনিক/ইউনিয়ন স্বাস্থ্য ও পরিবার পরিকল্পনা কেন্দ্রের মাধ্যমে দেশের প্রান্তিক জনগোষ্ঠীকে স্বাস্থ্যসেবা প্রদান করছি। চলমান করোনা মহামারী থেকে পরিত্রাণের লক্ষ্যে ২৮টি প্যাকেজের আওতায় ১ লাখ ৮৭ হাজার ৬৭৯ কোটি টাকার প্রণোদনা দিয়েছি এবং সকলের জন্য টিকা নিশ্চিত করছি। আমরা রূপকল্প-২০২১ অর্জন করেছি এবং দেশকে আমরা ডিজিটাল বাংলাদেশে রূপান্তরিত করেছি। শহরের সকল সুযোগ-সুবিধা প্রত্যন্ত গ্রামাঞ্চলেও পৌঁছে দিচ্ছি। ২০৩০ সালের মধ্যে 'টেকসই উন্নয়ন অজিষ্ট' অর্জন এবং ২০৪১ সালের মধ্যে উন্নত-সমৃদ্ধ বাংলাদেশ বিনির্মাণে 'দ্বিতীয় শ্রেণিত পরিকল্পনা' বাস্তবায়ন শুরু করেছি। 'বাংলাদেশ ব-দ্বীপ পরিকল্পনা ২১০০' নামে একটি যুগান্তকারী পরিকল্পনা গ্রহণ করেছি। নানা প্রতিবন্ধকতাকে জয় করে আমরা বাংলাদেশকে সমৃদ্ধির পথে এগিয়ে নিয়ে যাচ্ছি। আমরা জাতির পিতার জন্মশতবার্ষিকী এবং স্বাধীনতার সুবর্ণজয়ন্তী উদযাপন করছি।

বিগত ৫০ বছরে ব্র্যাক ত্রাণ ও পুনর্বাসন কার্যক্রম, ঘরে ঘরে গিয়ে খাবার স্যালাইন বানানোর প্রক্রিয়া শেখানোর মাধ্যমে ডায়রিয়া নিয়ন্ত্রণ, শিশু ও মাতৃ মৃত্যুহার কমানো, শিক্ষা ও স্বাস্থ্যসেবা প্রদান এবং দরিদ্র জনগোষ্ঠীর অর্থনৈতিক অন্তর্ভুক্তির মাধ্যমে দারিদ্র্য দূর করার ক্ষেত্রে উল্লেখযোগ্য ভূমিকা পালন করছে। ব্র্যাক উদ্ভাবিত উন্নয়নের বিভিন্ন উদ্যোগ ও মডেল আন্তর্জাতিকভাবে প্রশংসিত হয়েছে।

আমি বিশ্বাস করি সর্বকালের সর্বশ্রেষ্ঠ বাঙালি, জাতির পিতা শেখ মুজিবুর রহমানের স্বপ্নের 'সোনার বাংলাদেশ' গড়ে তুলতে ব্র্যাক আরও কার্যকর ভূমিকা রাখবে। ব্র্যাকের সুবর্ণজয়ন্তীর সকল আয়োজন সুন্দর, সফল ও সার্থক হোক।

জয় বাংলা, জয় বঙ্গবন্ধু
বাংলাদেশ চিরজীবী হোক।


শেখ হাসিনা



ড. শিরীন শারমিন চৌধুরী এমপি
স্পীকার
বাংলাদেশ জাতীয় সংসদ

বাণী

দেশের অন্যতম বৃহৎ বেসরকারি উন্নয়ন সংস্থা ব্র্যাক ৫০ বছরে পদার্পণ করেছে জেনে আমি আনন্দিত।

২০২১ সালে আমরা স্বাধীনতার সুবর্ণজয়ন্তী উদযাপন করেছি। বাংলাদেশের স্বল্পোন্নত দেশ থেকে উন্নয়নশীল দেশে উত্তরণ, এ মাহেস্ত্রক্ষণকে আরও আনন্দময় করে তুলেছে। দারিদ্র্য দূরীকরণ, মাতৃমৃত্যু-শিশুমৃত্যুর হার হ্রাস, নারীর ক্ষমতায়ন, স্বাস্থ্য ব্যবস্থার উন্নয়ন, গড় আয়ু বৃদ্ধি, শিক্ষার হার বৃদ্ধিসহ নানা আর্থ-সামাজিক সূচকে বাংলাদেশ আজ দক্ষিণ এশিয়ায় নেতৃত্ব দিচ্ছে। আমরা একটি কল্যাণকামী, উন্নত-সমৃদ্ধ বাংলাদেশ গড়ে তোলার লক্ষ্য নিয়ে রূপকল্প ২০৪১ এবং ডেল্টা প্ল্যান-২১০০ বাস্তবায়নে নিরলসভাবে কাজ করে যাচ্ছি। মাননীয় প্রধানমন্ত্রী শেখ হাসিনার গতিশীল নেতৃত্বে এমডিজি অর্জন, এসডিজি বাস্তবায়নসহ মেট্রোরোল, স্বার্থায়নে পশ্চিমবঙ্গ নির্মাণ, ভারত ও মিয়ানমারের সাথে সমুদ্রসীমা নির্ধারণ ও মাহকাশে বঙ্গবন্ধু স্যাটেলাইট উৎক্ষেপণ বাংলাদেশের সফলতার জয়যাত্রায় যুক্ত করেছে অনন্য মাইলফলক। বাংলাদেশ আজ 'উন্নয়নের বিপ্লব' থেকে 'বাংলাদেশ মডেল' হিসেবে আত্মপ্রকাশ করেছে। মাননীয় প্রধানমন্ত্রীর নেতৃত্বে বাংলাদেশ চ্যাম্পিয়নস অব দ্য আর্থ, এমডিজি অ্যাওয়ার্ড, সাউথ-সাউথ অ্যাওয়ার্ড, প্লানিট ৫০-৫০ চ্যাম্পিয়ন, এজেন্ট অব চেঞ্জ, ইউনেস্কোর 'শান্তি বৃক্ষ', গ্লোবাল উইমেন লিডারশিপ অ্যাওয়ার্ড-২০১৮, এসডিজি প্রোগ্রাম অ্যাওয়ার্ডসহ অসংখ্য আন্তর্জাতিক পুরস্কার অর্জন করেছে।

ক্ষুধা-দারিদ্র্য নিরসন ও আর্থ-সামাজিক উন্নয়নে ব্র্যাক গত ৫০ বছর ধরে কাজ করে যাচ্ছে। এই সময়ে অতিদারিদ্র্য থেকে মুক্তি, শিক্ষা বিস্তার, স্বাস্থ্যসেবা প্রদান, লিঙ্গবৈষম্য দূর করা, জলবায়ু পরিবর্তনের সঙ্গে খাপ খাইয়ে নেওয়া, দক্ষতা উন্নয়ন, ক্ষুদ্রঋণ বিতরণসহ বিভিন্ন খাতে উল্লেখযোগ্য ভূমিকা রেখেছে সংস্থাটি। দেশের সীমানা ছাড়িয়ে বিশ্বের আরও ১১টি দেশে দারিদ্র্য দূর করার জন্য দেশগুলোর দরিদ্র জনগোষ্ঠীর আর্থ-সামাজিক জীবন উন্নয়নে ভূমিকা রাখছে ব্র্যাক, যা দেশের জন্য সুনাম বয়ে এনেছে।

বৈশ্বিক করোনা মহামারি সফলতার সাথে মোকাবিলায় বাংলাদেশ একটি দৃষ্টান্ত করেছে। সংকট উত্তরণে ঘোষিত প্রগোদনা প্যাকেজ অর্থনীতির চালিকাশক্তিকে সচল রেখেছে। সংকারের পাশাপাশি বিভিন্ন বেসরকারি প্রতিষ্ঠান, দাতাগোষ্ঠী, করপোরেট প্রতিষ্ঠানসহ সবাই মিলে কাজ করলে যেকোনো দুর্ঘোণ সফলভাবে মোকাবিলা করা যায়। আগামী দিনেও বাংলাদেশের আর্থ-সামাজিক উন্নয়নে সরকারের সহযোগী হিসেবে ব্র্যাক ভূমিকা পালন করে যাবে বলে আমার বিশ্বাস।

ব্র্যাকের সুবর্ণজয়ন্তীতে এই প্রতিষ্ঠানের সকল কর্মী, কর্মকর্তা, অংশীজনসহ সংশ্লিষ্ট সকলকে আন্তরিক অভিনন্দন ও শুভেচ্ছা জানাই। ব্র্যাকের অহযাত্রা অব্যাহত থাকুক।

শিরীন শারমিন চৌধুরী

ড. শিরীন শারমিন চৌধুরী এমপি



অধ্যাপক গওহর রিজভী
প্রধানমন্ত্রীর আন্তর্জাতিক সম্পর্ক বিষয়ক উপদেষ্টা
গণপ্রজাতন্ত্রী বাংলাদেশ সরকার

শুভেচ্ছা বাণী

স্বাধীনতার ৫০ বছরে বাংলাদেশ উন্নয়নের অগ্রযাত্রায় অপ্রতিরোধ্য। অগ্রগতির এই ধারাবাহিকতায় জাতির জনক বঙ্গবন্ধু শেখ মুজিবুর রহমান-এঁর ‘স্বপ্নের সোনার বাংলা’ গড়ার প্রত্যয়ে ২০৪১ সালে উন্নত-সমৃদ্ধ বাংলাদেশ গড়ার লক্ষ্যে সরকার দীর্ঘমেয়াদি উন্নয়ন পরিকল্পনা ‘রূপকল্প ২০৪১’ গ্রহণ করেছে।

দেশের উন্নয়নে সরকারের উন্নয়ন সহযোগী হয়ে বেসরকারি প্রতিষ্ঠান বা এনজিওসমূহ কাজ করে যাচ্ছে। এ ক্ষেত্রে ব্র্যাক অগ্রণী ভূমিকা রেখে যাচ্ছে। দারিদ্র্য ও ক্ষুধামুক্ত পৃথিবী গড়ার স্বপ্ন নিয়ে স্যার ফজলে হাসান আবেদ এই প্রতিষ্ঠানটি গড়ে তুলেছিলেন। তাঁর নেতৃত্বে গত পাঁচ দশকে সংস্থাটি জাতীয় উন্নয়নের লক্ষ্যে ক্ষুদ্র ক্ষুদ্র গ্রামীণ উদ্যোগগুলোকে টেকসই করার ক্ষেত্রে বিশেষ ভূমিকা পালন করেছে। ব্র্যাকের ব্যয় সাশ্রয়ী সমাধান (Low cost solution) ও কার্যকর সামাজিক উদ্যোগ (Social mobilisation) উদ্ভাবনের সুফল সম্পর্কে আমরা সবাই জানি। ব্র্যাকের ক্ষুদ্রঋণ কর্মসূচির দ্রুত বিস্তার এবং নারীর মধ্যে সামাজিক সংযোগ ও গতিশীলতা বৃদ্ধির মাধ্যমে উন্নয়ন-কর্মকাণ্ড বাস্তবায়নের কাজ সহজতর করে তুলেছে।

বাংলাদেশের উন্নয়নের ক্ষেত্রে ব্র্যাকের নিজস্ব উদ্ভাবন ও অর্জিত অভিজ্ঞতা অন্য দেশের মানুষের জীবনমান উন্নয়নে গুরুত্বপূর্ণ ভূমিকা রেখেছে। দারিদ্র্য দূরীকরণে ব্র্যাকের ‘আল্ট্রা-পুওর গ্র্যাজুয়েশন’ মডেলটি বিশ্বব্যাপী প্রশংসিত হয়েছে। এই মডেলের ওপর ভিত্তি করে ভারতের নোবেল বিজয়ী অর্থনীতিবিদ অভিজিৎ বন্দোপাধ্যায় তাঁর গবেষণায় গুরুত্বপূর্ণ দিকনির্দেশনা দিয়েছেন। বিশ্বের ৪০টিরও বেশি দেশে মডেলটি স্থানীয় বিষয়ের সঙ্গে সামঞ্জস্য রেখে বাস্তবায়ন করা হচ্ছে। এনজিও সেক্টরকে বৈশ্বিক পর্যায়ে সম্প্রসারণ করে বাংলাদেশের সুনাম বৃদ্ধির জন্য ব্র্যাককে ধন্যবাদ জানাই।

ভবিষ্যতে সমতাভিত্তিক সমাজ গড়ে তুলে উন্নয়নের সুফল সকলের কাছে পৌঁছে দিতে এবং অন্তর্ভুক্তিমূলক বৃদ্ধি, বৈষম্য নিরসন, লিঙ্গসমতা প্রতিষ্ঠা, ঝুঁকিতে থাকা জনগোষ্ঠীকে দারিদ্র্যের ধাক্কা সামলে উঠতে সহায়তা করার ক্ষেত্রে সরকারের পাশাপাশি ব্র্যাক আরও কার্যকর ভূমিকা পালন করবে বলে আমি বিশ্বাস করি।

সুবর্ণজয়ন্তীতে ব্র্যাকের সংশ্লিষ্ট সবাইকে আন্তরিক অভিনন্দন জানাচ্ছি এবং এর উত্তরোত্তর সাফল্য কামনা করছি।

গওহর রিজভী

Selected quotes from Luminaries

“Abed was one of the foremost leaders of thought as well as action of our time. Not only did he transform Bangladesh, and indeed a lot of the world, by his radical initiatives, he proceeded to his actions through identifying what our deprived world needed, using remarkably penetrating analysis and social scrutiny. An astonishing combination of clear-headed thinking and sure-footed execution made Abed the great leader that he was. We have had very few like him in the history of the world.”

Amartya Sen

Recipient of the 1998 Nobel Prize in Economic Sciences

“It's an honour to join the entire BRAC community in celebrating 50 years of incredible work on behalf of others. Over the past five decades BRAC has changed the way the world thinks about health, education, and development. It has improved the lives of millions of people in Bangladesh and around the world. I am grateful for all you have accomplished and that the legacy of my friend and BRAC's founder Fazle Abed, lives on through your remarkable efforts. I miss him, we all do. But he will be so pleased by what you are doing. All my best wishes for much success today, tomorrow, for another 50 years and beyond.”

Bill Clinton

Former President, United States of America

“On the 31st of January, Australia celebrated the 50th anniversary of bilateral relations with Bangladesh. So, it is fitting today that I have the great pleasure to congratulate BRAC on its 50th anniversary. Over the last 50 years BRAC has grown from small grassroots relief operation to a huge organisation world renowned for its effectiveness and innovation. Today, at 50, BRAC is carrying on the legacy of its visionary founder Sir Fazle Hasan Abed.

Australia is a long-term supporter of BRAC and its work in Bangladesh. Australia and BRAC share a strong commitment to poverty alleviation, gender equality, women's empowerment, and to equip the youth of Bangladesh with the skills they need for a prosperous future. This year we are also celebrating a decade of the Strategic Partnership Arrangement between Australia and BRAC. Over the last decade, Australia has provided over 300 million dollars to BRAC through the partnership. That has helped BRAC support millions of the poorest and most vulnerable so that they can build better lives and contribute to their communities and to this wonderful country. We're delighted to be continuing our support to BRAC and to our strong relationship through the third phase of the partnership.

BRAC's story shows how determination, innovation and commitment to continual learning can achieve truly impressive results and find new ways to address even the most entrenched social and development challenges. From its humble beginnings, BRAC has now ranked 1st on the Global Journal's top NGO list. It has its own bank, its own dairy and its own university. But BRAC is most visible in the communities and villages of Bangladesh, creating opportunities for people living in poverty to realise their potential.

BRAC has achieved a great deal over the last 50 years, but as always, much remains to be done. The world continues to face challenges, especially how to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. But I'm confident that BRAC will continue to rise to these challenges. Through our Strategic Partnership Arrangement, Australia will be there to work with BRAC and the people of Bangladesh. On behalf of Australia, I would again like to congratulate BRAC on its extraordinary journey and on 50 years of making a difference.”

Jeremy Bruer

High Commissioner of Australia to Bangladesh

“Sir Fazle Abed was one of the world's most amazing human beings and defender of the poor. He was an inspiration to so many - and his message of hope resonates now more than ever. He showed us all that human kindness and love can overcome great challenges. BRAC is a reflection of this message and has grown into an amazing institution.”

Gordon Brown

Former UK Prime Minister

“Back in the early 1970s, Bangladesh was a very different country. Emerging from the War of Liberation, facing famine, and with a GDP per capita of just USD 134, the challenges were manifold.

Sir Fazle Abed, a visionary leader and determined reformist, realised he needed to act in order to improve the lives of the rural poor. He went on to founding what has become the world’s largest NGO that has changed the lives of millions of Bangladeshis and others around the world for the better. On the basis of Sir Fazle’s vision and through the leadership of his family and countless other experts and advisers, BRAC now operates in all 64 districts of Bangladesh delivering improvements in education, healthcare, microfinance, skills, human rights, agriculture, and enterprise development. And it has since exported its approach and its ultra-poor graduation model to other countries sharing not just expertise but also the values and ambition on which BRAC was founded. The UK and BRAC have had a long-standing relationship, both here in Bangladesh and elsewhere; a relationship built on much more than just programme delivery, but also knowledge sharing and lesson learning; and on inclusion and collaboration. BRAC’s leadership in framing the challenges and also how to use the evidence of what works to build our response has been inspirational. The UK had a ten-year Strategic Partnership Arrangement with BRAC which allowed us to collaborate on the ultra-poor graduation programme, health, education, water and sanitation and humanitarian response. We could not have asked for a better partnership. Going out in my first month here to see the impact on the extremely poor families north of Dhaka; hearing about how the transfer of a cow, or two goats, or a pool of ducks could transform lives was among my most moving days in Bangladesh. The pride on the women’s faces was self-evident as they showed me round their homes—with electricity, fridges, fans; and the sheer showing how much progress they were making with the mentoring support provided by BRAC staff. And their happiness at being included in village celebrations, with their own invitations to parties as fully recognised members of their community, will always remain with me. This is the difference that BRAC makes to lives across Bangladesh. Countless millions of lives improved as they moved out of extreme poverty and onto a sustainable path to a better future.

BRAC has been both a thought leader and an outstanding delivery partner throughout the COVID-19 pandemic—always focused on the poorest and most marginalised, and how best to deliver protection and improvements for them. BRAC was always my first port of call when we needed advice on emerging trends, what was most needed by the Government of Bangladesh, and how we could work together to raise awareness, improve mask-wearing, provide water and sanitation facilities, and ultimately save lives.

Working with BRAC is always about working with friends. The BRAC family has such strong values and from the leaders to the technical experts to the programme managers, there is an unflinching courtesy, passion, and determination to get stuff done. To say they have been a partner of choice would be to seriously understate their position in the former DFID and now FCDO architecture. They get out ahead on evidence, data, understanding the reality on the ground and then bring this back to others to build the case for action, and for funding. They know what needs doing; they know how to do what needs doing; and they do it. And they know what success looks like.

It has been an honour and a privilege to work with BRAC over the years and we look forward to many more years of partnership on education, health, and support to the Rohingya, to name one of the few priorities we share. Happy 50th BRAC – and welcome to the next half century. Please keep doing what you do so well.”

Judith Herbertson

Development Director
Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office

“As BRAC celebrates 50 remarkable years and having become the world’s largest NGO, with operations not only in Bangladesh but across the world, I need not look further than its birthplace to tell you of its formidable impact in empowering communities in need.

Through key interventions in microfinance, access to health services and education, agriculture, livestock, and youth empowerment, BRAC works alongside UNHCR in countries hosting the largest numbers of refugees, like Bangladesh and Uganda, or countries with large internally displaced populations, including Afghanistan, Myanmar or South Sudan. A foundational member of UNHCR’s “Poverty Alleviation Coalition”, BRAC makes a difference and brings hope to those forced to flee and the communities generously hosting them.

We thank you BRAC for your close partnership here in Bangladesh, and in the many other countries where you have set up operations. On behalf of your friends at UNHCR, we wish you a very happy 50th anniversary.”

Johannes Van Der Klaauw

Representative Bangladesh
UNHCR

“Hello BRAC colleagues! First of, I just want to offer a big congratulations on your 50th anniversary. What an achievement, and filled with such important milestones. At this time, we're reflecting on BRAC's important contribution to the economic and social transformation of Bangladesh since its inception. With this journey of yours, Canada is so proud to be a partner, working hand in hand for more than two decades. To mark this important milestone, we are reaffirming our commitment to be a true partner and collaborator with BRAC. We want to tackle the causes of poverty and focus on alleviation together. We want to focus our efforts on where the need is greatest, not just where it's most visible. Not only saving lives, because that's a bare minimum but transforming the lives of millions by lifting them out of great poverty or rather supporting them to lift themselves out of poverty.

As we know, BRAC has championed that individuals know the way to be able to support themselves. They just need the access, opportunities and tools. And so, we remain here as your partner to work on that, whether it be education, healthcare, other basic services, and giving them a chance for their voices to be heard and influence how they receive their services and how their communities are developed. Over the past few years, I have been truly fortunate enough to witness BRAC's incredible development programmes and remarkable achievements, as well as methodology and pedagogy that I do see epitomised by people on the frontline. I have had the honour to meet the volunteers who work in communities outside of what people normally see and their tireless efforts to bring people together to raise those of the ultra-poor out of poverty. In the initial months of COVID-19 pandemic, watching the volunteers enter slums, other areas at risk to give information on how to improve hygiene and save lives—was one of the most inspirational times of my entire career. They did that at true risk of their own safety and the safety of their own families. That is what epitomises BRAC for me. What is exciting is to see the new generation make BRAC its own with new strategies, look at new opportunities and how they can move forward to make sure BRAC is still relevant. Your visions are shifting BRAC and how we support the next generation in making Bangladesh a whole different idea of a development success story, driven by Bangladeshis themselves.

Make no mistake, the face of poverty, inequality and justice is changing with time and not always for the better. But I believe that BRAC, armed with the strength it derives from the people it serves and its staff, will be an unbending determination of passion that tackles challenges as they emerge. And it's an honour and a privilege for Canada to be a part of that. As a representative of the government of Canada and as the Head of Development Cooperation, I am extremely pleased to be here, at a time where we can recognise your golden jubilee and the contribution of BRAC to the success of Bangladesh as well as to the Canadian and Bangladesh relationship. I look forward to us continuing to advancing our shared values and being part of an arc that will move towards justice and improvements for the citizens of Bangladesh. ”

Thank you ever so much.

Phedra Moon Morris

Head of Aid
High Commission of Canada Bangladesh

“Happy anniversary BRAC. As a journalist I've met presidents and prime ministers, inventors and tycoons. However, I've seen few people change the world as much as my old friend Abed. That was because he showed that global poverty is not intrinsic, it is something that we can overcome. People often think that poverty, disease and illiteracy are depressing but Abed and BRAC showed these are things we can overcome and that we can make a difference. He was in the business of investing in our shared humanity and trying to make a better world. And so, congratulations BRAC. And never think BRAC is in the poverty business, it is in the business of empowering people, of educating people, of lifting people, of making a difference all around the world. It is in the business of hope. ”

Nicholas Kristof

Journalist and two-time Pulitzer Prize winner

“On behalf of the Kingdom of the Netherlands I would like to extend my warmest congratulations to BRAC on its 50th Anniversary!

We encourage BRAC to keep reaching out to the millions of people, including women and children, in Bangladesh and elsewhere, to help them build a better future. Know that you are not alone on this journey. We, the Netherlands, will stay a supportive partner to BRAC, and to Bangladesh. ”

Warm wishes,

Anne van Leeuwen

Ambassador of the Kingdom of the Netherlands to Bangladesh



MANAGING DEVELOPMENT THE APPROACH IN BRAC

Asian Institute of Management, Manila, Philippines, 7 July 1990.

It is indeed a great pleasure for me to come here and speak before you. I am a development practitioner, and whatever I say about management today will obviously be related to our own work at BRAC, our own experience and visions.

Perhaps I should start with a few introductory words about Bangladesh and BRAC. As you know, Bangladesh is one of the poorest countries in the world with an average per capita GNP of USD 160. Nearly 80% of our population live below the poverty line and are also illiterate. Infant and maternal mortality are amongst the highest in the world and 60% are malnourished. The density of population per square kilometre is four times higher than that here in the Philippines. It is in this context that various rural development programme targetted to the rural poor are being organised by both government and non-governmental organisations. Our own effort is along this course.

BRAC is now one of the largest national nongovernmental organisations in Bangladesh. It was set up in early 1972, and the first task we did was to rehabilitate thousands of refugees who were coming back to their homes from India following the liberation war. Since then we have designed and implemented large number of programmes such as: institution and organisation building to serve the interest of the rural poor, functional and primary education, income and employment generation,

savings and credit, health and family planning, skill and human development training etc. Alleviation of poverty and empowerment of the poor and other disadvantaged sections such as women have been the cornerstone of our activities.

Role of management in development: Creation of an 'enabling environment'

I shall now turn to the main theme of my talk development management. To me, development management is a little different from other kinds of management. It has to do something more than what others do. This will be clear if we try to understand how development takes place and what role a manager can play in promoting development.

Development quintessentially is action by the people. It is something that the people themselves do, or it does not take place at all. Capital, physical resources or infrastructures are obviously necessary for development, but these are secondary. The predominant factor is the people. This is particularly true for rural development. Rural development is basically an issue of individual and societal change—change in the attitude, values, skills, perceptions, institutions and ways of life of the rural poor. These changes are complex and time consuming. To expedite this change through action by the people we need what we call an 'enabling environment'. Such an environment enables the people to participate in planning, implementation,

monitoring and evaluation of their own actions. Creating this enabling environment is the responsibility of a development manager. His prime concern is—how to elicit and ensure participation.

Commercial management, on the other hand, has somewhat a different role. Its prime objective is profit. Take the case of a commercial bank. Mobilising public funds for profitable lending and recovery is their primary goal. In contrast, our bank through which we provide credit to our target people has to take care of many other issues. For instance, in providing credit for a poultry raising project to a target group, the BRAC manager first of all must ensure that the capacity of loanees for proper utilisation of the loan has developed. The manager will also see that the group has generated through saving their own share of the required funds which is usually 10% of the credit sought. Vaccination service will have to be arranged so that poultry mortality is checked. When all these are taken care of adequately then only the group can use their credit profitably and make poultry raising a sustainable project. Ensuring this is the responsibility of the development manager.

Participatory management

We in BRAC believe that participatory and decentralised management is essential for success in development. It is all the more necessary for an expanding organisation like ours which is involved in rural mobilisation, and envisions social transformation. We believe that every staff member irrespective of his/her seniority must take part in the management process and we ensure it that those at the grassroots level have a say, a role in the decision making process which is done through regular exchanges and meetings. The management of BRAC has thus been participatory so that the learning and experience of the workers in different levels can be used as ingredients in programme planning and policy making. I will add a few words to illustrate how we try to promote participatory management in BRAC. We have a number of programmes extending to all parts of the country, involving nearly four thousand staff. Although we use a vertical organogram to structure the organisation and its management, enough scope has been created for participation of the staff in the management process. To do that we have deliberately kept the unit of operation small. For a BRAC programme the unit of operation is the Area Office which has six to eight staff members. We give them freedom to take all operational decisions within a given framework which they themselves determine. Although BRAC is a big organisation, it is essentially a management of small units.

Creation of shared values

We believe that shared values play an important role in development management. Creation and sustenance of certain values has thus been a continuous process in our system. One of the important values which we have been transmitting among our staff as well as the members of our target groups is the creative potentials of human beings. We believe that every individual, irrespective of his/her

position in the society, has the capacity to contribute in the development process. In late seventies when most including the World Health Organisation (WHO) were sceptical about the capability of mothers in treating their children's diarrhoea with oral rehydration solution (ORS), we decided to teach mothers how to make this solution using home ingredients. History has shown that we were right. All mothers in Bangladesh now know how to make ORS at home.

BRAC also promotes work ethic. We try to create a caring environment where the workers feel that work is important and that through hard work, each of them is contributing something that goes to benefit the people. These institutional values add some distinctiveness to our management system.

Continuous learning: Role of research

A development manager has to continuously learn from his field programmes progress and shortfalls, strengths and weaknesses, effectiveness of his staff, impact of the programme and so on. There are various means of learning and remaining informed. A most dependable source is objective research and evaluation. We have, therefore, set up our own research and evaluation unit. Our research is not a one-shot thing; it is rather a continuous activity. Out of our research activities we have been able to redefine our goals and increase the scope and sustainability of our programmes. It is our experience that a successful development manager is the one who learns from his own failures and his decisions are backed by information generated through objective research.

Before I conclude, I wish to re-emphasise that development is a complicated job and its management is much more complex than is usually conceived. Rural development is no longer a job for an amateur. It is a professional activity, and specialised skills and competence are essential for achieving success. Development managers must have the interest and capability to understand the political economy and other dynamics of development, and for this they need professional training and continuous learning. We are developing our prospective managers accordingly to take up future responsibilities with seriousness and to conduct development action with necessary professional efficiency. There is no alternative to professionalism in development.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I am sure the MDM course has been a success. I hope it is useful for you in discharging your future responsibilities with humanist zeal and utmost professional competence. I wish you godspeed!

Let me again thank the Asian Institute of Management (AIM) for inviting me to address you this evening. We trust, the AIM will continue its endeavour to train people in the complex task of development management.

Thank you all.

Photo Feature



1972 Bangladesh Rehabilitation Assistance Committee (BRAC) begins relief and rehabilitation work in Sullá, northeastern Bangladesh.



1975 Research and evaluation division established. Monitoring, reporting and learning find a central role in all BRAC's work.



1976 Manikganj integrated project starts, the first BRAC project that provides multi-faceted support to people using a holistic approach.



1977 People in communities recruited to make change in their own communities, and get services to doorsteps at the last mile. First village organisations mobilised.



1980 Oral therapy extension programme launched, BRAC's first nationwide door-to-door campaign. This turning point could be termed the real birth of BRAC.

1985

Non-formal primary education programme starts, taking schools to the last mile. This heralds the beginning of BRAC's work in education, which has now graduated 15 million students across Asia and Africa.





1986

Rural development programme formed; beginning of merging awareness building with economic activities.



1993

Adolescent reading centres open, the first step in focusing on young people.



1998

Dairy and Food Project launches, marking the beginning of BRAC Dairy. The social enterprise grows to become Bangladesh's third largest milk processor, supporting 45,000 dairy farmers across Bangladesh.



2001

BRAC University established to build conscious, empathetic and capable leaders. BRAC Bank was established to provide banking solutions to the 'unbanked' Small and Medium Entrepreneurs.



2002

Challenging the Frontiers of Poverty Reduction - Targeting the Ultra Poor Programme launched, which becomes the Ultra-Poor Graduation programme and supports over 2 million people out of poverty. Development work commences in Afghanistan.



2017

BRAC becomes one of the leading responders to the Rohingya crisis in Cox's Bazar, launching humanitarian support at scale. Humanitarian Play Labs start.

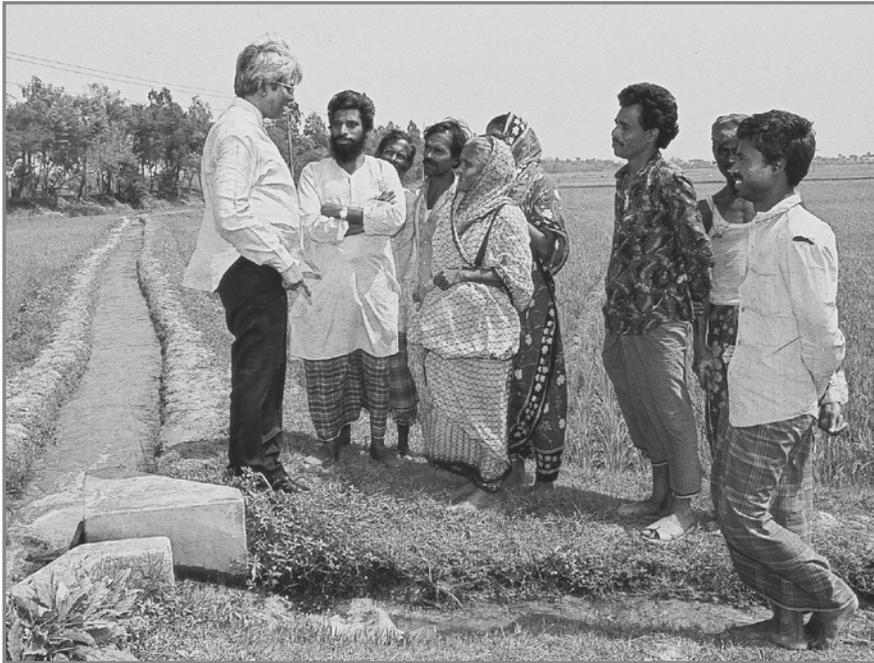


2020 to 2022

BRAC is a leading responder in the COVID-19 pandemic in Bangladesh and BRAC International countries.

BRAC at 50: A mission of commitment, relevance and results

Hossain Zillur Rahman



When Sir Fazle Hasan Abed – Abed bhai – took leave of this world in the closing month of 2019, recognition, remembrance and appreciation flooded in from homeland abroad. In truth this was his due. Stretching way back to the foundational years of newly-independent Bangladesh, Abed bhai had built up BRAC over five decades of unremitting efforts and perceptive guidance into a formidable agent of social change and derecognized as such by governments, national and international agencies and society at large. But what stuck in my mind in the sad months after Abed Bhai's passing was the commentary from ordinary citizens who had no direct interactions with BRAC. I heard many such voices who commented – 'a good person has gone who was always engaged in trying to improve the lives of ordinary people.'

As I ponder over BRAC crossing its fifty-year landmark, what stands out for me is Abed bhai's 'niyaat' – the sense of mission and commitment that was both the

initial spark forged in the cyclone-devastated wasteland of Bhola in 1970 and a recurring thread animating BRAC's subsequent programme and institutional journeys. The technocratic discourse of development often misses the fundamental significance of this ingredient of commitment and sense of mission which keeps at the forefront the question why we are in the 'development' work in the first place and the determination to persevere and forge ahead to bring out worthy results. My direct interactions with Abed bhai though stretching back to the early 1990s had been relatively few. But the insight I drew most from these interactions was the motivation and the sense of duty towards those having the potential but were vulnerable and facing institutional and social odds of circumstances. Even in the closing months of his life, his focus was for sure on BRAC the institution but more so on reinforcing the sense of mission that gave meaning to the institution.

BRAC started with relief work in war-ravaged Bangladesh. Circumstances change. Needs change. In the next forty years, BRAC stamped its footprints in multiple programmatic areas. But these were not random choices. Abed bhai gave great importance to listening to those on the ground. The logic was simple but fundamental. If your conversations are not with those whose lives you are trying to improve, how will you know where and how best to focus your attention and energy. The focus on reducing child mortality through anti-diarrheal innovation and expanded immunisation in the 1980s was for sure a goal in its own right but it also addressed a reasoning among women to go for six to seven children with the expectation that at least a few would survive. The decline in child-bearing burden for women set the stage for their opportunities to engage in new social and economic roles boosting the potential for women's empowerment. In the 1990s when the state pushed for compulsory primary education, village-level discussions revealed a problem of 'left-out' children who due to poverty were failing to access the formal education system. This is where BRAC under Abed bhai's guidance triggered a new frontier of non-formal education.

Abed bhai was an attentive listener not only to field voices but also to new, useful research that had potential for BRAC's programmatic initiatives. He looked both inside BRAC and outside for research insights and findings that resonated. On multiple occasions, Abed bhai told me how he picked up useful insights from the poverty research I was leading in the 1990s to open new programme fronts on the extreme poor then being bypassed by micro-credit and the graduated poor who found no entry into institutional finance. Under Abed bhai's guidance and the dedicated efforts of BRAC teams, the ultra-poor programme and BRAC Bank have gone on to become signature achievements of BRAC addressing these two critical beneficiary groups BRAC's foray into enterprises too emerged out of the intense interactions with another vulnerable group – rural artisans – who had skills but little access to remunerative markets. There are wider and fascinating lessons to be learnt from how BRAC navigated market dynamics to not only ensure stable market-based livelihood streams for rural artisans but also helped to create whole new markets for such products and become a market leader in the process.

As we cross the fifty-year milestone, the urgency to remain relevant to the needs and priorities of the vulnerable in today's circumstances is as compelling as ever. Four new strategic programme challenges loom. Urbanisation. Climate change. Youth. Agriculture.

BRAC is already engaged in experimentation in some of these areas. I am sure other challenges will manifest themselves. Before his passing, Abed bhai in a townhall dialogue – where we both addressed the gathering – harped on a whole new emerging challenge – mental health. Only a few months later COVID-19 hit the world including Bangladesh. After over two years of this existential crisis, mental health has indeed surfaced as possibly a lasting legacy of the pandemic that societies, governments, institutions and even individuals have to grapple with. How perceptive Abed bhai was.

If commitment and relevance have been two of BRAC's abiding preoccupations, the third in my view was the concern for worthy results. The sense of mission that Abed bhai ignited was not merely about declarative intentions. All creative energies and labour had to be deployed to generate beneficial, measurable and sustainable outcomes for the millions of women, men and children that BRAC worked with as well as for BRAC's capacity to continue to be a catalyst for beneficial change. We have to approach our work with a sense of mission. We have to prioritise listening those on the ground to ensure the relevance of what we do. And we have to be concerned about impact and results. When Abed bhai, out of the blue, asked me in mid-July of 2019 to succeed him as the BRAC Bangladesh Chairperson, after my initial shock I asked him if he had any 'to-do' advice for me. He skirted an answer. I remember pursuing the query again once or twice in the few months he continued to visit the office. There was no direct answer again. Later, I reflected and tried to divine what his message might have been to those in governance and management entrusted with guiding the future of the institution. My reading was that the technocratic legacy of a 'to-do' list was far from his mind. He was reposing his trust in successors – governance, management and the institution as a whole. And challenging us to gather our collective wisdom to craft the ways forward while ensuring relevance and results. His greater concern was to transmit that sense of mission he himself had forged in the wastelands of Bhola five odd decades ago. That journey of changing the fate of millions of vulnerable and disadvantaged people is nowhere near the end either in Bangladesh or around the world. Particularly so in these post-pandemic realities. We look back. We look forward.

Hossain Zillur Rahman is the Chairperson of BRAC Bangladesh.

TOGETHER, THE **8 ELEMENTS** OF OUR DNA EXPLAIN HOW WE MAKE CHANGE HAPPEN:



UNLOCKING THE POTENTIAL OF PEOPLE AND COMMUNITIES

Everyone has the potential to transform their own life. What is often missing, for those living in poverty and inequality, is the opportunity to realise it. We invest in building hope, and people's belief in their own capacity to change. We ensure access to knowledge and resources, and ignite the power of communities.

Our goal is for people to become self-reliant, and their own agents of change.



HOLISTIC APPROACH

Poverty and inequality are complex, so solutions have to be multidimensional. We take ownership of the entire problem, and persist until we find an answer. Our approaches are designed to ensure holistic wellbeing. We do not just tackle single issues in isolation, we consider how challenges correlate and solutions intersect—we build and strengthen ecosystems. Our approach combines development thinking with business acumen. We catalyse the entrepreneurial spirit of people, equip them with skills and high-quality inputs, and link them to markets—to become microentrepreneurs, artisans and social service providers.



SCALING UP FOR IMPACT

Small is beautiful, but big is necessary for meaningful and lasting change. We pilot ideas on a small scale, iterate until they are efficient and effective, and then scale them up to reach the highest number of people. Scale is only possible through collaboration. We partner with governments and other stakeholders to amplify impact and catalyse large-scale positive impact.



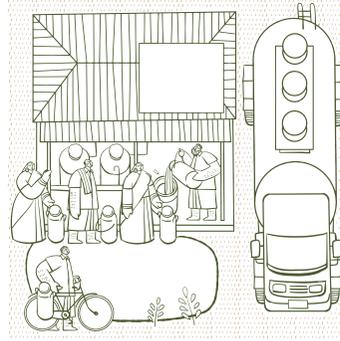
FRONTLINE PRAGMATISM

Challenges have to be lived to be understood. Our team is from the same communities we work with, so we are always connected to the realities on the ground. We turn frontline insights into localised solutions which are practical and relevant to changing needs. We are constantly listening to and engaging with communities. Participatory approach ensures ownership and sustainability.



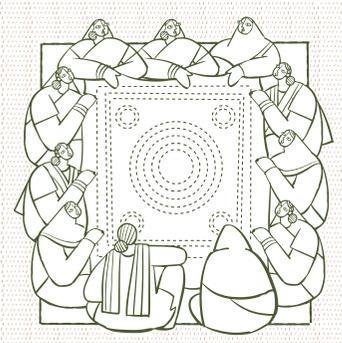
DELIVERING WITH SPEED AND RIGOUR

People living in situations of poverty, illiteracy, disease and social injustice need services fast. At the same time, they deserve quality. We act with urgency, while always holding ourselves to the highest standards. Our execution excellence combines a bias for action, a relentless focus on results, and rigorous monitoring of quality and impact.



LEARNING BY DOING

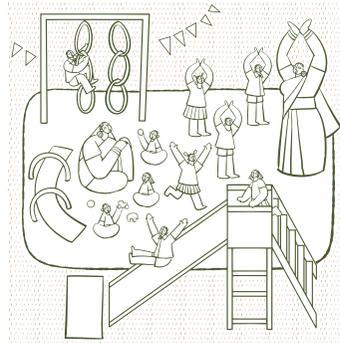
Timely action is preferable to delayed perfection. We learn on the go, and collect real-time feedback to continually improvise. We keep our implementation roadmap agile and adaptive. We are always trying to find the best way forward. If we fail, we never fail to improve based on lessons learned.



WOMEN AS THE CATALYSTS OF CHANGE

Investment in women is a force multiplier. When women have better access to healthcare, education, and livelihoods, the effects go far beyond a single individual. A woman multiplies the impact by creating a better life for herself and the people around her.

We work on shifting attitudes and practices to expand opportunities available to women. We develop and mainstream approaches for them to have confidence, skills and an enabling environment. Women are at the heart of all of our work. As teachers, community health workers, development professionals, programme participants, clients, artisans and entrepreneurs, they drive intergenerational change and build stronger communities and economies.



FRUGAL INNOVATION

We aim to do more, and better, with less. For us, being frugal is about designing inclusive solutions, so that no one is left behind. When resources are scarce and communities are hard to reach, solutions must be simple and robust. Our approaches are intuitive, making it easy for communities to embrace and scale.

Optimising indigenous resources and capabilities enable us to be cost-efficient and accessible.

BRAC After Abed: The Journey Continues

Rehman Sobhan



It is a year since Sir Fazle Hasan Abed left us. It is difficult to imagine a Bangladesh without him. He left a larger than life footprint with its imprint visible not just around the country but across the world. I can think of few people who have done more for the world's deprived population than Abed. His contribution spans Bangladesh where BRAC, the organisation founded by him in 1972, serves close to 10 million of the country's underprivileged households. Through Abed's commitment to serve the deprived, BRAC has now extended its reach across the globe. It has invested its experience in rehabilitating Sidr victims in Sri Lanka and the war ravaged population in Afghanistan where two of its officials, working in high risk areas, were once held hostage by the Taliban. BRAC has now reached out on a large scale to serve the underprivileged of Africa where they have been actively engaged in Rwanda, Tanzania, Uganda, South Sudan, Liberia and Sierra Leone. BRAC has even extended its reach to Pakistan and across the Atlantic to Haiti.

Abed's extraordinary engagement with the deprived has transformed BRAC into the largest NGO in the world with an annual budget of over a billion dollars and a workforce of around 200,000. Abed's singular contribution to the world for serving its deprived communities has been his ability to take BRAC programmes to scale so that they graduate from micro-welfare projects to the transformation of entire communities. BRAC is today more than an NGO. Its scale of operations would suggest that it is now a corporation for the deprived. Abed's organisational capacity has invested BRAC with a market recognition comparable to any of the top international NGOs such as Oxfam and his management contribution has been recognised in case studies in the best business schools.

Abed, was a strong believer in ensuring that BRAC should liberate itself from dependence on external donor financing and should become a self-financed facility. To this end, he established a number of programmes which could generate financial surpluses which could be reinvested in other BRAC projects. The biggest of such projects was BRAC's flagship micro-finance programme which could recycle its surpluses and expand its clientele of women borrowers to around 8 million so that today it presides over one of the world's largest microfinance programmes. Abed further drew upon BRAC's brand name and market reach to invest in a variety of other socially oriented income generating investments such as BRAC's stake in bKash and commercially competitive entities such as BRAC Bank which is today one of the best run and most profitable banks in Bangladesh. These investments generate revenues which have further enhanced BRAC's internal income generating capacity and has enabled it to expand its programmes to reach even larger numbers of the deprived.

In responding to the challenge of deprivation Abed demonstrated a renaissance vision which equipped him to recognise its holistic nature. He constructed a multi-faceted agenda for change which incorporated credit, women's empowerment, legal literacy, health care, education and skill development so as to empower the excluded to stand on their own feet. His approach of transforming the excluded from victims into masters of their own fate encouraged him to build an organisation which could graduate from aid dependence to fiscal self-reliance through building up the market competitiveness of its income generating programmes. Today BRAC is no longer dependent on the generosity of donors. Its internally generated revenues underwrite around 80% of its total budget. The growth and transformation of BRAC has made it a role model for other NGOs not just in Bangladesh but across the world. These achievements have been recognised through a plethora of awards and prizes which have been showered on Abed and BRAC. This recognition gave Abed as well as BRAC direct access to global political leaders, heads of international institutions and CEO's of the corporate world.

Abed invested 47 years of his life in serving the deprived at home and abroad. His final contribution to posterity was manifested in the meticulous effort he invested in preparing for his final departure. Abed was determined to ensure BRAC would outlive him and continue the transformative journey he began 47 years ago in the small village of Sulla, in Sylhet. It is a tribute to Abed's foresightedness and organisational vision that his successors have continued the journey so that BRAC grows and further diversifies its activities to extend its reach at home and abroad.

Rehman Sobhan is the founder and chairman of Centre for Policy Dialogue.

Salute to BRAC

Muhammad Yunus



BRAC has been a huge force for many things that have happened in the upliftment of the disadvantaged in Bangladesh. Looking back at the last 50 years, I see many things that would not be here today without BRAC.

Bangladesh's story would be different without BRAC. For BRAC every village mattered. It did not compromise its mission by token actions. BRAC created a whole sector in Bangladesh—the NGO sector, quite different from those in any other country. It even set a trend in naming of NGOs in Bangladesh. They named themselves by converting an acronym into a pronounceable word – often meaningful. Although BRAC itself remained different. The word 'BRAC' did not need any meaning. It created its own meaning with its legacy of the last 50 years.

BRAC stood for the courage of one man Fazle Hasan Abed, who took every difficult bull by its horns and

tamed it ultimately. His courage became the courage of the many thousands of BRAC workers. BRAC changed the way common villagers could look for any assistance in their daily struggles in life. Traditionally they would be looking for some kind of government assistance; or hope for a little help by the courtesy of kind-hearted men and women. BRAC offered them huge alternatives, things which none in the village could miss, because they are so insistently inviting. The destiny of a child from a poor family was to grow up without ever going to school. BRAC proved it wrong. "Berrack school"—as they called them, became the fun place for all these boys and girls. For the first time in the family history, they held their books close to their chests, with pride, and marched towards a life of hope. These schools were everywhere. The Apa (female teacher) opened the door for a new world for them. Nobody ever heard of a school like that. The same Apa took the same cohort of children from the beginning to the end of primary education.

BRAC schools looked simple but Abed poured out his heart to make sure that children get quality education. He was continuously searching for the best strategies to teach language, math, environmental education, etc to all these children. He was determined on his basic objective—the students may come from disadvantaged families, but the education they receive should in no way be disadvantaged.

BRAC was never afraid of innovations. BRAC thrived on innovations. Introducing oral saline was nothing less than a miracle. It was a nationwide operation within a time frame to reach every family in the country! A daring thought. BRAC went for it.

Innovations continued from learning how to make oral saline, to getting quality chicks for helping create family farms, or for inoculating newly hatched chicks. The list got longer and longer as BRAC's programmes continued.

BRAC has always been focused on the poor and marginalised. They would join a BRAC group or form a new one, to work for their empowerment of every kind. It may be to receive microcredit, or the skills training, or for the inspirations for a future they started believing in. BRAC inspired young people to create their own NGOs or take up a career in NGOs.

BRAC was always moving on to diverse areas of activities. There were so many needs waiting around. Some were being addressed by smaller NGOs with their own innovative ideas and initiatives. But BRAC could do things which others could not; it could scale up quickly to reach any height. Abed believed in doing big. He picked up successful small initiatives and turned them into national programmes.

BRAC did not want to miss anything that needed to be done. It applied its own research and development on any subject that came along. It used its world-wide connections for consultations to make sure it went in the right direction. In everything from girls' empowerment to handicrafts, appropriate business models were researched out – nothing was spared.

The common denominator in all these was to do it good and do it big. Even the look of a BRAC office or a BRAC training centre in the middle of a remote village bazaar would have the hallmark of BRAC quality –

something eye-catching, even if simple. Of course to be big and to maintain the quality at the same time, is a tall order. Something may function well within the direct supervision of its creator, but when it is replicated everywhere in the country and even beyond (through BRAC International) things may get loosened. There came the feat of the legendary BRAC workers and BRAC discipline. Who were the rank and file of these BRAC workers? The answer is – almost anybody.

Joining BRAC became a standard option to a hard-working school-leaver or a university graduate, wherever he or she was. The organisation was a great recruiter, always inviting young people to join in. Some training, some instructions and inspirations would make them ready to plunge into actions in some remote villages. Often they would work in teams and live communally in teams. It would be the start of the fire-test in community work for young men and women molding their lives for accomplishing an objective. This was a completely new kind of life for the youth, a phenomenon unknown to anybody. The types of training, inspirations and the discipline involved were also unknown. This new option gave many young people a new way forward and a new meaning of life.

BRAC triggered an NGO movement 50 years ago. New opportunities were created for the youth by a wider NGO sector. As a combined force these youths achieved so much for the poor, the women, and the other marginalised sections of the society. At this 50th anniversary of BRAC I look at its history as a proud history of Bangladeshi youth, their dedication to change the fate of the people, and the tenacity of the poor people to lift themselves up given the appropriate opportunity.

Abed masterfully made all these happen during the most difficult days of Bangladesh by creating BRAC. For this the nation will remain ever grateful to Abed and BRAC. On this day of the 50th anniversary of BRAC, we thank you Abed for your work, and your gift to the nation - BRAC.

Muhammad Yunus is the founder of Grameen Bank and a recipient of the 2006 Nobel Peace Prize.

Bending the arc of development towards gender equality

Irene Khan



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"BRAC's approach has been to put power in the hands of the poor, especially poor women and girls," said Sir Fazle Hasan Abed.

We were sitting in his office on the 19th floor of the BRAC head office in Dhaka. Abed bhai was describing BRAC's pioneering work with women and girls. Although I had heard him recount these anecdotes many times and had also seen some of the programmes on the ground, it was always inspiring to listen to him.

Twelve million mothers learned to make oral rehydration therapy so that children would no longer die from diarrhoea. Thousands of rural women became poultry micro-entrepreneurs, rearing and vaccinating chickens and spurring the growth of a new sector in the rural economy. Hundreds of thousands of housewives trained as para-professional teachers and even larger numbers as community health workers so that elementary education and primary healthcare could be available in every village. Millions of women pulled themselves and their families out of poverty with BRAC's support, improving their lives materially and also gaining voice and respect in their households and communities.

As dusk fell over the slums and rooftops of Dhaka that evening, Abed bhai turned from talking about what BRAC had achieved for women and girls in Bangladesh

to what still remains to be done elsewhere, about where and how it must scale up, innovate, break barriers and set new records. His plans were as audacious as ever, his energy seemingly abundant. But we both knew time was running out for him and the baton must pass on to others. When we next met a few months later, it was to say goodbye as he lay in bed, his eyes closed. Weeks later, on 20 December 2019, Sir Fazle Hasan Abed passed away.

Of all the remarkable contributions for which Abed bhai is remembered today, I believe none has been more ambitious in scale, nor more impactful in consequence, than his work to empower women and girls. His groundbreaking approaches to development turned perceived wisdom on its head and transformed the lives of millions of women and girls in Bangladesh and beyond.

"Small is beautiful but big is necessary," he said frequently—and with good reason. Scale matters if you want to end poverty, and there is so much of it, especially among women.

He often spoke of poor women as the best managers he had ever seen because with little income or assets, they fed the family, looked after the children and ran their households. "If poor women can manage poverty well, why should they not manage development?" he would say, packing in that one statement tomes of wisdom about women's agency.

Watching women toil in the villages and small towns

of Bangladesh, he saw in their thrift, ingenuity and resilience the promising talent of would-be entrepreneurs. Women became the key resource as well as the subject of BRAC's poverty eradication strategies.

With astute business sense, Abed bhai invested heavily in women and girls through education, health, legal services and microfinance programmes, income generation opportunities, community development and social mobilisation. BRAC's approach of working directly with communities to develop solutions and of testing, monitoring and modifying programmes constantly to make them more responsive gave new meaning to women's empowerment.

Women's agency was explicit in what is one of BRAC's—and Bangladesh's—great success stories: the Oral Rehydration Therapy (ORT) programme. Over a decade, starting from 1979, BRAC visited around 11.8 million homes, covering 98 percent of the total rural households,

to teach at least one woman in each household to make oral rehydration therapy with a three-finger pinch of salt, a handful of gur (molasses) and half a litre of boiled water. With no particular skills needed, ingredients available in every home and a simple technique for measuring, mothers produced oral rehydration solutions to treat diarrhoea and reduce infant mortality. Today, Bangladesh has one of the lowest death rates from diarrhoea and one of the highest user rates for ORT in Asia.

In the early 1980s, BRAC created income generation opportunities for women in poultry rearing and trained women to vaccinate chickens for a fee. The government provided free vaccines but there was no cold chain to carry the vaccines from the office of the sub-district livestock officer to the villages. So, BRAC devised a simple system by which the vaccines were packed inside ripe bananas to preserve the temperature and provide protection against damage during transport.

These are just a few examples of Abed bhai's down-to-earth approach to development and his relentless drive for scaling up. He was thrifty, creative and persevering, just like the poor women he admired so much. Today, frugal innovation on scale is a badge that BRAC wears with great pride.

With his characteristic audacity, Abed bhai carried BRAC's development models to other geographies. From adolescent girls in BRAC's schools in Helmand, Afghanistan to the BRAC community health microentrepreneurs in small towns in Uganda, thousands of woman and girls broke barriers to take control of their own destiny.

One of BRAC's most transformative programmes is the Graduation approach, which focuses on the poorest and most marginalised families, usually women-head-

ed households, who are unable to afford even one full meal a day, live on the fringes of society and are caught in the inter-generational trap of extreme poverty. For two years, the women are given an income generating "asset" (such as a cow or chickens), a stipend, healthcare, and education for their children, alongside training and counselling to build their financial capabilities, a sense of self-worth and become integrated into the community. Results show that over 95 percent of the almost 1.5 million women and their families benefitting from this programme have "graduated" out of ultra-poverty, and even more remarkably, have continued to improve their lives. Many have become successful microfinance savers and borrowers.

As always, Abed bhai was keen to scale up and readily shared BRAC's experiences with others. Today, the Ultra Poor Graduation Initiative is being replicated in 45 countries with impressive results.

Abed bhai knew that development cannot be sustained if it does not change the social and cultural norms that hold back the progress of women and girls, but to be successful, the change itself must take into account the cultural context of the community. So, to make girls' education culturally acceptable to tradition-bound families and communities in Afghanistan, BRAC trained thousands of female teachers and engaged hundreds of older women to chaperone the girls from home to school and back. In Bangladesh, where the social context is different, popular theatre and public campaigns are used to transmit messages on gender equality, women's groups are mobilised at the village level to advocate for social change and thousands of paralegals are trained to resolve family disputes in ways that respect women's human rights.

Whether in Afghanistan, Bangladesh or many other countries, the major barrier to women's empowerment and gender equality remains patriarchal values. "Patriarchy is an enemy to both men and women," Abed bhai declared on International Women's Day in 2018, acknowledging that gender equality was his "unfinished agenda".

Ultimately, the poor woman's struggle is not only a struggle to increase material assets but a struggle for equality, justice and dignity. Much remains to be done to make the world a safer, more equal place for women and girls. The pandemic has made that task harder, and also more urgent and vital. But when I think back to that evening in Abed bhai's office and how he not only made the impossible possible but also sustainable and scalable, I feel optimistic. The arc of development is long but it bends towards gender equality.

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