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BRAC STRATEGY
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I. INTRODUCTION

In 1994, Brac had a strategic exercise through which important changes occurring in the internal and external environment were reviewed, and future directions for the organisation were delineated. Brac repeated the strategic exercise in August 1997 which reviewed the strategies formulated in 1994, carried out a 'stocktaking' of its current activities, and assessed Brac's impact on the lives of the poor. As a consequence of this, the organisation's course of work for the next ten years has been reformulated, and this paper presents this.

II. BACKGROUND

Brac's Goals

Brac started small in 1972 as a relief organisation. Over the years it has attained phenomenal growth and is now one of the largest non-governmental development organisations in the world. Brac has two major goals :

- the alleviation of poverty, and
- the empowerment of the poor.

With these goals in mind, Brac's main priorities have been related to people and their participation in the development process. All Brac programmes have reflected this philosophy. The basic assumption has been that it is the poor themselves who can bring about changes in their own condition, through individual and cooperative action. Brac's role has been to respond in a flexible manner to the development needs identified by the people themselves.

Changing Environment

The beginning of the present decade has seen Bangladesh's transition to democracy. This along with a reasonable rate of economic growth, a slowing down in population increase and enhanced enrollment, particularly of girls, in school are positive changes which have created

new opportunities to accelerate the pace of development. In this, Brac has played a significant role, working as it has, in rural development including education and health sectors.

During the 1990's, Brac's programme interventions have grown in depth and dimension. At the same time the government has displayed increased willingness to enter into partnership with NGOs. This is also finding positive response from Bangladesh's development partners. Large numbers of the rural poor have now been organised and are increasingly asserting their socio-political and economic rights creating new frontiers of development opportunities. There is much to be done in the years to come.

Brac's Mission

In the light of the changing environment, Brac has redefined its mission statement as follows:

Brac works with people whose lives are dominated by extreme poverty, illiteracy, disease and other handicaps. With multifaceted development interventions, Brac strives to bring about positive changes in the quality of life of these people.

Brac is committed to making its programmes socially, financially, and environmentally sustainable using new methods and technologies. Brac firmly believes and is actively involved in promoting human rights and dignity, and gender equity.

Although the emphasis of Brac's work is at the individual and community levels, the sustenance of work of the organisation depends on a pro-poor policy environment and on supportive infrastructure. To achieve that, Brac will continue its efforts to bring about change in macrolevel policy and create an enabling environment.

The fulfillment of Brac's mission requires the services of competent professionals committed to the goals and values of Brac. Brac, therefore, believes in development of institutions of excellence that will produce leaders of society with competence and commitment.

Given that development is a complex process requiring a strong dedication to learning, the sharing of knowledge, and being responsive to the needs of the poor, Brac places a strong emphasis on capacity development of its programme participants and their organisations at all levels.

In order to achieve its goals, wherever necessary, Brac welcomes partnerships with like-minded organisations, governmental institutions, development partners and the private sector, both at home and abroad.

III. BRAC STRATEGIES

The coming years will see the intensification and consolidation of the current poverty alleviation programmes of Brac in the areas of economic development, health and education. Through these programmes, Brac hopes to cover a quarter of the country's poor and disadvantaged people.

Internal Culture

Brac programmes have more than doubled in size over the past five years. To maintain programme quality and to ensure higher output in this situation, the programme components had to be made more structured and routinised for ease of expansion and replication. This has had an effect on the creative enterprise of Brac staff. In an effort to reduce cost, staffing pattern had to be altered by the recruitment of less qualified personnel.

In consequence, Brac's internal organisational culture has been subjected to considerable stress and strain. The organisational behaviour has become somewhat hierarchical, whereas it was collegial in the past. The team spirit has also weakened. At the same time demand on Brac field staff for ever increasing information requirement of complex programmes to provide reports and returns have resulted in the growth of bureaucratic culture. The lack of development orientation of staff through training and induction also contributed to the situation. In the recent past, large number of women have joined our field offices introducing fresh complexities.

Brac needs to urgently reverse the situation. A number of intervention are on-going which address remedy. The Gender Quality Action Learning (GQAL) programme was started two years ago which addresses not only gender relations but also focuses attention on organisational behaviour and enhancement of analytical and problem solving skills of staff. Recognising the potential benefits of GQAL to the organisation, Brac has decided to hasten the Brac-wide implementation of this within the shortest possible time.

To increase the horizon of mid- to senior-level staff and their capacity, Brac has been implementing a training course on "Development Approaches and Management". With the aim of strengthening collegial relationships in the field, a team building exercise has been initiated which will lead to better and improved interactions and esprit-de-corps among various levels of staff.

Coordination and Management

Effective management and capacity to learn from its experiences have been the key to operate successful programmes and their rapid vertical and horizontal expansion. The organisation will continue to nurture effective management and strive towards a further decentralised and 'flat' management.

Three of Brac's core programmes, viz., Rural Development, Health and Education operate vertically independent of each other, only with some coordination at the head office level. As a result the synergies that could be expected from coordinated efforts are not being derived. Programme managers in the field operate without adequate interactions. This situation calls for urgent measures to improve coordination at the field level. Discussions are underway within the organisation for appropriate corrective actions.

At the headquarters level, the monthly coordination meetings of the Executive Director's Forum comprising senior head office managers, and the Directors' Forum, comprising all directors, will continue to play important coordination functions and efforts will be made to make these increasingly effective.

With the current strength of 18,000 staff in Brac, human resource planning and management need to be further professionalised. Personnel assessments, appraisals, evaluations, compensation and incentive systems need to be redesigned and implemented. Corporate and senior operational management of Brac require additional qualified personnel. However, there is a dearth of suitable individuals to fill these positions. Brac is exploring new avenues to attract qualified Bangladeshis from home and abroad. Brac recognises that compared to the size and complexity of the organisation's operations, the senior level management cadre is thin. With

increasing opportunities being created within the economy, staff retention has unfortunately become an area of concern.

Gender Equity

Brac has been in the forefront of advancing gender equity in Bangladesh. All its programmes address women's development and endeavour to ensure women's rightful place within her family and the community. Brac is in the process of finalising a comprehensive gender document which will clearly define Brac's gender policy.

Sustainability

Brac has been concerned about the sustenance of the positive impact of its interventions on programme participants as well as its own organisational sustainability. Brac is committed to programmes that are socially, financially, institutionally and environmentally sustainable. Recently Brac has undertaken an initiative to examine the sustainability issue in a systematic manner. Accordingly, a sustainability workplan is being developed.

Brac is committed to self sustenance. Over the years, Brac has created a number of income generating projects to support its core programmes. With the expansion of its micro-finance programme disbursing larger sums as credit, income from interests and service charges has continuously grown. Brac has thus been able to make substantial financial contribution to its own development work. It is expected that over the next few years, Brac will be able to finance its major programmes without any donor contribution. However, Brac's education programmes and some of its health interventions may require continuous outside subsidies, both from within the country and externally.

Brac Governance

Over the years, leaders of Bangladesh society have served on the Brac Governing Body (GB) and the relationship between successive GB and management has been based on trust and confidence. Brac's growth and success owe a great deal to the vision of the GB and to its

interaction with the management. Unlike many other institutions in Bangladesh where GB have been unduly active in the management arena, Brac's successive Boards have provided appropriate oversight and guidance without interference. This may have been possible relatively easily because the Founder of the organisation has been serving as the Executive Director. However, it is felt that in a situation where the Founder is no longer the Chief Executive, the existing patterns of governance and management need to be institutionalised with clear delineation of roles and responsibilities. The process of creating codified conventions of governance has been set in motion. The induction of new members and their rotation in the GB will continue.

Brac's activities are expected to be more diverse in the coming years, with the establishment of new affiliates such as the proposed Brac University and the Brac Bank. In this context the organisational arrangements of different enterprises, affiliates and programmes are being reviewed along with their status, structures and legal entities.

Environmental Issues

Brac's core programmes address environmental concerns frontally. Brac has been contributing to improved environment through several activities such as social forestry, health and sanitation, and environmental education to its school children and programme participants. In 1996, Brac set up a special cell to plan, initially and coordinate multifarious environmental activities of Brac. One of the initial activities of this has been to raise environmental awareness among all Brac staff. Development of environmental guidelines and environmental assessment of Brac programmes will continue to receive priority.

Brac considers it important to explore the possibility of generating and promoting the use of renewable energy in rural Bangladesh. Brac is also addressing the problem of arsenic contamination on an urgent issue.

Urban Programme

As its acronym suggests, Brac was created to serve exclusively in rural areas. However, in view of the fast growth of the population living in urban slums, Brac has found it necessary to commence addressing the diverse problems of the urban poor. Brac realises that urban settings have entirely different dynamics of its own demanding different strategies and interventions. Brac, therefore, needs to undergo an intensive learning phase in urban development. It is anticipated that an integrated package with separate parameters in health, education, employment generation, housing and environment will form the core of Brac's urban development programme over the next decade.

Future Expansion

Brac's future growth will comprise intensification of its existing programmes in its present project areas covering as many target group households as possible. In this task Brac will work closely with local NGOs to ensure that all poor households are covered by Brac and other NGOs.

A new impetus will be given to growth, particularly agricultural growth. Brac has already introduced experimental programmes in tissue culture, maize, and cotton cultivation and seed development. This new impetus through focus on agro-based programmes will target both marginal and small farmers. This is a key strategic shift on the part of Brac and is based on the recognition that as the largest development organisation operating in the country, Brac would make a more concerted effort to directly address on-farm needs in addition to its existing off-farm micro-enterprise support. The marginal and small farmers, who mostly constitute the *"future poor"*, are seldom provided any support now by any agency.

In view of government policy guidelines requiring providers of education in Bangladesh to implement a five-year primary education cycle, Brac has decided to introduce grades IV and V in BRAC schools as soon as possible. This will help pupils graduating from BRAC schools directly move to high schools. There is an increasing recognition on the part of the government about the need for NFPE in the education system, and Brac will work closely with the

government to achieve the goal of "Education for All". NFPE will also be extended more to "hard-to-reach" areas including urban slums, Chittagong Hill Tracts and other remote areas.

To improve the quality and reach of primary education in Bangladesh, an Institute of Education will be established to cater to the needs related to teachers training, management training, pedagogy and research. This institute may be linked to the proposed Brac University.

Over the past couple of years, Brac has established over 150 union-based libraries which are being managed jointly by the local communities and Brac. In view of the paucity of reading materials in rural Bangladesh, this programme should go some way in the promotion of continuing education. In view of its anticipated long-term impact, Brac wishes to intensify the programme further. Modern information technology and distance learning methods will be promoted to widen educational opportunities.

Brac plans to cover its entire project areas with basic primary health care including reproductive health, family planning, water and sanitation, health and nutrition education, and curative care. In partnership with the government, Brac will expand the Directly Observed Therapy, Short Course (DOTS) for tuberculosis control within our project areas. In addition, Brac will continue to work in nutrition in collaboration with the government. In view of the fact that it is not possible for the government to provide basic health care to the population, particularly the women and the poor, Brac has started setting up health centres in its project areas

Strategies to Include the Poorest

Despite special efforts, the majority of the ultra poor continue to remain out the purview of Brac. BRAC has already introduced several steps to increase the coverage of the poorest which include the extension of programmes such as VGD, and job creation through an expansion of Micro Enterprise Lending Assistance (MELA). The new emphasis on agriculture is expected to create increased employment for the ultra poor.

Collaboration with the Private Sector

As a new move to widen opportunities for the poor, Brac will strive to work closely with the growing private sector in Bangladesh. Such an initiative will link the poor with the market which, it is hoped, augment the capacity of the poor to compete, survive and flourish. Brac may also set up enterprises in collaboration with the private sector to expedite the process.

Brac University

Brac is in the process of implementing a project to set up a university that will offer liberal arts education. It is intended that this University will produce leaders of society sensitive to the needs and aspirations of the nation.