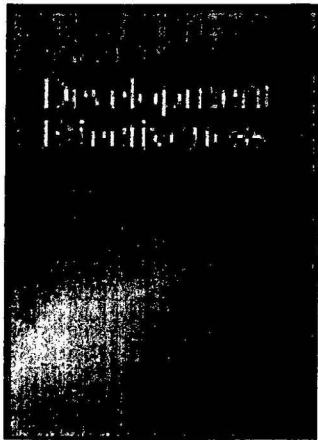


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Measuring the effects of interventions in BRAC, and how this has driven 'development'

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BRAC Contribution to:

Good intentions don't save lives. How do development agencies measure the effect of their aid?

Measuring the effects of interventions in BRAC, and how this has driven 'development'

Ahmed Mushtaque Raza Chowdhury^a, Andrew Jenkins^{b*} and Marziana Mahfuz Nandita^c

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BRAC started out as a limited relief operation in 1972 in a remote region in Bangladesh and has become probably the largest nongovernmental development organisation in the world. Organising the poor using communities' own human and material resources, BRAC has developed a holistic development approach geared towards inclusion, using tools like microfinance, education, healthcare, legal services, community empowerment, social enterprises and BRAC University. Its work now touches the lives of an estimated 135 million people in 12 countries in Asia, Africa and the Caribbean. BRAC established a Research and Evaluation Division (RED) in 1975 that, over time, has grown and developed as a multidisciplinary independent research unit. The division has been playing an important role in designing BRAC's development interventions, monitoring progress, documenting achievements and undertaking impact assessment studies. It provides an analytical basis for BRAC's programmatic decisions, fine-tuning it for better performance and making development efforts evidence-based, effective and community-sensitive. This article uses specific examples to demonstrate how a close link between evaluation and research, and project planning and implementation can drive a dynamic process of 'development', both in the sense of economic and social development of communities and in the sense of institutional change and innovation within BRAC itself. For example, research on the distribution of benefits in microfinance demonstrated that it rarely reached the 'ultra-poor', that is, those spending >80 per cent of income on food and still not reaching 80 per cent of calorie requirements. The ultra-poor tend to have limited social assets; this is a reason why they may not be included as members of self-selected microfinance groups, and there is a considerable literature on this. In 2002, this led directly to the introduction of a package of specific measures, centred on 'asset-transfer', which has enabled hundreds of thousands to 'graduate' from ultra-poverty and has been replicated in at least 11 countries. Results have been verified extensively through rigorous evaluation and are contributing to a continuing global policy dialogue on the effectiveness of different approaches to 'social safety nets'. This article also explores how organisational structures in BRAC aid or impede the reporting on results and the documentation of effects. It also examines the relationship between programme Management Information System and rigorous evaluation and the institutional factors encouraging or retarding BRAC's focus on results measurement and the development of a positive institutional culture. Specifically, BRAC RED focuses on the method that is best suited for each context and frequently conducts research using mixed methodology, with a good blend of qualitative and quantitative research. This has been understood from the beginning, but has also been borne out by experience throughout BRAC's development.

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Keywords: poverty; development; impact; measurement; results

Background

BRAC started in Bangladesh in 1972 and has been working in the country for the past four decades. Since its inauguration in Afghanistan in 2002, it has spread its work to 11 other countries around the world, implementing a diverse range of development programmes with great emphasis on poverty reduction and gender sensitivity. BRAC is the world's largest nongovernmental organisation (NGO) by population reach and provides a range of diverse services to its beneficiaries. According to the figures published in September 2013, the NGO, through its 120,249 employees, reached out to 135 million people. Their annual expenditure last year was US\$ 583 million for Bangladesh and US\$ 79 million for BRAC International.

BRAC's vision is to work towards 'creating a world free of all forms of exploitation and discrimination where everyone has the opportunity to realise their potential' (<http://www.brac.net/content/who-we-are-mission-vision#.VAQG0MWSy48>). This vision has been reviewed and reinterpreted through internal discussion and its contemporary meaning communicated over time principally by the founder and chairperson, Sir Fazle Hasan Abed. During induction and refresher training courses, BRAC staff regularly consider and debate the meaning of the vision and its practical application through specific programmes. In retrospect, BRAC's development achievement has been based on its core values, which include innovation, integrity, inclusiveness and effectiveness.

This article explores how organisational structures in BRAC aid or impede the reporting on results and the documentation of effects. It also examines the relationship between programme Management Information System (MIS) and rigorous evaluation and the institutional factors encouraging or retarding BRAC's focus on results measurement and the development of a positive institutional culture.

Since its inception, BRAC has had a strong emphasis upon effective implementation through continuous learning, and at a very early stage (1975), it established a separate division to carry out research and evaluation to aid in the organisation's development. Today, BRAC's Research and Evaluation Division (RED) is one of the country's largest multidisciplinary research body, carrying out over a hundred research projects nationally and internationally (see later for details). This article explains BRAC's experience with results measurement; this has been heavily focused on evidence-based research and evaluation as well as continuous and rigorous monitoring. It will also examine how monitoring and evaluation has helped towards driving BRAC's development initiatives towards success.

BRAC: an introduction

BRAC started as a small entirely donor-funded organisation¹ that was dedicated to the rehabilitation and relief work needed for resettling millions of returning refugees in war-stricken Bangladesh.² It carried on with development work as it became clear from practical experience that different dimensions of poverty (income, education, health and so forth) in Bangladesh were closely causally linked and so the country needed development interventions with a holistic approach. In the next two decades as Bangladesh grew so did BRAC and the need for development was not only limited to rural areas; during this time, the BRAC vision and mission was extensively debated and developed into its current form. As BRAC grew, it started social enterprises that would support and partially fund its activities (Kim 2009).

BRAC took its operation to an international level in 2002 and thus became part of the 'South to South' initiative, marking perhaps the beginning of new forms of Southern NGO, transplanted within southern contexts (Hossain and Sengupta 2009). Two incidents were pivotal in this move, first the fall of the Taliban government in Afghanistan in 2002 and the tsunami in Sri Lanka in 2004. In both countries, BRAC used its previous experience gathered through rehabilitation of postwar Bangladesh and the devastating cyclones that hit the country in 1988 and 1990 (Banglapedia 2007). Since most development assistance is 'North to South', BRAC's decision to go global aroused much curiosity and raised many doubts. According to Cronin (2008), who conducted extensive interviews with community members in BRAC areas of operation, many of BRAC's beneficiaries in both Afghanistan and Sri Lanka view BRAC as a local entity as opposed to an international NGO or a Bangladeshi NGO. This shows the level of integration that BRAC has achieved locally in these countries, by extensively recruiting and developing local staff and by sharing its ethos and experience as an organisation that began and continued as an initiative *by* people from a developing country *for* people in a developing country. Since the inception of BRAC International, it has gradually moved its work to other countries as well, and currently, it operates in Bangladesh, Myanmar, Afghanistan, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Philippines, Liberia, Sierra Leone, South Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda and Haiti. It also has affiliate offices in the United States and in the United Kingdom.

BRAC in Bangladesh³ works on a large scale covering a wide range of development interventions. According to DIFD Business Report 2011, BRAC is a complex and interconnected organisation that manages a range of development programmes. Within BRAC, its activities are divided into two main categories: core programmes and support departments/divisions. The core programmes are different field level interventions that BRAC is undertaking in 12 major development areas, including the following:

- Agriculture and Food Security
- Health, Nutrition and Population
- Microfinance
- Education
- Human Rights and Legal Aid Services
- Gender Justice and Diversity
- Community Empowerment
- Integrated Development
- Targeting the Ultra-Poor
- Disaster, Environment and Climate Change
- Water, Sanitation and Hygiene

In addition, social enterprises are organised separately, because they are designed to be financially self-sustaining, while social development programmes require continuing financial support, either from external sources or from the surplus of BRAC social enterprises.⁴ BRAC's Social Enterprises and Socially Responsible Investments are listed in Appendix 2.

There are currently 14 support departments/divisions that work for overall smooth running of the core programmes and include Learning Division; Research and Evaluation Division; Internal Audit; Monitoring, Finance and Accounts; Administration; Human Resource Development; Construction and Maintenance; Advocacy for Social Change and Communications.

In BRAC, specific programmes have been able to run interventions for rather long periods (while new programmes often have considerable continuity with previous

programmes in the same sector) using funding from different donor organisations, funding from BRAC itself and, more recently, funds from a strategic partnerships arrangement (SPA) with UKAid and Australian Aid, which BRAC is able to allocate as it wishes, within an overall strategy (DFID Bangladesh 2011). The SPA also provides BRAC with greater opportunities for designing and testing new types of intervention, using its own initiatives and also drawing on the experience and suggestions of its strategic partners.

BRAC's results management and its results measurement framework

Overall, results measurement includes monitoring, evaluation and research in ways that complement and cross-check each other, starting with the data collected by each programme through its MIS. Essentially, in BRAC, there are four different independent institutional arrangements that are related to results measurement and the overall results framework (Figure 1).

BRAC has a well-organised operational and management infrastructure, which is committed to continuous improvement in performance and learning. It generally operates through a results-based management (RBM) system and aims at ensuring transparency and accountability. The RBM system approach requires BRAC programmes or programme components to have clearly defined accountability for results as well as for monitoring of progress towards results, including reporting on performance. Consequently, in addition to carrying out regular activities required for programme implementation, this also demands rigorous monitoring and evaluation of the process throughout the whole life cycle of a particular development intervention.

Since BRAC has been running for over four decades, it has a set of interventions that are well established and have been running for a long time. Also, many new areas of development are being identified by BRAC's development workers and pilots being run to see how well implementation works and to determine the scope for scaling up. Both old and completely new programmes broadly follow the same steps, which are common to different initiatives in BRAC programmes.

Monitoring and evaluation has an important role in BRAC's results system, in the following process. Details of BRAC's structure and results framework are shown in Appendices 1, 2, and 3.

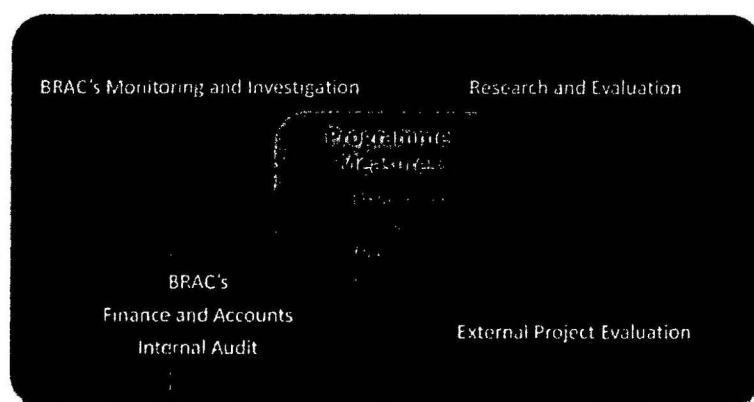


Figure 1. BRAC's accountability systems.

BRAC's project cycle⁵

First of all, a rigorous needs assessment is done where evidence is gathered using methods that are well defined and established in existing body of literature on that certain development aspect as well as after consultation with local communities. The structure of the needs assessment includes extensive literature review, secondary data analysis as well as frequent field visits to understand the development context (Figure 2).

Once the assessment shows the need for a certain intervention, whether this is a new development initiative or extension of an existing component, a proposal needs to be developed. This proposal is jointly developed by programme implementers, RED researchers and often outside consultants, which means that research and evaluation is involved from the very start of the process. It would typically include the context or background of where the intervention is required as well as findings from the needs assessment. It will also contain the details of the proposed intervention in terms of the inputs, activities, outputs, outcomes and finally impact.⁶ Each stage of implementation should be clearly defined. The proposal also contains a budget, action plan, timeline and a monitoring and evaluation plan. BRAC has developed its own standard logical framework (log frame), see Appendix 1, for example, which is a slightly simplified version of that used by its strategic partners.⁷ In the logical framework of the proposed programme, a set of SMART⁸ objectives and indicators are also defined, which are used in monitoring and evaluation. The outcome targets and indicators from the log frames of all the larger BRAC projects are included in an overall results framework, covering 13 programmes, which is updated on a six-monthly basis.

Once the proposal is developed, it goes through internal review and, after passing this stage, the next step is securing internal or external funds for the intervention. The programme implementation team meets with the programme's operational unit, BRAC's Monitoring Department and the RED to clarify and finalise the targets and indicators for monitoring and evaluation. At the same time, the programme will also relate to BRAC's Communication and Advocacy for Social Change Departments to plan how any knowledge created can be disseminated. Most BRAC programme budget contains sections specifying cost section for research that includes a detailed description of areas of research related expenditure.

Results measurement during the life cycle of a project is done through several different entities within the programme as well as a number of independent divisions and institutions inside and outside BRAC. Within the programme, monitoring is done using Programme Level Monitoring and a MIS for each project, which includes monitoring at the operational stage. This internal monitoring has a focus mainly on activities (those initiatives taken by the project staff) and outputs (immediate effects of those initiatives).

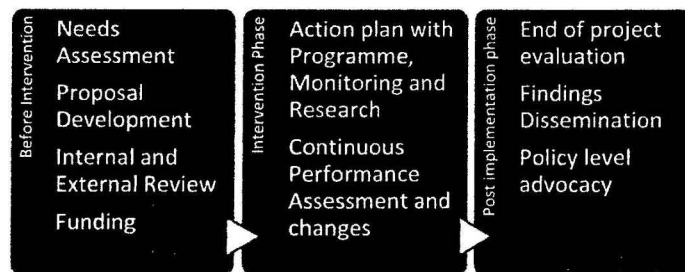


Figure 2. Planning, monitoring, and evaluation process.

Throughout the intervention, these different divisions of BRAC meet and communicate regularly to re-evaluate and address different issues that would help to improving the programme's performance and effectiveness. Once the programme is completed, the evaluation results from the programme are used for scaling up and for communicating internally and externally. Seminars and press briefings are conducted and publication in national and international peer-reviewed journals is carried out, depending on the nature of the evaluation, for the dissemination of the knowledge generated. Finally, the government and other stakeholders are encouraged to take note of the learning from the programme intervention for changes at a policy level.

In addition, BRAC as an organisation has two divisions that work independently but cooperatively on results measurement. These two divisions are the BRAC Monitoring and Investigation Division and the BRAC RED.⁹ As well as these direct mechanisms, other support departments within BRAC also help indirectly in keeping track of activities and ensuring accountable programme outcomes, such as, the Accounts and Finance Division and the Audit Division.

All BRAC programmes have developed their own individual system of regular data collection, processing, storing and dissemination, using a number of different indicators, which is known as the MIS. This information helps in providing insights into the programme for different programme managers at different levels and is used continuously for quality control and improving performance.

The MIS data collection, which is the first level of monitoring, starts at the field level and then finds its way to the Head Office following a number of different stages. The initial data collection is done by individual programme's Programme Officers at the Branch Office. Later, the data are compiled after discussion with the Branch Manager in a designated format and then sent to the Area Office. Then the Area Manager assigns the data, which normally come in hard form, to be transferred to a soft format. Once the data are computerised, these are sent to the Regional office. Once data from different Area Offices are collected, the Regional Manager then sends them to the Head Office. The Programme MIS team in Dhaka then uses software to do quality analysis of the data. The data are presented in the form of monthly report, half-yearly report and annual report. The half-yearly and annual reports are often shared with donor agencies and relevant government agencies.

Programme management uses the MIS in planning and understanding the current state of the programme, its quality and coverage while also using it as a means to tease out any deviation from the initial programme plan and activities. Consequently, the MIS plays a key role in overall tracking of programme activities and improving performance.

An important goal for BRAC is the computerisation of all its area offices, which is a continuous process and, once completed, will make a great contribution to effective management and implementation of programme as well as performance tracking. In the long run, it is expected to improve both intended and unintended programme results. It may be noted that BRAC has 'reach' in some of the remotest areas of Bangladesh at present, where no other government and nongovernment bodies are present. Systematic collection of digitally entered data in the Area Offices, equipped with computers and Internet, will dramatically increase access to technology as well as human resource creation in these locations.

The second level of monitoring is Programme Level Monitoring. This unit is outside the operational management structure of the individual project concerned, in order to ensure the quality of the Monitoring Unit's work. BRAC Microfinance Programme has different monitoring groups for its two major components: Dabi Loans (for very small borrowers) and Progoti Loans (for larger borrowers).¹⁰ According to the BRAC Education Programme, its monitoring unit is one of the most important elements in improving its

quality of performance, since the insights provided lead to continuous improvement of programme design and implementation.

Monitoring in programmes is carried out to check both qualitative and quantitative aspects. In the logical framework development phase of proposal planning, a monitoring plan and guideline for the monitors are created and many of the indicators in the monitoring framework are similar to the output indicators in the log frame. At the beginning of a project, a monitoring schedule is also created, which is made in such a way that all the branches carrying out implementation will be monitored directly on a half-yearly basis. For example, within each branch area, the decision concerning which village organisation (in the case of the BRAC Microfinance Programme) or which BRAC school (in the case of the BRAC Education Programme) will be checked is generally made randomly and at times based on previous reports.

Once a particular element (for example, a specific BRAC Village Organisation, BRAC School and WASH committee¹¹) is chosen, performance assessment is done and the results of the assessment are shared with relevant staff at different levels. First of all, the staff from the relevant branch is updated on the assessment findings in a meeting that is recorded in the branch's Meeting Register for future use. Normally, within a week, these findings are shared with the Area Manager and, in the case of some programmes, with their Quality Assurance Specialist or Sector Specialist. Then, the results are sent to the relevant monitoring unit in the Head Office. The results are then analysed and used later to take measures for further improvement.

Four key measures of the programme are carried out by BRAC. The first is Monitoring and Investigation carried out by a monitoring unit as part of BRAC's *internal control mechanism*. The monitoring unit first started as a cell within the rural development programme in 1988 and, due to growing demand, it became an independent unit in the late 1990s.

The monitoring unit provides support to BRAC's development programmes, supporting departments and enterprises. The unit's objective is to conduct periodic analysis, enabling the management to determine whether the key activities are being carried out as planned and whether they are having the expected outputs in relation to the target population.

The second key element is financial control and monitoring, carried out by two independent departments, Finance and Accounts, and Internal Audit¹² (in addition, BRAC is independently audited annually). This follows normal accounting procedures and is highly respected and will not be discussed in detail in this article.

The third key element is external project reviews, which is carried out by specially recruited teams of national and international consultants, usually for project mid-term and final reviews,¹³ but sometimes also for annual reviews. Whereas in the past these have been initiated and separately funded by BRAC's funding partners, increasingly these are now initiated and managed by the relevant BRAC Programme and BRAC RED in close collaboration with the Development Partners that are supporting a specific programme.¹⁴ These reviews have access to all the relevant monitoring data and analysis and are extremely important in drawing conclusions about project *relevance* and *effectiveness* and in planning new programme directions for future phases and projects.

BRAC Research and Evaluation Division

A fourth key element is Research and Evaluation, an independent research division within the organisation. Research is integral to BRAC's development activity and has been so from the beginning. The RED was established in 1975, and over time, it evolved as a multi-disciplinary independent research unit within the framework of BRAC. The division has

been playing an important role in designing BRAC's development interventions, monitoring progress, documenting achievements and undertaking impact assessment studies.

Some examples of RED published papers:

1. Dey NC, Ali RMM, Ashraf A, Arif T, Mobarak M, Miller G. *Pilot intervention of improved cook stoves in rural areas: assessment of effects on fuel use, smoke emission and health*. Dhaka: BRAC, 2012. 26p. (Mon.Series No. 53)
2. Das NC and Shams R. Integrating the poorest into microfinance: the role of grant-based support and group-based lending. *Enterprise Development Microfinance* 2012;23(2):130-45.
3. Raza WA, Das NC, Misha FA. Can ultra-poverty be sustainably improved? Evidence from BRAC in Bangladesh. *Journal of Development Effectiveness* 2012;4(2):257-76.
4. Das NC and Shams R. *Asset transfer programme for the ultra poor: a randomized control trial evaluation*. Dhaka: BRAC, 2011. 29p. (CFPR working paper no. 22).
5. Banu M, Nahar S, Nasreen HE. *Oral administration of misoprostol reduces postpartum haemorrhage in urban slums of Bangladesh*. Dhaka: BRAC, 2013. xii, 25p. (RED working paper no. 37).
6. Basak JK, Titumir RAM, Dey NC. Climate change in Bangladesh: a historical analysis of temperature and rainfall data. *J Environ* 2013;2(2).
7. Nasreen HE, Kabir ZN, Forsell Y, Edhborg M. Impact of maternal depressive symptoms and infant temperament on early infant growth and motor development: results from a population based study in Bangladesh. *J Affective Disorders* 2013; 146(2): 254-61.
8. Chowdhury A M R, Bhuiya. A, Chowdhury. M E, Rasheed. S, Hussain. Z, Chen. L C. 'The Bangladesh paradox: exceptional health achievement despite economic poverty'. *Lancet* 2013. 382: 1734-45
9. Chowdhury. A M R, Nath S R, Choudhury R K. 'Equity gains in Bangladesh primary education'. *International Review of Education*, 2003. 49(6): 601-619
10. Chowdhury. A M R. 'Arsenic Crisis in Bangladesh'. *Scientific American*. 2004 Aug; 291(2):86-91
11. Ahmed S M, Chowdhury M, Bhuiya A. 'Microcredit and emotional well-being: the case of poor rural women from Matlab, Bangladesh'. *World Development*. 2001; 29(11):1957-1966
12. Hossain N. 'Productivity and Virtue: Elite Categories of the Poor in Bangladesh'. *World Development*, 2005, Volume 33, Issue 66, Pages 965-977

It provides an analytical basis for BRAC's programmatic decisions, fine-tuning it for better performance and making development efforts evidence-based, effective and community-sensitive. RED conducts programme-driven research in agriculture, applied and reproductive health, communicable and noncommunicable diseases, education, environment, extreme poverty, food security and nutrition, microfinance, and social development and human rights.¹⁵ The division also caters to issues of national and international importance independently and in collaboration with reputed academic institutions and agencies.

RED Research and Support Units

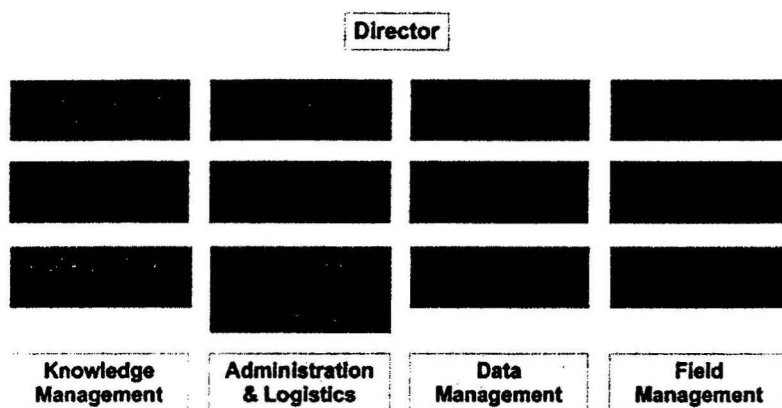


Figure 3. The Research and Evaluation Division.

Table 1. Staffing of BRAC Research and Evaluation Division.

	Male	Female	Total
Core researcher	43	37	80
Support staff	31	6	37
Visiting fellow	2	0	2
Consultant	3	0	3
Staff on study leave	4	10	14
Staff on other long leave	4	2	6
Total staff	74	43	122

Figure 3¹⁶ shows the structure of RED where the different units work with relevant BRAC programmes for conducting research and evaluation. RED's research activities are supported by three specialised units, namely (1) knowledge management, (2) field operations and (3) data management.

RED Bangladesh staffing is given in Table 1.

RED also extends research support to overseas programmes of BRAC in Asia and Africa implemented by BRAC International. In Asia, this is based at the RED office at the BRAC Headquarters in Dhaka, and for Africa, it is based in Uganda.

The research findings are disseminated through a range of oral and print media. Since inception, RED has produced nearly 1353 research reports, 350 journal articles, 274 book and book chapters, 19 theses, 55 research monographs, 111 working papers, 24 volumes of Nirjash – a research compendium in the Bangla language, 174 popular articles in newsletters and newspapers (as of December 2012).

Publications by category: 2011–2013¹⁷

Current approaches to research on and evaluation of projects include *both* of the following. First, a strong focus on process research, using MIS data and additional

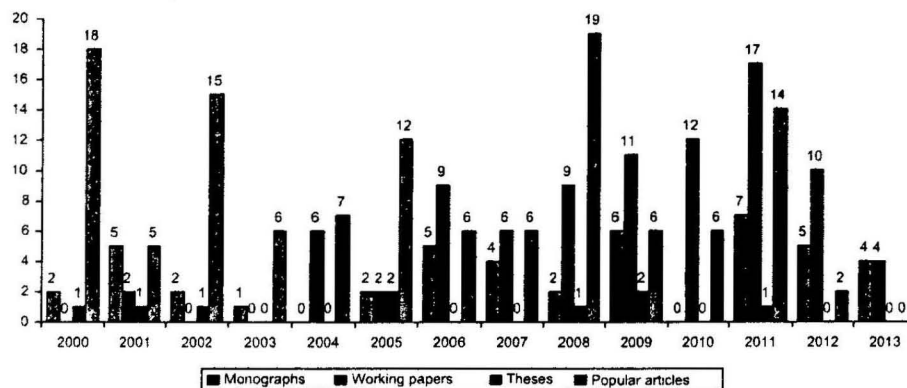


Figure 4. Recent RED publications.

qualitative information to determine independently during project implementation the factors determining success or failure in reaching long-term objectives. Secondly, rigorous impact assessment and evaluation is undertaken, including the use of counterfactuals, and using experimental and quasi-experimental methods, particularly in econometric analyses.¹⁸ For this, capacity building and collaboration have been developed with a number of international research organisations and institutes (Figure 4).

Factors promoting and impeding focus on results measurement in BRAC's institutional set-up include the following.

First, BRAC has a very strong commitment to transparency. Whereas integrity is one of its core values, it operates in a country that consistently scores very poorly in the Transparency International *Perception of Corruption* index. Therefore, measures to maintain integrity, transparency and effectiveness have been vital for BRAC's survival and growth.

Secondly, it can be seen from the discussion earlier that monitoring and formal or informal evaluation take place *at all levels* and on a continuous basis in BRAC, that this leads to a process of continuous correction and improvement, and it is not limited to specialised monitoring or research units. For example, it is not uncommon for the data and conclusions in programme MIS systems to differ somewhat from research results (usually because of different approaches to data collection and different types of question) and for this to lead to an active debate on which legitimate conclusions should be used for programme improvement. While this means that RED's capacity for independent judgement has to be carefully maintained, it is also encouraging since it shows the extent to which programme leaders use different sources of feedback to correct and develop their methods.

A recent example is an RED 'Rapid Assessment of the Haor (integrated development) Project'. This concluded that one operational model (combination) compared to another (coordination) achieved slightly better overall coverage of households, similar quality of services, better integration and a 30 per cent cost reduction. Project monitoring results supported these conclusions, which led to an important operational decision on the best method for 'scaling-up' the project.

The vision for future is that, over time, RED becomes a premier institution in the country, not only in terms of research but through pushing research findings and resulting agendas forward through policy advocacy. Since RED has already gone international, BRAC's goal is to have an even broader footprint for this research division.

Looking back at how RED came about, and what was it that pushed a small NGO at that time, when most counterparts were not conducting research (and in fact many still do not do so today), one thing that was critical was the mindset of the founders of the organisation, especially the chairperson and founder who is a great believer in research.

Back in the early 1970s as BRAC started its journey, most of the people who were implementing the programmes were from the urban middle class, and the areas where they were stationed were in the remotest rural villages. At that time, they had very little or in fact no understanding of village economy, culture, power structure, conflicts and clashes. Understanding of these elements is crucial to understand the social interactions that have, for centuries, been able to sustain the 'status quo' wherein the poor remain poor and the rich become richer. In order to create that level of understanding, from the very beginning of the work, the founder had the idea in mind of an anthropological study and related ethnography on how the poor become poorer (materialised, for example, in BRAC RSS2, 1980). While undergoing these qualitative research projects, it became obvious that BRAC should also carry out research on the implications.

In line with the theme of this article, BRAC also believes that great ideas are good, but it is the delivery or the successful implementation of the ideas, through careful planning, piloting, training and project management, that counts at the end of the day that matters. It is those terms what RED does is implementation research that makes RED as well as BRAC quite unique. No other NGO has done it at the scale that BRAC does, with an estimated current 120 million beneficiaries in Bangladesh (BRAC AR 2013).

As for RED, the people who are leading the division need the foresight to predict what might happen in the future. For instance, in the mid-1980s and early 1990s, BRAC recognised the need for extensive nonformal primary education, but there was no research on education when the programme started, and RED did not have any education experts. BRAC was looking for researchers on education and could not find any; at that time, Dhaka University did have an Institute of Education & Research, but it was oriented towards teacher training rather than education-related research. BRAC advertised for education experts and did not get any response, which was quite frustrating.

Therefore, since BRAC needed some critical done immediately, the management decided that what they needed could also be done by a social scientist. So, the interim research was done by RED, and for the long term, BRAC started to look for funding and resources to train people. Eventually, they found sponsorship from the British Council and sent some staff to Manchester University and the University of London.

Today, BRAC has one of the best education research groups in the country and their contribution to the literature has been substantial (see Figure 4 and RED website <http://research.brac.net/publications.php>). This was possible because BRAC was interested in the subject at an early stage, although no other organisation or donors were at that time undertaking education research. The important lesson is to be able to start! Once something good is started, it can potentially have great implications. Forward thinking is needed in a research unit, but this also needs forward thinking in operations to enable

testing and learning. In BRAC education, senior management ensured from the start that these two elements were well integrated with each other.

Another important principle is that 'You have to be opportunistic and look for new things to do research on'. BRAC started talking to the International Centre for Diarrheal Disease Research in the late 1980s when they were implementing many different activities. BRAC wanted to know the impact of different development initiatives on a broader scale, for example, the impact of microfinance on the health condition of the borrowers and their children.

RED decided to join ICDDR, B to conduct the study in MATLAB where a detailed population data set has been kept since the early 1960s and donors like the Ford Foundation came forward to fund the study, which showed a clear positive correlation and had an important effect on the further development of micro-finance and other development programmes.

It is also important to maintain a broad approach to research. Randomised controlled trials (RCTs) are in some ways considered the gold standard. However, when studies are designed using an RCT, the effectiveness of the methodology relies on the hypothesis used and its accuracy. In a lot of cases, the hypothesis is based on a set of assumptions. Therefore, RED focuses on the method that is best suited for each context and frequently conducts research on mixed methodology, with a good blend of qualitative and quantitative research. This has been understood from the beginning, but has also been borne out by experience throughout BRAC's development.

Notes

1. BRAC was initially financially supported by Oxfam and other international NGOs.
2. Work was focused in the Sulla, Dera and Baniachang thanas (subdistricts); initial emphasis was on housing reconstruction, agriculture and economic development, trying to focus on the poorest and most in need social classes.
3. In addition, there are BRAC Bank (which supports small and medium enterprises) and BRAC University, which are not described here (<http://www.bracbank.com/>, <http://www.bracu.ac.bd/>).
4. An exception to the categorisation is microfinance, which is considered primarily a social development programme, but is also financially self-sufficient.
5. NB: Some projects may continue for a long period of time.
6. Impact is here defined as outcome minus counterfactual.
7. UKAID and Australian Aid are BRAC's strategic partners as they came into a Strategic Partnership Arrangement in 2012.
8. SMART is short form of S = specific, M = measurable, A = achievable, R = realistic and T = timebound.
9. 'Investigation' has a focus on immediate issues related to activities and outputs, while 'research' relates to long-term outcomes and impact.
10. There is a different monitoring unit for each of the two micro-finance programmes since they are both rather large and serve different types of borrowers.
11. WASH = Water, Sanitation and Hygiene.
12. BRAC has the largest internal audit unit for an NGO with 350 staff and helps to ensure financial and all other transparency and accountability.
13. Mid-term reviews are usually timed to assess early project progress with enough time left to make corrections/improvements. Final reviews are timed to generate insights for overall evaluation of the project and plan a future phase, if appropriate.
14. BRAC has special 'Consortia' of Development Partners, which work together in the fields of: Education; Ultra-Poverty Reduction; and Health, Nutrition, and Population.
15. For BRAC RED Monographs, Working Papers and Research Reports, see <http://research.brac.net/publications.php>

16. MNCH= Maternal and Neonatal Child Health, FSNSP=The Food Security Nutritional Surveillance Program, TIGA=Ex-ante technology assessment and farm household segmentation for inclusive poverty reduction and sustainable productivity growth in agriculture.
17. 2013 data are up to June 2013.
18. For example, please see the 'Examples of RED published papers' given in 'BRAC Research and Evaluation Division' section...

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Table A1. Example from BRAC standard results framework and log frame.

4.2 BRAC Education Programme (BEP) Primary School						
Impact	Indicator	Baseline (Dec 2010)	Milestone1 (June 2012)	Milestone 2 (June 2013)	Milestone 3 (June 2014)	Target (Dec 2015)
Reduce Poverty in Bangladesh through enhancing equitable access to high quality education (MDG 2)						
OUTCOMES						
1. At least 90% of out-of-school children* enrolled in BPS in a given year completed primary education cycle	Percentage of children enrolled in BPS completing primary education (T: 90%)	C: 139,886 (93.0% of enrolled children for 2007 cohort completed primary education) (G: 99.67%)	C: 210,627 (90% of enrolled children for 2009 cohort completed primary education) (G: 90%)	C: 102,951 (90% of enrolled children for 2010 cohort completed primary education) (G: 90%)	C: 46,764 (90% of enrolled children for 2011 cohort completed primary education) (G: 90%)	C: 129,843 (90% of enrolled children for 2012 cohort completed primary education) (G: 90%)
2. At least 90% of BPS students who appeared in grade 5 national primary completion examination passed the examination	Percentage of children completing primary education in BPS passing grade 5 completion test (T: 90%)	99.54% of children completing primary education passed the primary school completion exam	90% of children completing primary education passed the primary school completion exam	90% of children completing primary education passed the primary school completion exam	90% of children completing primary education passed the primary school completion exam	90% of children completing primary education passed the primary school completion exam
3. Smooth transitions of BPS graduates into secondary school and at least 90% of the BPS graduates have enrolled in G6 in secondary school	Transition rate (% of primary graduates from BPS enrolling in class 6 in secondary school) (T: 89.5%)	96.89%	90%	90%	90%	90%
						Donor support to Bangladesh continues at current or higher levels

Note: *Proportion of girls being 60 per cent in most intervention areas and not less than 50 per cent in other areas, aged 9–12 years, including at least one child with special needs in each school and 45,000 ethnic children, enrolled in different grade levels in BRAC primary schools (BPS).

Appendix 2

Table A2. List of enterprises and investments.

BRAC enterprises	BRAC investments	
Aarong	BRAC subsidiaries and associates	BRAC Bank subsidiaries
BRAC Artificial Insemination	BRAC Bank Limited	BRAC EPL Investments Limited
BRAC Chicken	Delta BRAC Housing Finance Corporation Limited (DBH)	BRAC EPL Stock Brokerage Limited
BRAC Cold Storage	BRACNet Limited	BRAC Saajan Exchange Limited
BRAC Dairy	Guardian Life Insurance Limited	BRAC Saajan (FR) SARL
BRAC Feed Mills	BRAC Impact Ventures Limited (BIVL)	bKash Limited
BRAC Fisheries	BRAC Environment Enterprises Limited (BEEL)	BRAC IT Services Limited (biTS)
BRAC Nursery	BRAC Probashbandhu Limited	BRAC Asset Management Company Limited
BRAC Poultry	BRAC Tea Estates	BRAC Bank associates
BRAC Poultry Rearing Enterprise	Ayesha Abed Foundation (AAF)	CSR Centre
BRAC Printers		Bangladesh Rating Agency Limited (BDRAL)
BRAC Printing Pack		Industrial and Infrastructure Development
BRAC Recycled Handmade Paper		Finance Company Limited (IIDFC)
BRAC Salt		
BRAC Sanitary Napkins and Delivery Kits		
BRAC Seeds		
BRAC Sericulture		
BRAC Solar		

Appendix 3

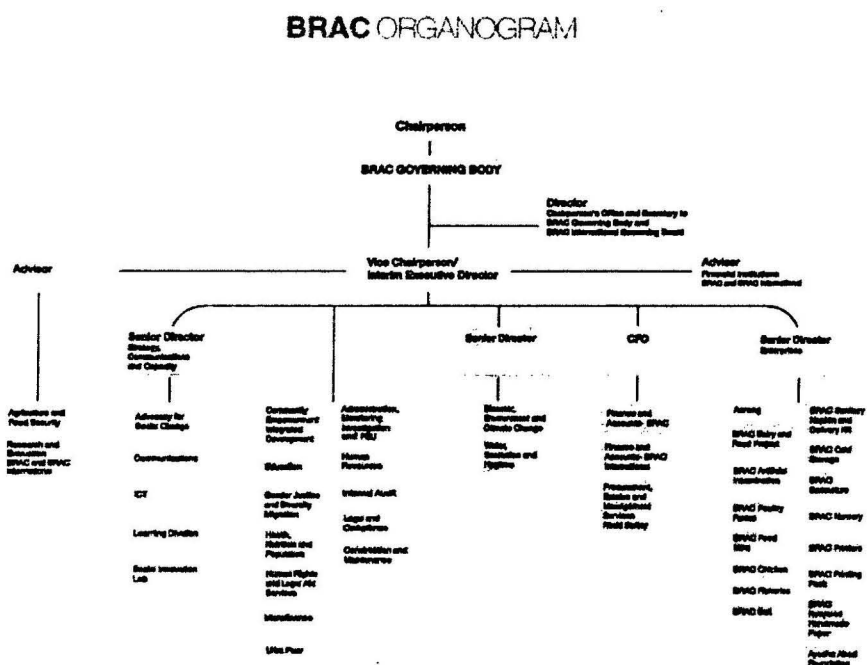


Figure A3. BRAC organogram.