



## Remembering Sir Fazle Hasan Abed, Development Pioneer

San Francisco, December 21, 2019 — Former Asia Foundation [Chang-Lin Tien Distinguished Visiting Fellow](#), friend to The Asia Foundation, and founder of BRAC, Sir Fazle Hasan Abed, passed away on December 20, 2019. He was 83 years old. Sir Abed devoted his life to standing up for social justice. He started BRAC in 1972 as a small relief and rehabilitation project in north-eastern Bangladesh. Over the past 47 years, BRAC has grown to become the largest nongovernmental development organization in the world, and one of the most effective.

In September 2012, The Asia Foundation was honored to host Sir Abed as a [Chang-Lin Tien Distinguished Visiting Fellow](#), arranging meetings and speaking engagements in the U.S. in the San Francisco Bay Area and in Washington, DC, an experience he called “wonderful.” At the time he [spoke at a World Affairs event in San Francisco](#), and sat for an interview with The Asia Foundation discussing his pride in Bangladesh’s remarkable transformation. He said when he started BRAC: “Bangladesh was the world’s second poorest country and the child survivor rate was terrible—a quarter of our children died before they reached five years old. Bangladesh’s per capita income used to be \$70, now it’s at \$850 per capita. We were a food-deficit country, now we’re a food-sufficient country. Our literacy rate used to be less than 25 percent, now it’s nearly 60 percent. Life for Bangladeshis is more secure, less fragile, and less uncertain. But I think the most dramatic change has been with women’s role in society. Women used to be forced to be housewives, now many are part of the work force. Large numbers of women have gone into jobs in the industry and service areas. Women’s literacy rate used to be almost 30 percent less than men, now it’s almost equal. Bangladesh is no longer at the bottom of the gender gap ranking, and we now rank better than Japan, Pakistan, and many countries which are in the bottom quarter of the gender gap.”

Sir Abed was born in 1936 in Bangladesh. While he was working at Pakistan Shell, the 1970 cyclone and 1971 Liberation War in Bangladesh dramatically changed the direction of his life. He left his job and moved to London, where he helped initiate Action Bangladesh and HELP Bangladesh in support of the Liberation War. After the war was over, he returned to the newly independent Bangladesh, finding the economy in ruins. The return of 10 million refugees, who had sought shelter in India during the war, called for urgent relief and rehabilitation efforts. Sir Fazle Abed established BRAC to address the needs of refugees in a remote area of north-eastern Bangladesh, guided by a desire to help the poor develop their own capacity to better manage their lives.

Today we mourn the loss of Sir Abed, a development pioneer, warrior for social justice, and friend.