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Newsletter Series No. 01 | December 2022

# BIGD Works

o n B R A C

A photograph showing a group of people, including men and women, gathered around a motorcycle engine in a workshop. They appear to be engaged in a collaborative activity, possibly a repair or maintenance task. The setting is a simple, somewhat cluttered workshop with concrete walls and various tools and parts visible. The lighting is natural, coming from a window in the background. The people are dressed in casual work clothes. One woman in a purple shirt is leaning over the engine, while others are looking on or assisting. The overall atmosphere is one of focused teamwork.

In 2022, BIGD completed three studies on different programs of BRAC, with 13 additional ongoing research projects and many more in the pipeline. As we approach the end of BRAC@50, we take a moment to reflect on our research and engagement with BRAC, the world's largest NGO and one of our key strategic partners.

# Featured Publications



## Graduation Approach to Poverty Reduction in the Humanitarian Context: Evidence From Bangladesh

*Journal of International Development* (in press) | Atiya Rahman, Anindita Bhattacharjee, Rafia Nisat, and Narayan Das

This paper examines the effect of a customized version of BRAC's Ultra-Poor Graduation (UPG) Programme on the livelihoods of the host communities of Rohingya refugees.



## What 'Cash Plus' Programmes Teach Us About Fighting Extreme Poverty

*Stanford Social Innovation Review* | Imran Matin

This article uses evidence from successful cash-plus programmes such as BRAC's graduation approach to derive lessons for linking the best interventions with existing cash transfer programmes and reducing poverty.



## Forced Displacement, Mental Health, and Child Development: Evidence From the Rohingya Refugees

*Quantitative Political Economy Working Paper 2022-45* | Asad Islam, Tanvir Ahmed Mozumder, Tabassum Rahman, Tanvir Shatil, and Abu Siddique

This paper examines the extent to which the home-based Humanitarian Play Lab (HPL), a multifaceted psychosocial programme, improves the mental well-being of Rohingya refugee mothers and facilitates growth and development among children under the age of two.



## Formation of BRAC: A Historical Account

*BIGD Monograph No. 01, April 2022* | Abu Ahasan, Sumaiya Iqbal, Shahaduz Zaman, and Imran Matin

The first in a series of monographs, under the Historicizing BRAC Project, that aims to meticulously document BRAC's lived experiences and attempts to draw the critical lessons from BRAC's 50 years of journey.





## BRAC Ultra-Poor Graduation Programme

What is the impact of the redesigned UPG Programme?

■ Status: Ongoing

The overall macroeconomic changes in the country have led to significant changes in the profile of the ultra-poor. In response to these changes, in 2017, BRAC modified the selection criteria as well as the intervention design of the UPG Programme. In order to understand and assess the impact of this new design, BIGD, in partnership with Innovations for Poverty Action (IPA), Northwestern University, University of Maryland, and Yale University has undertaken a rigorous impact evaluation employing a randomized controlled trial (RCT) design on the 2019 UPG cohort. BIGD anticipates that the support provided by the programme will increase household income, savings and food security. With the increase in household income, the proportion of UPG households that live below the poverty line will be significantly lower than their control counterparts.

How do variations in coaching and the presence of village committees impact the effectiveness of the graduation approach?

■ Status: Ongoing

Improving the cost-effectiveness of the UPG programme is a key priority for implementing institutions and funders. One of the ways to optimize costs can be to employ less intensive “coaching,” a component in the package of interventions under the graduation approach. An additional component of the programme includes Village Assistance Committees (VACs), which intend to help programme recipients protect their assets, increase access to government services, and offer support in times of need by coordinating local community support. However, it is one of the least discussed components of the graduation approach. BIGD, in partnership with the University of Oxford, is assessing the impact of coaching variation and village committees on the fourth cohort of BRAC’s



UPG Programme, by comparing three variations in the coaching structure and the presence or absence of VAC within villages through RCT.

### How can we help the “new poor” bounce back?

■ Status: Ongoing

Many vulnerable non-poor people in Bangladesh, whose incomes were above the national poverty line but below the median income before the COVID-19 crisis, fell below the poverty line during the pandemic and are considered as “new poor.” Under BRAC’s economic recovery plan, the UPG Programme, in partnership with BRAC’s

Microfinance Programme, provided a customized livelihood support package through business planning support and credit, so that the new poor could recover and improve their livelihood sustainability. BIGD conducted a mixed-method study to perform an early-stage evaluation of the programme, focusing on the targeting effectiveness, impact, and integration process of new poor participants with BRAC Microfinance. The evaluation found significant short-term impact of the programme on a number of key economic outcomes such as income, employment, and asset. The study also shows significant positive differences in household-level outcomes including expenditure, food security, and savings post-programme.

## BRAC Disaster Risk Management Programme

### How can we strengthen the resilience of urban migrants against climate change?

■ Status: Ongoing

Rural-poor communities are particularly vulnerable to climate change, owing to their reliance on climate-sensitive resources. They are often driven to migrate to urban areas. BRAC Disaster Risk Management Programme and the UPG Programme have initiated a project to strengthen livelihoods and improve the adaptation of many such ultra-poor households in urban settlements—who are also climate-induced migrants—in Khulna and Rajshahi. BIGD is using both qualitative and quantitative methods to conduct the study. A baseline survey was conducted to support the impact evaluation of the project through a quasi-experimental approach comparing pre-post differences in outcomes between the participants and non-participants. In addition, focus group discussions (FGDs) and key informant interviews (KIIs) are used in the qualitative component.





# BRAC Skills Development Programme

How can we connect youth to meaningful employment?

■ Status: Ongoing

Promoting Skills and Productivity Enhancement for Resilience (PROSPER) identifies young learners who are keen to receive hands-on training across multiple trades and incentivizes local firms to train these learners. BIGD, in partnership with the London School of Economics (LSE), is assessing the impact of this programme using an RCT-based field-level experiment. The study is evaluating young people's expectations for their future careers, salaries, and willingness to participate in skill-building programmes. Ultimately, the research aims to contribute to the design of scalable, sustainable skills development programmes that can offer stable jobs, skill acquisition, and successful transition into the labour market.

How can we empower marginalized urban youth and improve their participation in the retail sector?

■ Status: Ongoing

Progressing the Retail Sector by Improving Decent Employment (PRIDE) provides training to low-income urban youths in Bangladesh, particularly women and people with disabilities, and intends to place the graduates in retail sectors to facilitate sustainable livelihoods. The project has been piloted in the metropolitan areas of Dhaka, Khulna, Sylhet, and Chattogram. BIGD carried out an RCT to assess the impact of the project on the economic empowerment and labour market participation rate of the trained youth. Short-term findings reveal that the intervention significantly increased the employment rate, average monthly salary, and daily average working hours among the treatment group. Despite the intervention, a larger gender pay gap is still observable. Long-run evaluations will be necessary to assess the sustainability of the project of impact.

## BRAC Migration Programme

What can we do to reintegrate returnee migrants into the economy?

■ Status: Ongoing

BRAC's Migration Programme has designed an intervention to assist returnee migrants, specifically prioritizing unsuccessful migrants, to better reintegrate them into economic activities. Apart from emergency support, the project provides economic, social, and psychosocial support through the project itself, as well as through referrals. The economic support of the project include in-kind assistance, different soft and hard skills training,

job placement, and other relevant services. The intervention has been implemented across 40 sub-districts of the country. BIGD is working in close collaboration with the BRAC Migration team to measure the overall impact of the project and assess the effectiveness of the reintegration model.





## BRAC Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning



### How is BIGD supporting BRAC in formulating its third BRAC-Bangladesh strategy?

■ Status: Ongoing

After the two five-year cycles in 2011 and 2016, respectively, BRAC has been formulating its third BRAC-Bangladesh strategy for 2021-2025. BRAC's MEAL Department, along with the programmes and relevant support functions, has prepared the BRAC Results Framework (RF) to guide the planning and measurement of its anticipated accomplishments during the strategic period. BIGD, on behalf of BRAC, is conducting a nationally representative benchmark study to set the baseline for the impact indicators and selected outcomes of the RF. The study analyzes relevant dimensions like socioeconomic status, sex and gender, disability, ethnicity, religion, climate and disaster vulnerabilities, etc. to understand the social and cultural underpinnings of the studied issues.

## BRAC Microfinance Programme

### How can women have greater control over microfinance loan use?

■ Status: Ongoing

BRAC's Gender Transformative Microfinance (GTMF) Programme has initiated a pilot where microloans to women borrowers are supplemented by business management training, financial capacity building, and financial planning training. BIGD is conducting an RCT and qualitative analysis to examine the impact of these interventions on women's economic participation and changes in economic welfare. The analysis is looking into how women's participation in economic activities affect their agency, decision-making, and empowerment at home and also the challenges they encounter. If the pilot is deemed successful, it will be scaled up to ensure that BRAC's Microfinance Programme becomes gender transformative.

### What is the impact of COVID-19 on microfinance borrowers?

■ Status: Upcoming

Over 25% of BRAC's microfinance borrowers failed to repay loans even 12 months after the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. BIGD intends to explore the reasons for non-repayment of microloans and the potential pathways and mechanisms to reintegrate these borrowers back into the credit market. We will also assess the impact of financial exclusion on household welfare such as income, expenditure, health, and education. The sample for this survey will be based on a random subsample of BRAC Microfinance clients that BIGD has already surveyed in 2017 and 2020.



# Featured Event

## BRAC@50: What Can We Learn From the World's Largest NGO?

DSA 2022 Pre-conference Roundtable | 15 June 2022



**Asif Saleh**  
Executive Director,  
BRAC Bangladesh



**Tamara Abed**  
Managing Director, BRAC Enterprises and  
Chairperson, Board of Trustees,  
Brac University



**Dr Marty Chen**  
Adjunct Lecturer, Harvard Kennedy  
School and Senior Advisor,  
WIEGO Network



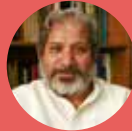
**Greg Chen**  
Managing Director, BRAC Ultra-Poor  
Graduation Initiative



**Nobonita Chowdhury**  
Director, Gender Justice and Diversity;  
Preventing Violence Against Women  
Initiative, BRAC



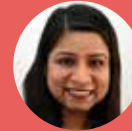
**Dr Shahaduz Zaman**  
Professor, Brighton and Sussex Medical  
School and Senior Advisor, BIGD



**Dr Syed Hashemi**  
Professor, School of General  
Education, Brac University



**Aude Montesquiou**  
FinEquity Facilitator, CGAP and  
Senior Advisor, BIGD



**Dr Sohela Nazneen**  
Research Fellow, Institute of  
Development Studies



**Professor Naila Kabeer**  
Professor, London School of Economics  
and Political Science

BRAC's 50 years of work focusing on the economic and social empowerment of people living in poverty has helped us to build a new approach to southern development. In this roundtable session organized by the

Development Studies Association (DSA) and BIGD, we brought together leading experts to share critical lessons of BRAC's 50 years in building a southern approach to development. The roundtable focused on the economic and social

empowerment of poor women and men through the transfer of resources and capacity building in order to promote beneficial policy changes in norms.

## Engagement with BRAC



### 10 years of STAR: BRAC's Apprenticeship Training Model

BRAC Centre Inn Auditorium | 10 November 2022

On the 10 years celebration of Skills Training for Advancing Resources (STAR), BRAC's apprenticeship training model, Dr Narayan C. Das, Associate Professor & Senior Research Fellow, BIGD, presented his study which assessed the impact of the STAR model in Bangladesh.



### Future of Work in Global South: Preparing for the Challenges of Tomorrow

Frugal Innovation Forum 2022 | 13 November 2022

Dr Imran Matin, Executive Director, BIGD, moderated a discussion session on Future of Work in Global South: Preparing for the Challenges of Tomorrow at the Frugal Innovation Forum 2022, organized by BRAC. Speakers included Minh Huy Lai, Europe COO, Generation.org, Tasmiah Tabassum Rahman, Associate Director, Skills Development Programme at BRAC, and Monisha Banerjee, Chief Executive Officer, Anudip Foundation.



## Featured Blogs

### UPG & Me: 20 Years of the Graduation Approach

As BRAC celebrates 20 years of the Ultra-Poor Graduation (UPG) programme within the broader context of the Golden Jubilee of BRAC and Bangladesh last year, BIGD is publishing an ongoing blog series where researchers and practitioners reflect on the impact of the UPG Programme in framing their perspectives in their worldview.



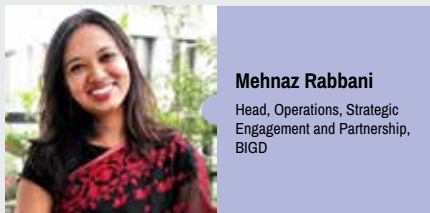
**Dr Imran Matin**  
Executive Director, BIGD



**Dr Oriana Bandiera**  
Professor, London School of Economics and Political Science



**Dr Munshi Sulaiman**  
Director, Save the Children International and Research Advisor, BIGD



**Mehnaz Rabbani**  
Head, Operations, Strategic Engagement and Partnership, BIGD



**Atiya Rahman**  
Associate Research Fellow, BIGD



**Dr Shaila Ahmed**  
Associate Research Fellow, BIGD



**Dr Tariq Omar Ali**  
Associate Professor, Edmund A. Walsh School of Foreign Service, Georgetown University



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