

Written evidence for the IDC's inquiry into UK Aid Cuts

Evidence provided by BRAC

Executive Summary

- The UK Government's Strategic Partnership Arrangement (SPA) with BRAC has over the last ten years been one of the largest, most successful, and poverty focused uses of the UK aid budget.
- Through the first Strategic Partnership from 2011-2016, BRAC delivered **17%** of the UK's global food security reach, **15%** of DFID's global sanitation reach and **13%** of the UK's global total of children attending primary school education. All this was achieved with an allocation of **less than 0.5%** of the UK's Global ODA budget.
- Independent assessments have ranked it as one of the most innovative, effective and best value interventions in the UK aid budget. The FCDO's own Annual Reports have given it a grade of A for every year it was assessed.
- The objectives of the partnership are fully aligned with the FCDO's priorities.
- Despite all this, the UK has informed BRAC that they will not be part of the SPA in Bangladesh during the year 2021/22. We are aware of the fiscal challenges the UK government is facing as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, but are genuinely concerned that 'leaving behind' the commitment to 'leave no one behind' could be damaging for the poorest people.
- Specifically, the decision not to contribute to the SPA will mean the UK is no longer providing **360,000 girls** with an education, **725,000 children** with a place in school, **12 million babies under the age of 2** (6.2 million girls) with additional nutritional support, **14.6 million women and girls** with access to family planning services, **385,000 families** with the assets and skills needed to lift themselves out of extreme poverty and **2 million vulnerable households** with climate change related interventions.
- We continue to see ourselves as a partner of the UK Government, and believe in both the proven impact and the potential of 'Global Britain'.

Our Submission

- 1) BRAC's vision is a world free from all forms of exploitation and discrimination where everyone has the opportunity to realise their potential. BRAC was founded in Bangladesh in 1972 by Sir Fazle Hasan Abed. The organisation has since grown dramatically and is known for its frugal innovation, scale, range of work, and relentless drive to create opportunities for people living in poverty to realise their potential. Today, BRAC is a global leader in developing cost-effective, evidence-based programmes in conflict-prone and post-disaster settings.

Strategic Partnership Arrangement, Bangladesh

- 2) The Strategic Partnership Arrangement (SPA) is a multi-year funding arrangement between BRAC, the UK and Australian government that has been in place since 2011. It has been implemented in two phases, the first from 2011 to 2015 (a £222 million contribution from the UK) and the second (£224 million) from 2016 to 2021.
- 3) The SPA has helped over 110 million people in Bangladesh, including over 4 million children who are currently enrolled in BRAC schools, and 980,000 families who have been supported to lift themselves out of extreme poverty. It has been hailed as an innovative partnership and has helped Bangladesh achieve many of its Millennium Development Goals (MDG's) and Sustainable Development Goals (SDG's) over the last decade, focusing on areas such as education, water, health, women's rights and extreme poverty.
- 4) It is also a unique partnership in that 2 'northern' donors (the UK and Australia) have invested in a 'southern' organisation to deliver agreed development impacts over a 5 year period, with exceptional results. This arrangement gave BRAC a unique ability to operate more flexibly than it could with project-based funding. Specifically it enabled integrated approaches, ongoing innovation, adaptive programming, and rapid response to emergency situations. Consequently, BRAC was able to achieve greater impact while also generating more evidence and often making important investments in organisational capacity.
- 5) The UK has informed BRAC that they will not be part of the SPA in Bangladesh during the year 2021/22.

Although the UK will not be a partner in 2021/22, the SPA will continue with Australia (DFAT) and Canada (GAC) partnering with BRAC, though it will be reduced by 30%. BRAC Bangladesh is proactively looking for new partners to join the SPA.

We hope to renew our remarkable partnership with the UK Government in Bangladesh in the future, and, in line with the sector, encourage the Government to return to meeting its commitment to spend 0.7 per cent GNI on aid as soon as possible.

- 6) BRAC has enjoyed a long-standing, positive and productive partnership with the UK Government, both in Bangladesh and many of our other countries of operation. We are saddened by the cuts - particularly as decisions with major implications appear to have been made without regard for the quality of delivery and the severity of impact on the most

marginalised of people. For example, the SPA achieved an A grade for every FCDO Annual Report. During the first Strategic Partnership from 2011-2016, BRAC achieved 17% of the UK's global food security reach, 15% of DFID's global sanitation reach and 13% of the UK's global total of children attending primary school education. All this was achieved with an allocation of less than 0.5% of the UK's Global ODA budget.

So it is clear that the SPA has provided the FCDO/DFID, and by extension the UK taxpayer, with outstanding value for money, giving BRAC the flexibility and funding security to innovate and implement extremely effective programmes that have achieved transformative results in Bangladesh. The Independent Committee on Aid Impact 2019 review of DFID's work with Civil Society highlighted the UK government relationship with BRAC as particularly strong (versus an overall ranking of 'amber-red' for civil society partnerships).

- 7) We are therefore confident that the decision to not continue with a third tranche of the SPA is not a reflection of the relationship with, or impact of, BRAC.
- 8) We are, of course, aware of the fiscal challenges the UK government is facing as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, but believe that 'leaving behind' the commitment to 'leave no one behind' could now be catastrophic for the poorest people. The decision risks impacting extremely negatively on the people of Bangladesh, 16 million of whom have slipped into poverty since the pandemic began. This also comes at a time when cases of the India variant of COVID-19 are rapidly increasing, putting health systems under strain in Bangladesh.

Specifically, the decision not to contribute to the Strategic Partnership Arrangement III will mean the UK will not be providing:

- **360,000 girls** with an education
- **725,000** children a place in school
- **12 million babies under the age of 2** (6.2 million girls) with additional nutritional support
- **14.6 million women and girls** with access to family planning services
- **385,000** families with the assets and skills needed to lift themselves out of extreme poverty
- **2 million vulnerable households** with climate change related interventions

- 9) It is also important to note the amazing impact the UK achieved through the first phase of the SPA (2011 to 2016). **580,000** people moved out of extreme poverty; accounting for 45% of the progress made through DFID Bangladesh's intervention, and 17% of what was achieved through UK funding globally.

4 million people gained sustainable access to improved sanitation facilities, representing 63% of the achievement by the UK government in Bangladesh and 15% of DFID's success worldwide.

As a result of UK funding, BRAC pioneered the '[graduation model](#)' in Bangladesh, which has, to date, enabled **2 million** households to lift themselves out of extreme poverty. Research by Nobel prize winner Banerjee et al [confirmed](#) the successful application of the model in Ethiopia, Ghana, India, Pakistan, Honduras and Peru. The FCDO's Chief Economist considers

this to be a 'best buy' in terms of development.

- 10) SPA II (2016 to 2021) supported BRAC's development programmes in Bangladesh to help the poorest people graduate from poverty; helping BRAC to make progress on its transition from a donor-funded to a self-sustaining organisation; created a knowledge partnership; delivered education, women's rights, water sanitation and hygiene, livelihoods, health, nutrition and poverty reduction on a generation-changing scale. The mid-term evaluation of the second SPA II showed the following achievements:
- The SPA was providing services to at least **110 million** people in Bangladesh
 - **4 million** students enrolled in BRAC's educational programmes, which proactively seek to include girls and children with disabilities
 - **18 million** adolescents and pregnant women received counselling on balanced nutrition
 - Over **400,000** households graduated under BRAC's graduation approach to ultra-poverty

Disability Inclusive Graduation, Uganda

- 11) BRAC, Humanity & Inclusion and National Union of Women with Disabilities of Uganda (NUWODU) are implementing a disability-inclusive ultra-poor graduation programme (DIG) in Northern Uganda. Specifically, the project is helping 2,700 people who are living in ultra-poverty. Of those, 17% (459) are people with disabilities and 87% (2,349) are women.
- 12) The project has been funded by UK Aid, Cartier Philanthropy, Medicor Foundation and the National Lottery Community Fund (NLCF). The project succeeded in receiving funding from the UK Government because it met their stated priorities on disability inclusion. The FCDO has now informed BRAC that their contribution to the project will cease, giving 90 days notice, leaving a funding gap of approximately £500,000. BRAC's UK office is proactively approaching its network of donors to fill the gap and enable the project to continue.
- 13) Without the FCDO funding, the scope of the project will be reduced to a point where all participants will experience a reduction in ongoing support, threatening the ability of 2,700 people to graduate out of extreme poverty. The project provides training, stipend support and an asset that can be used to help people earn an income and lift themselves out of poverty. This cut means that 784 people will not receive any of these services and 459 people with disabilities will no longer receive assistive devices. The remaining participants have received their main assets but 1,150 will not receive their secondary assets and may no longer benefit from training and stipend support. Without this support, people may struggle to manage the assets that they have already received, the assets may die or be sold off, and participants will be put at further and severe disadvantage.
- 14) In BRAC's experience, those living in extreme poverty are often experiencing a lack of self-esteem and feelings of hopelessness. This cut is particularly heartbreaking for the 784 participants who have been promised and offered the hope of graduating from extreme poverty, only to have it taken away from them with 90 days notice.

- 15) PENDA (Programme for Evidence to Inform Disability Action) is a consortium led by the International Centre for Evidence in Disability at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine. They have been leading an external evaluation into the DIG project as part of their wider FCDO funded efforts to gather evidence to achieve the long-term improved wellbeing and inclusion of people with disabilities in low and middle income countries. In [a letter to support BRAC's fundraising efforts](#) to replace the FCDO funds, they wrote:

“Wasted funds and opportunities to gather evidence: The PENDA grant from FCDO, of which we are the leads, aims to improve the evidence on what works in disability-inclusive development. The cancellation of the BRAC DIG project means that we lose the opportunity for learning of a potentially impactful intervention and waste resources, as the baseline has already been conducted through PENDA.”

Other programmes

- 16) We are awaiting news on other contracts including the **Girls Education Challenge-Transition (GEC-T)** programme in Afghanistan and the **Disability Inclusive Development (DID)** contract in Bangladesh and Nepal, for which BRAC is partner in a consortium led by Sightsavers and currently has activities in Bangladesh, having previously had activities in Nepal.

Our partnership with the UK Government

- 17) We continue to see ourselves as a partner of the UK Government, and believe in both the proven impact and the potential of ‘Global Britain’. We remain ready to deliver against our shared development objectives and to exchange learning directly from the communities we serve. We will uphold our promise to ‘Leave No one Behind’.