Research Study: Documenting the development and implementation of the Strategic Partnership Arrangement (SPA) between BRAC, DFID and DFAT

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Acronyms	
AHC	Australian High Commission
AusAID	Australian Agency for International Development (now DFAT)
BRICS	Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa
CBO	Community-Based Organisation
CEP	BRAC Community Empowerment Programme
CHC	Canadian High Commission
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
DBRs	District BRAC Representatives
DFAT	Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
DFID	Department for International Development (UKAid)
DLO	Donor Liaison Office (BRAC)
EMC	Executive Management Committee (BRAC)
GoB	Government of Bangladesh
HRLS	Human Rights and Legal Aid Services
IAU	BRAC Impact Assessment Unit
IDP	Integrated Development Programme
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
LIC	Low Income Country
LSE	London School of Economics
MDG	Millennium Development Goal
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MIC	Middle Income Country
MNCH	Maternal, New-born and Child Health
MTR	Mid-Term Review
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
RED	BRAC Research and Evaluation Division
SDDirect SDG	Social Development Direct
SPA	Sustainable Development Goal
ToE	Strategic Partnership Arrangement
ToR	Terms of Engagement Terms of Reference
VfM	Value for Money
WASH	Water, Sanitation & Hygiene
	water, Janitation & Hygiene



#### **Executive Summary**

As one of the world's largest and most celebrated NGOs, BRAC has long attracted avid attention and support from international donors. In 2011, a Strategic Partnership Arrangement (SPA) was launched between BRAC, the UK Department for International Development (DFID) and the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT). Under the terms of the SPA, DFID and DFAT committed £358 million in core funding (£226 million from DFID and £132 million from DFAT) over a five-year period, 2011-2015. This research report, commissioned by the partners and produced by Social Development Direct, has found that the SPA is a unique experiment in development cooperation that represents globally significant innovation in donor collaboration with a Southern NGO based on core budget support and a stated aspiration for a more equal partnership.

International development assistance has come under pressure in recent years as the perceived failure of traditional aid, combined with the recent global financial crisis, has intensified the pursuit of new, more effective forms of development cooperation. Partnership is a recurring theme in the current dialogue on aid effectiveness and the post-2015 development agenda. The proposed Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), to be launched at a UN summit meeting in September 2015, endorse a revitalisation of partnerships. Proposed SDG Goal 17 aims to advance 'multi-stakeholder partnerships that mobilize and share knowledge, expertise, technologies and financial resources to support the achievement of sustainable development goals in all countries, particularly developing countries.' Goal 17 will 'encourage and promote effective public, public-private, and civil society partnerships, building on the experience and resourcing of partnerships.'

As global leaders move towards endorsement of the SDGs, the story of the SPA is an evocative case study in the power of partnerships. BRAC is in many ways a uniquely qualified and credible civil society partner for donors with impressive coverage – it is estimated that BRAC reaches 138 million people in Bangladesh and 10 other countries (through BRAC International). It has an enviable track record of delivery capacity, high quality leadership, financial probity and 'value for money' on donor investments. Tracing the evolution of the partnership from 2008 to present, the SPA research study found that the development of the SPA was motivated largely by pragmatic and opportunity-based concerns, and not by a pre-conceived theoretical model of partnership. The central objectives at the start were to achieve greater efficiencies and to lower programme transaction costs for all parties. But as the partnership developed, the study observed, it has showcased good practice models and thinking about development partnerships.

Research confirms that the SPA was made possible by strong pre-existing relationships of trust between the partners. From its inception, SPA partners mobilised 'bridging leaders' – 'the right people at the right time' – to broker the strategic partnership. With its provision of core budget support within an agreed strategic framework, the SPA has sparked a shift in focus among the partners from activities to development outcomes. It offers opportunities for richer, more systematic technical and policy engagement between the partners, increased funding flexibility in responding to shared development priorities, and higher level, more strategic dialogue between the partners. As BRAC grows its programmes and nurtures a new generation of leaders, the SPA has provides critical support to organisational development and governance, stronger monitoring, research and evaluation systems, and innovation.

Drawing on documentary evidence and feedback from people active at all levels of the partnership over an 18 month period, the research study found that SPA has contributed substantially to a range of gains and benefits. Significant cost savings, management efficiencies and lower partner transaction costs have been achieved. BRAC's CFO has calculated that BRAC alone has saved more than \$2.3 million over five years that would



otherwise have been spent on donor and programme management costs. Donors have generated substantial returns – for example, BRAC is now DFID's largest single organisational contributor of reportable development results. Providing a more predictable and flexible single source of financing, the SPA has given BRAC greater freedom to set its own funding and programme priorities. A unified programme results framework was created as well as a more standardised BRAC monitoring and evaluation system. By devolving programme funding approvals to BRAC, the SPA has enabled better, more strategic programme planning and longer term thinking in BRAC.

SPA donors have made strategic investments in an accelerated, transformative organisational development and capacity development process in BRAC. To counter the tendency towards programme silos and fragmentation experienced by many large or fast-growing NGOs, BRAC has fostered a value-based culture of 'One BRAC' as well as an integrated development approach. As one BRAC leader said, 'BRAC is developing as an institution, not as a collection of programmes and projects.' A strategic human resource framework has been introduced, including a new performance management system. Concurrently, the SPA has supported strategic thinking about BRAC's sustainability and succession planning.

The strategic partnership has extended BRAC's programme coverage in new and remote parts of Bangladesh. It has also brought a sea change for previously 'hard to fund' programmes in human rights, community empowerment, gender, women and girls. According to BRAC's Director for Gender Justice and Diversity, more secure funding 'has brought rights-based work to the centre of the organisation.' Over 95% of BRAC stakeholders surveyed in 2015 reported impressive progress on programmes to improve the status of women and girls. SPA funds have been pivotal to the creation of BRAC's Migration Programme, promoting 'safe migration' and the rights of migrant workers, reaching over 1 million people, and potentially lifting millions more out of poverty over coming years.

While, as one BRAC leader put it, 'innovation is inherent in BRAC's culture,' the SPA has supported the creation of new institutional mechanisms in BRAC to strengthen a practice of innovation, including an Innovation Fund, the Social Innovation Lab and the Impact Assessment Unit. The range of BRAC innovations is growing, with increasing numbers of initiatives showing 'proof of concept' and being taken to scale across Bangladesh.

Striking examples of innovation include the development of a mobile phone application as a platform for women and girls to access vital information and make their voices heard on issues that affect their lives; a cost-effective integrated development programme that addresses the multiple dimensions of poverty and vulnerability; a new skills development programme that is already proving its worth by moving large numbers of disadvantaged youth into jobs; and a national nutrition programme that mobilises an integrated response across BRAC programmes.

Aligned closely to national development priorities, the SPA has strengthened policy advocacy and engagement with government, at both district and national levels. To broker better coordination with government, civil society and the media at local level, BRAC has introduced a system of District BRAC Representatives (DBRs). The DBRS are managed and supported by BRAC's Partnership Strengthening Unit (PSU), established in 2011, that works nationally to build relationships and collaboration with government agencies, NGOs, media and other stakeholders.

Advocacy efforts with government are premised on demonstrating programme impact and effectiveness on the ground. By working closely with government and other development partners, BRAC is able to leverage policy influence, more resources and collaborative action



around priority needs and issues. For example, through its WASH programme BRAC is working with government in 300 *upazilas* around TB prevention services, access to treatment and treatment compliance in hard-to-reach areas. Community-based health workers play a critical role in the TB initiative and the approach is generating huge positive impacts. BRAC is actively engaging with government through workshops and events in order to share experience and scale up this model. Similar success stories in school sanitation, through provision of improved latrine facilities in 5,000 schools, are being shared with government to promote replication across the education system.

A participatory partner self-assessment process conducted as part of the research study indicates good progress and satisfaction levels around key indicators of partnership health. Among the shared benefits identified were high quality information sharing among the SPA partners; greater mutual confidence and shared responsibility; increased access to top leadership and decision-makers; and increased collective access to global platforms and deliberations.

The SPA is relatively young and remains a work in progress. The partners have faced some challenges in building inclusive ownership across the partner organisations; in realising the SPA's full potential for more strategic engagement, technical exchange and learning; and in sustaining momentum around collaboration. But evidence suggests that a firm foundation has been built. As one partnership leader said, 'we have now put in the plumbing – it's time to turn on the water.' Looking to the future, BRAC, DFID and DFAT have articulated an emerging vision of the SPA as a 'knowledge partnership.' There is little doubt that the combined potential of the partners – in experience, networks, influence, data, proven capacity for practical innovation at scale, and possibilities for wider collaboration on research – could produce a powerful, globally significant knowledge partnership.

The SPA is a significant innovation in development partnership and it has generated rich lessons (summarise in the final chapter of this study) that can inform wider international learning and practice. Perhaps the most important lesson is that more equitable development partnerships are possible; but they are not built from formulaic, 'off the shelf' designs. Bridging leadership is required. New skills for partnership, reflection and collective action must be nurtured. Old aid paradigms must be shifted to create space for a new culture of collaboration. An authentic common vision as well as shared values must be forged, and renewed over time, through sustained dialogue and negotiation

As one DFID leader observed,

It is possible, over time, to change the nature of the relationship from one in which a donors buys results from an implementing organisation to something that more closely resembles a genuine partnership between equals, all of whom bring something to the table. But this requires vision and commitment, a willingness to take risks, and that donors be willing to cede some power and control to partners.

In partnership with DFID and DFAT, BRAC continues to challenge traditional expectations and stereotypes of the role of NGOs and their relationships with donors and government. The story of the SPA speaks directly to new global goals and targets for sustainable development partnerships. Sharing evidence from the SPA would help to push the boundaries of conventional mind sets and practice for the post-2015 era of development collaboration.



#### **1. Introduction**

#### a. Background

In January 2014, DFID Bangladesh engaged Social Development Direct (SDDirect) to undertake a research study to document the development, added value and lessons learnt from the Strategic Partnership Arrangement (SPA) between BRAC, DFID and the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT). Under the terms of the SPA, DFID and DFAT have committed £358 million in core funding (£226 million from DFID and £132 million from DFAT) over the period 2011-2015. Within the broad parameters of this innovative partnership arrangement, BRAC can make its own decisions about how to spend these funds. By exploring the evolution of the SPA to date, assessing its benefits and tracking its contribution to BRAC's development programmes (as well as the shared and individual objectives of the partners), this study mobilises evidence that can assist BRAC, DFID and DFAT to improve future programme and partnership decisions. The study also aims to contribute to the wider body of evidence on good partnership practice and development effectiveness.

The SPA represents a new way of working for the partners and a significant innovation in wider development partnership practice. Key distinguishing features are a delivery of more flexible core funding, an emphasis on shared goals rather than donor-driven requirements, a focus on collaboration around higher level outcomes, and commitment to faster progress in the achievement of shared development goals.

At the core of the SPA and its provision of core funding to BRAC are the following intentions and expectations<sup>1</sup>:

- Reduce the transaction costs of aid.
- Facilitate greater focus of the partnership on higher level outcomes.
- Improve the partners' use of evidence and results in programme decisions.
- Support BRAC's internal change management processes, organisational development and governance.
- Enable BRAC to be more strategic and sustainable.
- Support BRAC to develop a more holistic response to poverty reduction and learning by building synergies across its various priority sectors and programmes.
- Increase strategic engagement between BRAC and its partners to ensure sharing of knowledge, learning and expertise.

#### b. Objectives of the study and key research questions

In summary, the objectives of the research study are:

- To facilitate a participatory assessment of the SPA and its effectiveness in contributing to its agreed objectives, as well as an analysis of this partnership model as an innovation in development cooperation;
- To determine whether the gains from core funding and the partnership are additional to what would have been achieved through funding discrete programmes (that is, the pre-SPA model) and whether expectations of BRAC, DFAT and DFID, as recorded in design documents, have been realised.

A key research theme is *partnership development and lessons learned*, the study focuses on reasons for establishing the partnership, its development in early stages, key individuals involved, organisational processes that supported the development of the SPA, and the extent to which the SPA Reflects current thinking and best practice in 'innovative partnerships for sustainable development around the world.' The study also reviews the '*additionality' of the partnership*, including benefits and transaction costs, significant

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> BRAC/DFID/AusAID Strategic Partnership Arrangement (SPA) - Terms of Engagement (2011)

benefits and 'added value' to the partners, contribution to BRAC's programme effectiveness, difference and changes to BRAC programmes made possible by the SPA, contribution to BRAC's longer term sustainability plans, impact of the SPA beyond its primary stakeholders, behaviours of partners that are promoting or hindering the SPA's objectives, and unintended consequences (positive or negative).

### c. Conceptual framework

The research methodology draws on partnership thinking and analytical tools<sup>2</sup> and other current literature on aid effectiveness, multi-donor funding partnerships and innovative partnerships for sustainable development.

The SDDirect team made particular reference to the partnership conceptual frameworks and 'lifecycles' developed by two of the leading resource and thought centres on multistakeholder partnerships: the Synergos Institute and the Partnering Initiative<sup>3</sup>. The team also worked with partners to test the SPA's performance against the following seven key principles, distilled from general partnership principles developed by Synergos and the Partnering Initiative, as well as the results framework for the SPA and principles set out in the Partnership Assessment Tool developed by the Strategic Partnering Taskforce in the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (UK) in 2003:<sup>4</sup>

- Equity, Joint Purpose and Mutual Respect
- Collaborative Governance, Trust and Transparency
- Mutual Benefit
- Joint Evaluation and Learning
- Effective Communications and Sharing of Knowledge
- Human Capacity Development
- Resource Mobilisation and Sustainability

### d. Methods and approach

SDDirect has applied a mixed methods research approach including a desk-based review, in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with key partners and stakeholders, a facilitated participatory self-assessment of the partnership, and an initial online self-assessment survey.

Throughout the research process, the SDDirect team applied a collaborative stakeholder engagement approach, convening dialogue and interaction with and between key actors in the SPA. The team's methodology was one of participatory inquiry, combining collection of feedback from key informant interviews, online survey results and a facilitated self-assessment process. These results were compared to desk-based findings and selected literature on development partnerships and aid effectiveness.<sup>5</sup> The stakeholder survey instrument (and data from interviews and focus groups) allowed for generation of quantifiable data by disaggregating responses from different kinds of stakeholders, tabulation of responses to questions that include ranking or scoring, and generation of percentages, graphs and tables, etc., to map the results of survey research work.



<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> This includes Tennyson, R. (2011) *The Partnering Toolbook – An Essential Guide to Cross-Sector Partnering*, The Partnering Initiative; Tennyson, R. and S MacManus (2008) *Talking the Walk: A Communication Manual for Partnership Practitioners*, The Partnering Initiative; The Synergos Institute (2009) *Synergos Inclusive Partnerships Lifecycle;* Strategic Partnership Taskforce in collaboration with the Nuffield Institute and the Office of the UK Deputy Prime Minister (2003) *Assessing Strategic Partnership – The Partnership Assessment Tool* 

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> The Synergos Institute (2009) *Inclusive Partnerships Lifecycle* and The Partnering Initiative (2015) *Partnering Cycle*, see www.thepartneringinitiative.org

www.thepartneringinitiative.org
 <sup>4</sup> Strategic Partnership Taskforce in collaboration with the Nuffield Institute and the Office of the UK Deputy Prime Minister (2003) Assessing Strategic Partnership: The Partnership Assessment Tool

SDDirect aimed as much as possible to build co-ownership of research findings with partners, based on the assumption that the products of the research study will carry weight and command wider attention in direct proportion to the quality of collective reflection and self-assessment by the partners themselves.

To capture progress of the partnership, the study was divided into two phases: January-April 2014 and January-June 2015.<sup>6</sup> A follow-up survey and selected interviews with stakeholders and partners were convened roughly one year after the initial field interviews and workshops in February/March 2014 to provide an updated partnership 'health check' and to track further progress and changes. Two draft interim reports were submitted to DFID and the SPA partners, presenting the findings over these periods. These also fed into a SPA partners' 'visioning workshop' in May 2015, attended by SDDirect's Team Leader to present key findings and gather further insights to inform this final research report.

### e. Limitations

Since the SPA has only been operating for a relatively short time and wider public engagement around the partnership has been limited, the number of informed stakeholders in the wider development community, in Bangladesh and internationally, is relatively limited. Thus the number of informants to the research among Bangladeshi CSOs, the Government of Bangladesh and international development agencies were few.

The research scope does not include a systematic VfM analysis. However, drawing on existing documentation and available evidence from the study, this report attempts to illustrate, and where possible quantify, the transaction costs and added value from the partnership.

#### 2. The Strategic Partnership in context

International development assistance has come under pressure in recent years as the perceived failure of traditional aid, combined with the global financial crisis, has intensified the pursuit of new, more effective forms of development cooperation. Partnership is a recurring theme in the discourse on aid effectiveness and the post-2015 development agenda. For example, one of the core principles of the *Busan Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation* (2011) is:

*Inclusive development partnerships*: Openness, trust, and mutual respect and learning lie at the core of effective partnerships in support of development goals, recognising the different and complementary roles of all actors.

The aspiration to be more effective through new and better partnerships is echoed in Principle 6 of the *Istanbul Principles for CSO Development Effectiveness*, adopted by a global assembly of civil society development organisations in 2010:

*Pursue equitable partnerships and solidarity*: CSOs are effective as development actors when they... commit to transparent relationships with CSOs and other development actors, freely and as equals, based on shared development goals and values, mutual respect, trust, organizational autonomy, long-term accompaniment, solidarity and global citizenship.

The proposed post-2015 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) endorse a 'revitalisation' of partnerships. The draft SDG 17 (*Strengthen the Means of Implementation and* 

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> The initial phase of the research process (January-April 2014) overlapped with the first stage of the SPA Mid-Term Review (MTR). SDDirect worked closely with DFID and other partners to map the ToR for the SPA research study and the MTR and clarify the distinctive briefs of the two processes to minimise any duplication.

*Revitalize the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development*), includes the following targets in regard to multi-stakeholder partnerships:<sup>7</sup>

- 17.16 Enhance the global partnership for sustainable development complemented by multi-stakeholder partnerships that mobilize and share knowledge, expertise, technologies and financial resources to support the achievement of sustainable development goals in all countries, particularly developing countries
- 17.17 Encourage and promote effective public, public-private, and civil society partnerships, building on the experience and resourcing of partnerships.

Concurrent with the belief in the power of partnerships is a preoccupation with innovation. The landscape of development assistance has changed dramatically and there is a growing consensus that changing circumstances require new ways of working. Since 2000, 26 countries have moved from low-income country (LIC) to middle-income country (MIC) status. In Bangladesh, the government forecasts attainment of MIC status by 2021. Despite this seemingly positive trend, it is now widely acknowledged that the majority of people living in chronic or extreme poverty live in MICs. A wider, more diverse set of actors have come into play in international development, including: 'big philanthropy' (such as the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and the Open Society Foundations); 'new philanthropy' (social impact investors, social venture capital funds, networks promoting social entrepreneurship and social enterprise, diaspora philanthropy, etc.); private sector and business players (global corporate donors, businesses engaged in public-private partnerships, and issue-based business alliances.); BRICS countries engaging in direct South-South 'aid and trade' cooperation (Brazil, India, China and South Africa); global North-South civil society development alliances (like Oxfam International, ActionAid, etc.); 'people to people' giving and lending sites (like Global Giving and Kiva); and Southern-based NGOs with international development arms, notably BRAC through BRAC International.

As well as new actors, new (and not-so-new) approaches have proliferated, such as:

- Results-based management and 'results-based aid'
- Value for money (VfM) 'doing more with less'
- 'Cost-recovery' financing and social impact investment
- Public-private and multi-stakeholder partnerships
- Differentiated funding (varied aid mechanisms for countries according to their needs)
- Budget support and pooled funds
- Direct Northern donor development support to Southern NGOs
- Global thematic funds (including 'challenge funds')
- Funding of South-South development cooperation
- Development innovation though application of new technologies and social media
- Support to civil society policy engagement with governments, and regional and global institutions

In this shifting global landscape, BRAC is an exceptional NGO by most measures. Established as a small relief organisation in 1972, by 2013 BRAC employed nearly 120,000 reached an estimated 138 million people globally.<sup>8</sup> Working with and alongside the Government of Bangladesh at the grassroots level, BRAC manages programmes covering a wide range of issues, from microfinance, education, health, climate change and food security to community empowerment, human rights and gender justice. It is, by many accounts, the largest development NGO in the world. It has also launched a range of social enterprises designed to address its mission and national development priorities through market

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> UN Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform (2015), *Open Working Group Proposal for Sustainable Development Goals*, <u>https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdgsproposal#goal17</u>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> BRAC (2013) BRAC at a Glance: Global Headline Figures as of September 2013

mechanisms as well as to generate surpluses that can be ploughed back into BRAC's development programmes.

BRAC has a longstanding tradition of innovation – prototyping new initiatives, learning through doing, and adapting through trial and error. Its extreme poverty programme has already lifted over a million households out of chronic poverty.<sup>9</sup> BRAC manages the world's largest non-formal school system, which typically produces better academic results for students than the state system.<sup>10</sup> Its maternal health programme has contributed to achieving Bangladesh's Millennium Development Goal (MDG) targets for maternal and child health ahead of the deadline.<sup>11</sup> All of this has been enabled by the outstanding leadership of the Founder, Sir Fazle Hasan Abed and his senior management team, a 'zero tolerance' approach to corruption, and transparent management and financial systems that yield enviable value for money and results at scale.

As one of the most celebrated laboratories for development innovation, BRAC has attracted avid attention and support from international donors. It is unsurprising that BRAC has become the focus for a unique experiment in core budget funding for a Southern-based NGO – the BRAC/DFID/DFAT Strategic Partnership Arrangement. In microcosm, BRAC and the SPA encompass many of the current trends and new approaches in development assistance. The progress, added value and future of the SPA are of intrinsic significance for wider deliberations on development effectiveness and partnerships for sustainable development.

#### 3. The development of the partnership

#### a. Why was the partnership established?

The development of the SPA was largely motivated by pragmatic and opportunity-based concerns rather than a pre-conceived theoretical model of partnership. Evidence from documents reviewed and dialogue with partner informants suggests a great deal of commonality among the two donor partners about why the SPA was established. Key shared motivations of DFID and DFAT to engage in a strategic partnership included:

- To achieve greater efficiencies and lower programme transaction costs for all parties.
- It was felt by both donors for various reasons that 'the time was ripe' for a different way of collaborating with BRAC.
- Both donors had a strong pre-existing relationship with BRAC as a trusted partner that contributed significantly to their local and global development results.
- BRAC was a uniquely qualified and credible partner it was difficult for respondents to think of any other civil society partner with the same combination of delivery capacity, track record, maturity, high quality leadership, management systems and capacity, and impeccable credentials in relation to financial probity and transparency.
- Possibility of a richer, more systematic technical and policy engagement with BRAC.
- Increased funding flexibility, efficiency and agility in responding to shared priorities.
- As BRAC continued to expand and move towards a critical leadership succession, the SPA was an effective way to support organisational development and governance, stronger monitoring and evaluation systems, and innovation.
- Both DFID and DFAT saw the SPA as an entry point for higher level, more strategic engagement with BRAC, with each other, and with other key development players.

DFID was particularly animated by the need to build more predictable spending capacity into its Bangladesh programme, while DFID Bangladesh's leadership had an appetite to test a

<sup>11</sup> See BRAC (2013) Annual Report 2012, and Saleh (2013) Reaching Scale through Partnership

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup>Saleh (2013) Reaching Scale through Partnership

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> Nath (2002) School Evaluation Mechanism in BRAC Education Programme

civil society core funding model with a major Southern NGO. Concurrently, DFID was coming under pressure to derive greater VfM from its programme investments. The SPA offered opportunities for DFID to secure a substantial share of BRAC's high quality results to bolster the return on its aid investment in Bangladesh. In 2008, DFID commissioned a review of its strategy for engagement with BRAC. The review recommended a move to a '100% unrestricted core funding/budget support' arrangement, inspired in part by existing Partnership Programme Arrangements with UK-based and international NGOs.<sup>12</sup>

In the case of DFAT, the possibility of joining the strategic partnership emerged from a direct approach from DFID, with which it had already developed a close relationship. The SPA provided an opportunity for DFAT to strengthen this 'key partnership'. At the same time, DFAT's interest was driven by unforeseen Bangladesh programme budget reductions in the period leading up to the SPA, which would have repercussions for funding to BRAC. Through a core funding relationship, DFAT would be able to offer BRAC more flexibility in the short term to cope with reduced funding. Over the longer term, strategic core funding would potentially yield better development results by giving BRAC greater choice and control in the allocation of DFAT resources.

Those managing the DFAT Bangladesh programme were keen to learn more from BRAC's experience and to create a qualitatively different relationship, more closely approximating a 'true partnership.' By letting BRAC take the lead around its own programme priorities, DFAT aspired to refocus its relationship much more at the level of development outcomes. There was also an operational interest to enable greater harmonisation of BRAC's donor reporting, internal institutional strengthening process, and greater integration of BRAC's programmes.

For BRAC, the initial discussion about the SPA was a pragmatic response to DFID's suggestion of a restructured partnership based on core funding. But as the conversation unfolded, BRAC leaders came to see exciting possibilities for a new level of fair, mutually beneficial exchange – as a BRAC member of the SPA Core Group put it, 'the SPA donor partners give us funding and we give them the results,' with manifold opportunities for a deeper collaboration beyond funding. As the SPA discussion progressed, BRAC's leadership became increasingly convinced it represented a significant departure from conventional 'donor-driven' development – enabling BRAC to 'test drive' a unique funding and collaboration arrangement between a large Southern NGO and Northern donor partners.

BRAC informants identified a wide range of underlying reasons and motivations that drove the partnership-building process forward:

- A high degree of donor confidence in BRAC, its delivery of results, financial management systems and capacity for M&E.
- The prospect of reduced transaction costs and increased effectiveness of financing.
- With combined financing amounting to about 60% of BRAC's donor funding, the initial five years of core funding from the SPA would provide considerable stability, predictability and resilience to BRAC and its programmes.
- The possibility of higher level, more strategic engagement and dialogue with DFID and DFAT, and the potential to learn jointly and access their expertise and experience.
- While BRAC and its Founder have a long-standing presence on the world stage, the SPA offered opportunities for even greater global exposure.
- The SPA would offer BRAC more freedom and responsibility to decide on its own priorities and allocation of donor resources.

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup> Scott (2008) DFID Bangladesh's Strategy for Engagement with BRAC: Phase 1, An Analysis of the Options

- The partnership was an opportunity to develop BRAC's programmes and the organisation as a whole in an integrated way rather than as a diverse collection of projects and initiatives.
- The SPA was a major opportunity to acquire and use donor funds for organisational development and capacity-building.
- BRAC would gain greater scope for innovation 'BRAC has always prided itself on being ahead of the curve, and the SPA helps with this,' said a senior BRAC manager.

#### b. Key individual drivers and organisational processes

Key literature on partnerships and partnership-building stresses the importance of leadership, champions and partnership 'brokers.' According to the Partnering Initiative's Toolbook, an effective, resilient partnership needs 'a strong foundation of individual commitment to partnering' and the conviction that a partnership approach is required to achieve shared objectives. Across a range of international experience, there is strong evidence that partnership brokers/intermediaries can assist in convening and catalysing structured collaboration. The Partnering Initiative defines a broker/intermediary as:

An individual selected (either from one of the partner organisations or from outside the partnership) to act on behalf of the partners to build and strengthen the partnership – especially in its early stages.<sup>13</sup>

The partnership building process also needs high level champions with the stature, political will and legitimacy to bring partners together and invite or license them to find common ground for shared purpose. Successful partnerships are often forged when a core convening or holding group is formed by the partners and empowered with sufficient time, responsibility and resources to move the partnership forward (through what may be a protracted period of negotiation and gestation). While accountable to the larger partnership stakeholder group, such a core group can act as 'keepers of the flame', holding the wider vision of the partnership and sustaining both energy and momentum which may otherwise dissipate in the day-to-day bustle of individual partner business. Beyond the core group, a diversity of talents and leadership capacities must be assembled among the partners to tackle the many challenges and technical issues that will inevitably arise.

From leader as	To leader as
Commander and controller	Facilitator and convener
Sole owner of the problem and	Prime mover, but a co-owner of the problem and solution
the solution	
Having all the answers	Creator of the conditions where answers emerge
A single intelligence	Focuser of collection attention and the distiller of collective
	intelligence
Head of one organization	Ligament between organizations and institutions
Holder of power	Distributor of power, enabler of new things to emerge
Expert	Non-expert, mobilizing the expertise and inner- knowing of others
Stoic	Authentic and emotionally open

The Synergos Institute has highlighted the critical role of 'bridging leaders,' contrasting a 'bridging leadership style' with 'command and control' leadership as outlined below:<sup>14</sup>

Evidence from our research confirms that the prospective SPA partners were both fortunate and wise enough to have bridging leaders – 'the right people at the right time' – working to establish the partnership. A pivotal founding role was played by Chris Austin, then DFID's Bangladesh Country Representative, who first conceived of the SPA and then initiated

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>13</sup> Tennyson (2011) The Partnering Toolbook, pp. 19-20

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>14</sup> The Synergos Institute (2012) Ten Lessons on Multi-Stakeholder Partnerships, p.9

seminal discussions about a strategic partnership over the course of 2008/2009 with Sir Fazle Hasan Abed, BRAC's internationally renowned Founder and Chairperson, and Dr Mahabub Hossain, BRAC's Executive Director until Dec 2013. When DFAT was invited into the talks about partnership, the core group of senior level drivers and champions (the precursor to the current SPA Steering Committee) was enlarged to include Rachel Payne (then DFAT's Acting Counsellor, Development Cooperation), Mark Bailey (DFAT Regional Counsellor, South Asia, and subsequently Counsellor, Development Cooperation) and BRAC's Chief Financial Officer, SN Kairy.

Recognising the need for a 'partnership broker' to drive the SPA process, DFID appointed its Senior Programme Manager in Bangladesh, Jim McAlpine, to drive and convene the partnership-building negotiation process. In the course of the partnership research, stakeholders from all the partner organisations emphasised the important of this strategic investment in bridging leadership by DFID (Jim remained a key individual driver until his departure from Bangladesh in September 2012). After Jim's departure left, there was a hiatus and loss of momentum in the partnership building process until the appointment of a DFID Partnership Adviser (Bangladesh) from August 2013. The creation of the Partnership Adviser post, largely focused on facilitation and brokering support to the SPA, was a clear acknowledgement that devoted individual drivers and convenors are critical to the success of innovative development partnerships – nurturing high quality relationships, building trust and sustaining vision and energy among the partners.

At BRAC, Dr Hossain was, in the words of a senior DFAT leader, 'the indispensable champion' for the SPA. After his departure as Executive Director, this role was taken in by Dr Mushtaque Chowdhury (Vice-Chairperson and Interim Executive Director). The Head of BRAC's Donor Liaison Office (DLO), Andrew Jenkins, with support from DLO staff, provided crucial support to partnership development and led in the development of BRAC's new unified results framework, which has been a significant achievement of the SPA. On strategic communications and organisational transformation, both critical elements of the SPA, BRAC's Senior Director, Strategy, Communications and Capacity, Asif Saleh, has played a central role.

As the SPA moved into implementation, DFAT's core development cooperation team in Dhaka (Priya Powell, Counsellor, Jacqui Powell, First Secretary, Shahriar Islam, Programme Manager), has taken leadership in encouraging the move towards a more equitable, valuesbased and value-added partnership – going beyond the immediate objective of a more efficient funding model. DFAT provided accredited partnership brokers to facilitate a foundational joint partnership workshop, the development of the SPA Terms of Engagement and Donor Principles for Cooperation, and subsequent partnership 'health check,' review and reflection processes in 2012 and 2013. The partnership health check workshop in 2013 resulted in the decision to convene six-monthly SPA Steering Committee meetings to strengthen the engagement of senior-level champions in governance and strategic thinking for the SPA. DFAT has also invested in on-going technical support to BRAC on monitoring, evaluation and reporting systems.

The early inception and design work of the core team assigned to move the SPA forward in 2009-2010 was intense, with meetings happening as frequently as fortnightly. A conscious decision was made to do significant ground work before bringing wider stakeholders into the dialogue on the SPA, as the core team developed strong bonds of trust, openness and willingness to compromise. In retrospect, as the founders admit, there was a price to be paid for this fast-tracked process, in the form of lingering lack of buy-in from some programme directors, managers and advisers. Nonetheless, the agility and energy of the core team were a decisive factor in the successful launch of the SPA.



The core team evolved into the SPA Working Group, which includes implementation-level leaders from all three partners. With convening and coordinating support from the DFID Partnership Adviser, the Working Group meets regularly to monitor progress against work plans, deal with operational issues and review performance against partnership objectives.<sup>15</sup> The critical role of a core team throughout the formative period of the partnership cannot be over-emphasised. In the view of DFID's founding facilitator of the partnership process, Jim McAlpine, it would have been better if the SPA Working Group has been formally set up even earlier in the process.

Since the commencement of the SPA in 2011, there have been various personnel changes in the make-up of the SPA Working Group, particularly on the side of the donor partners. Periodic changes in donor agency staff are a structural challenge that is intrinsic to the SPA. Inevitably, it takes some time to bring new drivers of the process fully on board, particularly when they may be stretched across a range of other responsibilities. While in general the Working Group has worked well, it has not always been the best place to engage with senior leadership in dialogue about strategy, policy and shared vision for the SPA. Over the course of 2014/2015, the reactivation and re-energising of twice-yearly SPA Steering Committee meetings, chaired by Sir Fazle Hasan Abed, were an important advance in realising the potential for more robust high level conversations and engagement among the partners.

As the end of the initial five-year SPA financing agreements approaches, the partners have been focused increasingly on preparations agreeing new financing agreements from 2016. In August 2014, an SPA Mid-Term Review joint reflection process identified key programmatic priorities for the partnership as well as partner expectations for the period ahead.<sup>16</sup> In early 2015, BRAC drafted a new organisational strategy, which will be a centrepiece of the next phase of the SPA. The new draft strategy was presented formally to the partners at a partnership Visioning Workshop held in May 2015, where donor partners were invited to share their ideas and comments. Both DFAT and DFID have expressed interest in broadening the scope of the SPA in the next phase to include possible (non-financial) collaboration with the broader BRAC Group, including BRAC University, BRAC International and BRAC Enterprises. At the Visioning Workshop, the partners reviewed the SPA experience to date (drawing on the current partnership research), key issues for taking the partnership forward, updating the SPA Terms of Engagement, financing frameworks and communications.

#### c. The SPA, its development and good practice models

Evidence from the research study suggests that the SPA is a real (and, as far as we can ascertain, unique) innovation in donor collaboration with a Southern NGO based on core funding/budget support and the aspiration for more equal partnership. The SPA was inspired, in part, by donor framework agreements that provide unrestricted funding to Northern-based and international NGOs, particularly DFID's existing PPAs with UK-based and international NGOs.<sup>17</sup> While the PPA vehicle does support a number of international NGOs that include Southern-based member organisations, according to the UK Independent Commission for Aid Impact (ICAI) 2013 report on DFID's support through PPAs, only one of the 41 organisations supported through PPAs in the period 2011-2014 was a Southern-based partner (Gender Links, based in South Africa). The ICAI report found that, in practice, the PPAs have not operated as real partnerships as they tend to be administratively topheavy and DFID has, in ICAI's view, failed to realise the potential for genuine collaboration, including mutual sharing of knowledge, influence and expertise.<sup>18</sup> Certainly, none of the PPAs include the level of agreed aspiration for co-equal collaboration, strategic

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>15</sup> These are outlined in Level 4 of the Results Framework.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>16</sup> Mid-Term Review of the SPA Report, Part 2 (August 2014)

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>17</sup> See Scott (2008) DFID Bangladesh's Strategy for Engagement with BRAC: Phase 1, An Analysis of the Options

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>18</sup> ICAI (2013) DFID's Support for Civil Society Organisations through Programme Partnership Arrangements

engagement, knowledge-sharing and joint learning as set out in the SPA Terms of Engagement and the Results Framework.

As observed above, the SPA was not driven by partnership theory but was based primarily on pragmatic and opportunity-led concerns. Although the SPA was in some respects 'fasttracked' (and some informants regret that there was not more time available for the partnership-building process), the process has in many respects adhered to good practice models (including the partnership life cycles developed by the Partnering Initiative and the Synergos Institute – see Annex D). Following is a brief summary of how the SPA developed and how this process has compared to different phases of the partnership cycle.

Phases of the partnership cycle	Illustrative steps taken in the SPA partnership-building process
<ul> <li>Invitation, scoping, assembly and building</li> <li>Generate partnership idea</li> <li>Scope needs and options</li> <li>Identify potential partners</li> <li>Ensure legitimacy</li> <li>Situation research, assessing feasibility and possibilities</li> <li>Assemble and convene partners</li> <li>Build relationships</li> <li>Mapping, planning and initial goal-setting</li> <li>Make the case to decision- makers</li> <li>Develop and approve partnership arrangement</li> <li>Mobilise stakeholders and prepare for action</li> </ul>	<ul> <li>Idea generation, initially by DFID then with BRAC and AusAID</li> <li>Potential partners identified and 'invitation' to partnership originally extended by DFID to BRAC and AusAID</li> <li>Partnership needs and options scoped and mapped through dialogue between partners and specific studies/reports</li> <li>Legitimacy ensured by due diligence processes and securing support of high level champions in each organisation</li> <li>A core 'holding/working group' assembled with support from a devoted 'broker' from DFID</li> <li>Relationships, shared goals and plans developed through joint partnership workshops and sustained engagement of a Core Group</li> <li>Business cases, concept papers, peer review processes and submissions to decision-makers prepared and approvals secured</li> <li>Wider stakeholders within partner organisations informed/consulted</li> <li>Terms of Engagement agreed in late 2011 and signed in 2012</li> </ul>
<ul> <li>Dialogue and action, managing and maintaining</li> <li>Stakeholder dialogue</li> <li>Deepen organisational engagement</li> <li>Build governance and structures</li> <li>Build capacity of partners</li> <li>Problem-solve constructively</li> <li>Secure resource commitments</li> <li>Develop, launch and deliver programme innovations</li> <li>Delivery of projects/programmes</li> <li>Design and launch programme innovations</li> <li>Develop a communications plan</li> <li>Agree benchmarks for evaluation</li> </ul>	<ul> <li>Low-key media announcement/launch of partnership</li> <li>Engagement with wider stakeholders in partner organisations around implications and consequences of partnership</li> <li>Regular meetings of SPA Working Group</li> <li>Participation of donor partners in an annual meeting/consultation with BRAC Board</li> <li>Agreement to convene six-monthly senior level SPA Steering Committee meetings</li> <li>Donor resource commitments confirmed for period 2011 to 2015</li> <li>SPA results framework agreed, revised and reviewed</li> <li>New BRAC unified results framework developed</li> <li>Consultations on, and approval of, BRAC Strategy 2011- 2015</li> <li>BRAC Strategy 2016-2020 drafted and presented to SPA partners for input</li> <li>Sector consortia on thematic programme areas convened on a regular basis</li> <li>Visits of senior BRAC management to donor head offices</li> <li>Competitive internal project/programme approval process established by BRAC</li> <li>BRAC Social Innovation Lab and Impact Assessment Unit</li> </ul>



<ul> <li>Reviewing and revising</li> <li>Measuring results</li> <li>Agree evaluation procedures</li> <li>Assess impact of partnership</li> <li>Draw out and apply lessons</li> <li>Review efficiency and added value of partnership</li> <li>Brainstorm new ideas/developments</li> <li>Make necessary changes to programme and partnership arrangements</li> </ul>	<ul> <li>established</li> <li>SPA-funded programme innovations designed and rolled out</li> <li>BRAC internal organisation and capacity development programme underway</li> <li>Partnership skills training workshop convened</li> <li>SPA Terms of Engagement updated and reviewed</li> <li>SPA results framework reviewed and updated</li> <li>First Annual Partnership Review completed</li> <li>Partnership risk workshop convened and risk register formulated</li> <li>Financial systems and procurement reviews conducted</li> <li>Regular BRAC reporting on SPA-funded activities</li> <li>Successive DFID Annual Reviews of the SPA conducted</li> <li>Mid-Term Review of SPA jointly planned and undertaken</li> <li>Research study to document the SPA, lessons and added value commissioned</li> <li>Six-monthly Steering Committee meetings engaging senior staff and champions agreed and convened</li> <li>New priority programme themes agreed in 2014</li> <li>UK National Audit Office review of BRAC</li> <li>SPA Visioning Workshop held in May 2015 to set direction for the next phase of the partnership from 2016 to 2020</li> </ul>
<ul> <li>Sustaining outcomes</li> <li>Scaling and increasing impact</li> <li>Mainstream programme innovations</li> <li>Recognise and celebrate partnership achievements</li> <li>Share/communicate innovations and partnership lessons</li> <li>Identify and induct new partnership champions</li> <li>Build organisational and programme</li> <li>sustainability</li> <li>Support new institutional arrangements for development partnerships and social change</li> <li>Planning and management of further partnership development/adjustments (as well as eventual post-SPA future)</li> </ul>	<ul> <li>Scaling up of programme innovations</li> <li>Greater integration of BRAC programmes and a 'one BRAC' ethos taking hold</li> <li>Increased support for, and mainstreaming of, policy advocacy, human rights, community empowerment, gender and integrated development programmes</li> <li>Targets set for increased BRAC self-generated programme income</li> <li>Pilot efforts in place to test BRAC cost-recovery possibilities in education and health</li> <li>Major BRAC organisational development, HR, communications and capacity development initiative implemented</li> <li>Partnership research and documentation undertaken, with plans to disseminate key findings to a wider development stakeholder audience</li> <li>New senior champions for SPA inducted and brought on board</li> <li>BRAC leadership succession plans and processes supported, including recruitment of new Executive Director</li> <li>On-going efforts to diversify BRAC funding base and expand donor participation and representation in the SPA</li> <li>Agreement to widen scope of SPA from 2016 to include BRAC University and other BRAC entities</li> <li>Agreement to step up joint communications and advocacy to share experience and innovations of the SPA with a wider international audience</li> </ul>

#### d. Partnership reviews and due diligence processes

As the process for renewing SPA financing commitments and agreements moves forward, there has been a heavy schedule of review and due diligence processes in 2014-2015, including a Mid-Term Review of the SPA, carried out in two phases in March and August 2014 – with a three-person team nominated by the partner institutions, first assessing



evidence of progress in BRAC systems and organisation over the term of the partnership to date; and then gathering evidence on changes in emphasis or direction, and preparation for future cooperation between partners.<sup>19</sup> The MTR found that BRAC has continued to build on its traditional strengths, using opportunities available within the SPA to refocus where necessary on promotion of rights and emerging poverty issues – and the pursuit of its own organisational change process. Further findings indicate that BRAC M&E systems are well-developed and reliable, with information being generated by monitoring and research being used to improve programme implementation.<sup>20</sup>

The MTR reflection process was informed by an SPA Steering Committee meeting in May 2014 that identified priority programmatic themes for further partner collaboration as 1) skills development, 2) nutrition, 3) women and girls (gender) and 4) the 'golden thread' between open society and open economy (governance). There is broad agreement among the partners around these themes, and it was agreed to form joint task teams on these four themes. Identifying the need for a clearer analysis of the scope and significance of BRAC's contribution to national development outcomes, the partners agreed to refer this task to a new working group on results and evidence.

Noting that DFID and DFAT already share political economy analysis to inform forthcoming Bangladesh country strategies, the MTR provided a platform for a robust partner discussion of the emerging challenges in the national development context, such as growing inequality, lagging state capacity, lack of state accountability to citizens, and moves to restrict the space for civil society action. Looking to a further phase of the SPA, the partners resolved to develop 'an evidence-based narrative' to explain more clearly (particularly to the wider constituencies of DFID and DFAT) how BRAC service provision, social mobilisation and rights activities enables poor people to exercise active citizenship – and how this advances poverty reduction. The work will be taken forward by a partners' governance task team. So far, three task teams have been activated covering: Gender; Results and Evidence; and Finance.

The initiative to capture BRAC's approach to active citizenship and accountability is a significant outcome, not just for the partners and their constituents, but also for the wider international development community. Despite BRAC's renown as a leading Southern-based NGO, there is little understanding of the wider ramifications of its work for governance, citizen voice and rights. There are persistent myths about BRAC. It is sometimes caricatured as an enormous service provision machine, with marginal engagement around policy change and broader civic action. The MTR identified three other myths, namely that BRAC does not work with government, BRAC and the government do not talk and BRAC is a 'shadow government'.

The proposed evidenced-based narrative may progress dispelling such myths. Since there are still gaps in the global evidence of links between active citizenship, social accountability strategies and more responsive public services, it is important to understand better the effectiveness of BRAC's wide-scale approach to citizen empowerment through rights-based service delivery. As a bridging organisation that has carved out a unique position of influence, access and credibility with both the state and civil society in Bangladesh, BRAC sees itself as having a very specific contribution to make in the public sphere (generating evidence, learning through trial and error, testing and scaling up innovative models of service provision, partnering with government to institutionalise new policy and delivery approaches, convening multi-stakeholder policy dialogue, and nurturing other purpose-built CSOs that can provide platforms for citizen voice, campaigning and advocacy (and are

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>19</sup> DFID Annual Review of the SPA (3 March-17 March 2015)

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>20</sup> For more detailed findings, see Chowdhury et al. (2014) Mid-Term Review of the SPA Report, Part 1 (March 2014) and Part 2 (August 2014)

better placed to do so). However, in collaboration with its partners, BRAC is moving forward with work around rights, advocacy, gender, migration, and urban policy. A stronger evidence-based narrative or theory of change about active citizenship is needed to guide this trajectory – and will be of intrinsic interest to a wider community of practice around governance, voice and accountability.

In March 2015, DFID undertook a 2014-2015 Annual Review of the SPA, showing improved performance with an overall programme score of A+ (moderately exceeding expectations) – up from the 2012/13 and 2013/14 scores of A in each year (met expectations). The Review team confirmed that The SPA is an innovative funding mechanism, delivering impressive development results at scale that offers a potential model for future aid partnerships. With support from SPA funding, BRAC continues to make progress towards results targets and has already met its five-year targets for education and poverty outcomes.<sup>21</sup> The Review report indicated DFID would commission an Independent Assurance Review of BRAC programmes in the field, to report by September 2015.

There have been a number of other due diligence processes, such as a 2014 DFID-led Financial Systems Review (a further review was scheduled for 2015), and a visit from DFAT's head office to better understand BRAC's financial and procurement system and assess progress on recommendations from a previous finance and procurement reviews. In 2014, the UK National Audit Office (NAO) selected BRAC as one of four DFID-supported programmes to include in its DFID Bangladesh Country Office Audit. Feedback from this audit has been largely positive, and concurrently DFID Bangladesh conducted its own internal audit. Audit reports have not yet been published, but some technical recommendations are anticipated. Both DFID and DFAT are currently busy with due diligence assessment processes that will feed into new SPA financing agreements from 2016.

On the whole, BRAC has coped well with all of these due diligence processes. BRAC's leadership welcomed them as spaces for learning and systems improvement and as opportunities to promote a wider understanding among the SPA donor partner agencies. Generally, BRAC has been quick to respond to issues raised in due diligence reviews. For example, in response to questions raised by DFID about risk management, BRAC has introduced a new 'bottom-up' risk management system (including a fraud register), with a devoted Head of Risk Management, involving local area staff managers in monthly risk meetings, reporting to head office with risk assessment reports and risk mitigation strategies.

Still, there are signs that keeping pace with various audits and reviews required by donors does represent a challenge for all SPA parties. There were some noted concerns about whether due diligence processes are consistently conducted in the collaborative, harmonising spirit of the partnership and its Terms of Engagement. At times, there seems to be a divergence in approach among the partners about how best to balance compliance demands with the SPA's commitment to mutual respect, institutional strengthening and an ethos of 'a more equal partnership.' There is no doubt that since the SPA's inception, the demand within donor agencies (particularly DFID) for financial oversight and scrutiny has increased greatly.

#### e. Overall partnership health and effectiveness

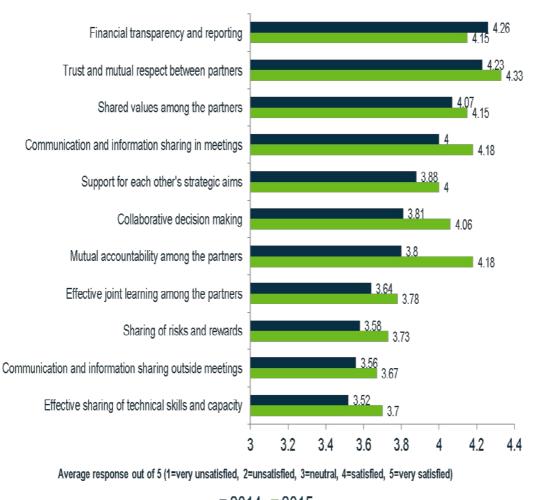
As part of its participatory research, SDDirect conducted a two partnership self-assessment surveys of relevant partner staff (the first in early 2014 and the second in early 2015). Drawing on the literature on good partnership practice as well as benchmarks set by the



<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>21</sup> DFID Annual Review of the SPA (3 March-17 March 2015)

SPA partners, the SDDirect team assembled a set of indicators and principles against which to gauge the general health of the partnership.

Following is a summary of the results, comparing 2014 and 2015 results.



Survey responses on partnership health

■2014 ■2015

The results indicate improved performance and satisfaction levels around several key indicators of partnership health, especially trust and mutual respect between partners, shared values among the partners, communications and information-sharing in meetings, and mutual accountability among the partners (which shows a marked improvement).

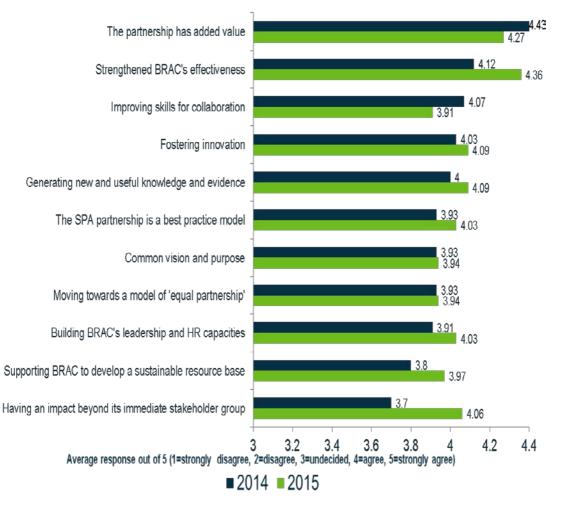
The survey reflects marginally less satisfaction with the level of financial transparency and reporting, although satisfaction levels are still healthy on this score. There is moderate satisfaction with support for each other's strategic aims and collaborative decision-making.

There is progress against the indicators that showed less positive results in 2014, including:

- Effective joint learning among the partners
- Sharing of risks and rewards
- Communications and information-sharing outside meetings
- Effective sharing of technical skills and capacity



The 2015 online survey updated stakeholder views on partnership effectiveness in relation to key indicators canvassed in the 2014 survey. Following is a comparison of 2015 and 2014 survey results:



Survey responses on partnership effectiveness

These survey results reveal perceptions of improved partnership performance, particularly in relation to:

- Having an impact beyond the SPA's immediate stakeholder group
- Greater BRAC effectiveness in achieving is development outcomes
- Supporting BRAC to develop a sustainable resource base
- Building BRAC's leadership and human resource capacities
- Generating new knowledge and evidence
- Fostering real innovation

The only areas where 2014 perceptions were slightly more positive that those reflected in the 2015 survey were the added value of the partnership ('achieving things that would not have been possible otherwise') and improving skills for collaboration among all of the partners. In comparison with 2014 results, the 2015 survey shows somewhat more positive levels of agreement that 'the SPA partnership is a best practice model for more effective and sustainable development partnerships globally.'



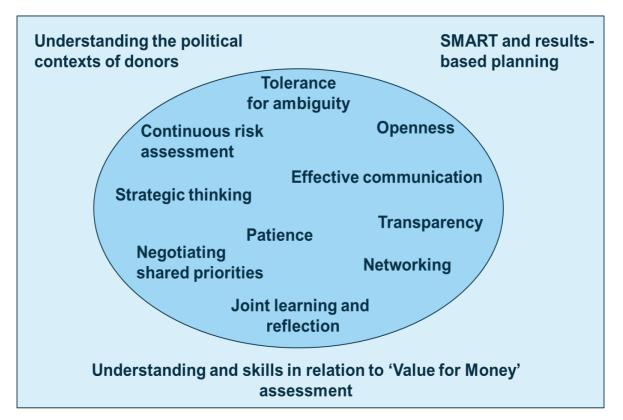
# f. Equity, joint purpose and mutual benefit

In 2015, when survey respondents were asked to rate the partnership against various indicators of equity and mutual benefit, 63% believed that equity in the distribution of benefits among the SPA partners had improved over the past year. Most respondents also report stronger performance in the areas of 'equal power and influence' among the partners (55%), 'openness and transparency' (55%) and 'participation, organisational commitment and shared ownership among the partners' (44%). Respondents largely agreed that the SPA partners have developed common vision and purpose and that they are moving towards a model of 'equal partnership'. Evidence from two online surveys and stakeholder interviews indicate there is general satisfaction with levels of trust and mutual support for the partners' strategic aims and objectives, and that over the past year there has been improvement in mutual accountability among the partners as well as sharing of risks and rewards.

# g. Collaborative governance, trust and transparency

In 2014-2015, the partnership made good progress in collaborative governance through successful convening of high-level strategic dialogue through the Steering Committee, agreement to form thematic task teams, and activation of task teams on results and evidence, gender (women and girls), finance, and procurement.

In 2014, participants gave priority to further development of partnering, networking and facilitation skills. There is evidence that some progress some been made in this field. In the 2015 survey, informants were asked to comment on the SPA's success in equipping staff with new partnering and collaboration skills. Based on their own personal experience, most of those who responded to this question felt that the performance of the SPA was either good or excellent. When asked to identify the most important partnering skills they have developed, respondents cited a range of capability areas, as summarised in the chart below:



#### Key partnership skills developed (2015 survey)



#### h. Joint evaluation and learning

Online survey results showed that the assessment score for effective joint learning among the partners improved over the course of 2014/2015. In response to a recommendation from the 2013/2014 DFID Annual Review of the SPA, BRAC now includes summary of challenges and lessons learned in annual programme progress reports. A number of stakeholders interviewed pointed to on-going improvements in BRAC M&E, research and impact assessment capacity that will help to fuel joint evaluation and learning. The 2015 DFID Annual Review noted that:

BRAC demonstrates continued commitment to assessing and demonstrating impact, though currently the majority of studies are initiated following requests from the programme or opportunities for collaboration, rather than based on strategic priorities. SPA partners would benefit from establishing research and evaluation priorities together to ensure key evidence gaps are being filled.

In late 2014, a research workshop was convened with sector leads from each partner organisation to agree research priorities for BRAC's Research and Evaluation Division (RED) and its Impact Assessment Unit. RED is currently developing a portal to improve data and evidence dissemination among the wider research community.<sup>22</sup> RED has struggled to find and retain high quality researchers and to fill the post of RED Director. BRAC has mitigated these problems by forging international research partnerships like the Institute of Development Studies in the UK. There are opportunities for donor partners to play a useful role in facilitating such partnerships and assisting BRAC to access relevant expertise around the use of data and technology to inform decision-making.

According to the MTR team, a future challenge for BRAC and SPA partners will be to combine data collected in M&E and research efforts 'to tell a broader story about BRAC's support to communities across the board' and to collect less data with more specific learning and dissemination objectives in mind.<sup>23</sup> An additional challenge for the SPA partners will be to ensure that the various due diligence and compliance-based reviews required by donor head offices enhance, rather than crowd out, the space for joint evaluation and learning.

#### i. Effective communications and sharing of knowledge

Survey responses indicate improving levels of satisfaction in regard to communication and information-sharing among the partners, both in and outside of meetings. Communication and information-sharing were highly rated by the MTR, which found that through the SPA partners are gaining access to wider range of information. A better understanding has emerged among donor staff of BRAC's overall impact, the development terrain in which BRAC operates, and the space for civil society action in Bangladesh. This knowledge is moving upwards in management chain, enabling more strategic linkages between BRAC and other programmes supported by the funding partners.

On the admission of various partner informants, progress on a joint SPA communications plan had been somewhat stalled in 2014, but the pace of action on strategic communications has picked up in early 2015 with decisions by the Working Group to revive the communications sub-group and outline a clear work plan. The 2015 SPA Annual Review recommended that an 'SPA communications and engagement strategy' should be agreed by June 2015, with improved communications to key external audiences, building on successful joint advocacy efforts from previous years and improve joint communications on the SPA's impact and outcomes. Some low level tensions have surfaced about donor branding and visibility (due to donor head office pressures for more branding of their development

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>22</sup> DFID Annual Review of the SPA (3 March-17 March 2015)

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>23</sup> Mid-Term Review of the SPA Report, Part 1 (March 2014)

assistance), but it appears these tensions are being managed in a transparent, constructive way.

All of the partners have expressed an aspiration to realise the potential of the SPA as a knowledge and advocacy partnership on a world stage. DFAT's Counsellor (Development Cooperation) believes that the SPA has not fully exploited its strategic opportunities for global influence and impact, but there is real potential for coordinated knowledge, policy and evidence efforts on a few priority issues. The challenge for the partners is to have a much deeper conversation and develop a strategy to move the SPA 'from a model or mechanism to systemic action.' DFID's Deputy Country Representative sees the SPA as a platform for innovation, research and international leadership, with possibilities for higher profile collaboration with global 'thought leaders' around key issues like new models of development partnership, empowerment of women and girls, urbanisation, technology transfer and skills development.

At the SPA Visioning Workshop in May 2015, the partners endorsed further exploration of future possibilities for the SPA as a knowledge partnership. According to the workshop report,

Such a partnership would broadly include widening the partnership to include BRAC University and possibly other BRAC entities, sharing of evidence, collaboration on research, technical exchange and cooperation in dissemination of results.

The workshop tasked the SPA working group to define clear aims and new ways of working to realise the potential of the SPA as a knowledge partnership.

#### j. Human capacity development

Evidence from stakeholder consultations and the online survey reveal consensus that the SPA is making good progress on improving partner skills for collaboration and supporting BRAC's leadership and human resource capacity. With support from SPA funds, BRAC has moved strongly to put in place 'strategic human resources' leadership and systems. BRAC is developing a comprehensive staff training plan based on needs assessments and a new organisational competencies framework. Progress has been made on embedding and implementing BRAC's gender strategy, with growing commitment to address the considerable challenges faced by women in leadership. The challenges posed by extensive changes among partnership and programme personnel, and the engagement of more staff in partnership processes, highlight a continued need for systematic induction and orientation of staff.

#### k. Resource mobilisation and sustainability

The SPA continues to provide a secure, flexible and accountable source of core funding for BRAC programmes, organisational development and sustainability plans. The partners are keen to engage other like-minded donor organisations in the partnership. In the recent past, there have been exploratory discussions with the Canadian High Commission. BRAC's CFO reported that the SPA (along with supporting research and reviews documenting the partnership) gives BRAC greater credibility with other donors, like the World Bank which has recently agreed its first major funding agreement with BRAC. Further efforts to profile the innovations, added value and impact of the SPA with external audiences can only strengthen BRAC's prospects for new donor partners.

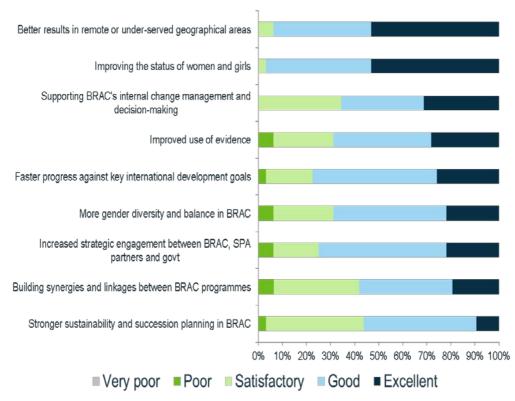
Structurally, the SPA presents a risk to BRAC as a result of the concurrent renewal of funding agreements with both DFID and DFAT from 2016. On the evidence available, it seems that this risk is being managed and mitigated by the partners through on-going, transparent consultations on the prospects, process and donor contexts for the extension of SPA funding.



#### 3. Benefits and 'added value' of the partnership

#### a. Partnership performance in key 'value added' areas: Survey results

The 2015 online survey tracked partner informants' assessment of the SPA's recent performance in several important areas of benefits and 'added value' referenced in key SPA documents.



#### SPA performance, 2014-2015: Benefits and 'added value'

It is encouraging that over 50% of respondents rated performance in all areas as 'good' or 'excellent.' Particularly striking are the strong performance assessments in relation to better BRAC results in remote or underserved areas as well as improved status of women and girls. At the same time, more than 70% of informants report good to excellent performance around faster progress against key international development goals in Bangladesh and increased engagement between the BRAC, SPA partners and government.

#### b. Programme priorities and funding approvals

As a result of the SPA, BRAC has much greater scope to determine its own funding and programme priorities, with less dependence on donor-led agendas. It also has increased ability to target remote and hard-to-reach areas of Bangladesh. All funding decisions are made through an approval process within BRAC, set up as a result of the SPA. Each programme develops its own programme and funding proposals which must first get a green light from at departmental level and then be reviewed by the Executive Management Committee (EMC), a joint senior leadership group that decides on the allocation of SPA funding. The EMC's decisions have a quick turnaround time (rather than customarily lengthy funding negotiations and approval processes with donors). This frees BRAC to respond swiftly to new priorities and opportunities and adjust allocations as needed.

Stakeholder interviews confirmed that the SPA provides flexibility to all the partners to respond to needs and priorities as they emerge. Senior DFAT informants noted that this



flexibility was critical in the context of significant Australian policy and funding shifts over the past few years. The SPA has enabled timely negotiations and a faster response from BRAC to accommodate the changing policy priorities of donor partners as well as developments in Bangladesh (including disaster responses). As well as the new shared SPA priorities around women, girls and gender, nutrition, skills development and governance, BRAC has been able to respond to developing DFID programme concerns such as urban development and climate change. 'This is our most flexible and efficient partnership,' said one senior DFAT informant.

While the mechanism for internal funding approvals is a relatively recent innovation, feedback from BRAC programme directors indicated that the approvals process is proceeding well and is perceived as fair and competitive. The MTR found that it was too early to tell how much evidence was driving BRAC resource allocations. However, the internal approvals process does seem to have boosted BRAC's pipeline of high quality, well-planned programme proposals. There is no doubt that BRAC is now better equipped to innovate and to resource programmes that embody its core values (innovation, integrity, inclusiveness and effectiveness).

#### c. More resources and momentum for rights-based and gender programmes

The SPA has made a big difference for BRAC's ability to resource previously 'hard to fund' programme areas such as gender justice, human rights, legal support and litigation, community empowerment, local governance, advocacy and migration. In the past, programmes in these areas often had to compete with each other for very scarce earmarked donor resources. Programmes like Human Rights and Legal Aid Services, Gender Justice and Diversity, Community Empowerment, and Migration have all received increased financial and organisational support through the SPA. The leaders of these programme say that by being more securely resourced (and no longer struggling just to 'stay afloat'), they have been freed up to 'think outside the box and innovate, try things and experiment.' The SPA 'has brought rights-based work to the centre of the organisation.' As a result, these programmes have gained a higher profile and more influence within BRAC. Building on their historic base at the grassroots level, they have been able to increase their presence and impact at the national policy level. Thus, the SPA has strengthened BRAC's continuing move from a service-based to a rights-based development organisation. At various high level meetings and forums, BRAC is actively promoting the rights-based approach as a pillar of the emerging post-2015 global development framework.

Over 95% of 2015 survey respondents have reported excellent or good progress in programmes to improve the status of women and girls. BRAC staff members were unanimous in hailing the landmark success of the 2014 Bangladesh Girls Summit, spearheaded by BRAC with DFID, in collaboration with government. The Summit produced important policy pledges from government and is perceived to have created real momentum around the agenda for girls nationally. Connections and partnerships were built between the key organisations working on girls' empowerment in Bangladesh.

Through the SPA, in Dec 2014 DFID supported a Strategic Review of Gender in BRAC. The Review has resulted in proposals to make gender equality a core commitment and responsibility of the whole organisation; to cast gender equality as a 'core product' of BRAC, not just as an attitude and value; to choose focus areas and commit to clear targets (suggested areas: violence against women and girls, early marriage, and women's economic empowerment); and to include a focus on gender equality in BRAC's private sector enterprises. At present, women represent only 35% of BRAC's total workforce, mostly in lower grade posts. Although the BRAC Gender Justice and Diversity Programme is still, on its own account, in a learning and piloting phase, its leadership observes growing political will in the organisation around the gender equality agenda. With clear gender targets set



(50% women's representation in the workforce) and 17,000 staff trained in gender over the past year, there is a strong sense that 'people are really talking about gender in BRAC.'

Another example of significant rights-based programming supported by SPA funding is the BRAC Migration Programme. Previously somewhat marginalised within BRAC, the programme works to enhance the rights of migrants and to promote 'safe migration.' While Bangladesh is one of the world's major exporters of migrant workers (income and remittances from migrants contribute nearly 13% of national GDP), there is little government investment in the protection of migrants' rights or regulation of employment agencies and recruiters. BRAC estimates that it currently reaches over 1 million people through the migration programme. Over the next ten years, through an integrated approach of services to migrants as well as advocacy and collaboration with government, the programme has the potential to lift millions more people out of poverty.

### d. Development results, monitoring and reporting

Together, the BRAC Strategy and the SPA Results Framework provide unifying touchstones for the partnership. Developed during the inception of the SPA and updated in 2013, the results framework has shifted BRAC's strategic focus from activities to outcomes. The framework outlines BRAC's programme results in relation to different sectors (such as extreme poverty, education, human rights and legal aid services) and specific projects. Through the results framework, the partners are able to track and report a substantial share of BRAC's programme results, and to attribute achieved results in proportion with the scale of their funding.

As noted by the 2014 SPA Mid-Term Review (MTR) team, the results framework equips BRAC 'to shape its own monitoring and evaluation requirements rather than allowing them to be shaped by funders.' By establishing common concepts of 'output' and 'outcome' across programmes, and encouraging those BRAC programmes previously unfamiliar with outcome monitoring to set and measure outcome indicators, the unified results framework has advanced progress towards a standardised, internal programme monitoring system.<sup>24</sup>

The SPA results framework has enabled a shift towards outcomes-based M&E and reporting. One DFAT representative on the SPA Working Group said, 'we used to get a lot of data [on outputs]; now we get more information and analysis' about outcomes and innovations.

# An overarching results framework for BRAC and the SPA

One of the principal achievements of the SPA is the development of an overarching results framework for BRAC, which fosters greater outcomeoriented accountability. There are four levels of results: Level 1: National MDGs (to determine BRAC's contribution to Bangladesh's development); Level 2: Programmes; Level 3: Institutions (organisational change); and Level 4: Tracking the Partnership. The framework assists BRAC and the SPA donor to report results in a coherent manner at different levels. As donor programme priorities shift or change, the framework allows donor partners to refocus and adapt their reportable results with relative ease as their core funding contribution is not narrowly restricted to a specific programme.

The Head of BRAC's Impact Assessment Unit confirmed that the results framework has enabled a much more coherent approach to recording and reporting evidence-based results. Before the SPA, BRAC contended with eight different log frames. Now there is one framework which has become a powerful planning tool 'that everyone owns and understands.' Because of the SPA, BRAC is no longer as reliant on donor-led external programme reviews. Although the input, critique and technical advice provided by external



<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>24</sup> Mid-Term Review of the SPA Report, Part 1 (March 2014)

reviewers is still appreciated and at times missed, stakeholders generally perceive that BRAC has made great strides in the quality of its reporting and M&E processes. BRAC has reinforced its field monitoring and reporting capacity. With 100 devoted staff, the BRAC monitoring team functions across all programmes, supporting programme reporting and monitoring targets and indicators embedded in the SPA results framework. Investments have been made to enhance staff capacity (including yearly refresher courses for monitoring staff) and to develop more scientific methodologies (better sampling techniques, cause and effect analysis, etc.).

Evidence from the partnership research suggests that the results framework has improved outcome-oriented accountability, strategic programme planning and long term thinking at BRAC. According to BRAC's Associate Director for Monitoring and Partnership Strengthening Unit, the 'number one' contribution of the SPA has been to strengthen BRAC's planning and accountability framework. BRAC and the SPA partners have access to better evidence and data. More results-based reporting means that BRAC is better equipped to analyse achievements and weaknesses. The SPA's six-monthly reporting cycle makes it possible for BRAC to identify trends, adjust programmes as necessary, and shift funding allocations as new needs or insights emerge.

Assessing the partnership against its results framework, the most recent DFID Annual Review found that the SPA is 'moderately exceeding expectations' (a score of A+), with many results targets exceeded or substantially exceeded. This positive assessment reflects BRAC's strong performance as well as the integrated approach to planning, programme allocations and reporting that is a direct consequence of the SPA. At a macro level, BRAC is better equipped to articulate, attribute and communicate its contributions to Bangladesh's progress in relation to both national and international development targets. Looking to the future, the most recent DFID Annual Review of the SPA recommended that the partners should make greater use of the results framework to inform strategic dialogue. The review team also recommended that the SPA partners should explore ways to capture qualitative indicators or approaches to assess 'hard-to-measure areas' and wider social impacts around issues like gender and social norm change.<sup>25</sup>

As observed by the SPA Mid-Term Review team, while the SPA has accelerated progress around monitoring and evaluation, careful and comprehensive monitoring is a longstanding feature of BRAC culture. At a partnership review meeting in May 2013, partners noted that some of the benefits and results associated with the SPA may have emerged without the partnership; but they would have done so without the same level of ambition, speed and delivery at scale.

#### e. Data, evidence and use of technology

The partnership research indicates that the SPA has boosted BRAC's capacity and systems for effective collection and analysis of data, mobilisation of evidence and use of technology. In mid-2014, BRAC piloted an Integrated Management Information System to ensure better management of data and information flows. A new Data Management Advisory Committee has been established, and BRAC plans to develop a 'central data warehouse' to support integration of data across programmes (aggregating for central analysis and comparability).<sup>26</sup> According to survey informants, ICT is being deployed more effectively to bolster programme activities, 'real-time monitoring,' and internal process improvement.

BRAC's Senior Director, Strategy, Communications and Capacity, cited the example of data collection work in relation to maternal and child health programmes. Data now feeds more

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>25</sup> DFID Annual Review of the SPA (3 March-17 March 2015)

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>26</sup> DFID Annual Review of the SPA (3 March-17 March 2015)

directly into both reporting, project design and adaptation. Building on the successful example of DFID support to an organisational gender review, SPA donor partners may want to consider support to a review of BRAC's use of data and technology, exploring the question, '*How can we make decisions more evidence-driven through the use of technology*?' The DFID Annual Review (2015) recommended that BRAC publish guidelines on data quality and provide staff training on data quality management as well as application of consistent quality assurance practices. The Review team urged BRAC to consider development of 'a data strategy to reflect its vision to strengthen the use and impact of data within BRAC and for the public good.'

# f. Programme innovation

BRAC has a well-established culture of innovation, expressed in its mantra of 'pilot, perfect, scale up.'<sup>27</sup> By freeing this culture from some of the limitations imposed by project-based funding, the SPA has contributed to various programme innovations, several of which have moved quickly to implementation and scale up as a result of faster turnaround of internal BRAC approvals. Some of these new ventures are already demonstrating 'proof of concept' and are making good progress towards higher level results. The 2014 Mid-Term Review of the SPA found that BRAC's reporting on innovation has become more consistent, with standard templates including designated space for reporting on innovation.

While, as one BRAC leader put it, 'innovation is inherent in BRAC's culture,' the SPA has introduced new institutional mechanisms to strengthen a practice of innovation, including an Innovation Fund, an Impact Assessment Unit, and a Social Innovation Lab. Launched in 2011, the Social Innovation Lab provides organisation-wide support by building a space for staff learning, capacity and innovation; incubating new products and practices; scanning for external innovations to introduce and internal innovations to scale up; leading a regional network around 'doing while learning' that is focused on scaling up social innovations within South Asia; and pushing forward important issues that don't fall neatly into any programme's scope of responsibility. Some of The Lab's specific activities include:

- Hosting 'innovation addas' (chats) and 'innovation forums' on a monthly basis
- Testing new products and processes at a micro level to determine if BRAC should undertake a pilot initiative
- Convening a learning network of South Asian organisations that are incubating and scaling up social innovations
- Conducting surveys, SMS-based polls and field visits to gather ideas from communities and programmes
- Hosting annual 'Frugal Innovation Forums' (large scale, internationally-attended events that expose BRAC to global innovations).<sup>28</sup>

BRAC's *Integrated Development Programme (IDP)*<sup>29</sup> is a good example of programme innovation supported by SPA funding. IDP was designed to tackle the multiple dimensions of poverty and vulnerability among the poorest and most marginalised people in remote and hard-to-reach areas. It tests new models and prototypes for integrated service delivery. IDP innovations that have already shown great promise include:

- Floating delivery centres in water-lying areas to ensure access even in extreme conditions.
- 257 new community-managed boat schools for children living on flood plains, marshlands and coastal or riverine island areas to ensure they have access to regular schooling even in extreme conditions.
- Floating latrines in *haor* areas (areas subject to yearly flooding).

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>27</sup> Davis (2013) 'Scaling up without losing your edge.'

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>28</sup> See <u>http://www.brac.net/content/social-innovation-lab</u>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>29</sup> BRAC (2013) Integrated Development Programme, <u>http://idp.brac.net/images/pdf/IDP\_4.pdf</u>

Recently, BRAC compared costs and results of both the traditional BRAC coordinated programme delivery model and the completely integrated programme approach. In its field-based testing of these two models, it found there were savings of up to a third on the integrated programme approach to achieve the same level of results. In 2014, IDP piloted innovative data collection through use of smart phones to collect programme information. This has enabled 'real-time' monitoring and improvements in the quality and consistency data reported. With support from the Social Innovation Lab and ICT staff, the IDP team has developed a new monitoring dashboard.

A more integrated development approach is also being pursued through cross-programme activities, such as: cross-programme advice and inputs to the 'safe migration' initiative and the Community Empowerment Programme); collaboration around shared thematic concerns; cross-sector inputs to programme design (such as development of an integrated nutrition initiative); and structural integration (District BRAC Representatives and field staff implementing integrated programmes at local level).

Skills development is another critical area for innovation. In line with the shared priority programme themes endorsed by the SPA Steering Committee in 2014, BRAC is undertaking important innovation and expansion in its skills development work (youth skills development, certification, training, and job creation). After an initial pilot phase, the *Skills Training for Advancing Resources (STAR)* programme is being rolled out on a larger scale with its own programme director.<sup>30</sup> The programme works mainly with school 'drop-out' children and youth, providing informal apprenticeships and work experience in collaboration with businesses as well as life skills, economic literacy and basic English lessons. An estimated 95% of STAR's pilot phase participants secured longer term employment with the firms where they were placed. Plans for the period ahead include developing a 'para-professional' training and skills certification in various technical fields.

Across the wider range of BRAC's programmes, other examples of innovation supported by SPA funding include:

#### Gender and women's rights

- In conjunction with a new women and girls' website (<u>www.maya.com.bd</u>), BRAC has developed and launched *Maya Apa*, an android-based mobile phone application that provides an affordable, accessible information platform for women and girls. Through *Maya Apa*, users in both urban and rural areas can find information and pose questions anonymously on issues affecting their lives (including health, rights, legal services, and psycho-social support).
- In collaboration with government, BRAC has spearheaded the MEJNIN (Safe Citizenship for Girls) campaign to combat sexual harassment and violence.
- BRAC has introduced training for women leaders in psycho-social counselling to provide front line support to victims of gender-based violence.
- Through its Human Rights and Legal Education (HRLE) initiative, BRAC is promoting 'transformative behavioural change' through community-based awareness classes that highlight women's rights over inheritable and acquired property as well as opportunities for women to secure, own and control land.

#### Community empowerment

 To address the trauma resulting from violence against women, girls and children, BRAC has piloted training and deployment of community-based psycho-social counsellors (*monobondhu* in Bengali). Recruited from the ranks of community-based organisations and popular theatre groups, *monobondhu* provide counselling and

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>30</sup> See <u>http://education.brac.net/skills-training-for-advancing-resources</u>

emotional support to survivors of violence and their families. Often isolated within communities as a result of their trauma, survivors are supported by the programme to re-integrate into their communities.

#### Education

- Working through a network of early childhood development centres, BRAC's Early Childhood Development Support programme strengthens school preparedness for pre-school children from disadvantaged families (ultimately improving longer term educational outcomes), providing parents with nutritional guidelines and 'parental safety net guidelines.'<sup>31</sup>
- BRAC has piloted and rolled out a School Meal Programme providing mid-day meals for students who would otherwise not have a proper meal as part of BRAC's delivery of inclusive education.<sup>32</sup>
- As well as pioneering mother-tongue education for children in ethnic minority communities, BRAC has developed and launched 'inclusive schools' for young people with special educational need and 'bridging schools' to address the needs of drop-outs from formal sector schools.
- BRAC is piloting girls' empowerment, life skills and leadership in schools through sports initiatives that train adolescent girls to become coaches, enabling them to be effective role models, mentors and peer-educators for other youth.
- The ICT in Education Programme is a breakthrough public-private partnership between BRAC and GoB. Through this sustainable cost-recovery partnership, BRAC is developing ICT-based materials for the whole public school system. As well as materials development, BRAC provides quality control services and capacity-building for educational staff.

#### Health

- BRAC's Community Skilled Birth Attendant training institute provides specialist training for traditional birth attendants and community health promoters. The programme has achieved impressive results. Community health workers are now better equipped to identify high-risk pregnancies and refer these cases to local clinics. In Dhaka's slums, this innovation has resulted in a neonatal mortality rate lower than the national average (between 14-18 deaths compared to 35 deaths per 1,000 live births). Similar results have been achieved in maternal mortality.<sup>33</sup>
- In coastal island areas, BRAC has piloted the use of water transport to convey pregnant women to medical centres and maternal waiting homes.
- Currently, BRAC is developing a new health initiative in the garment sector that works with companies to provide employer-paid health insurance and quality healthcare for workers, training for health staff, and better use of 'e-health' support systems.
- Building on its experience in mother and child nutrition work, BRAC is developing a more integrated, evidence-based Nutrition Programme that works closely with government and mobilises a response from other BRAC programmes (such as gender, agriculture and food security, climate change and education).

#### Water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH):

 In water-scarce regions of the country, BRAC's WASH programme has tested and rolled out safe toilet technologies that make use of a simple mechanical seal that closes after each toilet use to prevent disease transmission from open pit latrines.

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>31</sup> BRAC (2012) Annual Report 2012 http://www.brac.net/sites/default/files/BRAC-Annual-Report-2012e.pdf

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>32</sup> BRAC (2013) Annual Report 2012 http://www.brac.net/sites/default/files/BRAC-Annual-Report-2012e.pdf

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>33</sup> BRAC (2013) Annual Reports 2012 and 2013 <u>http://www.brac.net/sites/default/files/annual-report-2013/BRAC-annual-report-2013.pdf</u>

 In hard-to-reach areas in the south of Bangladesh, where high water salinity is a big problem, BRAC has innovated through use of deep tube water wells to provide safe and affordable water for poor communities.<sup>34</sup>

#### Migration:

Bangladesh has more than 6.5 million citizens employed as migrant workers abroad, many of whom endure human rights abuses, exploitative recruitment and employment practices, and unsafe working conditions. In 2013, BRAC's Migration Programme launched a 'safe migration' initiative. Marshalling the resources and involvement of several BRAC programmes, the Migration Programme provides comprehensive support to migrant workers and their families at all stages of the migration process: pre-departure, at destination )place of migration), and re-integration upon return. Working closely with GoB and CBOs, the programme is now reaching an estimated 1 million or more people with information, advice and community-based support. As well as direct service provision, the programme engages in dialogue and advocacy to promote better legislation, rights protection and services to migrants.

### g. Staff capacity, performance and programme integration

The SPA has added momentum to BRAC's internal agenda of organisation development through staff capacity-building and enhanced human resource planning and management. An ethos of working together as 'One BRAC' is evident in a shared pursuit of more integration, synergies and cross-learning between programmes. SPA core funding has created more incentives and opportunities for an integrated development approach. In addition, there is now enhanced coordination, communication, collaboration and cross-programme learning between BRAC programmes.

In 2014, BRAC introduced a 'strategic human resources system.' Building on an external human resources study undertaken with SPA donor support, the human resources team conducted a review of BRAC structures and an inventory of talent among staff. In response to identified structural and cost inefficiencies, and mismatches between posts, responsibilities and employee profiles, a major reorganisation was implemented, including significant rationalisation of staffing. At the same time, BRAC invested in better talent management and staff retention. A new rating system has been developed and salary structures are being reviewed. A much clearer system of job descriptions and reporting lines has been introduced, and BRAC is working to define technical and leadership competencies for each position. Human resources management capacity is now 'embedded' in each programme. As a result, the Senior Director for Strategy, Communications and Capacity sees 'better quality in the mix of BRAC people and skills.'

A major innovation was the launch of a new performance management system in BRAC. The new system is values-based and more 'bottom-up' than the previous regime, with staff members taking an active role in formulating their objectives. The system aims to support staff around both technical skills and personal development. It will provide centrally managed career development support to young professionals. Work has continued on creating a robust values-based culture through awareness training on BRAC's four core values and 'values awards' for champions of these values. BRAC is consciously promoting an integrated, 'One BRAC' leadership style and creating the next generation of BRAC leaders.

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>34</sup> BRAC (2014) Annual Report 2013

### h. Institutional change within BRAC

During the inception phase of the SPA, BRAC revised its 2011-2015 Strategy with input from DFID and AusAID. When the Strategy was updated in 2013 and subsequently redrafted in 2015, BRAC once again invited and incorporated comments from its SPA partners. In their feedback to the research process, BRAC staff members have consistently expressed enthusiasm for BRAC's renewed strategic vision and work plans.

The BRAC Draft Strategy for 2016-2020 (developed in consultation with SPA partners, including sector specialists and advisers) addresses both programmes and organisation development. It proposes an overarching goal 'to empower 20 million underserved and disenfranchised people in urban and rural Bangladesh to gain grater access to and control over resources, decisions and actions.'<sup>35</sup> The draft strategy analyses BRAC's positioning in a broader domestic and international landscape, its longer term financing strategy, and its role in relation to other NGOs and CSOs.<sup>36</sup> The MTR team noted that over the period of the SPA, BRAC has become more deliberate in articulating its strategy – moving strategically from 'what it will do' to 'what and how.'<sup>37</sup>

The founding Chairperson of BRAC, Sir Fazle Hasan Abed, continues to play an active role in external representation, strategic thinking and dialogue (including chairing the SPA Steering Committee meetings). Day-to-day leadership of BRAC is provided by the executive management team. While BRAC may not yet feel ready for 'life without the Chair,' there is a consensus among the leadership the SPA has facilitated critical support to thinking, planning and organisational readiness for succession.

The SPA provides support for an accelerated organisational development and capacitybuilding process within BRAC. As a result, significant institutional change can be observed at all levels of the organisation. Stakeholders consulted point to the growth of a vibrant leadership culture that encourages effectiveness, creativity and a strong values base in BRAC's work. The growing culture of 'One BRAC', working together and creating 'synergies' among BRAC staff, signifies a 'mind shift' away from a previous tendency for the various programmes and departments to work function in silos. The sharing of high quality information within the organisation has also become more effective and strategic.

Since the start of the SPA, BRAC has shown greater organisational commitment to gender and rights within its own institution. As noted above, programmes working on these issues (Gender Justice and Diversity, HRLS and CEP) have benefitted from an increased profile resulting in greater ability to effect change within BRAC. The inclusion of BRAC's 'Gender Action Plan' and progress around gender equality as strategic areas and outcomes in the SPA Results Framework (Level 3) have helped to improve organisational accountability on gender commitments as well as organisational will to achieve greater gender balance among staff.

Other key evidence of the SPA's added value and benefits for institutional change includes:

- Launching of the BRAC strategic human resources framework, including a performance management system, significant restructuring and staff rationalisation
- Implementation of a BRAC Gender Review, with recommendations for both programmes and organisational change
- Targets set for gender equity, aiming for a 50% female workforce and stronger representation of women in management (with BRAC providing support systems for women in leadership positions)
- Further development of BRAC M&E, impact assessment, research and ICT systems

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<sup>35</sup> BRAC Strategy, 2016-2020 (draft-April 2015)

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>36</sup> Final SPA Working Group Meeting Notes, Dec 2014

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>37</sup> Mid-Term Review of the SPA Report, Part 1 (March 2014)

 On-going succession planning, including successful recruitment of a new BRAC Executive Director – to commence duties in June 2015

In the view of the Senior Director for Enterprises, the wider BRAC family is becoming more aware of, and engaged with, BRAC's enterprises. Among staff of both non-profit and social enterprise arms (as well as donor partners), some myths and misunderstandings persist about these enterprises. As noted by BRAC's Acting Executive Director, there are communications gaps to be addressed about how various parts of BRAC work and fit together. More work is needed to remind people that BRAC enterprises have a larger role than merely to generate profits that subsidise other BRAC activities. The enterprises were always intended to make a contribution to national development and anti-poverty goals through economic empowerment, citizen access to credit and finance, employment and skills, and more sustainable market-based development solutions.

Both DFID and DFAT have expressed interest in engagement with the larger BRAC group in the next SPA phase. Senior donor partner leaders want to explore ways that the SPA can help BRAC to build its global brand, presence and effectiveness. In regard to engagement with business and social enterprise initiatives, BRAC's Senior Director for Enterprises has suggested that priority support be given to some of BRAC's non-profit programmes as they evolve in the direction of social enterprise through sustainable business models, costrecovery, fees for services, etc. As the dialogue unfolds around the new BRAC Strategy and new SPA financing agreements, it will be important to address divergent understandings within the partner organisations about the enterprises' role and their income streams and surpluses.

### i. Relationships and engagement between the SPA partners

The shift to a focus on results instead of activities demonstrates the level of trust placed in BRAC by both DFID and DFAT. The strong sense of locally-based ownership and presence in the partnership shown by DFID Bangladesh and the AHC/DFAT Bangladesh (rather than a more distant donor headquarters-owned arrangement) has enabled open dialogue from the start around expectations and delivery of results between the partners.

Key stakeholders among the SPA partners have generally acknowledged a shift in power relations in the direction of greater equity. The growing atmosphere of trust, mutual confidence and shared responsibility is striking. As one survey respondent commented, 'knowing each other better, thinking and planning together' has created greater transparency and understanding between the partners. The SPA Steering Committee and the Working Group are facilitating higher quality sharing of strategic information among the partners, particularly at leadership level but increasingly also at the programme implementation level (through sector consortia and other channels).

BRAC's programmes and the sector advisors/specialists at DFID and DFAT routinely share ideas, learning and technical knowledge. BRAC donor consortia, including non-SPA donors, continue to meet and facilitate dialogue. But it was clear from 2014 feedback that progress around richer, more strategic technical exchange at programme level has been erratic and in some sectors disappointing. Part of this perceived loss of technical engagement seems to have resulted from changes in the roles of donor sector advisers and BRAC programme leaders. Donor sector advisers no longer play the detailed oversight role they previously had in relation to BRAC. Released by the SPA from programme level interaction with each other around donor-specific proposals, approvals, payments, M&E and reporting, both BRAC programme directors and donor advisers have to make tough decisions about where to apply their scarce time and resources. Inevitably, there is a tendency to focus on immediate issues, day-to-day programme management and (in the case of BRAC) other more demanding donors – at the expense of value-added technical dialogue within the SPA.



Although some progress has been observed over the course of the partnership research in the field of technical exchange, dialogue and sector coordination among the partners, challenges remain. Participants in sector consortium meetings for education and health reported difficulties in securing consistent donor participation. Some participants see progress in the quality and inclusiveness of dialogue in the education sector consortium meetings. As well as education programme staff, these meetings now include participants from BRAC's Research and Evaluation Division, the BRAC University's Institute of Education Development and BRAC health programmes. In the view of DFAT sector specialists, opportunities for sector-level policy dialogue remain guite limited. While consortium meetings have potential, sometimes bureaucracies and hierarchies get in the way. There are some perceptions among partner staff that the really important policy dialogue happens at the senior management level of the partnership; that consortium meeting participants may not be adequately empowered to sustain critical policy debates and challenging feedback; and that mid-level managers or sector advisers may not have adequate opportunities to take their feedback up to senior management level (where ideas and proposals may be taken forward), particularly in BRAC.

There are still a number of other barriers to robust technical dialogue to be tackled:

- Cuts in country programme budgets and staffing have put real pressure on the capacity of donor staff to engage with BRAC and the SPA.
- Significant personnel changes among BRAC programme staff as a result of organisational restructuring and rationalisation.
- Persistent uncertainty among programme directors and sector advisers about the division of labour and 'rules of engagement' for technical and policy dialogue What are the expectations from dialogue at different levels? How does technical dialogue influence actions and outcomes? Who, if anyone, are the 'gatekeepers?'
- Lack of a clear linkage between staff performance indicators and engagement in technical exchange, peer-to-peer challenge and strategic dialogue among the SPA partners.

Both BRAC and donor staff have a common interest in taking forward a more vibrant advocacy agenda to influence public policy and practice on poverty issues, social inclusion and improved, more accountable public service delivery. As a BRAC member of the Working Group observed, the initial phase of the SPA has been preoccupied with mechanisms and funding – the next phase needs to focus on advocacy. DFID and DFAT in Bangladesh appreciate the breadth of engagement offered by the SPA across policy areas and being able to draw on a 'one-stop service' for information from BRAC. BRAC has benefitted from opportunities for higher level strategic engagement, such as donor-facilitated meetings and head office visits Ministers and donor government representatives.

Through the SPA, both DFID and DFAT give priority to BRAC's efforts to engage more closely with the Bangladesh government, particularly in terms of sharing experience, models, innovations, and relevant knowledge gained in programmes. The availability of better data and evidence has strengthened BRAC's ability to engage strategically with GoB around policy and to advocate more convincingly for the adoption and scaling up of BRAC's programme innovations.

When asked to identify behaviours among the partners that have helped or hindered the success of the SPA and its objectives, survey respondents pointed to collaborative decision-making as a key success factor along with more ownership from the senior management of donor partners, open communications and mutual respect and listening. The picture painted by the various enabling behaviours mentioned in the survey generally portrayed positive



attitudes and goodwill from all the partners, joint reflection on achievements and learning, and strategic discussions that lead to immediate actions.

On the negative side, key disabling behaviours cited included a lack of continuity and demonstrated senior level commitment from some partners; residual tendencies towards a 'paternalistic partnership'; and differing organisational priorities and requirements of the donor partners.

Some challenging patterns or behaviours that emerged from stakeholder meetings and interviews included:

- Lack of a harmonised approach to due diligence and compliance processes, including an agreed tone and approach from donors in line with partnership principles and the SPA Terms of Engagement.
- Lack of sufficient shared ownership and understanding of the SPA across partner organisations.
- A residual sense of detachment from the partnership among some partner staff that may inhibit more open and collaborative dialogue on key issues.
- Diverse understandings, or misunderstandings, of BRAC's business model, income streams, advocacy strategy, and relationships with government and civil society.
- Frustration with limited access to, and opportunities to engage with, senior partner leadership, including BRAC decision-makers.
- Erratic attendance at sector consortium meetings and other opportunities for technical and policy engagement.
- Lack of sufficient safe spaces and opportunities for 'robust challenge' among the partners (such as critical input to programme planning and peer review processes as well as technical review of delivery, innovations and quality issues).
- Concerns expressed about how the SPA can be held accountable to donor mandates as well as the needs and concerns of poor and marginalised people in Bangladesh.

The benefits to donor partners from the SPA in relation to information-sharing<sup>38</sup> include:

- Donor partner access to a wider range of information because they are funding over the whole spectrum of BRAC programmes.
- A deeper insight into the role of NGOs and CSO in Bangladesh as well as the civic space in which they operate.
- Knowledge about important issues as they arise in the country.
- A better understating of BRAC as an organisation (equally, BRAC benefits from privileged access to information and analysis of donor country policy contexts and political trends).

The SPA partners agree that strategic communications between partners need to be improved. Action is underway to develop a communication work plan and to build the platform and agenda for post-2015 advocacy work.<sup>39</sup>

# j. Relationships and engagement with government

BRAC programme directors report that the SPA intensified BRAC's focus on working with government and advancing national development priorities. BRAC's advocacy efforts with GoB are premised on demonstrating programme impact and effectiveness on the ground. By working closely with GoB and other development partners, BRAC is able to leverage policy influence, more resources and collaborative action around priority needs and issues. For example, through its WASH programme BRAC is working with government in 300 *upazilas* 

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>38</sup> Mid-Term Review of the SPA Report, Part 2 (March 2014)

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>39</sup> Final SPA Working Group Meeting Notes (2 February 2015) and DFID Annual Review of the SPA (3 March-17 March 2015)

around TB prevention services, access to treatment and treatment compliance in hard-toreach areas. Community-based health workers play a critical role in the TB initiative and the approach is generating huge positive impacts. BRAC is actively engaging with government through workshops and events in order to share experience and scale up this model. Similar success stories in school sanitation, through provision of improved latrine facilities in 5,000 schools, are being shared with GoB with a view to replication across the education system.

Building on BRAC's long-standing engagement with government at grassroots level, BRAC now has a District BRAC Representative (DBR) in each district where it is active and it has built working relationships with the government's Deputy Commissioners (executive heads of districts). DBRs actively promote dialogue and collaboration between BRAC field staff, local government officials and councillors, other government agencies and local media. At regional level, liaison and coordination with government is supported by BRAC 'delegates.' DBRs participate regularly in local issue-based, dialogue and advocacy events where government is represented. They are often invited by Deputy Commissioners to serve on government-appointed committees. Increasingly, BRAC is included in the agendas for local visits by central government officials and provides resource people for government training courses. The DBRs work with communities to enable local access to information under the Right to Information Act (2009). In partnership with government at the local level, they act as 'incident commanders' for disaster management, providing an early warning and fast response system to local communities. SPA funding has been critical to the development of the DBR model as well as to capacity development support to DBRs in their critical bridging leadership role.

#### 4. The transaction costs and 'value for money' of the partnership

Although partners have not yet undertaken a full-scale, quantifiable assessment of the SPA's collective 'balance sheet' on transaction costs, the evidence shows broad agreement that there has been an overall reduction in the transaction costs of programme approval, management and implementation. Key cost centres where reductions and efficiencies have been identified include:

- Assessment, negotiation, processing and approval costs associated with programme funding (all partners)
- Programme financial disbursement, accounting and audit costs (all partners)
- On-going programme M&E, review and reporting costs (all partners)
- Staff time, including programme managers, sector advisers/specialists, administrative and financial staff (all partners)
- Fundraising costs (BRAC)
- Costs of accessing and assembling high quality situation reporting, analysis and strategic information – on the Bangladesh development context, donor country and policy contexts, international trends and debates in development assistance, and the development funding environment (all partners)
- Access to technical expertise and experience (all partners)
- Shared access to high level decision-makers and meetings as well as international policy and advocacy platforms (all partners)
- Costs of testing and rolling out programme innovations (BRAC)

Findings from the online survey, field consultations and the recent DFID Annual Review suggest there is growing evidence of a solid value for money (VfM) proposition in the SPA,





although some informants estimate that that there has been a higher than expected investment in work and time spent on SPA engagement, partnership-building and partnership maintenance, particularly for the top tier of management in each organisation. Generally, there is a sense that these higher investments are balanced or exceeded by higher returns in results. A DFAT survey respondent observed that while donor partners may see efficiencies in administration as key manifestation of reduced transaction costs to date, even greater VfM could be gained in future by increasing 'high-level, strategic engagement' between the partners and realising the SPA's potential 'a true partnership.' The recent partnership Visioning Workshop, explicitly committed partners to a vision of the SPA in its next phase as a 'knowledge partnership,' not just as an innovative and efficient development funding mechanism.

The most substantial quantifiable evidence on transaction cost savings was provided by BRAC's CFO. According to his estimates, the SPA core funding will save US\$2,316,621 in costs of managing funding over 2011-2015. Cost efficiencies implemented by BRAC include: organisational restructuring and rationalisation of staffing; and an integrated approach to programme design and budgeting in which internal accountants, human resources staff and programme leaders work as a team. BRAC conducts on-going comparison, bench-marking and unit cost analysis across BRAC programmes and with government and other organisations. Recently, BRAC University undertook a VfM study on the development of BRAC's midwives programme.

As part of the Annual Review of the SPA in 2015, BRAC provided the review team with extensive VfM calculations covering unit costs per programme results as well as the quantified added value of DFID's financial contribution to programme outcome and examples of how BRAC can take further steps to improve performance around the '3 Es' (economy, efficiency and effectiveness). The Annual Review found that:

- On *economy*, the three largest cost drivers in BRAC from 2013 (staff, operations and training) have decreased substantially in 2014 as economies of scale have been realised.
- For *efficiency*, reduced management and staffing costs have been achieved at the same time that key outputs, such as extreme poor graduating households and sanitation coverage, have improved in 2014 indicating that significant gains in efficiency have been realised in 2014. However, some unit costs have increased in 2014 this trend requires further analysis.
- On *effectiveness*, of the 70 outcome indicators with 2014 milestones in BRAC's Level 2 results framework, 80% of are being met or exceeded.

In some cases, where it has already exceeded targets in its results framework, BRAC has revised targets upwards to ensure they are stretching resources and improving value for money – for example, a women's empowerment project had resulted in women engaging in more of the proposed project activities than had been anticipated, so the target was raised.<sup>40</sup>

#### 5. Contribution to BRAC's plans and thinking on sustainability

The partnership research indicates that the SPA is making a substantial contribution to BRAC's plans and thinking on sustainability. Headline evidence of this trend includes:

## Finance and financial planning

 As a result of the SPA core funding (about 60% of BRAC's programme funding), BRAC is able to plan more effectively in the medium and longer term.

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>40</sup> DFID Annual Review of the SPA (3 March-17 March 2015)

- BRAC is working to achieve a balanced approach between self-financing objectives and non-financial sustainability goals.
- BRAC currently generates about 10% of development programme costs from its social enterprises (representing 50% of surpluses). The target is to move to 13% or 14% within the next three to four years.
- The SPA provides a platform for BRAC to explore possibilities to grow its social enterprises and to test the scope for income generation within programmes (such BRAC's pilot cost recovery project in education).
- BRAC is exploring more resource-sharing and joint financing among programmes in different sectors.
- BRAC is leveraging the credibility and resources derived from the SPA to attract new donors and to respond to competitive calls for proposals in relevant programme areas.
- BRAC's financial sustainability was judged to be good by the 2015 Annual Review team. The top five BRAC donors (DFID, DFAT, Netherlands, CIDA, and the Global Fund) contribute more than 85% of BRAC's development budget, and other funders are coming on board (including the World Bank). BRAC is assessing the implications of different funding scenarios on an on-going basis.<sup>41</sup>
- BRAC is actively seeking additional funds from corporate social funds and other CSR sources.

It is important to note that observers (including some donor partner staff members) sometimes over-estimate BRAC's capacity to generate self-financing income from its social enterprises and investments. Much of the surpluses from BRAC's values-driven social enterprises must be re-invested in the business. On its own account, BRAC needs to do more to improve broader stakeholder understanding of the purpose, profitability and business model of its enterprises and investments as well as the scale and utilisation of surpluses generated. As one BRAC senior manager said, 'some BRAC programmes can never be fully self-financed – the point is to achieve sustainable results for BRAC community beneficiaries.'

## Organisational and programmatic change

- The organisational development and change process within BRAC, supported by the SPA donor partners, is in the words of a senior BRAC leader one of the biggest contributions of the SPA: 'it is moving BRAC forward from the founder-led era through the internal work on leadership, organisational values, succession and institutionalisation'.
- BRAC's leadership see SPA support to internal organisational change as critical to sustainability and 'incredibly well-timed at a critical juncture' in BRAC's development.
- The institutional change process in BRAC, including the new strategic human resource management system, is producing positive results in the areas of staffing efficiencies, staff retention and talent management, leadership development at all levels, gender equity, and succession planning (not only for senior positions but also for other key roles in the organisation).
- The partnership has provided a platform for dialogue, thinking and planning for leadership succession in BRAC.
- Through stronger resourcing of BRAC's gender programme and the organisational development process underway, BRAC is positioned to work towards a more sustainable gender balance and outreach – in both its programmes on the ground and in its internal leadership.
- The SPA continues to provide BRAC with flexibility and resources to respond to new needs and priorities as they emerge.

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>41</sup> DFID Annual Review of the SPA (3 March-17 March 2015)

- Through its pilot Integrated Development Programme, BRAC is starting to prove greater effectiveness and cost savings from an integrated development approach.
- BRAC has moved towards more integration between its programmes and BRAC enterprises, with cost-recovery strategies to be explored and developed for all programmes. Within BRAC Enterprises, a newly appointed Head of Business Development will help develop business development models across programmes.
- Through its local-level programming, BRAC is building the confidence of people in communities to represent their concerns effectively to local government.
- BRAC has significantly improved its capacity and effectiveness in the fields of M&E, impact assessment, 'live data collection,' and use of technology.
- Through engagement, advocacy and collaboration with GoB, BRAC is progressing uptake by government of models and approaches tested in BRAC programmes. The 2014 Bangladesh Girls Summit produced concrete pledges from GoB around policy and action.

Feedback from partner informants suggests the SPA donor partners are not entirely clear or consistent about their expectations around BRAC's sustainability trajectory. There needs to be more engagement and dialogue on this among the partners. The partners need to think collectively about the challenges and opportunities for BRAC's sustainability prospects that may be presented by Bangladesh's movement towards 'middle income country' status.

#### 6. Impact of the SPA beyond primary stakeholders

#### a. Survey results

In the 2014 online self-assessment survey, BRAC respondents scored the partnership highly on impact beyond immediate stakeholders. DFAT respondents were slightly less convinced about this impact and DFID informants were unsure or agnostic. In the 2015 survey, the overall rating improved noticeably, indicating growing confidence that the SPA is having an impact in the wider contexts of Bangladesh and international development.

## b. Government of Bangladesh

Evidence from the partnership research suggests that the SPA has encouraged an increase in the quality and depth of BRAC's engagement with government. BRAC engages with government in different ways, including:<sup>42</sup>

- Joint activities and service delivery with government.
- Rolling out successful ideas, service delivery models and innovations
- Provision of technical assistance, expert advice and research support to government.
- Local-level coordination and liaison with government through DBRs.
- Policy dialogue and advocacy with government around priority issues and 'messages.'

In 2011, BRAC established the Partnership Support Unit, which specifically focuses on strengthening its relations with government, statutory agencies, other NGOs and the media. With regard to its funding arrangements, BRAC maintains a close working relationship with the government's regulatory body for CSOs and foreign funding, the NGO Affairs Bureau, and complies with all government oversight, clearance and approval requirements. Through the SPA, donor partners are able to leverage their relationships and convening power with GoB to give BRAC greater 'voice' and access to government, particularly at a national level. This has enhanced opportunities for policy dialogue, knowledge-sharing, advocacy, and collaboration with government, especially around government uptake of BRAC service delivery models and innovations.

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>42</sup> Mid-Term Review of the SPA Report, Part 2 (August 2014)

Some examples of BRAC impact and policy influence on GoB include<sup>43</sup>:

- Development of a pre-primary education curriculum.
- BRAC inputs to a national skills training policy.
- Collaboration with government on national nutrition policy.
- Helping to shape the Domestic Violence Act and the Action Plan for the national Women's Development Policy

Through its Advocacy for Social Change (ASC) Unit, BRAC engages policymakers, government institutions, the media, civil society and community leaders to achieve positive change in the lives of poor and marginalised people. Using participatory techniques, social media, multi-stakeholder dialogue and social mobilisation, ASC facilitates community-based advocacy around issues like road safety, safe migration, climate change, education and health. An example of its evidence-based advocacy with government is the development of a national database on road accidents which can back up calls for action to increase road safety, which can be taken over by government once it has proven its worth as a tool for policymakers.

BRAC's close working relationships government at all levels provide a vital platform for policy influence through dialogue, practical collaboration and joint problem-solving. The research team met with the Director of Disease Control in the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare. He cited the long history of collaboration between BRAC and government. In his view, GoB is definitely influenced by BRAC at the policy level – 'BRAC has become a massive player in health, so government takes notice of its views on policy.' He stressed the importance of a clear division of labour between government and large NGOs like BRAC, with government taking responsibility for the national interest as well the policy and planning frameworks. The Director particularly highlighted GoB collaboration with BRAC on malaria control through a national programme supported by the Global Fund for HIV/AIDS, TB and Malaria.

The Mid-Term Review of the SPA recommended that BRAC should use the opportunity of its strategy update process in 2015 to articulate more clearly how it collaborates with and complements government. BRAC senior management have a sophisticated understanding of the web of relationships with government at local and national level, but more documentation work is needed to understand where these partnerships bring the greatest return.

# c. NGOs in Bangladesh and other countries

Currently, BRAC has more than 500 civil society partners in education and health programmes. It provides critical nurturing support to small and emerging NGOs and CSOs. Through District Programme Committees, local NGOs are invited to share experiences and provide input to, and feedback on, BRAC programmes. Many of the 2,000 or more donation-based NGOs in Bangladesh are struggling to secure adequate funding. BRAC aims to build stronger partnerships with other CSOs around joint advocacy and service delivery (such as the network of NGOs working on women and girls that was galvanised by the 2014 Girls Summit) as well as partnership to build longer term sustainability for CSOs in Bangladesh. When stronger regulations for foreign donations were tabled in Bangladesh, BRAC's Chairperson led a civil society delegation to represent the concerns of CSOs about the proposed bill.

Through initiatives like the 2015 Frugal Innovation Forum, BRAC shares ideas and models for social enterprise and cost-recovery with the civil society community in Bangladesh, South



<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>43</sup> Mid-Term Review of the SPA Report, Part 2 (August 2014)

Asia and globally. Through BRAC International, BRAC is involved in a growing range of partnerships with CSOs and government in Afghanistan (BRAC is now the largest NGO in Afghanistan), Pakistan, Philippines, Liberia, Sierra Leone, South Sudan, Tanzania, and Uganda. It also has international support and fundraising affiliates, BRAC UK and BRAC USA.

The research team met with the Executive Director of the NGO CAMPE (Campaign for Popular Education), a close collaborator with BRAC, who was generally positive about the SPA as an important new model of development cooperation to be tested and promoted. At the same time, she urged BRAC to be more active in explaining how the SPA benefits civil society and the country. The SPA should not set BRAC apart for wider civil society. Rather, it should be a means to strengthen BRAC's partnerships and collaboration with other NGOs and CBOs.

# d. Donor head offices and staff

There is some evidence of the partnership's impact on donor head offices, but there seems to general agreement that the donor partners have not yet fully exploited the possibilities for greater awareness of, and engagement with, the SPA. DFAT seems to have taken greater advantage of opportunities for such engagement – through, for example, high level BRAC visits to Australia, dialogue between the High Commissioner and the BRAC Chairperson, tapping BRAC's insights on the political economy of Bangladesh, and exploring the applicability of BRAC's experience in other DFAT Asia-Pacific programme countries. Both DFID and DFAT acknowledge that more concerted efforts are required to recruit further head office champions, to build broader ownership of the partnership across their organisations, and to raise awareness of the SPA and its benefits among political leaders. This work is particularly urgent in the wake of major policy and structural changes in DFAT as well as the recent election of a majority government in the UK.

There have been some advances in generating awareness and support in donor head offices. Recently, BRAC had a positive briefing meeting with the Permanent Secretary of DFID while he was on a visit to Bangladesh. DFID is actively working to build wider ownership and visibility for the SPA with DFID in the UK. The DFID Civil Society Department has become involved in dialogue with BRAC and DFID Bangladesh around the SPA, and there has been some engagement with other DFID offices that work with BRAC International. DFID's Head of Profession for Social Development participated as a panellist, along with DFAT's First Assistant Secretary from Canberra, at the dialogue and learning event in London (convened in collaboration with LSE) to share findings from the SPA partnership study. DFAT Bangladesh staff report the First Assistant Secretary has become a firm champion of the partnership.

# e. The SPA as a 'best practice model'

Results from the two online surveys confirmed that the partners view the SPA is a 'best practice model' for development partnerships. The SPA model certainly has great significance for wider partnership practice, aid effectiveness and the post-2015 agenda. It is the first partnership of its kind with a civil society organisation in the global South, which could be a model for other Southern NGOs that are operating at scale. According to one BRAC leader, the SPA's recognition of BRAC as a capable and mature organisation has shifted power relations among the partners – enabling BRAC to move from a narrow results focus to 'what an organisation like BRAC should look like in the 21st century'. While BRAC may be uniquely positioned in some respects, other NGOs can learn much from BRAC's evolution over time into a mature organisation with the necessary assets to sustain a core funding partnership. A DFAT partnership facilitator that has been close to the SPA believes that the model is definitely relevant in other situations. Elements and lessons can be applied to other partnerships 'even if they are not the Rolls Royce model.'



Although 'the partnership has lessons globally ... documentation of the process has been its weakest point,' said one DFAT manager. DFID's most recent Annual Review found that while the SPA partners have worked well together on joint advocacy, the SPA and its achievements need more visibility with a range of audiences, particularly the British and Australian public, academics, development policymakers and implementers. The 2015 DFID Annual Review recommended that a harmonised SPA communications and engagement strategy be developed and put into action to raise the visibility of the SPA, its value and impact and outcomes with a these key audiences.

There is considerable enthusiasm among members of the SPA Steering Committee to showcase the SPA as a critical experiment and innovation in development partnerships. Thus far, the partnership has been developed mainly as a local model. Various international platforms (like conferences on South-South cooperation and meetings on development financing, the post-2015 development agenda and aid effectiveness) offer opportunities to put the SPA on global and regional agendas. As long as Sir Fazle Abed remains active as BRAC Chairperson, he remains a pivotal asset to project partnership lessons on a global stage. In November 2014, SDDirect presented findings from the SPA partnership research at a dialogue and learning event convened in London by the SPA partners, BRAC UK and the London School of Economics. Attended by approximately 150 people, the event included panel discussion involving Dr Mushtaque Chowdhury (Interim Executive Director, BRAC) Paul Healey (Head of Profession: Social Development, DFID), and Scott Dawson (First Assistant Secretary, Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade). All panellists spoke highly of the achievements and innovations of the SPA. The LSE event demonstrated the potential for wider dialogue and learning about the SPA in future.

#### 7. Key observations, lessons and reflections from the SPA partnership research

While it is difficult to attribute directly to the SPA all of the changes and improvements noted in the partnership research, the evidence suggests that over relatively short period of time the SPA has contributed substantially to the following gains:

- High quality information sharing among the SPA partners
- A more predictable and flexible single source of financing for BRAC
- Creation of a unified programme results framework for BRAC
- A shift of focus in dialogue among partners from activities to outcomes
- Establishment of the BRAC Impact Assessment Unit
- Greater freedom for BRAC to set its own funding and programme priorities
- More secure resourcing and integration of human rights, community empowerment and gender equality programmes in BRAC
- An accelerated, transformative organisational development and capacity development process in BRAC
- Better, more strategic programme planning and longer term thinking in BRAC
- Extension of BRAC programmes into new and remote areas
- Strong impetus towards BRAC programme innovation and roll-out
- A growing culture of 'One BRAC' and integration rather than fragmented programmes
- Movement towards a standardised M&E system in BRAC
- Greater efficiencies and lowering of partner transaction costs
- A substantial return on donor investment in the form of reportable development results
- Greater mutual confidence and shared responsibility among the SPA partners
- Greater mutual access to top leadership and decision-makers
- More strategic dialogue and engagement among the partners and with GoB



- Greater BRAC focus on policy advocacy and GoB engagement at district and national levels
- Increased collective access to global platforms and deliberations

The strategic partnership is itself a major, and largely unsung, innovation. According to one SPA leader, 'it is unique with a unique story to tell.' The SPA partners have set an important precedent by co-creating a values-based, results-driven collaboration between major donors and a major Southern-based NGO that is achieving delivery and impact at scale. They have constructed a pragmatic, flexible (but also highly accountable) partnership mechanism that enables BRAC to innovate and take risks within an agreed strategic framework. The SPA is a globally instructive case study of donors and NGOs striving to work together as equals, generating mutual benefit through collective action and sharing of power. Evidence from the partnership clearly demonstrates that development partnerships based on trust, equity, core funding and donor investment in NGO institutional development can yield strong value for money as well as increased development effectiveness.

Great strides have been made in the SPA to institutionalise a culture of innovation and learning through partnership – generating an increasing number of practical, tested innovations (in BRAC development programmes, in BRAC's advocacy and collaboration with government, and in BRAC's own organisational capacity and sustainability planning). Through core funding support, the SPA has tested innovative market-related, cost recovery models to achieve development outcomes. It has enabled more responsive outreach to the ultra-poor and hard-to-reach populations. And it has provided catalytic resources for otherwise hard-to-fund rights and gender programmes that are now showing 'proof of concept' for rights-based delivery on a wide front.

The research process has surfaced many lessons and reflections, chiefly formulated by active participants in the SPA story. Following is a snapshot of lessons for practice (drawing on inputs and direct testimony from partner surveys and interviews):

- Assess the 'readiness for partnership.' Partnerships are not a solution to everything, in all times or circumstances. Evidence suggests that the timing for the SPA was right, that the key people driving the process were the right people, and that BRAC was 'in a class of its own' to sustain a more equitable partnership with donors.
- **Create a core convening team** of partnership brokers and 'bridging leaders' to hold and drive the partnership process.
- Develop a common understanding of partnership. 'Partnership' has different meanings to different individuals and organisations. Ultimately, there is no 'off the shelf' model that will fit all contexts. Partners must collectively invent, and re-invent, the collaboration for their own unique circumstances.
- Identify shared and individual interests (including underlying organisational needs and expectations that may not always be transparent).
- Be clear on agreed purpose, outcomes, values and principles for the partnership. The SPA experience has positive experience in negotiating a common vision and shared values. But it also illustrates the complexities of securing broad organisational buy-in and ownership beyond a committed core team of 'partnership insiders.'





- Build trust and relationships. The SPA would not have been possible without strong pre-existing relationships of trust between the partners as well as BRAC's exceptional track record as a trustworthy, transparent and highly accountable collaborator. Despite staff turnover and challenges around the inclusive engagement of some programme and sector level staff, the SPA has been remarkably successful in building mutual trust and strong working relationships at the heart of the partnership.
- Facilitate open, honest and effective communications. The SPA experience demonstrates the importance and challenges of achieving high quality dialogue. The integrity, openness and honesty of partnership spaces and forums are critical indicators of success. Robust internal and external communications are the oxygen of innovative development partnerships.
- Be realistic and manage expectations. The opportunities and expectations of partnerships tend to run ahead of achievable outcomes. In the case of the SPA, a shared pragmatism has generally helped to balance expectations and attainable results.
- Clarify expectations, mechanisms and roles for partnership engagement. All
  partnership stakeholders and staff cannot be expected to invest the same level of
  effort and engagement in the partnership. It is important to define clearly what is
  possible and what is expected from different stakeholders as well as the mechanisms
  and division of labour for engagement. It is equally important that people are held
  accountable for their roles through performance review systems.
- Dedicate time and resources for partnership-building and management. Although
  partnerships can reduce the transaction costs of development cooperation (as
  demonstrated by the SPA), significant investments of time and resources are also
  needed. Such investments can yield high returns, as has been illustrated by the SPA
  partners' investments in the Bangladesh Partnership Advisor post at DFID, the
  partnership brokers and facilitators sourced by DFAT, and the role played by BRAC's
  Donor Liaison Office.
- Partnering skills and facilitation are needed. Partnership skills are different from traditional programme management skills. The SPA has gained significant value from the expertise and support of experienced partnership brokers and practitioners grounded in best practice thinking. Time has been dedicated to a series of partnership-building and training workshops, partnership health checks and reflection sessions. In the self-assessment process for this study, partners have consistently given priority to further development of partnering, networking and facilitation skills among staff.
- Provide orientation and induction to the partnership for staff and leadership. A culture and understanding of partnerships does not grow unassisted. Among development organisations there are particularly high levels of staff mobility, so systematic partnership induction and orientation processes are essential.
- Governance, transparency and accountability are critical. Partnership leaders need to nurture mutual understanding at all levels of the rules and requirements influencing each organisation. Equitable decision-making, transparency, openness to change and innovation are all crucial ingredients of successful partnership. The SPA is a case study of 'working with a new framework, having flexibility and freedom, but not compromising with accountability.'



- Structured processes and sustained dialogue are required, with clear agendas set by decision-makers, allowing adequate time for consultation and making use of trusted intermediaries or facilitators where needed.
- Set clear success criteria and monitor effectiveness of the partnership model. Develop a strong monitoring, evaluation and reporting system, with clear milestones and targets. The SPA results framework has been a critical success factor, and collaborative review exercises, like the Mid-Term Review, have made a big contribution to partnership evaluation and adaptation.
- Nurture learning and innovation. Provide sufficient space for joint learning and experimentation. 'The SPA is an exercise in learning through doing,' said one informant. Another said, 'BRAC and SPA partners have demonstrated an appetite for risk and innovation, and are learning together to make this partnership work.'
- Build wider organisational ownership, staff capacity and shared responsibility for the partnership. Although there is a need for a committed holding and convening group at its centre, the partnership cannot be sustained if is seen as the sole responsibility of that group. Broader dialogue and involvement within partner organisations is required to build shared ownership. The partners must be clear to staff and stakeholders about the incentives and entry points for engagement. Delivery of partnership programmes outcomes requires strategic investment in staff capacity.
- Create head office advocates for the partnership. Without strong influential champions at the level of top leadership and donor headquarters, the SPA's added value and innovations (such as its core funding and institutional investment approaches) may not be sustained.
- Be patient partnerships are complex and hard work. 'It is not as easy as it looks. Personalities and important and turnover in leadership remains a risk.' A considerable investment of time and resources is required. But as long as the partners are honest, clear and realistic about objectives from the start, the rewards can be great.

The SPA is a work in progress and is still relatively young. It was not built according to a grand design. It is a prototype, animated by pragmatic interests, context and the remarkable qualities of BRAC. But the SPA process has also been informed by good practice thinking about development partnerships. It is driven by an aspiration for richer, more equitable forms of collaboration between donors and civil society organisations, particularly Southernled NGOs operating at scale. In the formative years of the SPA, the partners have refrained from going public with definitive lessons, models or achievements until some 'proof of concept' for this innovation emerged. Despite the continuing challenges of building inclusive ownership among the partners, realising the potential for more strategic engagement and learning, and sustaining momentum around collaboration, current evidence suggests that a firm foundation has been built. The very considerable results and innovations documented in this report and other recent reviews of the SPA provide solid proof of concept for this model of strategic partnership. As a BRAC leader said, 'we have now put in the plumbing – it's time to turn on the water.' The time is also right for the story of the strategic partnership to be shared with a much wider audience.

Since the inception of the SPA, the partner organisations have evolved, as have the environments and aid culture in which they work. As it moves into the future, the SPA needs



to be a development vehicle fit for changing times. Together, BRAC, DFID and DFAT have articulated an emerging vision of the SPA as a 'knowledge partnership.' Exactly how this may be realised in practice has yet to be determined. But there is little doubt that the combined potential of the partners – in experience, networks, influence, data, proven capacity for practical innovation at scale, and unrealised possibilities for wider collaboration on research – could produce a powerful, globally significant knowledge partnership.

Perhaps the most important lesson from the SPA experience is that more equitable development partnerships are possible; but they are not built from formulaic, 'off the shelf' designs. Bridging leadership is required. An authentic common vision as well as shared values must be forged, and renewed over time, through sustained dialogue and negotiation. New skills for partnership, reflection and collective action must be nurtured. Old mind sets and paradigms need to be shifted to create space for a new culture of collaboration: 'Partnerships are in the minds, not in the arrangements' (DFAT survey informant).

#### As one DFID leader observed,

It is possible, over time, to change the nature of the relationship from one in which a donors buys results from an implementing organisation to something that more closely resembles a genuine partnership between equals, all of whom bring something to the table. But this requires vision and commitment, a willingness to take risks, and that donors be willing to cede some power and control to partners.

In partnership with DFID and DFAT, BRAC continues to challenge traditional expectations and stereotypes of the role of NGOs and their relationships with donors and government. The story of the SPA speaks directly to new global goals and targets for sustainable development partnerships. Sharing evidence from the SPA would help to push the boundaries of conventional mind sets and practice for the post-2015 era of development collaboration.



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# Annex A: Detailed timeline of the SPA, 2008 to 2014

2008/9	<ul> <li>Recognition of BRAC's achievements and the long-standing partnership with DFID; Response to changes in DFID funding/programme priorities and the rapid scaling up of DFID Bangladesh programme: Core funding idea (DFID) 'Key moment' was a meeting on the BRAC education programme</li> <li>Initial high level discussions between DFID and BRAC; Key partner personnel deployed to facilitate consultation and design process</li> <li>DFID options paper for engegement with BRAC produced (May 2008)</li> <li>DFID-commissioned an Independent Review of BRAC (2009)</li> <li>DFID consultations with other BRAC donors: AusAID expresses interest in the strategic partnership and signals move to core funding for BRAC. Meetings and initial discussions between DFID, BRAC and AusAID</li> <li>AusAID develops concept note and engages in concept peer review, undertakes appraisal of BRAC strategy, conducts a procurement review</li> </ul>
•	<ul> <li>Working group assembled to drive set-up</li> </ul>
	<ul> <li>Negotiations on common and individual objectives, expectations and outcomes</li> </ul>
	<ul> <li>Joint partnership workshop BRAC, DFID and AusAID (Sept 2010)</li> </ul>
	<ul> <li>Drafting SPA Terms of Engagement and Donor Principles of Cooperation</li> </ul>
	<ul> <li>Donor partner consultations, ensuring of buy-in from head offices</li> </ul>
	Drafting of DFID Business Case
2010	<ul> <li>AusAID concept note and peer review from head office - approval secured</li> <li>Appraisal of BRAC strategy, procurement review</li> </ul>
	<ul> <li>Redefining roles among the partners and securing support by high-level champions in each partner organisation</li> </ul>
	<ul> <li>Financial and procurement reviews by AusAID and DFID</li> </ul>
	•DFID Business Case completed and approval secured
	Donor resource commitments confirmed for 2011-2015
	<ul> <li>BRAC Strategy (2011-2015) completed with input from DFID and then AusAID</li> </ul>
	Core Group formed; regular meetings
2011	Development of the Results Framework (RF)
2011	<ul> <li>Organisational review of BRAC undertaken</li> <li>Establishment of BRAC Impact Assessment Unit and Social Innovation Lab</li> </ul>
	•Terms of Engagement and Donor Principles of Cooperation agreed



- SPA signed with strong political support from donor governments, low-key media launch (visit of BRAC Chairperson to UK for signing)
- Results Framework completed and agreed by all partners
- ·Savar partnership brokering training facilitated by Yeshe Smith
- ·Light touch first Annual Review: programmatic and partnership level
- ·Revision of Resullts Framework (particularly Level 3)
- BRAC Executive Management Committee, proposal screening process instituted
- Organisational Change Committee formed; competitive internal project/programme approval process established
- ·Sector consortium groups (education, health) formed
- Engagement with wider stakeholders in partner organisations around implications and consequences of partnership
- Regular reporting on SPA funded activities

2012

2013

2014

- Updated BRAC Strategy, incorporating comments from DFID and then AusAID
   DFID Partnership Advisor in place
- Separation between Oversight Committee and Working Group
- ·All levels of the Results Framework updated
- AusAID integrated into DFAT, change of government
- ·Sector consortium continue to evolve (TOR, relationships)
- •DFID and DFAT attend BRAC's Board Meeting
- ·Risk Working Group and Risk Register created in partnership workshop
- New senior champions for SPA being introduced and brought on board
- Major BRAC organisational development, HR, communications and capacity development initiative underway
- ·Pilot efforts to test BRAC's cost-recovery possibilities in education and health
- Visits of senior BRAC management to donor head offices
- ·Research study to document the SPA, lessons and added value commissioned
- Six-monthly Steering Committee meetings engaging senior staff and champions agreed
- Regular reporting on SPA funded activities
- Visit of BRAC Chairperson to Canberra/DFAT
- Documenting the SPA and taking stock: Partnership research and documentation underway
- Mid-Term Review March August (jointly planned and initiated by the partners)
   Reflection: Where is the SPA going?
- ·BRAC leadership succession plans and processes supported
- ·Scaling up of programme interventions underway
- On-going efforts to diversify BRAC funding base and expand SPA donor participation and representation
- Regular reporting on SPA funded activities



# Annex B: BRAC transaction costs savings through SPA (provided by BRAC CFO)

			Calculatio	RAC SPA on of Cost S ear 2011 to						
		Unit Cost		Month	) Cost in Taka	Estima Unit Cost		Month	c. 2015) Taka	Total Cost in Taka
1	Project proposal negotiation with donors									
1.1	Ultra Poor Program Salary and benefits of									
	- Director (30% time)	275,000	1	6	495,000	-	-		~	495,000
	<ul> <li>Program Head (50% time)</li> <li>Program Manager (30% time)</li> </ul>	165,000	1	6	495,000 198,000		-	-		495,000 198,000
	- Communication officer (100%)	55,000	i	6	330,000		-	-		330,000
1.2	Human Rights and Legal Aids Services Salary and benefits of									
	- Director (30% time)	275,000	I	6	495,000		-	~		495,000
	- Program Head (50% time)	165,000	1	6	495,000		-		-	495,000
	<ul> <li>Program Manager (30% time)</li> <li>Communication officer (100%)</li> </ul>	110,000 55,000	1	6	198,000 330,000	1			-	198,000 330,000
		20,000		0	550,000					550,000
1.3	Community Empowerment Program Salary and benefits of									
	- Director (30% time)	275,000	1	6	495,000		-	1	-	495,000
	- Program Head (50% time)	165,000	1	6	495,000	~	-	-	-	495,000
	<ul> <li>Program Manager (30% time)</li> <li>Communication officer (100%)</li> </ul>	110,000 55,000	1	6	198,000 330,000	2	-	-	-	198,000 330,000
1.4	Policy and Advocacy for Social Change Salary and benefits of									
	- Director (30% time)	250,000	1	6	450,000	-	-	-	-	450,000
	- Program Head (50% time)	150,000	1	6	450,000	~	-	-	-	450,000
	<ul> <li>Program Manager (30% time)</li> <li>Communication officer (100%)</li> </ul>	100,000 50,000	1	6	180,000 300,000	-	-	-		180,000 300,000
		201000	-	Ŭ	200,000					
1.5	Education Program Salary and benefits of									
	- Director (30% time)	275,000	1	6	495,000	~				495,000
	- Program Head (50% time)	165,000	1	6	495,000	· ·	-	-		495,000 198,000
	<ul> <li>Program Manager (50% time)</li> <li>Communication officer</li> </ul>	110,000 55,000	1	6 6	198,000 330,000	-	-	-		330,000
		Unit Cost	Actual (20 Number	Month	) Cost in Taka	Estima Unit Cost		Month	e. 2015) Taka	Total Cost in Taka
1.6	Health Program Salary and benefits of - Director (30% time) - Program Head (50% time) - Program Manager (30% time) - Communication officer (100%)	275,000 165,000 110,000 55,000	1	6 6 6	495,000 495,000 198,000 330,000	:	-			495,000 495,000 198,000 330,000
1.7	Water Sanitation and Hygiene Programme Salary and benefits of		-							
	- Director (30% time)	275,000	1	6	495,000	~				495,000
	- Program Head (50% time)	165,000	1	6	495,000	-				495,000
	- Program Manager (30% time)	110,000	1	6	198,000	~	-	-	-	198,000
	<ul> <li>Communication officer (100%)</li> </ul>	55,000	1	6	330,000		-	-	-	330,000
1.8	Gender, Justice and Diversity Salary and benefits of									
	- Director (30% time)	275,000	1	6	495,000					495,000
	- Program Head (50% time)	165,000	i	6	495,000		-	2	-	495,000
	- Program Manager (30% time)	110,000	1	6	198,000	· ·	~	-	-	198,000
	- Communication officer (100%)	55,000	1	6	330,000	~		-	-	330,000
1.9	Agriculture and Food Security Programme Salary and benefits of									
	- Director (30% time)	275,000	1	6	495,000			~	-	495,000
	- Program Head (50% time)	165,000	1	6	495,000	× .		-		495,000
	<ul> <li>Program Manager (30% time)</li> </ul>	110,000	1	6	198,000	- F		×		198,000
	- Communication officer (100%)	55,000	1	6	330,000		2			330,000
	Finance and Accounts									
1.10		250.000			600.000					630.000
1.10	Salary and benefits of		1	6	630,000 495,000	· ·	1	-		630,000 495,000
1.10	- CFO (30% time)	350,000								
1.10	- CFO (30% time) - Head of Accounts (50% time)	165,000	1	6				-		
1.10	- CFO (30% time)		1	6 6	198,000 330,000	:		-		198,000 330,000
1.10	- CFO (30% time) - Head of Accounts (50% time) - General Manager (30% time)	165,000 110,000 55,000	1	6	198,000	:				198,000
	<ul> <li>CFO (30% time)</li> <li>Head of Accounts (50% time)</li> <li>General Manager (30% time)</li> <li>Communication officer (100%)</li> <li>Total of 1 (Proposal negotiation with donors)</li> </ul>	165,000 110,000 55,000	1	6	198,000 330,000	:				198,000 330,000
1.10	<ul> <li>CFO (30% time)</li> <li>Head of Accounts (50% time)</li> <li>General Manager (30% time)</li> <li>Communication officer (100%)</li> </ul>	165,000 110,000 55,000	1	6	198,000 330,000	:				198,000 330,000



			Actual (20		4)	Estim	ated (Janu	ary to De	e. 2015)	Total Cost
		Unit Cost	Number	Month	Cost in Taka	Unit Cost	Number	Month	Taka	in Taka
2.1	Director Ultra Poor Program - 10% time	27,500	1	48	1,320,000	30,250	1	12	363,000	1,683,000
2.2	Director Human Rights and Legal Aid Services - 10%	27,500	1	48	1,320,000	30,250	1	12	363,000	1,683,000
2.3	Director Community Empowerment Program - 10%	27,500	1	48	1,320,000	30,250	1	12	363,000	1,683,000
2.4	Director Policy Advocacy and Social Change- 10%	27,500	1	48	1,320,000	30,250	1	12	363,000	1,683,000
2.5	Director Education Program- 10%	27,500	1	48	1,320,000	30,250	1	12	363,000	1,683,000
2.6	Director Health Program- 10%	27,500	1	48	1,320,000	30,250	1	12	363,000	1,683,000
2.7	Director Gender, Justice and Social Change- 10%	27,500	Ĩ.	48	1,320,000	30,250	1	12	363,000	1,683,000
2.8	Director Agriculture and Food Security- 10%	27,500	1	48	1,320,000	30,250	1	12	363,000	1,683,000
2.9	Director Water Sanitation and Hygiene- 10%	27,500	ĩ	48	1,320,000	30,250	1	12	363,000	1,683,000
2.10	Communication Officer Ultra Poor Program	55,000	1	48	2,640,000	60,500	ī	12	726,000	3,366,000
2.11	Communication Officer Human Rights and Legal Aids Services	55,000	1	48	2,640,000	60,500	I	12	726,000	3,366,000
2.12	Communication Officer Community Empowerment	55,000	1	48	2,640,000	60,500	I.	12	726,000	3,366,000
2.13	Communication Officer Policy and Advocacy for Social Change	55,000	τ	48	2,640,000	60,500	1	12	726,000	3,366,000
2.14	Communication Officer Education Program	55,000	1	48	2,640,000	60,500	1	12	726,000	3,366,000
2.15	Communication Officer Health Program	55,000	1	48	2,640,000	60,500	1	12	726,000	3,366,000
2.16	Communication Officer Water, Sanitation and Hygiene	55,000	1	48	2,640,000	60,500	I	12	726,000	3,366,000

			Actual (20	11 to 201-	4)	Estima	ated (Janu	ary to D	ec. 2015)	Total Cost
		Unit Cost	Number	Month	Cost in Taka	Unit Cost	Number	Month	Taka	in Taka
2.17	Communication Officer Agriculture and Food Security	55,000	1	48	2,640,000	60,500	1	12	726,000	3,366,000
2.18	Communication Officer Gender, Justice and Diversity	55,000	1	48	2,640,000	60,500	ī	12	726,000	3,366,000
Sub to	otal of 2 ( Communication with Donors)				35,640,000				9,801,000	45,441,000
3	Donor wise Reporting and communication									
3.1	Report writer - 6 monthly Programme wise from 2011 to 2015	60,742	12	48	34,987,392	66,816	12	12	9,621,533	44,608,925
3.2	Financial Report - 6 monthly Programme wise from 2011 to 2015	60,742	8	48	23,324,928	66,816	8	12	6,414,355	29,739,283
3.3	Data collection and processing	54,000	9	8	3,888,000	59,400	9	2	1,069,200	4,957,200
3.3	Narrative report printing and supplies				1,075,000				591,250	1,666,250
3.4	External Audit Report - Yearly 5 report for each project	852,000	9	4	30,672,000	937,200	9	1	8,434,800	39,106,800
	Total of 2 (Donor wise reporting)				93,947,320				26,131,138	120,078,458
	Total Cost Savings			in Taka	144,764,320				35,932,138	180,696,458
	Total Cost Savings			in US S	1,855,953				460,668	2,316,621

#### **Annex C: Unpacking partnership principles**

The following partnership principles were assembled from international good practice literature on partnerships as well as The Terms of Engagement and Results Framework of the BRAC/DFID/DFAT Strategic Partnership Arrangement. These principles were used in participatory self-assessment workshops facilitated by Social Development Direct in 2014, involving key stakeholders from the SPA partner organisations, to reflect on partnership's performance.

#### 1. Equity, Joint Purpose and Mutual Respect

- •All partners have an equal right to be at the table.
- The partners are moving from traditional relationships to more equal relationships.
- •All partner contributions, financial and non-financial, are equally valued.
- •The partnership is built on a common vision, clear joint purpose and shared values.
- •There is shared ownership of the partnership, its common purpose and objectives.
- •There is widespread ownership of the partnership across and within partners.
- •The specific motivation and objectives of each partner are clear, realistic and well understood.
- •The partnership has clearly defined outcomes.
- The partners abide by the agreed Terms of Engagement and Donor Principles of Coordination.
- •There is an equitable balance of power and influence among the partners.

## 2. Collaborative Governance, and Transparency

- •There is increased mutual accountability and sharing of risk and reward.
- •There is open, honest sharing of ideas and timely exchange of information.
- •There is a clear commitment to partnership working from the most senior levels of each partner organisation.
- •Commitment to partnership working is sufficiently robust to withstand most threats, including turnover of staff and leadership.
- •A collaborative governance framework is in place outlining agreed roles, responsibilities, shared values and principles.
- •The partnership recognises and encourages partnership brokering, networking and facilitation skills.
- •The partnership has succeeded in having the right people in the right place at the right time to promote partnership working.
- The partners actively engage and educate their organisations on the partnership and its principles.
- •There is sufficient trust among the partners to ensure the resilience of the partnership and joint risk-taking.



#### 3. Mutual Benefit

- •The partners recognise, support and respond to each others' strategic objectives.
- Benefits derived from the partnership are distributed fairly among all partners.
  There is a clear understanding of the partners' interdependence in achieving
- shared and individual objectives.
- Partners facilitate access to top level decision-makers in the respective organisations.
- •The partners recognise BRAC leading role in the design and delivery of partnership outcomes with contribution development partners' support.
- •There is strong technical cooperation and engagement through effective sharing of technical skills, knowledge and capacity.
- Donor consortia are meeting and leading to collaborative practices.
- •Technical staff and programme leaders meet regularly and participate in donor consortia, reviews, studies, workshops, field trips and learning events organised by the partners.
- •Partners share findings of research, surveys and analysis.

#### 4. Joint Evaluation and Learning

- •The partners are committed to managing for results.
- •Rigorous outcome and impact information is generated that meets the needs of all partners.
- •The partnership results framework is agreed and reviewed annually.
- The results framework has clear success criteria for both programme goals and performance of the partnership itself.
- •There are clear arrangements for monitoring and review of both programme and partnership results.
- Development partners use information generated by the results framework, reports and other BRAC data and keep requests for further information to a minimum.
- •Monitoring, evaluation and review findings are widely shared among the partners.
- Monitoring, evaluation and review processes provide a platform for joint learning and joint action (adjustments, changes, improvements).
- There are sufficient incentives and requirements to ensure regular technical exchange and learning among the partners.
- 5. Effective Communications and Sharing of Knowledge
- •The partnership is generating useful knowledge and evidence.
- The impact and outcomes of the strategic partnership are effectively communicated.
- Target audiences for communications are identified and tools/mechanisms to reach these audiences are developed.
- Internal and external communications strategies have been agreed and implemented.
- Partners are acknowledged in line with agreed branding and communications guidelines.
- •The partnership story is well-documented (history, process, lessons, the changes it has produced at social, organisational and personal levels).
- Partnership successes and innovations are well communicated outside of the partnership.
- •Other development partners are being encouraged to join the partnership.
- •Knowledge generated through the partnership is shared with stakeholders who are working on similar issues or pursuing a partnership approach.



#### 6. Human Capacity Development

- •The partnership is building the leadership and human resource capacities of BRAC.
- •The partnership fosters an environment that respects a range of skills and experience.
- •The partnership articulates clear capacity development objectives.
- •The partnership recognises and encourages partnership brokering, networking and facilitation skills.
- The partnership is improving partner skills for collaboration among all the partners.
- Partner staff at different levels are engaged practically in partnership activities.
- •Leaders and managers in partner organisations are promoting staff awareness of, and involvement in, the partnership.
- The partnership is advancing gender equity, balance and representation at management level.

#### 7. Resource Mobilisation and Sustainability

- •There is a predictable and accountable single source of financing available to BRAC.
- It is clear what financial and non-financial resources each partner brings to the partnership.
- Development partners are providing financing according to agreements.
- •BRAC accounts of development partner funds in the form and at the times agreed.
- The partnership has strengthened BRAC's programme effectiveness.
- •The partnership is enhancing BRAC's sustainability (financial and non-financial).
- The partnership is having an impact beyond its immediate stakeholders (including with the Government of Bangladesh, broader civil society in Bangladesh, donor head offices).
- The partnership is sustainable beyond the life of the current SPA (with or without current levels of funding).
- •The partnership is advancing gender equity and gender balance in BRAC.



The Synergos Inclusive Partnership Life Cycle (see <u>www.synergos.org</u>)

# Inclusive Partnerships Lifecycle

# Invitation

- Ensuring legitimacy
- Assessing feasibility
- Framing goals and outcomes

# Assembly

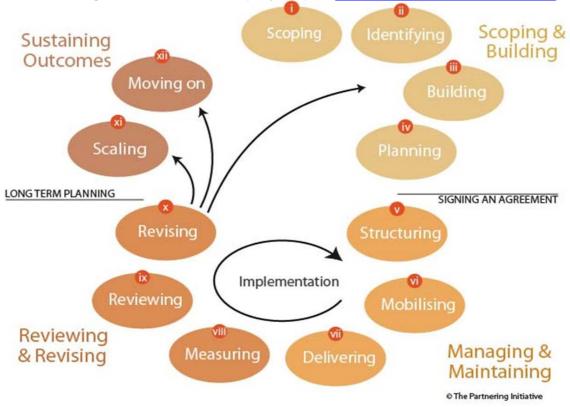
- Convening initiating partners and situation research
- Systems analysis and stakeholder mapping
- Mobilizing stakeholders and preparing for action

# Sustainability

- Building political support
- Mainstreaming effective pilots
- Supporting new institutional arrangements

# Dialogue & Action

- Stakeholder dialogue to deepen systems understanding
- Co-creative design of prototypes and pilots
- Launch and measurement of systems change pilot initiatives
- Network and movement building



# The Partnering Initiative: Partnership Cycle (see <a href="http://www.thepartneringinitiative.org">www.thepartneringinitiative.org</a>)



#### Annex E: The future of the partnership

The vast majority of stakeholders surveyed in the 2015 online stakeholder survey support a continuation of the SPA beyond 2015, although there were mixed views on the sustainability of the partnership without current or increased levels of funding. When canvassed about their hopes and expectations for the future of the partnership, participants responded as follows:

- Continuation: Greater focus on BRAC's long-term sustainability and thinking of this as a long term joint/collaborative activity.
- Expansion: Secure the engagement of other development partners in the SPA; replicate the partnership in other countries.
- Advocacy and influencing: Jointly plan global events; increase the joint influencing role of the partners.
- Recognition and promotion of the partnership model: Actively promote the partnership to external audiences; create donor HQ advocates for the model; and raise BRAC's global profile and reputation (including with UK and Australian publics).
- Agree on risk appetite (or agree to disagree)
- More thematic focus on women and girls' empowerment, rights-based work, and quality education; possible interventions in Madrasa schools; work in more hard-toreach areas.
- Address new challenges, such as the post-2015 agenda, urban sector development, and governance.
- More innovation with results framework, at outcomes level, and measuring VfM.
- Increased use of ICTs in programme activities and process improvements.
- Build government capacity to take over service delivery.

There is energy among senior leaders from all of the partner organisations to explore possibilities for a stronger knowledge and advocacy partnership, with global influence and impact, and for a wider engagement through the SPA with the larger BRAC group, including BRAC enterprises, BRAC University and BRAC International. One senior DFID leader conceives of the future partnership as a 'social innovation lab.'

Some critical questions have been surfaced in the course of the research that should be explored as the partners consider their vision and terms of engagement for a possible next phase:

- How can the partners mobilise sufficient political will and organisational support from across partner organisations to sustain collaboration and common purpose beyond 2015?
- What are the essential things that can be gained through the strategic partnership that cannot be accomplished through a more conventional bilateral relationship?
- Are the partners getting the most out of the SPA? What unrealised potential in the partnership has yet to be realised?
- What would a vibrant, achievable knowledge and advocacy partnership look like in the future of the SPA?
- Do the principles and culture of the partnership sufficiently enable the kind of robust and challenging dialogue envisaged by its founders (and advocated by the recent DFID Annual Review)?
- Are there opportunities in the next phase of the SPA to strengthen BRAC's brand, presence and effectiveness as a global player?
- How can the partners find an acceptable balance between SPA principles of equity, trust and mutual respect and the growing compliance culture in donor agencies?

At a partnership Visioning Workshop convened in Dhaka in May 2015, some of these questions were addressed. The partners are considering possibilities to broaden organisational and staff involvement with the SPA through more focused technical



engagement around agreed priority programmatic themes. Additionally, BRAC proposes to ask its programme staff to have dialogue (including frank critical review) with relevant donor sectoral advisors about new funding proposals before they are submitted for approval by BRAC. Joint communications and advocacy efforts will be stepped up, including efforts targeting donor head offices, decision-makers and the wider public in donor countries.

As for the essential objective that requires partnership, BRAC's new strategy for 2016 to 2020 aims to reach 20 million underserved people in Bangladesh, which can only be achieved through collaboration with government and the SPA donor partners. The strategy embraces key donor partner priorities in the areas of skills development, economic growth, women and girl, and resilience (tackling ultra-poverty and social protection), with accountability and empowerment as an underlying thread in all programmes.

The SPA partners are in conversation about the merits of building on the existing SPA to realise its potential as a 'knowledge partnership.' The exact definition of a 'knowledge partnership' in the context of the SPA (as well as the mean to achieve it) needs further exploration. A 'knowledge partnership' might entail collaboration with BRAC University and other relevant arms of BRAC. It could include greater sharing of evidence, research collaboration, more technical exchange and joint dissemination of results. The partners are looking at options for joint international advocacy on priority themes and opportunities to strengthen BRAC brand and presence at the global level.

To mitigate the burden of due diligence and external review that falls on BRAC, the partners agreed that all scrutiny processes should be carried our collectively, sharing outcomes and learning among all of the SPA partners.<sup>44</sup>

The recent Visioning Workshop produced new draft Term of Engagement (ToE) for the SPA for a potential next phase. Drawing on dialogue around principles convened as part of the partnership research process, the new draft ToE reflect shared values negotiated over the course of the partnership as well as principles set out in the literature on good partnership practice. The suggested guiding principles for the partnership include:<sup>45</sup>

- Equity, joint purpose and mutual respect. Partners act with mutual respect, prioritise the joint objectives of the SPA in their dealings with other partners and promote, internally and externally, the shared ownership of the SPA. Contributing development partners participate in the SPA on an equal basis regardless of their relative financial contribution.
- **Enhanced resource mobilisation and sustainability:** Contributing development partners provide predictable funding. All partners work to promote additional resource flows and the long-term sustainability of BRAC.
- Collaborative governance, trust, transparency and internal communication: Partners are committed to an open and honest exchange of information and to early notice of problems or issues. Partners participate in the governance structures and manage their relations in a spirit of mutual accountability. Partners recognise that business processes differ, but aim to ensure early notice of requirements, harmonisation, sharing of documents and benefit to all partners arising from these processes. Partners encourage dissemination of knowledge and results arising from the partnership within their respective agencies, and promote specific and targeted

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>44</sup> SPAA Visioning Workshop Report, Dhaka (27-28 May 2015)

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>45</sup> BRAC/DFID/DFAT Strategic Partnership (SPA): Terms of Engagement (June 2015)

engagement of staff in consultations, knowledge sharing and joint action with other partners in agreed priority areas.

- Mutual benefit: The partners strive to share the benefits of the SPA equitably. They
  also undertake to support each other's development activities through exchange of
  knowledge and experience, to support where possible each other's relationships
  with other development agencies and actors and to seek mutually beneficial
  opportunities for advocacy. Partners seek to maximise the mutual benefit from
  reducing transaction costs.
- Sharing of knowledge and effective external communications: Partners undertake to share knowledge and experience derived from Bangladesh and globally, particularly on issues agreed from time to time as being priorities for the SPA. Partners work together as the SPA to contribute knowledge and experience to national and global discussions on development, to use targeted opportunities for joint advocacy and to disseminate the experience of working in partnership.
- Joint evaluation and learning: Partners use a single set of results and reporting as the basis for assessment of BRAC programme effectiveness and carry out reviews and evaluations jointly where possible. Partners continue jointly to assess the effectiveness of partnership structures and principles.



# Annex F: Participants in interviews and meetings

### BRAC

Andrew Jenkins         Donor Liaison Office and Impact Assessment Unit           Dr Ameena Ahmed         Programme Coordinator, BRAC Education           Anna Minj         Director, Community Empowerment           Asif Kashem         Donor Liaison Office           Asif Kashem         Donor Liaison Office           Asif Kashem         Donor Liaison Office           Asif Saleh         Sr. Director, Strategy, Communications and Capacity, BRAC and BRAC International           BA Wahid Newton         Programme Manager, BRAC Education           Babar Kabir         Sr. Director, DECC and WASH           Bhaskar Das         Chief People Officer           BM Hamin Rahman         Manager, M&E, ASC Unit           Bonosree Sarker         Manager, Migration           Faruque Hossain         Senior Manager, Gender Training           Faustina Pereira         Director, Human Rights and Legal Aid Services           Habibur Rahman         Programme Head, Gender Justice and Diversity           Hasan Imam         Programme Manager, Gender Justice and Diversity           Ishita Islam         Sr. Programme Manager, Human Rights and Legal Aid Services           Kazi Nazrul Fattah         Programme Coordinator, Community Empowerment Programme           Programme Coordinator, Gender Justice and Diversity         Director, Director BRAC Health, Nutrition and Population Programme     <	BRAC	
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Ishita Islam       Sr. Programme Manager, Human Rights and Legal Aid Services         Kaosar Afsana       Director, Director BRAC Health, Nutrition and Population Programme         Kazi Nazrul Fattah       Programme Coordinator, Community Empowerment Programme         Kaleda Khanom       Programme Coordinator, Gender Justice and Diversity         Dr Mahabub Hossain       Advisor to Executive Director and Research & Evaluation Division         Md. Abu Hanif       Programme Manager, IDP         Md. Abu Hanif       Programme Director, TB and Malaria Control, WASH and DECC         Md. Aki Hossain       Senior Manager, ASC Unit         Md. Aminul Islam       Senior Manager, Gender Justice and Diversity         Md. Aminul Islam       Senior Manager, Gender Justice and Diversity         Md. Aminul Islam       Programme Manager, PSU         Md. Aminul Islam       Manager, Gender Justice and Diversity         Md. Auruzaman       Sr. Manager, Gender Justice and Diversity         Md. Nurul Islam       Manager, Monitoring Dept.         Md. Saiful Islam       Head of Risk Management         Md. Sarwar Alam       Assistant General Manager, Monitoring Dept.         Morseda Chowdhury       Programme Coordinator, Health , Nutrition and Population Programme Programme         Dr Mushtaque Chowdhury       Vice Chair and Interim Executive Director, BRAC		
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