

# BRAC Bangladesh: *Building a Better Tomorrow*



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*BRAC and The World Food Prize Foundation*



*As I was leaving the comfort of home, the thought of being thrown into a developing country halfway across the globe was an exciting but extremely scary thought; however, it was worth every second. My development, climate change, and mitigative agriculture based internship in Bangladesh forced me to confront discomfoting ideas and situations, which altered my global perceptions. My assigned readings and conceptual research were enlightening, however my twelve interviews in four rural villages were illuminating. Not only could I learn from the best, but I was able to help them with my independent research inputs.*

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## Preface: Truth in Poverty

Corn. People from all over the world can easily relate to corn (or maize). My background in agriculture consists only of driving around Iowa and observing row after row of growing corn. The corn reminded me of the ocean's flowing and blowing waves. At the peak of the growing season, the stalks would rise far above my head. In a developed country or area, such as Iowa, corn is subsidized heavily, fertilized extensively, watched constantly, farmed technologically, and marketed securely. In stark contrast, developing countries or areas, raise corn with callused hands and put in countless hours of effort to sustain livelihoods.

Corn from Iowa is huge, well kept and will probably be sorted into ethanol or high-end feed. Corn in the developing world looks weak, inferior and will most likely be used for cheap grain for human or livestock consumption. Iowa corn will reach eight to nine feet tall by its mature phase, while the corn in developing countries can only dream of that height. Iowa corn will be observed with scientific precision; the corn in a developing country will have minimal care. While hundreds of acres of corn are harvested by just one farmer in Iowa, one family may harvest less than one acre in a developing country. If the corn seed was planted in a financially and resource rich area, it would reap the benefits and grow to soaring heights. However, if it was planted in a financially and resource limited area, it could only grow to a fraction of its potential. Just as it is impossible for a corn plant to move from one area of the world to another, it is nearly impossible for a family in a developing country to escape the chains of poverty. Many people, like corn, have a minimal part in determining this birth fate; both are at the mercy of luck.

Analogously, people in the developed world are financially strong, surrounded by support, thoroughly educated, and competitively employed. In the developing world, people are poor, on their own, untrained and underemployed. Though exceptions exist, these stereotypes generally characterize the painful plight of those in the developing world. In reality, people are not much different from the corn they raise. They both struggle for opportunity; they both grow to serve a higher purpose. Ultimately, their fate is determined by how they develop.

When you peel back a corn's husks, you see that it is all the same. Though one may have a major growth disadvantage, both developed and developing corn are genetically indistinguishable in basic sense. The same is true for humans. Some of us are born into wealth and some of us are not. At the core, we are all the same. We are all united by the common species we represent. I was raised an Iowan, surrounded by goliath-sized corn. In my youth, I blindly accepted all the resources given to me, and I have grown into a large, strong, young man because of it. My convenient birth into wealth gave me an opportunity to explore all corners of the world. In contrast, a child from a developing country grew up in a region not as rich with resources or wealth. My counterpart will struggle from day one to survive and become stronger. She or he could work for years and never achieve much by the standards of developed countries. I am not blessed. I am simply lucky. The dice were rolled, and our fates were sealed. Fortunately, this Iowa boy can begin to comprehend the plight of millions trapped in the realities of development by being able to meet and engage with his counterparts. Through these meetings, he can gain priceless information to empower his resources to change the lives of millions. I did not earn my placement in this world; therefore, I do not deserve it anymore than anyone else, and I do not have a blind right to the things I was given at birth. However, I was given wealth and countless resources, which I can choose to use to improve the livelihood of many in the developing world.

Wealth is power. A person's power is often determined by their wealth; however, the objects of power and wealth are intertwined from the roots of growth. So then, what is real poverty? Logically, it must be powerlessness. As the founder of BRAC, Sir Fazle Hasan Abed said, "people are poor because they are powerless. We must organize people for power. They must organize themselves in such a way that they can change their lives." The solution lies in empowerment. If we can empower the poor, they will unleash their infinite potential.

## Introduction

My journey into the developing world began October 2010 at the 24<sup>th</sup> Annual World Food Prize Symposium. Little did I know, this gathering in Des Moines, Iowa would transform my life forever. This experience would lead me on an adventure through Bangladesh that will not soon be forgotten.

As a high school senior, I was occupied in numerous ways. In addition to preparing for college, pursuing my academics, competing in debate and speech competitions, and working to perform music in many forums, I was working diligently on my World Food Prize Extended Essay. I had chosen to research and discuss South Africa's urbanization and overpopulation issues. I spent many hours swimming through the vast supplies of available literature regarding South Africa. While I attempted to saturate myself in the modern academic literature, I became temporarily immersed in the attitudes of the developing world. I completed a five-page research paper that described the problems and suggested achievable solutions. After completing my essay, I attended the three-day-long Youth Institute portion of the World Food Prize Symposium. I heard from motivating speakers such as H.E. Kofi Annan, Jeff Raikes, H.E. Nazar Gondal, H.E. Mohammad Rahimi, Hon. Tom Vilsack, etcetera. Throughout the symposium, youth are immersed into and exposed to experts in the fields of agriculture, development, and global poverty. On the final day of this symposium, students are given an opportunity to discuss and interact with global experts and peers about the student's specific independent research project. In my committee, I was paired with three world-renowned experts. One of who was Dr. Mahabub Hossain, who, unknown to the both of us, I would be working with the following summer.

After participating in the insightful Youth Institute, I was determined to do my part for the world. Fortunately, the World Food Prize Youth Institute offers multiple world-class research internships across the globe. I applied and was thrilled to learn a few months later that I was awarded an internship. Prior to receiving an internship, I was specifically interested in BRAC within Bangladesh. I had been in awe reading about their multitude of programs available to the people of Bangladesh and was interested in the both urban and rural opportunities the BRAC internship brings. When I was informed that I was to be placed in BRAC Bangladesh, I was obviously ecstatic.

I admit that I had an unfortunately limited knowledge of economics or the developing world, so I knew I was getting into something way over my head. I prepared as much as possible; however, nothing but an open mind could prepare me for eight weeks in Bangladesh. Prior to coming, I had never traveled outside of North America, so this was going to be a new experience. After twenty-three hours of travel, I arrived in Dhaka at four in the morning. The city of Dhaka was immense with millions of people from all different socioeconomic backgrounds crowding the streets. In the first few weeks, I felt as though Bangladeshi and American cultures were mutually exclusive. One of the major difficulties to overcome was being constantly surrounded and bombarded by abject poverty. Young children would run up to me and relentlessly beg. They would hold on to me and continue their efforts for blocks. I often felt extremely disheartened. Rural Bangladesh was an entirely different experience. Besides being much quieter than the bustling city of Dhaka, rural Bangladesh seemed to be in a much crueler condition of dismal dearth. In my one week in rural Bangladesh, meeting with local farmers, I was finally able to start grasping poverty. It was tremendously difficult to listen to the stories these farmers shared, but I learned more through dialogue with others. One cannot really appreciate and fathom Bangladesh without venturing into the rural areas. In Bangladesh, no place exists to escape poverty and oppression. The problems are—shockingly—everywhere.

## Internship Overview

From May 28<sup>th</sup> to July 23<sup>rd</sup>, I spent my Borlaug-Ruan Internship with BRAC Bangladesh doing pilot research for a European Union evaluative study. In my first week, I spent my time reading about climate change and the social atmosphere in the developing world. I spent the second week in orientation on Bangladesh and the complex of BRAC programs. I sat through fifteen presentations, which covered every inch of BRAC's unique, holistic poverty alleviation approach. Around the third week, I meet with Dr. Mahabub Hossain and Dr. Manoranjan K Mondal to set up the specific details of my internship at BRAC. The meeting was a dialog about their needs and my interests and aspirations. As the executive director of BRAC, Dr. Mahabub Hossain provided the academic means for my internship, while Dr. Manoranjan K Mondal, the program director for Agriculture and Food Security, counseled from within the program I was evaluating. During my fourth week, I went to the communications floor to work with Faisal Rezwan on the BRAC Agriculture website. Following the website work, I worked with my directors to cultivate an interview questionnaire for the field. Once I arrived in Pirojpur for the fieldwork, I met with twelve farmers to execute my survey with my translator, Nishu Ahmed. I travelled to several rural areas surrounding Pirojpur: Kumirmara Abason, Sankorpasha, Norkhali, and Khontakata. After compiling large amounts of field data, I returned to BRAC's Head Office where I spent the balance of my internship analyzing the field information and writing the included case study reports for BRAC. I found that BRAC beneficiaries were in a better state than their counterparts but some work needs to be completed for further rehabilitation.

## The People of Bangladesh

The first observation made, when traveling to most countries, is, understandably, the beauty of the local landscape. When I flew into Bangladesh at four in the morning, nothing was visible from the plane; therefore, I was flying in blind. My first impression of Bangladesh was then from the people. In the airport after a whole day of travel, I observed how little space people kept between one another and how aggressive it seemed they would act while waiting for customs, getting off a plane, or retrieving their luggage. I realized later that this was the direct result of the anthro-climate of Bangladesh. In this area of the world, resources are shockingly limited, so from birth, people must constantly fight to stake claim to any and all resources. Since life in this area is defined by these limitations, the attitude of competition becomes instinctual. Simple tasks, like waiting in line or retrieving luggage, evolve to be major competitions. In addition to having limited resources, Bangladesh is a massively population dense country. Although Bangladesh's population is approximately seventy times that of Iowa's, their surface areas are reasonably the same. When so many people are packed into a relatively small area, personal space becomes virtually impossible. This is best explained as a part of the evolution of the Bangladeshi compact culture.

Over the course of my residence in Bangladesh, my overall impression of the Bangladeshi people was tremendously upbeat. With few exceptions, I was constantly impressed with the warm aura the Bangladeshi people radiated. The people were welcoming, kind, and curious. It was surprising, at first, when so many Bangladeshis would approach me, and, as quickly, leave after they had exhausted all their known English. Men would move to sit closer to me, and after ten minutes of careful observation, they would engage me in conversation about my life (and often Barack Obama). Regardless of their social standing, the Bangladeshis have an undying curiosity and willingness to help all visitors. Whether I was standing on a street corner bargaining with a rickshaw or sitting in a restaurant enjoying the local cuisine, people from all walks of life would extend a hand of welcome or assistance. Though some would stare in

entrancement at my broken Bangla, the majority would be eager to help my struggling tongue bargain down a rickshaw ride to a reasonable price. At first, the attention was a custom, which I had a hard time assimilating to, but eventually I warmed to it. I found myself carefully calculating the timing of my drinks, because if waiters saw me, they would quickly rush over to refill my cup. Humorously, in Bangladeshis' attempts to make the area comfortable for westerners, they make vast assumptions about the people of the West. When I walked in to a DVD store, the owners rushed over to change the overhead song to the theme from Titanic, and in popular higher-class restaurants, I would be entranced by the sweet melodies of the Backstreet Boys. Whether they were practicing their English or genuinely extending their help, I would have found myself lost many times without the help of the eager locals.

While visiting the shipwrecking yards of Dhaka, I came across a ten-year-old boy, who was grinding down a piece of metal for later fabrication. Our guide said the child did not attend school and worked there all day for around 1000 taka a week (13 USD). I immediately assumed this child would not be happy because of his circumstances; however, upon seeing his guests, he lit up with excitement. It appears that Bangladeshis live life optimistically and appreciate things some Westerners may take for granted. I had no idea that some of the poorest people in the world live happier than the richest. A lesson of optimism ought to be learned from the people of Bangladesh.

In the work place, it seemed, at first that Bangladeshis never let up. Within the BRAC 19<sup>th</sup> floor, the workers were always busy and little time was wasted. Many would eat lunch at their desks, while tackling their current objectives. Once I ventured beyond the executive floor, the attitude partially changed. I observed two completely different characteristics, seemingly intertwined in the same people. Essentially, Bangladeshis have an intuitive competitiveness and an obvious inefficiency; I found this to be a curious paradox. The competitiveness (discussed earlier) is most likely due to the region's limited resources. The inefficiency, in this case, is not related to laziness, as it would first seem. It is the way the nation's working class has evolved. The effectiveness of the BRAC staff has almost become bimodal; the executive and field staffs worked at unbelievable rates, while the middle staff does not share this working ethic. This observation of the BRAC staff outside of the executive floor helped me understand why BRAC is a field-based NGO. The type of people BRAC employs in the field are locals; therefore, a majority of the field staff are not from the wealthy classes. Those who work for BRAC in the field are given an opportunity (some for the first time in their life), so they have a strong instinctual drive to work hard. It seems that many people who are born with opportunity tend to squander it, and most people who have little and are given an opportunity do the best with it. For the middle and upper class of Bangladesh, this drive has suffered the same complacency. How can one bridge the gap between wealth and inefficiency?

Inefficiency spills beyond the working class and into the government. The Bangladeshi government runs a multi-party system of government, and whenever there was a small dispute the major opposition party—the BNP—would call for a countrywide hartal or protest. A hartal consisted of a countrywide shut down and in my stay; one or two day hartals were called almost every week. Historically, these hartals have turned violent, but this year the hartal conducts were limited to an occasional confrontation with the police or army (I did not participate in the hartal). These common hartals would not only cripple the current government's power, but also cripple the local economy. As businesses are forced to shut down, the only form of income generation during hartals is a rickshaw; otherwise, all economic activity is halted. One or two occasional hartals may be an effective protest, but the government is plagued with these to the point that it is

damaging and setting back the country from any progress. The Bangladeshis took Gandhi's teachings of civil disobedience in hartals too far and are only hurting themselves. When the government cannot be effective, it is hard for the people to follow suit.

One thing that is extremely evident in the Bangladeshi culture is the segregation of wealth. While walking in Dhaka, a high-rise overshadows the slums and a rickshaw winds and bends around a Mercedes. A minimal physical division separates the classes; therefore, the differences appear more striking. This might explain why the attitude of class is much more blunt within Bangladesh than it is in the developed world, where significant distances or physical barriers normally separate contrasting classes. In Bangladesh, areas cannot be created to facilitate this zoning, so the classes become completely intertwined. One consequence of this proximity was especially disheartening to me; I noticed that some of the Bangladeshis, who I perceived to be of the wealthier class, radiated a privileged attitude. This included simple acts of disrespect toward service employees (i.e. waiters), rickshaw drivers, and street vendors. I was extremely surprised to see this amount of classist disrespect in an extremely poor country.

Beyond being surprised by some of the mannerisms of Bangladeshis, I was shocked by the desperation of some. Some rickshaws would try to extort large amounts of money for a ride that should cost only a fraction. In the moments of negotiation, I would find myself enraged at their sinister attempts. Afterward, I become upset that they must resort to the exploitation of foreigners to survive. At many points, a rickshaw ride would turn into a large mixed bag of emotions filled with anger and guilt.

As businesses in Bangladesh have been evolving, they have been striving to emulate an economy that they know has been historically successful: the American economy. Certain aspects of the American business climate have been successfully replicated, while others have been omitted or distorted. This is an example of a major negative consequence of western-based modernization. Instead of paving their own path, developing countries are pressured to emulate "successful economies." This pressure is becoming a growing crisis as the lack of organic systematic support leaves local economies extremely vulnerable to minor fluxes in the global trade economy. Besides exemplifying the effects of western-based modernization, this reveals a lot about the culture of Bangladesh. The people eagerly cling to an effective business model, but similar to a common foreign visitor, they neglect to follow through and analyze the intricacies of specific actions. This serves as a poignant reminder to make careful observations when one is in a new country or situation.

In sum, I experienced only a fraction of the Bangladeshi culture. I saw as much as eight weeks would allow. I would opt to return if an opportunity arose. The experience was unarguably amazing. I had bumps in the road, but I learned from them and moved on. Bangladesh sometimes struggles with a negative first impression, but once you settle in you can see the true beauty the country and its people hold. Bangladeshis gave me a close sense of community and always were eager to help. Falling victim to western-ism, the country's almost nonexistent middle class and growing upper class has taken long strides in attempting to mirror a western culture, but in the meantime, conflict from internal tradition has given birth to a completely new, eclectic culture.

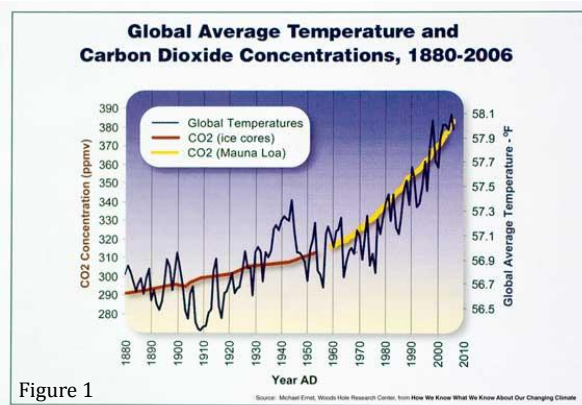


## Climate Change in Bangladesh

In 2008 at the Dhaka Symposium, leaders laid out their principal recommendations to combat climate change. Their solutions go beyond just stimulating research but to develop financial mechanisms to scale up the technical and financial support for current adaptation efforts. Beneath the problems and solutions lies a major irony. “Results [suggest] that although Bangladesh emits less than 0.2% of the global carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>), it is nevertheless facing the [greatest] impact of global climate change” (R. Lal et al. 119). In 2009, Bangladesh was ranked 175th in total contribution of carbon dioxide pollution per capita. In stark contrast, the United States contributes eighty times as much carbon dioxide per capita as Bangladesh (R. Lal et al.). South Asia, most specifically Bangladesh, will feel the wrath of climate change in the coming years.

Climate Change, though not entirely, has been caused through anthropogenic means. From fossil fuel consumption and utter disregard for mitigation of pollutants, the world is headed

down a dismal path. Among present greenhouse gases, carbon dioxide accounts for approximately 72% of global climate change followed by methane at 18%. As shown in figure 1, global recorded temperatures and carbon dioxide concentration have a strong direct correlation. Within the scientific community, an understanding of the devastating impact of climate change on topographically low-lying nations, such as Bangladesh, is growing. In fact, in 2007



the UN Climate Panel listed Bangladesh as one of the countries most vulnerable to the effects of climate change, majorly because projections show an eminent and dramatic sea-level rise, which would be particularly damaging to a low-lying nation. To add to the pessimism of the situation, 20% of Bangladesh’s growing population of 150 million is located in the ever-vulnerable coastal regions of the country. For Bangladesh, climate change would be a population detriment. Some of the projected impacts of climate change will be an increase in global sea levels, an increased global temperature, an increased variability of precipitation events, and an increased amount of cloud cover resulting in decreased sunlight penetration. Since the 1950s, Bangladesh’s average temperature has been raising by 0.7 degree Celsius per decade. During the same time period, daily-recorded sunshine has decreased .06 hours per year, and the average yearly rainfall increased 0.73cm each year. Unfortunately, the rates in which these have been increasing have been growing in linear interaction with the rate of greenhouse gases (R. Lal et al.). Therefore, beyond posing a threat to the population for Bangladesh, climate change threatens the current delicate balance of the ecosystem.

Although the world is beginning to transfer into more intensive development initiatives, climate change is escalating the urgency of this transition. Developing nations, like Bangladesh, are especially vulnerable to a changing climate. The vulnerability of these nations can be classified into three categories: exposure, sensitivity, and adaptive capacity. Exposure is related to the real changes in the climate. The sensitivity of a country refers to the degree to which it is negatively affected. It was stated earlier how developed nations will feel the disproportionate blunt of climate change. Some areas are better prepared for climate change related impacts. This

is quantified through adaptive capacity, which is “the ability to prepare for, respond to and tackle the effects of climate change” (Stern 106). A country struggling to build any sort of secure infrastructure is in no position to begin preparing for climate change adaptation—something even the developed world is currently struggling with. Adaptive capacity is made up of a nation’s economic wealth, infrastructure, technology, services, institutions, information availability, equity, and its social capital. According to the IPCC Third Assessment Report, these and the potential impacts (exposure and sensitivity) create the amount of vulnerability to climate change. The developing world is extremely sensitive to the wrath of climate change given its large reliance on agriculture, the consistency of its ecosystems, and its vast concentration of people in slum settlements. Peoples can only adapt to climate change as well as their resources will allow. Developing nations, by definition, have limited resources. Many parts of the developing world will look significantly different at the end of this century. Climate change will be the determining factor of change for these nations as the ecosystem is their limiting factor (Stern).

The nature of Bangladesh’s population not only exacerbates the problem, but also makes climate change mitigation much harder to tackle. Bangladesh’s population is fast approaching 150 million people and although birth rates are diminishing, the population will increase another 100 million before stabilizing in an estimated 50 years. These population levels force lands into urban/residential development making cultivable land more and more limited. Furthermore, the agriculture sector of employment is not prepared to accommodate the increasing population; therefore, masses of Bangladeshis will be forced to move to urban areas to seek employment. With both a quickly growing population and a weakening ideal agricultural climate, the future for Bangladesh is grim. Fortunately, since 1950 the amount of area under rice tillage has decreased while rice yields have grown exponentially. The most likely reason for this curious paradox is crop intensification. As “long-term analysis [suggests] that the most direct and adverse effect of global warming on crop production across Bangladesh may come from an alarming rate of increase in solar dimming,” crop intensification seems to be the best, if not the only, long-term solution (R. Lal et al. 130). Using projective mathematics, it has been estimated that Eastern Bangladesh would lose 14,000 million grams of grain production in 2030 because of sea level rise alone and 252,000 million grams by 2075 (R. Lal et al. 132). The impact of increasing population will only magnify the climate change related problems Bangladesh was already facing.

Climate Change is expected to have major impacts in fields of health, poverty, risk prevention, and nation spending. Climate Change will

alter the distribution and incidence of climate-relation health impacts, ranging from a reduction in cold-relation death to great mortality and illness associated with heat stress, droughts, and floods. Equality, climate change will contribute to the geographical extension or contraction of potential outbreak of vector borne diseases such as malaria. (Stern 115)

Poverty will, likely, increase the most in areas where poverty is already predominant, because extreme weather events are devastating for household incomes. For example, in the 1997-98 El Niño, Ecuador lost major harvest potential accounting for an increased incidence of poverty by ten percent in the affected areas. According to economist Nicholas Stern, as the symptoms of climate change mount, poor peoples’ ways of coping with a changing climate will most likely be detrimental for their long-term development (116). For example, a poor Bangladeshi farmer may switch to low risk crops such as traditional varieties of rice rather than the riskier high-return breeds. After the shock of climate change impacts, the poor have an extremely difficult time coping with the damages, so they get stuck under what is called the “poverty-trap threshold”

(Stern 117). The impacts on national spending and budgets will be two-fold. First, affected areas will receive a hit on their agricultural sectors. For the developing nation this is even direr as agriculture accounts for much larger portions of their gross domestic product (GDP). In Bangladesh, 18.4 percent of its 258.6 billion USD GDP is from the agricultural sector. Secondly, much more governmental capital will have to be spent to cope with the increasing occurrence of national and international disasters in the world. Many governments will not have access to the capital and recourses that will be necessary as national and international disasters increase.

All in all, climate change can be viewed as a gloomy apocalyptic end to the planet earth if we—as humans—chose to look at it that way. It would be in the best interest of the world for us to embrace this crisis as an opportunity. It is an opportunity to reflect on our actions, improve our environmental impact, and begin to mitigate the unpreventable impacts as a whole. This will be a fight beyond the biblical proportions of David and Goliath. It will stake man against the ever warming and changing world. This is an opportunity to rewrite our future and take hold of our destiny. Climate change can no longer be simply a topic of heated debate but of comprehensive political policy. Our ancestors created this problem, we have intensified it, and our children will pay the largest price. Like David, humanity can prevail in the darkest of times.

### **BRAC: Basics**

In response to Bangladesh’s bloody civil war from West Pakistan, Sir Fazle Hasan Abed created the Bangladesh Rehabilitation Assistance Committee. Abed had previously worked for Shell Oil in the Chittagong region of Bangladesh. Prior to the civil war and in response to Cyclone Nora, Abed had created the Heartland Emergency Lifesaving Projects (HELP) with help from colleagues. From this, grew present day BRAC. With no intention for a long-term existence, Abed had planned to shut down BRAC soon after the area had been restored. As need grew across the country, so did BRAC. Later, Abed renamed the company the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC) as they expanded their programs to help alleviate property in more rural areas across Bangladesh. Eventually, the name became just BRAC as they expanded in urban areas and into other needy countries. Their current motto is “Building Relationships Across Communities” (Smillie).

Since its inception, BRAC has grown into the world’s largest NGO—in terms of beneficiary reach. BRAC employs over 120,000 people—95.5% of which are stationed in the field. In 2009, BRAC’s expenses totaled 268 million USD. BRAC’s headquarters in Dhaka houses the head offices for all of BRAC’s Bangladesh programs: Targeting the Ultra Poor (TUP), Microfinance (MF), Agriculture and Food Security (AFS), Education (ED), Health (H), Water Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH), Advocacy, Human Rights and Legal Aid Services (HRLS), Gender Justice and Diversity, Disaster Environment and Climate Change (DECC), and Enterprises. In recent years, BRAC has expanded many of its operations throughout the world:

Afghanistan (2002)= MF, ED, H, Capacity Development, and Adolescent Empowerment

Haiti (2008)= TUP, H, and Disaster Rehabilitation

India (2009)= TUP

Indonesia (2008)= MF

Liberia (2008)= MF, H, and AFS

Pakistan (2007)= MF and ED

Sierra Leone (2008)= MF, H, and AFS

Southern Sudan (2007)= MF, ED, H, and AFS

Sri Lanka (2005)= MF, Government Capacity Building, and Disaster Rehabilitation

Tanzania (2006)= MF, AFS, H, and Adolescent Empowerment

Uganda (2006)= MF, AFS, H, ED, and Adolescent Empowerment

In the United States (2007), United Kingdom (2006) and the Netherlands (2009), BRAC has set up support offices to raise funds for BRAC International (all countries except Bangladesh). BRAC is an innovative, comprehensive, and holistic approach to alleviating poverty by empowering the poor. The reason BRAC works so well in many different regions is its intensive self-critical nature. Sir Fazle Hasan Abed is not afraid to eliminate a program at a first sign on ineffectiveness. BRAC best does this through their process of piloting programs. Every innovation development idea within BRAC is piloted for at least two years before scaling-up to serve more people. BRAC treats scaling-up with delicate precision; they have made an art out of it. Without the influence of BRAC in Bangladesh, conditions on the ground would be devastating. In *Freedom From Want*, a BRAC story, Smillie writes, “BRAC [is] genius for making important connections in a disconnected world” (99). That is the essence of BRAC; they do not give handouts—with few exceptions—but instead provide avenues for people to write their own future. BRAC’s story is a remarkable one. BRAC’s envisions “a world free from all forms of exploitation and discrimination where everyone has the opportunity to realise their potential.” They achieve this vision though their stated values of “innovation, integrity, inclusiveness, [and] effectiveness.” BRAC ultimately strives “to empower people and communities in situation of poverty, illiteracy, disease and social injustice. Our interventions aim to achieve large scale, positive change through economic and social programmes that enable women and men to realise their potential” (“BRAC Report 2009” 2). BRAC fails to rest until they are no longer needed. BRAC is like an organism as it evolved to suit the specific needs of regions and does not prescribe the same pill to every region.

### **BRAC: Agriculture and Food Security Program**

The BRAC Agriculture and Food Security Program (AFS) was one of the initial programs in 1972 that truly gave BRAC its start. The program evolved for a small rehabilitation outreach for lost crops into today’s massive existence. Today, AFS has two major objectives. AFS first wants to support the alleviation of poverty through agricultural activities such as: cultivating fruit and vegetables, and raising livestock and poultry. AFS also strives to be a research and development entity of BRAC dedicated to raising productivity for future sustainability. This second goal stems from BRAC’s interest in climate change mitigation. These two vastly different objectives form one common mission: “to increase food security for the poor” (“BRAC Report 2009” 18).

The program attempts to meet these goals through capacity development and cutting-edge research. BRAC sees capacity development as a repertoire building enterprise, and it holds training sessions to disseminate valuable information through their complex system of village organizations (VOs). BRAC empowers local farmers by providing free capacity building and development resources. Their focus is to educate the poor about management and upkeep for their own long and short-term benefits. BRAC understands that cutting-edge research is necessary to mitigate major problems in starvation, malnutrition and climate change. By 2009, the research program had developed three new varieties of hybrid rice, and 5,500 metric tons of these high quality seeds have been distributed via commercial vendors. The overall approach of BRAC Agriculture is “to increase crop production while ensuring environmental sustainability,

adaptability to climate change and affordability for marginal and small farmers” (“BRAC Report 2009” 18)

### **BRAC: Crop Intensification in the Coastal Regions of Bangladesh**

In the south central region of Bangladesh, AFS is working diligently to develop technologies to assist marginalized farmers in the area. The program that they developed was the Crop Intensification for Achieving Self-Sufficiency in the Coastal Regions of Bangladesh. To fund this initiative, BRAC applied for funding from the European Union Food Facility. The program targets beneficiaries from areas affected by cyclone SIDR and/or AILA, but the overarching goal of the program is to mitigate and prepare for climate change. Once AFS was awarded the grant money, they immediately went to work. To receive aid, the farmers must own less than one acre of land that has a low cropping intensity and have access to irrigation and proper drainage. The potential beneficiary must be a permanent resident of the affected area and be willing to cultivate in the block approach, which is under current evaluation. The block approach, as opposed to the individual approach, uses an area of land that may have 40-50 participating farmers. Within the land area, BRAC implements different styles of intensification to identify one that is best fit for the region. Through the utilization of BRAC’s village organizations (VOs), the block farmers meet with BRAC program organizers (POs) to identify what does and does not work for the region. This displays BRAC’s intensive self-critical nature. Once an area and the beneficiaries have been selected, they are provided with three benefits over the course of the two-year program: knowledge and training, cash grants for seeds and technologies, and personal/technical assistance from trained experts. In order to facilitate these products, BRAC sent 106 staff members to extensive area training. BRAC strives to mitigate poverty and climate change in the region through this productivity stimulation. (“Crop Intensification...”).

### **Research Case Studies: Methodology**

In order to establish a fair evaluation of the Crop Intensification program, I needed to identify the groups I would target for interviews. After careful consideration, I chose to complete twelve case studies and target four different groups. Three of the groups would have been severely impacted by cyclone SIDR and would have received varying degrees of assistance from BRAC or the government, including no assistance at all. The last group would serve as a control for rural life in Bangladesh. Since it is impossible to find someone who was not impacted in some way, the last group would be individuals who were moderately impacted and received no assistance. After consultation with region experts I targets four villages for my interviews: Kumirmara Abason, Sankorpasha, Norkhali, and Khontakata. In the interviews, I executed a self-prepared questionnaire that targets the progress of livelihood before and after cyclone SIDR using common livelihood indicators such as income, food availability, health, etc. After completing the interviews and compiling all the information into case studies, I analyzed the effectiveness of the BRAC programs through comparison to the control and the others.



### **Mohammad Jahargiur Maghi**

*Married to Sahida Begum, Mohammad Jahargiur Maghi has two boys: seventeen and nineteen years old. While Jahargiur has only a grade-three education, both his children have their higher secondary certificates. The nineteen year old even has completed his Bachelor of Arts degree. It was obvious that the motivation for this education came from Jahargiur's wife, who has a grade-nine education. Being 53 years old, Jahargiur has an optimistic view on his life, beyond that of his fellow*

*Bangladeshis. Before Cyclone SIDR, Jahargiur's family income was around 200,000 to 300,000 taka annually. He actually owned seven decimals of land. He was not only a rice farmer but a banana farmer and fisherman as well. He is a man who works for hours upon hours. He shared how in harvest seasons it was common for him to sleep for three hours a night for fourteen straight days. SIDR destroyed everything to Jahargiur's name. His home, livestock, and crops were all completely eliminated. He said that all he had left was his family and God. After the natural disaster, his family was forced to sell their land to cope with the damages and their income was cut to just 150,000 taka. Jahargiur is a strong religious man. He looked to his God for answers and comfort. He knew that life would be better if he allowed his God to lead him through his troubles. Though he was surprisingly optimistic, he quickly would displace the duty of livelihood restoration to his educated sons: He expects his two sons to help him recover from his endless debt. Fortunately, for him and his family, he only had to wait one week before the government provided him with 15kg of rice and cloth for clothing. BRAC insisted that they came in immediately to help the victims in his region, but Jahargiur denied ever receiving this aid. There seemed to be a gap in immediate aid that was disbursed to this region. No argument was raised when we discussed his assistance from BRAC for long-term assistance rehabilitation through the CIP. He received training and financial assistance, and his condition today, while still difficult, is much improved from that immediately after SIDR. His rice yield is now almost twice the pre-SIDR levels. Unfortunately, costs of agriculture have outpaced his increased output. For him to continue to farm per BRAC recommendations, Jahargiur was forced to take out loans from other local NGOs, pushing him farther into debt. However, while having all this stresses and difficulties in life, he claims to be happy.*

### **Abdur Rahman Talukdar**

*As a young child, Abdur was forced to end his school career to help his father cultivate rice on their small farm; therefore, he only completed grade-four before leaving. His wife, Hasina Begum, completed the same amount of education before being forced into income-generation. The two have four children—three boys and one girl. The three boys are seven, ten, and nineteen and the girl is twenty-one. Their youngest child has an undiagnosed brain tumor or disease. The ten-year-old has completed up to grade-five. The nineteen year old has completed his tenth grade, and the twenty-one year old girl only completed grade-six. Before cyclone SIDR, their annual income Abdur*



*estimated was 100,000 taka. Beside the land their house sat on, they owned no land. Abdur's only source of income for his family was and is through his rice cultivation on his leased land that produced 100 mound and now produces 163 mound. Before he was only farming on the Aman and Boro seasons and now—through BRAC training, he cultivates rice for all three seasons. Abdur's family lost absolutely everything in the cyclone; therefore, they are classified as severely affected. For Abdur's family, they received instant aid from a local government member of rice and clothing. Otherwise, they coped with the destruction with help from others in their neighborhood. For long-term rehabilitation, Abdur was given 2500 taka worth of high-yielding seeds and apropos training. He reports that these changes have doubled his production when that is not actually true. Compared to the seasons he cultivated before SIDR, his yield only increased by 32% or a 1.62 multiplier. He has less food availability today because his costs are outpacing his increasing yield. He said that his family has heightened anxiety. They fear constantly that they will not be able to provide for themselves. They look to God for answers and solutions. Fortunately, Abdur is looking forward and hopes to bring more land under cultivation in the next few years. He just does not know where to get the large amount of necessary capital. He is unsure whether his livelihood has increased, but he is extremely trusting in BRAC's expertise.*

### Mohammad Rasul Sheikh

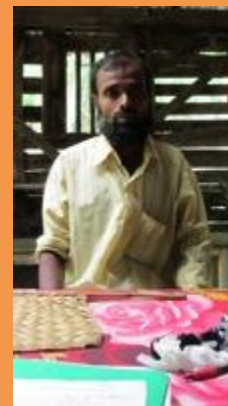


Rasul was quick to inform about his large pre-SIDR annual wealth of 200,000 taka. Rasul only completed grade-one of school, while his wife, Nupur Akhter, completed grade-eight of schooling. Through their marriage, they have had two children: one six-year-old boy and one twelve-year-old girl. They have each completed class-two and class-eight, respectively. The family's sources of income before SIDR included rice cultivation, and a new fishery business. Before SIDR, the family cultivated 256 decimals of land for all three seasons. In the storm, Rasul lost everything except his family. His ancestral home was destroyed, and since then they have rebuilt a small shelter that fails to keep out the rain. In the monsoon season, it is really difficult to get much work done in the house without becoming completely soaked. After SIDR, he had to eliminate his entrepreneurial fishery business and cut his cultivation to 189 decimals; admittedly, the decrease in land under cultivation was per BRAC recommendations. The only aid he received was from distant family

members; therefore, to cope with the damage, he had to spend all of his accumulated life-savings. Once BRAC was able to reach him, they provided him with 5000-taka worth of high-yielding seeds and appropriate technical assistance. They provided advice such as the appropriate levels and timing of fertilizer application. He reports a yield increase of three times that of pre-SIDR levels. In reality, his yield increased by 78% or a multiplier of 1.79. In order to pay for the high costs of BRAC's recommendations, Rasul's wife went the Asa, a local NGO, to get a 10% interest loan. Rasul said he told his wife to get the loan so he could use it to pay for the new BRAC-recommended expensive cultivation technologies since BRAC is not provided enough financially assistance to cover their programs. He continually reiterated how much debt he is accumulating because of this, but because of BRAC's reputation he would never consider BRAC to be at fault. Soon after the devastation of cyclone SIDR, the Bangladeshi government initiated major cuts to their 70% subsidy on agricultural fertilizer. Debt was a major worry and stressor in his life. He feels that debt has become a major part of the rural Bangladeshi culture.

### Abdul Halim Siker

At 37 years of age, Abdul Halim has completed a grade-five education. He is married to Asna, who has completed her grade-eight education. Together, they have three children: one boy and two girls. They are seven, five, and nine, respectively. The seven-year-old boy and the five-year-old girl have only completed class-one so far, while the nine-year-old is in class-three. Before cyclone SIDR, Abdul Halim created a living for his family through the cultivation of rice in the Aus and Aman seasons. For additional income, he would sell this rice to the city as a vendor. He considered himself a relatively wealthy man in his village of Sankorpasha. Together, his annual income was just over 100,000 taka. He owned 100 decimals and farmed 67 decimals of that with a yield of 76 mound per year. His family lived well on three meals per day all year. This all came to a drastic end on November 15<sup>th</sup> with the visit of cyclone SIDR. Overnight, everything of Abdul Halim's was lost. He estimates his property loss at 200,000 taka—an amount that would take his family years to earn. Within one month, the government of Bangladesh provided his family with 15kg of rice and 1000 taka. Before receiving any of this aid, Abdul Halim was forced to sell his property to cope with the damages. The rice and cash were the extent of his aid until this past year when the government gave him 50kg of fertilizer to offset high costs. Today, his family's income is 30,000 taka—a shocking 70% less than before. He had to leave his vendor business, and now he is a sharecropper on his original 67 decimals of land. This year he is expecting a 30-mound yield, of which one-third will be his. The productivity of his land is now less than half of its previous levels and his net yield is now one-sixth of before. Now, his family never eats three meals a day. They will usually skip their breakfast meal. This would only occur during the three to six months, in which he had food accessible. The remainder of the year, his family struggles to find food for one meal each day. Often, going hungry for days at a time. His family has grown thin, malnourished, and is weakened day by day. Life is not a pleasure for his family; it is a struggle.



### Kazi Razzak



Growing up in Sankorpasha, Kazi began to be a daily laborer as soon as he finished his grade-four education. Kazi and his wife, Khadiza, have two children together—a two-year-old boy and a nine-year-old girl. The nine-year-old girl is in her grade-three of education in the local government school. Before the cyclone hit, Kazi was working as a local laborer for 200 taka a day. His employers would then provide him with two square meals everyday but nothing for his family. When given work, he would be on the clock from seven in the morning to five at night, but the work was extremely unpredictable. On average, work would be available five to seven days per month, and work was only guaranteed during harvest times. Kazi recalls a story where he had not

been working for three weeks and his family was suffering miserably when he believes his prayers were answered, and he was given a job for three days. He earned 600 taka and was extremely grateful. When he was working, his family would have two meals everyday. When he was unemployed—which was often—his family would struggle to eat one. During the storm, Kazi says that he had to hold on to part of his house and surrounding tree to keep alive. The storm destroyed everything of his and almost took his life. Three months after the storm, Kazi's family received their first form of aid. From the government of Bangladesh, they received 5000 taka and 15kg of rice. He described life as impossible before the government came. After the government came, life became survivable. In May of 2008, Kazi was able to purchase a cow with a loan from an unnamed NGO. He prayed that someone could offer him a loan to start a new business to get settled and get away from struggling everyday. Today, Kazi is still a day laborer and the work climate is similar to before SIDR. Currently, he has been unemployed for three weeks, so life is still hard. He sits at home simply waiting for harvest season to come around. He feels sorrow and guilt because he cannot provide for his family. Today, two meals a day is a luxury and one is convenient. His income has remained the same but his expenses have skyrocketed. Life is just getting worse.

### Mohammad Sakhatwat Hossain



As a leasing rice farmer, Sakhatwat is struggling to get back on his feet after the devastation of cyclone SIDR. Sakhatwat and his wife, Maya Begum, are raising their six-year-old daughter, who is in a pre-grade-one schooling—a level comparable to the American preschool program. Before cyclone SIDR, Sakhatwat was leasing 150 decimals of land for rice cultivation for 22,500 taka a year, and his fields were producing 50 mound per year. Rice cultivation only provided food for six months of the year, so Sakhatwat was also a day laborer to continue to provide for the

remaining six months. Though his home was not completely destroyed, everything else was a complete loss. Within one month, the government of Bangladesh had provided his family with 15kg of rice for survival. To cope with the damages and setbacks, Sakhatwat took to begging in the local streets for money from wealthier community members. After the storm, Sakhatwat was expecting irrigation help from the government, but he received none. Today, Sakhatwat is a fifty percent sharecropper on 100 decimals of land, because he does not have the starting capital to lease land like before. His yield last year was 61 mound; therefore, his yield per decimal is 184% of what it was before SIDR. The amount he takes home is 92% of before. This number is surprising, given he is only receiving half of the production. This drastic increase in land productivity is because Sakhatwat was learning and imitating BRAC beneficiaries in the area with their new technologies and hybrid breeds. He chose to do this after witnessing their successes. The only reason he is not a part of BRAC is because when BRAC came through to recruit members, Sakhatwat was working in the city in the brick industry to provide much needed income. He missed the help from BRAC because he took the initiative to help himself. Like most of his counterparts, his costs to farm have increased drastically. Today, his food availability is less than three months in a year. His family is lucky to eat two meals a day and only dreams of three. His family is severely malnourished and his wife has been recently diagnosed with tuberculosis, and her recovery is looking unlikely. Sakhatwat feels like every action he makes to help his family out of their horrible situation only pushes them farther into it. For every step he takes forward, he is thrown back a mile.



### Mohammad Suleiman



Mohammad and his wife, Mala, have been suffering through abject poverty for the past five, long years. They and their two daughters, who are seven and twelve, are living in a severely affected community named Norkhali. Their seven-year-old is in her second year of government school, and their twelve-year-old is in her seventh year. Before cyclone SIDR, Mohammad's family was not living anything near comfortably. He would estimate his family's income at approximately 21,000 taka per year. His income was coming from his work as a rice farmer and as a day laborer. In 2006, his land's production was 70 mound, but since he was a sharecropper, he would receive one-third of this production. Because of this low net yield, his family's food availability was between three and six months a year. His family ate two meals on a regular basis but never three. Mohammad could not believe their luck when SIDR then hit. They were already living in harsh conditions and the cyclone just expounded those impacts. In the storm, he lost everything. All of his property, his chickens, his cows, and his crops were gone literally overnight. Mohammad had always tried to stay an optimistic person, but this was a hard idea to hold in these harsh times. Because of his family's dire condition, Mohammad knew he needed to travel into the city to make extra money since all other forms of income for him had washed away. In his days in the city, BRAC and other NGOs came through his village, so he missed out on any help or assistance. Today, his income may appear higher—60,000 taka—but this was not true growth, just inflation. He is still a sharecropper on 150 decimals of land, and he is producing 100 mound of rice per year. His production increase is due to his choice to switch to a high-yielding variety per local dealer recommendation. Even though his real income may have increased slightly, the cost of being a farmer in these times is rapidly growing. The government of Bangladesh recently cut their 70% subsidy on fertilizer, pushing farmers like Mohammad into darker situations.

### Fazlul Haque Hawladar

As a 65 year old, Fazlul Haque's extent of education is only being able to sign his name. His wife, Sitara Begum, has no education at all. Fortunately, some of their four kids have spent time in school. While working at home in the rice fields and cucumber patches, some of their four kids—a nineteen-year-old son, twenty-one-year-old son, twenty-three-year-old son, and twenty-five-year-old daughter—went to the government school in Norkhali. The nineteen-year-old son completed grade-five, and the twenty-one-year-old son has completed grade-eight. The twenty-three-year-old son has no education, and the twenty-five-year-old has completed grade-five in her life. Before cyclone SIDR, Fazlul Haque would spend the entirety of his days tending to his 600 decimals of sharecropping rice fields and to his small cucumber patches. In his sharecropping, he would receive one-third of the total yield, which in 2006 was 150 mound. In the time before SIDR, his family had food available for six to nine months of the year. For those months, they ate three meals a day. For the remainder of the year, they struggled to have two. The devastation of cyclone SIDR was the last thing Fazlul Haque needed. Everything to his name was washed away, outside of his family members. Fortunately, a local relative gave him a 10,000-taka loan with no interest to keep him treading water. The one thing he wishes he could have today to minimize damages would be food storage capabilities. Profits would more than double if the farmers would be able to store their foods past the peak market season. Today, Fazlul Haque sharecrops on only 200 decimals and yields 70 mound per year. He is still receiving a net yield of one-third, so the food available to his family has decreased. This past year, his family had food available to them for approximately three to six months out of the year. As a result, his family has become more malnourished and weakened. Almost all hope has been lost.



### Abdul Khaleque Fakir



*Abdul Khaleque's last four years have been really hard for him and his family. He said that he and his wife, Aleya Begum, have seven children. Many times throughout the interview, Abdul Khaleque took a moment to compose himself, when he was overcome with upsetting emotions. In his home, he has a nine, seventeen, twenty, twenty-three, twenty-seven and a thirty-year-old daughter and a single eleven-year-old son. Abdul Khaleque and all of his children do not have any education, but his wife has completed grade-three in her brief schooling. Today, Abdul cultivates rice on 100 decimals of land, which 70% is leased and 30% is sharecropped. With the sharecropping fields, he collects one-third of the production. In that land area, he was only able to yield 30 mound, which is enough to feed his family for three months on two meals a day. Before SIDR, life was never this bad. Everything was taken from him in the storm. A combination of the storm and Abdul's age create a situation that made this seventy-year-old man break down in to tears on multiple occasions. Before the storm, Abdul was working consistently all year, six days a week, eight hours a day in a local saw mill making 80-100 taka a day. Meals in his home often consisted of a large fish portion and plenty of vegetables from the local markets. He had more food available to him than he needed for all twelve months of the year. Life was good for his family. Everyone ate well and everyone seemed to be happy. Cyclone SIDR changed all of that. Not only was everything lost in this horrible storm, but the livelihood of Abdul's family was destroyed beyond his wildest dreams. Abdul questioned his faith in these times. Going from having everything to having nothing, it is not surprising. He dreams and hopes for help to come from the down the road. Seeing our entourage of BRAC workers excited him up to the point when he found out that we were not there to give him any financial support.*

### Abul Kalam Mollik

*As a lifelong rice farmer, Abul Kalam has only completed grade-two of school. His wife, Ratna Begum, completed grade-eight in her childhood. They have two young boys at home: a four-year-old and an eight-year-old. The eight-year-old is in grade-one, and the four-year-old has not started his government schooling. Before cyclone SIDR, Abul Kalam owned 50 decimals of land and then leased an additional 300 decimal for rice cultivation and banana harvesting. In the Aman and Boro seasons, Abul Kalam produced 160 mound of rice. Food was available to his family for all months of the year. In fact, he would have a significant amount more than necessary for consumption. It was common for his family to enjoy three large meals a day with varieties of meats. Nutrition and food availability was never a major issue in Abul Kalam's eyes. Abul Kalam had been putting money into saving for years and estimated his total reserves at 200,000 taka. Being categorized as moderately affected, Abul Kalam had little damage to his property and the extent of his damage to his crop was 50% loss. Even his cows and chickens were all alive and accounted for after the storm. Abul Kalam said that his family just had to restrict their spending and they could live off of the 50% of the leftover crop. Today, Abul Kalam leases 450 decimals of land and is cultivating kakrol underneath the banana trees. His production is still at 160 mound and he is earning an additional 20,000 taka per year on excess kakrol. Like the numbers show, Abul Kalam feels as though his income is elevated from before SIDR. His family's food availability has remained consistent, and he has increased his savings. Though life may not be as great as he dreams it could be, his family is living satisfied and without many worries. While reflecting on the time of SIDR, Abul Kalam says the only thing he wishes he could have had were interest-free disaster loans from the government or a local NGOs. He feels grateful that he can dream and plan for better times without being constantly worried about his family's survival. Abul Kalam thanks God for all of his blessings and hopes God continues to watch over and protect his family.*



### Mohammad Kamrul Islam

*Kamrul Islam was a rice sharecropper provider in Khontakata. He shared the production yield 50-50 with his employees. He has completed nine years of school, and his wife, Minara Begum, has her secondary school certificate. They have two children—a ten-year-old son, who is in grade-four and a thirteen-year-old daughter, who is in grade-nine. Before cyclone SIDR, Kamrul's income was approximately 160,000 taka per year. He owned 200 decimals of land, half of which he would provide to sharecroppers at a 50/50 divide. On this land, his sharecroppers would grow rice, bananas, papayas, and eggplants. The rice yield was about 50 mound each year but the other vegetables produced a large income. In his situation, he could provide three nutritious meals each day to his family for the whole year. In the cyclone, he lost about half of the production for that season. He was able to comfortably survive off of his savings and the remaining production. Because of this relatively minor impact, no immediate or long-term assistance was made available to him. He acknowledges that he did not need help to survive, though he believes it would have been smart for the government to continue its former subsidy on fertilizer during the time of crisis. Though the impact of SIDR was not severe on Kamrul's life, he did have to make some changes. He is no longer a sharecropping provider, and today he cultivates the land on his own. His production is currently at 60 mound and the fruits and vegetables still bring in a comfortable income. He does say it is a slight change now since he is doing all of the labor instead of hiring out, but Kamrul ultimately believes his life is essentially the same as before the storm. Unfortunately, he can only provide a secure supply of food for nine months of the year because of the rapid climb of expenditures, but in the three limited months, his family just eats less than before. Instead of three meals everyday, they have to skip breakfast from day to day. Though he is not satisfied, he is happy knowing that life is not getting any worse. Life is sustainable, in his mind. He is grateful for this.*



### Mohammad Shamsul Hoq Mollik

*The seventy-one year-old Shamsul Hoq is married to sixty-year-old Noor Jahan Begum. In their thirty-six years of marriage, they have raised four children. They have a twenty-two year-old daughter, who has received her high secondary certificate, a twenty-five-year-old son, who has his secondary school certificate, a thirty-year-old daughter, who has completed grade-nine, and a thirty-five-year-old son, who has received his secondary school certificate. Before retiring in 1996, Shamsul Hoq was a government service order for his local government, so he was able to offer an interesting insight. He believes that even though his region was not severely affected, the government of Bangladesh owed them some help. After retiring from his service, Shamsul Hoq started farming 200 decimals on his 250 decimal property. On this land, he began to harvest rice, bananas, and papaya. In his rice cultivation, he was producing 100 mound each year and approximately 55,000 taka in his banana and papaya business. Before SIDR, his family was enjoying a secure twelve months of available food. In the storm, he lost all of his livestock and two-thirds of his rice crop. Also, the foundation to his home was weakened from the current high water table. Shamsul Hoq believes he only survived this disaster because of his 3000 taka government pension and help from his son in Singapore. He said he was disappointed with the actions of the local government and wished there was at least some approach from the local officials. Today, Shamsul Hoq tells how life was extremely hard in the period immediately after the storm, but he says he has fully recovered from the damages, and his production has returned to pre-SIDR levels. Food is still readily available to his family. On his mind now is his wife. He is worried about her well-being. She has been recently sent to the hospital in Bagerhat to receive treatment for cardiac arrest. He reports that she is fine, but he desperately wishes he could be with her in these difficult times. For this reason, he claims to not be satisfied with life. He humbly asks for thoughts and prayers for his wife and not him.*



## Conclusions

Being given the responsibility to evaluate the effectiveness of BRAC's Crop Intensification program, I was able to make a few conclusions from my twelve interviews and time in Bangladesh. BRAC, as a whole, has been criticized for not meeting all the needs of poor Bangladeshis. I found this criticism to be greatly unfair; it is wholly unreasonable to expect a single nongovernmental organization (NGO) to sate all the needs of an exceedingly poor populace. My observations therefore are based on internal review and critique of BRAC itself rather than an external and illogical comparison to a utopian realm. It was easy to see that the three groups of severely affected farmers, who were assisted by BRAC, were the most recovered. Those helped by the government were slightly improved, and those who did not receive any help were in crisis. As expected, the control group was in the best condition because of the limited state of their damages. The reason for the higher success of BRAC beneficiaries is because BRAC promotes development as opposed to strictly dispensing aid. Neither the government nor any of the other NGOs provided anything more than aid-based rice, clothing, or money. BRAC, on the other hand, disseminated extensive vocational training for struggling farmers giving them more than increased production but hope for the first time in years. The BRAC beneficiaries had, on average, a production (mound per decimal) increase of 1.78 times compared to before the cyclone showing that BRAC's methods are working to increase yields. I must recommend a detailed cost-analysis for further study. Both those assisted by the government and other NGOs and those not assisted at all had an average increase of 1.32 times that of pre-SIDR values. This means that, by current 2011 market value, BRAC farmers are making an additional 470 taka per decimal of land under rice cultivation than before the storm. Based on the amount of raw cash BRAC gave to farmers, BRAC spent 996 taka on each beneficiary. For this to be cost effective, given the increase in yield and profit, a BRAC beneficiary would have to have only 2.12 decimals under cultivation to make as much as was spent (Note: this calculation includes only the cash provided and does not factor in the money spent on training or other assistances.). Of those I interviewed, the average cultivated area was 157 decimals; therefore, unless training for the CIP cost significantly more than what BRAC spends on other programs, the CIP seems to be cost-effective on a preliminary basis. In fact, many times the farmers from the other groups said that they have been following their fellow BRAC farmers; therefore, BRAC is impacting more than those they are specifically targeting.

Even though I applaud BRAC for having receiving the highest ranking, BRAC must do a few things to enhance their impact beyond the extension of studies such as these. Within BRAC's Crop Intensification Program, which is off to a good start, there is a sizeable gap in funding, causing inescapable debt for their beneficiaries. For example, if a farmer is given recommendations from local BRAC officials, they trust everything BRAC says without much skepticism. In order to afford most of BRAC's recommendations, the beneficiaries are forced to seek loans from other local NGOs, thereby indebting themselves even farther. If BRAC wishes to continue the CIP, then they must increase their oversight and financial support. At the very least, BRAC should provide subsidized loans for farmers who want to adopt BRAC recommendations. BRAC's Agriculture and Food Security Program already has a similar finance plan for rural sharecroppers, so it seems the transition would not be too difficult. In addition to this neglect in providing adequate financial support, there also appears to be some failures of communication and information flow within BRAC in the field. Though interviewees would deny receiving any immediate assistance from BRAC, BRAC officials would claim that support was given. This raises questions as to how much was actually done for the area immediately. It even causes

question of the validity of all stories or testaments relayed in the BRAC Head Office. Finally, it seems that in the Agriculture and Food Security Program of BRAC the focus on gender equality has been overlooked or neglected. If BRAC wishes to claim to be a women's empowerment NGO, they must successfully extend gender quality initiatives into all of their programs. I understand the difficulty in making this change, but the setbacks this creates for gender equality are far more damaging. There were instances when I would see men given chairs in the field while women were expected to use the floor.

For further research, I would recommend extending the number of interviews and explaining the locations served. Other than a quantitative expansion of cases, I would recommend widening the pool to interview women even if they are not the direct beneficiaries to gain a better perspective and more insight into the effects of cyclone SIDR. With such a small pool of interviewees, quantitative analysis was essentially impossible.

During my interviews, many ideas were suggested by farmers about what they believe would have helped them in their rehabilitation, such as a cyclone shelter, a storm warning system, a temporary food shelter, large business start-up loans, interest-free disaster-time loans, and subsidized fertilizer. So much can be done for these areas of Bangladesh and the people who live there have some of the best ideas. They are resources that must be tapped.

## Reflections

This project has allowed me—an eighteen-year-old Iowan—to contribute to the challenging issues of food security. In Bangladesh, food security has been shown to be a growing issue for millions. Within my project I evaluated the effectiveness of BRAC's Crop Intensification Program, which has the goal to produce more product on less land. Bangladesh expects to lose large amounts of farmable land as water levels increase and the soils become more saline; therefore, the single best solution is to—as Norman Borlaug did—increase the productivity of the land that is available. Norman Borlaug began this fight, now BRAC is attempting to use his ideas to save millions of lives and hopefully raise many out of poverty in the process. BRAC has to make sure their programs are effective and are doing the job they set out to do. My job was to make sure they were heading down the right path: the path to ultimate and complete food security. Not only will this project help BRAC better serve the people of Bangladesh, but also it allowed me to better grasp the concepts of agriculture and food security. Although I still have much more to learn, through this internship I have been given insights into the real world of food security. This is critical to my future contributions to the world, because it will alter my perceptions within classrooms and discussions. The images I saw and the conversations I had in Bangladesh will forever change my views on a wide array of issues. This experience opened my eyes beyond what a book could ever do. Through this experience I am better prepared to tackle my education with a vision: A vision to do more and to do better. My goal coming to BRAC was to not just represent the life and work of Dr. Norman Borlaug, but to engage many and further his efforts and dreams.

When reading through materials provided to me by BRAC, I kept interpreting the universal message that poverty holds back the masses. It holds them back from achieving great things. The limited resources prevent millions from reaching their full potential in life. I will call it the developing potential. This report was more to me than just an evaluation of the crop intensification program within BRAC Agriculture and Food Security. It is a lesson to me and to the world. The lesson is one of perspective. There will always be something you have not seen

and have not experienced. You have to embrace this and accept the difference. This lesson compels me to promote a charge to any and all readers. In the developed world, nothing is holding us back but ourselves. Do not hold yourself back. If poverty is holding back the masses in the developing world, then what is holding back the developed world? The answer: nothing but ourselves. I charge each and every reader to never except the norm and never make excuses. In America specifically, we have virtually an unlimited supply of resources. We need to utilize them to their fullest potential.

I will no longer make excuses but accept the fact that I was holding back my potential. In America, we have almost everything. Use it.

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