



BRAC

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25 Years of BRAC Research: Achievements, Challenges, and Opportunities

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INTRODUCTION

Thirty years ago, after a horrible cyclone and bloody war, Bangladesh was born • a child torn from the womb in the most violent of ways. Always a country of immense beauty and resilient people, Bangladesh nonetheless suffered great hardships from the very start.

In the difficult time following the war, a small organization known as the Bangladesh Rehabilitation Assistance Committee was founded, aiming to help provide emergency services in the Sulla region of the country. No one could have imagined at that point that the organization, later known as the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee and then simply BRAC, would remain in operation and later grow into the largest development Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) in the world. Today, BRAC has 25,156 full-time staff and more than 31,000 part-time teachers in villages throughout Bangladesh. The variety of programmes run by BRAC is positively extraordinary • ranging from BRAC University, a new venture that will award academic degrees relevant to Bangladesh's development needs, to Aarong, a chain of handicraft stores that helps create a market for the goods of rural village women, to the BRAC dairy, a model of scaling up production and marketing the milk and milk products from the hard-earned cattle of BRAC participants. As the needs of Bangladesh change, BRAC finds itself continually reaching out and expanding in new directions, starting, for example, to work with the urban poor as it becomes clear that cities are a new location for some of the most vulnerable citizens.

The major development interventions of BRAC are performed in three broad areas • poverty reduction, education, and health care • under highly decentralized management. The poverty reduction initiatives like micro-finance, poultry, fisheries, sericulture, and enterprise development are carried out under the BRAC Development Programme (BDP). BDP has so far organized 3.92 million landless rural people (97.8% of whom are female) into more than one hundred thousand small groups known as village organizations (VOs), forming the nuclei for all BRAC activities. Recognizing that micro-credit plays a pivotal role in improving the lifestyle and reducing the poverty of its members, BRAC has so far disbursed Tk. 5,826 crore (US\$ 1.25 billion) in loans to its members. Along with credit, BRAC gives requisite skill training and close supervision with advisory services.

Given the urgent needs of the poor in Bangladesh, however, BRAC felt that credit without education was insufficient intervention. As such, BRAC initiated a Non-Formal Primary Education (NFPE) Programme in 1985, opening 22 new schools which targeted the children of the most disadvantaged populations. Based on its high success rate in those schools, BRAC created the BRAC Education Programme (BEP) for adolescent girls and adults, opening a large variety of schools and rural libraries at the village level. BRAC now runs more than 31,000 non-formal schools and several hundred other schools for different target groups.

BRAC also realized that development programmes cannot achieve their desired goals without ensuring that the basic health needs of the community are met. BRAC's health, nutrition, and population interventions aim to achieve a sustained health impact by reducing childhood and maternal morbidity and mortality, increasing sexual health awareness among adolescents, reducing the prevalence of STDs/RTIs, increasing

awareness of HIV/AIDS, and reducing deaths from TB and ARI*. All the risk factors of HIV/AIDS are highly prevalent in Bangladesh. Besides, STD/RTI, TB, and ARI are also widespread. The situation may turn into havoc unless timely appropriate measures are taken. These diseases are preventable. As such BRAC targets these interventions. BRAC empowers women by teaching them to engage in healthcare activities, and also provides essential health care, curative services, reproductive health services, and disease control services.

Since 1975, research and evaluation has been an inextricable part of BRAC's mission, providing an analytical basis for BRAC's programmatic decisions, allowing BRAC to learn from its mistakes, and helping BRAC to share the impact and lessons from its work with academics, NGOs, and development agencies around the world. Probably the largest NGO research division in the world, the Research and Evaluation Division (RED) undertakes many of its studies in cooperation with international research and academic institutions of the highest caliber. Initially the part-time job of one statistician, RED had grown by December 2000 to encompass 46 professional staff working on a wide range of issues using an equally diverse array of tools and methodologies. The division also consisted of 64 support staff, including management staff. In 2000 alone, RED began 125 studies, of which 66 were completed as of December. RED research areas span the full range of BRAC activities and beyond: nutrition, family planning, health, legal issues, environment, education, agriculture, credit, gender, NGO capacity building, and much more. These are extraordinary achievements by any measure, representing the energies and commitments of a diverse and talented group of people.

This brief report is a salute to BRAC's extraordinary research and evaluation accomplishments over the past 25 years and to the ways in which this division has been a pioneer in the attempt to make development efforts more accountable, effective, and community-sensitive. The report represents only a snapshot of the more than 800 studies completed by BRAC RED over the years. It does, however, attempt to give a small picture of the manner in which RED operates and envisions its role in the larger arena of development work. We hope that this report will help broaden your understanding of BRAC as a learning organization and RED as an essential and ever-growing force within it.

*
STD = Sexually transmitted diseases
RTI = Reproductive tract infections
TB = Tuberculosis
ARI = Acute respiratory infections
HIV/AIDS = Human Immunodeficiency Virus/Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
For more information on BRAC research, please contact bracamr@bdmail.net or search the BRAC website (www.brac.net)

25 YEARS OF RESEARCH



“Arguably the Research and Evaluation Division of BRAC is the best evaluation unit in the country.”

-- George L Rubin, Programme Officer, The Ford Foundation, Dhaka, 1987

The past 25 years in the Research and Evaluation Division have been marked by a continued willingness to innovate and a commitment to understanding the communities with which BRAC works. Research methods have changed and expanded throughout the years along with BRAC's needs, starting out as mere quantitative data collection and methodological research and later increasing to include more policy oriented research and qualitative work • studies of village women's perceptions and attitudes, focus group discussions, regular surveillance in villages to monitor diseases and study attitudes towards interventions, and much more.

The journey from 1975 to today has been an exciting one, with much learned along the way and much more still to discover. At the beginning, RED was merely a one man attempt to compile service statistics from the Sulla relief effort and, one year later, to develop a baseline understanding of the area with a demographic survey.

*In an attempt to increase understanding of village dynamics in rural Bangladesh, however, BRAC RED soon branched out into new and more comprehensive research topics. Aided by Dr. SPF Senaratne, a Sri Lankan development anthropologist, RED launched a four-site village study project that culminated in the publication of two reports: *Who gets what and why* (BRAC, 1979) and *Ashram village: an analysis of resource flows* (BRAC, 1980). The findings of these studies were crucial for BRAC's shift towards more targeted programming in 1977, and continue to be powerful tools for understanding Bangladesh village life. In fact, a recent BRAC study found that, from the perspective of BRAC programme staff, these early reports are still just as widely read and appreciated as the more recent major RED projects (Schaefer, 2000).*

*The success of these kinds of studies led RED to establish the Rural Study Series in 1983, emphasizing policy relevance and operational features of BRAC's programmes at the grassroots level rather than theoretical and rigid methodological issues. The series includes a wide variety of multidisciplinary studies, including: the two anthro-pological studies previously mentioned; *The Net: Power Structure in Ten Villages* (1983); two reports on *Peasant Perceptions* (1990); *A Tale of Two Wings: Health and Family Planning Programmes in an Upazila in Northern Bangladesh* (1991); and many more. Since then, RED has initiated a number of other series, especially those designed to improve the data set to which researchers have access and to allow RED to gain an even better understanding of life in rural areas and of the operation of BRAC programmes.*

In 1986, for example, RED introduced the Health Watch Project, which monitors villages in Manikganj and Joypurhat with registration of vital events and other relevant development indicators such as school enrolment, coverage by expanded programme on

immunization (EPI), distribution of vitamin A capsule (VAC), prices of essentials, wage rates, etc. Similarly, in 1992, RED initiated a joint research project with the International Centre for Diarrhoeal Disease Research, Bangladesh (ICDDR,B) in Matlab, where ICDDR,B has been maintaining a Demographic Surveillance System for more than 35 years and BRAC's development programmes have been operating since 1992. The joint study aims to see the impact of BRAC's socioeconomic interventions on the well-being of the rural poor (especially women and children), and to study the mechanism through which this impact is mediated. The study findings to date show that BRAC's interventions have had a positive impact on the health and well-being of the poor. The cumulative life table survival probability show that the children of BRAC members always have a lower risk of death than the children of poor non-members. RED received generous grants from The Ford Foundation, The Aga Khan Foundation, the National Institutes of Health (NIH), and the Rockefeller Foundation for this project.

The 1980s were key years for RED, which ballooned in size from two staff members in 1977 to over 100 in the early 1990s. This rapid expansion allowed RED to increase the number of completed studies very rapidly, and to improve the relevance of research for BRAC programmes. At this time, RED began some of its largest studies, as well as some of the pioneering “action research” for which BRAC RED would become known. In 1989, for example, RED completed the study “Controlling a forgotten disease: the case of tuberculosis in primary health care setting in rural Bangladesh,” an action research undertaking whose subtle findings would turn out to have profound consequences. In this study, BRAC's village-based female health workers introduced a novel approach to ensuring commitment to the compliance of TB treatment: a system of monetary deposits. On diagnosis, each patient needs to deposit Tk. 200 as caution money. After completion of treatment, half of the money is returned to the patient and the rest to the *Shebika* (Female voluntary health worker). The dropout rate was so low (8%) that the government of Bangladesh later adopted this system as part of national TB treatment policy. Later that year, the Research and Evaluation Division would begin one of its largest projects to date: a benchmark survey of the basic learning of Bangladeshi children between the ages of 11 and 12. A joint collaboration between RED, UNICEF, the Institute of Education and Research (IER) of the University of Dhaka, and the National Curriculum and Text Book Board (NCTB). The study, “Assessment of Basic Knowledge of Children in Bangladesh,” was the first of its kind in Bangladesh and probably the world, suggesting a simple and inexpensive way to evaluate a child's basic education. These days, BRAC RED continues active collaboration on a number of studies with a wide variety of nationally and internationally renowned research organizations and academic institutions, including: Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS), Dhaka; Bangladesh Livestock Research Institute, Dhaka; University of California, Davis, USA; Campaign for Popular Education (CAMPE); Cornell University, USA; Harvard University, USA; Helen Keller International, Dhaka; Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex, UK; Intermediate Technology Development Group (ITDG), Sri Lanka; International Centre for Diarrhoeal Disease Research, Bangladesh (ICDDR,B), Dhaka; International Rice Research Institute (IRRI), the Philippines; Karolinska Institute, Sweden; London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, UK; Micronutrient Initiative; Institute of Child and Mother Health (ICMH); Rickets Consortium; Royal Tropical Institute, the Netherlands; Tufts University, USA; Umeå University, Sweden; UNICEF Bangladesh, Dhaka; University College of Wales at Swansea, UK; University of Manchester, UK; World Food Programme, Dhaka; World Health Organization; Rabindra Bharati University, India; and many more.

The Research and Evaluation Division believes strongly in the potential for advocacy through research. Towards that end, RED has involved itself in large research/reform projects, such as the Education Watch project of the Campaign for Popular Education (CAMPE) • a coalition of more than 400 NGOs involved in Bangladesh education efforts. The first Education Watch report, published with the help of RED in 1999, was entitled “Hope not complacency: state of primary education in Bangladesh 1999.” Today, RED continues its active involvement in Education Watch. The Executive Director of BRAC is on the Advisory Board of the project, and the Director of Research is the convenor of the working committee. RED worked to further the Education Watch theme for the year 2000 • quality of education • by performing an assessment of student learning achievements based on competency tests adopted by the National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB). RED researchers surveyed 186 schools (government, private, and non-formal) in both urban and rural areas, with 2,509 students of grade five taking part in the testing process. RED is also conducting a repeat survey of internal efficiency indicators, surveying 30,000 households and 960 schools from all around the country. The second and the third Education Watch reports are due to come out in 2001.

“[REDhas] got a lot of experience generally, but more importantly for us, this experience especially relates to BRAC programmes. An outside organization wouldn’t have insights as deep as our own research division. It’s the strength of BRAC. It’s our ‘library’!”

“The research division opens my eyes to things I haven’t noticed before.”

-- BRAC programme staff, 2000

Yet despite RED’s increasing importance in addressing national and international policy questions, the Research and Evaluation Division also remains committed to monitoring and improving BRAC’s own programmes. If programmatic mistakes and oversights are inevitable, especially with increasing scale and scope then it becomes all the more important for research to provide a keen eye and fresh perspective, ensuring BRAC’s ability to learn from its mistakes • even when those mistakes are large. After over a decade of experimenting with deep tubewells for irrigation, for example, BRAC research determined in 1995 that the tubewell project could never be financially sustainable over time. BRAC bought back the tubewells at their full prices from community groups that had purchased them, sold off the equipment, and covered the deficit through its loan loss reserve fund.

“Error is a simple fact of an active and productive life—so long as its lessons are reflected in increasingly effective behaviour. An organization in which such learning is valued is characterized by the candour and practical sophistication with which its members discuss their own errors, what they have learned from them, and the corrective actions they are attempting. Intellectual integrity is combined with a sense of vitality and purpose...BRAC comes as near to a pure example of a learning organization as one is likely to find.”

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The Research and Evaluation Division takes pride in its commitment to learning, both on the divisional and individual levels. The division supports its staff in pursuing higher education • short term training, master’s programme, or PhD programme. During the year 2000, for instance, six RED staff were pursuing doctoral programmes, one pursued a master’s programme, and three returned to RED after successful completion of their master’s programmes. RED also encourages its staff to learn from one another, recognizing the great talent and knowledge of the people it employs. Many RED staff attend journal clubs, meeting on a regular basis with other staff to discuss recent publications and developments in their fields. Staff also attend weekly tea seminars, sharing information about their own research and findings and providing each other with constructive advice. RED even extends its commitment to learning beyond its own walls, offering its research and technical support to interns from around the globe. During the year 2000, RED hosted seven interns from Bangladesh, the United States, New Zealand, and Canada; some came just for a few weeks of exposure, while others pursued intensive research for over a year.

Seeking to maximize the potential contributions of every member of the RED community, the Research and Evaluation Division operates within a decentralized administrative framework. All research takes place within one of eight thematic study groups, headed and guided by a senior member of the RED staff. The administrative work in RED is headed by RED’s manager, while the publishing and dissemination work is headed by the chief of editing and publications. All ten working groups are in turn guided by the Director Research, who is also a Deputy Executive Director (DED) of BRAC and reports to the Executive Director. The elevation of the head of RED to a DED position indicates the kind of importance BRAC places on research.

Research costs money, for obvious reasons, and RED relies on the support of both BRAC and other organizations from around the world to continue to produce incisive findings and quality reports on a wide variety of development-related issues. During the year 2000, RED spent Tk. 48.47 million (approximately US\$ 862,000) to fund its research output, 37.7% came from BRAC’s core fund, while the rest came from generous international donors. Current RED donors include the Aga Khan Foundation; Canadian International Development Agency; Department for International Development (DFID) of the UK; European Community; Government of Bangladesh; International Centre for Diarrhoeal Disease Research, Bangladesh (ICDDR,B); International Development Research Centre, Canada; NOVIB/DGIS, Netherlands; Pathfinder International; Rockefeller Foundation; UNICEF; University of Aberdeen, UK; World Food Programme; as well as other organizations. The Research and Evaluation Division is extraordinarily grateful to all of its donors, and continues to prioritize financial

sustainability as an important step towards ensuring the continued success of RED for many years to come.



MAKING RESEARCH MATTER

“The most obvious impact of the BRAC research may be local and direct... But much more significant for the conditions of the poor, will be the way their report works its way through much longer causal chains in the cores of centralized knowledge and policy.”

“Paradoxically, the report was possible because the researchers started not with research, but with the problems and knowledge of the landless, working with them on solutions. We have moved a long way in the research approach, from participant observation to participant organization. Purists may throw up their hands in horror, and point to the danger of distortion and propaganda. But in the next decade, those outsiders who have the courage and vision for such reversals, and who communicate their experience widely to others, will be at one cutting edge of rural research.”

*-- Robert Chambers, describing the 1980 BRAC publication *The Net* in his book *Rural Development, Putting the Last First*.*

While research for its own sake can be quite interesting, the Research and Evaluation Division tries to ensure that its work is relevant to efforts to help improve people's lives. RED makes special efforts to guarantee that its work can have broader impacts, whether that means improving methods of dissemination to other researchers and programme field workers or even using innovative research techniques (such as action research).

RED researchers meet with programme staff at the beginning of every study and exchange ideas, looking for angles on studies that would make the studies more interesting and relevant, as well as sharing information and perspectives.

The timing of studies is carefully planned so as to maximize the impact that research can have on field-level work. Before field staff begin working in a new BRAC programme, RED researchers generally undertake a baseline survey to gather more information about the conditions in the programme area. Once the programme has been implemented, researchers perform a mid-point survey to assess the efficacy of the programme to date. After the completion of the programme, researchers carry out an achievement study; a few years later, they execute an impact study. Taken together, these multi-stage studies help to ensure that research truly informs programme and serves as a critical eye, offering another perspective on daily life, interactions, and interventions.

When a study is completed, its findings are disseminated widely to BRAC senior management, programme staff, other NGOs, and research and academic institutions.

Since 1992, a system providing for more personal interaction between researchers and programme staff has also been in place. RED researchers attend meetings of the regional managers held at the BRAC headquarters every month; most also attend some meetings at the regional level and exchange views with field staff.

*Since early 1995, BRAC RED has published *Nirjash*, a Bangla publication containing summaries of important recent research. Designed to make research findings accessible to more*

people in Bangladesh, including BRAC field staff, copies of Nirjash are distributed to all field offices and departments of BRAC, other Bangladeshi NGOs, relevant government offices, news media, and more.

RED staff serve as advisors and consultants for national and international policy organizations including ICDDR,B; Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) of the UN; Department for International Development (DFID) of the UK; UNICEF; World Health Organization; the government of China; and others. They attend and give presentations at numerous conferences, seminars, and workshops. They also publish books and articles in well-known journals including Lancet, New England Journal of Medicine, Social Science and Medicine, Journal of Biosocial Science, Health Policy and Planning, the Harvard Asia Pacific Review, International Review of Education, World Bank Volume, World Development, Public Health, Public Health Nutrition, Journal of International Development, Journal of Applied Communications, Journal of Scholarly Publication and more.

BRAC's Ayesha Abed library, once housed at RED but now housed within BRAC University, provides a way for visitors to gain access to research by RED and other development research organizations.

The Research and Evaluation Division also makes a special effort to ensure that its research tools are tailored to the relevant needs in the field, devising new techniques in the process. Recognizing, for example, that no competent tools existed for measuring the relative educational skills of Bangladeshi children, RED, in collaboration with UNICEF and several other agencies, developed the pioneering technique mentioned briefly before • the Assessment of Basic Competencies (ABC). This methodology, now widely used in Bangladesh, Nepal, and Pakistan, tests a child's ability to read and write simple, short statements; work out every day arithmetic; and use various life skills important for his or her quality of life (the ability to treat diarrhoea, use clean water for drinking, treat a fever, etc.). ABC now serves as a "standard" for basic education in Bangladesh, and studies based on its methods established baseline figures for monitoring educational progress and instituting educational reforms. The ABC methodology has also been adopted by the Department of Primary Education, GOB.

Other useful research techniques are adapted from ones that already exist. Rapid Rural Appraisal (RRA), a methodology developed in the late 1970s by Robert Chambers at the Institute of Development Studies (IDS), University of Sussex, UK, has been used very successfully since that time to generate ideas for possible development interventions in villages. RRA involves a multi-stage and multi-source approach to rapid data collection, including informal and semi-structured methods, diagrams, and maps. The subsequent versions including Participatory Rural Appraisal and Participatory Learning Action are now extensively used in RED Research.

BRIEF PORTRAITS: BRAC RESEARCH AND EVALUATION DIVISION IN ACTION



Early RED triumphs: oral rehydration therapy for diarrhoea

In 1968, researchers discovered the clinical applications of oral rehydration salt (ORS) solution, an innovation called the “most significant medical advance of this century” with potential to save millions from death by dehydrating diarrhoea (Lancet, 1978).

Harnessing that potential in reality, however, was • as always • easier said than done. In 1980, BRAC stepped up to the job, designing a programme to teach people in Bangladesh how to make a rehydration solution with lobon (salt), gur (brown sugar), and water. The questions involved in planning a field experiment were endless, and the potentials for missteps enormous. Who would be taught to make the solution, and how? How would the educational message be publicized? Who would do the teaching? How could they make sure that their students remembered the lessons, remembered them correctly, and knew when to use them? And given the life or death situations in hand, how could BRAC make a recipe that would minimize the chances of the solution being prepared incorrectly? Answering these questions required a lot of study, and a lot of creative thinking. Since mothers are the primary caretakers of children in Bangladesh, they and adolescent girls (future mothers) were chosen as the primary targets of the lessons. Determining the process for sharing the lessons with the mothers was indeed a difficult task. Radio programmes were not a reasonable option, since only 20 percent of Bangladeshi households owned a radio; on the other hand, teaching the lessons to large gatherings of all the mothers in a village would make the lessons time-efficient but would make it difficult to assess how well each mother understood the lesson. Eventually, it was determined, trained female workers would have to teach mothers individually, ensuring that lessons could be transmitted in a culturally-appropriate setting and that each mother could be tested to make sure she really comprehended what she had learned. Lessons were designed to include information about dehydration, post-diarrhoeal nutritional status, and diarrhoeal prevention, while the rehydration solution recipe was carefully designed to prepare just the right amount of solution, using local measures of water and finger measurements of lobon and gur.

A large number of studies were carried out to guarantee that this Oral Therapy Extension Programme (OTEP) was a success. Many of these studies took advantage of action research methods, testing different teaching techniques in the field and evaluating their efficacy.

A critical juncture came in 1985, when it was suggested that OTEP use rice instead of gur in its recipe, since rice is more readily available in rural households and may even be more successful in stemming diarrhoea. The concept of cereal-based ORS was gaining force internationally, and it seemed reasonable for BRAC to jump on the bandwagon.

The Research and Evaluation Division performed an action research to see which kind of solution people preferred to use, rice-based or gur-based. Mothers in the Baratara union of the Joypurhat district were taught to prepare rice-based solution; mothers in the Dhalahar union learned gur-based solution; and mothers in the Bhadsha union received training in preparing both solutions. Interestingly, the study found, teaching mothers to make rice-based

solution took much more time and thus much more money; in addition, preparation of rice-based solution is itself more complicated, time consuming, and costly (due to fuel requirements). Even though the rice-based solution seemed to shorten the duration of the diarrhoea, mothers preferred lobon-gur solution. BRAC research had halted an international trend.

By November 1990, 12 million mothers in Bangladesh had learned how to make lobon-gur solution. The “diarrhoea curse” was no longer so deadly, thanks to the hard work of BRAC field workers, researchers, and mothers everywhere.

Current RED challenges: arsenic contamination and safe-water options *The newest crisis to hit Bangladesh is arsenic poisoning in drinking water. About 27% of all tubewells, which supply most of the country’s drinking water, have arsenic concentrations above the Bangladesh government limit of 50 µg per litre. The World Health Organization now suggests a provisional guideline limit of 10 µg per litre. Arsenic in drinking water can lead to a variety of diseases, including melanosis, leukomelanosis, hyperkeratosis, black foot disease, cardiovascular disease, hepatomegaly, neuropathy, and cancer. Malnutrition and other problems associated with poverty exacerbate the dangers of arsenic poisoning.*

In conjunction with UNICEF and the Department of Public Health Engineering (DPHE) of the government of Bangladesh, BRAC has been working on a project entitled “Action research into community-based arsenic mitigation.” In two upazilas, BRAC-trained village health workers tested tubewells for arsenic, painting contaminated wells “red” and safe wells “green.” They also identified and helped treat current arsenicosis patients.

Ongoing research is now attempting to assess various safe water options, both for their technical efficacy and for their relative acceptance by the community. A number of devices, including pond sand filters, rain water harvesters, three-pitcher filters, arsenic removal plants, and dugwells, have been installed in communities and continually monitored. People living in the project areas have been involved throughout the process and have had final input in deciding which safe water options are installed and where they are located. The programme has now been expanded into five more upazilas.

The story is not yet finished; the arsenic crisis is an ongoing one. Until we find the best ways to provide safe drinking water for all, however, BRAC research will continue • always innovating, always working with the community, always committed to finding effective and acceptable solutions for Bangladesh’s gravest problems.



THE ROAD AHEAD: RED, BRAC, AND FUTURE CHALLENGES

The next decade will prove to be a crucial time for the Research and Evaluation Division, as it continues in its efforts to improve the quantity, quality, and relevance of its research.

Towards that end, as already discussed, RED continues to invest in capacity development, believing that education and learning are the greatest stepping stones towards the creation of new potential and new knowledge.

Perhaps the greatest challenge for RED in the upcoming years is ensuring its own independence and vitality in an atmosphere of shrinking funding from international donors. Although RED currently receives only 37.7% of its money from BRAC's core funds, it seeks to continue to reduce its dependence on BRAC programmatic finances. The uniqueness of BRAC's financing of research is that all BRAC programmes keep two to four percent of their budget for research. Should unforeseen budget problems in the future force BRAC programmes to cut corners, BRAC should not be forced to choose between funding its own programmes and funding research on those programmes, nor risk having to choose between RED research and the research of cheaper outside teams. The role of an impartial observer requires some measure of financial independence, and the Research and Evaluation Division will continue to seek that independence through concerted fundraising efforts.

RED also seeks to expand upon its partnerships with other institutions and research teams, allowing it to pursue continually varied and more significant types of studies.

Grassroots-level development involving millions of poor, illiterate, and malnourished people living in a tradition-bound society is a difficult process, to say the least. RED has shown that research can help identify the problems lying in the way of development. It is always impossible to predict what the future may hold, but one thing is certain • the Research and Evaluation Division will continue to strive to engage in research that have the greatest possible impact on BRAC programmes and development thinking and action.

A BRIEF NOTE ON SOURCES

Sources for this brief report have been drawn from a wide variety of areas, including BRAC Research and Evaluation Division Annual Reports; Ian Smillie's commemorative booklet "Words and Deeds: BRAC at 25"; AMR Chowdhury and Richard Cash's book A Simple Solution: Teaching Millions to Treat Diarrhoea at Home (University Press Ltd., 1996); Kai Schaefer's unpublished study "Perceptions of the Research and Evaluation Division and its Work: A Qualitative Study" (February 2000); the research monograph "Combating a Deadly Menace: Early Experiences With a Community-Based Arsenic Mitigation Project in Bangladesh" (BRAC, August 2000); and an editorial in Lancet (Lancet, 1978).

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