

How Australia's support has been transforming Bangladesh, and making global impact: A brief on the Strategic Partnership Agreement

In 2011, Australia, the UK and BRAC came together to do development differently, forming a strategic partnership to support Bangladesh achieve the global goals. **Australia broke new ground with the partnership, which equipped the people closest to the challenges with flexible, long-term core funding, and the trust that they knew best how to use it.** The funding has been transformational, ensuring that over 84 million people have the tools to change their own lives, but are also better-equipped to navigate an increasingly unpredictable future, and contribute to the prosperity that supports regional and global stability.

1. 700% return on Australia's investment

The services delivered in just the first phase of the agreement (2011-2015) reached more than 12 million people - or almost half of Australia's population - and returned benefits estimated at USD 2.38 billion, while costing just USD 350 million.¹

2. Australia's support is making an impact at a national level

1 in every 4 households who lifted themselves out of extreme poverty in Bangladesh in the last 13 years did so with Australia's support. Approximately four million households lifted themselves out of extreme poverty in 2012-2024, and one million did it through BRAC's Graduation approach, which Australia supported to pilot and scale.

3. New development models created in Bangladesh with Australian support are making an impact globally

The Graduation approach to ending extreme poverty is being adapted in over 100

countries, including the Philippines, Indonesia and India. The adolescent development programme developed in Bangladesh has evolved to become the Mastercard Foundation Accelerating Impact for Young Women programme, which is equipping 1.2 million adolescent girls and young women with entrepreneurship, employability, and life skills, across Sierra Leone, Liberia, Uganda, Tanzania, Rwanda, Ghana, and Kenya. The BRAC Play Lab and Humanitarian Play Lab models are being implemented in Uganda, Tanzania, Sierra Leone, the Philippines and in the Rhino refugee camps in Uganda. **Australia's investments are tackling the world's most urgent challenges, with girls and women at the centre of the solutions.**

4. Australia is equipping Bangladesh to implement proven solutions to long-standing challenges - but also to take risks and test new approaches to emerging issues

Bangladesh is the sixth largest migrant sending country globally.² BRAC's migration programme started in 2014, with Australia's support. In 2013, two out of three Bangladeshi women going overseas to work were abused by their employers.

The work has since evolved into a comprehensive package of services including pre-departure orientation, in-country support, and reintegration of returnee migrants. **Australia's initial two-year investment has catalysed the creation of a diverse donor portfolio, which has enabled 47 million potential migrants to receive information and services to date.**

5. When the Rohingya were fleeing genocide in Myanmar, Australia mobilised international support to stand beside them

In 2017, almost a million Rohingya were displaced in a matter of weeks. Australia was the first country to support BRAC, mobilising AUD 6 million just three days into the crisis, when money was needed the most. **The support was catalytic, helping to unlock a donor landscape which has now grown to AUD 66 million. The investment also set the foundations for transforming aid architecture to better respond in protracted crises.** A pooled fund, established with Australia's leadership, has supported four local organisations to strengthen their capacity to take up leadership roles in the response, and 21 other local organisations are on track to achieve the same by the end of 2025.

¹ Project Completion Review - BRAC Strategic Partnership Agreement (2011-2016).

² <https://www.iom.int/news/female-bangladeshi-migrant-workers-face-abuse-iom-study>

6. From COVID-19 to climate, Australia is prioritising the issues that matter most

In an increasingly volatile world, development gains are constantly at risk - unless the ability to rapidly pivot is built into programming. During COVID-19, **Australia's support enabled BRAC to transform its entire workforce within days to become the largest non-government responder to the pandemic, and administer 1 in every 7 vaccines. In 2024, Australia's support enabled BRAC not only to respond to unprecedented flooding, but also to coordinate the civil society response across Cumilla, one of the worst-hit regions.** As climate impacts rapidly accelerate - Bangladesh was hit by five major disasters in 2024 alone - it is crucial that communities can access what they need in time to respond to crises.

7. Investing in government and a vibrant civil society for impact at a landscape level

BRAC takes a landscape-level approach to challenges, delivering services but also strengthening the ability of other actors to ensure a robust ecosystem for social development. As an example, BRAC operates a wide variety of educational institutions, but also invests in strengthening public education, through initiatives such as teacher training and curriculum development, as well as supporting non-government organisations to provide services. As a result, **Australia's support continues to have incredible ripple effects.** In 2012, over 400 of BRAC's partner organisations managed 4,700 schools. Many of those organisations went on to continue to scale on their own, such as Probhati Relief Organisation Nilphamari, which started with five schools and has now established 1,400 schools, reaching 35,000 students.

8. Building capacity, for speed, scale, and sustainability

Australia's support has significantly strengthened BRAC's organisational ability in a wide range of areas. Deepening disability inclusion required programming changes, but also structural change - and now 1 in every 6 persons with disabilities in Bangladesh accesses support from BRAC. The role of technology has been reimagined, with the Graduation approach now supported by a real-time app that supports data-driven decision-making, saving 27,000 work days annually. Similarly, BRAC's community health workers, who deliver 1 in every 5 safe deliveries in Bangladesh, now have an app to ensure they have the **information they need at their fingertips.** Other highlights include the strengthening of safeguarding, introducing an enterprise resource planning system, Innovation Fund, Social Innovation Lab, and the digitisation of BRAC's monitoring, evaluation, accountability and learning system.

Bangladesh is the world's seventh most climate-vulnerable country. As the climate crisis worsens, its impacts will threaten every facet of the country's development. Piecemeal, siloed, project-based approaches will become even less effective - and may even be detrimental in a complex, rapidly changing environment. **Long-term, multidimensional, flexible and locally-led programming will become central to making an impact.**

Australia's support has shown that the right kind of support has incredible returns on investment, but also that people are capable of changing their

own trajectories - they just need access to the right resources. Households in the Graduation approach, which evolved with Australia's support, demonstrate that - with people continuing on an upward trajectory when measured seven years after the programme ended. **The integrated climate change programme, currently being piloted with Australia's support, is next in line, poised to become a blueprint for slowing migration by putting the conditions in place for communities to be able to effectively adapt to climate change across the world.**

In an increasingly uncertain world, investing in flexible,

long-term, core support will not only improve the lives of people and communities in Bangladesh, but it is a crucial investment in regional and global prosperity and stability.

BRAC is an international development organisation founded in Bangladesh in 1972 that partners with 130 million people living with inequality and poverty to create opportunities to realise their potential. BRAC is known for its community-led, holistic approach, and delivering long-term impact at scale. BRAC works with communities in marginalised situations, hard-to-reach areas and post-disaster settings across Asia and Africa, with a particular focus on women and children. BRAC operates as a solutions ecosystem, including social development, social enterprises, humanitarian response, BRAC Bank and BRAC University.