

ORGANISATION ANALYSIS CCMA 1.1

ORGANIZATION BRAC

BRAC

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BRAC is an international development non-governmental organization devised in 1972's 'war-torn newly independent' (Hossain and Segunpta, 2009: 23) Bangladesh by its founder F. H. Abed. It started as a small committee of volunteers who wanted to help returning refugees after a devastating cyclone and the immediately after War of Independence from Pakistan - considered genocidal on the Bangladeshis (Hossain, 2017).

Nowadays it is considered the largest NGO in the world (Ellis, 2016) with more than 120.000 employees in eleven different countries and is acclaimed worldwide for its innovative approach and highly significant contribution to poverty eradication.

BRAC'S VISION:

'A world free from all forms of exploitation and discrimination where everyone has the opportunity to realize their potential.'

BRAC'S MISSION:

'To empower people and communities in situations of poverty, illiteracy, disease and social injustice. BRAC's interventions aim to achieve large scale, positive changes through economic and social programmes that enable men and women to realize their potential.'

BRAC'S VALUES:

'Innovation
Integrity
Inclusiveness
Effectiveness'

BRAC'S FUTURE GOALS:

'BRAC's global strategy outlines three priority goals scaling up its global ambition to support the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development within the next 10 years:

empowering at least 250 million people to have control over their own livelihoods; reaching at least 30% of the participants with multiple interventions; and leading innovation and the dissemination of learning in the development sector.’

BRAC’S KEY PRIORITIES:

‘Eliminating extreme poverty

Financially empower people living in poverty

Skills and decent work for underprivileged women and men

Resilience to climate change and emergency response capacity

Gender equality

Pro-poor urban development

Universal healthcare access and improved nutrition

Invest in the next generation through early childhood and improved education quality’

(BRAC’s grey literature)

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

BRAC’s headquarters are in Bangladesh. Its governance lies in the Governing Body and an Executive Management Committee. Since 2002 it started expanding globally, so in 2009 it constituted Stitching BRAC International, a non-profit foundation based on the Netherlands that manages the overseas entities except Bangladesh and the affiliates. These affiliates are BRAC UK and BRAC USA designed to raise BRAC’s identity globally and raise funds.

‘It invests on several independent commercial enterprises to generate revenue for its development activities, [...] increase its scale through vertical integration’ (Ahmed et. Al., 2012: 38) and be self-sufficient, including BRAC Bank, Delta BRAC Housing, BRAC Net, Guardian Life Insurance, IPDC Finance Limited, BRAC IT Services and BRAC Tea Estates – all described as socially responsible companies. It also counts with 12 different self-sustaining cause-driven social enterprises -including the ‘largest poultry industry in Bangladesh’ (Ahmed et. Al., 2012: 39) - and its own university based in Dhaka.

BRAC’S FUNDING

According to BRAC’s 2018 annual audit report, its total income in 2018 was 836 million euros, its total expenditure of 646 million euros, and its net surplus for the year 171 million euros.

A considerable amount of its income comes from its own commercial and socially-responsible enterprises and the mentioned affiliates. It also gets funding from bilateral donors such as DFAT, DFID or USAID, some international agencies such as UNICEF or The Global Fund, foundations like The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and EAC-QATAR, private enterprises including universities and schools and private individuals.

UNDERSTANDING OF DEVELOPMENT AND SOCIAL CHANGE

BRAC's understanding of development and social change is very interesting and quite complex. In order to explain it, it is important to first recall that development theory and studies have gone through various phases from its beginnings in 1945 that have historically mirrored the interests and perspectives of the dominant discourses in each era and paradigm shift (McEwan, 2018: 149-190).

Previously in time, powerful development agencies and NGOs have been based on the global North, whilst BRAC is from the South and fosters development of 'South in the South – a transfer of development knowledge, technology or resources across and between poor countries' (Hossain & Sengupta, 2009: 10). In this sense, BRAC proposes innovations in the application of international development practices such as creating 'new frontline organizations in the new countries' instead of working with local partners (Hossain & Sengupta, 2009: 21), the majority of the staff at the grassroots being intendedly Bangladeshi women, with an important focus on speaking the local languages, 'campus-style living arrangements' (Hossain & Sengupta, 2009: 33), low salaries compared to other INGOs, etc. These innovations are very relevant and most enable a more horizontal relation between practitioners and recipients that values 'lived experience and practical knowledge' (McGee et al. 2020) and narrows power differences if we compare it with Northern-based organizations.

As so, BRAC sits on and nurtures a fascinating shift in development theory that is related to the 'development pluralism' described by Pieterse, where development is multifocal (Pieterse, 2010: 214) and less and less biased by the global North's gaze.

However, it is not certain that BRAC's understanding of development is really alternative (Hossain and Sengupta, 2009) or more of a mixture of prior orientations that the particular history and context of BRAC, its 'Southernness' and Bangladesh itself and its history (Hossain, 2017) have also molded.

Since its beginnings, BRAC's perspective on development has been very influenced by Freire's notion of '*conscientization*' that explains how deprived communities/people need to go through a process of critical consciousness to understand the causes and realities that dispossess them and plan and act accordingly to pull themselves out of poverty (Banerjee, 2019: 84).

In this sense, BRAC's vision of development is considerably pro-poor and emancipatory. It argues that development should not rely on solidarity and altruism (donors). A social restructuring is needed instead; one that, rather than seeking wealth redistribution, seeks the creation of new wealth and its distribution in innovative ways that transform the social order without having to contest nor challenge the existing conditions, hierarchies and power structures (Hours, 2006: 132)

This orientation, together with BRAC's 'core philosophy [...] that is just not enough to do something useful on a small scale' (Hossain and Segunpta, 2018: 38), has led BRAC to pull out all the stops to try to grow and be self-sufficient. This, in turn, has also derived on its strong financial reliance on microcredits – considered by multiple authors as largely controversial (Ahmed et. Al., 2012: 39).

The pro-poor orientation we were mentioning before is weekend by these 'individualistic economic solutions of poverty' (Ahmed et. Al., 2012: 43), and by not contesting the real causes of social (and environmental and global) injustice, it 'may reduce beneficiaries' political consciousness, inhibit state provision of service [and accountability], and constitute members as economic subjects, [...] rather than empowering them as citizens active in the political process (Ahmed et. Al., 2012: 44).

Therefore, BRAC's understanding of development is not -at least yet- really emancipatory. Its work is vital, saves countless lives and has 'contributed to a reformist counter-hegemony that has helped empower and meet the needs of the poor and disadvantaged' (Ahmed et. Al., 2012: 44), but its view is more of a 'passive revolution to ameliorate the lot of clients within the parameters of dominant hegemonies' (Ahmed et. Al., 2012: 44).

As cited by Clammer: 'What people desire and what the sustainability of our fragile planetary ecology and civilization requires is liberation, rights/reciprocities/responsibilities, fulfillment, autonomy, community, and meaning, rather than 'growth' and the disruptions imposed by the global expansion of marketization (Diener and Seligman 2004, cited in Clammer, 2012: 18).

As one of the largest NGO, and one that can really transform development practice, BRAC needs to bear in mind that ‘a different balance of state, market and society’ is needed (Stiglitz cited by Pieterse, 217) by building citizenship, challenging and resisting power over, and building and creating own transformative power (McGee et. Al. 2020: 111-112).

BRAC’S COMMUNICATION FOR DEVELOPMENT

Manyozo defines communication for development as the method-driven, theory-informed, learning-based and evidence-driven employment of media and communications to interrupt and transform the political economy of development in ways that enable individuals, communities and societies to determine their own history (Manyozo, 2012).

In this sense, BRAC’s wording is profoundly in line with Manyozo’s definition, but its real communication approaches not always are. For communication to be transformative and sustainable it ‘must be rooted in a more inclusive, people-centred and radically participatory development paradigm’ (Tufte, 2017: 166).

Nowadays, BRAC’s communication is more focused on ‘communicating the good done’ (Engel et. Al, 2018: 1), than in boosting ‘participation by people in those things that most affect their lives’ (McAnany, 2012: 150). However, some communication projects as the following case study does lie in this direction.

CASE STUDY: RADIO POLLIKONTHO

Radio PolliKontho, “Village Voices” is a community radio project devised by BRAC in the Moulvibazar District, in the Southeast of Sylhet Division in Northeast Bangladesh. It is aimed to improve people's right to information and promote grassroots voices, community participation, advocacy and media skills (BRAC, 2017). It has been active since 2011 (although some sources note 2012).

It is especially aimed at women and young people, considered to be the main drivers of social mobilization.

The radio is run by 24 young volunteers that broadcast 12 hours every day amusing their listeners with 41 different programs of which 95% are in the local dialect, Sylheti and 5% in Bengali.

The content is diverse: 'education, agriculture, healthcare, women's empowerment, child & youth development, biodiversity conservation, tourism, early marriage prevention, news, entertainment, etc.' (Habib, 2017: 74) and they are famous for their folk music sections, their on-air English lessons sponsored by the US embassy and a program called *Suswasthya* that gives health advice to the community with special focus on de-stigmatizing 'dialogues on menstrual and reproductive healthcare [...]' (BRAC, 2020).

Its key objectives are to 'provide information, education, entertainment and motivation to its listeners' (Fisher, 2012: 13) and contribute to community participation. It is broadcasted within a radius of 17km around the station, reaching about 400.000 listeners of which 7.857 congregate in 765 listener clubs (Habib, 2017: 74). These listener clubs have been encouraged in order to increase community engagement and promote spaces for social participation. They are separated in different categories to ensure women participation in patriarchal environments: children from 4 to 15, youth from 18 to 25, women from 30 to 45 and mixed adults from 40 to 65 years. Some listen to through radio devices, some through digital platforms and social networks.

Abounding on the participative efforts, listeners are encouraged to be part of the volunteers who write, produce and edit the programs. Also, interviews with local people are included regularly; sometimes people ask or give their opinion and invited experts build on it. Participation is also encouraged by asking people to comment on their social networks (FB, TW, IG, LI) or by letter. And the fact that it is a local radio makes possible proximity actions such as courtyard meetings with locals -as the ones conducted by the volunteer that runs *Suswasthya*- or printing the script of the English lessons and handing it out for the community to follow them.

PolliKontho Radio has won the Meena Media Award from UNICEF every year since 2012 till the last celebrated one in 2019 for its contribution to the community, the ABU Prize by Asia Pacific Broadcasting Union, 2015, and the Family Planning Media Award, 2013, by the Bangladeshi Ministry of Health and Family Welfare.

After 8 years, the success of the station has made it possible to scale up its broadcasting range and it will soon be able to cover 3 districts and 11 subdistricts more and, therefore, reach a broader audience.

Community radio as PolliKontho represents a relevant example of communication for development and social change when done through 'participative communication'

- conceived to enable communal participation and bring together spaces for community members to plan and make decisions that can make social change possible (Manyozo, 2012). The fact that programs are written and produced by volunteers, involving locals' interviews and encourage discussion spaces such as listener clubs pulls it away from the one-way communication typical of mainstream radio, making it the ideal environment for a really transformative communication for development. However, community radio should ideally be funded and belong to the community [instead of belonging to BRAC] to avoid top-down communication, 'media-centrism' and ensure community's participation, confidence, ownership, and means to make it work (Costa, 2012).

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