

Founded in 2006, BRAC Uganda is implementing a number of projects across the country, which are greatly impacting the lives of young men and women. Some of these projects are in education, health, financial services and agriculture. The organisation's operations in the country have grown to 159 branches across 80 districts. They have more than 213,072 microfinance members and 102 branches of the small enterprise programme. The organisation works with over 3,000 staff, with almost 98% being nationals, few expatriates, and close to 80% are women who hold most of the leadership positions. Uganda is one of BRAC's biggest setups outside Bangladesh. The country representative, Hasina Akhter, who has held this position for about one-and-half-years, gave Vivian Agaba insights into their different programmes

You have many projects that are contributing to the transformation of lives of Ugandans. What are some of them?

The Mastercard Foundation Scholars programme is one of our biggest education and youth programmes. Apart from the scholarships, we also do youth empowerment programmes, where we work closely with not only young adolescent girls, but also boys. We provide them with support and life skills as well as alternative livelihoods, particularly girls and young women who dropped out of school or have never been to school.

We are also integrating boys known as male champions in several of our livelihood programmes, by first creating linkages between them and the job market. These trainings are done after thorough market assessment through the balances of demand and supply. This is made possible through partnerships with business owners, already existing government programmes and other development partners and stakeholders.

We also provide micro enterprise support to groups, particularly women groups under the youth programme. We implement the Early Childhood Development Programme, where we target children under the age of five.

The programme aims to ensure that children are taught using child-friendly pedagogy of learning through play, and incorporate social and emotional learning with the emphasis on play, make, share and think in safe places referred to as play labs.

BRAC is also dedicated to fight gender-based violence (GBV). We are closely working with the gender ministry and World Bank on the SCOPE project particularly in the project target areas such as

BRAC empowers Ugandans

Kamwenge and Kabarole. We are educating the people susceptible to GBV about the dangers, preventive measures and controls of violence. BRAC is reaching out to the possible offenders through information and educational materials on the consequences of GBV. We also provide psycho-social support and counselling to victims of gender-based violence.

You said the big chunk of your work is in health. What exactly do you do?

In health, we are supporting the community at the grassroots through our community health promoters (CHPs). They are trained and certified by the health ministry, together with BRAC and have to go through a six-month intensive fundamental training before they start working as CHPs.

We have more than 4,700 CHPs on the ground and 80% of them are women who provide basic curative care to community members. They are helping the community access regular essential health packages by taking these services to their doorsteps. They provide services such as post-natal care, sexual and reproductive health services, basic treatment for malaria, tuberculosis, family planning, water and sanitation as well as nutrition.

It has been noted that in the 72 districts in which this programme is implemented, there has been a 20% drop in maternal mortality rate.

What do you do under the agriculture and food security programme?

Here, we support smallholder farmers with diversified crop varieties for cultivation, because in many areas, they depend on one crop. Many of them lack knowledge and skills in irrigation. We are educating and encouraging them to practise better farming methods. These farmers are also integrated into our microloans programmes to allow sustainability of their crop farming.

Nutrition comes in as part and parcel of agriculture and food security programme. We are supporting close to 50,000 small holder farmers in five districts in Uganda with orange flesh sweet potatoes, variety brought from Bangladesh, which is rich in different micronutrients.

It has been proven that 50% of children feeding on this nutrient-rich porridge have a higher and healthier

WE ARE SUPPORTING CLOSE TO 50,000 SMALLHOLDER FARMERS IN FIVE DISTRICTS IN UGANDA WITH ORANGE FLESH SWEET POTATOES

growth rate compared to those without access. Through this programme, we encourage mothers to breastfeed their children and also educate them on the benefits. Many women are fascinated by the fact that breastfeeding is one of the family planning methods there is. We educate women on the importance of family planning as well as dangers of unplanned pregnancies.

Elaborate on your ultra-poor graduation model, what is about?

BRAC is implementing a pilot graduation known as ultra-poor graduation programme (TUP) in Luwero district. It is a 24-month programme that targets youth between (15 -35 years) living below the poverty line of \$3 and cannot afford a meal a day and no proper accommodation.

We provide them with financial and livelihood skills training on how to improve their lives. We also give them start up kits in form of livestock and monthly stipends. To date, over 2,000 youth in Luwero have benefitted from this initiative.

You also mentioned providing emergency support?

We recently launched our

emergency response and disaster preparedness programme (ERDP) in districts of Arua and Kiryadongo. This programme is not only targeting the refugees, but also the host communities. We teach both refugees and host communities on how to adapt to population changes, environmental changes as well as social economic shifts. We also educate them on how to prevent and control disasters and prepare for hazards.

Refugees and members of host communities are educated on other existing BRAC programmes such as micro loans / small enterprises programme. It is important to note that all our programmes are mostly targeting the youth, as 70% of Uganda's population is under 50.

Are you satisfied with the contribution BRAC has made in Uganda?

For the 12 years we have been operating in Uganda, I believe we have made a tremendous achievement in supporting people to change their lives in a positive manner as highlighted in the different projects undertaken.

The most form of satisfaction for me is to start the process, facilitate it and make sure that

all the elements are in place and functional. Functionality of the process is the key to achieving targeted results. Seeing as systems are in place, and adhering to BRAC values such as inclusiveness, innovativeness, integrity, effectiveness and efficiency, then it is a matter of time to achieve what we want.

I am satisfied with the achievements we got so far by bringing positive change to over 4.5 million Ugandans through our programmes. However, there is a lot to be done not only by BRAC, but other partners, government, communities and Ugandans who are doing well financially; they can contribute towards the betterment of fellow Ugandans.

What are some of the challenges you have faced along the way?

The challenges

faced along the way include limited resources like finances / funding and skills; there are many development challenges to deal with yet the resources to handle are not available.

BRAC believes in our works speaking for us as opposed to spending on publicity and this has affected our visibility. Despite our 12 years of operation in Uganda, many still refer to us as only a microfinance organisation.

What is your last message to readers

Punctuality and timeliness is the key in any success or development. It is said that time is the only capital that any human being has, and the only thing one cannot afford to lose. Uganda has a fast-growing economy, the time factor in every effort is crucial. I, therefore, appeal to all readers to manage time if they are to achieve peak success.



Hasina Akhter, the BRAC Uganda country representative