

Research at BRAC – BRAC University

The Research and Evaluation Division (RED) of BRAC was established in 1975 as a multi-disciplinary independent research unit within the framework of BRAC. The division had played an integral role in designing BRAC's development interventions, monitoring progress, documenting achievements, and undertaking impact assessment studies. It provided an analytical basis for BRAC's programmatic decisions, fine-tuning it for better performance and making development efforts evidence-based, effective, and community-sensitive.

Seeking inspiration from RED and to bridge development practice with academic knowledge with a focus on professional and life skill development, resulted in the inception of BRAC University in 2001. The University was established with the mission to foster the national development process through the creation of a center of excellence in higher education that is responsive to society's needs, and able to develop creative leaders.

Being an independent entity and being associated with BRAC, the largest NGO in the world, gives BRAC University a unique opportunity to cultivate its research and knowledge base further through synergizing academic knowledge with learnings from development interventions. This eventually translated into the initial step towards the transition of BRAC RED. In 2018 BRAC RED was merged with three institutes of BRAC University. These institutions apply praxis-oriented approach and involve the community or group under study in the research process through transformation of tacit knowledge into action-oriented research that facilitates translation of research into global knowledge stream.

The three institutions that broadly reflect the main domain of BRAC:

1. In 2004, **BRAC Institute of Educational Development (BRAC IED)** was established as a proponent for contributing to the development of education from a holistic perspective through professional development, capacity building, skills development, training and research. The Institute aims to tap into emerging areas of development by exploring areas including early years' learning & early childhood development, psychosocial wellbeing of stakeholders from diverse socio-economic backgrounds, adolescent mental health, Primary and Secondary education and curriculum & textbook design. Committed to building human capital from birth to age 18 by pioneering solutions and providing leadership, the institute specializes across four areas of focus:
 - Teaching and learning: Reimagining teaching and learning – in Bangladesh and the world
 - Play-based learning: Developing the whole child through play and creative expression
 - Mental health: Promoting psychosocial wellbeing for adolescents and families
 - Humanitarian response: Acting rapidly to support the world's most vulnerable children, adolescents and their families through play based learning & mental health support

The works span research, model development, direct service delivery, program evaluation, advocacy, and capacity building. BRAC IED offers postgraduate programs and short programs for educators and leaders who share its mission of supporting children to become engaged, empathetic, and empowered individuals through education. In addition to providing direct counselling services, there are mental health experts at the institute to offer professional development opportunities to train and upskill both specialized practitioners and community members.

2. Founded in 2013, **BRAC Institute of Governance and Development (BIGD)** is a social research institute that focuses on improving development and governance outcomes. The institute has a strong background in ethnographic, participatory, and mixed-method research, and it excels in delivering high-quality field research using a broad range of methods while working closely with the government and development partners. Impact evaluation using experimental methods such as randomized control trials (RCT), for example, is a key strength of BIGD.

Over the years, BIGD has developed extensive experience in three thematic areas: (1) **economic development and growth**, (2) **governance and politics**, and (3) **gender and social transformation**. **Digitization** and **climate change** are emerging as strategically important cross-cutting agendas for BIGD, in which the institute is investing heavily. It also has a special focus on identifying constraints to successfully scaling up policy interventions and development programs, and finding efficient and equitable solutions to these problems.

BRAC University established the Centre for Governance Studies in 2005, realizing the need for research-based evidence and insights to support continuous innovation and improvement in contemporary public policy and management. In 2007, the centre was upgraded to the Institute of Governance Studies (IGS) as a pioneering governance research institute in Bangladesh. Alongside research on important governance issues, IGS started offering post-graduate degrees and professional training. In 2008, BRAC University established the BRAC Development Institute (BDI) for promoting research and generating knowledge on practical solutions to issues of poverty, inequity, gender, and social justice.

But development is inextricably linked to governance. We cannot achieve sustainable development outcomes without solving relevant governance challenges. Conversely, the focus of governance improvement should be on making development outcomes efficient, effective, and equitable. So in 2013, the two prestigious institutes—IGS and BDI—were merged into the BRAC Institute of Governance and Development to transform the institute into a regional centre for research on governance and development. It also provides a space for academics and practitioners to come together to raise critical questions around governance and development, to provide lessons on good practices, and to advocate for pro-poor policies.

3. In 2004 **BRAC James P Grant School of Public Health (JPGSPH)** was founded to address the unmet public health challenges particular to Asia, Africa and South America. The School applies an interdisciplinary integration that consists of Education, Training, Research and Advocacy to diverse health challenges. Multidisciplinary in approach and method, BRAC JPGSPH's research practice investigates critical and emerging developing country health needs to identify evidence based solutions under the five Centres of Excellence: (1) Gender and Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (established in 2008), (2) Health Systems and Universal Health Coverage (established in 2012), (3) Urban Equity and Health (established in 2013), (4) Science of Implementation & Scale-up (established in 2016) and (5) Non-communicable Diseases and Nutrition (established in 2017).

The School draws from Bangladesh's remarkable public health achievements as well as BRAC Health's nationwide services and BRAC International's Health programmes in South Asia and Africa. BRAC JPGSPH offers unparalleled real-life, community-centric teaching, learning and research experiences on critical and emerging national and global public health challenges such as, Maternal & Reproductive Health, Nutrition, Gender Equity, Sanitation, Non-communicable Diseases, Urbanisation and Climate Change including qualitative research, surveys and impact studies on Rohingya refugees.

The School has national and international partners for policy and advocacy to create pathways for public health to improve on a governmental or regulatory front including identifying policy barriers and solutions with tailored advocacy strategy. The School hosts Bangladesh Health Watch, an influential civil society initiative established in 2006 with the objective of monitoring Bangladesh's progress towards achievement of the goal of good health for all its citizens.