

Joint Event of Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and the Peacebuilding Commission
“Partnerships for job creation for young people in countries emerging from conflict”

4 June 2012, 9.00am-1.00pm, New York

(10-15 minutes)

H.E.Mr.Milos Kotorec, President of ECOSOC and Permanent Representative of Slovakia to the United Nations.

H.E. Dr.A K Abdul Momen, Chairperson of the Peacebuilding commission.

Honorable Deputy Secretary-General (TBC), Dr. Asha Rose Migiro

Respected Panelists, First respondents and Representatives from UN Member states, UN systems and civil society organizations, special guests, Ladies and gentleman.

As the Country Representative of BRAC Liberia I am privileged and honored to be one of the panelists in this joint event of ECOSOC and Peacebuilding Commission. Before going into detail about BRAC Liberia, I would like to give some background about our parent organization BRAC Bangladesh.

BRAC, a development organization founded by Sir Fazle Hasan Abed in February 1972, soon after the liberation of Bangladesh was as a small scale relief activities organization. Over the past 40 years, BRAC has developed, tested, and implemented development programs that have grown to become the largest development organizations in the world. BRAC's **vision** is to work towards “a world free from all forms of exploitation and discrimination where everyone has the opportunity to realize their potential”.

From its inception, BRAC strives to bring about positive changes in the quality of life of the poor by working with people whose lives are dominated by extreme poverty, illiteracy, disease and other handicaps. **Our approach** is comprehensive with services in areas of education, health care, social and economic empowerment, finance and enterprise development, human rights and legal aid, agriculture and food security, as well as environmental sustainability and disaster preparedness.

BRAC has had a strong impact on job creation, creating more than 90,600 permanent staff positions within BRAC's organization, just in Bangladesh. Through its finance, training and program support enterprises, BRAC has also created over **8.5 million** self-employment opportunities throughout multiple sectors in Bangladesh. Major program areas are the microfinance program, Ultra Poor program (which targets extreme poverty), employment and livelihood for adolescents program and the self employed community workers program.

Spurred by BRAC's success within Bangladesh there was motivation to help the poor beyond Bangladesh borders. With our specialized experience in post-conflict reconstructions from Bangladesh, BRAC's first international operations started in Afghanistan from 2002. Inspired by success in adapting BRAC's approach to the challenging context of Afghanistan, BRAC felt more confident in its ability to adapt and manage rapid scaling up operations internationally. And gradually BRAC responded and expanded programs in Sri Lanka, Tanzania, Uganda, southern Sudan, Pakistan, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Haiti and very recently in Philippines. Our International programs has contributed in creating employment opportunities for more than 1.7 million people. The domestic programs of BRAC in these Countries have generated jobs for more than 8,781 national staff.

Excellencies Ladies and Gentlemen,

Now that we have discussed BRAC's international mission we can better understand BRAC's operations in Liberia. Liberia faced the brutality of Civil war for fourteen years, which totally destroyed the economy. The war also destroyed the productive capacity and physical infrastructure of the country too. Tens of thousands of Liberians became homeless and lost their income sources. The conflict ended in 2003; leaving the country facing tremendous challenges not only to recover the economy but also rebuilding its human capital. Productive capacity and sustained economic growth are depressed by the high unemployment rate, intense illiteracy, poor health, and the absence of basic infrastructural system, and lake of power supply. Only about 15% of the workforce is employed in the formal sector and 68% of Liberians live below the poverty line.

With the experience from Asia and Africa, BRAC started its journey in Liberia in October, 2008 through working with the most vulnerable groups of the country to realize their potentials and help them to became self employed to contribute to the development of Liberia. Considering immediate national needs, BRAC started programs on microfinance, community based health, agriculture and poultry and livestock development and presently covering 7 out of 15 Counties with a total population of 560,000.

The main foundation for BRAC's work in is centered around Microfinance, which acts as a conduit supporting to our other diversified programs. Microfinance is critical in supporting the poor, especially women through job creation in a post war country like Liberia. Among the adverse effects of the war in Liberia was the destruction of rural finance. Commercial Banks have little interest in serving the poor, especially those living in the rural areas. Only a handful NGOs and couple of Government programs are running in the Country which is not sufficient to meet the demand of the 300,000 potential clients. BRAC is implementing two products –one is micro loan only for women and small enterprise for small business man and women. It's micro loan for the women- is an effective strategy to involve women in their economic activities and

make them empowered. Violence against women is high in Liberia and BRAC's empowerment strategy will help in this regard. Strategically, BRAC implements microfinance plus services- which means beyond loan services, other development programs like health, agriculture, poultry & Livestock and capacity building initiatives is complementing in changing the lives of people.

As of April 2012, BRAC has disbursed micro loans to 25,457 women with an average loan size of 170 US\$ and small enterprise loans to 1,044 Business men and women with an average loan size of 2,000 USD. The most common investments we see for micro loans are selling used cloths, selling soft drinks and drinking water, selling Charcoal, Retailing/ groceries, hairdresser/beauty parlor service, selling bush meat/dried fish, selling audio/video CDs, selling cooking food, vegetable marketing, tailoring, just to name a few. For small enterprise, investment goes for Provision shop, running restaurants & Bars, rice sales, new and used cloth shop, shoe shop, Tailoring Shop, hardware shop, cement, agriculture farming, and small pharmacies.

Excellencies Ladies and Gentlemen,

Liberia is facing an extreme lack of health services especially in community health. BRAC is working to make essential health care accessible to the doorsteps of the poor. Experienced in Bangladesh, Afghanistan, and East Africa on community based health care services, BRAC provides support at the root level of the country through trained Community Health Promoters. Developing these health promoters, BRAC created self employment for more than 550 poor women.

During the 14 years of conflict, Liberia's agriculture land became neglected and was soon reclaimed by the jungle. New generation detached from Agriculture for a long time and the farmers are not aware of improved technologies or high yielding varieties. The average yield of crops does not match with the daily requirement for them. To assist the small farmers through technical assistance and provisioning of high quality seeds, agriculture tools and equipments to obtain better yields and improving their livelihoods, engage rural people in agriculture, BRAC started the agriculture program in November 2008. Self- employed volunteer promoters are a key player for supporting farmers in the community. BRAC transfers technology to the community through training and follow up through its agriculturist technicians and demonstrates how to develop farms with quality seeds through its model farm.

To increase local production of high-quality seeds and their multiplication for distribution, BRAC established a Seed Testing and Multiplication Farm to work as an agent of high quality seed production and distribution among rural farmers with an affordable price through Community Agriculture Promoters.

Cultivation through the traditional system the yield is not satisfactory. BRAC believes that farm mechanization can increase production and lower costs. BRAC provides support for the farmers through implementing practices of Power tiller and offered training for farmers.

To address the capacity of local farmers, BRAC has established a 25 bed residential training centre in the Seed Testing and Multiplication farm. The centre is suitable for theoretical and practical training for BRAC staff and also for other organizations or farms.

Poultry and Livestock is another growing sector in Liberia. The entire Poultry sector was destroyed during the Civil war. Currently there is no poultry hatchery facilities or feed mill in Liberia. Liberia's poultry facility is fully dependent on imports. BRAC started small scale poultry rearing but found it difficult to get Day Old Chick, poultry feed and vaccines. All of which need to be imported into Liberia. This has proved too costly for poor farmers and was not profitable nor sustainable. With this learning BRAC plans to establish poultry hatchery and feed mill in Liberia. This initiative will create jobs but more importantly community level entrepreneurs will be developed. BRAC also provided small ruminants like goat, sheep and pigs to the small farmers for rearing which increases their household income. We are expecting in the coming year, BRAC will be able to develop a sustainable poultry sector with thousands of job opportunities both direct and indirect.

Creating job opportunity

I would like to mention in respect to creating jobs, BRAC has focused its strategy to localize in each country. In other words BRAC is an INGO but works like national NGO through recruiting national staff. BRAC's recruitment strategy always looks for fresh graduates specially women for employment and to build the capacity within the requirement of country programs and local context.

As of today, BRAC has created more than 76,000 aggregate job opportunities for Liberians. BRAC has more than 380 Liberians as regular staff and most of them are new graduates and women. Through micro-finance, BRAC created job opportunities more than 65,500 Liberians and around 10,000 through agricultural development program, and more than 900 self employed community promoters.

I would like to take the opportunity to talk about National Capacity Building initiatives by BRAC which contributes to peace building.

All BRAC program staff and community promoters received training under respective programs. Besides this formal training, BRAC also conducting informal training and provides on-the-job training to keep them updated as part of enhancing their skill set.

Among some other initiatives -

BRAC has provided technical assistance through hiring expert to support the work of the MoH&SW. Beside this, BRAC has arranged an exposure visit program for two of Liberian Ministers visited Bangladesh to gain knowledge on Agriculture. This is also noted that BRAC has arranged scholarship to 4 Liberian health manager for MPH at BRAC University in Bangladesh. In addition BRAC also conducts international training for top performing local managers. Realizing the needs of building capacity of Liberians, BRAC already acquired a land to construct a regional training centre. This training centre will work as a regional capacity building institute.

Now let me say about our unique approaches for program implementation.

- Our basic approach is to identify the needs of the poor, develop an intervention, test it for effectiveness, make improvements and then scale up for efficiency and impact – all underpinned by a firm commitment to increase capacity for sustainable development.
- Build local capacity and transfer technology to the community

Challenges: To implement programs, major challenges are we facing

- Infrastructure- road, communication, utilities, is a barrier for rural development
- Poor Banking Facility
- Lack of Credit culture/ relief orient attitude of general people
- High and fluctuating program inputs and operational cost

Opportunities/Way forward:

Despite these challenges there is a significant opportunity for growth and job creation in Liberia

- Expand existing BRAC programs to south east part of Liberia
- Establish Poultry hatchery and feed mill
- Develop poultry farmers and entrepreneurs in the community
- Initiate Adolescent development program which will create more self employment for youths
- Community based Reproductive health programs
- Ultra poor program- transfer asst to poor to be self employed

In my Conclusions, I want to tell you that

Microfinance can play a significant role in peacebuilding through employment generation and self-employment in a post war country or a country emerging from conflict under a private of business entity rather than NGO. Agriculture, poultry & livestock development in the rural communities will help to create more jobs and keep people in rural areas to reduce migration patterns to urban centers. Adolescent development program also will be an effective way to create self employment for youths and keep them in the peace building process. Community based Health services will provide platform for a healthy life of program participants.

For sure Liberia has made great progress in development after the war. However, there is much work yet to be done to ensure sustainable growth for Liberia. As Liberia shifts from a country in need of emergency aid to a country in need of development support, we see BRAC's operations of current and new programs expanding to assist in this transition. BRAC operates a robust program in our sector of expertise, but to ensure Liberia's success we need to ensure the well planned coordination from all of the development community together in Liberia. Critical to Liberia's growth will be the continued financial support from international donors.

Thanks so much for your patience.