



# Enhancing decent employment opportunities for women and marginalised groups in growth sectors

BRAC's contribution to the Expert Group Meeting on *Strategies for Eradicating Poverty to Achieve Sustainable Development for All* – United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs Division for Social Policy and Development /May 2017

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## 1. Introduction

Around 200 million people globally are out of employment, particularly affecting young people.<sup>1</sup> Focusing on unemployment rates alone draws an incomplete picture on a nation's success in utilizing its human resources. More than a third of employers claim difficulties in finding the right skilled workers.<sup>2</sup> To unlock the potential of their prospective workforce, governments, business leaders, educational institutions and civil society at large have to make an effort to better understand workforce development and value chains.

At the same time, attention has to be drawn to population dynamics. In comparison to high-income economies, the so-called 'youth bulge' of lower income countries, where a large share of the population consists of children and young adults, will result in "a demographic dividend" according to a World Bank report.<sup>3</sup> Demographic change is still one of the most pressing development challenges. Around 87 per cent of the world's poor live in countries that are expected to have rapid population growth and thus, they will continuously face an increasing working-age population share. Hence, if those countries are able to accelerate and adjust their job creation to keep pace, they have the potential to increase economic growth.<sup>4</sup> And consequently deliver the Sustainable Development Goals by essentially eradicating extreme poverty.

Over the next decade a billion more young people will enter the job market, parallel to an extreme increase in population across Africa and Asia. The respective emerging economies have to act fast to create jobs to avoid consigning a generation to a future where jobs and opportunities are out of reach.<sup>5</sup>

To catalyse change in labour market participation and reduce unemployment of youth, the improvement of the individual's employability is of utmost importance, so that the reported skills shortage and mismatch<sup>6</sup> threatening sustained economic growth in low and lower-middle income countries can be reduced. Part and parcel of reaching the sustainable development goals in reducing poverty and exclusion is skills development. Societies with skills meeting industries' demands will increase productivity and competitiveness of enterprises, strengthen innovation and attract investment. The International Labour organisation (ILO) states in its paper on national skills development policies, skills development will also facilitate the transition from the informal to the formal economy.<sup>7</sup>

Following the worldwide trend to have an explicit National Skills Development Policy (NSDP), countries have the chance to turn the 'demographic dividend' into development opportunities for the future.<sup>8</sup> An ILO comparative policy analysis identified common challenges, including:

Rapidly growing population; Unemployment, which is more pronounced among youth; Low level of skills of the labour force; Low social status accorded to skills training; Limited access to skill training; Low participation of females and persons with disability (PWDs) in skills training; Lack of coordination

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<sup>1</sup> According to the ILO's World Employment and Social Outlook – Trends 2017 (WESO). In this context, it has to be noted that a

<sup>2</sup> World Economic Forum (WEF): Employment, Skills and Human Capital. Global Challenge Insight Report. The Human Capital Report 2015. Source: [http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF\\_Human\\_Capital\\_Report\\_2015.pdf](http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_Human_Capital_Report_2015.pdf), p. V, 3.

<sup>3</sup> World Bank Report 2012.

<sup>4</sup> Ahmed et al.: From population bomb to development opportunity: New perspectives on demographic change. The World Bank 2015. Source: <http://blogs.worldbank.org/developmenttalk/population-bomb-development-opportunity-new-perspectives-demographic-change>. Department for International Development (DfID): Economic Development Strategy: prosperity, poverty and meeting global challenges. 2017. Source: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/dfids-economic-development-strategy-2017>.

<sup>5</sup> Department for International Development (DfID): UK to boost jobs and trade for world's poorest countries. 2017. Source: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-to-boost-jobs-and-trade-for-worlds-poorest-countries>.

<sup>6</sup> Potential employers are struggling to find skilled workers while at the same time millions of people are looking for jobs.

<sup>7</sup> Aggarwal A. & Gasskov V.: Comparative Analysis of National Skills Development Policies: A guide for policy makers. International Labour Office, Decent Work Technical Support Team for Eastern and Southern Africa - Pretoria: ILO, 2013. Source: [http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---africa/documents/publication/wcms\\_224559.pdf](http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---africa/documents/publication/wcms_224559.pdf), p. 1-2.

<sup>8</sup> Ahmed et al., 2015.



among various agencies/ministries engaged in skills development; Weak link between skills development system and industry; Inadequate mechanism for career guidance and counselling; Unsatisfactory quality of teaching and learning; Apathy of industry in taking full advantage of workplace learning; Dependence on government as the main source for finance, leading to inadequacy of finances; Inadequate/obsolete infrastructure available with skills development providers and institutions; Supply-driven skills development programmes; and Absence of research, development and innovation in skills development.<sup>9</sup>

## **2. BRAC's approach: Meeting the challenge of preparing youth, including marginalized groups for decent employment opportunities**

BRAC was founded in 1972 (formerly known as the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee) with the aim to rehabilitate the victims and survivors of Bangladesh's liberation war. It gradually grew into a development agency with the aim to alleviate poverty by empowering the poor and the disadvantaged through various interventions and support mechanisms, such as agriculture and food security to education, legal aid, climate change risk reduction, livelihoods support and maternal and child health. Spreading development solutions now works in 11 countries in Asia (Bangladesh, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Myanmar, Philippines, Nepal), Africa (Liberia, Sierra Leone, South Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda), impacting the lives of 135 million people.<sup>10</sup>

BRAC is considered "by most measures the largest, fastest-growing non-governmental organization in the world – and the one of the most business-like" (The Economist, 2010). The organisation is gaining independence from donor influence each year as it covers almost 80 per cent of its \$684 million income through a burgeoning portfolio of catalytic social enterprises – a clear trend positioning the organization in an enviable position of financial and programmatic sustainability.

BRAC has made smart and targeted youth investments a strategic focus. Building on decades of experience with large-scale anti-poverty programs, it has launched youth empowerment programs in six Asian and African countries, focusing on adolescent girls from impoverished backgrounds. The youth empowerment programs and projects are tailored to local needs to meet the challenges mentioned in the ILO paper on skills development policies.

Investing in adolescent girls, as many governments and donors now recognize, yields an especially robust economic dividend. Yet given the wide range of girls' empowerment programs, there remains relatively little understanding of which methods are most effective in creating gains for young people. Based on the evidence so far, we can see that successful youth programs must invest in both social and economic empowerment. It is not enough to create productive workers; youth must also become self-confident, fully aware of their rights and freedoms and able to negotiate. In the case of girls, this means having the life skills, awareness and confidence to stand up to gender-based threats such as sexual violence and harassment.

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<sup>9</sup> Aggarwal & Gasskov, 2013: pp. 21.

<sup>10</sup> For the second year in a row, the largest non-governmental development organization in the world has made it to the top of the World NGOs rankings (NGO Adviser).



BRAC has piloted and up-scaled various approaches to bridge the skills gap of youth catering to the specific needs of marginalized groups, such as young women or school-dropouts. The following is an overview of BRAC's current skills training for youth interventions, which are contextually applied in Bangladesh and Uganda:

1. Cognitive and non-cognitive skills for adolescent girls, including enterprise incubation support

BRAC's adolescent empowerment approach operates through "adolescent development clubs," spaces within each community that normally include 20-35 girls. Club participation is voluntary and targets girls who are vulnerable. Eligibility is based on gender and age: girls between the ages of 13 and 21 are permitted to become club members. Using a curriculum designed with input from the girls, two forms of skills training are provided: life skills training and livelihood training. Training includes basic health awareness, reproductive and sexual health, gender based violence and life skills. Additionally, club based recreational activities and competitions are offered to encourage bonding and sharing. For girls 15 and over, training in specific livelihood skills is offered, such as tailoring, trading and farming. Microloans coupled with financial literacy training and input supplies also encourage girls to start their own enterprises.

2. Socially inclusive hands-on apprenticeships in the informal sector leading to decent jobs

The apprenticeship model was designed to be inclusive and to offer opportunities to school drop-outs and marginalised groups, including disabled people, orphans, the children of sex workers, and the Hijra transgender community, who suffer from discrimination in and out of the workplace (age 14-18+). The project places learners in pairs under a master craftsperson, who is usually an experienced shop-owner or worker within a particular trade. The apprentices receive hands-on training five days a week for a period of six months, leading to a certified qualification under the Bangladesh National Technical and Vocational Qualifications Framework (NTVQF). The trades were chosen based on the needs of the economy. In addition to the workplace based practical training, apprentices receive classroom-based soft-skills training once a week on various issues, including financial literacy, market assessment, English language skills and knowledge on health related issues, such as HIV/AIDS and adverse impacts of substance abuse. Once the training is completed, the project links the

participants with potential employers. For those that are keen on self-employment, the programme offers mentoring and technical assistance.

### 3. Mentored start-up support for youth entrepreneurs in the informal sector

This project creates decent employment opportunities through the establishment of youth-led enterprises in local communities, ensuring that starting an own business will not be risky for its graduates. The project provides ten months entrepreneurship skills, knowledge and mentoring support to potential youth entrepreneurs (age: 18+). The business support links clients to a needs adjusted microloan product.

### 4. Cooperating with government bodies to promote technical vocational education

BRAC works closely with the Government, so that along with general education in the secondary level/ high school level technical vocational training is provided to those who have not been able to complete or even dropped out of secondary school education. This offers an alternative career path for young people.

## 3. Example I: Apprenticeships in Bangladesh's informal sector

**Background:** Bangladesh has developed rapidly over the past four decades, and 'graduated' into lower middle-income status in 2015. The country has a young, growing workforce — 2.2 million people enter the labour market each year, according to the National Skills Development Council — which could be a potent economic resource. But it ranks poorly on the labour force participation rate, predominantly due to its large informal sector.<sup>11</sup> For Bangladesh economic growth is forecasted but job creation has not kept up with the growing working-age population. Over 40 per cent of youth in Bangladesh are not in employment, education or training (NEET). 62 per cent of the economically inactive youth are females. However, employment in the country is still driven largely by the informal sector, which currently accounts for 79% of the workforce. Fuelled by population growth and urbanisation, the informal sector, which largely consists of traditional enterprises, is growing at 2.4% per year, adding 40% of total gross value to the Bangladeshi economy. Many young people are under-employed within this informal economy. To ensure that employment in Bangladesh is sustainable and secure, people entering the workforce need access to technical skills that can enable them to become more productive and entrepreneurial members of the workforce. Unfortunately, the technical and vocational education and training (TVET) institutions in the country only have the capacity to train around 1.3 million people per year, leaving nearly one million people without training. Moreover, the school dropout rate remains an alarmingly high 40 percent, and the majority of dropouts are girls. Dropouts usually end up working in the informal economy means irregular, low-paying and often dangerous jobs that offer few, if any, non-wage benefits.

Encountering the challenges of the skills sector, the Government of Bangladesh (GoB) has introduced the National Skills Development Policy. The policy recognises the inadequacies of the existing Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) system to cater to the growth of the country's economy, and the need for bridging the skills gap by 'up-skilling' its human resources, especially the youth. The GoB promulgated the National Skills Development Policy in 2011 (NSDP 2011). The NSDP overhauled the TVET sector by establishing a National Technical Vocational Qualification Framework (NTVQF), introducing a Quality Assurance System (QAS) for the country, and recognizing that training that is provided for both domestic and overseas employment by private institutions, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and through informal mechanisms.

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<sup>11</sup> World Bank Country and Lending Groups: <https://datahelpdesk.worldbank.org/knowledgebase/articles/906519>. Informal economy: The ILO definition is used in this paper, and it refers to all economic activities by workers and economic units that are — either in law or in practice — not covered or insufficiently covered by formal arrangements.

Building on BRAC's strategic priorities for 2016-2020, the organisation has committed to equip 500,000 young people with skills training, and link them with decent jobs and entrepreneurship opportunities both at home and abroad. Accordingly, the Skills Development Programme was designed to support the Government of Bangladesh to implement the NSDP 2011 and as such, contribute to achieve the macro goal of developing a skilled Bangladesh, as well as SDG-8.

**The STAR project:** Through its apprenticeship model Skills Training for Advancing Resources (STAR), BRAC seeks to address this shortfall by working with more than 9,000 small business owners who can take on young people as apprentices, training them up with the skills and experience that they need to more fully participate in the informal sector. The model benefits the apprentices and the business owners at the same time. It worked with business owners of micro, small or medium sized enterprises to identify specific skills that were in short supply, and occupations that are currently in demand. The curriculum that is taught under the project was created in collaboration with business owners to ensure that the training was appropriate and met their needs. The project was designed to be inclusive and to offer opportunities to marginalised groups, including disabled people, orphans, the children of sex workers, and the Hijra transgender community, who suffer from discrimination in and out of the workplace.

Moreover, gender roles remain quite proscribed in some sections of Bangladeshi society, and certain trades are considered to be reserved for a single gender. There is also some stigma attached to some professions, such as the beauty industry, which some families consider to be sinful. Women and men are given equal access to training and the same choice of trades to pursue, and employers in the project must sign up to BRAC-approved work practices. The project places learners in pairs under a master craftsperson, who is usually an experienced shop-owner or worker within a particular trade. The apprentices receive hands-on training five days a week for a period of six months, leading to a certified qualification under the National Technical and Vocational Qualifications Framework (NTVQF). The trades were chosen based on the needs of the economy and include: aluminium fabrication, basic electronics, beauty care, graphic design, IT support, mobile phone servicing, refrigeration and air conditioning, tailoring and dress making, carpentry, block batik and screen printing, embroidery and sequin crafts.

In addition to the workplace based practical training, apprentices receive classroom-based soft-skills training once a week on various issues, including financial literacy, market assessment, English language skills and knowledge on health related issues, such as HIV/AIDS and adverse impacts of substance abuse. Once the training is completed, the project links the participants with potential employers. For those that are keen on self-employment, BRAC offers mentoring and technical assistance, which can lead to participation in a further training offered by BRAC, if it caters the clients' needs.

### **Evaluation and Impact of apprenticeships:**

Evaluations of vocational training programs in various countries have produced mixed results. With this in mind, and with a view toward determining the most effective interventions, BRAC has also made research and evaluation a vital component of its skills development projects with a series of working papers published.<sup>12</sup> The initial evaluations of the Skills Training for Advancing Resources (STAR) pilot show it boosts participants' earnings, increases labour market participation, and has a positive effect on awareness of workers' rights and safety; a subsequent study of a new cohort has shown similar results.

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<sup>12</sup> Rahman et al: The Effects of Skills Training on Livelihoods. Evidence from BRAC's Intervention on School Dropouts. Skills Development Working Paper Series #2. BRAC Research and Evaluation Division, 02/2017. Source: [https://docs.google.com/viewerng/viewer?url=http://research.brac.net/new/publications/download/418\\_e898977b9ac435354b2a9f20d4312636&a=gt](https://docs.google.com/viewerng/viewer?url=http://research.brac.net/new/publications/download/418_e898977b9ac435354b2a9f20d4312636&a=gt).  
Bhattacharjee et al.: Towards Employability and better Livelihood: An Evaluation of BRAC's Skills development Initiative. Skills Development Working Paper Series #1. BRAC Research and Evaluation Division, 10/2016.





The project has trained 18,900 young people so far; with a 95% job placement rate for graduates and a six fold increase in their average income, across seven divisions of Bangladesh. The programme has been inclusive: 57% of graduates have been female and 10% have been people with disabilities.

**Jobs:** A survey in late 2015 showed the program had been successful in raising the employment rates of dropout adolescents by as high as 46 percentage points. This confirmed the results of the earlier pilot, where only 28 percent of selected participants had work that generated an income, compared to 38 percent of a control group of non-participants. About a year later, or six months after the training ended, that proportion had risen to more than 99 percent for participants, compared to only 61 percent for non-participants. Other internal evaluations have confirmed that more than 95 percent of program graduates remain employed well after the training ends.

**Income:** Earnings increased by 1,150 BDT (£12) per month for girls and 889 BDT (£9) for boys. The increased income led to greater household welfare, as measured by increased expenditure on food, durable asset holdings and savings.

**Working conditions:** 28 percent of participants reported having “very good” conditions in their workplace, compared to about 10 percent of non-participants.

**Early marriage:** Early marriage decreased by 62% among participants.

**Breaking gender barriers:** About 15 per cent of female graduates are employed in non-traditional jobs, including professions previously considered off-limits for Bangladeshi girls, such as graphic design.

**Entrepreneurship:** Early anecdotal evidence had suggested that access to income and training on entrepreneurship had motivated trained youth to start saving for investments.

**Cost-benefit analysis:** According to a cost-benefit analysis, the program’s cost of about \$412 per person yields roughly three times as much in benefits, such as consumption, asset value and savings. Trades such as refrigerator and mobile phone servicing were shown to have higher returns than others.



**Overall empowerment:** BRAC also found that the project has a significant positive effect on the empowerment of young people. Their role in household or personal decision making increased significantly and they are less likely to be addicted to drug substances.

Furthermore, the project includes regular data collection through a mobile customer relationship management tool to collect in real-time the learner and enterprise data in order to manage its field operations and monitor its social impact. Each learner and enterprise's performance is tracked during the training and job placement phase. The system's powerful data analytics ensures that the operations team can easily identify deviations and take immediate action to improve the intervention's design, quality and outcome.

### A case study of three very abled sisters

Shipra and Shormila, two sisters who belong to the world's largest minority - people with disabilities. They are living on the outskirts of Dhaka. Shipra the eldest one has got typhoid before her tenth birthday. As a consequence she became deaf, then mute. Shormila, the youngest, was eight when the accident happened that changed her life. The middle sister Lipa recalls, "Shormila was in class two when her teacher slapped her across her face. She developed a high fever the next day, and became deaf. We all knew that there was treatment out there, but we didn't have the money."

The girls have a very typical story of girls living in Bangladesh: They had to drop out of school to support the family. „It was extremely hard for us, especially with two sisters being deaf. People don't really treat us with respect“, Lipa explains.

In Bangladesh, around 20 million people have some form of disability, which covers almost 10 per cent of its population. Yet, discrimination and stigma around disabilities create inequalities, making it impossible for people with disabilities to participate. Some people still try to hide that their family members have disabilities—especially when they are female.

Various stigmas carry on into workplaces.

A general assumption is that they are not worth the full. Around 80 percent of people with disabilities in Bangladesh are unemployed because most employers are unwilling to recruit persons with disabilities. Therefore, disability and poverty together become a vicious cycle.

Shipra got to know from a BRAC employee that they can do an apprenticeship in a tailoring shop in their neighbourhood as dress makers. She encouraged Shormila, and both started the six-month training. Lipa stayed home with her parents.



The tailoring shop owner and young women's trainer says he was initially resistant to training disabled women, "At first I wasn't that positive about girls who cannot hear coming to work in my shop, but they were keen and willing—and after six months I couldn't doubt their expertise. So I hired them."

The sisters' long-term goal is to run an own shop for women and men's clothing. They already bought two sewing machines from the savings they accumulated and convinced their parents to start a small business in the front part of their house.

Now the three sisters are running a tailoring shop. Shormila says, "We won't get rich with our shop but we can determine our own lives." Lipa adds, "The feeling that my family needs me gives me a lot of satisfaction and motivation."

#### 4. Example II: Empowerment and Livelihood for Adolescents – skills and entrepreneurship in Uganda

**Background:** Africa's population is set to double by 2050 and as many as 18 million additional jobs will be needed. According to predictions, by then, 29 per cent of the total world youth population will reside in Africa. Comparably, it is the 'youngest continent' with children and youth aged below 30 years constituting 70 per cent of the continent's entire population (ECA, 2009)<sup>13</sup>, and youth aged 15 to 24 constituting slightly more than 20 per cent of Africa's population. About 36.8 per cent of Africa's workforces are youth. The youth unemployment rate is at 11.9 per cent in Sub Saharan Africa and 23.7 per cent in North Africa; particularly affecting particularly young women. The East African nation of Uganda has a very low rate of active young people (age 15 to 24) not in employment, education or training (NEET) as well as low tertiary and vocational enrolment. The majority of Uganda's 15–24 age group has an early start into the workforce, having a relatively high labour force participation rate. The possible downside to this is indicated by the country's 72 per cent incidence of undereducation.

In 2011 Ugandan government with the help of World Bank and Government of Belgium, finalized 'Skilling Uganda' a Business, Technical and Vocational Education and Training (BTVET) strategic plan 2011-2020 with the objectives of making BTVET relevant to productivity development and economic growth, Increase the quality of skills provision, increasing equitable access to skills development, improving the effectiveness in BTVET management and organisation, increasing internal efficiency and resources available to BTVET. The strategy was built on the BTVET Act of 2008 and the establishment of the Uganda Vocational Qualifications Framework (UVQF).

Uganda is the origin of Empowerment and Livelihood for Adolescents (ELA), one of BRAC's highest impact programs in Africa. The combined life skills and livelihood approach of ELA creates a network of clubs for adolescent girls, ages 13 to 21, which uses peer mentorship to offer life skills training, livelihood options and microfinance. A randomized controlled trial has recorded remarkable impacts across a range of social and economic indicators and BRAC has replicated and adapted in the model in Tanzania, Sierra Leone, Liberia and South Sudan.

Since its launch in 2006, BRAC Uganda has scaled up to reach millions of Ugandans. Based on decades of experience in Bangladesh, BRAC uses an approach that combines microfinance with other interventions, including skills and entrepreneurship training, agricultural support, health services, and youth empowerment. With nearly 60 per cent of Uganda's population under the age of 20, programs that target youth, particularly adolescent girls from poorer backgrounds, are a vital part of BRAC Uganda's overall approach.

**The ELA programme:** BRAC's Empowerment and Livelihood for Adolescents (ELA), among the most innovative components of BRAC's scale-up in Uganda, is now one of the largest youth empowerment platforms in the country, with about 70,000 girl members.

Each of the approximately 1,500 ELA clubs starts with a "safe space," a rented or borrowed room within walking distance of girls' homes, where about 30-40 girls from the area meet daily to socialize, play games and discuss problems with peers in a girls-only setting. Within these groups, removed from the pressures of family and male-centred society, the girls gain confidence and learn new skills.

BRAC selects one girl to be the club leader or "peer mentor," who operates the club five days a week. BRAC trains the peer mentors with a multi-day introductory session followed by monthly refreshers. Using a curriculum designed with input from the girls themselves, they learn to lead empowerment classes within the club. Training includes basic health awareness, reproductive and sexual health, life skills and financial literacy. The girls then begin discussing the full range of adolescent issues,

<sup>13</sup> Youth Employment Interventions in Africa 2011: A Mapping Report of the Employment and Labour Sub-Cluster of the Regional Coordination Mechanism (RCM) for Africa.

including contraception, how to deal with the threat of violence, and the importance of savings.

Various livelihood skills are offered to adolescents who have never been to school or have dropped out of school. The kinds of livelihood training offered are based on understanding the needs of adolescents through conducting market assessments. Key self-employment opportunities include: agriculture, poultry and livestock, computer, hairdressing, tailoring and catering services and involve local resource people providing their expertise. Training takes place in the area where the club is located and is designed to equip adolescent girls for income earning activities and link them with the existing microcredit access under the ELA program. In addition, the program organizes skills trainings, which are given through vocational institutes and small-scale firms with six months practical and theoretical classes conducted by professionals.

To create a more open dialogue between the boys and girls, some boys' forums have also been initiated with some clubs. The boys receive life skills training and interact with the adolescent girl using the club platform.

### **Evaluation and Impact of ELA in Uganda:**

**Impact:** Over a two-year period, scholars from BRAC, the London School of Economics, the World Bank and other research institutions collaborated on a randomized controlled trial that recorded substantial and meaningful impacts.

- **Income generation:** Compared to adolescents in control communities, the intervention raises the likelihood that girls engage in income generating activities by 72 percent over a period of two years.
- **Private consumption:** Expenditure on private consumption goods rose by 38 percent versus the control group.
- **Forced sex:** The program "significantly improves control over the body," according to the study, with the share of girls reporting sex against their will drops from 14 percent to almost half that level.
- **Contraception:** Self-reported condom usage increases by 26 percent over baseline levels.
- **Pregnancy:** Teen pregnancy falls 26 percent.
- **Early marriage:** Early entry into marriage or cohabitation falls 58 percent.

BRAC pursues other youth interventions in Uganda in addition to ELA. This include the following:

- **Job training:** BRAC Uganda has tested the effect of vocational training on young people's employment prospects. Between 2012 and 2015, London School of Economics and University College London collaborated with BRAC's research unit in Uganda to evaluate several BRAC youth-focused interventions, including formal vocational training, on-the-job training, and firm-worker matching. The study showed that, compared to a control sample, vocational and on-the-job training increased the probability of youth being in engaged in paid employment by 9.5 and 8 percentage points, respectively, over two years, with a larger impact among females. A cost-benefit analysis reveals large rate of returns for both types of interventions. On the other hand, the study showed no impact of the firm-worker matching intervention.
- **Scholarships:** With support from The MasterCard Foundation, BRAC Uganda runs a robust scholarship program, whereby talented young people from disadvantaged backgrounds are able to attend the best high schools in Uganda. The MasterCard Foundation Scholars Program at BRAC supports 5,000 secondary school students through 2020.

**Growth opportunities:** BRAC sees significant scope for growth of the ELA methodology, both in terms of scaling up and piloting new innovations.

- **Scale-up:** In Uganda, ELA requires additional funding to maintain its current course. Based on its success, BRAC is prepared to expand the program, which is already active in five sub-

Saharan African countries, into additional geographies.

- **Graduation:** The next step for BRAC is to implement a graduation approach for the ELA girls, where the members after receiving programme interventions for a certain time will be graduated when they transition to become empowered. ELA will also include interventions in education through peer mentoring and focus on wage employment for the youth. BRAC has launched and continues to revise an improved curriculum covering more advanced life skills as well.

### Nalwanga Noeline: A case study in leadership



The story of Nalwanga Noeline is typical of many of the 70,000 members of Empowerment and Livelihood for Adolescents (ELA) clubs in Uganda.

Like many Ugandan girls from rural backgrounds, Noeline bore a child at an early age. The father offered no support. “I left school because I couldn’t afford the fees,” she recalls. Her life seemed to have run aground at that point.

Today, she is a small business owner with a steady income to support her family. She wakes up every morning to stock the shelves of her small shop near her home in Masaka district. In the afternoons, she unlocks the metal double

doors of the nearby ELA club space, where she is a peer mentor, spreads a nylon woven mat on the floor, and prepares for the daily gathering of club members, all of whom are adolescent girls from the area.

Noeline first learned about ELA from a friend, Olivia, whom she has known since primary school. “I told her things would get better, that her life was not over—and then I told her about the ELA club,” says Olivia, who works for BRAC as a program assistant.

The club as a safe space for adolescent girls, who come to socialize and play games, while also participating in peer-led trainings on sexual and reproductive health, financial management, and the skills needed to start a business.

At Olivia’s prompting, Noeline soon became an active member of the club. She learned budgeting skills, received training on how to start a business, and took a small loan from BRAC to start a shop. BRAC eventually trained her to be the club leader.

As a peer mentor, Noeline now leads the trainings for the other girls. “I’m like an old sister,” he says. “I prepare them for the challenges they will face.”

She regularly meets other peer mentors in the surrounding area for additional trainings and receives a small stipend from BRAC for her services to other girls in the village. “Here we’re all like friends and sisters,” she says. “If someone is going through difficult time, we talk and counsel them. We’re like one big family.”

## 5. Future perspective: Scaling up based on local market demands

The apprenticeship model (STAR) as described above has had a catalytic effect on the skills sector in Bangladesh by simultaneously providing training opportunities for young people and raising the health, safety and employment practices of micro, small and medium sized enterprises’.

Opportunities for adolescents to learn new skills through apprenticeships has resulted in a higher employment rate, an increased income, a higher spend on food as well as a host of social impacts from a lower rate of child marriage to a decrease in substance abuse.

In Bangladesh, the project has already proven to be highly scalable. The project helps address concern raised by the World Bank statement that “it remains unclear if the “youth bulge” of lower-income countries, where a large share of the population consists of children and young adults, will result in “a demographic dividend or a demographic bomb.” The project helps young people become productive members of the workforce and of society at large. The STAR project can also be replicated in countries with similar skills crises to Bangladesh, of which there are many.

Internationally, BRAC has made smart and targeted youth investments a strategic focus. It has focused on adolescent girls from impoverished backgrounds. Impact evaluations have shown positive results. For example, in Uganda, the country with the second-youngest median age in the world, a club-based girls’ empowerment program has led to remarkable gains in both social and economic indicators; BRAC is now implementing the methodology elsewhere in sub-Saharan Africa and has plans to scale up contextualize this approach with governments and other organizations for the model to be replicated worldwide.



## 6. Bibliography

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