# MORE THAN MONEY

**Sir Fazle Hasan Abed, founder and chairperson of BRAC, the largest NGO in the world, offers insights into what the transition from a poor country to a middle income country really means.**

***What can Bangladesh do to reach the goal of becoming a middle income country and what roles can BRAC and NGOs for that matter, play in this regard?***

We are 6-7 years off from becoming a middle income country given that the economy grows at a rate of 7 percent. But what does a middle income country really mean? To me it means lowering child mortality rate and maternal mortality rate— where a child has the right to a good education, nobody remains hungry, no child grows up stunted, he or she has proper nutrition to realise their genetic potential, and workers have a decent life.

India is already a lower middle income country. But there are lots of people in India who are very poor—40 percent of its children are stunted. Their infant mortality rate is higher than that of Bangladesh; their life expectancy is lower than Bangladesh's. NGOs have played a leading role in achieving this success.

BRAC has been working towards providing education and nutrition, lowering child mortality rate, educating mothers. We are going to develop graduate midwives who will have a four year university degree. We will send them to villages. Hospitalization is required only in 10 percent of births when complications arise. Ninety percent of births are natural and midwives can handle them.

We have not yet reached the genetic potential of our race. From 0-3 years, many things happen in the child's brain such as development of motor skills, intellectual skills and so on. A lot of mothers do not know that children need nurturing to learn these skills. We have a lot more to do in early child development. BRAC University is offering an MA in the subject. We will produce at least 200 MAs in the next five years who will train mothers and caregivers. We have to raise emotionally stable children who are capable of developing social-emotional skills or soft skills. Thus if we can reach our genetic potential, we can become not only a middle income country, we can become a high income country.

***BRAC is synonymous with success. Among many other achievements, BRAC's education model too has proved effective and efficient. We are lagging behind in English learning. Can BRAC promote the learning of the English language in our country?***

We are working on that. Learning English is important in the sense that if we want to be connected to the global economy, we need English. Our migrant workers can get better jobs if they know basic, communicative English. We are going to offer two to three months' customized English training to workers in the construction and hospitality industry, and household maids who go abroad to work. BRAC University's language department is doing that. We have 30 training centres in the country where we are going to start offering evening courses on English.

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