

PIONEERING PARTNERSHIP

During a recent site visit to Kampala, Uganda in January, 2010, Susan Davis, President and CEO of BRAC USA; Imran Matin, Deputy Executive Director of BRAC International; Ariful Islam, Program Coordinator for BRAC Uganda; and Reeta Roy, President and CEO of The MasterCard Foundation, paused to discuss the progress of their two-year partnership. Following are excerpts from their conversation.

Susan Davis: *What qualities do you look for in a programmatic partner?*

Reeta Roy: Trust is paramount. We need to share the same values and goals. We also want partners who have the ambition and innovation to do great things; in this case, to attack poverty. This is going to be hard work. Regardless of the grand plans that we have, partnerships are based on relationships. And relationships are based on trust.

Ariful Islam: I think understanding and believing each other's missions, and working together on the ground to realize those missions, is happening between BRAC Uganda and The MasterCard Foundation.

Susan Davis: *What is the significance of The MasterCard Foundation/BRAC Uganda partnership?*

Reeta Roy: We have learned a great deal from BRAC. BRAC has absolutely kept its commitment in terms of delivering results. It is rare to find an organization that can take on an old challenge with fresh ideas and actually see possibilities rather than constraints.

BRAC has profound knowledge of what poverty means from the perspective of a poor person. It is this knowledge and insight, which is very powerful when shared by an organization from a developing country, like Bangladesh, with another like Uganda. This is truly pioneering.

Imran Matin: I think what really impresses us is the ability of The MasterCard Foundation to go really deep in terms of understanding our operations. But then being able to zoom out and draw from that in-depth knowledge to think about strategic issues. That ability to zoom in and zoom out is very rare and something we really value.

Uganda, in many ways, is the crucible of our Africa experiences. With The MasterCard Foundation's support, we have been able to prove that we can deliver, that our model can work in the context of Africa, and I think that's very significant.

Susan Davis: It's also a seriousness of purpose, a clarity of vision and being able to bring together the comparative advantages of our organizations to accomplish real results that matter in the lives of these women.

Susan Davis: *Why is The MasterCard Foundation investing in BRAC's "microfinance multiplied"?*

Reeta: One of the things that absolutely captivated me when I visited BRAC in Bangladesh was the holistic approach to development and the recognition that money alone doesn't necessarily change someone's life. Money is extremely important. But equally important is health care, knowledge, and the skills to put capital to work and eventually improve lives. All of these trigger lasting change and impact the next generation.

Imran: I think you've captured it so well - what is also happening now is that, through The MasterCard Foundation's support, Uganda is increasingly becoming the next hub from which we spearhead the south-to-south and African experience, sharing and growth, and opening up new possibilities.

Reeta Roy: *What feedback do you have for The MasterCard Foundation Board of Directors?*

Susan Davis: You picked a group from Bangladesh that's trying to work in Africa – it's an improbable story on some level, certainly quite untraditional. It wasn't a safe bet, but you bet on a track record of homegrown ingenuity, innovation and creativity that has managed to be a market disruptor.

The idea of making that bold bet took courage, and for me it signaled that The MasterCard Foundation wanted to do something different, be pioneering and risk-taking, and really put the capital on the scale to try to move the needle on things that matter.

Ariful Islam: It was possible to expand this program at this scale due to The MasterCard Foundation's support.

Susan: So, one of the advantages I'm hearing is that a partnership that also holds us accountable makes us better and we learn from it too.

Imran: Donors keep challenging us with new ideas, with new forms of accountability. It is difficult at times, but without change, we will be fossils. We need to change and adapt to different requirements and changing landscapes. The species that survive are not the strongest, but the ones that are most flexible and changing.