

**Appendix V: Guidance Provided by Dr. Yousuf Rahman, Moderator,  
Second Segment of the VAB Retreat, on “VAB’s Finances”**

(This is a revised and expanded version of the Paper for the Retreat. Readers are invited to review and make comments on the Paper.)

**WHAT CAN VAB DO TO ACHIEVE LONG-TERM SUSTAINABILITY**

Prepared by: Dr. Yousuf H Rahman

1. VAB must make extra effort to ensure that its donors’ expectations are met. In my opinion most donors contribute for a humanitarian cause like Sadaqa. However when someone donates through a charity organization, he has the right to know if his contributions are actually distributed as promised. For example, if contributions are made to buy books and supplies, then donors could be supplied with pictures and videos as proof of proper utilization. Donors should also be encouraged to speak with the principals of the schools directly and enquire about their future needs. For large donors a personal thank you letter from the Principal with a picture of the students holding the books and supplies would be great. In other words, VAB must make effort to bring the donors closer to the students and teachers so they are content that their donations are benefitting the community.
  
2. Emotion plays a big role in benevolence. VAB should focus on the emotional side of giving on their website and also when approaching prospecting donors. Soliciting for donation is a skill and not everyone has the right disposition and charm. That is why in a charity or fundraising event, the most charismatic, delightful and charming person is brought to lead the drive. VAB has not succeeded in stirring up the humanitarian side of giving. On the other hand, VAB has overly concentrated in publicizing its wide array of programs but has not been successful in convincing its donors that these interventions are having much of an effect except for some anecdotes; this is clear from what is on the website. Surely the programs need to be projected but striking the right cord in the heart of the donor is more important. The website therefore needs to be thoroughly reconstructed. VAB could take ideas from websites of other large charity organizations. This should be considered primary for VAB’s long-term sustainability.  
Here are links to three such websites:
  - <http://child-aid.org/>
  - <https://www.directrelief.org/>
  - <https://www.charitywater.org/>
  
3. VAB’s \$200K annual program expenses are too thinly spread over too many programs. VAB has focused on two broad objectives: provide financial support to needy students and improve skills mostly through training and group tutoring outside the classroom. The latter approach is basically wasteful and there are more effective ways of improving education standards in rural schools. Here are my observations and suggestions:
  - i. VAB is of the opinion that the traditional mode of education is obsolete in Bangladesh. Their approach is based on the premise that nowadays students require substantial tutoring outside the school to perform well academically. And this is mainly because teachers hardly teach in classrooms. Unfortunately, villagers do not have the financial capability to

hire private tutors. With this view in mind, VAB has introduced programs like book & science clubs, debate, cultural and sport programs, and tutoring for math and science. VAB has in essence created a supplementary and remedial mode of education because the 6-7 hours traditional schooling system has turned into a wasteful and ineffectual institution.

While VAB may be right about the failure of the traditional school education system, I believe this is primarily true in the large cities for reasons that are different from villages. **Professor Jasimuzzaman, during his introductory remarks at the VAB retreat, mentioned that parents, elders, local leaders and teachers in the villages are a lot more concerned and caring for the children compared to urban areas. He also mentioned that teachers are still highly respected in the villages. I strongly agree with Professor Jasimuzzaman's observation.** Therefore, instead of focusing on remedial measures outside the classroom, VAB should take advantage of the village people's camaraderie and fellow feeling and focus on improving the quality of education in the classrooms with the help of local leaders, village elders and the teachers. The central focus should be on training existing teachers and changing the entire mode of classroom teaching. Changing the mode of classroom teaching will require teachers' involvement and some retraining not necessarily employing higher quality teachers. But demanding extra effort from the teachers will entail substantially increasing teachers' salary and providing them with fringe benefits (housing, health care, and savings for retirement, for example), supplying them with free didactic materials, providing training, and by constantly monitoring performance.

- ii. Following the traditional schooling system, speech and debating skills, analytical skills, general knowledge, pronunciation, essay writing and such other skills should be assimilated in the classrooms. I do not see any reason why this cannot be reintroduced in the village schools with additional resources and support. **VAB will just need to redirect its resources from remedial training measures outside the classroom to improving teaching quality and changing teaching techniques inside the classrooms. I think the effect of such a change is going to be significant. I would be more than happy to demonstrate what needs to be done how this can be done.** The greatest benefit of this would be the time that students and teachers will find for extra curricular activities after schools.
- iii. There are two pages of description about VAB's programs for preparing students for Math & Science competition and the formation of various student clubs on its website. Training for Math & Science competitions and forming science, debate and reading clubs may have some impact for students who are already at the top of the class. Moreover for positive results these special tutoring and training must be supported by parents' involvement, which is missing in the villages. **VAB's student empowerment programs are too romantic and reflect misallocation of**

**limited resources given the extreme deprivation that exists in the villages. In a population beset with malnutrition, lack of basic health care, and backward social and cultural conditions, these programs are just wasteful. VAB would do better spending resources on feeding the poor students with nutritional food in schools, giving them vitamins and supplements, supplying them with soaps and detergents and teaching them good hygiene and basic health education, discipline, moral values and Bengali arts and culture.**

- iv. Vocational training is another area that VAB should not be getting into given its limited resources. Vocational training is usually reserved for students who may not benefit from the traditional education system that leads to college and university degrees. Vocational training cannot be provided within the same campus where the traditional school is located. Vocational training institutes require serious facilities and paid professional trainers. Usually students of subpar caliber or who are handicapped end up in vocational schools. Bangladesh has a very high unemployment rate and it is not for VAB to turn that tide by introducing vocational training with its meager budget. This is another romantic idea.
4. VAB should seriously pursue fundraising from international and foreign grant makers and foundations. I was able to find a list of more than 100 such organizations that give grants to underdeveloped countries for improving primary and secondary education. There is intense competition among charity organizations like VAB for these grants. The application process is not simple and most of them require substantial supporting documents. VAB should visit the websites of these grant makers and foundations and explore the possibilities and the processes. To be successful the submitted application materials must reflect exceptional quality and professionalism. **Given its twenty-year success story, its very impressive list of members with very high credentials, its programs, its field office in Dhaka, its backing from the government and its certifications, VAB definitely stands a good chance of receiving international grants. There are a few third-party research and training institutes that offer courses and workshops that teach the process of applying for these grants. VAB should invest some money in sending someone to get the training from one of these institutes or hire an outside consultant to help prepare the application and the necessary documents.** Here are the links to two well known organizations that provide this type of training, information and consultancy service:
  - GrantSpace at <https://grantspace.org/>
  - CAF America at <https://www.cafamerica.org/>
5. Towards long-term sustainability, VAB could explore the possibility of setting up partial revenue-producing projects within some of its cluster schools. Suppose you target a cluster school, which has a total of 30 adult staff (mostly pedagogical) that could be involved in a small-scale plant that manufactures socks, or shoes and sandals, or furniture, or utensils, or toilet soaps & household detergents, or basic cosmetics, or repairing cell phones, etc. The initial capital could be raised through

contributions by donors, whose names should be displayed in front of the plant for recognition. The Head Masters could be employed with extra commission to oversee and monitor the work. The staff of the school should be compensated plus a percentage of net income should be declared as bonus depending on their direct involvement in the project. Note that the pedagogical staff of these schools is educated and therefore it should be fairly simple to give them some basic training to operate a small-scale facility. Alternatively VAB could use the pedagogical staff to just administer and monitor the work to ensure quality and efficiency. A section of the school's high school students could be employed as paid interns.

6. VAB should become a member of “GlobalGiving” which is the largest global crowd funding community connecting nonprofits, donors, and companies in nearly every country. I did not find VAB in their list of charity organizations operating in Bangladesh. **Please go to their website: <https://www.globalgiving.org/> and become a member. They also have information on other charity organizations and some very appealing websites that VAB management can look at for ideas about how to build an effective website.**
7. One of VAB's immediate concerns related to long-term sustainability is that it has not been able to attract younger people to join the organization. I have two suggestions on this matter:
  - i. Create a separate VAB youth group with maximum autonomy. They could operate as a youth subsidiary of VAB with their own working committee and their own Chief. This VAB youth group should be allowed to conduct its own exclusive meetings and social G2Gs. I would even suggest that VAB dispense an entire cluster of schools or if you prefer a couple of individual schools for this youth group to manage. This will foster good competition and it will make the youth feel connected and the urge to apply their own creative ideas. VAB youngsters should be encouraged to take trips to their schools. VAB should select only one or two directors from their management team to interact and coordinate the activities of the youngsters. The rest of the VAB elders should not intervene or interact with this youth group.
  - ii. After forming this separate entity for the young, this new affiliated body should make an all out effort to invite other Bangladeshi student associations to join VAB-youth. To make this outreach effort effective, VAB should prepare an attractive “prospectus” or “invitation package” what will introduce VAB to the new generation. After reaching an expected goal of memberships, VAB-youth should organize a gala event in New York with interesting cultural programs to attract the youth. If need be VAB should ask its senior and wealthy members to sponsor or contribute to this event. If done right, this could be a turning point for attracting young Bangladeshis to VAB.  
**The following is a link that lists Bangladeshi Students Associations in the U.S.:**  
[http://www.bangladeshcircle.com/bangladesh-business-directory/wpbdp\\_category/student-association/](http://www.bangladeshcircle.com/bangladesh-business-directory/wpbdp_category/student-association/)

VAB should ask some of its young members to get in touch with these student bodies. In addition, most mosques have lecture programs, seminars and halaqas. VAB should send its representatives to meet up with the coordinators of these programs. VAB should conduct seminars in mosques in conjunction with the masjid imams or other known scholars affiliated with the mosques to present the idea that VAB's programs are consistent with Sadaqa or charity in Islam.

8. VAB should make extra effort in introducing it to the Bangladeshi community and most importantly it should be done in a sustained way. Just giving a few ads in a local Bangladeshi tabloid for a few weeks is not good enough. It is not difficult to obtain a list of Bangladeshi professionals, businessmen and academicians in the U.S. and Canada. **VAB should not only send them a comprehensive and attractive brochure but it should have some of its senior members follow up by directly calling them and emailing them. The website: <http://bangladeshcircle.com/> has a lot of information on Bangladeshi educators, writers, physicians, politicians and other prominent Bangladeshis living in the U.S.**

9. VAB has successfully established good relationship with high level Bangladesh government officials. For a charity organization this is a great boon. While this relationship is already bringing dividends, VAB should capitalize on this for raising funds and expanding its Bangladesh donor base. Ministers, secretaries and political leaders in power carry a lot of influence and control on local businessmen and the wealthy. The senior executives of VAB who have close contacts with government officials should use this as a great opportunity to raise funds.

10. The tech-savvy generation values donating and connecting with nonprofits online, especially through mobile devices. According to a recent study, nearly half (47 percent) of Gen X donors indicated they would consider donating through their mobile device. Social media is an effective engagement channel for stirring up the emotions and propensities of the youth. VAB should seriously explore the possibility of reaching out to our new generation through selective publicity on Facebook, Google+, MySpace, Instagram, LinkedIn, Twitter, Viber, WhatsApp and such others. These social media websites have more than 100 million registered users in the U.S.

11. VAB's Bylaws should allow its senior and elderly executives to exit with dignity and make room for others to join. **It should therefore strongly consider instituting term limits for some of its key positions. Sustainable organizations always look for new faces and new ideas.**